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GEORGE AMOS CHIDDIE. The Haunted World of C. S. Lewis: A Study of His Space Trilogy. (1968) Directed by: Dr. Randolph M. Bulgin. pp. 88

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that C. S. Lewis in his space trilogy is not so much a maker of myths as a reteller of myths. He uses older myth to affirm his belief that man lives in a world haunted by the supernatural.

The first chapter is a study of the idea of myth, with special emphasis on Lewis's attitude toward myth, as seen in the trilogy. For Lewis, myth is more than a form of literature; it is a "thing" (divorced from language), which has the power to fill the human heart with awe. Lewis's space trilogy does not symbolize the truth about human life so much as it emphasizes "questions" about human life. It brings to the surface all of the longings of the human heart.

The space trilogy contrasts an older mythology, in which the universe is one, with a newer mythology, in which the universe is fragmented. In the first, everything belongs and has its place; in the second, nothing belongs. The essence of the Old Mythology is the principle of hierarchy or inequality. Unequals are properly related to one another by Rule and Obedience. Rule means continuous caring for and providing for those placed under one's care; Obedience means continuous receiving of the gifts of the Ruler and continuous self-giving to the Ruler.

This constant interchange of giving and receiving

is pictured by Lewis as the Great Dance, in which all things are equally superfluous. All things were made for Maleldil (Christ) and all things exist for Him. The fact of interdependence has two implications: nothing is equal to anything else, because all are different, and nothing is greater than anything else, because the highest cannot exist without the lowest. In the Great Dance "all is gift": all things come through the hands of many others, but come only to be given to others.

The Old Mythology is in conflict with a New Mythology, in which the universe is seen as completely naturalistic. The universe is no longer one; instead, fragmented man lives in a fragmented universe. Underlying man's frantic activities is the fear of death, which drives man to push out into the universe in an effort to escape death.

Lewis pictures man trying to escape the spiritual or the supernatural, but without success. Inevitably, man's life moves toward the "spiritual"--science, government, technology, all tend to become "religions", answering all of man's problems. Man is haunted by a dream of one world, where he truly belongs. Pagan mythology, modern "myths", the trilogy itself--all cause modern man to long for this kind of world.

Approved by

Randolph Bullock

Faculty Advisor

THE HAUNTED WORLD OF C. S. LEWIS
A STUDY OF HIS SPACE TRILOGY

by

George A. Chiddie

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APPROVAL SHEET

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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C. S. Lewis's space trilogy, consisting of Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength,¹ has continued to provoke discussion and interest since his death. Lewis, together with J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, is often called a "mythmaker". I believe the heavy diagnosis on the trilogy as myth has certain unfortunate results.

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That Hideous Strength far from being myth. Once the trilogy is accepted as myth, then the third novel falls apart completely. in

¹Because of the nature of these novels and the approach made, it has seemed advisable to include a summary of each. These have been placed in the Appendix.

²Clayton S. Kilby, The Christian World of C. S. Lewis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 80.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

C. S. Lewis's space trilogy, consisting of Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength,¹ has continued to provoke discussion and interest since his death in 1963. Lewis, together with J. R. R. Tolkien and Charles Williams, is often called a "mythmaker". I believe the heavy emphasis on the trilogy as myth has certain unfortunate results. Such an emphasis tends to destroy the unity of the trilogy and to make it completely otherworldly. If the trilogy is taken as myth, then the third novel, That Hideous Strength, must be seen as a failure. For example, Clyde S. Kilby says, "Critics are generally agreed that although That Hideous Strength contains significant and even powerful elements, it is as a whole less successful than the first two novels."² I maintain that this attitude results from an overdue emphasis on the trilogy as myth. It is hardly fair to classify the trilogy as myth and then criticize That Hideous Strength for not being myth. Once the trilogy is accepted as myth, then the third novel falls apart completely. In

¹Because of the nature of these novels and the approach made, it has seemed advisable to include a summary of each. These have been placed in the Appendix.

²Clyde S. Kilby, The Christian World of C. S. Lewis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 80.

her dissertation on Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams, Dr. Marjorie Wright tends in this direction. She says of That Hideous Strength:

Actually, the plot of the book, if considered as a novel, centers around a young don, Mark Studdock, who has been taken in by the Belbury scientists, and the efforts of his wife, Jane, and others of the company to save him.³

She goes on to say that "the mythical quality overshadows the plot." As a result of her emphasis on the trilogy as myth, Dr. Wright weakens not only the unity of the trilogy but the unity of That Hideous Strength as well. I would maintain that the third novel (That Hideous Strength) can be seen to have a unity of its own and to be an integral part of the trilogy. Instead of approaching the trilogy as myth I would approach it simply as three novels which expound a certain view of human nature. It is true that this view of human nature includes a view of the nature of the universe. It is also true that Lewis makes use of older myth throughout the trilogy, but his beginning point is the human heart. This is his strength, his psychological insight into the human heart and the intricacies of evil that are to be found there.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the mythic quality and

³Marjorie Evelyn Wright, "The Cosmic Kingdom of Myth: a Study in the Myth-Philosophy of Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien" (diss., Univ. Of Illinois, 1960), p. 60.

the mythic framework of the novels tends to overshadow the more important function of these novels: to reveal the nature of evil. Miss Wright devotes many pages to "the Geography of the Cosmos", which she defines as "the passive system of order, the stable, unchanging organization in which each thing, person, and event has its own proper place."⁴ This is what I have called the "mythic framework" of the universe. But this kind of emphasis makes the trilogy otherworldly, so much so that it has no reference to man's life in this world.

We might say that Miss Wright chose to approach Lewis's space fiction from above, to look down on it, with an emphasis on the framework and structure of this mythical cosmos. I prefer to approach it from below, from where man stands as a human being. I believe that, although the trilogy makes use of older myth, it is finally very much this-worldly. The method of narration emphasizes its concern for this world. The first two novels, which are laid in outer space, are narrated by "Lewis" (I will so differentiate him from C. S. Lewis, the author). The effect is to tie the events in outer space with man's life in this world. If the stories had been told from the viewpoint of an omniscient author--an unknown quantity who is never seen in the story--then the events in outer space would have been left dangling

⁴Ibid., pp. 65-66. *She with Her Behind There* (New York: Hamilton Books, 1962), p. 151.

in never-never land. But by making "Lewis" the narrator, the first two novels are given not only a touch of realism but also a definite relation to this world. I believe that this approach from below, with an emphasis on man--his nature and his sin--preserves both the unity of the trilogy and the unity of That Hideous Strength.

Instead of speaking of Lewis as a maker of myths, I would prefer to call him a "reteller" of myths. He brings together many elements of pagan mythology and incorporates them into the framework of Christian teaching, thus giving to the trilogy a mythic quality. But the very parts of the trilogy which are most grave and awe-inspiring (which, as I shall point out in the next chapter, are the most important qualities of myth) are those parts borrowed from older myth. Perelandra most nearly approaches myth and it is, in effect, a retelling of the temptation of Eve. Edmund Fuller says of Lewis, "He uses the resources of contemporary imagination, blended freely with motifs from classical mythology, as vehicles for eternal inquiries."⁵ Instead of saying that the trilogy is set in a mythic world, I would say that myth and Christian teaching are brought into our world. Lewis uses myth and archetypes to illuminate the Christian faith and the human heart. As I said earlier, this is his great

⁵Edmund Fuller, Books with Men Behind Them (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 151.

strength. He causes us to ask, as one character in That Hideous Strength asks of himself, "Is there a whole Belbury inside you too?"⁶

The matter can be stated another way: in these three novels Lewis contrasts an Old Mythology with a New Mythology. The Old Mythology is that view of man and the universe, which was commonly accepted until modern times and is stated both explicitly and implicitly in the Christian Scriptures. The New Mythology is that view of human nature and the universe which is common to our time and which may be called naturalism or scientific idealism. Lewis calls it "scientism", or "the mythology which follows in the wake of science."

The next chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the nature of myth, with particular emphasis on Lewis's attitude toward and use of myth. In the following two chapters I shall discuss the character of the Old Mythology as seen in the trilogy. Then will follow a chapter on the New Mythology, especially as it comes into conflict with the old. This will contrast the new view of man and the universe, with the old. I believe that this approach not only preserves the unity of the trilogy but also reveals a movement within the three novels: in general the first two set forth and

⁶That Hideous Strength, p. 224.

CHAPTER II

elucidate the Old Mythology, and the third brings the Old into conflict with the New.

A final brief chapter will attempt to evaluate the trilogy critically, especially from the viewpoint of secular man.

literary world the word myth must be carefully defined, for, in the words of Richard Chase, myth "is a powerful word, but not precise." It is a word "used with a multitude of meanings." Therefore in this chapter I will first attempt to clarify my own position concerning myth and then go on to examine Lewis's attitude and use of myth.

Although critics have trouble defining the word myth, they seem to have little trouble agreeing that certain stories and books are myth. There seems to be a general agreement that is myth as opposed to literature at that latter cannot begin to agree in defining the word. There is general agreement that myth is myth but disagreement as to what this means. Thus, I am suggesting that the real question is not "What are myths?" but "Why do we call them myths?"

Wallace W. Douglas cites a wide variety of definitions of myth, but the general idea is that the definition of myth is "belief in 'higher truth'."

Richard Chase, "Notes on the Study of Myth," in *Myth and Literature*, ed. Jean A. Vickers (London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1953), p. 67.

Wallace W. Douglas, "The Meaning of 'Myth' in Modern Criticism," in *Myth and Literature*, p. 135.

CHAPTER II

LEWIS'S USE OF MYTH

As I have indicated, I prefer to speak of Lewis as a teller of myths rather than a maker of myths. But in the present literary world the word myth must be carefully defined, for, in the words of Richard Chase, myth "is a powerful word, but not precise."¹ It is a word "used with a multitude of meanings." Therefore in this chapter I will first attempt to clarify my own position concerning myth and then go on to examine Lewis's attitude and use of myth.

Although critics have trouble defining the word myth, they seem to have little trouble agreeing that certain stories and books are myth. There seems to be a central core of material that is generally accepted as myth by critics who cannot begin to agree in defining the word. There is general agreement that this is myth but disagreement as to what this means. Thus, I am suggesting that the real question is not "What are myths?" but "How do myths mean?"

Wallace W. Douglas cites a wide variety of definitions of myth, pointing out that "the spread in usage seems to be from 'illusion' through 'belief' to 'higher truth'."² Many

¹Richard Chase, "Notes on the Study of Myth," in Myth and Literature, ed. John B. Vickery (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 67.

²Wallace W. Douglas, "The Meaning of 'Myth' in Modern Criticism," in Myth and Literature, p. 120.

critics assume that myths must be believed before they can be meaningful, but it is hardly necessary to believe in a myth for it to be grave and awe-inspiring. In fact, I question whether myths were ever believed in the same way religion is believed. I very much doubt Philip Rahv's statement that myths were believed as "truth pure and simple."³ G. K. Chesterton has raised the same point:

A man did not stand up and say "I believe in Jupiter and Juno and Neptune," etc., as he stands up and says "I believe in God the Father Almighty" and the rest of the Apostle's Creed.⁴

Chesterton relates the story of an American Indian telling a fantastic story about the sun being the chief of heaven. In the middle of a long, complicated story appears this sentence: "It is ordered that way by the Great Spirit who lives above the place of all."⁵ I would agree with Chesterton's suggestion that "the savage is talkative about his mythology and taciturn about his religion." I doubt that it is true even for the primitive that the mythic imagination "envisages its objects as actually existing."⁶ On the other hand, David

³Philip Rahv, "The Myth and the Powerhouse," in Myth and Literature, p. 109.

