ARGUMENT, STYLE AND ROMANCE IN THE PROSE WORKS OF C.S.LEWIS

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CONTENTS

He had at first addressed himself
to kneel, but Ransom forbade him.
'See thou do it not!'
<u>That Hideous Strength,</u> XV.

SUMMARY

The thesis is designed to examine a number of aspects of the prose of C.S. Lewis. Those dealt with are not necessarily commeasurable, but are handled with regard to the balance between incidence and significance. Lewis's arguments, for instance, are given an amount of space which reflects their importance in Lewis's body of work, but the thesis drives towards a consideration of Lewis's eschatological romanticism, since that is his noblest legacy.

The introduction is largely confined to a description of Lewis's literary career. To the image of Lewis as infallible monolith, it counterposes an idea of Lewis moving slowly from askesis to Beatific Vision. It tries also to establish critical practice for the following chapters, in which undue veneration is supplanted by decent respect for the writings. The introduction defines, in its conclusion, the Lewisian skandalon, and the unique, full-blooded attempt that Lewis makes to redeem his own inadequacies.

The second chapter, Critics & Ideas, develops the recognition of exact qualities in Lewis's romanticism, and its pastoral intention. It poses Lewis as an explorer of inner space, indeed as a searcher for an ontological pole. It notes Lewis's desire to make Heaven a matter of nervous excitement for the reader, and describes his feeling that this very faculty is of supernatural origin. On such business, the chapter reviews the more substantial critical reactions to Lewis, and remarks upon their tendency to avoid this central area of concern.

Words, the third chapter, deals with Lewis's prose style, taking as its starting point a typical claim by one

critic for its beauty and clarity. The chapter presses, in response, a view of Lewis's prose as being chiefly valuable for its efficiency. It considers in passing the charge that the prose is a farrago of borrowings, and concludes that such derivativeness as is present does not devalue the particular synthesis forged.

This chapter selects passages on a largely random basis and analyses them. It notes particularly Lewis's rhetorical parallelisms, his semantic weightings, and his oratorical idiom. It notes too the adaption of these discursive traits to fictional presentation. From the general prospect of a robust prose it goes in quest of the beautiful Lewisian style, and upholds the case of one exemplary essay, finding a use of metaphor which transforms common structure, and the growth of a style which communicates extreme longing.

The next chapter is the first of three concerned with Lewis's skill in debate.

It tries to form a picture of Lewis's essential political stances, recording initially the frequent charges of revanchism levelled at Lewis. It traces his first political stirrings and their contribution to the idea that Lewis withdrew from political debate. Examining Lewis's opinions, the chapter finds that Lewis could be illogical, misleading and inconsistent in his social philosophy, and it looks at occasions on which the guiding spirit appears to be maliciousness. It recognises Lewis's expressions of social desiderata, clothed as Christian wisdom, as blatantly sectional, and it resents the incorporation of these attitudes by some critics into a consonant scheme of Christian thinking developed by Lewis.

But a real liberal strain in Lewis is also acknowledged, and the chapter concludes with a view of Lewis as a half-baked but not utterly inhumane social critic.

Chapter Five examines the logical standard of Lewis's explicit arguments for moral and religious positions. It attempts to find a balance between Lewis's button-holing, with its attendant stimulation, and his resultant motions to conclude on complex issues, a forceful and sometimes forced Socratic method.

Examples of logical wilfulness are offered, with reference to specific critical claims on Lewis's behalf. One essay, finally, is adopted as a sturdy argument, and it is defended against general coolness.

The last chapter dealing with arguments looks at Lewis's use of fiction for proselytisation and debate. It considers several positions: the use of characters for the expression of unresolved doubt, argument as entertainment, as strategy, or even from obsessiveness.

Different qualities of debate are noted in Lewis's fiction. Examples from the same trilogy are opposed, showing in one case that Lewis uses debate mechanically, in a false climax, while a more deeply-structured argument is taking place in the sensibilities of the characters.

In another, and more thoroughly examined, case, Lewis devolves a major part of a novel's structure upon an argument, and comments upon its value in the course of the narrative development. The extent to which the argument is consistent, logical and artistically integrated is considered. An attempt is made to seek out the genuine locus of debate, and a case is pressed for Lewis's use of the discursive novel as arguing out an unquietness of soul,

made all the more complex by Lewis's simultaneous assessment of the worth of his own arguments.

The final chapter, Saved by Joy, looks at Lewis's main achievement, described in the thesis as 'the sensible rendering of Christian ontology'. It examines the relations between the act of writing and the feelings of joy, salvation and deliverance which burst from time to time into Lewis's narratives. The argument is that Lewis works as in a variety of gears, and that one, in which he shows passionate delight in the thought of Christian expectations made manifest, is far and away his most valuable. Passages are quoted to show Lewis in this his most characteristic and joyful mode.

I INTRODUCTION

'No man who values originality will ever be original'.[1] It is only with the blackmail of such an assurance that we may begin with what might seem a needless procedure, a survey of Lewis's work. This well-trodden path, if not notorious by now, certainly deserves to be. It has,rather frequently, been the point of departure for many a dissertation which fulfils its promise in exegesis of the perfectly evident, capped by the revelation that Lewis was an exciting Christian writer. The implication of such studies has commonly been that in according Lewis the kind of reverence he never looked for in his life, one's own piety is put beyond question.

A glance at the provenance of a number of Lewisian critiques explains in part why this should be so. Critiques of socialist realism from Eastern European colleges doubtless proceed with the same unquestioning approval. What is not clear is why more acute critics, those not applying for Narnian visas, should disentangle themselves from Lewis's texts as completely as others are overgrown by them. Corbin Scott Carnell[2], for instance, is anxious to relate Lewis to literary history, and Paul Holmer[3] sets himself the task of outlining the 'shape' of Lewis's thought. Such critical approaches might seem grandiose to anyone who dipped into any of the works outside of Lewis's professional studies. Though they are, in fact,

1 'Membership', Fern-Seed and Elephants, and other essays on Christianity ed. W. Hooper. (Fontana Books, 1975) p.25.

2 Bright Shadow of Reality: C.S. Lewis and the feeling intellect (Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdmans, 1974).

3 C.S.Lewis: the shape of his faith and thought (Sheldon Press, 1977).

relevant and worthwhile, they remain evasive, avoiding the grit of Lewis's texts with the greatest care; and with even greater care (for these are, as I say, acute critics) they avoid the air of solecism which hangs over the canon.

This may seem an unnecessary violence, but the reader will understand that to begin with Lewis the solecist by no means implies a similar ending. I do not honestly suppose that Lewis has offended against the best manners, but he has certainly offended against manners of a kind, and of a kind that have root in most of us, for good or bad. No matter how phenomenal his sales, his cult cannot be other than that of a large minority. He is always important and never paramount, and there are reasons for this. As we go over his works once again, the reasons may, I hope, stand out without great need of explanations.

Lewis's first stirrings as a writer were in childhood. He made up stories about 'Animal-Land', noting that they might be 'only legends'[4]. Before he was twenty he had a volume of poems at his back. 'Until 1918,' says Humphrey Carpenter, 'Jack Lewis had gone on writing poems that were deeply pessimistic, flinging accusations at a cruel God. They were not particularly good as poetry, so he was lucky to have a volume of them published by Heinemann in 1918 under the title Spirits in Bondage.'[5]

4 Surprised by Joy: the shape of my early life (Geoffrey Bles, 1955) Fontana Books, 1959, p. 17.

5 The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their friends (George Allen and Unwin, 1978) p. 12.

Although an entertaining critic of verse (his chapter on the 'Drab Age' is especially memorable[6]) he was no poet himself. This discovery, oddly, has been left to Carpenter to make, if we discount Chad Walsh who in 1949 referred to Lewis's verse as 'indifferent'[7].

Lewis continued with a long narrative poem called Dymer, galvanised by Dent in 1926, and this more or less marked the end of his career as a poet. He was converted to Christianity in 1931, and within a year had written The Pilgrim's Regress (1933), a torn-faced spiritual allegory completed in a fortnight. As Carpenter remarks, 'There was to be no novitiate.'[8]

In 1936 he began to fill in one of the sides of his personal triptych with The Allegory of Love: a study in medieval tradition. Lewis's critical side is his most immediately respectable. Apart from his humour, general humility before his subject matter, and his striking erudition, there is a suavity in his longer studies that enters his non-professional works less often. It is, in fact, as noticeable in English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: excluding drama (1954) as in The Allegory. In these works, Lewis's contention that literature is about pleasure really seems to take on force: he seems most at ease with the long view, least inclined to controversy. Controversy follows him, nonetheless. 'It is the critical mind that bothers me,' Yvor Winters says. 'It is my

6 English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: excluding drama (O.U.P., 1954) 1973, pp. 222-271.

7 C.S. Lewis: apostle to the skeptics (New York; MacMillan, 1949) p. 49.

8 Inklings, p. 48.

own conviction that one cannot write the history of poetry unless one can find the best poems.'[9] But Winters concedes that such studies are inevitably of limited value, while it should be said that Lewis is often at his most companionable in these volumes.

A Preface to Paradise Lost (1942) is perhaps more characteristic of Lewis's criticism. The suavity (an alert belles-lettrisme, really) is present, and yet as surely as Paradise Lost creeps into Perelandra, Perelandra, as yet unwritten, creeps into A Preface. The influence of Charles Williams, Lewis's own love of Milton and his apprehension of the potent Edenic theme all intertwine to make one wonder (as Philip Hobsbaum seems to[10]) whether the poem or the protology is at the centre of the exercise. Like the poem, the book is embattled. In Chapter Two, dramatically entitled 'Is Criticism Possible?', Lewis takes up the silly and well-known remark of Eliot's that only the best contemporary poets, in his opinion, could judge Paradise Lost. Exposing the full absurdity of this in a short chapter, Lewis goes on placate anyone who might think that Eliot is making some sort of point: and I leave it up to others to decide in which frame of mind Lewis is the more venomous.

Lewis's taste for controversy in criticism stems from his devotion to the extra-literary--the realm of people,

9 The Function of Criticism: problems and exercises (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) p.197.

10 A Theory of Communication (Macmillan, 1970) p.48.

places and activities (real and imaginary) which in his view stands in relation to literature as fuel. Rehabilitations and other essays (1939), apart from having the brilliant 'Variation in Shakespeare and Others', shows Lewis's extra-literary bias in two pieces: 'Christianity and Literature' and 'High and Low Brows'. It would not be difficult to concoct an authentic-sounding Lewisian formula from these essays. It would say that being extra-literary is not only necessary to the survival of whole men, but necessary also to the survival of literature. You cannot properly be literary until you can see past literature. If it were objected that all of this terminology is vague (and although this isn't from the horse's mouth, it was certainly Inkling policy) because the 'literary' and the 'extra-literary' are, no doubt, only relatively divided, Lewis extends the argument thus:

> ...a posteriori it is not hard to argue that all the greatest poems have been made by men who valued something else much more than poetry--even if that something else were only cutting down enemies in a cattle-raid or tumbling a girl in a bed. The real frivolity, the solemn vacuity, is all with those who make literature a self-existent thing to be valued for its own sake. (11)

There is a slight problem here, almost as though Lewis were saying that he'd much rather be abusing (or, as it may be, returning) Nausicaa's hospitality than writing an essay about poetry, but this confusion arises from the extremity of the example. More important is that Lewis's chiaroscuro here is a good deal sharper than we generally see it. Christianity and literature are precisely contrasted, subject and object. Yet once

11 Rehabilitations and other essays (O.U.P., 1939) p. 196.

writing has been safely subjected, the idea of a real Christian literature creeps into the essay, much, I suppose, as it haunted Lewis's thought. It will have 'gravity' and 'sublimity' which 'belong to the theme... mighty nouns with which literature, an adjectival thing, is here united.'[12] I lived with this statement for years before it occurred to me that you can have puny nouns and very muscular adjectives; but our problem will be rather that in Lewis's practice, once his uniting and entwining is done, it is not so simple to put the various elements into test tubes and discover to which any gravity and sublimity there is pertains.

The solemn and vacuous people that Lewis has in mind when he points out the dependence of literature on the external world are not difficult to identify; but the controversy itself is probably deceptive. Lewis can be fairly dismissive when confronted with works that make no appeal to him, as with, for example, Lady Chatterley's Lover. He suggests that Lady Chatterley will have to face harder judges than the Crown: 'Nine of them, and all goddesses.'[13] On another occasion he admits to having tried very hard to see how an evening can be like a patient etherised upon a table, never quite managing it[14]. But this occasion is in verse, and one instinctively feels that this is, in part, a gesture of concession. To guy another, and more popular, poet in your own verse is to admit that you've been passed by and that you're very far from discounting the other man.

12 Rehabilitations, p. 196.

13 Selected Literary Essays ed. W. Hooper (C.U.P., 1969) p. 174.

14 C.S.Lewis:Poems ed. W. Hooper.(Geoffrey Bles, 1964)p.1.

Carpenter, as usual, sums up the matter very well by pointing out that Lewis was a Georgian poet[15]. The rankling at the literary developments of the twentieth century that would naturally arise in someone who had been a young Georgian poet finally emerges with some dignity when Lewis, in his inaugural speech at Cambridge, describes himself as a dinosaur[16].

It's difficult not to feel that Lewis's earlier forays on the warpath were largely emotional and instinctive, as in his attribution of all he didn't like in contemporary letters to T.S. Eliot[17]. But An Experiment in Criticism (1961), written towards the end of his life, uses the emotionality and instinctiveness as data for the proposition that value is inherent in some forms of narrative. The Experiment displays fewer challenges, flourishes and crenellations than the earlier essays which share the same roots--it as almost as though Lewis has come to believe his own proposition practically, and is surer that his own tastes will be perpetuated--but his radical call for critical 'abstinence' over a ten or twenty year period, to purge bookish responses to literature, is not plausibly contentious but wilfully blind.

Lewis had contributed, in his way, to what he calls the 'surfeit of criticism'[18]. Despite having argued that anyone who needs help in reading the literature of his contemporaries might as well ask for a nurse's

15 Inklings, p.158.

16 Selected Literary Essays, p. 14.

17 Inklings, p.49.

18 An Experiment in Criticism (C.U.P., 1961) p.129.

help in blowing his own nose[19], he offered this very act of hygiene in dealing with Charles William's grotesque Arthuriad. Arthurian Torso (1948) is the volte-face of a man who castigated the kind of critic who 'will be angry with a true lover of literature who does not take pains to unravel the latest poetical puzzle...'[20]. If we were being very legal, we should think that Lewis's escape clause, his noting that Williams' poems need comment because they are so very difficult, does not excuse him from his own condemnation.

This is one side of the triptych, Lewis at his most secular, often at his best-tempered and sometimes at his meanest. Another side is his famous career as a Christian apologist, pursued in a series of long argumentative essays running mainly through the 'forties. Their qualities have long since been noted: the air of challenge, of perversity in the face of the Zeitgeist, the imaginative orthodoxy, the irresistible Socratic tempting. They began when Lewis was asked to contribute to Geoffrey Bles' series of 'Christian Challenge' books with an essay on the Christian justification for pain[21]. The Problem of Pain (1940) is a milestone among Lewis's works. His explanation is conventional, but the organisation of his material is quite individual. 'On the scale of a pamphlet in a church porch,' says Austin Farrer, a little myopically, 'he is prepared to handle the origins of theism.'[22]

19 Rehabilitations, p.91.

20 Rehabilitations, pp.114-5.

21 Inklings, p.173

22 'The Christian Apologist', Light on C.S.Lewis ed. J. Gibb. (Geoffrey Bles, 1965) p.34.

Here, for the first time, Lewis lays bare the nerves in his discussion of Heaven.

He followed this with The Screwtape Letters (1942), an extraordinary spiritual manual in which a junior devil receives advice on how to damn a human. The hapless Wormwood, who has to bring in his 'patient' as food or be eaten himself, is urged by his 'affectionate' uncle Screwtape to keep his 'patient' as imperceptive as he can. Evil is seen as a kind of progressive glaucoma, and the grace which clears it away is as likely to be felt in simple, 'real' experiences as seemingly trivial as the tiny and unsuspected lurches towards 'Our Father Below'. The more the latter continue, the deeper the blindness and the surer the catch; the more the former, the clearer the sight. The fiction of the book has a quite distinct feel. Since the hero is seen at two removes (through Screwtape's comments on Wormwood's reports) he is a vague Everyman; but experiences that he has are radiated very clearly through Screwtape's consciousness, Screwtape having a vivid idea of what each experience signifies.

By processing everyday experiences and trains of thought through the mind of a demon, Lewis aggressively turns the reader to a consideration of his own habits and ideas. Whether in the long run this amounts to much more than a check-your-personality test is a difficult question, and not one which there is ever likely to be a general answer; it is not a book, I think, to shake anyone's basic assumptions about the universe for very long. But Lewis uses the central device to swat one of his favourite bêtes-noires, rationalistic a priori thinking. In this

case Screwtape is reminiscing about his treatment of a 'patient' whose atheism begins to crack after a session in the British Museum.

> I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch... Once he was in the street the battle was won. I showed him a newsboy shouting the midday paper, and a No.73 bus going past, and before he reached the bottom of the steps I had got into him an unalterable conviction that, whatever odd ideas might come into a man's head when he was shut up alone with his books, a healthy dose of 'real life'... was enough to show him that all 'that sort of thing' just couldn't be true. (23)

In a passage like this we can see, as I've been suggesting, that the value of the book is probably not what Lewis may have supposed it to be. Certainly our metaphysical speculations may be sharpened if we do not interpret contingent phenomena too dogmatically: proving or disproving the existence of God from an observation of buses does seem like a shaky enterprise. But few readers, surely, are likely to preserve a conviction that whatever they do think about the subject is much tampered with by demons. Indeed, what interest the book holds apart from its exploration of crabbiness and light-heartedness is akin to science fiction: what demons would be like if there were demons. Alternatively, there may be further discussion in the Sixth Circle.

That this witholding of complete assent is not entirely a point of philosophy becomes evident after reading The Great Divorce (1946), although this is, if anything, more abrasive than Screwtape. Its characters

23 The Screwtape Letters (Geoffrey Bles, 1942) Fontana Books, 1955, p.13.

know that they are dead, and that the universe is run on other than natural principles, but in most cases their vision is as defective as that of the atheist 'patient'. There is, however, more to look at in The Great Divorce. The story begins halfway between Heaven and Hell, seen I think, with some perception as a light industrial town, and waiting sinners are taken off for interviews in Heaven on a bus. 'It was a wonderful vehicle, blazing with golden light, heraldically coloured. The Driver himself seemed full of light and he used only one hand to drive with. The other he waved before his face as if to fan away the greasy steam of the rain.'[24] The subtitle of the book is 'A Dream', and this passage seems successfully dreamlike in the sense that it has a kind of coherence which is difficult to pin down, but genuinely appreciable. This is partly, in my case, owing to the fact that I'm tagging childhood memories on to the scene; I'm encouraged to do so, needless to say, by Lewis's capitalisation of the word 'Driver'. But it's also generally available in the idea of 'the greasy steam of the rain', which is one of these unusual invocations which you can neither precisely picture nor misunderstand. It's not quite the blur on the window or the cloud from the radiator, but something in the atmosphere. With one or two other observations -- 'bookshops of the sort that sell The Works of Aristotle'[25] or Lewis's thought in the queue, '"Come," thought I, "that's two places gained"',

24 The Great Divorce (Geoffrey Bles, 1946) Fontana Books, 1972, p.15.

25 p.13.

even if it is H.G. Wellsish--Lewis strikes a realistic vein which it's almost disappointing to leave, principally, it may be, because it's Lewis who's doing this.

On only one other occasion, I think, does Lewis catch the kind of poetry that he employs with the bus. Looking out from Paradise, in The Last Battle, we see a neighbouring plateau which is England, and an England in which the tiniest details are visible[26]. Neither of these occurrences is a genuine example of Lewis's famous Platonism, the idea that Heaven is a greater reality than we can comprehend; both, rather, are cameos of security, such as a child can best appreciate.

In Heaven, where they may stay if they desire to, the ghosts wander about blindly. We know that they are suffering from the cataracts imposed on them by Screwtape during their lives, but because they show some sign of knowing this too, they seem impossibly stupid. The climax reveals the foregoing to be some kind of shadow play, not of course a strong move on Lewis's part, and as with The Screwtape Letters we probably concede only that Lewis has made a limited effect. He has, certainly, shown us what it's like to know you're in the wrong and carry on regardless; again as with The Screwtape Letters, he implies that he's doing more than this, but without conviction.

Yet here, at any rate, there is a sign that the emphasis has shifted. The Great Divorce, set in Heaven, follows

[26] (Bodley Head, 1956) Puffin Books, 1964, pp. 163-4.

The Screwtape Letters in one distinct Lewisian genre, and follows immediately after the demoniacal That Hideous Strength (1945). Something, certainly, had happened to Lewis. His view of man's place in the universe is not any less austere, but his horizons seem to have widened, and his devils, hereafter, never appear so oppressive.

In the years between Screwtape and the Divorce Lewis published his addresses for radio as Broadcast Talks (1942), Christian Behaviour (1943), and Beyond Personality (1944). These were later collected as Mere Christianity (1952), a book impressive in two particular ways. It is genuinely interdenominational[27] and remarkably comprehensive for its size; and though its prose is pure workhorse and its artistry mute, it exercises a genuine grip. Lewis's tone is pastorly and even naïf, and he uses few stylistic variations other than dilute snatches of Edwardian dialogue (as they are stigmatised by George Orwell[28]); but what he does do is to describe a relationship with God practically rather than dramatise it, which is what happens in the novels and the accounts with lesser fictional commitment. The book is, in a strict sense, impersonal; in the sense, precisely, that the emphasis is generally on the relationship between God and men rather than man. The reader, as a person with his own quirks and ways of doing things, seems to have been obliterated from Lewis's attention. Lewis prefers to concentrate on what he

27 See Carolyn Keefe, 'On the Air', C.S.Lewis: speaker & teacher ed. C. Keefe. (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974) pp. 152-4.

28 Collected Essays, Journalism And Letters of George Orwell, Volume III eds. S. Orwell and I. Angus. (Penguin Books, 1970). pp. 302-4.

gathers--I think rightly--will be widespread habits of mind. On doing one's best to be good, for example, '(and then failing)':

> All this trying leads up to the vital moment at which you turn to God and say "You must do this. I can't." Do not, I implore you, start asking yourselves, "Have I reached that moment?" Do not sit down and start watching your own mind to see if it is coming along. (29)

This is a difficult tone to succeed with over any distance, yet Lewis does succeed. The insurance against rejection, to put it unduly cynically, is that there is enough psychological sophistication to ward off the sense of simple-mindedness in a passage like this.

Miracles (1947) is a defence of the supernatural. Lewis attacks, as we have seen him do already, the *a priori* assumption that miracles cannot occur, and the book stands as a reproach to lazy popular thinking. But the interest of Miracles is the excitement that Lewis finds in the subject, and the instinctive familiarity he shows with it. 'Perhaps,' he says on one occasion, 'one may without boldness surmise that the direct change from stone to bread appeared to the Son to be not quite in the hereditary style.'[30] This familiarity, again, shows us a Lewis whose Screwtape complex is weakening; but Lewis is also following Scripture ('The Son does nothing except what He sees the Father do'), which he quotes, and broadening his argument by stressing the appropriateness of some miracle stories--not stone into bread, but a little bread into a lot of bread--and

29 Mere Christianity (Geoffrey Bles, 1952) Fontana Books, 1955, pp. 125-6.

30 Miracles (Geoffrey Bles, 1947) Fontana Books, 1960, p.140.

in this way he demonstrates how even the oddest tales can have a rightness about them.

There are hints, too, of an occult excitement in the book, occurring in Lewis's class of Miracles of the New Creation. Lewis's observations on these miracles do read rather like something you get in red ink and six-point type from America, but the tradition in which he is writing is really somewhat older:

> In the Walking on the Water we see the relations of spirit and Nature so altered that Nature can be made to do whatever spirit pleases. This new obedience of Nature is, of course, not to be separated even in thought from spirit's own obedience to the Father of Spirits. (31)

This is the literature of _theosis_, which has continued in the Eastern church, and it is this tone in Lewis which accounts for part of his following. But Lewis comes to this point rationally enough; he argues his case for theism, announces what he calls the 'Rubicon' of belief or non-belief in the Christian story, and, for those still with him, draws out speculations like the above.

From the simple point of view of presenting argument, Lewis had been more compelling in _The Abolition of Man_ (1943), not a Christian apology as such, but a defence of the idea of value. Carpenter is wrong-headed, I think, in calling the book 'not an argument but a harangue'[32]; he points out Lewis's use of _reductio_, his trick of basing the argument 'on what he _supposes_ to be his opponents' case'. We can consult the example of this

31 _Miracles_, p.154.

32 _Inklings_, pp. 221-2.

already quoted in Lewis's attack on Eliot in A Preface to Paradise Lost. But in The Abolition, Lewis collects a reasonable amount of evidence about his opponents' position before he ascribes to them the attitude that 'all sentences containing a predicate of value are statements about the emotional state of the speaker, and secondly, that all such statements are unimportant.'[33] He can possibly be faulted for thinking up excuses for the writers of the text which has annoyed him (he calls them, rather pompously, Gaius and Titius) and then forgetting the excuses when he wants to believe that their intentions are genuinely inhuman, but in their state of latinised abstraction it does them little harm. Lewis's arguments, though extenuated, are striking, and we shall examine them in depth.

Lewis's other religious books, principally Reflections on the Psalms (1958), The Four Loves (1960) and Prayer: Letters to Malcolm (1964) are not so impressive as those of the forties; Carpenter records the blow to Lewis's ego in the debating chamber which shifted him away from dogmatic aggression[34]. But there are a number of essays, addresses and sermons which have the spirit of the first group. These include 'Membership', 'Historicism' and 'Fern-Seed and Elephants'[35], 'The Inner Ring' and 'The Weight of Glory'[36].

33 The Abolition of Man (O.U.P., 1943) Fount Paperbacks, 1978, p.8.

34 Inklings, p.216.

35 In Fern-Seed and Elephants.

36 In Screwtape Proposes a Toast and other pieces (Fontana Books, 1965).

The third side of Lewis's triptych consists of his science fiction, his fantasies for children, and the novel Till We Have Faces. The first of these comes as a trilogy: Out of the Silent Planet (1938), Perelandra (1943) and That Hideous Strength (1945). The story begins with the kidnapping of Elwin Ransom, a Cambridge philologist, by Professor Weston (the celebrated physicist and J.B.S. Haldane) and the less-qualified but equally villainous Dick Devine. Ransom is carted off to Mars in order to be the cardinal element in a human sacrifice, but he escapes his captors and takes up lodgings with the hrossa, who are 'something like an otter, something like a seal'[37]. The hrossa, like Ransom, are hnau: that is, rational and creaturely. They model themselves on the best patterns in the Germania, and are ruled, with all of Mars, by a being known as Oyarsa. Oyarsa summons Ransom, Weston and Devine together, and discovers that the latter two are under the influence of the incommunicative spirit that rules Earth and gives it, thereby, the name of the 'silent' planet. Ransom is told of Maleldil, who orders all the planets by the agency of tutelary spirits like Oyarsa. Weston and Devine are deported, and Ransom, at his peril, decides to go home with them.

He has used his time profitably on Mars, coming to learn Old Solar, the lingua franca of the spheres. This fits him, in Perelandra, for the work of saving the first parents of Venus from the seductions of Weston, who is divinably under satanic possession. In this business Ransom progresses from argument to mayhem, and is forced to deposit Weston in a pothole; but he

37 Out of the Silent Planet (Bodley Head, 1938) Pan Books, 1952, p.61.

himself, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, receives a wound in the heel. He is an alter Christus, bearing the trials of the Eve of Perelandra, who does not fall.

His final task, in That Hideous Strength, is to oppose the National Institution for Co-ordinated Experiments (the N.I.C.E.), a nightmarish anticipation of the QUANGO, whose remit is the domination of Britain. The agency is of Hellish inspiration and is gradually approaching the 'Interplanetary Problem', as Dick Devine, reappearing as Lord Feverstone, puts it. Satan communicates with the N.I.C.E. through the guillotined head of a scientist (a little symbolical touch) and tells them to dig up Merlin, who may help (another little symbolical touch[38]). To do this, however, they need the help of Jane Studdock, an unwitting clairvoyant almost estranged from Mark, her husband.

Mark is wooed by the N.I.C.E. to Belbury (which, being interpreted, is the burgh of Ba'al), but Jane encounters Ransom's establishment at St. Anne's and becomes part of it. For Ransom is now the Pendragon of Logres, not in fact a Cambridge appointment, but the office of Arthur's heir in the true Britain, and it is on his doorstep that Merlin, having got himself up, now arrives. Satan has first opened up his frontiers by dispatching Weston to Mars, and now the powers of Deep Heaven are permitted to descend and fill Merlin, whose mind has formerly been deflowered by his practice of the sorcerer's art. Merlin destroys Belbury by inflicting the curse of Babel upon the N.I.C.E., and in a surge of tidiness he goes to his rest while the

38 See The Abolition of Man, pp. 45-47, and English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, for Lewis's views on the parallel development of science and magic.

estranged couple are converted and reunited, and Ransom is lifted up into Arthur's bosom.

