CHRONICLES OF HEAVEN

UNSHACKLED

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INTRODUCTION: THE LOSS OF GOD IN THE NOVEL

The fictions of J.R.R.Tolkien and C.S. Lewis are huge cultural phenomena. In a famous Waterstone's survey, The Lord of the Rings was voted top as the most significant novel of recent times. Films of both Tolkien's and Lewis' fictions have made a huge impact worldwide. Many of us find them fascinating; and this despite the fact that, as any but their most diehard aficionados must admit, there are some real weaknesses in the books. What is their fascination?

There are several answers we could give to that question, and many books that do. This study has been written to focus on one aspect of their uniqueness that for some reason usually gets overlooked, yet is of enormous importance to us culturally and indeed to us individually – and yet, one that seldom gets noticed.

The issue is this. The vast majority of the fictions we consume (and this goes for cinema, television fiction, even the `reconstruction' of reality we get from the newspapers, as well as novels) are what we can call `flatland narratives'. They happen in two dimensions only. Underlying the events we read about are causes, significant causes, but these are limited strictly to certain spheres: psychological, sociological, military, economic. And yet meanwhile we live in a world where the majority of human beings – the overwhelming majority in the two-thirds world, but the majority (according to most surveys) even of the north Atlantic countries – believe in some sort of God, some sort of supernatural. And yet most of our fictions don't to allow for that entire rich dimension to be active at all. (Think

about it: we don't expect that dimension in our fictions, do we?) What they amount to, instead, is a ubiquitous imaginative training (one might almost say a brainwashing?) into a `colourblind', two-dimensional view of the world.

And this is what makes Tolkien and Lewis so different. Theirs are worlds where that whole dimension operates. Three-dimensional worlds, worlds with the vertical dimension restored. Where God and the supernatural do things. And deep in our hearts, we know that that's how it is. But it is hard to write such narratives when the whole consensus tradition of fiction in our culture goes against it.

A colourblind tradition

How did we get into this situation?

Jump the whole of the rest of this introduction if you choose (the next chapter will take us straightaway into Tolkien), as it's about the history of the English novel. But some of us will find it useful, both in better understanding our consensus tradition (and its cultural effects on us), and also in pointing up what's unique about the authors we're going to look at.

Let's remark, then, that English literary history is a curious thing. And one especially curious thing about it is that it contains so very little of importance which might be termed a Christian novel. The novel, as a form, offers to tell its reader a story; it implies (by recording it) that this story is of significance, and indeed (at least usually) that it will include in its account all the main aspects necessary for a reader to grasp what it depicts. And yet, although the novel arose in the seventeenth century - a time when

Britain considered herself the champion and printing-house of Christianity, the worldview that, above all others, emphasises the work of God in events – this whole `aspect' of God in action is conspicuously excluded from the novel; throughout almost the entire English tradition. Indeed, we may say that the convention that came to dominate the English novel was exclusively non-supernaturalistic - the fictional counterpart of deism, or, latterly, agnosticism. We don't find in the great English novels a depiction of the action of God in guiding, or answering prayer, or orchestrating events for the advancement of his kingdom. He is simply left out. So the `realism' that writers like Ian Watt (The Rise of the Novel) have seen as characterising the novel (compared at least to other literary forms) is one that, to the Christian, is not so much realistic as myopic with reference to the most significant fact in the universe.

And yet prose fiction doesn't have to exclude God. In fact the English novel has credibly been argued by Watt and others to have emerged with the Reformation and with biblically-minded Christians – John Bunyan (The Life and Death of Mr Badman), Daniel Defoe (Robinson Crusoe); and this because they had a worldview in which the doings of ordinary people were taken seriously (because they mattered in the eyes of God), and seemed worthy of record – rather than just the doings of kings, heroes and saints, as in the literary productions of the less biblically-shaped culture that preceded them.
(H.R.Rookmaaker's famous Modern Art and the Death of a Culture observes the same massively significant shift in the content of the painting of the period.)

Those, however, were the days of the novel's infancy. Its further development coincided with the decay of the Reformation, and the

coming to dominance of a very different worldview indeed; that which we call the Enlightenment. And the eighteenth-century novel, far from being the objective embodiment of unsullied realism, bears very clearly the marks of its development in that much less Christian era. For Enlightenment philosophy, following Descartes, generally stressed the empirically-perceived at the expense of the divinely revealed: it tended to restrict faith and the supernatural. ('The Divine', says Paul Hazard in his classic work on the period, The European Mind, 'was relegated to a vague and impenetrable heaven, somewhere up in the skies.') Faith tended to become set against reason: the unified world of the Reformation, which combined both the natural and supernatural, disappeared. And the growth both of capitalism and of modern science accentuated the centrality of what was material, what could be measured, what was empirically there and was instantly observable by sense-perceptions rather than by faith.

It is not surprising, then, that as the novel develops we find the supernatural getting banished to its periphery. Robinson Crusoe (1719) is indeed an exception, with a strong sense of residual Puritanism alongside the emergent materialism: but when Defoe moved on to Moll Flanders just three years later, he wrote a novel with a notorious and almost total preoccupation with the material, cash-value aspects of existence. What grips Defoe’s imagination here is the cataloguing of possessions of market-value, and the accumulation of material stock. Richardson's Pamela (1740-41) is likewise concerned with laying up treasure on earth as morality's reward. Admittedly the subtitle 'Virtue Rewarded' is a glance at an organising principle behind events; but as there is not much real sense of divine involvement in practice, this merely gives us a fictional expression of deism. In Richardson’s Clarissa (1747-48) the moral issue of chastity is at the centre of the stage, but the result

is merely to show the decadence of Puritanism in one of its worst aspects: relationship with God seems to have little value until after death, and the entire spiritual pilgrimage on this side of the grave seems to turn on a single act of rape. Clarissa can hardly be said to offer an exploration of divine grace permeating every area of life.

In Fielding's Tom Jones (1749), certainly, we find 'Fortune' shaping the events to a productive end: coincidence plays an important role, and this `Fortune' and coincidence would have been attributed by Fielding's favourite divines to
the activities of a benevolent Providence. But Fielding's concern, as a good neo-classicist, was with drawing a moral for `human nature' in general, not as something visible in particular instances. Tom Jones seems only to express Fielding's faith in the benign ordering of the universe in general: similar claims for the individual he regards as a falsification of reality.

In these three key authors, then, supernaturalism comes to receive little expression in particular, existential terms. And we may see in them a second reason for the secularisation of the novel, namely the reaction against the romancers of their day. Richardson objected to romances because 'they dealt so much in the marvellous and improbable'; Fielding too stressed the need for novelists to keep 'within the rules of probability'. And at the end of the eighteenth century Sir Walter Scott characterised the novel as 'differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society', as against 'what is obviously miraculous and impossible'. But the 'religious supernatural' tended thereby to be bundled up and rejected along with the purely 'fantastic'; and, to be fair, that was an amalgam the earlier saints' legends had provided in plenty. Hence the young

novel tradition's need to mark out a territory distinct from that of the romancers, combined with the Enlightenment's sense of an ordinary, regular universe, established a consensus as to what was 'probable' that stayed firmly within a closed naturalistic system. The novel form, Leslie Fiedler has complained, was 'invented precisely....to drive the "marvellous" and "wonderful" from the realm of prose fiction'; and the actions of providence, which tend to be "wonderful' in one way or another, were a casualty.

At the risk of getting into even deeper waters we may note a third factor: there was in some of these authors a strong influence from neo-classical aesthetics, which stressed the general, the temporally static and the typical and was uninterested in causality, and was therefore not very suited to a depiction of divine providence and its historical development of the lives of particular individuals. And alongside this we may also note the classical doctrine of the `separation of styles'. This was an aesthetic doctrine which divided subject-matter between the tragic (which had noble characters, lofty sentiments, elevated language), and the comic (which had 'low' or rustic characters, everyday actions). Obviously there was little room for God on either side of that dichotomy. Christianity and the tragic vision were not very compatible; and God could certainly not be depicted in the low/comic tradition in which, say, Fielding and Smollett saw themselves. (Fielding, indeed, apologises for the introduction of a clergyman into his fiction.) As Auerbach remarks in his famous study Mimesis, this was an aesthetic to which the implications of the Gospels, with their union of the realistic, the everyday, and the sublime, were totally opposed. So it is not surprising that the dominance of the hellenistic aesthetic left no scope for expression of the content of the rival Judaeo-Christian worldview. (The main exceptions to this, Bunyan's work and Robinson

Crusoe, both owed a great deal to popular culture, and so were less within the reach of the ruling aesthetic.)

These three factors combined, then, to create a kind of 'lowest common denominator' convention, stressing the empirically-perceived world, and the generally-agreed virtues. It should be noted, too, that the dominant theological outlook in the state church in the years of the novel's rise in England was `Latitudinarian', and this outlook stressed charity and ethics to the exclusion of any radical revolution of grace. Its tendencies towards salvation by works inevitably made divine activity less significant. So one way or another, the novel's development took place in a context not at all favourable to the presentation of God in action.

But the vital point is that this exclusively anti-supernaturalistic convention was to reign almost unchallenged in the English novel right up to our own time. Thus, although Scott and Jane Austen, for example, were apparently strongly influenced by Christianity, the causality in their novels remains naturalistic. Scott does raise the issue of providence in Heart of Midlothian; but even there it is hard to tell whether this has objective existence, or whether it is merely local colour, the attitude of the main figures in the story. Besides, providence appears there to be more a matter of the mechanical and inexorable distribution of rewards and punishments than of the personal challenge of a personal grace. Jane Austen was strongly influenced by Evangelicalism, particularly in the ethos of Mansfield Park; but she too accepted the convention that had arisen. As Peter Faulkner points out, the ladies in her novels `never seek for guidance or consolation from any source beyond themselves'; again, a vaguely Christian stoicism seems the order of the day. Her clergymen - even Edmund Bertram - regard religion as a social institution

rather than a personal experience: manners, not the knowledge of God, is determinative.

Nor, indeed, did the high tide of Victorian Evangelicalism challenge this dominant convention to very much effect. Victorian Evangelicalism was not always noted for the stringency of its intellectual aspect: certainly it was uneasy about fiction in principle, often seeing it as 'mere entertainment' of a dubious kind, rather than a serious exploration of reality. Hence it’s not surprising that the religion of fiction of this period - Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope for example - tends to be vague in content, and primarily ethical in orientation. The spirits of Dickens' Christmas Carol are blatantly not those the Gospels associate with the incarnation, as C. S. Lewis pointed out. Jane's flight from Rochester in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, on the basis of faith in God's guidance and overruling, seems the only case of a supernaturalistic approach in the major Victorian novels: apart, bizarrely, from the fiction of the agnostic George Eliot, whose strong identification with the Methodist Dinah Morris in Adam Bede and with Maggie Tulliver in Mill on the Floss carries an unexpected providential worldview right across into the narration itself.

But as the nineteenth century wore on the move towards fictional 'realism' gathered strength: the novel began to be turned into a sterilised character laboratory, from which coincidences and irregularities were to be rigorously excluded. ('Fiction is bound as fact is not', proclaimed Mrs. Oliphant, 'and must consider vraisemblance' - ie the popular consensus view of reality - 'as well as absolute truth.') This selectivity was based on a dominant worldview that was now starting to be shaped strongly by the celebrated nineteenth-century 'loss of faith'. Meredith boasts that

'our people...move themselves - are not moved by any outside impulsion' – providence included. In these fictions, therefore, faith comes to be seen as a biographical item, rather than the point of contact with the supernatural universe. And as time goes on this naturalistic convention receives its purest formulation in Zola and his school, where it reveals itself clearly as part and parcel of the worldview of deterministic materialism. 'Realism' in the French nineteenth century novelists is not so much a matter of objective record as the projection of a particular atheistic ideology.

Finally, then, we come to the modern era; and modern fiction has been described by Josipovici and others as characterised by the 'death of God' and an exploration of what this must entail. Here there can be no sense of a providence guiding events, and few authors have been prepared to venture anything more hopeful than Conrad's description of destiny in Heart of Darkness as a 'mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose'. In modern fiction, God is usually dead.

All in all, then, we find ourselves faced today with a conception of the novel that has preserved the limitations of post-Enlightenment naturalism almost inviolate. The absence or inactivity of God is the norm, is a certainty, a fact of life; the novel has become an imaginative training in atheism. And the main reactions against the straitjacket of naturalism have tended to dissipate themselves in sentimentalism. Is a Christian alternative possible?

Fictions and world views

In fact it is. As Dorothy Van Ghent has argued, any novel must take as its starting-point, its 'given', certain assumptions about the nature and contents of reality: 'Like a science, or like mathematics,

but, unlike history, the novel proceeds by hypothesis. It says, implicitly, "Given such and such conditions, then such and such would take place."' This hypothesis, these assumptions as to what the world is like, determine what events can happen in the novel, and control the inevitable selective process that takes place. So the novelist does not present unmediated reality; even if the intention is supposedly `realistic', what gets depicted is merely a hypothetical model of reality, based upon a worldview, whether implicit or explicit. (Art, as Rookmaaker puts it, 'always gives an interpretation of reality.') So even so-called 'naive realism' is a technique based on a particular set of attitudes, a fictional hypothesis grounded in a particular view of the world; it is most certainly not an objective record, because it begins, as Van Ghent puts it, with an assumption, the assumption that 'spatiotemporal facts are the only "real" '. And its claim to be `realism' will be accepted only at cultural moments when it matches with the popular consensus of a conventional humanistic or atheistic view of reality.

But this means that a novel may with as good justification be written with Christian supernaturalism as its underlying hypothesis as anything else. This is not a question either of propaganda or of didacticism; it is merely a matter of the Christian writer depicting the world as (s)he believes it is - exactly as the agnostic writer uses a naturalistic hypothesis. Indeed, to do otherwise, to omit the concept of the God-who-acts that is the fiery centre of the Christian's worldview and lifestyle, is to capitulate to the dominant agnostic consensus. The issue here is one of honesty to, and faithful and consistent recording and working out of, the artist's own vision.

And once we realise this, we begin to see something remarkable arising in the achievements of C.S.Lewis, J.R.R.Tolkien and Jack Clemo. For theirs are worlds where the supernatural genuinely does things, actively shaping events. (In Tolkien less obviously than in Lewis, admittedly - but very clearly once we pick up the hints as to how his largely Christianized imagination works, and what kinds of events it creates.) We begin to see these writers as the radicals, flying in the face of a consensus tradition that has dominated most of British fiction for two hundred years. Their works are three-dimensional; they are not `flatland' narratives. And this, no doubt, is one key reason why many of us find their fictions so refreshing.

So this study explores just how they have attempted this heretical strategy, and how far they can be said to have succeeded. How do their fictional worlds operate? What works in this revolt against the dominant consensus tradition, and what doesn't? We'll be looking at The Lord of the Rings, Lewis' planetary trilogy, and Lewis' unusual, complex and remarkable myth-fantasy Till We Have Faces. And to get a helpful side-perspective we've included, alongside the fantasies, a single, powerful but little-known work of `supernatural realism', set in Cornwall rather than Perelandra or Middle earth: Jack Clemo's Wilding Graft. Clemo helps us ponder how far the fantasy mode is the only means currently available to challenge the dominant consensus; for it would be a somewhat troubling conclusion to come to that the `vertical dimension' can currently only be accessed in fantasy worlds.

Because in the end all this matters a lot. If Christian faith is true (and who knows, it might be), then there is nothing more vitally important to our existence than `knowing God' – which includes coming to grasp his purposes. As we said at the beginning, what the

dominant consensus narratives of our world are doing (and again we include cinema, television fiction and the newspapers), is training us to look at series of events in purely sociological, psychological and economic – purely horizontal - terms, and to regard the result as adequate for living. It isn't; it may be training us to miss out the most vital (because most permanent, eternal) dimension of all. Which means it's deeply (even fatally) impoverishing. Those two sentences raise huge issues: but at any rate to pick up on that perspective is to see something of why the fictions we shall consider in this study matter – and why it is that, somehow in our hearts, we sense that they do.

A final word of explanation is necessary. This study and its companion Fictional Absence arose from a doctoral thesis completed some years ago. Fictional Absence explores the development of the dominant consensus (and the few exceptions to it) in the English novel tradition, along the lines sketched out above, and is obtainable free from the author at peterlowman@lineone.net. It's unfortunate that these issues have received so very little scholarly attention, when they have been significant for the entire imaginative training of our culture. And that's why these two studies are circulating in this form, in the hope that they may be of use to some of the many people who love English novels – an area on which very little has been written from a biblical-Christian standpoint – and also to the many who have loved the work of Lewis, Tolkien and Clemo.

But there is more. What has struck me in returning to (and completing a fairly superficial edit on) this material is just how spiritually significant the achievements of these three writers are - despite real weaknesses. I've been struck again how much these

remarkable narratives, and the questions they raise, enrich our entire grasp of how the living God works. And that is something immensely valuable. My hope is that, as we journey together, my readers will experience something of the same.

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1. TOLKIEN'S *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

The Lord of the Rings is a lengthy volume!- so it may be wise to begin by summarising its plot. The fantasy world Tolkien creates is one that includes many species of beings beside Men: including Elves (but these are no gossamer fairies, rather an immortal race of considerable valour and wisdom); Dwarves; Orcs (a race committed to the forces of evil); and Hobbits. The Lord of the Rings is centred upon the last of these. Hobbits, we read,

> are an unobtrusive but very ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today; for they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth… They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom… For they are a little people, smaller than Dwarves: less stout and stocky, that is, even when they are not actually much shorter.(l)

Four of the book's heroes, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, are hobbits from the 'Shire': and the book begins when Frodo's quiet life is interrupted by the realisation that he possesses a magic Ring of immense power, coveted by Sauron, a force of supernatural evil. Gandalf, a member of the 'Istari', an order of wizards opposed to Sauron, informs him that the recovery of the ring by Sauron would lead to the enslaving of the world. As a result, Frodo sets out eastwards for the Elvish stronghold of Rivendell, pursued by Sauron's servants, the Black Riders. At Rivendell a council takes place of all the races not already subjugated by Sauron: and there it is decided that the only way of removing the peril is to destroy the Ring, in the event of which Sauron's power would vanish. The Ring can only be destroyed by casting it into Mount Doom in Sauron's own kingdom, Mordor. Frodo offers to take the Ring to Mordor: and a group of nine representatives of all the Free Peoples, the

(1) J.R.R.Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings(1954-55),p.1. Unless otherwise indicated all references are to the one-volume Harper Collins paperback edition of 1995, henceforth referred to as TLOTR.

Fellowship of the Ring, is chosen to accompany him.

The Fellowship pass through great perils as they travel south and east towards Mordor: and at Parth Galen they are ambushed by orcs and separated. Meanwhile, war breaks out. Mordor launches an assault on Gondor, one of the two major kingdoms of Men opposed to it: while the other kingdom, Rohan, is treacherously assaulted by the armies of Saruman, one of the Istari who has become corrupt and is now building his own empire. Among the Fellowship is Aragorn, the lost heir of Gondor, and under his leadership the assault on Rohan is defeated and that on Gondor countered. Frodo and Sam make their way into Mordor, accompanied by Gollum, a creature similar to the hobbits, once possessor of the Ring, now enslaved by desire for it. The leaders of Gondor decide that the only way to reduce Sauron's vigilance is by drawing his attention elsewhere, and so they begin a suicidal invasion of Nordor. Frodo reaches Mount Doom, but decides not to destroy the Ring: at which point Gollum seizes it and falls with it into the flames. Sauron's power collapses and a new age begins - though not until the hobbits have returned to the Shire, found it under Saruman's control, and organised a rebellion.

A plot summary of a fantasy of 1000 pages is inevitably bald, and this is no exception. There is a great deal more: Tolkien has created his own myth, a whole new world of Middle-earth with its own geography and with a history of three Ages, each containing thousands of years. The book's narrative is followed by over a hundred pages of appendices that describe Middle-earth in even greater detail: another of Tolkien's books, The Silmarillion, narrates the story of its first few millennia, beginning before its creation. There can be little doubt that the cosmic scope and overwhelming detail with which Tolkien has worked out his imaginary

world are two factors that attract many of the readers who enjoy his books: Mlddle-earth is a world that it is possible to know a great deal about, and many Tolkien aficionados certainly do.

The concern of this study is not with the book as a whole, but simply with its use of supernatural causality. Part of the 'fantastic' nature of Tolkien's world lies in the fact that it is an overtly supernatural universe: Sauron, for example, is a power of absolute evil that can be seen (if one is unfortunate enough), and that is located, at the time of the story, in the tower of Barad-dur in Mordor. Magic (whatever may be meant by the word) is a reality, and magical powers are possessed both by the wizards and the Elves. But it is not a world where 'religion' plays a major role. There are no temples, there is no organised worship: there is no direct mention of God until the appendices, where there is a veiled reference to 'the One'. One might therefore assume that this is not a book where a pattern of Christian supernaturalism would be apparent. But in fact such a pattern exists, and is indeed the foundation of the narrative, as we shall see.

(i) The Sensible Shire

It is important to notice how the book commences. Apart from the Foreword and the contents page, its first paragraphs belong to a section of the Prologue entitled 'Concerning Hobbits': and these emphasise the hobbits' earthiness and unadventurousness. The third paragraph describes them as loving 'peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt.' The following page fills out the picture:

> Their faces were as a rule good-natured rather than beautiful, broad, bright-eyed, red-cheeked, with mouths apt to laughter, and to eating and drinking. And laugh they did,and eat, and drink, often and heartily… The beginning of Hobbits lies far back in the Elder Days that are now lost and forgotten. Only the Elves still preserve any records of that vanished time, and

> their traditions are concerned almost entirely with their own history, in which Men appear seldom and Hobbits are not mentioned at all. Yet it is clear that Hobbits had, in fact, lived quietly in Middle-earth for many long years before other folk became even aware of them. And the world being after all full of strange creatures beyond count, these little people seemed of very little importance.(1)

The impression the reader receives is clear: these are a very normal people, if one discounts their size (and even that, given that they have no magical powers, serves merely to underline their unremarkable nature). The next paragraphs supply a little more of their history, but we read that on entering the Shire they passed 'out of the history of Men and of Elves':

> While there was still a king they were in name his subjects, but they were, in fact, ruled by their own chieftains and meddled not at all with events in the world outside… There in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk. They forgot or ignored what little they had ever known of the Guardians, and of the labours of those that made possible the long peace of the Shire. They were, in fact, sheltered, but they had ceased to remember it.(2)

And with that Tolkien strikes a different note - the keynote of the early chapters of the narrative: outside the 'sensible' Shire there is a world where 'dark things moved', powers that may be forgotten in the 'well-ordered business of living', yet powers that would be capable of destructive activity were it not for other, benign, forces that are equally mysterious. Tolkien proceeds to describe the hobbits' buildings, their habit of smoking, and their system of government and policing, and then retells the story of Frodo's uncle Bilbo.(3) Bilbo travelled far outside the Shire and

(1) TLOTR,p.2. (2) Ibid,pp.4-5. (3) This is the story Tolkien tells in his children's book The Hobbit.

acquired considerable treasure, but 'the matter would scarcely have concerned later

history... but for an "accident" by the way.' While lost in the mountains Bilbo found

a ring which could make its wearer invisible. 'It seemed then like mere luck.' He next

encountered the villainous Gollum in the darkness, whom he outwitted

'more by luck (as it seemed) than by wits'.(1) Why the repeated

ambiguity? Tolkien does not explain, and the whole incident is played

down by being narrated in the 'quaint' style of The Hobbit. But a

hint has been given of some force orchestrating events beyond the

framework revealed thus far.

A quaint, almost twee tone also marks the opening chapter of the

story proper. The first paragraphs tell how 'When Mr.Bilbo Baggins of

Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-

first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much

talk and excitement in Hobbiton'; much talk, in part because at 110

Bilbo is showing no signs of ageing, and this brings some

disapproval: `"It will have to be paid for, " they said. "It

isn't natural, and trouble will come of it!"'(2) We are in a world

of small, and sometimes small-minded hobbits, happy within their

'normal' world, and distrusting anything abnormal. The next couple

of pages portrays Bilbo being discussed in the local hostelry by the

village rustics, who have their own share of prejudices: 'They fool

about with boats on that big river - and that isn't natural… Mr.

Bilbo has learned him his letters - meaning no harm, mark you, and I

hope no harm will come of it.'(3) The strategy of these opening pages

is clear: Tolkien is presenting a group of characters earthy and

admirable enough in their own small way - but the smallness of it

comes across clearly. The reader grows tired of their

(1) TLOTR, p.11. (2) Ibid, p.21. (3) Ibid, pp.22,24.

distrust of all things from boats to letters, and so develops an interest in

just what is outside their comfortable Shire and what it was that Bilbo saw and

(apparently) acquired eternal youth from seeing. The hobbits themselves are

interesting, so the reader's desire to move further afield is nurtured only

slowly. But of course these same conservative hobbits are not human: the reader

is already in a world of fantastic creatures, and being prepared for more.

At the height of his party, Bilbo uses the ring to make himself invisible, and leaves the Shire forever. Frodo inherits his house and the Ring. Seventeen years pass by (Tolkien's casual treatment of the passage of time is one thing that gives his fiction the sense of spaciousness); and Frodo grows restless too. At this stage the wizard Gandalf comes to the Shire and tells Frodo that his ring is the all-powerful master-ring of the 'dark lord' and would eventually 'utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it, it would possess him.'(l) Worse than that, the 'dark lord' now knows - for the first time for millennia - the whereabouts of the ring, and will attempt to recover it: with the certainty of utter catastrophe for all the lands of 'Middle-earth' if he succeeds. The Shire can only be saved if Frodo takes himself and the ring out of it, fleeing 'from danger into danger, drawing it after me'.(2) It is a passage of revelation, showing Frodo that the world contains far more that is terrible and powerful than he had realised, and forcing him into action. Powers normally forgotten must be taken into account. 'I wish it need not have happened in my time', says

(1) Ibid,p.45. (2)Ibid,p.61.

Frodo. 'So do I', replies Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.'(l) That context, of what we are 'given', is the arena for mortal free will.

The section also repeats the ambiguous reference to 'accident' of the Prologue. Gandalf tells Frodo that the Ring left its previous owner because it 'was trying to get back to its master'. But its new owner, Bilbo, was 'the most unlikely person imaginable… There was more than one power at work… I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought.' 'It is not', says Frodo.(2) The section is unclear, and The Lord of the Rings never puts matters much clearer; but the point is plain: there seems to be some power in the world opposed to the 'dark lord', and capable of orchestrating events in a manner he cannot. Further, that power is in some sense bound up with right and wrong action. Frodo regrets that Bilbo did not kill Gollum, the ring's previous owner, before he could alert the 'dark lord': Gandalf tells him that pity stopped him, and 'My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many. '(3) No 'God' has been mentioned, but there is some pattern, some organizing principle in events; and that principle is in some sense 'moral'. Part of the 'widening of the world' that Gandalf produces -and in which Frodo is more or less the reader's surrogate

(1) Ibid, p.50. (2) Ibid, pp.54-55. (3) Ibid, p.58.

- has to do with something resembling providence.

(ii) A First Step Outwards

Frodo takes Gandalf's advice seriously, and leaves his home in Hobbiton. He does so just in time, for he finds mysterious horsemen or 'Black Riders' are searching for him; and their presence is accompanied by an overpowering urge to put on the Ring - the action Gandalf had warned him against. On the second occasion he comes close to capture. 'But at that moment there came a sound like mingled song and laughter.... The black shadow straightened up and retreated.' It is a wandering company of the Eldar, the Elves. Frodo is amazed. 'Few of that fairest folk are ever seen in the Shire.... This is indeed a strange chance! '(1)

Tolkien has carefully reemphasised the 'earthiness' of the hobbits in the flight of Frodo and his friends across the Shire, through repeated conversational references to food, losing weight, feather beds, and bathwater. The Eldar are a world away from that: 'They passed slowly, and the hobbits could see the starlight glimmering on their hair and in their eyes.' Tolkien's skill lies in the way he brings his earthy Hobbits into the numinous world of the Eldar. The two groups are separate, the hobbits by the side of the path and the elvish company marching by. But as the last Elf passes he calls out, 'Hail, Frodo! ...You are abroad late. Or are you perhaps lost?' The jovial tone breaks the mystique, and yet the phrasing (particularly the word order of 'perhaps lost') is not

(1) Ibid, pp.77-78.

entirely out of keeping with the Elves' highly poetic song a few lines earlier; and it establishes a sense of community -Frodo, as Bilbo's nephew, is already known to the Eldar. The next remark from the Elves -'This is indeed wonderful!... Three hobbits in a wood at night!... What is the meaning of it?' is acceptably 'Elvish' (the emphasis on 'meaningfulness' matches with Tolkien's presentation of the Elves as possessors of various forms of awareness unavailable to other races), and yet has a sense of jest not alien to the hobbits. With Frodo's reply the reverse occurs: 'The meaning of it, fair people... is simply that we seem to be going the same way as you are. I like walking under the stars. But I would welcome your company.' This has both a tongue-in-cheek note that comes appropriately from a hobbit, and a touch of courtesy that belongs with the Elves' use of language. In short, having presented the hobbits' world of feather beds and the Elves' world of starlight and night-marches as sharply distinct, Tolkien brings them together in a few lines of dialogue. For Frodo's three friends, who have never seen Elves before, this is a further 'widening of the world'. The thematic movement is completed by a physical movement: the Elves are troubled by the hobbits' mention of the Black Riders, and say that 'It is not our custom, but for this time we will take you on our road.' The resumed march is Elf-style, not hobbit-style: 'They now marched on again in silence, and passed like shadows and faint lights.' As Frodo and his friends are taken into the middle of the marching column, it is also as if they have been absorbed into the world of the hidden forces outside the Shire.

Before the chapter - and the night –ends, Frodo talks with the

Elvish leader Gildor, and learns -as does the reader -a little more about the nature of the world into which the hobbits have moved. The Black Riders, it emerges, are evil forces of great power. 'Flee them!', says Gildor: 'Speak no words to them! They are deadly… May Elbereth protect you!'(l) The reference to 'Elbereth' -the power to whom the Elves were singing when they met the hobbits -is not without significance; in this world of evil powers beyond Frodo's previous imaginations, there may be forces for good as well. And, once again, a possible patterning in events is hinted at. Gildor comments that Elves are usually little concerned with other races: 'Our paths cross theirs seldom, by chance or purpose. In this meeting there may be more than chance; but the purpose is not clear to me, and I fear to say too much.' Gildor's uncertainty is a shrewd touch, as he has already been shown to know far more than Frodo does about the forces Frodo must contend with; and if he seemed easily familiar with what was going to happen, then the plot would begin to seem mechanical. Instead, there remains a sense of foreboding. There is some shape in what is taking place, but its end is not clear. Still, this section does an important thing: it shows that even inside the Shire (which, says Frodo, 'always seemed so safe and familiar') there may be powers with their own reasons for not making their presence overt. Gildor reminds Frodo, 'It is not your own Shire… The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out.' (2).

(1) Ibid,p.83. (2) Ibid, p.82.

Before moving on, it is worth pointing out how Tolkien uses the Elves in The Lord of The Rings. They are a race that are not entirely 'of this world'. They once lived in 'Elvenhome', a place now (it would seem) outside this world, and as Gandalf tells Frodo, 'Those who have dwelt in the Blessed Realm live at once in both worlds, and against both the Seen and the Unseen they have great power.'(1) The EIvish lands are places where time seems to function in different ways to the rest of the world.(2) Yet paradoxically, Tolkien succeeds in giving this numinous race concreteness by making them the keepers of Middle-earth's history. 'Only the Elves still preserve any records of that vanished time', he says of the primaeval Elder Days(3): but those records prove to be of crucial importance for understanding the apocalyptic events in which the hobbits are caught up. And, it should be added, it is in good measure through the vast depth of history with which Tolkien invests the characters, peoples and places of Middle-earth that he gives solidity to his imagined world. Hence, where history is of crucial importance, and is a source of verisimilitude, the Elves as the guardians of history are linked firmly to what seems most real. And thereby the 'wider world' of the supernatural, to which equally they belong, acquires reality.

The Elvish otherworld also has a moral dimension: Aragorn says of their stronghold of Lorien that 'There is ...in this land no evil, unless a man bring it hither himself. '(4) And the question whether

(1) Ibid,p.215. (2) Cf. ibid,pp.225,379. (3) Ibid,p.2.
(4) Ibid, p.349. In Tolkien's other long fantasy, The Silmarillion, it turns out that the Eldar are not unfallen, and indeed Galadriel, the ruler of Lorien, participated in the Fall. But that is a complexity beyond The Lord of the Rings.

one is for or against the Elves can almost be a test of moral good and evil.

For example, the sceptical Ted Sandyman, who expresses his disbelief in the

Eldar in the second chapter, turns evil at the book's close; this is not

attributed to his scepticism, and yet a lack of openness to the powers for good

in the 'wide world' seems to be part of a complex of characteristics that can

be corrupted.(l) For Frodo's servant Sam, in contrast, the main attraction

about accompanying Frodo out of Hobbiton was the possibility of meeting the

Elves; and that proves to be a maturing experience as a result of which he

concludes that he must continue to accompany Frodo: 'It isn't to see Elves now,

nor dragons, nor mountains, that I want –I don't rightly know what I want: but

I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead.'(2) In the presence

of the numinous people of the otherworld he has found some sort of 'calling'.

(1) Faramir, likewise, seems marked out as a good character in part by his attitude to the Elves (ibid, p.664). (2) It bears consideration whether Tolkien was influenced at this point by his friend C.S.Lewis' concept of Desire, of a basic human longing which, whatever it appeared to be directed towards, would in time prove to be unsatisfied with all fruitions (like Sam after seeing the Elves?), and pointing beyond, towards heaven. At any rate, Sam's discontent with the narrow bounds of the Shire and his openness to the 'wider world' undoubtedly had positive connotations for Tolkien.

For Frodo, Gildor's advice is the decisive factor in making him set out for the

Elvish stronghold of Rivendell. And the journey there serves to 'widen the world' still further. For our purposes, the most significant instance is the time the hobbits spend with Tom Bombadil, a remarkably well-imagined figure with a strong folktale flavour that is a curious mixture of the rustic and the numinous. He has lived in Middle-earth even longer than the Elves: 'When the

Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were

bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless -

before the Dark Lord came from Outside.'(1) There is a sense here

of some huge upheaval that has 'bent' the seas; and it has to do

with the 'Dark Lord from Outside'. Middle-earth itself is proving

supernatural enough, but the Dark Lord comes from further beyond,

presumably from beyond this world. Tolkien has not created any

expectations of his story including beings from other planets; hence

most readers are likely to understand the Dark Lord as a force of

spiritual evil. This is underlined by the sense of something that

will outlive the physical universe in the song of the grave-spirit

or 'barrow-wight' in the following chapter:

> ...never more to wake on stony bed,
> never, till the Sun fails and the Moon is dead.
> In the black wind the stars shall die,
> and still on gold here let them lie.
> till the dark lord lifts his hand
> over dead sea and withered land.(2)

Tolkien has introduced a concept very similar to the Christian

framework without using Christian terms.

(1) Ibid, p.129. (2) Ibid, p.138.

(iii) Rivendell: The Revelation of the 'Pattern'

After various perils the hobbits reach Rivendell. The Lord of the Rings is a book with a structure in which an experience of revelation (verbal knowledge rather than mystical experience) leads to a process of action: Frodo's discussion with Gandalf teaches him about the Ring and causes him to leave Hobbiton; his encounter with Gildor teaches him about the Black Riders and hastens him out of the Shire; and at Rivendell, a far lengthier revelation of things past and present sends him to Mordor. It is his increasing awareness of what happens in the 'wide world' that motivates his travels.

At Rivendell there takes place a Council of leaders of all the 'Free Peoples' of Middle-earth, to discuss what should be done with the Ring. Various possibilities are considered: it could be sent to Bombadil, but neither he nor the leading Elves have the power to withstand the dark lord 'at the last, when all else is overthrown'; it could be thrown into the Sea, but it might be recovered thence and in the meantime the dark lord's power would remain; so the only option remaining is to take it back to the one place where it can be destroyed, the Cracks of Doom in Mordor. Frodo reluctantly volunteers.

There are various plot weaknesses here. The case against throwing it into the Sea, in particular, is weak: it is argued that the road to the Sea is watched, and 'fraught with gravest peril'(l), but it soon transpires that the Black Riders have been temporarily destroyed, and that Gandalf has the fastest horse in Middle-earth.

(1) Ibid, p.260. It is an effective touch that the generally saintly and altruistic Elves should be quite capable of selfishness in this case: if the dark lord's army pursue the Ring to the Sea, they argue, 'hereafter the Elves may have no escape from the lengthening shadows of Middle-earth.'

The Elf-lord Elrond fears 'to take the Ring to hide it', because he knows it could corrupt him, but does not seem to consider whether this might be his duty.(1) When Frodo finally volunteers, Elrond remarks that often great deeds must be done by 'small hands...while the eyes of the great are elsewhere'(2); but at this point the 'eyes of the great' are most assuredly on the destiny of the Ring. Certainly there are times later in the quest when it seems that a little more strength or wisdom in the Ring-bearer might not have come amiss. But it appears that the various figures of supernatural power – Bombadil, Elrond, Gandalf -are being ruled out so that the task has to be performed by a mortal; Tolkien is writing a book about hobbits going to Mordor, and to Mordor they must go.

Having said that, it is an enjoyable chapter: Tolkien's ability as writer of chronicle is well to the fore, and the dialogue is generally apt, courtly and dignified. The Council meet in full knowledge that 'doom', the apocalyptic moment, 'is near at hand'; forces such as Aragorn's Rangers who have remained secret, even as the subjects of scorn, to ensure by their ceaseless labours that 'simple folk are free from care and fear', must be openly revealed. (3) The participants at the Council are also aware of some sort of pattern in the events that are taking place. They have not met at Rivendell by their own design; Boromir of Gondor has come because of a dream, Legolas the Elf from the East has come to report the loss of an important prisoner, Gloin the Dwarf because of disturbances from the dark lord's subjects on which his people seek advice. But they have come simultaneously to Rivendell when the Ring's fate must be decided. Elrond tells them,

> That is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me… You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by

(1) Ibid.p.261. (2) Ibid.p.262. (3) Ibid,pp.242.

> chance as it may seem. Yet is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world.(l)

'Providence' does not seem an inappropriate label for this kind of beneficent overruling. It is not an overwhelming, mechanical force. Elrond's hearers are invited to apprehend and perceive the pattern: 'Believe rather...' The theme recurs. To Aragorn, Frodo's possession of the Ring is something 'ordained...for a while'.(2) The notion of 'ordaining' is an intrinsic part of the pattern that is being revealed.

Four important aspects of this 'ordaining' need to be drawn out to make clear the nature of the providential vision that Tolkien is embodying in his narrative. First of all, there is the paradox that is familiar to Christians: the existence of a providential pattern does not remove the need for difficult decision-making. In the passage quoted above, Elrond makes it clear that those present are 'called' in order to 'find counsel', to find the next stage of the pattern, which will itself require action: 'The road must be trod, but it will be very hard.'(3) The passage in which Frodo volunteers strikes a fine balance:

> Still no one spoke. Frodo glanced at all the faces, but they were not turned to him… A great dread fell on him, as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen but vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice.
>
> 'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way. '(4)

It is a free decision, and a reluctant one, the result neither of revelation nor of advice (in fact everyone but Gandalf is surprised (5)). Yet the 'as if some other will' hints that there might be

(1) Ibid,p.236. (2) Ibid,p.240. (3) Ibid,p.262. (4) Ibid,pp.263-64.(5) Ibid, p.265.

another dimension to this besides an existential choice in a providential vacuum. On the other hand, Frodo's 'overwhelming longing' and the 'effort' involved prevent him seeming a mere pawn on a chessboard whose own will has been temporarily silenced; the deliberate choice and the expression of the pattern go together. Elrond immediately expresses his own judgement that Frodo's choice is indeed what is ordained:

> If I understand aright all that I have heard... I think that this task is appointed for you… Who of all the Wise could have foreseen it? Or, if they are wise, why should they expect to know it, until the hour has struck?(1)

This dovetailing of human choice with the unfolding of an ordained pattern is very similar to the biblical vision. And the need for the characters of the story to affirm by their own free choice the providential pattern recurs throughout the book: for example in Galadriel, the ruler of the Elvish land of Lorien, helping Frodo in the full knowledge that the destruction of the dark lord's Ring will mean the dwindling of her land, but desiring only that 'what should be shall be', even renouncing the offer of the Ring which would give her the power to become Queen of Middle-earth.(2)

(It is worth noting here how this note of free choice of renunciation reappears in numerous other contexts: Aragorn leaves the woman he loves to go with the Ring, and Gimli the Dwarf likewise renounces the vision of Galadriel(3); while for Frodo and for Legolas the Elf, the price of the quest is that they will never be at ease in their own lands again.(4) Indeed, choice of renunciation characterises the Elves' whole approach to history: the Age is changing, their

(1) Ibid,p.264. (2) Ibid,p.356. (3) Ibid,pp.766, 369. Daniel Hughes notes the unusual importance of renunciation 1n the book's central action, in that Frodo goes forth not to find a treasure but to lose one ('Pieties and Giant Forms in The Lord of the Rings', in Hillegas, op.cit.,p.85). (4) TLOTR, pp.1006, 855.

heyday is past, but instead of struggling they are leaving Middle-earth and

sailing away west. Just so Aragorn will finally lay down his power and his life at the end of his reign, urging his wife to make this choice with willingness

rather than despair:

> Let us not be overthrown at the final test, who of old renounced the Shadow and the Ring. In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory, Farewell!(1)

Here the concept of an otherworld introduces hope that justifies the choice of renunciation; and for the Elves and Frodo too, consolation in renunciation is likewise to be found in the otherworld of the West. The pattern is not unlike John 12:24: 'Unless an ear of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.' Here again, Tolkien's Christianized imagination embodies a Christian shape in the events of his fiction.)

Arising out of this is a further point: the operations of destiny in Tolkien's Middle-earth not only do not rule out freewill, they actually create room for it by bringing characters to the point where a choice or affirmation has to be made. The apocalyptic era is one in which choice and action are crucial. 'Here is the Sword that was Broken and is forged again!', cries Aragorn to Eomer, the prince of Rohan. 'Will you aid me or thwart me? Choose swiftly!' Eomer is impressed: 'These are indeed strange days… Dreams and legends spring to life out of the grass… What doom do you bring out of the North?' Aragorn replies, 'The doom of choice… None may now live as they have lived, and few shall keep what they call their own. '(2) The crucial moment at Parth Galen, when Frodo has actually put on the Ring, is comparable. He is aware of the will of the dark lord searching for him, and another will

(1) Ibid,p.1038. (2) Ibid, p.423.

(presumably Gandalf) urging him to take off the Ring:

> The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Suddenly, he was aware of himself again. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose, and with one remaining instant in which to do so. He took the ring off his finger. He was kneeling in clear sunlight before the high seat.(l)

'Kneeling' is an interesting addition: there is no reference here to prayer, yet in this conflict of superhuman powers it is hard to believe that such connotations are entirely absent. At any rate it is clear that, even with the Ring on his finger, Frodo remains a free agent: and he uses his freedom to affirm the pattern, deciding to go to Mordor, and (for their sake) to leave his companions behind: 'I will do now what I must.' (In contrast, the effect of evil is to destroy freewill. Gollum could not lay aside the Ring, says Gandalf; having possessed it so long, 'He had no will left in the matter. '(2) And yet he is not merely the victim of an overwhelming evil force; he is in this situation because he committed murder to obtain the Ring.) Elrond's Council likewise were 'called' together, yet each of them had come to Rivendell because they had already chosen to make a long journey in order to take right action against the dark lord. The providential pattern both makes room for and works through freely willed choices.

It is important that it should be so; in theological terms, because if destiny removes freewill altogether, then human beings

(1) Ibid, p.392. (2) Ibid, p.54. Patricia Meyer Spacks points out that Saruman, after his defeat, 'too corrupted to choose, is forced by the decay of his own will to remain in a slavery resulting from free choice made long before'('Power and Meaning in The Lord of the Rings', in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, Indiana. 1968), p.93). At the same time, Saruman is offered a kind of 'salvation', and it comes to 'the balance of a hair' (TLOTR, pp.568-70); the same is true of Gollum (ibid, p.699; cf. Gandalf's 'There is little hope... for him. Yet not no hope.'(p.54) The outworkings of destiny bring a moment of free choice to everyone, although their past actions have left both Saruman and Gollum

hardened; and this, too, is enacting something very much in keeping with the biblical pattern.

made in the image of the Creator turn into marionettes, and an extreme fatalism results; and in fictional terms, because if the purposes of destiny cannot be hindered by any other will, then the story loses all suspense. Or, at best, its interest resides only in the distant clash of good and evil; the human characters become powerless spectators, and their actions -and hence they themselves -lose significance. (It can be argued that something dangerously close to this occurs in C.S.Lewis' That Hideous Strength, which we shall examine later.)

A further point emerges from this, however: Tolkien's treatment of 'providence' is such that not only does it operate only through free choice, but also, it seems, only through unaided choice. Here the relationship to the biblical framework is less close: there seems no 'vertical dimension' to the process of decision-making, no parallel to 'seeking God's will'. This element is missing from the deliberations of the Council at Rivendell, despite the sense of a 'pattern'. And it is an absence characteristic of the book as a whole. References to 'the One', the God of Middle-earth, do not appear until the Appendices, and the 'Elbereth' to whom the Elves of Rivendell sing(1) is not invoked for guidance. The same restraint is evident when Elrond bids farewell to Frodo and his companions: 'May the blessing of Elves and Men and all Free Folk go with you. May the stars shine upon your faces!'(2) -a choice of phrasing noteworthy because it is a point at which a reference to providential care would have come very naturally. Tolkien is keeping the powers behind the 'pattern' very much in the background: possibly to avoid the need for explicit terminology, possibly to avoid damaging the suspense. But the absence of any real relationship with such powers has important consequences, as we shall observe below.

(1) Tolkien himself saw the references to Elbereth as 'references to religion' (cf. Clyde Kilby, Tolkien and the Silmarillion (1977), p.55.
(2)TLOTR, p.274.

Finally, the providential basis of The Lord of the Rings involves an emphasis on the preordained roles of the smaller and weaker characters. When Elrond tells Frodo 'I think this task is appointed for you', he adds, 'This is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the Great.'(1) Later in the book Gandalf extends this concept of an 'appointed... hour' to a general statement:

> Other evils there are that may come....Yet it is not our part to muster all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule.(2)

Nor is it merely the good characters who have a 'part' or a 'task' where they are 'set'. At the very beginning of the book Gandalf reflects that even Gollum (the former possessor of the Ring) has 'some part to play yet'(3), and so it turns out: it is Gollum who guides Frodo and Sam into Mordor, and it is only because of a final desperate attempt on Gollum's part to recover the Ring that it is destroyed at all. There is, then, some sort of providential strategy operating in history, for a small part of which individuals are responsible; the good characters seek out, affirm and collaborate with what is 'ordained'; the others may resist it, but they too may be caught up in it and become apart of it, even against their will. This too is part of the biblical concept of providence, expressed most clearly in the epistle to the Romans. (4)

The significance that this gives to the actions of the small and unimportant is perhaps one of the things that the book is most centrally 'about'. C.S.Lewis describes it in these terms:

(1) Ibid,p.264. (2) Ibid,p.861. (3) Ibid,p.58. (4) Cf. Romans 8:28, 9:17.

> On the one hand, the whole world is going to the war; the story rings with galloping hoofs, trumpets, steel on steel. On the other, very far away, two tiny, miserable figures
> creep (like mice on a slag heap) through the twilight of Mordor. And all the time we know that the fate of the world
> depends far more on the small movement than on the great. (1)

As Roger Sale points out, one of the functions of the Ring in the narrative is to ensure the kind of characters who will be its bearers: precisely because of its power over the great, it has to be carried by hobbits, not mighty wizards or warriors.(2) Tolkien has chosen a group of heroes several of whom appear small or weak: Pippin feels like 'a pawn... on the wrong chessboard'(3); Merry feels 'small, unwanted, and lonely'.(4) And yet in the battle outside Minas Tirith Merry helps kill the chief of the Black Riders - because the latter 'heeded him no more than a worm in the mud.'(5) Even Gandalf appears generally as an old man, and receives such epithets as 'beggar-like'.(6) It is an absurdly small army that finally assaults Mordor.(7) Again, this complex of themes is analogous to aspects of the New Testament; particularly to Paul's 'God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong'.(8) The small individual is crucially important, because he is selected by elective grace for a specific task. It is an idea that makes a great deal more sense if there is a concept of an overall providential design.

(1) C.S.Lewis, 'The Dethronement of Power', in Isaacs and Zimbardo, op.cit.,p.13. (2) Roger Sale, 'Tolkien and Frodo Baggins', in ibid, p.253. (3) TLOTR,p.750. (4) Ibid,p.812. (5) Ibid,p.823. (6) Ibid,p.502. (7) Ibid,p.864. (8) l Corinthians 1:27.

(iv)The Open Countrv

The motif of a journey is ever-present in The Lord of the Rings: Frodo and his friends journeying to Rivendell, the Fellowship of the Ring or Nine Walkers setting off from Rivendell through Moria and Lothlorien and down the Anduin, Pippin and Merry dragged across Rohan by orcs with their friends in pursuit, the Rohirrim racing to Gondor, the Grey Company riding through the Paths of the Dead, Frodo and Sam struggling across Mordor. Many of the characters most aware of the true nature of the world are travellers; the Elves or 'Wandering Companies'(l), Aragorn and the Rangers who turn out to be the unknown but indispensable guardians of many lands, and Gandalf whose Elvish name is Mithrandir, 'Grey Pilgrim'. The most noble representative of Gondor in the book is perhaps Faramir, captain of the Rangers of Ithilien. The hero, in The Lord of the Rings, is a wanderer; the powers for good are powers of the road, powers of the open country.

It is fitting, then, that as Frodo and his companions travel south from Rivendell, the narrative contains numerous references to the openness of the country. This matches a major theme of the section: for an important aspect of the journey is that in symbolic terms too it is an ominously 'open road', with its ultimate end very far from a foregone conclusion. Various places they must travel through - Moria and Fangorn especially -have an evil reputation; when Aragorn ventures into the subterranean Paths of the Dead, his friend

(1) TLOTR, p.83.

Eomer gives up hope of seeing him again. In a time when 'all foretelling is now vain: on the one hand lies darkness, and on the other only hope'(l), the deliberate journeying into danger is an apt

symbol of the will to go on with no assurance of success in an unpromising struggle against colossal evil.

In such a quest, the traveller - particularly a traveller as small and ordinary as a hobbit -needs the support of others. The first of the three volumes of The Lord of the Rings is entitled 'The Fellowship of the Ring', and 'fellowship' is an essential support when the road is ominously open. When Elrond asks Frodo if he holds to his decision to take on the quest, Frodo replies, 'I do… I will go with Sam'(2); and it is Sam's support alone that sees him across Mordor. In the choice of Frodo's companions, Gandalf believes that 'it would be well to trust rather to their friendship than to great wisdom'(3); Gildor's attitude is similar.(4) One of the book's most moving passages is that in which Merry becomes the squire of Theoden, the king of Rohan, on the eve of Theoden's last venture, riding to the rescue of Gondor's besieged capital:

> 'As a father you shall be to me,' said Merry.
> 'For a little while,' said Theoden.(5)

But the places of fellowship that exist in the open country are primarily places of refreshment, of encouragement to go on with the journey, rather than strongholds in their own right, alternatives to the open country. This is true of the inn at Bree, of Rivendell, Lorien and Ithilien. Charles Moorman catches the prevailing tone very well:

> As in the pagan heroic literature of the West, civilization is seen in terms of outposts, little circles of light and

(1) Ibid,p.367. (2) Ibid,p.268. (3) Ibid,p.269. (4) Ibid, p.83.
(5) Ibid,p.760.

> fellowship dotting the forests of the night… Finally the little circles of light die out altogether, and there are no more havens, only the wastes and mountains of Mordor.(1)

But this is not merely a Nordic vision, as Moorman suggests. There is a parallel with the biblical concept of the church: 'Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come', says Hebrews 13:14. The New Testament church is not an entrenched fortress into which the elect can escape from attack and spiritual conflict, but rather a place of refreshment for the ongoing travel; a community of 'strangers and pilgrims'(1 Peter 2:11) who are all on a perilous journey through the wilderness, like the Israelites of the Exodus to whom Peter is here comparing the church. That, it would seem, is the kind of picture of people engaged in conflict with supernatural evil that informs Tolkien’s imagination.

And in opposition to it he sets two very different approaches, those of the towers of Orthanc and Minas Tirith. The second volume of The Lord of the Rings is entitled 'The Two Towers', and these would seem to embody defective attitudes to the conflict against the dark lord. Obviously, the book is not an allegory: but at the same time thematic complexes of attitudes become associated with Tolkien's imaginative conceptions. Orthanc is the stronghold of Saruman, greatest of the wizards; Saruman has settled in this stronghold rather than being, like Gandalf, a 'Grey Pilgrim' travelling the open country. By the time of the story, he has become corrupt, concluding that the ends justify the means, that the dark lord's victory is inevitable and that therefore it is best to ally with him: as he urges Gandalf,

> We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our

(1) Charles Moorman, ‘”Now Entertain Conjecture of a Time" -The

Fictive Worlds of C.S.Lewis and J.R.R.Tolkien', in Hillegas, op.cit., p.66. Incidentally, there is a very similar passage in Lewis' That Hideous Strength, p.139.

> hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order....There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means.(1)

This is, of course, the direct opposite of the approach of the Fellowship of the Ring, which is to affirm and act upon the 'pattern' of what must be done, even if it is leading to an unpromising end. And with the change in means, the ends have changed too; 'Knowledge, Rule, Order' are hardly Gandalf's goals, and Saruman's kind of 'order' and the Fellowship's acceptance of 'openness' seem virtually opposites. Saruman's desire for order means personal control, personal rule ('We must have power, power to order all things as we will'(2)). His response to Gandalf's refusal to collaborate is (appropriately, given his opposition to openness) to confine him in a small space at the top of Orthanc. When Saruman himself is defeated, and has refused Gandalf's offer of freedom - 'free...to go where you will'(3) -the consequence is his own confinement in Orthanc; and when he finally escapes, he goes to the Shire, with the result that the hobbits on their return find 'a lot of rules and orc-talk', including the fact that 'The Chief...doesn't hold with folk moving about.'(4) The sickness of Orthanc, in contrast to the Fellowship of the Ring following the 'pattern' wherever it leads them, is its distrust of openness.

Minas Tirith, the citadel of the military power of Gondor, represents much that is good. But to the Fellowship, its stronghold is an alternative to their preordained quest, and hence a temptation. Its representative in the Fellowship is its ruler's son, Boromir, who is willing to accept the leadership of Gandalf and

(1) TLOTR,p.253. (2) Ibid,p.252. (3) Ibid,pp.568-69. (4) Ibid,p.979.

Aragorn; but in the conflict against supernatural evil he has a marked confidence in human strength over against the hidden, non-human powers in whom trust must be placed in the `open country'. Boromir is proud, proud of Gondor: 'Believe not that in the land of Gondor the blood of Numenor is spent, nor all its pride and dignity forgotten. By our valour...are peace and freedom maintained in the lands behind us, bulwark of the West.'(1) He alone of all the Council urges that the Ring be used by the 'Free Lords of the Free' against the dark lord, something neither Elrond nor Gandalf would trust themselves to attempt.(2) But he does not know the 'wide world' as well as the Rangers of the open country, who are much more oriented to the numinous: Aragorn tells him, 'Many evil things there are that your strong walls and bright swords do not stay. You know little of the lands beyond your bounds.'(3) There is an implicit debate here, and Tolkien has, of course, loaded the scales (as any author will when choosing the tale he will tell): the manifestation of a new, supernatural evil has proved Gondor's valour insufficient, and Boromir has left his stronghold and come to Rivendell in response to a dream (4); and in Rivendell it transpires that he does not even know Gondor's own records as well as Gandalf does. The Lord of the Rings is not intended as an allegory, but it is not entirely absurd to suggest that Boromir's attitude corresponds to a humanistic approach to warfare against evil, as against dependence on the non-human. The issue surfaces again when they reach the Elvish land of Lorien: Boromir distrusts such a numinous place, preferring 'a plain road, though it led through a hedge of swords'(5) -preferring, in fact, dependence on his own valour.

At the end of the first volume, the matter comes to a crisis. The

(1) Ibid,p.239. (2) Ibid,p.260. (3) Ibid,p.242. (4) Ibid,pp.239-40. (5) Ibid,p.329.

Company have to decide whether to go on to Mordor (which even to Aragorn appears to

be 'to walk blindly... into darkness'(1)), or whether -since Gandalf is apparently dead -to go to Minas Tirith. To Boromir, it is 'a choice between defending a strong place and walking openly into the arms of death'. Frodo, however, has less faith in human strength, and senses a warning against departing

from what had seemed 'ordained' -'against refusal of the burden that is laid on me. Against - well, if it must be said, against trust in the strength and truth of Men. '(2) Boromir argues again for the use of the dark lord's Ring: 'These elves and half-elves and wizards, they would come to grief perhaps… But each to his own kind. True-hearted Men, they will not be corrupted.' And with that he attempts to seize the Ring from Frodo by force - denying any concept of 'ordaining' as he does so: 'It is not yours save by unhappy chance… It should be mine. Give it to me!'(3) As a direct result of his attempt, the Fellowship become divided.

It is an important moment, for several reasons. For one thing, it demonstrates how Boromir's character functions to prevent 'destiny' swamping the book's causality, in that he can carry out actions that are in opposition to the 'pattern'. Edmund Wilson complains of the absence of 'serious temptations' in The Lord of the Rings(4), but Boromir tempts, is tempted, and falls. At the same time, his choice itself becomes woven into the pattern: as Urang points out, it is because of the apparent catastrophe of the Fellowship's breakup that the dark lord's attention is concentrated on its other members and Frodo and Sam are able to enter Mordor.(5) And again, this 'pattern' is concerned with the fate of individuals

(1) Ibid,p.359. (2) Ibid,p.388. (3) Ibid,pp.389-90. (4) Edmund Wilson, The Bit Between My Teeth (1965), p.329. (5) Urang, Shadows of Heaven,p.114.

and not merely the broad sweep of the conflict. Almost immediately there comes an attack of orcs, and Boromir dies trying to save the hobbits; this is narrated as the death of a hero, and the funeral song that Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli sing (itself a fine elegiac lament) emphasises the point. Further, although Boromir's last words are 'I have failed', this amounts to a negation of his earlier, obsessive self-confidence, and he dies in peace rather than despair. As we noted above, the patterning in The Lord of the Rings appears to be a moral providence, and it seems that Boromir is finding some sort of 'salvation' within the terms of the book.

Boromir's death is not the end of this debate, however. His father, Denethor, is ruler of Gondor, and to him 'there is no purpose higher in the world as it now stands than the good of Gondor. '(1) His advice to the horsemen of Rohan -who, as their king says, 'fight rather... in the open', and who ride to Gondor's rescue despite the cost to themselves -is that 'the strong arms of the Rohirrim would be better within his walls than without. '(2) Here again confidence in Gondor's 'strong walls', and a belief in its ultimate importance, are set against the self-sacrifice of the people of the open country. When, finally, the armies of the dark lord appear triumphant, and Minas Tirith seems to have fallen, Denethor has no higher loyalty to fall back on and turns to total nihilism, denying the values of the Western kings that Minas Tirith supposedly represented: 'We will burn like heathen kings before ever a ship sailed hither from the West… It shall all go up in a
great fire, and all shall be ended. Ash! Ash and smoke blown away on the wind!'(3) Gandalf attempts (unsuccessfully) to prevent his

(1) TLOTR, p.741. (2) Ibid, p.781. (3) Ibid, pp.807, 834.

suicide: 'Authority is not given to you...to order the hour of your death… And only the heathen kings, under the domination of the Dark Power, did thus. '(1) Practical action, Tolkien implies, is rooted in attitudes to supernatural power: the heathen kings committed their acts of despair 'under the domination of the Dark Power', and Denethor should be bearing in mind the nature of the 'authority' he has been 'given'. Gondor is not ultimate, rather there is a higher power to which he is in some way responsible. Denethor has forgotten this: with disastrous results. In his suicide is embodied Tolkien's conclusion of this particular theme. The war against cosmic evil fails when conducted on the basis of faith in human strength; indeed, that faith is a type of egoism, and when finally defeated can turn into nihilism. It is the direct opposite of Frodo's willingness to venture out from the safety of the Shire (or Rivendell or Lorien) into the unguaranteed openness of the wild, facing danger but enacting a faith in what is 'ordained'.