⁴G. K. Chesterton, The Everlasting Man (New York: Image Books, 1925), p. 108.

⁵Ibid., p. 88.

⁶Philip Rahv, op. cit., p. 112.

Bidney's statement that "the 'truth' of myth is purely subjective and differs not at all from the truth of a delusion"⁷ seems to be too extreme in the other direction.

Is myth "true" or "not true"? If it is "true", in what sense? Is myth to be interpreted literally or symbolically? Again, it is Chesterton who seems to point in the right direction. He suggests that the meaning of all myths "is not the voice of a priest or a prophet saying 'these things are.' It is the voice of a dreamer and an idealist crying, 'Why cannot these things be?'"⁸ Northrop Frye makes a similar distinction between religion and poetry; he contrasts religion's "this is" with poetry's "but suppose this is."⁹ Myth is not a proclamation of having found something ("This I believe"), but it is a search, a seeking after God through the imagination.¹⁰ In a sense the meaning of myth is a question or "longing" rather than a truth. It is what Carnell calls "Sehnsucht".¹¹ Although myth may at times

⁷David Bidney, "Myth, Symbolism, and Truth," in Myth and Literature, p. 9.

⁸G. K. Chesterton, op. cit., p. 115.

⁹Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 128.

¹⁰Chesterton, op. cit., p. 110.

¹¹I have seen only the abstract of Corbin S. Carnell's dissertation, "The Dialectic of Desire: C. S. Lewis' Interpretation of Sehnsucht," DA, XX (1960), 4653 (Univ. of Florida).

symbolize "higher truth", most of the time it can only hint at or suggest "higher truth". Although the "truth" of myth may be infinitely removed from the Truth, still it in some way points toward the Truth. One evidence of this is the fact that myth can fill the human heart with awe even when it is not believed.

If it is true that myths are the expression of a longing of the human heart, then it is to be expected that the word myth will always be elusive in meaning. Frye is right in his concept of a sliding scale, from myth, through romance, to realism, with no clearcut distinctions. Myth, then, does not represent an absolute quality but a changeable quality. At the center stands a group of stories which are generally accepted as myth; surrounding this center are other stories standing at varying distances from the center. For example, many would call Light in August a myth, while others would simply speak of its mythic quality. The changeable, elusive meaning of myth would suggest that the adjective mythic is more applicable to most literature than is the noun myth. I see myth as an extension of the quality and power of archetypes. Myth uses archetypes in such a way that "all is shot through with meaning." Both myth and archetype fill man's heart with awe and gravity, with a sense of the numinous. And ultimately, no one can explain why myth

has this power.¹² Lewis has pointed out that what might be a myth for one man will not be for another, because of the elusive nature of myth.

But what about Lewis's own attitude toward myth? In his Experiment in Criticism he discusses myth and begins with brief summaries of the myth of Orpheus and the story of Odysseus. He contends that these stories have the power to grip and impress the reader, even in the form of an abstract. This is a power that ordinary novels do not have. A summary of a novel is extremely dull; a summary of a myth, though it may be dull reading, still has the power to grip the reader. For Lewis myth is more nearly a thing, somehow separate from the language in which it is couched. He defines myth as a few such stories which have the quality of being "grave" and "awe-inspiring". Myth imparts a sense of the numinous. "It is as if something of great moment had been communicated to us."¹³ Myth troubles a man's soul and causes him to feel sorrow for all humanity.

¹²Jung's explanation in terms of the "collective unconscious" seems to be, as Lewis has suggested, "one more myth." Those two words, "collective unconscious," do not explain but they can fill a man with awe and gravity. (See Lewis's Of Other Worlds, ed. Walter Hooper [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966], p. 71.)

¹³C. S. Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism (London & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1961), p. 44.

Lewis has a good deal to say about myth within the text of the trilogy itself. After Ransom has met "the original of the Cyclops" on Malacandra and recognized the garden of the Hesperides on Perelandra, he wonders, "Were all the things which appeared as mythology on Earth scattered through other worlds as realities?"¹⁴ Over and over Ransom has the sense of "enacting a myth." Later, through his talk with the Oyeresu, he comes to understand that "in the very matter of our world, the traces of the celestial commonwealth are not quite lost." He learns that,

Our mythology is based on a solid reality than we dream: but it is also at an infinite distance from that base. And when they told him this Ransom at last understood why mythology was what it was--gleams of celestial strength and beauty falling on a jungle of filth and imbecility.¹⁵

Myth is a kind of "good dream" of what might have been or what might yet be. But most myths would be far removed from the "base". Pagan myths are an expression of longing for "I know not what." This longing is an inexplicable part of man's nature. On Perelandra Ransom is conscious that the cord of longing,

which drew him to the invisible isle . . . [had] been fastened long, long before his coming to Perelandra, long before the earliest times that memory could recover in his

¹⁴Perelandra, p. 41.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 215.

childhood, before his birth, before the birth of man himself, before the origins of time.¹⁶

Because myth is so far removed from the "base", it can only ask questions, it can only arouse desire, it can only wish that "these things might be." But for answers, for satisfaction, for "the things that are," a man must go elsewhere. Since it is well known that Lewis was a Christian, it is hardly necessary to say that he would have directed us to the Christian faith and Scriptures.

Little needs to be said about the actual use Lewis makes of older myths and archetypes, since most of these are a part of the storehouse common to literature. Scattered through Lewis's books are "bright, elusive people--albs, devas," talking animals, mermaids, an enchanted forest (Bragdon Wood), a Mr. Fisher-King, a seer, the King and Queen of Perelandra. Many times Lewis uses literary allusions to older myths. For instance, while Ransom is traveling to Malacandra, the light of outer space becomes a living thing to bathe in, pouring "sweet influence" into his body. He feels himself to be in a "chariot" carried through the "regions of light." Of particular interest is Lewis's use of the old myths of the five planets. In That Hideous Strength the Oyeresu of the five planets descend to earth to empower Merlin. Mercury is the god of language. Venus

¹⁶Perelandra, p. 104.

is the goddess of love and charity, Mars the god of strength and courage, Saturn (more vaguely) is the god of antiquity, and Jove is elevated to some superior significance as "King of Kings."

More interesting are those myths and archetypes which are conspicuous by their absence or are changed in such a way as to reveal Lewis's Christian faith. In this way Lewis changes "myth which asks a question" into "myth which points to an answer." Most noteworthy is the absence of a dying god; instead, there is a wounded man (wounded in the heel), whose name, Ransom, is linked with Christ. Ransom is not a Christ figure but a figure of the suffering Christian. Another example is Lewis's reversal of the old cycle of morning and night, summer and winter. On Perelandra when the King and Queen have successfully resisted the Tempter and have been made rulers of their world, it is proclaimed that the "morning" is at hand. Then follows the vision of the Great Dance, and when the vision has faded, Ransom remarks that it is still "early in the morning." But it is not the same morning. A whole year has passed and still "the morning is at hand."

On Perelandra Ransom makes the traditional visit to the underworld. He and the Un-man sink beneath the water and come up inside a cavern. There Ransom kills the Un-man and then begins the journey through the sightless darkness

to the surface. He is pursued by the Un-man's animated body, which is finally thrown into an underground fire. There, in the bowels of Perelandra, Ransom sees strange sights, especially a kind of flat car drawn by four large earth-beetles. On the car stood a mantled form, "huge and still and slender." Ransom decides that "that thing, that swathed form in its chariot, was no doubt his fellow creature. It did not follow that they were equals or had an equal right in the underworld."¹⁷

The quest-myth, often considered the central myth of literature,¹⁸ also figures in the trilogy, but again with a difference. Ransom journeys through space to Malacandra and to Perelandra, but in both instances he goes almost against his will. It is by accident that he is taken to Malacandra as an offering to the Oyarsa. He is sent to Perelandra by the Oyarsa of Malacandra for a particular task. The task is laid upon him and he goes with reluctance. The result is that Ransom becomes not the searcher but the sought. He finds fulfillment, not through seeking but through being found.

Lewis's Hell is hardly the Hell of Dante and Milton, both of whom made Hell a positive thing, so positive as to

¹⁷Perelandra, p. 196.

¹⁸Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature," in Myth and Literature, p. 95.

become almost a good. For Lewis Hell and its inhabitants are almost nothing.¹⁹ On several occasions the conscious of Weston comes back to the surface of the Un-man and he mumbles incoherently about where he has been. He describes life as a thin rind, but underneath is the "inner darkness" where all the dead go: a place of "darkness, worms, heat, pressure, salt, suffocation, stink." The most revealing line is Weston's mumbling, "They won't let me see my press cuttings."²⁰ As Ransom listens he is filled with a new understanding and horror of death:

Up till that moment, whenever he had thought of Hell, he had pictured the lost souls as being still human; now, as the frightful abyss which parts ghosthood from manhood yawned before him, pity was almost swallowed up in horror.²¹

Nor is Satan a "suave and subtle Mephistopheles" or "a sombre tragic Satan out of Paradise Lost." Ransom is chilled by the very childishness of the Un-man, who exhibits great ability and subtlety in his temptation of the Green Lady, but who uses intelligence only as a weapon to be cast aside when it has served its purpose; intelligence is only a thing borrowed for the moment, not a permanent possession.

¹⁹Cf. C. S. Lewis, The Great Divorce (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946).

²⁰Perelandra, p. 134.

²¹Ibid., p. 135.

In his "time off" from the Temptation the Un-man amuses himself by killing small frog-like animals or pulling feathers from the birds. Ransom ponders this paradoxical behaviour:

On the surface, great designs and an antagonism to Heaven which involved the fate of worlds: but deep within, when every veil had been pierced, was there, after all, nothing but a black puerility, an aimless empty spitefulness content to sate itself with the tiniest cruelties, as love does not disdain the smallest kindness?²²

Similarly, in That Hideous Strength, the final picture of the Devil and his worshippers is one of obscene puerility.

Lewis uses the Arthurian story to point out the dualism in the history of man: the conflict between good and evil, between Bors and Kay, between Logres and Britain.²³ With the passing centuries the separation between good and evil has become more definite, so that there is no longer room for neutrality. More and more all powers must fit into the categories of angels or devils. Merlin represents a time when supernatural and natural powers could work together. Dr. Dimble expresses it in this way:

"Merlin is the reverse of Belbury. He's at the opposite extreme. He is the last vestige of an old order in

²²Perelandra, p. 127.

²³Cf. Charles Moorman, Arthurian Triptych: Mythical Materials in Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and T. S. Eliot, Perspectives in Criticism, No. 5 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1960).

which matter and spirit were, from our modern point of view, confused. For him every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something dead----"24

But good and evil are becoming more hardened, and the intermingling of natural and supernatural is no longer possible.

Again, in Dr. Dimble's words: "In a sense Merlin represents what we must get back to in some different way."25

Of special interest are a few symbols, which I believe are original with Lewis. For example, what image can an author use to symbolize the divine presence? Lewis uses both the images of fullness and physical pressure to symbolize the presence of God. At times on Perelandra the air is packed so full that there seems to be no room; a pressure is laid upon Ransom forcing him off his feet.²⁶ Another example is actually a psychological interpretation of the Biblical passages in which the husband is a symbol of the Divine. When Jane expresses her resentment of the possessiveness of the male, Ransom says to her,

"[The Male,] the loud, irruptive, possessive thing, . . . which breaks through hedges and scatters the little kingdom of your primness The male you could have escaped, for

²⁴That Hideous Strength, p. 285.

²⁵Ibid., p. 286.

²⁶Perelandra, p. 59.

it exists only on the biological level. But the masculine none of us can escape. What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it."²⁷

The Male, the Husband, is a symbol of the rule and dominion of God.