Little as I have allowed it to sound in the reduction, the trilogy reads rather well. Lewis, as usual, characterises happily away with his unhoned chisel, but he has a knack for tasteful heroic dialogue (generally rendered 'in a great voice') and his monsters are original and convincing. Wither, in particular, the deceptively muddled Deputy Director of the N.I.C.E., remains in the mind as an aspect of Kingsley Amis's Professor Welch[39] (or vice-versa), which helps, though Lewis could hardly have anticipated this, to put Wither a step ahead of the other characters in the reality stakes. It has been felt that in making a 'spiritual thriller' of That Hideous Strength Lewis had fallen under the influence of Charles Williams. But anything I've said about Lewis's characters will be qualified immediately by a look at those that Williams creates; it's clear too that Lewis, whether instinctively or not, recognised that bizarre stories need a narrative clarity greater than Williams could achieve if they're not to seem merely peculiar. As Carpenter points out, 'Williams' ideas of right and wrong often seem extremely odd.'[40] Lewis's ideas of right and wrong, at worst, seem merely hidebound and injustifiably reinforced by fantasy figures[41].

39 In Lucky Jim (Gollancz, 1954).

40 Inklings, p.96.

41 Merlin's reaction to Jane's wilful infertility, for instance, is made to seem less bigoted after the unnatural Filostrato has introduced to us the perverted sterility of the Selenites (That Hideous Strength, Bodley Head, 1945, Pan Books, 1955, pp. 103-4 and 169-171).

I've already suggested that the representation of the diabolic is not the most rewarding area of Lewis. But this is the period in which his devils are most successful, and this alone makes one think twice about Bob Dixon's claim, plausible on the face of it, that the war was of little consequence to Lewis[42]. It seems to me quite likely that Ransom, in his dux bellorum phase, is Lewis's contribution to the war effort.

The diabolic, as Lewis sees it, is not so much plain wickedness as cutting the self off from all possibility of perceiving goodness. Therefore we have his Frost, who thinks, or appears to think[43], that objectivity lies in accepting thought as a chemical phenomenon only[44]. The acts that arise from such philosophies are apt to touch off eschatological events, a connection that Lewis makes equally in his children's stories. His devils do not attack humanity by trying to make them hate goodness, or not, at any rate, initially: they suggest, rather, that goodness cannot exist, or is a meaningless idea, and this propaganda may come through apparently decent men[45]. It is clear from Lewis's fiction that he felt atheistic and value-free argument to be (or deserve to be) an

42 Catching Them Young 2: political ideas in children's fiction (Pluto Press, 1977) p.161.

43 Frost propagandises in this way, but is a deliberately bad man.

44 That Hideous Strength, p.154.

45 That Hideous Strength, p.243.

apocalyptic event--an idea which would not have borne justification in his theology, but which partly explains its existence. The effect was noticed by Walsh in That Hideous Strength: 'One reads on, expecting Christ to appear on clouds of glory and the dead to rise from their graves.'[46]

Lewis's own place in his imaginative anticipation of the Last Things is no less heroic for being self-appointed. He wants to be on the side of Odin, fighting against the giants and the trolls[47], and it is as the latter that he casts people like Haldane and Professor Waddington.

In what Roger Lancelyn Green dubbed 'The Chronicles of Narnia' Christ does at last appear. Aslan, the great Lion who sings Narnia into existence, is Christ as Lewis might have expected to meet Him if he fell by chance into another sort of world. Aslan is not a type any more than the Pantocrator of Daphni is a type. This creates problems for Lewis (and for the adult reader) because Lewis at first does use Aslan symbolically. The first-written of the Narnia books, The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe (1950) is an Atonement story. Edmund has betrayed his brothers and sisters during their stay in Narnia, and it is Aslan who pays the price, dying and being resurrected. Lewis tells the story movingly, but it is at odds with the wider story, which Lewis accepted, in which Edmund has already been redeemed. When Lewis, later on, lays the ground for this in the chronologically earlier The Magician's Nephew (1955) he sounds, in telling of the

46 Apostle to the Skeptics, p.104.

47 Prayer: Letters to Malcolm (Geoffrey Bles, 1964) Fontana Books, 1966, p.120.

first fault, a little weary. 'Evil will come of that evil,' says Aslan, 'but it is still a long way off, and I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself.'[48] It seems too ready, too automatic. Like its original in Book III of Paradise Lost, it moves with facility over the inscrutable: with, in this case, the greater facility.

But Aslan is one of Lewis's great coups. I do not pretend to be a psychologist, but it seems to me--and it may seem, in a moment, to the reader--that Aslan is transposed from somewhere very far down in Lewis's psyche, while reflecting very tellingly the human and the divine aspects of the Second Person, as in this passage:

> "Are you ill, dear Aslan?" asked Susan.
> "No," said Aslan. "I am sad and lonely. Lay your hands on my mane so that I can feel you are there and let us walk like that."
> And so the girls did what they would never have dared to do without his permission, but what they had longed to do ever since they first saw him--buried their cold hands in the beautiful sea of fur and stroked it, and, so doing, walked with him. And presently they saw that they were going with him up the slope of the hill on which the Stone Table stood. (49)

It might be said that the feeling which resides in this is borrowed, and it would be silly to suggest that this is not, in one clear sense, a dependent piece of work. But it is not simply lifted. Aslan, as a lion, is not just a metaphor for Christ which Lewis supposed would be stirring and vigorous. The physical contact between Aslan and the children suggests more than that, as it does on every occasion when it occurs. And Lewis tinkers with

48 (Bodley Head, 1955) Puffin Books, 1963, p.126.

49 The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (Geoffrey Bles, 1950) Puffin Books, 1959, p.136.

his original; the equivalent, remember, has Christ alone with somnolent disciples, and even though a practically-minded writer of children's books will naturally include children of both sexes, it's noticeable that Lewis has arranged matters so that the girls attend Aslan. The feeling that Lewis creates between the characters ranges from that which is lavished on a cuddly toy to something attributable to a St. Theresa of Lisieux: either somewhere in between, or almost encompassing both. If it does seem very physical--and it does--it's as well to remember that there's a heightened sense of companionship too, and one, which it is pointed out, has been present in some form for as long as the girls have known Aslan. In a word, this is not an encroachment of Sunday School: it is, through a series of choices in presentation, genuinely devotional.

The figure of Aslan is the most important in the development of Lewis's fiction, for the fiction itself arises from a romantic longing which Lewis calls Sehnsucht[50]; this, in turn, is aroused by perceptions of beauty which in themselves suggest that their origin is in something immortal, good and absolute. Experiences of this kind are fleeting but intense; and Lewis goes so far as to say that they may be exactly what they claim to be if they mediate 'a really detailed idea'[51] of God. Aslan is closer to being a testament to a really detailed idea of God than any other figure that Lewis creates,

50 Surprised by Joy, p.12.

51 Letters of C.S.Lewis ed. W.H. Lewis. (Geoffrey Bles, 1966) pp. 143-4.

and it is evident from Aslan's closeness to the experiences which Lewis beyond any doubt regarded as the most significant of his life that the Narnia books are the natural culmination of Lewis's work. It has been felt by one critic or another that Perelandra or Till We have Faces is Lewis's best book--Lewis himself voted for the latter--but achievement is not strictly the question here. Lewis's deepest aspirations as a person rather than as a writer are expressed in the Narnia books. It is true that one cannot simply say that the 'Chronicles' bind up all of the Lewisian strands. There are too many of them, and they stretch out in too many different directions, for that. But one can say that the Narnia books are distinguished, in some places, by rawer emotional answers to perennial fixations of Lewis than occur in his other books, and that the reason for this is the sudden immanence of the figure that he had been slowly enticing into his fiction, and who had not, as yet, appeared.

Wise figures, such as Ransom eventually becomes, or the characterisation of George MacDonald, Lewis's guide in The Great Divorce, are of secondary importance in the children's books. Koriakin the Magician or the Lord Digory appear no more than wise before the sacramental quality of Aslan's actions, as when Aslan, in the symbolic and unintegrated way we noticed before, frees Eustace from original sin[52].

52 The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (Geoffrey Bles, 1952) Puffin Books, 1963, Chapter 7.

The detail in the idea of God which Lewis insisted upon for a spiritual experience to carry conviction comes most fully at the end of the series. It is, one must say, the salient detail, not a theological appendix. In The Last Battle (1956) Aslan unmakes creation and leads the human children and the Narnians into Paradise. Lewis knows exactly where to bring his story to a halt, and he does so with extraordinary grace; when he does it, in fact, it is as though his career had led solely to two or three paragraphs. But when he draws down the veil he has shown us something solid about his Heaven: it encloses real countries that we know, such as England, and the new Narnia, which if in strange dimensions has all the qualities of the old.

When this has been done, it is difficult not to see Till We Have Faces (1956) as a regression. Lewis calls this last novel, rather disingenuously, 'a straight tale of barbarism'; but the book has its complications, not the least of which are some dream sequences at the end, which are problematic for a work in which the setting is vague anyway. The story is about the 'good dreams' of the pagans, the points by which revelation progresses. By grafting an ugly sister on to the myth of Cupid and Psyche Lewis provides an increasing volume for the note of transcendence. Orual, the heroine, 'becomes' the beautiful Psyche when she realises that her complaints against the gods, which she has nursed all her life, are really tantrums, and that Cupid himself is all she needs. Lewis rather piqued himself in getting, as he thought, inside the mind of a seriously unattractive woman, but Orual indulges in a shade too much swordplay for this to be really convincing. His other characters, a noble

Captain of the Guard, a clever Greek, a Herod, a demi-mondaine of Ultima Thule and a parish witch-doctor, are predictable and dull, and they maintain these attributes for at least a hundred pages more than they need do.

It should be evident by now that I had several things in mind when I said that Lewis's work had an air of solecism about it. In the purely bad sense of this, he can even make you cringe (nowhere more surely, I suppose, than in the story of 'Mrs. Fidget' in The Four Loves[53]); at other times he assumes that the audience is with him, and goes striding on, a lonely figure, into a facile emotionalism or a social bitterness[54]. Looking over much of the imaginative stock mentioned above, it is clear that the origins are sometimes shabby: so much wish fulfilment, so much ego endorsement, so much self justification. Among the stalks and blooms in the weeded soil, tins cans and old fish-heads protrude: we often hear, for example, that Lewis had no interest in politics (he thought that Tito was the King of Greece[55]) but he was not content with ignorance. He wanted to be vociferous as well.

Yet this, if one is not prepared to praise lavishly too, is over-harsh. Against it all one sets the deeper and real solecism, the appearance of a motley gang of books in which the design to mediate the presence of God is evident. It

53 (Geoffrey Bles, 1960) Fontana Books, 1963, pp. 48-9.

54 As in 'Screwtape Proposes A Toast', Screwtape Proposes A Toast, pp. 9-27.

55 Inklings, p.207.

is not that Lewis intended this for every volume he produced; it's obvious, in fact, that Lewis produced books when he felt like it and not to any plan. But his desire to create certain kinds of experience in his reader is also clear; it comes round like a regular comet. I have called this a solecism, but Lewis when he was doing it called it 'almost... an indecency.'[56] 'Do you think,' he says, a moment later, 'I am trying to weave a spell?'

The answer, of course, is yes, and it remains to see if he does it.

[56] 'The Weight of Glory', Screwtape Proposes A Toast, p.97.

II CRITICS & IDEAS

Since Lewis had a long career, rising to notice quickly and enjoying a fair bit of attention at all times, it's odd that it was only after he died that critiques of his work showed a distinct and sensible excitement. Over the past ten years in particular, the best critics of Lewis have not been satisfied with the readier and more obvious inflammations that beset their colleagues. Gradually they have become aware of the strange properties and directions of the texts.

An exception to the rule that the most useful books about Lewis are fairly recent is Walsh's introduction, which combined the insight that Lewis's 'eschatological note' was going to be of importance with a handy summary of Lewis's work to date. This, unfortunately, instituted a numbing vogue of such works. I have no way of telling, but I shouldn't be surprised if it had been through keeping an eye on the critical work arising round Lewis that caused Walsh to feel, twenty years afterwards, that his own essay had been written in adulation. Looking back, in fact, it seems pleasantly naïf, bright and good-hearted; but Walsh feels that the adulation is only the first of a characteristic three stages in the appreciation of Lewis. It is followed, in his opinion, by a turning away from what appears to be Lewis's narrowness, only for the realisation that Lewis's confines are themselves the condition in which his synthesis of 'myth' and 'poetry' can be thoroughly understood[1]. This is rather mystical, perhaps, and it seems likely that Walsh is talking about his own

[1] Foreword to William Luther White, The Image of Man in C.S. Lewis (Hodder & Stoughton, 1970).

reactions, unduly generalised, rather than anything which could be isolated in the books. But it is worth noting, with all the dangers of patronisation, that Lewis has readers who allow their opinions of him to change and grow.

For the norm among Lewis critics, in the years between Walsh's two declarations, has been an adulation far less critical than that of Walsh himself. As Lewis, feeling less and less the restraints of regular fictionalising, romped home into Narnia, his followers tended to assume that the milennium had arrived and that balanced literary judgement, much like Mosaic Law, had been outgrown. 'Clive Staples Lewis,' one of them announced, granting him his full name the better to accommodate what followed, 'was not a man: he was a world.'[2] He was certainly becoming a business world. As his sales boomed, and his star conjoined with Tolkien's in the firmament of Stateside higher education (like Tarva and Alambil in Prince Caspian), an attractive line in Inkling accessories was discovered. In a promotion which appeared shortly before the transfer of the Narnia books to Armada Lions, Penguin Books ran a competition in which you could get a 'phone-in clue from Aslan the Lion'.

Lewis could become the subject of absurd comparisons. I see what Coghill means when he compares Lewis, informally, with Dr. Johnson (particularly since he explains what he means[3]) but Thomas Howard's analogy is enlightening without

2 Peter Kreeft, C.S. Lewis, a critical essay (Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdmans, 1969).

3 Clyde S. Kilby, 'The Creative Logician Speaking', C.S. Lewis: speaker & teacher, pp. 21-22.

being helpful. He describes a conversation at Lewis's home: '...never by so much as a cough did Lewis give me to feel that he was anything but wholly engaged by our conversation... I felt a little like the children in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe felt with Aslan: you knew that gentleness did not suggest weakness. The situation was redolent of terror as well as warmth.'[4]

We're not far away here from an attempt, even if tentative, to create a kind of alternative reality. A reaction like Howard's is not incomprehensible, but it's not uncommon either, and sometimes Betjeman's gibe seems to have considerable justification:

> Oh! well-bound Wells and Bridges! Oh!
> earnest ethical search
> For the wide high-table λoyos of St.
> C.S. Lewis' church...(5)

Lewisites such as Walter Hooper, who knew that a little more was demanded of the reader than the admissible prerequisite of a childlike enthusiasm for Lewis's miracles, his Lion and his oceans, were troubled.

> The valuators have, for the most part, done little to satisfy the desire of thousands of admirers to have Lewis's genius explained. Humbler critics have rarely soared any higher than writing mere paraphrases of what Lewis has already said so much clearer [sic]. Other critics, judging Lewis from some partial perspective of their own, have assumed a critical position higher than they have a right to. (6)

4 Foreword, C.S. Lewis: speaker & teacher. The volume also contains the indispensable 'Notes on Lewis's Voice.'

5 'May Day Song for North Oxford', John Betjeman's Collected Poems (John Murray, 1958) p.118.

6 Foreword to Paul L. Holmer, C.S. Lewis: the shape of his faith and thought.

A parable of sheep and goats, really. Hooper's last area of reference is veiled, but it is easy to understand that some critics will choke in the Narnian atmosphere. Long before gusts of rapture for all Narnian things blew like Pentecost over the backwaters of criticism, the very name of Lewis could evoke irritation. E.K.T. Dock revealed in Scrutiny that editorial policy regarding Lewis was more or less to consider him dense[7]; Orwell thought that with a bit more backbone Lewis might have made a decent phalangist[8]; and recently Bob Dixon, in the open-minded critical heritage of Trotskyism, accused Lewis among others of being the deed's creature in paedocide[9]. While the Narnian critics struggled against the Calormene secular imperialism of modern letters, a faction of Black Dwarves could always be found to shoot at both.

The absurdity of these criticisms is matched only by the haplessness of many Lewis enthusiasts in suspending any kind of objectivity, particularly when their accounts take colour from reminiscences of Lewis the man. The very existence of such tensions and divisions, however, suggests strongly that there is in Lewis something to talk about. Obvious as it is that one can hardly just describe Lewis as a 'world', it is equally clear that such statements are an attempt to convey a singular excitement. At the risk of sounding pseudo-scientific, or even unintelligible, one

7 14 (1946) pp. 53-9.

8 Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, III, pp. 302-4.

9 Catching Them Young 2, p.163.

might say that Lewis enjoys a sense of dimension, and a sense of dynamics where you wouldn't suppose that there was any room for movement. I don't think there is really a language which will cover this, but some examples should make it clearer, as this peculiar faculty is reflected or symbolised in the work. When he invents travellers in time, for instance, they don't simply go back and forwards, but 'eckwards and andwards' as well[10]. It might be argued that this is standard pseudo-referential practice, which it is, but most pseudo-references simply aren't as suggestive as this. To say that doesn't help me to find out exactly what 'eckwards and andwards' does suggest, except that my usual conception of time as two-dimensional is disrupted. It also helps to make the idea of time-travel more attractive (for anything that may be worth), as though you'd discovered an Underground in a city where you'd thought there were only buses. This example isn't conclusive of anything at all, particularly as it occurs in a fragment, but another of the same sort turns up in The Last Battle, where Lewis describes Heaven expanding as you penetrate its inmost circles[11].

These examples should, if nothing more, help us to understand why it should occur to anyone to call Lewis 'a world'; they connect with Lewis's own idea of a hidden inner country within him. This isn't altogether a solipsistic place, because there is evidence of two thousand years or more of dogma and philosophy all about it,

10 The Dark Tower and other stories ed. W. Hooper. (Collins, 1977) pp. 86-7.

11 pp. 162-3.

but it's governed pretty firmly by one hand all the same. It is the natural environment of Lewis's critics, who cannot detail but who know well the fusion of guessed and unguessed, of given and constructed, of pianoforte score and unwritten orchestration that is the characteristic experience of Lewis.

It was presumably a recognition of some such phenomenon that led to the balanced work of Corbin Scott Carnell, William Luther White and Paul L. Holmer. All three wandered from the broad highway of superficial textual description established by most of Lewis's critics, and although they tended to refuse the strait gate of involved textual description as well, their differing paths have nonetheless been relevant.

Carnell has concentrated on analysing the state of mind of an author who longs for something beyond the world, using Lewis mostly as an example of someone consciously stricken by Sehnsucht[12]. White and Holmer have dealt respectively with Lewis's idea of man in the cosmos and the 'morphology' of Lewis's thought.

The lightest glance at the diversity shown by these essays indicates the oddness of the critical problems posed by Lewis. Areas have been marked off for investigation before the establishment of a strong, central and synthetic understanding: the kind of understanding that might, for example, have restrained Professor Holmer from saying that there is little in Lewis of ontology[13],

12 Bright Shadow of Reality, pp. 13-29.

13 p.6. 'Ontology', of course, is one of those plasticine words which can be made to suggest very much what you like; but the tenuous ghosts of The Great Divorce, the real England and Narnia of The Last Battle, and the effects of the angels in the trilogy on apparent reality suggest that Lewis was concerned with ontology in a very basic sense of the word.

a statement which, without benefit of qualification, is contradicted by Carnell's entire drift, not to mention Lewis's. The desire for a holistic understanding of Lewis cannot be eccentric when much of the opposition to him is grounded on his very accessibility, his guiding, indicative pursuit of the 'Same Old Thing'. Such an understanding might have led before now to an emotionally satisfying description of Lewis. Yet along with the absence of a central study is the absence of an indisputable Lewisian chef d'oeuvre, nor can it be coincidental that polite variance over what is to fill this position arises in the work of a critic who, broadly speaking, resisted evaluation. Lewis spoke of the Christian view of life as a mingled yarn of good and evil. This wouldn't be a bad description of his canon, for which few will claim overwhelming technical mastery nor deny its general value.

There is also the question of whether it would ever be possible to understand Lewis, save instinctively. The question applies equally to other writers, but with Lewis it seems more demanding simply because he covered so many pages. And in doing so, he could not keep still. Words, in his books, pale and fall back at the image of their referents: light, he says to the artist, should be your first concern, not paint. Yet Ransom, 'sitting within the very heart of language, in the white-hot furnace of essential speech', when Mercury comes to St. Anne's, finds it 'heavenly pleasure'[14].

I don't think that this is so much a paradox as the natural turn of the mind, particularly the natural turn

[14] That Hideous Strength, pp. 199-200.

of a mind which likes to be right more often than not. But the contexts here are dissimilar. The artist in The Great Divorce who is more interested in painting Heaven than in seeing God is differently placed from Ransom, who is finding out what the Gods are like. Yet even so, between the two examples we seem to see a romanticism which asserts that whatever is happening at this present moment is best, a theme for perfect worlds and one, indeed, which runs through Perelandra.

To take this even further, it is possible to say that Lewis in one sense thought hierarchically, and in another refused to grade. This is not quite as complicated as it sounds. That some things were of overwhelming importance to him is clear enough; but on the other hand his nature abhorred exclusion. His reverence, therefore, for the rational is but the measure of his awe for the supra-rational: therefore he loves 'good "bad" books', the 'Same Old Thing', and simple experiences like tea at the old mill, or 'a walk through country he really likes, and taken alone.'[15]. The whole complex of competing urges can hardly be summed up better than by the Ransom of That Hideous Strength, who directs the war against the enemies of mankind while laid up in his cosy manor.

Whether we would care for a Lewis who impressed one side of his personality or the other upon us more consistently is another matter. But the problems of describing Lewis are, as I've indicated, made more difficult by his occasional stumblings. Even if we say, in shorthand, that he has a domestic and a dramatic side, the existence of the two making it harder to categorise him, the very fusion

[15] The Screwtape Letters, p. 67.

of the two can have side-effects itself.

On the 'domestic' side, he tells us often enough that the highest cannot stand without the lowest, and it's understandable that his presentation of the lowest should sometimes seem merely sentimental or facile. But he does frequently convince us of the straightness and decency of some ordinary thing, as in the case of Mark in That Hideous Strength, who is converted slowly during his stay with the N.I.C.E. The conversion proceeds through his longing, in a nightmare prison, for 'Jane and fried eggs and soap and sunlight and the rooks cawing at Cure Hardy.'[16] Yet our compassion is hindered by the fact that it's very difficult to believe that anyone could get into Mark's situation in the first place, even if (which of course makes it worse) it only happened to him because he had no more sense than you would expect from a sociololgist. To confront Lewis with this sort of problem was to be told that you had confused 'holiday' fiction with serious work[17], which is not unlike hearing that a Festival of Light rally is the Women's Institute annual trip.

However, we can find ourselves concluding the case against Lewis on the ground of some shocking neglect of all plausibility when he turns and plunges us into a nostalgia of the soul itself for what it has never known, and for what, at one point, he has the sufficiency to ask if we can remember[18]. If we're looking for a

16 That Hideous Strength, p.184.

17 'A Reply to Professor Haldane', Of Other Worlds: essays and stories ed. W. Hooper. (Geoffrey Bles, 1966) p.74.

18 The Lion, and Witch and the Wardrobe, p.164; though not a particularly impressive passage.

definable quality in Lewis, this is the most important one. Yet so far from claiming that he has this quality himself, he denies that it is a human faculty at all, and even warns us against it to some extent:

> The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things--the beauty, the memory of our own past--are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. (19)

Implicit here--without any prescription on method--is the idea that the artist's task is the sensible rendering of Christian ontology, with the suggestion, obviously, that this is something that will depend on factors that cannot be accounted for. The passage is of course addressed to audiences rather than to artists, but Lewis is at the same time taking it for granted that art is there to provide spiritual experiences, if the spiritual experiences themselves will permit it. This is part of what he means when he calls himself a dinosaur. He sees any good that comes through art as transcendent; we see it as tied up with the work, like sap in a leaf.

To be more explicit, he sees the point of art as imitating the transcendent realness of God; part of this, as we saw, is clear in Rehabilitations. All theists have a greater or lesser sense of this realness, but Lewis's preoccupation with it is quite extraordinary. God was Love, in Lewis's opinion, or not God at all, but this Love he perceives effectively as facthood. We may see his individuality in that he is much more likely to invoke his relations with an ultimate fact of love than (as might be

19 'The Weight of Glory', in Screwtape Proposes a Toast, p.98.

expected) a personal sense of communion with the risen Christ. The language he uses to describe his personal relations with God is, on balance, unpointed. When, for example, he portrays himself as a donkey in The Last Battle he refers to Aslan as 'You know Who'[20]. (Puzzle the Donkey is a characterisation of 'Brother Ass', St. Francis' name for the body, and one which Lewis took up for himself - particularly, since he was a diplomatic man, when he was writing to Catholics.) The missing bits, the portentous subrecognitions like this one, are designed to encourage reactions in the reader, reflections of his own longing for Facthood, Sehnsucht, and his appreciation of it, which he calls 'Joy'.

'I find,' says Carnell, 'in C.S. Lewis's understanding of Sehnsucht a parallel to Anselm's ontological argument...'[21] Anselm's proof, which has recently received fresh attention[22], runs that 'something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality'[23]. In the lore of seminarians and clerics, which you do not always see written down, Anselm's argument is to be used more as an aid to meditation than as a proof, but it is effectively the most frequent of all the arguments that Lewis uses for the

20 p.11.

21 Bright Shadow of Reality, p.163.

22 See Alvin Plantinga (ed.) The Ontological Argument: from St. Anselm to contemporary philosophers (Macmillan, 1968).

23 Sr. Benedicta Ward (trans.) Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm (Penguin Books, 1973) p.245.

existence of God. (Nominally, he says more often that we can't think of values for ourselves and that they must have come in from the outside.) In fact, Lewis never quite articulates Anselm's argument as a matter for fiction, preferring instead to talk in terms of smuggling in theology under the guise of romance[24]. But his stories, in a way, are a long-term investment, depending largely on the possibility that they might be 'true'--not, let us say, accurate, but delineating, even if sketchily, perfect modes of being. The critic, like any other reader of Lewis, is led to the overwhelming question: and if some part of him cannot respond to Lewis's answer, he will tend to see Lewis as worthless, as for example Dixon does.

Lewis does not, as I say, tell us much about Anselm, but in one letter where the ontological argument comes up, he immediately relates having the idea of a perfect being to his feeling of Sehnsucht:

> ...it is arguable that the 'idea of God' in some minds does contain, not a mere abstract definition, but a real imaginative perception of goodness and beauty beyond their own resources. It certainly seems to me that the 'vague something' which has been suggested to one's mind as desirable, all one's life, in experiences of nature, music, and poetry... and which rouses desire that no finite object ever pretends to satisfy, can be argued not to be any product of our own minds. (25)

It is the correlation of two ideas, the longing and the idea of perfection, which carries weight here. The longing, partly, is the detail in the idea, the importance of which we saw before, and the imaginative part of the perception: 'though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I

24 As in Of Other Worlds, p 37 (but see p.36), and Letters of C.S. Lewis, p. 167.

25 Letters of C.S. Lewis, pp.143-4.

think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will.'[26] This, in effect, is the argument of Boniface and one that is clearly akin to Anselm's.

Carnell calls this 'understanding... Lewis's most significant contribution to Christian apologetics...'[27] There is one piece of description in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe which may suggest the same. The house of Professor Kirke, who is one of Lewis's guises, seems to reflect aspects of Lewis's life. There is a long room 'full of pictures' with a 'suit of armour'--his ancestors, among whom, he tells us, was a Norman knight[28] --another 'all hung with green, with a harp in one corner', which suggests Lewis's time in Ireland, and another 'lined with books--most of them very old books', which needs no comment. The final room is empty except for the wardrobe and 'a dead blue-bottle on the window-sill'[29]. The isolation of the wardrobe--being the door between the worlds, it really counts--and the dead blue-bottle may be nothing but a bit of stage design. But the other details seem to call out for identification, and the blue-bottle is enigmatic. Lewis was aware of Aquinas's remark that his theology reminded him of straw, and Lewis often takes the same tone about his own theology: one extreme case is in A Grief Observed[30], in which he reflects on the

26 'The Weight of Glory', Screwtape Proposes A Toast, p.99.

