

TRANSCENDENCE AND DESTRUCTION:  
DEATH IN C. S. LEWIS'S OTHERWORLDLY NOVELS  
*OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET* AND *PERELANDRA*

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*This thesis is dedicated to my husband,  
Chuck –  
steadfast and true.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Woven throughout the tapestry of strange, beautiful, and cathartic images of other worlds created by C. S. Lewis in the first two novels of the Space Trilogy - *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) and *Perelandra* (1942) – is the persistent thread of death. It certainly takes the form of the threat or reality of physical death, but there are many other forms: death of innocence, of self-interest, of notions or fears about the world or about other worlds, of fear of the unknown, of cowardice or complacency, of the natural world. This thesis examines death in two categories: death as transcendence (ultimately personified in the life and Redemption of Jesus Christ), and death as destruction (culminating in ruin) for Fallen humanity, exploring the ways in which Lewis divides the many forms of death into these two categories. Only the first two novels of the Trilogy are examined because they both take place on other planets, and neither of the planets is Fallen. Lewis gives the reader perspective on the depths of mankind's depravity by comparing the human race to unfallen races that either accept, or do not know, death. The great distances between the physical celestial bodies and the moral condition of their inhabitants reveal humanity's own potential for greatness and courage, and also its weakness, fear, and use of death as a weapon.

Death entered the world with the Fall of Man, described in Genesis 3. In the story, Eve was tempted by Satan in disguise to desire wisdom as great as God. Pride made her

believe her tempter, and she and Adam disobeyed God to attain the promised wisdom. They put to death the oneness they had enjoyed with God by trying to supplant Him. The punishments and results of their disobedience are so far-reaching that they are inescapable by any human generation: enmity between man and man, man and animals, man and the earth, man and the elements, and so on. But the most fatal of the consequences is man's willful separation from God in the soul, leaving room for evil to enter, take root, and grow. In Christian thought, Christ's Incarnation, death, and Resurrection restored man to his former status, but the restoration affects the soul only if it is surrendered to, and that surrender often involves suffering. In the words of St. Paul,

that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed,

that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. (Romans 6:6-9 KJV)

Such is the transcendence that death brings in *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra* – identification (explicit or implied) with the death and Resurrection of Christ redeems the Fallen nature of man.

Lewis continually brings the two novels' characters to a sort of tunnel; to go through the tunnel, accepting and enduring the imminent darkness and struggle of death to something they know or feel, brings a character to greater wisdom and strength, to moral and emotional transcendence, and finally, redemption. To avoid the tunnel, cleverly going around it and following the instinct for self-preservation, is to descend to greater egotism, false wisdom, and pride, which all eventually lead to entropy, violence, and evil destruction. This avoidance of death in its many forms is a death in itself – a death to possibilities for development, change,

and something more than the singular reality recognized by mankind. Lewis uses his own experiences of death in its varied forms, his considerable skills as a writer and scholar, and his substantial knowledge of theology and the Bible to effectively convey his ideas about death – and its transcendent and destructive potential for Fallen humanity – to readers who may not be believers. The result is a pair of enduring, well-written fantasy novels that quietly instruct the spirit as they thoroughly entertain the mind.

In his essay “The Grand Miracle,” Lewis described what he felt is the Christian view of death and its importance:

On the one hand Death is the triumph of Satan, the punishment of the Fall, and the last enemy. Christ shed tears at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood in Gethsemane: the Life of Lives that was in Him detested this penal obscenity not less than we do, but more. On the other hand, only he who loses his life will save it. We are baptized into the *death* of Christ, and it is the remedy for the Fall. Death is, in fact, what some modern people call ‘ambivalent.’ It is Satan’s great weapon and also God’s great weapon: it is holy and unholy; our supreme disgrace and our only hope; the thing Christ came to conquer and the means by which He conquered... If the pattern of Descent and Re-ascent is (as looks not unlikely) the very formula of reality, then in the mystery of Death the secret of secrets lies hid. (Miracles 151-152)<sup>1</sup>

Lewis had clearly thought long about death by the time he wrote this essay, published in 1947. He wrestles with the paradox of God’s Incarnation as both God and man, who came to overcome death at the expense of his own life. It is this very paradox that Lewis’s characters struggle with when they come to the point of the tunnel. It is up to them, in the context of the

stories, if they are to transcend death and receive redemption, or avoid the tunnel, risking destruction.