Throughout the trilogy the central doctrines of the Christian faith are operative. All of the important, central doctrines are to be found there. The Fall of Man is seen from the vantage point of the Malacandrians, who are ruled by the Oyarsa; in contrast, on earth where there is no rule, each man becomes his own Oyarsa. The Temptation of the Green Lady on Perelandra gives deep, psychological insight into the nature of evil. The doctrine of the Incarnation is important in the trilogy; the fact of the Incarnation is seen to change the whole structure of the universe. Reference is made, also, to the crucifixion. One of the most fascinating instances is the quoting of Jesus' words from the cross, "Eloi, Eloi, lama, sabachthani." Ransom realizes that the Un-man is not quoting but remembering.²⁸ The doctrine of the Trinity is mentioned and Maleldil is identified with Christ. The King on Perelandra relates that during his absence from the Queen he learned many things "about Maleldil

²⁷That Hideous Strength, p. 316.

²⁸Perelandra, p. 160.

and about His Father and the Third One."²⁹

The doctrine of the Last Things becomes on Perelandra the doctrine of the First Things, of the Beginning. Maleldil will Himself descend to the Earth again and the power of the Dark Lord will be broken. The evil things in Earth will be seen as they are and all will be cleansed. Tor, the King, says about the Last Things,

"It is but the wiping out of a false start in order that the world may then begin. As when a man lies down to sleep, if he finds a twisted root under his shoulder he will change his place--and after that his real sleep begins."³⁰

Earlier in Out of the Silent Planet it has been related that once there was war in Deep Heaven, and Satan was driven into the air of his own world. This false start will be made right, and then will be the real beginning.

These cardinal Christian doctrines provide the cosmic framework of Lewis's world. They provide the foundation. At an infinite distance from that foundation are the pagan myths, but in some way they too are the shadow of the truth.

²⁹Perelandra, p. 225.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 227-228.

CHAPTER III

THE OLD MYTHOLOGY: RULE AND OBEDIENCE

For Lewis the foundation principle of the universe is what Miss Wright calls "the hierarchy of heaven and earth," or what I prefer to call the principle of Rule and Obedience. Rule and Obedience, mutually given and mutually accepted throughout the whole universe, is the central idea of the trilogy. It is through Rule and Obedience that man becomes himself most completely: as the Prayer Book says, speaking of God, "Whose service is perfect freedom."

As I have said, my approach is from below, from where man stands. When Ransom arrives on Malacandra, he asks over and over, "Who rules?" Later he discovers that there are three intelligent species on Malacandra and asks, "If both hrossa and séroni wanted one thing and neither would give it, would the other at last come with force? Would they say, give it or we will kill you?"¹ In this way Lewis begins right where man stands, with the questions, "Who gives the orders? Who tells whom what to do?" What Ransom actually discovers on Malacandra is that the three species are mutually helpful, that their society is very much like "man's unattained ideals." It seems significant that the three species represent different aspects of man's life. The

¹Out of the Silent Planet, p. 75.

hrossa are the agrarians: the farmers, fishermen, and poets; the séroni are the scientists and philosophers; and the pfifltriggi are the artists and technicians. Each of the species and every individual is ruled by the eldila.

The word rule is a different word on Malacandra² from what it is in ordinary earthly politics and government. Rule does not mean using force or power to take away from others that which you want for yourself; rather it means providing for and serving those over whom you rule. When Ransom first asks the question he means, "Who forces others to provide food and other pleasures?" But the Oyarsa rules the creatures of Malacandra by love and not by force; he rules by providing for and serving his subjects. Thus, rule means very much what we mean when we speak of the Providence of God.

Because man finds himself alone in the universe without a Provider, he must provide for himself. On Earth man occupies much of his time providing for himself; he seeks power in order to assure himself of food and pleasures. Ransom is very reluctant to tell the hrossa about man's "wars and industrialisms"--about the political and economic

²It is fascinating to ponder the fact that Malacandra contains two Greek words, malakos and andros. Malakos means softness or sickness. Combined with andros this might be a hint that the novel is about "the sickness of man."

framework of Earth, because in these things "ruling" is revealed as "seizing" rather than "providing". Man stands in contrast with the Malacandrians, who trust the Oyarsa to provide for them and to meet every emergency. The seroni are impressed with how much man is preoccupied with moving things great distances, which indicates man's obsession with the need to provide for himself. It is significant that men often speak of the speed of airplane travel by saying, "I had breakfast in New York and lunch in Paris." The speed of travel is an extension of man's need to provide food and pleasure. It gives him the sense of being able to provide whatever he needs or wants, whenever he chooses.

Because the Malacandrians live in obedience to Oyarsa, they are able to rule or control their own instincts and passions. This is in contrast with man, whose passions and instincts are "uncontrolled". (This will be discussed more fully, when I discuss the New Mythology in Chapter V.) One of man's "uncontrolled" passions is sex, but for the hrossa sex occupies only a brief period in their lives. Rather, as Hyoi describes the life of the hrossa to Ransom:

"When he is young he has to look for his mate; and then he has to court her; then he begets young; then he rears them; then he remembers all this, and boils it inside him and makes it into poems and wisdom."

3Out of the Silent Planet, p. 76.

Thus, the sex act itself occupies only a brief part of life, but sex and the begetting of children fills the lives of the hrossa from beginning to end.

On Perelandra Ransom observes another instance of the instincts and passions being "controlled"; in this instance, the instinct, sleep. For man sleep is a kind of dying, a thing that man "falls into," a thing that happens to man. But for the Green Lady sleep is an active thing which she chooses to do. Lewis is emphasizing that for these ideal creatures the body is not a thing alien to the mind and will; rather the body is under the direct control of the mind.

A necessary corollary of Rule is Obedience. It is Perelandra that has the deepest insight into the nature of Obedience. In moving from Malacandra to Perelandra there is a heightening of the idea of Obedience. On Malacandra obedience is without passion or feeling, and there is always the possibility of disobedience. On Perelandra obedience becomes almost a religious act, that is, ritualistic act. Since Malacandra is an old world that began before the Incarnation, it seems likely that Lewis was contrasting "Obedience to the Law" with "Obedience to Christ"--or Law versus Grace. At any rate it is on Perelandra that Ransom comes to understand fully the nature of Obedience.

Inseparably connected with the Temptation of the Green Lady and the idea of Obedience is the whole question of the

creature's dependence upon or independence from his Creator. Does Obedience mean dependence? and is disobedience the only way to independence? Is there any other way from childish dependence to mature independence, other than disobedience?

It is primarily through the Temptation of the Green Lady that Lewis answers these questions. The Temptation actually begins before Weston's arrival, with a conversation between Ransom and the Green Lady. She sees that it would be possible to wish for one wave instead of the one that actually comes; it would be possible to cling to the one wished for, and thus make the actual wave joyless. She learns that obedience is not just being carried by the waves, the events that come to her; rather it is deliberately walking in Maleldil's will. Of this new knowledge the Green Lady says,

"It is delight with terror in it! One's own self to be walking from one good to another, walking beside Him as Himself may walk, not even holding hands. How has He made me so separate from Himself? How did it enter His mind to conceive such a thing? The world is so much larger than I thought. I thought we went along paths--but it seems there are no paths. The going itself is the path."⁴

It is through the attack of Weston, the Tempter, that the nature of Obedience is most clearly revealed. His points of attack are these:

1. He appeals to her desire to grow older--wiser

⁴Perelandra, p. 68.

through experience. He teaches her to grow older by telling stories, in this way giving her understanding not only of that which is but that which might have been.

2. To become completely old or grown up the Green Lady must disobey at least one of Maleldil's commands. The Tempter says to her,

"But could the taking away of your hand from His--the full growing up--the walking in your own way--could that ever be perfect unless you had, if only once, seemed to disobey Him?"⁵

He goes on to say that the command not to dwell on the Fixed Land is "forbidding for the mere sake of forbidding."

3. The Tempter teaches the Lady to think of herself as daring some great good for the sake of the King and their children. He teaches her to look upon herself as a pioneer, a self-sacrificing risk-bearer, daring all for the sake of the King.

The heart of the Temptation is this: does the Queen wish to become older, that is, to become more separate from Maleldil? Lewis's choice of older to describe this growing non-dependence (which here is probably a better word than independence) is illuminating, for certainly it is the desire of every parent that his child may grow older. To become older is to become separate from the parent, non-dependent,

⁵Perelandra, p. 119.

walking through life without holding the parent's hand. And of course this growing up is a part of the Divine plan. Ransom is forced to think about this very thing on Perelandra:

Certainly it must be part of the Divine plan that this happy creature should mature, should become more and more a creature of free choice, should become, in a sense, more distinct from God and from her husband in order thereby to be at one with them in a richer fashion.⁶

Throughout the discussion of "growing older" the language suggests the growing up of a child. Weston says to the Green Lady,

"[Ransom himself] made you see . . . that Maleldil is beginning to teach you to walk by yourself, without holding you by the hand. That was the first branching out. . . . You are becoming your own."⁷

Ransom, who is on Perelandra as Maleldil's representative, attempts to counter the arguments of the Tempter. His most telling point is in reply to the suggestion that the command about the Fixed Land is given for no good reason, but simply that the Queen might break this command and become truly separate or mature. To this suggestion Ransom answers,

"I think He made one law of that kind in order that there might be obedience. In all these other matters what you call obeying Him is but doing what seems good in your own eyes also. Is love content with that? You do them, indeed, because they are His will, but not only because they are His

⁶Perelandra, p. 138.

⁷Ibid., p. 118.

will. Where can you taste the joy of obeying unless He bids you do something for which His bidding is the only reason."⁸

The Lady sees immediately that the command was given in order that she might daily step out of her own will into the will of Maleldil. Without such a command there would be no way for her to say, "Not my will but Thine be done." "I knew," she says, "there was joy in looking upon the Fixed Island and laying down all thought of ever living there, but I do not till now understand."⁹

But there are two kinds of non-dependence: there is the non-dependence of the child who takes into himself the will of the father (assuming that the father's will is perfect), and there is a non-dependence which is a rebellion against the father. The first is a voluntary laying down of the will to the father, saying, "Thy will be done." The second is saying, "My will be done." On Perelandra the obedience of the King and Queen means that that which Satan promised Eve ("You shall become as god") becomes a fact, for by their obedience they become separate from God, non-dependent. And thereby they become like God Himself, for only God is completely non-dependent. As the Green Lady moves toward dependence that is her own choosing she becomes more like Maleldil. Obedience, then, is the path to true selfhood, to

⁸Perelandra, p. 121.

⁹Ibid., p. 122.

full maturity. This paradoxical idea is very similar to the words of Jesus, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."¹⁰

The result of Rule and Obedience, mutually given and mutually accepted, is pictured by Lewis as "the Great Dance of Deep Heaven." Because of its importance, I will devote a separate chapter to a discussion of the Great Dance. Before doing so, I wish to look at the results of man's disobedience, as Lewis describes them in the trilogy.

The first and perhaps the most important result of man breaking the foundation principle of the universe--Rule and Obedience--is this: because man was meant to be ruled, he does not know how to rule himself. When Ransom tells the séroni of human history--of war, slavery, and prostitution, they answer in this way:

"It is because they have no Oyarsa," said one of the pupils.

"It is because every one of them wants to be a little Oyarsa himself," said Augray.

"They cannot help it," said the old sorn. "There must be rule, yet how can cratures rule themselves? Beasts must be ruled by hnau and hnau by eldila and eldila by Maleldil. These creatures have no eldila. They are like one trying to lift himself by his own hair--or one trying to see over a whole country when he is on a level with it--like a female trying to beget young on herself."¹¹

¹⁰Matthew 16: 25

¹¹Out of the Silent Planet, p. 110.

