A Mythical Approach to Christian Orthodoxy: C. S. Lewis's Space Trilogy.

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A Mythical Approach to Christian Orthodoxy: C. S. Lewis's Space Trilogy

by

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Abstract

In an attempt to communicate the vital principles of Christian orthodoxy to the skeptics of his age, C.S. Lewis approaches philosophical thought artistically, by his development of a unified concept of the place of myth in literature. Myth, according to Lewis, represents an ultimate and absolute reality; myth in literature represents a shadowy reflection of that reality. Although unfocussed, this reflection is almost always capable of conveying the meaning and power implicit in the myth itself. Hence my study is an analysis of the artist's conception and use of myth in his criticism, theology, and fiction.

The first three chapters of my thesis examine Lewis's assertion that mythical images in literature are an expression of the basic elements in man's spiritual experience. Moreover, it is the vestigial elements in myth that are essential to man's understanding of truth, not necessarily the literal images embodied in myth.

The last four chapters deal with the Space Trilogy, in which the author's view of myth is graphically presented. Out of the Silent Planet concerns false myth, embodied in Weston's quest for Creative Evolution and secularism in society. Perelandra deals with genuine myth and provides for the hero, Dr. Ransom, a confirmation in Christian experience. In his struggle with evil,
personified in Weston, he comes to understand the true implications of man's Fall and the mystery of atonement. *That Hideous Strength* is a speculative notion of the author's, perhaps best described as emergent myth. Earth becomes the center of activity as the forces of good combine to rescue her from evil.

Lewis's fiction illuminates his personal philosophy; myth is a manifestation of universal reality. Truth first appears in mythical form, and by a process of focussing finally becomes Incarnate as History. In other words, "myth became fact."
Chapter I
Myth: Lewis's Stronghold

Why does a successful literary critic decide to write fiction of his own? While attempting to fulfill his creative impulses, says John Fitzpatrick, he may also be seeking to fulfill some didactic purpose. The critic may choose to reveal his message through fiction in order to approach skeptical readers. He may even hope to prove his theories in the very process of putting them into a different form. Whatever motivates him, a critic who seeks to become an artist cannot help becoming his own critic as well. Through his artistry he will affirm or deny the validity of his theories and provide illustrations that support or weaken his case.¹

The works of C.S. Lewis exemplify an artistic approach to philosophical thought, for much of his fiction reflects ideas advanced in his criticism and theology. Resounding throughout his works is a firm embrace of Christianity, and the unity of those works is manifested in the artist's sense of "myth."

Judging from the torrents of criticism, there is a great deal of confusion concerning the nature of myth.

While some scholars such as Gilbert Murray and F.M. Cornford consider it the origin upon which religious ritual is based, others consider it preterlogical, or the confused memory of such ritual. Charles Moorman concludes, however, that neither the origin nor the nature of myth is important, but rather how it functions in literature, how the artist uses it "to convert the raw materials of chaotic experience into a finished artistic work that represents an ordered view of that experience."\(^2\)

Thus the focus of this essay is Lewis's conception and use of myth.

It is essential to recognize that Lewis provides us with no concrete theory of myth; for "theory," says Fitzpatrick, "implies a systematic working of all relevant factors into a coherent whole,"\(^3\) and Lewis never bothered to do that. In *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy*, he states,

> The most characteristic contents of literary utterances are stories — accounts of events that did not take place. The primary value of these is that they are interesting. But why the interest, and in what different ways, and what permanent results they produce in the reader, I do not profess to know. Oddly enough, criticism has discussed this very little. Between Aristotle and the


\(^3\)Fitzpatrick, p. 4.
modern mythographical school of Miss Maud Bodkin, Professor Wilson Knight, and Professor D.G. James, we find almost nothing.4

In 1947, Lewis describes Boccaccio's attempt to explain the fascination of myth in terms of allegory and Jung's doctrine of Archetypes. Both explanations, he asserts, are inadequate.5 He later states:

> It would seem from the reactions it produces, that the mythopoeic is rather, for good or ill, a mode of imagination which does something to us at a deep level. If some seem to go to it in almost compulsive need, others seem to be in terror of what they may meet there.6

Only in 1961 did Lewis devote so much as a chapter to a formal discussion of myth, and his essay, from *An Experiment in Criticism*, remains his largest contribution.

Why such reticence from a man who restructured his entire life because certain myths came to appear to him as fact as well, a man who contributed many insights on myth throughout his commentaries on literature and theology, and who is considered by many critics to have

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6Ibid., "On Science Fiction," p. 72.
had a rare capacity for myth-making. His silence, says Fitzpatrick, was both real and deliberate, for Lewis had too much respect for the evanescent and numinous qualities of myth to attempt to explain them away. He... saw through a mythical lens things that might otherwise have gone unseen. He sought to avoid the error of excessive concern with the act of seeing and with mere states of mind; he learned to concentrate on the vision itself, on the object of the strange desire that the best myths arouse and not on his merely subjective response to it.7

Yet Lewis's ideas about myth permeate his works and provide a source of value for those works. The influence of myth on his life and fiction is apparent, for example, in Surprised By Joy, subtitled The Shape of My Early Life. This work is a conversion story identifying nature and myth as the two most prominant forces that caused Lewis to return to Christianity. The title, Surprised By Joy, originates from one of Wordsworth's sonnets, and the work attempts to capture Lewis's recognition of a longing for something completely outside himself. Though the longing speaks more of a romantic response to nature than of a truly mythical experience,8 Charles Moorman states that this very aspect of Romanticism has often been associated with myth. He cites Wordsworth's words, "earth and every common sight... seem appareled in celestial light" to describe the

7Fitzpatrick, p. 6.
8Ibid., p. 10.
feelings that he believes primitive myths try to re-
capture. Lewis describes his experience in the following
passage:

As I stood beside a flowering currant bush
on a summer day there suddenly arose in me
without warning, and as if from a depth
not of years but of centuries, the memory
of that earlier morning at the Old House
when my brother had brought his toy garden
into the nursery. It is difficult to find
words strong enough for the sensation which
came over me; Milton's "enormous bliss" of
Eden (giving the full, ancient meaning to
"enormous") comes somewhere near it. It
was a sensation, of course, of desire; but
desire for what? not, certainly, for a
biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even ... for my own past ... before I knew what
I desired, the desire itself was gone, the
whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned
commonplace again, or only stirred by a
longing for the longing that had just
ceased. It had taken only a moment of time;
and in a certain sense everything else that
had ever happened to me was insignificant
in comparison.10

As the first experience was inspired by natural
beauty, a later, similar experience was more mythical
and came through poetry:

I had become fond of Longfellow's 'Saga
of King Olaf: fond of it in a casual,
shallow way for its story and its vigorous
rhythms. But then, and quite different
from such pleasures, and like a voice from
far more distant regions, there came a
moment when I idly turned the pages of the
book and found ... I heard a voice that cried,
Balder the beautiful
Is dead, is dead —

9Moorman, p. 9.

I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote) and then, . . . found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it.\textsuperscript{11}

The intense desire evoked by these experiences is what Lewis calls "Joy,"\textsuperscript{12} or "Sehnsucht" and his search for Joy infiltrates his life and his works. Eventually he concludes that "all that stuff of Frazer's about the Dying God . . . . almost looks as if it had really happened once."\textsuperscript{13} and that "myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not 'a religion,' nor 'a philosophy.' It is the summing up and actuality of them all."\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., pp. 223-24.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 236.
Chapter II

The Literary Qualities of Myth

In the fifth chapter of *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis states emphatically that myth is not a purely literary phenomenon. In other words, the value of a myth is independent of the value of the literary work that contains it. Lewis reminds the reader that some powerful myths have never found first-rate artistic expression. For what seems the meaningless, cruel, even silly myths of people arise the potent imaginative concepts of Balder and the Hesperides. On the other hand, the story of Orpheus strikes deep of itself, aside from its exquisite poetic value. If some perfected art of mime or silent film could convey the story clearly without words, it would still affect us in the same way. Consequently, although Lewis identifies "myth" with what he calls "story," he stipulates that not all stories which an anthropologist would classify as myths have the qualities he is concerned with. Story, according to Lewis, is not only a vital element in literature, but also the most misunderstood. He states,

Granted the story, the style in which it should be disposed, and (above all) the delineation of the characters, have been

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abundantly discussed. But the Story itself, the series of imagined events, is nearly always passed over in silence, or else treated exclusively as affording opportunities for the delineation of character. Thus Lewis focuses on the fascination of Story and attempts to restore it to its proper place, particularly in his fiction. And myth, according to Lewis, means a story with certain characteristics.