Once again it is worth pointing out how all this parallels a biblical theme. The book of Genesis contains the story of how the human race were instructed to spread and 'fill the earth', but instead, in defiance of God, build the tower of Babel, 'so that we may... not be scattered over the face of the whole earth'; the results are disastrous. (2) In the following chapter, precisely the reverse occurs: Abraham leaves his security in the city of his people to go to a land he does not know.(3) The New Testament chooses this incident as a paradigm of faith: 'By faith Abraham... obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. '(4) This pattern of the obedient journey out of the security of the city and into the unknown would
seem to be the shape of Tolkien's narrative too.

(1) Ibid,p.835. (2) Genesis 9:1,11:4. (3) Genesis 12:1.
(4) Hebrews 11:8.

(v) The Vision of Hopelessness

Yet it is at this point that Tolkien gives to his narrative a tonality different from that of a biblical providentialism. As The Lord of the Rings progresses, its tone grows darker and darker, from Rivendell onwards. After Gandalf's disappearance, Aragorn asks, 'What hope have we?', and a little later describes the quest as 'more hopeless than ever'.(1) Frodo tells Faramir that he does not think he will ever reach his goal(2), and Faramir too feels that it is 'a hard doom and a hopeless errand… I do not hope to see you again on any other day under this Sun.'(3) To Pippin's query, 'Is there any hope?', Gandalf replies, 'There never was much hope… Just a fool's hope, as I have been told.'(4) When the army of the West makes its final suicidal assault on Mordor, the narrative describes it as a 'hopeless journey' and 'the last end of their folly'.(5) There are numerous similar passages; this is a world away from the ebullient note of, say, Paul's 'Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph'(6), or of 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'(7), which seems to be his response of faith to any situation. Rather, the approach to Mordor is a growing revelation of apocalyptic evil, with no sense that the pattern that had pointed in that direction could in any respect promise victory. The end point is the passage describing the beginning of the final battle:

> The Sun now climbing towards the South was veiled in the reeks of Mordor, and through a threatening haze it gleamed,
> remote, a sullen red, as if it were the ending of the day,
> or the end maybe of all the world of light. And out of the
> gathering mirk the Nazgul came with their cold voices crying words of death; and then all hope was quenched.(8)

Such is Middle-earth when all the forces have been gathered, and

(1) TLOTR,pp.324,393. (2) Ibid,p.666. (3) Ibid,p.678. (4) Ibid,p.797. (5)Ibid,pp.868,869.(6) 2 Corinthians 2:14. (7) Romans 8:31. (8) TLOTR, p.873.

the picture is finally clear; cosmic evil is manifest, but no powers of cosmic good seem to be revealed to match them. (There is no suggestion that Gandalf's powers can handle so unequal a conflict: 'Black is mightier still', he says on an earlier occasion.(1)) Here and elsewhere in the book, the absence of powers of cosmic good is such that no matter how desperate the situation the characters do not pray.(2) There is a sense of a path laid before them, but no one has a relationship with God like that which Christians build their lives upon. At the time of need there is no deity who can be called upon or depended upon. It is not the same world as the hopeless universe of, say, Graham Greene's The Heart of the Matter, because there is a providential plan of some kind and (as we shall see) that providence seems to have intervened for good on a number of occasions; but it has not been revealed in any detail - Middle-earth has no Bible -and no one can assume it will step in again.

In the absence of powers of cosmic good, the dark lord dwarfs all other characters. The very title of the book, The Lord of the Rings, is his title.(3) What binds together the 'Free Peoples' is that they are 'all enemies of the One Enemy'.(4) Galadriel summarises millennia of Middle-earth's history by saying 'Together through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat. '(5) The only hope in such a world is that evil will defeat itself: that the dark lord will be destroyed by his own weapon, or, more precisely,

(1) Ibid,p.489. (2) For example, in Gandalf's imprisonment at Orthanc, Frodo's vital decision at Parth Galen, or the total disaster that seems to have befallen the quest after Frodo is apparently killed at Cirith Ungol, when Sam is 'utterly alone' (ibid,p.877). The invocations of Elbereth (eg p.894) are more a magical weapon than a

prayer. (3) Ibid,pp.220, 259. The point is Manlove's. op.cit.,p.193. It could be argued, of course, that Gandalf, Aragorn, Sam or (most of the time) Frodo are 'lords of the Ring' in that they master its power in renouncing it. (4) TLOTR, p.644. (5) Ibid,p.348.

through his own strategy in creating it. And Tolkien gives several instances of such a pattern. 'Often does hatred hurt itself', says Gandalf, after Saruman's henchman, having (presumably) cast around for something to hurl at Gandalf, finally (and a trifle implausibly) selects a vital magic stone.(1) Elrond hopes -correctly -that the dark lord will not consider the possibility of his enemies seeking to destroy the Ring rather than using it against him, because 'the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power, and so he judges all hearts. '(2) The inability of the orcs to get along with each other gives a narrow escape to Frodo and Sam on at least three occasions, including one where two groups of orcs fallout and slaughter each other almost to the last soldier.(3) Destiny, then, achieves its purpose partly by standing back and leaving evil to work out its own destruction. To what extent this is a biblical concept is questionable; it is not clear that self-destructiveness must necessarily be inherent in the very concept of evil, and certainly the final destruction of the antichrist in the book of Revelation is the result, not of the fruition of 'internal contradictions', but of the return of Christ in power.

At the same time, the artistic advantages of such an approach are obvious. The more colossal the power of evil, the more ominous seems the outcome of the quest, and the more strikingly small do its main protagonists appear. It also helps to preserve suspense. New Testament supernaturalism gave the early church a total conviction that the outcome of their conflicts was guaranteed by God; and if a church is to stake its all on the promises of God, even to the point of martyrdom, it needs certainty, not suspense. In a novel, in

(1) Ibid,p.569-70. (2) Ibid,p.262. (3) Ibid, p.884. Other instances of the same pattern are found on pp.797,816,858.

contrast, a guaranteed outcome is not what is required; and it is not surprising, therefore, that evil in The Lord of the Rings appears monstrous and unchallengeable in a manner somewhat different from the biblical picture. This also serves to enhance the nobility of the struggle. In his essay on Beowulf, Tolkien cites a description of the warfare of the gods of Norse mythology against monstrous evil, a war in which they will finally be defeated, as 'absolute resistance, perfect because without hope.'(1) He adds that this vision is changed in literature affected by Christianity: 'The tragedy of the great temporal defeat remains for awhile poignant, but ceases to be finally important… There appears a possibility of eternal victory… But that shift is not complete in Beowulf.'(2) Nor, indeed, in The Lord of the Rings.

It may be that at this point there is a conflict between the Christian aspects of Tolkien's imagination and the Nordic ethos that he also found so attractive. In one sense Tolkien's description of Beowulf as a poem by a Christian poet about 'characters conceived dramatically as living in a noble but heathen past'(3) is directly applicable to The Lord of the Rings. Indeed, Tolkien's use of religious references follows the approach he believes the Beowulf poet to have adopted: a deliberate suppression both of 'specifically Christian' content and of the 'old gods' too(4), combined with

(1) J.R.R.Tolkien, The Monsters and the Critics (1983). p.21. Cf. C.S.Lewis: 'Dualism can be a manly creed. In the Norse form ("The giants will beat the gods in the end, but I am on the side of the)gods") it is nobler by many degrees than most philosophies of the . moment.' (God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids. 1970), p.24.) (2) Tolkien, The Monsters and the Critics, pp.22-23. (3) Ibid,p.39. (4) Ibid,p.22. Kilby quotes a letter to Father Robert Murray in which Tolkien describes The Lord of the Rings as 'fundamentally religious', but adds that he had 'cut out practically all references to anything like "religion", to cults and practices in the imaginary world. For the religious element is

absorbed into the story and the symbolism.' (Kilby, op.cit., p.56.)

occasional instances that are 'partly "re-paganized"... with a special purpose.'(1) That is to say, neither the Christian God nor any Middle-earth deity (not even 'the One' mentioned in the appendices) is worshipped in The Lord of the Rings (2), but 're-paganized' references -for example the magical invocation of Elbereth -may be utilised outside a context of worship. Such a deliberate depiction of a 'pre-Christian' era (and this is still more true of the sad world of The Silmarillion) would explain the sense of abandonment, the absence of anything resembling Christ's 'Surely I will be with you always'.

Some readers have gone further and seen The Lord of the Rings as 'basically pessimistic' and 'essentially pagan in conception'.(3) However, this is not really necessary. Certainly Tolkien presents an ambiguous picture where hope and despair seem evenly matched.(4) But the final outcome is not exactly 'a temporary victory gained at enormous cost'(5); there is a cost, and other evils will come, but the eventual defeat of the dark lord himself is complete. Perhaps the two incidents in the book that come closest to an embodiment of the Nordic spirit are Eomer's defiance and song of despair on the field of Pelennor(6), and Aragorn at the Black Gate ('The Captains of the West were foundering in a gathering sea… His eyes gleamed like

(1) Tolkien, The Monsters and the Critics, p.41. (2) In The Silmarillion, in contrast, there are many religious references, because the book sets out the entire cosmology of Middle-earth. The issue of worship is crucial in the section titled 'Akallabeth'.
(3) As does Charles Moorman, in Hillegas, op.cit., pp.62ff. But the 'never-ceasing wars against evil' that Moorman stresses are part of the Christian vision of this world too; he cites Elrond's description of the previous victory over Sauron as 'fruitless', but Elrond himself modifies this (TLOTR, p.237); he quotes Frodo's being wounded beyond recovery, but for Frodo, as in Christianity, there is an afterlife that compensates for this. He is simply inaccurate when he says there is ‘no hearkening back...to a Golden Age', and

no time 'when the "Great Darkness" did not exist somewhere'; Bombadil is used by Tolkien to recall such a time(ibid,p.129). (4) A similar coexistence of the old Northern heroic ethic and the Christian vision appears in Tolkien's poem 'The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son'. (5) Moorman, ibid,p.62. (6) TLOTR, p.829.

stars that shine the brighter as the night deepens'(1)); but both of these are followed, not by a brave resistance to death, but by an unhoped-for deliverance. Here the Christian pattern reappears. Thus the vision of The Lord of the Rings as a whole is not dualistic or Manichaean. But it must be said that the characters' experience along the way is not unlike it; the endeavour seems to them one in which the forces of evil really are going to win in the end. But this too can be a sense Christians may well experience in the real world.

(vi) Despair, Hope, 'Eucatastrophe'

There are two possible responses to a situation of apparent hopelessness. One is that of despair; in The Lord of the Rings this finds its embodiment in Denethor's suicide, one of the book's most powerful scenes.(2) Denethor is portrayed with a real nobility, despite his relapse into a self-destructive paganism, and Tolkien puts real emotional force into his farewell to Pippin and his feelings towards Faramir, his son whose unconscious body he wishes to burn with him. Pippin's response to Denethor's farewell contains the alternative attitude, however:

> Gandalf... is no fool, and I will not think of dying until
> he despairs of life… And if they come at last to the Citadel, I hope to be here and stand beside you and earn perhaps the arms that you have given me.

This alternative has another, subtler expression. Denethor arranges for his son's body to be carried to the House of the Dead, where he intends them both to die; while Aragorn was last depicted setting off with his Rangers through some subterranean tunnels known

as the Paths of the Dead, which are the shortest route to Minas Tirith. The reputation of these Paths is such that Aragorn's friend

(1) Ibid,p.927. (2) Ibid,pp.834-36.

Eomer gives him up for lost; but unlike Denethor's journey, Aragorn's passage through death is one expecting resurrection. Indeed, Tolkien makes Aragorn overcome death in an unusual sense: during this journey he summons the 'living dead', unquiet spirits who had betrayed his ancestors, and uses them for the defeat of the forces of the dark lord. By this counterpoint Tolkien supplies a striking context for Denethor's reaction to apparent calamity. The alternative to Denethor is, in fact, that of the Norse warrior ethic: to go on fighting against evil right to the end. 'Your part is to go out to the battle of your City, where maybe death awaits you', Gandalf challenges Denethor. He cannot offer a promise either of victory or of his son's healing; but the choice is between playing one's part, and abandoning all action. ('Go then and labour in healing! Go forth and fight! Vanity', cries Denethor.)

Despair is a weapon of the dark lord(I); and therefore, even in situations of total hopelessness, the forces of good are continually called to hope. 'Do not give up hope!', Aragorn urges Sam after Frodo is critically wounded at Weathertop.(2) Aragorn himself has gone for many years under the name 'Estel', 'Hope'.(3) 'Do you ask for help?', Gandalf demands of the king of Rohan; '... No counsel have I to give to those who despair. '(4) 'Up with your beard, Durin's son!', Legolas tells Gimli the Dwarf when it seems the relieving army cannot reach Minas Tirith in time; '...Oft hope is born, when all is forlorn.'(5) But it is important to notice what such a `hope' is. 'Don't trust your head, Samwise, it is not the best part of you', Sam

reflects after mistakenly assuming Frodo to be dead at Cirith Ungol. 'The trouble with you is that you never really had any hope. Now what is to be

(1) The chief Black Rider is the 'Captain of Despair' (ibid, p.801); cf. p.805. (2) Ibid,p.198. (3) Ibid,p.1032. (4) Ibid, p.503. (5) Ibid,p.859.

done?'(1) Sam's problem here is not that his evaluation of the external probabilities was inaccurate; it is that he has failed to base his actions on `hope' as an internal quality. Tolkien sums up the action of the book as a whole in the words 'hope beyond hope'.(2)

The question then arises, what does The Lord of the Rings present as the source of hope? What is it that enables someone to follow the 'open road' - into the open country, into places of notorious danger, into unequal battle - in defiance of the likelihood of defeat and destruction? The book offers several answers. One is the sense of the pattern that is 'ordained' or 'appointed', that motivates Frodo's acceptance of the Ring at Rivendell(3); Galadriel's encouragement to the Company as they depart from Lorien ('Maybe the paths that you each shall tread are already laid before your feet. though you do not see them'(4)); Frodo's decision to carry on into Mordor, alone if necessary ('I know what I should do'(5)); or Aragorn's decision to challenge the dark lord in the Stone of Seeing ("I deemed that the time was ripe, and that the Stone had come to me for just such a purpose'(6)). Another, expressing this pattern, is prophecy, the verbal revelation from a bygone era, such as the verses that lead Aragorn to attempt the Paths of the Dead or Boromir to seek out Rivendell.(7) A third, as we noted above, is the fellowship of like-minded travellers; and, linked with this, devotion to or trust in the wisdom of a guide or leader. Trust in Gandalf is what

motivates Frodo’s departure from Hobbiton; love for Aragorn leads the Rangers to venture into the Paths of the Dead(8) and Eomer to join

(1) Ibid.p.723. (2) Ibid,p.lO36. Tolkien sometimes uses 'hope' and 'despair' in a sense more directly related to the external probabilities, but the intention is still the same. Frodo watches the powerful army of Mordor leave Minas Morgul: 'Despair had not left him, but the weakness had passed.... What he had to do, he had to do, if he could.'(p.692) Aragorn challenges the Company after Gandalf's fall in Moria. 'We must do without hope.... We have a long road, and much to do. '(p.324) (3)Ibid, p.264; cf p.240. (4) Ibid,p.359. (5) Ibid,p.388. (6) Ibid,p.861. (7) Ibid,pp.764, 240. (8) Ibid, p.767. This passage, incidentally, is a most effective piece of narration in its own right, and is a good example of Tolkien's ability to create his own legends, almost by way of ornamentation, as he goes along.

the apparently doomed assault on Mordor(1). Again these are a combination comparable to the Christian framework. (My personal feeling, by the way, was that they were significantly weakened in the film version; which gave much more force to Boromir's questions as to whether sending the ring to Mordor just with two small hobbits –and thus the plot in general - wasn't simply a bit stupid.)

And we must add a further factor: the embodiment of the pattern in actual events. Gunnar Urang suggests that in The Lord of the Rings Tolkien is creating 'an imaginative framework... for the Christian experience of hope', in which hope is nurtured both by the 'ordering of the historical process to some end' (that is, the sense of a providential pattern) and also by the experience of specific '"signs" and paradigm-events within history'. There is in the narrative, he says,

> a series of unexpected rescues, of lesser "happy endings" figuring forth the ultimate triumph. The list is a long
> one: Old Forest, the River Bruinen, Mount Caradhras, Fangorn, Helm's Deep, the gates of Minas Tirith, the Pelennor Fields, Cirith Ungol, the Black Gate of Mordor, Mount Doom. In everyone of these, despair is abruptly transformed to joy by a sudden and unexpected display of (often magical) power. (2)

This is, of course, the pattern of eucatastrophe which Tolkien describes in On Fairy-Stories as the 'highest function' of fantasy: the 'sudden joyous "turn"' coming out of despair and darkness.(3) Urang is right to observe the repeated way in which this pattern of deliverance appears in the book; and yet more instances could be quoted. There is the close escape from the Black Riders in the Shire after the appearance of the Elves; there is Merry and Pippin's escape from the orc that is taking them to Mordor after the latter is hit by an arrow 'aimed with skill, or guided by fate'.(4) One other example of particular

(1) To this we should perhaps add the impulse to 'go on' for the honour of one's people (eg ibid, p.860). (2) Gunnar Urang, 'Tolkien's Fantasy: The Phenomenology of Hope', in Hillegas, op.cit., p.105. (3)

J.R.R.Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories, reprinted in The Tolkien Reader (New York, 1966),p.68. We explore this further in the appendix to this study. (4)TLOTR,p.446.

interest, because it shows Tolkien's ability to present this pattern in many different guises, is when Aragorn looks ahead to the future of Gondor. He is filled with foreboding: Gandalf is going, Aragorn himself is mortal; and the legendary and symbolically important White Tree of Gondor, the only tree of its kind, has been dead for many years. Gandalf turns his attention to 'where all seems barren and cold', and on the edge of the snow he sees a sapling of the Tree. To Aragorn, it is a 'sign'. 'Who shall say how it comes here in the appointed hour?' says Gandalf.(1) Here, outside the context of combat, are the ingredients of the same pattern: gloom turned to joy by a quasi-miracle.

(vii) Mordor: The Place of Apocalypse

The most extended instance of eucatastrophe is the last long journey of Frodo and Sam across Mordor. For here the book's themes come together: the apparently impossible journey of the small across a totally Manichaean landscape, devoid of water, devoid of life (except occasional thornbushes) and devoid of hope; and the deliverance when disaster seems to have fallen at the very end of the quest. Tolkien is very good at conveying the tremendous exertion involved in this final stage; he emphasises repeatedly how hopeless it appears, and how, despite this, the hobbits refuse to give up. 'The whole thing is quite hopeless, so it's no good worrying about tomorrow'(2); 'I am tired, weary, I haven't a hope left. But I have to go on trying to get to the Mountain, as long as I can move'(3); 'I never hoped to get across. I can't see any hope of it now. But I've still got to do the best I can.' (4)

It is in such black situations that eucatastrophe, and the possibility of supernatural intervention, appears. It is when Frodo has been captured and Sam,

(1) Ibid,p.950. (2) Ibid,p.893. Tolkien possibly intends an echo here of Matthew 6:34, 'Take therefore no thought for the morrow… Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof' – though this in context is a statement of faith in the care of providence (cf.vv.25-33). (3) Ibid, p.897. (4) Ibid,p.903.

having failed to find him, sits down 'weary and feeling finally defeated', that, 'moved by what thought in his heart he could not tell'(sic), Sam begins to sing; and Frodo hears the song and replies, revealing his whereabouts.(1) This vague hint is repeated. Frodo and Sam are trapped by a monstrous insect; the creature is repelled by a light emerging from a phial given to Frodo by the elf-lady Galadriel, but Sam only remembers it at all because of a 'light' that comes 'in his mind', followed by a vision of Galadriel.(2) A little later Sam again finds deliverance as a result of remembering the phial because 'a thought came to him, as if some remote voice had spoken'; after which `his tongue was loosed and his voice cried in a language which he did not know', which leads to victory.(3) (To the Christian there is a paradoxical realism about the former at least; for if divine guidance has any meaning, it must in part at least have to do with thoughts being given or stimulated that were not present before.) As the hobbits press on into Mordor, something resembling answered prayer is slipped into the narrative: Sam remarks. 'If only the Lady could see
us or hear us. I'd say to her: "Your Ladyship, all we want is light and water."'(4) Two pages later the clouds clear and the hobbits find an unexpected stream; Sam bursts out. 'If ever I see the Lady again, I will tell her!... Light and now water!' Frodo describes it as 'our luck... or our blessing'(5); Tolkien is keeping the slight ambivalence with which he has phrased such things throughout the book. However, the most important reason for the credibility of such incidents as these is the fact that the overall picture still seems (convincingly) hopeless.

An interesting aspect of the Mordor sections is that, with the

recurring presence of eucatastrophe, it becomes plain that the hobbits must live by that and that alone. Tolkien introduces an

(1) Ibid.p.887. (2) Ibid.pp.703-04. (3) Ibid.p.712. (4) Ibid,p.897. (5) Ibid,pp.899-900.

element one can only refer to as asceticism; the everyday becomes stripped away, leaving Frodo and Sam with the powers of the otherworld - the Ring, the sense of the dark lord's nearness, and Galadriel’s phial -in naked confrontation. Tolkien draws this out in a remark about food. In Ithilien, on the marches of Mordor, there had been a moment of relaxation when Sam had cooked a true hobbIt meal 'Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit' {the chapter's title); but in Mordor itself they live entirely on food given them earlier by the Elves for 'when all else fails'(1):

> It did not satisfy desire, and at times Sam's mind was filled with the memories of food, and the longing for simple bread and meats. And yet this waybread of the Elves had a potency that increased as travellers relied on it alone and did not mingle it with other foods. It fed the will, and it gave strength to endure, and to master sinew and limb beyond the measure of mortal kind.{2)

The same note appears when Frodo realises he can no longer carry anything but the Ring. First he has to abandon his mail-shirt, at the risk of being stabbed in the dark{3), and eventually his orc-cloak, shield, helmet and sword have to follow ('I'll bear no weapon, fair or foul. Let them take me, if they will!'{4)) At the same time, his consciousness is becoming monopolised by the Ring, and as a result he can recall 'no taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of

wind'.(5) Sam, too, has to leave all that he has carried so far, even his cooking-gear (his 'chief treasure'(6)). Ancient archetypes of poverty and detachment appear here: all disguises and weapons, indeed everything ordinary, has been left behind, and only the apocalypse and the possibility of eucatastrophe remains.

It is immediately after this that Sam feels Frodo has 'found new strength, more than could be explained by the small lightening of

(1) Ibid,p.361. (2) Ibid,p.915. (3) Ibid,p.897. (4) Ibid,p.916. (5) Ibid. (6) Ibid,p.273.

the load that he had to carry. '(1) Tolkien's touch is again light: no naturalistic explanation is offered, but prov1dence and miracle are not mentioned either. Still, in the context of the 'answered prayer' for light and water earlier, there is an inevitable impression of strength com1ng to Sam and Frodo from some unspecified source as they labour on at the very limit of their endurance. Thus three pages later - after a final attack of despair brought on by the realisation that they don't know the route for the final stage(2) - Sam finds he has to carry Frodo, and 'whether because Frodo was so worn... or because some gift of final strength was given to him', he does not find the difficulty he expected.(3)

Soon afterwards comes 'a sense of urgency which he did not understand... almost as if he had been called.'(4) Frodo has sensed it too: the reason is that many miles away the army of the West is facing annihilation and can only be saved by the immediate destruction of the Ring. That, however, is only achieved by the reappearance of Gollum. It 1s a last attack by Gollum that 'roused the dying embers of Frodo's heart and will'(5); and when, at his

very dest1nation, Frodo proves to be so much under the power of the Ring that he cannot destroy it, it is Gollum who seizes it, falls with it into the flames and so brings about its destruction –and the downfall of the dark lord. This last eucatastrophe is a final instance of evil's self-defeating nature: the dark lord is destroyed by his own Ring, the Ring is destroyed by Gollum’s ‘devouring desire’.(6)

(1) Ibid,p.917. (2) Ibid,p.918. (3) Ibid,p.919-20. (4) Ibid,p.921. (5) Ibid,p.922. (6) Ibid.

But it is also the climax of the outworking of an essentially morally-oriented providence. At the start of the book, when Frodo had regretted that Gollum had not been killed, Gandalf had commented, 'My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many.'(1) The fulfilment is complex: Gandalf's hopes of Gollum's 'healing' are not fulfilled, nor is Tolkien's pattern a purely mechanical providence where Gollum helps Frodo because Bilbo pitied Gollum. Rather, Gollum only exists to play his part because other people had spared him - and spared him despite the unpleasant consequences that would probably follow. (In their doing so we see perhaps a further instance of the pattern of the 'open road'; pursuing the right action although the outcome is ominously uncertain.)

So, at length, the providential pattern is completed, through the long, freely-willed exertions of Sam and Frodo and through the long-term results of a free choice of evil by Gollum. At this point providence and freewill are inextricably interwoven. Patricia Meyer Spacks observes that while this 'final twist' with Gollum is dramatically unnecessary, prolonging the suspense by barely a page, thematically 'it is essential. In the presentation of this event, the idea of free will intimately involved with fate receives its most forceful statement.' Gollum is now will-less through his long servitude to evil, and 'it is appropriate that at the last he should be merely an instrument of... essentially benevolent fate. '(2)

Gunnar Urang would seem to be mistaken when he complains that, because Frodo's decision not to destroy the Ring and Gollum's craving for it are both overruled, 'the individual's freedom and

power... are affirmed only in the abstract, whereas the divine

(1) Ibid,p.58. Gollum has also found himself at the mercy of Frodo, the wood-elves, Faramir, and Sam (pp.600-01,248-49, 670-71, 609, 923);
it is a collective act of pity that makes possible Gollum's crucial intervention at Mount Doom. (2) Spacks, in Isaacs and Zimbardo, op.cit.,p.95.

absoluteness of power...is affirmed in the concrete.'(1) For there is an important issue at stake here. The biblical confession is that God's sovereignty alone is final: He is Lord. A mortal may have the power to damn himself (Gollum does), but God has not abandoned the cosmos entirely to human frailty. Hence, the Ring-bearer Frodo can still possess the ordinary hobbit's follies - and yet the quest will not fail. In the final event, hope is based not on Frodo's strength but on the final eucatastrophe. And yet even that last intervention operates through the longterm consequences of freely-willed acts by Gollum and Bilbo many years previously. This is not a humanistic celebration of the hero triumphing over all odds, nor an anthropocentric tragedy of the gulf that finally opens between the ideal and the reality. Rather, even in the Manichaean landscape of Mordor, the pattern is the biblical one of providence co-working with its willing agents.

(viii) 'Eucatastrophe' and the Products of a Christian Imagination

It is plain that this pattern of the eucatastrophe, the providential deliverance, meant a great deal in Tolkien's imagination. Indeed, it is the pattern of the book as a whole: the overthrow of overwhelming evil by the derisory strength of the small, as they attempt to do what is 'ordained'. The specific, paradigmatic deliverances that come, through 'fortune' or 'fate' or the supernatural power of Gandalf, to those who are 'going on' in the midst of despair and ruin, are what distinguish the 'hope' of The Lord of the Rings from a

more existentialist 'hope' based solely on the fact that the future is 'open'. They are the embodiment of

(1) Urang, Shadows of Heaven, p.160.

something within history 'working together for good' (reverting again to Paul's terms in Romans) with those who are seeking to follow through what they have seen of the providential pattern. Tolkien makes it quite clear in On Fairy-Stories that these eucatastrophes, these instances of 'a sudden miraculous grace', are analogous to 'evangelium', the pattern of the Gospel in the real world(l); the pattern of eucatastrophe is the pattern of Tolkien's Christian supernaturalism.

Since we have Tolkien's own authority for emphasising this parallelism, it is worth taking a closer look at the figure of Gandalf. For Gandalf is the agent of deliverance, often by supernatural power, in a number of the eucatastrophes. It is he who defeats the wolves on Caradhras, makes possible the escape from Moria, heals Theoden of Rohan and sets him free to play his part in history, turns defeat into victory at Helm's Deep, stands in the breach when the gate of Gondor falls, saves Faramir from his father and Frodo and Sam from the lava, and finds the sapling of the White Tree. 'Gandalf!', cries Pippin when Faramir is rescued from the Nazgul on the field of Pelennor, 'He always turns up when things are darkest'(2)- an explicit comment that Tolkien gets away with only because it occurs in the midst of an effective narrative of action. Throughout the book Gandalf is the guide and director, sensing the turn of events, the movement of the shape of history(3), and indeed moulding it as a kind of surrogate providence: 'a great mover of the deeds that are done in our time', Faramir calls him.(4)

It is significant, then, that he is presented as a power of the

(1) Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories,pp.68,71. (2) TLOTR, p.791. (3) Ibid,pp.484,581. (4) Ibid,p.655.

otherworld. His appearance does not suggest any great significance: in Fangorn, where he first reappears after his fall in Moria, he is described as 'a bent figure moving slowly... like an old beggarman'.(1) But that can be dispelled in a sudden epiphany, when the presence of the otherworld is revealed in him:

> The old man... sprang to his feet and leaped to the top of
> a large rock. There he stood, grown suddenly tall, towering above them. His hood and his grey rags were flung away… He lifted up his staff, and Gimli's axe leaped from his grasp and fell ringing on the ground… His hair was white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand. Between wonder, joy and fear they stood and found no words to say.(2)

The infelicities of this passage are clear -the unhelpful inversion of word order, the virtual meaninglessness of 'power was in his hand'. In context, though, it seems to succeed; in part because Tolkien shrewdly ensures that the transition from weakness to power is incomplete -Gandalf's memory is shown within the next few lines to have considerable gaps. Still, when his true nature is revealed, even Aragorn, heir of Gondor, pledges his allegiance: 'He has passed through the fire and the abyss, and they shall fear him. We will go where he leads. '(3) As a power of the otherworld, Gandalf is a sign that in the midst of darkness there can be hope for a pattern of deliverance.

The reason for this hope is important. The reference to 'the fire and the abyss' -reminiscent perhaps of the Harrowing of Hell - refers to Gandalf's struggle in Moria with a monstrous, demonic force called a Balrog, recounted by Tolkien in a fine piece of mythic narrative. Gandalf recalls the aftermath of the struggle:

> Then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and Time…. Naked I was sent back -for a brief time, until my task is done. And naked I lay upon the mountain-top… There I lay staring upward, while the stars wheeled over,

(1) Ibid,p.481. (2) Ibid,pp.483-84. (3) Ibid,p.490.

> and each day was as long as a life-age of the earth. Faint
> to my ears came the gathered rumour of all lands: the springing and the dying, the song and the weeping, and the slow everlasting groan of overburdened stone.(1)

So far so numinous. The dominant note here is perhaps more animistic than Christian; that, no doubt, is a deliberate move on Tolkien's part, because later in the book the references to Gandalf take on an explicit death-and-resurrection pattern. 'I am Gandalf the White, who has returned from death... and I cast you from the order and from the Council', says Gandalf when he is revealed in power to the treacherous Saruman.(2) 'My heart will not yet despair', says Pippin later. 'Gandalf fell and has returned and is with us.'(3) For Sam, Gandalf's resurrection becomes a token of a still more far-reaching cosmic restoration: 'Gandalf! I thought you were dead!... Is everything sad going to come untrue?'(4)

It is, then, as the 'resurrected one' that Gandalf embodies eucatastrophe. It is still important to remember that The Lord of the Rings is not allegorical: Gandalf is only 'a steward'(5), neither omniscient(6) nor omnipotent.(7) Unlike with Aslan in C.S.Lewis' Narnia stories, there is no question of the reader being invited to supply an interpretation of deity.(8) Still, it is not without significance for an understanding of the nature of Tolkien's vision that eucatastrophe should be embodied in a deliverer who has died and risen again.

Gunnar Urang goes a little further:

> No "God" is required in this story; it is enough if it suggests the kind of pattern in history which the Christian tradition has ascribed to the providence of God. Gandalf
> and Aragorn need not turn our thoughts to the Christ of Christian faith; but they persuade us that if we are to have hope in our lives and in our history it must be hope for the kind of

(1) Ibid,p.491. (2) Ibid,p.569. (3) Ibid,p.749. (4) Ibid,p.930. (5) Ibid,p.742. (6) Ibid,pp.484-85, 488, 950. (7) Ibid,p.489. (8) Edmund Fuller quotes Tolkien as saying that 'Gandalf is an angel'. ('The Lord of the Hobbits', in Isaacs and Zimbardo, op.cit.,p.35.)

> power and authority revealed in Aragorn the king and on the basis of the kind of power revealed in Gandalf's "miracles" and in his rising from the dead. What Frodo does and undergoes speaks to us of what a man's responsibility, according to the Christian faith, must always be, to renounce the kind of power which would enslave others and ourselves and to submit to that power which frees us to be all we are capable of being.(1)

Apart from the last phrase, which seems to lack connection with Tolkien's text, this seems a fair summary. Frodo could alternatively be described as the suffering victim bringing deliverance not by his strength but by 'bearing' the Ring and enduring its attendant evil; again, not as an allegorical figure, but as something analogous to the Christian pattern, a figure with some of the characteristics which the Christian believes must be present in the pattern of hope and liberation from evil. Aragorn is the alternative figure, the warrior-messiah who brings in the new age(2); the King who spent years wandering the wild until his 'looks are against' him(3), who does not assert his kingship forcibly, and who also is a healer, 'Envinyatar, the Renewer'.(4) Gandalf announces of him, 'There is a king again… Indeed the waste in time will be waste no longer, and there will be people and fields where once there was wilderness' - language reminiscent of Old Testament messianic passages.(5) The news of the fall of the Dark Tower is brought in terms that appear to be straight out of the Psalms:

> Your King hath passed through,
> and he is victorious.
> Sing and be glad, all ye children of the West,
> for your King shall come again,
> and he shall dwell among you
> all the days of your life.(6)

(1) Urang, in Hillegas, op.cit.,p.1O7. (2) The idea of characters that partially embody the characteristics of the ultimate Messianic figure forms a key part of the Jewish-Christian understanding of the Old Testament; David and Solomon, for example, can both be seen as

partial foreshadowings of the Messiah. What Tolkien is doing is in this respect not especially novel. (3) TLOTR,p.167. (4) Ibid,p.845. (5) Ibid,p.971. (6) Ibid,p.942.

In all these cases, then, the characters who bring about deliverance embody some part of the Christian pattern; the elements of the Christian story have been separated and recombined, but they are still present. Another instance is the light-giving phial of Galadriel, her gift to Frodo. This is as much the presence of eucatastrophe in Mordor as is Gandalf outside it; it repeatedly banishes temptation(l) and fear(2), it breaks the black magic of the Watchers.(3) It contains light from 'Earendil's star'; and Clyde Kilby tells how one Christmas Tolkien sent him a note containing a line of Anglo-Saxon poetry which he later translated as 'Here Earendel, brightest of angels, sent from God to men.' The line was from Cynewulf's Christ, a poem concerned with Christ's advent, the ascension and the judgement; and Tolkien described it as 'Cynewulf's words from which ultimately sprang the whole of my mythology'.(4) Earendil himself is a major figure in The Silmarillion; and it is significant that Galadriel's phial, the bringer of eucatastrophe in The Lord of the Rings, should have this direct connection in Tolkien's mind with advent and the coming of deliverance in the Incarnation- which to Tolkien was 'the eucatastrophe of Man's history.'(5) Again, this is not to see the phial as having deliberate allegorical connotations; the link is not one Tolkien makes within the text. Rather, it is another sign of the analogous relationship existing between Tolkien's beliefs about the real world and the shape he moulded into the events taking place in his sub-created world; deliverance in the latter parallels the motions of grace in the former.

(1) Ibid, p.691. (2) Ibid, pp.705,712. (3) Ibid, pp.882,894.
(4) Kilby, op.cit. ,pp.57-58. (5) Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories,p.72.

For the purposes of this study, then, Tolkien may be considered as having

found at least a partial solution to the problems of the fictional depiction of providence, by inventing his own historical process (buttressed by a vast amount of ancillary information, for example in his appendices), and then excluding explicitly Christian terminology while embedding in his history a sense of a purposive design. This design is in some sense opposed to the power of the 'dark lord', and it is a moral providence, working through individuals and their free moral choices. Within the overall design, this 'providence' seems to have a concern for the 'salvation' of virtually all the individual characters: Gollum and Saruman have the opportunity to repent, Boromir's death has importance for the same reason, and at Lorien each of the Fellowship are tested, even those who will not be accompanying the Ring much longer.(1) In the accomplishment of the design, mortal characters may have a role that is 'ordained'; but following the 'paths that are laid'(2) involves a long obedience, venturing into the open in the face of monstrous evil, motivated by a sense of the overall pattern and an awareness of duty, and supported by mutual fellowship. That is a journey that leads (for Frodo, at any rate) right out of this world into the otherworld; and it is carried through not merely by human hardihood but by something resembling grace, manifesting itself in specific paradigmatic events in the darkest moments of all.

What is striking is the wide variety of episodes in which Tolkien

(1) Ibid, pp.348-49. (2) Ibid, pp.359,696.

expresses these patterns. This is a credit to his imagination; and yet it is surprising that the deliverances do not become repetitious. There are perhaps four main reasons why they do not.

Firstly, the events in question are scattered through a narrative of over a thousand pages; and secondly, those pages are very far from being an account of the elect waiting complacently and inactively for the next deliverance. On the contrary, the imaginative weight of the book falls very heavily on the smallness and weakness of the good characters, and the overpowering nature of the evil that confronts them. In such a situation miraculous deliverances usually serve to balance the forces, making room for the mortal protagonists to continue to exercise their wills in action. That this balance is generally achieved is itself a noteworthy achievement, although the price Tolkien has to pay is removing any element of real relationship with God to the point where his world sometimes seems more Manichaean than Christian. But it does at least ensure that his preliminary eucatastrophes do not wreck the book; deliverance of the characters is only the prelude to a still greater sense of foreboding. The hobbits escape the Old Forest, but there are still Black Riders ahead; they escape into Rivendell, but a still worse journey is to follow; unexpected deliverance in the battle of Pelennor brings with it as a reward participation in the impossible assault on Mordor.(1)

Besides that, there is the ambivalent nature of the book's references to 'chance' and 'fortune'. 'Just chance brought me then,

(1) The absence of any such sense of foreboding is one reason why the 'Scouring of the Shire' episode at the close comes as something of an anticlimax.

if chance you call it', says Hombadil after rescuing the hobbits in the Old Forest.(1) 'You have been saved, and all your friends too, mainly by good fortune, as it is called. You cannot count on it a second time', Gandalf warns Pippin at Isengard -repeating later, 'We have been strangely fortunate.'(2) Such references hint at something more than chance that is operating, but they keep it from becoming too imaginatively prominent. It is in the Appendices that Tolkien varies this phrasing in a slightly more explicit manner, when Gandalf recalls that Rivendell escaped destruction in the War of the Ring only because some years earlier a Dwarf-kingdom had been established further east, and that in turn had been the result of 'a chance-meeting, as we say in Middle-earth', albeit one preceded on both sides by quasi-premonitions.(3) Here the implication is that the term 'chance' only makes sense if one's perspectives are limited to the purely terrestrial, to 'Middle-earth' in its ancient sense. (It is not surprising that we should find this in the Appendices, which are still 'widening the world'; it is in the Appendices that we first find direct mention of 'the One', the God of Middle-earth, and His sole overt intervention in history, in the downfall of Middle-earth's equivalent of Atlantis.(4)) Still, such a providence can scarcely be described as obtrusive.

Finally there is the elegiac note that dominates The Lord of the Rings, playing against the sense of victory in a kind of counterpoint. Although the 'dark lord' is finally defeated, much is lost. The Elves lose their power when the Ring is destroyed (despite Elrond's hopes to the contrary(5)), and must leave Middle-earth; they are losing Middle-earth and Middle-earth is

(1) Ibid, p.123. (2) Ibid, pp.579-81. (3) Ibid, p.1053. (4) Ibid, p.1013. (5) Ibid, p.262.

losing them. Frodo, too, returns to 'little honour...in his own country'(l),

and will never be ease in the Shire again: 'It has been saved, but not for

me.'(2) All this militates against any sense of a wooden march from facile

triumph to facile triumph, thereby preserving the effectiveness of Tolkien's

pattern of eucatastrophe.

Here, then, is one way of presenting providence in contemporary fiction. That is not the purpose of Tolkien's book; although he has referred to it as 'fundamentally religious'(3), yet the 'prime motive' was, as he says in the Foreword, 'the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story'(4); not to express providentialism! There are numerous other thematic complexes that could be drawn out from the story. Still, there can be no doubt that the pattern of hope fulfilled in _eucatastrophe, the repeated revelation of the 'sudden joyous "turn"', is one of the most powerful aspects of the tale for many readers. W.H.Auden wrote that 'No fiction I have read in the last five years has given me more joy'.(5) Bernard Levin, himself not a Christian, launched into rather extravagant praise of the book, calling it 'one of the most remarkable works of literature in our, or any, time. It is comforting, in this troubled day, to be once more assured that the meek shall inherit the earth.'(6) Whatever we may think of Levin's views on the literary canon, it is at least plain that for him, as no doubt for many readers too, Tolkien has found a model of providence that is imaginatively effective. Here, at least, the fantasy option seems justified.

(1) Ibid,p.l002. (2) Ibid,p.l006. (3) Letter to Father Robert Murray, quoted Kilby,

op.cit., p.56. (4) TLOTR, p.xvi. (5) Quoted Humphrey Carpenter, op.cit., p.221. (6) Ibid, p.222.

2. C.S.LEWIS: OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET

Out of the Silent Planet is the first of a science fiction trilogy by C.S.Lewis that also includes Voyage to Venus and That Hideous Strength. It is the story of how a philologist named Ransom is kidnapped during a walking holiday, by a physicist, Weston, and his collaborator, Devine. Ransom is bundled into a spaceship that Weston has constructed, which takes off for 'Malacandra' or Mars. Malacandra, it turns out, has intelligent inhabitants called sorns; and these have asked for a human being to be brought to their leader, Oyarsa, before Weston and Devine can be permitted to continue their activities -acquiring gold in Devine's case, and, in Weston's, preparations for some grand but obscure design involving the extermination of Malacandra's current inhabitants to make room eventually for man.(1) Weston and Devine suspect that no good will come to the man who goes to Oyarsa; and this is why the kidnapping of Ransom has occurred.

Ransom, however, escapes from them when they are unexpectedly attacked by a shark-like marine creature called a hnakra. In his escape he encounters another intelligent race, the hrossa; and while living among them he comes to realise that Malacandra is

(1) To read Lewis -especially his apologetic works such as Miracles and Mere Christianity - is to become aware of how far the climate of ideas, and particularly the popular objections or alternatives to Christianity, have altered between the 193Os and our own decade. Many of the notions Lewis combats have no currency now;
this conception that Weston represents is an example -and one that seems today an implausible quirk. Nevertheless, Lewis himself speaks of it as 'circulating all over our planet in obscure works of "scientification", in little Interplanetary Societies and Rocketry Clubs, and between the covers of monstrous magazines, ignored or mocked by the intellectuals, but ready, if ever the power is put into its hands, to open a new chapter of misery for the universe... the idea that humanity, having now sufficiently corrupted the planet where it arose, must at all costs contrive to seed itself over a larger area.' (Voyage to

an unfallen, utopian world whose inhabitants live together, in unselfish harmony. Oyarsa turns out to be, not a sorn, but a non-material entity 'put into Malacandra to rule it when Malacandra was made'(1), by 'Maleldil the Young', the deity of Malacandrian belief. Ransom learns that his own planet is unique among the worlds of the solar system in that it does not know such a ruler: 'It alone is outside the heaven, and no message comes from it', Oyarsa tells him when eventually they meet.(2) Earth, in fact, is the 'Silent Planet' of the book's title.

The book's narrative is much more concerned with what Ransom sees and learns from his various encounters than with dramatic action. But it concludes with the capture of Weston and Devine by the hrossa, their defence of their actions to Oyarsa, Oyarsa's response and its decision that all three human beings should be returned to Earth. The return journey is given an element of somewhat meaningless suspense by a race against time, resulting from Oyarsa's arrangement that the spaceship will destroy itself at the end of the ninety days predicted by Weston for the return journey; meaningless, to this reader at any rate, because although the destruction of the spaceship would seem to be a reasonable

Venus (1943; Pan edition of 1953), p.73). Of course such dreams now have an air of an exploitative, imperialistic spirit that seems distasteful. Still, Lewis' words 'at all costs' raise a perennially relevant ethical issue: whether - as Lewis strenuously denied and his contemporary J.B.S.Haldane seems to have suggested - the survival of humanity was an overriding priority justifying the abandonment of traditional morality (cf.Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids, 1970),p.311). Lewis touches on this question in That Hideous Strength, The Abolition of Man, and the short story 'Ministering Angels' (reprinted in Of Other Worlds and The Dark Tower). (1) C.S.Lewis. Out of the Silent Planet (1938), p.108. All references are to the 1952 Pan edition, henceforth referred to as OOTSP. (2) Ibid,p.140.

move on Oyarsa's part (even if it cannot and does not hinder Weston from building another), yet the time limit is something for which no real reason seems to exist.

Into this story Lewis builds a theological framework. The categories of 'fallen' and 'unfallen' are essential to an understanding of how Earth came to be 'Thulcandra', the Silent Planet, and why Malacandra is so different. The causes of Earth's Fall are traced beyond human history to the rebellion of the 'Oyarsa' of Earth, or the 'Bent One' as he becomes known ('bent' being the only word corresponding to 'evil' in the language of unfallen Malacandra):

> It is the longest of all stories and the bitterest. He became bent. That was before any life came on your world... It was in his mind to spoil other worlds besides his own. He smote your moon with his left hand and with his right he brought the cold death on my harandra before its time; if by my arm Maleldil had not opened the handramits and let out the hot springs, my world would have been unpeopled. We did not leave him so at large for long. There was great war, and we drove him back out of the heavens and bound him in the air of his own world as Maleldil taught us. There doubtless he lies to this hour, and we know no more of that planet: it is silent.(1)

The theological framework consists of more than quasi-angelic beings, however. As he learns from the hrossa about the divine 'Maleldil', Ransom is introduced to a Malacandrian doctrine of the Trinity:

> Then Ransom, following his own idea, asked if Oyarsa had made the world. The hrossa almost barked in the fervour of their denial. Did people in Thulcandra not know that Maleldil the Young had made and still ruled the world? Even a child knew that. Where did Maleldil live, Ransom asked.
>
> 'With the Old One.'

(1) Ibid.

> And who was the Old One? Ransom did not understand the answer. He tried again.
>
> 'Where was the Old One?'
>
> 'He is not that sort', said Hnohra, 'that he has to live anywhere,' and proceeded to a good deal which Ransom did not follow. But he followed enough to feel once more a certain irritation... He found himself being treated as if he were the savage and being given a first sketch of civilized religion. (1)

This works fairly well: the sudden appearance of well-known religious concepts in strange guise has its own interest (there is a subtle difference between the connotations of 'the Old One' and the connotations of the traditional terminology of Christian' doctrine), and its own internal logic (if what any religion has to say about God is true, then it is only reasonable to expect that God might have revealed the same facts about Himself to other civilizations that might exist in the universe). Lewis nowhere explicitly equates the Malacandrian cosmology with Christian dogma, but the parallelism is too obvious to miss.(2) It is reinforced by more subtle allusions. The passage quoted above on the 'Silent Planet' concludes,

> We think that Maleldil would not give it up utterly to the
> Bent One, and there are stories among us that He has taken
> strange counsel and dared terrible things, wrestling with the Bent One in Thulcandra. But of this we know less than you; it is a thing we desire to look into. (3)

Lewis gives no footnote or direct reference, but the allusion is obviously to the Authorised Version translation of I Peter 1:11-12, where Peter speaks of 'the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow... which things the angels desire to look into.' Out of the Silent Planet, then, is clearly a 'Christian fantasy'.

(1) Ibid, p.78. (2) Or so one would have thought. One can only note-with astonishment the statements recorded in Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, C.S.Lewis: A Biography (1974; Fount edition of 1979), pp.164-165, that numerous early readers and reviewers missed the parallelism in these passages. (3) OOTSP, p.140.

(i) 'Widening the World'

The book commences as a fairly standard piece of science fiction, written very much with one eye on H.G.Wells. However, Lewis is intending to use the traditional motifs of science fiction for an original purpose, and he refers to the use Wells made of them to emphasise his own departure from the norm. For example, when Ransom first learns he is to be handed over to the sorns:

> But what was a sorn?... His mind, like so many minds of his generation, was richly furnished with bogies. He had read his H.G.Wells and others. His universe was peopled with horrors such as ancient and medieval mythology could hardly rival. No insect-like, vermiculate or crustacean Abominable, no twitching feelers, rasping wings, slimy coils, curling tentacles, no monstrous union of superhuman
> intelligence and insatiable cruelty seemed to him anything
> but likely on an alien world.(1)

When he meets the sorns, his initial reaction is indeed of 'Giants - ogres - ghosts - skeletons'(2). But on further acquaintance this changes to 'It was more grotesque than horrible'(3), and finally, as his categories become attuned to the realities of the unfallen world, "'Titans" or "Angels". '(4) The landscape, likewise, is deliberately set against the worlds of early science fiction:

> Before anything else he learned that Malacandra was beautiful; and he even reflected how odd it was that this possibility had never entered into his speculations about it. The same peculiar twist of imagination which led him to people the universe with monsters had somehow taught him to expect nothing on a strange planet except rocky desolation or else a network of nightmare machines. He could not say why, now that he came to think of it.(5)

(1) Ibid.p.39. (2) Ibid,p.53. (3) Ibid,p.lO6. (4) Ibid.p.117.
(5) Ibid.p.47. Ransom's 'whole imaginative training' is likewise presented as a source of deception in pp.50.67,141.

The motivating force behind these departures is clearly Lewis' worldview. Wells' science fiction is that of a humanist for whom the

immensities of the cosmos must inevitably be (at best) alien, indifferent to man. For Lewis, in contrast, the cosmos is the domain and dwelling-place of a God who may be called 'Father'. This is basic to his fiction; in seeking to 'widen' his reader's notions of what the universe might possibly be conceived as including, he is aiming to make room for the Christian cosmology, along with much newly-imagined material. This is fiction with an apologetic purpose, even if it is much more than apologetics. The 'fictional hypothesis' is related to the author's worldview more directly than in Tolkien. As Lewis said of the second novel of the trilogy, _Voyage to Venus, 'It wouldn't have been that particular story if I wasn't interested in those particular ideas on other grounds. '(1)

However, Lewis' first efforts to 'widen the world' are not so specifically Christian. Neither are they offered particularly seriously. After being hit on the head during the kidnapping. Ransom has a peculiar dream. He, Weston and Devine are standing in a 'bright and sunlit' garden surrounded by a wall topped with broken bottles; and although the garden is sunlit, 'over the top of the wall you could see nothing but darkness.' Weston insists on their climbing over the wall; Ransom is the last to do so, and while he is astride the wall Weston and Devine are ushered back into the garden by 'the queerest people he had ever seen'. Ransom, finds he cannot get down from the wall, and remains there, feeling uncomfortable because

(1) C.S.Lewis, Of Other Worlds (New York,1966), p.88.

> his right leg, which was on the outside, felt so dark and his left leg felt so light. 'My leg will drop off if it gets much darker,' he said. Then he looked down into the darkness and asked, 'Who are you?' and the Queer People must still have been there for they all replied, 'Hoo -

Hoo -Hoo?' just like owls.(l)

This is whimsical, amusing, and, considered as a narrative tactic, very effective. It is comparable to some of the dreams in Graham Greene's novels: it does not bear a directly meaningful, one-to-one relationship to the events of the narrative (the reference to Ransom's leg, and the concluding 'just like owls', make sure of that); yet it seems to reinforce the movement of the narrative as a whole. The reader is being presented with the image of an uncertain journey out of the security and certainty of a limited world into an unknown but inhabited darkness. (It is a little like the journey out of Tolkien's Shire at the beginning of The Lord of the Rings.) The sense that the journey is dangerous (it is 'into the darkness'), and possibly prohibited (in view of the broken bottles), both safeguards the suspense and is sufficiently different from the 'Seek and you shall find' ethos of Christian cosmology to help the book away from the direction of single-level allegory; yet it does this without jeopardising the framework Lewis intends eventually to set up (it is only a dream). This is an amusing piece of 'sub-creation' which nonetheless prepares the reader's imagination - and, by its whimsy, his curiosity -for the shape of a universe that includes other powers besides man.

To this we can compare Ransom's reactions to his experience of weightlessness:

(1) OOTSP, p.19.

> He felt an extraordinary lightness of body: it was with difficulty that he kept his feet on the floor. For the first time a suspicion that he might be dead and already in the ghost-life crossed his mind. He was trembling, but a hundred mental habits forbade him to consider this possibility. Instead, he explored his prison.(1)

Indeed, he is not a ghost, and the book never suggests anywhere that ghosts exist (just as the earlier dream is only a dream). But the 'hundred mental habits forbade' suggests a sense of confinement; he has rejected this idea for emotional rather than rational reasons. Ghosts and Queer People may indeed belong in dreams, but still the reader's imagination is being stimulated to make room for considering whether there might not be more things in heaven and earth than in Horatio's, or his own, philosophy.

The next step is a little different. In a descriptive tour de force, Lewis presents Ransom's experience of the radiance of space:

> The Earth's disk was nowhere to be seen, the stars, thick as daisies on an uncut lawn, reigned perpetually with no cloud, no moon, no sunrise to dispute their sway. There were planets of unbelievable majesty, and constellations undreamed of: there were celestial sapphires, rubies, emeralds and pin-pricks of burning gold; far out on the left of the picture hung a comet, tiny and remote: and between all and behind all, far more emphatic and palpable than it showed on Earth, the undimensioned, enigmatic blackness. The lights trembled: they seemed to grow brighter as he looked. Stretched naked on his bed, a second Dana, he found it night by night more difficult to disbelieve in old astrology: almost he felt, wholly he imagined, 'sweet influence' pouring or even stabbing into his surrendered body.(2) .

Again, Lewis is not inviting his reader to believe in astrology; in fact he suggests that Ransom is benefiting from 'rays that never penetrated the terrestrial atmosphere'(3), creating a 'severe delight'.

(1) Ibid,p.24. (2) Ibid,p.34. (3) Ibid,p.35.

But the 'old astrology' is shown to bear a closer relation to reality than more recent mythologies that had made the heavens a bleaker and more alien place:

> A nightmare, long engendered in the modern mind by the mythology that follows in the wake of science, was falling off him. He had read of 'Space': at the back of his thinking

> for years had lurked the dismal fancy of the black, cold vacuity, the utter deadness, which was supposed to separate the worlds. He had not known how much it affected him till now- now that the very name '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.(l)

This is a notion that matters very much to Lewis. At the end of the book he introduces himself into the fiction as 'the author', learning of Ransom's concern for the continued struggle against the forces behind Weston in the light of his Malacandrian experience:

> What we need for the moment is not so much a body of belief as a body of people familiarized with certain ideas. If we could even effect in one per cent of our readers a change-over from the conception of Space to the conception of Heaven, we should have made a beginning.(2)

What Ransom refers to here is the 'baptism of the imagination' that was to Lewis the goal of the Christian fantasist. The hope is not so much to convince the novel-reader of the formulations of Christian dogma as to impress on his imagination a particular shape, with which (as in the parallelism of Maleldil and Christ) Christian beliefs about the nature of the real world can later coincide. It was Lewis' solution to a problem that faces any contemporary Christian apologetics: unbelief too often arises not from an informed awareness of the evidence, but from a completely closed

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid, p.180.

imagination that cannot conceive of the universe having the added Godward dimension, and so is incapable of giving the matter serious consideration. Lewis felt that the conception of the outside universe as an utterly indifferent 'black, cold vacuity' was a important imaginative obstacle of this kind. It was one he encountered frequently, and assaulted several times in his books.(l)

Hence, therefore, the significance of Lewis' conception here. The remarkably sensuous warmth that he succeeds in putting into his description of the 'sweet influence' plays a major part in his overall aim. It enables him to suggest, too, that Malacandra is not an exception, a utopian Shangri-la tucked away in a forgotten corner of a broken universe; rather, the 'abundant life' of Heaven and (in a different tonality) Malacandra is the norm, and Earth, the 'silent planet', the planet of barrenness, is the exception. The cosmos is not a vast, alien, impersonal emptiness(2); rather, it is 'the womb of worlds, whose blazing and innumerable offspring

(1) In an essay on 'Christian Apologetics' in God in the Dock, p.99, Lewis presents the argument from the size and indifference of the universe as one of the two main popular objections to Christianity. Cf. also The Problem of Pain (1940; Fontana edition of 1957), p.1; Fern-seed and Elephants (1975), p.86; and Miracles (1947; Fontana edition of 1960), pp.52-58, where Lewis' argument includes a 'fantasy'(p.56) similar to Out of the Silent Planet.
(2) Once again, it needs to be stressed that Lewis is not writing a piece of apologetics concerned with scientific evidence and aimed at the intellect, seeking to prove that neighbouring stars or planets support intelligent (and God-believing!) life. Rather, in so far as he is concerned with apologetics here, he is aiming at the 'baptism of the imagination', whereby the Christian certainty that the cosmos as a totality is not empty and indifferent (even if the astronomical universe as a whole is lifeless, and 'other life' is to be found only in the spiritual world), and that humankind is not alone, can be offered as an imaginative possibility. This he does by presenting 'other life' as existing within the astronomical universe, although in actuality it might be necessary to look further afield. The presentation of realities of the spiritual universe as if they were part of the physical universe is a major aspect of the trilogy.

looked down nightly even upon the Earth... Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens -the heavens which declared the glory...'.(1) Here Lewis hints subtly at the framework of belief that underlies his imaginative conception. Thus far he has included no explicitly Christian reference, despite the fact that his Christian belief is the reason why he is depicting space in this manner. But here, presumably, he could rely on many of his readers completing the quotation from Psalm 19: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork.'

The full theological implications begin to emerge at the end of the chapter; Malacandra's atmosphere seems only a 'pallid, cheerless and pitiable grey' compared to the 'splendour' of space/heaven:

> Nothing in all his adventures bit so deeply into Ransom's mind as this... Now, with a certainty which never after deserted him, he saw the planets... as mere holes or gaps in the living heaven - excluded and rejected wastes of heavy matter and murky air, formed not by addition to, but by subtraction from, the surrounding brightness. And yet, he thought, beyond the solar system the brightness ends. Is that the real void, the real death? Unless... he groped for the idea... unless visible light is also a hole or gap, a mere diminution of something else. Something that is to bright unchanging heaven as heaven is to the dark, heavy earths.(2)

He does not follow the implications through. He simply hints that there might be a 'wider world' beyond the physical cosmos; and that the relation between the sensuously radiant interplanetary space that he has drawn so vividly, and the world

(1) OOTSP, p.35. (2) Ibid, p.44.

we know, can be contemplated as a metaphor for the relations between physical and supra-physical realities. It is not his purpose to give evidence for the existence of such realities; he seeks merely to offer a way of thinking about them to the reader's imagination. Considered as a deliberate expression of the Christian worldview, this section functions to challenge the reader to think of the 'wider world' beyond or above human society not as empty and impersonal, but as radiantly alive.