Lewis knew firsthand that one's growth into moral personhood occurs through suffering, that delicate matter of honestly facing whatever occurs within the context of our lives. He endured and overcame many tragedies in his own life that eventually made him a humble, peaceful, and wise man. He learned early on, however, that we become what he called "bent" if we ignore or attempt to circumvent our suffering, or if we deny the great truths common to virtually every civilization in existence. He felt so strongly about the ubiquitous nature and importance of these truths that he explicitly spelled them out and explained their worth in *The Abolition of Man* (1944). Lewis called the collected precepts "The Tao:" bringing no harm to others, taking care of one's own family and friends, being just, being honest, being gentle, and being courageous and honorable.<sup>2</sup> In *Abolition*, Lewis goes to great lengths to describe the cultures who uphold these same basic laws and duties of each member of society. He concludes with the Chinese version, adopting their name for the moral set of standards:

The Chinese also speak of a great thing (the greatest thing) called the Tao. It is the reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator Himself.

It is Nature, it is the Way, the Road...It is also the way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar...[Lewis paraphrased facts from A. B. Keith's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, volume ii, iv, ix].

(*Abolition of Man* 30)

So Lewis called "this conception, in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike" the Tao as the shorthand name (*Abolition* 30-31). Thomas Howard comments, "Lewis is speaking of the taproot here which he thinks underlies any and all societies and



cultures that are viable. We can't re-draw the moral map, nor the psychological map. We can re-do some cultural ways, but the map remains" (Culture Without Chests 10). No matter what our reaction to it, Lewis says, the facts remain unchanged. So, what happens when we do not adhere to the Tao? John Willis, in Pleasures Forevermore: The Theology of C. S. Lewis, says,

It is not altogether clear from reason alone what the sanction is when the moral law is broken. To step outside of the tao is to cease to be a member of the human community. It is in a sense to destroy one's self. Christianity is clearer: 'the wage paid by sin is death' (Rom. 6:23), and to violate the natural law is to break fellowship with God. For this is the purpose of man's creation – eternal happiness with his Creator" (105).

Therefore, to choose not to adhere to the Tao is to choose a kind of death – to cut off the connection to God and invite evil into the situation in God's absence.

Lewis wrote *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra* in an attempt to convey the importance of these truths he called "the Tao," and how they apply to the world at large, through their application in these deadly tunnel experiences. Lewis's ultimate goal was always to reach his concept of Joy, the higher, transcendent plane where we are close with the Creator. In the novels, he grants the reader glimpses of the spiritual ecstasy one is given if going *through* the tunnel is the chosen way. He also describes the very real dangers of "scientification" to a modern audience that desperately needs to hear his message. Margaret Hannay says that the novels "do not pretend to give us realism, but they do give us truth in mythic form" (88). His audiences have largely found the novels to be what he wanted them to be – subtle, entertaining teachers urging us toward acceptance and transcendence, both of which he knew to be of the greatest value to humanity.

Clive Staples Lewis, or “Jack” as he was affectionately called, enjoyed a happy childhood. His parents, Flora and Albert Lewis, loved him and encouraged his education. Warnie, his older brother, was a willing playmate with whom he spent long hours in imaginative play. His nurse, Lizzie Endicott, was a genuinely good and loving person – “even the exacting memory of childhood can discover no flaw – nothing but kindness, gaiety, and good sense” (*Surprised* 5)<sup>3</sup>. David Downing, in his Space Trilogy commentary *Planets in Peril*, goes so far as to say that “throughout the diverse books of the Lewis oeuvre, the words *nurse* and *nursery* virtually always connote that which is simple, but also that which is true and good” (14).