In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis emphasizes the extra-literary quality of myth in his assertion that "myth is a stronger thing than formal literature . . . as . . . literature is refreshed by myth from beneath, so it is also refreshed by larger philosophic conceptions from above. . . ." He states that myth is of unique value to the poet because it gives him the power to reach meanings beyond those his own words consciously convey. Some of Homer's stereotyped images of "the sea, the gods, the morning, or the mountains make it appear that we are dealing not with poetry about the things, but almost with the things themselves." Lewis illustrates in a passage from the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*:

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2Lewis, "On Stories," in *Of Other Worlds*: . . . p. 3.


A girl walks on the shore and an unknown lover embraces her, and a darkly shining wave arched over them like a coverlet while they lay; and when he had ended his deeds of love, he told his name, 'Lo, I am Poseidon, shaker of earth' (Od. XI, 242-252). Because we have had "shaker of earth" time and again in these poems where no miracle was involved, because those syllables have come to affect us almost as the presence of the unchanging sea in the real world, we are compelled to accept this. Call it nonsense, if you will; we have seen it. The real salt sea itself, and not any pantomime or Ovidian personage living in the sea, has got a mortal woman with child. Scientists and theologians must explain it as best they can. The fact is not disputable.

But the power of the myth is still manifested in the skill of the poet, and unleashed only if it meets the right reader. In a tribute to the "Fantastic" or "Mythical Mode," Lewis closes his essay on "Fairy Stories" by praising myth for its power "to generalize while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experiences, and to throw off irrelevancies . . . . it can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of 'commenting on life,' can add to it."6

In addition to its extra-literary quality, the mythical story encompasses a sense of inevitability,7

5Ibid.


7John Fitzpatrick, "From Fact to Fantasy: . . . " p. 22.
implying that the reader experiences, not suspense or surprise, but a personal identification with what is happening. Lewis demonstrates the impact of this assertion in his reference to Gower's *Confessio Amantis*; his favorite passage in that poem is the closing one in which Gower rises to myth:

... the deadly cold that quenches the lover's heart, the companies of singing Youth and singing Age whom he sees in his trance, the figure of Cupid as he stoops over his body to pull out the long-embedded dart, the ointment 'mor cold than eny keie' with which the wound is healed, and the beads, given him by Venus, which bear the inscription 'Por reposer.' All these images tell the story of this particular lover, and this death of love, to admiration; but it is of death in many other senses that our minds are full while we read, and we rise from the book, as the Lover rose from his trance... The words strike ghost-like on some modern ears. But no one can miss the heartfelt peace of the line -- so simple in itself, so perfect in its context -- 'Homeward a softe pas I went.'

Myth arouses in us an unconsolable longing for something that relates to our origin as well as to our goal. It gives us an experience that seems to be peculiarly our own. Passages like this one of Gower's make death seem like a homeward journey and relate a poem to our own private experience more deeply than realism could.

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8 Lewis, * Allegory*, p. 221.
In *A Preface to Paradise Lost* Lewis warns us that myth forces us to realize that "stock responses" are not necessarily bad, neither is "originality" necessarily good.

... giants, dragons, paradises, gods, and the like are themselves the expression of certain basic elements in man's spiritual experience. In that sense they are more like words -- the words of a language which speaks the else unspeakable -- than they are like the people and places in a novel. To give them radically new characters is not so much original as ungrammatical.¹⁰

Concerning the mythical dragon of Phaedrus, "a creature born under evil stars . . . and doomed to guard against others the treasure it cannot use itself,"¹¹ Lewis states: "The image proved so potent an archetype that it engendered belief, and even when belief faded, men were unwilling to let it go. In two thousand years western humanity has neither got tired of it nor improved it."¹² Thus the conception of the planetary deities remained fruitful in the Middle Ages even when belief in those deities ceased to exist. Medieval poets knew better than to be "original," and that is why Lewis retains the old conception of Mars and Venus in his space trilogy.¹³

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¹⁰Lewis, Preface, p. 36.
¹²Ibid., p. 148.
¹³Fitzpatrick, p. 28.
A third characteristic of myth is distance: One sympathizes with the human condition rather than the particular characters.\textsuperscript{14} In other words, the pattern of events is more important than the fate of those who enact the events. Many times, rudimentary characterization is essential. Lewis states: "Every good writer knows that the more unusual the scenes and events of his story are, the slighter, the more ordinary, the more typical his persons should be."\textsuperscript{15} Hence Gulliver, Alice, and the Ancient Mariner are commonplace persons. And hence Dr. Ransom is introduced as a Cambridge philologist of recognizable physique and personality. But by the end of the trilogy he is transformed into the mythical, mysterious fisher-king.

Lewis frequently uses the term "fantasy" in reference to myth, signifying the impossible and preternatural. It remains clear, however, that while myth is always fantastic, fantasy need not always embrace myth. According to Lewis, fantasy came into its own when the gods ceased to command belief: "... the decline of the gods, from deity ... to decoration, was not ... a history of sheer loss. For decoration may let romance

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 22.

\textsuperscript{15} Lewis, "On Science Fiction," in Of Other Worlds: ... p. 69.
in." Hence, the marvelous must be stripped of belief before it can be truly marvelous. "If Wordsworth found the idea of seeing Proteus rise from the sea attractive, this was partly because he felt perfectly certain he never would. He would have felt less certain of never seeing a ghost; in proportion less willing to see one." Finally, Lewis asserts that the fantastic element should not be confined by rationality. Having regretted the invention of a spaceship to transport Ransom to Mars, Lewis says, "... when I knew better I had angels convey him to Venus." Most important to Lewis is the sense of awe and the recognition that myth means more than all the allegories that explain it. He distinguishes between allegory and myth by the assumption that

Allegory ... is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms. ... But there is another way of using the equivalence, which is almost the opposite of allegory, and which I would call sacramentalism or symbolism. If our passions, being immaterial, can be copied by material inventions, then it is possible that our material world in its turn is the copy of an invisible world. As the god Amor and

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16 Lewis, Allegory, p. 75.
17 Fitzpatrick, p. 22.
18 Lewis, Image, p. 126.
his figurative garden are to the actual passions of men, so perhaps we ourselves and our 'real' world are to something else. The attempt to read that something else through its sensible limitations, to see the Archtype in the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism. . . . The 'allegorists' leaves. . . . the given . . . to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real.20

In other words, symbolism is more congenial to myth than allegory because it looks beyond the visible to the infinite. Lewis reiterates the point, insisting that "a good myth is a higher thing than allegory . . . . Into an allegory a man can put only what he already knows; in a myth he puts what he does not yet know and cannot come by in any other way."21

At this point Lewis ceases to be the literary critic. He insists that what myth tells us must be analyzed by the theologians. And those who are interested will turn to his theological works.

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20 Lewis, Allegory, p. 45.
Chapter III

The Spiritual Implication of Myth

A taste for myth was one reason why Lewis embraced Christianity. While the dominant trend in much of Twentieth Century theology has been to strip scripture of its mythical covering and to present its impact to modern man in abstract terms, Lewis states, "I find it easier to believe in a myth of gods and demons than in one of hypostatised abstract nouns."¹ Thus to restore myth to its proper place, Lewis turned to Christianity.