(ii) New World, Old Supernaturalism

On arrival in Malacandra, there is a whole new world for Ransom to explore and for Lewis to describe.

We note elsewhere in this study the curious paradox that where a 'realist' such as Flaubert can be marked by a nauseated hatred of the 'unworthy reality' he depicts, the Christian fantasists Lewis and Tolkien seem to delight in reality even though their subject matter is far from mundane. This is not just a feature of Lewis' fantasy, but of his whole pattern of thought. His work contains several enthusiastic references to the variegated, concrete 'thereness' of the universe that God has created, akin to the spirit of Hopkins' 'Glory be to God for dappled things':

> It will be agreed that, however they came there, concrete, individual, determinate things do now exist: things like flamingoes, German generals, lovers, sandwiches, pineapples, comets and kangaroos. These are not mere principles or generalities or theorems, but things - facts - real resistent existences. (1)

(1) Lewis, Miracles, p.90.

The same hungry love for reality appears at the end of Out of the Silent Planet as the space travellers attempt to get back to earth before the destruction of their spaceship:

> Wild, animal thirst for life, mixed with homesick longing for the free airs and the sights and smells of earth -
> for grass and meat and beer and tea and the human voice -
> awoke in him.(1)

There would seem to be a kinship rather than an opposition between this delight in created things and the 'sub-creative' impulse that makes Lewis' fellow-fantasist Tolkien elaborate the geography, genealogy and linguistics of an imaginary world in page after page of appendices to The Lord of the Rings; and that sets Lewis himself effoliating what are perhaps some of the most attractive 'imaginary worlds' in the history of prose fiction:

> He tried hard, in such stolen glances as the work allowed him, to make out something of the farther shore. A mass of something purple, so huge that he took it for a heather-covered mountain, was his first impression.... It looked like

> the top of a gigantic red cauliflower - or like a huge bowl of red soapsuds - and it was exquisitely beautiful in tint and shape.
>
> Baffled by this, he turned his attention to the nearer shore beyond the shallows. The purple mass looked for a moment like a plump of organ-pipes, then like a stack of rolls of cloth set up on end, then like a forest of gigantic umbrellas blown inside out. It was in faint motion. Suddenly his eyes mastered the object. The purple stuff was vegetation... The huge plants opened into a sheaf-like development, not of branches but of leaves, leaves large as lifeboats but nearly transparent. The whole thing corresponded roughly to his idea of a submarine forest: the plants, at once so large and so frail, seemed to need water to support them, and he wondered that they could hang in the air.(2)

Lewis is enjoying himself, and his enjoyment is communicated to his reader. The mixture of the unexpected homely images - cauliflower, soapsuds, umbrellas -with the more conventional 'submarine forest', and the visually-striking 'leaves large as

(1) OOTSP, pp.173-74. (2) Ibid, pp.48-49.

lifeboats', serve to create a world at once vivid and surprising. The imaginative force Lewis puts into his 'sub-creation' gives it a robust reality. And this carries over into its inhabitants, the hrossa and sorns, and -an important point for our purposes -to their attitudes and beliefs, including their cosmology/theology.

Lewis soon faces an old problem in a new guise: the difficulty of presenting in a compelling way a good or saintly character, or, in this case, an unfallen one. His other-worldly setting proves to offer various ways of evading the difficulty. Characters that will turn out to be good can be made imaginatively striking by emphasising aspects that are apparently alarming or obnoxious at the first encounter. This is the case with his first sight of the sorns:

> He had a momentary, scared glimpse of their faces, thin and unnaturally long, with long, drooping noses and drooping mouths of half-spectral, half-idiotic solemnity. Then he turned wildly to fly and found himself gripped by Devine. (1)

This element is present in his first encounter with a hross too:

> In its hand (he was already thinking of its webbed fore-paw as a hand) it was carrying what appeared to be a shell. Then it held the shell to its own middle and seemed to be pouring something into the water. Ransom thought with disgust that it was urinating in the shell. (2)

Added to this is the simple element of curiosity. There is a neat piece of psychological observation when Ransom –a philologist -first hears the hross talking:

> It had language. If you are not yourself a philologist, I am afraid you must take on trust the prodigious emotional consequences of this realization in Ransom's mind... The love of knowledge is a kind of madness. In the fraction of a second which it took Ransom to decide

(1) Ibid,p.51. (2) Ibid,pp.63-64.

> that the creature was really talking, and while he still knew that he might be facing instant death, his imagination had leaped over every fear and hope and probability of his situation to follow the dazzling project of making a Malacandrian grammar... The very form of language itself, the principle behind all possible languages, might fall into his hands. Unconsciously he raised himself on his elbow and stared at the black beast.(1)

Lewis moves deftly from intellectual curiosity to action and emotional involvement:

> Ransom rose to his knees. The creature leaped back, watching him intently, and they became motionless again. Then it came a pace nearer, and Ransom jumped up and retreated, but not far; curiosity held him. He summoned up his courage and advanced holding out his hand; the beast misunderstood the gesture. It backed into the shallows of the lake and he could see the muscles tightened under its sleek pelt, ready for sudden movement. But there it stopped; it, too, was in the grip of curiosity. Neither dared let the other approach, yet each repeatedly felt the impulse to do so himself, and yielded to it. It was foolish, frightening, ecstatic and unbearable all in one moment. It was more than curiosity. It was like a courtship... The creature suddenly turned and began walking away. A disappointment like despair smote Ransom.(2)

The reader too has had his curiosity sharpened about the inhabitants of another world, about other possible life-forms; and Lewis continues to feed that curiosity with details about the hross' culture, food, huts, poetry, agriculture, conviviality, body-temperature, droppings and life-expectancy. And in the middle of this he introduces hross religion, if religion it can be called: the fact that Malacandra is ruled by a deathless being named Oyarsa but was made and is in the final analysis controlled by Haleldil the Young, and that Maleldil lives with 'the Old One' who is 'not that sort that he has to live anywhere'.(3)

This element might have come as a shock, particularly given the parallels with Christian belief. That it does not is partly due

(1) Ibid, pp.62-63. (2) Ibid, p.63. (3) Ibid, p.78.

to' Lewis' occasional allusions to a Christian framework as a normal way of looking at the world:

> If escape were impossible, then it must be suicide.
> Ransom was a pious man. He hoped he would be forgiven.
> It was no more in his power, he thought, to decide otherwise than to grow a new limb. Without hesitation he stole back into the galley and secured the sharpest knife.(1)

> Weston grew grimmer and more silent than ever. Devine, a flask of spirits ever in his hand, flung out strange blasphemies and coprologies and cursed Weston for bringing them. Ransom ached, licked his dry lips, nursed his bruised limbs and prayed for the end.(2)

> At the same time, the disabling panic of the first moments was ebbing away from him. The idea of suicide was now far from his mind; instead, he was determined to back his luck to the end. He prayed, and he felt his knife.(3)

> He drank again and found himself greatly refreshed and steadied... He was quite aware of the danger of madness, and applied himself vigorously to his devotions and his toilet.(4)

In each of these cases the Christian allusion has appeared in a context of crisis or action -Ransom's decision to ensure he can kill himself; the entry into Mars' atmosphere; Ransom's escape; his attempts to come to terms with

his situation on first awakening the next day. The reader is not confronted with the idea of prayer in the foreground; it appears in passing while other more important things are taking place. Again, just as the unfallen hross were given unpleasant characteristics, so prayer now appears in seemingly inappropriate contexts -the intention or desire for suicide, the fear of madness, the decision to 'back his luck'. The sense that a prayerful attitude is something commonplace, scarcely requiring comment, is conveyed successfully;
even if it is a slightly muddle-headed prayerfulness -or, indeed, because it is.

And if this is a world where it is reasonable for a man to think in religious terms, it cannot be too unreasonable for a hross to

(1) Ibid,p.40. (2) Ibid,p.43. (3) Ibid,p.53. (4) Ibid,p.57.

do the same. When Ransom is introduced to the hross beliefs, Lewis inserts a sentence to the effect that 'Ever since he had discovered the rationality of the hrossa he had been haunted by a conscientious scruple as to whether it might not be his duty to undertake their religious instruction'(1); it is a reasonable idea to be concerned about, given the cast of mind Ransom has already been shown to possess. (It is also important to note that this cast of mind has not been presented in a way that singled Ransom out as 'the religious character' in the novel, different from the other 'normal' characters whose attitudes define the 'normal' point of view.) Lewis does not depict Ransom wondering whether his religious beliefs and those of the hross should be in competition. No theological argument develops; rather the convergence is simply assumed(2), and Lewis moves the narrative onto another subject:

> It became plain that Maleldil was a spirit without body, parts or passions.

'He is not a hnau', said the hrossa.

'What is hnau?' asked Ransom.

'You are hnau. I am hnau. The seroni are hnau. The pfifltriggi are .'

'Pfifltriggi?' said Ransom.

(1) Ibid,p.78. (2) Elsewhere in his writings Lewis expressed a fear that, if ever man encountered extra-terrestrial life in reality, he might be far less successful at sensing this 'convergence' of belief than Ransom is on Malacandra. (Fern-seed and Elephants,pp.92-93; Christian Reflections (1967; Fount edition of 1981),pp.217-18.)

The existence of a utopia poses a question in more than one direction, of course. Considering the hrossa's harmonious sexual behaviour, Ransom reflects,

> At last it dawned upon him that it was not they, but his own species, that were the puzzle. That the hrossa should have such instincts was mildly surprising; but how came it that the instincts of the hrossa so closely resembled the unattained ideals of that far-divided species Man whose instincts were so deplorably different? What was the history of Man? But Hyoi was speaking again.(1)

Again, Lewis hints at the Christian framework and then moves the reader rapidly onwards -in fact to a consideration of the place of danger in his paradise. Hyoi, Ransom's hross friend, tells him, 'I do not think the forest would be so bright, nor the water so warm, nor love so sweet, if there were no danger in the lakes.' Hence the hnakra, the shark-like creature that the hrossa love to hunt, is not an evil that they would wish to see exterminated from the world, even though he occasionally kills some of them:

> They will not wish that there were no hneraki; nor do I. How can I make you understand, when you do not understand the poets? The hnakra is our enemy, but he is also our beloved. We feel in our hearts his joy as he looks down from the mountain of water in the north where he was born; we leap with him when he jumps the falls...

> We hang images of him in our houses, and the sign of all the hrossa is a hnakra.(2)

Here Lewis hints at the place that suffering might acceptably retain in a paradisiac world -and perhaps in the universe as a whole. (Later on Ransom finds a carving representing the early history of the Solar System, in which, Lewis notes without comment, the 'Bent One' is presented as 'a fantastic hnakra-like figure'.(3))

(1) OOTSP, pp.85-86. The same question is perhaps raised obliquely when a sorn expresses surprise that men cannot tell the time without watches, and Ransom replies that while 'there are beasts that have a sort of knowledge of that... our hnau have lost it.' (Ibid, p.124.) (2) Ibid, p.86. (3) Ibid, p.128

With these passages Lewis introduces important aspects of the Christian framework; the Fall as the historical explanation of evil, the fact that the presence of evil in a divinely-ordained universe might be something out of which good might come. These ideas are presented without stepping outside his descriptions of the hrossa's beliefs and attitudes.

When Ransom finally meets Oyarsa, the convergence between Malacandran and Christian belief is assumed to be complete. Qne of Oyarsa's questions concerns what has happened on Earth 'since the day when the Bent One sank out of heaven into the air of your world', and 'what Maleldil has done in Thulcandra'; Ransom begins a reply based on the -presumably theological -'traditions' of Earth.(1) (Ransom does not complete his answer, since the colloquy is interrupted at that point -having served Lewis' purpose for it -by the reappearance of Weston and Devine. Lewis is careful not to be more explicit about his Christian content than is necessary.)

Of course this encounter is the book's climax, towards which its entire movement has pointed: the meeting, regarded first with fear and then awe, with the ageless overlord of the planet. Lewis' success in creating the new races of hrossa and sorns encourages the reader to give a hearing to that which these races accept as the locus of authority; if Malacandra has been accepted imaginatively at all, then what Oyarsa has to say will tend to be accepted imaginatively as part and parcel of it. Lewis'

(1) Ibid, pp.143-144.

'sub-creation' has served to open ('baptise') his reader's imagination to receive - instead of rejecting immediately - Oyarsa's account quoted earlier describing how Earth became the 'silent planet'; the more so since what Christian theology knows as the 'Fall of Satan' is presented less as part of Earth's history (an area in which Oyarsa remains uninformed) than as part of the history of Malacandra, in connection with Oyarsa's story of how its surface came to be wrecked and turned into the Mars that Lewis' readers knew about(1).

There are points in the presentation of Oyarsa in this scene and in the following one (with Weston) where Lewis' touch falters. There is a jarringly inappropriate note when Oyarsa tells Ransom that Weston and Devine 'stuffed as much as they could into the sky-ship'.(2) Likewise. when Ransom finally answers Oyarsa's questions about Maleldil's deeds on Thulcandra:

> All that afternoon Ransom remained alone answering Oyarsa's questions. I am not allowed to record this conversation. beyond saying that the voice concluded it with the words:
>
> 'You have shown me more wonders than are known in the whole of heaven.'
>
> After that they discussed Ransom's own future.(3)

The convergence is acceptable, and Oyarsa's consuming interest in the topic usefully suggestive of something corresponding to emotion. But there is an inescapable note of the over-portentous - switching suddenly and bathetically to the boardroom-style discussion of Ransom's own future. Weston, too, is portrayed displaying little curiosity when Oyarsa speaks of 'the lord of the silent world' in terms matching Christian theology; one would have thought that no scientist, no matter how eminent, would have

(1) Ibid,p.140. (2) Ibid,p.142. (3) Ibid,p.165.

failed to pause for consideration before replying (in pidgin Malacandrian), 'Me think no such person - me wise, new man -no believe all that old talk.'(1) But Lewis' portrayal of the sacred place of Meldilorn, where Ransom meets Oyarsa, makes up for much of this; and Oyarsa's inability to comprehend human evil -'This explains things that I have wondered at... I did not think any creature could be so bent as to bring another of its own kind here by force'(2) -is an excellent touch. Fictional angels are seldom willing to admit their ignorance. Still, it is really on the strength of his depiction of Malacandra as a whole that Lewis' further expression of the Christian framework through

Oyarsa gains access to his reader's imagination.

(iii) The Bridge to the 'Primary World'

One other matter is worthy of attention. As Weston's spaceship leaves Malacandra, Ransom reflects on what he has learned:

> 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.(3)

This merging of the categories of myth and history is fundamental to Lewis' fiction, as we shall see in the following chapter. Obviously he is not postulating a state of being in which all mythology is indistinguishable

from history, where every legend, no matter how ludicrous, trivial or corrupt, is true. Rather, he is suggesting that our classification of the two categories should not be too hard and fast, that perhaps what we call 'mythology' might be 'true' in more ways than we know. The fantasy mode is ideal for presenting such possibilities. In the closing section, however, Lewis attempts to blur the borders between the categories on Earth itself:

(1) Ibid, p.162. (2) Ibid, p.141. (3) Ibid, pp.168-169.

> At this point, if I were guided by purely literary considerations, my story would end, but it is time to remove the mask and to acquaint the reader with the real and practical purpose for which this book has been written... Dr Ransom -and at this stage it will become obvious that this is not his real name -soon abandoned the idea of his Malacandrian dictionary and indeed all idea of communicating his story to the world This is where I come into the story. I had known Dr Ransom slightly for several years...
>
> A good many facts, which I have no intention of publishing at present, have fallen into our hands; facts about planets in general and about Mars in particular, facts about medieval Platonists, and (not least in importance) facts about the Professor to whom I am giving the fictitious name of Weston... And we have also evidence -increasing almost daily -that 'Weston', or the force or forces behind 'Weston', will play a very important part in the events of the next few centuries, and, unless we prevent them, a very disastrous one... It was Dr Ransom who first saw that our only chance was to publish in the form of fiction what would certainly not be listened to as fact.(1)

It is a little hard to see what Lewis is trying to do here. Presumably it is something of the kind that Tolkien describes at the close of his discussion of the fantasy form, On Fairy Stories:

> It is not difficult to imagine the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel, if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be "primarily" true, its narrative to be history, without thereby necessarily losing the mythical or allegorical significance that it had possessed.(2)

But simply stating that a story is "'primarily" true' does not create this effect; it merely confuses the issue, turning a good fantasy into an implausible realistic novel. If Lewis' readers

receive any aspect of his work as "'primarily" true', it will be because the strength of his earlier presentation of Malacandra has resulted in something of a 'baptism of the imagination', opening

(1) Ibid, pp.177-79. (2) Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories, p.72.

the mind to new possibilities, rather than because of an odd and rather meaningless gesture at the close. It seems Lewis sensed that; for, having raised this apparent red herring, he closes the book with a postscript including two sensuously evocative scenes from Malacandra, indeed two of the most well-conceived in the book. Thus his novel closes with the reader plunged in the depths of Lewis' imaginative vision. It seems that the 'baptism of the imagination' is more secure if the imagination is left to itself, than if a rickety bridge is constructed across to this-worldly reality. Tolkien's most striking instances of providential causality require nothing of the kind.

At the same time, the forces Lewis' readers encounter on Malacandra are capable of effective presentation in a terrestrial setting, albeit without any claim to being `"primarily" true'; as we shall see from the opening of Voyage to Venus.

3. C.S.LEWIS: VOYAGE TO VENUS

The 'theological' content of Lewis' fiction becomes considerably more prominent in Voyage to Venus than in Out of the Silent Planet. Voyage to Venus -like Tolkien's Silmarillion -is a story of the Fall; or rather, of how the Fall is avoided on Venus - or, as its inhabitants call it, Perelandra. At the beginning of the book Ransom is sent -by angelic power this time -to Perelandra, which turns out to be a planet made up largely of oceans containing floating, mobile islands. Here he meets the Green Lady, the Venusian equivalent of the Eve of Genesis. No sooner has he made the Lady's acquaintance than Weston too reappears; but Weston is now a far more formidable force than the interplanetary imperialist of Out of the Silent Planet -he has become directly demon-possessed. Weston seeks to persuade the Lady to break the one prohibition Maleldil has laid upon her, which is not to remain upon a 'fixed' island (the equivalent of not eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil in the Genesis narrative); Ransom seeks to dissuade her. But in Perelandra the terrestrial dichotomy between physical and spiritual is no longer meaningful. Consequently, it is not inappropriate for the debate to climax at length in physical combat. Ransom is the victor; after a long subterranean journey he finds himself in a 'holy place' where the Lady and her husband (who had been facing his own temptation elsewhere) receive their 'coronation' as rulers of the planet. After a vision of the 'Great Dance' and the cosmic purposes of Maleldil. Ransom returns to Earth.

(i) 'Widening the World' Again

Lewis intended that his three 'interplanetary' novels should be readable independently; so at the beginning of Voyage to Venus he has to address himself once more to 'widening the world' for his reader. But Ransom cannot now be the reader's surrogate in this

process; his position in the plot is that of someone who has returned from Malacandra thoroughly acquainted with the 'unearthly powers'. Consequently the reader is introduced to 'Lewis' himself(1), who, having got involved with Ransom's doings at the end of Out of the Silent Planet, has been summoned to assist his departure for Perelandra. Lewis (the real author) has no qualms about plunging his readers immediately into the marvellous. That is not where the problem lies; anyone willing to read a fantasy at all will be imaginatively ready for the marvellous. But to introduce straightaway the theological ramifications that arose in the book's predecessor would indeed be to risk losing readers. Consequently, the angelic eldils, Oyarsa and his fellows, are introduced in thoroughly material terms:

> Their physical organism, if organism it can be called, is quite unlike either the human or the Martian. They do not eat, breed, breathe, or suffer natural death, and to that extent resemble thinking minerals more than they resemble anything we should recognise as an animal.(2)

The comparison to 'thinking minerals' is far less accurate than a reference to angels would have been, but far wiser.(3) A similar tactic is used a page later when Lewis describes his involvement in Ransom's mission to Venus as 'Here we were both getting more and more involved in what I could only describe as inter-planetary politics.' This is not the only way he could describe it, of

(1) This may seem a little curious in a book with a preface declaring that 'All the human characters in this book are purely fictitious'! (2) Voyage to Venus(1943), p.5. All references are to the 1953 Pan edition, henceforth referred to as VTV. The novel has also been published under the title Perelandra. (3) But Lewis' attempt at a tone of scientific reportage gets him into trouble a little later when Ransom speaks of the sorns' language as 'by Malacandrian standards, quite a modern development. I doubt if its birth can be put farther back than a date which would fall within our Cambrian Period'(ibid, p.20) - a remark which loses its impressiveness when we wonder how one would tell a language arising 450 million years ago from one arising a mere 350 million years ago.

course: allusions to theology or even church history would have been possible - but nowhere near as useful. And the reference to the eldils two sentences later as 'creatures alien in kind, very

powerful, and very intelligent' has a daunting note that would be lacking from a description in theological categories.

Nevertheless, the boundaries between theological and scientific description are not watertight, and Lewis soon sets about eroding them:

> The truth was that all I had heard about them served to connect two things which one's mind tends to keep separate, and that connecting gave one a sort of shock. We tend to think about non-human intelligences in two distinct categories which we label 'scientific' and 'supernatural' respectively.... But the very moment we are compelled to recognise a creature in either class as real the distinction begins to get blurred.... The distinction between natural and supernatural, in fact, broke down; and when it had done so, one realised how great a comfort it had been.... What price we may have paid for this comfort in the way of false security and accepted confusion of thought is another matter.(l)

In one sense, a major purpose of Lewis' fantasy is to bring about precisely this breakdown of categories; and to show, as the use of the word 'comfort' implies, that the result will not be a world that has become more tame and predictable, but indeed one that can be more disquieting. Lewis has sounded this note in a different way a few sentences earlier:

> And I realised that I was afraid of two things -afraid that sooner or later I myself might meet an eldil, and afraid that I might get 'drawn in'. I suppose everyone knows this fear of getting 'drawn in' -the moment at which a man realises that what had seemed mere speculations are on the point of landing him in the Communist Party or the Christian . Church- the sense that a door has just slammed and left him on the inside. The thing was such sheer bad luck. Ransom himself had been taken to Mars (or Malacandra) against his will and almost by accident, and I had become connected with his affair by another accident.

(1) Ibid, pp.6-7.

Here again, the imaginative impact of the eldils is enhanced by presenting them as a threat, entities that cannot be contemplated in safe academic isolation. There is a subtlety in the use of 'the Christian Church' -the 'Church' is something sufficiently different

from the eldils to be used as an analogy, which strengthens the materiality with which they are being depicted: on the other hand, it is a place where a normal person can quite conceivably arrive by pursuing 'mere speculations', and that one may possibly be avoiding out of fear rather than out of maturity. All this, summarised in the excellent image of the 'door that has just slammed and left him on the inside', is the first note of a theme that reappears when Ransom confronts the uncompromising presence of Maleldil on Perelandra. On a second reading of the book, the references to 'luck' and 'accident' will reveal themselves as inadequate: the whole force of the 'Great Dance' passage at the close is that such categories are meaningless.

As the chapter proceeds, Lewis develops his fictional surrogate's sense of unease into a condition of psychological imbalance. The function of this is not just so that the bizarre can be introduced through 'Lewis'' diseased perceptions without necessitating authorial endorsement; rather, his distrust of the eldils, having served its purpose of increasing their imaginative impact, is itself to be revealed as a symptom of imbalance. 'Lewis'' unease turns into mental confusion when he realises he has left his pack in the train:

> Will you believe me when I say that my immediate impulse was to turn back to the station and 'do something about it'? Of course there was nothing to be done which could not equally

> well be done by ringing up from the cottage... But at the moment it seemed perfectly obvious that I must retrace my steps, and I had indeed begun to do so before reason or conscience awoke and set me once more plodding forwards. In doing this I discovered more clearly than before how very little I wanted to do it. It was such hard work that I felt as if I were walking against a headwind.(1)

A reader of Lewis' other books will perhaps recall that he presents 'reason' and 'conscience' as the twin footholds of grace in the human psyche(2); that is to say, an alert reader who thinks as Lewis does, or who is aware of this line of thinking, will already be thinking in 'theological' terms as a result of this passage. Meanwhile, 'Lewis" unease is increased as he contemplates Ransom's description of the Earth as 'enemy-occupied territory, held down' by dark eldils: 'Like the bacteria on the microscopic level, so these co-inhabiting pests on the macroscopic permeate our whole life invisibly and are the real explanation of that fatal bent which is the main lesson of history.'(3) What if Ransom is a dupe, thinks 'Lewis': that thought makes his reluctance to proceed return with astonishing strength - and the sheer strength of his reaction makes him wonder if he is at the start of a nervous breakdown. What the reader has learned thus far does indeed leave this possibility open. But it is important to note how 'Lewis'' doubts -not of the eldils' existence (this question is -wisely -never raised), but of their beneficence - is quietly set alongside, and linked with, mental instability. The latter is quite convincing:

> At the bottom the evening mist was partly (sic) thick. 'They call it a Breakdown at first', I thought. Wasn't there some mental disease in which quite ordinary objects looked to the patient unbelievably ominous?... looked, in fact, just as that abandoned factory looks to me now? Great bulbous shapes of cement, strange brickwork bogeys, glowered at me over dry scrubby grass pock-marked with grey pools and intersected with the remains of a light railway... I felt

(1) Ibid, p.7. (2) Of his major apologetic works, Miracles starts from Reason as something that cannot be explained in naturalistic terms, and Mere Christianity from the moral sense. (3) VTV, p.8.

> that I was getting nearer to the one enemy -the traitor, the sorcerer, the man in league with 'them'... walking into the trap with my eyes open, like a fool. "They call it a breakdown at first," said my mind, "and send you to a nursing home; later on they move you to an asylum."(l)

There is no logical connection between the doubt and the 'breakdown'; the only connection the reader can supply is in considering them both in terms of mental confusion.

It should also be noted that 'Lewis’’ paranoia is being described from the outside. Even when he writes -with a tone a little too close to second-rate horror fiction -'Then came a moment -the first one -of absolute terror and I had to bite my lip to keep myself from screaming'(2), this assessment is made from a safe, objective standpoint in the future. The double reference to his thoughts as 'childish' has the same effect.(3) It is quite deliberate: Lewis continues, 'I have naturally no wish to enlarge on this phase of my story... I would have passed it over if I did not think that some account of it was necessary for a full understanding of what follows –and, perhaps, of some other things as well.' In other words, the events taking place may be about to receive an explanation of some importance -one with implications reaching beyond the immediate context of 'what follows'.

And so they do, when 'Lewis' and Ransom finally meet. In the meantime, 'despite the loathing and dismay that pulled me back and a sort of invisible wall of resistance that met me in the face', 'Lewis' reaches the cottage. Here there is a shrewd twist: Ransom is out. 'Lewis' is free to retreat. But the daunting prospect of repeating his journey in

(1) Ibid, pp.8-9. (2) Ibid,p.9. (3) Ibid,pp.lO-ll.

the dark, 'and then, I hope, something better... -some rag of sanity and some reluctance to let Ransom down', keep him from doing so:

> At least I could try the door to see if it were really unlocked. I did. And it was. Next moment, I hardly know how, I found myself inside and let it slam behind me.(1)

At that point, 'Lewis' has crossed the Rubicon: with all his doubts and disturbance (and possibly because of 'some rag of sanity'), he has completed the journey to the house, and brought himself to the point where going back is harder than going on. The action that seals this is that of the slamming

of a door, used five pages earlier as an image of being 'landed' in the Christian Church or the Communist Party. This is not insignificant.

The next words, 'It was quite dark, and warm', serve effectively to mark a new stage. Lewis has been using his character's perceptions of the outside world as marks of his subjective experience- 'the black enmity of those dripping trees', and so on. Inside the cottage (which, we have been told, probably contains 'strange company', 'Visitors') it is still 'dark'; here the platitudinous physical detail (a cottage is likely to be dark when its owner is out) coalesces with 'Lewis" uncertainty. But his uncertainty is not now about intangibles -his own sanity, the interpretation of Ransom's actions; rather, it is a simple, objective question of who or what is in the cottage. '...and warm', the warmth that is felt after entering a house and shutting the door behind you, evokes everyday connotations; Lewis does not articulate them, but there is something of the sense of security, of relaxation, even of receptiveness as against the resistance involved in a difficult journey through the cold. It is perhaps not unreasonable for the reader to feel that 'Lewis" perceptions will have become more settled and trustworthy.

(1) Ibid, p.ll.

And so they have. The passage continues,

> I groped a few paces forward, hit my shin violently against something, and fell. I sat still for a few seconds nursing my leg. I thought I knew the layout of Ransom's hall-sitting-room pretty well and couldn't imagine what I had blundered into. Presently I groped in my pocket, got out my matches, and tried to strike a light. The head of the match flew off. I stamped on it and sniffed to make sure it was not smouldering on the carpet.

The narration has turned from a description of 'Lewis" mental condition (and an external world perceived through the diseased perceptions of that condition) to a description of the external world perceived apparently without emotional distortion. The sense of pain helps with this, as does the

bringing into play of at least three senses, 'Lewis'' sight ('It was quite dark'), touch ('I groped in my pocket') and smell ('sniffed to make sure...') Likewise, 'Lewis' is now trusting his own mental processes ('I thought I knew the layout...') and is acting in a systematic manner (stamping on a match and sniffing may not seem deeply significant, but are vastly different from his behaviour on the road). Without labouring the point, Lewis has accumulated details to build up an impression that, once inside the cottage, his character is seeing things as they are, and thinking correctly about them.

> I rose gingerly and felt my way forward. I came at once to an obstacle -something smooth and very cold that rose a little higher than my knees... I groped my way along this to the left and finally came to the end of it. It seemed to present several surfaces and I couldn't picture the shape. It was not a table, for it had no top. One's hand groped
> along the rim of a kind of low wall -the thumb on the outside and the fingers down inside the enclosed space.(1)

Because of the concrete manner in which Lewis employs the sense of touch, the reader does not notice that he has almost completely suppressed his character's fear of the alien. For here, at last, is the unknown; conveyed effectively with the help of 'Lewis" renewed mental reliability and sensory experience. Whatever it is, he falls over it; he is preparing to get up and 'hunt systematically'

(1) Ibid,p.12.

for a candle (again, the note of recovered rationality),

> when I heard Ransom's name pronounced; and almost, but not quite, simultaneously I saw the thing I had feared so long to see... What I saw was simply a very faint rod or pillar of light... Since I saw the thing I must obviously have seen it white or coloured; but no efforts of my memory can conjure up the faintest image of what that colour was. I try blue, and gold, and violet, and red, but none of them will fit... It was not at right angles to the floor... What one actually felt at the moment was that the column of light was vertical but the floor was not horizontal –the whole room seemed to have heeled over as if it were on board ship... Its mere presence...abolished the terrestrial horizontal.
>
> I had no doubt at all that I was seeing an eldil.(1)

Here, in one sense, is the end point of 'Lewis'' journey through the dark. The reader's confidence in 'Lewis' has been restored at the point where he must be trusted to bear witness to the supernatural. The reader's own imagination is called into play by the colour that is neither gold nor blue nor violet; while the details Lewis does supply -above all the sense that the room has 'heeled over' -convey at once the sense of the marvellous, the powerful (the 'terrestrial horizontal' is abolished), and the sense of striking experience (especially in the connotation of motion in 'heeled over')(2). Lewis has brought his character to a point where he is caught between two alternatives: the world outside the cottage, the 'cold and the darkness', the place of doubt and mental instability; and the world inside the cottage, 'quite dark and warm', a world of mental clarity and trustworthy perceptions but containing an eldil. This opposition Lewis has built up from the details of his character's experience, rather than simply asserting it.

(1) Ibid,p.13. (2) Once again, the terms used are not theological. On the next page Lewis includes something most unusual in a novel, namely a 19-1ine footnote quoting a (fictitious) seventeenth-century angelologist and matching his conclusions with modern multi-dimensional mathematics -all to give his narrative the sense of a scientific record.

'Lewis' finds the presence of the eldil who has 'abolished the terrestrial horizontal' 'in some ways very unpleasant... The fact that it was quite obviously not organic... was profoundly disturbing. It would not fit into our categories.' (1) This was an effect of some importance to Lewis. In Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature he speaks of the 'sublimity and masculinity' of Dante's angels, and remarks,

> It is the loss of this conception which finally vulgarizes the angels into those consumptive girls with wings that figure in so much Victorian stained glass. The full degradation of the Cherub -the fat baby who has played that role ever since Raphael -will perhaps be clearest if we remember that the word probably comes from the same root as

gryphon. Even for Chaucer a cherub was a creature of fire: not at all 'cuddly'.(2)

One of the ways in which Lewis was trying to 'baptise the imagination' of his readers was in attempting to restore the sense of the numinous, the 'other', indeed the daunting and dangerous about the supernatural. Certainly this must be one of the impressions left most strongly on the reader by the trilogy; Lewis' angelic(3) intelligences share something of the character of the Aslan of his Narnia books who is emphatically 'not tame'. And, as a result, they appear more obtrusively real than their conventional stained-glass equivalents.

'Lewis" doubts vanish, and he feels 'sure that the creature was what we call "good"' -but rather less sure 'whether I liked

(1) Ibid,p.14. Cf. also p.18S, where 'pure, spiritual intellectual love shot' from the eldil's faces 'like barbed lightning... But it was terrifyingly different from the expression of human charity, which we always see either blossoming out of, or hastening to descend into, natural affection.... It was so unlike the love we experience that its expression could easily be mistaken for ferocity.' (2) C.S.Lewis, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature (1966), p.54. (3) Although Lewis asserts that eldils and Christian angels are 'different in some way'(OOTSP, p.184), that seems to be nothing more than a device for distancing himself from allegory. His 'seventeenth century source' is discussing 'the body... of an angel'.

"goodness" as much as I had supposed.' The crisis here, it should be noted, is not merely a science-fiction crisis of a human being facing an alien; Lewis is seeking to give it moral overtones. It is being presented as akin to the choice that faces character after character in his The Great Divorce, where the denizens of the afterlife finally see what good and evil really are, and, thus enlightened, must make their ultimate choice. The bridge between science fiction and moral choice is supplied by the presentation of the issue in terms of the desire for independence that Lewis saw as the fundamental issue in man's relations with God. ('The one

principle of hell is -"I am my own"', says George Macdonald in the quotation Lewis chose as epigraph to the chapter in his autobiography dealing with his own conversion(1).)

> I wanted every possible distance, gulf, curtain, blanket, and barrier to be placed between it and me. But I did not fall quite into the gulf. Oddly enough my very sense of helplessness saved me and steadied me. For now I was quite obviously 'drawn in'. The struggle was over. The next decision did not lie with me.(2)

This `drawn in' is a 'special case' of the 'being drawn in' that is the start of all Christian experience, just as three pages later Ransom argues that for him to battle with the forces of the dark eldils in the physical heavens is merely a 'special case' of the spiritual warfare in which all Christians are involved. Christian fantasy turns on just such 'special cases'. So too the fine balance between freewill and providence here reflects Lewis' understanding of human spiritual experience. 'Lewis' 'did not fall', did not reject the eldil; yet it is his 'sense of helplessness', his sense that the 'next decision did not lie with me', that 'saved' him -

(1) C.S.Lewis, Surprised by Joy (1955; Fontana edition of 1959), p.170. (2) VTV pp.14-15.

because it is accepted and not revolted against. This web of forces -which Lewis, wisely, does not attempt to unravel -is a commonplace of Christianity: the acceptance of helplessness is itself an action, a crucial surrender; and the prelude, by divine grace, to further action. Just so Lewis describes his own conversion: 'I chose to open, to unbuckle, to loosen the rein. I say, "I chose," yet it did not really seem possible to do the opposite.'(1)

There is a nice touch to close the chapter. Ransom enters; the eldil addresses him, and Ransom replies; 'Lewis' has a fit of pique: 'It was in my mind to shout out, "Leave your familiar alone, you

damned magician, and attend to Me."' The capital *'M'* is an effective comment; Lewis himself had known what it was to be a 'reluctant', 'resentful' convert.(2)

(ii) Fantasy as Objectification

This opening chapter has been analysed in some detail because it provides a good example of an author 'widening the world'; the whole of 'Lewis'' journey to the cottage enacts the process of discovery and surrender. The reader goes the journey with 'Lewis', and so in some small measure his imagination is 'baptised' along with 'Lewis" intellect. But what of the doubts on the journey? The second paragraph of the second chapter sets them in a drastically new context when Ransom -employing an image more potent in 1943, when the book was published, than today -asks 'Lewis' if he 'got through - the barrage without any damage?... I was thinking you would have met some difficulties in getting here... They didn't want you to

(1) Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p.179. Cf. also p.l89. (2) Ibid, pp.182-83.

get here.'(1) The conversation is fairly credible in the light of what has preceded it; if there are eldils inside the cottage there may as well be dark eldils outside it. That they should have been the source of 'Lewis" doubts merely confirms the feeling that is carefully built into the first chapter: that the doubts are themselves at bottom irrational, unjustified, part and parcel of a mental confusion which also includes fear and illogical thinking. We noted how Lewis placed his character's doubts alongside his fear of a mental breakdown; the two were not logically connected, but their juxtaposition suggested they might possibly be different aspects of the same phenomenon, of which the dark eldils are now revealed as the cause. But then that is to take the notion of 'spiritual warfare' out of the cottage and back into the 'normal world' as a possible explanation of the 'fatal bent' in history, to which 'Lewis' referred

without applying the lesson to himself. Supernatural 'spiritual warfare' is shown to be a concept that can exist quite independently of the overtly miraculous. We are not far from the world of Lewis' The Screwtape Letters;we are also not far from St.Paul's words in Ephesians 6:12: 'Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against... spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

That biblical verse is the starting-point for the next stage. Ransom tells 'Lewis' that Oyarsa is sending him to Venus to engage in conflict with 'depraved hypersomatic beings at great heights (our translation is very misleading at that point, by the way.' 'Lewis' counters that this passage refers to 'moral conflict'; Ransom replies that

(1) VTV p.16.

> ...your idea that ordinary people will never have to meet the Dark Eldila in any form except a psychological or moral form- as temptations or the like -is simply an idea that held good for a certain phase of the cosmic war... But supposing that phase is passing? In the next phase it may be anyone's job to meet them... well, in some quite different mode.(1)

And in that 'supposing' lies the whole rationale of these novels as supernatural fantasies; their 'fictional hypothesis', their 'What if...?' We note elsewhere in this study, in the section entitled 'The Monsters and the Christians', that a function of fantasy is to vary basic aspects of reality, in just the way that is implied here. In objectifying moral conflicts into more physical terms, Lewis might seem merely to be writing allegory (that, after all, is the basis of Pilgrim's Progress). But if (as Lewis believed, and as orthodox Christianity has always stated) moral decisions do not merely involve contradictions of principles but (in some obscure manner) conflict in

which external intelligences playa part as well, then to portray them as combat is not merely to allegorize. Fantasy then objectifies in physical terms what is already in existence as a non-physical reality.(2) The forces in the conflict are forces which Lewis (judging by the preface to The Screwtape Letters) believed to be real; the 'fictional hypothesis' postulates, 'Let us imagine those forces took on physical expression: it would be like this.' Later in the book, Ransom's fate is described as being 'to enact what philosophy only thinks'(3).

To Lewis this was something more than a fanciful hypostatization. One of his close friends, and a significant influence on his thinking(4), was Owen Barfield. One particular notion of

(1) Ibid, p.19. (2) However, Christian's fight with Apollyon (unlike, for example, his encounter with Worldly Wiseman) is not merely allegory either. Perhaps no book ever is. (3) VTV, p.135. (4) Cf. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p.161.

Barfield's, which recurs in Lewis' writings, the latter paraphrased thus:

> Mr.Barfield has shown, as regards the history of language, that words did not start merely by referring to physical objects and then get extended by metaphor to refer to emotions, mental states and the like. On the contrary, what we now call the "literal and metaphorical" meanings have both been disengaged by analysis from an ancient unity of meaning which was neither or both... As long as we are trying to read back into that ancient unity either the one or the other... we shall misread all early literature and ignore many states of consciousness which we ourselves still from time to time experience.(l)

Sure enough, towards the end of the third book in the trilogy, That Hideous Strength, we find Ransom warning the sceptic MacPhee against dividing 'one of Barfield's "ancient unities".'(2)

But there is still more to it than that. Lewis, both as a

classicist and as a literary critic, had a high regard for myth. 'Myth in general is... a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination', he wrote in Miracles; it is in the incarnation that that 'truth... becomes incarnate as History'. Yet 'Myth remains Myth even when it becomes Fact', and must be responded to at both levels.(3) His vision of the New Creation, therefore, is that the breakdown of the "ancient unities", a disease permeating the whole of modern culture so that 'a purely mathematical universe and a purely subjective mind confront one another across an unbridgeable chasm', will be healed: 'Those who attain the glorious resurrection will see the dry bones clothed again with flesh, the fact and the myth re-married, the literal and the metaphorical rushing together.'(4)

(1) Lewis, Miracles, pp.81-82. (2) C.S.Lewis, That Hideous Strength (1945; revised edition of 1955, published by Pan), p.159. (3) Lewis, Miracles, pp.137-138. (4) Ibid, p.165.

This vision haunts Lewis' fantasies. His short story 'Forms of Things Unknown' presents an astronaut arriving on the Moon and encountering a Gorgon; the trains of our world are mythological 'smokehorses' to the inhabitants of the alternative dimension in ~ Dark Tower; in the Narnia of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Man himself is a myth. In That Hideous Strength, Merlin comes back to life. But the idea is clearest in Voyage to Venus. Ransom's first morning on Perelandra is a case in point:

> At Ransom's waking something happened to him which perhaps never happens to a man until he is out of his own world: he saw reality, and thought it was a dream. He opened his eyes and saw a strange heraldically coloured tree loaded with yellow fruits and silver leaves. Round the base of the indigo stem was coiled a small dragon covered with scales of red gold. He recognised the garden of the Hesperides at once... He remembered how in the very different world called Malacandra ...he had met the original of the Cyclops, a giant in a cave and a shepherd. Were all the things which appeared as mythology on earth scattered through other worlds as realities?(1)

Later, he meets mermen, humanoid creatures without intelligence, and

> remembered his old suspicion that what was myth in one

> world might always be fact in some other. He wondered also whether the King and Queen of Perelandra, though doubtless the first human pair of this planet, might on the physical side have a marine ancestry. And if so, what then of the man-like things before men in our own world? Must they in truth have been the wistful brutalities whose pictures we see in popular books on evolution? Or were the old myths truer than the modern myths? Had there in truth been a time when satyrs danced in the Italian woods?(2)

When he eats the food of the mermen, he suddenly sees things as they do, becoming 'startlingly conscious of his own experience in walking on the topside' of the floating islands 'as a miracle or myth.'(3) Finally, at the end of the book, he meets the Oyarsa of

(1) VTV, p.39. (2) Ibid, p.92. (3) Ibid, p.149.

Mars (the warrior being who had experienced the wars with the Bent One described in Out of the Silent Planet) and that of marine Venus, and he reflects, '"My eyes have seen Mars and Venus. I have seen Ares and Aphrodite." ...When and from whom had the children of Adam learned that Ares was a man of war and that Aphrodite rose from the sea foam?'(l) In summary,

> 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 earth-men would call it mythological.(2)

Lewis' fantasy world is thus one analogous to that which he believes existed before the Fall and will reappear in 'the glorious resurrection... the fact and the myth re-married, the literal and the metaphorical rushing together'.(3) It functions as apologetics by giving his readers the chance to experience the reality of things they have been accustomed to consider mythical. (4)

(iii) The Providentialist Paradise

Such an objectification of spiritual states presents its own problems. It is a truism that good fictional characters are harder to portray than evil ones; on Perelandra Lewis has an even greater task, the presentation of a whole paradisiac planet. When Ransom

(1) Ibid, pp.186-187. (2) Ibid, p.131. (3) That Perelandra is indeed a world of the 'glorious resurrection' may also be concluded from Ransom's journeyings in his 'coffin-shaped casket': on return he had 'risen from that narrow house -almost a new Ransom, glowing with health and rounded with muscle and seemingly ten years younger.' (Ibid, pp.16, 25.) (4) And the passage about mermen and satyrs has obvious apologetic significance of another kind, in hint1ng at an integration of evolutionary anthropology and a worldview based on Genesis.

arrives on Perelandra, he finds himself plunged into an ocean:

> As he rushed smoothly up the great convex hillside of the next wave he got a mouthful of the water. It was hardly at all flavoured with salt; it was drinkable -like fresh water and only, by an infinitesimal degree, less insipid. Though he had not been aware of thirst till now, his drink gave him a quite astonishing pleasure. It was almost like meeting Pleasure itself for the first time.... The water gleamed, the sky burned with gold, but all was rich and dim, and his eyes fed upon it undazzled and unaching. The very names of green and gold, which he used perforce in describing the scene, are too harsh for the tenderness, the muted iridescence, of that warm, maternal, delicately gorgeous world.... It was altogether pleasurable. He sighed.(1)

Lewis' sudden employment of the present tense is used to give a sense of authority, of a scientific observation that is timelessly accurate. But the dominant tone is one of an overpowering sensuousness, in contrast to the concrete descriptions of Ransom's arrival on Malacandra in Out of the Silent Planet. Still, once he has established this tone, the more concrete descriptions reappear, in the depiction of the floating island:

> As he approached it he saw that it ended in a fringe of undoubtedly vegetable matter; it trailed, in fact, a dark red skirt of tubes and strings and bladders... He grabbed again and got a handful of whip-like red strings, but they pulled out of his hand and almost cut him. Then he thrust himself right in among them, snatching wildly straight before him. For one second he was in a kind of vegetable broth of

> gurgling tubes and exploding bladders; next moment his hands caught something firmer ahead, something almost like very soft wood.(2)

There is not space here for a full examination of how Lewis builds up and brings to life his fantasy world of Perelandra.(3) What is worthy of particular note is how Lewis' initial, almost over-sensuous paragraphs give the landscape something verging on a moral significance. It is a note that recurs:

(1) Ibid, p.3O. (2) Ibid, pp.33-34. (3) For a good analysis, see Manlove op.cit., pp.115-I27. Manlove points out that Lewis makes a convincing presentation not only of objects on Perelandra but of Ransom's experience of them. 'All the time we are aware of a mind inspecting data and relaying and checking its responses....Frequently an initially vague apprehension is corrected with more precise data.'(p.118.)

> He was not in the least tired, and not yet seriously alarmed as to his power of surviving in such a world. He had confidence in those who had sent him there, and for the meantime the coolness of the water and the freedom of his limbs were still a novelty and a delight; but more than all these was something else at which I have already hinted and which can hardly be put into words -the strange sense of excessive pleasure which seemed somehow to be communicated to him through all his senses at once... There was an exuberance or prodigality of sweetness about the mere act of living which our race finds it difficult not to associate with forbidden and extravagant actions. Yet it is a violent world too. Hardly had he lost sight of the floating object when his eyes were stabbed by an unendurable light.(1)

The last sentence does a little to prevent the passage seeming over-sickly.(2) But here are two important aspects in a definition of a providentialist paradise: the world is trustworthy, even in Ransom's bizarre circumstances of being deposited in an ocean(3); and it offers an enormity of pleasure, with no taint of evil or shame. The trustworthiness is directly related to Ransom's providentialist faith in 'those who had sent him there'; the 'exuberance of sweetness' without shame is a reminder that this is a Creation without a Fall.

When Ransom meets the Lady of Perelandra, this attitude to the trustworthiness of the planet, grounded in a sense of providence, is reintroduced. Lewis emphasises the alienness of the Lady's

(1) VTV,pp.31-32. (2) What the light reveals, in fact, are those aspects of Perelandra that will prove dangerous: 'the waste of waves spread illimitably before him' that almost overthrow Ransom's faith later in the book, and the 'single smooth column of ghastly green standing up', the Fixed Land that will be the focus of temptation for the Lady. In a second reading of the book, this undercuts the almost excessive sensuousness. (3) The same trustworthiness is revealed when Ransom attempts to swim from one island to another in the darkness. He loses his sense of direction in the water: 'He swam on, but despair of finding the other land, or even of saving his life, now gripped him It could only be by chance that he would land anywhere.' Chance, however, is a meaningless concept on Perelandra. Ransom tries to change direction, confuses himself still further, then 'gave up all attempts to guide himself. Suddenly, a long time after, he felt vegetation sliding past him. He gripped and pulled.' (Ibid, pp.50-51.)

consciousness. She is the 'Eve', the only woman in an unfallen world, and when Ransom first meets her he is struck by her calm expression which 'might be idiocy, it might be immortality, it might be some condition of mind to which terrestrial experience offered no clue at all.'(1) Lewis makes great play of the fundamental differences between Ransom's concept system and that of an unfallen being at the very outset of experience. To Ransom's greeting 'I come in peace' she replies curiously, 'What is "peace"?'(2) Communication gets no easier as time goes on: the Lady does not understand the meanings of 'people'(there are only two human beings on Venus), 'home'(the whole planet is her home) or 'alone'(she has never experienced loneliness). She nonetheless turns out to be well-informed about the inhabitants of the rest of the Solar System, and Ransom learns from her that the hrossa of Mars will soon be extinct. He is sad: 'Are they to be swept away? Are they only rubbish in the Deep Heaven?' The Lady replies that she does not know what 'rubbish' means: in a world so full of Maleldil's will, the concept is meaningless.(3) Nor does she understand the difference between freewill and Maleldil's ordaining, until Ransom explains it,

and she has certainly never regretted that ordaining. Ransom's query on the topic brings forth a triumphantly effective reply:

> "But are you happy without the King? Do you not want the King?
> "Want him?" she said. "How could there be anything I did not want?"(4)

(1) Ibid, p.49. (2) Ibid,p.50. (3) Ibid,p.55. (4) Ibid,p.62.

The Lady is not just a curio; she is the queen and mouthpiece of a providentialist paradise where the spiritual and moral are inseparable from the physical. The Lady asks Ransom why he frowns, and what such gestures mean 'in your world':

> "They mean nothing," said Ransom hastily. It was a small lie; but there it would not do. It tore him as he uttered it, like a vomit. It became of infinite importance. The silver meadow and the golden sky seemed to fling it back at him. As if stunned by some measureless anger in the very air he stammered an emendation: "They mean nothing I could explain to you."(1)

This is effective too. The physical force of 'tore him... like a vomit' and 'fling it back' underline the sense that here, on Perelandra, a lie is an event: Ransom is defiling the unsullied unity of paradise. For this paradise that has taken shape in a Christian imagination must be a paradise radiant with the presence of God; and it is this presence, almost physically manifest, that rejects untruth. Something similar occurs when the first temptation fails:

> At the same moment he was conscious of a sense of triumph. But it was not he who was triumphant. The whole darkness about him rang with victory. He started and half raised himself. Had there been any actual sound? Listening hard he could hear nothing but the low murmurous noise of warm wind and gentle swell. The suggestion of music must have been from within. But as soon as he lay down again he felt assured that

> it was not. From without, most certainly from without, but not by the sense of hearing, festal revelry and dance and splendour poured into him -no sound, yet in such fashion that it could not be remembered or thought of except as music. It was like having a new sense.(2)

Here the passage succeeds precisely because it is close to a common human experience of joy: but in the universe of Lewis' fiction the suggestion is that the 'festal revelry' is no mere 'pathetic fallacy', no allegory of a mental condition, but rather is an external reality in which the internal emotion participates.

(1) Ibid, pp.62-63. (2) Ibid, pp.96-97.

This is also true of Ransom's perception of the revelatory process whereby the Lady learns directly from Maleldil:

> "How do you know that?" asked Ransom in amazement.
>
> "Maleldil is telling me," answered the woman. And as she spoke the landscape had become different, though with a difference none of the senses would identify. The light was dim, the air gentle, and all Ransom's body was bathed in bliss, but the garden world where he stood seemed to be packed quite full, and as if an unendurable pressure had been laid upon his shoulders, his legs failed him and he half sank, half fell, into a sitting position.(l)

Here again what Lewis records is not utterly distant from an earthly experience of awe so intense that it almost seems a physical sensation. The recognisable nature of the experience means that the manifestation of the presence of Maleldil is something believeable. Its very intangibility -when presented by Lewis as a datum about something the narrator's authority guarantees as a real event, rather than as a stimulus to doubt -is equally recognisable. Thus, ironically, a mystical experience appears as a 'realistic' feature rather than a 'marvellous' one.

The Lady's remark that 'Maleldil is telling me' recurs several times in different forms.(2) The fact that the Lady has a mind directly open to Maleldil involves less of an imaginative leap because Lewis has hinted that she experiences various forms of thought and action that are beyond our

fallen comprehension: ‘She was standing a few yards away, motionless but not apparently disengaged -doing something with her mind, perhaps even with her muscles, that he did not understand.'(3) But her experience is

(1) Ibid, p.54. (2) Ibid,pp.58.67.71.73.74. (3) Ibid,p.57. Cf. also p.113 on the Lady’s sleep. Lewis suggested in The Problem of Pain, pp.65-66, that unfallen man on earth might have experienced many states of consciousness no longer available to us, and includes a specific reference to 'willed and conscious repose' analogous to the notion in Voyage to Venus.

not entirely alien; Lewis does not hesitate to create a convergence between Perelandran belief and Christian doctrine. Earth, says the Lady, is the place where 'our Beloved became a man.'(l) Lewis seeks to mitigate any problems this may create for his readers by presenting Ransom sharing their surprise: '"You know that?" said Ransom sharply.’

But the convergence is no real shock. It is only a recurrence of the linkage created between Christian belief and Lewis' myth in the second chapter, where Ransom explained to 'Lewis' that his journey to Venus was merely a special variety of the spiritual warfare that is every Christian's duty. (That in turn means that while Ransom's expression of sharp surprise makes him a surrogate for the reader, his astonishment must have more to do with the Lady's in-depth knowledge of events on Earth than with her use of the Christian framework; the Malacandrians had had that framework too.) And the Lady's theistic beliefs -or observations or experiences, as they might equally well be called -make sense as an integral part of the Perelandran world that Lewis has created with tangible particularity. The whole paradisiac and trustworthy character of this world demands some explanation such as the Lady's beliefs provide. If as readers we have responded to Lewis' imaginary world, we will accept this too as part and parcel of it.

(1) VTV, p.55.

Some Varieties of Rebellion

Where there is a Eden-like Paradise, the possibility exists of an Eden-like Fall. The question of whether this event, of such crucial importance in the relationship between the created beings and their Creator, will be repeated on Venus is the subject of much of the rest of the book. But Ransom's actions as a free, responsible moral agent take place against the backcloth of the presence of God that we have described in the previous pages.

There are at least three possible scenarios for a Perelandran Fall, and all of them have to do with an attitude to God's providential presence: an attitude of obedient faith, or else of resistance. The first is hinted at before the Lady's appearance, when Ransom first comes ashore. One of his first discoveries is that Perelandran fruit have a taste that brings with it a more or less ecstatic experience. 'It was like the discovery of a totally new genus of pleasures, something unheard of among men, out of all reckoning, beyond all covenant. For one draught of this on Earth, wars would be fought and nations betrayed.'(l) He finishes one fruit and is about to take another:

> He was now neither hungry nor thirsty. And yet to repeat a pleasure so intense and almost so spiritual seemed an obvious thing to do... Yet something seemed opposed to this 'reason'... Perhaps the experience had been so complete that repetition would be a vulgarity -like asking to hear the same symphony twice in a day.(2)

Lewis does not elaborate on or explain this notion, but it recurs five pages later when Ransom discovers another immense pleasure in a

wood of 'bubble trees', trees that draw up water and then expel it in the form of aromatic bubbles.(3) Ransom senses the same constraint against

(1) Ibid. p.36. (2) Ibid. p.37. (3) Ibid.p.41. The specificity with which Lewis imagines Perelandra's plants -and animals and birds -is one of the key factors in his successful presentation of an imaginary world.

repeating his pleasure:

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

Here, on a planet without sin, Lewis is creating a form amid the flux of ecstatic experience; in a world where there is no such thing as chance, and evil powers are absent, where all is radiant with providence, the attempt to control and to impose one's own shape on experience is a kind of rebellion. Where the Fall has not occurred, aesthetic and moral good amount to much the same thing. But, Lewis suggests, maybe the same might hold good in our world: the clutching at security might itself be an evil. If there is a providence in our world too, that evil is simply a lack of faith.

Likewise, when the Lady learns (from Ransom) that she possesses freewill, she realises that there is the possibility of 'clinging to the old good instead of taking the good that came. '(2) Ransom explains to her that there have been powers in the universe that did just that: 'There was an eldil who clung longer -who has been clinging since before the worlds were made.' 'But the old good

would cease to be a good at all if he did that', replies the Lady in puzzlement. 'Yes', says Ransom. 'It has ceased. And still he

(1) Ibid, p.42. (2) Ibid, p.74.

clings. '(1) Here, the 'clinging' is linked with the Fall of Lucifer, with the deliberate rejection of God's plans, a lack of faith in the loving, creative variety of Maleldil's providence. Later on Ransom realises that indeed 'Maleldil never repeated Himself. As the Lady said, the same wave never came twice. '(2) The Lady's initial response is the response of faith: 'But how can one wish any of those waves not to reach us which Maleldil is rolling towards us?'(3) Such faith 'is delight with terror in it!' because 'The wave you plunge into may be very swift and great. You may need all your force to swim into it.'(4)

When it comes to presenting the temptation of the Lady, Lewis has two sets of metaphors to choose from as specific embodiments of these issues. One is through Ransom's issue of fruit, of

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid, p.132. (3) Ibid, p.6O. (4) Ibid, p.62. All this may seem curiously alien to Lewis' cherished notion of the beneficial effects of Desire, that all true desire honestly and consistently pursued will point towards God. This process is the theme of the autobiographical Surprised by Joy; and there Lewis recalls that, after one visitation of Joy, 'I knew (with fatal knowledge) that to "have it again" was the supreme and only important object of desire.'(p.63) However, Voyage to Venus is concerned with a later stage in the process, where God is known to exist and hence all other desires are subsidiary to the imperatives of His presence. Lewis articulates this subordination on the final page of Surprised by Joy, where he comments that his Desire or Joy was of importance 'only as a pointer to something other and outer.' God will not do the same thing twice: 'And how should the Infinite repeat Himself? All space and time are too little for Him to utter Himself in them once.' (Prayer: Letters to Malcolm (1964; Fount edition of 1977), p.29. To 'say the fatal word Encore' (ibid,p.92) may be to impose, egoistically, one's own expectations on how Desire shall come: 'I shall insist on finding it... But if I go a new way I shall not be able to insist: I shall just have to take what comes', says the hero of The Pilgrim's Regress

(1977; Fount edition of 1977, p.39). Throughout The Great Divorce Lewis makes it clear that those who make an idol of the 'old good' thereby both forfeit or distort it and also cut themselves off from God. Voyage to Venus is thus offering an exact fictional analogue of this part of the process; and thereby, incidentally, illustrating the way in which Lewis' 'fantasies' model the pattern of relationship between God and man that Lewis saw as taking place in reality.

deciding whether to ignore the 'inner adviser' and repeat a meal. On the other hand, the Lady more often resorts to images of the waves, of welcoming and plunging into the wave that Maleldil sends; and it is this metaphor that Lewis chooses to place at the centre of the action. Had he chosen the other, it would have been virtually impossible to prevent his book appearing an unimaginative retelling of the Genesis account.(1)

The temptation, then, is to break the sole specific prohibition that Maleldil has given to the inhabitants of Perelandra: not to sleep on the Fixed Land, the one solid island among the floating archipelagoes. This is the equivalent of 'eating the fruit' in the book of Genesis; the basic issue is whether the Perelandrans will obey Maleldil or not.(2) If Ransom's rebellion against the moral constraints that 'come naturally' on Perelandra would have amounted to a disregard of general revelation, then disobedience to this prohibition would amount to a rejection of special revelation. Only after the temptation is over does the Lady realise the reason for

(1) Nonetheless, it is interesting that Lewis chooses to present Ransom himself facing the issue in terms of fruit. One cannot help wondering whether this was for an apologetic purpose. In his chapter on the Fall in The Problem of Pain, Lewis emphasises that the crucial sin in Genesis is of self-idolatry, not of eating a tabooed fruit. Then he adds, 'We have no idea in what particular act, or series of acts, the self-contradictory, impossible wish found expression. For all I can see, it might have concerned the literal eating of a fruit, but the question is of no importance' (p.68). Ransom's decisions dramatise just what kind of issue could be at stake in the mere 'eating of a fruit' such as is narrated in Genesis. (2) Cf. Lewis' remark on the Fall in the real world: 'The Fall is simply and solely Disobedience -doing what you have been told not to do; and it results from Pride -from being too big for

your boots, forgetting your place, thinking that you are God.' (Preface to Paradise Lost (1942), pp.70-71.)

the prohibition, that to stay on the Fixed Land would also be to refuse to commit oneself to the unpredictable but providentially-guaranteed motions of the waves, seeking rather to be master of one's own fate:

> And why should I desire the Fixed except to make sure – to be able on one day to command where I should be the next and what should happen to me? It was to reject the wave –to draw my hands out of Maleldil's, to say to Him, 'Not thus, but thus'... That would have been cold love and feeble trust. And out of it how could we ever have climbed back into love and trust again?(1)

Elsewhere on the planet her husband has faced the same issue. He has been shown what was happening to the Lady, and known that she might fall. Would he trust the goodness of Maleldil's unrevealed will (as with the Fixed Land prohibition) and continue to obey Him? Or would he repeat Adam's error(2) of raising his love to the status of an absolute and joining his partner in rebellion? If he obeyed, through that obedience Maleldil 'might send life back into the other'. But 'He gave me no assurance. No Fixed Land. Always one must throw oneself into the wave. '(3)

The way in which the narrative action expresses the issue of faith as it arises even in terrestrial reality is plain. At the same time, as a fantasy, the book can objectify these realities in physical terms, embodying them in the geography of the imaginary world. And here is one of its major strengths. Lewis' starting point for his vision of Perelandra was not the story of the Fall, but a mental picture of floating islands(4). And yet, as Manlove notes(5), there is a superb fitness between the geography and spiritual realities of the planet; the objectification is exact.

