

Teaching Truth Through Fiction: A Study in C.S. Lewis

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Abstract

This thesis aims to introduce the key themes present in C.S. Lewis's fiction. Throughout his works, he sought to teach his readers, whether that be through his non-fiction, his fiction, his poetry, his letters, or his life. There are five truths that Lewis commonly exhibits in each of his fictional works. These can be traced through his characters, plot, setting, and conversations in novels and other works of creative fiction. By using his non-fiction to trace these truths in his fiction, we see Lewis's masterful art of storytelling and teaching unfold.

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Introduction

The art of the story is one often used as an effective way of teaching. Stories allow readers to participate vicariously in imaginary or inaccessible worlds. Perhaps that world is born and explored in the recesses of the mind or explored during recesses at school. Oblivious to reality, many find themselves drawn into the captivating worlds of Middle Earth, Narnia, Hogwarts, or Some Castle Far, Far Away. As many seek to do, yet few accomplish, Clive Staples Lewis spent his life creating these stories, these landscapes of words, in order to explore the ideas that swirled in his mind. As a boy growing up in Ireland, he spent his formative years enjoying the rolling green hills and the backyard gardens. The form, the beauty, the pattern, and the structure of the objects he saw daily inspired sensual and experiential responses that proved to be of great importance to him. They are what lead not only to his conversion, but also to the majority of his literary corpus.

Lewis's early life mirrored many of his Irish contemporaries': attending boarding school and tutoring, writing letters, and smoking tobacco. He was a voracious reader from the time he learned to walk, and he grew up within a complex circle of friends and family. Like many of his fellow young men during the beginning of the 20th century, his schooling was temporarily interrupted when he was called to serve in World War I. After being injured, he was honorably discharged, and he again began his intellectual journey through Oxford. During his academic tenure, he gained a Triple First at Oxford (first-class honors in three distinct areas of study), then was a Tutor and Fellow at Oxford. Alongside his academic achievements, he wrote fiction. The story was always of

importance to Lewis, before and after his conversion to Christianity in 1931. Ever since his first prosaic work—*The Pilgrim's Regress*—was published, he never stopped writing till he died on the 22nd of November, 1963.

Lewis is known popularly for two main works, *The Chronicles of Narnia*—his septet of children's fantasy novels—and *Mere Christianity*—his apologetic defense of Christianity. He wrote and spoke endlessly during and after World War I, becoming a household name in Britain. He became the primary voice in British apologetics during the war, and gained a strong following of those who depended on him for some sort of hope for truth in that dark time. *Mere Christianity* came out of these broadcasts and propelled his career, giving him the visibility he needed to continue to produce more novels and non-fictional works. His once-ignored works of the past were now being brought to light and being used by Christian and non-Christian alike. His roles of social critic, amateur philosopher, Christian theologian, and creative novelist were all being appreciated, giving him bandwidth that stretched between reason and imagination. Alistar McGrath points out that “it is clear that the relationship between reason and imagination is of critical importance to Lewis,” therefore explaining the breadth of theological, fantastic, apologetic, and imaginative works in Lewis's corpus (McGrath 172).

Since he wrote on so many different topics, scholarship on Lewis is vast. The majority of authors in Lewis scholarship write on allegorical meaning and the theses and archetypes present in specific books or novels. Most authors choose one novel, or a couple of novels and do deep dives into what these books could possibly mean, viewed through various lenses. Some authors do take a general approach to the works, but still choose to have a particular lens by which they discern what each work might mean. For

example, Michael Ward chooses a planetary lens to view each *Chronicle*, and exhaustively considers Lewis's corpus with a "planetary theology." Jerry Root and Mark Neal in *The Surprising Imagination of C.S. Lewis* observe Lewis's works by analyzing what kind of imagination he is interacting with in each work.

This thesis attempts to use a holistic approach to Lewis's truth, including, as Ward did, all parts of Lewis's corpus—fiction, nonfiction, and letters. Lewis regularly chooses to portray his truth through an allegory contained in a fictional universe. He does so to de-mystify that truth by placing it inside a glass vessel: the story, to better view that truth. Other times he crafts children's stories that tell truth in a deeper manner than any adult's book could. Additionally, he uses abstract examples in his theological works to paint a portrait of truth. Through combining his theological works, his letters, and his fiction, we begin to see C.S. Lewis's masterful approach to truth-telling unfold. Lewis's work has the ability of enriching the reader's appreciation of literature. Through the cultivation of this greater appreciation for the art of the story and the purveyance of its value, Lewis becomes the quintessential truth-teller.

Lewis was a teacher at heart and in practice. He was known for his superlative speaking, and his lectures were always highly attended, even more so than those of his close friend J.R.R. Tolkien, whose lectures were rather poorly attended due to lackluster presentation (McGrath 179). Teaching was an art he never relinquished throughout his entire career. Moreover, through his literary group, The Inklings, he constantly critiqued and perfected his fellow friends and colleagues' creative works. His letters, too, served as tools of instruction, as he would push back on ideas he found faulty through opposition or encouragement in a new direction. Lastly, he taught as a Tutor and eventual Professor at

Oxford and then Cambridge, respectively. His entire adult life was engulfed in teaching, whether obviously from the lectern, or possibly more subtly through his personal relationships. It is therefore paramount to search through all his writings for the consistent truths he has lodged in his fictional works. This thesis proposes to reveal how Lewis shows these truths to be consistent throughout his fantastic works. Truths, to Lewis are propositions that exist outside of our personal thoughts or opinions about them. “Truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is,” so a scholarly approach requires someone to sculpt the reality which Lewis applies his truth upon (“Christian Apologetics” 66). This reality is seen in the worlds which he creates. No matter what happens with characters, plot, scenery, laws of nature, or science fiction, these virtues remain the same in all of his works, and they act within his reality in wondrous, rich ways.

In this thesis I will focus on five virtues that Lewis prominently teaches throughout his fiction. While it is easy enough to see some of these truths in his non-fiction and his letters, the focus of this thesis is on his fiction. Lewis deeply cherished the vehicle of imaginative fiction; one can expect that this is the place where he will most fully express his ideas, and where they will be the richest. The first of these overarching truths is that man is more than matter. Our lives, as we experience them, are not simply material. They include a supernatural state that coincides with a natural state to produce a certain kind of amphibious reality. Secondly, Lewis teaches that all people have a longing within them for something outside of themselves, and above the material experiences of day-to-day life. The third truth is the important distinction that exists between men and women. Lewis’s fiction teems with masculine and feminine archetypes, and his works are

improved by his endorsement of this literary tool. Fourth, Lewis reminds his readers of the importance of recognizing authority and submitting to the right authority. The background of all of his novels utilize a cosmic structure that exemplifies what happens when those obey, and what happens when those do not. Finally, Lewis teaches on the importance of friendship. We see this present in every facet of his life, in his fictional works, his letters, his lectures, his personal friends, and his non-fictional writings. Those who were close to him received letters from him as often as they asked—and possibly more. He never stopped writing, and he always expressed his gratitude for friendship to those he loved.

Analyzing all of Lewis's fictional works would require more pages than room available in this thesis, so particular books will receive more attention than others: particularly *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the Ransom Trilogy, his sci-fi trilogy. *Till We Have Faces* has had many papers written about it, so it does not require a microscopic view; however, it will be discussed briefly alongside fictional works like *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, and others. It is in these works that a reader can quickly see a parallel between what is made clear in his direct teaching, and what is creatively expressed in his "indirect" forms of teaching: fiction, letters, and poetry.