The problem of fundamentalism arises because Lewis insists that the myths in scripture are important in themselves as well as for the meanings they convey. For example, Lewis does not insist on a literal acceptance of the account of the Fall, but neither does he deny the possibility of literal truth: "For all I can see, it might have concerned the literal eating of a fruit, but the matter is of no consequence."² What is of consequence, however, is the mythical aspect of the magic fruit and the trees of life and knowledge, which may not be reduced to a pledge of obedience. Their truth contains

²Ibid., p. 68.
a deeper and subtler significance, but to define this significance would be to allegorize and rationalize, and myth defies these processes. Lewis emphasizes this point in his essay, "Myth Became Fact," cataloguing some of the pro- and anti-Christian teachers of history whose ideas about Christian myth have failed to survive the myth itself. Lewis proclaims,

Even assuming (which I most constantly deny) that the doctrines of historic Christianity are merely mythical, it is the myth which is the vital and nourishing element in the whole concern. . . . In religion we find something that does not move away. It is what Corineus calls myth, that abides; it is what he calls the modern and living thought that moves away. . . . The myth (to speak his language) has outlived the thoughts of all its defenders and of all its adversaries. It is the myth that gives life. Those elements . . . which Corineus regards as vestigial, are the substance; what he takes for the 'real modern belief' is the shadow.  

In an attempt to distinguish between "thinking" and "imagining," Lewis admits that mythical or anthropomorphic imagery may distort spiritual reality. For example, an early Christian might have thought that Christ's sitting on the right hand of the Father implied two chairs of state, in a certain spatial relation, inside a sky-palace. But if the same man . . . discovered that

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3 Ibid., p. 59.

God has no body, parts, or passions, and therefore neither a right hand nor a palace, he would not have felt that the essentials of his belief had been altered. What had mattered to him ... had not been the supposed details about celestial furniture. It had been the assurance that the once crucified Master was now the supreme Agent of the unimaginable Power on whom the whole universe depends .... he would recognize that in this he had never been deceived.5

Even though the images are false, so are the images of the child who does not drink poison because he thinks that there are "horrid red things" inside. The child's understanding of poison is essentially correct even though it is embodied in a false image. Thus "thinking may be sound in certain respects where it is accompanied not only by false images but by false images mistaken for true ones."6

Lewis maintains that by replacing childish or primitive images with abstractions that appeal to modern intelligence, one merely substitutes an inferior myth for the inspired original. By defining God as "a great spiritual force" one merely substitutes physics for man. And man is a nobler thing than electricity. Likewise, to say that God "entered the universe" only substitutes horizontal movement for vertical.7 Lewis relates the

5Lewis, "Horrid Red Things" in God in the Dock ... p. 70.
7Lewis, "Horrid Red Things" in God in the Dock ... p. 71.
story of a girl, raised to conceive God as a "perfect substance," who conceived of Him as a vast tapioca pudding. But while the old myths deny literalism, they do give us concreteness. Lewis points out that although the Old Testament sometimes suggests that God lives in the sky, many passages function to warn the Jews against such literal conceptions.

Obviously Lewis preferred myth to abstract meaning, because myth can convey more than one meaning. As a result he was often accused of relying on romanticism rather than reason. Lewis rebukes his critics, however, in his paper, "Is Theology Poetry." Christianity, he says, has not the grandeur and richness of Polytheism or Pagan animism. It does, on the other hand, represent "the humiliation of myth into fact, of God into Man: what is everywhere and always, imageless and ineffable, only to be glimpsed in dream and symbol and the acted poetry of ritual becomes small, solid -- no bigger than a man who can lie asleep in a row boat on the Lake of Galilee."  

Fritzpatrick asserts that if the story strikes deeper than the abstract thought that explains it, and yet has not the taste of myth, the question remains, what is it? Lewis's answer to this question is manifested

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9 Fritzpatrick, p. 42.
in his distinction between the Pagan stories and the Christian story:

It is not the difference between falsehood and truth. It is the difference between a real event on the one hand and dim dreams or premonitions of that same event on the other. It is like watching something come gradually into focus: first it hangs in the clouds of myth and ritual, vast and vague, then it condenses, grows hard and in a sense small, as a historical event in first century Palestine. . . . 'God Became Man,' should involve . . . 'Myth Became Fact.'

In Miracles, Lewis reiterates the point. He states that Death and Re-birth are the key principles of nature. All the plant and animal life must reduce itself to something small and deathlike — a buried seed or a dark womb — before springing up again. And this same pattern — the Adonis or Osiris who must die with the corn to be reborn every spring — is at the center of many ancient religions. Thus Christ seems to be merely another corn-king. Yet Christ rarely makes any analogy to a growing seed. Even when he takes bread (corn) in his hands and says "This is my body," there is no suggestion from Him or anyone else that a parallel is intended. The only way to explain the discrepancy, says Lewis, is to recognize that Christ is both the God of Nature, "Bacchus, Venus, Ares all rolled into one," and the God beyond nature. The Old Testament includes both literal myth and

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transcendent spirit because the New is to combine them. Christ is not compared to the corn-king because He is the corn-king.

For the corn-king is derived (through human imagination) from the facts of Nature, and the facts of Nature from her creator; the Death and Re-birth pattern is in her because it was first in Him. On the other hand, elements of the Nature-religion are strikingly absent from the teaching of Jesus and from the Judaic preparation which led up to it precisely because in them Nature's original is manifesting itself . . . . Where the real God is present the shadows of that God do not appear; that which the shadows resembled does . . . . it was the destiny of the Hebrews to be turned away from lifenesses to the thing itself.11

So a myth that is yet not like a myth is what is most essential to Lewis. And the myth that commands total belief is the one that becomes "incarnate" in history. "Myth in general is . . . a real though unfocussed gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination."12 Although the mythology of the Hebrews gradually emerges as pure history in the New Testament, losing much of the imaginative splendour of pagan myths, nevertheless it "remains myth even when it becomes fact. The story of Christ demands from us, and repays, not only a religious and historical but also an imaginative response."13

11Lewis, Miracles: . . . p. 120.
12Lewis, Miracles: . . . p. 139.
To Lewis, this imaginative response is central. While some use it to attack Christianity, Lewis insists that pagan myth is greater, not lesser evidence for the veracity of Christianity. Though Lewis expertly defended Christianity from the charge of unreasonableness, it was poetic myth that influenced him more than rational argument. In *Surprised By Joy* he states that MacDonald's *Phantastes* had "baptized his imagination." The results are powerful, for Lewis "incorporates into his fiction all his meditation on the nature of sin and grace, man, God, and the devil, framing his thoughts in a concrete myth that is, though not fact, yet in its essence truth."\(^{14}\)

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Chapter IV

"Lewis's Myth of "Deep Heaven"

What if within the moone's faire
shining sphære?
What if in every other starre
unseen.
Of other worlds (we) happily
should heare?

Spenser
The Fairie Queene II Prol. 3

These words of Spenser's, the appropriate epigraph for *Of Other Worlds*, are at the root of Lewis's entire planetary trilogy: *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*. In the epilogue of *The Discarded Image*, Lewis insists that all descriptions of physical reality are of necessity metaphorical; since men's sense organs have as much to do with what men see as do the characteristics of the things seen, physical descriptions must always be indirect -- descriptions not of, say, the moon itself, but the moon as it is imaged in the human mind or as it appears in a theoretical construct designed to account for empirical data. Men construct "models" of the universe on the basis of what they consider the best information they can get about it. But men have tended to forget that these descriptions of the universe are mere models, and have taken them for reality itself. ¹ Their imagination has been spurred by

the speculative fiction of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, and the superstition emerging from this fiction has had poisonous effects.