27 Bright Shadow of Reality, p.163.

28 Surprised by Joy, p.9.

29 p.11.

30 (Faber, 1961; 1966) p.52.

death of his wife. What is certain is that Lewis is allusive in a personal way throughout the Narnia series. Tolkien is cast as a retired star in Dawn Treader: Ramandu's daily consumption of a burning coal to revive himself[31] reminds us of Tolkien's Kolbitar club.

The origins of the wardrobe itself are full of symbolic reverberations. It is made from the wood of a tree grown from the core of a protological Narnian apple, an apple from the Tree of Life:

> ...it did not bear apples that would revive a dying woman as Digory's Mother had been revived, though it did bear apples more beautiful than any others in England, and they were extremely good for you, though not fully magical. (32)

The beauty was not 'in them, it only came through them.' Sometimes, he says, the tree would move mysteriously when there was no wind blowing, which is as acute as any of Lewis's descriptions of Sehnsucht. When the tree blows down, Professor Kirke has it made into a wardrobe, and it proves to be the door into Narnia. As the wardrobe for the characters, so, Lewis thinks, the stories may act for the readers. There is more to this than metaphor. The Wardrobe, if you like, is a metaphor for the imaginative faculties--that would be one way of reading the story--but we have already seen that Lewis believes these faculties themselves to be of supernatural provenance. They are a real door into something even better than Narnia; for, in cultivating mythic imaginings, Lewis was trying to encourage actions of a distinctly existential kind. 'A

31 p. 176.

32 The Magician's Nephew, p.170.

cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside.'[33] These actions, in turn, are to bring us face to face with the myths, as Lewis believed they exist in reality: into the heart of what he calls 'Joy'[34].

The two examples of 'poetry' in Lewis which I mentioned in the previous chapter (in criticism of Lewis, the word 'poetry', along with 'myth', should be used with restraint) are among the occasions when Lewis can communicate this 'Joy' to us. It first arrived into his life as a toy garden made out of moss and twigs by his brother[35], and it later became Paradise in The Last Battle. 'Joy' is normally felt by us as part of the longing: 'anyone who has experienced it will want it again.'[36]

Holmer, almost in embarrassment, neglects to acknowledge this aspect of Lewis fully, though it is this aspect which carries away most of the other critics. The picture he gives us of Lewis is rather more of a stick-in-the-mud who happens to be right. Holmer points out how consistently Lewis emphasises 'the little things', and how the Narnian creatures progress, or otherwise, according to how they carry these out. 'And most of those animals are like hieroglyphs for human beings. The logic of their lives

33 'The Weight of Glory', Screwtape Proposes A Toast, p.108.

34 White's decree on 'Joy' (p.111) should be recorded: 'Through his experience as a young man, Lewis discovered that Joy was not disguised sexual desire. Sex might be a substitute for Joy, but Joy was no substitute for sex.'

35 Surprised by Joy, p.12.

36 Surprised by Joy, p.20

stands out after a bit.'[37] These, however, are also the creatures that Lewis, with perfect and proper seriousness, ushers into Heaven. They do not simply, as Holmer leaves it, 'grow in spirit.'

But the little things, it must be admitted, are the reverse side of the romantic longing and 'Joy'. The orthodoxy, the 'Same Old Thing' of church attendance, moral theology and dependence on the Fathers is, Lewis might have said, the only possible fuel for Sehnsucht and 'Joy', for these are things which cannot be pursued, on earth, in any other way. 'I must say my prayers to-day whether I feel devout or not; but that is only as I must learn my grammar if I am ever to read the poets.'[38] And Aslan, though not a tame Lion, obeys rules if he makes them.[39]

But Lewis is a shade inconsistent about this orthodoxy. He presents it on occasions (as a moment ago) as a kind of booster, the main service of which is to get you out of earth gravity; at other times it is the 'sun' by which he sees everything else[40]. And this orthodoxy, too, is part of a set, along with his medievalism, his scholarhood and his avowed political moderation. The Christian orthodoxy is predominant, but it interacts with and is foreshadowed by the others. Humphrey Carpenter goes some

37 C.S. Lewis: the shape of his faith and thought, p.83.

38 Prayer: Letters to Malcolm, p.116.

39 Dawn Treader, p.136.

40 'Is Theology Poetry?', Screwtape Proposes A Toast, p.58.

distance to suggest that there was something airy and ill-defined about Lewis's character[41], and Lewis, of course, felt that this is true of everyone. The ghosts of the Divorce are not simply the dead. All creatures, seen in contrast with what Lewis believed was reality, are weightless and transparent. Lewis was simply not exempt from the attractions of orthodoxies, in term of their calorific content.

There is, in any case, a continuum running through the frightened ghost, the semi-public and wholly dogmatic figure, and the poet who feels that an ineffable happiness is breaking in on his consciousness, then stealing away. As these things make a life, so they make an oeuvre, with some parts of it (pace Hooper) not quite of such inestimable value as others. If all of these facets are not admitted, it will be easier to insinuate, like Carnell, that Lewis is a type who is the touchstone of Western art, or to systemise him like White. If we misplace his delight we shall find it, with Holmer, in his self-discipline.

'All that you are...', Lewis says, 'every fold and crease of your individuality was devised from all eternity to fit God as a glove fits a hand.'[42] That Lewis meant this precisely is clear from the man beset by lust in The Great Divorce[43]. Lust, a whispering lizard on his

41 Inklings, pp. 243-245 especially.

42 Pencilled on a fly-leaf in Lewis's copy of von Hugel's Eternal Life. See Carnell, Bright Shadow of Reality, p. 43.

43 pp. 89-96.

shoulder, is killed with his consent, and rises as a stallion; while the man, a ghost like the others, immediately becomes more solid. Lewis makes it plain that the condition of death must be met before this can happen. 'Nothing, not even the best and noblest, can go as it now is. Nothing, not even what is lowest and most bestial, will not be raised again if it submits to death.'[44] While an attitude like this is hardly indulgent, it is not simply negative, and the positive side of it, which Lewis presents, convincingly, as cancelling out the suffering involved[45], is seen in the example of the glove. Any particularity in the example has to remain understood. Lewis says nothing about any specific person's individuality, and while the remark is not in case addressed to readers, it's not unlike Lewis's public manner. It has, in fact, all the air of a five-finger exercise for a romantic popular theologian. But no-one who does read it is likely to worry that there's no mention of his particular quirks: the image is too strong to preserve any fear that these will, ultimately, prove irremediable. The image is, characteristically[46], a transposition of the erotic.

Conveying the feeling that such a writer arouses in us, particularly when these feelings fluctuate, suggests that, in the first place, Hooper's critical dilemma should

44 The Great Divorce, p.95

45 It is clear at many points in A Grief Observed that Lewis himself thought that he had been, to say the least, blasé about suffering.

46 George F. Cassell, in Clive Staples Lewis (Chicago Literary Club Papers, 1950) is good on Lewis's audacious analogies.

be reset. It is extraordinary, looking over the critical literature, how easy it is for the critic either to tag along behind Lewis or to wheel off into more or less distant meditations. No-one looking at criticism of Lewis, when it is sympathetic, could fail to be impressed by its lack of ordinary and proper analytical aggression. We have to stop regarding the texts as fragile; though they have weaknesses, they are anything but. And they were not meant for monuments, but doors.

III WORDS

> My prose style is really abominable, and between poetry and work I suppose I shall never learn to improve it. (1)

This, as Hooper tells us, comes 'as a surprise to those of us who have long admired the beauty and clarity of Lewis's prose.' (It's interesting to note the tic of the enthusiastic amanuensis[2] in that those of us: some of us, by implication, are reproached.) We do not suppose, of course, that even at the age of twenty-three, when Lewis made this entry in his diary, that his prose was really abominable. Our problem, rather, will be to see whether it is in fact beautiful and clear. It's tempting, offhand, to say yes, remembering lines like the one in the atheist's argument from The Problem of Pain: 'The creatures cause pain by being born, and live by inflicting pain, and in pain they mostly die.'[3] The iambic flourish, clearer in the last phrase than in the middle one, is in context taken no further than will do any good, and 'mostly' is an inspiration, even if its tendency to float, in terms of strict meaning, is only controlled by the universal application of 'die'. But is this the impression that remains?

The most likely reaction to Lewis's prose would be to recognise it as a string of dialectic habits working under

1 Quoted in the Preface, Selected Literary Essays, p.ix.

2 Has Hooper been truthful about his friendship with Lewis? See The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal, 9-14.

3 (Geoffrey Bles, 1940) Fontana Books, 1957, p.2.

contract. Lewis's prose personality is aggressive and argumentative, and such beauty as it has is often met in a kind of crushing sweetness, as in his reply to Professor Haldane:

> Here, as so often, what I was really saying was something which the Professor, had he understood it, would have found simply uninteresting. (4)

The insult is many-sided enough to be aesthetic, but it is, naturally, in the way of striking efficiency rather than limpid perfection. Lewis reaches out for forms like an octopus, and, workmanlike, creates style by exerting stress on a given matrix. He says of his children's stories, 'I fell in love with the Form itself... Its very limitations of vocabulary became an attraction; as the hardness of the stone pleases the sculptor or the difficulty of the sonnet delights the sonneteer.'[5] If you react like this consistently, you end up using a variety of styles. Carpenter, relating the derivativeness of these to his question of what lay at the core of Lewis's personality, argues that

> ...one can regard all Lewis's most successful literary work as pastiche. He chose a form from one source, an idea from another; he played at being (in turns) Bunyan, Chesterton, Tolkien, Williams, anybody he liked and admired. (6)

It wouldn't be easy to deny this, but it tends to ignore the effects of the whole catalogue. One of the effects, which has a bearing on Lewis's chameleon-like abilities, is that Lewis is staked out across the entirety of some

4 Of Other Worlds, p.81.

5 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said', Of Other Worlds, pp.36-7.

6 Inklings, p.244.

readers' lives, and to an extent which no other writer is likely to match. He is read in primary schools, secondary schools and universities, quite apart from those who read him for what he can offer as a pastor, and it is precisely in this way that hegemonies are constructed. None of this makes Lewis any less the pasticheur (though Lewis had his own ideas on the subject, one of which I used at the beginning of this thesis) but this is of academic importance in a world where the majority of readers are likely to find Bunyan and Chesterton more attractive because of their resemblances to Lewis, and not vice-versa.

The effect of the whole catalogue, again, is something deeper than role-play. One can certainly identify bits of Lewis which sound like Tolkien or Williams or Chesterton, but that's not to say that there isn't a different, and individual, tegument surrounding them. This may, even then, be 'the sort of thing a man might say', as Owen Barfield dubbed a particular example[7], but if it has some kind of consistency, and unless you can identify the other man who might say it, it's better to call it a personal style than a pastiche.

Interestingly, a remark of Alastair Fowler's about Lewis's style leads us in a direction opposite to Carpenter's. Noting that Lewis had read E.R. Eddison's The Worm Ouroboros at least five times, Fowler says that 'to have done so and kept his style uninfected testifies to remarkable discrimination in selecting what was of value.'[8] Incidentally, the closest Lewis came in his fiction to imitating Eddison is

7 Light on C.S. Lewis, p. ix.

8 'The Aliens of Othertime', Times Literary Supplement, 1st July, 1977.

in Prince Caspian, where Peter sends a stately message to King Miraz; and Lewis is obviously so tickled by this that for a while after the conversation has a seventeenth-century flavour[9]. But it is rather ironic that Lewis corresponded with Eddison in the latter's idiosyncratic tongue[10].

What I propose to do, in looking at Lewis's prose, is to take passages more or less at random, and see as far as possible just how Lewis does communicate. The first of these concerns 'Historicism', Lewis's name for the idea that evolution, and human development in particular, is inherently purposeful.

> I grew up believing in this myth and I have felt--I still feel-- its almost perfect grandeur. Let no-one say we are an unimaginative age: neither the Greeks nor the Norsemen ever invented a better story. Even to the present day, in certain moods, I could almost find it in my heart to wish that it was not mythical, but true. And yet, how could it be? (11)

The first thing we notice is the rhetorical parenthesis 'I still feel'. When we connect it with the third sentence it ought to strike us as redundant, but Lewis wants it: he is protesting. He has, pace Carpenter, a strong enough sense of who he is. In fact, he is playing on it. He will knock the myth down by pointing out that it is he who is giving it a form of endorsement.

9 (Geoffrey Bles, 1951) Puffin, 1962, Chapter 13.

10 Inklings, p.190.

11 'The Funeral of a Great Myth', Christian Reflections ed. W. Hooper. (Geoffrey Bles, 1967) p.88.

We see also that the first two sentences are really four balanced alpha clauses, and we realise that what we are to feel is Lewis's immense conviction and understanding of the problem from within. This calls for stateliness. His generosity is suggested by the smooth stress-triad, 'almost perfect grandeur', and by the fact that this group is isolated by the parenthesis (this, of course, qualifying the balance I mentioned a second ago, but not as much as all that). It's also true that Lewis's generosity is diminished by the fact that the stresses fall so evenly over the phrase--'almost' has just as much weight as 'perfect' and 'grandeur', a physical weight as opposed to its usual mere semantic impact.

The pinnacle of Lewis's concession is in his apparent argument for the other side with the rhetorical assertion 'Let no-one say we are an unimaginative age'. This is unconsciously funny, or ironic, since few have ever gone further to suggest it than Lewis. But whether or not he gives us the impression that he is carried away by his own magnanimity, a seeming empathy remains one of his most successful debating tricks. Nor does the context, incidentally, give us any real impression other than that the 'Myth', as the title indicates, is to be buried.

Lewis, I suppose, is consciously debating against an idea which he neither underestimates nor despises. But his choice of lexis leaves us in no doubts as to where his deepest sympathies lie. The words 'invented' and 'story', in particular, are juxtaposed to divest 'story' of the overtones that Lewis can give it if he pleases. Compare

this passage with one in which Lewis adresses children:

> ...I know very little about how this story was born. That is, I don't know where the pictures came from. And I don't believe anyone knows exactly how he 'makes things up'. Making up is a very mysterious thing. (12)

It's true that Lewis is talking about different kinds of creative process, though the one we started with could be argued by some people not to be a creative process at all, but a recognition of the way things actually are. But there is a great difference, even for a story, in being 'born' or being 'invented'. Here, Lewis almost frowns on the idea of a story's being 'made up'. The inverted commas admittedly catch a slight shift of tone to the completely conversational, but the fact that Lewis's audience is made up of children would be a reason for keeping them on the recurrence of the phrase, instead of dropping them as Lewis does. The difference between the two sorts of story is that 'Historicism' is not a <u>real</u> story. In this precise context, 'imaginative' is, to say the least, barbed praise. And the wistful, but anaemic, 'find it in my heart' is a subtle appeal to what Lewis conceives of as rationality. This expression bears no relation to the rather more seductive ways in which Lewis normally unveils his emotional insights, as we shall see in a passage below.

Phonetic tone is carefully employed in the 'Historicism' passage. Apart from the 'almost perfect grandeur', the voice lifts on 'present day' to fall sharply on 'certain moods', leaving us in no doubt as to what sort of moods these are. And it's interesting to see that lift of the voice used to alter the contribution that Lewis's personal history makes in the passage. He introduces his early

12 'It All Began With A Picture...', <u>Of Other Worlds</u>, p.42.

familiarity with the 'Historicism' attitude in order to assure us that he is not attacking something alien to him out of prejudice; but within a second he is on the verge of implying that it is, after all, something you grow out of. The word 'invented', too, is in the spotlight.

We can notice that Lewis takes care not to be literary, as the 'was' in the third sentence demonstrates. When he was working on The Pilgrim's Regress he wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves that

> I aim chiefly at being idiomatic and racy... to put the thing in a nutshell you want 'The man of whom I told you' and I want 'The man I told you of '. (13)

Elegance in itself is not at a premium, and Lewis is consciously looking for the readiest means of communication. There is a difference between this and the simplest means of communication, as we've seen. Lewis, deliberately or otherwise, will use artifice to convince, and this no doubt added to his confidence that 'he can detect the fallacy of current objections to belief'[14]. I'm not suggesting that Lewis used mere verbal substitutes for argument, but he did reinforce bona fide argument with semantic complements. From this point of view, beauty and clarity and Lewis's prose, if present, are aspects rather than the whole.

Where Lewis can spread himself out more, and is not forced to convince within a short space, he is less pragmatic and a little closer to a putative norm of modern English style. Here he is talking about sexual morality

13 Roger Lancelyn Green & Walter Hooper, C.S. Lewis: a biography (Collins, 1974) p. 129.

14 Austin Farrer, 'The Christian Apologist', Light on C.S. Lewis, p.24.

to an audience about whom, on the face of it, he can make fewer assumptions:

> Before we can be cured we must want to be cured. Those who really wish for help will get it; but for many modern people even the wish is difficult. It is easy to think that we want something when we do not really want it. A famous Christian long ago told us that when we was a young man he prayed constantly for chastity; but years later he realised that while his lips had been saying, 'Oh Lord, make me chaste,' his heart had been secretly adding, 'But please don't do it yet.' This may happen in prayers for other virtues too; but there are three reasons why it is now specially difficult for us to desire--let alone to achieve--complete chastity. (15)

The original of this passage was written for radio, and it's interesting to compare the coupling of words here--'cured'/'cured', 'wish'/'wish', 'want'/'want'--with the expository balance in the second sentence of the previous passage ('Let no-one say we are an unimaginative age: neither the Greeks nor the Norsemen ever invented a better story'). At the same time the 'famous Christian' remains anonymous, which saves the text from appearing spiky. Faced with a mild psychological complexity, Lewis handles it by using the conventional symbols of 'lips' and 'heart'; but above all we feel that the individual weight has been taken out of the words, so that any effect in the passage arises out of its cursiveness. The craft is slighter throughout. Lewis partitions sentences as incorrigibly as ever, but it's noticeable that in using semi-colons in successive sentences he is content to emerge with a uniform effect, one of strong qualification. In the last sentence, the parenthesis does not seem ideally placed.

15 Mere Christianity, p.88.

These two passages work so differently that, even so far, we can probably guess Lewis's standards of efficiency in prose to be strictly functional, and we may want to prise apart Hooper's 'beauty' and 'clarity'. This next is from Till We Have Faces[16], where Orual considers the sacrifice of her sister Psyche to the Brute (as Cupid appears):

> It is, in its way, admirable, this divine skill. It was not enough for the gods to kill her, they must make her father the murderer. It was not enough to take her from me, they must take her from me three times over, tear out my heart three times. First her sentence; then her strange, cold talk last night; and now this painted and gilded horror to poison my last sight of her. Ungit had taken the most beautiful thing that ever was born and made it into an ugly doll.

In some ways this is more difficult to discuss than the other passages, since it is a paragraph not strictly necessary. The sequence of events has been narrated clearly enough, to the extent where no reader of ordinary attentiveness could have missed the significant changes in Psyche. Psyche, in fact, has just appeared in her sacrificial grotesquerie, and, avoiding a climax, Lewis enters this paragraph of comment before a time-switch in which Orual describes her behaviour as reported to her by others. As a conscious decision, the commentary aids the transition to a different viewpoint. But it's difficult not to notice, in reading the novel, that Lewis can make Orual complain against the gods more effectively than this, and in shorter form. On the preceding page, for instance, Orual remarks on the sacrificial preparations: 'Food for the gods must always be found somehow, even when the land starves.'

[16] (Geoffrey Bles, 1956) Fount Paperbacks, 1978, p.88.

It is perhaps because the passage I've chosen has no real narrative function that it seems so worked up with parallelisms, and indeed extensions of these, supplied at the end of the second sentence, and, in the third sentence, with greater numerical accuracy than might be expected from a person under stress. There is a kind of grim sonority in 'cold', 'painted', 'gilded', 'poison' and 'doll'; they tell us, readily enough, that something artificial and sinister is happening. But this, as description, does not rise above the commonplace. The standard, once again, is a robust and functional one.

Staying with fiction, we encounter some dialogue of Mrs. Dimble's amid chaos engendered by the N.I.C.E.:

> "As far as I can see there won't <u>be</u> any houses in Edgestow. There's no question of trying to live on the far side of the river any longer, even if they'd let us. What did you say? Oh, indescribable. All the poplars are going down. All those nice little cottages are going down. I found poor Ivy--that's your Mrs. Maggs, you know--in tears. Poor things! They do look dreadful when they cry on top of powder." (17)

William Luther White puts it very well when he says of Lewis that 'while he does not restrict himself to allegory to depict the inner world, his preoccupation with man produces a narrative form which differs markedly from the psychosociological novel stemming from Fielding and Richardson'[18]. It might be thought, however, that this passage is carrying the experiment too far.

17 <u>That Hideous Strength</u> (Bodley Head, 1945) p.88.

18 <u>The Image of Man in C.S. Lewis</u>, p.17.

It's fairly obvious that Lewis has assumed that the female voice requires italics, periphrasis and intensitives. Lots of women, of course, do speak in a manner which resembles this, but I cannot shake a sense of reduction when I read the passage. However, it arises from a constriction of Mrs. Dimble's character which appears to be deliberate. We discover, for instance, that 'poor Ivy' is in some ways much closer to Mrs. Dimble than Jane, whom Mrs. Dimble is addressing, is, and this despite Mrs. Dimble's comment-- of the kindest possible sort--on Ivy's vulgarity. Mrs. Dimble helps to set us up when we are surprised, along with Jane, to find that Ivy is part of the community at St. Anne's where social relations are more equitable than even the advanced Jane could expect, or, as it appears, desire. The licence of dialogue may absolve this passage from the charge of indulging in the Mimetic Fallacy, but to read it helps to account for a sense of unease that besets me when I find a noted student of Lewis saying that he relishes every word that Lewis wrote[19].

One could go on, not for ever, but through fifty-odd volumes, picking out passages from page 88 of one edition or another. I shall take only one more, this time allowing the bottom half of a page 87 to creep in. Lewis, here, is talking about the place of mental images at devotions.

> Yet mental images play an important part in my prayers. I doubt if any act of will or thought or emotion occurs in me without them. But they seem to help me most when they are most fugitive and fragmentary--rising and bursting like bubbles in champagne or wheeling like rooks in a windy sky: contradicting

[19] Walter Hooper, Foreword to Paul L. Holmer, C.S. Lewis: the shape of his faith and thought.

> one another (in logic) as the crowded metaphors of a swift poet may do. Fix on any one, and it goes dead. You must do as Blake would do with a joy; kiss it as it flies. And then, in their total effect, they do mediate to me something very important. It is always something qualitative--more like an adjective than a noun. That, for me, gives it the impact of reality. For I think we respect nouns (and what we think they stand for) too much. All my deepest, and certainly all my earliest, experiences seem to be of sheer quality. (20)

We can, as we read this passage, gain the impression that Lewis has said something, and this impression is not altogether unjustified. If we boil the passage down to something like 'There is an unreliable but appreciable significance in pictures which fleet through the mind' we shall, even though the context of Lewis's remarks be largely ignored, probably feel that we have had much the same experience. In all fairness, the experience is incommunicable. Simply because we feel that a mental image is significant, but don't know why, we can tell other people very little about it.

Lewis's approach to the problem is, I think, misjudged. Metaphors advanced to describe the action of the mental images look suspiciously like the mental images themselves, and this suspicion is reinforced by the exhalation from the alliteration in the fifth to the seventh lines, and by the word 'swift' applied to 'poet'. We feel, for a second, that the 'swiftness' of any particular poet's technique is only marginally what Lewis has in mind, even though in this case he has left us an essay to describe what he means[21]. It may be captious to mention that since the processes of the mental images have been described in so active a way,

20 *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, pp. 87-88.

21 'Variation in Shakespeare and Others,' *Rehabilitations*, pp. 161-180.

we may have a mental image of our own--a ludicrous if vague one--when Lewis has the images 'contradicting one another (in logic)'.

What confusion there is in the first half of this passage is pardonable, but the confusion in the second half is less so. Taken on its own, it might not seem utterly impermeable to meaning; but we should remember what Lewis has said on another occasion about adjectives and nouns (quoted on page 10 of this thesis). Lewis had doubtless forgotten about the other occasion, which would be an easy thing to do after twenty years, but it is noteworthy that he makes essentially the same mistake at both points, although the examples are opposed to one another. Neither variation of the metaphor will bear the weight that Lewis evidently wants to impose upon it; parts of speech are more dependent on one another than Lewis will allow. The effect, therefore, is rather vacuous when Lewis says that we respect nouns too much.

I wouldn't pretend that what's happened so far has been a conclusive experiment. But we started from a description of Lewis's prose as beautiful and clear, and these are terms which evoke expectation. If we're told that Lewis's prose has these qualities, we shall look for them on most occasions. What we've found--and what I think we'd continue to find if we went on working in this way-- is something rather different: a robust prose, not faultless, but one which meets Lewis's needs.

Hooper, I guess, has generalised from real experiences of good writing in Lewis. The experiences can be found, but only in reading large sections of Lewis, and with

moderate expectations. Here is one moment from The Horse and His Boy, which, as I've observed in children's libraries and the classroom, is the least popular of the Narnia stories; Shasta (the Boy) is riding through dense fog when he hears something large padding along beside him.

> 'Who are you?' asked Shasta.
> 'Myself,' said the Voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook: and again 'Myself,' loud and clear and gay: and then the third time 'Myself,' whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all round you as if the leaves rustled with it. (22)

Much of the effect that this passage has in context is owing to the benefits of serial publication. Aslan, entering here, brings a strong aura with him. But Lewis does not leave it at that. Sensitive to the fog he has spread around--and I should imagine, though of course I don't know, that Lewis thought of the fog before he thought about bringing in Aslan--Lewis allows Aslan to speak as a Mystery, as Father, Son and Paraclete. This is done carefully if idiosyncratically. The Holy Spirit is not to be identified with nature, though nature is filled with it. It also helps to bring the surroundings to life, as we cannot see the leaves. On the other hand, it's difficult to imagine the Christs you see on walls in Ravenna speaking out not only loud and clear, but gay; yet this is in tone with the characterisation of Aslan in the stories. While he is frequently mournful, he is not above a wild romp, as at the end of Prince Caspian. At a more mechanical level, it's interesting that Lewis partitions his sentences as usual, but with the difference that the divisions merely

22 (Geoffrey Bles, 1954) Puffin Books, 1965, pp. 139-40.

regulate the narrative flow. They do not signal an exposition, or another go at what was nearly expressed in the previous line.

A lot of energy in Lewis was, no doubt, released into the children's stories. The lexis of the passage above is certainly simple, but the individual words do count for something. They do not, for example, simply flood out. The voice of the Second Person does not have an effect on the surroundings, as do the voices of the others: it is immanent. But a similar energy can be found in other works, one of the most notable being 'The Weight of Glory':

> ...if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. (23)

This is, I suppose, more interesting as an introduction than as 'pure' prose. I do not really like the transferred epithet 'unblushing', or the 'promises'/'reward'/'reward'/'promised' inversion, and the eye, when it lights on 'fooling about with drink', may well flick back to 'the staggering nature of the rewards'. But the immediate promise is of vigour. 'Fooling about' is an interesting variation on the usual strictures of moral theologians, the terrible trinity of drink and sex and ambition is neatly reduced by the precise amount of attention each of its

23 Screwtape Proposes A Toast, pp.94-5, and ff.

elements receives, and there is an economic suggestion of the animal rationale stance in 'half-hearted'. At the end of our passage there is also the hint that we are about to go on another Lewisian vacation.

As the piece progresses, Lewis increasingly uses metaphor to underwrite his prose. That first example is striking enough, having precisely the distance and the similarity that he wants. Hereafter, pace is of great importance. Lewis has started with the idea of reward, and he goes on to consider whether the desire for Heaven is mercenary. He contrasts a man who marries for money with one who marries for love, then a general fighting for victory with one who fights with a peerage in mind. Then he puts the case that the joy of some rewards cannot be foreseen: 'The schoolboy beginning Greek grammar cannot look forward to his adult enjoyment of Sophocles as a lover looks forward to marriage or a general to victory.'

It is in working out the implications of his analogy for the Christian that Lewis provides coherence and structure for what has gone before: 'poetry replaces grammar, gospel replaces law, longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship.' Metaphor appropriately transforms metaphor, we might say. Lewis brings us to the shoreline, and we might notice that though you can make pies in the mud or on the beach, you can't see ships in a slum. Modulation, incidentally, replaces parallelism, both phonetically and lexically: for the paradigmatic structures are contained in a lapping, syntagmatic movement with one outcome.

Having come this far, he breaks off and addresses us more directly.

> In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you--the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name.

This feeling, which Lewis talks about in some other places, evidently matters more to him than anything: 'some secret attraction... something, not to be identified with, but always on the verge of breaking through, the smell of cut wood in the workshop or the clap-clap of water against the boat's side...'[24].