Here is the root of all man's trouble: because he is not a subject each tries to be his own Oyarsa. (Again, we are reminded of the serpent's words to Eve, "You shall be as god.") The Oyarsa of Malacandra says to Weston,

"The weakest of my people does not fear death. It is the Bent One, the lord of your world, who wastes your lives and befouls them with flying from what you know will overtake you in the end. If you were subjects of Maleldil you would have peace." *[My italics]*¹²

A further result of man's disobedience is that his desires and passions run rampant. He wants more and more of everything. There seems to be no end to his desire. Ransom tells the hrossa that a man might want a pleasure (in this instance, sexual pleasure) over and over. One of the hrossa, Hyoi, replies, "But why? Would he want his dinner all day or want to sleep after he had slept?"¹³ Later, on Perelandra, Ransom finds himself tempted to repeat certain pleasures (in this instance, the pleasure of eating exotic fruit), although his hunger has been satisfied. He drinks the contents of a particular fruit and is overcome with sweet sensation; he is satisfied but still strongly tempted to drink again. Later, he contemplates this tendency on man's part to cry "Encore!" to the pleasures of

¹²Out of the Silent Planet, p. 152.

¹³Ibid., p. 76.

the body:

He had always disliked the people who encored a favourite air in an opera--"That just spoils it" had been his comment. But now this appeared to him as a principle of far wider application and deeper moment. This itch to have things over again, as if life were a film that could be unrolled twice or even made to work backwards . . . was it possibly the root of all evil? No: of course the love of money was called that. But money itself--perhaps one valued it chiefly as a defence against chance, a security for being able to have things over again, a means of arresting the unrolling film.¹⁴

This is, of course, the meaning of the Fixed Land. The floating islands, in contrast, are never the same. There the Green Lady can only accept the next wave that Maleldil rolls toward her. It is against this kind of background that the Tempter offers the Green Lady a mirror to keep, but she fails to understand the meaning of keep. Weston explains to her:

"I had forgotten that you would not live on the Fixed Land nor build a house nor in any way become mistress of your own days. [*My italics*] Keeping means putting a thing where you know you can always find it again, and where rain, and beasts, and other people cannot reach it. . . . There can be no gifts, no keeping, no foresight while you live as you do--from day to day, like the beasts."¹⁵

The Green Lady can never become mistress of her days, until she can "keep" things. The Fixed Land symbolizes the ability to provide for oneself and thus be one's own Oyarsa.

¹⁴Perelandra, p. 45.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 144.

Because of his disobedience, man is thrown on his own and must compete with all other men for food and pleasures. For the Malacandrians there is no sense of competition, although it is acknowledged that each species is superior in certain qualities and inferior in others. But there is no competition because they know themselves to belong to the hierarchy of heaven and therefore to belong to Maleldil. But man is in competition with his fellowmen, and the result is pride. Lewis has said elsewhere that competition is the mainspring of pride: pride is the desire to have more than someone else, to be more important than another. Pride invites man to compare himself with others.

Man's disobedience has also caused the division between man and Nature. This will be discussed more fully in the comparison of the Old Mythology with the New, but for now I will mention briefly the ideal as seen on Malacandra and Perelandra. There is a unity between man and Nature that is particularly evident on Perelandra, where even the animals and plant life seem to make themselves available for man's use. The Green Lady is always surrounded by her "animal court". The large fish delight in being ridden by the Green Lady and Ransom. After Ransom's ordeal in the depths of Perelandra, he feeds on clusters of grapes "which almost seemed to bow themselves unasked into his upstretched hands."

Finally, Lewis suggests that all of man's fears are based on one fear, the fear of death. The Malacandrians do not fear death, because they live in obedience. They know themselves to be ruled and served by the Oyarsa. Death for them is perhaps like the Fixed Land for the Green Lady, the way by which they step out of their own wills into the will of Maleldil. Hyoui tells Ransom of visiting in the far north where the mountains fill his soul with awe and reverence. There he stood by a pool in which the hnéraki (the natural "enemy" of the hrossa) live. Hyoui says, "I drank life because death was in the pool." He goes on, "That was the best of drinks save one. . . . Death itself in the day I drink it and go to Maleldil."¹⁶ For them death is a kind of voluntary "translation". It is known ahead of time when a creature will die. He literally goes to his death. Death is not to be feared but accepted, even deliberately chosen. In so doing Hyoui walks out of his own will into the will of Maleldil.

¹⁶Out of the Silent Planet, p. 79.

¹⁷Out of the Silent Planet, p. 72.

CHAPTER IV

THE OLD MYTHOLOGY: THE GREAT DANCE

The result of Rule and Obedience, given and accepted, is a kind of "equal inequality" among all creatures. No one is equal to another; no one is greater than another. There is an interesting example of this "equal inequality" in the attitude toward each other of the three species on Malacandra. As Ransom questions the hrossa, he repeatedly gets the answer, "The séroni would know." Finally he asks if the séroni know more than the hrossa:

This produced more a debate than an answer. What emerged finally was that the séroni or sorns were perfectly helpless in a boat, and could not fish to save their lives, could hardly swim, could make no poetry, and even when hrossa had made it for them could understand only the inferior sorts; but they were admittedly good at finding out things about the stars and understanding the darker utterances of Oyarsa and telling what happened in Malacandra long ago--longer ago than anyone could remember.¹

Lewis believed that perfect love casts out modesty, and this is what he is picturing on Malacandra.

What I have called "equal inequality," Lewis pictures as "the Great Dance of Deep Heaven." The Great Dance is an affirmation of the unity of the universe. The principle of Rule and Obedience extends upward to God Himself and downward to include every part of the universe. It is on Pere-landra that Ransom sees the Great Dance of Deep Heaven. The

¹Out of the Silent Planet, p. 72.

two Oyéresu of Malacandra and Perelandra speak a "Litany" of praise, in which they affirm that the Great Dance is at the center of all things and that all things were made for the Dance. "Never did Maleldil make two things the same." It is "the dance of righteousness but not of equality." To Maleldil belongs the greatness of Deep Heaven and yet He dwells in the seed of the smallest flower. Because everything is in Maleldil and He is in everything, then everything is at the center.

The Great Dance is the outworking of the principle of Rule and Obedience, but always with an emphasis on Rule exercised in love--providing for and caring about those who are subjects. Everything exists for the Dance, therefore nothing will be fully itself until it has taken its place in the Dance.

One implication of the Great Dance is that the universe is in some way a living thing. Rule and Obedience might imply that the universe is a huge police state. Or the New Mythology (which we shall look at later) sees the universe as a great complicated machine where every part exists for every other part. Lewis's universe, on the other hand, is bound together by the movements of the Great Dance:

"All is righteousness and there is no equality. Not as when stones lie side by side, but as when stones support and are supported in an arch, such is His order; rule and obedience, begetting and bearing, heat glancing down, life growing

up."²

It is important to understand that Lewis does not begin with a view of the universe and then extrapolate from that view certain ideas about man and his existence. Although it must be admitted that his view of the universe is in keeping with Biblical doctrines. Rather, Lewis begins with an understanding of human nature and human selfhood, and from this extrapolates a view of the universe. This can be made plain by looking at a passage in Lewis's Problem of Pain:

The Golden apple of selfhood, thrown among the false gods, became an apple of discord because they scrambled for it. They did not know the first rule of the holy game, which is that every player must by all means touch the ball and then immediately pass it on. To be found with it in your hands is a fault; to cling to it, death.³

It is on this understanding of selfhood that Lewis bases his view of the universe. Selfhood is not something to be clung to but to be given away. On this understanding of human nature, Lewis builds his picture of a universe where everything exists for everything else and nothing exists for itself.

²Perelandra, pp. 229-230.

³The Problem of Pain (London: Fontana, 1957), p. 141.

⁴That Hideous Strength, p. 370.

One result of this view of the universe is that goodness, instead of being a standardized code that can be contained within a man, becomes a living thing that depends upon man's relationships with God and with other men. When Ransom is discussing the idea of goodness that "haunts" England and every nation, MacPhee--the sceptic--asks, "But this seems a very round-about way of saying that there's good and bad men everywhere." Dimble, a member of the company, catches him up quickly:

"You see, MacPhee, if one is thinking simply of goodness in the abstract, one soon reaches the fatal idea of something standardized--some common kind of life to which all nations ought to progress. . . . He doesn't make two blades of grass the same: how much less two saints, two nations, two angels."

The true path to goodness is through man's relationships with others, not in a standardized, self-contained code. Everything and everyone becomes good by its participation in the Great Dance.

Another way of expressing the truth of the Great Dance is to say that the universe is made in such a way that the "good" life is that life where all are giving to others and none is keeping for himself. The phrase, "All is gift," is used throughout the Great Dance Chapter, and the idea permeates the trilogy, especially Perelandra. The

⁴That Hideous Strength, p. 370.

Green Lady says of the Oyeresu,

"They have grown less and we have increased. . . . They received us--us things of the low worlds, who breed and breathe--as weak and small beasts whom their lightest touch could destroy; and their glory was to cherish us and make us older till we were older than they--till they could fall at our feet."⁵

Later the Queen understands that even as the Oyarsa and eldila cared for her and the King until their glory exceeded that of the eldila, so it may be that she will cherish children who will overtop her and at whose feet she will fall. She concludes, "Joy also widens out and comes where we had never thought."⁶ All is gift, and the joy of giving widens until all is included.

Giving in the Great Dance is the greatest of all joys. The Oyarsa of Perelandra, who ruled that world from its beginning, who built the Fixed Land and the holy mountain, says to Ransom,

"The beasts that sing and the beasts that fly and all that swims on my breast and all that creeps and tunnels within me down to the centre has been mine. And today all this is taken from me. Blessed be He."⁷

And at the same time, receiving is the greatest of joys.

⁵Perelandra, p. 82.

⁶Ibid., p. 108.

⁷Ibid., p. 209.

When the King and Queen receive Perelandra as Oyarsa's gift to them, the King says, "This world we receive: our joy is the greater because we take it by your gift as well as by His."⁸ A little later the King says to Ransom,

"All is gift. I am Oyarsa not by His gift alone but by our foster mother's, not by hers alone but by yours, not by yours alone but by my wife's--nay, in some sort, by gift of the very beasts and birds. Through many hands, enriched with many different kinds of love and labour, the gift comes to me. It is the Law. The best fruits are plucked for each by some hand that is not his own."⁹

Elsewhere Lewis speaks of something very similar: a teacher works toward the moment when his pupils are able to become his "critic and rival." The teacher should be delighted when this moment arrives; some are and some are not.¹⁰ There may even come a time when the pupil surpasses the teacher, and the teacher must "bow down" to the pupil.

Because "all is gift," there is no reason for pride in the Great Dance. Not only does perfect love cast out modesty but pride as well. After Ransom has destroyed the Un-man, thus ending the Temptation of the Green Lady, he is greeted by the Oyéresu of Malacandra and Perelandra:

⁸Perelandra, p. 221.

⁹Ibid., p. 224.

¹⁰C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves (London: Fontana, 1960), p. 50.

"Be comforted," said Malacandra. "It is no doing of yours. You are not great, though you could have prevented a thing so great that Deep Heaven sees it with amazement. Be comforted, small one, in your smallness. He lays no merit on you. Receive and be glad. Have no fear, lest your shoulders be bearing this world. Look! it is beneath your head and carries you."¹¹

The great thing which Ransom did was actually something that simply happened to him. It was by accident that he was taken to Malacandra. Because he had the opportunity there to learn the Old Solar language, he was chosen to go to Perelandra. His efforts in arguing against the Un-man were not very successful. Even his destruction of the Un-man seems almost to be an accident. Ransom has simply been obedient to the voice of Maleldil in the midst of events that seem to be without plan. One of the Oyéresu expresses it perfectly: "Love me, my brothers, for I am infinitely superfluous."¹²

Not only does the Great Dance affirm the unity of the universe, but it also emphasizes man's oneness with Nature. This is in contrast with the New Mythology in which man feels himself separated from Nature. All things are a part of the Great Dance: flowers, insects, a fruit, a storm of rain, a wave of the sea, rivers, mountains, individuals, universal truths, even the clouds of dust scattered in space.