Some of the truths that are found in Lewis's fictional works have not been explicitly expressed in his non-fiction. For example, Lewis has clear male and female archetypes that can be seen practically everywhere. However, he does not spend a large amount of time in his non-fiction explaining why he considers this gender distinction to be of so much importance. Friendship, on the other hand, has more than forty pages

dedicated to it in *The Four Loves*, one of the last books Lewis wrote before his death. For those truths that are not explicit externally, the sheer volume of its presence within his fictional works is the criteria for it being considered an essential truth that Lewis is teaching. As each chapter progresses, the reader can notice how these truths present themselves uniquely in different facets of Lewis's fictional reality: characters, setting, and time, for example. Lewis uses these literary building blocks to extol what he desires through the creative medium of the Story. This thesis attempts to provide some insight into how Lewis creatively uses such building blocks to give a novel what it needs to truly reach and teach his readers.

I: Humans are Amphibians: more than matter

To Lewis, it is an inescapable truth that the world around us, even though felt through our senses, is more than material. Often, Lewis points to times where his characters have an experience that seems to transcend the five senses. These are explained using the words of sensual experience but are described in many of Lewis's works as being above or outside the senses. Most sci-fi stories include many such beings with powers or abilities or forms that are different than anything we could imagine in the "real world." When describing how humans perceive these disturbances in reality, the senses are used. Even though fictional, when unreal beings are created and put into these stories, the characters see them as a creature that is normal in that fictional world. This is where Lewis departs from most. In his stories, he makes the seemingly impossible, or the fictional beings, perceptible in a different way. Lewis himself seems to have a hard time describing these feelings and experiences because he believes that ordinary language cannot describe them. One such example is a moment in *Perelandra* where Dr. Ransom sees Oyarsa, a character who is a manifestation of God's traits: "He never could say what it was like. The merest whisper of light—no, less than that, the smallest diminution of shadow—was traveling along the uneven surface of the groundweed; or rather some difference in the look of the ground, too slight to be named in the language of the five senses..." (*Silent Planet* 118). These experiences do not always include spiritual or fictional beings, as Lewis's unique descriptions include natural experiences of beauty and even tastes. Many fruits and tastes on the other worlds that Dr. Ransom visits seem to have a supernatural quality about them: "It was, of course, a taste, just as his thirst and

hunger had been thirst and hunger. But then it was so different from every other taste that it seemed mere pedantry to call it a taste at all. It was like the discovery of a totally new *genus* of pleasures, something unheard of among men, our of all reckoning, beyond all covenant” (*Silent Planet* 37). Lewis’s form of story indicates that these fruits don’t taste so splendid because they are supernatural fruits. He is inferring that certain sensual experiences (if you can call them that) seem to go beyond what we can describe with mere words. It is “like having a new sense” (*Perelandra* 92) that has the ability to perceive those things that we all feel but can’t always put to words. When Ransom is called to trial on Malacandra (Mars) to meet the Oyarsa, or lesser God, of the planet, he describes his character’s experience encountering it: “Like a silence spreading over a room full of people, like an infinitesimal coolness on a sultry day, like a passing memory of some long-forgotten sound or scent, like all that is stillest and smallest and most hard to seize in nature, Oyarsa passed between his subjects and drew near and came to rest” (*Silent Planet* 118). We are taught through Ransom’s experience, as he is barely able to describe his sensual reception, we are called to remember those times in our lives when the same feeling of slight incomprehension occurred.

There is a type of character Lewis discusses that falls under this topical umbrella: The Materialist Magician. There are primarily three sources where this character appears: *The Screwtape Letters*, the Ransom trilogy, and *The Magician’s Nephew*. In “Letter 7” of *The Screwtape Letters*, head demon Screwtape writes to his nephew and novice demon Wormwood regarding the materialist magician who can be identified as “the man, not using, but veritably worshipping what he vaguely calls ‘Forces’ while denying the existence of ‘spirits’” (*Screwtape* 41). Lewis is not particularly fond of this kind of

person, and it usually constitutes either a mischievous character or a downright villain in his books. In *Perelandra*, the infamous Professor Weston is considered a material magician. He was introduced in *Out of the Silent Planet*, where he was one of the main villains attempting to take over Mars (Malacandra). Weston is one of the world's leading physicists and has begun a quest to immortalize humanity through interplanetary colonization and the destruction of the indigenous populations. His "materialist magician" leanings become clear in the early pages of *Out of the Silent Planet*: "We have learned how to jump off the speck of matter on which our species began; infinity, and therefore perhaps eternity, is being put into the hands of the human race" (*Silent Planet* 29). Weston does not believe in "God" or "spirits," but he has come up with a way to explain his worldview without verbally assenting to their existence. This, from the Head Demon Screwtape's perspective, is exactly where the devil wants him.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, the male protagonist, Digory, has a run-in with his uncle Andrew. He is a mad scientist that tricks Digory and his friend Polly into going to another world with the rings he has created. In the second chapter of the book a strong correlation between Uncle Andrew and Weston is made obvious when the former says "men like me, who possess hidden wisdom are freed from common rules just as we are cut off from common pleasures. Ours, my boy, is a high and lonely destiny" (*Magician* 21). In likeness, Weston believes he has become a fit receptacle for the "Life Force" that will prepare him for continuing the human race *ad infinitum*. He has a "high and lonely" destiny as well. He tries to semantically twist religious diction to justify his submission to the evil forces: "'Your Devil and your God,' said Weston, 'are both pictures of the same Force. Your heaven is a picture of the perfect spirituality ahead; your hell a picture of the

urge or *nisus* which is driving us on to it from behind...The next stage of emergent evolution, beckoning us forward, is God; the transcended stage behind, ejecting us, is the Devil” (*Perelandra* 80-81). By giving a new definition to Devil and God, he justifies his actions, which are now, by his framework, amoral, and necessary. This kind of character is a dangerous picture of what happens when someone tries to semantically slither around the reality of a true combination of the natural and supernatural.

The eighth letter of *Screwtape* written to his nephew contains an important statement that has a resonance pervading throughout practically every single work of Lewis: “Humans are amphibians” (*Screwtape* 45); in other words, humans are two-fold spiritual beings who have two habitats: the natural world, and the supernatural world. This theme is perhaps his most central theme of all. Albeit an amoral one (at first), this theme is the springboard for creating landscapes capable of containing his moralistic framework—the marriage of the natural and supernatural; material and immaterial; “spirit and animal” (*Screwtape* 45). This was not an easy theme to express, and Lewis’s primary problem “lay in the difficulty of bringing within the range of normal human perceptions what really was outside normal experience” (Shumaker 52). As Shumaker eloquently posits, “It was necessary somehow to bridge the gap between a non-sensory reality and the limitations of normal sense organs” (Shumaker 53). His solution to this problem was to create a space fiction novel: *Out of the Silent Planet*, followed by the sequel *Perelandra*. Both books use a protagonist—Ransom—who is a normal human. However, he has the same perceptive tools as the readers do, so the reader gets to somehow experience the extraterrestrial life on Mars and Venus just as Ransom does, and “in due time attention could be recalled to the Earth [in *That Hideous Strength*], which would

then appear to the reader's sharpened perceptions in its true character, as the battleground of a fight to the death between good and evil" (Shumaker 53). In addition, Lewis uses himself as the narrator in the story. That is, the narrator is telling you the story that he heard from Ransom's mouth once he came back to earth. This point of view also makes the reader feel more drawn into this reality that Lewis created on the other two planets. Keeping in mind that the Ransom Trilogy was published before *The Chronicles of Narnia*, he has created his image of reality within a set of novels, and the stage is set for his latter works: he can then use the complex truth of a bi-reality to teach the rest of his truths that will be discussed further below, beginning with the Chronicles.