In *Out of the Silent Planet* a Cambridge philologist named Ransom is, despite his sincere Christianity, a victim of this superstition. His experiences on Mars suggest, on one level, that men's speculations may be wrong: "What if" man goes out into the universe and discovers that it is similar to what the Medievals thought it to be? On another level, the reader recognizes that reality may be somewhat better than men's sense organs indicate. In either case, within the novel Ransom discovers the Wellsian universe to be a false myth\(^2\) or "anti-myth,"\(^3\) in constant opposition with the Christian myth. The action in the first volume is initiated by a physicist bent on the human colonization of the universe. Although he is eventually destroyed, he is replaced in *That Hideous Strength* by the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments, a manifestation of scientific devilry. Because Lewis constantly identifies popular science with evil, he has been frequently attacked for his anti-scientific bias, particularly by

\(^2\)Norwood, p. 70.

\(^3\)Fitzpatrick, p. 50.
the distinguished Marxist biologist, J.B.S. Haldane. Fitzpatrick reminds us, however, that the age of progress has passed, and popular opinion has taken another direction. "We have reached the moon," he states, "and if we have not, like Lewis' villains, introduced corruption and death, we have at least deposited enough terrestrial garbage to rob the evolutionary myth of some of its glamour." Lewis's fiction must be of some value to offset the powerful myth of progress.

Challenging the anti-myth in the space trilogy is the myth of "Deep Heaven," and one recognizes at its center the familiar Christian story: God creates the world. Man rebels and is doomed by his action. God becomes man and redeems the world. However, though the story is very good, it is also very familiar, and the imaginative response that myth demands is threatened. People either "insist on the doctrine and fact of the story to the detriment of imagination, or else they dismiss the story as a 'mere myth' and wind up ignoring it entirely (with lip service to 'the Bible as literature')." But Lewis forces the reader to respond


5Ibid.

6Ibid., p. 51.
imaginatively by reorienting the story in time and space. He creates an extension of Christian mythology. By placing the action on other planets, Lewis deemphasizes the importance of man in the universe and puts him in his place. Lewis activates the reader's imagination by avoiding a scientific description of the universe. He arouses the reader's curiosity about other worlds, then heightens the mystery of them.\(^7\) J.R. King states,

\[ \text{I do not believe we can \ldots discover why Lewis \ldots is shaking us so violently by the collars unless we can suspend disbelief -- at least temporarily -- and enter willingly into the mysteries which he knows so well.}^{8} \]

Malacandra (Mars) is the oldest world. This planet is peopled by three different rational species of hna\(u\) who have one essential characteristic in common: they have never fallen. But the absence of Temptation, Original Sin and Incarnation is a problem here; because the inhabitants have never been given true free will, their possibilities are limited. What little danger they face is of no consequence to them, for what they desire more than anything is death.

Unlike the state of affairs in Malacandra, however, free will and temptation are crucially present in

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\(^7\)Ibid.


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Perelandra (Venus), the newest of worlds. But its Eve does not succumb to temptation; thus the planet achieves a perfection that the older planets cannot touch.

Because Perelandra is innocent, both her tempter and defender must be imported from another world. And this third world is also the third from the sun: Thulcandra, the silent planet, a sort of dark hole in the Field of Arbol. It is silent because its fall has severed it from communication with other worlds, and the rest of its sad history we are already familiar with. But the Incarnation has a vital and permanent effect on the universe, for although Thulcandra the fallen sends its corruption to other worlds, Thulcandra the redeemed also sends agents to destroy that corruption. Perelandra triumphs because of the aid of a fallen man, and paradoxically, Earth is very much the center of things after all.  

The flavor of myth is enhanced by creatures such as the eldila, only fleetingly visible to the human eye as moving rods of colored light. Although they seem ethereal, they are more solid and real than any of the other creatures. They are not subject to the laws of gravity, for when they appear, the very horizontal plane of the solar system seems to be at an angle. Each planet has its eldil or Oyarsa who administers laws and maintains

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9 Fitzpatrick, pp. 53-54.

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the orbits of the spheres. The Oyarsa on Malacandra protects his world from evil. The one on Perelandra leaves the choice open.

The Oyarsa of Thulcandra is the Dark Lord, the "bent" eldil who represents sin and corruption. His plan to spread his poison to other worlds is foiled, however, for all the powers of the solar system unite to battle the "hideous strength." But the eldila can work on earth only through the agency of men; they are forbidden to wholly unleash their powers, for they could destroy the world.

Yet all the creatures, as powerful as they are, are subject to a still greater figure, Maledil, creator of the universe. Even to them Maledil (God) remains as awesome and ambiguous as He is to us. To this extent the eldila are humanized and linked to the reader in a concrete way. Obviously Lewis meets the criteria for myth in his trilogy. The myth of "Deep Heaven" remains open-ended, and is certainly larger than the books that contain it. For the last chapter of the trilogy, "Venus at St. Anne's," only begins to reveal the true nature of Perelandra. Furthermore, the consistency of Maledil's works with the laws of nature reflect the inevitability of myth. Though the justice applied on Malacandra and Perelandra is beyond earthly ideas of justice, it is not in conflict with them. In addition to the sense of
inevitability, there is the distance felt by the reader, not only in terms of astronomy, but in terms of human participation in the ritual of the birth of a new world. Finally, fantasy and awe are inherent in the very fictional format of the myth.  

Chad Walsh, pleased by Lewis' careful integration of myth into his fiction, states that the trilogy is "a vast myth. Lewis has baptized the solar system and filled it with the presence of Maledil." He further states that the war metaphor is vital. Out of the Silent Planet predicts a coming struggle of major significance, Perelandra initiates the actuality of the struggle, and That Hideous Strength is "a dress rehearsal for Armageddon." Lewis underlines the theme in Mere Christianity:

Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war. But it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel. Enemy-occupied territory -- that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.  

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10 Ibid., pp. 56-57.
11 Chad Walsh, C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics: . . . . p. 47.
12 Ibid., p. 44.
But the reader finds himself drawn into something much larger than a new myth about the Christian story. He is drawn into a nightmarish, anti-utopian extreme manifested in the NICE. Every character is forced out of neutrality. Dr. Ransom, an ordinary, believing Christian, realizes a deeper truth. Professor Weston, humanly recognizable in the beginning of the trilogy, becomes a demon bent on conquering and corrupting the universe. Finally, an ordinary married couple is divided by the struggle, but reunited by the triumph of good in *That Hideous Strength*.

During an informal conversation between Lewis, Kingsley Amis, and Brian Aldiss, Amis was amused by the account of the space drive: "When Ransom and his friend get into the spaceship he says, 'How does this ship work?' and the man says, 'It operates by using some of the lesser known properties of --' What was it?" Lewis responded, "Solar radiation. Ransom was reporting words without a meaning to him, which is what a layman gets when he asks for a scientific explanation." If the words were filled with scientific improbabilities, it was of no concern to Lewis. He admits, "... it was pure mumbo-jumbo ... meant primarily to convince me."¹⁴ Yet the trilogy is enhanced by what Northrop

¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, "Unreal Estates" in *Of Other Worlds*: pp. 86-87.
Frye calls the mythos of summer: romance. The essential elements, says Frye, are adventure and a fortunate ending, \(^\text{15}\) and the trilogy qualifies on both counts. Angels whisk Ransom off to Venus in an icy casket and he becomes the redeemer.

Chapter V

Out of the Silent Planet:
Ransom Steps Into the Myth

In Lewis's trilogy, the earth becomes "Thulcandra," the "silent planet," alienated from the rest of the cosmos by the rebellion of Satan and the subsequent Fall of Man. In the tradition of fantastic literature, however, Lewis achieves distance, for Out of the Silent Planet opens with an ordinary scene: A middle-aged Cambridge philologist is walking in the English countryside. He is "The Pedestrian" and is certainly not seeking adventure. But he is also Dr. Ransom and his name implies that he is destined for adventure indeed. He is to shed his blood, not to redeem a world but to insure that a world will not need to be redeemed.