¹¹Perelandra, p. 210.

¹²Ibid., p. 233.

Man's continuity with Nature is emphasized in the trilogy by its strong imagery, appealing to all of the senses. Lewis's ability to paint pictures of unknown worlds is amazing. Edmund Fuller says that, thanks to Lewis, he can remember with Ransom "the Malacandrian sky at morning" or the Milky Way "rising like a constellation behind the mountain-tops--a dazzling necklace of lights as brilliant as planets, slowly heaving itself up till it fills a fifth of the sky and now leaves a belt of blackness between itself and the horizon." The reader may be filled with nostalgia for the pink world and furry beasts of Malacandra, the floating islands of Perelandra, and the intoxicating odors of that world. For Ransom in these exotic worlds, the acts of eating, smelling, and so on, are ritualistic acts that are almost sacramental. This sacramental view of the ordinary acts of life is a happy reversal of the division between soul and body, physical and spiritual, which was the result of the Fall. "Even on Earth the sacraments existed as a permanent reminder that the division was neither wholesome nor final."¹³

Another implication of the Great Dance is that the terms equality and inequality are meaningless. In one sense all things are equal; in another all things are different

¹³Perelandra, p. 149.

and therefore unequal. "Nothing [is] more or less important than anything else."¹⁴ "Nothing is great or small save by position."¹⁵ Lewis attacks the concept of equality especially as it relates to marriage. It is on Malacandra that the foundations for inequality are laid--in the idea of hierarchy or Rule and Obedience. By taking seriously the inequality of all things, those things that are inferior are given a new dignity which they could never have by pretending to be equal to superior things. This is illustrated very clearly by the Green Lady, surrounded by the animals of Perelandra:

It was not really like a woman making much of a horse, nor yet a child playing with a puppy. There was in her face an authority, in her carresses a condescension, which by taking seriously the inferiority of her adorers made them somehow less inferior--raised them from the status of pets to that of slaves.¹⁶

Perhaps Lewis had in mind here a little dog pictured in The Four Loves.¹⁷ His mistress, Mrs. Fidget, treats him "just like one of the children." He is "vetted, dieted and guarded within an inch of its life." By treating him like a child Mrs. Fidget destroys his dogginess, the one thing he really has. He could have been a noble dog, but makes a very poor

¹⁴Perelandra, p. 151.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 62-63.

¹⁷Pages 48-49.

child.

Jane Studdock has great difficulty understanding the idea of inequality, especially as it relates to marriage. First of all, she is bothered by the way Ivy Maggs, a mere servant girl, is treated at St. Anne's, and yet Jane has a high view of the equality of all men. She argues with Ransom, saying that equality is surely to be realized in marriage, if no where else. In contrast, Ransom never talks about equality, only about inequality. He is, as Mother Dimble points out, "usually talking about spiritual ranks." But Jane argues, rightly, that his house is run on very democratic lines, although there is always the reminder that Ransom is the "Director". But this too does not mean what it would mean in ordinary life. He is the Director and claims authority over them, but this authority is not based on his choice of them or their choice of him. Rather, they have all been chosen (almost, it seems, by accident) by a higher authority. They are a part of the Company because of events that have come into their lives.

But surely in marriage (as Jane argues) equality ought to be a reality. Lewis has been rather sharply criticized for his views of marriage, because he takes seriously the command to the wife to obey her husband. Ransom tells Jane that the reason she lost her husband's love is because she never attempted obedience. When she protests, Ransom

replies, "Courtship knows nothing of it [equality]; nor does fruition."¹⁸ Which to me seems to be a truism. No woman, no matter how modern, would like to be courted on the assumption that she and her lover are equals. And as for fruition, she might prefer that the pain of childbearing could be shared by the husband, but in fact it is not. Though perhaps it is an oversimplification, it would be fair to say that Lewis's view of marriage can be summarized in this one sentence: Marriage is to be a continuation of courtship. As Mark examines the failure of his own marriage after his conversion, he comes to see that "he had gone wrong only in assuming that marriage, by itself, gave him either power or title to appropriate that freshness" which Jane had been to him during their days of courtship.¹⁹ Courtship in marriage, because it in some way makes the wife inferior to the man (weak and helpless, so that she must have doors opened for her) raises her to the status of a queen to be adored and won over and over--not merely taken.

It is important that Lewis's views of marriage be made clear, because marriage is an example both of the working of Rule and Obedience and of the continuous self-giving of the Great Dance. Even though the Christian

¹⁸That Hideous Strength, p. 148.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 360.

marriage ceremony commands the wife to obey her husband, it never commands the husband to rule the wife. Rather, the husband promises that he will "love, honor, and care for" his wife. This underlines the nature of Rule and Obedience. Rule is always the rule of love, constantly giving itself to the beloved.

Marriage, then, is an everyday example of the Great Dance. On one occasion, Ransom shows Jane the mice who come from behind the woodbox to remove his crumbs after he has eaten. When they have scuttled away, he says,

"Humans want crumbs removed; mice are anxious to remove them. It ought never to have been a cause of war. But you see that obedience and rule are more like a dance than a drill--specially between man and woman where the roles are always changing."²⁰

Rule and Obedience in marriage are not like "war" and "drill" where the lines of command are definite and unchanging, but they are exercised with the understanding that one's needs and abilities are always changing. Mark came to realize that his sensual desire had been to him a constant reminder of a fact about the husband-wife relationship: there was something which he lacked and which Jane had to give. But sensual desire is only a symbol. It is not just her body that Jane has to give; she has a fullness that first came to his "dry and dusty world" like a "spring shower." At the same time,

²⁰That Hideous Strength, p. 149.

Mark has that to give which is lacking in Jane's life. Therefore, marriage can only be likened to the Great Dance, where there is continuous giving of self, continuous rule and continuous obedience. The roles of master and servant are always changing. Each exists for the other, equal in their inequality.

The word dance in the Great Dance implies that the Dance is filled with joy and laughter, with festivity. In the middle of the Great Dance on Perelandra, suddenly "the King laughed."

His body was very big and his laugh was like an earthquake in it, loud and deep and long, till in the end Ransom laughed too, though he had not seen the joke, and the Queen laughed as well. And the birds began clapping their wings and the beasts wagging their tails, and the light seemed brighter and the pulse of the whole assembly quickened, and new modes of joy that had nothing to do with mirth as we understand it passed into them all----²¹

Indeed, laughter has an important place in Lewis's universe and can occur at some rather unexpected times. On Malacandra, when representatives of all species have gathered on Meldilorn and stand solemnly in the presence of Oyarsa, Weston offers the "natives" beads, following the "orthodox rules for frightening . . . primitive races." He gives "the most successful performance in Malacandrian history," and all join in the laughter.

²¹Perelandra, pp. 223-224.

The Great Dance has its opposite, the Great Dance of Death, in which there is no joy or laughter. In the middle of the destruction of Belbury, Wither and Straik enter the room where the Head stands on its bracket and there perform an obscene dance before their masters. In his preparation to meet the "macrobes," Mark is made to do things that had about them a kind of "nursery fatuity". He had the feeling that "one good roar of coarse laughter would have blown away the whole atmosphere of the thing."²² But there can be no laughter there, for evil can never take itself lightly.

Near the end of That Hideous Strength, the Great Dance is seen again in a delightful dance of love. The goddess Perelandra (Venus) has drawn near the Earth to overthrow the powers of Belbury and now tarries to take Ransom with her back to Perelandra. The result is that St. Anne's comes under the influence of Venus, including all the animals released from Belbury. Mr. Bultitude (Ransom's pet bear) is in the kitchen with a second bear, acting, says Ivy Maggs, "as if he thought he could dance, which we all know he can't." All the animals at St. Anne's join in the merriment, including a pair of elephants who dance "a minuet of giants." Sex on the biological level, marriage on the psychical level, both are shadows of the Great Dance. After his voyage to

²²That Hideous Strength, p. 310.

Perelandra, Ransom emphatically asserts that the spiritual life is not a denial of the sensual, but a transcendence of the sensual. The spiritual world does not deny the physical but draws it up into itself.

All things, including marriage and sex, exist for and are shadows of the Great Dance.

In the plan of the Great Dance plans without number interlock Thus each is equally at the centre and none are there by being equals, but some by giving place and some by receiving it, the small things by their smallness and the great by their greatness, and all the patterns linked and looped together by the unions of a kneeling with a sceptered love.²³

All things are interlocked by the union of a "kneeling love" that bows in submission, with a "sceptered love" that rules and provides for its subjects. All is rule, all is obedience, all is gift. The golden apple of selfhood must be touched but not held or clung to. Only in giving it away does man attain true selfhood. The Great Dance says in its way what the Bible says in another way: that man's proper life is a life lived in right relationship with God and with his fellowmen.

²³Perelandra, p. 232.

²⁴ Kathleen Mott, *The Magician's Clothes* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1931), pp. 231-235.

CHAPTER V

THE OLD MYTHOLOGY IN CONFLICT WITH THE NEW

It is now time to look at the New Mythology, which is the guise evil takes in the modern world and in the trilogy is usually associated with science. This New Mythology stands in opposition to the Old Mythology, which I have identified with hierarchy or Rule and Obedience.

One of the most frequent accusations brought against Lewis is that he is opposed to science, because he attacks popular science or what he calls "the mythology that follows in the wake of science."¹ Kathleen Nott accuses both Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers of being opposed to science. She says of the two, "In both may be discerned again and again a wish to discredit scientific thinking which springs from a profounder wish to make theology paramount again."² Of Lewis she writes, "He is generally content . . . with sneers at science and scientists, and rarely specifies their kind." Perhaps inadvertently, she expresses Lewis's concern rather accurately when she says, "As a rule, they [Lewis and Sayers] do not attack science directly, only the humanism to which science lends, by implication, support." It is not science,

¹Out of the Silent Planet, p. 29.

²Kathleen Nott, The Emperor's Clothes (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 253-255.

what he calls "real science," to which Lewis is opposed, but the philosophy a pseudoscience may engender. In an essay published posthumously, Lewis defends himself against the accusation that he attacks science. He writes concerning the trilogy:

[It] certainly is an attack, if not on scientists, yet on something which might be called 'scientism'--a certain outlook on the world which is causally connected with the popularization of the sciences.³

Lewis takes a stand against that science which is completely naturalistic--science made into a way of living, science which tells men how to live or how not to live. It is that science that uses the phrases "the march of progress" and "the good of humanity" without thinking seriously about their meaning. Lewis is inviting his readers to ponder what such a mythology really means:

The Empirical Bogey, came surging into [Ransom's] mind-- the great myth of our century with its gases and galaxies, its light years and evolutions, its nightmare perspectives of simple arithmetic in which everything that can possibly hold significance for the mind becomes the mere by-product of essential disorder.⁴

The New Mythology exalts man to the position of God Himself, but in so doing loses all interest in men as

³C. S. Lewis, Of Other Worlds, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), p. 76.

⁴Perelandra, p. 173.

individuals. Weston is typical of this attitude: he condemns Ransom for his narrow, individualistic outlook on life, saying,

"You cannot be so small-minded as to think that the rights or the life of an individual or of a million individuals are of the slightest importance in comparison with this."⁵

But, as the Oyarsa of Malacandra points out, Weston, who would do anything for the sake of Man, would not hesitate to send Ransom to his death. He loves Man but does not love any one man.