(1) VTV, p.193. (2) Cf.Lewis,Preface to Paradise Lost, p.127. (3)

VTV p.195. (4) Lewis, Of Other Worlds p.87. (5) Manlove, op.cit., p.129. Urang (Shadows of Heaven, p.I7) calls the effect 'almost Spenserian', an accolade Lewis would have welcomed joyfully.

Life on 'floating islands' journeying unpredictably through the waves is an excellent 'objective correlative' for the Perelandran abandonment to the -sometimes unexplained -will of Maleldil; life on the Fixed Land would indeed involve self-imposed fixity. There is an admirable unity in the whole conception; Lewis' 'sub-creation' approaches his notion of the New Creation where 'Every state of affairs in the New Nature will be the perfect expression of a spiritual state and every spiritual state the perfect informing of, and bloom upon, a state of affairs.'(1)

There is also a third variety of sin which can be committed on Perelandra. It is one of which the Lady is probably incapable, but which represents the standard reaction of an unregenerate, fallen human being to the presence of God. Lewis presents it just after Ransom's first audience with the Lady has closed with his attempted lie:

> That sense of being in Someone's Presence which had descended on him with such unbearable pressure during the very first moments of his conversation with the Lady did not disappear when he had left her... At first it was almost intolerable; as he put it to us in telling the story, "There seemed no room." But later on, he discovered that it was intolerable only at certain moments -at just those moments in fact (symbolised by his impulse to smoke and to put his hands in his pockets) when a man asserts his independence and feels that now at last he's on his own. When you felt like that, then the very air seemed too crowded to breathe; a complete fulness seemed to be excluding you from a place which, nevertheless, you were unable to leave. But when you gave in to the thing, gave yourself up to it, there was no burden to be borne. It became not a load but a medium, a sort of splendour as of eatable, drinkable, breathable gold.(2)

This is a significant passage, having a direct parallelism with terrestrial reality. In the autobiographical Surprised by Joy

(1) Lewis,Miracles,pp.164-165. (2) VTV, p.64.

Lewis presents his desire not to be 'interfered with', to 'call my soul my own'.(1) To Lewis, the problem in Eden was in part that the first human beings had this same desire 'to "call their souls their own". But that means to live a lie, for our souls are not, in fact, our own.'(2) Here, then, Lewis is portraying the ordinary, terrestrial human being enacting the sin of the Fall; and almost certainly he felt himself to be representing what was at issue in his readers' relationship with God -or with any hypothetical God that might turn out to exist. Hence the somewhat out-of-place reference to cigarettes and pockets (Ransom is, in fact, naked); these are intended as a means of identification with the reader. The fantasy element still exists in the objectification of the divine Presence as something highly tangible, even 'intolerable', challenging Ransom's attitude rather than becoming forgotten. Nonetheless, the experience of the supernatural in a fantasy context here comes close to what Lewis saw as terrestrial experience of the divine; and the references to 'eatable, drinkable, breathable gold' are presumably included to distance it, so that an experience which Lewis hoped would be recognisable should not appear as preaching.

(v) The Presence of Evil

Ransom himself could have brought the temptation to the Lady. But fantasy tends to objectify spiritual states; and so it is that Weston reappears as the overt representative of evil, having travelled to Venus in his spaceship. One of his last recorded remarks on Mars in Out of the Silent Planet was 'Me no care Maleldil. Like Bent One better: me on his side. '(3) This is now

(1) Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p.182. (2) Lewis, The Problem of Pain, p.68. (3) OOTSP, p.163.

literally true. Weston's loyalty has moved from man to 'Spirit', but that in turn becomes a question of 'surrendering yourself' to 'the main current... the live, fiery, central purpose... the very finger with which it reaches forward.'(l) The 'reaching forward', however, recognises no categories of good and evil: 'The world leaps forward through great men and greatness always transcends mere moralism. When the leap has been made our "diabolism" as you would call it becomes the morality of the next stage.'(2) But at the same time Weston refuses to describe the 'main current' as 'impersonal': it is a 'Force that can choose its instruments', and Weston himself has been 'Chosen. Guided', and given a miraculous ability to speak the Perelandran language -'Things coming into my head.'(3) He is, in short, demonically possessed.

The debate that follows on Weston's first encounter with Ransom functions in several ways. To begin with, it is a matter of Lewis having to get Weston onto Venus, and seizing the opportunity to settle a few philosophical scores with the then-popular notion of 'emergent evolution', whence Weston draws most of his jargon ('Ransom had heard this sort of thing pretty often before'(4)), by pointing out that a creed with no adequate framework of good and evil contains nothing to keep its adherents from evil. The debate has its own interest: it includes a new and impressive character telling his life story. It also serves to give intellectual fibre to Lewis' imaginary world without drifting into obtrusive didacticism;

(1) VTV, p.85. (2) Ibid, p.86. (3) Ibid, pp.83,85. (4) Ibid, p.81.

the characters are capable of talking sense -an important point in view of the emphasis on almost orgiastic pleasure in earlier sections.

Still, Lewis' main task here is to depict the reality of evil; and the evil of the Bent One is merely using the chatter of 'emergent evolution' just as it is merely possessing Weston's body. Several aspects of Lewis' technique here deserve comment. First, there is the flatness of Ransom's language when he seeks to avoid the idea of Weston's commitment being to anything more disturbing than a set of ideas: 'I expect all you really mean is that you feel it your duty to work for the spread of civilisation and knowledge and that kind of thing.' The sense of inane platitude here makes Weston appear the realist when -with an effectively nasty 'cackling laughter, almost an infantile or senile laughter' -he replies, 'There you go, there you go... Like all you religious people. You talk and talk about these things all your life, and the moment you meet the reality you get frightened.'(1)

Secondly, there is the miracle of Weston's facility in the Perelandran language. The important thing about this is that, because Perelandran and English cannot be distinguished by the reader, Weston's use of Perelandran does not appear miraculous until Weston himself points it out.(2) Hence very little 'suspension of disbelief' is necessary. But to accept that miracle is to accept the presence of evil incarnate. Thirdly, there is the unpleasant passage where Lewis shows his full hand, and Weston, following his logic through, announces, 'I call that Force into me completely':

(1) Ibid, pp.84-85. (2) Ibid.

> Then horrible things began happening. A spasm like that preceding a deadly vomit twisted Weston's face out of recognition. As it passed, for one second something like the old Weston reappeared -the old Weston, staring with eyes of horror and howling, "Ransom, Ransom! For Christ's sake don’t let them –“ and instantly his whole body spun round as

> if he had been hit by a revolver bullet and he fell to the earth, and was there rolling at Ransom's feet, slavering and chattering and tearing up the moss by the handfuls. Gradually the convulsions decreased.... Ransom... found a bottle of brandy which he uncorked and applied to the patient's mouth. To his consternation the teeth opened, closed on the neck of the bottle and bit it through. No glass was spat out. "0 God, I've killed him," said Ransom. But beyond a spurt of blood at the lips there was no change in his appearance. The face suggested that either he was in no pain or in a pain beyond all human comprehension.(1)

'Horrible things', and especially 'slavering and chattering', may be unnecessary. But the rest -the sudden distinction of two personalities in Weston; the old, original Weston demanding compassion; the sense that the very presence of Weston has trapped Ransom into manslaughter; the biting off of the bottleneck, implying that Weston is either thoroughly insane (which we have seen he is not) or thoroughly possessed -all do their work.

There is more to come. A few pages later, Ransom comes across what appears to be a new animal.

> At first he thought it was a creature of more fantastic shape than he had yet seen on Perelandra. Its shape was not only fantastic but hideous. Then he dropped on one knee to examine it. Finally he touched it, with reluctance. A moment later he drew back his hands like a man who had touched a snake.(2)

The reader's interest has been brought into play -we have not been introduced to a new animal for some time -and the word 'snake', at the end of a long paragraph, carries an element of shock. It focuses the thrust of the whole sentence into one abrupt monosyllable; more important, the reader recognises the experience

(1) Ibid, pp.86-87. (2) Ibid, p.98.

of touching a snake, but snakes do not exist in Perelandra. The very concept of a poisonous, hostile creature is alien to the trustworthy world Lewis has built up. Which is precisely the point he goes on to make: for the creature is a mutilated frog.

'Some accident had happened to it.... Something had torn a widening wound backward... along the trunk and pulled it out so far behind the animal that the hoppers or hind legs had been almost torn off with it.' To Ransom, such a thing on Perelandra is 'like a blow in the face', a denial of everything he had thought Perelandra to be. He decides to put the frog out of its misery. But

> He had neither boots nor stone nor stick. The frog proved remarkably hard to kill. When it was far too late to desist he saw clearly that he had been a fool to make the attempt. Whatever its sufferings might be he had certainly increased and not diminished them. But he had to go through with it. The job seemed to take nearly an hour.(l)

The sense of frustration is plain; Ransom, again, has been trapped into involvement with evil. Disorder has come and is spreading. 'Sick and shaken', Ransom washes, resumes his walk -and finds a trail of mutilated frogs. After the twenty-first he finds Weston, ripping the frogs open with his fingernails,

> quietly and almost surgically inserting his forefinger, with its long sharp nail, under the skin behind the creature's head and ripping it open... Their eyes met... Weston... did not look like a sick man: but he looked very like a dead one. The face which he raised from torturing the frog had that terrible power which the face of a corpse sometimes has of simply rebuffing every conceivable human attitude one can adopt towards it. The expressionless mouth, the unwinking stare of the eyes, something heavy and inorganic in the very folds of the cheek, said clearly: 'I have features as you have, but there is nothing in common between you and me.'... And now, forcing its way up into consciousness, thrusting aside every mental habit and every longing not to believe, came the conviction that this, in fact, was not a man: that Weston's body was kept, walking and undecaying, in Perelandra by some wholly different kind of life, and that Weston himself was gone.

(1) Ibid,pp.98-99.

> It looked at Ransom in silence and at last began to smile... The smile was not bitter, nor raging, nor, in an ordinary sense, sinister; it was not even mocking. It seemed to summon Ransom, with a horrible naivete of welcome, into the world of its own pleasures, as if they were the most natural thing in the world and no dispute could ever have occurred about them. It was not furtive, nor ashamed, it had nothing of the conspirator in it... This creature was whole-hearted.(1)

It is loathsome and superb. The combination of painstaking care ('almost surgical'), general commonplace ugliness ('long sharp nail'), straightforward horror ('very like a dead one'), and above all the alien nature of the pleasures this creature is enjoying, add up to a striking evocation of evil. By the end of the paragraph the whole imaginative experience of Perelandra is back in play: Weston, or whatever he is now, is as pure and undiluted an example of what he is as the Lady -and the whole planet -are of what they are. Weston himself, the human being, has disappeared; this is important, because the process of fantasy objectification will soon turn spiritual conflict into physical conflict, and Ransom must not seem a murderer. But it is also important to note the sense of something trivial, something childish, about the Un-man (as Ransom begins to call it); Lewis remembered the problems Milton created by making his Satan too admirable.(2) 'It was more like... an imbecile or a monkey or a very nasty child.... Was there, after all, nothing but a black puerility, an empty spitefulness content to sate itself with the tiniest cruelties?'(3)

To this Lewis adds a neat science fiction touch, emphasising that the Un-man is now something that does not really belong to the physical universe at all. It seems an obvious device until one considers how seldom it has been used, or indeed could be:

(1) Ibid,pp.99-100. (2) The point is Chad Walsh's, The Literary Legacy of C.S.Lewis (1979), p.98. (3) VTV,pp.117, 112.

> One got the impression of a force that cleverly kept the pupils of those eyes fixed in a suitable direction while the mouth talked but which, for its own purpose, used wholly different modes of perception. The thing sat down.... If you could call it sitting down. The body did not reach its squatting position by the normal movements of a man: it was more as if some external force manoeuvred it into the right position and then let it drop... Ransom had the sense of watching an imitation of living motions which had been very well studied and was technically correct: but somehow it lacked the master touch.(1)

To this reader, at any rate, this is an impressive and credible evocation of unqualified evil; Lewis has succeeded in creating an imaginary Garden of Eden with a real toad in it.

(vi) Decision and the Presence of God

Voyage to Venus is a book with many strengths. The debate between Ransom and the Un-man that occupies the central chapters has been worked out in minute detail. Space demands, however, that we pass it by, noting only the effective way in which Lewis presents Ransom continually outmanoeuvred and overburdened by the tussle with an immortal intelligence. One section that does require particular attention is Chapter Eleven, where 'supernatural causality'

attains simultaneously its greatest prominence in the book, and its closest convergence with Christian experience in terrestrial reality, producing something almost unique in contemporary fiction.

Ransom finds himself awake, and his mind goes straight to the problem in hand. After three chapters of temptation, the Lady has remained faithful to Maleldil, but her imagination is being corrupted and her resistance undermined psychologically.

> It seemed to Ransom that, but for a miracle, the Lady's resistance was bound to be worn away at the end. Why did no miracle come?... He could not understand why Maleldil should remain absent when the Enemy was there in person.

(1) Ibid, p.lll.

> But while he was thinking about this, as suddenly and sharply as if the solid darkness about him had spoken with articulate voice, he knew that Maleldil was not absent. That sense -so very welcome yet never welcomed without the overcoming of a certain resistance -that sense of the Presence which he had once or twice before experienced on Perelandra, returned to him. The darkness was packed quite full.(1)

The 'as if' is the keynote for the rest of the chapter. It introduces as a simile something we have already learnt to accept as one of the Lady's unearthly experiences; and this is to be a way of introducing

the same thing happening to a terrestrial consciousness. But it is done gently: what is communicated 'as if' is less a proposition than a sense - a sense of awe that Ransom has already experienced and that is not alien to Christian experience on earth. This 'realism' is enhanced by the straightforward piece of psychological observation that follows -'There is a chattering part of the mind which continues, until it is corrected, to chatter on even in the holiest places'. The 'chatter' is equally straightforward -and meets with a stark response:

> 'It's all very well... a presence of that sort! But the Enemy is really here, really saying and doing things. Where is Maleldil's representative?'
>
> The answer which came back to him, quick as a fencer's or a tennis player's riposte, out of the silence and the darkness, almost took his breath away. It seemed blasphemous. (2)

The sense of motion in the sporting comparisons suddenly gives imaginative depth to the idea that some dialogue really is flashing back and forth between Ransom's mind and some other source. And this time, the content of the 'answer' is indeed propositional. Yet it is acceptable because it is a proposition to which the reader will easily assent: we recall -without the hindrance of Ransom's humility -just who was sent him to Perelandra.

(1) Ibid, p.128. (2) Ibid, p.128-129.

Ransom objects:

> He, Ransom, could not possibly be Maleldil's representative... The suggestion was, he argued, itself diabolical -
> a temptation to fatuous pride, to megalomania. He was horrified when the darkness simply flung back this argument in his face, almost impatiently.(1)

Here the 'darkness' is not merely giving information, but contradicting or rejecting Ransom's notions; thereby gaining objectivity. ('Impatiently' is the imaginatively important word

here.) Yet even now we are not far removed from terrestrial experience. Christian readers will know what it is to wrestle with a moral issue in prayer, and find that an apparently plausible line of reasoning just 'does not fit'. An agnostic may see this as simply objectifying conscience, but is unlikely to find it unimaginable. Once again, fantasy serves to objectify things usually less tangible, while raising the question as to whether the things symbolized are merely internal, mental events, or objective, external realities normally beyond the reach of our perceptions.

> His mind darted hopefully down a side-alley that seemed to promise escape... As long as he did his best -and he had done his best -God would see to the final issue. He had not succeeded. But he had done his best... Probably Maleldil's real intention was that he should publish to the human race the truths he had learned on the planet Venus. As for the fate of Venus, that could not really rest upon his shoulders. It was in God's hands. One must be content to leave it there. One must have Faith....
>
> It snapped like a violin string. Not one rag of all this evasion was left. Relentlessly, unmistakably, the Darkness pressed down upon him the knowledge that this picture of the situation was utterly false. His journey to Perelandra was not a moral exercise, nor a sham fight. If the issue lay in Maleldil's hands, Ransom and the Lady were those hands.(2)

The 'violin string' is a superb image; but also of importance is the way in which Lewis' supernaturalistic causality serves to enforce rather than to obliterate the significance of human action.

(1) Ibid, p.129. (2) Ibid.

It is precisely the vague, evasive spirituality of ‘One must be content to leave it there. One must have Faith' that the 'darkness' is ruling out. In so doing, it acquires imaginative reality by identification with all that has been most powerfully embodied in the book hitherto; for the beautifully-imagined world of Perelandra is one where every action is indeed significant, and the evil of the Un-man is something that must (in such a world) receive a response. It is Ransom's ideas, not the 'darkness', that have a sense of unreality. Ransom speaks in possibilities and qualifications ('probably', 'could not really'); the 'darkness' speaks forth

certainties, crisp, uncompromising. 'They could, if they chose, decline to save the innocence of this new race, and if they declined its innocence would not be saved'; if thus, then assuredly thus. Yet Ransom's very evasiveness is realistic. Lewis had a strong distaste for Freudian psychoanalysis, but an equally strong sense of the deviations of the moral will. The reader recognises the twistings and turnings of Ransom's rationalisations.

All this time the 'darkness' has not sounded at all like the mouthpiece of didacticism. For one thing, anything resembling 'preaching' in the book hitherto has either been placed in Ransom's mouth or in the general narration; and the 'darkness' is in direct confrontation with Ransom and the 'cheerful, rational piety' in which he takes refuge.(1) It is worth noting, too, how the 'darkness' is presented solely as a voice or as a crisp expression of ideas; to this Lewis adds adverbs or adverbial phrases, not to explain the mode of communication but to emphasise the sense of confrontation and hence of otherness: 'relentlessly, unmistakably'.

(1) Ibid.p.130.

'The Presence in the darkness, never before so formidable, was putting these truths into his hands, like terrible jewels.'(1) There is a fine economy here: Lewis wastes no efforts filling out our picture of the nature of the dialogue; he emphasises its irreducible, uncompromising facticity and leaves our imaginations to do the rest. Extraneous factors are ruled out by setting the dialogue in the total darkness of the Perelandran night; it seems 'realistic' because it might all be going on inside Ransom's head - and yet the voice of the 'darkness' remains external and objective.

There comes a point when Ransom decides his

> horror had been premature... All that was being demanded of him was a general and preliminary resolution to oppose the Enemy in any mode which circumstances might show to be desirable... "What bugbears we make of things unnecessarily!" he murmured, settling himself in a slightly more comfortable position.(1)

But immediately the possibility arises of the temptation being ended in the 'mode' of physical combat:

> Hullo! What was this?.... His thoughts had stumbled on an idea from which they started back as a man starts back when he has touched a hot poker... The voluble self.... became for some seconds as the voice of a mere whimpering child begging to be let off, to be allowed to go home. Then it rallied. It explained precisely where the absurdity of a physical battle with the Un-man lay. It would be quite irrelevant to the spiritual issue... The thing was patently absurd!
>
> The terrible silence went on. It became more and more like a face, a face not without sadness, that looks upon you while you are telling lies, and never interrupts, but gradually you know that it knows, and falter, and contradict yourself, and lapse into silence. The voluble self petered out in the end. Almost the Darkness said to Ransom, 'You know you are only wasting time.'(2)

Here again it is the uncompromising honesty of the Darkness that appears to be grappling with reality, rather than making mental postures. And Ransom's experience of the Darkness' 'silence' has

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid, pp.131-132.

again a definite realism: the sense of following through a line of thought and finding it peter out, revealing itself perhaps as egoism and self-deception, is one many of Lewis' readers will recognise. The watching presence that Ransom encounters is very much the presence of deity as Christian belief understands it: something all-knowing ('gradually you know that it knows'), gentle ('never interrupts'), and emotionally involved ('not without sadness'). These attributes are, indeed, the presupposition of the dialogue that is taking place.

From this point on the dialogue alters. Hitherto, Ransom's perceptions have been limited to one side of the question, while Lewis has been building up the 'thereness' of the voice of the 'darkness'. But once that has been achieved, Lewis can present

Ransom himself perceiving the answers to his questions: 'Every minute it became clearer to him that... At the same time he also perceived that...'(l). The 'darkness' still participates - 'Patiently and inexorably it brought him back to the here and now'(2) -while remaining firmly silent when Ransom seeks some assurance that no real sacrifice will be demanded -'Perhaps he would fight and win, perhaps not even be badly mauled. But no faintest hint of a guarantee in that direction came to him from the darkness. The future was as black as the night itself.'(3) (The silence here is that faced -as we later discover -by the Lady's husband too: 'He gave me no assurance. No fixed land. Always one must throw oneself into the wave. '(4) But it is also a silence that can accompany moral decision on Earth.) As he grapples with

(1) Ibid,p.132. (2) Ibid,p.133. (3) Ibid,p.134. (4) Ibid,p.195.

these issues, Ransom's personality becomes more distinct, of greater moral stature: yet his whole internal drama is played out in the presence of a God who speaks. It is not that conscience is being imagined as an external voice; rather, the point is being made that conscience can be the mouthpiece of a God who is objectively there - in any part of the universe. This is how the presence of God may operate in our world.

Having established this sense of realism, Lewis can modify the nature of the Voice away from its terrestrial nature, giving it a more directly revelatory character, supplying information that is new to Ransom, to focus the issue raised by his wish for a guarantee of safety:

> "It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom," said the Voice.
>
> And he knew that this was no fancy of his own. He knew it for a very curious reason -because he had known for many years that his surname was derived not from ransom but from Ranolf's son. It would never

> have occurred to him thus to associate the two words.... All in a moment of time he perceived that... the whole distinction between things accidental and things designed, like the distinction between fact and myth, was purely terrestrial. The pattern is so large that within the little frame of earthly experience there appear pieces of it between which we can see no connection, and other pieces between which we can... But step outside that frame and the distinction drops down into the void, fluttering useless wings... Before his mother had borne him, before his ancestors had been called Ransoms, before ransom had been the name for a payment that delivers, before the world was made, all these things had so stood together in eternity that the very significance of the pattern at this point lay in their coming together in just this fashion.(1)

It is a fine model of providence; no direct miracle is involved, but nonetheless the disparate purposes of God come together for a particular configuration. The metaphor of 'void' and 'wings' is excellent: the reader's thought too is being invited to hover above an abyss with no bottom.

(1) Ibid, p.135.

> "My name also is Ransom," said the Voice.
>
> It was some time before the purport of this saying dawned upon him.... Before the answer came to him he felt its insufferable approach and held out his arms before him as if he could keep it from forcing open the door of his mind. But it came. So that was the real issue... Yet nothing was ever repeated. Not a second crucifixion: perhaps –who knows -not even a second Incarnation... some act of even more appalling love, some glory of yet deeper humility.... He felt like a man brought out under naked heaven, on the edge of a precipice, into the teeth of a wind that came howling from the Pole. He had pictured himself, till now, standing before the Lord like Peter. But it was worse. He sat before Him like Pilate. It lay with him to save or to spill. (1)

Lewis is so close to blasphemy. And yet not. For the whole process of what he is describing -moral decision in a context of prayer, leading to combat against evil that may well involve death - must be directly related, for the Christian, to what happened at Calvary. 'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers', writes John in 1 John 3:16. Calvary is the paradigm, the model; Lewis is using the Perelandran setting to make a terrestrial issue starkly plain. He continues the passage in a way which demonstrates that Ransom's situation is not qualitatively different from earthly

discipleship: 'His hands had been reddened, as all men's hands have been, in the slaying before the foundation of the world; now, if he chose, he would dip them again in the same blood.' Of course to introduce such a theme in a piece of shallow hack narrative would be horrific. But Lewis has rebuilt the structure of the archetypal Fall -the paradise and unfallen innocence at stake, the presence of evil, the presence of God -with sufficient imaginative power to make this further extension seem not inappropriate. The facts of Perelandra are the dogma of
Christianity: the convergence is total.

(1) Ibid, p.l36.

And in the light of that, Ransom accepts his duty of combat with the Un-man. Lewis simply states Ransom's realisation that 'about this time tomorrow you will have done the impossible'.(1) He does not make explicit a causal connection between Ransom's reflections about Calvary and his decision: the one flows quietly out of the other -as it should on Earth. Again, the link with terrestrial discipleship is subtly reinforced when Ransom's realisation that the thing would be done is described as 'something... which had happened to him only twice before in his life': with this phrase Lewis preserves the scale and rarity of what he is describing, while making clear that it is still akin to his readers' experience. And, with the decision made, Ransom perceives it as

> a smaller matter than he had supposed.... He stood for Maleldil: but no more than Eve would have stood for Him by not eating the apple, or than any man stands for Him in doing any good action....It might as well be he as another. It might as well be any other choice as this. The fierce light which he had seen resting on this moment of decision rested in reality on all.(2)

The calm, universalising sentences, while distancing us from the edge of Golgotha and bringing us nearer the everyday, nevertheless reinforce the sense of the mythic, the archetypal, in what Lewis is

describing; Ransom's experience is not unlike every man's, but for that reason he is Everyman, alone in combat against evil.

Different readers will react to this section in different ways; but to this reader at any rate it is one of the most striking evocations of man in the presence of God to be found anywhere in the novel. The presence of Maleldil is deliberately veiled but emphatically 'there'; while the 'mechanics' of Ransom's decision, the shifts, evasions, and rationalisations, the fears and the demands for an

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid,p.137.

assurance of 'safe conduct', are entirely recognisable, entirely accurate. Each position in the process is stated and its implications drawn out clearly, accurately and economically. The total reality of decision-making as the Christian understands it, including the areas of prayer and conscience, are presented in a manner virtually unparalleled elsewhere. At this point realism and fantasy meet, and the 'baptism of the imagination' becomes possible: whether or not we believe in the 'presence of the Lord', if it should be true it could well be like this.

(vii) The Great Dance

There are many excellent passages still to come. The fight between Ransom and the Un-man is stark and bloody, though cleanly fought (no-one employs the kick in the groin), and moves smoothly from a passage where the Un-man speaks clearly as the Satan of Christian belief to one giving a brutally detailed account of the fighting, and from an overpowering sense of evil at the start of the fight to near-delirium at the close. Weston makes two final, well-delineated appearances as a crumbling consciousness that is apparently neither the human scientist nor the Un-man, that suffers human terror and yet has passed through death. Ransom's wanderings underground after the fight contain several fine imaginative touches (especially the opening to

Chapter Fifteen). However, space demands that we restrict our attention to the final section, where Lewis presents a vision of the Great Dance, an enactment of what supernatural causality must mean on a universal scale.

When Ransom faces the presence of Maleldil in the darkness, he perceives the crucial importance of the decisions of the small:

'Thus, and not otherwise, the world was made. Either something or nothing must depend upon individual choices.... A stone may determine the course of a river. He was that stone.'(1) But as he pursues Weston across the vast Perelandran oceans he comes to doubt the meaningfulness of tiny humanity. Perelandra had seemed to exist for man, yet what was the Lady's archipelago of floating islands but a 'negligible freckling in a landless ocean'?(2) Was the 'great prohibition... really so important?' What did it matter 'whether two little creatures, now far away, lived or did not live on one particular rock?' These doubts are given power by Lewis' evocation of the endless, daunting expanses of sea ('The crying of these birds was often audible, and it was the wildest sound that Ransom had ever heard, the loneliest, and the one that had least to do with Man'(3)). Weston reappears, describing existence as 'a thin little rind of what we call life, put on for show, and then -the real universe for ever and ever... Neither rational nor consistent nor anything else... Darkness, worms, heat, pressure, salt,
suffocation, stink. '(4)

Ransom's wanderings underground help him understand that 'the inside of this world was not for man, but it was for something.'(5) Still, at the end of the book, he meets with the Lady, her husband,

and two eldils, and gains the impression that they see the whole of Earth’s history since the Fall as 'a failure to begin.' He enquires,

> Is the enemy easily answered when he says that all is without plan or meaning? As soon as we think we see one it melts away into nothing, or into some other plan that we never dreamed of, and what was the centre becomes the rim, till we doubt if any shape or plan or pattern was ever more than a trick of our own eyes, cheated with hope, or tired with too much looking.(6)

(1) Ibid,p.130. (2) Ibid,p.150. (3) Ibid,p.146. (4) lbid, pp.154-156.
(5) Ibid, p.170. (6) Ibid,198.

In response, Lewis takes the narrative out of dialogue altogether into something more like ritual in which all present participate - or, indeed, ecstasy:

> Another said, "Never did He make two things the same; never did He utter one word twice. After earths, not better earths but beasts; after beasts, not better beasts but spirits. After a falling, not a recovery but a new creation. Out of the new creation, not a third but the mode of change itself is changed for ever. Blessed be He!"
>
> ..."Each thing was made for Him. He is the centre. Because we are with Him, each of us is at the centre... Each thing, from the single grain of Dust to the strongest eldil, is the end and the final cause of all creation and the mirror in which the beam of His brightness comes to rest and so returns to Him. Blessed be He!"(1)

And so on for several pages. It is a difficult section to assess critically. This writer recalls reading it for the first time and finding it overwhelming; as a series of fictional analogues for the divine purposes to which nothing is superfluous and everything is crucially significant, it seemed peerless. Brian Aldiss, on the other hand, writes that this 'psalm-singing ending' makes him
'squirm with embarrassment'.(2) Very probably the strength of both these reactions has much to do with the reader's response to Lewis' worldview, here at its most prominent. To a Christian reader, for example, the section beginning 'He has no need at all of anything that is made'(3) may well have a meaningfulness that is less available to the non-Christian. Worship is something that occurs rarely in fiction, and therefore may seem alien to the

novel-reader. But to concede that is to abandon hope of a 'baptism of the imagination'. And surely a passage like this has its own power, even viewed as a myth of the irreducible 'otherness' of nature:

> Though men or angels rule them, the worlds are for themselves... Times without number I have circled Arbol while you were not alive, and those times were not desert. Their own voice was in them, not merely a dreaming of the day when you should awake. They also were at the centre. Be comforted, small immortals. You are not the voice that all

(1)Ibid, pp.198,201. (2)Brian Aldiss, Billion Year Spree, p.199. (3)VTV, p.201.

> things utter, nor is there eternal silence in the places where you cannot come. No feet have walked, nor shall, on the ice of Glund; no eye looked up from beneath on the Ring of Lurga, and Ironplain in Neruval is chaste and empty. Yet it is not for nothing that the gods walked ceaselessly around the fields of Arbol. Blessed be He!(l)

The parallelisms ('No feet have walked... Yet it is not for nothing...') play a part in building up the sense of ritual, of a symphonic structure as speaker succeeds speaker. The sense of the significance of each participant in the Great Dance, balanced with the emphasis (enforced by the unfamiliar names – Glund, Lurga, Neruval) that there is much more to the pattern than anyone has seen or can see, bring to a climax the providential patterns that have marked the book as a whole.

It may, admittedly, be a final gamble on Lewis' part that has not worked in the case of some of his readers. If so, it is a pity. For Voyage to Venus is an impressive achievement. Its introduction of the eldils; its evocation of an unfallen paradise; its union of the symbolic and the geographical in its treatment of the Fall; its presentation of evil; and above all its depiction of Ransom's moral decision in the presence of God, add up to something unique in contemporary fiction. Evidently supernaturalism and providentialism can be raw material even for the contemporary teller of tales, and Voyage to Venus points one possible way.

(1) Ibid, p.200.

4. C.S.LEWIS: THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH

That Hideous Strength will require somewhat less extensive treatment than its predecessor in Lewis' trilogy. The reason is that it is a different kind of book.

When he was writing the opening of Voyage to Venus, Lewis tried his hand briefly at depicting the struggle between the powers of light and darkness in the terrestrial arena; and he makes Ransom say that possibly 'the isolation of our world, the siege, was beginning to draw to an end... The two sides... have begun to appear much more clearly, much less mixed, here on Earth, in our own human affairs.'(1) And in That Hideous Strength demonic evil becomes manifest, through a massive organization for scientific planning named the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments. This organization, unfortunately, is headed up by men who have 'seen through' traditional moral categories as nothing more than a system of conditioning such as they themselves are intending to operate. A successful attempt to keep alive the head of an executed criminal brings them into contact with supra-physical intelligences called 'macrobes', who soon come to dominate NICE's planning at the highest levels. Their efforts are opposed by a small Company, mostly made up of Christians and led by Ransom. Matters come to a head as both sides discover that the ancient magician Merlin is not dead, but rather in an age-long coma. NICE seek to find and awaken him, expecting him to be a powerful ally; however, his loyalty turns out to be to the other side, and after receiving the powers of the

(1) VTV,pp.17-18.

eldils he destroys the NICE. All this is narrated through the adventures of a young married couple, Jane and Mark Studdock. Jane is unknowingly a clairvoyant; visions of the Head and Merlin bring her into contact with the Company, to which she serves as a vital source of information. Mark, a young sociologist, is in the meantime being drawn into the NICE, and then into the inner circle of initiates, but finally rejects what he sees and is rescued by Merlin. The marital problems of the Studdocks serve as a sub-plot to the book.

There is general agreement that That Hideous Strength shows the influence of Lewis' friend Charles Williams. Williams' own 'spiritual thrillers' are set on Earth, albeit an Earth where figures like Prester John or Simon Magus can suddenly make an appearance in twentieth-century society. In Williams' novel The Place of the Lion, as in That Hideous Strength, angelic powers come down into the world of men; but the results are harmful and at the end the 'guard that protected earth was set again; the interposition of the Mercy veiled the destroying energies from the weakness of Man.'(1) Williams and Lewis also shared an interest in the Arthurian myth that Lewis employs extensively in That Hideous Strength. This may be demonstrated by quotation from Arthurian Torso (1948), a book containing an essay by Williams on the topic, and a lengthy commentary by Lewis on Williams' Arthurian poems. In these poems, as in That Hideous Strength, there is an opposition between an ideal 'Logres' and 'mere Britain', and 'Logres' is embodied in a 'Company', led by Taliessin in Williams and by Ransom as 'the Pendragon' (ie Arthurian monarch) in Lewis. Williams presents Merlin as the 'last figure of sacred magic, of magic before magic even in

(1) Charles Williams, The Place of the Lion (1931; Faber edition of 1964),p.205.

art became impermissible'(l) -exactly the role he plays in Lewis. And when Lewis summarises Williams' description of the assault on the Roman Empire with the words 'the barbarian wizards are dragging from old graves "the poor, long dead, long buried, decomposing shapes of humanity"'(2), it is hard to avoid a sense of a link with NICE's disinterring of Merlin. Lewis' shift to a terrestrial setting, then, was made in the context of influences that were themselves by no means 'realistic' in orientation. Hence it is not entirely surprising that in its treatment of supernaturalism That Hideous Strength would seem to have considerably less of a realistic intention than Voyage to Venus, set away in Perelandra.

(i) Realism in the Opening

The book certainly begins in a realistic enough manner:

> "Matrimony was ordained, thirdly", said Jane Studdock to herself, "for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other." She had not been to church since her schooldays until she went there six months ago to be married, and the words of the service had stuck in her mind.

This opening paragraph raises several themes that will be important in the book: the meaning of marriage (the next two paragraphs show that Jane's marriage has proved a failure); Jane's attitude to Christianity; and Christianity as a source of stock responses to life of an unexpectedly abiding kind. These are areas that call for realistic treatment. But supernaturalistic fantasy content soon appears too. It is important to note what kind of supernatural Lewis wishes to present right at the beginning: neither angels nor demons, rather a clairvoyant dream that is confirmed by the following day's paper.(3) This is perhaps more the supernaturalism of Williams'

(1) Charles Williams and C.S.Lewis, Arthurian Torso (1948),p.73. (2) Ibid, p.183. (3) C.S.Lewis, That Hideous Strength (1945; revised edition of 1955, published by Pan),p.7. Unless otherwise indicated, all further references are to the shorter 1955 version, henceforth

'spiritual thrillers' than that of the mainstream of Christian belief.

Still, such a supernaturalism can be integrated with the book's realistic concerns:

> The moment she saw the picture, she remembered her dream; not only the dream but the time after she had crept out of bed and sat waiting for the morning, afraid to put on the light for fear Mark should wake up and fuss, yet feeling offended by the sound of his regular breathing. He was an excellent sleeper. Only one thing ever seemed able to keep him awake after he had gone to bed, and even that did not keep him awake for long.(l)

Jane's ambivalent motives are well expressed: it is fear as much as affection that prevents her switching the light on. Yet in Lewis' description there is, perhaps, too intrusive an authorial commentary:

> By work she meant her doctorate thesis on Donne. She still believed that if she got out all her note-books and editions and really sat down to the job she could force herself back into her lost enthusiasm for the subject.(2)

'She still believed' are the words of an author who knows better than the character, who knows exactly what the character is doing. Jane, unlike Ransom in the earlier books, is being observed from the outside -or worse still, manipulated from the outside to do the right thing at the right time. There is a weakness in Lewis' realism here.

referred to as 1955. This tends to be considered an improvement on the 1945 edition (henceforth referred to as 1945), but the case is debateable; the abridging has been rather uneven. Certainly the book is better off for the omission of some of Straik's tirade, for example (1945,pp.93-94; 1955,p.52). But the omission of the Donne quotation in the first section (1945,p.13) hinders our understanding of the passage where it recurs (1945,p.31; 1955,p.18); the original occurrence of Feverstone's jibe that Mark is an 'incurable romantic' (1945,p.135) is dropped in 1955 but nonetheless is quoted in 1955,p.148; and the omission 'better than you' from Miss Hardcastle's 'I know better than you which is going to be most fun' when Mark is deciding whether to stay with NICE seems a pity (1945, p.117; 1955, p.62). The college politics sections are also weakened in the abridgement, as is argued below. (1) Ibid. (2)Ibid.

Realism is also Lewis' concern in the next section, which begins with Mark going to a meeting in Bracton College, 'founded in 1300 for the support of ten learned men whose duties were to pray for the soul of Henry de Bracton and study the laws of England', and now possessing forty Fellows 'of whom

only six study Law and of whom none, perhaps, prays for the soul of Bracton.'(1) (The reference to prayer places the academic system in a spiritual context; in a world in which it is possible to pray or not to pray, the university has become secularised.) Mark is one of the 'insiders' in the 'modern' Bracton:

> He was beginning to find his feet. If he had felt any doubt on that point (which he did not) it would have been laid to rest when he found himself meeting Curry just outside the post office, and seen (sic) how natural Curry found it that they should walk to College together and discuss the agenda for the meeting... You would never have guessed from the tone of Studdock's reply what intense pleasure he derived from Curry's use of the pronoun 'we'. So very recently he had been an outsider, watching the proceedings of what he then called "Curry and his gang" with awe and with little understanding. Now he was inside, and the gang was "we" or "the progressive element in College". It had happened quite suddenly and was still sweet in the mouth.(2)

This is fairly shrewd writing; although '(which he did not)' betrays the extent to which Lewis is describing a kind of person he dislikes. The same animus is rather too marked when Lewis gets down to describing college politics:

> They wanted a site for the building which would worthily house this remarkable organisation. The N.I.C.E. was the first-fruit of that constructive fusion between the state and the laboratory on which so many thoughtful people base their hopes of a better world. It was to be free from all the tiresome restraints -"red tape" was the word its supporters used -which have hitherto hampered research in this country. It was also largely free from the restraints of economy.(3)

'Worthily', 'remarkable', 'constructive', 'thoughtful', 'tiresome': Lewis' sarcasm shows his hand, parodying the attitude he hates before his readers have had the opportunity to judge for themselves. Still, his picture of the university's 'Progressive Element' fixing the sale of Bragdon Wood(which contains Merlin's Well) is effective. Curry, the

(1) Ibid, p.9. (2) Ibid, pp.9-10. (3) Ibid, p.13.

sub-warden, conveniently produces letters from a society for the preservation of ancient monuments who have been somewhat too inquisitive

about the Wood's welfare; another from a group of Spiritualists wanting to investigate supposed psychic phenomena in the Wood; and a third from a firm wanting to make a film of the Spiritualists doing so. Having made the Wood appear a source of annoyance, the 'Progressive Element' then make clear that the upkeep of the Wood and the increase of junior fellows' stipends are mutually exclusive. Curry follows this with a report that NICE want to purchase, not the Wood, but 'the area coloured pink on the plan which, with the Warden's permission, I will now pass round the table'(l) –leaving, indeed, a section of the Wood at least sixteen feet wide in the College's hands. The 1945 version adds, 'There was
no deception for the Fellows had the plan to look at with their own eyes. It was a small-scale plan and not perhaps perfectly accurate -only meant to give one a general idea.' (There are some other fine touches that have surprisingly been omitted in the abridged version: Lord Feverstone apparently leading the opposition to the 'progressives'; the narrator's 'I would not like to accuse a man in Curry's position of misreading a letter: but his reading of this
letter was certainly not such as to gloss over any defects in the tone of the original composition'; and the Bursar's delivery in which each 'sentence was a model of lucidity: and if his hearers found the gist of his whole statement less clear than the parts. that may have been their own fault. '(2))

All this is excellent -and based, it would seem, on Lewis' recollections of the manipulation of college politics at Magdalen College in Oxford.(3) Lewis' own sympathies, of course, lie clearly

(1) Ibid.pp.14-16. (2) 1945.pp.23-28. (3) Cf. Green and Hooper. op.cit.,p.148.

with the 'few real "Die-hards"' who wish to save the Wood from NICE but are outmanoeuvred. Two sentences cut from the 1955 edition

make this clear. The aged Jewel, one of the 'Die-hards', rises to speak:

> Men turned round to gaze at, and some to admire, the clear-cut, half-childish face and the white hair which had become more conspicuous as the long room grew darker. But only those close to him could hear what he said.(1)

There are two striking notes here: the Anglo-Saxon note that Tolkien found so congenial, of heroism in the gathering darkness - 'Heart shall be bolder, harder be purpose, more proud the spirit as our power lessens!'(2); or of Aragorn at the last battle -'His eyes gleamed like stars that shine the brighter as the night deepens'.(3) But one senses also the note of pessimism that emerges occasionally in the very cavalier quality of Lewis' rearguard action against much of 'modernity': what if this is not the end, what if apocalyptic deliverance does not come? Is there nothing more to hope for than Jewel growing old and being shouted down (as here) or (later in the book) Hingest bravely fighting for his life, one man against three - 'Then it was rather horrible, but rather fine... Of course they got him in the end'?(4) In fictional terms. Lewis' assault on the college politicians aiming to build 'a better world' has enough realism and seriousness about it to make it important to know what he can offer as a constructive alternative. It is questionable whether Ransom's Christian Company is equally compelling as a counterbalance. or whether -like Dickens' good characters -it is merely a stronghold of the past. And the fact that, as we shall see, Lewis' Christian supernatural in this book is deliberately distanced

(1) 1945, p.28. (2) J.R.R.Tolkien. 'The Homecoming of Heorhtnoth Beorthelm's Son', in The Tolkien Reader (New York. 1966),p.17.
(3) TLOTR, p.927. (4) 1955, p.51.

into fantasy and away from realistic experience (unlike that of Voyage to Venus) seems, from this standpoint, a weakness.

(ii)The 'Non-Realistic' Supernatural

One of the first instances of this problem comes when Jane has her vision of Merlin's awakening. She dreams she is in the tomb with his corpse:

> If only someone would come quickly and let her out. And immediately she had a picture of someone, someone bearded but also divinely young, someone golden and strong and warm coming with a mighty earth-shaking tread into that black place. At this point she woke.(1)

Who exactly this might be is not made clear. But it is a portrayal unlike (and much more human than) Lewis' depictions of eldils; hence, 'Maleldil the Young' ('someone... divinely young') seems the most likely. But then what a desperately perfunctory picture of deity! Ransom's encounter even with the King of Perelandra left him shattered(2); Jane, in contrast, wakes up with little more than exciting news -about 'the corpse'.(3) There is no sense of the 'When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead' of the Book of Revelation, or of Isaiah's 'Woe is me! For I am lost...for my eyes have seen the King!' In neither of the other books of the trilogy does Ransom have an actual vision of deity. Lewis seems to toss in, just in passing, something which (if he did it at all) should arguably have been a climax for Jane and for the whole book, even for the whole trilogy.

And it is so vague: 'golden and strong and warm' is imprecise and not at all numinous.And alas, it soon turns out that Ransom(or Mr Fisher-King as he is now rather unnecessarily renamed, with an eye on the Grail myth) has turned into something like his Master. Jane goes to meet him, and 'her world was unmade':

(1) Ibid,p.81. (2) VTV,p.190. (3) 1955,p.83.

> All the light in the room seemed to run towards the gold hair and the gold beard of the wounded man.
>
> Of course he was not a boy -how could she have thought so? The fresh skin on his cheeks and hands had suggested the idea. But no boy could have so full a beard. And no boy could be so strong. It was manifest that the grip of those hands would be inescapable, and imagination

> suggested that those arms and shoulders could support the whole house... Pain came and went in his face: sudden jabs of sickening pain. But as lightning goes through the darkness and the darkness closes up again and shows no trace, so the tranquillity of his countenance swallowed up each shock of torture.(l)

Ransom's time on Perelandra has had a rather marked effect. But the distancing into myth is deliberate. The role of realistic consciousness that Ransom played in Voyage to Venus now belongs to Mark and Jane (not without some loss; Ransom was enough like Lewis and his friends to have a good deal of depth). Lewis has reserved Ransom for an attempt at presenting something which would never normally appear in modern fiction; and despite the desperate lack of concreteness in the paragraph just quoted (which renders the pain, in particular, too stylized to be meaningful), he does manage to convey something in the following sentences:

> She had long since forgotten the imagined Arthur of her childhood - and the imagined Solomon too. Solomon... for the first time in many years the bright solar blend of king and lover and magician which hangs about that name stole back upon her mind. For the first time in all those years she tasted the word King itself with all its linked associations of battle, marriage, priesthood, mercy, and power.

Lewis has indeed restored a most un-modern archetype for his readers' imaginations. It is not in the least realistic, of course. But that is not a criticism; merely a statement of what Lewis is seeking- this time successfully -to do.

At the end of the interview, Jane suddenly finds herself thinking of, or rather experiencing, 'hugeness'. It is her first encounter

(1) Ibid,p.84.

with an eldil:

> The whole room was a tiny place, a mouse's hole, and it seemed to her to be tilted aslant -as though the insupportable mass and splendour of this formless hugeness had knocked it askew. She heard the Director's voice.
>
> "Quick," he said gently, "these are my Masters. You must leave me now. This is no place for us small ones, but I am inured. Go!"(l)

Again, there is a significant difference from Voyage to Venus, where 'Lewis' found the presence of an eldil disturbing, even horrifying, but not dwarfing quite in this way. In that book, the aim was to create a sense of confrontation and hence of imaginative freshness and a kind of realism; here, the purpose is rather the sense of something utterly great, great beyond platitude, beyond all normal human experience. The same is true of the later scene when all the planetary eldils come together to take over the body of Merlin for his work of judgement and destruction:

> Quick agitation seized them: a kind of boiling and bubbling in mind and heart which shook their bodies also. It went to a rhythm of such fierce speed that they feared their sanity must be shaken into a thousand fragments. And then it seemed that this had actually happened. But it did not matter; for all the fragments - needle-pointed desires, brisk merriments, lynx-eyed thoughts -went rolling to and fro like glittering drops and reunited themselves. It was well that both men had some knowledge of poetry... For the lord of Meaning himself, the herald, the messenger, the slayer of Argus, was with them: the angel that spins nearest the sun, Viritrilbia, whom men call Mercury and Thoth....
>
> And now it came. It was fiery, sharp, bright, and ruthless, ready to kill, ready to die, outspeeding light; it was Charity, not as mortals imagine it, not even as it has been humanised for them since the Incarnation of the Word, but the trans-lunary virtue, fallen upon them direct from the Third Heaven, unmitigated. They were blinded, scorched.
> They thought it would burn their bones. They could not bear that it should continue. They could not bear that it should cease. So Perelandra... came and was with them in the room....

(1) Ibid, pp.88-89.

> Saturn, whose name in the heavens is Lurga, stood in the Blue Room. His spirit lay upon the house, or even on the whole earth, with a cold pressure such as might flatten the very orb of Tellus to a wafer. Matched against the lead-like burden of his antiquity, the other gods themselves perhaps felt young and ephemeral... Ransom and Merlin suffered a sensation of unendurable cold: and all that was strength in Lurga became sorrow as it entered them.(l)

In these passages Lewis surely succeeds in creating a memorable evocation of non-human, supra-human, states; and in one respect,

given the connotations of personality and (as it were) moral qualities that he integrates into the conception, there is a sense that 'This is what celestial beings might be like'. Minor imaginative touches such as Lewis' remark that there are seven eldilic sexes, five of them alien to mankind, and that Jupiter's eldil had been 'by fatal but not inexplicable misprision, confused with his Maker -so little did they dream by how many degrees the stair even of created being rises above him', serve to give an idea of vast, unknown but wonderful expanses opening up, stretching far beyond human vision. But still, the supernaturalism Lewis is creating in this book remains distant from the realm of the everyday.

This obviously goes for Merlin too. It even goes for the nearest thing to an expression of providence, which occurs when MacPhee, the Company's resident Scottish agnostic, challenges Ransom's leadership. Ransom responds by denying that he himself had brought the Company together, and enquires whether anybody thought he had consciously selected them. Noone does.

> You never chose me. I never chose you. Even the great Oyeresu whom I serve never chose me. I came into their worlds by what seemed, at first, a chance; as you came to me -as the very animals in this house first came to it. You and I have not started or devised this: it has descended on us. It is, no doubt, an organisation: but we are not the organisers.(2)

(1) Ibid, pp.199-204. (2) Ibid, p.118.

Here, at the very point where Ransom retrospectively declares providence to have been at work in the everyday, Lewis distinguishes his narrative action from the normal process of providence operating through prayerful decision-making. The presence of the supernatural excludes ordinary human action rather than collaborating with it; and the book's supernaturalism remains distanced from ordinary experience.

The same is true of the operations of supernatural evil. Wither, the NICE Deputy Director, has (for reasons that are never explained) learned how to go into certain trances where he can travel outside his physical body in multiple wraith-forms. It is not really clear how this came about, nor does it contribute much to the plot, but it is disturbing in itself:

> Mark... thought he was looking into the face of a corpse.... He was not unconscious, for his eyes rested momentarily on Mark and then looked away. "I beg your pardon, sir," began Mark, and then stopped. The Deputy Director was not listening. What looked out of those pale, watery eyes was, in a sense, infinity -the shapeless and the interminable....
>
> When at last Mr.Wither spoke, his eyes were fixed on some remote point beyond the window.
>
> "I know who it is," said Wither. "Your name is Studdock. You had better have stayed outside. Go away."(1)

Again, this is imaginatively striking (especially the sense of dislocation from normal human sensory experience in 'I know who it is' used to someone familiar). But it is far removed from the everyday.

Lewis' central image of evil is taken from Olaf Stapledon, an earlier science fiction writer whom he both admired and strongly

(1) Ibid, p.lll.

disagreed with. It is Alcasan's Head, the forerunner of 'a new species - the Chosen Heads who never die'(l), separated from its body and kept alive artificially. This image is given multiple, related meanings. Firstly, it stands for the rational processes operating in supposedly 'objective' separation from the moral law. As Lewis says in the 1955 Preface, he is making the same point here as he did in his essay The Abolition of Man; and in the latter book he describes thinkers who move in that direction as 'men without chests... The head rules the belly through the chest - the seat...of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments.'(2) Secondly,

Lewis is using the amputated Head to stand for a rationalism that cuts itself adrift from or is hostile to 'Nature'.(3) And a third variant appears when NICE initiate Frost compares humanity to an animal no longer needing a large body for nutrition and locomotive organs: 'The masses are therefore to disappear. The body is to become all head. The human race is to become all Technocracy' -and so sixteen major wars are scheduled for the twentieth century. (4)

References to demonic powers are integrated into this very easily. In The Abolition of Man, Lewis insists that those who deny the absolute moral law can finally have no categories whatever with which to make decisions except their own desires, and hence are open to evil. He also suggests that the magician and the scientist can be comparable in their desire to control by knowledge(5); and in The Screwtape Letters the demons' goal is to produce 'our perfect work, the Materialist Magician' who will use and even worship

(1) Ibid,p.117. The forerunner of the image is the dying or dead Weston's 'Buried alive. You try to connect things and can't. They take your head off...'(VTV, p.157), and- one suspects -the warning to Ransom's sister about evil 'coming to a head'(!) in Britain (1955,p.72). (2) C.S.Lewis, The Abolition of Man (1943; Fount edition of 1978),p.19. (3) Cf. ibid, pp.42-43. (4) 1955,p.157. (5) Lewis, The Abolition of Man, pp.45-47.

'Forces' while denying the existence of 'spirits'.(1) From there it is a straightforward step to the idea in That Hideous Strength that the whole philosophical development that has led to this situation was in some degree 'subtly manoeuvred' by 'dark contrivers', until the combination of scientific control with reawakened magic made 'hell... at last incarnate'(2). Here, Lewis is creating a 'supernaturalistic realism' by raising philosophical issues and then suggesting that these too are an arena for spiritual warfare. The effect of the demonic 'macrobes' on history has been massive, Frost tells Studdock: 'The real causes of all the principal events are

quite unknown to the historians.'(3) This is, of course, very much the point that Lewis makes throughout The Screwtape Letters.

And yet, where the macrobes actually make their influence felt in the action of That Hideous Strength - and Lewis is wise to use them seldom and to tell us very little about them - the effect is striking, but (as with the eldils) an experience remote from the everyday world: 'Frost... had chosen this time for this stage in Mark's initiation partly in obedience to an unexplained impulse (such impulses grew more frequent with him every day).'(4) In Lewis' treatment of the evil supernatural, then, he is still using the powers of the Christian cosmology, and discussing the issues that he believed to exist in the real universe. But his characters' experience remains 'extreme'; it is deliberately distanced from the 'normal' spirituality of the ordinary believer.

(iii) The 'Non-Realistic' Apocalypse

It is in accordance with this distancing that, when good and evil

(1) C.S.Lewis, The Screwtape Letters (1942; Fount edition of 1977), p.39. This is more or less what happened to Weston in Voyage to Venus. (2) 1955,p.121. (3) Lewis himself largely agreed with this Last point; cf. the essay on 'Historicism' included in both Fern-seed and Elephants and Christian Reflections. (4) 1955, p.212.

finally came to grips in the apocalyptic judgement on the NICE, the human beings on the side of 'good' play scarcely any part. This section is a retelling of the story of the divine judgement on the tower of Babel referred to by Lewis in the book's epigraph, a comparable instance of human power extending beyond 'that limitation... which mercy had imposed ...as a protection'(1). Merlin comes to the NICE in answer to an advertisement for an

interpreter, and by eldilic power turns their communication with one another into total nonsense; and then an attack by wild animals plus an earthquake complete the Institute's destruction. Lewis makes great play of the Babel episode. The NICE Director speaks of something being 'as gross an anachronism as to trust to calvary for salvation in modern war', meaning to say 'cavalry' but accidentally stating a credo; Frost sends a message to Miss Hardcastle as the chaos worsens -'Blunt frippers intantly to pointed

bdelluroid. Purgent. Cost.' Meaning, presumably, 'Urgent. Frost'; but what is happening is indeed

'purgent', the 'cost' of NICE's misdeeds.(2) There is much that is effective in this section: the smell at the NICE banquet after bedlam has broken out - 'the smell of the shooting mixed with the sticky compound of blood and port and Madeira'(3); Frost committing suicide under the control of the 'macrobes', being allowed at the last minute to see his error, until 'With one supreme effort he flung himself back into his illusion'(4); three other NICE leaders,

their minds likewise taken over, engaging in ritual murder punctuated by chants before the Head, in a powerful and horrific scene.(5)

All this is a vivid picture of judgement and hell upon earth ('The valley seemed to have turned into Hell', notes Feverstone (6)).

(1) Ibid, p.121. In this respect, That Hideous Strength, like Voyage to Venus, is a retelling of Genesis. (2) Ibid, ,pp.218,221. (3) Ibid, p.221. (4) Ibid, p.232. (5) Ibid, pp.227-229. (6) Ibid, p.239.

But Ransom and his Company have little to do with it; they are aware only of fierce heat and light and they spend the time preparing for Ransom's farewell meal. (Having let Merlin loose, Ransom’s task on Earth is over.) Obviously Lewis intends to give a sense of the directness of divine judgement, the 'sudden, violent end imposed from without: an extinguisher popped on to the candle, a brick flung at the

gramophone, a curtain rung down on the play -"Halt!"'.(l)

(Precisely because such an idea conflicts with the 'favourite modern mythology' of unending progress, he says, it should be 'made more frequently the subject of meditation'.(2)) But the price he pays is the presentation of divine action as radically separate from human action in a way very different from the 'co-working' of God and man of which the New Testament speaks(3) -and which Ransom experiences in

Voyage to Venus. Merlin's deeds are done because he is 'one in the saddle of whose soul rode Mercury himself'(4), rather than

someone 'filled with the Spirit' like Samson or the apostles in the scenes of judgement in the book of Judges or the Acts. With human action so clearly swept aside, the sceptical MacPhee's question deserves more than the brief answer it receives: 'I'd be greatly obliged if anyone would tell me what we have done -always apart from feeding the pigs and raising some very decent vegetables.'(5) Sorting Merlin out and sending him in the right direction seems the only answer. True, they have 'obeyed and waited'(6); but it is not clear why they had to be brought together as a mystical Company

(1) From the essay on the Second Coming in Lewis, Fern-seed and Elephants,p.72. (2) Ibid, p.77. (3) Eg Romans 8:28. (4)1955, p.226. (5) Ibid, p.241. (6) Ibid, p.242. Certainly this is Lewis' point in his essay about awaiting the Second Coming, and the phrasing suggests he may have had this passage in mind: 'For what comes is judgement: happy are those whom it finds labouring in their vocations, whether they were merely going out to feed the pigs or laying good plans to deliver humanity a hundred years hence from some great evil.' (Fern-seed and Elephants,p.83.)

entrusted with the secrets of Atlantis and outer space, if that was all they were to do.