His opponent, the force behind the anti-myth, is Professor Weston, a renowned physicist whose name suggests the technological thrust of modern Western civilization. Bent on universal colonelization, he is determined to prepare the planets for future development. Weston has already been to Mars. There he meets the Oyarsa, the planetary intelligence of that planet. At this point the reader perceives that the universe, apart from Earth, exists in harmony and peace, having a common language ("Old Solar") and a common interplanetary religion and government.
Weston, however, incapable of understanding the superior beings of Malacandra, regards them as savages to be placated by a human sacrifice. With the aid of an opportunist named Devine, Weston infiltrates the empty space of the solar system, and takes Ransom as a potential offering to the Malacandrians. Paradoxically, it is Weston who sets in motion the force that eventually destroys his allies in That Hideous Strength.

Unlike Weston, the reader recognizes the theocratic arrangement of the universe. It is clear that Lewis is seeking to translate familiar Christian concepts into mythical terms without losing or distorting the basic Christian ideals with which he is working. Using the literary methodology of the writers of science fiction, Lewis is attempting to justify the ways of God to skeptical man by presenting the core of the Faith. Moreover, because his main appeal is directed toward the skeptic, he must describe and define the theological principles with which he is dealing from a point of view that, of necessity, avoids the use of Church terminology and rationalization. For this reason it is more than a third of the way through Out of the Silent Planet before the reader perceives even a hint of theological implications. Ransom's sensations of Deep Heaven are merely that — sensa-

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tions. Yet his heightened sensibilities are in direct contrast to the myopic perceptions of Weston and Devine. To them "space" remains merely what the name implies. They are stifled by their anti-myth, "the mythology that follows in the wake of science." They perceive nothing but a frightening, cold void. To Ransom, however, "Space' seemed a blasphemous libel for this empyrean ocean of radiance in which they swam. He could not call it 'dead'; he felt life pouring into him from it every moment. How indeed should it be otherwise, since out of this ocean the worlds and all their life had come? He had thought it barren: he saw now that it was the womb of worlds, whose blazing and innumerable offspring looked down nightly even upon the earth with so many eyes -- and here, with how many more! No: Space was the wrong name. Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens. . . .

What Ransom describes is "Deep Heaven," a brighter reflection of God than anything seen on earth -- or any other planet. But even the unfallen world of Malacandra is only a shadow of Deep Heaven. The entrance into the Malacandrian atmosphere made it seem "as if some demon had rubbed the heaven's face with a dirty sponge. . . . They were falling out of the heaven, into a world." Ransom had experienced joy during the voyage, despite his grim

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3 Ibid.

circumstances, but entry into another world reawakens fear, and it is apparent that Ransom himself is partly under the spell of the anti-myth. Even the Oyarsa recognizes his problem: "'You are guilty of no evil, Ransom of Thulcandra, except a little fearfulness. For that, the journey you go on is your pain, and perhaps your cure.'"

After wandering for quite a while on Malacandra, Ransom encounters a rational creature, a hrossa. Only after lengthy exposure to the hrossa, or Martians, does the reader understand their significance in the myth. They are simple, childlike creatures with a taste for poetry and little interest in systematic thought. Ransom encounters the first touch of the eternal when he realizes that the hrossa have no religion because they need none. Inhabiting as they do an unfallen world, they are free from carnality and disease. They cannot view Christianity from the same point of view as do fallen Earth men. The term "Christianity," or even a strict Martian equivalent, would have no meaning to Martians who have never had need of a Redeemer. Moreover, having no need of the Holy Ghost since they have immediate grace, Martians have no conception of the Trinity. Ransom treats their notions about the Oyarsa, their benevolent ruler, somewhat

5Ibid., p. 142.
smugly, as Lewis might treat a pagan myth — as an unfocused gleam of the real thing. But the hrossa soon prove that they know more, not less, than Ransom. It is he who needs instruction. He learns that "Maledil the Young" made the universe and now dwells with the "Old One." And like the "Old One," his nature is such that he is not bound to dwell in any one place in the universe at any one time; it became plain to Ransom that Maledil is "'not the sort that he has to live anywhere.'" Thus, the hrossa know both the Father, the "Old One," and Maledil, the Son, as spirit. In this description of God as He looks to a Martian, Lewis incorporates all the aspects of the Trinity which we on Earth see as separate qualities. To the Martians there is no "mystery" of the Trinity, no necessity of division by function, but rather an immediate perception of the whole essence of God.

This treatment of the Trinity represents the kind of problem Lewis faces throughout the novels. For example, how can he account for the presence of evil on Mars where there has been no Fall? As Moorman asserts, Lewis's treatment of this problem corresponds to perfectly orthodox thinking on the problem of evil generally, but his

6 Fitzpatrick, p. 64.
7 Lewis, OSP, p. 68.
8 Moorman, p. 108.
presentation of the matter is, as it must be in order to reach the skeptic, given from a point of view differing radically from the usual approach that takes from its starting point the Fall of Man. On Mars, Ransom learns that there exist dangerous water beasts called *hneraki* who periodically attack the *hrossa* who live in the low lands. Ransom asks why Maledil created the *hnakra*. Hyoi, a hross, answers that the "forest would (not) be so bright, nor the water so warm, nor love so sweet, if there were no danger in the lakes." Here Lewis proposes a perfectly orthodox answer to the problem of the existence of evil. God allows evil to exist in the universe for reasons that man does not understand, but which eventually work together for his good.

Before both Ransom and the reader realize it, they have been exposed to the main tenor of Lewis's myth — Christian orthodoxy. Yet, as Fitzpatrick asserts, Lewis's time and care in introducing the supernatural element is vital on the basis that a reader's belief in the ordinary world must be won before he can accept the extraordinary. He must be persuaded to suspend his disbelief gradually by being led from what is partly familiar — the rocks and seas of Malacandra — to what is wholly new — the

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10 *Lewis, OSP*, p. 75.
planetary spirit. Once the reader, like Ransom, has adjusted to the mythical atmosphere, there is no limit to what he can perceive. Ransom himself adjusts with difficulty. At first the *eldila* are invisible to him. But they are beyond his sense organs because they are beyond his nature. He eventually learns to perceive them by the faint rods of colored light that impress on his brain, not his eyes. They appear as apparitions, not because they are less real than men, but because they are more real. They can go through rocks and walls because the barriers are like clouds compared to their own solidarity.\(^1\)

Ransom discovers that on Malacandra, the spirit is more real than the natural. But why not on earth? Ransom suddenly realized

... that the recurrent human traditions of bright, elusive people sometimes appearing on the Earth -- *albs*, *devas*, and the like -- might after all have another explanation than the anthropologists had yet given. True, it would turn the universe rather oddly inside out; but his experiences in the space-ship had prepared him for some such operation.\(^2\)

And that is exactly what Lewis's myth does -- turns the universe inside out, makes mythical spirits appear as solid facts. Thus the entire distinction between myth and fact is of purely terrestrial origin. Unfortunately Weston could not comprehend Ransom's discovery.

\(^1\)Fitzpatrick, p. 65.

\(^2\)Lewis, *OSP*, p. 95.
Weston's disbelief in the existence of the Oyarsa and his meager attempts to explain away the supernatural make him appear ridiculous. He has failed to realize that supernatural myths on earth are everyday facts on Malacandra. He attempts to pacify the inhabitants with gifts and defends himself in baby talk. When he fails to convince, he offers his great plan for the conquest of the universe in English for Ransom to translate into Old Solar. But only a "bent" language can convey the concept of emergent evolution.

"Life is greater than any system of morality; her demands are absolute. It is not by tribal taboos and copy-book maxims that she has pursued her relentless march from the amoeba to man and from man to civilization."  