The Chronicles of Narnia hardly need more praise, as they have made a notable impact on the world of children's literature since they were published between 1950 and 1956. Although the Narnia novels do not necessarily accomplish the same bi-reality that the Ransom Trilogy does—or at least not quite as explicitly, since the characters in the Narnia are either in the real world or Narnia, not both at the same time—the framework of the setting still points to an amphibious state. "A central theme in the Chronicles of Narnia is that of a door into another world—a threshold that can be crossed, allowing us to enter a wonderful new realm and explore it... we are at present on the 'wrong side' of the door that leads into this world" (McGrath 269). Every Narnia novel (excluding *The Horse and His Boy*) has characters from the material world of Earth as we know it, who enter into the spiritual, fictional yet real, world of Narnia. This order is no accident, as Lewis finds great meaning in the world that seems to engage our imagination. He finds that when we are transported to places that embolden and expand our imagination, we can truly learn. So, Narnia accomplishes a dual purpose. Not only do Lewis's characters

benefit from entering into this world, but the reader also benefits since we are, by proxy, experiencing the invigoration of imagination that the kids also feel in that world.

Spectating encounters of applied truth through the experience of fictional characters is perhaps one of the most helpful experiences one can have. As Lewis himself said, “one of the functions of art [is] to present what the narrow and desperately practical perspectives of real life exclude” (*On Stories* 13). As such, the children learn spiritual truths; it can be postulated that the children’s time spent in Narnia represents the spiritual aspect of their lives in a way that real life would not permit. When in Narnia, they are ageless, timeless, beyond materiality, in the infinite space of Lewis’s fiction. This could be the case because the children come back to earth the same age. They are learning truths that they have in their mind when they come back, but not in an aged body. The Spiritual world is, in Lewis’s mind, infinite, so why do the children have to obey the laws of time of the material world? They grew in some way in their souls, without growing in age.

The existence of the amphibian human allows for Lewis to explain the complex intertwining of the physical and the spiritual within time. Lewis (speaking as Screwtape) somewhat philosophically describes the human state as such: “As spirits they belong to the eternal world, but as animals they inhabit time. This means that while their spirit can be directed to an eternal object, their bodies, passions, and imaginations are in continual change, for to be in time means to change” (*Screwtape* 45). This “directing to an eternal object” is the entire theme of *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, and Lewis elaborates what it would look like for a being to be completely “directed to an eternal object” clearly in many characters in his works.

Not only does Lewis use his setting to show a bi-reality, but also his characters. Namely, Dr. Ransom—the protagonist of the first two books of the Ransom Trilogy and a main character in the third—embodies a character fully given to the eternal object of God. Dr. Elwin Ransom, University of Cambridge professor of philology, doesn't seem to have anything unique about himself that would make him a star-studded protagonist, but that changes quickly. By the end of the first novel, he has traveled across Mars tasked by an invisible figure to defend that world against Weston and Devine, the two antagonists of the story. However, Ransom still understands his place as a simple man: “Don't imagine I've been selected to go to Perelandra because I'm anyone in particular” (*Perelandra* 22). He is being called to fight a spiritual battle, but as a physical man. The narrator finds it hard to believe that the spiritual battles described in the Bible could be literal battles, but Ransom laughingly corrects him, and reminds him that they can be one in the same sometimes (*Perelandra* 21-22). When he arrives back from his trip to Venus, in the sequel, *Perelandra*, the narrator recalls: “One thing is certain, that he came back from Venus even more changed than he had come back from Mars” (*Perelandra* 30). When the final book, *That Hideous Strength* rolls around, we see Ransom turned into the Director, the supreme leader of the Christian group that is fighting against the dark powers of evil (the N.I.C.E.) to save the world (or at least Britain) from destruction. When Jane, one of the protagonists, sees Ransom, she speaks constantly of his other-worldliness, his appearance that always seems to be glowing in some way, and a body that paradoxically defies both youth and age. The nature of his body has become one attuned to both the physical, since he is still a man, and the spiritual, as he is constantly listening and obeying the wholly spiritual God (a feature appropriately present in the un-

fallen Eve type, the Green Lady, in *Perelandra*). Ransom will be discussed further in chapter IV, for there is thematic overlap between the idea of being both spiritual and physical, and also being submitted to higher authority.

II: Sehnsucht (longing or joy)

“At present, we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door...some day, God willing, we shall get in” (*The Weight of Glory* 16-17).

Although the present can be a beautiful time with pleasures abounding, there seems, in Lewis’s mind, to be a longing planted in every heart which is greater than present pleasures and concerns. Similar to his beliefs on the supernatural pairing of flesh and spirit mentioned in the previous section, *sehnsucht*, encompasses a belief that our hearts have a hole that is only filled when looking outward, above, and forward. This theme of *sehnsucht*, or longing, is one of the most pervasive themes in all of Lewis’s works. Everywhere you look in his books, fictional or not, his characters, book titles, themes, and settings exude a feeling of longing, joy, and expectation of something greater. Scott Oury posits that “this continuing experience of Joy became the most important experience of his life” (Oury 3).

Lewis himself experienced what he called *sehnsucht* a few times in his life. These experiences, usually accompanied by an imaginative experience, are what brought him the most joy in life and were a central part of his theology and therefore his fiction. His first experience occurred around the summer of 1905 at his home, “Little Lea” in Down, Ireland. As he smelled a flower, he longed for an old house that his father had rented a few years earlier (McGrath 18). When the feeling had vanished (almost immediately) he was left “longing for the longing that had just ceased” (*Surprised by Joy* 6). Another time, Lewis experienced a longing for “the Idea of Autumn” (*Joy* 17) after reading

Squirrel Nutkin by Beatrix Potter. The last of his childhood experiences of intense longing came when he was reading Longfellow's translation of a poem by Esaias Tegner. Lewis says after he read it, "I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described" (*Joy* 18). The experience of longing and hoping for were feelings he thought were central to the human experience. In fact, he even put forward in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy* that "the central story of my life is about nothing else" (*Joy* 17-18).

Lewis's perspective on longing becomes evident in almost every single work of his when studied with the proper lens. In his 1941 sermon "The Weight of Glory," Lewis speaks of a certain feeling that words are inadequate to describe. The vehicle, language, we employ to describe this thing always falls short. These desires are hard to pin down, and that is exactly what Lewis tries to communicate in one of his sermons:

"The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have not yet visited" (*The Weight of Glory*).

In *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis's masterful re-telling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche, Lewis plants longing in the heart of Psyche, the beautiful young daughter of the King of Glome. She dreams of a castle on a hill that will one day be hers with a loving husband. It is no accident that she sees a castle on a hill, for as McGrath reveals, "The low, green line of the Castlereagh Hills... came to be a symbol of something distant and unattainable..., distant objects of desire, marking the end of his known world" (16). This semiautobiographical detail snuck into his myth gives the reader a reason to believe that it is longing, *sehnsucht*, that drives the maturation of Psyche, and Lewis as well. We see how important this longing is because every main character in *Till We Have Faces* longs for something. Orual, Psyche's oldest sister, longs for love. She has none of it because of her ugliness, so she longs and seeks for the love she feels she will never have, at the cost of her family and closest friends. Redival, the middle daughter, longs for a husband. But, as a foil to Psyche, she wants a man with money and looks and fame. She wants physical security, to be taken care of in a way that her sister Orual never offered, so she has a stilted longing. Psyche longs for the truest form of love, a pure, unadulterated way of life that reaches beyond the immediate circumstances of her kingdom and family. Lewis teaches us that all humans long for something, but he shows us through Psyche that only the true longing for joy, or *sehnsucht*, brings about vibrant life: "Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longing? The longing for home? For indeed it now feels not like going, but like going back. All my life the god of the Mountain has been wooing me" (*Faces* 76).

Lewis continues teaching this idea in the acclaimed second book of the Narniad: *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. As Aslan's name was spoken, a special feeling

was imbued within each of the children. “Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer” (*Lion* 64-65). Lewis encourages his readers to remember “such longing is in itself the very reverse of wishful thinking: it is more like thoughtful wishing” (*Narrative Poems* 4).