Lewis was almost ten years old when his mother, Flora, died of cancer. She was brilliant, educated, and the center of his world. To him “it was the sea and islands now; the great continent had sunk like Atlantis” (*Surprised* 21). He felt she had a “coolness” about her, a temperate disposition that soothed his own. “Coolness for Lewis was nearly always a term of approbation, connoting mildness, freshness, freedom from tyrannical passions” (Downing 12). Though he apparently spoke little of it to others, everything changed for him when she died. “Knowing that she lay dying in the next room, the boy prayed to a father in heaven, a magician-god, as he would call him, who failed to answer his prayers” (Como 38). His father, Albert, could not help his sons in their grief, as he was lost in his own. He became withdrawn and unavailable to the boys. When Flora died, “Jack in a very real sense lost his father and his home as well...[Albert] became increasingly subject to fits of temper after his wife’s death, responding to his sons unpredictably and sometimes unjustly” (Downing 16). So, the combined losses of his mother in body and his father in spirit and mind conspired indelibly to burn the image of death and its nature in his mind. Being so young, effectively losing both his parents, he became permanently occupied with the problem of death. Lewis recounts the sight

of his mother's dead body, an experience where "grief was overwhelmed in terror...the ugliest man alive is an angel of beauty compared with the loveliest of the dead" (Surprised 20). The curious practice we have of peering into caskets in funeral home parlors, the dread, the awe, the longing for the lost, commingled in his mind and marked him for life. She was no longer herself, the once beloved, now inanimate, body that had been his mother. "His mother's early death, [the eventual] long periods of separation from his brother, and his father's melancholia, all conspired to convince him that God was either cruel or dead" (Lyle Dorsett, "Keys to Effectiveness," 217). With these experiences fixed firmly within him, Lewis began his long journey through his own spiritual death, carefully tending his growing atheism and seeking wisdom for its own sake.

Soon after Flora died, Albert sent Lewis from their Irish home to the Wynyard School in England to join his brother, Warnie. Their schoolmaster was an "arbitrary and sadistic man, whose frequent rages were accompanied by caning and severe verbal abuse" (Downing 16). The experience must have been a living hell for both of them. But through Warnie's support, the celebration of Eucharist, and the refuge of books, Lewis managed to grow. "Amidst the prolonged and intense misery which was his stay at Wynyard School...Lewis began to love England, learned gregariousness...and first became an effective believer, seriously praying, reading the Bible, and attending to doctrine" (Como 38).

The next few years were marked by dabblings in foppishness, attention-getting, and terrible loneliness. There was nothing to fill the growing void revealed by Flora's death: "the boy clamped down upon his emotions...with all his strength of will; and [eventually] the man utterly refused to attribute his putative atheism to the failure of this sky-magician to save his mother or to the willingness of a loving God to snatch her away" (Como 38). A few years later, alone at Malvern College and losing ground to his emotions, Lewis cried out for help:

“He wrote repeatedly to his father asking to be removed from Malvern, eventually threatening to shoot himself unless his father would allow him to withdraw” (Downing 19). Albert finally took his son seriously, sending him this time to live and study with William Kirkpatrick, his own former tutor, in 1912.

Kirkpatrick, affectionately nicknamed “The Great Knock,” helped Lewis in a way that no one else could. Lewis became one of the family, treated and tended as such. The family environment and support the old schoolmaster gave Lewis provided much of the needed stability that had been missing from his life for so long: “Under Kirkpatrick began a healing process that was not completed until Lewis fully reclaimed his childhood in his early thirties” (Downing 19). The Great Knock was to have enormous influence in Lewis’s education, infusing him with rationalism and logic in all matters of the mind, and carefully scrutinizing each thought and response for validity and meaning. Beginning at the age of 14, Lewis read the classics of philosophy and literature in the original languages, and read French, Italian and German works (Dorsett, Essential 5). The Great Knock taught C. S. Lewis more than how to think and read intelligently. An atheist, rationalist, and pessimist, the retired schoolmaster reinforced his pupil’s obligatory disdain for people who could believe in the existence and goodness of God without palpable evidence. Truth, as C. S. Lewis learned, is eminently worth pursuing. But the teaching he received insisted that the pathway to truth came only through reason (Dorsett, Essential 5).

After a few years, Lewis went on to University College at Oxford. As the story goes, when he arrived at the station, he walked up the street in the wrong direction. As he turned to go back the way he’d come, “there...was the fabled cluster of spires and towers...I did not see to what extent this little adventure was an allegory of my whole life” (Surprised 184).