There are two threads running through this passage. One is that of physical imagery ('rip open', 'pierces with such sweetness') and the other is the social language of romance ('shyness', 'inconsolable', 'secret', 'sweetness', 'intimate' and 'awkward'). Both of these lead toward the final comparison, which in itself becomes a specific angle that Lewis desires: not simply our being lovers, but our behaviour as lovers, is his concern. At the same time, the guiding spirit of the passage is that of transposition. Lewis has no intention of leaving matters as they stand here - 'very earthly imagery indeed,' he calls it further on. There are difficulties in this approach. Lewis is trying to recall an emotion without an immediate

[24] The Problem of Pain, p. 134.

correlative--'The Weight of Glory' is a sermon, and there are no convenient fairylands to explore--and redefinition, which he is fond of in any case, becomes de rigeur:

> These things--the beauty, the memory of our own past--are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them.

We may have felt, on sight of that transforming metaphor, that Lewis was building a refining structure, but by this point it begins to look accumulatory, proceeding by richesse. We may well find some banality in the individual elements heaped together, but Lewis avoids the dilution of his aggregate effect by the inspiration which distracts attention from the limits of his incantatory powers.

At this point Lewis spends some time on 'the evil enchantment of worldliness' and how this dampens the immortal longings. The argument is not in fact a good one, being directed again at the idea of creative evolution, in such terms as could effectively be reversed by the creative evolutionist and hurled back at Lewis. When Lewis says, for example, that the progressive gives a sop to your sense of exile on earth by persuading you that the earth can be made into a heaven, his opponent can say that the Christian takes into account your sense of alienation when he tells you that it is the next world that is important. Lewis has the advantage insofar as he can arouse these

inconsolable emotions which fall short of description; the creative evolutionist has the advantage when he points to a tangible world in front of your nose.

What is interesting is where this leaves the audience, for by this point it should have noticed that the ground in the sermon has been shifting. Lewis has no sooner invoked his idea of basic personality, putting out considerable effort to do so, when he huddles his audience into the collective for his treatment of the Great Myth: 'as if we could believe,' he says, 'that any social or biological development on this planet will delay the senility of the sun or reverse the second law of thermodynamics.' This is not quite the confidence that Austin Farrer describes, a confidence that he can detect fallacies in arguments against belief. The confidence is rather that the audience will be guided by him to the extent that it will see itself at one moment as a number of deeply personal beings whose inner reality is always threatening to overflow, and at another as Men against the Universe. Lewis, at any rate, as the expectations rise and he seems to unveil one thing and turn suddenly to explore another, is forced to move more and more quickly. In the next paragraph he covers Boniface's argument that the desire for Heaven demonstrates that Heaven exists: 'it would be very odd if the phenomenon called "falling in love" occurred in a sexless world.' It is worth noting, by the way, that for all the passages where Lewis does shell his opponents in a ruthlessly logical way, we are quite likely to meet the dogmatic apologist saying that it will be 'odd' if a given proposition is not the case.

A simpler pattern, however, emerges from beneath all this activity. The broaching of Sehnsucht turns out to have been important, and Lewis turns swiftly to match it with the canonical idea of glory, which, he says, appears to him 'ridiculous. Either glory means to me fame, or it means luminosity.' Then--and we begin to see how he has been shaping us--he remembers that 'no one can enter heaven except as a child; and that nothing is so obvious in a child... as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised.'

> Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures--nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator.

By now we've seen enough of Lewis's habit of balancing phrases to know that his grounded ship metaphor is unusual for him, in that he genuinely does file down rough edges at that point. Here, while there is a progression through 'humblest', 'most childlike' and 'most creaturely', the passage only appears to refine, with the use of 'nay' and the set of expository phrases. The phrases simply accumulate, they don't bring any further distinction. On the other hand, the general distinction that this passage makes, the development of that notion of revelation and discovery that Lewis invokes earlier on, causing himself so much embarrassment, is important. He wants to make us sense the 'specific pleasure of the inferior', which I would suggest is a feeling of security, and one, at that, which Lewis is at some pains to obscure. The principle of news from an unvisited country, as he puts it, is at work again.

He is talking, ultimately, not about actual feelings of security which occur in some people, but about feelings of security which he hopes will come about in us if we can enter into a state where we know that nothing can ever go wrong again. Fiendishness, from this point of view, is not so much something to be feared as something which is mechanically unsound. Caspian, on the farther shore, is worried for a moment in case his desire to see Earth is wrong; and Aslan tells him, 'You cannot want wrong things any more, now that you have died, my son.'[25]

Lewis thinks that he can glimpse just a short moment before satisfaction in 'the specific pleasure of the inferior' becomes pride.

> And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex for ever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero's book.

This is rough speech: 'inferiority complex' seems soldered into the noble context. But Lewis makes it clear that he is using names for things 'as we should now call' them, like self-approval. These names, like the things themselves, will be swept away. If any attitude to style is implicit here at all (Lewis is not, of course, thinking about style) it is a sense that he would be happy to replace any word he uses with a better candidate. There is structure ('beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief') but

25 The Silver Chair (Geoffrey Bles, 1953) Puffin Books, 1965, p. 204.

this is of so instinctive a sort that it can scarcely be called artifice.

Again, I'd be happier to call Lewis's prose energetic rather than beautiful or clear. On this occasion, for instance, would we not say that if something were beyond all hope, in the strict meaning of that phrase, it would also be beyond all belief if it happened? Yet we understand him well enough. His point simply does not rest on things like that. Lewis's prose, which is only seasonally graceful, will do; there are enough subtle effects to quieten our deeper aesthetic qualms, but it doesn't seem as if these occur to Lewis with great frequency. 'If you simply try to tell the truth,' he says, '(without caring twopence how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it.'[26] It may be ironic to point out that this attitude is derived from Carlyle, but it is certainly this attitude which constitutes Lewis's fist.

26 Mere Christianity, p.188.

IV ARGUMENTS, SOCIAL

Claiming that the modern moral outlook has become thoughtlessly utilitarian, Holmer finds that

> Lewis resisted this panacealike mentality and all the nostrums bedecked in moral garments--the welfare state, the growth of science, the popularisation of education, socialism, and even the picture of nations united to prevent war. Somehow all of these lacked what he wanted more than anything else,namely, a bright and infectious felicity that would catch all of us up in an intelligent and deep passion. (1)

As a description of what Lewis actually thought, this seems to me to be accurate. It certainly sheds light on some adverse views of Lewis, such as Bob Dixon's:

> The Narnia books encompass about a thousand years of Narnian history, but they remain, throughout, fixed in an approximation of the Middle Ages, like the author...
>
> ...we've seen political quietism, antagonism towards ordinary people, royalism, patriotism, original sin and selfishness- in fact, all the familiar characteristics of religion. (2)

It is true that a more widely accepted list of the familiar characteristics of religion consists of a sense of the numinous along with a moral code, but even given that in other ways Mr. Dixon's critique is not thoroughly thought out-what, for example, is the real effect on someone of patriotic propaganda for Narnia?--his outburst is useful in that it allows us to see how markedly Lewis can rub people up the wrong way. He had had much the same effect on Orwell, who interestingly, makes an interpretation of Lewis's motives which is rather more sinister.

> ...I draw attention to Mr. C.S. Lewis and his chummy little wireless talks, of which no doubt there will be more. They are not really so unpolitical as they are meant to look. Indeed they are an outflanking movement in the big counter-attack against the Left which Lord Elton, A.P. Herbert,

1 C.S.Lewis: The shape of his faith and thought, p.50.

2 Catching Them Young 2, p.161.

> G.M. Young, Alfred Noyes and various others have been conducting for two years past. (3)

It would be presumptuous to suggest that Orwell did not know his own Zeitgeist, but there's plenty of evidence to indicate that Lewis was never willing to become part of any social movement[4]. Nor is it likely, from Lewis's autobiographical sources, that he was drawn to theological enquiry in the pursuit of any social or economic vendetta. But Orwell, coming to a rather different conclusion from that of Dixon, shows again that Lewis presents a skandalon to some readers, while a critic like Holmer, who evidently sees this, will have it for a virtue to which one must be reconciled.

Allied with the problem of specifying what the stumbling-block is--if we are not content to label it some kind of blimpishness--is the question of how far it really is dictated by the rest of Lewis's concerns. Are we dealing with arbitary prejudices, as Carpenter suggests, fixations that we can happily divert, or the necessary consequences of a view of life that we might applaud or want to argue for? Lewis, we have seen, is a demanding author in the sense that he discourages lukewarmness in the reader: what he presses on his following is pressed, generally, with borrowed recommendations from the Most Highest. It is certainly not too much to argue that a broad acquiescence in Lewis's theology will tempt the reader into agreement with his social criticism. In That Hideous Strength, for

3 Collected Essays, III, p.304.

4 For example, see Lawlor in Light on C.S. Lewis, p.73.

example, Lewis polarises social liberalism and religious orthodoxy. He does so not unconvincingly and not without circumspection (Jane's anticipation of Women's Lib is countered by the charitably arranged domestic life of St. Anne's, as the couple's jejune radicalism is answered by St. Anne's equal disavowal of social inequality and any attempt to change it) but the middle ground that Lewis allows is tiny. St. Anne's is autocratically, if kindly, run--a germane example of this being Ransom's dictat that men and women shall have separate days for working in the kitchen, since they express themselves so differently over practical tasks that they irritate each other[5].

The idea of St. Anne's as a model, like the models of Byzantium presented by Justinian to God, and with comparable plausibility, leads us to two oddly related phenomena in Lewis, his avoidance of overt political talk and his inexhaustible lust for social discussion. For the former there are several probable reasons, the most likely and justifiable of which is connected with fear of heterodoxy. 'Christianity has not,' he says, 'and does not profess to have, a detailed political programme...'[6] Lewis will not have a Christianity allied with anything else that looks like a movement, particularly, it must be said, if the other thing sounds at all progressive. For that reason he makes Screwtape recommend 'Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Psychical Research', and so on. 'If they must be Christians let them at least be Christians with a difference.'[7] Lewis points out, sensibly,

5 pp. 99-100.

6 Mere Christianity, p.74.

7 The Screwtape letters, p.126.

that Christianity 'is meant for all men at all times and the particular programme which suited one place or time would not suit another.'[8] This may be a clever way of omitting the idea that although Christianity should not have a detailed political programme, it might still have detailed political principles; but one can only guess that Lewis, if confronted with such an argument, would have rested on the core of humane Christian ideals.

In addition to this Lewis chose to remain ill-informed, refusing to do anything so secular as to read a newspaper. Whether this was the result or the cause of his lack of political imagination is impossible to say, but of such a deficiency one is frequently aware. In his essay 'Meditation on the Third Commandment'[9] Lewis introduces us to three Christians, Philarchus, Stativus, and Spartacus, who are respectively phalangist, social democrat and revolutionary. They decide to form a Christian party,but of course anything they try to do leads to deadlock or to a rump unrepresentative of Christianity at all. What is interesting here is that Lewis does not regard Spartacus as free to be orthodox. Spartacus is certain 'that "the historial Jesus", long betrayed by the Apostles, the Fathers, and the Churches, demands of us a Left revolution', and has, in this respect at least, a touch of the lunatic Reverend Straik in <u>That Hideous Strength</u>[10]. Lewis, in his

8 <u>Mere Christianity</u>, p.74.

9 In <u>Undeceptions: essays on theology and ethics</u> ed. Walter Hooper. (Geoffrey Bles, 1971).

10 See pp. 51-2.

observation of reality, had doubtless been encouraged in the use of the typology that leads to Spartacus, but we still look for the vision, or at least the will, to see past the type.

The greatest attention to political complication as such that Lewis ever paid in his life[11] was in his boyhood stories of Boxen. These are, Green and Hooper remark, 'intensely dull.'

> This is largely due to the careful banishment of the poetic, the romantic and imaginative elements--and to the extraordinary absorption with politics. (12)

Warren Lewis wrote that the national and domestic atmosphere was such that the effect on his brother was firstly to convince him

> ...that 'grown-up' conversation and politics were one and the same thing, and that therefore he must give everything he wrote a political framework; and secondly to disgust him with the very word 'politics' before he was out of his teens. (13)

The Boxen stories, Lewis said, had no connection with 'Joy', and in them, we can readily understand, he had spent his interest in social mechanics. But he is, nevertheless, a vocal student of society, and when we look at some of the opinions he voices it can be difficult to believe, as Holmer asserts, that all Lewis wanted was for us to be caught up in 'a bright and infectious felicity'. The address 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast' is admittedly exceptional in that Lewis is hardly ever so irritable in

11 Except in the matter of faculty politics.

12 C.S. Lewis: a biography, p.23.

13 Ibid.

other places, while the reassumed demonic persona no doubt permits the entry of a tone that would not otherwise be present. Yet Lewis, even if he is speaking from one extreme of his character, does not seem to be entirely out of it; except, perhaps, that his historical grip appears weak.

> By the latter part of the century... The dangerous phenomenon called Christian Socialism(14) was rampant. Factory owners of the good old type who grew rich on sweated labour, instead of being assassinated by their workpeople-- we could have used that-- were being frowned upon by their own class. The rich were increasingly giving up their powers not in the face of revolution and compulsion, but in obedience to their own consciences. As for the poor who benefited by this, they were behaving in a most disappointing fashion. Instead of using their new liberties--as we reasonably hoped and expected--for massacre, rape, and looting, or even for perpetual intoxication, they were perversely engaged in becoming cleaner, more orderly, more thrifty, better educated, and even more virtuous. (15)

It is true that in 1887, after the dispersal of a crowd of thousands from Trafalgar Square by police, Foot Guards and Life Guards (in an incident which came to be known as 'Bloody Sunday') R.B. Cunninghame Graham, a Liberal MP and member of the Scottish aristocracy, was badly injured and later sent to prison for his involvement in the march. In the following year the prosperous shipowner, Charles Booth, began his twelve volumes of Life and Labour of the People in London[16], in which he estimated that sixty per cent of East Enders were living below the poverty line. If real

14 i.e., dangerous from Screwtape's point of view.

15 Screwtape Proposes a Toast, pp. 16-7.

16 A school textbook, Mr. I.M.M. MacPhail's Modern Times: a brief history from 1880 to 1955 (Edward Arnold, 1961) Chapter 4, provides the information in this paragraph.

wages, in the last quarter of the century, rose by almost forty per cent, unemployment could still stand at ten per cent--and that, let us remember, in an age without national insurance. In 1887, in fact, demonstrations were a weekly occurrence in London, twenty Irish MPs were in prison, and on one occasion gunboats were sent to the Isle of Lewis. Above all, from the point of view of the class history which Lewis has invoked, this is the time of such actions as the Great Dock Strike, the rise of trade unionism and the formation of the Labour Party.

As Screwtape continues, assessing the menu at the infernal banquet, a sense remains of the complete lack of the detail that would be necessary in making contentious social statements:

> The Trade Unionist garnished with Claptrap was perhaps a shade better. He had done some real harm. He had, not quite unknowingly, worked for bloodshed, famine, and the extinction of liberty. Yes, in a way. But what a way! He thought of those ultimate objectives so little. Toeing the party line, self-importance, and above all mere routine, were what really dominated his life. (17)

The effect here is much the same as we found with Spartacus, except that this is more vicious. The two-pronged attack is enough to suggest that Lewis has said all there is to be said about trade unionists; the reason why there are two sides to the attack is that objections from well-meaning people to the first assault will be undermined. The type is flashed up for recognition like the silhouette of a MIG. What we want to know is something definite, something to distinguish this trade unionist from others, thereby assuring ourselves that Lewis is not simply being a hooligan. He might have told us, for example, what was the reaction of

17 p.12.

his character to the fairly recent invasion of Hungary, but in fact the opportunity is lost.

The company the trade unionist keeps is also of interest: a 'lukewarm Casserole of Adulterers' and 'a municipal authority with Graft sauce'. These, Lewis says, under the license of his character, are 'vermin muddled in mind'--'under-sexed morons', in the case of the Adulterers, 'who had blundered or trickled into the wrong beds in automatic response to sexy advertisements, or to make themselves feel modern and emancipated, or to reassure themselves about their virility or their "normalcy", or even because they had nothing else to do.'[18] It is very fortunate that there is more of Lewis to offer than this; on this showing, it would be easy to conclude that he simply hated human beings.

Lewis, however, is a step ahead of this, and would have claimed that what he was doing in presenting modern society in the light of diabolical approval was to preserve the image of human beings. The address makes the point explicitly that the contemporary way of life which we all enjoy, taking a kickback before hopping into bed with the woman next door, is one which makes it difficult to produce either very good or very bad people: just lots of mediocre addicts of petty vice. Having taken a nasty setback over the severed head strategy, the infernal powers are now dehumanising everyone through the means of the totalitarian collective.

> Penal taxes, designed for that purpose, are liquidating the Middle Class, the class who were prepared to save and spend and make sacrifices in order to have their children privately educated. The removal

[18] p. 12.

> of this class, besides linking up with the abolition of education, is, fortunately, an inevitable effect of the spirit that says I'm as good as you. This was, after all, the social group which gave to humans the overwhelming majority of their scientists, physicians, philosophers, theologians, poets, artists, composers, architects, jurists, and administrators. (19)

The tone, we notice, is breaking down: Screwtape's 'fortunately' sounds a little forced. From another point of view, however, the fiction is reinforced. And Lewis is prophetic here; in the last days (almost) of Macmillan, he is making a complaint which did not really become popular until the first days of Healey. It is surely an off day for 'a man with a mind like a sword'[20] when he appears to argue that people are taxed on their father's profession, or perhaps this is the most imaginative of his fantasies for children.

The singularity of the outburst is most evident in the haplessness of the arguments. It is not simply that Lewis is here so acid; he is nowhere else so vulnerable. The case of the Trade Unionist, for instance, is brought in because he wants to attack what he sees as a growing totalitarianism of the Eastern European kind--this will become clearer--and, in referring to the first sputnik, he forgets the original target and traps himself in an impossible position.

> One Democracy was surprised lately when it found that Russia had got ahead of it in science. What a delicious specimen of human blindness! If the whole tendency of their society is opposed to every sort of excellence, why did they expect their scientists to excel? (21)

19 pp.23-4.

20 'Prologue', Anne Arnott, The Secret Country of C.S.Lewis (Hodder & Stoughton, 1976).

21 p.25.

Of course, there's no reason why a society which has got rid of its Middle Classes--in Lewis's imagination, anyway--could have excelled as the USSR did in space flight. But what makes the whole business even sillier is that Lewis, a few years earlier, had denounced public schools, or at any rate his[22]. In another place, arguing against the idea that money is the worst corrupter of men, he offers his own experience of the most corrupt society in which he ever lived: his public school, in which money did not circulate[23].

Despite its failure to argue well, the essay is unpleasantly calculating. Lewis will not take the chance of being labelled a political hierarchist:

> We, in Hell, would welcome the disappearance of Democracy in the strict sense of that word; the political arrangement so called. Like all forms of government it often works to our advantage; but on the whole less often than other forms. (24)

Credentials like these, when the ironic husk has been stripped from them, are worth having. They distinguish the socially unenlightened from the outright social pest. But Lewis has already undermined this tacit credo by the use of a story he recalls about Greek tyrants, and the lesson one gave to another in the art of government. 'The second dictator,' he says, 'led the envoy into a field of corn, and there he snicked off with his cane the top of every stalk that rose an inch or two above the general level.'

22 In Surprised by Joy, Chapters 2 ('Concentration Camp') and 6 ('Bloodery').

23 Of Other Worlds, p.79.

24 Screwtape Proposes a Toast, p.24

This story, when it comes with the approval, a hypocritical approval, of public schools, makes us despair not of Lewis's view of democracy, but of his ability to understand what a democracy might be. He offers nothing on the subject of equality of opportunity, but rather pretends that anything done in this way is performed in a spirit of malicious levelling. 'The bright pupil... remains democratically fettered to his own age-group throughout his school career, and a boy who would be capable of tackling Aeschylus or Dante sits listening to his coaeval's attempt to spell out A CAT SAT ON THE MAT.'[25] The alarming thing about a sentence like that is not its essential argument, which suffers mainly from Lewis's undesirable approach. It is true that Lewis has nothing to say about depressing the state education system, which would be the result of the policy he evidently favours. But what surprises me about this is that Lewis had in fact spent time teaching slow learners to read[26], and it is distinctly unusual for anyone who has had that experience to be so dismissive of people with that sort of problem. He had not, I assume, seen bright children helping 'coaevals' who find the going tougher.

This kind of bitterness, though infrequent in Lewis's writings, was not, Carpenter suggests[27], untypical of his conversation. It's not so easy to overlook 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast' as an aberration when Lewis elsewhere exposes similar social premises, albeit without the venom.

25 p. 23.

26 The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal, 9 (Sept., 1979) p.8.

27 Inklings, p.206.

Another of his essays, 'Learning in War-Time', is interesting in that having found a position which is secure from possible dispute, he gives the impression of being the complete time-server. He is reassuring students that their academic work is still worthwhile despite the fact that there is a war on.

> If our parents have sent us to Oxford, if our country allows us to remain there, this is prima facie evidence that the life which we, at any rate, can best lead to the glory of God is the learned life. (28)

This, of course, is evidence of nothing of the sort; it is not even worth constructing any of the crazy analogues that could be built upon this in order to disprove it. They are all too obvious. Doing things to the glory of God is a central idea of the essay, and Lewis tells you how to know what you should do: 'A man's upbringing, his talents, his circumstances, are usually a tolerable index of his vocation.' This is comprehensible and innocent, to a point. The statement is qualified. But these ideas centre around a notion which is not really so palatable. Grasping, as usual, after the apothegm, he tells us that 'A mole must dig to the glory of God and a cock must crow. We are members of one body, but differentiated members, each with his own vocation.' Lewis is content with the apothegm, for it dictates the terms of any possible argument. It tells you that everything is ordained, and, in another way, it tells you that this is very good thing. There is a danger here of importing what we know of Lewis's attitudes; the Narnian beasts, for instance, all pursue their natural functions energetically and with pleasure. A Narnian mole would like being a mole, snuffling up to the surface for the occasional peer round, and so on. Its whole register

28 Fern-Seed and Elephants, p.33

would be tunnelly. But to apply an impression like this to society is miserably inadequate, and it had, in the course of the war, an interesting reverberation. One of the major factors in the institution of the National Coal Board was conscription to the mines as a form of national service. People, whether Lewis liked it or not, are not content to be appointed moles or whatever. They generally realise that it is not the glory of God which is uppermost in the minds of the appointers.

Lewis does slip with notorious ease into the world-view of moles and cocks. If, for example, you are faced with the problem of finding out whether people suppose art to imitate life, Lewis suggests an experiment you can try 'on your grocer or gardener.'[29]

Or, when he is explaining why God allows men to have free will:

> It may be quite sensible for a mother to say to the children, 'I'm not going to go and make you tidy the schoolroom every night. You've got to learn to keep it tidy on your own.' Then she goes up one night and finds the Teddy bear and the ink and the French Grammar all lying in the grate. (30)

Why can't the maid do it? It's difficult to imagine why Lewis allowed an example of this tone into what is a broadly-aimed introduction to Christian ideas, unless he felt, perhaps rightly, that the E. Nesbit atmosphere added something. It is an altogether comforting idea of the divine strategy. And Lewis, it should be remembered, is radiating only what he himself has experienced, as seems obvious in another case when the 'patient's' mother, in

29 An Experiment in Criticism, p.76.

30 Mere Christianity, p.48.

The Screwtape Letters, longs for the days 'when you could get good servants'[31]. This unpleasant character is generally believed to be Mrs. Moore, with whom Lewis lived in his inexplicable ménage and who supervised her own servants fiercely. Lewis, who did much of the housemaids' work anyway, sees nothing more in the complaint than the meanness of spirit. It is directly comparable to moaning overmuch about the weather, and we understand that Lewis is simply using the social material around him to make a point. But once we grant this indulgence, we remember that Lewis had more than the observer's commitment to this kind of world. When he thinks that it is changing for good, he gives us 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast'.

And that basic social attitude, in fact, grows wearisome, as when Mrs. Dimble remarks of the N.I.C.E. taskforce, 'I didn't know we had workpeople like that in England'[32], an observation clarified by the complaint of another local: 'They never ought to have brought those Welsh and Irish.'[33]

Might it be oversubtle to see this as an example of how prejudice becomes magnified as it travels down the social scale? Perhaps not. But such a sentiment is a little too close for comfort to the odd contention of That Hideous Strength, that an old unregenerate Britain keeps trying to swamp Logres, the true spirit of the country.

In cases like this (though rather more with Mrs. Dimble's example than the other) it often seems as though

31 p.88.

32 That Hideous Strength, p.49.

33 p.128.

Lewis has forgotten that his business is to create character, and indeed that the fiction itself is a dramatic treatment of what Lewis would have told you over his bitter. It can certainly appear that the limits of Lewis's social experience weaken his ability to tell a story, both by irritating the reader and by their invitation to stereotype. In the second paragraph of The Magician's Nephew he explains what life was like in Edwardian England: 'In those days, if you were a boy you had to wear a stiff Eton collar every day...'[34] It is surely absurd to have to give the caeteris paribus to someone who was a child at that very time.

We learn shortly after this that a particular boy, Digory, who has to wear an Eton collar, has several problems. The most serious of these, a very sick mother, is overcome through the right sort of effort in Narnia; but another, being in London because the family is not well-off, is resolved even more magically:

> Old Great-Uncle Kirke had died and this meant, apparently, that Father was now very rich... And the great big house in the country, which Digory had heard of all his life and never seen, would now be their home: the big house with the suits of armour, the stables, the kennels, the river, the park, the hot-houses, the vineries, the woods, and the mountains behind it. (35)

The critic has to be aware that to launch an attack against a paragraph like this, even when informed by the keenest sense of outrage against privilege, will be largely

34 p. 9.

35 p.169.

to say that it is unfashionable. The real fault of such a conclusion, as I've suggested, is that it simply happens. But I wonder, having noted Lewis's idea of what fiction ought not to be, if this differs greatly from the forbidden tract: 'wishful reverie' (he labels the genre) '...things that really might happen, that ought to happen, that would have happened if the reader had had a fair chance.'[36] And if this, after all, is what Lewis would have liked, we may think twice about his argument, which we have already seen, that we are all members of the one body.

Dixon, considering this, only needs to think once. Lewis, he says, is guilty of 'anatagonism towards ordinary people'. This is the only one of his charges which is likely to stick, possibly because it is the only one which makes any sense. To object to Lewis as a 'Royalist', for instance, is to ignore Lewis's own well-defined terms. He was, not surprisingly, a monarchist, but he was whole-hearted about the subject rather than enthusiastic. His feelings for the Royal Family as such are of no consequence whatsoever in his writings, and while feeling for monarchy in itself is obviously strong in the Narnia stories, the concern is really with kingship, which is not altogether the same thing. The appointer of kings in Narnia is represented as an immanent deity, and the result, which has no connection with anything that ever happened, is different from what happens in absolute and constitutional monarchies.

Even so, the two spheres, Narnia and England, do

36 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children', Of Other Worlds, p.30.

occasionally rub against one another, and at these points there tend to be regrettable effects. One example is the prospective King Frank I's interview with Aslan, where the candidate is asked how he views his role with regard to injustice:

> 'I never could abide such goings on, sir, and that's the truth. I'd give 'em what for if I caught 'em at it,' said the Cabby. (All through this conversation his voice was growing slower and richer. More like the country voice he must have had as a boy and less like the sharp, quick voice of a cockney.) (37)

It is surely surprising to come across such a throughly gratuitous slur. We have, admittedly, grown much more sensitive about these things since 1955. But our uneasiness is confirmed, rather than lessened, by an incident shortly preceding this, when the Cabby's wife is summoned from 'the middle of a washing day...':

> If she had had time to put on her good clothes (her best hat had imitation cherries on it) she would have looked dreadful; as it was, she looked rather nice. (38)

She is not, happily, given an opportunity to cry on top of powder, and manages 'a little half curtsey, as some country girls still knew how to do in those days.' All of this does appear to me reasonably good-humoured, and Lewis is only displaying antagonism towards ordinary people if we interpret a patronising manner as antagonism. If we miss anything here, it is again the absence of a certain imaginative quality rather than of social principle. Using something like the same material, P.L. Travers comes up

37 The Magician's Nephew, p.129.

38 p.127.

with a better result:

> Mary Poppins walked behind them, wearing her new hat and looking very distinguished. Every now and then she would look into the shop window just to make sure that the hat was still there and that the pink roses on it had not turned into common flowers like marigolds. (39)

Again, if Travers wants to suggest something of the artificiality of town life, she does not, like Lewis, grasp at facile and unconvincing comparisons:

> Now, the City was a place where Mr. Banks went every day--except Sundays, of course, and Bank Holidays--and while he was there he sat on a large chair in front of a large desk and made money. All day long he worked, cutting out pennies and shillings and half-crowns and threepenny bits. (40)

If we look at another writer for children, E. Nesbit, to whom Lewis owes and acknowledges much, we may notice that Lewis, using a given model, transforms it into something inferior as well as different. The suggestion for the mayhem in London caused by the wicked queen Jadis (in The Magician's Nephew) is clearly Nesbit's queen of ancient Babylon in the Mile End Road:

> 'You'll have a revolt of your slaves if you're not careful,' said the Queen.
> 'Oh, no,' said Cyril; 'you see they have votes--that makes them safe not to revolt. It makes all the difference. Father told me so.'
> 'What is this vote?' asked the Queen. 'Is it a charm? What do they do with it?'
> 'I don't know,' said the harassed Cyril; 'It's just a vote, that's all! They don't do anything particular with it.'
> 'I see,' said the Queen; 'a sort of plaything.' (41)

Lewis follows this only to the extent of including the

39 Mary Poppins (Peter Davies, 1934) Collins Armada Lions, 1971, p.99.

40 Mary Poppins, p.11.

41 The Story of the Amulet (T. Fisher Unwin, 1906) Puffin, 1959, pp. 148-9.

subsequent riot. But the tone of commentary in Lewis is clearly sanctioned by the original model, and what is interesting is that Lewis--not simply because he takes the opposite line--is less deft, less confident, and more presumptuous. Where we have the benefit of comparison, Lewis's social criticism also emerges as more conscious and deliberate than we might immediately think. He is not merely turning out a plain man's view of society, untainted by consideration of other people's ideas.