Lewis devoted an entire book to longing, but it did not strike readers in the way some of his more acclaimed works have. *The Pilgrim’s Regress* was a response/addition to John Bunyan’s 1678 spiritual allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in which Lewis makes his protagonist, John, travel on a journey to a place he is longing for. The island he is searching for is the symbol of longing, and is what drives John for the entire novel. Although there is more to discuss on that book than can be contained in this study of Lewis’s fiction, it is important to note the what can be drawn from Lewis’s application of longing into spiritual life.

Lewis’s conversion to Christianity in his early thirties was a product of longing. Since his early years he longed for what Scott Oury calls “the object itself” (3), and he never stopped longing for all his days. Although Oury provides a detailed discussion of such a theme, a straightforward description is appropriate here: Lewis was in search of something outside of himself, something that was “sheerly objective, . . . the naked Other” (*Joy* 221). He primarily began to find this Joy and its meaning by reading. Three books, Macdonald’s *Phantastes*, Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, and Alexander’s *Space, Time and Deity* guided him out of corrupted experiences of joy through sex and magic—something he dabbled in as a young man—into “the very quiddity of each thing, to rejoice in its

being...what it was" (*Joy* 199). For Lewis, few things gave him more "spiritual healing, of being washed, as to read G. MacDonald" (*Letters to Arthur Greeves* 388-389). Lewis referred to MacDonald as "my master" and was influenced by him almost as much as by his religion. Lewis arrived at this realization through the corruption of the longing in his early life and the pain it wrought. Similarly, his character Orual arrives at her eventual surrender to the true God at the end of *Till We Have Faces* only by the suffering she experienced early in her life through her insolence, jealousy, and hatred. The curious autobiographical details of some of Lewis's characters is no accident. He had no choice but to express in literature what he had experienced in life. His conversion was "a progression from *experience* to realization" (Oury 6). Once he realized his longing was attached to the greatest of all beings, the God of the universe, his love for all things imaginative did not stop, but burst forth with overflowing rapidity. He wrote many books after his conversion, all containing the image that Psyche had when she was young: "When I'm big,' she said, 'I will be a great, great queen, married to the greatest king of all, and he will build me a castle of gold and amber up there on the very top'" (*Faces* 26).

Sehnsucht is also expressed in *Perelandra* through a combination of theological conversation and natural exploration of Venus (Perelandra), seen especially in the form of characters and setting. When Ransom first lands on the planet, he describes his initial sensory reaction to his new environment: "The smells in the forest were beyond all that he had ever conceived. To say that they made him feel hungry and thirsty would be misleading; almost, they created a new kind of hunger and thirst, a longing that seemed to flow over from the body and soul and which was a heaven to feel" (*Perelandra* 37).

While Ransom rides the waves on his Perelandrian marine companion, he contemplates

his longing for the floating islands that he had just before left behind for the Fixed Land—the only part of Perelandra that is ‘fixed’ into the ocean floor. Ransom, upon seeing the Fixed Land, thought to himself that it would bring him comfort, as the land was as similar as it could be to the land of Tellus (Earth). However, he quickly wished he had never set eyes on it, for he awoke with a horrible feeling in his spine and a dark stillness over the atmosphere, reminding him of the cold rock which he called home: Earth (*Perelandra* 84). Ransom, upon getting closer to a floating island, arrives at this thought: “The cord of longing which drew him to the invisible isle seemed to him at that moment to have been fastened long, long before his coming to Perelandra, long before the earliest times that memory could recover in his childhood, before birth, before the birth of man himself, before the origins of time” (88). This passage is obviously quite dramatic, and for good reason: the narrator speaks on the importance of longing, and how potent of an experience this emotion is to the human life, taught through his characters. Lewis implanted in Ransom the same longing he said was planted in him by God, therefore giving readers a glimpse into his personal convictions while teaching his readers what he thought was the best way to live.

In perhaps the clearest quote of Lewis on this topic, we understand the basis behind this truth: “What does not satisfy when we find it, was not the thing we were desiring” (*The Pilgrim’s Regress* 128). In combining the joy of longing with the actual object of desire, we begin to see where Lewis wants us to be: locating what we are truly desiring, not a falsehood, then enjoying the object for what it is, not just what we subjectively think about it. Ransom described his longing as something before time. Did he create this desire, or was it placed inside of him? Lewis believed that God had placed a

desire within our hearts for Him, but sin has made that once-easy connection to God much more difficult. As the Book of Ecclesiastes states: “[God] has put eternity into man’s heart” (Eccl 3:11b). The desires we have at their root come from God, but how those desires manifest themselves do not always satisfy us. And that, in Lewis’s theology, is an indication that that object does not really contain the quality you were searching for all along. It is a fake, a copy, an imposter. The false subverts *sehnsucht* and leads us away from our true desire. When we follow the true longing we desire and are content when we find it, we have arrived at the true object of our heart’s desire.

III: Men and Women are Beautifully Different

Lewis is not too often misunderstood. His claims are clear, and his messages are, albeit hidden, not deceptive. Scott Oury claims “If he was anything, C.S. Lewis was the essence of clarity” (Schakel 2). As Lewis writes, he creates a world, places the reader inside, and begins to read them a story that takes them along a cerebral path of their choosing. He leaves signposts along the way that mark the themes and truths he is planting inside his characters and inside the atmosphere of the story. This is why so many people have gained so much from his writing. You enjoy a story, but it is not an empty one: “Lewis does not demand that his readers be clever; but if they are clever, he rewards them” (Schakel 61).

However, although he is clear on many subjects, he is most misunderstood (and most disliked) for his views on gender. This subject has become a hot button issue for many in the present century, and it brings along with it much baggage. Yet, he expresses very clear views on this matter. Gender was so important that he weaved this theme throughout his sci-fi series.

One of the claims leveled against Lewis was that he lacked women membership in his and Tolkien’s literary group, The Inklings (McGrath 178). It must first be noted here that in the 1930s, Oxford was a male-dominant school. However, there were a few female-only colleges, namely St. Hilda’s College, Somerville College, and Lady Margaret Hall, that had some emerging female scholars. Knowing this, it might be odd that no women were ever listed in the names of The Inklings. There are, however, many compelling explanations for Lewis’s nuanced views on women and men.

First, the fact of female absence does not directly correlate to academic sexism, for Lewis himself had many female literary friendships, listed by McGrath: “Katherine Farrer, Ruth Pitter, Sister Penelope, Dorothy L. Sayer... Janet Spens,” and many more (178). He appreciated their contributions to scholarship. In fact, with regard to Janet Spens, Lewis offered a “detailed appreciation of her *Spenser’s Faerie Queene*” (McGrath 178). When Lewis spearheaded the contributory essay collection for the late Charles Williams, he invited Dorothy Sayers—one of only four authors invited, and the only non-Inkling—to contribute. Another important defense against the claim that he had an aversion to female academics is the Socratic Club. This club was started in 1942 by Stella Aldwinckle, the Oxford Pastorate’s chaplain, in order for “Christian students [to] find intellectual engagement and reassurance, rather than bland spiritual platitudes” (McGrath 250). Aldwinckle, needing a don to take responsibility for the organization, went straight to the rising apologetic star at Oxford: C.S. Lewis. “An interesting aspect of the Socratic Club has passed unnoticed. Its members were primarily women.” (McGrath 252). In fact, out of the “164 members...109 were from Oxford’s five all-women colleges” (252). If Lewis was indeed not interested in the intellectual matters of women, or did not consider their ideas capable of bearing any fruit, he never would have considered sponsoring a heavily-female collegiate group.

Additionally, Lewis had an encounter with a young Catholic philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe, during her Socratic Club seminar. The subject of her seminar was a critique on Lewis’s third chapter of *Miracles*: “The Self-Contradiction of the Naturalist.” As a result of her critique of his work, “Lewis rose to Anscombe’s criticism, as if she were a kind of philosophical Inkling, and rewrote his argument in the light of her

criticisms” (McGrath 254). In the field of academics and literary criticism, Lewis was accustomed to criticizing and being criticized, no matter who it came from.