And if Lewis wished to give an imaginative experience of eschatology(l), of the 'descent' of the heavenly powers, then he has chosen a strategy with inherent disadvantages. The reader has indeed had a chance to see what an apocalypse might be like; but it is tangled up with much that is very deliberately non-real. At the close, for example, Ransom goes off to be with King Arthur in a paradise, in Avalon, or rather 'Aphallin'(2) -on Venus; and he goes to paradise in a spaceship, or at least a 'vessel'(3). Here, the spiritual reality is left objectified in very mechanical terms

to the very end; and one wonders whether this does not hinder Lewis' apologetic purpose.

(iv) 'Supernaturalistic Realism' in the Conversion Scenes

The relation of the book's supernaturalism to 'normal' spiritual experience is perhaps closest in the experiences of the characters who undergo conversion, Mark and Jane Studdock. The agnostic MacPhee- who could be a crucial figure, as the sole non-Christian in Ransom's entourage -stays an agnostic to the last, blissfully and improbably unconvinced even by Merlin's arrival or the earthquake; but he is less a character with real spiritual experiences than a narrative symbol of agnosticism. His function is

(1) Assuming he does, he has a neat, comic way of preventing it seeming over-portentous. Seven pages from the end, the petty bureaucrat Curry reappears, receiving the news of the earthquake. 'He had not up till then been a religious man. But the word that now instantly came into his mind was "Providential". He'd been within an ace of taking the earlier train: and if he had... It was Providential again that some responsible person should have been spared... Providential -providential.' (1955,p.245.) (2) Ibid,p.240. (3) Ibid, p.249.

plain in the final chapter, where he is the only character without a mate when Venus descends ('I'll away down to my office and cast some accounts. There'd better be one man about the place keep his head'), swearing 'In the name of Hell', but nonetheless giving a moving, quasi-Shakespearean farewell to Ransom: 'What you and I have seen together... but no matter for that. You... you and I... but there are the ladies crying. I'm away this minute. Why would a man want to lengthen it?'(1)

Mark is a figure of a kind Lewis disliked: 'He was a man of straw, a glib examinee in subjects that require no exact knowledge... Mark liked to be liked. There was a good deal of the spaniel in him'(2). It is not surprising, therefore, that he functions better

as a medium for satire than as a character whose spiritual experiences can be penetrated into. His development tends to be described from the outside: 'There were no moral considerations at this moment in Mark's mind. He looked back on his life, not with shame but with a kind of disgust at its dreariness. He saw himself as a little boy in short trousers'(3). The stages by which Mark is weaned away from the NICE are not entirely clear, although evidently it is the danger of death at the hands of the NICE that makes him see the folly of his ways. After he has learnt from Frost about the 'macrobes', however, he grapples with

> desire (salt, black, ravenous, unanswerable desire)... These creatures of which Frost had spoken -and he did not doubt now that they were locally present with him in the cell -breathed death on the human race and on all joy. Not despite this but because of this, the terrible gravitation sucked and tugged and fascinated him towards them.(4)

Interestingly, this fascination for the occult is clearly intended as realism: Lewis describes precisely the same experience in his

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid,pp.1O9,130. (3) Ibid,p.148. (4) Ibid,pp.162-163.

autobiography.(l) Mark is awakened from it by the reminder that he faces death -and the realisation that he had forgotten this makes him conscious that under the influence of fascination regarding the 'macrobes'

> he had sustained some sort of attack, and that he had put up no resistance.... The very moment you tried to be good, the universe let you down. That was what you got for your pains.
>
> The cynics, then, were right. But at this thought, he stopped sharply. Some flavour that came with it had given him pause. Was this the other mood beginning again? Oh, not that, at any price! He clenched his hands... "Oh, don't, don't let me go back into it!" he said; and then louder, "Don't, don't!" All that could be called himself went into that cry; and the dreadful consciousness of having played his last card began to turn slowly into a sort of peace.... The cell, also, seemed to be somehow emptied and purged, as if it, too, were tired after conflicts it had witnessed -emptied like a sky

> after rain, tired like a child after weeping. He fell asleep. (2)

The strength of this passage is that, in the context of Frost's revelations to Mark about the existence of the 'macrobes', it gives to Mark's struggles and changes of thinking a dimension of spiritual warfare, without in any way having to describe the 'macrobes' or indicate the manner in which they are penetrating his thoughts. It is not even necessary to specify how Mark's quasi-prayer in some way relieves the assault. (Mark himself would not attribute it to the Christian God: he is not presented as a believer in subsequent interviews with Frost. Nor -although this is a fantasy in which spiritual forces are objectified -does Lewis give any
indication of how grace is operative in Mark's subsequent reconsiderations, operative even in the stronghold of the NICE.) The final sentences quoted above seem to contain a

(1) Lewis, Surprised by Joy, pp.142-143. (2) 1955, pp.163-164.

deliberate verbal ambiguity in the word 'emptied': the connotations that the following phrases hold of being emptied of struggle seem to imply the cell also being emptied of those forces, formerly 'locally present', with which he was struggling. But Lewis does not spell it out. The supernaturalism here is presented with some delicacy.

Lewis' presentation of Jane's conversion has a similar balance. It comes after a vision of Venus; not the Perelandran eldil this time, but her fallen earthly equivalent which, though not entirely evil, is very much a force of chaos and disorder. This appearance is linked by Ransom to the chaos of Jane's marriage as someone who is neither a virgin nor a 'Christian wife', someone who has not made a surrender to the ultimate masculine, Maleldil Himself. 'There is

no escape... You had better agree with your adversary quickly.'

Jane makes the convergence with terrestrial categories: 'You mean I shall have to become a Christian?'(1) She goes out to think it over:

> Still she thought that "Religion" was a kind of exhalation or a cloud of incense, something steaming up from specially gifted souls towards a receptive heaven. Then, quite sharply, it occurred to her that the Director never talked about Religion, nor did the Dimbles nor Camilla. They talked about God. They had no pictures in their mind of some mist steaming upward: rather of strong, skilful hands thrust down to make and mend, perhaps even to destroy. Supposing one were a thing after all -a thing designed and invented by Someone Else and valued for qualities quite different from what one had decided to regard as one's true self?(2)

Suddenly there is a convergence with 'normal, realistic' spiritual experience; many Christians would read this as an accurate description of the difference -or one of the differences -between 'religion' and Christianity, and the issues it raises for Jane are the claims that a God must have on anyone in the real world. They have flowed naturally out of the fantastic Venus episode because

(1) Ibid, pp.193-194. (2) Ibid, p.196.

that too was concerned with the same issue, Jane's wish to be her own possession: 'Pride', Ransom terms it.(1) And it is not merely a matter of abstractions:

> Then, at one particular corner of the gooseberry patch, the change came.
>
> What awaited her there was serious to the degree of sorrow and beyond. There was no form nor sound. The mould under the bushes, the moss on the path, and the little brick border were not visibly changed. But they were changed. A boundary had been crossed. She had come into a world, or into a Person, or into the presence of a Person. Something expectant, patient, inexorable, met her with no veil or protection between. In the closeness of that contact she perceived at once that the Director's words had been entirely misleading. This demand which now pressed upon her was not, even by analogy, like any other demand. It was the origin of all right demands and contained them... The name me was the name of a being whose existence she had never suspected, a being that did not yet fully exist but which was demanded. It was a person (not the person she had thought) yet also a thing -a made thing, made to please Another and in Him to please all others -a thing being made at this very moment, without its choice, in a shape it had never dreamed of... Words take too long. To be aware of all this and to know that it had already gone made one single experience. (2)

This passes muster as a 'realistic' description of Christian 'conversion' as some people might experience the encounter. At the same time, the passage does not quite have the directness that exists in the scene in Voyage to Venus where Ransom debates with the Darkness. No doubt the amount of mythology built into That Hideous Strength serves to hamper such a reading experience, since one more 'presence' may just be one more myth; though the suggestion that Ransom's words had been 'misleading' builds in a sense of separateness between that part of the narrative and this. There is still a problem with the narrative appearing external -these are not Jane's thoughts, but her author's report. But there is the same delicacy in the use of the supernatural that we noted in the account of Mark's crisis. The 'presence' described is real, not

(1) Ibid, p.194; and cf. Jane's horror at an unexpectedly 'widened' world interfering with her life: 'Windows into huge, dark landscapes were opening on every side and she was powerless to shut them... She didn't want to get drawn in' (1945,p.99).(2) Ibid, pp.196-197.

symbolic, but is handled with the absolute minimum of description. Hence - in contrast, especially, to Venus ten pages earlier, who received a full description -it does not appear mythological. And the sense of convergence with realism may be said to extend even to the immediate introduction of something like the 'macrobes':

> Her hand closed on nothing but a memory, and as it closed, without an instant's pause, the voices of those who have not joy rose howling and chattering from every corner of her being.
>
> "Take care. Draw back. Keep your head. Don't commit yourself," they said. And then more subtly, from another quarter, "You have had a religious experience. This is very interesting. Not everyone does. How much better you will now understand the seventeenth-century poets!"(l)

This, of course, is the tone of the devils of The Screwtape Letters. Compared with the rest of That Hideous Strength, these 'temptations' sound very much like subjective phenomena; yet their position in a book containing so much that is supernatural does a little to impel the reader towards conceiving such forces as having

some objective existence. And that too is a 'baptism of the imagination' of a kind.

Jane's conversion is as close as Lewis comes to 'supernatural realism'. In general, his earthly setting does not really signify an intention to show supernatural causality functioning in earthly affairs, although there is not an absolute dichotomy between a supernatural realism and what he is doing. This book is much farther than Voyage to Venus from 'everyday spiritual experience', and it is best read as a 'fabulation', or, to use Lewis' own phrase from the Preface, a 'tall story'. It is full of bizarre grotesqueries, plays of the intellect, strikingly imaginative scenes; it is weak on real people (Ransom, and virtually all of the

(1) Ibid, p.197.

NICE members, are not especially 'realistic', and Mark and Jane are viewed externally most of the time), and the fact that Merlin and Mercury handle the climax so emphatically without any human aid removes narrative tension. Hence it cannot serve as a general model of supernatural causality in realistic fiction.

And also, perhaps, its 'fabulation' character creates a problem of a different kind. Some Christian readers may well be uneasy with the way in which Lewis uses the invocation of the Trinity as part of Ransom's methods for dealing with Merlin.(1) In Voyage to Venus, the references to the crucifixion don’t seem blasphemous because they are being used for a serious purpose, giving a vital illustrative sidelight on the issue of self-sacrifice that faces Ransom. Here, however, the invocation can appear to be merely thrown in (and unnecessarily) to give a little extra flavour. To some readers this may seem rather sacrilegous;

God's Name is too holy to be reduced to something resembling an abracadabra in a thriller. It is too much like what the Old Testament calls 'taking the Lord's name in vain'; the context is not a suitable setting and debases something sacred. There is, perhaps, a warning here for any would-be Christian fantasist: that if they wish to introduce the deepest content of their faith into their fiction, the rest of their material must provide a worthy surrounding.

(1) Ibid, p.164.

5. C.S .LEWIS: TILL WE HAVE FACES

The last fantasy we shall consider is Lewis' Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold, which is a reworking of the story of Cupid and Psyche. It concerns two sisters, Orual and Psyche, daughters of the King of the semi-barbaric country of Glome. Psyche is beautiful, indeed so beautiful that she begins to be worshipped as a goddess; after being betrayed by a third sister, Redival, she is left on a mountainside as a human sacrifice to the 'Shadowbrute', a monster which is also believed to be the son of Ungit, Glome's equivalent of Aphrodite.(l) Orual, the book's narrator, is the oldest of the sisters. She is ugly, but deeply attached to Psyche, and when Psyche is sacrificed she determines to follow and bury her. But on the mountain she finds Psyche herself, declaring that the Shadowbrute is the god of the westwind and that he has taken her for his bride – while forbidding her to see his face. When Psyche shows Orual her supposed palace, however, Orual can see nothing, and decides that Psyche is deceived, having fallen prey either to a demon or an outlaw. By threatening to kill herself, Orual forces Psyche to light a lamp at her husband's side; at that point the mountain valley where Psyche has been living is wrecked and Psyche goes wandering into exile. Orual sees a vision of the god of the westwind pronouncing judgement on her that she too 'will be Psyche'.

She returns to Glome, and eventually becomes its Queen -and a very just and successful Queen at that. She has, however, a quarrel against the gods, in that they have judged her, making both her and Psyche wretched, whereas if only they had shown her Psyche's palace

(1) C.S.Lewis, Till We Have Faces (1956: Fount edition of 1978),p.12. All further references will be indicated by TWHF.

clearly, 'I would have walked aright'.(l) Finally, in a neighbouring country, she finds a shrine to Psyche; but in the shrine's sacred story, Orual's own actions are ascribed simply to jealousy. Furious, she determines to write 'the case against' the gods.(2) Her 'case' forms the first section of the book, comprising 259 of its 320 pages.

In Part Two, it emerges that the labour of writing the book has enabled Orual to see another side to the story and to realise just how far her own love has been a tyrannically selfish possessiveness. She seeks to change herself. The attempt is unsuccessful. Eventually, she has a vision in which she receives the opportunity to present her denunciation of the gods; the effect is to make her see her own egoism. In a final vision she is given the beauty of Psyche and is received by the god. She returns to waking consciousness, adds the final chapters to the book and dies four days later.

(i) Posing the Question

One way of summarising the book's subject-matter is to see it as the story of the difficulties faced by a woman in a world where the gods do not speak clearly. 'Only the gods know', Orual comments at one point, '... and the gods do not tell.'(3) 'Perhaps this gladness of mine is one of the things the gods have against me. They never tell.'(4) The complaint of her book is directly concerned with the silence and ambivalence of the gods; the second part is in effect her summary of the gods' response, the response that can only come when she has finally realised what it is she has been attempting to say. Fifteen pages from the close comes the passage containing the phrase that is the book's title:

(1) Ibid, p.253. (2) Ibid, p.254. (3) Ibid, p.41. (4) Ibid,p.118.

> I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces? (1)

It is not inappropriate, then, to say that the book is about, or parallels, the question of the silence of God, of how it can be that the divine revelation is not clear.(2) For Lewis, as a Christian apologist, knew that although the evidence for Christianity –the subject-matter of such books as Mere Christianity -might to him seem blindingly clear, yet to others this was not the case. Indeed, sometimes people might yearn for a direct word from heaven, and it would not come. There was a hiddenness about God. Why should this be so? The issues in Till We Have Faces are analogous to these.

And they are highlighted from the very first sentence.

> I am old now and have not much to fear from the anger of gods. I have neither husband nor child, nor hardly a friend, through whom they can hurt me. My body, this lean carrion that still has to be washed and fed and have clothes hung about it daily with so many changes, they may kill as soon as they please. The succession is provided for. My crown passes to my nephew.
>
> Being, for all these reasons, free from fear, I will write in this book what no one who has happiness would dare to write. I will accuse the gods... But there is no judge between gods and men, and the god of the mountain will not answer me. (3)

This is a very different book from the science fiction trilogy. The gods are obviously not the trilogy's planetary angels; and Orual is a character of far greater depth than Jane Studdock of That Hideous Strength. Where Jane was described -with sorrow, pity, or scorn -from the outside, Lewis is clearly able to penetrate right inside the mind of his later heroine. And one thing he shows us, without any obtrusive comment, is that her view of the gods is at least questionable: her conception of their possibilities

(1) Ibid, p.305. (2) Lewis comments in the Preface that the main alteration he has made to Apuleius' original is to make the god's palace invisible; that is, to make the evidence for Psyche's story problematic (ibid, pp.7-8.) (3) Ibid, p.ll.

of action does not extend to their doing anything as drastic as disrupting the succession to her throne.

In the next few pages the reader is introduced to the two main influences on Orual's early life. One is her teacher, a Greek known as the Fox, who seeks to train her in the values of classical culture. He and his philosophy represent much that is admirable. 'I loved the Fox... more than anyone I had yet known', Orual records, and tells of his cheerfulness as a slave, his humility and his wide-ranging interest in the language, culture, history and botany of Glome.(1) But the Fox is representative of other things but classicism; he also brings to Glome something resembling rationalism. 'All folly, child,' he says of the supposed magical powers of the king's bed, 'these things come about by natural causes. '(2) 'Those gods -the sort of gods you are always thinking about -are all folly and lies of poets. '(3) He grows utterly impatient with the paradoxes of Glome's religion: 'Ask him which he means. It can't be both.'(4) His is a world where everything is 'clear, hard, limited and simple.'(5)

But Lewis hints at something inadequate in all this. The name 'Fox' represents a question-mark; and the Fox himself demonstrates that his rationalism does not really mesh with his love of mythic literature. He tells Orual the story of Aphrodite and Anchises, then adds hastily, 'Not that this ever really happened... It's only lies of poets, lies of poets, child.' But Orual knows that it is such poems as these, and not the ones he praises most (such as 'Virtue, sought by men with travail and toil') that bring 'the real

(1) Ibid, p.15. (2) Ibid, p.18. (3) Ibid, p.36. (4) Ibid, p.57.
(5) Ibid, p.314.

lilt... into his voice.'(l) The Fox is portrayed lovingly, but his enlightened philosophy has an insufficiency about it. Nonetheless, he is a far more rounded figure than the representatives of error in the earlier books (eg Weston or Wither); where he is inconsistent, it is because he is more human than his ideas. (And, at the end, he is redeemed.)

The paganism of Glome that the Fox finds nonsensical is likewise represented as paradoxical. It has something in it deeper than the Fox allows:

> The Fox had taught me to think -at any rate to speak -of the Priest as a mere schemer and a politic man who put into the mouth of Ungit whatever might most increase his own power and lands or most harm his enemies. I saw it was not so. He was sure of Ungit. Looking at him as he sat with the dagger pricking him and his blind eyes unwinking, fixed on the King, and his face like an eagle's face, I was sure too. Our real enemy was not a mortal. The room was full of spirits, and the horror of holiness. (2)

Besides this the Fox's logic-chopping seems a little paltry. Psyche remarks,

> The Fox hasn't the whole truth. Oh, he has much of it. It'd be dark as a dungeon within me but for his teaching. And yet... I can't say it properly. He calls the whole world a city. But what's a city built on? There's earth beneath. And outside the wall? Doesn't all the food come from there as well as all the dangers?... things growing and rotting, strengthening and poisoning, things shining wet (3)

Just like the House of Ungit, concludes Psyche. It is a Lawrentian note, and it summarises the enigma posed by Ungit: this goddess that the Priest worships with human sacrifice is a force both of fertility and destruction.

But destructive and alien the cult of Ungit can assuredly be:

(1) Ibid, pp.16-17. Lewis' choice of the Fox's subject-matter is significant; this story of a mortal who sleeps with a goddess and who ought not to have looked upon the goddess, and of the loss of sight which follows, has obvious parallels with what happens later to Psyche and Orual. (2) Ibid, p.62. (3) Ibid, pp.78-79.

> I had a fear of that Priest which was quite different from my fear of my father. I think that what frightened me (in those early days) was the holiness of the smell that hung about him -a temple-smell of blood (mostly pigeons' blood. but he had sacrificed men too) and burned fat and singed hair and wine and stale incense. It is the Ungit smell. Perhaps I was afraid of his clothes too; all the skins they were made of, and the dried bladders, and the great mask shaped like a bird's head which hung on his chest. It looked as if there were a bird growing out of his body. (1)

It is unpleasant, and the horror is driven sharply home when the Priest demands Orual's beloved sister for a human sacrifice. Here and in several other instances Lewis is giving a new meaning to the word 'holy'. ('The holiness and horror of divine things were continually thickening in that room.'(2) 'Temple music, Ungit's music, the drums and the horns and rattles and castanets, all holy, deadly; dark. detestable, maddening noises.'(3)) Just as in the trilogy, the supernatural is made more striking, more concrete, by appearing alien and repugnant. And it is not something that can be simply discarded, as the Fox wishes. When the old Priest dies and is replaced by an 'enlightened' successor who hellenizes the cult under the Fox's influence, Orual notes that

> He would never be terrible like the old Priest. He was only Arnom, with whom I had driven a very good bargain yesterday; there was no feeling that Ungit came into the room with him. And that started strange thoughts in my mind. (4)

And by an enigmatic coincidence, the sacrifice of Psyche is followed by the rains it was intended to bring.(5)

(1) Ibid. p.19. (2) Ibid. p.57. (3) Ibid. pp.86-87; cf. also pp.5~0. 108. (4) Ibid. p.214. (5)Ibid, pp.91-93. The Fox's objection that for this to have changed the weather, everything 'would have to have been different from the beginning', is precisely the argument Lewis answers (in the context of answered prayer) in Miracles, pp.179ff.

What Lewis is doing here is providing a model of the problem posed by pre-Christian mythology, with its 'gleams of celestial strength and beauty falling on a jungle of filth and imbecility.'(1) It is not exactly 'true', and yet there is something there that must be reckoned with.(2) Ungit embodies this; she is not an eldil like Perelandra, nor indeed a macrobe; nor, most assuredly, is she the Christian God under another name, as the classical gods are in some Renaissance writers.(3) She embodies the question, rather than the answer, that emerges from the religious experience of mankind, the experience of devotion that can be cruel and horrific and yet seems at bottom to be in contact with the creative sources of life itself.(4) And so her 'old shapeless' image(5) comes also to embody the silence of the gods who will not speak clearly; that silence (in this case manifested in the confusion of human religion) appears sadistic and heartless, and yet, the book as a whole suggests, can be seen in quite a different light.

And at this point it becomes clear how the debate between the Priest and the Fox is an analogy of the problem presented by the plurality of religions in the real world. 'Holy places are dark places', asserts the Priest when the two conflict. 'It is life and strength, not knowledge and words, that we get in them. Holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood.'(6) Yet the advantage of the Greek wisdom that is 'clear

(1) VTV, p.187. Here too, interestingly, Lewis is talking about Aphrodite. (2) Cf. Lewis' description of mythology in Miracles as 'a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination' (p.138). (3) There is a slightly greater similarity between what is represented by the 'god of the westwind' and Christian belief; when Lewis wants to raise the issue of the search for God in Christian terms, he turns from Ungit to a different symbol. (4) Hence even at the end of the book the question 'Then there is a real Ungit?'(TWHF, p.312) can receive no unequivocal answer; too many opposing things are contained in her. In the afterlife, the Fox speaks of Ungit as 'too true an image of the demon within. And then the other face of Ungit (she has a thousand)

and thin' is plain too. Can there be a resolution? Lewis has posed the problem in precisely the terms he uses elsewhere to describe the problem posed by the world religions:

> We may salva reverentia divide religions, as we do soups, into 'thick' and 'clear'. By Thick I mean those which have orgies and ecstasies and mysteries and local attachments.... By Clear I mean those which are philosophical, ethical and universalizing.... Now if there is a true religion it must be both Thick and Clear; for the true God must have made both the child and the man, both the savage and the citizen, both the head and the belly. And the only two religions that fulfil this condition are Hinduism and Christianity.
> But Hinduism fulfils it imperfectly... Christianity really breaks down the middle wall of the partition... That is how one knows one has come to the real religion. (1)

Lewis' narrative focuses these issues: the problem of how one is to reconcile the insights of' thick' and 'clear'; of what truth might lie behind the strength and horror of the 'thick'; and the supernaturalistic question beyond these, of how to regard the divine silence -or hiddenness -that causes and is expressed in this enigma.

...something live anyway.... Only that the way to the true gods is more like the House of Ungit... oh, it's unlike too, more unlike than we yet dream, but that's the easy knowledge, the first lesson; only a fool would stay there, posturing and repeating it. The Priest knew at least that there must be sacrifices. They will have sacrifice; will have man.'(p.3O6) Nor do these complexities exhaust the symbol; Lewis also develops Ungit into an archetypal image of the feminine (eg p.281), as one would expect from an Aphrodite-symbol; and towards the end of the narrative she illustrates by parallel Orual's own personality (eg pp.287-289). In such controlled multiplicities of meaning the maturity of Lewis' fictional art becomes apparent. (5) Ibid, p.243. (6) Ibid, p.58.
(1) Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics: p.102.
The 'last stage' in his own conversion to Christianity was when he asked `"Where, if anywhere, have the hints of all Paganism been fulfilled?" With the irreligious I was no longer concerned.... As against them, the whole mass of those who had worshipped –all who had danced and sung and sacrificed and trembled and adored - were clearly right. But the intelllect and the conscience, as well as the orgy and the ritual, must be our guide.' These considerations, along with the historical basis of the Gospels, led Lewis to Christianity. (Surprised by Joy, p.188.)

(ii) Orual: the Questioner of the Gods' Silence

The triumph of Till We Have Faces is in good measure the triumph of the presentation of Orual. As we read her narrative we are conscious of an alert mind recalling, sorting, recording:

> One asked if she should bring Batta to me. I told that one, with bitter words, to hold her tongue, and if I had had the strength I would have hit her; which would have been ill done, for she was a good girl. (I have always been fortunate with my women since first I had them to myself and out of the reach of Batta's meddling.) (1)

And her femininity is conveyed in a way that (to this masculine reader) has a ring of credibility:

> The Fox... had forgotten all his wiles... simply because things such as the Priest had been saying put him beyond all patience. (I have noticed that all men, not only Greek men, if they have clear wits and ready tongues, will do the same.) (2)

There are other fine touches; the slow, carefully-traced development of her love for Bardia(3); her frustrated sexuality(4); the deep-seated hatred of her father, the King, which emerges from her cool description of the agonies he suffers when he breaks his leg.(5) In this book, as against That Hideous Strength, supernaturalism and psychological realism go together; there are few if any passages where the realism of presentation falters.

Orual is presented as a girl who is made very conscious (by her father) of her ugliness; yet she has a deep affection for her beautiful sister.(6) The nature of this affection is central to the book. The key episode in this respect is Orual's last meeting with Psyche before the Great Offering. Orual finds Psyche far more cheerful than she anticipated:

> All she was saying seemed to me so light, so far away from our sorrow. I felt we ought not to be talking that way, not now. What I thought it would be better to talk of, I did not know... "I believe you are not afraid at all," said I; almost, though I had not meant it to sound so, as if I were rebuking her for it. (7)

(1) TWHF, p.86. (2) Ibid, p.58. (3) Ibid, pp.89,99,139,155,177, 179,233. (4) Ibid, p.172. (5) Ibid, pp.193-195. (6) Ibid, p.31. (7) Ibid, pp.76,78.

There is a kind of possessive egoism here; Orual cannot bear Psyche either being taken from her or being stronger than her. She has come to Psyche's prison to play a particular role, and it is only when Psyche thinks about her real fear (that the Shadowbrute is merely a fable, and the person sacrificed merely dies where they are left of hunger and thirst) that Orual can carry it out:

> And now she did weep and now she was a child again. What could I do but fondle and weep with her? But this is a great shame to write; there was now (for me) a kind of sweetness in our misery for the first time. This was what I had come to her in her prison to do. (1)

Orual records this self-analysis, and the companion awareness that when Psyche was not weeping 'I felt (and this horribly) that I was losing her already... She was (how long had she been, and I not to know?) out of my reach', because 'Since I write this book against the gods, it is just that I should put into it whatever can be said against myself. '(2)

Two points emerge. Firstly, Orual is not merely a moral exemplum of egoism masked as love, but is capable of a radical honesty. This reappears throughout the narrative(3), giving the reader a sense of the depths and ambiguities of Orual's character, though not, of course, the idea that Orual understands herself entirely. (Lewis is guarded from that absurdity by Orual's realisation in Part Two that her self-assessments of Part One were inadequate.) This radically honest questioning of the gods, herself and her experience is not what finally brings her to the knowledge of the gods; she only arrives at denunciation of the gods by the end of Part One. But when it is coupled with the revelatory visions that follow the completion of her book, and when she has been willing to face the full implications of those visions, then she can understand the truth.

(1) Ibid, p.78. (2) Ibid, pp.82-83. (3) Eg ibid, pp.179,189,231.

Secondly, the issue between her and Psyche is Lewis' old theme of Desire. Orual observes that

> Perhaps it was a sort of pride in me... not to blind her eyes, not to hide terrible things; or a bitter impulse in anguish itself to say, and to keep on saying, the worst. (1)

This too might be called 'realism'; but to Lewis, 'to say, and to keep on saying, the worst' is not realism but despair, a pessimism of an unfortunately self-fulfilling kind.(2) It presupposes that there is no supernatural ordering that is in some way working for the best, even in the darkest times. Psyche, in contrast, has a faith and a hope resembling the biblical variety. She can face the facts ('Anyway, it means death... How can I be the ransom for all Glome unless I die?'), but believes that there could be some sort of joy beyond. ('We don't understand. There must be so much that neither the Priest nor the Fox knows.') This hope is based on Psyche's experience of Desire:

> I have always... had a kind of longing for death.... It was when I was happiest that I longed most... Do you remember? The colour and the smell, and looking across at the Grey Mountain in the distance? And because it was so beautiful, it set me longing, always longing. Somewhere else there must be more of it. Everything seemed to be saying, Psyche come! But I couldn't (not yet) come... I felt like a bird in a cage when the other birds of its kind are flying home... If only you could believe it. Sister! No, listen. Do not let grief shut up your ears and harden your heart.... The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing –to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from- ... Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longing? The longing for home?

(1) Ibid, p.8O. (2) Cf.Lewis, Mere Christianity, p.ll8. Where he describes the 'Disillusioned "Sensible Man"' who 'settles down and learns not to expect too much and represses the part of himself which used, as he would say, to "cry for the moon"... It would be

It is one of Lewis' best evocations of Desire. But Orual's possessive love closes her mind to this liberation: 'What can these things be except the cowardly murder they seem?'(l) As it will turn out, both sisters possess something that, relentlessly pursued and after divine intervention, will bring them into the presence of the gods: Orual's passionate honesty, Psyche's longing. (These correspond to the twin forces that led to Lewis' own conversion, the stringent reasoning that marks his books of apologetics, such as Miracles, and the longing that is the theme of the autobiographical Surprised by Joy.(2)) Orual, however, is rejecting Desire, rejecting the foretaste of the gods, and so going the long way round.

(iii) The Cruelty of the Gods

The question raised by the Great Offering is obviously acute to anyone not possessed of Psyche's assured faith: Why are the gods allowing this? Orual's answer is simple: 'The gods are real, and viler than the vilest man.'(3) 'Now mark the subtlety of the god

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the best line we could take if man did not live for ever. But supposing infinite happiness really is there, waiting for us? Supposing one really can reach the rainbow's end? In that case it would be a pity to find out too late (a moment after death) that by our supposed "common sense" we have stifled in ourselves the faculty of enjoying it. (3) TWHF, pp.82-84. In Lewis' The Pilgrim's Regress, the Mountain is heaven, and turns out to be the same as the Island that is the goal of Desire. (1) TWHF, p.79. The fact that Psyche too is guilty of insensitivity in this meeting ('I don't think she even heard me'(p.83) is a wise addition. (2) The same combination appears in the sub-title of The Pilgrim's Regress: 'An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism.' (3) TWHF, p.79.

who is against us', she remarks of the way Psyche got the reputation of being a goddess that led in the end to her being sacrificed.(1) She can still notice that the gods have not been so cruel that they have taken everything: 'One thing the gods have not taken from me; I can remember all that she said or did that night.'(2) A reader familiar with Lewis' beliefs about Desire will recall that he saw memory as one of its purest forms(3); in other words, Orual's memories of Psyche are the foothold of Desire in her personality. It is her loyalty to that memory, jumbled up though it is with anger and selfishness, that the gods will use to lead her on; and that is grace, not cruelty.

But for the time being the gods seem merely loathsome. Orual sees Psyche dressed for the Offering and can only respond,

> The gods are cleverer than we and can always think of some vileness it never entered our heads to fear.... It is, in its way, admirable, this divine skill. It was not enough for the gods to kill her, they must make her father the murderer. It was not enough to take her from me, they must take her from me three times over, tear my heart out three times. (4)

Thus Lewis sets up the problem. And the reader surely must share Orual's feelings about the horror of human sacrifice. Can there possibly be anything worthwhile among such bigotry, savagery and folly?

After the Offering, the gods will not leave Orual alone. She becomes sick and delirious. 'Now mark yet again the cruelty of the gods': one thread runs through all her fantasies, that Psyche is her enemy -'always wrong, hatred, mockery, and my determination to be avenged. '(5) But the rest of the book puts this 'cruelty' in

(1) Ibid, p.38. (2) Ibid, pp.88-89. (3) Cf. Lewis. Surprised by Joy. p.l35 (4) TWHF, pp.87-88. (5) Ibid, pp.88-89.

perspective; whether or not the dreams are sent by the gods, they are profoundly revelatory of the complexity of Orual's feelings towards Psyche. For example, Orual dreams of having a bridegroom stolen by Psyche, who was 'no bigger than my forearm': the reference to size is reminiscent of Orual's unwllingness before the Offering for Psyche to be in any way her better. (1) The dreams also focus Orual's hatred for her father (Psyche resembles him in some of them) and her sexual frustration (Psyche stealing her lovers is a repeated theme). This presentation of psychological complexity again meshes in with the supernaturalism of the book. It is the beginning of Lewis' answer to the question about the silence of the gods; even such apparent evils as Orual's sickness and her hateful dreams may be a part of an answer, hinting at the possibility of seeing things otherwise than they appear to Orual.

And of the refusal to see them otherwise; or, indeed, to see at all. For it is possible to seek a defence against the gods: not to do so would be an act of trust in them and in their hidden nature and purposes. Orual complains that

> There is no escape from them into sleep or madness, for they can pursue you into them with dreams... The nearest thing we have to a defence against them (but there is no real defence) is to be very wide awake and sober and hard at work, to hear no music, never to look at earth or sky, and (above all) to love no one. (2)

When she goes up the Mountain to bury Psyche, this defensiveness is put to the test.

> I came on a sad errand. Now, flung at me like frolic or insolence, there came as if it were a voice -no words, but

(1) Cf. Ibid, p.90: 'I lay for hours saying, "Cruel girl. Cruel Psyche. Her heart is of stone." And soon I was in my right mind again and knew how I loved her and that she had never willingly done me any wrong; though it hurt me somewhat that she should have found time, at our last meeting of all, talking so little of me, to talk so much about the god of the Mountain' (2) Ibid, pp.88-89.

> if you made it into words it would be, 'Why should your heart not dance?' It's the measure of my folly that my heart almost answered, Why not?... The sight of the huge world put mad ideas into me; as if I could wander away, wander for ever, see strange and beautiful things, one after the other to the world's end. (1)

Her resistance to this 'attack' of Desire is explicitly a rejection and distrust of the gods (and their world); she would be a fool, she says, if she let them deceive her, if

> a mere burst of fair weather, and fresh grass after a long drought, and health after sickness, could make me friends again with this god-haunted, plague-breeding, decaying, tyrannous world... The gods never send us this invitation to delight so readily or so strongly as when they are preparing some new agony... I ruled myself. Did they think I was nothing but a pipe to be played on as their moment's fancy chose? (2)

Here, Orual's entire attitude is controlled by the assumption that nothing good can be expected from the gods. Thus, while the gods themselves are apparently remaining silent, the incidents that are occurring are revelatory in that they draw out her attitudes to the gods. And what follows offers a further such choice. Orual reaches the place of the Offering -and there is Psyche, still alive and glowing with health. It is the fulfilment of Desire -or else it is what Orual's 'complaint' indicates, the next twist of the gods' torture. Psyche's own response to Orual's arrival is precisely the question Orual faced on the journey up: 'Why should our hearts not dance?'(3)

(iv) The Alternatives on the Mountain

In Psyche Lewis presents the believer. Psyche tells Orual how while she was bound on the mountain her initial childish dreams of the 'gold and amber palace' -her 'mythology', in one sense - disappeared and were replaced by a faith (that seems the appropriate noun); something 'very hard to put into words', that reconciled the approaches of the Fox and the Priest. 'It was shapeless, but you could just hold on to it; or just let it hold on

(1) Ibid, p.l04. (2) Ibid, p.105. (3) Ibid, p.113.

to you.' (Orual, of course, has refused to let anything 'hold on' to her; she has 'ruled herself'.) Something greater follows. The weather changes; and 'I knew quite well that the gods really are, and that I was bringing the rain... The wind got wilder and wilder.... And then -at last -for a moment -I saw him.... The god of the wind: Westwind himself.'

It is only for 'a lightning flash', but that is enough to give her faith for whatever bizarre events may follow. (Not so Orual, who has her own split-second of vision later.) And then she is swept away through the air and set down in the god's house. There she learns she is to be 'the bride of the god.'(1) And so it happens; and that is where Orual has met her. In every sense Psyche's faith has been rewarded with the fulfilment of Desire; her being offered to the gods has turned out like -or beyond -what she had dreamed: 'Mightn't it be - they do these things and the things are not what they seem to be? How if I am indeed to wed a god?'(2) According to her own account, anyway. There is just one problem. Orual, the 'realist', has lived the rejection of Desire, and, in the manner of fantasy, the spiritual difference between them is objectified in physical terms: Orual cannot see the god's house at all.

It is a critical moment, and Lewis handles it superbly:

> And now we are coming to that part of my history on which my charge against the gods chiefly rests; and therefore I must try at any cost to write what is wholly true. Yet it is hard to know perfectly what I was thinking while those huge, silent minutes went past... Anyway, my whole heart leaped to shut the door against something monstrously amiss; not to be endured. And to keep it shut. Perhaps I was fighting not to be mad myself.
>
> But what I said when I got my breath (and I know my voice came out in a whisper) was simply, "We must go away at once. This is a terrible place."
>
> Was I believing in her invisible palace? A Greek will

(1) Ibid, pp.118-124. (2) Ibid, p.79.

> laugh at the thought. But it's different in Glome. There the gods are too close to us... No door could be kept shut. Yes, that was it; not plain belief, but infinite misgiving- the whole world (Psyche with it) slipping out of my hands. (1)

The emphasis on Orual's painstaking truthfulness, and the fact that her account is intended as a criticism of the gods rather than as a confession, make the flaws that appear in her own character in this passage seem credible. She is predisposed at some very deep level against what Psyche is telling her. For a moment -just before it becomes plain that she cannot see the palace -she accepts it; but once Psyche's judgement is set against hers, she assumes Psyche to be mad. Something is 'utterly amiss'. It is not a purely intellectual issue; as in the Bible, unbelief is at its absolute roots a matter of the will rather than the intellect, a problem of deliberate independence rather than of a lack of dexterity in solving cosmological puzzles. 'My whole heart leaped to shut the door', says Orual. She has grounds for 'infinite misgiving' indeed; if there are gods -worse, gods who do not always make themselves plain- then the whole world is in very truth out of her hands; indeed, was never in her hands at all. 'How did I know whether she really saw invisible things or spoke in madness? Either way, something hateful and strange had begun.'(2)

Lewis then introduces the challenges to Orual's perception of the world. Orual seizes Psyche, but finds her 'stronger than I ever dreamt she could be'(3); Lewis does not emphasise this strength, but it is obvious that it would be a fact hard to explain in any other way but Psyche's. Then there is Psyche's own trustworthiness:

> She was as certain of her palace as of the plainest thing... This valley was indeed a dreadful place; full of the divine, sacred, no place for mortals. There might be a hundred things in it that I could not see.... A sickening discord, a rasping together of two worlds, like the two bits of a broken bone. (4)

(1) Ibid, pp.126-127. (2) Ibid, p.127. (3) Ibid, p.128. Psyche uses this as evidence a little later (p.132). (4) Ibid, p.129.

The attitude that Lewis evokes with that excellent simile is obviously the direct opposite to Psyche the believer's joyous acceptance of the presence of the mysterious otherworld; to Orual, that presence is something unwanted. But Psyche and Orual are not 'goodie' and 'baddie'; Psyche is quite capable of losing her temper in this scene, and indeed of a 'sharp, suspicious' look that Orual has never seen her wear before.(l) Orual, in contrast, has besides her honesty a very real grief: 'The world had broken in pieces and Psyche and I were not in the same piece... Gods, and again gods, always gods... they had stolen her. They would leave us nothing. '(2) These things enable her reader to continue to identify with Orual's experience; and thus, in the long run, with the 'widening of the world' that she undergoes.

Then the gods step in again.

> Was it madness or not? Which was true? Which would be worse? I was at that very moment when, if they meant us well, the gods would speak. Mark what they did instead.
>
> It began to rain. It was only a light rain, but it changed everything for me... If that wise Greek who is to read this book doubts that this turned my mind right round, let him ask his mother or wife. The moment I saw her, my child whom I had cared for all her life, sitting there in the rain as if it meant no more to her than it does to cattle, the notion that her palace and her god could be anything but madness was at once unbelievable... I saw in a flash that I must choose one opinion or the other; and in the same flash knew which I had chosen. (3)

To Orual, writing when all is lost, this seems another instance of the gods' calumny. But once again it admits another explanation: what the rain does is to compel the expression of her mental attitude in a definite decision. Orual attempts to take Psyche away by force, and fails. Psyche is by far the stronger (‘”Of course," thought I, "they say mad people have double strength"'(4) -Orual

(1) Ibid, pp.127,128. (2) Ibid, pp.129-130. (3) Ibid, pp.134-135.
(4) Ibid, p.136.

has found an explanation for that now.) The rain stops: 'It had, I suppose, done all the gods wanted' -which might be correct, even if Orual has misunderstood their purposes. Orual is 'weeping... broken with shame and despair' (and so, incidentally, seeming far more human than the unbelievers of Lewis' earlier books). With a final prophecy from Psyche that their father will not hinder her return, and that 'all will be better than you can dream of' (the fulfilment of Desire again), Orual departs.(1)

But that night, before she leaves the valley, the problem is forced on her again. She thinks she catches a momentary glimpse of the god's palace, 'wall within wall, pillar and arch and architrave, acres of it, a labyrynthine beauty' -and just as she is going to it to beg forgiveness, it vanishes, leaving only a 'tiny space of time' in which Orual sees some swirlings of mist that could have resembled towers.

> That moment when I either saw or thought I saw the House -does it tell against the gods or against me?.... What is the use of a sign which is itself only another riddle?.... If they had an honest intention to guide us, why is their guidance not plain? Psyche could speak plain when she was three; do you tell me the gods have not yet come so far? (2)

The gods break their silence only in ways that do not remove their hiddenness. Or, perhaps, that continue to force Orual into choices; for it is noticeable that once the vision has disappeared she does not go to 'ask forgiveness' as she had intended. These enigmas can be seen as cruelty -or alternatively as stimuli that cause Orual to 'break her silence', to express her deepest self.

(v) The Point of Decision

To some of the book's characters Psyche's situation is no enigma at all. Orual's guide up the Mountain is the soldier Bardia, an ordinary believer in the religion of Glome (and one through whom Lewis distinguishes it from Psyche's disturbingly total devotion:

(1) Ibid, p.138. (2) Ibid, pp.141-143.

'I think the less Bardia meddles with the gods, the less they'll meddle with Bardia.'(1)) Orual's riddle is 'no riddle to him'; Psyche was sacrificed to the Shadowbrute, and now 'some holy and sickening thing, ghostly or demonlike or bestial... enjoyed her at its will.'(2) To the Fox, the whole thing is equally obviously madness; she is in the hands of an outlaw. Orual finds the idea monstrous: 'Leprosy and scabs on the man!... Psyche to carry a beggar's brat?... He shall die for days.' The Fox disapproves of that response: 'There's one part love in your heart, and five parts anger. and seven parts pride'(3) -which might indeed explain much of Orual's difficulties. But the certainties of Bardia and the Fox cannot remove the enigma: 'The Fox's explanation seemed too plain and evident to allow me any hope of doubt. While Bardia was speaking, his had seemed the same. '(4)

Accordingly, Orual turns to the gods again:

> Then I did a thing which I think few have done. I spoke to the gods; myself, alone, in such words as came to me, not in a temple, without a sacrifice. I stretched myself face downward on the floor and called upon them with my whole heart.... I promised anything they might ask of me, if only they would send me a sign. They gave me none.... When I rose up again the fire had sunk a little lower, and the rain drummed on as before. (5)

Thus the gods' indifference seems proven. But of course the question is begged: Orual is demanding a sign immediately, and when that is not forthcoming she concludes that she is 'left utterly to myself.' She ignores the alternative possibility, that the gods' silence might have some purpose in her life which is not completed yet. Just so she explained Psyche's strength away, and set aside the vision in the mist. The thought comes to her that 'Anything might be true. You are among marvels that you do not

(1) Ibid. p.144. (2) Ibid, p.146. (3) Ibid, pp.154. 157. (4) Ibid, p.153. (5) Ibid, p.159.

understand. Carefully, carefully.' She stifles it.(l) In all of these things a pattern is emerging; possibly the gods' silence is as much a matter of nothing being heard as of nothing being said.

And this becomes obvious when Orual returns to the Mountain, convinced of the one point that Bardia and the Fox agreed on, that Psyche's lover is evil and that Psyche must be rescued. Psyche meets her: 'The King has been no hindrance to you, has he? Salute me for a prophetess!' Orual is momentarily startled: 'I had forgotten her foretelling. But I put it aside to be thought of later... I must not, now of all times, begin doubting and pondering again. '(2) Looked at one way this is resolute; looked at another, it is foolhardy. The reader recalls -though Orual does not -the prayer for a sign; Orual has predetermined how (or when) any answer to her prayer should come, so when a possible 'sign' appears she turns her back on it.

Above all, Orual trusts her own logic. 'Nothing that's beautiful hides its face. Nothing that's honest hides its name. '(3) Psyche does not have this assurance in her own reasoning: 'He is a god. He has good grounds for what he does, be sure. How should I know of them?'(4) That, of course, is faith.(5) Orual has another weapon, however: if Psyche will not swear to break her lover's command, take the lamp and look on her lover, Orual will kill herself. Psyche is horrified; but finally she realises that

> I can't have your blood on my threshold. You chose your threat well. I'll swear... And even now... I know what I do. I know that I am betraying the best of lovers and that perhaps, before sunrise, all my happiness may be destroyed for ever. This is the price you have put upon your life. Well, I must pay it. (6)

(1) Ibid, p.161. (2) Ibid, p.166. (3) Ibid, p.168. (4) Ibid, pp.172-173. (5) Cf. Abraham's calm confidence in Genesis 18:25: 'Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Or Job 13:15: 'Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him.' (6) TWHF, pp.175-176.

Thus the issue of faith and unbelief facing the hiddenness of the divine comes to its climax. Lewis retains the psychological realism, as Orual fantasises about Psyche realising that Orual was right all along, and

> creeping through the darkness and sending a sort of whispered call... And I would be half-way over it in an instant. This time it would be I who helped her at the ford. She would be all weeping and dismayed as I folded her in my arms and comforted her.(1)

Jane Studdock's flaws were something on a slab, exposed for our observation; Orual's flaws we recognise from experience. Wisely, Lewis also gives Orual her doubts about her whole scheme, and a 'terrible longing to unsay all my words.' Her heartbreak is also as real and as human as her egoism and her distrust of the gods: 'My tears broke out again... "Oh, Psyche, Psyche... you loved me once... come back."'(2) Side by side with this realism, Lewis is presenting Psyche as facing Adam's (rather than Eve's) archetypal temptation(3), of putting loyalty to another human being above loyalty to God, rather than putting God first and trusting Him to look after the consequences. (In Fictional Absence, the companion study to this, we examine how this issue arises - with opposite choices being made as a result – in both Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and Greene's The Heart of the Matter.) At the same time the reference to 'paying the price' make her a redemptive 'scapegoat', in the biblical sense. That all these elements should be present together in this drama of the conflicting claims of human and divine love is a tribute to Lewis' skill.

The judgement, when it comes, is real too. Psyche's light shines,

(1) Ibid, pp.177-178. (2) Ibid, p.134. (3) There are several points of contact with Genesis; Psyche's action drives her out of what was a paradise (cf. p.1O9); like Cain, she goes out 'to wander'(p.184). There are similarities with Eve's sin too: Psyche is demanding a knowledge the god has refused, rather than obeying; and Orual's 'Who that loved you could be angry at your breaking so unreasonable a command -and for so good a reason?'(p.172) sounds like the serpent's 'You will not surely die' (Genesis 3:4).

longer than Orual had expected. 'Then the stillness broke.' There is a 'great voice', and then the sound of weeping; and the mountain valley is wrecked. Even this Orual takes for a good sign: 'I was right. Psyche had roused some dreadful thing.' They might both die, but at least Psyche would die 'disenchanted'(sic),'reconciled to me.' The illusion is not permitted to last. There comes 'as if it were lightning that endured... In the centre of the light was something like a man.' The figure is utterly beautiful, but he 'rejected, denied, answered, and (worst of all) he knew, all I had thought, done or been.' And without anger, in a voice 'unmoved and sweet; like a bird singing on the branch above a hanged man' -the alienness of the supernatural that was manifested earlier in Lewis' reinterpretation of 'holiness' -he declares that Psyche is going into exile, and Orual 'shall know yourself and your work. You also shall be Psyche. '(1) The figure disappears, and Orual hears Psyche's despairing weeping dying away in the distance. Whatever purpose the gods' silence may have had is over; Psyche is ruined, and Orual returns home expecting to be struck down or turned into an animal. It does not happen: still the gods' actions are not as expected, still they do not speak clearly.

(vi) Orual Hides her Face

Psyche's part in the book is now over; she only reappears, briefly, in a vision at the close. She has existed in the book primarily as a counterpart to Orual; now she exists as something that -whatever it is -Orual must become. That is, indeed, a new enigma: Orual now knows (or thinks she knows) that 'the gods are and that they hated me'(2); but her expectations of

(1) TWHF, pp.179-182. (2) Ibid, p.184.

divinely-ordained calamity or of ways in which she would suffer Psyche's fate continue not to turn out as foreseen.(1) Anticipating exile, for instance, Orual reflects that 'the god had been wide of the mark -so then they don't know all things? -if he thought he could grieve me most by making my punishment the same as Psyche's. If I could have borne hers as well as my own... but next best was to share. '(2) In fact it turns out to be Orual who is 'wide of the mark': at the end of the book Orual is shown that she has indeed borne most of the pain of Psyche's exile while reigning in Glome. Judgement is revealed as mercy: the hidden patterning of divine purposes continues to be worked out in things that 'are not what they seem to be'.(3)

But first of all Orual returns home to the Fox's shrewd questioning. She is uncomfortable, having misquoted the Fox in her attempts to convince Psyche. 'I had taken off... the veil I had worn all day. Now I greatly wished I had it on.'(4) A veil keeps you hidden -and within a page Orual has adopted it permanently.(5) It is a logical enough step for an ugly woman to take; and Lewis makes plenty of realistic use of the veil in the later action of the narrative. (6) But above all, it functions as a crucial symbol.

For this book is called Till We Have Faces; it is about why the gods are silent, or rather, why we cannot see or hear them. 'How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?'(7) To wear a veil is to seek to be hidden, to avoid precisely this face-to-face encounter. As Orual wished to avoid the questions of the Fox, so too

(1) Eg ibid, pp.195, 225. (2) Ibid, p.185. (3) Ibid, p.79. (4) Ibid, p.188. (5) Ibid, p.189. (6) For example, Trunia's and Argan's reactions (ibid, pp.224-225); Trunia's flirtation, occurring because he cannot see Orual's face (pp.221, 231); the legends that arose to explain the veil (pp.237-238). (7) Ibid, p.305.

she wishes now to avoid thinking about Psyche and her loss and the whole encounter with the gods.(1) Earlier, she had recorded that the only ways to escape this confrontation were through hard work and shunning music, natural beauty, and love. So in the section where she begins wearing the veil, we watch her trying to escape into her work of queenship.

She burns everything of Psyche's from the period of the last year, arranges Psyche's room as it was 'before our sorrows began... when she was... still mine'(sic), and locks and seals it. 'And, as well as I could, I locked a door in my mind.' She refuses to discuss Psyche with the Fox, turning her attention rather to learning everything he can teach her about the sciences, and everything Bardia can teach her about fencing: 'by learning, fighting, and labouring, to drive all the Woman out of me.'(2) Her aim is to buildup the 'strength, hard and joyless,' that she first felt on hearing the god's judgement. ('Joy', of course, is a key word for Lewis, signifying the experience of that Desire that Orual has now turned her back upon.) 'I was taking to queenship as a stricken man takes to the wine-pot... If Orual could vanish altogether into the Queen, the gods would almost be cheated.'(3)

In this process it becomes plain that the fate of Orual's true self is bound up with the memory of Psyche. 'One part of me ... said, “Orual dies if she ceases to love Psyche.” But the other said, “Let Orual die. She would never have made a queen.”'(4) 'What was that?' she asks one night wWhen drunk. 'No, not a girl crying in the garden. It was the chains swinging at the well. It would be folly to get up and call again; Psyche, Psyche, my only love...

(1) Obviously she can hardly be said to be avoiding thinking about it when she writes her book. But this confrontation with the facts is itself the eventual means of destroying her 'veil' and bringing her to the gods. (2) Ibid, pp.192-193. (3) Ibid, p.210. Cf. also pp.198, 214,216. (4) Ibid, p.220.

I am the Queen; I'll kill Orual too.'(l) When the sound of the chains continues to remind her disturbingly of Psyche, she walls them up with stone; for a while she dreams she has walled up 'not a well but Psyche (or Orual) herself. But that also passed. I heard Psyche weeping no more. The year after that I defeated Essur.'(2) Forgetting Psyche and becoming submerged in her queenship are the twin aspects of her 'veil'.

Yet even in the midst of her queenship, she can still dream 'the impossible fool's dream' of having Bardia as her husband and being in labour with Psyche.(3) (And in a book by Lewis we are unwise to ignore an 'impossible fool's dream'; by the end of the book it turns out that she has indeed been 'in labour with Psyche' insofar as Psyche is her new nature that must be brought to birth. The gods' mysterious purposes are marked by a complexity and a fruition beyond human expectations.) But instead of that, she is conscious that during this period she has locked the real Orual up 'somewhere deep inside me; she lay curled there. It was like being with child, but reversed; the thing I carried in me grew slowly smaller and less alive. '(4)

Her achievements mount up: 'I did and I did and I did -what does it matter what I did?' -for, once out of the 'bustle and skill and glory of queenship', she is 'alone with myself; that is, with a nothingness.'(5) Her submergence in her work has led to success; but the refusal to confront the memory of Psyche and the gods means that Orual's own self is dying.

(vii) The Recovery of a 'Face'

Eventually, after the long years of the veil, the action moves on again. Orual goes on a journey outside Glome, and to her surprise finds a shrine to the goddess Istra -which is Psyche's other name.

(1) Ibid, pp.233-234. (2) Ibid, p.244. (3) Ibid, p.233. (4) Ibid, p.235.(5) Ibid, p.245.

The temple priest tells her Istra's story, but to Orual's outrage it is altered, saying that Psyche's sisters could *see* her palace and determined to ruin her merely out of jealousy. Orual has no doubt that this is the gods' doing: in no way but through divine revelation could the story of Psyche's palace have become known. But

> it's a story belonging to a different world, a world in which the gods show themselves clearly and don't torment men with glimpses, nor unveil to one what they hide from another, nor ask you to believe what contradicts your eyes and ears and nose and tongue and fingers. In such a world... I would have walked aright. The gods themselves would have been able to find no fault in me.(1)

Here Orual's self-righteousness stands out, but so does the problem posed by the gods' silence and their ambivalent actions. Is that not the cause of all the difficulties? She decides to do 'what had never perhaps been done in the world before', to write the case against the gods.(2) Part One of the book is the record of this 'case', and ends with Orual expecting the same direct act of judgement from the gods that she mistakenly foresaw after the destruction of Psyche's palace:

> Let them answer my charge if they can. It may well be that, instead of answering, they'll strike me mad or leprous or turn me into beast, bird or tree. But will not all the world then know (and the gods will know it knows) that this
> is because they have no answer? (3)

Quite so: and therefore, if the gods have an answer, they will not speak it through a direct but unexplained judgement. Part Two of the book is concerned with the ways in which the answer comes. It begins in the very process of Orual's writing down her accusation. Even in Part One, Orual remarks that

(1) Ibid, p.253. (2) Ibid, p.254. (3) Ibid, p.259. The last words are quoted twice in the following chapter: 'Not many days have passed since I wrote those words No answer'(p.263); 'that last line of the book (they have no answer)'(p.267). It is almost a summary: the gods do not speak because they dare not.

> I was recalling every passage of the true story, dragging up terrors, humiliations, struggles, and anguish that I had not thought of for years, letting Orual wake and speak, digging her almost out of a grave, out of the walled well. (1)

The real Orual is coming back to life. At the beginning of Part Two she goes further:

> Let no one lightly set about such a work.... I found I must set down (for I was speaking as before judges and must not lie) passions and thoughts of my own which I had clean forgotten.... The change which the writing wrought in me... was only a beginning; only to prepare me for the gods' surgery. They used my own pen to probe my wound. (2)

As it turns out, it is Orual's willingness to face her own weaknesses and (thoroughly realistic) self-gratifying fantasies ('I am ashamed to write all these follies'(3)), her passionate quest for justice and truth ('I must try at any cost to write what is wholly true'(4)), that is to prove the foothold of grace. The love of truth is at the very least love of a divine attribute. In one sense this is Lewis' old confidence, expressed most clearly in Miracles, in the ability of divinely-given Reason, relentlessly followed through to the very end, to attain to truth; although, in Till We Have Faces, it clearly has to be met by divine revelation. Orual, like Habakkuk or Job, is posing anguished questions to heaven; and where there is an honest question, Lewis believes, there will, in heaven's own time and way, be an honest answer. To desire to speak to the gods is to desire to 'have a face'; in writing her book Orual has begun to lay aside her 'veil'.

(1) Ibid. p.257. This is an image with a firm hold on Lewis' imagination. In That Hideous Strength the story of how Merlin is quite literally woken and brought out of the grave is combined with a narrative in which both Christian and naturalistic thought are depicted as being taken to their logical conclusions -the pursuit Orual is engaged in. That which is buried is brought up into daylight; the question is whose side it will turn out to be on. (2) Ibid. p.263. This quotation is one for the post-structuralist: Lewis' story turns out to be 'self-reflexive', and salvation is found

through the act of writing! (3) Ibid, p.179. (4) Ibid, p.126.

Not that Orual's assessment is thereby vindicated. There is still the absurdity of 'I must write it all quickly before the gods found some way to silence me'(1), as if divinity could be caught unawares and left frantically preparing contingency plans. More crucial is her summary, 'They gave me nothing in the world to love but Psyche and then took her from me.'(2) The gods' 'answer' tackles this issue, not by direct revelation, but by the juxtaposition of events.

Orual recalls as she writes her opening pages how close she had once been to the third sister, Redival ('And I thought, how terribly she changed'(3)); and thereupon arrives an embassy from another kingdom led by an old lover of Redival's, who tells Orual how lonely Redival felt when Orual's love was transferred to Psyche. Orual is 'sure still that Redival was false and a fool'; and yet through this event she recognises that 'I had never thought at all how it might be with her.'(4) Clearly Orual is mistaken when she says she had 'nothing in the world to love but Psyche.' Bardia's death, and Orual's horrified realisation in a well-crafted dialogue with his widow that she has consumed his life, make the same point about the selfishness of her love. 'Why did you not tell me?' Orual demands of his wife, who has not wanted to take from her husband the glory of his deeds; '... Or are you like the gods who will speak only when it is too late?'(5) Bardia's wife replies that she loved Bardia too much to intervene -even though Bardia was, on one level, being destroyed. Again, the implication is obvious, although unmentioned: what if the gods were doing the same?

(1) Ibid, p.257. (2) Ibid, p.258. (3) Ibid, p.264. (4) Ibid, p.266
(5) Ibid, p.274.