Downing observes that

...for too long he had been walking in the wrong direction. For him boyhood had been a kind of 'fall' from childhood. For him becoming a 'grown-up' would be a further step in the wrong direction...a state of dreary practicality... For him, the path less taken involved a return to childhood, to a sense of wonder, glory, even nightmare, instead of submitting to the mundanities and inanities he found all too prevalent in modern life. (*Planets in Peril* 22)

Lewis used this idea of moving away to gain perspective as an important device in *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. He staged them both on nearby planets – one on Mars, the other on Venus – to effectively mark the contrasts between Fallen humanity and the unfallen beings of these other worlds. He was also able to use this otherworldly context to show the transformation his characters underwent, through submission to and avoidance of death in its varied forms, outside the context of terrestrial society.

Oxford was a catalyst for change in Lewis's life. He read voraciously and enjoyed his studies, but a spiritual awakening was dawning on his atheistic horizon. His years with William Kirkpatrick had taught him mental discipline, but questions were now beginning to surface about his belief in "philosophic materialism." Lewis described reading George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858) on a train, during his first term at the university in 1917. Something stirred inside him:

It was as if I were carried sleeping across the frontier, or as if I had died in the old country and could never remember how I came alive in the new...I met there all that had already changed me in Malory, Spenser, Morris and Yeats. But in another sense all was changed. 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... It was Holiness. (*Surprised* 179)

Lewis later understood that “that night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized” (Surprised 181). Dorsett quotes him as saying the book created a world “in which one at least felt strongly vigilant; that the whole book had about it a sort of cool, morning innocence, and also, quite unmistakably, a certain quality of Death, good Death” (Dorsett, Essential 5). Downing speculates that “Macdonald first suggested to Lewis, still then a resolute agnostic, that his quest for Joy and his sense of a lost childhood might both be pointing him toward Christianity” (29). It would be a long time before Lewis would fully recognize his “baptism,” and that recognition would be earned through long years of arduous searching, but his mind was definitely changed by George MacDonald. A. N. Wilson, in his biography of Lewis, says that “MacDonald’s entire oeuvre has been described as ‘a life-time effort of mourning’ the traumatic losses of his boyhood, above all the death of his mother [at the age of eight]. Lewis, when he first read *Phantastes*, could have had no idea that MacDonald’s early history was so like his own” (46).

World War I came to Europe as German imperialism threatened most of the continent. The traditional, largely agrarian, way of life began to change as the hillsides and pastures became crisscrossed with trenches. Entire villages were destroyed. Millions were wounded or killed in the trenches. Lewis described his army enlistment and training assignment after only one term at University College: “[I] arrived in the front line trenches on my nineteenth birthday (November 1917), saw most of my service in the villages before Arras – Fampoux and Monchy” (Surprised 188). During a brief hospital stay due to an illness, some time between December 1917, and the spring of 1918, Lewis first read G. K. Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy*. Lewis’s spirituality was once more stirred (Dorsett, Essential 6). Chesterton’s effect on him was profound:

In reading Chesterton, as in reading MacDonald, I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere – “Bibles laid open, millions of surprises” as Herbert says, “fine nets and stratagems.” God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous. (Surprised 191)

As the war dragged on, Lewis tried to keep in good humor. But there were images that remained with him as he fought and waited in the trenches – images that daily became more elaborate and relevant: “Familiarity both with the very old and the very recent dead confirmed that view of corpses which had been formed the moment I saw my dead mother...the horribly smashed men still moving like half-crushed beetles, the sitting or standing corpses...”

(Surprised 196). The motif of death became even more established in his life when Lewis himself felt sure he would face it. He was wounded at Mt. Bernenchon, France, near Lillers, in April 1918:

...just after I had been hit...I found (or thought I found) that I was not breathing and concluded that this was death. I felt no fear and certainly no courage...The proposition “Here is a man dying” stood before my mind as dry, as factual, as unemotional as something in a textbook...The fruit of this experience was that when, some years later, I met Kant’s distinction between the Noumenal and the Phenomenal self, it was more to me than an abstraction. I had tasted it; I had proved that there was a fully conscious “I” whose connections with the “me” of introspection were loose and transitory.