Even though Lewis exemplified his gratitude for input from both men and women on multiple occasions, he still thought it was important to make a clear distinction between men and women on certain matters. He makes it clear in *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength* that the roles, attitudes, desires, and functions of men and women are vastly different. He brings forward a statement in *Perelandra* that goes as follows: “Everyone must sometimes have wondered why in nearly all tongues certain inanimate objects are masculine and others feminine” (*Perelandra* 200). This phenomenon in language is not odd to Lewis, but rather reassuring--a cultural acceptance that seems obvious throughout all of history. Exploring that observation, Lewis embodies the idea of gender and sex in his sci-fi series. Perhaps most intriguingly, Lewis creates an overarching narrative structure in the Ransom Trilogy that invokes gender. If a reader simply read the storyline of the first book in his Ransom Trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*, they might overlook any masculine theme, but reading the series as a whole reveals the scheme. On the surface, the first book is an interplanetary Lewis and Clark expedition. Ransom arrives on Mars with no clear objective, but recognizes there is evil afoot as his captives are trying to sacrifice him to a god they believe is in need of a human sacrifice. Ransom learns the language of the people, explores their culture, and eventually meets this god, who is far different than his captives, Weston and Devine, ever thought he would be like. The second book, *Perelandra*, documents Dr. Ransom’s return to the heavens, this time to Venus (called Perelandra). There he once again encounters his enemy—Weston—but now in a spiritual battle of temptation and truth. This book,

although primarily a conversation reminiscent of the Garden of Eden between Weston, Ransom, and The Green Lady, exudes a feminine environment. Why do these two books have this foundation? To better understand Lewis's plan, a slight detour is required.

Lewis was a unique writer and quite a talented one at that, and he was not without his literary heroes and influences. He obsessed over Dante, Chaucer, Milton, and other poets of old, as he saw beauty in their works. Not only was his literary fire kindled by celebrated writers, but also by ideas. Lewis was enamored with the pre-Copernican understanding of the cosmos. The old cosmos was geocentric, operating under the now-false understanding that the heavenly realms (planets) revolved around the earth, not the sun. Each of these planets had a particular environment that the people of the time believed influenced the air and the circumstances on the earth (which Lewis calls Tellus). When Lewis decided to plant Ransom on Mars, he did not just want that to be the setting. He planted Ransom there because he wanted to "communicate the Martial spirit, for 'What's the excuse for locating one's story on Mars unless "Martianity" is through and through used?" (Ward 80). The masculinity of the planet and god Mars was something believed at the core by the people of old; Lewis wanted to capture that idea and integrate it in a space exploration teeming with Martial influence.

In contrast, Venus, the "Queen of Cypris" is a feminine planet, implanting a picture of beauty, abundance, and pleasure upon those who contemplate upon her (Ward 164). *Perelandra* is not only set on the planet of Venus, but is also filled with the traditionally feminine influence of Venus by having the main focus of the book be upon the female character Tinidril, who is an obvious type of Eve, and inserting Venusian

influence on the language, the foliage, and even the repetitive use of breast-like objects (which is mirrored in *Out of the Silent Planet* with phallic imagery).

That Hideous Strength, Lewis's longest fictional work and the finale of the Ransom trilogy, ties together the male and female structure of the previous two stories. This theme is revealed both at the beginning and at the end of the book. The book begins with a quote from the female protagonist of the story, Jane, as she recalls what the director of her wedding said: "Matrimony was ordained thirdly...for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other" (*Strength* 11). Matrimony is the first word of the book—the joining of the male and female has begun. Throughout this novel we see Jane and Mark battle insecurity, pride, doubt, self-sufficiency, and selfishness as they both try to subjectively arrive at their understanding of what marriage is—it is a quasi-love story. However, romance is by no means the stated storyline; instead good is pitted against evil as the bad guys are trying to outlast the good guys. The fairy-tale, fantasy structure remains secure. However, it can be argued that the ups and downs, the victories and losses, the confidence and doubt, can all be symbols for marriage. Jane and Mark begin their story together but apart. They spend the rest of the book apart physically and emotionally. However, they end the book together mentally, physically, and sexually. Mark had to learn what it meant to be a man and a Christ-follower. Jane had to learn to let go of her pride and allow obedience to pave the way to Christian love (*Strength* 145). To continue the theme of last chapter, the desires and longings of Mark and Jane are fully satisfied first through their understanding of God, found through Ransom, the symbolic Jesus Christ, and then secondly in each other as husband and wife, now in a marriage relationship that is founded upon truth, not selfishness.

Lewis's characters say many things about marriage and sex in *That Hideous Strength* that seem to be drawing attention away from the storyline of the book. At first, it appears that Lewis does not know what his priorities are: his dispensing of marital wisdom or his fantasy world where the N.I.C.E. is trying to take over mankind. However, assuming that Lewis cannot do both in tandem is a false assumption. We have arrived in the place Lewis sought to take us all along: the reader is forced to realize that Lewis has been trying to pull us towards truth through his story. His story is the vehicle by which he teaches his readers. He was, after all, by trade, a teacher. Even though he can be blatant with comments here and there, he saves his choicest truths to be seen only by the strong of heart. Only by strong inquiry, humility, and study can a reader begin to see the parallels that Lewis has constructed. The pride of the N.I.C.E. matches the marital pride of Jane, the false view of the universe of the N.I.C.E. matches Mark's false view of marriage. The villains, although providing a target that readers can shoot at when trying to find out what Lewis does not like about society, also give a reason for his two main protagonists, Jane and Mark, to take a painful journey to figure out the problems they bring to their union. Lewis contained many bifurcations within his trilogy, the marriage of the sexes being one of them.

The dichotomy of sex in this series is important because Lewis is passively showing the reader—whether they know it or not—that a masculine or feminine influence on an environment helps constructively teach the maxims. Not only are things and people masculine or feminine, but also ideas. Certain truths can sometimes be better taught within the influence of femininity or masculinity. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Ransom is fighting against two men who are trying to sacrifice him to a supposedly evil,

hungry god. To Lewis, it did not sit well to place this story in a lovely floral garden with bulbous fruit. Instead, he placed it in a world whose water “reminded him somehow of the water that he has seen shooting up under the impact of shells in pictures of naval battles” (*Silent Planet* 44). To teach the story of temptation towards selfish beauty, he naturally chooses a beautiful place, “the planet of love” where “the very names of green and gold...are too harsh for the tenderness, the muted iridescence, of that warm, maternal, delicately gorgeous world” (*Perelandra* 32). Naturally, he chooses an adaptation of the Garden of Eden.

In conclusion, it cannot be forgotten that Lewis could be a jokester occasionally, and especially regarding how men and women behave towards one another. While important to the balance of life and the sexes, gender could be quite humorous, and Lewis obviously took great delight in it. Take this excerpt from *That Hideous Strength* as an example:

“But why should they quarrel?” asked Jane.

“Different methods, my dear. Men can’t *help* in a job, you know. They can be induced to do it: not to help while you’re doing it. At least, it makes them grumpy.”

“The cardinal difficulty,” said MacPhee, “in collaboration between the sexes is that women speak a language without nouns. If two men are doing a bit of work, one will say to the other, ‘Put this bowl inside the bigger bowl which you’ll ding on the top shelf of the green cupboard.’ The female for this is, ‘Put that in the other one in there.’ And then if you ask them, ‘in where?’ they say,

‘in *there*, of course.’ There is consequently a phatic hiatus.” He pronounced this so as to rhyme with “get *at* us.”

“There’s your tea now,” said Ivy Maggs, “and I’ll go and get you a piece of cake, which is more than you deserve. And when you’ve had it you can go upstairs and talk about nouns for the rest of the evening.”