'And now these divine Surgeons had me tied down and were at work.'(1) The combination of painstaking recollection and 'chance' encounters have enabled her to achieve -or rather, be given -a little self-knowledge; she sees that to some extent at least her love has been that of the mythical Shadowbrute to which Psyche was sacrificed, a love in which 'loving and devouring are all one.'(2) Or of Ungit. Lewis presents a magnificent dream sequence in which Orual's father reappears, insists that she lay aside her veil (and, significantly, 'instantly all the long years of my queenship shrank up') and dig a tunnel with him into the heart of the earth. There he forces her to look in a mirror and answer the question, 'Who is Ungit?' 'I am Ungit', she replies; and, waking, she recognises that this is true. The 'ruinous face' of Ungit's image matches her own; 'I was that... all-devouring, womblike, yet barren, thing.'(3) Through a psychologically realistic vision Lewis' gods lead Orual to self-knowledge; it is an effective fusion. Orual is horrified by this realisation and tries to drown herself, but the gods step in again and prevent her. 'Die before you die', she is told; 'There is no chance after.'(4)

The gods have spoken again, but again it is ambiguous, and no explanation comes. 'To expect further utterance is like asking for an apple from a tree that fruited the day the world was made', says Orual. (It is tempting to interpret this as linking the silence of the gods with the rebellion against God of the Genesis Fall.) Orual

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(1) Ibid, p.276. (2) Ibid, p.275. This is also the love of the demons in The Screwtape Letters (pp.156, 160).(3) TWHF, pp.284-287. It is worth pointing out just how much is going on in this scene. The King forces Orual to dig, with the words 'Do you mean to slug abed all your life?' -words he had used to her years earlier (p.96), but also the words she used of Bardia while working him to death (p.267). The claustrophobic room where they dig is the Pillar Room where Orual had consumed Bardia's energies (p.271). Her father leads her to a mirror which in reality she has given away; he did this earlier too (pp.69-70), but this time, unlike the earlier occasion, Orual is humbled and forced to confront the identity she evaded with her veil and her disposal of the mirror. The jumble of incidents from Orual's past is both psychologically credible and symbolically effective. (4) Ibid, p.291.

is left to work at the meaning of their utterance. At the symbolic level, the narrative contains signs of hope. When she goes out to drown herself it is without her veil, 'for the first time in many years'(1), because it is the best possible disguise -but symbolically

the detail implies her growing self-knowledge. 'The voice of the god had not changed in all those years, but I had. There was no rebel in me now.'(2) That in turn may well be why the following pages are full of revelatory visions: the gods' voice has not changed, but Orual's new-found humility means she is able to hear.

Orual wonders if the reference to death means the death of her vices, and seeks to change her personality, 'the gods helping'. But she discovers that she is incapable of doing so.(3) (Lewis' autobiography presents this discovery as one of the last 'moves' in his own conversion.) Worse, she begins to fear that 'they would not help.... A terrible, sheer thought, huge as a cliff, towered up before me' -Bunyan's dread from Grace Abounding, the horrific possibility of being one of those that the gods will not choose. Orual has a despairing dream of being sent to collect the Golden Fleece, suffering the pain of encountering the rams that guard it and then watching another woman collect the prize. This incident says something further about the wrath (and silence) of the gods:

> They were not doing it in anger. They rushed over me in their joy... The Divine Nature wounds and perhaps destroys us merely by being what it is. We call it the wrath of the gods; as if the great cataract in Phars were angry with every fly it sweeps down in its green thunder.(4)

Perhaps man is too small for the gods to care about him; perhaps Orual is too trivial for the gods to speak to her.

(1) Ibid, p.289. It is when the veil is removed from Psyche's image in the temple that spring is come (p.255). (2) Ibid, p.29I. (3) Ibid, p.293. (4) Ibid, p.295.

(viii) Silence Ended: Orual's True Voice

Orual still has one point she is maintaining against the gods: 'I had at least loved Psyche truly. There, if nowhere else, I had the right of it and the gods were in the wrong. '(1)

That is the keynote for the final vision. Lewis uses yet another Greek myth: Orual is sent to bring back the water of death from the dead lands for Ungit. Faced with an impassable mountain-range, she meets an eagle; but the eagle says, 'It is not you that I was sent to help. '(2) In that speech reappears the rejection Orual has felt throughout her life because of her ugliness, and more recently since she tried to beautify her soul. And at that point -in a fine dream-transformation -Orual realises that 'what I had been carrying all this time was not a bowl but a book' -her complaint against the gods. 'This ruined everything.' Instead of a receptive bowl she has a complaint; that is the story of her life and of the gods' silence. Straightaway the eagle tells her, 'Come into court. Your case is to be heard.' A huge crowd gathers, and her veil is finally taken from her. (The judge, however, is veiled -as the gods have been throughout Part One.)(3)

When she comes to read her book, she suddenly realises that what she has is not 'my great book'. She is about to protest, but (another superb dream-like touch) 'already I found myself reading it'. What she reads, in fact, is her true book, in her true voice:

> I know what you'll say. You will say the real gods are not at all like Ungit... As if that would heal my wounds! ... Do you think we mortals will find you gods easier to bear if you're beautiful? I tell you that if that's true we'll find you a thousand times worse. For then (I know what beauty does) you'll lure and entice. You'll leave us nothing; nothing that's worth our keeping or your taking...stolen away by this everlasting calling, calling, calling of the gods. Taken where we can't follow... Oh, you'll say...that I'd signs enough her palace was real; could have known the truth if I'd wanted. But how could I want to know it? Tell me that. The girl was mine. What right had you to steal

(1) Ibid, p.296. (2) Ibid, p.298. (3) Ibid, pp.298-300.

> her away into your dreadful heights?... If you'd gone the other way to work -if it was my eyes you had opened -you'd soon have seen how I would have shown her and told her and taught her and led her up to my level. But to hear a chit of a girl who had (or ought to have had) no thought in her head that I'd not put there, setting up for a seer and a prophetess and next thing to a goddess... how could anyone

> endure it?... That there should be gods at all, there's our misery and bitter wrong. There's no room for you and us in the same world... We want to be our own. (1)

Here is the heart of the whole book, the reason why Orual has been unable to hear the gods speak. To this reader, it works; it is possible to believe that this really is Orual's 'true voice'. The egoism that was willing to listen to the gods, but only if that in turn feeds the ego; the possessiveness; the real pain and loss - this ambivalent combination we have seen throughout the narrative. The refusal to accept the possibility that Psyche's lover was a real god, the deliberate taking of the veil -these have marked Orual's refusal to *see.* The endpoint of such a refusal is in Orual's speech the creed of hell; 'The one principle of hell is - "I am my own"', said George Macdonald in a line Lewis chose as the epigraph to the penultimate chapter of Surprised by Joy. Hell, total independence, is the self-inflicted deafness to God carried to its logical conclusion of total separation from the presence of God. Orual has not yet come finally to that point; but she realises -or. more precisely, 'there was given to me a certainty', a revelation - that this 'was my real voice.'

> There was silence in the dark assembly long enough for me to have read my book out yet again. At last the judge spoke.
>
> 'Are you answered?' he said.
>
> 'Yes, ' said I. (2)
>
> ...The complaint was the answer. To have heard myself making it was to be answered. Lightly men talk of saying what they mean... When the time comes to you at which you will be forced at last to utter the speech which has lain at the centre of your soul for years... you'll not talk about joy of words. I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we

(1) Ibid, pp.301-303. (2) Ibid, p.304.

> have faces? (1)

The silence of God here is the silence Ransom encountered in his debate with the Darkness on Perelandra; nothing needs to be said. 'The complaint was the

answer.' It is the end of a long process on the gods' side; the 'word' has to be 'dug out of us' before we realise what it is we are wanting to say, before a question can be posed that can be answered. Until that point, says Lewis, man is in the same position as the damned of The Great Divorce, who will know that they were always in the wilfully self- deifying condition of Hell, but will phrase that awareness in a more self-approving way needing 'translation' into the 'real voice':

> In the actual language of the Lost, the words will be different, no doubt. One will say he has always served his country right or wrong; and another that he has sacrificed everything to his Art; and some that they've never been taken in, and some that, thank God, they've always looked after Number One, and nearly all, that, at least they've been true to themselves. (2)

The divine silence is not merely fantasy. Five years after Till We Have Faces Lewis wrote the autobiographical A Grief Observed, a record of his tortured questionings after the loss of his wife. And at the end of that book there comes a comparable situation to this climax of Orual's questionings about a lost beloved:

> When I lay these questions before God I get no answer. But a rather special sort of 'No answer'. It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze... Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are there in a mile? Is yellow square or round?(3)

The silence here is not quite the same as in Till We Have Faces or The Great Divorce, in that it results, not from the moral inability to encounter God, but from the questions asked being nonsense questions. But the point is very similar: sometimes, Lewis is saying, God is silent, not out of lack of love, but because we make communication almost impossible.

(1) Ibid, p.305. (2) C.S.Lewis, The Great Divorce (1946; Fount edition of 1977), pp.62-63. Cf.the 'translation' of Weston's attempt to utter 'the thing...which he had to say' (OOTSP, pp.157-160). (3) C.S.Lewis, A Grief Observed(1961; Faber paperback of 1966),pp.54-55.

(ix) The Breaking of the Gods' Silence

Once the question has been asked aright -once Orual has a face - the gods can answer. The vision continues as Orual is taken

through the underworld by the Fox, now aware of the incompleteness of his own rationalism. Orual is now, in her turn, to be accused by the gods. She learns this in a memorable section, encapsulating much of the essence of Christianity:

> "I cannot hope for mercy."
>
> "Infinite hopes -and fears -may both be yours. Be sure that, whatever else you get, you will not get justice."
>
> "Are the gods not just?"
>
> "Oh no, child. What would become of us if they were? But come and see."(l)

This, of course, is faith: the faith that the gods know what they are doing. It is also the hope of grace, of undeserved salvation. And it preserves, right to the end, an element of enigma. Lewis has implied that our inability to hear the gods has much to do with our egoism. But there is another aspect: when all is said and done, we are only human. 'Even I, who am dead, do not understand more than a few broken words of their language', the once-rationalistic Fox confesses to Orual.(2) The finite human mind is limited in its capability to understand the divine.

Before the judgement, the Fox shows Orual a series of pictures of what befell Psyche under the judgement of the gods. Psyche comes in despair to the riverbank to drown herself; Orual, seeing the picture, cries out, 'Do not do it' (the gods' words that interrupted her own suicide attempt), and Psyche goes away. Psyche has to sort an immense mass of seeds: she succeeds with the aid of numerous ants. (Orual dreamed of herself as an ant performing this task while she was

(1) TWHF, p.3O8. (2) Ibid, p.316.

engaged in the sorting of motives involved in writing her book.) Psyche has to collect the Golden Fleece; she succeeds because 'some intruder' draws away the rams that are guarding it. (Orual was the

Intruder, but had thought herself to be 'nothing in their minds' as the rams trampled her.) Psyche and
Orual toil across the desert; an eagle comes to help Psyche, and Orual vanishes. 'Another bore nearly all the anguish', summarises the Fox.(l) This is the other side of Orual's love, the reality of love that was mingled with the bitter possessiveness. But also it is the other side of the gods' apparent cruelty: in all her anguish, Orual was doing something better than she could have dreamed.

And finally the gods' enigmatic prophecy is fulfilled. 'You, woman, shall know yourself and your work. You also shall be Psyche.'(2) The first half has come to pass through the gods' slow process of revelation; the second can now follow. Psyche was crossing the desert to fetch 'the casket of beauty' to 'make Ungit beautiful'(3); and Orual, of course, has seen in herself the ugliness that is part of the ambiguous figure of Unglt. The vision comes to a climax as Psyche returns to the House she had lost,bringing the casket. And then something else occurs.

> You have seen the torches grow pale when men open the shutters and broad summer morning shines in on the feasting-hall? So now... From a glorious and awful deepening of the blue sky above us... or from a deep, doubtful, quaking and surmise in my own heart, I knew that all this had been only a preparation. Some far greater matter was upon us. The voices spoke again..."He is coming," they said. (4)

So the god comes. 'The pillars on the far side of the pool flushed with his approach. I cast down my eyes. '(5) In doing so Orual realises that the impossible has happened: her ugliness is gone, she is Psyche. It is a symbolic transfiguration that could

(1) Ibid, pp.309-311. (2) Ibid, p.182. (3) Ibid, pp.316-317. (4) Ibid, 317-318. (5) Ibid, p.319.

never have been done in a 'realistic' fiction; and, given that Lewis

has not forfeited the psychological verisimilitude of Orual's personality, he seems to have retained the advantages of both modes at this juncture.

> "You also are Psyche," came a great voice. I looked up then, and it's strange that I dared. But I saw no god, no pillared court. I was in the palace gardens, my foolish book in my hand... I ended my first book with the words, No answer. I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. 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 - (1)

And at that point she dies. Her veil has gone, she has a face and can speak with the gods face to face; and 'before your face' the questions die away. Until that point, says Lewis, until someone is ready to 'face' the Lord Himself, there can only be silence; until Orual can 'know herself and her work', there is only the self-frustration of her earlier reasonings: of 'words, words; to be led out into battle against other words.' It is a climax not without humility from a man with Lewis' reputation as a master of verbal argument and logical apologetics.

There is far more in this book than can be discussed in a brief treatment such as this. The complexity of the interplay between Psyche and Orual considered as realistic characters in a drama of human vocation, and considered as aspects of the same character in a drama of internal spiritual development, deserves further exploration, particularly in the context of the closing section. Space forbids. But even a superficial examination of Till We Have

(1) Ibid, pp.319-320.

Faces makes clear the depth and complexity that Lewis achieved in this his final novel. The fantasy context enables him to achieve a richness of symbolic complexity that he would probably not have achieved in a 'realistic' novel. But the drama of the silence of the gods, of the enigmatic and apparently cruel occurrences that lead Orual into self-revelatory actions, followed by the long process of the taking and then divinely-stimulated removing of the veil, are at one level a model of the parallel drama in the real world. In this fantasy Lewis attains his most mature expression of supernaturalistic causality; and a great deal more besides. It necessitates and rewards numerous readings.

6. SUPERNATURALISTIC REALISM: JACK CLEMO'S 'WILDING GRAFT'

We have considered a number of novels that attempt to depict providentialism by means of fantasy. In contrast, there are very few realistic modern novels which have attempted to portray the operation of grace in this world. In Fictional Absence, the companion study to this, we have given some attention to Graham Greene's work, and, more briefly, to that of Evelyn Waugh; another very interesting example, much less well known but valuable to set alongside Lewis and Tolkien's work, is Wilding Graft by Jack Clemo. (1)

Set in the claymining country of Cornwall during the second world war, Wilding Graft turns on two characters, Garth Joslin and Griffiths. At the beginning of the book, Garth has just returned from his mother's funeral. His relationship with his fiancee, a somewhat frigid and ill-matched girl named Edith, has been disintegrating as his mother's mental illness has developed, and has finally terminated -along with Garth's good reputation in the area - after a flirtation with Irma Stribley, a London girl on a brief visit to relatives in Cornwall. Garth's mother, mentally broken from nursing her husband's final illness, has attempted suicide at the time of Edith's marriage to someone else, and has spent the closing four years of her life in Bodmin mental asylum. Garth himself is much damaged by all of this, but being of an (unconventionally) Christian cast of mind he concludes that there must be some divine plan working itself out through all that has happened, and determines to wait for it to become plain: specifically, to wait for Irma to be brought back to Cornwall.

Griffiths likewise is someone whose life has gone awry: a Welshman, his marriage and career have both turned sour, his child has died of pneumonia, and his wife has deserted him and later committed suicide. He, however, has become

(1) Wilding Graft (1948) is Clemo's only novel. The major part of Clemo's work, for which he is most widely known, is poetry; a representative selection appeared in Penguin Modern Poets 6. Wilding Graft was reprinted in 1983; all further references will be indicated by WG.

militantly anti-Christian, although his agnosticism is 'of the Victorian rather than the modern type'(1) -that is, of a Hardyesque kind: he seems to discern a malignant, hostile aspect in what takes place -'the inhumanity of Chance'.(2) He forms a friendship with Minnie Lagor, the unmarried mother of Shirley who is killed halfway through the book. The relationship founders, however, in good measure because of the effect Griffiths' pessimism has on Minnie, and he is last seen dogged but despairing.

Garth's situation progressively worsens, till finally news reaches him that Irma has 'run wild' and been placed on probation. His dream shattered, Garth virtually breaks up, and his health collapses too through a fever caught while searching for Shirley Lagor. But it is Shirley's mother who brings him relief: in Truro she has seen Irma, who has returned to Cornwall out of a sense that her relationship with Garth was 'the point it all turned on'.(3) So the book's action draws to a close.

(i) Constructing the Arena

Once again, a bald plot summary cannot do justice to the power of the fiction, and in this case may even make the novel sound like a saccharine romantic paperback. But such fiction is utterly alien to a book like Wilding Graft, in part because of the intensity of the anguish of the book and in part because of Clemo's ability to evoke the concrete reality of the landscape in which the action is played out. The Cornish clay land setting is the only area Clemo has known, and his use of it is one of the great strengths of the book.

The first glimpses the reader receives it are far from being pristinely pure of metaphor:

(1) WG,p.I76. (2) Ibid,p.178. (3) Ibid,p.246.

> His pace slackened perceptibly as the huddled, shapeless white mass of Meledor clay dumps jarred his vision above the frost-thinned scrub of downs... The refuse-heap bulged out as far as the hamlet, but Garth was soon free of it, passing the school standing on a branch road south-west -the school to which he could not honestly say he owed anything -and abreast of the first bare stone cottage of his birthplace.(1)

Thus the opening paragraphs. This is not the Cornwall of romance: there is a sense of discomfort in 'huddled, shapeless', in the refuse-heap that 'bulged out' (echoing the note of the unplanned and indeterminate in 'shapeless'), in the useless school, even perhaps in the bareness of the cottage. The concrete 'thereness' of the objects is conveyed to the reader, but neither we nor Garth are, as it were, 'at home'. Meledor is Garth's home, but the sight 'jarred his vision': and in the verb there is a note of violence, echoed when Clemo writes of 'a thin drizzle... driving across the plateau', and again in the following paragraph:

> Meledor was not arranged compactly, but scattered in groups of two or three houses each down the whole length of a long lane. The bends of the road and the thickness of the tree-growths were so pronounced that from none of the cottages was it possible to see many of the others. At several corners one came unexpectedly upon drying-sheds, their low roofs and stacks almost hidden among the trees, and trolley-lines crossed the road, connecting kilns with clay-tanks, the industrial features giving a false impression that the end of the village had been reached.(2)

It is not a paragraph in which anything 'happens', and yet there is the sense of the sharply unexpected running through it. This is a landscape that is not determined by man ('scattered', 'unexpectedly', 'false impression'): an indeterminate universe (as Griffiths will view it) or at least one whose true determinants are not visible to ordinary vision. The sense of movements without discernible shape is an undertone in the paragraphs that follow:

(1) Ibid, pp.7-8. (2) Ibid, p.8.

> His hands clenched, but the thoughts that would have surged anew at sight of that place were stemmed by a swift distraction. A movement! Something was happening down there.... Along this gulch the clay-clogged Fal oozed turbidly.... Drawing near to it Stribley led the horse in a broad curve until it faced the farmstead, and then backed it towards the fence that guarded the brink of the gorge. The group were soon hidden from Garth's view by a blob of trees on the higher bank. He heard Stribley bawling at the horse, then sounds of confused movement, the creak of the cart and the rattle of the fence, as if some bulky object had bounced against it.(1)

'Clenched', 'surged/stemmed', 'oozed turbidly', Stribley's unclear movements (finally hidden by a shapeless 'blob' of trees), 'confused movement... as if some bulky object had bounced' (bulky objects only bounce under great force) all contain the sense of motion, of action, but of motion with no evident direction. At the same time, 'the clay-clogged Fal' is equally important in tying the landscape into the real world. It must not be a mere phantasmagoria, a clumsily-invoked analogue for attitudes within the characters' minds: it must exist in itself before it can have emotional resonance.

> The scrubby vegetation, the white muffled clay streams, the dunes and clay-beds glimpsed unexpectedly through snaky boughs and the dimly-seen expanse of Goss Moor below. carrying the desolation to wilder and more savage extremes of tarn, bog and featureless wasteland until jarred six miles north-west by the low grim tors around St.Columb -these details seem united in a common withdrawal from the general tone of English scenery.(2)

Here again are the note of the indeterminate in 'unexpectedly' and 'snaky'; and the sense of violence in 'jarred'. At the same time the placenames, and the matter-of-fact present tense evoking the tone of the guidebook, preserve a distance from the dreamscapes of second-rate romanticism. The tarn might indeed be 'wild' and 'savage', and the tors 'grim'; no 'pathetic fallacy' is required. Yet these words are crucial containers of the symbolic content of the passage. At its best, then, the landscape in Clemo's work embodies meaning, rather than being simply labelled. The

(1) Ibid, pp.8-9. (2) Ibid, pp.llO-lll.

sense of inhospitality or of estrangement from humanity appears innate rather than imaginary.

And that is the world Clemo wishes to depict as the arena in which grace operates: alien, the home of forces which appear to have no beneficent shape, and indeed can seem -and be -thoroughly destructive. The concreteness of the landscape is significant for another reason: this is a real world into which the lightning of divine grace will strike. This is very important, as the whole thrust of the book is that the action of divine grace is historical, is factual. Clemo's deep sense of his native landscape gives to his narrative enhanced power and credibility.

(ii) Evil and the Presence of Grace

This portrayal of the solid, jagged, object-strewn clay landscape is an index of the fictional world of Wilding Graft as a whole -vivid, violent, hostile, containing much that is horrific, both in the catastrophes that come upon its ordinary characters, and in the petty cruelty and spite that seem to characterise village life. That the world is a place of much suffering, indeed of violent tragedy, is the 'given' upon which the book is built; and to seek the causes of this in Clemo's own crippling blindness and deafness is hardly illegitimate. But it has a positive consequence for a Christian writer aiming to depict the action of God within the world: instead of the 'problem of suffering' being an awkward item for which some piece of apologetics must be provided somewhere along the way, it is the starting-point from which Clemo's understanding of grace has to develop.

And just as Clemo earths his vision in his perception and delineation of the landscape he knows best, so too he chooses very local events as the expression of evil in the world. At times, as Clemo presents page after page of trivial, spiteful village gossip, the reader may wonder whether it is worthy of record

(although the authors of, say, Dubliners, or Mrs.Dalloway, would have had few doubts on the issue). But the choice of subject is itself a deliberate gesture: God is sovereign and concerned with the affairs of minor individuals, and it is into precisely this arena that the power of grace is breaking. Still, the gossip is ubiquitous, and vicious; and conversation -and human relationship generally -take on the form of combat. Garth is visited by his former fiancee, Edith, and his first concern is 'to gain time for any serious duel she might force upon him'.(l) There is deeper wretchedness too. Garth's mother's lunacy and death -

> 'Twas four year ago I really lost her. There's been nothing left since, the few times I've visited the asylum. She didn't always recognise me. 'Twas a bad case.(2)

- and then the broken relationship between Garth and Edith, the shattering of Garth's reputation, Edith's subsequent failed marriage:

> 'I sometimes wish it never happened... because I aren't happy with Seth...'
>
> Garth's voice came curtly enough now:
>
> 'I don't want to hear any 0' that cant. You made your choice and ought to be satisfied when you think how it got me cornered.' (3)
>
> `'Twas your fault and Stribleys' more than Seth's. A weakling like him- he isn't worth hating.' (4)

Seth has his own problems, of course:

> A fellow goes it blind when he ties the knot wi' any woman. The very next day something may happen to knock the whole thing flat. Edith never been the same to me since I had me accident -'shamed to be seen walking wi' me, lame like I are. But how could I know when we married ' that any such trouble was coming?(5)

Meledor, then, is a place where for the most part life ranges along a spectrum from discomfort to tragedy, the prey of unforeseeable events. The war merely universalises the situation and prevents people ignoring the brutal nature of reality:

(1) Ibid,p.9. (2) Ibid,p.12. (3) Ibid,p.15. (4) Ibid,p.11. (5) Ibid,p.20.

> 'Well, anyhow,' she said with a swift evasive look at the banister partly screened by two of Garth's coats hanging from nails in the beam, 'I don't think the war'll last years. It seems to be fizzling out already.'
>
> 'You'll find your mistake there. Evil forces bide their time, getting up strength, and then pounce, as they did on me nearly five year ago. The wreckage that's left then takes a lifetime to clear up. All the questions this war'll bring to people I've had weighing on me since 1935- while they've been doing their damnedest to forget there's any danger.'(l)

Clemo, writing in 1948, is obviously speaking to 'all the questions this war'll bring', when the 'evasive look' no longer serves; and these 'questions' must focus on how one deals with such a situation, how one lives in such a world.(2)

Garth's words in this last quotation provide a partial answer: he is viewing the world through a framework in which there exist 'evil forces' that quite consciously 'bide their time'. The reference to his own affair makes it clear that Hitler is to be regarded as a special case of a more general evil. And if there is any sort of cosmic framework, it makes sense to attempt to know it, or at best to cooperate with it. He tells Edith on the previous page:

> They talk o' keeping their chins up, but that's a risky practice when you're standing up to the Almighty. It invites the knock-out.(3)

There is an enigma in Garth's words here, that is permissible at this early stage but which Clemo never quite disposes of: it is not clear to what extent Garth's misfortunes are the work of 'evil forces' or of 'the Almighty'. However, that is an age-old problem that the Christian encounters both in daily

(1) Ibid, p.14. (2) It is worth noting that Wilding Graft was published at a time when the neo-romantic poets were addressing themselves to similar questions: Kenneth Allott writes in his introduction to the Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse, 'Militarism, bureaucracy, Russian foreign policy, the melted eyeballs of the Japanese at Hiroshima, weariness of slogans and propaganda lies, with a hundred other matters great and small, conspired to produce an atmosphere in which all political optimism and idealism seemed childish.... A number of the younger poets found meaning and consolation in Christianity, were convinced like Newman of some "aboriginal calamity" when they looked out on "the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin... a vision to dizzy and appal". The names of Anne Ridler, Kathleen Raine, Norman Nicholson, and David Gascoyne come to mind.' (Ed. Allott, edition of 1962, pp.29-30). (3) WG, p.13.

experience and in the Bible (as early as the opening of the book of Job, for instance). Anyway, the obscurity here helps to avoid any sense of an over-tidy and hence implausible piece of 'religion' being involved.

This is important, because the introduction of forces on a cosmic level needs all the help it can get to seem realistic in a novel written in 1948. Other factors may be adduced too: there is the simple realism involved in citing the date '1935' in Garth's 'evil forces' speech ('July 1935', in particular, according to the following sentences). There is the fact that -as the reader in 1948 or afterwards knows full well -Garth is right in his main point: the 'evil forces' did indeed take years to combat and the war lasted until 1945. There is the presentation of Garth, no plaster saint, curt, bitter, or (three sentences before the last quotation) 'shamefaced, sullen... fumbling with his cap'. And finally there is the casual -and entirely true-to-life - use of a supernatural framework (of a kind) in the everyday village conversation:

> A talent -nothing less, Mr.Spragg, though we may question which Power above had gived it to him.(l)
>
> If he means to marry her 'twill be a surprising turn, yet in some ways a providence.(2)

Amidst such dialogue, Garth's 'religious remarks' can seem merely to be acting consistently in the light of what the average person generally suspects to be true.

Garth's view of the universe is also not presented without humour. In chapter three, Minnie Lagor is in Truro to meet Griffiths, and instead meets several of the novel's other characters, including both Garth and the grandmother of her illegitimate daughter: she asks Garth, '...Must be a stroke o' this destiny you're always talking about?'(3) This is a shrewd move on Clemo's part. For the very

(1) Ibid, p.22. (2) Ibid,p.25. (3) Ibid,p.40.

'ordinary' Minnie Lagor is probably the sanest character in the novel; and yet although she laughs at Garth, the implication is not that his beliefs are wrong but simply that he is - not unpleasantly - eccentric. As the novel progresses Minnie turns out to share Garth's faith: which, given Minnie's sanity, helps to make it seem more credible to the reader too. Thus part of the 'ordinary' character Minnie is given is an 'ordinary' faith, which comes under similar testing to Garth's when her daughter is killed: she represents a less intellectualised and more phlegmatic pilgrim on the same journey. It is Garth who enables her to see a purpose in Shirley's death and so retain the will to be a person who 'always bore up and went on, whatever happened'(l); and she concludes, 'It seemed hard, yet I'm coming to feel that Garth looked at it right'.(2) She in turn saves Garth's sanity when the crisis comes in his own life. Minnie's character is a wise fictional strategy for keeping Garth's faith from seeming a subjective eccentricity.

Garth's faith, then, is represented by Clemo as the outgrowth, or logical extension, of beliefs that everybody knows deep down to be true. This is of course significant for the strategy of the novel as a whole. Clemo is suggesting that most people (this is 1948, of course) assent vaguely to the Christian statements about the nature of reality, but few proceed logically to act upon that faith. (Garth's struggle to do so is a fictional analogue to Clemo's own attempt to portray forces which standard Christian belief is supposed to recognise but which few novelists have attempted to depict in action.) Garth's normality is carefully stressed in the section describing his response to the events that took from him his mother, fiancee and reputation:

> Garth had reacted normally to those staggering events of 1935- that is, religiously. Having been reared in this remote area, having at that time never been to church, and having forgotten most of what he learned at school, he was fortunately untouched by the emasculations of the twentieth-century outlook. He was free to feel with full-blooded instinct that an experience that transfigured life must be essentially

(1) Ibid,p.177. (2) Ibid,p.182.

> a religious experience. And when a man was struck by the lightning of destiny, his old love stripped off like dead bark and a new stain of fire burnt along the whole length of his life by a momentary flash amid the density of circumstance -that too was an Act of God. And because it was a spiritual operation it must be creative as well as destructive. Some purpose was behind, discoverable if one kept in contact with spiritual realities. So Garth had felt, and his mystifying behaviour since had been merely the expression of his honesty to that belief.(1)

This passage contains the kernel of the novel. The basic pattern is clear: to respond 'normally' to disaster and tragedy is to respond in faith; and to believe in God at all should be to believe, firstly that God is omniscient and no 'lightning flash' comes as an unforeseeable surprise to Him, and secondly, that if God is involved in these events then there is a purpose at work that is 'creative as well as destructive'. Garth draws out the implications in discussion with Griffiths, in the passage containing the phrase Clemo chose to make the title of the book:

> When the little vendetta was over and I'd lost every round –lost my mother and Edith, and lost my character so that no local girls'd look at me, there was nothing I could cherish but the memories that kid'd left me, and nothing for me to do but try and find out the meaning of why she'd come. And that, of course, brought religion into it.... At bottom...'tis just an experiment in prayer.... As months passed and I found that girl's coming had worked a revolution in me - my nature changing and opening out as I'd never dreamed possible while Edith was in the picture -well, I began wondering. I thought p'raps Irma'd got a similar shock from it, and that God had got close to us and done a bit o' grafting without our knowing it. I came to feel like that fellow Browning says, that God has a right to graft excellence on wildings how He likes, whether through a church service or a vulgar scandal, at the altar or in the workshop. The result's the only thing that matters; and I've staked my whole life on the belief that that result will come.(2)

In short, he intends to live by, to gamble on, the objective reality of the action of God. This is the book's narrative pattern. But there is another important point here, and that is the striking way in which the power of grace is made concrete by the violence Clemo puts into its description: 'And when a man was struck by the lightning of destiny, his old love stripped off like dead bark and a new stain of fire burnt along the whole length of his life by a momentary flash amid the density of circumstance -that too was an Act of God.'

(1) Ibid,p.64-65. (2) Ibid,p.l06.

This fits well with Clemo's assertion that Garth, being 'untouched by the emasculations' of the outlook of his century, is 'free to feel with full-blooded instinct' the divine dimension in what has happened in his life. Such phrasing, combined with the undoubtedly jarring and effective imagery in the sentences quoted, amount to an affirmation that this whole matter is not something 'gentle, meek and mild', but something colossal,something of equivalent power to sexuality or death or agony. The word 'stain' is also significant: Clemo is rejecting the standard religious imagery of purity for images of forces that must be destructive in order to be creative.

Grace is, then, a force of instantaneous power like lightning that flashes down, searing the 'dead bark' that must be 'stripped off'. And it should be noted that the moment Clemo pinpoints as the occasion when 'the fateful lightning struck down in Meledor workshop'(1) is the moment when Garth first kisses Irma: 'The flash struck them both at the next instant'.(2) It is natural that it should be so, since it is through Garth's passion that he is to be drawn into the gamble of faith. But the conjunction of grace and sexuality is effective in both directions. At a crucial point in the book grace is portrayed as earthed in -or smashing into -the heart of human experience; while at the same time the image of a lightning flash gives colour to the passion of the couple. The same is achieved later in the book, when the moment is recalled as 'that first stabbing flow of communion'(3) -'stabbing' functioning much as the earlier 'flash', and 'communion' offering a fruitful ambiguity: it is the point where Garth and Irma first truly experience each other, but also the point at which people stand in the presence of grace. The combination of imagery and context give to Clemo's presentation of grace a real depth and power.

(1) Ibid,p.10. (2) Ibid,p.ll. (3) Ibid,p.230.

(iii) Three Alternatives

'Lightning' is something which cannot be predicted or summoned, however: and once the 'lightning flash' has come and gone, and Irma returned (apparently permanently) to London, there is nothing left for Garth to do but wait in hope and faith for the operations of grace to become complete. The result may seem a somewhat passive model of faith. But to Clemo a deliberate refraining from action is in certain situations necessary so that the eventual deliverance should be 'all of grace': and he makes Garth speak of 'the unreasonable Christian way o' choosing to stay put and cut away all the worldly helps so that deliverance when it comes'll be the work of destiny'.(l) The same note is clear in the book's epigraph, from Browning:

> The great Gardener grafts excellence
> On wildings where He will.
>
> That is our secret: go to sleep!
> You will wake, and remember, and understand.

It is not entirely appropriate(2): 'go to sleep' does not match the agony involved in Garth's vigil. But at any rate the gamble of faith is being deliberately set against the natural course of the world. 'Since the object of the covenant is to show that God's ways are not man's ways, there is usually an element of resistance to common sense in the divine proposal', Clemo declares in The Invading Gospel(3): and in Wilding Graft Garth muses,

(1) Ibid, p.78. Cf. his remarks on the model of faith he found in the biography of the pioneer missionary C.T.Studd: 'The book showed me what was involved in full consecration, a life completely overswept by the forces of the eternal world... For Studd, Christian experience meant pure supernaturalism, reckless gambling with Bible texts as the only guarantee of success. The disciple of Christ must step right outside "normal" procedure; he must demonstrate that he belongs to a Kingdom whose laws were "foolishness" to the carnal, calculating mind. Whether he needed health, money or wife, all motives and methods promoted by worldly wisdom and selfish instinct must be discarded; the blessing must reach him through channels opened by prayer and the direct intervention of Ged.' (Jack Clemo, The Invading Gospel (1958; Lakeland edition of 1972),p.3O. This book will henceforth be referred to as TIG). (2) As Clemo himself recognised later: in TIG he comments that that volume's dominant image of an invasion 'leaves more room for the area of free-will, for an invasion can be resisted, while a grafting...cannot.' (p.7). (3)Ibid, p.45.

> No one could appreciate the absurdity of the position more than he did with his reasoning powers. Irma! Who could expect-? As if-! The protests broke as always against something in him deeper than reason.(1)

This setting of Garth's faith against 'reason' (that is, against the probabilities of the situation) is dependent on supernaturalism. Clemo is suggesting that the factors of the fictional situation -Irma's background, her precocious flirtatiousness, the years of silent separation -are such that it is highly improbable Garth will see her again; so that it will take the direct intervention of grace to turn probable sorrow into actual triumph. The action of grace is not allowed to be assimilated into more convenient and less disturbing categories: it is not a matter of the predictable sociological effects of 'churchgoing', nor of merely 'reasonable' actions dressed up in religious language. Grace must be real: there is a deliberate sense of confrontation, of challenge.

This role of confrontation is implicit in much of the book's imagery, giving it a challenging, provocative flavour. Indeed, such is the sense of the violence of grace in the book that the characters might almost be referred to as its victims. Clemo was thoroughly aware of what he was doing. In The Invading Gospel he writes, 'In all my mature writings I have stressed the aspect of disturbance and even of violence, in the impact of grace', the aim being to ensure the presentation of 'the divine conquest of human nature as the supreme reality'.(2) The religious experience is a matter of being conquered. It is intriguing that C.S.Lewis felt a similar compulsion to emphasise the anguish experienced by the human beings into whose lives intrude the workings of grace, in what is perhaps his most 'realistic' novel, Till We Have Faces.(3) Both writers are reacting against an understanding of the power of God that

(1) WG,p.43. (2) TIG,pp.6-7. (3) This may also sound reminiscent of Greene; but there is a major difference. Grace may be alien in Clemo's world as in Greene's, but it is active and it is trustworthy. There is a fruition at the end of Wilding Graft that is far distant from the 'appalling...strangeness of the mercy of God' at the end of Brighton Rock. Garth is a man gambling on a belief that the character of God will prove to be what the Christian revelation declares it to be, trusting God as Scobie will not in The Heart of the Matter; and in the end, no matter what apparently catastrophic and incomprehensible occurrences have taken place on the way, God proves to be a God who keeps His promises.

presents it as merely 'comfortable', an indistinguishable part of the natural, orderly processes of the world, and hence tamed, non-apocalyptic, colourless. Clemo complains about this kind of religion:

> The Modernist idea of offering a simple "friendship" instead of a complex redemption was an attempt to by-pass the Atonement, the terrific point of collision between divine justice and human guilt. The element of danger was removed. The predicted Messianic cyclone had arrived as a gentle zephyr.(1)

The embodiment of such an approach in Wilding Graft is Mr Rundle, a decent churchgoer 'with a ruddy clean-shaven face and rather owlish eyes blinking behind horn-rimmed spectacles...smiling blandly'(2), who encounters the anti-religious Griffiths in Truro museum:

> '... As for myself, I get hope for the future when I look deep into what's behind.'
>
> 'Pretty sort of hope', retorted Griffiths, "when even while we're here talking the people of Belgium and Holland are being massacred.'
>
> Mr.Rundle rubbed his bald head, his eyes wandering along the wide arch of skylights in the roof.
>
> 'The Dutch may be able to do something with their dykes', he said with an air of vague practicality. '... But somehow I feel the danger won't come too close. To look around here and see how peaceful these things lie after all the upheavals the world has known -it helps a man see things in true perspective.' ...
>
> 'Well, I'm afraid I don't find the survival of coffins very encouraging', muttered Griffiths. '... And there's the cathedral stuck above it all to commemorate the complete and final triumph of right over wrong two thousand years ago. What humbug!'
>
> Mr.Rundle shifted uneasily and coughed into his hand; he always felt nervous when Griffiths was in this bellicose mood.
>
> 'Well, Mr.Griffiths, we can't see eye to eye on every point. As a churchman I must say I get help from the services back at St.George's -a quiet and soothing atmosphere. It strengthens one's ideals, and that's no bad thing.'(3)

This sort of religion, Clemo implies, is true neither to grace nor to nature. It lacks intellectual robustness (hence Rundle's unease in debate), is reducible to vague 'ideals', 'a quiet and soothingatmosphere' and an ungrounded

(1) Ibid, p.58. (2) WG, p.212. (3) Ibid, pp.213-214.

confidence that in the natural course of events things will turn out right. Griffiths, on the other hand, is a realist, all too aware that the natural course of events can end in massacre and tragedy; and the thrust of the novel is that Christian faith must be equally realistic in its insistence that there is no hope without a radical revolution of grace.(l) The 'divine conquest', Clemo suggests, is a force that, far from being a 'quiet and soothing' component in the natural processes of history, is an intruder; but one of even greater power than the evil that Griffiths recognises. Rundle is decisively 'placed' as this power breaks in at the climax of the chapter, when Griffiths discovers that Garth's faith has been justified and Irma has indeed returned to Cornwall:

> Griffiths' stunned look had given place to that of a creature at bay,defenceless, uncertain of the concealed forces threatening him. His face was dark with something more desperate than anger... Mr Rundle stared, pale and alarmed, licking his lips helplessly.(2)

Well-meaning religion is simply swept aside; its platitudes are irrelevant among the mighty forces at work in the world.

Rundle's attitudes are one possible alternative to Garth's gamble of faith. But the real alternative in Wilding Graft is Griffiths. Like Garth, Griffiths' life has gone awry; but instead of waiting for the purposes of grace he becomes embittered, and militantly anti-Christian. Early on, as we observed, Clemo makes Garth say, 'They talk o' keeping their chins up, but that's a risky practice When you're standing up to the Almighty. It invites the knock-out.'(3) Griffiths does precisely this: he refuses to believe in -or accept –any divine plan. And as the narrative progresses, and it appears that some pattern exists in the events, he refuses to cooperate.

Hence his girlfriend Minnie notes that 'His defiant reaction seemed to be the signal for the piling up of calamities'.(I) Or, in the terms of The Invading Gospel:

(1) Cf.TIG,p.70,where Clemo makes a similar criticism of an identification of God with nature, which betrays its adherents when 'Reverence turns to perplexity and dismay as the mask of benevolence and beauty is swept aside by some disaster... Only a complete orthodoxy has the adequate reply here: "Yes, but we insist that [God's] love is in Christ, not in nature."' (2) WG,p.222.
(3) Ibid, p.13.

> The saving truth confronts man as a barbed and fiery opposition, for that alone can rouse the alienated soul to the battle in which it is conquered by grace... At its deepest level Church warfare is a unique battle between divine grace and human "goodness", between God's merciful decision to come to man's rescue and man's innate conviction that he does not need to be rescued. (2)

Griffiths is clinging to self-sufficiency: Garth describes him as 'putting up a stiff fight for the best values he could figure out, only he was determined to trust his own nature to see him through'.(3) And when the 'warfare', the 'barbed and fiery opposition', reveals that such means can offer no grounds for hope, Griffiths is not willing to put his trust elsewhere. Thus Garth recognises that he is trapped in a net of natural probabilities that point to tragedy, but dares to believe that there is a Rescuer and it is worth waiting for the rescue: Griffiths, in contrast, rejects that hope, and in the warfare that follows he is virtually destroyed. In C.S.Lewis' terms, he is a man who refuses to believe in the fulfilment of Desire beyond hope(4); or in the coming of eucatastrophe, to use Tolkien's. ('There'll tragedy come of this' is his reaction when he sees Garth in Truro in search of Irma.(5))

The story swings back and forth between the two: Garth trusting and following the plan, and finally receiving the fulfilment of Desire; Griffiths too, Clemo hints, potentially involved in such a eucatastrophe through his relationship with the admirable Minnie(6), but losing her precisely because of his inability to believe that joy can be anything but a prelude to disillusionment. In a novel like Wilding Graft these two characters are not merely proponents of

(1) Ibid,p.30. (2) TIG,pp.21,57. (3) WG,p.266. (4) Cf. C.S.Lewis, Mere Christianity (1952; Fount edition of 1977), p.118, where he describes the man who 'decides that the whole thing was moonshine... And so he settles down - and learns not to expect too much... But supposing infinite happiness really is there, waiting for us? Supposing one really can reach the rainbow's end? In that case it would be a pity to find out too late (a moment after death)...' Clemo had nothing to do with the Inklings, but in TIG, p.61, he recognises a kinship between Lewis' treatment of 'immortal longings' and his own concept of the 'personal covenant'. (5) WG,p.216. (6) This interpretation seems reasonable both in view of the book's pattern as a whole, and specifically in the light of Colly Snell's references to the relationship as a 'providence'(ibid,pp.25, 254).Griffiths himself, of all people -but quite plausibly –recalls that 'the thrill of promise had been unmistakeable, a mysterious recognition of fitness. They'd seemed to have been prepared for that hour' (p.14).

different theories: they are figures standing in contrasting relationships to a third 'character', the presence of grace. And from their differing relationships to grace the action follows.

(iv) Two Problems

Such, then, are the different 'life-stances' that the novel depicts. We must now consider how, and how successfully, Clemo presents the motions of grace. First of all, we must take note of a problem at the level of the plot.

For there is all too much truth in Griffiths' attitude that Garth's venture of faith is unreasonable. The difficulty is not that the sociological probabilities as Clemo presents them make it unlikely that Irma will treat Garth as anything more than a brief and forgotten peccadillo: Clemo's point is that grace runs counter to such probabilities. The difficulty is rather that the reader is shown little or no substantial reason for Garth's assumption that grace will actually operate in this specific manner. Garth reflects that his life has been wrecked, but because there is a God the experience must be meaningful and fruitful; therefore Irma will return, and he should wait for her. The question is how Garth can be so sure that Irma in particular is to be the source of renewal. Clemo speaks of a 'spiritual kinship that seemed arbitrary and

cruel'(1), but this would not appear to be enough for Garth to base his life upon, particularly as Irma does not seem to be a Christian at this juncture. Clemo's picture of her is not of someone especially impressive; he remarks in an aside to a description of the promiscuous Jean Blewett,

(1) Ibid, p.69.

> Of no marked intelligence, she was forced to live on her emotions and let them be prostituted by pagan standards because she had never heard of any others. She had much in common with Irma Stribley.(1)

That grace should snatch up such a person for redemption and transformation is entirely believable; but there is little in Clemo's portrayal to justify Garth's tenacious faith that this is occurring. That of course makes his faith seem all too much like an obsession. A dialogue between Garth and Edith raises this point clearly:

> Garth answered tremulously, while fumbling with the newspaper:
>
> 'I've seen in these towns what she'd be unless God stepped in.'
>
> 'Well, He didn't, that's all; there was other examples too close... You needn't blame God. He has nothing to do with it. It's just your own silliness. You must have been crazy ever to think of marrying her.'(2)

Obviously the possibility that Edith might be right throws doubt on Garth's entire gamble.

And the gamble has a second problem associated with it. Clemo has decided to present grace active in the area of human sexuality; but it is all too easy for God to appear as a means to an end, the end being marriage to Irma. The word for this, of course, is idolatry. It is a real danger; the experiences that set Garth's gamble of faith in motion are experiences of Irma, and we are given little or no hint of his Godward experience to keep the balance. A passage like

> ...the prophetic image of Irma which had shaped itself in his mind during that tremendous period when night after night he had knelt there upon the turf while the moonlight broke mutely upon the white crags(3)

sounds more like romantic infatuation than spiritual devotion. And this is worse:

(1) Ibid, pp.81-82. (2) Ibid, pp.183-184. (3) Ibid, p.64.

> It had long been his habit to take the Bible with him when he went out to spend an evening in the solitude of the heath. Sometimes, when there was a bright moon, he had stayed out till midnight,

> hunched as now upon some deserted dune or squatting on a ridge of the bare downs, drawing from this book the sustenance of his passion for Irma. He had not discarded it now; it still gave his mood, even his stupor, a language.(1)

This is part of a powerfully desolate section; but the priorities seem muddled, and it is strange that Clemo did not notice. Instead of bringing him closer to God. Garth's Bible reading is used first to sustain his passion and then to provide articulation for it.

It is worth noting that by the time Clemo wrote The Invading Gospel he was exploring this whole area in ways that could have avoided these problems. He came to see Christian sexuality as a crucial point at which the processes of nature are caught up into the sphere of grace, thereby becoming something entirely new while yet remaining themselves:

> Something quite extraordinary, something we can never fully understand in this world, happens to the sex-drive when the whole personality is yielded to the Holy Spirit... When C.T.Studd became engaged to Priscilla Stewart, he wrote to his mother concerning this fiery little missionary: 'I do not love her for her pretty face; I love her for her handsome actions towards the Lord Jesus Christ"... Love a girl physically because of her handsome actions to Christ? The logic of this is a secret of the Christ-centred life....
>
> No two persons can know Christ in exactly the same way, since no two persons have exactly the same temperament or spiritual capacity. The believer's apprehension of his Lord must therefore be completed from without, not from within, and while this need is met in general by the fellowship of the Church, the communion of saints, there are elective affinities within that communion. A Christian man meets a girl whose approach to Christ has some unique kinship with his own. Something distinct about her faith -the yearning on her face or the passion in her voice as she bears witness to it -arrests him and fills him with a great longing to fuse himself with the facet of Christ which she reflects. If the same girl were an atheist her face and voice would never show the spiritual intensity which fascinates him.... This is the sexuality of the New Creation, a direct product of discipleship. (2)

(1) Ibid, p.189. (2) TIG pp.76,77,78.

To a non-Christian reader this may seem bizarre, even preposterous, but

pause for reflection will make clear that it is a logical enough development of Christian doctrine; and many Christian couples would probably endorse Clemo's description of the complex motivations that united them. The ideas of these sections seem to offer the possibility of a genuine fusion of the erotic and spiritual. It is worth speculating how Clemo could have used such a fusion; by building into the passages describing the passion of Garth and Irma a greater element of a Godward consciousness (which would be perfectly realistic in the courtship of an individual like Garth Joslin), he could have made more credible Garth's subsequent conclusions about their spiritual dimension and the direction of his destiny, and created a more genuine union of Garth's spirituality and sexuality. But this is not really what we find.

(v) Catastrophe and Response

The origins of Garth's venture of faith, then, are problematic. Clemo's touch is somewhat surer in depicting how the pattern develops. He sets out to demonstrate -or build a model of -grace operative in and through and despite actual evil; and to depict a situation in which the eye of faith can -though with great difficulty -see the hand of providence, while the man who 'stands up to the Almighty' sees nothing but indeterminate brutality.

The 'everyday' nature of the book's evil has already been commented on. For example, when Garth's mother hears about his scandal:

> As they were going to bed she paused on the stairway, her figure gaunt, shrivelled behind the banisters, her peaked face looking queer, the eyes glaring in the light of the guttering candle she carried.
>
> 'Garth,' she said in a hoarse tone, 'do 'ee know what be the best way to git rids o' woonself? I be tempted sometimes.... There's that old rope we hanged our pig with last year, and barrels is full o' rain-water what a body could slip quiet in.'(l)

Such is the situation in which grace must be seen at work: and it is through two specific calamities that the action develops. What Clemo does is to create a context suggesting in advance, before the catastrophe, that events might 'fit', might have some sort of meaningfulness, and then to use that expectation to show just how deep is the darkness in which grace appears. One of Garth's workmates comments that the war's development could cause the claypit's closure, and adds, in Garth's presence,

> Garth have just told us he means to stay put and wait for this destiny he've spoke to us of so often. But that don't mean lying around dreaming all your life. It means that when the proper time have come you'm forced to act, even against your own will; and it look as if that time is pretty near for Garth now.(2)

Garth walks out, but similar thoughts recur. A few pages later we read that his mother's death had presented the matter 'afresh to his mind as a problem'; then come 'the later shock of Bella's news' that Irma's mother has remarried, so there would be no more news of Irma, and (in logical consequence) 'the sense that the time for action in relation to Irma might be now at hand' (since his mother's death and the possible claypit closure had removed the constraints upon him).(3) Something is moving here; but it is not clear what.

The clearest statement of this sense of direction comes when Shirley Lagor goes missing. Garth joins in the search, reflecting that

> the pounce of dramatic possibility had opened up a fresher phase in his thought of Irma. It seemed united with an outer mood of urgency: a large raindrop, cold and wind-driven, stung his ear as if bidding him listen, and as he raised his head the mournful call of a wood pigeon smote up the vale from the copse where he was now going to look for Shirley. Something prophetic in this sudden quest! Just as unexpectedly, ere long, he might pass from thought to action regarding

(1) WG, pp.98-99. (2) Ibid, p.80. (3) Ibid, p.98.

> Irma herself. In what way the challenge would come he could not guess - perhaps through some such chance bit of news as had now startled him, perhaps through a direct move of Irma's. (1)

We may feel that the 'pathetic fallacy' is rather too present here, and is obliterating Clemo's cherished distinction between the outworking of the processes of nature and the abrupt incursions of grace. Indeed it is; but not, perhaps, by accident. Garth is presented seeing things in terms of natural, harmonious development, and even the 'pounce of dramatic possibility' is tamed - it merely means that he is walking in the rain looking for Minnie's daughter. But that sense of harmony is illusory, and Clemo shatters it.

> When he had gone a few hundred yards Garth espied a faint branch path that led down to the coppice, skirting a water-wheel. He halted, gazing at the huge structure, nearly thirty feet high, turning in slow, jerky fashion while the milky liquid streamed and splashed from the trough over the top of it, mingling with the rain and streaking the dusk with flying white flakes as of spume. He became almost hypnotised by this mechanical motion set amid the lush and primitive natural growths....
>
> The scene had somehow the quality of a nightmare, a wild unreality. The wheel might have been Ixion's, the background Hades, for all the relevance they had to the workaday world. The clanking and grinding noises, the whirling spokes, the rush of water, the gliding motion of spiky rods and wooden beams against the trees, only half-visible in the gloom -these things jarred on the nerves while lulling the reasoning faculties into a trance-like stupor....
>
> The end of the horizontal beam supported a wooden box about five feet square, full of boulders. Its edge came within an inch or two of the ground when it lurched forward, rising six feet above the soil when the vertical beam was drawn back. Some overhanging hazel boughs were knocked senselessly about with each tilt and dip of the beams, sprinkling a shower of drops occasionally as they were freed from the entanglement. There was something inexorable, indescribably malignant in this ceaseless rise and fall of the inanimate.(2)

The sheer concreteness of Clemo's depiction, the fact that he knows exactly what he is describing, enable him to build an image of a spiritually alien world that is firmly rooted in reality. For this is, of course, a metaphor; the 'mechanical motion', the 'ceaseless rise and fall of the inanimate' as the water-wheel circles endlessly, contain a sense of 'inexorable' determinism -yet of a determinism that merely guarantees the shapeless, the purposeless, the

(1) Ibid, p.126. (2) Ibid, pp.130-131.

indeterminate. The 'slow. jerky' movements of 'half-visible' machinery 'clanking... grinding... whirling... gliding' and yet remaining utterly irrelevant to the 'workaday world' (that is, presumably, not having meaning or apparent purpose, knocking the boughs 'senselessly') present again those directionless motions that we noted in the opening descriptions of the book. These are the un-meaning, destructive motions of the world without grace (even the 'lush and primitive natural growths'); a world inherently and deterministically tragic. In a way that is harder to pinpoint, the 'milky liquid' and 'flying white flakes', combined with the 'spiky rods', convey a sense of malignance; perhaps because 'milk' should occur in a context of life, a world that is supportive rather than this hard, sharp setting? The machinery likewise seems divorced any purposeful context. These are things cut off, separated from their raison d'etre.

Garth steps forward and 'chanced upon the key of this oppressive mood':

> There on the muddy turf sprawled a blurred form, revealed fully to his view only for the few moments that the box was aloft; but before it descended he had glimpsed the red tint of clothing, the white blob of a face.
>
> In an instant he realised, and stood petrified.
>
> Shirley Lagor was lying there before him, and as the heavy box ground down upon her again he could h9ve no doubt that she was dead. Her figure did not move as the massive bulk crushed into its vitals.
>
> Minutes passed, and like a gigantic hammer the box rose and fell upon the prostrate body. In the copse an owl hooted, and then came the scream of a hawk pouncing upon some hapless little animal.(1)

It is horrible, and powerful. Shirley has been turned into a thing, a part of the mindlessly destructive/destroyed world of nature, 'blurred', 'sprawled', a 'blob'. The horrifying repetitiveness of the motion of the ballast-box under which she has fallen universalises the event, connects with the symbolic force, carried by the malignant motions of the water-wheel in the preceding pages. And the hawk 'pouncing' (the verb used at the opening of the chapter when Garth is wondering what the next development in his history will be) is an effective if slightly obvious supporting image: this is the world of nature, functioning

(1) Ibid, p.132.

in recurrent, pointless tragedy.

Clemo's very ability to make the scene come sickeningly alive -and the fact that his portrayal of Shirley in earlier chapters has made her attractively vivid -means that he has set himself the uttermost test. Here is the tragedy of nature; where is grace? Clemo's touch is not so sure in this aspect of his presentation. Garth drags Shirley's body free from further mauling; then comes this passage:

> Six years ago he had beheld the corpse of his father, wasted almost to a skeleton, hideous, repulsive. The spectacle before him now was so different as to confuse, even reverse his attitude to the mortal stroke. Here was still beauty, freshness. Apart from some blood congealed around the cut on her temple where she had been stunned as she fell. Shirley was unstained in her final sleep... only the staring eyes, the pallor, the rigidity, told of the irretrievable ravage within.(l)

It simply will not do; his 'attitude' is too easily reversed. The whole structure of the book could have been ruined here, in fact, were it not that Clemo's loathing of sentimentality helps him keep a grip on the reality of the situation:

> He couldn't bear to leave her here long, exposed, defenceless, with the rain soaking her body, toads and birds likely to find and defile her. (2)

But there is another weak passage at the close of the chapter. Garth summons help, but reaches the body first:

> It seemed no longer harsh, but mournful in its dignity and sublime in its triumph, eternally beyond the reach of harm.... It was the hideous potency of the ills she had escaped that now fleered in the soul of Garth and threw over him the pall of an abject melancholy. The terrible menace of the mood of nature, the loneliness, the inhuman gloom- all combined to enforce his surrender.
>
> He sank on his knees beside the dead girl. He looked at her with a sort of agony, hands clasped; and now the tears came, falling one by one upon the remote white face.
>
> Words came too, at last, relieving the awful strain.
>
> 'Blessed are the dead. Shirley,' he murmured in a choked tone. 'I wish to God that this was Irma and not you!'(3)

(1) Ibid, pp.133-34. (2) Ibid, p.134. Clemo also throws in the idea that, with his reputation as it is. Garth may be accused of murdering her. (3) Ibid, p.138.

'Abject melancholy' makes it plain that Clemo does not approve, and the 'surrender' -overt in the final sentence -is alien to his exuberant determination in The Invading Gospel to 'march on' through tragedy. But that is not what the reader notices. It is the falsely romantic 'mournful in its dignity', the 'agony, hands clasped', and the appalling sense of self-indulgence (especially in the closing words). Were it not for the harshness of so much else of the book, to which self-indulgence is alien, Garth as hero could hardly survive this fiasco.

This, then, is ineffective, compared to the starkness of Clemo's presentation of tragedy. But later Clemo begins to offer hints of the possible presence of grace in this event in a more acceptable way. There is a hint in an image he employs in the opening of the following chapter:

> Birds kept swooping through the sky that was pale blue with here and there small tufts of white cloud like wads of cotton-wool tossed from some heavenly surgery and floating down to the earth wounded by its long battle with winter.(1)

There is a tactfully-employed suggestion here that there are circumstances where the wound of the 'heavenly surgery' may still turn out -eventually -for good, in some respect. Next comes Garth's remark that 'There was some purpose behind' his being the person to find Shirley, although at that point it seems merely to be the further trial of his faith.(2) Minnie herself is capable of seeing that, if there is an afterlife, an early death may be preferable to long life (3); this is logical enough, and happens sufficiently late after the accident to be credible. Finally, Colly, in his mumbling way, speculates about the event occurring 'to open the way' for Minnie and Griffiths' relationship to develop (4) -which is harder to accept, unless one concedes the point about an early death not being necessarily evil. But it is tactful enough -four references scattered over a hundred pages suggest, not a preposterously complete 'answer', but hints and tokens that even in this darkness some purpose might still be going ahead.

(1) Ibid, p.139. (2) Ibid, p.157. (3) Ibid, p.182. (4) Ibid, p.254.