It is a scientist (a chemist and thus a "real scientist") who expresses the opposite viewpoint. When Mark has made a reference to "sciences like Sociology," the chemist replies, "There are no sciences like Sociology. . . . I happen to believe that you can't study men; you can only get to know them, which is quite a different thing."⁶ Mark, the Sociologist, exemplifies the attitude of the New Mythology. He is greatly concerned about "vocational groups", "classes", "populations", but men as individuals have no meaning for him. He has no interest in the real people who dig ditches and plow fields. When Man is made into God, then Man is

⁵Out of the Silent Planet, p. 23.

⁶That Hideous Strength, pp. 70-71.

only an abstraction, and the individual is forgotten. The great danger in the New Mythology is that it is "idealism" without morality. Because it exalts Man, it would improve Man by educating and civilizing him. But, lacking a morality, it does not hesitate to use individuals for the sake of Man.⁷ The N.I.C.E. at Belbury has high sounding goals--solving the problems of unemployment, cancer, housing, currency, but it is willing to do the most hideous things in accomplishing these goals--sterilizing the unfit, eliminating the undesirables. Belbury decides what man is to become and then enforces its will upon those to be "improved". It foresees a time when prenatal education will make it possible to make everyone conform to a pattern. The very thing that is lost is man's humanity, his freedom to choose either the bad or the good.

Belbury denounces as completely subjective, as "mere chemical phenomena," all feelings such as love, pity, friendship. The result is that there are no "oughts" or "ought nots".

⁷Clyde S. Kilby quotes Dr. Philip Siekevitz, biochemist at the Rockefeller Institute: "There is a golden age ahead on earth for our species; if only we use to the utmost capacity our heads and our hearts. . . . We are approaching the greatest event in human history, even in the history of life on earth, the deliberate changing by man of many of the biological processes . . . man will be remolding his own being Events in biological research are happening so rapidly that we will soon have to answer a new question. No longer, What creature is man? But what creature should he become?" (The Christian World of C. S. Lewis /Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964/, p. 114.)

In a preface to That Hideous Strength, Lewis says that this book has the same serious "point" he had tried to make in The Abolition of Man, in which he denounces those who deny the reality of what man calls beauty, truth, morality, honor, justice, love, and belief. In these qualities lies man's humanity, and to eliminate them is to eliminate man.

Another tendency of the New Mythology is to create a sharp division between man and Nature. Because the principle of hierarchy is rejected, Nature no longer exists in and for herself but only for man's sake. Nature is only a machine, to be improved, taken apart when it does not work, eliminated when unnecessary. It is to be used, exploited, and finally annihilated in order to make room for man.

The reasons for man's opposition to Nature are hidden deep in his subconscious, but Lewis indicates that these reasons are somehow related to man's fear of death. It is Filostrato, a little Italian doctor at Belbury, who gives clearest expression to man's hatred and fear of Nature. Filostrato expounds on the advantages of an "art tree" made of aluminum: besides the fact that it can be moved where we like, "It never dies. No leaves to fall, no twigs, no birds building nests, no muss and mess."⁸ Again, it is Filostrato who points out that man's opposition to Nature is in a sense

⁸That Hideous Strength, p. 172.

a hatred of life, for it is organic matter which man feels to be "dirty" and "filthy". Minerals, in contrast, are clean. That which has been alive and is now dead and decaying is a threat to man because it reminds man of his destiny. Filostrato explains to Mark that there is life on the moon, but for the most part this life has made itself almost entirely free of Nature. The moon creatures live as pure mind; they have eliminated the body. He goes on to explain that there are savages living on the surface of the moon; on the far side there is "one great dirty patch . . . where there is still water and air and forests--yea, and germs and death."⁹

Man's opposition to Nature becomes finally an opposition to his own body. His life is dependent on the body; when the body dies, man's life ends. As long as the body remains the repository for man's life, then man is subject to the mortality of the body. Filostrato speaks of this when he says,

"The Institute is for the conquest of death: or for the conquest of organic life, if you prefer. They are the same thing. It is to bring out of that cocoon of organic life which sheltered the babyhood of mind the New Man, the man who will not die, the artificial man, free from Nature."¹⁰

Man will be immortal because he is no longer dependent on

⁹That Hideous Strength, p. 176.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 177.

the body.

Admittedly, the head of Alcasan, kept "alive" artificially, is a brutal and grotesque object; nevertheless, the Head symbolizes man free from Nature and therefore free from death. The Head symbolizes man as pure mind. Here is the Head that never dies; Bodiless Men who are free from Nature and therefore free from death.¹¹

A quite different implication of the phrase "Man over Nature" is expounded by Filostrato: what man means when he speaks of man ruling Nature is that Nature becomes an instrument by which one man can rule over other men. Every advance in science brings the accompanying question, "Who decides who will receive the benefit (or the destruction) of this latest invention?" And with each advance the number of those who can understand and use the new invention

¹¹Since this may sound very farfetched, it might be well to quote Isaac Asimov writing in the World Book Encyclopedia Yearbook, 1965, p. 37. Mr. Asimov is a science-fiction writer and thus illustrates Lewis's contention that it is often the popularizers of science who make it into a "mythology". After reporting success in keeping a monkey's brain alive for eighteen hours Asimov asks these questions: "Will there come a time when the brain of a young man about to die of an accident, or of sickness not affecting his mind, might be withdrawn and kept alive for years? Could mankind continue to get the use of the brain of a genius long years after it might otherwise be dead? Could the life of an isolated brain be bearable under such conditions to a human being?" My italics

becomes smaller.¹²

This, then, is the New Mythology, but it is Lewis's belief that man can never escape the Old Mythology or the old view of the universe. The modern age is haunted by a world view it cannot escape. In some way man's life has reference to a standard that lies beyond the realm of science. Lewis uses a number of images to symbolize the relation between the new, naturalistic world and the older, spiritual world. One example occurs several times when the eldila visit either Ransom or "Lewis". In Perelandra, "Lewis" sees the eldil as a column of light in Ransom's cottage, but the column is not at right angles to the floor.

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. The impression, however produced, was that this creature had reference to some horizontal, to some whole system of directions, based outside the Earth, and that its mere presence imposed that alien system on me and abolished the terrestrial horizontal.¹³

¹²Clyde S. Kilby quotes Eric Hoffer: "The new revolution in science and technology which has so enormously increased man's power over nature, has also reduced enormously the significance of the average individual. With the advent of automation and the utilization of atomic energy, it soon might be possible for a relatively small group of people to satisfy all the country's needs--and fight its wars too--without the aid of the masses." (Op. cit., p. 114.)

¹³Perelandra, p. 11.

It is Lewis's belief that, when man does away with the supernatural, he does away with all standards of conduct. But man is still haunted by a feeling that there are certain things he ought to do, and other things he ought not to do. But, if the natural world is all there is, whence this sense of good and evil? For example, there has never been a perfect father, yet man can conceive of such a father. Man's whole life seems to have reference to some "vertical" outside himself.

As a step in his conversion Mark Studdock comes to realize that there is a Normal which is unalterably opposed to the Abnormal, represented by Belbury. This process begins as he wonders "on what ground . . . [are] actions to be justified or condemned?"¹⁴ In the Objective Room he takes another step:

As the desert first teaches men to love water, or as absence first reveals affection, there rose up against this background of the sour and the crooked some kind of vision of the sweet and the straight. Something else--something he vaguely called the "Normal"--apparently existed.¹⁵

This idea of the Normal "grew stronger and more solid" in Mark's mind until it became a "kind of mountain." Jane has a similar experience. For her the sense of the Normal comes

¹⁴That Hideous Strength, p. 295.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 299.

as a demand, an ought: "This demand which now pressed upon her was not, even by analogy, like any other demand. It was the origin of all right demands and contained them."¹⁶

In these ways Lewis reveals his belief that human life is always haunted by a sense of the Normal: a Normal that is never seen in actual fact or in real lives, but nevertheless is always there making man's actual life appear out of kilter with the universe. As a member of the Company says, "We've heard something better than we can do, but can't quite forget it."¹⁷ The whole planet of Malacandra symbolizes this truth: there a society, made up of sorns (scientists), hrossa (poets and farmers), and pfifltriggi (artists and technicians), lives together in perfect harmony. Ransom cannot understand how it happened "that the instincts of the hrossa so closely resembled the unattained ideals of that far-divided species Man whose instincts were so deplorably different."¹⁸ He discovers that "it is not Malacandra which is a place of terror, but the planet from which he came."¹⁹

I believe that this is the point of Lewis's use of the Old Mythology throughout the trilogy--to emphasize that ours is a haunted world. For Lewis this is what myth is:

¹⁶That Hideous Strength, p. 318. ¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 370.

¹⁸Out of the Silent Planet, p. 78.

¹⁹Edmund Fuller, op. cit., p. 154.

a kind of haunting or good dreams--and sometimes bad dreams. Although the Old Mythology is no longer believed by modern man, it can still make a man feel as though he were standing on the edge of a great precipice. The best of the old pagan mythology can still cause a man to be filled with a deep sense of awe.

In recent years there has been an increased interest in myth. This renewed interest is surely an evidence that modern man "rejects" the implications of modern realism and its emphasis on the mechanistic universe, the evolutionary process, and the meaninglessness of human existence. Although he is writing in opposition to "the cultism of myth," Philip Rahv is certainly right when he says, "It seems as if in the modern world there is no having done with romanticism,"²⁰ which he equates with "mythomania". Although the old myths are no longer "believed", in any valid sense of that word, they still exert a strong pull on the heart.²¹

²⁰"The Myth and the Powerhouse," in Myth and Literature, p. 110.

²¹A further evidence of the appeal of the Old Mythology is the increasing number of writers whose "myths" or fantasies are being read. Although I am in no position to judge their popularity, I do know that the public libraries and paperback publishers have increased the number of "fantasies" available to the reading public. J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings has become very popular on many college campuses.

Modern realism sees man lost on a shoreless sea; Lewis in his retelling of the old myths tries to see beneath the waves. Over and over Lewis emphasizes his belief that modern man cannot escape the Old Mythology. Another "way of escape" is to divide the world into natural and supernatural; this somehow eases the sense of strangeness man has in the universe. Man's sense of being "a fish out of water" is made more tolerable by dividing the world into two parts and keeping the two entirely separate from one another. But this distinction between natural and supernatural does not always apply, because the two worlds are in close conjunction and cannot be separated. When "Lewis" first meets the Oyarsa of Malacandra, he is filled with terror. Through the experience he learns something about himself:

The distinction between natural and supernatural, in fact, broke down; and when it had done so, one realized how great a comfort it had been--how it had eased the burden of intolerable strangeness which this universe imposes on us by dividing it into two halves and encouraging the mind never to think of both in the same context.²²

A word of caution is necessary in speaking of physical and spiritual worlds. Obviously, Lewis did not expect that we would find eldila in space. He makes this explicit in a "postscript" to Out of the Silent Planet, in which Ransom

²²Perelandra, p. 3.

says that we have no idea of the relationship of the eldila to "our space". Lewis's view of the world probably resembles what the science-fictionists call the multidimensional world. The two, physical and spiritual, co-exist, but they are not entirely separate, for they do touch and interpenetrate one another. It is this interpenetration that continues to haunt modern man.

Lewis uses Light to symbolize the proximity of the physical and spiritual. The light of space impresses Ransom deeply and he is moved to think of this region of light as "the heavens". But he realizes that at the edge of the solar system this light would be only a pinpoint, "unless visible light is also a hole or gap, a mere diminution of something else. Something that is to bright unchanging heaven as heaven is to the dark, heavy earths----"²³ The eldila, whose bodies consist of a "movement swift as light," suggest the interpenetration of the two worlds and also suggest that the spiritual world is more real and solid than the physical: for the eldila light is "a thing like water, a visible thing, a thing he can touch and bathe in."