With great difficulty, Ransom attempts to translate:

"He says . . . that living creatures are stronger than the question whether an act is bent or good -- no, that cannot be right -- he says it is better to be alive and bent than to be dead -- no -- he says, -- I cannot say what he says, Oyarsa, in your language. But he goes on to say that the only good thing is that there should be very many creatures alive. He says there were many other animals before the first men and the later ones were better than the earlier ones; but he says the animals were not born because of what is said to the young about bent and good action by their elders. And he says these animals did not feel any pity!"  

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13 Lewis, OSP, p. 136.

14 Ibid.
When Weston's goals are finally understood, the Oyarsa orders the men banished to prevent evil from infiltrating Malacandra. But evil has already occurred. And the Oyarsa is no more able to grasp the nature of evil than he is to comprehend human language. Though supernatural, his intelligence is not infinite and his failure to understand reveals a vital truth: without the potential for evil, good itself is limited. Free will has been reserved for the newer worlds. Even though Thulcandra has made a mess of things, Maledil has still been active. Ransom's account of the Incarnation evokes awe even from the Oyarsa. It strikes non-human ears immediately with both the numinosity of myth and the inevitability of fact, for the Oyarsa cannot distinguish between the two.  

Maledil has begun to invade Thulcandra, the territory of the Bent One. Folklore and myth cast but shadows of the invasion, but the Incarnation was the fulfillment of the stories -- the beginning of the real

15 Fitzpatrick, p. 69.
thing. The war in heaven is to become open, and Ransom is sent to Perelandra to do battle.
Chapter VI

Perelandra: The Battle Begins

Out of the Silent Planet ends on an ominous note. Ransom has experienced such strange phenomena that he fears his story will be taken for mythology:

Those handramits, for example. Seen from the height which the spaceship had now attained . . . they put to shame his original impression that they were natural valleys. They were gigantic feats of engineering, about which he had learned nothing; feats accomplished . . . before human history began . . . before animal history began. Or was that only mythology? He knew it would seem like mythology when he got back to Earth (if he ever got back), but the presence of Oyarsa was still too fresh a memory to allow him any real doubts. It even occurred to him that the distinction between history and mythology might be itself meaningless outside the Earth.¹

The irruption of myth into history is further dramatized by the unexpected announcement that fiction is fact. "Lewis" reveals in a postscript that "Dr. Ransom" is only a fictitious name for his Cambridge friend who really went to Mars. His announcement is an effective bit of authorial psychology intended to convince his readers. But more than that, it is a justifiable development of the "myth became fact" theme.²

Lewis even supports his claim with actual references to

¹C.S. Lewis, OSP, pp. 144-45.
²Fitzpatrick, p. 70.
Oyares in the twelfth century Latin writings of Bernardus Silvestris.³

The reader, like Ransom, has by now fully plunged into the myth and is struck by the sense of urgency at the opening of *Perelandra*. Ransom is being sent on a vital mission. The war with the Bent One is intellectual, spiritual and physical, and the fate of a new world hangs in the balance.

*Perelandra* marks a critical advance in Lewis's use of myth. On earth myth contains a deeper reality than our senses perceive. On Malacandra Ransom is able to observe myth more directly. In Perelandra, however, he becomes an active participant. Appropriately, his role begins with a sort of archetypal birth, following his journey in an icy casket. The narrator observes,

> All this time he must have been making faint, unconscious efforts to move his limbs, for now he suddenly found that the side of his prison-house yielded to pressure. He was moving his limbs, encumbered with some viscous substance. Where was the casket? His sensations were very confused. Sometimes he seemed to be falling, sometimes to be soaring upwards, and then again to be moving in the horizontal plane. The viscous substance was white . . . . White, cloudy stuff just like the casket, only not solid. With a horrible shock he realized that it was the casket, the casket melting, dissolving away, giving place to an indescribable confusion of colour -- a rich, varied world in which nothing, for the moment, seemed palpable:

³Lewis, *OSP*, p. 152.
There was no casket now. He was turned out -- deposited -- solitary. He was in Perelandra.4

The principles of Death and Re-birth that Lewis discusses in Miracles and to which I referred in chapter three are clearly present in this passage. Ransom is reduced to something deathlike, and the casket becomes his womb. As he moves his limbs, he is deposited -- born, so to speak, into a fresh new world, and the pattern of nature, originating in her Creator, repeats itself.

In Perelandra, known as Venus in the Old Solar language, Ransom finds a green-and-copper-colored world of floating islands which sit to the water like blankets, yet bear lush vegetation. The dominant colors are long associated with Venus in "terrestrial mythology."5 The world of Venus is "maternal," feminine in its characteristics: beautiful, sweet-smelling, mild, warm, soft, pliable and inconstant. Ransom recalls the redness and hardness, the essential masculinity of Mars. Seeing a scene that reminds him of the Garden of the Hesperides, he wonders if "all the things which appeared as mythology on earth" are "scattered through other worlds as realities."6


6Lewis, PE, p. 45.
And "... at that moment he had a sensation not of following an adventure but of enacting a myth."\(^7\)

The glorious image is shattered, however, by the arrival of Weston. Claiming that he has come to terms with "religion," he worships the anti-myth which he now labels the Life-Force. Yet Weston is less recognizably human than his portrayal in *Out of the Silent Planet*. Scientific plausibility and realistic characterization are increasingly abandoned; thus the story becomes more mythical. Weston is now possessed by a demon, the Bent One of Thulcandra. He is the Un-man, the serpent in this version of the Adam and Eve story.

The struggle between good and evil begins with the temptation scene in which Ransom and Weston advocate opposite courses of action for the lovely Green Lady, the Eve of Perelandra. Edmund Fuller calls it "an extraordinarily intricate, far-reaching debate at the deepest level of moral theology."\(^8\) The newness of this Garden story is that two voices from the world that had known the tragedy of man's fall intervene in the Green Lady's decision. Consequently Lewis deepens our understanding of the nature of man's fall. He gives us a vision of what man was intended to be. The intervention, in God's

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methods, is not one of force, but one that appeals to free wills. One may believe and accept redemption, but no one is compelled to accept it or believe it.

Speaking through Weston the scientist, Satan tempts the beautiful creature -- not to eat forbidden fruit but to 'know good and evil,' instead of good alone. He tells her stories of passionate lovers and noble but misunderstood women; he shows her how to make pretty, useless clothes and admire herself -- all in order to plunge her into the state of perpetual doubt and revolt which will ruin her marriage and begin to destroy her soul. Weston requests that the woman commit the forbidden act of staying overnight on the fixed lands before an appointed time has come. In direct contrast to the exotically beautiful world of floating islands, the Fixed Land corresponds to Weston's destructive "fixed idea" of emergent evolution.

At this point Ransom is fully engaged in his struggle with evil personified, and a terrifying thought occurs to him: What if the spiritual struggle were to become physical. He tries to dismiss the idea as a childish and deceptive notion -- as "mere mythology."

It stood to reason that a struggle with the Devil meant a spiritual struggle ... But here he got another check. Long since on Mars, and more strongly since he came to Perelandra, Ransom had been perceiving that the triple distinction of truth from myth and of both from fact was purely terrestrial -- was part and parcel of that unhappy division between soul and body which
resulted from the Fall. Even on earth the sacraments existed as a permanent reminder that the division was neither wholesome nor final. The Incarnation had been the beginning of its disappearance. In Perelandra it would have no meaning at all. Whatever happened here would be of such a nature that earthmen would call it mythological.9

What Ransom fears is actualized in a grotesque physical battle between himself and Weston. Moreover, Lewis creates for the reader that "real though unfocussed gleam of divine truth," manifested in Christ's spiritual battle in Gethsemane prior to His death, and His physical battle on the Cross.

In the dramatic struggle that follows, the two naked scholars chase each other across the awesome Perelandrian landscape. Ransom is forced to destroy what remains of the enemy -- his body. But Ransom does not destroy the body of the Un-man until he plunges to the bottom of the sea and into the bowels of Perelandra, dying, as it were, to live.