This becomes clearer when we look at a poem called 'The Genuine Article', in which Lewis does his usual work of sapping his opponent's argument. This, almost invariably, means pointing out that the other man is wrong on first principles, rather than that the things he advocates are undesirable. It could be argued that there's nothing very unusual about this, but it does indicate a hardened, partisan attitude within the opposition.

> You do not love the Bourgeoisie. Of course; for they
> Begot you, bore you, paid for you, and punched your head;
> You work with them; they're intimate as board and bed;
> How could you love them, meeting them thus every day?
> You love the Proletariat, the thin, far-away
> Abstraction which resembles any workman fed
> On mortal food as closely as the shiny red
> Chessknight resembles stallions when they stamp and neigh.
> For kicks are dangerous; riding schools are painful, coarse
> And ribald places. Every way it costs far less
> To learn the harmless manage of the wooden horse
> -So calculably taking the small jumps of chess.
> Who, that can love nonentities, would choose the labour
> Of loving the quotidian face and fact, his neighbour? (42)

42 C.S. Lewis: Poems, p.63.

This is not, of course, the most eligible of anthology-pieces. It is marvellous to note how clotted imagery and redundancy in real poetic terms combine in evil chemistry with Alexandrines. But most of the story seems to be clear. A young middle-class intellectual is making his revolt, and Lewis is pointing out to him, in a more managerial than fatherly way, that the objects of his interest are in one direct sense unworthy, if not in fact imaginary. His disorder is sometimes known as 'workerism', and is generally held to stem from unresolved parental conflicts. Lewis does not quite say this, though he comes extremely close, but it's probably reasonable to suppose that this is in his mind, given a statement he makes elsewhere: 'If you listen to young Christian intellectuals talking, you will soon find out who their real enemy is. He seems to have two names--Colonel Blimp and "the business-man". I suspect that the latter is usually the speaker's father, but that is speculation.'[43]

This isn't, on its own, an unthinkable argument, but again it isn't, on its own, an argument up to Lewis's usual standard. Seeking out the neurosis can never be an independent counter-thrust. It would be ludicrous, for instance, so say that racialism is bad because racialists are secretly afraid of unexplored areas of their own personalities. You would have to say that racialism is bad because of outcomes X, Y and Z, and you may add your explanation of its origins, if you think you have the correct one. Lewis, looking at doctrine, never accepts a purely psychoanalytical response. He always, and

43 Undeceptions, p.152.

consciously, poses rational evidence for his beliefs.

But Lewis does bring a new sophistication to the psychology of economic thinking. Even if we grant that the poem is a tolerable critique of what sounds like a half-baked attitude, and even if we grant that Lewis really wants to re-work some of his favourite themes, such as the need to accept the 'Same Old Thing', we are still left with an eccentric sociology. He leaves us in little doubt that he finds class terminology wearisome: the words 'Bourgeoisie' and 'Proletariat' come over like an irritated reprise of the initial speaker. But while he contrives to sound disgusted with the class terms, he takes it for granted that there is something identifiable in the idea of the 'Bourgeoisie' (even if it is only tedious people who call them that) yet casts doubt on the existence of anything that it would be reasonable to call the 'Proletariat'. There are, he admits, workmen--and this, in itself, is an interesting use of language, 'workman' not being chosen over 'worker' on grounds of metre--but the idea of the 'Proletariat' is, Lewis says, absolutely an 'abstraction'. This supposed validity of class description, when applied to one class only, is reinforced by the simple trick of seeing the middle-class in plural terms, and the 'workman' in the singular.

Apart from this--I think untenable--point of view, Lewis gives us the peculiar sestet, which is dominated by an image apparently arising from an innocent example. Actual workpeople and your idea of them, Lewis seems to be saying, are as different as chalk and cheese; and he expresses this difference by comparing a red chess-knight, with its convenient overtones, with a stallion. On its

first appearance, the comparison seems deficient in tenor, with the exception of the redness. But when Lewis puts it to work, or when it takes over (for it is difficult to say exactly what is happening) he appears to provide us with an extraordinary picture of what working-people are for.

If we assume that Lewis is by inclination a Tory, it seems quite generous of him to picture an individual worker as a stallion; a bit patronising, perhaps, with shades of Boxer, but given Lewis's love of animals, not unreasonable. The working-class stallion, however, doesn't even make the status of a Talking Beast. Lewis is staggeringly explicit. His rebel is taking a perverse attitude because he's afraid of flunking riding-school, where the stallions are tamed, or at least where people learn to manage them. There is nothing ambiguous in the idea of mastery, particularly since it is echoed in 'the harmless manage of the wooden horse'. (A distinctly unfortunate line, given the confusion caused by the equitational term 'manage'--a piece of ground reserved for riding--and 'wooden horse', which hardly suggests a chess-piece in the first instance.)

It's worth noting the deficiencies of Lewis's ear for semantics in verse, since he may then be excused for what seems amazing offensiveness in the penultimate line, the expression 'nonentities'. We know, of course, that in terms of the strict argument Lewis is using the word very precisely, talking about people who do not actually exist as opposed to insignificant people who do. What is surprising is that such a <u>mot juste</u> should suggest itself at all.

It might be objected that Lewis cannot be expected to cover every contingency in a sonnet, that he may mean only

that the middle class, given the youth's experience, ought to be closer and more real to him than the working class. But in fact you have to distort the poem to read it in that way, to emerge with a more attractive picture of social relations and functions than Lewis provides, and the sonnet is par excellence a form chosen by a writer for the decanting of thoughts. Lewis frequently placed very short pieces, revolving round a single idea, in magazines, and could without doubt have made an article of this theme and covered his back at the same time.

It is true that few people will have read the poem, and only a handful would read it more than once. But a fair number will have read 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast', particularly when it appeared in The Saturday Evening Post. The elitism of the Screwtape essay may not appear as such at all, since it seems merely to defend choice, while the target is collectivist levelling of taste and ability. The poem helps us see why Lewis really thinks that choice is to be defended. It isn't for the sake of 'true' democracy or real achievement, at all; it's so that you can do your bit to keep the class system going when your turn comes.

This is the most characteristic of the specifically Tory bits of Lewis. He is much more likely to argue for the rightness of the class system than for the rightness of a sequence of economic measures designed to perpetuate such a system, or to put it another way, he will tell you that it's good for everyone that there are classes, rather than that the things which keep classes going are good for everyone. I recognise that these ideas are related, but they are not simply interchangeable, and it's important

that Lewis is obviously not very interested in the latter, more pragmatic, and generally more irresponsible attitude. Lewis's choice of Tory attitudes, with all its defects, is the more social choice, though in another sense it is the more deeply right-wing. Despite what I've said about Dixon's attack, it will be clear to anyone reading the Narnia books that Lewis's emotions simply didn't underwrite his approval of social democratic attitudes. On the face of it, the parable of the three political Christians grants support to Stativus; We know that Stativus is the most sensible because he is 'deeply conscious of the Fall'[44]. But Lewis's imagination was full of benevolent despots, kings and emperors with the divine right because they have the divine ear, and he felt that prelapsarian government would have been hierarchical by nature[45]. This is a difficult argument for us to face, not because it has implications for our society, but because it has none.

The acceptance of social democracy by default is all we have to place against the nature of Lewis's social vision as interpreted by Holmer. Holmer's gleeful abstract of Lewis's social ends, in practice, means a society whose poorer members will remain uneducated, where there will be no insurance against unemployment, and where people may be sent to fight in wars without the right of discussion. To ignore possible solutions to the problems that grow up around these issues, as Holmer, with applause, says that Lewis did, sounds less like enjoying 'a bright and

44 Undeceptions, p.158.

45 Inklings, p. 206.

infectious felicity' than suffering from tunnel vision. We can't properly ask whether Lewis's social arguments are designed to build a better society, or not, at any rate, for very long. But against the onslaught that arises whenever a left-wing critic looks at Lewis, we can ask a simpler question, one of whether Lewis's heart was ultimately in the right place. This is a minor question in terms of great social problems, and it may seem that it is these which I have in the first place invoked. But it's an important question from the point of view of finding out the value of Lewis's Christian writings, and Christian writings are of the kind which become meaningless most rapidly where there is no purity of intention.

It's a question, also of quirkiness. A man can be heard giving voice to ideologies, as Lewis does in Screwtape's Toast, but this in itself may not make him an ideologue. Lewis's description of the daily conditions of Digory's life, and his happy acceptance of the inheritance that Digory, via his father, comes into, may be example of an unthinking elitism, but that does not mean that Lewis is always unthinking. Indeed, in cases like these the opposite is likely to be true: Lewis's social thought is inherently disorganised, and most resembles the response of an Any Questions? audience, which rewards, alternately, opposing speakers. One may feel that there is some organic connection between the various points of view, but one would, after all, be doing exactly that: sensing it. Defining it would be an altogether different matter.

The issue of what Lewis really wanted (as opposed to

what he could persuade himself he wanted when he was in a mood) is complicated by an attitude which can simultaneously make an assertion and send the assertion up:

> Narnian time flows differently from ours... Consequently, when the Pevensie children had returned to Narnia last time for their second visit, it was (for the Narnians) as if King Arthur came back to Britain, as some people say he will. And I say the sooner the better. (46)

Coming, rather unexpectedly, in the middle of a stretch of narrative, this is designed, and succeeds, as comic effect. But, as Dawn Treader goes on to show, the aside is not meant to be punctured, but enhanced, by the humorous tone. King Caspian, later in the book, deposes the bureaucratic governor of a Narnian colony, all with great hilarity, and re-establishes the settlement as a duchy. It is all very just, because the slave trade has been flourishing under a system which responds thus to enquiry: 'No interviews without 'pointments 'cept 'tween nine 'n' ten p.m. second Saturday every month.' It is the spirit of adventure which is foremost in this episode, and it would be tiresome to see Lewis as criticising all government by commoners (though this is doubtless in his mind). But Lewis, throughout Dawn Treader, does satirise remorselessly and rather unjustly everything of 'progressive' hue, such as Eustace, who is dragged up in front of the House Committee for Un-Narnian activities, like sneaking and being a rotter. His parents, 'very up-to-date and advanced people', were 'vegetarians, non-smokers and teetotallers and wore a special kind of underclothes.'[47] Eustace is taken away from all this to a world of Stevensonian romance, and he is converted. But since Lewis goes out of his way to snipe--

46 Dawn Treader, p.18.

47 p. 9.

it is not more than this--at contemporary forms of government, it may be reasonable to ask whether the kind he wants is as attractive as he makes it seem. The slave trade, after all, flourishes because Narnia is ruled by noble kings who only make it out to the colonies every few centuries. Caspian roots out the abuse with heroic discipline, but his forebears, evidently, had never learned the art of delegation. This is, however, the sort of sensible observation which Dawn Treader is designed to disrupt.

Lewis is invariably partial about modern government, and always in the way outlined above. Shift the Ape, coming upon the skin of a lion in The Last Battle, sees cunning ways of making Narnia 'a country worth living in':

> 'There'll be oranges and bananas pouring in--and roads and big cities and schools and offices and whips and muzzles and saddles and cages and kennels and prisons--Oh, everything.' (48)

Shift is clearly a bad sort from the very beginning, but if Lewis makes his motivation clear--Shift is greedy and domineering--he nevertheless provides no motive for this behaviour. Why should anyone brought up in Narnia behave like this? This is a necessary question simply because abuses in, and of, civilisation, arise because of need: when Shift calls for roads we recognise that roads are both useful things and a notorious obsession among planners. Shift wants a social organisation that he can control, and profit from, and while this drive may explain any given form of social organisation that arises, it does not explain why social organisation, in principle, occurs.

48
p.33.

The reasons for that are quite obvious, and they simply are not present in Lewis's Narnia: no-one ever seems to fall sick or go very hungry.

It's a defect in Lewis that he cannot, as he and his enthusiasts claim he does, write a simple tale of otherwordly adventure. He must make a habitual comparison of the natural world with his invented Utopia, and this in itself divides the reader's reaction. We agree with him that many of his criticisms, if only implicit, have a point. There are people like Shift. But I think we also feel that a comparison between ourselves and the Narnians is altogether unfair, as though we, in the remedial class, were being urged to take doctorates. And the issue may be deeper than this. Is Eustace, ultimately, condemned as a form of the quotidian, or as the quotidian itself? Eustace is redeemed, certainly, which suggests the former. Dull reality, perhaps, can change, but the form of the story, the genre itself, indicates otherwise. Dawn Treader is a holiday: the heroes, as it begins, have just been denied a more regular vacation in America[49], and it is probably not for nothing that the stylised figure of Tolkien, as we have seen, is at the core of the book. This is Lewis's response to the problems that he brings to our attention. He questions, justly, our motives and our actions, but the only alternative that he suggests is rather out of our reach. Or so it seems; I've already argued that Lewis enjoyed a turn of thought which makes his apparently unfeasible alternative stronger than it looks at first, and we shall examine this more closely in concluding.

[49] pp.9-10.

But even if Lewis's fantasy is the result of a purely truant impulse, it says more about his character than simply that he is an escapist. If we look at Aslan's romp at the end of Prince Caspian, comparing it with Caspian's bursting on to the scene in the Lone Islands to put down the slavers, we shall see that Lewis's feelings are not exclusively on royalty and God. These entities, rather, tying down their significance to the fiction which surrounds them, seem rather like media whereby something similar to anarchism is radiated. As Aslan routs the occupying force in Narnia, a classroom full of female Eustaces is put to flight, and the one natural soul among them joins the Narnian band. A man beating a boy is turned into a tree; a classful of swinish little boys become pigs in reality, and their oppressed teacher is released for the carnival. It's difficult to look at this episode and conclude that Lewis feels much attraction in authority itself, or rather in authoritarianism, and it's something like that that I would oppose to left-wing characterisations of Lewis, recognising that there was a lot of liberal sentiment in him, as marble has veins.

That this strain is not further developed in him has something to do with the fact that obsessive typology is not merely the curse of Lewis's left-wing critics. Lewis suffered badly from it himself, as we have already seen in the cases of Philarchus, Stativus and Spartacus. Here he explains how he nearly became a Spartacus:

> Looking back on my life now, I am astonished that I did not progress into the opposite orthodoxy--did not become a Leftist, Atheist, satiric Intellectual of the type we all know so well. All the conditions seemed to

> be present. I had hated my public school. I hated whatever I knew or imagined of the British Empire... continual reading of Shaw had brought it about that such embryonic political opinions as I had were vaguely socialistic... It is true that I hated the Collective as much as any man can hate anything; but I certainly did not then realise its relations to socialism. (50).

The type he mentions, whom 'we all know so well', is given form in Dick Devine, the smartass materialist whose ultimate allegiance, as he passes into the demonic, is only to himself. Lewis is bound by this vision, and, not for the first time, we see him give way to an uncharacteristic reading of personal reaction as a reaction pure and simple to conditions, or indeed conditioning. He is, after all, not just telling us why he did not become a socialist; he is telling us what sort of people do become socialists.

But a technique of labelling groups, and then objecting to the labels, cannot disguise the genuine feelings that he does have for certain forms of social organisation. The 'old furry people' of Mars, while they may not administer their affairs in a succession of five-year plans, are as inimical to bourgeois individualism as are the Bushmen. And his Talking Beasts, while supplying him with the occasional frisson (he added a whole new meaning to the expression Venus im Pelz) and enriching the natural interest of the landscape, are emblematic of the spirit of social co-operation. Ransom, at one point, asks the hrossa whether there is ever war between them and the other (very different) species on Mars, but they cannot imagine why there should be. Apart from the fact that resources are never selfishly hoarded, there is always enough to go round.

50 Surprised by Joy, p.140.

This, it is suggested, is because the Martians' dependence on Providence is perfect[51], a traditional argument which goes some way to counter the objection that Lewis's utopias are unacceptable yardsticks for the measuring of our society.

Such a point of view, whatever its practical coherence, is incompatible with the approach of Screwtape's Toast. It's possible to understand how they each arise within the one frame, but they cannot be confused, although they set out from the same co-ordinates. It could be said that Lewis is ready enough to encourage perfect societies so long as they approach Earth only once in every four years, but Lewis, I think, is too choosy to support most attempts in that direction. 'The New Testament,' he says, 'without going into details, gives us a pretty clear hint of what a fully Christian society would be like.'

There would be no unproductive work, no adverts, no elitism. 'To that extent a Christian society would be what we now call Leftist.' It would have 'properly appointed magistrates' (a way of saying that Lewis doesn't know how they would be appointed) and they would have to be obeyed. The chief characteristic of such a society would be joyfulness.

> If there were such a society in existence and you or I visited it, I think we should come away with a curious impression. We should feel that its economic life was very socialistic and, in that sense, 'advanced', but that its family life and its code of manners were rather old fashioned--perhaps even ceremonious and aristocratic. Each of us would like some bits of it, but I am afraid very few of us would like the whole thing. (52)

51 Out of the Silent Planet, pp. 83-4.

52 Mere Christianity, pp. 76-7.

To look back at Holmer's view of why Lewis was not more enthusiastic about social development, after reading this passage, is to notice that Holmer has recast some of Lewis's opinions. Part of the trouble is the way that Lewis uses political language: his opinions are described as 'vague' and 'embryonic', which also explains the fact that he does not appear to know clearly what they are. Words like 'socialist' or 'left' usually have '-ist' or '-ic' tacked on to them so that we may realise how discreet is Lewis's approval for parts of the programmes associated with them. But some things seem to be distinct. Although Lewis often talked like a Tory, although he supports privileges which were not in his experience desirable, although socialism is abhorrent and the collective particularly so, he does not seem to be opposed to collective ownership of the means of production, which he is probably hinting at in the last passage.

All of this may be very gauche, in our normal sense of the word. In the passage above, for instance, Lewis appears to believe that social and economic spheres operate independently. But the issue, it seems to me, is that some critics have seen Lewis as being a particularly nasty fusion of Christian and right-winger, the sort that, for example, now has more political clout in America than anyone else. The fact of the matter is that Lewis was a political semi-literate, burdened by contradictions, but capable of displaying humane values. And from the last quotation, and others, one thing is surely clear. The humane values in Lewis come over most strongly when his Christian convictions are strongest, not the other way

round. He is reactionary when his mind is overpowered by the thought of Hell; and the thought of God, unhappily for his critics, inspires in him a sense of social happiness which ought to put most of us to shame.

V ARGUMENTS, MORAL AND RELIGIOUS

> '...It suddenly occurs to me that the best meetings I've ever had have been all questions, i.e., I've announced myself as a one-man Brain's Trust on moral and religious questions.' (1)

Biographers of Lewis, and commentators in general, have left such a picture of him that, were we to encounter him in a séance, the one thing we could be sure of would be a rigorous debate. Lewis's books leave much the same impression. '...He never', Green and Hooper say, 'outgrew the teachings of "the Great Knock"'[2], his tutor during his adolescent years.

> As he says of him in Surprised by Joy, 'the most casual remark was taken as a summons to disputation,' and so it was with Lewis himself. If a friend made a thoughtless remark or a loose generality in conversation, Lewis would boom out, 'I challenge that!' and the foils of logic would be clashing in a moment... (3)

This description suggests that the habit of arguing was more than the ordinary academic tic in Lewis: not dinner-table bickering but public house debate carried over into philosophical societies and radio, and (in particular) print. For Austin Farrer he is an ossified philosopher, a born professional who levels out early and doesn't keep his interest up, but the advantages of this can be delightful, even if the image building up here is not entirely sympathetic. Lewis never wastes your time in wondering whether either of you is there or not, or in talking about

1 C.S. Lewis: speaker and teacher, p.22.

2 W.T. Kirkpatrick.

3 C.S. Lewis: a biography, p.147.

natural rights to property when all the time you know that what he wants to do is send children to school with no shoes on.

It follows automatically from this that, as a contributor to the realm of ideas, Lewis's inclinations are rather on the cracker-barrel side. But this, I guess, would not have reduced the practical authority in him that must have intimidated many a performer on the opposing side of the platform. To cast around for a comparison, you may not agree with everything that's written in The Conquest of Happiness, but that doesn't mean that you can argue like Bertrand Russell. There is a danger of underestimating Lewis' s arguments. Although he no doubt felt that he had made the best cases he could for his convictions, it is likely that he felt forced to cruise, and it would not be entirely fair to go through the majority of his propositions for ticking off as true or false, or badly or well argued. Where he cannot, in the nature of things, assess his audience fully, his flank is sometimes open; where he has a better idea of the people he is addressing, the gaps close and he is much more difficult to assail. Arguments, of course, still have to be examined, and there are flaws which cannot quite be excused in the restraint that ought to be shown in looking at Lewis's more popular exercises. But these flaws, and there are not so many of them, are not simply ragged edges. I've argued before for seeing Lewis as an educational process, and when we realise that the reader of Lewis will probably be drawn more deeply into the works with time, we can see that some of the roughnesses will be smoothed for him.

Lewis approaches his maximum cruising speed at the

beginning of Mere Christianity, which opens with a discussion of the appeals that people make to an agreed common standard of behaviour. People show, as Lewis demonstrates, that they expect others to know about this standard of behaviour, and when they depart from it themselves they don't deny the standard but make special pleadings as to why they should be exempt from it in any particular case. This standard is the Moral Law, immutable and not exactly natural. It varies from society to society, but it never contradicts itself fundamentally; nor is it merely 'herd instinct', as Lewis puts it, because instincts can be at odds within us and it is the Moral Law which arbitrates between them.

Lewis argues further that there is a common idea of the word 'ought', and that this idea is implicit in every theory of values, however 'basic' or 'realistic' it claims to be. Austin Farrer[4] finds this type of argument stimulating because it is a defence of what seemed to be the doomed remnants of traditional thought, scattered battalions which Lewis marshalls and leads towards the enemy's territory. But what is most striking about argumentation like this, I think, is its absolute directness and its fundamentalism. Lewis tries to establish his moral consensus in his first two paragraphs, and a more effective way of buttonholing is difficult to imagine.

However, although Lewis simply invades a piece of ground and digs himself in, his approach is not entirely unsophisticated, being lit with interesting psychological harmonics. These are seen in the snatches of dialogue he introduces to demonstrate people's belief in the Moral Law, like 'Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of

[4] Light on C.S. Lewis, pp.33-4.

mine'. It is in areas like this that you can find out best what exactly Lewis is arguing, and why. The snatch about the orange tells you that much of this section is really about quarrelling, and how not to; it is presented as an example to illustrate an argument, and it emerges as the real precept. It is childish, silly, understandable and pathetic to squabble about an orange. Later, in fact, we shall have Lewis's vision of immortal spirits slightly, if tolerantly, amused by the idea of morality. They have better things to think about[5]. Lewis, says Farrer, 'was overbalanced on the side of moralism'[6], and Walsh, as we saw, admits to having had this impression. But it might be better to say that Lewis was thorough, knowing where he was in each stage of contemplation.

But such thoroughness has its limits, as does Lewis's directness. Lewis's position seems basic because it is often evaded in its full rigour, but militantly amoral people are pretty thin on the ground: so thin, in fact, that Lewis is on balance likely to win, whereupon we shall find that the importance of the argument has been defined by episodes like that of the orange. Where he is utterly cowardly, or almost blind, is in the recognition that taking a moral stance is rarely the complete issue, and that the fair division of oranges, though an enlightening dilemma in some respects, is not the most complex of the problems that most of us face. In his personal correspondence Lewis could be very helpful about complicated moral issues, and in the last chapter of Mere Christianity he is

5 Mere Christianity, pp.128-9.

6 Light on C.S. Lewis, p.42.

affectingly kind about moral agonies; this may be an odd thing to say, but his rapport is very great by then. Yet of the many skilled in bringing discussion to an impasse by the invocation of such involved problems as Lewis generally avoids, few, I think, would succeed in seeing the simple matters so clearly. Few, certainly, could draw so much from them. For Lewis, having convinced us that we do in practice believe in the Moral Law, gets round our qualms about its universal application by a pruning exercise which leads in all too clear a direction:

> Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him. (7)

Suppressing a murmur which suggests Italy for the first category, we realise that reservations about difficult things like abortion and euthanasia are not going to prevent us from being shoved over the Rubicon. Lewis depends on vigorous bellwethers such as this to pull the argument through miry patches, such as the defining of the Moral Law as against 'herd instinct':

> The thing that says to you, 'Your herd instinct is asleep. Wake it up,' cannot itself be the herd instinct. The thing that tells you which note on the piano needs to be played louder cannot itself be that note. (8)

Good analogies, of course, must answer the demand for some kind of applicability. It isn't quite the score which calls for a forte; the aural context itself is ultimately more important. And I don't see any psychological

7 Mere Christianity, p.17.

8 p. 21.

objection to an image of the herd instinct, complete with horns, lowing softly in our dreams to be led to daylight pastures. Instincts seem rather to have automatic timers, but they respond at any rate more commonly to circumstance than to conscious moral invocation.

But an analogy like this is rather more like flat passage in a painting than a flaw in design. The design itself, as I've indicated, proceeds through dramatic points of division, however much it may look like a running chain of argument. Lewis uses the analogies, rather, to build up a consensus of the feeble, binding up Gullivers of the moral law and free will and predestination. The Law, for instance, is compared with the multiplication table: both are mediated by society, and both are true no matter what society thinks of them. Lewis must naturally know that you can demonstrate three times seven bananas to be twenty-one bananas more readily than it can be demonstrated that you ought to give someone a bit of orange, but his main point is in showing an audience (who may be unaware of this) that there are laws of the multiplication kind. While Lewis asserts that his Law is one of them, we open at least to the possibility.

We can agree, I think, that the existence of thorny problems could not in itself be taken to negate the existence of a Moral Law, but Lewis moves immediately from his demonstration of the Law to theism, and from theism he moves, more quickly than he states he is doing, to Christianity. It is obvious that the second of these jumps will be the larger, and the second is certainly the more ungainly. This is signalled by departures from the generally rational tone such as this:

> When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. (9)

The liberality or otherwise of such a view, it goes without saying, is nothing to the point. Hereabouts the sense of distortion is very strong, and the sense is increased particularly because the reasoning in the previous section concerning the Moral Law seemed so bona fide. We seem suddenly to step into a poorer mode of discussion. In moving from theism to Christianity, for example, Lewis follows Augustine's aut deus aut diabolus:

> A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse... let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (10)

The problem with this argument, and particularly when it is offered in this exact form, is that there is another alternative. The entire story might be a fiction. I don't especially advance this view, but it is another rational block, and it's one which we can reasonably demand to be covered. The absence of such an admission, it is easy to feel, is the main reason behind the forcefulness of the tone, which emerges in the repetitions and the short, mandatory sentences. The problem is a simple,

9 p.39.

10 pp.52-3.

but enfeebling one. We don't expect feats of scholarship, but we do look for frankness.

Lewis, however, is confirmed by this time into a romantic mode of argument, a failing which becomes clear when we look at how he prepares the ground for the point of division above:

> ...He selected one particular people and spent several centuries hammering into their heads the sort of God He was--that there was only one of Him and that He cared about right conduct.
>
> Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins... (11)

On some readers, one suspects, the effect of this would be that they feel themselves in the hands of a writer who can reduce a lot of fuzzy details into a clear picture; in the hands of someone who has the inside story. The directness, it is true, can be appreciated, but the tone is ultimately conspiratorial. You knew about this all along, he seems to be saying; I'm just reminding you. He passes from argument to hagiography without appearing to notice the difference.

When we see what Lewis intends for his aut deus, we may feel rather lost:

> We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what He said or else a lunatic, or something worse. Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form. (12)

11 p. 51.

12 p. 53.