IV: Look Up, Not Straight Ahead

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, from,
Office, and custom, in all line of order
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd
Amidst the other; whose med'cinable eye
Corrects the influence of evil planets
(*Troilus and Cressida* I, iii, 85-92)

Submission, albeit a loaded term in post-modernity, is a repeated theme throughout Lewis's fiction. Amidst his Christian theology, Plato-astronomical love, and fantastical universes, Lewis "teaches by example" in the area of hierarchal governance, leadership, and submission by allowing this theme to be present, even though hidden, in practically every work of fiction he wrote. The characters succeed well when they listen to those who are given the office of administration in the chain, or those who have been charged to lead them; they do not successfully operate off on their own. When Lewis became a Christian, "he began to realize there was a deeper order, grounded in the nature of God, which could be discerned—and which, once, grasped, made sense of culture, history, science, and above all, [his] acts of literary creation" (McGrath 158). How someone lives when they do not have the right vision, and then how they live when they

do, is “best seen in his late work *Till We Have Faces* (1956)” (McGrath 158). We will begin there.

This tale is set in a time period apropos for such a thematic structure: a kingdom ruled by a heartless king with a people following a ruthless goddess. The kingdom of Glome is a sad kingdom that is led by the selfish, fearful, and greedy King Trom. He is presented to the readers as the reason for why the two blood sisters are who they are. Through the bad leadership of the king, his two daughters grow up not knowing love. Redival, the youngest, chooses to chase after romantic fantasies, hoping the men she finds will bring her what she seeks. Orual, the eldest sister and the narrator of the novel, becomes calloused and lonely; she is a “craver” (*Faces* 348). This was not just because of her father; she was seen as ugly from her childhood by her kingdom. However, her father was the one who had been clear with her on many accounts that her sister, and then later, Psyche, her stepsister, were far more beautiful than she. How is Orual supposed to “look up” to her father when all she would see are eyes of regret or disgust and shame at her birth? Although this theme is not obvious, for there are many more flagrant themes that could be covered in this work, like false love, selfishness, and trust, it is important to note its presence, and how it acts as a catalyst for the downfall of all of the main characters.

In particular, Orual represents a character who not only did not receive the care and love from the one above her, her superior, but she also arrogantly placed herself above one she was not meant to govern: her sister, Psyche. The fiendish control and maddening jealousy for Psyche’s attention and love turned Orual into the one she hated: her father. So we see that if one link in the hierarchical chain rusts, the rust spreads. How is Orual supposed to redeem these vicious qualities she has? By looking up to the true

God, Lewis says. And instead of coming with words, come with yourself, penitent. In the final pages of *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis paints a picture of the redemption of Orual as she speaks of the gods in conclusion: “Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words, to be led out to battle against other words. Long did I hate you, long did I fear you. I might—” (*Faces* 351). Although this seems somber diction, Orual has arrived at peace. Ultimate peace in fact, as she died after that last word. She died with joy in her heart as she was reconciled with her Father, the one she never felt loved by.

The Narnian corpus, commonly known as the Narniad, bursts at the seams with kings, queens, princes, obedience, and leadership. In fact, the whole world is built around one character who spoke the world into existence in *The Magician’s Nephew*: Aslan the Lion. It is obvious to the reader that Aslan is a literary type of Jesus. From book to book, Lewis depicts Aslan in different ways, based on the *logos* he is purveying. Each book, however, depicts him in the leadership position, the one who guides, and the one who instructs. A study of the hierarchy of leadership in the Narniad begins with one of the most poignant scenes in *Prince Caspian*: the meeting of Aslan and Lucy in the woods at night. Up till now, Aslan has been trying to lead Lucy to bring Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Trumpkin the Dwarf through Narnia, which none of them quite knew how to do since their return to Narnia brought them among a completely changed world. Twice, Lucy allows the party to overrule her urging to follow where Aslan was leading her, for no one in the party could see Aslan for their lack of faith. The children have clearly not learned their lesson from their first journey to Narnia. In the opening book of the Narniad, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, Lucy enters Narnia first, but upon her return is

mocked by Edmund and kindly dismissed by Peter and Susan when she tries to explain where she had been. The children could partly be excused for some of this, since she was describing a magical wonderland entered through a wardrobe. However, this time, the children could have trusted Lucy, for she had only been trustworthy. Most importantly, Lucy was appealing to the authority of Aslan, not herself: “Oh don’t be so stupid!” said Lucy. ‘Do you think I don’t know Aslan when I see him?’” (*Caspian* 126). Other than the Emperor-Beyond-The-Sea, Aslan is the highest in Narnian order of command. Even though Peter was crowned High King and given dominion over Narnia, he is submitted to Aslan at all times. Therefore, when his trusted sister and fellow Queen Lucy sees Aslan, Peter should take charge and reject passivity. But he does not. Instead, he listens to Edmund and agrees to put it to a vote. This of course fails since no one in the party other than Lucy can see Aslan. However, on her third sighting of Aslan, she is drawn in by him to the woods. A longer description is appropriate here for context to see how Aslan stands at the top of the hierarchy:

“Lucy,” he said, “we must not be here for long. You have work in hand, and much time has been lost today.”

“Yes, wasn’t it a shame?” said Lucy. “I saw you all right. They wouldn’t believe me. They’re all so—”

From somewhere deep inside Aslan’s body there came the faintest suggestion of a growl.

“I’m sorry,” said Lucy who understood some of his moods. “I didn’t mean to start slanging the others. But it wasn’t my fault anyway was it?”

The Lion looked straight into her eyes.

“Oh, Aslan,” said Lucy. “You don’t mean it was? How could I—I couldn’t have left the others and come up to you alone, how could I? Don’t look at me like that... oh well, I suppose I *could*. Yes, and it wouldn’t have been alone, I know, not if I was with you. But what would have been the good?”

Aslan said nothing.

“You mean,” said Lucy rather faintly, “that it would have turned out all right—somehow? But how? Please, Aslan! Am I not to know?”

“To know what *would* have happened, child?” said Aslan. “No. Nobody is ever told that.”

Aslan is referring to his role as omniscient Lord of Narnia: he knows what can happen, but Lucy is not privy to that information, for she was never meant to. She was asked to trust, and she did not. Just as Peter, Edmund, and Susan were all asked to trust Lucy, and they also declined. Lewis teaches us an important lesson by showing what happens when we appeal lower down the chain of command than we should. Selfishness and vain leadership exist when Aslan is excluded because he is the Creator of Order to Lewis. By nature, nothing can come to fruition without the creator. We see the Aslanian redemption of the children’s missteps a few pages later when Lucy finally convinces them, and Edmund begins to see Aslan, but just faintly: “He led them to the right of the dancing trees—whether they were still dancing nobody knew, for Lucy had her eyes on the Lion and the rest had their eyes on Lucy” (*Caspian* 144). At last, the children are

restored to the right order. Perhaps not the correct royal order, but the right order by faith, as Lucy exhibited the strongest faith.

Later in *Prince Caspian*, The old Kings and Queens meet up with Prince Caspian, who is currently the next rightful King to the throne of Narnia. Here we see a character deal with obedience as he should. He immediately welcomes Peter as “Your Majesty” and allows him to proceed with battle plans. This obedience bears fruit, for even though Prince Caspian is not a bad leader, Peter has experience behind him. With the help of Aslan, they defeat the Calormenes and take back Narnia.