Something of this is embodied in a single striking image that Clemo inserts, without undue explicitness, when Sal Blewett visits Shirley's grave:

> All was in shadow over there, but a waft of sunlight wavered forlornly around the graveyard, slipping across it to stab the roof of the school just below. The church stood a hundred yards to the south. a dark square tower clean-cut among the scabrous frothy outline of trees. From the corner of the cemetery nearest it came the rhythmic thud of a pick, the grating of fallen earth: the sexton digging another grave, Bella supposed.(l)

There is no suggestion here of any 'parable': but this image is Clemo's world. 'All was in shadow' in this universe where nature is 'scabrous', 'frothy', marked by the 'rhythmic thud' of the gravedigger (those repetitive. non-creative motions that are so common in the book) and where all illumination can only 'waver forlornly'. In this universe the 'dark church' stands out as at least 'clean-cut among the scabrous frothy' landscape; a centre of unexplained certainty among the shapeless yet inevitable tragedies.

Here, then, is the first tragedy through which grace must be shown to operate. A second blow follows when Edith visits Garth and is driven by frustration to tell him that Irma has 'run wild' and is on probation; the pure 'Beatrician vision', the Irma of four years' dreams, is in reality being thoroughly promiscuous in London. Garth is broken:

> Garth lay back, flagging in exhaustion, stupor clouding his face again for a moment.
>
> 'Put on probation because... And I all the while believing... No, damn it. I won't believe it! If God's served me such a trick... '
>
> 'You needn't blame God. He has nothing to do with it. It's just your own silliness. '(2)

Here too the picture is clear enough. This world is not a 'quiet, soothing' place; it is a place of apparently broken dreams, of torment and disaster.

In the next three chapters, therefore, Clemo presents three responses to the apocalypse of evil and disillusionment; in the bereaved Minnie, the broken Garth, and Griffiths whose whole worldview of Hardyesque pessimism is a reaction to the tragedy in his own life. Minnie's response is in character:

(1) Ibid, p.167. (2) Ibid, pp.163-164.

> Minnie's black clothes of mourning shrouded a figure wrenched and warped, the vitality drained from it, though her eyes, scanning Griffiths' twitching face, were brave and trustful, the pale lips forcing a smile weary but with no more of bitterness than they had shown when she last parted from him. (1)

She has recovered from her bereavement sufficiently to sense a new freedom for whatever might come of her meetings with Griffiths.(2) In the context of the whole book it seems clear that the relationship is a possible means whereby the suffering they have both experienced will be transcended and turned into glory.

Here, however, the very different nature of Griffiths' worldview reveals itself as an obstacle. 'Both of us', he tells Minnie, 'seem singled out for the spite of whatever Power presides over human destinies'(3), and the same pessimism marks his expectation that Garth will have given in to Edith's desperate attempt at seduction. Minnie cannot believe this(4), and proceeds to raise a deeper issue:

> 'That's the main trouble between us, Mr.Griffiths... I don't think I could be happy with a man who would keep on believing that everything's meaningless. 'Twould take all the heart out o' me. What's the good of anything I might do, any sacrifice I'd make, if you'd treat it as a accident or fluke, as you just said?'
>
> She paused, shot him a stealthy glance and felt a twinge of pity for him: he looked haggard, tense, staring at some white butterflies that fluttered about the shrubbery.
>
> 'And if,' she went on, resolved now to speak her mind fully on this point- 'if some woman came into your life so that looking back you'd see that all the misery was only preparing you for the happiness at last, then if you still say it's without any purpose the experience would die out again. It couldn't live if you wouldn't give it air, and a sensible woman wouldn't try it if you was determined to stifle it like that.
>
> He lifted his face, twitching -a gleam of torture in the deep baffled eyes.
>
> 'Honesty can be a bitter thing, Miss Lagor. '(5)

(1) Ibid, p.175. (2) Ibid, p.176. (3) Ibid, p.182. (4) Ibid, p.184. (5) Ibid, p.185.

Atheism, Sartre said, is a cruel, long-term business; and this is what Clemo is portraying here. Griffiths is consistent, to the point of seeming (like Garth) an extremist; and as a result he is losing his girl. (This is the last conversation between them that the book records.(l)) That is not simply an easy way in which Clemo can score off the representative of atheism: he is not suggesting that atheists are bound to have unsuccessful marriages. What he is doing is thematically sound: if a relationship between Minnie and Griffiths is to be the eucatastrophe of desire fulfilled after years of suffering for both of them, it is essential that they both see it that way. It is hard for a woman to accept a view of her advent in the terms of Griffiths' attitude that 'life is... kind only by accident or by some unlikely and very short-lived fluke in the timing of events'.(2) At the level of verisimilitude we might question whether someone in Griffiths' circumstances would come up with such an attitude. But Clemo is presenting Griffiths as determinedly shunning illusion and evasion, an unusually consistent representative of his creed. Minnie's faith enables her to go on with life expecting the 'joyous turn'; Griffiths' refusal of hope blights the possibility when it is offered.

At that level, the debate might merely seem a matter of which belief is most conducive to a happy existence. Garth's role destroys that, in part because his renunciation of action, his uncompromising determination to wait for deliverance by grace alone, removes any possibility that his faith is merely something that assists human action: and in part because of the painful, indeed destructive, nature of the waiting. Clemo's approach here is more that of the romantic novelist than the strict realist -he is following in the footsteps of Dostoevsky or Emily Bronte, let us say, rather than George Eliot - and the presentation of Garth at the opening of the next chapter is reaching towards the archetypical:

(1) Yet even in the breakup grace is at work: it is because Minnie is in Truro with Griffiths that she sees the returned Irma. As she tells Garth: 'if 'twasn't for him I shouldn't ha' been there and p'raps you'd never have heard in time; so things still fit, you see' (ibid, p.210). In the act of rejecting the plan Griffiths has shut only himself out of it. (2) Ibid, p.184.

> Garth laid down the book on the wooden platforn upon which he was sitting, part of the tip framework at the top of a clay-dump behind Meledor. He dropped his head, slumped forward with elbows on his knees, and remained motionless, supported by the rail that guarded the edge of the platform -a grey huddled shape, the only figure visible in the wide waste of the plateau, and a fit match for its desolation.(l)

One is reminded of the huge, devastated figures –Michael, the Leech Gatherer - that appear in equally barren landscapes in Wordsworth's poetry.

> His actions were mechanical, slovenly; he ate little and kept no regular meal-times. Even now, though it was Sunday, he had not thought of putting on his best clothes, but wore his ordinary clayey corduroy trousers and ragged black coat, without a collar or tie. (2)

As in the preceding scene with Minnie and Griffiths, Clemo does not articulate what is happening in precise theological terms at this point, but the shape is clear. Edith's news has crippled Garth's faith in the working of grace; he is now living out the slow, disintegrative ('mechanical, slovenly') process of unredeemed nature. He wonders, for example, if Edith's report of Irma may be false, but

> the effort to persuade himself of this soon collapsed now that he had no faith to support him against conclusions which he had always known to be natural. (3)

'Natural', of course, is the key word, although Clemo does not emphasise it; the question is whether there is hope outside the natural. Clemo presents one token only that in these circumstances grace may still be at work in Garth's circumstances:

> Yet there was still a nerve in Garth that resisted the final paralysis, one fact in which he found encouragement. Sal Blewett! Why had she come at that crucial hour, when Edith, having weakened him by her news, was bent on conquest? She had leaned over the bed to kiss him just as Sal's knock sounded. Had there been no interruption -who knew what he might now have had on his conscience? He'd certainly felt very queer and unbalanced -might have strangled her, or even, if the touch of her lips whetted his starved senses -! And instead- that abrupt turn, breaking the temptation.... Sal's coming had saved him from taking some irrevocable step into the dark. But why, if Irma was not to be his? (4)

Here again the suggestion is of grace obscurely active through evil: Sal

(1) Ibid, p.187. (2) Ibid, (3) Ibid, p.188. (4) Ibid.

is a disreputable character, and her interruption of Edith's assault involves her only good deed in the book. Still, Garth himself is being presented in a state of defeat, and 'change... exhaustion, decay.... Flamboyant hope passing to purple shame and grey misery'(1) is all he can see at this point. When Edith's husband appears, Garth's mood is truculent, even vicious:

> Seth shrugged.
> 'I don't want to fight', he mumbled. 'Nothing between us that need be settled in that way.'
>
> 'Oh! I thought there was.' Garth's voice taunted now openly, his face was dark, with ugly lines playing about it, breaking up the dazed surface. 'Men usually get a bit wild when their wives start kicking loose after other fellows. '(2)

It is effective that it should be so: Garth is thereby made a far more plausible hero than if he were an unmitigated saint. At the same time, the book hints in subtle ways that the drama is still in progress. For an appropriate metaphor, Clemo resorts again to the claypit machinery among which Garth speaks with Seth:

> The two men faced each other, dwarfed by the beams of the tip, rising twenty feet on either side of the waggon-track, a cross-bar at the summit completing the gallows-like structure. Viewed from below, there was something fantastic in the sight of that pair, tiny and trivial figures, subtly antagonistic, framed up there on the pyramid's point against the sunset sky.(3)

'Trivial figures', 'dwarfed' in some huge but hidden ('subtly antagonistic') pattern: it is a picture redolent of death, with its 'gallows-like structure' completed by a 'cross-bar'. Yet a 'gallows-like structure' is still a structure, something very different from indeterminate disintegration; the note of repetitive meaninglessness is absent, and where there is a structure there may well be some sort of plan. Perhaps too it is possible to see in the 'cross-bar' that is 'completing the... structure' a hint that the pattern may be redemptive, without involving Clemo in a charge of heavy-handed portentousness: it is not highlighted as a major interpretative image, yet in the tableau-like context of a picture 'framed up there' it has its own implications.

(1) Ibid, pp.189-190. (2) Ibid, pp.193. (3) Ibid, p.191.

The chapter closes similarly. There is a moment of sheer despair:

> Leaning against the window-frame he let the waves of despair sway in, one with the darkening tide of twilight that had washed all colour from the clouds and fronted him, even in the west, with sullen grey. Minutes passed, while from the surrounding trees and the heath beyond birds flung into song the ache of the spring night, soft for them with mating bliss.(l)

The disjunction is sharply effective: the birdsong offers no comfort, is become meaningless, contingent, in a world where sudden events have like the twilight 'washed all colour' away (the choice of verb is excellent). Garth articulates his feelings through the language of the book of Job:

> He breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: He shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening.... Where is now my hope? As for my hope, who shall see it?(2)

But here is the potency of the novel form: for the very use of quotations from Job to verbalise Garth's overwhelming despair is, in the novel as a whole, a pointer of hope. Job's faith in God's justice, his yearning for answers to his questions, was rewarded: the terms in which the questions are phrased assume a God. If 'He breaketh down, and it cannot be built again', still God is at work: and that -as with the 'gallows-like structure' seven pages earlier -is different from a universe where there is no significance or meaning at all. Clemo's presentation of the twofold tragedy and of Garth's despair is effective; and he also succeeds in hinting that a supernaturalistic pattern is still at work on its inconceivable purposes.

(vi) Eucatastrophe

It is in keeping with the whole purpose of the novel, presenting grace at work in the everyday, that it should be the mundane Minnie who sets in motion the events of the eucatastrophe. She sees the apparently reformed Irma in Truro and goes to the trouble of bringing the news to Garth, at the same time providing an interpretation for what has happened to them both:

(1) Ibid, p.198. (2) Ibid.

> 'I really believe you're going to marry Irma. I've felt so very strong since Shirley died. I felt you've paid too big a price to miss your reward.'
>
> Garth's hand dropped to the Bible in his pocket; his face had lit up, become beautiful.
>
> 'Can it be that this - Edith's stab -was just the final test? If it is... My God! I can hardly believe... I can only wish you an equal deliverance, Minnie.
>
> ...'I think mine'll come,' she said. 'But I'm getting less and less sure that it'll be through Griffiths.'(l)

Something is out of control in 'His face had lit up, become beautiful'; and indeed there is an over-intensity in the presentation of Garth throughout this chapter and the next:

> His head jerked round, his arms dropped limply; she saw him sway and then stand glaring at her in a blank stupor for a full minute. At last he found his voice - dull, unnatural.(2)
>
> As Colly watched the young man half turned, wafting kisses out along the sky, then remained with both arms stretched in vehement yearning towards Truro.(3)

'Gone too far at last, my sonny... There's the makings of Bodmin' (the lunatic asylum) 'in that spectacle', Colly comments later(4), and well he might. It is plain that Clemo intends Garth to seem thoroughly overwrought: later he describes himself to Irma as 'feeling pretty rattled, and just walked up and down... trying to get a grip on myself'.(5) That self-awareness (and the guarantee of the author's detachment from his character that it represents) puts into safer perspective a potentially damaging uncertainty: for while we are unsure whether Garth might not be crazy indeed -or, even worse, whether Clemo might not be presenting insanity without recognising it -then Garth's venture of faith (or Clemo's belief in it) can begin to appear a piece of subjective crankiness. It is therefore important that Garth's deliverance is brought about by the stolid, down-to-earth Minnie, and that it is she, rather than Garth, who makes the major statements of faith in the outworking of the pattern in that chapter. Certainly Clemo is writing in a thoroughly respectable tradition when

(1) Ibid, pp.210-211. (2) Ibid, p.2O5. (3) Ibid, p.212. (4) Ibid, p.2S4.
(5) Ibid, p.236.

he presents his hero almost breaking up mentally under the strain of the lonely venture. But when it comes to Garth blowing kisses along the skyline, Clemo has overdone it -for this reader, at any rate.

But there is a worse error here. Minnie arrives at Garth's workshop, and sees

> the blurred figure slumped by the window-frame. His face was hidden in his coat sleeve as he supported himself with an arm against the wall. He did not hear her approach, and she stopped, hesitant, feeling something of awe at that revelation of tragic depth. Such mute despair she had never before witnessed, though she had felt something of it when the news of Shirley's death was brought to her. Garth remained quite motionless.(1)

This is overwritten, and very hard to accept. Minnie has lost a daughter; Garth has only lost a dream of a potential wife. One could say, perhaps, that Garth's reason for living has been taken away, along with his faith in God; but even so, the comparison with Minnie's bereavement is unacceptable. There is too much indulgence in the presentation of Garth: Shirley's death cannot be brushed aside in this way. So to assert the overwhelming importance of a novel's central character is to assert the unimportance of the supposed feelings and sufferings of the other characters, and therefore the unreality of the fictional world they live in.

Still, the fruition is now underway, and the writing is better when Clemo narrates Griffiths' discovery that this is the case:

> It was as if he felt the approach of an unveiling, a touch of irony that would reveal him and Garth, not as mere champions of opposing creeds, but as figures placed in deadly juxtaposition in the same act of destiny.
>
> The first practical hint of that ambush came sooner than he could have expected, and from an unlooked-for quarter.
>
> The stillness overhead was snapped suddenly by an uncertain, almost stealthy footstep that echoed on the stone floor.(2)

The breaking of the (as it were) theological stillness simultaneously with the very literal 'stillness overhead' is effective.

(1) Ibid, p.205. (2) Ibid,p.219.

> Griffiths' stunned look had given place to that of a creature at bay, defenceless, uncertain of the concealed forces threatening him. His face was dark with somcthing more desperate than anger.(l)

In 'ambush', 'at bay', 'concealed forces threatening', there is again the sense of the violence, the alien otherness, of the presence of grace. Even Irma experiences this when she hears Garth's name mentioned:

> Griffiths noted the rigidity of her pose, an intent watchfulness as of one startled, holding shut with all her strength some spiritual door from which the main bolt had slipped. (2)

Again, the sense is of grace as a powerful physical force, something threatening to burst a door open; by no means a cloudy abstraction, and very far from 'gentle, meek and mild'.

At this point Clemo faces the task of presenting the experience of eucatastrophe, making his reader experience just what it is to see the revelation of desire fulfilled, the final coming of what was longed for after the long agony of delay. For if Irma is the embodiment, to Garth, of desire fulfilled, she must seem so to the reader as well. But she is not one of the the book's best characterisations.

> '... The very same face, only a lot older and thinner, as if she'd suffered -just as you have, Garth -suffered and been hunted and misunderstood everywhere -all alone in the world.'(3)

> This background of radiance gave a strange vividness to her slim tall figure; it surrounded her like a halo, almost etherealized the lonely mould of youth, mystery and passion that were combined in her.(4)

Yuk; Irma cannot be canonised in this way. It is only tolerable because it comes directly after the paragraph just quoted on the 'stealthy footstep': Irma is the localised sign of the presence of grace that has been so effectively presented in its 'stealth', and because of that she can safely shrink into a symbol for a paragraph or so.

(1) Ibid,p.222. (2) Ibid,p.219. (3) Ibid,p.209. (4) Ibid,p.219.

The final reunion between Garth and Irma is better managed, however. It gets off to an inauspicious beginning when Irma catches sight of Garth and follows him ('This was no "date" with a boy friend! Destiny!'(1)). But Clemo's sense of physical presence salvages the situation when they enter the cathedral:

> A hazy gloom brooded over the great nave, a few shafts of sunlight wavering up among the white arches. The stained glass windows broke up the spilth of beams, toned them to unearthly hues, remote, gentle, floating out like aureoles over the carved symbols of worship. No one visible up towards the north transept. That part of the building was still unknown to her: the place had seemed so big that she hadn't ventured far beyond the west entrance for fear of getting lost.
>
> She moved noiselessly out across the nave, holding her breath, treading stealthily as though she had come on some sacrilegious mission. Her eyes glided about, darting into every niche and among the rows of chairs and the pillars, where a blacker bulk might break the smooth flow of twilight.(2)

The sense of size and of silence -and yet of gentleness -provide, suddenly, a context: at the same time 'a blacker bulk' is in tune with the earlier presentation of the darkness of grace that alone can bring this fulfilment of desire. There is an interplay between 'sacrilegious' and the sentence that closes the paragraph:

> Passing free of a pillar that had obscured a full view of the chancel she saw it as the place where the great moment of recognition was fated to strike -fitly, since the life they sought to consummate had been nourished by the truths acknowledged there.
>
> Garth was standing within a few yards of the altar, near the row of chairs... (3)

This is spelled out rather too clearly, but the paradox is effective. This is eucatastrophe, 'all is well' now; and yet grace is something with which human beings should never feel merely -complacently -'comfortable', and the earlier 'sacrilegious' preserves an essential element of audacity, of awe, even of fear. At any rate, the encounter is not merely contingent; it is set within a pattern, a meaningful drama taking place on a stage (like Garth and Seth at the time of Garth's despair, 'framed up there on the pyramid's point' (4)):

> She still kept a sharp look-out for intruders. All remained calm, like a stage purposely set for her and Garth...

(1) Ibid, p.231. (2) Ibid, p.233. (3) Ibid, (4) Ibid, p.191.

> ...Her instinct was driven into passionate certainty of what was meant by that figure so absorbed, broken and careless who should see his last agonised appeal for guidance and succour... This feeling burnt from her every trace of reserve, misgiving , apprehension; it gave her strength, the knowledge of her power over him and of a higher Power claiming them both. She ascended the side steps of the chancel, with her gaze lifted to the figure of Christ carved in the centre of the reredos, gleaming gold. His hands outstretched behind the altar - grafting hands....
>
> Tip-toeing in on to the paved floor she touched Garth's arm and said in a gulpy tone, very different from her gay challenge of that earlier day:
>
> 'Garth! I've come! '(1)

Much depends here on paradox, a paradox that is within Irma herself (thereby making her, at last, come alive). On the one hand she is conscious of her unchallengeable power over Garth, expressed in her situation as the observer watching him passionately at prayer. On the other, she is conscious of the watching 'higher Power claiming them both', the violent focus of grace that has been 'grafting' and has 'burnt' throughout the novel: something emphatically solid, a figure 'carved... gleaming gold'. Likewise there is the fundamental, paradox of grace itself: overwhelming power, 'gleaming gold', yet functioning in people who must go 'tip-toeing in' and speaking 'in a gulpy tone', or who are - notwithstanding Garth's fortitude -'absorbed, broken and careless'. Both Irma's character and the presence of grace attain verisimilitude through complexity; the fusion is successful and grace is palpably present at the moment of human eucatastrophe.

The fusion is hard to hold: before Garth's 'gaze swept back to her, burning, avid to feast on every feature', he 'looked up at the reredos -a beautiful look, groping towards adoration'(2) -and well he might, but 'a beautiful look' is not a very meaningful phrase. Clemo is wise to get off this plane as soon as possible and set his characters conversing on ordinary topics -such as Griffiths, who, Garth confesses, 'unsettled me a bit' (3) -and to fill out Irma's character a little further by including a marked element of flirtatiousness.(4) Precisely this is easy to follow with Garth's summary of the

(1) Ibid, pp.233-234. (2) Ibid, p.234. (3) Ibid, p.235. (4) Ibid, p. 237.

providential aspect:

> 'God knows what I've been through since we met last. It's like a dream - so much off the common lines. This last month or so I knew I was in sight o' the end -some sort o' end. The enemy came in like a flood and it seemed the foundations must give way. But God stood by me, gave me the hint in time... I've been here three times this week, and felt last night that I must find you today or else....' He shrugged, staring at the red altar frontal, the flowers above it.(1)

Garth's overwroughtness is still present; but precisely because of this, the firmness of his statement (eg the biblical 'the enemy came in like a flood') is credible. But Irma is present too- present to the reader as well, this time -to emphasise that what he is talking about is reality. He is nearly broken, but he is correct in what he is saying; the overwroughtness is the mark of a real conflict, not a sign of the onset of insanity. This is the shape of eucatastrophe.

(vii) After Eucatastrophe

A further challenge faces Clemo immediately: now he must show how life goes on after the apocalypse of grace. This is a challenge that the Christian fantasists -Tolkien in The Lord of The Rings, Lewis in Till We Have Faces or That Hideous Strength -are not perhaps under so great pressure to handle: after the apocalypse Frodo dwindles away, Orual dies, Ransom the Pendragon returns to Perelandra. But in real life the hero and heroine do not simply ride off into the sunset; and a biblical realism such as Clemo has sought to build upon must reckon with that.

This is why it is important that Garth's overwrought state does not vanish overnight(2), and that there should still be questions such as where they are to live:

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid, p.264.

> 'I might be sent to Devonport or Bristol instead -if I'm lucky enough to escape active service; and you'd want to come with me, in digs up there.'
>
> Irma rose, frowning moodily back at the stairway.
>
> 'It's real enough, Garth -this miracle of ours: there's still so many things we could worry about. '(1)

Faith has to be shown to have some relevance in these 'things' now that the main 'gamble' is over. Irma's description of how she is virtually assaulted by Griffiths contains a phrase that tactfully suggests an entire attitude at work:

> I was just strolling up and down there, thinking of our meeting and wondering how things would open for us to get married.(2)

'How things would open': here is embodied a whole outlook of faith in an ongoing plan, and in a power that in its own good time can bring the plan into reality.

An equally important element at this stage is the quality of eroticism in Clemo's descriptions of Garth and Irma together, which provides an essential realism to the fruition of Garth's covenant with grace (a realism lacking in the passages concerned with Irma alone), and also asserts that grace is still present (rather than disappearing after the climax in the cathedral). Some of these passages have a sense of earthiness reminiscent of Lawrence:

> He was in his workaday, clay-smeared trousers, stripped to his shirt above the waist, and had obviously been shaving when she knocked: half his face was white with lather and he still held a safety razor in his hand... 'You've caught me this time -and you'll have to wait till I finish my shave before you get what you've come for!'(3)

But this does not stop Clemo setting a spiritual context for their passion:

> Garth hastily completed his shave, wiping his face with a towel hung behind the door. Then he drew her back in front of the dresser, and for several minutes they stood there embraced, very still, her lips drawing at his mouth as if it were the one duct of nourishment God had opened to her soul just then. (4)

(1) Ibid,p.277. (2) Ibid,p.263. (3) Ibid,pp.261-262. (4) Ibid,pp.262-263.

Through an unobtrusive simile Clemo introduces the idea of God the Creator, naturally interwoven with, and a natural context for, what is taking place between Garth and Irma. And there are other ways too of establishing grace as the context of their sexuality:

> She was ready. Their kiss was swift, lips locked to lips for only a few seconds, but it brought them fully through to realisation, the perfectly natural sense of mateship begun so long ago, maturing in darkness and silence, budding out now with delicious, frank audacity. (1)

In the 'sense of mateship' there is presented a pattern to which their love belongs; although the word 'natural' must evidently now be understood as meaning 'fitting', rather than 'pertaining to the sphere of nature rather than grace', as earlier in the book. The image of darkness reappears, and even the note of violence is present in 'budding out now with delicious, frank audacity', but transformed by the adjective 'delicious' and by the connotations of fertility. Or again:

> She glanced at the drawn curtain barring out the dying daylight from the room, making a shadowy world all round.
>
> 'Yes. Good night, Garth - till then!'
>
> He knew what she meant, and as soon as he was alone he knelt beside the camp bed for a long while, his head bowed, praying earnestly.(2)

The erotic and the spiritual are brought naturally together as part of the same created world, freely compatible concerns of the same minds: there is not the sense of something furtive and guilt-ridden that one when feels when sexuality and spirituality meet in some of Greene's writing, for example. It is precisely the fusion that was missing earlier in the book, when it was needed to justify the specific direction of Garth's venture of faith: it presents Garth as 'priest and lover'.

(1) Ibid,pp. 244-245. (2) Ibid,p. 278.

But a third point is worth making about Clemo's treatment of the post-apocalypse phase. The sense that grace operates through the very midst of evil does not disappear now that the fruition has come: the evil is not simply brushed away. In fact Clemo chooses the moment of the reunion to emphasise it, as Irma tells Garth how her father died:

> 'He... he got struck on a woman, early last year -went to live with her. They took lodgings in Dulwich. I didn't see dad for two months or more. And then -one day they... they was found gassed in their bedroom.'
>
> 'Gassed?'
>
> 'Yes. A suicide pact. They'd burnt themselves out, I s'pose, and couldn't face it.'(l)

Garth reacts with horror, 'No wonder God plagued me with prayer for you' -not the usual way of speaking about prayer, but in keeping with what Irma has just said. And realistic too (any Christian knows the experience of finding a real labour in prayer feeling like a real burden); yet it contains the basic paradox of the book's theology of the alienness of grace: prayer can seem a 'plague'. The fruition of Garth's dream has not altered the facts of existence.

(viii) The Rejection of Grace

The woman in the suicide pact is in fact Griffiths' wife. This seems something of an unnecessary coincidence. But the point Clemo is trying to make is clear: the evil is there anyway, and the issue is how we handle it. For Irma, the suicide is 'what pulled me up'.(2) For Griffiths, in contrast, the experience had precisely the opposite effect, as Garth tells Irma:

> 'Minnie blabbed a bit about me, as neighbours will, and he called to try and make me "expect only the worst and accept it in silence," as his experience -that tragedy about his wife -had convinced him there wasn't any God.'
>
> A look of wonder held Irma's eyes very wide and steady.

(1) Ibid,p.243. (2) Ibid.

> 'And that same experience -how strange! It was that very thing that led me to find my feet and....and reward your faith.'(1)

These remarks are a summary of the book's action. And in the midst of Irma's eucatastrophe they raise the issue of how Clemo would have us regard those who -for whatever reason -do not end up participating in grace.

He deals with this issue in the closing chapters, the last of which is perhaps the best in the whole novel. The starting-point is the discussion of the Dulwich suicide, and the differing effects it has had on Irma and Griffiths. Garth makes a comment which at first sight seems deliberately offensive: 'Yes; God seems to have been thinking of us rather than him.' But Clemo does not leave it there. Garth continues:

> I can't explain - it's too vast, too deep, the puzzle of things. But there are facts enough to show that the way of faith is the right way, and doubt and cynicism and bitterness warn God off a man's life so that it crumbles to disaster.(2)

There is a comparable passage in The Invading Gospel that could have stood as an epigraph to Wilding Graft:

> The essence of the Christian Gospel lies in its proclamation to the individual: 'Your fate is unspeakably tragic, but you need not fulfil it. Surrender the self that would fulfil that fate and the fate itself collapses. You become a new creature with a new destiny. '(3)

Griffiths is a fictional model of the rejection of this proclamation. Both he and Garth show every sign of being trapped in the deterministic processes of natural tragedy, and both are offered escape through grace. But where Garth chooses the 'way of faith' and so escapes his destiny, Griffiths' refusal to 'surrender the self that would fulfil' his fate forces him to attitudes which, as Garth says, 'warn God off a man's life so that it crumbles to disaster'. His position -outside God's redemptive covenant purposes, left to the outworking of natural tragedy -is the result of a deliberately-adopted stance.

(1) Ibid,p.247. (2) Ibid,p.248. (3) TIG, p.l16.

Griffiths' reaction to the discovery of Irma's return is the overwrought eccentricity to which Clemo's characters seem prone.(l) But when the final chapter opens, he has recovered self-awareness and realises that he will be psychologically incapable of enduring Cornwall under the circumstances. But before leaving Cornwall, he seeks to get some perspective on his position, and in the attempt at reflection emerges clearly as a Clemo-surrogate, like Garth himself:

> He shrank instinctively from the lush natural landscape lying towards Falmouth: now in the full riot of May its soft beauties would be maddeningly incongruous. His mood was one for the desert, a stripped barren expanse suggesting the ultimate conflicts. And he realised through an imaginative, poetic nerve still keen at times amid the general cloudy flux, the fitness of the clay area as a setting for his desperate spiritual battle.(2)

Of course this means that Griffiths stands, not as a representative of all agnostics, but rather of all passionate, poetically-minded agnostics capable of conceiving 'desperate spiritual battles': the clash between Garth and Griffiths is here not quite a clash of worldviews, but rather a clash between the kind of Christian faith Clemo himself holds and the kind of atheism he might be attracted by. But once again, the concreteness of the landscape prevents the drift into a mere drama of internal, mental phenomena:

> He descended a step-ladder from the embankment and moved past the workshops to the pit-edge, where the path broke away into a flight of rough steps leading down into the "bottoms" which he would have to cross to reach the sand-dune... The steps were cut in the gravel soil of the cliff, but the shape of each was preserved by a board set vertically in front of it, secured by iron spikes... Several times he halted and leaned over the bar, peering gloomily down the cliff-side that was matted with coarse knots of fern, hazel and broom bushes.(3)

As at the book's opening, it is because the landscape is so well known to and/or well-imagined by Clemo, and so clearly presented to the reader along with its

(1) WG, p.263. (2) Ibid,p.285. (3) Ibid,pp.288-289.

inherent barrenness and hostility to life, that it can serve as a metaphor for spiritual conditions and yet remain more than a metaphor.

> He could stroll out along that flat broad pile, which in itself seemed to be stiffened in defiance to the dunes of Meledor across the valley, and there decide upon his active defiance, some retaliation.(l)

The landscape is being used to enforce the dominant image of the book, of a violent conflict involving colossal spiritual forces -forces perhaps whose shape is not clear -in which Griffiths is by now a battered combatant:

> It seemed to Griffiths that his moves in Cornwall had brought him into an ambush of fate, the denouement of apparently random friendships baring maliciously, and ripping open afresh, the old wounds he had hidden... He felt that his whole life was drained out by it, the long attrition complete.(2)

And here Clemo's vision comes into its own; the reality of the conflict has been plain throughout the book, with the whole weight of its violent imagery and action behind it. And where there is a combat, there must be more than one combatant. The existence of a real, invasive force against which Griffiths has been struggling thus becomes finally credible, as does his cool, unemotional acknowledgement of the fact:

> His personal animosity towards Garth had ebbed and flowed with his moods; but it was diminishing. As he surveyed Garth's home now from the bridge his hatred of the man seemed trivial, misplaced. He saw that it was useless blaming Garth; the fellow had done him no conscious wrong. After all, Garth himself had chosen Edith and expected to settle down to a quiet domestic life that interfered with nobody. It was not Garth who had chosen that the girl who pressed her virginity to him in Meledor workshop should be Irma Stribley; nor had he willed the death of Shirley Lagor. Behind these decisive events there was a Mood -the Mood of which Garth had spoken during their talk in his cottage last Easter. To Griffiths it was still impersonal; he would not admit that it was a God in the Christian sense. But he was compelled to acknowledge that there was a mysterious force in the universe with which human faith could be allied. It was

(1) Ibid,p.288. (2) Ibid,p.287.

> what he had always been up against. And he was oppressed by a feeling that this last wreckage it had brought upon him was too complete to be repaired. It was not a new, separate blasting from which he could recover to grapple with the next elsewhere. (1)

In one sense this passage is the climax of the book's pattern: the whole force of what Clemo has sought to do leads to this moment at which Griffiths quietly surveys his life and concludes that there is a 'force' at work. And the ubiquitous violent images are still there; grace acts through 'wreckage', through 'blasting', through a girl who 'pressed her virginity to' a man expecting a 'quiet domestic life that interfered with nobody', but whose choice has been drastically cancelled. Clemo is not writing a systematic theology, and the doctrinal particulars belong elsewhere: it is this moment of recognition or concession of vast powers pounding their way into the events of everyday life that he has been working to produce.

But by his refusal of God, Griffiths has closed himself off from any mode of relationship to these titanic forces except confrontation. At the same time, Clemo is using Griffiths to demonstrate that the acknowledgement of the reality of a God -or something similar -does not compel submission. Nor is Griffiths simply being held up as an exemplum, a horrid example of impenitence: there is something close to genuine tragedy here, a real strength in Griffiths and a real sorrow in the writing. The 'point of view' contributes a little; the reader has been made to see through Griffiths' eyes, and indeed when Garth appears he is seen from the outside, 'much agitated... his hair clotted with sweat and falling untidily over his narrowed, feverish eyes'.(2) The reader watches from Griffiths' position and hence experiences, 'sees', just what it is to know of the powers of the heavens to be at work, and yet, consciously and deliberately, to refuse, to reject. It is the utter reality of that choice that Clemo wishes to convey.

But the conflict is not merely something of the past, to be contemplated from a safe intellectual distance. Griffiths has heart trouble and collapses in the

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid,p.290.

claypit; it is the National Day of Prayer and so the unchurched Garth is one of the only possible rescuers. Clemo thus arranges his final confrontation with far less of a forced coincidence than earlier in the book:

> Griffiths stood up, his hand clawing at the iron body of the waggon. He was still weak and a further shadow of pain clouded his face for a moment, leaving an ugly mark of cynicism in the twist of the lips.
>
> 'Our creeds have worked themselves out now with a vengeance, haven't they, Joslin?' he taunted. 'Just like my fate that -so near the end -I should see what faith can do -in the family that confirmed my scepticism -Stribley's daughter. And that your part of it should turn Miss Lagor...'
>
> 'I didn't mean to turn her against you,' muttered Garth.
>
> 'I admit it... But when her child died she turned to the faith in you, and that worked again to thwart me And now -this farewell glimpse -as I meant it to be -of this cursed landscape -and you're brought before me again. '(1)

It is an effective, unforced exposition (if one allows that Griffiths – like Clemo's other characters -is inclined to give audible vent to his feelings). Indeed, Clemo could have dispensed with one or two similar passages of clarification earlier on, since this was still to come. The book's events are no longer opaque: Griffiths' exposition is entirely compatible with Irma's in its awareness of their significance. Yet there remains a distinction: the irony of Irma Stribley and Minnie Lagor both finding faith in a situation of evil is to Irma the divine irony of grace, but to Griffiths the twists of a Hardyesque fate. The point Clemo is making is that both Griffiths and Irma correctly recognise a pattern, but where Irma has submitted to and seen the glory of the action of grace, Griffiths has rejected it and so is left only with a 'cursed landscape' -a deft use of an everyday phrase, for in Clemo's theology the landscape is indeed 'cursed' as a result of the Fall, in the outworkings of which Griffiths remains trapped.

Yet even here the suggestion is that Griffiths' fate is not sealed. There is an ambiguous possibility of significance in this final encounter with Garth; perhaps it is 'just like my fate' that that last humiliation should occur –or

(1) Ibid, p.293.

again, a last encounter forcing Griffiths to this degree of self-awareness could equally well be 'just like' grace. But Griffiths' rejection has the upper hand: that he should see 'what faith can do' is not a motivation to repentance, but rather is 'just like my fate'. The pattern is complete; tragically.

The last glimpse we have of Garth is not exactly as hero. Griffiths declares 'doggedly' that he is leaving Cornwall (the adverb saves his speech from self-indulgent heroics):

> 'My heart wouldn't stand an air-raid, so perhaps it may as well be London.'
>
> Garth shrugged.
>
> 'It's your own life,' he commented. 'No business o' mine, however much you may try to drag me into it. '(1)

This is the unloving side of Garth's nature.(2) But it is a fine choice for his last speech in the book. That Garth's own moral development should still have so far to go prevents the development of a simple antithesis of saint and sinner. Secondly, the speech emphasises -without overt preaching -Griffiths' freedom of choice, even in a universe where omnipotent grace is at work.

> 'I'm not blaming you -I've outgrown that. It's what you stand for.' Griffiths braced himself and stepped forward, his eyes brooding out over the countryside drowsed in its Sunday calm: no sound or activity on the clayworks but those of the birds and the running water in the conduits.... He turned back to Garth with sober, hostile deliberation.
>
> 'The churches are full this morning, Joslin - superstitious crowds pretending to faith. But you - you've got some damned secret they'll never touch - you and your God. And it's broken me. Perhaps before many months it'll have finished off the jest and left me -as my wife is, or Shirley Lagor...
>
> `...So be it. We've both paid the price... and you've won, Joslin.'
>
> He threw a last defiant glance across the dale at the ridged skyline of Meledor, then, waving Garth and Chirgwin aside, he moved slowly towards the embankment, a hand pressed over his heart.(3)

(1) Ibid, p.294. (2) Clemo has not wanted to present Garth as a perfected saint. To Edith, for example, he can be totally -and conceitedly -callous: 'you were never meant to be my wife. God just used you as a stop-gap till Irma was ready.... What's soul and depth to a woman like you? For years it's been too late for you to catch up with me.'(Ibid, pp.160,162.) (3) Ibid, p.294.

So the book ends: with a final evocation of tile violent otherness, so unlike the tameness of the churches, of the grace that is invading this world, grafting the life of the eternal world into 'wildings' that naturally would resist it. The confrontation is raw: Griffiths is soberly 'hostile' to the 'danmed secret' that has 'broken' him in the course of its 'jest'. The violence and the presence of death are there till the end. Griffiths is still the focus of the narrative, so that as he walks away, 'a hand pressed over his heart', something is conveyed of the reality and conscious cost of his choice of defiance. And perhaps the last sight the reader has of Garth embodies something of the grace he 'stands for': seen from the outside, silent, not (necessarily) 'friendly'; something that cannot be ignored although it can be 'waved aside', defied. It is an effective ending, with the book's two protagonists in harsh, almost archetypal, juxtaposition.

Such, then, is Wilding Graft; a book with very considerable flaws, but one which has attempted to depict the workings of grace in human affairs in a way attempted by hardly any other novelist this century. The result is a novel that in places achieves a stark power. Clemo's ability to depict his native Cornish landscape and to use it as metaphor for spiritual conflict; his evocation of evil and of the violence and alienness of grace that distances him far from milk-and-water piety; and his compulsive vision of that power of grace pouncing and grafting, and man submitting or defying, have produced a book which, though far from perfect, is still an unusual achievement.

7. A FEW CONCLUSIONS

The tragedy of the modern world, said Solzhenitsyn in his Templeton Address, is that humankind has forgotten God.

Or perhaps one should say white European humankind. One chapter of this study was written in Lagos; and among the Nigerian university community the writer was struck by the prevalence of a supernaturalistic worldview that seemed universally acceptable and that often made the average Britisher -even the average British Christian - seem a humanist by comparison. One encounters a similar situation in many other cultural contexts: in the Middle East, for example, and among African-Americans. A worldview that is dominated by an exclusively naturalistic causality is a fairly 'local' phenomenon of the contemporary West. That it should be merely the view of a minority (an influential minority) does not per se prove it to be false, of course. Many things believed only by a minority have later turned out to be true. But it certainly makes it worth enquiring whether prose fiction must always be expected to reflect this particular 'party line'; and if it did not -if, in Solzhenitsyn's terms, it remembers God -what it would become. And it is also worth asking what effect the dominance of such a convention is having, in terms of shaping our consciousnesses and the ways in which we are capable of seeing the world.

At the same time, whatever may be true in other cultures, the contemporary English novelist writes in a tradition largely shaped in Britain; along with other influences from America, France, and Russia, in particular. (S)he writes in a tradition and for an audience largely conditioned by the aftermath of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth-century loss of faith, and in a social context most of the components of which reflect the presuppositions of humanism.

We have observed that in this situation some Christian writers have turned to the fantasy model. And to some extent this has been chosen as an apologetic strategy: a shape in events that might not be easy for readers to cope with in

a so-called realistic novel may be palatable if it appears in a fantasy world. What can we learn from the work of the writers who have chosen this approach? Has it worked?

(i) Problems of the Fantasy Mode

There are perhaps four problem-areas that emerge from our discussions of the fantasy fiction of Lewis and Tolkien. We shall not concern ourselves with the charge that these fantasies are 'escapist': as the appendix that follows will demonstrate, they bear a very definite relation to reality, though not the relation of the realistic novel. Likewise, we shall not be concerned with the stylistic weaknesses of individual writers. Tolkien, for example, is prone to verbal disasters of the 'That is the doom that we must deem' variety(1); but that tells us nothing about his choice of fictional strategy and its suitability as a vehicle for creating of a narrative marked by Christian supernaturalism.

(a) The first question is whether such an approach lends itself to the presentation only of a certain type of content. In particular, the objectification of spiritual states characteristic of the fantasy form naturally means that physical combat and the physical destruction of evil become important. This is perhaps most problematic in C.S.Lewis' trilogy. Evil is removed in That Hideous Strength by what Robert Plank rightly refers to as a 'peerless massacre'(2); one feels that Lewis himself sensed the problem, and his efforts to get rid of it sound slightly lame. The apocalypse that extinguishes the NICE also wipes out Edgestow as a whole, and Lewis' suggestion that the entire university community were tarred with the same brush, that the NICE was only taking all their attitudes to their logical conclusion, feels somewhat forced:

(1) Tolkien, TLOTR,p.236. (2) Robert Plank, 'Some Psychological Aspects of Lewis' Trilogy', in Shadows of Imagination, ed. Mark R.Hillegas (Southern Illinois, 1969),p.35.

"Aren't Merlin and the eldils a trifle...well, wholesale. Did all Edgestow deserve to be wiped out?"

"Who are you lamenting?" said MacPhee. "The jobbing town council that'd have sold their own wives and daughters to bring the N.I.C.E. to Edgestow?... It'll learn them not to keep bad company."...

"I know," said Denniston. "One's sorry for a man like Churchwood. I knew him well; he was an old dear. All his lectures were devoted to proving the impossibility of
ethics, though in private life he'd have walked ten miles rather than leave a penny debt unpaid. But all the same... was there a single doctrine practised at Belbury which
hadn't been preached by some lecturer at Edgestow?"...

"I'm afraid it's all true, my dear," said Dimble. "Trahison des clercs. None of us are quite innocent."

"you are all forgetting," said Grace, "that nearly everyone, except the very good (who were ripe for fair dismissal) and the very bad, had already left Edgestow."(1)

(1) C.S.Lewis, That Hideous Strength (1955 edition), p.243.

'None of us are quite' convincing; both MacPhee's 'It'll learn them...' and Denniston's cosy 'old dear' seem to depend on the people concerned not having been decimated in the way Lewis has described; Dimble's contribution sounds like moralising, and Grace's stretches the reader's credulity (or else leaves a lot of work for providence). And yet the wiping out of Edgestow is logical enough in the fiction as a whole; apocalypse has come, and in the time of apocalypse it is the doers of hidden evil as well as the perpetrators of blatant iniquities who face judgement. It is true, too, that Lewis' underlying point, the fundamental 'either/or' nature of good and evil, is perfectly orthodox. (He returns to this theme in The Great Divorce.) But it is rather hard to conceive 'wholesale apocalypse' in the same world as the Studdocks' marital breakdown; in a world that seems at times to smack of everyday reality, wholesale destruction reminds the reader of the Bomb. And that is not quite the connotation one normally associates with grace. There is too little room in this pattern for the redemption of the evildoer, as Plank points out.(l)

The same problem exists in Voyage to Venus. J.B.S.Haldane's hostile summary is unfair but contains a grain of truth: 'Ransom's arguments against the devil are inadequate, so he finally kills Weston, and is returned to earth by angels, with thanks for services rendered.'(2) It is true that if Lewis must recreate 'Barfield's "ancient unities", then disposing of a spiritual evil will involve disposing of something physical as well(3); it is true that the vividly-narrated fight gives dramatic strength to the book; it is true too (perhaps) that this denouement may have been

(1) Plank, ibid. (2) J.B.S.Haldane, 'Auld Hornie, F.R.S.', in Hillegas, Ibid, p.15. (3) As Lewis himself points out (Voyage to Venus,pp.18-19,131).

more acceptable to the wartime audience for whom the book was written, who might perhaps have seen themselves in an analogous situation. But it is also true that because Weston is (despite Lewis' efforts) not entirely unlike a human being(1), Ransom is not entirely unlike a murderer; and that there is a hint of 'might is right'. (What if Weston had been physically stronger than Ransom? Ransom's success in combat seems arbitrary -it owes nothing to supernatural aid.)

The difficulty is that the spiritual issue is not in fact objectified entirely. Lewis poses the problem of the Un-man first of all as an abstract, moral problem, something to be handled on the logical level; but then that is not how it is finally dealt with. In terms of the plot this makes sense: the Lady has been tempted 'enough' (cf. Paul's comment to the Corinthian church that 'God... will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear'(2)), and the tempter has to be disposed of somehow. It would have been tidier- though less dramatically effective -if Weston was repulsed simply by the Lady's realisation of what the true spiritual issues were (which in fact happens after the fight(3)). Alternatively, Tolkien's approach has consistency to recommend it: in Mordor objectification is total, so that the evil that is combated by physical conflict is also something that expresses itself primarily by physical, rather than moral, destruction. What is hateful about the 'dark lord' is that he creates places like Gorgoroth, not that he lures people into sinning. But of course this option has its own weakness. Edmund Wilson complains that Tolkien never tells the reader 'what exactly was so terrible' in Mordor(4); and what he is

(1) For example, when Weston arrives on Perelandra he has a will that seems distinct from, though committed to, the Bent One (ibid, p.86). (2) 1 Corinthians 10:13. (3) Lewis, Voyage to Venus,p:T93. (4) Edmund Wilson, The Bit Between My Teeth (1965),p.331.

asking for is a moral temptation, for example one in which Mordor might seem 'a plausible and pleasant place'.(l) Lewis avoids this problem. But to raise the spiritual issues he does is to some extent to situate the most essential combat in a non-objectified context, where killing the mouthpiece of evil still constitutes murder.

In The Lord of the Rings the question of physical combat reappears. Where there is battle, we are likely to be invited to admire the warrior virtues. Eomer's defiance of impending doom at the battle of Pelennor is imaginatively impressive: 'To hope's end I rode and to heart's breaking', he sings. 'Now for wrath, now for ruin and a red nightfall!' Tolkien continues, 'Once more lust of battle was on him... He was young, and he was king: the lord of a fell people. And lo! even as he laughed at despair he looked out again on the black ships, and he lifted up his sword to defy them.'(2) But surely such battle-lust stems from the Nordic part of Tolkien's imagination, not the Christian; and there is a tension between this and what is represented by the figure of Frodo, triumphing by grace and eucatastrophe rather than by force of arms, struggling weaponless across Mordor ('I'll bear no weapon, fair or foul'(3)), objecting to the use of violence in the 'Scouring of the Shire'(4), and refusing to sanction violence against Saruman although the latter has proved himself a murderer capable of wrecking an entire country.(5) Possibly some such tension is going to be an inevitable part of any fantasy that objectifies the combat against spiritual evil into physical terms; and then the question will be whether the dramatic power that can be gained thereby is sufficient to make such an inconsistency a price worth paying.

(1) Ibid, p.330. (2) Tolkien, TLOTR, pp.829. (3) Ibid, p.916.
(4) Ibid, p.983. (5) Ibid, p.996.

There is another aspect to this question, however, although perhaps a non-literary one. Susan Sontag observes in an essay on science fiction films that

> Another kind of satisfaction these films supply is extreme moral simplification -that is to say, a morally acceptable fantasy where one can give outlet to cruel or at least amoral feelings.... In the figure of the monster from outer space, the freakish, the ugly, and the predatory all converge -and provide a fantasy target for righteous bellicosity to discharge itself.... Again and again, one detects the hunger for a "good war," which poses no moral problems, admits of no moral qualifications.(l)

Neither Lewis nor Tolkien could really be said to indulge emotionally in the violence they present; still, their presentations of conflict with the Un-man or the orcs need to be considered in the light of these comments.

(b) Susan Sontag's remarks also provide a cue for discussion of a different issue; the question of whether -in the hands of Lewis and Tolkien at least -the movement away from realism has not resulted in an over-simplification of character. Hardly any of the characters in That Hideous Strength are particularly believable (it is, as we have noted, very much a 'tall story'); The Lord of the Rings has perhaps one credible female human character, it has been said, and she dresses up as a man. Tolkien also has a tendency to present his characters making moral decisions by discussing them aloud with themselves, which can be a trifle bizarre.(2) This is not, of course, the whole story. Lewis' portrayal of Ransom in Out of the Silent Planet and Voyage to Venus contains much shrewd psychological insight (for instance in the long debate with the Darkness in the latter book). Even Tolkien's characters are not totally one-dimensional (Aragorn is capable of pride and fussiness(3), Gollum of tenderness(4)), and they are not altogether free from moral dilemmas.(5) It seems, however, that Lewis at any rate

(1) Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation (New York, 1969),pp.218, 222. (2) Eg Tolkien,op.cit.,pp.618-19,918. (3) Ibid, pp.499-500. (4) Ibid, p.699. (5) Eg ibid, pp.672-73.

deliberately avoided complexity of characterisation. There was 'a good deal to be said', he once suggested, for the point of view that 'the first business of a novel is to tell a story and that characters etc. come second.'(1) And in On Other Worlds he argues that this is especially true of stories dealing with the fantastic:

> It is absurd to condemn them because they do not often display any deep or sensitive characterization. They oughtn't to. It is a fault if they do.... 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.(2)

Irwin quotes Northrop Frye in defence of the similar practice of Lewis' friend Charles Williams:

> The nature of romance invites portrayals of absolutes rather than highly individualized persons. As Northrop Frye has demonstrated, characters in romance usually owe their being and energy to a principle or allegiance which has been somewhat internalized rather than to any original inner prompting. One does not look to romance for a probing of the psyche and emotions. (3)

Another relevant point is Ian Watt's observation that in the novel 'the importance of the plot is in inverse proportion to that of character'(4); if he is correct, it is not surprising that writers like Lewis and Tolkien who are very consciously 'telling stories' should not be overly concerned about complexity of character. And yet there has to be a balance, especially if the notion of providence is to be used; for, while providence provides a theoretical basis for the notion of a pattern within history and hence a validation of the concept of plot, providence is also supposed to be concerned with the development of human beings as individuals. (This element is visible in Tolkien's treatment of

(1) Quoted Chad Walsh, 'C.S.Lewis: The Man and the Mystery', in Hillegas, op.cit., p.5. (2) C.S.Lewis, Of Other Worlds. (New York.1966).pp.64-65. (3) W.R.Irwin. 'Christian Doctrine and the Tactics of Romance: The Case of Charles Williams', in Hillegas, op.cit.,p.142. The reference to Frye is to Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957).pp.3O4-05. (4) Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957; Pelican edition of 1972).p.317.

Boromir, Saruman and Gollum, as we noted in an earlier chapter.) Surely The Lord of the Rings is a stronger book because through his struggles Frodo appears to have 'grown' (Saruman's word(1)) from a 'twee' hobbit into something sadder but more mature; and surely Lewis' choice (apparently deliberate(2)) to remove Ransom's 'warm humanity' in That Hideous Strength leaves something of a vacuum in that book. Orual in Till We Have Faces proves that Lewis could combine fantasy with a more complex characterisation, and the result is a heroine vastly superior to Jane Studdock in That Hideous Strength.

(c) Two other questions are worth considering, of a more extra-literary kind. Is there, perhaps, a danger of repeating an ancient error, in lumping together the 'Christian supernatural' and the fantastic? Does this not tend to reduce the Christian supernatural to the level of hobbits and Elves, making providence seem a concept suited only to lovers of 'fairy-tales'? -which are a specialised taste, despite the apologias of the Inklings. It might be argued that the urgent need today is to make the presence of God seem more real, not more fantastic. Against this, of course, stands the possibility that a 'baptism of the imagination' in a fantasy context is almost the only way of presenting thoroughgoing supernaturalism to a secularised readership at the present time.

Related to this is the difficulty we noted in the case of That Hideous Strength, that the use of certain types of Christian content in what is palpably a 'tall story' can seem almost to smack

(1) Tolkien, TLOTR,p.996. (2) Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, C.S.Lewis: a Biography (1974; Fount edition of 1979),p.179.

of irreverence; and it would be unfortunate to become entirely insensitive to the kind of issues raised by Johnson when he complained that in Lycidas Milton was mingling 'trifling fictions' with 'the most sacred and awful truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverend combinations.'(1) It is at least a question worth asking; otherwise the sense of the dignity of God could unwittingly be forfeited in the fantasy mode.

(d) Likewise, the tendency of fantasy to concern itself with the unique periods of apocalypse, while making possible the construction of paradigmatic situations revealing an interplay of forces that would normally be concealed, can on the other hand suggest that the norm is something totally different and thoroughly naturalistic. God takes an active part in human existence once in a millennium, when the events of the Fall or the tower of Babel are about to be repeated; but the mundane world is a closed naturalistic system, and the experience of the eternal is only for the saint. Here indeed arises a complication, for, as C.S.Lewis says, the overt miracle is perhaps not to be understood as an everyday event:

> God does not shake miracles into Nature at random as if from a pepper-caster. They come on great occasions: they are found at the great ganglions of history -not of political or social history, but of that spiritual history which cannot be fully known by men. If your own life does not happen to be near one of those great ganglions, how should you expect to see one? If we were heroic missionaries, apostles, or martyrs, it would be a different matter. But why you or I? (2)

Yet there is a sort of 'inverse elitism' about this which does not tell the whole story. For Christianity is about the redemptive concern of God not merely for the vanguard of 'heroic missionaries, apostles or martyrs' but for the ordinary individual Christian. Jack Clemo affirms that the norm of Christian experience is the `personal covenant' , when

(1) Quoted Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (1942), p.234. (2) C.S.Lewis, Miracles (1947; Fontana edition of 1960),pp.171-172.

> God takes the former rebel into His confidence and allots to him some stretch of existential territory where he can practice the divine presence. To a consecrated Christian life all events are ordered towards certain definite objectives.... The sense of covenant is one of the chief marks which distinguish the Christian from the mere religious man. The latter is largely concerned with abstractions.... Every Christian is to let his light shine, coloured by the experience which has proved to him personally the faithfulness of God. (1)

Clemo and Lewis are not in direct disagreement, of course(2); Lewis is talking about the overt miracle, Clemo about the patterning in the ordinary individual's life which need not necessarily involve such an event.(3) Yet it is not without significance that Lewis, whose stories depict God's presence in the life of someone so unusual that he never dies, should feel concerned to write the above caveat on the rarity of the miraculous, whereas Clemo's fiction and non-fiction both stress the possibility and opportunity of perceiving and acting upon the purposes of God in the everyday.

There is a difference of emphasis. And on Clemo's side it might be argued that, if all providentialist fiction were written in the fantasy mode, it would have succumbed to the post-Enlightenment dichotomy Francis Schaeffer emphasises, where order, design, meaning and so on tend to belong to a sphere of religious myth divorced from empirical reality. And that would almost be the world of Greene's The Heart of the Matter: 'Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of

(1) Jack Clemo, The Invading Gospel, (1958; Lakeland edition of 1972),pp.44-45.
(2) Indeed, Clemo explicitly recognises the kinship of Lewis' notion of 'immortal longings' with his own concept of the 'personal covenant' (ibid,p.61), where he also speaks with enthusiasm of Lewis' this-worldly supernaturalism in The Screwtape Letters. (3)Clemo does however remark that how 'exotic' the fruits of the personal covenant will be 'depends on the intensity of individual faith in Christianity as the stumbling-block, the upsetting and dislocating factor in the midst of human progress. Orthodoxy has always maintained that angels rush in where fools fear to tread... Religious people who want to appear “scientific" will try any dodge before they will admit that the natural sphere has been invaded by a Power which knows no law except faithfulness to the covenant of Scripture.' (Ibid, pp.89-90).

death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meanness....'(1) It would, of course, be foolish to overemphasise this aspect of the fantasy mode; we have noted throughout our studies of Lewis and Tolkien the strong parallelism between what occurs in their fantasy world and what they believe occurs in reality. But a Christian writer faced with a world that has (as Solzhenitsyn suggests) 'forgotten God' may see it as a prime need to reawaken the awareness of God's purposive presence in the everyday world of mundane affairs; and at that point, the apocalyptic preoccupation of the fantasy mode may appear a disadvantage.

(ii) Challenges and Strategies

There is in contrast so little contemporary fiction possessing both artistic merit and a fictional hypothesis of providentialist realism that it is impossible to make sweeping statements about the latter strategy. (There are some encouraging recent examples that we haven't looked at here; two worth singling out are First and Vital Candle by Rudy Wiebe, one of Canada's finest novelists, and on this side of the Atlantic the very funny Foreign Bodies by Hwee Hwee Tan.) But some tentative general observations may be made.

Firstly, the attempt to express providentialism, especially in terms of everyday reality, will be prone to show up mercilessly the inconsistencies in the artist's own vision. Any unresolved conflict of values - let us call it syncretism -will become all too plain. This may be illustrated elsewhere, from the difficult fusions between the Christian and the capitalist in Defoe, the Christian and the Romantic in Jane Eyre, the Christian and the aesthete in Brideshead Revisited. The materialistic reward of the heroine's virtue that mars Richardson's Pamela also deserves mention here.

Secondly, artistic success may depend to some extent on the

(1) Greene, The Heart of the Matter, p.36.

writer's ability to present a convincing fusion of nature and grace, of the human and divine. The writer for whom grace is a concept situated away at the back of his thinking will not be experimenting with providentialist fiction at all. But if the events are 'swamped' by supernatural overruling, the outcome can be false to reality. Human choice can cease to matter; or the conflict can become one in which there is no danger of any real defeat or any real pain. This is perhaps a problem in the climax of That Hideous Strength, and Tolkien too has been accused of being unprepared to 'allow any really telling loss or vicissitude' into the overall pattern of The Lord of the Rings.(l) That, of course, would simply be untrue to experience; anyone's experience.

At the same time, an overcompensating attempt to emphasise human responsibility can remove the divine presence to an inaccessible distance. Arguably this too is a problem in Tolkien, where no real relationship of faith underlies the repeated eucatastrophes. (The question arises in a different mode when Scobie condemns himself by committing adultery in Greene's The Heart of the Matter.) At its best, a providentialist fiction should seek to portray an interplay of divine initiative and free human choice; and this is indeed to be found in Ransom's encounter with the Darkness in Voyage to Venus, in the climax of The Lord of the Rings, in Till We Have Faces and Wilding Graft at their best.

Thirdly, providentialist fiction will need to come to terms with the thorny aspects of the doctrine of providence; for example the problem of suffering, which is central to Wilding Graft (as it is to Greene’s The End of the Affair and Dostoevski’s Brothers Karamazov); or the clash that can occur between the claims of human and divine love which is central to Till We Have

(1) C.N.Manlove, Modern Fantasy (1975).p.185. This may be supported from a consideration of which characters are permitted to be killed, and under what circumstances. But Frodo's loss is real.

Faces (and to Jane Eyre, Brideshead Revisited and much of Graham Greene's fiction. We have examined these in the companion study to this, Fictional Absence.) It will also need to grapple with the problem of the silence and absence of God. This is, after all, part of the biblical doctrine of God; one thinks of the Psalms ('My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"... I say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me?"'(l)), or Habakkuk ('How long, O Lord, must I cry for help, but You do not listen?'(2)), or Isaiah ('Truly You are a God who hides Himself, O God and Saviour of Israel'(3)). This question too is confronted directly in Till We Have Faces (as it is, after his own fashion, in the fiction of Graham Greene).