Suddenly and irresistibly, like an attack by tanks, that whole view of the universe which Weston (if it were Weston) had so lately preached to him, took all but complete possession of his mind. . . . What he had called the worlds were but skins of the worlds: a quarter of a mile beneath the surface, and from thence through thousands of miles of dark and silence and infernal fire, to the very heart of each, Reality lived -- the meaningless, the un-made, the omnipotent idiocy to which all spirits were irrelevant and before which

9Lewis, PE, pp. 143-44.
all efforts were vain. Whatever was following him would come up that wet, dark hole, would presently be excreted by that hideous duct, and then he would die.\(^{10}\)

One recognizes in the image of the underground caverns the death and rebirth pattern. The descent and reascent from the cave explains the emergence of a new Ransom. The blackness beneath the surface is the universe without redemption, and the utter despair that overtakes Ransom's psyche is no less devastating than that which overtook Christ when he cried, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani."\(^{11}\)

Yet Ransom emerges victorious when he smashes the Un-man's face with a stone and destroys him. Ransom survives and emerges a new man, for he is "breast-fed by the planet Venus herself."\(^{12}\) He receives a gash in his heel, however, that refuses to be cured.

The entire passage describing the Un-man's fatal wound in the head and Ransom's wound in the heel is reminiscent of the Adamic Covenant found in the Old Testament: God says to the serpent, "'... I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.'"\(^{13}\) Weston, like the serpent, must be killed by

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\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 180.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 153.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 185.

the head. But the effects of sin and the deepest mystery of the atonement are intimated here. Ransom suffered the sting of the serpent, and the wound would serve as a constant reminder of his Fallen state. His experience in Perelandra is a shadow, a glimpse of the truth manifested in the Incarnation, and the "myth became fact" theme is apparent once again.

Ransom's victory, however, is only the beginning for him. He ascends to a high mountain valley and meets there the Oyersu of Malacandra and Perelandra. For the great occasion -- the deification of the Adam and Eve of Perelandra -- they appear to him in forms more visible than mere rods of colored light. Appealing to the mythical imagery he understands best, they appear as great anthropomorphic figures, moving at incredible speed. They are sexless but gendered. They are Mars and Venus, Ares and Aphrodite, the realities of which the ancient earthlings had but vague notions. And, even they bow down to Tor and Tinidril, the King and Queen of Perelandra.

Yet even amid this scene of unimaginable beauty with its partial vision of the Great Dance, Ransom's thoughts are still bound to earth. Tor and Tinidril know more about Earth than he does now. By remaining innocent, they have gained a deeper knowledge of evil than possible on earth. By exercising their free will and choosing not to fall, they have risen even higher than Malacandra. And
here Lewis manages a fresh approach to the Adam and Eve Story. While many theologians insist that one cannot understand the meaning of good without experiencing the impact of evil, Lewis approaches the problem in reverse. He implies that the more men do evil, the more ignorant they become of its very nature, and the less capable they become of perceiving good. Tor says, "'... it is waking that understands sleep and not sleep that understands waking.'"\(^{14}\) In light of his observation, the reader is not shocked by the narrator's view of *eldila* in the first chapter of *Perelandra*. He states:

> I felt sure that the creature was what we call 'good,' but I wasn't sure whether I liked 'goodness' so much as I had supposed .... Here at last was a bit of that world from beyond the world, which I had always supposed that I loved and desired, breaking through and appearing to my senses: and I didn't like it, I wanted it to go away. I wanted every possible distance, gulf, curtain, blanket, and barrier to be placed between it and me.\(^{15}\)

The King and Queen prophesy that war, destruction, and plagues will encumber the earth until the Bent Eldil is destroyed. The end? Ransom asks. No, only the eradication of a false start, and a true beginning, they assure him. And on that note, Ransom returns to earth.

\(^{14}\)Lewis, *PE*, p. 209.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 19.
Chapter VII

That Hideous Strength: A New Beginning

There is a great deal of contention among the critics over the last volume of the trilogy, That Hideous Strength. Gunnar Urang asserts that "the myth itself seems synthetic and contrived. Lewis has been left with the mythical apparatus from earlier books which has to be integrated with the Arthurian material... The welding does not hold, the machinery creaks and groans, and the result has neither the simplicity nor the focussed intensity required for mythopoeic power." Fitzpatrick contends that the novel projects a "drab quality" in its treatment of the "ordinary earthly meanness and cowaredices." Neither critic, however, is accurate in his evaluation.

In That Hideous Strength, Lewis retains his general method in that he presents orthodox Christianity by means of non-Christian terms. Although he shifts his emphasis to some extent away from the silent-planet myth developed in the first two novels, he still retains the primary structure of myth: Ransom remains Lewis's hero; we find allusions to Weston, the physicist; the moon is still

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2Fitzpatrick, p. 83.
Earth's battle perimeter. But the action shifts from heaven to earth, for the hints given in the first two novels that the great battle to rescue Earth is about to begin are developed. Lewis deliberately deemphasizes the solar myth and replaces it with elements of the Arthurian legend.

Many critics question whether or not the Arthurian "legend" can legitimately be used to investigate the use of myth. Consequently a definition of the two terms is in order. Susanne Langer cites Bethe's distinction between "myth" and "legend" in her work, *Philosophy in a New Key*: the two terms "differ from one another in origin and purpose. Myth is primitive philosophy, the simplest presentational . . . form of thought, a series of attempts to understand the world, to explain life and death, fate and nature, gods and cults. Legend is primitive history, naively formulated in terms of love and hate, unconsciously transformed and simplified."³ Langer further designates as the distinctive mark of legend the presence of the "culture-hero" whose " . . . deeds . . . benefit mankind."⁴ From one point of view, then, the Arthurian


material can be called legendary, for Arthur appears to be the "culture-hero" who moves from one triumph to another and whose exploits become the primary subject of the story. Charles Moorman asserts, however, that in the reworkings of the story by the French romancers, the material comes more and more to resemble "myth," with its themes of courtly love and the Holy Grail. The Arthurian story, as it exists in its most complete medieval version, that of Malory, may be legitimately considered as myth. It is concerned only incidently with man in his earthly dealings; its true subject is the relationship of God and man, its true purpose an attempt "to understand the world, to explain life and death, fate and nature."  

Thus Lewis uses the Arthurian story as myth, devoting most of his attention to the Grail material. The basic theme of the myth is primarily the failure of a secular society to preserve itself by an alliance with the Christian principles symbolized by the Grail. Religion in the form of the Grail could have saved Arthur's kingdom, but the Grail was lost and the court crumbled under the weight of evil, instability, and civil war. Certainly Lewis sees his basic theme in precisely these terms. He abstracts from the myth the symbols of the Pendragon, Merlin and the Fisher King in order to present a modern

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Moorman, p. 25.
equivalent of the battle between Logres and Britain, religion and secularism. He writes a novel about his own age and uses myth to elevate the story of the conversion of an ordinary human couple into an allegory of the cosmic and universal battle between good and evil. By using elements of the Arthurian myth, Lewis gives to the fictional situation of *That Hideous Strength* the high seriousness and order inherent in the structure of myth.\(^6\)

The central theme of the novel is a development of Lewis's philosophy in *The Abolition of Man*: that scientific conditioning may deprive future men of free choice, and thus be detrimental to their humanity. Lewis had already jeered at the pretensions of technology and the social sciences in *The Screwtape Letters*, in which Screwtape counsels his protege:

> Above all, do not attempt to use science (I mean the real sciences) as a defense against Christianity. They will positively encourage him to think about realities he can't touch or see. There have been sad cases among the modern physicists. If he must dabble in science, keep him on economics and sociology.\(^7\)

Thus Evil takes the form of a sociological and scientific society whose professed aim is to improve the social and economic conditions by means of a secular cooperative

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\(^7\) Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 10.
state. Yet this society, ironically called N.I.C.E. (National Institute of Coordinated Experiments), is actually only a facade for the operations of the Bent Eldil, who is seeking to conquer England and the world by appealing to ideals of secular humanism, science, and progress:

'Man has got to take charge of man. That means, remember, that some men have got to take charge of the rest. . . . (The program includes) quite simple and obvious things, at first — sterilization of the unfit, liquidation of backward races . . . selective breeding. Then real education, including pre-natal education . . . we'll get on to biochemical conditioning in the end and direct manipulation of the brain. . . .'8

The organization's goal is "'Man Immortal and Man ubiquitous . . . . Man on the throne of the universe.'"9

Weston, in Out of the Silent Planet and Perelandra, shared the same hopes that by Creative Evolution man would triumph over the universe. And it is against precisely this same sort of secularism that Lewis's theological arguments are directed.