The real shift in Lewis's argument is from empirical discussion to the zone of literary criticism. Lewis reads the meaning of the Gospels quite correctly, and it would be unfair not to note that he points out clearly that his main concern is proper reading at this point. But that is because he assumes that the records are generally accepted, which is by no means the case. His usefulness is therefore restricted to the case of someone who accepts the bones of the story but who interprets wilfully, and this constitutes a major evasion. This, in turn, is not enhanced by Lewis's retention of the forms of argument, which occurs particularly in the repetition of details. He also, notably, uses highly colourful language: the invocation of the 'frightening alternative' which the reader is faced with will rivet his attention on what appears to be the issue, and the concentrated drama of the last sentence, with its connotations of Sir Percy Blakeney and the Maquis, will probably make him alert in the wrong direction.

The most irritating thing about this manoeuvre of Lewis's is that he can, when he chooses, be the very devil with demythologisers, holding his end up sweetly and tirelessly against reductive Biblical critics. The method is largely the same, in that Lewis still depends on his critical acumen, rather than seeking out the proper historical grounds. But in coming up against the critics Lewis elevates the critical skill into the art of seeing what must be the case from the quality of the internal evidence. When one reader thinks that John is a spiritual romance, Lewis packs him off to read Auerbach. How can Bultmann say that the prediction of the parousia is

'unassililated' with the prediction of the Passion?

His appeal to authority is very strong-arm, but he also seems to be using his talents properly, checking a priori contentions by his simple ability to read:

> I begin to fear that by personality Dr. Bultmann means what I should call imperson ality:what you'd get in a Dictionary of National Biography article or an obituary or a Victorian Life and Letters of Yeshua Bar-Yosef in three volumes with photographs. (13)

This, of course, is much preferable to Lewis's using rough critical descriptions to reinforce a priori positions of his own.

A further problem is that we often feel the groundwork shifting beneath our feet, as when Lewis refines theism from our perception of the Moral Law. On either side of the major theistic divide he places Pantheism and the Middle Eastern religions:

> People who all believe in God can be divided according to the sort of God they believe in. There are two very different ideas on the subject. One of them is the idea that He is beyond good and evil. (14)

There is nothing in this regrettable error that militates conclusively against Lewis's own thesis--the position that recognition of the good leads to the recognition of a supernatural force--but it undermines the universal tones in which he establishes his point of view. The universality, as the essay proceeds, becomes more and more suspect. The ancients, he says, 'thought that the

13 Fern-Seed and Elephants, p. 111.

14 Mere Christianity, p. 40.

human idea of decent behaviour was obvious to everyone. And I believe they were right'[15]. But there can, it seems, be confusions[16], and the consensus, in his summing up, sounds as if it has been reduced to a group of UNESCO supporters: '...human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way...'[17]. Lewis is right, of course, to vary his stimuli, but in the course of this one hundred per cent becomes something more like a large majority.

So we have another qualification of the 'man-with-a-mind-like-a-sword' idea. The two areas of Mere Christianity we've glanced at don't match up with one another in rigour, and even the tougher first part has weaknesses. This, as I suggested at the beginning of the chapter, I would ascribe to the vagueness that Lewis must have felt about his audience. It has been said that Lewis's mail got very heavy after his talks were broadcast[18], and this is very probably true; but this would, in all likelihood, bring worse confusion to anyone trying to weigh up his audience.

Fortunately, we can compare Lewis's treatment of the 'human idea' in Mere Christianity to his handling of it in a series of lectures, printed as The Abolition of Man, where he gives the impression of knowing exactly to whom he is speaking. This has two principal effects: the argument has fewer holes, and the sweet reasonableness of

15 p. 17.

16 p. 18.

17 p. 19.

18 C.S. Lewis: speaker and teacher, p.159.

Mere Christianity vanishes. Stressing the consequences of ignoring the Law, Lewis is much fiercer, and this, despite Carpenter's criticism of the argument as a 'harangue', enhances the sense of conviction.

Lewis begins by examining two 'debunkers' whose purpose is to expose a confusion 'continually present', as they say, 'in language as we use it. We appear to be saying something very important about something: and actually we are only saying something about our own feelings.' Lewis makes his point d'appui the implications of these thoughts having appeared in a school textbook, and swiftly reduces their position to an untenable contention: that Your feelings are contemptible must mean My feelings are contemptible[19]... 'the very pons asinorum of our subject.' Lewis is not kind to 'Gaius' and 'Titius', as he eccentrically names the writers who have provided him with his subject; but even as he snipes at them, he does not associate them completely with the position that he now sets out to contend:

> ...I doubt whether Gaius and Titius have really planned, under cover of teaching English, to propagate their philosophy. I think they have slipped into it for the following reasons. In the first place, literary criticism is difficult, and what they actually do is very much easier... To 'debunk' the emotion, on the basis of a commonplace rationalism, is within almost anyone's capacity. (20)

Lewis even admits that 'Gaius' and 'Titius' may genuinely have felt that the world is too full of 'emotional propaganda' and really intended to inculcate a

19 p. 8.

20 p. 13.

sense of higher reason among pupils. It seems unfair, then, for Carpenter to charge that Lewis is basing his argument 'entirely on what he supposes to be his opponents' case'[21]. What Lewis actually does is to synthesise a position opposed to the traditional perception of values, and attack that. Of this process, Carpenter again takes a cynical view, pointing out that the only modern ethical philosopher whom Lewis mentions is Waddington, and that in a footnote. But we have already seen one of Lewis's genuine reductions to the absurd, in the case of Eliot, and anyone reading that would be inclined to see Lewis's approach here as preferable. Lewis could hardly have been short of names, had he wanted to mention any; but a remark in That Hideous Strength, another treatment of the same theme, suggests that Lewis is aware that men he feels good can utter opinions which seem to him, at the same time, misguided[22].

Lewis's purpose is the defence of traditional values, and as upholders of these he cites St. Augustine, Plato, the early Hindus with their Ṛta and the Chinese with their Tao. This last, throughout the book, stands as a hieroglyph for the Moral Law. He sets up a great divide, of which the equivalent in Mere Christianity is the gap between those who feel that some actions are proper and some not, and those few who can make no sense of this idea. Here the distinction is between those who believe that moral principles and sets of emotions can be conformable to 'Reason', in fact constitute 'Reason', and those who believe

21 Inklings, p. 222.

22 p. 243.

that these qualities can somehow conform to an empirically verifiable 'actuality'. Lewis does no more to defend the former position (or little more) than he does to defend the fact that he is writing in sentences, but the latter he attempts to drive to utter ruin. This is a strategy altogether more effective than that of Mere Christianity, where the reader, if he feels no compulsion to adopt Lewis's full argument, is left with a shabby but habitable ground. This, in The Abolition of Man, is left a smoking, devastated waste, and if the reader is inclined to support Lewis at all, he will feel a strong gravitational pull to go over to him completely.

Lewis claims that anyone who wishes to replace traditional values will either select principles from the aggregate and erect these into a whole system, or do this effectively and disguise the fact. With such a system,

> To abstain from calling it good and to use, instead, such predicates as 'necessary' or 'progressive' or 'efficient' would be a subterfuge. They could be forced by argument to answer the questions 'necessary for what?', 'progressing towards what?' 'effecting what?'; in the last resort they would have to admit that some state of affairs was in their opinion good for its own sake. And this time they could not maintain that 'good' simply described their own emotion about it. (23)

Hereabouts, perhaps, Carpenter's charge begins to take on more weight, for it is difficult to suppose that anyone could actually disagree with Lewis. Is anyone, anywhere, proposing an alternative approach, and if anyone seems to be doing so might this not be explained by the embarrassment which usually pursues anyone trying to express what Lewis is expressing? Surely even Skinner and Watson would

23 pp. 21-2.

be reduced by such a formula. But this impression is, I think, created in us by the sheer strength of Lewis's case, which beats down the deadly embarrassment generally raised by such issues. We forget immediately how helpful Lewis is in seeing the matter with a clarity which thereafter seems plodding. This is very much what I meant in drawing attention to what looks like solecism in Lewis: a facility in moving so close to a reader that whatever of Lewis is instructive or moving or entertaining will afterwards be almost disparaged, having become part of the reader's personality itself.

Meanwhile the slaughter continues, as Lewis imagines a creator of revised values working out, under his new dispensation, why anyone should die for the community.

> If by Reason we mean the process employed by Gaius and Titius when engaged in debunking (that is, the connecting by inference of propositions, ultimately derived from sense data, with further propositions), then the answer must be that a refusal to sacrifice oneself is no more rational than a consent to do so. And no less rational. Neither choice is rational--or irrational--at all. From propositions about fact alone no practical conclusion can ever be drawn. This will preserve society cannot lead to do this except by the mediation of society ought to be preserved. (24)

The great strength of Lewis's argument is his insistence on the totality of the Law. Where, in a case like the above, Lewis might seem to fall down is that propositions of the dulce et decorum est variety have commonly been invoked in cynicism, and certainly applied to the benefit of comparatively small groups of people. These, to make matters worse, generally constitute societies of which hardly anyone would say that they ought to be preserved, such

24 p. 23.

as Pol Pot's in Kampuchea. (We do not, after all know what the majority of Chinese think about the matter.) Again, parts of the Law can be brandished against individuals with Yahwistic ferocity, to the great detriment of enterprises like the Iranian tourist industry. But that such monstrosities can occur is not a flaw in Lewis's position as expressed; he would have said the only way to avoid such monstrosities is to preserve his full position. 'The rebellion of new ideologies against the Tao is the rebellion of branches against the tree'[25].

Lewis, as in Mere Christianity, never admits the extent to which his Tao has been synthesised, preferring to rest on the position that a common basis for the Tao in different societies is enough for the demonstration of its significance. But where he does defend the idea, he does so much more effectively in The Abolition of Man, and even more circumspectly. From Mere Christianity, for instance:

> I know that some people say the idea of a Law of Nature or decent behaviour known to all men is unsound, because different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities.
>
> But this is not true. There have been differences between their moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference. (26)

Lewis then exhorts the reader to compare the teachings of various ancient cultures and see for himself how similar they really are, and it's only fair to add that in the next sentence he directs the reader to his own digest of moral teachings in the appendix to The Abolition of Man. These,

25 p.29.

26 p. 17.

incidentally, provide a striking case,ranging through the decrees of Norsemen, Redskin (sic) and Australian Aborigines, as well as those of the more obvious Greek, Roman, Babylonian and Egyptian peoples. The instances do suggest that people from these cultures not only made moral pronouncements, but were aware of making them from within the tradition of a Moral Law. But Lewis,in not using the placatory tone above, reconciles himself to the differences in The Abolition of Man:

> Does this mean, then, that no progress in our perceptions of value can ever take place? That we are bound to an unchanging code given once for all? And is it, in any event, possible to talk of obeying what I call the Tao? If we lump together, as I have done, the traditional moralities of East and West, the Christian, the Pagan, and the Jew, shall we not find many contradictions and some absurdities? I admit all this. Some criticism, some removal of contradictions, even some real development, is required. (27)

And, with a master's touch, he avoids any suggestion that a turn like this is in itself 'a rebellion of branches against the tree'. There is criticism within the spirit of the Law, and criticism outside that spirit, and the differences between them are like those 'between the organic and the surgical.'

There are marked differences, also, in the quality of the concession in each passage. The first, if apparently rational, is guarded, but the second is comfortable and secure. The first has to be so defensive because the Law itself is resting on consensus, and any note of discrepacies between moral codes is approaching its foundations too closely. In the latter case Lewis has invoked

27 p.30.

rationality itself as the basis of the Law, and having shown that his opponents themselves shed their own claims to rationality, he can let in the doubts that restrain our thorough-going acceptance of the beginning of Mere Christianity.

From this security there arises, in what follows, an uncompromising flexibility which, as though by paradox, convinces us more firmly of the Law's meaning than the cajoling insistence of Mere Christianity. There are other buttresses to this, one being, as Lewis says, that he is not 'attempting any indirect argument for Theism'. We do not have the sense, as we have in Mere Christianity, of being carried too far and too fast. It might be said that an attack on the view of the Law as a natural phenomenon must be an indirect argument for theism, but the material in the argument that Lewis actually does carry out is nonetheless different.

For this time the chosen territory is the consequence of treating the Law as if it were a natural phenomenon, should the following position be adopted:

> Let us regard all ideas of what we ought to do simply as an interesting psychological survival: let us step right out of all that and start doing what we like. Let us decide for ourselves what man is to be and make him into that: not on any ground of imagined value, but because we want him to be such. Having mastered our environment, let us now master ourselves and choose our own destiny.(28)

This is an introduction to the final part, 'The Abolition of Man', which provided the impetus for That Hideous Strength[29].

28 pp. 32-3.

29 Of Other Worlds, p.75.

The connection is particularly noticeable in the character of Frost, the seeker of total 'objectivity' who denies the validity of any judgement of value and wants to mould a ruling elite.

Lewis begins by considering what is meant by the conquest of Nature, and in particular 'Man's conquest of Nature'. He makes a graceful bow to all that has been 'really beneficial', a gesture which Carpenter ignores[30], but argues that 'Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument'[31]. This is accomplished by the examples of the wireless, the aeroplane and the contraceptive (which is to stand roughly for eugenics). He despairs of any turn in government changing this essential condition, and adds that '...all long-term exercise of power, especially in breeding, must mean the power of earlier generations over later ones.'[32] There is an optimum point, he supposes, in future history when one generation, having most fully liberated itself from the influence of the past, will be able to exert more control over the entire extent of the future than any succeeding generation. The final stage in the conquest of Nature comes, Lewis says, 'when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself. Human

30 Inklings, p.222.

31 p. 35.

32 p. 35.

nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man.'[33]

In past ages the schemes of educators failed because of the poverty of their techniques; but even then, they worked within and transmitted the Tao. But the 'Conditioners', being able to reproduce whatever parts of the Tao they desire in their charges, will be the arbiters of meaning, and what they decide upon they cannot be subject to. Yet, having freed themselves from judgements of value does not mean that they will have freed themselves from their impulses, and thus neither they nor their subjects can be distinct from Nature, in the sense of that which is operated on. 'Man's conquest of Nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature's conquest of Man.'[34]

No projection can ever be more than credible; if it is proved to be correct, it has stopped being a projection. The credibility of this one hangs not so much on the perfection of behavioural modification as on an increasing wideness in its use, which would (as use generally does) tend towards its refinement. Lewis is simply saying that its use, alone, will have the effect he describes, and even if his hourglass time chart seems a little neat, any state of affairs resembling his nightmare would quickly convince us that we do in fact revere something like the Tao (except that we would no longer be able to think that sort of thought).

33 p.37.

34 p.41.

The story in itself may be an over-detailed way of saying that there can be a nadir in human affairs, after which, when it comes, nothing can ever get better again. But Lewis's point is precisely that such an event will be a direct result of conscious rejection of the Tao. In such a world, he makes clear, there will be no reason to expect benevolence of the 'Conditioners', since benevolence would be a meaningless concept.

Much of the sense of his argument hangs on his understanding of 'Nature', which he uses to indicate a halfway house between exterior and interior zones which we cannot comprehend:

> We are always conquering Nature, because (sic) 'Nature' is the name for what we have, to some extent, conquered. The price of conquest is to treat a thing as mere Nature. Every conquest over Nature increases her domain. The stars do not become Nature till we can weigh and measure them: the soul does not become Nature till we can psychoanalyse her. The wresting of powers from Nature is also the surrendering of things to Nature. (35)

Without further reference to psychoanalysis, about which Lewis is usually firm and fuzzy, putting it in its place with vague distaste, he declares that the human must be kept in ultimate exclusion of Nature. All is gain until the final step; thereafter one does not so much have diminishing returns as no returns ever again. The central point is made quietly and deftly: 'It is the magician's bargain: give up our soul, get power in return.'[36] Then he makes an outline of the position later developed in English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, the idea that magic and science were born at the same time, and that

35 p. 43.

36 p. 43.

magic only died out because science was more efficient in bringing about what the practitioners wanted.

This is the extent of Lewis's 'slur' on science and his 'obscurantism', the charges that Haldane makes against him (answered in Of Other Worlds) and revived by Carpenter when he claims that Lewis ignores the benefits of scientific advances. But Lewis, I think, comes out on top; he is not simply being unscientific, and he has indeed a positive recommendation to make. Underneath the view of Nature as whatever we can analyse and control, he has been constructing a rather animistic approach which, for him, had originated with Barfield's Poetic Diction:

> We do not look at trees either as Dryads or as beautiful objects while we cut them into beams: the first man who did so may have felt the price keenly, and the bleeding trees in Virgil and Spenser may be far-off echoes of that primeval sense of impiety. (37)

These outrunners help him to come in sight of a 'new' Natural Philosophy, a 'regenerate science' which 'would not do even to minerals and vegetables what modern science threatens to do to man himself. When it explained it would not explain away.'

> The analogy between the Tao of Man and the instincts of an animal species would mean for it new light cast on the unknown thing, Instinct, by the inly known reality of conscience and not a reduction of conscience to the category of Instinct. (38)

This is not, I imagine, the way a harangue develops: it lays flesh on the bones of Lawlor's Lewis: a man 'talking

37 p. 42.

38 p. 47.

for victory', but a man who wanted to be master of the doctrine as well as master of the controversy[39].

Perhaps the real basis for the argument being labelled a harangue is an occasional deficiency in style in the essay, something which might have been handled more properly when I was looking at Lewis's prose, but which is perhaps worth a word here, since it can readily be demonstrated that part of Lewis's style of argument is to gather mass like a snowball. Looking at the passage quoted on page 125, and noting the progress of the thought through each sentence, we see that the movement is a clinkered, overlapping one up to the word 'domain'. The idea itself may be a pearl, but it forms exactly as pearls do, being endlessly coated and layered.

This is not, I am afraid, an isolated case. Immediately after the quotation at the top of page 125, Lewis writes:

> Every victory we seemed to win has led us, step by step, to this conclusion. All Nature's apparent reverses have been but tactical withdrawals. We thought we were beating her back when she was luring us on. What looked to us like hands held up in surrender was really the opening of arms to enfold us for ever. (40).

While we are ready ourselves to surrender at this point, Lewis goes on to sum up his argument again. Eventually he stirs in his final point about the regeneration of science, and at a satisfactory level of restatement The Abolition of Man comes to an end. From the appearance of the passage above, it was not much recast from Lewis's original script,

39 'The Tutor and the Scholar' in Light on C.S. Lewis, pp. 68 and 76.

40 p. 41.

although it ran to two editions before being issued recently in paperback. Since the talks which constitute Mere Christianity were edited by Lewis, the pristine state of The Abolition, if this really is the case, would incline to support my impression of Lewis's satisfaction with his original audience in Durham, a satisfaction also apparent in other, more suave works which are based on lectures. This, at least, might explain his apparently variable powers of argument; why he should have been so prolix, however, is likely to remain a mystery.

VI ARGUMENTS IN FICTION

> I will accuse the gods; especially the god who lives on the Grey Mountain. That is, I will tell all he has done to me from the very beginning, as if I were making my complaint of him before a judge. (1)

Lewis's essays in themselves do not exhaust his habit of arguing. Orual, in the above, announces that Till We Have Faces has a programme. The myth is 'retold' to a purpose, which is that Lewis will be devil's advocate. Beneath all this, perhaps, there is contrivance. Orual is alone among Lewis's main characters in having crippling doubts about the good intentions of the cosmos, and of course she reflects real doubts that Lewis was having at the time of writing. But she is also excused by being the only main character speaking at an early stage of progressive revelation, and her story in itself is an example of Lewis's idea of the 'good dreams' of the pagans. Lewis therefore sets up in Orual the innocent voicing of a querulousness which, at most points in his career, he would have regarded as inadmissable for a Christian and indeed for himself. A Grief Observed, the work that has most kinship with Till We Have Faces, was published anonymously.

The programmatic tendency, however, is not always of such serious and personal inspiration. Lewis's fiction often reflects the argumentative atmosphere he inhabited, and as some of the arguments that he had with people were undoubtedly odd[2], a number of the arguments that arise in

1 Till We Have Faces, p.11.

2 Carpenter, Part Three, Chapter 3, describes an imaginary Inkling conversation which is reasonably based on recorded Inkling opinion.

his books are consequently odd too. We do not, it is true, have a fiction from Lewis in which the principles of British Israelitism are constantly propounded, but he does have the face to suggest that there is a good and an evil nature specifically in Britain, and that the good nature is derived from Atlantis[3]. Now it seems to me very unlikely that Lewis actually believed anything of the sort, and pretty probable that he very much wanted to, so that many of the arguments merely entertain while the charm of the narrative is on. No rational person could hold the view of history which Ransom's central dialogue with Merlin depends upon[4], and Lewis did not claim that this was an alternative version of human events[5]. But Chapter Thirteen of That Hideous Strength remains for me the most accomplished piece in the whole genre of spiritual nonsense, and the emotional conviction of the episode must be accounted for: it would not be enough simply to label it art, even if it is only art of a sort. The main question is why Lewis does this, a question more difficult to answer than why, for example, Charles Williams wrote as he did. Williams believed, or affected to believe, in the essential reality of the bizarre events that he describes, and in the essential reality of the terms in which he describes them. With Lewis the position is more complex, and I would claim that the number of constructed worlds that he invents, each

3 That Hideous Strength, Chapter 17, iv, in particular.

4 That Hideous Strength, Chapter 13.

5 Of Other Worlds, p.76.

with its own quiddities, is a result more of his circumspection than of the form his creativity takes. While Williams seems to be saying that things are really as he puts them, whether or not this appears to be the case, Lewis is saying that if the reality his imagination proposes is not reality at all, then (as a principle) something better will be. The 'arguments' that Lewis puts forward in fiction are therefore immediately more disposable than those defended by Williams, though they are ultimately more serviceable. They are media rather than propositions in themselves.

This category of argument, then, does not simply propose a different world view, nor simply entertain without further purpose. Its function, I think, is to create an alternative sphere for debate, one which extends horizons without specific cartography. From this point of view we can see how The Abolition of Man and That Hideous Strength work in tandem. The latter is not so much the fictional embodiment of the former as a more extreme version of it: it draws fire from the more moderate stance when the actual target is to have the more moderate stance accepted--or, if you like, it keeps the middle distributed for a practical purpose.

But even if we accept the tactical quality of Lewis's debates in fiction, perhaps wanting to add that the stories take up spare capacity in Lewis's obsessiveness, we shall still want to examine them for any richness they may have in themselves, always granted that this will not always be a richness of a logical or expository sort. However, before we do this there is another, and simpler, category of argument to handle: cases where Lewis does no more than have his characters bandy ethics at one another.

One such case is the climax of Out of the Silent Planet, in which Ransom, within the logic of the narrative, has to convey Weston's point of view to the Archon of Mars. This in itself is Lewis's contribution to the matter of linguistic honesty. Since Weston, who has killed some hrossa, cannot explain his actions in Oyarsa's 'accursed language', Ransom's translation rather extends Lewis's argument on debunking, which we encountered in the previous chapter. Lewis, we remember, holds that the significance conferred on an object or action by our emotional reaction to it should not be reduced by reference of the emotion to a 'commonplace rationalism', and it's interesting to see, as Ransom debunks Weston, whether Lewis himself succumbs to this temptation. This is the pompous stuff which Ransom is instructed to translate:

> 'To you I may seem a vulgar robber, but I bear on my shoulders the destiny of the human race. Your tribal life with its stone-age weapons and beehive huts, its primitive coracles and elementary social structure, has nothing to compare with our civilisation--with our science, medicine and law, our armies, our architecture, our commerce, and our transport system which is rapidly annihilating space and time. Our right to supersede you is the right of the higher over the lower.' (6)

Weston's part in destiny, in Ransom's version, becomes:

> 'He says that what he does now will make very different things happen to those of our people who are not yet born.'

And this is how the advantages of civilisation come out:

> 'He says we know much. There is a thing happens in our world when the body of a living creature feels pain and becomes weak, and he says we sometimes know how to stop it. He says we have many bent people and we kill

6 p.157.

> them or shut them up in huts and that we have people for settling quarrels between the bent hnau about their huts and mates and things.'

This is, I think, a mixture of the fair and the unfair. Weston's use of the word 'destiny' is coloured by what we know are his actual intentions for the human race: that they should ruthlessly colonise other planets. In dismissing Weston's actual meaning, Ransom stands on good ethical ground. But in appearing to ascribe no other possible meaning to 'destiny' than 'change', Lewis seems to deny the very idea of ordinate development as meaningless, and this is reinforced in his treatment of Weston's view of the excellence of our civilisation. Weston, again, is foolish in not seeing the ordering agencies of our society as a real indicator of our moral condition, but Lewis, once we appreciate his general satirical thrust, which he sees to it that we shall not be long in doing, is confusing the issue by seeing the indicators as no more than that. Is a faulty penal system as bad a thing as the necessity for having any kind of penal system? Are we really likely to agree that the settling of quarrels is as deplorable as the quarrels themselves, or that medicine is comparable with ill-health? These remedies, faulty as they actually are, are made to seem less desirable than we actually ought to regard them by Lewis's expedient of having them aired in a perfect world by someone who regards them as a reason for destroying that world. It therefore becomes difficult to tell exactly what Lewis is arguing, given that we assume him to have been after something more solid than a Martian playlet. If he simply means that no matter what we do, we

shall always be faced with some or other aspect of our wretchedness, it does not seem helpful to pronounce this at the risk (a very minor risk, it may be) of associating genuine advances with Westonism.

However, within the immediate context of the argument this risk is greatly reduced. Weston is ever more clearly a buffoon, and Ransom's side, in Oyarsa, displays a good deal of clarity. The apparent position on modern scientific advance is refined into the necessary viewpoint of objective value, such as can be radiated from a perfect society. Weston's fault, we discover, is not that he is a 'realist', having no moral viewpoint, but that the moral viewpoint he does have is partial. (The role of the 'realist' is filled by Dick Devine, Weston's accomplice.)

> 'It is well that I have heard you,' said Oyarsa. 'For though your mind is feebler, your will is less bent than I thought. It is not for yourself that you would do all this.'
>
> 'No,' said Weston proudly in Malacandrian. 'Me die. Man live.' (7)

The Weissmullerian Weston (as against Oyarsa's Saunders of the River) is a biological historicist of sorts, supposing that some form of meaning and basis for action is to be found in the fact that one species supersedes another. This is the very last assumption that the Malacandrians would make, given that such a process is to them natural and utterly unremarkable. When Mars itself is 'unmade', they will go to Maleldil. Life itself, however, is a matter of obsession with Weston, who could not be expected to understand the distinction that Lewis makes between bios,

7 p. 160.

the state of being alive, and zoe, the life of the Spirit.

> 'She--' began Weston.
> 'I'm sorry,' interrupted Ransom, 'but I've forgotten who She is.'
> 'Life, of course,' snapped Weston. 'She has ruthlessly broken down all obstacles and liquidated all failures and today in her highest form--civilised man--and in me as his representative, she presses forward to that interplanetary leap which will, perhaps, place her for ever beyond the reach of death.' (8)

Oyarsa, by close questioning, finds out that it is neither any specific person, nor human morphology, nor even the rational mind, that Weston wants to survive:

> 'It seems to me, Thick One, that what you really love is no completed creature but the very seed itself: for that is all that is left.' (9)

And there, more or less, the debate ends, since Oyarsa feels that he knows enough about Weston. But I sense at this point that I have myself been unfair to Lewis in stating that the argument is carried forward merely by characters swapping ethics with one another. For it is not until Ransom journeys home with Weston and Devine that we understand properly the point of view that is held both by Ransom and the Malacandrians. Weston has announced that he would gladly sacrifice himself to see man established on Mars, and Ransom, by way of counterweight, has an experience in which his own dissolution might be welcome:

> He could not feel that they were an island of life journeying through an abyss of death. He felt almost the opposite--that life was waiting outside the little iron eggshell in which they rode, ready at any moment to break in, and that, if it killed them, it would kill them by an excess of vitality. He hoped passionately that if they were to perish they would perish by the 'unbodying'

8 pp. 158-9.

9 p. 161.

> of the space-ship and not by suffocation within it. To be let out, to be set free, to dissolve into the ocean of eternal noon, seemed to him at certain moments a consummation even more desirable than their return to earth. (10)

Ransom feels that space is 'full of life in the most literal sense, full of living creatures'--a useful revelation in itself, for Lewis is suggesting his fuller cosmology without giving too much away. Interestingly, here, there is promiscuous reference: a sensible touch of Hamlet, a less sensible touch of lōse von der Welt mich los, and (a moment after this passage) a touch of the sursum corda. This is not a characteristic practice, and, as these go in Lewis, is more than likely unconscious; but what he gets from it is an unspecific theistic catch-all, a mystical experience of a mild sort which is not only consonant with Ransom's apparent religious development at this point, but which contrasts also with Weston's apprehension of 'Life'.