As I have said earlier, Lewis feels that the most important obsession that haunts modern man is death and the fear of death. He sees this as the underlying reason for

²³Out of the Silent Planet, pp. 37-38.

many of man's activities. This is Weston's motive for colonizing the planets: it is "the sweet poison of the false infinite--the wild dream that planet after planet, system after system, in the end galaxy after galaxy, can be forced to sustain . . . the sort of life which is contained in the loins of our own species."²⁴ Before the Oyarsa of Malacandra, Weston pictures man extending his life from one planet to another, from one galaxy to another, thus escaping death. The Oyarsa asks him, "And when all [the worlds] are dead?" Weston is silent before this question, even as science is. When all the worlds are dead, then what? Alcasan, the Head, is a feeble attempt to escape death, but as long as man's life is tied to Nature by the slightest gossamer thread, then man must surely die.

In an exchange between Weston and Ransom on Perelandra, all of man's subconscious fear of death is brought to the surface. Weston, who is now completely in the power of the evil spirit that has taken control of his body, comes momentarily to the surface of consciousness. He tells Ransom that all of his life he has tried to pretend that it really matters what you do, that it is important to do something for the human race, but that now he knows better. He

²⁴Perelandra, p. 81.

goes on:

"A little child that creeps upstairs when nobody's looking and very slowly turns the handle to take one peep into the room where its grandmother's dead body is laid out-- and then runs away and has bad dreams. An enormous grandmother, you understand. . . . I mean that child knows something about the universe which all science and all religion is trying to hide."²⁵

Weston goes on to describe what it is like to be "inside the rind" where all the dead go: it is "darkness, worms, heat, pressure, salt, suffocation, stink." Death is such a horror that even Ransom, who is a Christian, is repelled and tells Weston to "shut up."

Elsewhere, Lewis says that he believes that all Christian theology could be deduced from two facts: that men are afraid of the dead and that they tell coarse jokes.²⁶ If the natural world is the "whole show", then death is completely natural also. Why, then, should man feel that death is unnatural? Ransom says as much to Weston:

"That could hardly be the whole story. If the whole universe were like that, then we, being parts of it, would feel at home in such a universe. The very fact that it strikes us as monstrous----"²⁷

²⁵Perelandra, p. 176.

²⁶In the telling of coarse jokes, man reveals the sense of the strangeness of his body. This is seen throughout the trilogy as the division between body and soul. (See Miracles [London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947], p. 154.)

²⁷Perelandra, p. 178.

All man's life is, as the Oyarsa says to Weston, "flying from what you know will overtake you in the end." Materialism is no protection from the spiritual world. The two cannot remain separated for any length of time. The physical world is always being pulled toward the spiritual, if not to good spirits, then to bad spirits. Naturalism, which begins by denying the supernatural, ends by moving back to the supernatural--the spiritual world of evil. On Perelandra, Weston describes his own movement from naturalism to "spiritualism". He had started as a physicist but became convinced of the oneness of life and nature. Now, instead of working for the physical sciences, Weston gives his life to the service of what he calls "spirit--mind--freedom--spontaneity," "a great, inscrutable Force." Weston discovers that there is a real spiritual world--a world of horror and filth. He says to Ransom,

"Even the ordinary scientists--like what I used to be myself--are beginning to find that out. Haven't you seen the real meaning of all this modern stuff about the dangers of extrapolation and bent space and the indeterminacy of the atom? . . . What they're getting to . . . is what all men get to when they're dead--the knowledge that reality is neither rational nor consistent nor anything else."²⁸

As the physical sciences come to despair of objective truth, they become indifferent to it and concentrate on

²⁸Perelandra, p. 178.

power. This is what Belbury is, an instrument of political power. Lewis, in answering the accusation that his books "traduce" scientists, replies by pointing out that Belbury has no scientists in it. It is filled with "officials". As a result of this desire for power Belbury is ready to call into itself that "spiritual" power of the "macrobes".

Lewis's use of the word haunting may lead to a misconception. It may suggest that the spiritual world is less real than the physical, or that the spiritual is only a shadow of the physical. Lewis would see all this the other way around. One evidence is found in Augray's description of the bodies and mode of existence of the eldila. He explains to Ransom that their "being" is a movement as swift as light: "To us the eldil is a thin, half-real body that can go through walls and rocks: to himself he goes through them because he is solid and firm and they are like a cloud."²⁹ The reality of the spiritual world is emphasized with a certain finality in a conversation in which "Lewis" is questioning Ransom about his trip to Perelandra. When Ransom has difficulty expressing what it was like, "Lewis" says, "Of course, I realize it's all rather too vague for you to put into words." Ransom comes back quickly, "On the contrary, it is words that are vague. The reason why the

²⁹Out of the Silent Planet, p. 101.

thing can't be expressed is that it's too definite for language."³⁰

It is Lewis's belief that man can never escape the spiritual; if he will not have the good, then he will have the bad. Even science is open to the spiritual. If man will not have angels, then he will have devils. Ransom says very much the same thing to Jane, after she has had a kind of vision of Venus, but Venus with something left out-- Venus without charity. Ransom cautions Jane that if she will not have marriage with charity and obedience, she will have only lust remaining. Speaking of the Venus of her vision, he says, "She's what you'll get if you won't have the other."³¹

³⁰Perelandra, p. 28.

³¹That Hideous Strength, p. 314.

CHAPTER VI

EVALUATION

Because I have written from my own viewpoint as a Christian, I have probably created the impression that Lewis's space fiction is no more than disguised theology. Certainly, Christian doctrine permeates the whole, but the scope of the trilogy is far wider than I have indicated. Similarly, my approach has perhaps obscured the appeal of the trilogy to many readers who do not claim to be Christians. Curiously, the personal beliefs of the reader seem to have little to do with his response to these works. A Christian friend tried to read Perelandra--the most explicitly Christian of the three--but was unable to complete the book. On the other hand, there are those who make no claim to Christian belief and yet who read these books with pleasure. For these reasons, it would be well to look very briefly at other aspects of the trilogy.

Lewis is a superb story teller. His gifts of narration, description, and characterization keep the story interesting and lively. Even though he is writing fantasy, he achieves a strong realism of presentation; so much so that a few readers seem to have been convinced that Lewis is recording history--as evidenced by the fact that a few of his letters were written to individuals to convince them that the trilogy is no more than fiction. This realism is

partly due to his ability, mentioned earlier, to describe unknown and imagined worlds. Most readers will long remember the golden light of "Heaven", and Malacandra with its pastel landscape, its "theme of perpendicularity" seen in the vegetation, mountains, and animals. Readers will remember the sorns, hrossa, and the Green Lady with her animal court.

The structure of the novels maintains interest, and contributes to the sense of realism. For example, a postscript to Out of the Silent Planet, written by Ransom to "Lewis", leaves the impression that many other things happened on Malacandra, which have not been told. Again, references to obscure writers heighten the sense of realism. In one instance Bernardus Silvestris is quoted; in another Natvilcius is quoted in Latin, no less. I have no idea whether these men ever existed, but the effect is convincing.

Lewis's approach to characterization is psychological. Only with Weston do I have the feeling that I would recognize him if I met him on the street, for his mannerisms and personality are clearly pictured. But most of Lewis's characters come alive psychologically rather than visually. The reader concludes the trilogy with a sense of knowing what it feels like to be Ransom on Perelandra, or Mark Studdock struggling to become a part of the Inner Ring, or

Jane in her rejection of that which threatens to dominate her life. Furthermore, the reader will conclude with a new understanding of himself, of the Belbury within. He perhaps will see in himself that same pride which causes man to seek to dominate the universe, by destroying all other species.

Also important for modern man is the evaluation of science offered in the trilogy. Though many will certainly disagree with Lewis, yet he can force us to look at some of the claims of science and to ask some of the questions that need to be asked. Ransom's description of the world seems very familiar:

"However far you went you would find the machines, the crowded cities, the empty thrones, the false writings, the barren beds: men . . . worshipping the iron works of their own hands, cut off from Earth their mother and from the Father in Heaven."¹

Lewis may help the modern reader recognize the "false promises" of the New Mythology and to understand what science can do and what it cannot do.

For many readers the trilogy might very well be an introduction to Christianity, especially in correcting some false concepts of the Christian faith. As I pointed out earlier, Lewis corrects the false idea that the spiritual

¹That Hideous Strength, p. 293.

²That Hideous Strength, p. 337. ³Op. cit., p. 157.

world is a negation and denial of the physical world.²

Lewis makes the Christian life quite attractive. Here there is no dreary Puritanism, but a world of laughter and gayety. The natives on Malacandra even have an alcoholic beverage on which they get "elevated" but not drunk. My favorite example of Lewis's rather unconventional attitude toward Christian experience is seen in Mark's confession of faith. In preparation for his introduction to the "macrobes", he is learning objectivity--the denial of the reality of all human emotions. Finally, he is asked to trample on a large crucifix. In this moment Mark comes to a kind of identification with the Man on the Cross and makes what is for him a decisive confession of faith: "It's all bloody nonsense, and I'm damned if I do any such thing."³ For Lewis goodness is not mere Puritanism, but a positive understanding of the worth of the individual and the duty of the individual to serve others. The trilogy gives the reader a sense of what it is like to be a good man. Edmund Fuller refers to this feeling when he says, "To any responsive reader it gives a unique experience, a purgation through exaltation and awe rather than the familiar Aristotelian one through pity and terror."⁴

²It is curious that the religion of the Incarnation needs this reminder but apparently it does.

³That Hideous Strength, p. 337. ⁴Op. cit., p. 157.

Another possible result is that the reader may see more clearly the division and ambiguity of his own heart and life. Lewis follows Aristotle in believing that only goodness can understand the nature of evil. In The Problem of Pain he quotes Aristotle: "To find out what is natural, we must study specimens which retain their nature and not those which have been corrupted."⁵ He makes the same point in Perelandra. After the first man and woman on Perelandra have successfully withstood the Temptation to disobey Maleldil, the King says to Ransom, "humanity, I believe these books

"We have learned of evil, though not as the Evil one wished us to learn. We have learned better than that, and know it more, for it is waking that understands sleep and not sleep that understands waking. There is an ignorance of evil that comes from being young: there is a darker ignorance that comes from doing it, as men by sleeping lose the knowledge of sleep. You are more ignorant of evil in Thulcandra now than in the days before your Lord and Lady began to do it."⁶

The trilogy may penetrate the mind of the "sleeping" reader as a kind of "good dream".

Thus, the trilogy may be able to slip under the defences of modern man to give him a first hint of the beauty and meaning of Christianity. Chad Walsh says something like this of his first reading of the space trilogy: "In Perelandra

⁵Page 117.

⁶Page 223.

I got the taste and smell of Christian truth. My senses . . . were baptized. It was as though an intellectual speculation or abstraction had become flesh and dwelt in its solid bodily form among us."⁷ The trilogy may introduce the reader to the idea and feeling of holiness.

As for the future of the trilogy, I believe that it will continue to be read, unless or until the day comes when Naturalism reigns supreme. By Naturalism here I mean both the philosophy and the literary school. Until Naturalism completely dominates all humanity, I believe these books will not be forgotten. It may be an overstatement to say that these books appear to modern man as an oasis in the midst of the desert; but if not an oasis, at least a mirage. They stimulate the longing for a different world from the modern one. They stimulate man's longing to know that he does indeed live in a universe where all things are made for each other and where the unity of the "Great Dance" is a possibility.