The Silver Chair is the gloomiest book in the Narniad, for more reasons than we have room here. However, there is an important macro-theme running throughout the book. There are multiple realms in this book, more than any other chronicle. The book begins in Aslan’s country, which is to be seen as the perfect realm, “heaven” if you will. The rest of the book is set below his realm in Narnia, and the climax of the book in the Underworld. Just as in Dante’s *Inferno* where the narrator must go through Hell to make it to Paradise, the protagonists in *The Silver Chair* must sacrifice in the Underworld before they can return to the paradisaic realm of Aslan. Until Dr. Michael Ward wrote *Planet Narnia*, the pervasive theme of obedience in *The Silver Chair* was practically untouched by scholars. In his groundbreaking study on the cosmology behind not only *The Chronicles of Narnia* but also Lewis’s other fictional works, he asserts that: “Just as the Underworld can be retained if Narnia is put first, so, *mutatis mutandis*, Narnia can be retained if the Mountain of Aslan is put first” (Ward 137). There is an order to Narnia, and we are being reminded by Ward that Lewis wants us to remember the order of the universe. When Jill was sent to Narnia at the beginning of the book, she was told by

Aslan to remember four signs—“The first step is to remember” and “But first, remember, remember, remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night.” (*The Silver Chair* 26-27). If Jill keeps remembering what she has been instructed by Aslan, she and Eustace will succeed the Narnian realm and “live in the realm of Aslan.”

When the children enter the Underworld, they encounter a witch. A Socratic dialogue ensues in which the witch uses logic to pin down the children and Puddleglum (a Narnian marsh-wiggle, and the children’s guide). She tries to force them into forgetfulness by claiming that anything above them is just a copy of reality, which is the Underworld. She tries to make them forget Narnia—directly above them in the order of the Narnian universe—and replace it with the only reality she is willing to accept: the dull, dead Underworld: “You see? When you try to think out clearly what this *sun* must be, you cannot tell me. You can only tell me it is like the lamp. Your *sun* is a dream; and there is nothing in that dream that was not copied from the lamp. The lamp is the real thing; the *sun* is but a tale” (*Silver* 178). But once Puddleglum stamps out the enchanting fire and begins speaking, we see his memory of Narnia returning: “I’m going to live as much like a Narnian as I can even if there isn’t any Narnia” (*Silver* 182). This awakens each of their minds, and they kill the Queen of the Underworld with their swords even as she turns into a serpent and tries to kill Prince Rilian. The Narniad novels demonstrate many cases where characters benefit when they obey those placed above them—and are destroyed when they do not.

Less obvious, but still in support of his hierarchy, Lewis’s sci-fi series gives us a few characters who fully embody submission to higher authority and leadership. The first

is The Green Woman from *Perelandra*. One of the main characters of the second book in Lewis's sci-fi trilogy, The Green Woman embodies a type of Eve before the Fall: beautiful, innocent, sinless, unbroken. When Ransom meets her on Perelandra, he is mistaken for someone else, for the expression on her face hinted (and we find out later) that she was looking for someone else, her King. As Lewis describes it, her face was like "a calm which no storm had ever preceded" (*Perelandra* 49). When he says he "comes in peace" she responds with "What is 'peace'?" (50). Her innocence is made plain from the start of the novel, in order to establish the main theme of the book: a slough of conversations between the Green Woman, Ransom, and the Un-Man, who is really Weston from the previous book in a fully demonic state, attempting to strip her innocence from her, just as the serpent did in Genesis. We see, however, a characteristic remark of the Green Woman repeated over and over throughout the novel in response to most of the Un-Man's temptations. She assumes the correctness of Maleldil (God) and responds out of an obedience to him that rivals any of the rhetoric the Un-Man throws at her. It is a matter-of-fact response. When the Green Woman does not hear any words from Maleldil on a topic that the Un-Man is speaking on, she does not respond to him and waits on Maleldil's guidance. The Un-Man's logical quibbles hit a wall that he almost breaks through in the novel, save for the interference of Ransom, who at this point realizes what his name has foretold. He was to be a ransom to the future life that would be on Perelandra, if only he listens and acts upon what Maleldil tells him to do, even to death.

While the Green Woman represents full submission to good authority, the Un-Man is a stark foil. In chapter 7, Weston and Ransom have a highly theological conversation that goes on for almost the whole chapter. At the end of the conversation,

we see Weston commit himself fully to the demonic power that has taken over his soul: “I *am* the Universe. I, Weston, am your God and your Devil. I call that Force into me completely...” (*Perelandra* 82). After this episode, Weston drifts into becoming the Un-man: a wholly corrupted being, bent on poisoning, destroying, and killing; once “something that was and was not Weston” into a creature that was “beyond vice as the Lady was beyond virtue” (*Perelandra* 91, 95).

It is important to note that right before Weston asked evil into himself, Ransom came about to a point of agreement between himself and Weston: “That may be a point of contact. You say it’s a total commitment. That is, you’re giving up yourself. You’re not out for your own advantage. No, wait half a second. That *is* the point of contact between your morality and mine” (*Perelandra* 82). Weston, under the guise of accelerating the immortality of mankind, was really out to immortalize himself and poison all other worlds.

The reader is given two examples of complete servitude: one good, one evil. Ransom, as is evidenced in *That Hideous Strength*, the trilogy’s finale, becomes one high completely attuned to Maleldil, the fantastic representation of God in the series. He can at least verbally express that moral commitment of his to the Un-Man, who has given himself completely to the evil spirit. Weston does not do this unwillingly, and even understands his commitment: “Can you not even conceive a total commitment—a commitment to something which utterly overrides all our petty ethical pigeonholes?” (*Perelandra* 82) Ransom is on his way to being fully committed to Maleldil, but his commitment looks different than Weston’s: his ethical pigeonholes are not overridden by his commitment to God, they are perfected. Lewis himself expressed what this looks like

in a letter he wrote in 1953: “I became my own only when I gave myself up to Another” (*Letters* 251). As Weston is destroyed through his commitment to Evil, Ransom gains freedom through his commitment to God, a stark antithesis.

This hierarchy holds throughout Lewis’s works, and it provides a lens by which to understand the motives of the characters, and the outcomes of their decisions. There is, however, one place where a hierarchy simply cannot exist; a place where only the unity of equal persons is allowed: friendship.

V: Together We Stand, Alone We Fall

“In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own...” (*The Four Loves* 78)

A literary journey is rarely undertaken alone, and if it is begun alone, you can be confident it will not likely end alone. In literature, characters commonly experience the trials and triumphs of life with others. Tolkien’s Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas all experience the journey together as a brotherhood. Even though Alice entered Wonderland alone, she quickly is joined by important characters that generally stuck with her. The pilgrim Christian in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* began his journey utterly alone, but he was eventually joined by Faithful, and encouraged and built up by Evangelist, Piety, and Wisdom. Lewis’s works follow this mold and include groups of people—often complimentary, heterogeneous groups. This chapter is dedicated to exploring why Lewis considers community an important facet of life, and how he expresses that in his fictional works, and how his nonfiction informs them.

There are three sections in this chapter: Lewis’s personal life, his nonfictional writings on friendship, and his use of friendship to drive his character development and plot. The first section includes Lewis’s care for personal relationships and correspondence. Since he was a young boy, Lewis wrote letters to his neighboring friends and family when he could not visit them. This is a habit he continued ad nauseum until his death in 1963. Before he died, however, he hired a young man, Walter Hooper, to be

his personal secretary. After the turn of the millennium, Hooper edited Lewis's correspondence, which added up to over 3,500 pages (McGrath 368). The nexus of his mature friendships would be the literary group called The Inklings, of which he was a cornerstone, and which met at The Eagle and Child pub near Oxford. This group was essential to his joy and contentment during his Oxford years. Weekly attendees introduced new ideas, read them aloud, and then received praise or criticism from the other members, all over a few beers. Lewis shared a place in Oxford's faculty with another literary giant of the twentieth century, and one of Lewis's closest friends and fellow head of the Inklings during his time at Oxford: J.R.R. Tolkien.

Every Monday, J.R.R. Tolkien would stop by Lewis's room to share a drink and speak on endless amounts of things, ranging from faculty politics to new creative writing ideas (McGrath 175). Lewis read *The Hobbit* with Tolkien for four years before it was published in 1937. This was a common practice for the two of them, to critique each other's work. Their friendship helped inspire many of Lewis's creative ideas, and it helped his writing flourish under Tolkien's rather critical pen. Lewis's conviction of myth being of central importance for the creation of beautiful and meaningful literature was epitomized in Tolkien's Middle Earth, and the idea that Christianity was a *true* myth was Tolkien's suggestion, bringing Lewis to the doorstep of Christianity (McGrath 149). Lewis is strikingly appreciative of Tolkien's work, so much so that he wrote two essays critiquing (but really just praising) *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, with almost no negative comments, and almost all joy and happiness tied to his reading experience.