Weston's mistake is to confuse the vague abstraction that he calls 'Life' with the absolute, an entity which he foolishly supposes he has grasped. Lewis argues in The Great Divorce that there are sins of the intellect[11], and it is for arrogance such as this that Weston is eventually condemned. Though his situation does not afford him the opportunity he imagines, Weston would surrender his own life in the attempt to allow the human hnau to live perpetually as a group. But Ransom, in the very presence of something that he calls life, is ready to be 'unbodied'; he is not so

10 pp. 172-3.

11 p. 37.

apparently purposive as Weston, but Weston has no vision of the life he talks about. The creatures that Ransom senses, and accepts, are 'completed', and within this moral concrete he finds an absolute. He has of course been doing this all along with the hrossa, but it is only with his realisation aboard the space-ship that the argument is completed.

Even so, we are perhaps inclined to feel that for enlightenment Lewis substitutes something that we might call information regarding a world of his own creation. There is a moral affinity between our feelings and what Ransom appreciates, and while we may grant that Lewis has a special talent for drawing this out, Lewis's perspectives are in themselves imaginary. If we take them, as I think we are encouraged to, as a basis for thought and action, there may be some danger as to the ultimate affiliation of our own moral sensibility. Does it make sense to do something, or not to do something, because it would or wouldn't go down well on Perelandra?

Fortunately, we can see that whatever critical problems arise from the breadth of Lewis's writing interests, the problems might actually be greater if this breadth were not to be found. Lewis's is not a poetic morality: it can be stated, as he does state it, without benefit of props and backcloth. In terms, however, of the isolation of Lewis's moral stances within the environment of one specific book, we are left with a development in Ransom which is not specially coherent. The structure of the argument, which I've described lightly, in Out of the Silent Planet, is not necessarily the same thing as the pattern of learning that

might occur in any human being. To put this another way, it's not clear why Ransom should have his vision when he actually does, except that at that point he is in particular danger without recourse to action. Without sacrificing readability, Lewis creates problems for himself in this way. Ransom's evolution by the end of the first book is picked up, and indeed expanded, at the very beginning of the second; but Lewis has to prune Ransom's precociousness harshly to give the now-demonic Weston's arguments the force they require. This in its turn, since it leads nowhere, gives way abruptly to physical action.

Again, the programme selected by Lewis for a novel can distort his presentation of character, particularly where he is weakest. Lewis is very good on perception, because he has a good eye, and in another sense a plausible eye when he describes how a character reacts to an unfamiliar landscape. Lewis is pre-eminent among the Inklings for this trick, which comes over well because his characters' reactions are generally confined to the case that they find themselves in. There is little reference, by and large, to the lives of the characters beyond the text, as with Scudamour who rather absorbs everything he encounters in the Otherworld[12], and where characters do not describe their feelings very deeply their reactions to external stimuli gain in importance.

But this means that when Lewis refers to a character's history the result is often unconvincing, as when Ransom builds up his courage to attack Weston:

[12] In The Dark Tower.

> The thing still seemed impossible. But gradually something happened to him which had happened to him only twice before in his life. It had happened once while he was trying to make up his mind to do a very dangerous job in the last war. It had happened again while he was screwing his resolution to go and see a certain man in London and make to him an excessively embarrassing confession which justice demanded. (13)

It's not, I think, particularly morbid to want to know more particularly about the second case. Ransom, after all, is interesting enough to warrant it, especially as he is the saviour of Perelandra. Nor, I think, is it captious to want to have known about it by this time, since the actual effect of this passage is to remind us that Ransom is Lewis's invention, a state of affairs only emphasised by the insertion of this convenient detail.

Notwithstanding this, the debates in the science fiction novels obviously differ in nature. The first is chaired formally by Goodness, the second lets the whole quality of a world hang on the outcome of the dispute. Preoccupation with the activity of debate is nevertheless very apparent in both cases: it is exalted when Ransom discovers that the Un-man is not very interested in exploring reality through dialectic, keeping up a facade of reason for its own ends[14], and again it seems the prime method of concourse, as when Weston suggests that Ransom has seduced the Green Lady:

> 'You ask me to believe that you have been living here with that woman under these conditions in a state of sexless innocence?'
> 'Oh, sexless!' said Ransom disgustedly.

13 Perelandra (Bodley Head, 1943); Voyage to Venus (Pan 1953) p. 136.

14 p. 117.

> 'All right, if you like. It's about as good a description of living in Perelandra as it would be to say that a man had forgotten water because Niagara Falls didn't immediately give him the idea of making it into cups of tea.' (15)

Lewis, I think, is simply used to a style of conversation which always progresses by the interchange of ideas. But even if we learn something (not much) about Weston's pomposity, the force of the narrative is weakened in the assumption that every moment should be devoted to our spiritual profit. The very clumsiness of the sentence structure, in fact, suggests that Lewis has little idea of what Ransom and Weston will say to one another on the Venusian littoral.

A shade later, as Weston is talking, Lewis appeals to the reader as pro. tem. Oyarsa:

> Ransom had heard this sort of thing pretty often before and wondered when his companion was coming to the point. (16)

Passages like this, I suppose, led Carpenter to comment that there is something rather schoolboyish about the trilogy; the semantic qualities of 'this sort of thing' and 'pretty often before' remind us of the kind of response that Bob Cherry would make to Vernon-Smith, if not of The Riddle of the Sands. The danger for Lewis is the possible awakening of the reader's sense of having an eccentric fictional experience, a danger which is always on the cards anyway.

Weston, however, saves the day by saying things of such refined fiendishness that we wish Lewis hadn't troubled to signpost the moral essence of the two characters.

15 p. 78.

16 p. 81.

'"Your Devil and your God, "' says Weston, '"are both pictures of the same Force,"'[17] and he thereafter proposes to do anything to which the Force prompts him, pointing out that he himself is the Universe, God, and anything else of significance. In a splendid coup de théâtre he falls into diabolical possession, which immediately alters the status of the passage as argument. Weston had supposed that he was engaged in discussion, but in his misplaced and mistimed arrogance, he goes over the edge and is betrayed into damnation. Lewis allows few distinctions in his mythical space - and particularly in the two protological worlds - between words, meanings, actions and states, an attitude summed up in the impression that 'the distinction between history and mythology might be itself meaningless outside the Earth.'[18] Weston's fall, though we never see much decency in him, is reasonably complex. His one chance has been to see that he has a capacity for selflessness, but he cannot ultimately make any difference between himself and whatever it is that he follows. He suffers intolerably for this mistake, for Lewis is in the phase where his greatest success is in ideological terrorism.

As Weston tries to snare Ransom, there comes a different argumentative track and a problem. What do you mean, Ransom asks, by saying that you work for the Holy Spirit?

> 'I mean,' said Weston, 'that nothing now divides you and me except a few outworn theological technicalities with which organised religion has unhappily allowed itself to get incrusted. But I have penetrated that crust. The Meaning beneath it is as true and living as ever. If you

17 p. 84.

18 Out of the Silent Planet, p.169.

> will excuse me for putting it that way, the essential truth of the religious view of life finds a remarkable witness in the fact that it enabled you, on Malacandra, to grasp, in your own mythical and imaginative fashion, a truth which was hidden from me.' (19)

Weston's claim that the beliefs of the two are at heart the same suggests very strongly that his new-found faith is a form of Modernism. The comparative language he uses, even the slightly patronising tone, is that of Modernism. But this, of course, is the Weston who came flying through space in his subtle engine and met the ruling spirit of Mars. He knows that things are not as he puts them, and he knows that Ransom is equally au fait. Both, by this point, inhabit a sphere of public revelation. His later attempt to seduce the Green Lady has, in terms of her comparative awareness, a narrative legitimacy besides which this is clay pigeon-shooting, a side-swipe by which a perfectly respectable opinion is condemned by association with an untenable opinion, as Weston's, given the circumstances, would be.

Lewis's main argument not only coheres with the narrative, but is fairer in that it addresses itself to the reader's condition rather than trying to enlist his support against philosophical deviations. Weston attempts to persuade Tinidril, the Green Lady (this is not a public appointment on Venus), that Maleldil really wants her to disobey His command to pass nights on the floating islands rather than on the Fixed Land. She is urged to make, as it were, her adolescent rebellion. We are never quite sure how clear her communications with Maleldil are, but His

19 p. 82.

immanence seems shifting enough for her to be vulnerable. Her will is perfect, but her understanding is not, and her weakness is brilliantly reflected in the imagery of the novel. Tinidril lives by complete dependence on God; the emphasis lies always on new experience, on not holding on to the past, and this attitude, natural in an oceanic world of floating islands, is one which Weston has a chance of perverting.

C.N. Manlove, with clarity, points out the ingenuity with which Lewis defines Tinidril's innocence. The islands in themselves are not a natural symbol of paradise, and might strike us as the reverse[20], because of their incompatibility with any apparent order. But this immediate impression is owing largely to our psychology.

> The particular choice of floating islands to accomplish this reversal of our presuppositions has a number of possible explanations, of which the foremost is perhaps that their movement and shape are directed entirely by the ocean, and thus are a near-perfect (the element missing is choice) emblem of that endless delighted self-resignation which is at the heart of the Lady's innocence. Rolled towards her by Maleldil, life to her is a series of waves, huge and small, which it is her willing joy to meet. (21)

A rough, exciting fugue develops as Ransom and the Un-man, at odds with one another, seem both to argue within the Spirit. The case that Ransom makes is vital, perhaps for us as well as for Tinidril. Since Jung, we are inclined to believe that psychic growth is a result of killing the dragon and passing fearlessly through the magic fire, which is generally the line that the Unman pursues, as when he invokes the patristic idea of the

20 Modern Fantasy: five studies (C.U.P., 1978) p.119.

21 Manlove, p.120.

happiness of Adam's Fall. Ransom is beaten for a moment, and the demon's immediate attempt to seduce him is held at bay only by the presence of Tinidril. Ransom then makes his reply:

> 'The first King and first Mother of our world did the forbidden thing; and He brought good of it in the end. But what they did was not good; and what they lost we have not seen. And there were some to whom no good came nor ever will come.' He turned to the body of Weston. 'You,' he said, 'tell her all. What good came to you? Do you rejoice that Maleldil became a man? Tell her of your joys, and of what profit you had when you made Maleldil and death acquainted.' (22)

We accept, I think, Ransom's ennobled dialogue. This is his transitional novel, where we must believe that he has the makings of the golden rex futurus who appears in That Hideous Strength. Ransom's distinctions help to create for the reader a tableau in which the eternal verities of Lewis's espousal are displayed: demon, oppressed protagonist, and unfallen. This is immediately set back into the narrative as the demon howls and Tinidril goes to sleep.

> And while these two things were happening the piece of ground on which the two men stood and the woman lay was rushing down a great hillside of water. (23)

The sense of flow, here literal, is often lacking even in metaphorical ways in Lewis's cosmological diagrams. Here he defends his genre, showing that contingency is more important than the realism of the detail. In terms of plot, Ransom is making a last-ditch effort for a case which will not succeed against the tactics of the

22 pp. 110-1.

23 p. 111.

Unman, such as disturbing his sleep[24]. But in terms of the real argument that Lewis is pursuing, Lewis has scored a success in pointing out the sort of father that God is. Perelandra is not so much a mythological book as a purge of mythology, and what is being purged is psychological stock-in-trade. This, in Lewis's mind, is simply part of the modern attitude to life, and even as the admirable passages above develop, he cannot resist a few sly kicks:

> How if the enemy were right after all? Felix peccatum Adae. Even the church would tell him that good came of disobedience in the end. Yes, and it was true too that he, Ransom, was a timid creature, a man who shrank back from new and hard things... Who could be certain that Creative Evolution was not the deepest truth? (25)

How likely it is, even for a scholarly man like Ransom, to think quite like this in such a situation is debatable, but mention of the technicality, the term 'Creative Evolution', gives a sense of reportage, of editing, to the passage. We have returned, as we did a moment ago with the attack on liberal theology, to the acidity of The Pilgrim's Regress. Of course the demon's thinking is damnable in a world like Perelandra, but his advantages were never granted to creative evolutionists who do not, like the demon, amuse themselves by disembowelling live frogs and pulling the wings from birds. But the use of creative evolution in argument is not even seen as damnable, so much as symptomatic of being damned. The

[24] p. 113.

[25] p.110.

ghost of Weston, who is already in Hell, haunts his body when the demon leaves it and reveals its spiritual history as it raves:

> 'So then I went and told him that if they didn't want me in the First Fifteen they could jolly well do without me, see. We'll tell that young whelp it's an insult to the examiners to show up this kind of work. What I want to know is why I should pay for a first-class ticket and then be crowded out like this. It's not fair. Not fair. I never meant any harm.' (26)

The implicit thesis here is not one that is likely to be forgotten, but it is improper of Lewis to associate attitudes and behaviour such as this with the voicing of theories he does not happen to agree with.

I wanted to show that Lewis uses various arguments, with various motives, in a book which sets out to be partly a debate. The main argument, however, is dealt with all but unanswerably in Manlove's Modern Fantasy: five studies. Manlove contends that the moral and physical continuum on Perelandra, the acceptance of whatever wave Maleldil sends, is one which could lead the Lady to fall 'without having actually sinned'.[27] It is her love for Maleldil that will make her disobey Him, if she thinks that this is what He really wants:

> ...the attempted suggestion is that she would disobey Maleldil's command only for the sake of this self-development: the fact that she could do it out of love for her Creator and for others is conveniently forgotten in order to make her uncorrupted urge towards falling more insubstantial. (28)

26 p. 118.

27 p. 136.

28 p. 137.

Manlove continues to unravel basic contradictions in Perelandra: the gist of them (doing his clarity no justice) is that theology for other worlds cannot really be written. If the thesis of Perelandra is accepted--that a man from our world could save another planet from a fall such as ours-- we inevitably see the Eve of our world as having been abandoned. Manlove even makes the striking point that 'one might well be tempted to use the "rightness" of...Perelandra to argue the inadequacy of the innocence in the fixed garden of Eden... The landscape of Perelandra is the perfect expression not only of the Lady's but, as rationalised by Lewis, of any innocence anywhere.'[29]

This leads us to strange criticism, for it is very like saying that Lewis is defeated by his own ability, superseding a context in which, nevertheless, he remains firmly bound. We have, in fact, seen something like this problem before in the double redemption of Edmund. Double atonement means no more than double baptism. Lewis does give the reader a Passion story which is widely acknowledged to be effective, and by attaching it to the sin of one particular sinner he emphasises its individual efficacy. But it makes no wider cosmological sense, and the approach taken does something to exclude another, that of Christ's call to sinners to repent. (This is taken up in Dawn Treader, where Eustace, having lapsed into dragonhood by his own fault, is returned to something better than normality by Aslan.)

Again, in the temptation narrative in The Magician's Nephew, the evil that enters Narnia cannot be blamed on the Narnians, and none of them is corrupted by it.

29 p.120.

Digory's obedience averts the worst effects of the White Witch's penetration, and Aslan, as we saw, will atone for the rest. But this statement in the 'prequel' is no explanation of Edmund's second redemption: Edmund is not even a Narnian. This leaves us with the inexplicable contradiction of Narnia as neither fallen nor unfallen, enjoying manifest immanence and suffering manifest evil. Neither Perelandra nor Narnia, though both offer Lewis narrative possibilities, rejoices in a systematic comprehensibility.

What Manlove fails to stress, I think, is the moral empathy that Lewis arouses in us despite our recognition of his imperfect models. The 'apparent change of gear in Perelandra', Manlove points out[30], is not only unsatisfactory in itself but shows up Lewis's lack of control over his own scheme[31]. One defect, which I don't believe has been pointed out, is that redemption (redemption of a sort is the issue in Perelandra) will henceforth be carried out by human beings, as a direct result of the Incarnation[32]: an effect which makes little sense in a cosmos where, apart from the isolation ward that is Earth, history and mythology are the same thing. From a true idealist's point of view, mythology is more a reflection of unrecorded events than the other way round. As usual, it is because talking about mythological paraphernalia excites Lewis that he has levelled myth, event, body and soul in the extraterrestrial sphere, and not because a real argument can be made for this being the case. If it could, it would

30 p. 142.

31 p. 143.

32 Perelandra, p. 132.

have to take due note of the timelessness of the outside, as Oyarsa himself is inconsistently aware.[33] But despite all this, we hold on (as, notably, does Manlove; he exercises much greater rigour over Lewis than over Tolkien[34], and evidently has much less patience with the latter). There are reasons for this. Ransom's choice, if thrust awkwardly upon him and the reader, is a real choice. It may not arise coherently, but we are still as concerned over whether or not he will obey, and what will be the outcome of that obedience, as over the logic of the event. If what happens appears as inevitable as Christ's refusal to turn stones into bread, it is still with such an inevitability as cannot reasonably deny the possibility of succumbing. This may vitiate the logical status of the term 'inevitable', but it does not affect the mystery of making a correct moral decision.

Another reason is Lewis's exploration of, and reaction to, the nature of evil. The thoroughness of this in Perelandra sets it in a unique category among Lewis's works, in that Lewis departs from his usual technique of diagnosing evil and comes close to the actual experience of it. We may see this more clearly in Lewis's consistent and unusual reference to a 'realistic' theme in Perelandra, this being the war in Europe. Lewis will certainly tie down his fantasy to appreciable elements in our world, such as dateable styles of conversation and noticeable trends. But even his concentration on the abuse of amoral science and on corporatist politics in That Hideous Strength

33. Out of the Silent Planet, p.165. Oyarsa's ignorance of events on Earth is rather surprising.

34. pp. 152-206.

does not match the insistence of the theme of hostilities in Perelandra.

The war breaks, perhaps naturally, into Ransom's first conversation; on Venus, the noise of a flying dragon makes Ransom think of enemy planes, we are reminded of the blackout, told of Ransom's having been on the Somme, and Ransom tries to force himself to fight Weston on the example of the troops back on earth. Weston admits that he would betray England to the Nazis if the Force prompted him to do it. Lewis never keeps his eye this close to actuality elsewhere, which has led to the common accusation that his fantasies reflect a tangential view of reality itself.

Coupled with this is Lewis's own extended presence in the novel, something not simply explained by noting that it is a common practice with Lewis to introduce himself as a fictional character. His various roles as Dante, Kurwenal, foil or prologue are distinct from, though they intertwine with, his contribution to Perelandra. It should be evident from the very objections which Manlove is able to make that the value of the Genesis reworking is limited, and to treat Perelandra as if it were no more than this is to leave unexplained a great deal of the energy that the book generates. In fact nothing about that view, as a whole view of Perelandra, makes it clear why Lewis writes the actual prologue that he does, in which Lewis the character struggles in great difficulty towards Ransom's house. This episode coheres with the plot, but it is strikingly intense, and at odds with Lewis's general practice in opening a novel which is not at the same time the beginning of a series.

The initial feeling is one of nightmare, as the fictional Lewis encounters a 'barrage' of malign influence from the black Archon and his creatures:

> The rational part of my mind, even at that moment, knew perfectly well that even if the whole universe were crazy and hostile, Ransom was sane and wholesome and honest. And this part of my mind in the end sent me forward... but I felt that I was getting nearer to the one enemy--the traitor, the sorcerer, the man in league with 'them'... 'They call it a breakdown at first,' said my mind, 'and send you to a nursing home; later on they move you to an asylum.' (35)

This is the keynote of the first chapter. He wants to go home, he wants to scream, he is frightened by a cat, by an old house, by an abandoned factory, by Ransom's garden. But what frightens him most is 'the horrible surmise that those whom the rest call mad have, all along, been the only people who see the world as it really is.'[36] This is compounded in the ingenious passage in which Lewis encounters the Oyarsa of Mars:

> It was not at right angles to the floor. But as soon as I have said this, I hasten to add that this way of putting it is a later reconstruction. What one actually felt at the moment was that the column of light was vertical but the floor was not horizontal--the whole room seemed to have heeled over as if it were on board ship. (37)

There is no Joy here, no Sehnsucht. The room has suddenly appeared as it is in relation to reality, of which the eldil is a true representative. And this experience

35 p. 9.

36 p.10.

37 p.13; an example of the interest in perception which, as I mention above, p.138, is often found in Lewis. Manlove (pp. 116-7) quotes the example of Lewis stumbling upon Ransom's 'coffin' (Perelandra, pp. 11-2).

prompts the question which the novel is really designed to answer:

> ...suppose you struggle through to the good and find that it also is dreadful? How if food itself turns out to be the very thing you can't eat, and home the very place you can't live, and your very comforter the person who makes you uncomfortable? (38)

It will be noticed that this is not exactly the same question as that which asks what happens when evil invades a perfect world. That latter problem begs the question of what evil is, and the depth of its penetration into the rational psyche. In another way, critics have read Perelandra as though the central question is what happens to that world, whereas the matter is really that the struggle is on for Ransom, and what Ransom stands for we need hardly be so crude as to state. Ransom, Lewis said, was not a fanciful portrait of himself[39], and this, I think, is perfectly fair; he is rather the strategical map with which a person engaged in hostilities is intimately involved, if not interchangeable. Lewis is asking himself whether the good, in its dreadfulness, is truly distinct from what looks like cosmic insanity, as summed up in the 'barrage' and the conduct of the war. Ransom goes to Paradise as much to be reconciled to it as to save it. The screen blurs over until consciousness finally returns.

> The water gleamed, the sky burned with gold, but all was rich and dim, and his eyes fed upon it undazzled and unaching. The very names of green and gold, which he used perforce in describing the scene, are too harsh for the tenderness, the muted iridescence, of that warm, maternal, delicately gorgeous world. It was mild to look upon as evening, warm like summer

38 p. 14.

39 Of Other Worlds, p.78.

> noon, gentle and winning like early dawn. It was altogether pleasurable. He sighed. (40).

To get back to Paradise, I suppose, requires a sort of rebirth. Human life on Venus, it is suggested, comes more fully-formed out of the sea than on Earth[41], and here the ocean is seen as what it is in reality, an amniotic fluid of kinds. Along with the 'maternal' cue, this helps to explain why the impression of any specific time is levelled.

Despite the perfect, objective comfort, Ransom discovers 'something in Perelandra that might overload a human brain.'[42] By human standards, indeed, Perelandra is overwhelming. The waves beneath the floating islands describe themselves as enormous ripples of earth coming towards you[43]; as has already been noted, it is an ambiguous sort of Eden. Its pleasures range from the merely rapturous to the all-but unbearable, such as the scent of the bubble-tree[44]. The planet is an ontologically feminine world. Remarking on the albedo from the inside, Lewis comments that 'The queen of these seas views herself continually in a celestial mirror'[45]; in the distant thunder we hear what can only be laughter-loving Aphrodite[46], and we know by the constant

40 p. 30.

41 p. 92.

42 p. 36.

43 p. 34.

44 p. 41.

45 p. 30.

46 p. 32.

invocations of fecundity, by the representation of the world in the Green Lady, that the genius of the place enjoys her full astrological endowment.

It seems to follow that the sort of brain likely to be overwhelmed by this excess will be a masculine brain rather than a human brain in general, since the nature of the planet is so predominantly feminine. Here there will be no songs round the camp-fire, no hnakra-hunts; and despite the generosity of Lewis's tone in describing the effect of the albedo, the idea of gazing at oneself at all is later charged with corruption, as the Unman teaches Tinidril vanity[47].

Even the wild pleasures of the scenery are relative. Once Ransom has caught sight of Tinidril, the bubble-trees are not so attractive.

> The solitude, which up till now had been scarcely painful, had become a horror. Any return to it was a possibility he *dared* not face. The drugging and entrancing beauty had vanished from his surroundings; take that one human form away and all the rest of this world was now pure nightmare, a horrible cell or trap in which he was imprisoned. (48)

This, though psychologically right, is violent language to use of Eden, and brings us once again upon the central idea of the book. Though there must be objective conditions in Eden before it can be Paradise, it can only become Paradise when it is accepted as such. Tinidril herself is upset when she discovers (or, in fact, is shown by Ransom) that she can, to some extent, share Ransom's view of isolation upon the planet[49]. Ransom is so uneasy

47 pp. 122-6.

48 p. 46.

49 p.60.

here that Weston's arrival is really an objectification of what Ransom has already brought to Perelandra. Ransom, in his nakedness, is visibly divided, since the sun has tanned him down one side on his journey[50].

Ransom's difficulties are focussed by the Un-man into formal debate. His main irritation, as when the devil talks of the felix culpa, is the enemy's trick of approaching the truth, particularly about Ransom himself, very closely[51]. The devil shows up Ransom's imperfections and makes us conscious of kinds of good that Ransom has not attained. Nothing in the context encourages us to think that the devil is anything but wrong--he shows us constantly that he is genuinely evil--but his demiurgic speeches are,nonetheless, powerful. There is, ultimately, a connection between the two; when the eldila survey Ransom after his ordeal, they take note of his fallenness as well as his triumph. If they were like him, their lights would go out[52]. Ransom's function as an antibody, a fallen man against a demon, finds a close analogue in the role of Merlin in That Hideous Strength, where Ransom points out to Merlin that part of the exercise is that he shall be saved as well as civilisation defended[53].

It is from this that Lewis develops the most startling position in Perelandra. Ransom measures up to the place by maintaining obedience against the devil's advocacy of dynamic evolutionary steps. In contemporary mythology,

50 p. 49.

51 As when it recalls Ransom's feelings about the creatures of Mars, p.103.

52 p. 181.

53 p.177.

the devil would be tamed by our acceptance of him, and indeed at one point, as we have seen, Ransom falters[54]. Perelandra, implicitly, is a condemnation of the idea that absorption of the Shadow is the road to development.

But Ransom, as the Lady does not, sees the devil as a devil. We are shown on a number of occasions that the Un-man is meaninglessness itself, and when Ransom confronts it in physical battle he knows that it is 'living Death, the eternal Surd in the universal mathematic'[55], and hence the source of his lack of complete harmony with Perelandra, as well as the source of Lewis's panic over the awfulness of the good. Ransom, in seeing this, is filled with joy.

> The joy came from finding at last what hatred was made for. As a boy with an axe rejoices on finding a tree, or a boy with a box of coloured chalks rejoices on finding a pile of perfectly white paper, so he rejoiced in the perfect congruity between his emotion and its object. (56)

Such a hatred, we are told, could only be accommodated on a world like Perelandra, only justified within perfection. Ransom is identifying truly what it is that he hates. The ensuing combat, victory, and night journey are more than a symbolic solution with archetypal overtones. Here, rather, the analysis begins, with a spiritual agony in Ransom which if muted is real. It is prefigured by the demon's quotation to him before the battle, 'Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani'[57], a shaky tender on Lewis's part, but given more force by the reminder that the devil was there

54 p. 110.

55 p. 143.

56 p. 143.

57 p. 140.

on the occasion and is speaking from memory.

After the battle, the ruined Weston approaches Ransom and presents again the vision of futility and madness, the same vision in the nightmarish introduction and the private behaviour of the devil throughout:

> 'I know that's what you believe,' said Weston, 'but you're wrong. It's only a small parcel of civilised people who think that. Humanity as a whole knows better. It knows--Homer knew--that all the dead have sunk down into the inner darkness: under the rind. All witless, all twittering, gibbering, decaying. Bogeymen.' (58)

The surroundings, of course, make this effective. The rind is the fruit-laden planet itself, apparently perfect. Weston fears what he will find beneath: 'darkness, heat, horror, and stink.'[59] It is the sense of betrayal and exclusion here which Ransom takes with him 'under the rind.' He is followed by Weston's despairing talk some way under the Holy Mountain (of the existence of which he is as yet ignorant) and it affects him sufficiently for him to pray that the first light he sees is not a delusion[60]. When he comes to a cave filled with subterranean fire, he seems to 'see that he had been living all his life in a world of illusion. The ghosts, the damned ghosts, were right.'[61] The fires are reminiscent of creativity, dwarf forges, and the like. Ransom has descended to find out the nature of the

58 pp. 154-5.

59 p. 164.

60 pp. 164-5.

61 p. 167.

unconscious, but he is not caught up in a transformation myth at Lewis's whim. He has, rather, qualified for the experience by struggling against the temptation to it. Resisting temptation, Lewis was given to saying, is the only way of getting to know about the darker urges[62].

Ransom discovers what is, after all, beneath Perelandra. It is his (and Lewis's) old nightmare of the nursery, the giant insect[63], the fear of which had been prefigured in his imaginings of the Sorns of Mars[64]. (It is also, we learn in Dawn Treader, the bête-noire of the saintly Lucy[65].) It is the Terrible Mother--except that it is not very terrible at all, particularly in juxtaposition with the Un-man who shows up along with it. Ransom gets angry once again:

> 'Do you think I'm going to stand this?' he yelled. 'Get out of my brain. It isn't yours, I tell you! get out of it.' As he shouted he had picked up a big, jagged stone from beside the stream. (66)

And what he does with the big, jagged stone is to remove Weston's face, a means of dispatch which is telling in itself. After this we hear no more of madness in Perelandra. It dies with the body of the Un-man, and the great insect passes in peace. It almost amuses Ransom. He fears no more what Lewis later described as, 'in the

62 As in Perelandra, p.193.

63 pp. 167-8.