Fourthly, developments in this field in the foreseeable future in Britain are going to face a readership not very sympathetic to overt expression of Christian supernaturalism; even though a large proportion of the population would still seem to acknowledge some kind of belief in some kind of deity, there seems to be a problem with any printed expression of what that deity may be up to. (One suspects from experience that this problem is far less common in the context of a private conversation; but the expression of a deviant belief in a conversation has a living person present to support it.) The exclusively naturalistic convention that we have been discussing is undoubtedly a mark (and a cause) of the average reader's expectations. Thus writers attempting to write providentialist fiction have a choice of writing for a minority readership, or else finding some way of breaking out of the mould. C.S.Lewis said of Voyage to Venus that it was 'mainly for my co-religionists'(4); and it may be that certain types of stories can, at certain points in history, only be written for a minority. Possibly the end of Voyage to Venus is in this category. But of

1) Psalm 42:3, 9. (2) Habakkuk 1:2. (3) Isaiah 45:15. (4) Lewis, Of Other Worlds,p.78.

course the committed Christian is likely to want to find some way of sharing what (s)he has found of the presence of God with other people; rather than finding something wonderful and then keeping it secret.

Various strategies seem to emerge from this situation. One is the attempt to present God in unusual ways. There is, for example, the emphasis on the violence or alienness of grace in Wilding Graft and The End of the Affair and Till We Have Faces (cf too the powerful image of the avalanche at the end of Brideshead Revisited), and in Lewis' deliberate use of connotations of the distasteful and unpleasant in his evocation of the unfallen supernatural in Out of the Silent Planet and the start of Voyage to Venus. Related to this are the attempts to present God in the context of sexuality. Clemo seems to have felt a calling, as 'priest and lover', to forge anew a Christian celebration of redeemed sexuality(l), and this is related to the subject-matter of Wilding Graft. Similarly in Greene's The End of the Affair Sarah's love for God is given a sense of real devotion by analogy with human affection; however the result of this approach in Greene's work is at times the presentation of religion as something furtive and quasi-pornographic; and it lacks the note of triumphant exuberance that marks Clemo at his best. In this connection, there is the danger of a novelist ending up mixing providentialism with a thoroughly sub-Christian and voyeuristic approach to sexuality. (To this reader, that would appear a valid criticism of Updike's Rabbit, Run, for example.)

Similarly, the likelihood of a sceptical readership raises the technical question of how best to present experience of the supernatural. The sceptical narrator, as employed in The End of the Affair and Brideshead Revisited, is one solution. The

(1) Clemo, The Invading Gospel, pp.46,75.

first-person believing narrator may also be attractive, in that their reflections can be introduced without necessitating quite the same degree of authorial endorsement as is implied in a more impersonal approach. Instead, an individual's perspective can be offered, and then the 'baptism of the imagination' can do its own work: offering a shape for the reader's contemplation, but not insisting on its verifiability. The 'stream of consciousness' approach of To the Lighthouse and similar works may have some untapped potential; it does after all enable a free movement between the specifics of an occurrence and a wide range of other relevant material (which is the point at which a tentative linkage with providential patterning could be made), without insisting on the nature of the connection between these items.(1)

It is no easy task. It is not surprising that there should be instances of writers apparently making some attempt to represent providential causality and then, before the end of the book, drifting increasingly into fantasy. (This is a reasonable interpretation of the telepathic message at the climax of Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre.) It is also not surprising that there should be committed Christian novelists who have left providential causality out of their fiction almost altogether, presenting the beliefs and actions of their characters in terms that are virtually or entirely naturalistic. One thinks of Tolstoy's Resurrection, which only gives a couple of isolated cues to the effect that the ultimate causality of events is providential:

(1) An interesting model, not exactly a novel, is Amy Carmichael's His Thoughts said... His Father Said...(1941), which is essentially a series of situations described in terms of the Christian's thoughts and the 'Father"s response; that is, a dialogue taking place inside the Christian's consciousness. A number of these situations are triggered by an external situation, and it would seem that joining this technique with a continuous external narrative could produce a new kind of novel.

> So Nekhlyudov, now appreciating the baseness of what he had done, felt the mighty hand of the Master; but he still did not realize the significance of what he had

> done, or recognize the Master's hand. He did not want to believe that what he saw now was his doing; but the inexorable, invisible hand held him and he already had a presentiment that he would never wriggle free.(1)

That is clear enough; but Tolstoy has given his readers one hint of the ultimate pattern, and he gives very few others. Other novelists have done the same, for various reasons: the neo-classicist Fielding's general assertions of a benign providence in Tom Jones, Waugh's 'twitch upon the thread' in Brideshead Revisited, and Updike's 'something that wants me to find it' in Rabbit, Run are all general assertions of providence that do not receive much embodiment in the specific events of their books. Such caution runs the risk of turning the notion of providence into a myth with no conceivable specific meaning. In that case, the concrete assertion that God is active in history becomes reduced to a mere 'religious way of looking at things'(2), and nobody really knows what it actually refers to. But in a situation where these expressions of providence that we have quoted are among the very few exceptions to a dominant naturalistic convention in the novel, and in a culture that is growing increasingly secularised, it is not an unexpected compromise.

(iii) Conventions and Distortions

And what, in the end, does it matter? The answer to that question will obviously depend on the individual's presuppositions.

Of course the Christian will concede that the specific direction of providence in the everyday is frequently highly obscure to the human observer. Hence, a narrative of events including no clear expression of providential causality is acceptable as a model of reality as it frequently appears, even to the most hardened believer. But the situation changes as

(1) Leo Tolstoy, Resurrection (1899; trans. Rosemary Edmonds, 1966), p.lll. (2) Cf. *Os* Guinness, The Dust of Death (1973),p.341. The problem of whether 'religious language' actually has any real meaning was of course a major battleground among philosophers of the twentieth century.

the panorama widens. When a whole lifetime or a whole society or a set of crucial events (a marriage or a bankruptcy or a war) come into the picture (as

they tend to do in most novels) the Christian will feel it imperative to ask, Where is the presence of God in what is happening here? What is God's purpose here, and how do I act upon it? For if there is a God at all, He is obviously the prime factor in any situation.

The Christian's complaint about the naturalistic convention we face in fiction is, therefore, that it amounts to a repetitive imaginative training in thinking about events without any reference to God's purposes, and dealing with them entirely independently of His power. It fosters our logically preposterous situation where the average Britisher believes vaguely (so most pollsters tell us) in some sort of almighty God, but pays no practical attention to Him whatsoever. Logically, that isn't very sensible. If there were indeed a God, there could be nothing more disastrous – or absurd - than attempting to put together the jigsaw puzzle of our lives with the central piece left out. Yet our culture trains us in many subtle ways to do just this: training us, perhaps, to be deaf or blind.(1) It is this `training to leave God out' that we find happening in most of the most vivid and imaginatively striking novels we read; and this has a profound impact on the mental frameworks through which we look out at the world. The price of our deafness to God may be considerable. We can be deeply thankful, therefore, for those authors who have gone against the tide, and sought to develop and model for us an alternative `way of seeing'.

(1) Sociologist Alan Gilbert, in The Making of Post-Christian Britain (1980) cites Weber's remark 'I am a-musical as far as religion is concerned, and have neither the desire nor the capacity to build religious architectures in myself.' 'It is a salient fact', comments Gilbert, 'that the crisis of contemporary Christianity lies not in challenges to the truth of its dogmas, but in the fact that... people in a secular culture have become increasingly "tone-deaf" to the orchestration of those dogmas.'(p.14).

APPENDIX: THE MONSTERS AND THE CHRISTIANS: HOW CAN A `FANTASY' HAVE A WORLDVIEW?

To many readers the whole idea of describing a writer like Tolkien as a `Christian fantasist' may seem highly peculiar. Fantasies are fantasies; what relation can possibly exist between such a deliberately non-realistic fictional strategy, and a worldview such as Christianity, concerned (as a worldview must be) with reality?

To answer that question we need to understand what fantasy is.

The problem is that definitions of fantasy often lose their way in the very area with which this study is concerned: that is, the supernatural in fantasy functioning as an expression or reflection of belief in supernatural agency in the real world. This is true of Irwin's stimulating volume The Game of the Impossible, where fantasy is described as a play of intellect that 'projects the persuasive establishment and development of an impossibility, an arbitrary construct of the mind with all under the control of logic and rhetoric'(1); and of Manlove's definition in Modern Fantasy, which includes a reference to 'supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects',(2) the two adjectives being intended to be synonymous. Neither definition is at all adequate to, say, C.S. Lewis' Voyage to Venus, the hero of which is transported by angels to a paradise made up of floating islands where he has to combat a demon-possessed foe. The Venus of Lewis' fantasy is not the

(1) W.R.Irwin. The Game of the Impossible (Illinois,1976).p.9. (2) C.N. Manlove, Modern Fantasy (1975),p.3.

planet known to astronomers, and the angelic transportation and the paradise

are obviously intended as constructs of the imagination. Yet we must also recognize that the angels and the demon are reflections of reality as Lewis perceived it; such forces - albeit without the physical details and astrological allusions with which Voyage to Venus enriches their portrayal – formed part of Lewis' Christian orthodoxy. Thus the supernatural in Voyage to Venus can only be classed as uniformly `impossible' if one assumes, as Irwin blithely does, the `long-foregone loss of any power of a particular supernatural to command belief' (1) – something Lewis would have hotly contested. This sort of definition says more about the narrowness of Irwin's view of the world than it does about the books he is describing.

So let's attempt a different way of developing the distinction between fantasy and realism. It's possible to arrange literary works on a scale according to the extent to which their created worlds are intended to correspond to reality. At one extreme might stand historical writing and fiction-reportage. Then there's the deliberately 'realistic' novel, the novel which presents a world that, though fictional, still claims to correspond more or less to reality - as the author sees it, of course. In such a novel, what Dorothy Van Ghent has called the novel's 'fictional hypothesis' - 'Given such and such conditions, then such and such would take place' - is more or less equivalent to the author's worldview(2): not 'Let us imagine the world is like this: then this sort of thing would happen', but 'The world is like this: and this is the sort of thing that does happen'.

Then as we move down the spectrum there are the writers who are more consciously interested in 'telling a tale'; among the classical novelists we

(1) Irwin, op.cit., p.160. (2) Within certain significant limits, of course: particularly, what the author feels their audience will be able to accept; what they conceive of as the formal possibilities of their chosen genre; and the extent to which they choose to reveal and express their own attitudes and beliefs.

might think for example of Scott, Dickens, Emily Bronte, or Hardy. Here there is less of a concern to mirror reality. And then further along the scale come works where the correspondence to reality is intended to reside only in certain elements (being displaced from others by the author's concerns), or is simply regarded as unimportant; works stressing the creative imagination, or the power of the artist as maker. And then there is a wide variety of explicitly non-realistic forms: what Robert Scholes calls the 'fabulations' of writers like Durrell, Vonnegut, Murdoch and Barth (or, in a somewhat different category, Beckett); science fiction; allegory; utopian fiction; beast-fable. Here too we find fantasy of the kind practised by Tolkien and Lewis. Finally at the far end of the scale might be the hypothetical work of art that exists solely as a work of art, where the correspondence to reality is not merely limited or disregarded but non-existent; the theoretical extreme defined by Flaubert:

> What seems to be ideal, what I should like to do, is to write a book about nothing, a book with no reference to anything outside itself, which would stand on its own by the inner strength of its style, just as the earth holds itself without support in space... (l)

(1) Quoted Damian Grant, Realism (1970),p.17.

Of course all works of art are works, things that are made, artifacts of language: and again, all works contain some correspondence to reality, if only because the 'signifiers' of which they are composed have in most cases 'signifieds' within the real world. But, as our scale illustrates, these `imitative' and `expressive' impulses are in tension, and will vary in proportion according to the work.

But this scale isn't entirely satisfactory; to represent it as a single linear spectrum involves a big over-simplification. There is more than one factor that can displace the realistic impulse as the driving force of the book – the impulse of the creative imagination, for example, or the sheer delight in making with language, where the words themselves, pre-eminently, are the thing. So Tristram Shandy is non-realistic for different reasons from Gulliver's Travels or The Lord of the Rings; and the relations to reality of fabulation, allegory, utopian fiction and satire vary greatly from one another. The various forms of fiction at the non-realistic end of the spectrum displace reality for different purposes, and to different extents. Much early science fiction, for example, was `fantastic', yet it had a simple exploratory impulse, displacing local reality for what might be the case in more distant areas of the same universe. As these were 'beyond our ken', they were clearly 'hypotheses' with a strong element of theory or imagination (hence of course the bipartite name

'science fiction'): 'Maybe the Andromeda Galaxy is like this: in that case these things could occur there'; 'Maybe before the human race existed there was this: then this could have happened next'; 'Maybe ten thousand years in the future the world will be like this; then these events could take place'. But the approach of this kind of `fantasy' is still, up to a point, one of intentional realism.

More surprisingly, the fictions of the 'fabulators' could also be said to be concerned with reality in their own fashion. Olderman argued that they were motivated by

> the strangely paradoxical possibility that fable, in a fabulous world, may be 'realism', for only through fable can we be faithful to the strange details of contemporary life.(l)

Here the `fable' has been chosen as a form of fiction that goes at one remove to present aspects of reality which cannot be presented directly. And so in a sense does Lewis' Voyage to Venus, insofar as it embodies a conscious apologetic strategy whereby the real cosmic struggle of evil and good can be represented more easily on Venus than on Earth. Again, in different ways an allegory such as Pilgrim's Progress and a satire such as Gulliver's Travels are approaching particular aspects of reality dialectically, as it were, through a non-realistic fictional hypothesis. Robert Scholes refers to such strategies as those of 'romance', which

> can be used to get a more vigorous purchase on certain aspects of that very reality which has been

> set aside in order to generate a romantic cosmos. When romance returns deliberately to confront reality it produces the various forms of didactic romance or fabulation that we usually call allegory, satire, fable, parable, and so on - to indicate our recognition that reality is being addressed indirectly through a patently fictional device… Traditionally, it has been a favourite vehicle for religious thinkers, precisely because religions have insisted that there is more to the world than meets the eye, that the common-sense view of reality - "realism" -is incomplete and therefore false. Science, of course, has been telling us much the same thing for several hundred years. (2)

(1) Raymond M.Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land (New Haven,1972), p.24.
(2) Robert Scholes, 'The Roots of Science Fiction'. in Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Mark Rose (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey,1976). It is worth noting that Brecht's dramatic practice represented a similar approach, with its concept of 'estrangement': 'A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognise its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar.'Short Organum for the Theatre, quoted by Darko Suvin, 'On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre', in Rose, ibid.p.60.

Lewis himself suggests yet another way in which stories may be presented as fantasies in order to grasp aspects of reality:

> The real theme may be, and perhaps usually is, something that has no sequence in it, something other than a process
> and much more like a state or quality. Giantship, otherness, the desolation of space, are examples.... (1)

Here it is still an aspect of reality that is the theme, but the 'state or quality' has been detached from reality so as to grasp it more firmly.

It is in utopian fiction that we take one step further from realism: here the desirable 'state or quality' is one which does not exist in the real world. And here the non-real elements displace the realistic for a didactic purpose; the world that is becomes replaced by the world that ought to be, or `would be nice if it was’. Yet it is still with reference to this reality: we are seeing the world that

`ought to be’ or `would be good to have’ here. A step further still, with a greater value for the fantasy world `for its own sake’, brings us to pastoral romances and mediaevalising fantasy. (Much of The Lord of the Rings could be said to function in this way, alongside the providentialism it also contains).

As we move still further along the spectrum we find fictions that attempt a deliberate, experimental departure of the fictional hypothesis from reality. Darko Suvin summarises the science fiction

(1) C.S.Lewis, Of Other Worlds (New York. 1966),p.18.

genre in this way: 'SF takes off from a fictional ("literary") hypothesis and develops it with extrapolating and totalizing ("scientific") rigor'.(l) Now the purpose is no longer an exploration of the distant reaches of our reality; the fictional hypothesis has become dominant, and its correlation with reality has become less important than the extrapolation of the central idea. Indeed, the idea may now be considered as the `hero’ of the story, as Aldiss suggests(2), and a major aesthetic criterion will be a consistent working-out
of the initial hypothesis, whatever that is.(3) The hypothesis can take bizarre, complex and entirely `unrealistic’ forms, depending on how far-reaching and radical the author's ideas are.(4) So here the author is no longer departing from realism in order to achieve a better purchase on it by an indirect strategy; the story, or the idea, is pre-eminently the thing. Something of this kind is embodied in Tolkien's notion of 'sub-creation': the artist is a world-maker in his own right, and so Middle-earth is a world made for its own sake; it may not be `science fiction’, but the extended working-out (over a

lifetime) of the `hypothesis', the `totalizing rigor', are clear for all to see.

And yet in Tolkien there are still very important correlations with `reality', as we have seen in his fiction and are about to see in his criticism. A final, more thoroughgoing example might be offered by nineteenth-century Romantic novelists like R.L. Stevenson, who makes a very conscious and clear separation between Art and Life:

(1) Darko Suvin, in Rose, op.cit.,p.60. (2) Brian Aldiss, Billion Year Spree (1973), p,137. (3) Cf. C.S.Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism (1961),p.65. (4)
Mark Rose compares the space warp in science fiction to the magic of mediaeval romance, but then argues that the distinctiveness of science fiction is its insistence on scientific laws, placing Lewis Carroll's use of the marvellous as fictional hypothesis in passing: 'Let us note now, however, that in the old romances, as in modern fantasy, no explanations are required for the introduction of marvels: knights simply encounter magicians as little girls fall down rabbit holes without authorial apologies. In such worlds the marvellous is normal.' (Rose, op.cit.,p.5.)

> Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt, and poignant; a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing, and emasculate.... The novel which is a work of art exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work.(l)

In such cases, as Lewis says,

> Surely the author is not saying, 'This is the sort of thing that happens'? Or surely, if he is, he lies? But he is not. He is saying, 'Suppose this happened, how interesting, how moving, the consequences would be! Listen. It would be like this.'(2)

Here the world the author reveals is obviously not the world he sees as

reality; the fictional hypothesis (`Let’s imagine a world like this’) is

certainly not the same as the author's view of reality.

But yet, once again, in Stevenson and those like him the divorce between

fiction and reality was never desired to be total. The dominant `idealistic’

(1) Quoted Kenneth Graham, English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900 (1965),p.66. (2) Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism,p.66. Lewis continues, significantly, 'To question the postulate itself would show a misunderstanding; like asking why trumps should be trumps.' This is true. But it should be noted that Lewis was writing polemically against the notion that 'truth to life' had 'a claim on literature that overrides all other considerations', because he felt that the 'dominant taste at present demands realism of content' (p.60). As a fantasist, taking a 'postulate' that was non-realistic, Lewis felt excluded by this 'dominant taste'. That has now changed completely, and the point now needs to be made that it is valid to ask, 'Is this a kind of literature that claims no correlation between itself and reality? Or does it (even as fantasy) imply a claim to verisimilitude, to be, in some sense, "true to life" (for example in its implied ethics or its cynicism)? And if such claims are implied are they justified?' And if we are concerned with the relations of literature and culture we may ask, 'Is this literature read as being in some sense "true to life", and is such a reading justified?' The question of truth to reality still arises, although it is not strictly an aesthetic criterion.

thinking provided a foothold for them in reality: in the passage just quoted,

Stevenson stresses 'the essence' of man as his concern. His contemporary Hall

Caine likewise proclaimed 'the superiority of ideal existence over the facts of

life', and fiction as 'not imagined history' (a description Tolkien would have

accepted for his work), but rather 'fallacy, poetic fallacy...a lie if you

like, a beautiful lie'; and yet he also described it as 'a lie that is at once

false and true - false to fact, true to faith'(1). Elsewhere he goes so far as

to suggest that 'an idea is only valuable to man in the degree to which it

helps him to see that come what will the world is founded on justice....

Justice – poetic justice, as we call it - is the essence of Romanticism' (2).

This statement actually brings us within hailing distance of providential

patterns that we have seen to be foundational to Tolkien's `fantasy' world.

So there is nearly always a correlation with reality in these various forms of

non-realistic fiction. And it is simply insufficient to summarize the

fantasies among them simply as the `persuasive establishment and development of

an impossibility', to repeat Irwin's definition with which we began. There is

a great deal more going on; and to grasp and enjoy the richness of what a

writer like Tolkien is creating, we need to grasp the specific way in which his

fictional world correlates with reality – or rather with his understanding of

it, that is, with his worldview. So to this we now turn.

(1) Quoted in Graham, p.68. (2) Ibid,p.85.

(ii) An Inevitable Correlation

Although the dominant impulse in the creation of these fictional worlds is frequently the creative imagination; although the fictional worlds are created primarily for their own sake; there is, as we have seen, still some definite correlation with to reality in most of these forms. It is because of this that the fictional hypothesis, the newly-created fictional universe of fantasy, can be compared with our perceptions of the real world we live in. And that is why it is meaningful to describe the work of Lewis and Tolkien as 'Christian fantasies', and to convey something by that description which would be grossly inappropriate if applied to the fables of Kafka or Vonnegut. So how does this correlation operate?

The lack of correlation between a non-realistic fiction and reality can only ever be partial, because it is impossible for a fantasist to create a true `heterocosm', a totally `other' universe. A great fantasist may produce a world that seems very different from our own, but the presuppositions that the two worlds will have in common will almost inevitably be greater than what divides them. A science fiction novel may make some alterations in the laws of nature in the world it portrays, but the greater part of those laws will continue to be those of the world we know. Such things as colours tend not to be changed too often: nor do many of the most basic moral assumptions regarding loyalty, truthfulness, cruelty, etc. (Nor, indeed, the more minor attitudes. In Star Trek, or Farscape, it is astonishing to find how xenophobic cultures that have shut themselves off for generations from all other

races turn out, on contact, to be twentieth century Californians, with twentieth century Californian morals. Many of us watch television SF to experience the truly `alien’, but genuinely alien cultures are exceedingly rare.) In short, the 'maker of new worlds' seldom makes a world with very many major variations from the real one.

Nor is this necessarily a bad thing. C.S.Lewis draws a distinction between 'realism of content', that is, being probable or 'true to life' in the theme, and 'realism of presentation', that is, 'the art of bringing something close to us, making it palpable and vivid, by sharply observed and sharply imagined detail'; and he takes his examples of the latter from apparently non-realistic contexts -'the dragon "sniffing
along the stone" in Beowulf' or 'the fairy bakers in Huon rubbing the paste off their fingers'.(l) Such 'realism of presentation' is a tremendous asset in the creation of a world whose basis is thoroughly fantastic; to recast Marianne Moore's phrase, it is a great deal easier to conceive of an imaginary garden If there turn out to be real toads in it. The addiction of Tolkien's hobbits to smoking tobacco is of some importance in helping them become more vivid to the reader. But this does mean that there is inevitably a considerable degree of correlation, even in the greatest examples of these genres, between the world of fantasy and the world of reality. Much of fantasy and science fiction strives to reduce the

(1) Lewis, ibid, pp.57-59.

correlation; nevertheless, as Stanislaw Lem, one of the most prominent modern science fiction authors, has remarked, 'The invention of new worlds in SF is as rare as a pearl the size of a bread loaf'.(l)

And it is hard to see how it could be otherwise. For books are made of language, and the greater part of language signifies things or concepts that we consider as part of our own reality. Where a word is created to describe something entirely new, it is difficult for that word to be given content except by reference to our present reality. The centaur is a fabulous beast: but the word 'centaur' could have no meaning unless it began by conveying to us a creature with a body like a horse and a head and shoulders like a man. 'Dragon', likewise, communicates to us only if it has already been given a meaning reflective of aspects of our reality: a dragon has a body like a reptile, flies, perhaps, like a bird, sings, perhaps, like a miser, has scales, breathes fire -but 'reptile', 'bird', 'sings', 'miser', 'scales', 'fire', are all building-blocks taken from the conceptual framework through which we perceive our own reality. The 'floating islands' of Lewis' Venus are 'islands'; and they 'float'. Imaginative newness is attained in good measure by rearranging and reassembling the components of the reality we perceive around us.

A method that escapes from this impasse is that of negation: imaginative newness is to be attained by the denial of the world to which our words refer. C.S.Lewis employs it in Voyage to Venus:

(1) Stanislaw Lem, 'The Time-Travel Story and Related Matters of SF Structuring', in Rose, op.cit., p.85.

> But it had two other characteristics which are less easy to grasp. One was its colour. Since I saw the thing I must obviously have seen it either white or coloured; but no efforts of my memory can conjure up the faintest image of what that colour was. I try blue, and gold, and violet, and red, but none of them will fit.(l)

And in small quantities this refusal to name can be very effective, as our own imaginations are called upon to do the work. But it can only be used to a limited extent: otherwise the piling of negative on negative produces imaginative colourlessness, and finally fails to communicate at all. And that may be all very well in the ineffable experiences of mysticism, but it cannot feature too largely in imaginative literature. For literature must communicate, albeit ambiguous, multiply significant, or even self-contradictory meanings; even if what it communicates is merely itself as a witness to the incommunicable. Kafka's The Castle is literature: five thousand words strung together that possessed no 'signifieds' whatsoever could have a value only as a series of sounds, could not create a fictional world, which is the purpose of the forms we have been considering. The negative method, then, can only be used to a limited extent, in combination with that of reassembling the components of the reality the writer sees around him.

It seems, then, that the fictional hypothesis of a fantasy must be conveyed in terms of the material and conceptual elements we see as comprising reality. Our imaginative possibilities - or rather their communication in literary form -seem to be limited by the

(1) C.S.Lewis, Voyage to Venus (1943; Pan edition of 1953),p.13.

conceptual framework of our worldviews. Hence the fictional hypothesis of a fantasy can be considered as a theoretical construct in relation to those worldviews: it is formed by the rearrangement and occasional negation of the elements of which those worldviews themselves are comprised. Or, to put the matter in a more structuralistic fashion, a fictional hypothesis of a work of fantasy and a worldview of reality are not entirely alien to one another because both find expression by means of a common stock of words.(l)

(111) Fantasy and Attitudes to God

The fictional hypothesis we conceived of earlier in Dorothy Van Ghent's terms: 'Given such and such conditions, then such and such would take place'.(2) Of course all that the hypothesis can communicate about the 'conditions', about the fictional world of the novel, is what is actually stated or implied in the book: we define as the postulated conditions for the narrative those conditions that the book itself postulates! Having said that, some conclusions may be drawn from the absence of a particular element from the fictional world of a novel, particularly if the novel

(1) It is interesting that Tolkien, hardly a structuralist, should at one point choose to describe the writing of fantasy in terms of linguistic rearrangement: '...Fantasy, this sub-creative art which plays strange tricks with the world and all that is in it, combining nouns and redistributing adjectives...' (On Fairy-Stories, reprinted in The Tolkien Reader (New York,1966),p.53.
(2) Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York,1953; Harper edition of 1961),p.3.

apparently claims to give a fairly full and complete account of its world. If, for example, a full-length fantasy contains no reference

to the sciences. it is correct to describe the world the author has chosen to create as one in which science is of no great significance.(1) And in this sense it is also correct to speak of a fantasy text as being theistic or a-theistic, according to whether God is present or absent.

These categories have little meaning in the lighter works of art, the divertissements (Tolkien's Farmer Giles of Ham, for example): they are really only of significance where we are faced with a more 'serious' work or one that portrays its fictional world with a fair degree of completeness. But in fact the cosmological aspect is often highlighted -as against being left unstated -in works of fantasy and science fiction(2); because on the one hand there are few other genres so suited to handle the cosmological, the apocalyptic and the other-worldly; and, on the other hand, the act of 'reshuffling the universe' involved in the making of fantasy is itself ontologically interesting. And that

(1) When this occurs in a work of realism, the implication is that the absent elements are of no great significance in reality itself. So wide-ranging an implication does not exist where a work ignores a particular aspect of the world for its own special purposes: it is not in the least surprising that there are hardly any women in Conrad's Typhoon. The implication there is that women might well be absent from, and, if so, might be of no great significance to a ship in a typhoon. The absence of God from the narrative suggests a comparable implication: but thereby a worldview is directly expressed. (2) For example, many science fiction writers have tried their hand at rewriting the early chapters of Genesis: eg Isaac Asimov's 'The Last Question', in his anthology Nine Tomorrows, and Eric Frank Russell's 'Sole Solution' in The Penguin Science Fiction Omnibus (which also contains Arthur C.Clarke's creation apocalypse story, 'Before Eden', and John Brunner's rewriting of the Flood, 'The Windows of Heaven'). Vonnegut gives an absurdist parody of Genesis 1 in Cat's Cradle. Of the Christian fantasists, Tolkien's The Silmarillion and Voyage to Venus deal with the Fall; and their friend Charles Williams handles the naming of the beasts (Genesis 2) in The Place of the Lion.

fact will tend to come into prominence, because as a genre develops it tends to grow more self-conscious, more aware of its own procedures. For example, the ontological issue -what is it to remake the world? - comes out amusingly in Howard Schoenfeld's story. 'Build Up Logically' in The Penguin Science Fiction Omnibus. Here the hero is a novelist who inserts himself into his own world, then unwisely creates a character who can himself create things ex nihilo, and who proceeds to 'create the universe' and take over the story, remaking his own creator in the process.

That story is interesting to set beside John Barth's remark that 'If you are a novelist of a certain type of temperament, then what you really want to do is re-invent the world. God wasn't too bad a novelist, except he was a Realist'.(1) Robert Scholes comments,

> For the post-World War II fabulators, any order they impose on the world amounts not to a symbol of the divine order, but to an allegory of the mind of man with its rage for an order superior to that of nature. It amounts to thumbing their nose at You Know Who.(2)

Another significant parallel is Brian Aldiss' argument in his history of science fiction, Billion Year Spree, that the archetype and progenitor of science fiction is Mary Shelley's Frankenstein:

(1) Quoted Robert Scholes, The Fabulators (New York,1967),p.IO6. (2) Scholes, ibid.pp.l06-107. The last phrase is from the end of Vonnegut's Cat’s Cradle. Vonnegut may be considered both as an absurdist fabulator and as a writer of science fiction.

> If God did not have personal charge of creation, then might not man control it? In Shelley's wife's hands, the

> scientist takes on the role of creator. The concept of Frankenstein rests on the quasi-evolutionary idea that God is remote or absent from creation; man is therefore free to create his own sub-life… God- however often called upon- is an absentee landlord, and his tenants scheme to take over the premises.(l)

From this tale of man taking over the role of creator, argues Aldiss, sprang the whole science fiction genre - a genre which seeks to do precisely that. In these last two examples the cosmological and ontological reference is plain. We may make a further observation: in these particular examples the reference involves and is rooted in a particular stance towards the idea of a sovereign creator God, considered as part of any conceivable reality whatsoever.(2)

Such non-realistic writing, then, is capable of implying a definite ontological stance. It is the privilege - the Christian would say the gift -of the artist to create a new world that either does or does not include God. So Vonnegut, an absurdist, creates an absurd universe where God is unhelpful or absent; so Robbe-Grillet's Last Year in Marienbad, if it can be seen as presenting a fictional universe at all, presents one without a sovereign God guaranteeing its coherence, its categories and the possibility of absolute truth; and Sartre illustrates his conception of the fantastic by improvising an example of this kind:

> I sit down in a cafe. I order a light coffee, the waiter makes me repeat my order three times, and repeats it himself in order to avoid any chance of a mistake. He rushes off, transmits my order to a second waiter, who scribbles it in a notebook and transmits it to

(1) Aldiss, Billion Year Spree,p.26. (2) Another interesting example is the hatred towards God that seems evident in Harlan Ellison’s fiction; made explicit in the Nebula-winning `The Deathbird’, for example, and implicit, one suspects, in the Hugo-winning `I Have No Mouth But I Must Scream.’

> a third. Finally a fourth waiter appears and says: 'Here you are', setting an inkwell down on my table. 'But', I say, 'I ordered a light coffee'. 'And here you are', he says as he walks away… If we have been able to give the reader the impression that we are speaking to him of a world in which these preposterous manifestations figure as normal behaviour, then he will find himself plunged at one fell swoop into the heart of the fantastic.(1)

'Preposterous'; and yet Sartre as an existentialist declares the absence of absolute laws that could guarantee reality. In each of these cases the fictional universe created is not of a particularly realistic mode, and yet the author's worldview tends to be reflected in the kind of story he chooses to tell. The same reflection is also evident in the two great comic fantasists of recent years, Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett; both have expressed a dislike of Christian faith, and both have created fantasy worlds in which God, or the gods, though they exist, are manifest absurdities.

It need not be so: Lewis might, perhaps, have written the above example from Sartre- and yet the kind of fantasy he actually did write leaves room for the bizarre and miraculous but is clearly within the providence of God; the bizarre is the miraculous rather than the arbitrary. This reflection seems to be a common phenomenon, and the Christian writer will be no exception. Indeed, because he loves the presence of God, he may feel uneasy at the use of the God-given imagination to create a surrealistic universe that neither contains nor reflects Him, since He is the determinant of all possible realities. And since to be a Christian is not merely to hold a belief but also to engage in a love-relationship with God, the notion of a universe from which God has been removed is not merely the fanciful reversal of a proposition, it is the notion

(1) Quoted Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland,1973),p.174.

of bereavement. Therefore, a Christian devoted to the sovereign God of Love revealed in the Bible is unlikely to choose to create a fantasy-world ruled by the distant dreamer-God of Lord Dunsany, the whimsical deity, slightly taken aback, who visits the world of T.F.Powys' Mr Weston's Good Wine, or the schizoid and sometimes sadistic 'divine-diabolic' First Cause of J.C.Powys' A Glastonbury Romance. These are poor substitutes, false Gods. The God he will wish to portray, even in a fantasy, will probably be the God he worships in reality.(l)

So it is that when Tolkien, a committed Christian, elaborates a theory of fantasy, his concept of 'sub-creation' is determined by the notion of a Creator:

> Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.(2)

The same idea emerges in the semi-autobiographical piece Leaf by Niggle, where the artist Niggle discovers, growing, the imaginary tree he has planted:

> 'It's a gift!' he said. He was referring to his art, and also to the result; but he was using the word quite literally.(3)

(1) However, it is worth pointing out that Lewis makes use of the classical mythology, reworked slightly to fit in with the Christian cosmos, as a strategy to circumvent scepticism in the reader: he also writes, 'Paganism is the religion of poetry, through which the author can express, at any moment, just so much or so little of his real religion as his art requires' (quoted Gunnar Urang, 'Tolkien's Fantasy: the Phenomenology of Hope', in Shadows of Imagination, ed. Mark R.Hillegas (Southern Illinois,1969),p.1O6.)(We noted above that the reflection of the worldview in the fictional hypothesis may be limited by factors such as audience expectations, and this may serve as an example.) It might be said, however, that the move into `paganism' involved in the`distancing' of Tolkien's God from the lives of His creatures, in The Lord of the Rings and still more in The Silmarillion, tends to result in a sense of hopelessness and abandonment, and hence in The Silmarillion at least of pervasive

sorrow. (2) Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories, p.55. (3) Tolkien, Leaf by Niggle, in The Tolkien Reader, p.1O4.

These remarks stand in sharp contrast to Barth's remarks, quoted above, where the story-teller uses his art to 're-invent' the world, almost in competition with God. For Tolkien, the dominant idea is one of stewardship of the gift God has given: a gift to be used, not for onesself, but for God. Christ is Lord of all; and therefore, to the Christian, aesthetics too is not autonomous but under His sway, and glorifies Him by the very act of fulfilling its created function. And one aspect of its position under the Lordship of Christ is acknowledging His presence.

In Lewis' Voyage to Venus, indeed, the Lady makes it clear that there are certain fantasies she finds inappropriate, that are incompatible with such stewardship:

> 'It is not from the making a story that I shrink back, O Stranger', she answered, 'but from this one story that you
> have put into my head. I can make myself stories about my children or the King. I can make it that the fish fly and the land beasts swim. But if I try to make the story about living on the Fixed Land [the one prohibition on Venus] I do not know how to make it about Maleldil [Christ].
> For if I make it that He has changed His command, that will not go… But also, I do not see what is the pleasure of trying to make these things.'(1)

The worshipper is unlikely to desire an altered God; so God does not change in the fantasy world. Nor, says Tolkien's Aragorn, do the deepest principles of good and evil:

> `I had forgotten that', said Eomer. `It is hard to be sure of anything among so many marvels. The world is all grown strange. Elf and Dwarf in company walk in our daily fields; and folk speak

(1) Lewis, Voyage to Venus, p.lO2.

> with the Lady of the Wood and yet live… How shall a man judge what to do in such times?'
>
> `As he has ever judged', said Aragorn. `Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.'(1)

Because, of course, the deepest principles are bound up with the very nature of God; God actually is Love and Truth.

It seems, then, that an author's worldview will tend substantially to affect the type of fantasy they choose to tell, in Tolkien and Lewis as much as in Sartre and Vonnegut; and if they believe in God, then God will not be absent from their fantasy merely because it is a fantasy. In practice, as we've seen, Lewis' fantasies declare themselves throughout to be explicitly within the Christian framework, and display different aspects of a cosmic struggle between the Christ of the Bible and the Satan of the Bible; and the paean of worship at the end of Voyage to Venus is certainly to no imaginary deity, but to the Christ whom Lewis worshipped in reality. If the author is a committed Christian, then their fantasy will in some measure be `Christian' too.(2)

(1) J.R.R.Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings(1954-55),p.427-28. Unless otherwise indicated all references are to the one-volume Harper Collins paperback edition of 1995, henceforth referred to as TLOTR. (2) Cf Humphrey Carpenter in the `standard' biography of Tolkien: `Tolkien cast his mythology in this form because he wanted it to be remote and strange, and yet at the same time not to be a lie. He wanted the mythological and legendary stories to express his own moral view of the universe; and as a Christian he could not place this view in a cosmos without the God that he worshipped.' (J.R.R.Tolkien: A Biography (1977), p.91.)

(iv) The Christianized Imagination

Some of Tolkien's theoretical statements might seem at variance with these conclusions; and indeed The Lord of the Rings was not begun with any apologetic purpose in view. It seems from Humphrey Carpenter's biography of Tolkien that the story has its roots in Tolkien's linguistic interests, not theology. Tolkien himself says in the Foreword that his prime motive

> was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them.

He proceeds to deny any 'inner meaning' in the book:

> As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical… I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.(1)

But these remarks should not be understood as denying a correlation between the story and the Christian worldview. To begin with, our understanding of this wholesale condemnation of allegory must be qualified by Tolkien's fictional practice in Leaf by Niggle. That story concerns a man bundled off, rather unprepared, on a journey

through a 'dark tunnel', firstly to a corrective 'Workhouse Infirmary' where he works hard and 'during the first century or so'

(1) Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, pp.xvi-xvii.

sorts out his conscience and learns discipline. His moral past is reviewed, and eventually he is sent on to a kind of Paradise, where the imaginary Tree that was his work of art now stands as a real thing. After working creatively there for a while, he is led on by a shepherd into the Mountains -'What they are really like, and what lies beyond them, only those can say who have climbed them'.(1) It is difficult to see this short story as anything but an allegory of the Catholic view of the afterlife, with purgatory paving the way for heaven.

Be that as it may, it seems that in the Foreword to The Lord of the Rings Tolkien is using the terms 'inner meaning' and 'allegory' in a very narrow sense; one in which Sauron would actually signify Satan (if the allegory were religious), or the Ring the atomic bomb (if it were political). 'Applicability' in contrast would seem to suggest a more general pattern that occurs in the fictional universe and which may match (can be read as) the shape of the reader's experience in the real world; that is, a correlation of a general kind, owing its shape to Tolkien's worldview and leaving its mark on his imaginative work. Lewis imagines Tolkien being asked why he uses a fantasy setting if he has 'a serious comment to make on the real life of men', and replies for Tolkien: 'Because, I take it, one of the main things that the author wants to say is that the real life of men is of that mythical and heroic quality'.(2) 'Mythical', meaning, presumably, amongst other things, that human life is part of the

cosmic struggle between good and evil, in which powers on both sides that we might call 'mythical' are in very

(1) Leaf by Niggle,p.ll0. (2) Quoted Gunnar Urang, Shadows of Heaven (1971),p.134.

truth actively involved. In such a view there is a definite correlation between the fantasy and the author's view of reality. But such a vision, Lewis implies, can be better glimpsed when it is projected onto a fantasy context.

This understanding of The Lord of the Rings receives confirmation from Tolkien's essay On Fairy Stories. Here Tolkien uses the term Fantasy

> in a sense...which combines with its older and higher use as an equivalent of Imagination the derived notions of 'unreality' (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World),
> of freedom from the domination of observed 'fact', in short of the fantastic.(1)

This essay is in part written to defend the legitimacy of fantasy against the suggestion that all literature must be in a more realistic mode; hence its primary emphasis is on the value of sub-creation:

> That the images are of things not in the Primary World (if
> that indeed is possible) is a virtue, not a vice. Fantasy (in this sense) is, I think, not a lower but a higher form
> of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent.(2)

The goal of such a fantasy is to achieve 'the inner consistency of reality', that is, that 'which commands or induces Secondary Belief'.(3)

But, as Tolkien goes on to say, there is more to it than that.

(1) Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories,p.47. (2) Ibid. (3) Ibid.

The four major qualities of fairy-stories, he says (using this term, not for children's stories, but for fantasy in general), are 'Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation'.(1) Two of these are explicitly oriented towards the real world. 'Recovery' is the 'regaining of a clear view...seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them'.(2). 'Consolation' is concerned precisely with the patterning of events:

> I will call it Eucatastrophe. The eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function.
>
> The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn' (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale): this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially 'escapist', nor 'fugitive'. In its fairy-tale - or otherworld - setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the world, poignant as grief… In such stories when the sudden 'turn' comes we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through.

In passing beyond the 'very web of story', the impulse of the creative imagination coalesces with the realistic impulse:

> Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a
> real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be described by the dictionary definition: 'inner consistency of reality', it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not in some way partake of reality.

(1) Ibid, p.46. (2) Ibid, p.57.

In other words, the 'consolation' is not just an anodyne, an

encouraging opiate. To Tolkien as a Christian, the eucatastrophe mirrors, or partakes of, a pattern of true 'consolation' in reality.

> The peculiar quality of the 'joy' in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a 'consolation' for the sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question. 'Is it true?' The answer to this question that I gave at first was (quite rightly): 'If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world'. That is enough for the artist (or the artist part of the artist). But in the 'eucatastrophe' see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater - it may be a far-off gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world.

As we saw earlier, eucatastrophe is a dominant motif in The Lord of the Rings: not only for purely formal reasons, but because Tolkien believes in the same pattern within reality. This happy ending is embodied supremely in the evangelia, the four Gospels:

> But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfilment of Creation. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation.... This story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified… Legend and History have met and fused.(1)

Tolkien's position may be summarised in these terms: because Man is made in the image of his Creator, his own creation of

(1) These quotations are from ibid, pp.68-72.

autonomous, non-realistic worlds is entirely valid, and is

assisting 'in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation'.(1) But if they contain imaginative 'truth', this is at root because they partake of the basic pattern of reality, in which God's purposive 'making' is joyously at work to an ever more glorious end. Tolkien's stories are in the first place stories, and not fictionalised apologetics; but the story that takes shape in his Christianized imagination is, he knows, one bearing the Christian pattern. At the end of Leaf by Niggle, the Second Voice says of Niggle's 'art' that it is 'very useful indeed… As a holiday, and a refreshment'; but he adds, 'not only for that, for many it is the best introduction to the Mountains', that is, heaven.(2) Tolkien believed that art, just by being itself rather than through overt didacticism, could serve as an 'introduction to the Mountains'.

Accordingly, the practical end result is not far from the position of Lewis. For although Lewis, unlike Tolkien, ack-knowledged an apologetic purpose, he nevertheless says firmly, 'I've never started from a message or a moral'; his brilliant myth of the Fall, Voyage to Venus, began with the mental picture of floating islands. But then again, as he adds, 'It wouldn't have been that particular story if I wasn't interested in those particular ideas on other grounds'.(3) Similarly, he records that the Narnian stories began their creative life as a series of images - 'a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent

(1) Ibid, p.73. (2) Tolkien, Leaf by Niggle,p.112. (3) Lewis, Of Other Worlds, pp.87-88.

lion. At first there wasn't even anything Christian about them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord. It was part of the bubbling.' But slowly the 'author as man, citizen, or Christian' came to shape the initial impulse of the 'author as author'.(l) The story's shape was determined, we may say, by the fact that it arose in a mind with a distinctively Christian cast, rather than an agnostic one. This is similar to Tolkien's account, although Lewis' apologetic tendency was deliberate:

> I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood… The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them appear for the first time in their real potency?(2)

(v) Advantages of the Fantasy Mode

Fantasy, then, offers to the Christian novelist a useful form for providentialist fiction. Such an extended departure from realism has at times seemed critically disreputable. And yet the use of a certain stylization, a certain selectivity and re-creation to emphasise and underline aspects of reality that might otherwise be lost in a welter of realistic detail, is part of theoretical approaches as diverse as those of Brecht and Racine. It is

(1) Ibid,pp.35-36. Cf.Tolkien's reference, cited above, to 'the artist part of the artist'. (2) Ibid,p.37.

possible to say, indeed, that Lewis' and Tolkien's fantasy writings are only extending the basic premise of fiction, that truth or beauty or both may be served by a certain departure from historicity, from mimesis of the real world. In the world they sub-create, the pattern of the eucatastrophe (among other things) can be portrayed with clarity.

In this they have some highly respectable precedents. Northrop Frye has described a similar procedure as taking place in some of Shakespeare's comedies. Plays like As You Like It and The Midsummer Night's Dream, he suggests, present a 'green world' to which the characters withdraw, where the confusion of events is resolved into a pattern of order; matters are clarified when the action is moved into something resembling a fantasy context. The parallel with the function and content of Lewis' Perelandra and Tolkien's Middle-earth becomes clearer still when Frye continues:

> The natural society is associated with the things which in the context of the ordinary world seem unnatural, but which are in fact attributes of nature as a miraculous and irresistible reviving power. These associations include dream, magic and chastity or spiritual energy as well as fertility and renewed natural energies.(1)

And although, as Frye remarks elsewhere, 'it is clear that the world of Puck is no world of eternal forms or divine revelation'(2), yet underlying Shakespearean comedy it is possible to see the pattern of events of the Christian mediaeval comic

(1) Northrop Frye. A Natural Perspective (New York.1963), pp.142-143
(2) Northrop Frye. 'The Argument of Comedy', in Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed.Leonard F.Dean (New York.1967).p.87.

vision. The pattern of resolution is parallel to Tolkien's notion of eucatastrophe. That shape of events is amenable to the imagination in both cases because of the influence of the shared faith in overruling providence. Within the fantasy or romance context such a shape can be strikingly formulated.

For the contemporary supernaturalistic novelist, such a context offers three important attractions. To start with, it removes one of the major problems of such fiction: and that is that there is a great difference between asserting that God acts in history, and claiming to discern definitely (outside the divinely-interpreted biblical narratives) the precise direction and shape of His acting. Pontification about the exact details in the complex world of reality can be avoided in the fantasy mode; for, while that mode may still provide a kind of model of the providential pattern in the real world, it can embody 'the opposition' in an unquestionable, absolutised evil. This has the added advantage of highlighting the cosmic dimensions of the clash of good and evil, and avoiding the implication that the Lord of the universe is like some tribal deity, useful for paying off scores against one's neighbours or neighbouring states. Such an absolutised evil is embodied in Sauron, the 'dark lord', who reigns over the barren land of Mordor in ~he Lord of the Rings; in the demon-possessed Weston of Voyage to Venus; and in the 'macrobes' that 'breathed death on the human race and on all joy' in That Hideous Strength.(1) Where such evils

(1) Lewis, That Hideous Strength (1945; revised edition of 1955, published by Pan),p.163.

are manifested, the pattern of providence, and the relationship of small events to great, becomes clear.

Secondly, by depicting the apocalyptic termination of an age of doubt and uncertainty, fantasy can present a situation where the hidden forces behind events are revealed. This is true both of That Hideous Strength, where the link between university politics and spiritual warfare is made manifest, and of The Lord of the Rings, where Aragorn remarks,

> 'Strider' I am to one fat man who lives within a day's march of foes that would freeze his heart, or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly. Yet we would not have it otherwise. If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple they will be, and we must be secret to keep them so… But now the world is changing once again. A new hour comes.(1)

The creation of a time of revelation is a tactic that gives the fantasist an opportunity to present paradigmatic events through which the secret determinants of apparently 'normal' history are set forth.

A further advantage is apparent in fantasy on the grand scale, such as The Lord of the Rings, dealing with events over several centuries: 'pseudo history', as Lewis calls it.(2) A problem with fictional presentation of the doctrine of providence is that the patterns may be too large or complex for human vision; Milton, for

(1) Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings,pp.242. (2) Lewis, Of Other Worlds,pp.65-66.

example, needs to take his readers beyond the world and beyond the dawn of history to make the pattern clear when he attempts to justify the ways of God to men. But patterns that may be hard to perceive within a small focus may be clarified as the scope becomes broader, as a larger structure of events is revealed - or created. This is a technique employed by anti-Christian writers as well: Stapledon's Last and First Men implies that God is not involved in human suffering as it invents fiction after fiction of civilisations crumbling into agony and cruelty after being, perhaps, within striking distance of stepping forward instead. The suggestion is thereby made that if there is a deity in the universe He regards all events with an unemotional aesthetic detachment: He is Joyce's God, outside His handiwork, paring His fingernails. Whether in Stapledon or in Tolkien, the non-realistic mode of pseudo-history enables the author to enforce his pattern by the construction of a large number of instances. If not an accumulation of 'evidence', it is at least an accumulation of experiences containing a similar shape.

Within the bounds of the text itself, nothing is 'proven'. A hypothesis is offered, a shape in the flux of events: the reader mayor may not make the correlation with the real world and begin to think. 'Yes, maybe things are like that in reality'. In this sense, as Lewis says, fantasy offers a 'baptism of the imagination'; of the imagination, not the reason, in the first place. Lewis writes of his first encounter with George Macdonald's Phantastes,

> I did not yet know (and I was long in learning) the name of the new quality, the bright shadow, that rested on the travels of Anodos. I do now. It was Holiness… That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptised; the rest of me, not unnaturally, took longer. I had not

> the faintest notion of what I had let myself in for by buying
> Phantastes.(l)
>
> What it actually did to me was to convert, even to baptise...my imagination. It did nothing to my intellect nor (at that time) to my conscience. Their turn came far later with the help of many other books and men.(2)

Elsewhere he gives the example of stories that 'turn' on fulfilled prophecies, such as that of Oedipus, or Tolkien's The Hobbit:

> In most of them the very steps taken to prevent the fulfilment of the prophecy actually bring it about… Such stories produce (at least in me) a feeling of awe, coupled with a certain sort of bewilderment… We have just had set before our imagination something that has always baffled the intellect: we have seen how destiny and free will can be combined, even how free will is the modus operandi of destiny. The story does what no theorem can quite do. It may not be 'like real life' in the superficial sense: but it sets before us an image of what reality may well be like at some more central region.(3)

The weapons of such writing are not those of neatly-marshalled polemical arguments. A 'baptism of the imagination' is achieved by

(1) C.S.Lewis, Surprised by Joy (1955; Fontana edition of 1959), pp.145-146. (2) C.S.Lewis, Introduction to George Macdonald: an Anthology (New York,1947),p.21. (3) Lewis, Of Other Worlds p.15.

imaginative and verbal power. And then, if in his imaginary world the novelist can 'make you see', as Conrad says, he will give his reader the option of seeing the real world too in a providential shape.

(vi) The Return Towards Reality

It should perhaps be made plain, as a final comment on the Christian fantasy mode, that this is not a matter of siding with what 'ought to be' rather than what 'is' - a subject of some concern to writers in the novel tradition. Defoe makes Moll Flanders declare, 'I am giving an account of what was, not of what ought or ought not to be'(1); Hardy in the Preface to Tess of the D'Urbervilles declares his intention to write what is rather than what should be. And in the general flight from didacticism that has taken place in criticism over the last century or so, the point has been accepted.

(1) The example is Dorothy Van Ghent's, op.cit., p.171.

Actually, one would have thought there was scope for a Christian challenge to this particular dogma. The preference for what is over what ought to be is not exactly self-evident as an aesthetic principle, and could conveniently be labelled reactionary by a Christian, whose loyalty, as a 'cosmic radical'(!), is to the order of the new heavens and new earth. (Or, for similar reasons, by a Marxist.) The Christian is engagé, radically dissatisfied with the alienated world as it is. Tolkien states that the Escape of Fantasy is the Escape of the Prisoner, not the Flight of the Deserter.(1) The idea behind this statement is not entirely foreign to Camus' notion of the novelist as rebel, where art is

> a demand for unity and a rejection of the world. But it rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes can be… In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it and the construction of a substitute universe. Rebellion from this point of view is a fabricator of universes. This also defines art. (2)

In one sense the Christian is a rebel of this kind. But the difference is that he is not faced with the 'impossibility of capturing' the vision; he does not merely rebel against brokenness and evil in the name of what ought to be or even 'sometimes can be'. Rather, the Christian's loyalty is to a reality: that existed before the Fall, that is

(1) Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories, p.60. (2) Albert Camus, The Rebel (1951), trans. Anthony Bower (1953; Peregrine edition of 1962),pp.219,221.

still partially visible as the hallmark of the Creator, that will finally triumph at the Second Coming, and that now erupts into history (albeit incompletely) as the kingdom of God. When Lewis or Tolkien set about being (in Camus' terms) 'fabricators of universes', their work bears a clear relationship to this reality: in the Malacandra of Out of the Silent Planet or the Perelandra of Voyage to Venus, where the loss of paradise through a Fall is stated explicitly as a possibility; in The Silmarillion, which clearly relates the brokenness of the world to the Fall(s) it describes; in the close of That Hideous Strength, when the powers of heaven come down into this world and so the 'ancient unities' are partially restored.(1) These Christian 'sub-creations' serve not only as Escape, as rebellion, but as Consolation and Recovery; evoking a homesickness and desire (2) for the lost (but partially recoverable, and one day returning) order, and revealing a world that includes

(1) C.S.Lewis, That Hideous Strength,pp.158-159, 248. (2) 'Desire' is a crucial concept to C.S.Lewis. On various occasions, and especially in Surprised by Joy and The Pilgrim's Regress, he suggests that all desire honestly pursued finally points towards God; nothing less will finally prove satisfying. To describe this desire, he invokes the images of fantasy: `Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years.' (Screwtape Proposes a Toast (1965),p.98.) The demon Screwtape complains that 'the incalculable winds of fantasy and music and poetry' are continually undoing his work of 'unravelling their souls from Heaven and building up a firm attachment to the earth'. (The Screwtape Letters (1942; Fount edition of 1977),p.144.) Stories, Lewis suggests, can come as close to capturing the object of desire as is possible in this life. (Of Other Worlds,pp.20-21.) 'The poets and the mythologies' suggest the impossible, 'to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it… That is why the poets tell us such lovely falsehoods. They talk as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul; but it can't… Or not yet. For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day give us the Morning Star and cause us to put on the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy.' (Screwtape Proposes a Toast, pp.l06-107.) What the myths express will finally be manifested in reality. It is noticeable that Lewis' own fantasies make use of precisely the images he invokes here: in Voyage to Venus, Ransom actually 'passes into' Venus, the 'Morning Star'; in Till We Have Faces, a human being is united with the god of the west wind. Lewis' fantasies are in part evoking that saving 'desire' for what will finally be manifested in the 'kingdom of heaven'.

providence and eucatastrophe, as a challenge to faith. Such a dialectic is not merely idealistic but fundamentally concerned with reality:

> 'Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth'
> (desirable, incompletely manifested)
> 'as it is in heaven'
> (an order already in existence; that which is, not 'ought to be')

Nor is this 'Recovery' restricted to the area of providential causality in events; rather, says Tolkien, it involves in general 'seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them.'(1) It is interesting that where the arch-realist Flaubert writes. 'Don't you think that this unworthy reality... doesn't turn my stomach also? If you knew me better. you would know that I execrate ordinary life'(2), the Christian fantasist Tolkien desires that

> We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps
> suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep and dogs
> and horses - and wolves.(3)

He and Lewis write fictions marked by a delight in created reality rather than a hatred of it. Lewis argues that only the person who can see nature from outside can see her as she is:

> You must go a little away from her, and then turn round. and
> look back. Then at last the true landscape will become
> visible… Come out, look back, and then you will
> see... this astonishing cataract of bears, babies, and
> bananas: this immoderate deluge of atoms, orchids, oranges,
> cancers, canaries, fleas, gases, tornadoes and toads (4)

That hungry delight in created reality. that love of the particular. reappears continuously in Lewis' work:

> ...a serious, yet gleeful, determination to rub one's nose
> in the very quiddity of each thing, to rejoice in its being
> (so magnificently) what it was.(5)

(1) Tolkien. On Fairy-Stories. p.57. (2)Quoted Grant. op.cit.. p.59. (3) Tolkien. ibid. (4) Lewis. Miracles(1947; Fontana edition of 1960).p.70. The immediate context of the remark is setting the naturalistic vision against that of a supernaturalistic universe, rather than discussing fantasy. (5)

Lewis. Surprised by Joy. p.160. It is not at all coincidental that Lewis' words here resemble the delight in the unique 'inscapes' of Creation that delighted his fellow-Christian Hopkins.

> I felt as if I had suddenly been banished from the real, bright, concrete, and prodigally complex universe into some sort of second-rate universe that had all been put together on the cheap; by an imitator.(l)

> Indeed, in a way I was drunk; drunk with the sheer delight
> of being back in the real world.... There was real sunlight falling on a panel. That panel needed repainting; but I could have gone down on my knees and kissed its very shabbiness -the precious real, solid thing it was.(2)

For such a fantasist, the goal of fantasy is that the 'excursion into the preposterous sends us back with renewed pleasure to the actual'(3):

> Fantasy is made out of the Primary World, but a good craftsman loves his material, and has a knowledge and feeling for clay, stone and wood which only the art of making can give. By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed; by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory… It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.(4)

And for some readers at least, Tolkien has passed on the vision:

Clyde Kilby writes of The Lord of the Rings,

> Again, the Rings joins the high art of the world in revealing the significance, even the glory, of the ordinary.... No book published in recent times creates a more poignant feeling for the essential quality of many outdoor and indoor experiences - of flowing streams and the feel and taste of water, of food when one is desperately hungry, of a pipe and complete relaxation, of

(1) Lewis, Of Other Worlds, pp.100-101. (2) Ibid, p.105. (3) Inid,p.15. (4) Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories,p.59.

> being safely shut-in from hurtful forces at the door, of light in dark places, of the coming of dawn, or of the quiet strength of song and legend. After reading the Rings one sees and feels more deeply.(l)

This aspect of the work of Lewis and Tolkien has not been discussed in detail in the preceding chapters, which were explicitly concerned with the issue of providentialism. But this discussion of the relation between their fantasy worlds and the Christian perception of reality would not be complete without a recognition of this paradoxical but entirely logical connection between providentialism and the delight in particular reality. For it is precisely because God is the Creator of every individual item in the universe, and because He is intimately involved in His universe, that every particular is of infinite significance, the masterpiece of the master craftsman.

Lewis and Tolkien seek - among other things - to give us back the real world we have lost by taking us briefly outside it; by showing us a paradigm of an imaginary, sub-created world that is upheld and irradiated by the providential workings of God; as ours too could turn out to be, if we wish to see it. This is not their fantasies' sole raison d'être: both authors are in the first place simply telling a tale. But it remains a key part of what they are doing, a part that marks them out as distinctively Christian fantasies.

(1) Clyde Kilby. 'Meaning in The Lord of the Rings', in Hillegas, op.cit.,pp.73-74.