I have said that the Old Mythology haunts the modern world. As long as the Old Mythology continues to haunt, so long will Lewis be read, for the trilogy is a part of the haunting. Here is one more good dream, which takes "bodily

⁷Light on C. S. Lewis, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), p. 107.

form" for a little while and causes modern man to cry out,
 "Why cannot these things be true?"

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APPENDIX

SUMMARIES OF THE NOVELS ON WHICH THIS STUDY IS BASED

Because the novels on which this paper is based are not well-known and because the approach made here demands an acquaintance with the novels, it has seemed necessary to include a rather full summary of each of the three. This is especially true because the space trilogy is set in an imagined world.

Out of the Silent Planet

Dr. Elwin Ransom, a philologist, on a walking tour, happens into the presence of Weston and Devine; the former is a famous physicist and the latter a former schoolmate of Ransom's. The two have made an earlier trip to Malacandra (Mars) and now kidnap Ransom to take him there, when they learn that his whereabouts are unknown. On board the space ship Ransom is filled with a sense of well-being, in spite of his perilous position, as he enjoys the golden light of the sun. He decides that this place of golden light is better called "Heaven" than space.

He overhears a conversation between Weston and Devine in which it is implied that he is to be offered to the sorns as a sacrifice, and he determines to escape, if possible. On Malacandra he is struck by the beauty of this world with its theme of perpendicularity, in spite of his fear of the sorns. Just as the sorns appear a great beast appears in

the water, distracting Weston and Devine so that Ransom is able to escape. The sorns, three times the height of a man and with long, thin legs and long, solemn faces, fill him with terror; he runs as fast and far as he can. Finally, exhausted, he drops by a warm, blue stream and falls asleep. The next morning he finds that the water is suitable for drinking and begins searching for food. Beside a large river he sees an animal that looks like a mixture of otter, seal, and penguin. When the animal begins making noises, Ransom is convinced that the animal is talking. The two begin a friendship when the creature offers Ransom food and drink (which probably suggests the Holy Communion). Ransom learns that the creature is a hross (plural, hrossa) who lives down in the handramit and that the séroni (or sorns) live up on the harandra. While Ransom is wondering which is the dominant species, he follows the hross (whose name is Hyoi, as he later learns) to a hrossan village.

For three weeks Ransom lives among the hrossa, learning their language and about their culture. They tell him of the stars and planets, of Thulcandra (Earth), of Oyarsa (plural, Oyéresu) who rules all the Malacandrians. On a hunt for the hnakra, who is the enemy of the hrossa and yet an object of awe because of his great strength, a voice suddenly commands Ransom to go to Meldilorn to see the Oyarsa. It is the voice of an eldil, whose bodies are almost

invisible. Just as this happens, the hnakra appears and is finally killed. In the moment of triumph a rifle sounds and Hvoi is killed, perhaps because Ransom has not obeyed the voice of the eldil. He is sent across the mountains to Meldilorn.

Along the way Ransom spends the night with Augray, a sorn, who tells him of Oyarsa, the greatest of the eldila, who rules all Malacandra. Another night he tells a group of sorns of earth's history--of war, slavery, prostitution. They conclude that it is because each man would be his own Oyarsa or ruler. On Meldilorn, a beautiful island set in a blue lake, Ransom meets a third species of intelligent life, the pfifltriggi, who delight in making beautiful objects of gold and silver. One of the pfifltriggi is carving the history of the solar system on the huge rocks that stand at the summit of the island. Ransom is shocked to discover that, although all the planets are represented with their ruling Oyarsa, Earth has no Oyarsa. On the island Ransom sees many of the hrossa, séroni, pfifltriggi, and thousands of eldila. The latter can be seen only faintly as a kind of disturbance of the normal light.

The next morning Ransom stands in the presence of the Oyarsa and is told that the reason for sending for Ransom was to learn more about Maleldil's war with the Bent One on Earth. They are interrupted by the arrival of hrossa bearing

the dead bodies of three hrossa, followed by Weston and Devine. Weston tries to conciliate the "natives" by following the "orthodox rules" for frightening primitive races. Meanwhile the Oyarsa causes the bodies of the three dead hrossa to disappear in a flash of light. Weston, in a speech translated by Ransom, sets forth his belief that man is destined to occupy all the worlds. The Oyarsa concludes that Weston is totally bent, while Devine is nothing more than a greedy animal. He will not "unmake" them because they are not under his authority. Rather, he sends them back to earth, after learning from Ransom about Earth and Maleldil's battle with the Bent One. After a dangerous journey that takes them very close to the sun, they arrive back on the Earth.

Perelandra

Perelandra is essentially a retelling of the story of the Temptation of Eve, but in this instance there is no Fall. As the story begins, Ransom is to travel in space again, conveyed in a white casket by the Oyarsa of Malacandra. He is to go to Perelandra because the Bent Oyarsa of Earth is about to launch an attack there. On Perelandra he finds himself floating in a sea in which numerous large islands of twisted fibers float, taking always the shape of the water. These islands are covered with vegetation, trees, and animals. As Ransom eats of the fruit he experiences

sensations that make eating a kind of ritual.

Suddenly he sights a human figure on a nearby island. It is a Green Lady, like a green goddess. She and the King, from whom she is lost, are the first man and woman on Pere-landra. Through her conversation with Ransom she begins to grow older--to know herself as separate from Maleldil. Until now she has lived in unbroken fellowship with Maleldil, and she marvels that He could make her so separate from Himself.

They go to a Fixed Island (like our continents) to look for the King, though she warns Ransom that she is forbidden to stay there overnight. From the Fixed Island they see an object fall into the water and a boat begins to move toward the shore. Suspecting that it is Weston and afraid for the Green Lady, Ransom races to the shore, but the Queen is there beside him to welcome this guest to her world. As night approaches, the Green Lady leaves on the back of a large fish, leaving Weston and Ransom on the Fixed Island. Weston tells Ransom that he no longer thinks of materialism as being the greatest good; rather he exalts spiritualism. Ransom reminds him that there are good spirits and evil spirits, but Weston insists that this distinction is only a part of Ransom's outmoded religious beliefs. Finally, Weston says that if the Life-Force prompted him to do so, he would lie and kill. He calls this Life-Force into himself completely.

During the night Weston disappears, and the next morning Ransom rides a great fish back to the floating islands, where he finds Weston engaged in conversation with the Green Lady. He is tempting her to disobey Maleldil's command not to dwell on the Fixed Island. For many days the temptation goes on, and Ransom remains close by to protect the Green Lady and to counter the arguments of the Un-man, whose mechanical movements and inhuman face fill him with loathing. The Un-man suggests to the Green Lady that the command about the Fixed Land has been given so that she may disobey and thus come to a full realization of her separateness from Maleldil. She can do this for the King and then teach him to become older--that is, more separate. Ransom counters by saying that this command, for which there is no obvious reason, is given so that there might be obedience for the sake of obedience and for no other reason. He describes the results of Eve's disobedience, but Weston points out that it was because of her disobedience that Maleldil became a man. Weston continues the temptation by giving the Green Lady a sense of tragic grandeur with herself as the heroine.

During the night, Ransom questions why Maleldil is absent. He suddenly realizes that Maleldil is present, that he himself is the miracle on the good side. He tries to think that this only means spiritual opposition but is

forced to see that the Un-man must be destroyed. The Green Lady has not disobeyed, but the temptation cannot go on forever. Ransom and Weston fight. Badly injured, the Un-man flees on one of the great fish with Ransom following. For a short time the conscious of Weston returns to talk about the meaninglessness of the universe. As they approach breakers, the Un-man drags Ransom beneath the waves. When it seems that he will burst, he and the Un-man come to the surface and Ransom kills the Un-man on the beach. Ransom waits in darkness for the morning and finally realizes that they have come up inside a cavern. Filled with terror he makes his way by feel and sound, away from the sea through the dark cavern. He comes to a section of the cavern lighted by an underground fire, and suddenly out of the darkness comes the Un-man. This time the body of the Un-man is thrown into the fire. Ransom climbs out of the mountain and for many days is fed by the Planet Perelandra at the mouth of the cave. When his wounds have healed he discovers a wound on his heel that continues to bleed. As he climbs the holy mountain he comes to a valley where a white casket awaits his return to Earth. There he meets the Oyéresu of Malacandra and Perelandra, who proclaim, "The world is born today." In honor of the King and Queen they appear in the shape of a man and woman. Ransom is struck by the fact that Malacandra is masculine while Perelandra is feminine. When the

King and Queen arrive they are enthroned as the rulers of Perelandra. Ransom sees many visions of the nature of the universe; this is the Great Dance of Deep Heaven. The King relates that he too has learned of good and evil, not by yielding to evil but by overcoming it. Ransom is placed in the casket and is brought back to the Earth.

That Hideous Strength

The third novel, which Lewis calls a "modern fairy tale" for grownups, begins with Jane and Mark Studdock. She is a discontent housewife, restless from being alone so much. Mark is a fellow of Bracton College, located in the town of Edgestow. Mark's life is controlled by the desire to belong to the "Inner Ring" and at Bracton College he has moved into this magic inner circle. The College decides to sell Bragdon Wood (containing a well which is associated with Merlin) to the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.), whose announced goals are state-planned efficiency and the remedial treatment of criminals. Other goals, not announced, include sterilization of the unfit, liquidation of backward races, absolute power for the police, social conditioning by prenatal education, the elimination of death. The N.I.C.E. is controlled by men who see pity, fear, religion, and the like as mere chemical phenomena. They know that Merlin's body, which lies under Bragdon Wood,

has not decayed and is due to come back to life. They want control of Bragdon Wood in order to use Merlin's power to accomplish their purposes.

Jane Studdock has visions of actual events or future events. While Mark is being drawn into the N.I.C.E., she is being drawn to St. Anne's where a small company has gathered to oppose the powers of Belbury, the headquarters of the N.I.C.E. Ransom is the head of the company and the Pendragon of Logres. At Belbury Mark is moving into the inner circle and finally meets the Head, the head of the guillotined criminal Alcasan, which has been kept alive scientifically, as a first step toward the conquering of death. The Head speaks but, known only to a few, the voice that speaks through the Head is the voice of macrobes, which is the name given to the Bent Oyarsa of Earth and all his bent eldila.

Ransom believes that Merlin was the last remnant of a time when magic had not yet become unlawful, that it was permissible for him to dabble with magic although now it is unlawful. Through Jane's dream, the company at St. Anne's know that Merlin has awakened and Jane and others are sent to search for him. They find only a fire with evidence that a tramp has recently left. As they return they see a horse bearing a huge figure. Later they learn that the figure is Merlin who has forced a tramp to exchange clothes with him. The tramp is picked up by the N.I.C.E. police.

Merlin rides to St. Anne's and there confronts Ransom. He acknowledges that Ransom is the Pendragon and learns that he is to be used by the forces of Maleldil, for he is to be empowered by the Oyéresu of Malacandra, Perelandra, and the other planets.

At Belbury the tramp has been mistaken for Merlin. Because they speak to him in Latin, the tramp, acting from long experience, simply remains silent. A call is sent out for experts in Celtic dialects. Merlin himself appears to act as interpreter. Through the tramp he asks to be shown all the secrets of Belbury, including the Head and the laboratories where experimentation on animals and men had taken place. That evening the whole institute joins in a great banquet. Merlin throws the curse of "Babel" upon the whole group and releases the animals from the cages into the dining hall. Belbury, Edgestow, and Merlin are destroyed. Mark makes his way to St. Anne's, where Ransom is preparing for his return to Perelandra where the wound in his heel will be cured completely. Perelandra (Venus) waits for him, and her presence momentarily floods the Earth with love and joy. Mark and Jane come back together, both realizing that they have not served one another and now truly loving one another for the first time.