64 Out of the Silent Planet, pp. 39-40.

65 p. 125.

66 p. 168

hive and the ant-hill... the two things that some of us most dread for our own species--the dominance of the female and the dominance of the collective.'[67]

Lewis's mother, it happens, had given him a book in which there was a picture of a beetle threatening a little boy[68]. It had pincers attached to the plate which could be worked from behind, and Lewis remembered them.

In Lewis's other underground novel (so to speak) there are echoes of Perelandra's neurotic aspects. The Silver Chair is an enchanted object by which a sorceress binds a lost prince of Narnia after poisoning his mother. When the Narnians free him, and he kills the witch, the entire underworld in which the heroes find themselves stirs up, and the miserable little gnomes who live there run wild with happiness. They are naturally good-humoured denizens of even lower depths, and these they go back to.

Ransom, after killing the Unman, meets other strange forms, but he is not afraid of them. Anything in the unconscious which seems bad probably is bad, being (on this reading) an external and malign influence. The infesting devils are real devils, but the thing itself is innocent.

Outside the mountain he meets Mars and Venus, and greets Tor and Tinidril as his parents[69]. The great celebration of cosmic order begins, unbalancing as it does so the trilogy, so that the last part, when it comes,

67 Surprised by Joy, p.13.

68 Surprised by Joy, pp. 13-4.

69 p. 190.

fizzles out rather. Design, of course, could hardly be expected to wait on Lewis's pressing psychic needs. And, since every story should have a happy ending, we learn that Perelandra is not to be a matriarchy.

I have claimed, implicitly, that there is a double argument in Perelandra, perhaps a public and a private one. It is because the public one, in which the desire for good is taken for granted, rather falls apart that I have noted the private one, which at least goes some of the way to explaining why Perelandra is not even on the face of it confined to practical theological enquiry. As Paradise Lost retold it voices far too much anxiety, particularly where this would not at all be expected, to be plausible.

To counter one possible objection, I know very well that the Lewis enthusiast might direct me towards The Personal Heresy[70], in which Lewis declared his opposition to the point of view that literature is about the state of mind of its creators. But this attitude, needless to say, cannot operate in its full rigour when an author explicitly states his intention to deal with a psychological problem ('...suppose you struggle through to the good and find that it also is dreadful?'). Although this does not mean, necessarily, that the stated intention will be followed up, I believe, obviously, that this is in fact what happens in Perelandra, and that this can be shown to be the case. And although Lewis immediately steps back from posing his question in that very absolute way once he has put it, we have seen that in one form or

[70] with E.M.W. Tillyard, The Personal Heresy: a controversy (O.U.P., 1939).

another it continues to haunt Ransom. Where one would come under the censure of The Personal Heresy would be in arguing that Lewis's conclusions about living, as made in Perelandra, are invalid because he at least seems to be in some considerable need to make them; and that position I would not defend for a moment.

VII SAVED BY JOY

> Seven long years I served for thee,
> The glassy hill I clamb for thee,
> The bluidy shirt I wrang for thee,
> And wilt thou not wauken and turn to me?

'The Consolation of the Happy Ending,' says Tolkien, before he quotes from The Black Bull of Norroway, '...is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance: it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.'[1]

We have seen before what Lewis made of these experiences of 'Joy', and the ways in which he thinks they can transform a narrative. 'Joy beyond the walls of the world', to a mind like Lewis's, would be either a romantic exaggeration or not; essentially a lie, or the very truth. Lewis, we noticed, was interested in the idea that the possibility of there being such a truth was the same as that truth necessarily existing, and I argued before that the main drive behind Lewis's fictional practice was the embodying of that idea. Since I'm unable to demonstrate that Anselm, from whom this attitude is derived, was right, I shall confine myself here to examining passages in which the attitude is present and seems most exactly realised.

Such a passage must, at the least, alter very greatly our way of looking at, and feeling about things. This effect may not last for very long, but it must be sensed;

[1] 'On Fairy-Stories', Tree and Leaf (Unwin Books, 1964) p. 60.

otherwise it will be difficult to see any point in the passage at all, except that Lewis has gambled and lost. He does make attempts from time to time from which, if there is no success, nothing can be salvaged. What he is aiming at is, as I said above, the sensible rendering of Christian ontology; not just to make real the conviction that Christianity is true, but that in being true it is immensely happier than we can ordinarily appreciate.

Lewis was probably driven to the creation of such experiences by extreme feelings that he himself had had. These could be prompted by various encounters, but in a well-known passage he makes a firm connection between reading and a barely-justified, intense emotion.

> What I had read was the words Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods... Pure 'Northernness' engulfed me... I knew that I had met this before, long, long ago (it hardly seems longer now) in Tegner's Drapa... And with that plunge back into my own past there arose at once, almost like heartbreak, the memory of Joy itself, the knowledge that I had once had what I had now lacked for years, that I was returning at last from exile and desert lands to my own country; and the distance of the Twilight of the Gods and the distance of my own past Joy, both unattainable, flowed together into a single, unendurable sense of desire and loss... (2)

A number of features appear in Lewis's description of this experience, but these, I think, are the most important. (1) The barest of images, if the stimulus can even be called an image, arouses a sense of its profound, if indefinable, personal significance. (2) Lewis's sense of time is re-shaped in his immediate reaction to the image. (3) The experience, though charismatic, is not simply pleasant; we are faced with the difficult, if not dangerous idea that

2 Surprised by Joy, p.62.

in its intensity, an attractive intensity, it includes pain. This recalls at once Tolkien's understanding of a Joy 'poignant as grief'.

All of these factors will be present in a passage of which we can say intelligibly that it has an ontological import. The first is important in that it allows a response to bear an imprecise relationship with the actual words encountered, while insisting on some kind of relationship. This, while flying in the face of any generally accepted model of communication, preserves the independence, and indeed the dominance, of the matter chosen.

The second is important in that it makes the third, which is obviously the meat, seem something other than the result of neuraesthenia. The intense experiences throw the normal sense of a life's progression out of kilter, and the life itself becomes an archipelago, the connecting masses being submerged. Attention is necessarily concentrated on the peaks. If this seems fanciful or pedantic, it is even more difficult to explain the occasion on which Lewis, within a moment of watery lyricism, asks if we can remember a celebration in Narnia[3]. Such an extravagance is obviously connected with the foregoing idea, though in what way and what either actually means is rather hard to say. It is not, of course, any sillier or more complicated than the events at the beginning of Burnt Norton, which are recorded in the memory although they did not take place. 'Memory' in either instance, I suppose,

[3] The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, p. 164

is a poetic term for the perception of events in the unconscious, which as the unconscious is no great regarder of time.

A further feature is the association of 'Joy' with eschatology, an association more conscious in Tolkien than in Lewis as he reminisces, but one which, as we saw before, Lewis consistently makes. One guesses (one can only guess) that the real trigger-word in the example above was Twilight, particularly when applied to Gods. Lewis went through life demonstrating that things weren't important--things like empires, civilisations, galaxies, and so on--and it's natural that we should eventually be brought up against the things that do excite him and arouse his interest, in this case the sliding down of all creation, and the doomed gods, into chaos. Without being derisory, there are endless opportunities, as Lewis was aware, for a staggering panache in situations like these: 'Would you and I not take the Viking way: "The Giants and Trolls win. Let us die on the right side, with Father Odin."'[4] This to prove to himself, rather than the inattentive, indeed fictional, Malcolm, that Heaven is no kickback, but partly, I think, invoked so that the panache may be displayed.

Another reason why Lewis leaps at mythological invitations is their habit, which he readily and happily conceded, of filling a gap. Episodes like Odin's crucifixion are generally assimilated into an impoverished Christian mythology under the license of progressive revelation; but Lewis (sometimes) treats them more like

[4] Prayer: Letters to Malcolm, p. 120.

an augmentative revelation, for he does not cast them away after sucking out their contents, as the trilogy shows.

There is a further attraction in eschatology, in that it greatly clarifies things. Ransom, as we saw, discovers *in extremis* what hatred is for, and rejoices in his discovery as a boy with crayons rejoices when he discovers a sheet of blank paper. The signs of the Last Things, as in *That Hideous Strength* and *The Last Battle*, are unbelief, false belief and the loss of any idea of right and wrong; and these not confined to individuals, but actually tearing or threatening to tear throughout society. There is nothing in developments such as this which resembles the mid-life crisis, a state generally in operation between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five; it is emphatically not a time to find out what is fittest for renunciation, as the most thoroughly believed-in. A climate comes into being in which masquerading, at first, is immensely profitable; but that very bubble incurs a reaction in which nothing can any longer be masked. Wither, fittingly, is eaten by a bear: appropriate because he has developed incoherence as a technique for mastering other people, and Lewis makes sure that we have previously been treated to a description of Mr. Bultitude's primal, chaotic consciousness before his florescent explanation of Wither's fate[5]. Equally fitting is Miss Hardcastle's encounter with the tiger, or the sweeping away of Dick Devine among, and as, rubble. In Frost's immolation, however, the nature of things is seen with finer distinction, since Frost has lived, more than others, a life of the mind.

5 *That Hideous Strength*, p. 229.

> He became able to know (and simultaneously refused the knowledge) that he had been wrong from the beginning, that souls and personal responsibility existed. He half saw: he wholly hated. The physical torture of the burning was hardly fiercer than his hatred of that. With one supreme effort he flung himself back into his illusion. In that attitude eternity overtook him as sunrise in old tales overtakes trolls and turns them into unchangeable stone. (6)

We learn that it is not the state of Frost's knowledge, but the state of his soul, that damns him. The precise nature of his infidelity is only a sign of the hatred at his core, which now stands revealed. A contrasting revelation occurs when the Calormene Emeth, who believes passionately in the Great God Tash, is brought face to face with Aslan, whom he has always held to be a devil. No pardon is given for this: Emeth's life has been spotless (his name is 'truth' in Hebrew, which is curious in a character of such obvious Hamitic inspiration) and Aslan tells him what his craving for the God Tash really means. '"Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek."'[7]

In what might be called eschatological gear, the rules remain the same, even if direction seems lost and everything is breaking up. The mode, however, is designed to show what the rules are for, and that can generate powerful emotions. The capacity to do this grows in Lewis, which may be a submerged argument for the strength of his positions: but at any rate, you have before Perelandra alarmed visions of Hell and the Devil, and thereafter

6 That Hideous Strength (Bodley Head, 1945) p. 445. The corresponding scene in the Pan edition (p.232) is abridged.

7 The Last Battle, p. 149.

increasingly frequent glimpses of God. These come principally in Narnia, an insipid, suddenly blooming landscape, and Lewis's shabby crown.

It would, of course, be fanciful to suggest that the very shabbiness of Narnia is almost a technique. This sort of conclusion runs against our instincts. But there is, in Tolkien as well as Lewis, a certain voulu negligence which they would have defended. Tolkien, in fact, explains it in this way:

> If a story says 'he climbed a hill and saw a river in the valley below,' the illustrator may catch, or nearly catch, his own vision of such a scene; but every hearer of the words will have his own picture, and it will be made out of all the hills and rivers and dales he has ever seen, but especially out of The Hill, The River, The Valley which were for him the first embodiment of the word. (8)

'"He climbed a hill and saw a river in the valley below", 'says Burton Raffel, 'does not, I suggest, evoke any kind of scene at all.'[9] This reaction, if ill-considered, conjures up by its very virulence the extremeness of Tolkien's position, prompted in Tolkien's own case by a narrative ability which is principally structural, and underwritten in Lewis's case by a belief in the inherent properties of given types of narrative.

Now it's true that Lewis does not simply fall into Tolkien's vice; Manlove points out, to the contrary, that Lewis makes us 'aware of a mind inspecting data and relaying and checking its responses.'[10] As good an example as any is Ransom's note of the demonic fingers

[8] Tree and Leaf, p. 67.

[9] 'The Lord of the Rings as Literature', in Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (eds.), Tolkien and the Critics, (University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1968) p. 226.

[10] Modern Fantasy, p. 118.

working at the buckles of Weston's pack, with the thought that Weston must have bought it at the same London shop where Ransom bought his[11] (a device rather spoiled by a piece of editorialising which points out that distancing is in progress); this, in itself, is enough to show us that Lewis's procedures differ from Tolkien's pale water-colours. But at the same time the primal, naive approach is not at all foreign to Lewis, and occasionally it seems like a natural state to which he desires only to return. Such is the suggestion of the 'Great Dance'[12], or of the little time-bomb in Dawn Treader, when Lucy reads a beautiful story in a magic book and can neither remember it nor turn back the pages to read it again:

> 'Let's see... it was about... about... oh dear, it's all fading away again. And even this last page is going blank. This is a very queer book. How can I have forgotten? It was about a cup and a sword and a tree and a green hill, I know that much. But I can't remember and what shall I do?' (13)

('I will tell it to you for years and years,' says Aslan later.) This isn't a perfect example, since it contains hints of the Passion story which don't become more than unascertainable hints, but the selection of basic implements which it makes to represent its character, and the value which Lewis lays upon it, shows that Lewis is swinging his weight behind a particular narrative mode. This will stand even if, as is obvious, this is not Lewis's only mode

11 Perelandra, p. 124.

12 Perelandra, pp. 198-202.

13 p. 135.

nor the one in which he is most consistently and steadily good: it indicates rather a taking of sides and an ideal preference. In another sense, of course, it is not a narrative fashion in the context of competing styles, since it exists only to reflect the view that this world is a copy of the real one, and that means that in the hands of Lewis and Tolkien, basic lexical elements are stressed again and again; what we are given is the noun almost as outline, rather than the play of light upon it, a Möbius band of your hundred favourite words (or reactions), because by and large the simplicity isn't there to do anything but be consoling. In Tolkien, therefore, you get a thousand pages of trees, battles, and prophetic utterances, with the occasional distraction of something peculiar walking or flying about. You might well argue that this hardly sounds like an ideal world, but such a complaint would be misconstrued. Its idealness lies not in any lack of conflict, but in the degree of resolution (in both senses) which it can bring to conflict. Not only will you be in little doubt as to who your enemy is, but the author is firmly on your side and will provide you with a battle-axe with which to split your enemy's head open.

The problem is not that this is the general approach, but that within this approach there are strands of genuine stimulation and genuine attempts to handle difficulties. There is an effect, an uncontrolled effect, of divergent tone when we are told that the Dawn Treader was 'shining like a great bright insect and crawling slowly north-westward with her oars', and, a moment later, that 'The

little white town of Narrowhaven on Doorn was easily seen'[14]. Even when we notice that the description of the ship leans on the easier words of the high style (particularly 'great', which means nothing more than 'be impressed') the effect is not dispelled, since we feel that we have for a moment seen the ship, but not the town.

The use of a certain style as an idea-repellent is probably connected with a love of parallelisms of which we saw so many in Chapter 3. But the negative effects of this and other repetitious devices don't exclude the possibility of something worthwhile happening; and it should be noted especially that many, and the best, of the worthwhile things don't arise from more conscious literary attempts, such as the description of the Dawn Treader. The following example, by contrast, is readily developed from the writing habits which I've just been berating:

> 'Aslan,' said Lucy, 'you're bigger.'
> 'That is because you are older, little one,' answered he.
> 'Not because you are?'
> 'I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.' (15)

A student of deviations from the norms of prose might say that this isn't so simple, with its 'answered he'; but this is mannered rather than complex (and a mistake). What we have here is a communicable human experience in the correlative of the simplest words available, with a fresh quality that exhibits a talent to remind. The simpleness is indeed deceptive: there are two propositions here, and the second is a subtle and delightful promise.

14 Dawn Treader, p.39.

15 Prince Caspian, p. 124.

There are other examples of Lewis's using a terse nominal register, rather than being used by it, as in his Deposition:

> ...still they could see the shape of the Lion lying dead in his bonds. And down they both knelt in the wet grass and kissed his cold face and stroked his beautiful fur--what was left of it--and cried till they could cry no more. And then they looked at each other and held each other's hands for mere loneliness and cried again; and then again were silent. ...
>
> ...And it was all more lonely and hopeless and horrid than I know how to describe. (16)

The economies observable here are no omission: adjectival distribution is both spare and full, each showing us what we need to know (about the distraction in kneeling in wet grass, the telling contrast between cold and beautiful) and with none doubled, there is no suspicion of Lewis's luxuriating in the grief. With some sensitivity, two reasons are proposed for the grief--not the death only, but a loneliness which can operate between remaining companions. Horrid may be an enervating intensitive, but it is less so after lonely and hopeless. Clusters like this certainly develop; Lewis's sparseness is far from absolute, but such complexity as is present is very much the result of pushing very simple elements to their limits.

A passage worked in this way can mesh, we find, with others in which there is a more marked degree of patterning, and even a wider repertoire of terms, as one which follows after the death of Aslan, when the children walk up and down for the cold until the dawn comes up. Then they hear the crack of the Stone Table on which Aslan was killed, and they see him behind them.

16 The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, pp. 142-3.

> A mad chase began. Round and round the hill-top he led them, now hopelessly out of their reach, now letting them almost catch his tail, now diving between them, now tossing them in the air with his huge and beautifully velveted paws and catching them again, and now stopping unexpectedly so that all three of them rolled over together in a happy laughing heap of fur and arms and legs. It was such a romp as no one has ever had except in Narnia; and whether it was more like playing with a thunderstorm or playing with a kitten Lucy could never make up her mind. (17)

Here, a comparatively unexpected word like velveted receives its full weight. The patterning, too, seems more than fortunately apposite, a handy opportunity for habitual rhythms. Obviously, it has the foregoing passage to work against. But it's noticeable too that this style which turns it on itself rather, in which the rhythms are clinkered, and in which tendrils are not thrown out to catch extraneous ideas, often reflects dimensions of ideas which were there from the first, doing so surprisingly and with perfect simplicity.

We may suspect, for instance, that the game though a natural expression of joy, stresses the complete physicality of the Resurrection, something on which Lewis concentrates in Miracles, and I think there's something more in the momentary indistinctness of the characters than the inevitable result of their all falling down together in a jumble.

Writing for adults does not necessarily draw Lewis out of his self-imposed restrictions. In this passage he is describing the death of his wife, finishing an account of the miseries of bereavement and the resulting attack on his orthodoxy.

17 The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, pp. 148-9.

> How wicked it would be, if we could, to call the dead back! She said not to me but to the chaplain, 'I am at peace with God.' She smiled, but not at me. Poi si tornò all' eterna fontana. (18)

A movement like this is not uncommon in Lewis--a moral stance, followed by something concrete, followed in turn by something with direct theological bearing. There needs, it must be admitted, considerable sophistication to choose so immaculately a line from the Paradiso on which to finish; at this point Beatrice leaves Dante, who is himself now ready for the final vision. Simply to consider the line as a transition from one language to another is to realise in part why the passage is so effective. Was there ever a description of a death so gentle, heart-rending and indeed generous as there is in this translation from one state of language to another? One could go deeply into the implications of such an ending. A Grief Observed spends some time, not unnaturally, on Lewis's own life and work, and assesses them sometimes harshly; yet without the faintest tint of egoism, the quotation affirms once more Lewis's sense of his own worth.

Noticing effects like this may leave us with a more exact idea of Lewis's procedure. If he is not dealing with what is an unambiguously alien sight, he depicts very simply. But with a word, a phrase, an idea, or, as here, a quotation, he can glaze: and this utterly transforms the nature of what he has already laid down. Strangely, too, for a critic who barred the accidents of an author's life from any place in reading his books, knowledge of Lewis's own circumstances can be one of the most transformative

18 A Grief Observed, p.60.

glazes that we encounter. You have to be rigorous indeed not to read The Magician's Nephew as a book in which Lewis's mother recovers from, instead of dying of, an illness in Lewis's childhood. If such a question had been addressed to Lewis, he would, I believe, either have ignored it or replied that the acid test of the book should be the effect it has on someone who knows nothing about the author. Yet such an attitude, and I think it's a fair representation of Lewis's, goes only part of the way to explaining the sting of Narnia when Narnia is working. There is in Narnia, after all, an element of reproach, and the series in some ways is a very sophisticated development of Lewis's early atheistic poems, in which God is told off very sternly for not existing. Russell jauntily prepares to ask God why He did not make Himself more evident, in the tone of one suggesting himself for the post of public relations consultant; Lewis is looking for a letter of apology. This is, certainly, only one of his motives, but it is the main reason why Narnia often hurts.

In The Magician's Nephew Digory awakens a Witch who will later kill Aslan, and unintentionally he brings her into the newly-created Narnia. His mother is dying on Earth, and it is for help for this that he approaches Aslan. But he is asked instead if he is prepared to make up for his fault.

> Up till then he had been looking at the Lion's great front feet and the huge claws on them; now, in his despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. They were such

> big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself. (19)

Despite what I've said, this remains principally a statement of belief, and even perhaps a statement of experience as Lewis felt it. It is not a moment of mere sentiment; I'm impressed rather with the psychological realism, amid all the queer circumstances and the outlined misery, which Lewis employs in making Digory ponder the nature of the Lion. Nor is there, at this point, any ready solution: Digory must undertake the task of fetching an apple from a far-off garden, from which a tree will grow to defend Narnia from its enemy. Overcoming temptation, in the form of the witch's claim that the apple will cure his mother, Digory brings the apple to Aslan, who explains that it would have worked, but in such a way that it would have brought misery to both Digory and his mother; and Digory despairs.

> But now Aslan was speaking again, almost in a whisper:
>
> 'That is what would have happened, child, with a stolen apple. It is not what will happen now. What I give you now will bring joy. It will not, in your world, give endless life, but it will heal. Go. Pluck her an apple from the Tree.' (20)

This is a perfect example of the 'turn', the eucatastrophe. I've argued already that it operates most successfully in a world of high, or indeed selective, resolution. If you like, you get a different picture when you put a filter over the lens. But Tolkien's defence of

19 pp. 131-2.

20 p. 163.

this procedure is only allowable when the threatened catastrophe is confined to the characters; as a rewriting of one's own history it is mere fancy, a purblind, obdurate evasion of the facts--unless, of course, you take it as an oblique statement of the facts, as a form of irony. The joy is poignant as grief because it is grief. The solutions hurt because they represent a justice in nature which we can never stumble upon.

If we had to leave it at that, we should still have before us something worth looking at; for it would nevertheless increase the sensibilities and human understanding. But Lewis, in fact, was by this time moving towards his most notable statement of the eucatastrophe, one in which he has at last shaken off the vulnerability of using personal material, and in which he rips open, as he put it elsewhere, 'the inconsolable secret'[21].

The heroes of The Last Battle are pinned down by the Calormenes around a stable, in which, supposedly, lurks the Great God Tash, and one by one they are pitched in as sacrifices to him. Contrary to their expectations, they find themselves under the open sky, and the present king of Narnia, so to speak, meets his predecessors, all in regal attire: '...then, for the first time, Tirian looked about him and realised how very queer this adventure was.'

There is marvellous fruit. The stable door stands on its own. The company can walk round it, and through a crack they see a colony of treacherous dwarves, trapped by their own inability to see: they cannot even be helped by Aslan, who now appears.

21 'The Weight of Glory' in Screwtape Proposes a Toast, p.97.

> He went to the Door and they all followed him. He raised his head and roared 'Now it is time!' then louder 'Time!'; then so loud that it could have shaken the stars, 'TIME'. The Door flew open. (22)

Lewis realises Time as a giant who rises up in the darkness. The stars fall down, an opportunity which Lewis takes up:

> 'Perhaps it is a cloud,' thought Edmund. At any rate, there were no stars there: just blackness. But all around, the downpour of stars went on. And then the starless patch began to grow, spreading farther and farther out from the centre of the sky. And presently a quarter of the whole sky was black, and then a half, and at last the rain of shooting stars was going on only low down near the horizon.(23)

This sort of detail is used cleverly: it signals that something is Going On, and it's dwelt on for long enough to strain the patience pleasantly. The suggestions are, by this point, intelligible; all the reader is concerned with is whether Lewis is really about to do what he seems to be about to do, and what he is presented with is the lovely fireworks of stars fizzling out on the grass, causing low-level floodlighting on tree and bush against the blackness.

Out of the lower darkness comes a stream of creatures, rushing to the stable door. They are compelled to look into Aslan's face: some carry on through the Door, while others swerve away into his shadow. 'There were,' Lewis says, tolerant for once, 'some very queer specimens among them.' The company meet people thought to be dead, while giant beasts treat Narnia as an object for mastication. Great waves sweep over the country, and 'A streak of disastrous dawn spread along the horizon' as the sun dies.

22 p. 135.

23 pp. 136-7.

(Lewis was a poet, in the end.) Giant Time squeezes the sun 'as you would squeeze an orange.' The Door is shut by Peter, 'High King of Narnia.' Aslan leaps ahead of them all, urging them to follow, in a new daylight, towards a country which looks familiar. It looks like Narnia, only richer: 'More like the real thing.'

Lewis's reader, by this point, has probably some suspicion of what is happening; but readers are unused to this sort of overture from an author, and may well suppress their expectations. Lewis, however, has only one goal in mind, and goes manfully for it, while conviction grows in his reader that Lewis is going to have a crack at the incommunicable. Lewis's bridges are burnt by now, and the story has only one possible conclusion. So that when more old characters are met, and the heroes are in Lewis's own toy garden, which encompasses everything that anyone ever wanted in the world, they meet, as one expects, Aslan.

At this point, when everyone seems a little uneasy, Lewis demonstrates the value of a lifetime's apprenticeship in communication. When the children say that they are afraid of being sent back, Aslan's reply needs no referents whatsoever. 'Have you not guessed?'

> Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.

'The effect of this kind of ideology,' says Mr. Dixon, 'is to resist change.'[24] The charge, of course, is untrue, for the very practice is a kind of alchemy. To look back

[24] p. 161.

at some of the ideas which have been thrown up here, we remember that Lewis could make sense of the thought that what is imaginable must be true, if the thing imagined contains a beauty or goodness beyond our own resources. If the thing imagined is not true, said Lewis, something better will be. What is claimed, then, is that the conclusion of The Last Battle is a depiction of reality, or is, to be more precise, and more mindful of other remarks, a medium through which the eternal promise is made. This is, beyond doubt, what Lewis wanted to do; it has seemed to me to work like that, and whether or not it contains a goodness or beauty beyond human resource, it certainly contains something which is, in a sense, almost beyond endurance.

> And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before. (25)

As I say, we are not familiar with practices like this. The emotion underlying the last page is perhaps drawn from the thought that someone can exist principally to express such a desire, such Sehnsucht. But it is not, in that way, a dramatic exercise: 'It is the secret signature of each soul, the incommunicable and unappeasable want, the thing we desired before we met our wives or made our friends or chose our work, and which we shall still desire on our

25 p. 165.

deathbeds, when the mind no longer knows wife or friend or work.'[26] The ontological dimension of such passages (the passage under discussion is, as mentioned before, about dimension in the very exact sense that space is one of its preoccupations) is that Lewis conjures these desires into reality: he makes them conscious and he makes them explicit, so that Perelandra (for instance) is an exercise in distinctions. Perelandra makes clear what it is that is really desired: it sets on one hand Sehnsucht, the desire for heaven, and on the other emotional maturity and good social adjustment. It is not, of course, the latter that the demon offers: he proposes them in a world of such polarity that they are meaningless, there being no compromise between Heaven and Hell, but rather a Great Divorce.

Within this perspective, Lewis's invocations of real (perhaps even involuntary) desires leave me in a different realm from that created by general literary experience. If the creation of Byrhtnoth, Othello, Adam and Eve, Emma and Candide is artistic, then Lewis's moments are not, or not in the same sense. Lewis was perhaps too committed to his own interests to see any functional distinction:

> Those who seek only vicarious happiness in their reading are unliterary; but those who pretend that it can never be an ingredient in good reading are wrong. (27)

However implausibly, Lewis's use of 'vicarious' in the Experiment is ambiguous: the context of the essay suggests

[26] The Problem of Pain, pp. 134-5.

[27] An Experiment in Criticism, p.39.

something rather more like 'co-inherent', to borrow Williams' term. We don't, of course, regard the characters I mention, and all the others, as ciphers: it is precisely because we become involved with them that we notice the different effect that Lewis creates. With Lewis, what concerns us is that we become aroused; feelings are stirred that we only suspected we had, and we do not resent the fact that characters and situations become peripheral. Lewis uses them to set us up for a confrontation with the ground of his own being, and we do not turn from that and tell the characters that they are part of a bad novel.

We are taken up, rather, with a new experience, the discovery of consonance between ourselves and a man whose whole idea of living was to long for something perfect and incorruptible, in the passionate hope that he would some day encounter it. We are content to gather up the stuff of the novels, for we exchange it soon for pearls of great price.

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