(Surprised 197-8)

His ambivalence about his own death stemmed partly from the saturation of deathly images of war, partly from his past, and partly from the constant notion before he was even drafted that he wouldn't be coming home.

He did return to Oxford in 1919, after recovering from his wound. He picked up where he had left off as a scholar, “doing Mods” and “beginning Greats,” and “assuming what we may call an intellectual ‘New Look.’” There was to be no more pessimism, no more self-pity, no flirtations with any idea of the supernatural, no romantic delusions...a panic-stricken flight from all that sort of romanticism which had hitherto been the chief concern of my life” (Surprised 201). Freud and the Viennese School’s New Psychology were en vogue at the time and Lewis and his friends “were most concerned about...‘Fantasy’ or ‘wishful thinking.’ ...Now what, I asked myself, were all my delectable mountains and western gardens but sheer Fantasies? Had they not revealed their true nature by luring me, time and again, into undisguisedly erotic reverie or the squalid nightmare of Magic?” (Surprised 203-4) According to Owen Barfield, Lewis was at one time eager to analyze himself and those around him concerning the “latest perversions” put forth by the New Psychology (Sayer 132). These distractions must have been amusing to Lewis, but the idea of dying was never far. Peter Kreeft comments that “Freud talked about making friends with the necessity of dying, but no one but a sheep or a scholar is fool enough to believe in such inhuman nonsense” (“Argument” 257). Lewis would later reflect on the unrealistic nature of “the lofty view, which reached its greatest intensity among the Stoics, that Death ‘doesn’t matter,’ that it is ‘kind nature’s signal for retreat,’ and that we ought to regard it with indifference” in his essay, “The Grand Miracle” (Miracles 150-151). However at the time, Lewis did not comprehend the implausibility of these theories. His return to academia from the horrors of war must have temporarily clouded his memory. Then something terribly sobering happened that forever



cleared his mind of delusions: Lewis witnessed his friend Paddy Moore's uncle go mad. "He was a man whom I had dearly loved, and well he deserved love...[but] he had flirted with Theosophy, Yoga, Spiritualism, Psychoanalysis, what not?...I thought I had seen a warning; it was to this, this raving on the floor, that all romantic longings and unearthly speculations led a man in the end..." (Surprised 203). Lewis's constant companion revealed itself in this new form: the death of sanity and reason. Lewis promptly abandoned his interests in Freud and the stylish New Psychology, and began a narrower, more traditional life. These popular theories became repulsive to him as the sea of bodies and blood he had endured in World War I, the stiff corpses of his mother's body and his father's heart, and the mental agony endured by Dr. Askins, crowded back into his mind: "This dislike and distrust of psychology, occultism, and introspection made him desire a religion with an objective, traditional morality. It was clear that Christianity, if only he could accept it, would suit him admirably" (Sayer 132).

Another change occurred when Lewis returned from the war. He and Paddy Moore had promised each other that if either died, the other would look after his family. It was Paddy who did not come home, so his mother, Mrs. Moore, and his sister, Maureen, went to live with Lewis and Warnie. Though Maureen grew up, married and moved away, Mrs. Moore stayed in Lewis's care until she died, almost thirty years later. This kept promise is impressive, and hints at the depth of Lewis's character. Nevertheless, the nature of Lewis's commitment to look after Mrs. Moore, which appears to be a foster mother-son arrangement, has been called into question by one biographer. A. N. Wilson speculated that Lewis and Mrs. Moore were intimate at some point, but John Beversluis rebuts his claim: "given the available facts, we cannot know that they were. Since no further facts are likely to turn up, our only reasonable position is permanent agnosticism. From this, it follows that there is no burden of proof on anyone. Indeed, except for zealots and gossips, there is nothing to prove" (13).