So, out of Lewis's friendship with Tolkien arose a literary group that has become legendary among literary circles: The Inklings. This group met every Thursday in

Lewis's room near Oxford, and every Tuesday at The Eagle and Child pub in St. Giles to talk about literature. "The group that gathered around Lewis and Tolkien acted as 'critical friends' for the discussion and development of works in progress" (McGrath 177). This was, like the time he spent with Tolkien on Mondays, one of the most joyful times for Lewis. He had the opportunity to critique his friends works and enjoy the pleasure of Christian community, without the fear of "Oxford formality." If it was a Tuesday meeting, Lewis's older brother "Warnie" would be handing out drinks while they discoursed; for Lewis, there was no "pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a fire" (*Letters* p. 197).

Lewis explores the theme of friendship directly in the fourth chapter of *The Four Loves*, one of the last books Lewis wrote before his death. In this treatise on love, the love of friendship is described to be "eminently spiritual" and the "sort of love one can imagine between angels" (*The Four Loves* p. 111). This chapter will be used to cross-reference Lewis's description of friendship in *The Four Loves* with his science-fiction description of a true group of friends in *That Hideous Strength: St. Anne's-on-the-Hill*.

Lewis believed that friendship groups had to freely come and go. Forced friendships were, to him, not friendships at all. In *That Hideous Strength*, Jane Studdock, the female protagonist of the story, is asked to join St. Anne's group of nestled-away Christians. She is told that if she doesn't choose them, the Enemy, the N.I.C.E., will take her because of her gift of prophecy. However, "she is invited freely to become one of the company at St. Anne's" (Purtill 93), even though they need her to stay one step ahead of the enemy's schemes. Camilla, one of the women at St. Anne's, does try to apply peer pressure when she says "It's all been arranged long before we were born. Don't spoil

everything. Do join us” (*Strength* 113). Her husband Denniston quickly rebukes her by saying that “Mrs. Studdock must come freely” because “The Head [Ransom]...wouldn’t like us to do that” (*Strength* 113). Not only is this interchange an example of the previous chapters teaching on submission to authority, but it is also a moment of honesty about Christian community. Jane was valued for what she brought to the table, but her friends knew that it would never be possible for them to be in true community if they force her in, like the N.I.C.E would have tried to do. They would have been no better than their enemy. Therefore, we see the antithetical nature of St. Anne’s and the N.I.C.E. through how they handle community.

As Jane arrives at the Manor at St. Anne’s, the haven for the Good in the story, a revealing scene begins, where Jane gets a glimpse into the natural beauty of many like-minded individuals living together in harmony, sharing the banter of true friendship:

As they entered the house they met Mrs. Maggs.

“What? Mrs. Studdock! Fancy!” said Mrs. Maggs.

“Yes, Ivy,” said Denniston, “and bringing great news. Things are beginning to move. We must see Grace at once. And is MacPhee about?”

He’s out gardening hours ago,” said Mrs. Maggs. “And Dr. Dimble’s gone in to College.” And Camilla’s in the kitchen. Shall I send her along?”

“Yes, do. And if you can prevent Mr. Bultitude from butting in—”

“That’s right. I’ll keep him out of mischief all right. You’d like a cup of tea, Mrs. Studdock, wouldn’t you? Coming by train and all that.”

Excluding Jane, seven characters are mentioned in just a handful of lines. As one reads this section, you cannot help but imagine Lewis's room, full of College men, with Warnie brewing hot tea while Lewis asks boisterously if anyone had brought anything to read this evening. The multitude of like-minded individuals living life together was such a joy of Lewis's that he had to make it the centerpoint of Good in his closing sci-fi novel. In addition, Lewis comically describes his notion of sexually-separated friendships a bit later in the novel:

“There are no servants here,” said Mother Dimble, “and we all do the work. The women do it one day and the men the next. What? No, it's a very sensible arrangement. The Director's idea is that men and women can't do housework together without quarreling. There's something in it. Of course, it doesn't do to look at the cups too closely on the men's day, but on the whole we get along pretty well” (*That Hideous Strength* 164).

These are but several examples of how Lewis tells of the treasure of friendship through his writings, but also demonstrates the beauty of companionship in his novels.

The N.I.C.E. (The National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments), in stark contrast, exemplify what Lewis described in *The Four Loves* as a circle “judiciously enlarging itself to admit recruits whose share in the original common interest is negligible but who are felt to be ... ‘sound men’” and the circle “becomes a power in the land” (110). This group of scientists aim to take over the planet through academia, science, socialization, and blackmail. Mark, the male protagonist of the story, gets drawn into the

N.I.C.E. because of the position they offered him at the college he worked at, and the worth they feigned to give him in order to draw him in as one of their minions. They made Mark feel as if he were a “sound man,” increasing the likelihood of his participation because he felt like part of the in-crowd. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape teaches his nephew that “any small coterie, bound together by some interest...tends to develop inside itself a hothouse mutual admiration, and towards the outside world, a great deal of pride and hatred which is entertained without shame because the ‘Cause’ is its sponsor and it is thought to be impersonal” (*Screwtape 41*). Lewis shows which side is the superior community in the end, when all of the antagonists are killed by the very animals they used vivisection on for their experiments, with the community at St. Anne’s triumphantly bringing the N.I.C.E. to an end.

Conclusion

The idea that one could express beauty, longing, fear, pleasure, pain, and joy inside of an amalgamation of words was one that Lewis held dear to his heart. As his life drew to a close, it is clear he was still wrestling with what he believed and what he held to be of worth in life. His wife, Joy Davidman, died three years before he did, and that was the last straw in his already declining health. During his grieving process, he anonymously released *A Grief Observed*, an autobiographical lament and conversation with himself about the difficulty of pain; a stark contrast to his first apologetic work released three centuries earlier, *The Problem of Pain*.

C.S. Lewis's entire literary corpus is vastly rich; the five points considered here are not the only ones present. But they are essential. Lewis's settings give us a sense of another reality that is similar but also wholly different than ours. His characters teach us, through their successes and failures that life cannot be done on one's own terms: some sort of cosmic order exists to keep us in check, and by longing for things outside ourselves, we live well. We learn through his characters that men and women live in uniquely different ways, but complement each other's masculinity and femininity in ways that are beautiful and profound. Lastly, we see that as people stick together and grow and challenge one another, true growth happens in friendship. Without it, the mighty warrior falls to the many, and the lone hero dies a lonely death, the hero of no one but himself.

Readers of Lewis receive a pleasant surprise when they take his works as a whole. His fiction does not teach anything opposite to his non-fiction. He tries, though fails at times, to emulate in his life what he taught in his books and in his lectures. When he finds

that his reality might not match what he teaches in his non-fiction (i.e. *The Problem of Pain*), he expresses that honestly (i.e. *A Grief Observed*). Lewis's characters were occasionally autobiographical, and we get a glimpse into Lewis's life while we read about Mark Studdock grippingly coming to faith when commanded to stomp on a crucifix, just as Lewis could not let go of his frustrations towards Christianity in his young adult life. We see Orual get tangled in her pride in *Till We Have Faces* just as Lewis admittedly was never being able to separate himself from the temptation of pride. And we see High King Peter, the noble man of honor, courage and strength, a picture of the ideal man that Lewis strived to be. All the words that he wrote down were to an aim: craft a reality that can be a vessel for truth. He sought to espouse those truths that could inspire the imagination and provide a resistance to falsity, lies, and the sad life of non-creativity. He holds true to his word, and his work inspires even as it instructs.

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