Ransom appears in That Hideous Strength as the wounded Fisher King, a figure taken from the Grail myth. In this novel he is half-human, half-divine. Occupying a small country house called St. Anne's, he and a small nucleus

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9 Ibid., p. 178.
of people are waging war against the forces of the Bent Eldil. But Ransom, the reader discovers later, is not only the Fisher King of the Arthurian legend; he is also the Pendragon, and his household is the remnant of Logres:

Ransom was summoned to the bedside of an old man then dying in Cumberland ... That man was the Pendragon, the successor of Arthur and Uther and Cassibelaun. Then we learned the truth. There has been a secret Logres in the very heart of Britain all these years; an unbroken succession of Pendragons.  

The general assumption that underlies Lewis's use of the Arthurian myth is the popular tradition that Arthur was transported to the Isle of Avalon to be cured of his wounds. According to the tradition, he stands perpetual guard over England and will return when he is needed.  

Lewis then envisions a perpetual conflict between Logres and Britain, the Arthurian ideal and secular reality:

'... something we may call Britain is always haunted by something we may call Logres. Haven't you noticed that we are two countries? After every Arthur, a Mordred; behind every Milton, a Cromwell: a nation of poets, a nation of shopkeepers; the home of Sidney -- and of Cecil Rhodes. Is it any wonder they call us hypocrites? But what they mistake for hypocrisy is really the struggle between Logres and Britain.'  

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10Ibid., p. 369.  
11Moorman, p. 113.  
12Lewis, HS, p. 369.
Both Mr. Fisher-King, the representative of Logres, and the N.I.C.E., which constitutes modern Britain, attempt to find the body of the magician Merlin, who, according to tradition, did not die but was cast into a deep sleep; both sides wish to make use of his power to achieve their ends.

These elements, then -- the perpetual battle between Logres and Britain, the reappearance of Ransom as the Fisher King and the Pendragon, the remnant of Logres, and the figure of Merlin -- constitute the core of the Arthurian story as Lewis uses it in That Hideous Strength. What Lewis apparently sees in the Arthurian myth is a metaphor that fits within the scheme of the silent-planet myth and is also parallel to it. The war between Logres and Britain parallel the war between good and evil forces on Earth, the silent planet. Moorman reiterates that Logres is represented in British history by Arthur, Milton, Sidney, Britain by Mordred, Cromwell, Rhodes. Britain constantly attempts to destroy what Logres builds. Obviously, both in this novel and in Lewis's over-all myth, Britain is the most powerful; the bent eldila outnumber the good on the silent planet. But the Pendragons and the Logres "have been the fingers which gave the tiny shove . . . to prod England out of the drunken sleep or to draw her back from the final outrage into which Britain tempted her."13

13 Ibid.
Logres still haunts, though it never quite (at least, as yet) wins. Moorman further states that Lewis has succeeded in fitting this material to his already established myth and pattern by stating that what we call the Arthurian "myth" is a record of historical fact, and by asserting that the history of the struggle between Logres and Britain has never been described in its proper terms.\textsuperscript{14} Dimble says, 'When the history of these last few months comes to be written in your (McPhee the skeptic's) language, and printed, and taught in schools, there will be no mention in it of you and me, nor of Merlin and the Pendragon and the Planets. And yet in these months Britain rebelled most dangerously against Logres and was defeated only just in time.'\textsuperscript{15}

Thus Lewis is free to introduce a real Merlin and a real Fisher King and allow them to function as historical personages without violating his definition of fictional reality. Furthermore he can link their conflict with N.I.C.E. to the silent-planet myth (1) by keeping Ransom and the eldila as characters and (2) by showing that the fight between Logres and Britain in the Arthurian myth is, in fact, a manifestation of the universal conflict, the war in heaven.\textsuperscript{16} Even the temptations of the N.I.C.E. are similar to those used by Satan in \textit{Perelandra}.

One of the most significant details Lewis uses in his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14}Moorman, p. 115.
\item \textsuperscript{15}Lewis, \textit{HS}, p. 369.
\item \textsuperscript{16}Moorman, p. 116.
\end{itemize}
description of Mr. Fisher-King is the wound in his heel. In terms of the silent-planet myth, the wound is a symbol of Ransom's fallen state; it is the sting of the serpent. It is also the heel of Achilles, the symbol of the hero's humanity. In the Fisher King myth the wound is in the thigh, and, obviously, to Lewis, is a symbol of the Fall; the earth has become a waste land and can be made fertile only by yielding to the principles that the Grail represents. Again, both the silent-planet myth and the Arthurian myth are incorporated into the last volume. Mr. Fisher-King's wound will not heal until Logres captures Britain and the battle is ultimately won.

Lewis's introduction of Merlin is the last of the major Arthurian elements in the novel. To Lewis, he represents the power of nature. He

'...is the reverse of Belbury. He is the last vestige on an old order in 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 ...'18

He is also a comic anachronism, transported from the Arthurian world to an environment he doesn't understand. Dimble says:

'We'd the dickens of a job to make him understand that Ransom isn't the king of

17Ibid., p. 117.
18Lewis, HS, p. 285.
this country or trying to become king.
And then we had to break it to him that
we weren't the British at all, but the
English -- what he'd call Saxons. It
took him some time to get over that.'

But as Ransom explains his own history to Merlin, the
magician's true function becomes apparent. Ransom ex-
plains that Maledil will work only through

' ... a man whose mind is open to be
... invaded, ... one who by his own
will once opened it. ... And through
a black "magician's" mind their purity
neither can nor will operate. One who
has dabbled ... in the days when dab-
bling had not begun to be evil ... and also a Christian man and penitent
... there was only one man who had
lived in those days and could still be
recalled. You --' 

During the terrible night that follows, the gods descend
and impart their special powers to Merlin so that he can
destroy Belbury. From this point on, Merlin becomes the
active force of good in the novel, and Mr. Fisher-King
the passive. It is Merlin who confounds the scientists
at Belbury with the curse of Babel, releases the animals,
and prepares the destruction.

In light of Lewis' theory that the Arthurian story
is historical fact, the reader is not surprised that he
uses Merlin, a figure half-mythical and half-real, as an
active force for good. Merlin is associated naturally
with the Arthurian myth and artificially with the cosmic

19 Ibid., p. 282.
20 Ibid., p. 291.
myth. Through the device of having the gods descend to pour their powers on him, Lewis is able to connect him with the silent-planet myth and thus use him, as he had used Mr. Fisher-King, within the context of both myths.\textsuperscript{21}

The elements of the Arthurian myth allow Lewis to convey in \textit{That Hideous Strength}, in a more familiar and less "unreal" form, the themes that are present in the first two volumes. The creatures of Mars and Venus could not be forced into the context of a novel about people on earth. But the Arthurian myth is a part of the native English literary tradition. Moreover, as myth, it is recognized by Lewis as half-glimpsed truth. By its very nature then, it is adaptable to an earthly situation, and is easily fitted through the character of Ransom to the silent-planet structure. The presence of the Arthurian characters imply the search for grace by which the civilization may be redeemed from the secular materialism of both Mordred and the N.I.C.E. By placing the battle within the Arthurian context, Lewis enhances the full meaning and power inherent in the structure of \textit{That Hideous Strength}.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.
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