As Lewis pursued this narrower scope of life, reining in his fantasies and intellectual wanderings, his personal development changed direction. He unwittingly set his feet on the path of Christianity, and God had His way: “the great Angler played His fish and I never dreamed that the hook was on my tongue” (*Surprised* 211). He had no plans to become a believer, much less a Christian, but according to Lewis himself, his intellectual New Look – devoid of romanticism and idealism – was fading. Reading his second G. K. Chesterton book, *The Everlasting Man*, helped things along. His friendships with J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson were also instrumental, especially after a particular midnight discussion with the two of them. Downing explains that Lewis’s opinion of myths was that they were embellished lies:

but Tolkien and Dyson answered that myth was better understood as ‘a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination.’ They argued that one of the great and universal myths, that of the Dying God who sacrifices himself for the people, showed an innate awareness of the need for redemption, not by one’s own works, but as a gift from some higher realm. For them, the Incarnation was the pivotal point at which myth became history. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ not only fulfilled Old Testament types but also embodied – literally – central motifs found in all the world’s mythologies. (30)

From the “New Look” days, Lewis had considered “truth” and “myth” mutually exclusive terms. He had distrusted fantasy and could not take the Norse Sagas, Irish legends, and Greek mythology seriously. This amazing conversation now gave Lewis the chance to embrace these legends in a more serious context. Downing continues:

In Christianity, the True Myth to which all the others were pointing, Lewis would eventually find a worldview that he could defend as both good and real.

It was a faith grounded in history, and one with a reasonableness he never tired of defending...it also became the fountainhead of all myths and tales of enchantment, the key to all mythologies, the myth that unfolded itself in history. (31)

Because his cynicism was losing ground, Lewis perceived more in the human psyche than he had before. Instead of simply ignoring the Freudian explanations of all desires as ultimately sexual, which he began doing at the beginning of his New Look period, Lewis replaced these titillating elucidations with a profound understanding of something greater – something transcendent. He recognized within himself a longing that he could not explain:

...in the deepest solitude there is a road right out of the self, a commerce with something which, by refusing to identify itself with any object of the senses, or anything whereof we have biological or social need, or anything imagined, or any state of our own minds, proclaims itself sheerly objective. (Surprised 221)

Thus he began his pursuit of what he called Joy, the insatiable yearning for oneness with the Creator. Peter Kreeft, in his essay “C. S. Lewis’s Argument from Desire,” described this pursuit of joy thus: “every natural or innate desire in us bespeaks a corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire. The minor premise is that there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature, can satisfy. The conclusion is that there exists something outside of time, earth, and creatures which can satisfy this desire” (250).

Another great contributor to Lewis’s dying atheism was T.D. Weldon, one of his Greats professors at Magdalen College. Lewis explains: “Early in 1926 the hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew sat in my room on the other side of the fire and remarked that the evidence for the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. ‘Rum thing,’ he went on. ‘All that stuff of Frazer’s about the Dying God. Rum thing. It almost looks as if it had

really happened once.’ ...Was there then no escape?” (Surprised 223-4) After that, it seemed all he knew, all the great thinkers, philosophers, and writers so dear to him, supported his conversion: “Everyone and everything had joined the other side” (Surprised 225). Lewis could not get away from the pursuit of the universe, from the irresistible press of God:

He could not get out of his head such arguments as Chesterton’s that, in claiming to be the Son of God, Jesus Christ was either a lunatic or a dishonest fraud, or he was speaking the truth. Lewis reread the Gospels and became more and more aware that they were not myths or made-up stories at all, because the authors were simply too artless and unimaginative. (Sayer 132-3)

There was yet another important element to Lewis’s conversion – his father’s death. Albert tried his best to stay in Lewis and Warnie’s lives, to love them and take care of them in any way he could. Nevertheless, Lewis kept his distance from Albert, nursing old wounds and refusing to reconcile with him until 1928. Albert retired from legal practice that same year, and fell into a depression soon thereafter:

While Lewis still found it difficult to be happy in his father’s company, he went to stay with Albert for some part of nearly every vacation...By August 1929, it became clear that he was seriously ill. Lewis did everything possible for him during that month, running errands, helping him to eat and shave, and reading to him. Early in September, he had an operation...[the doctors] thought that ‘he might live a few years.’ Lewis...went back to Oxford...[and when he returned] he learned that Albert had died during the previous afternoon.

(Sayer 133)

His brother Warnie was in the military, stationed in Asia, so Lewis was solely responsible for settling Albert’s affairs. He somehow managed until Warnie arrived, but in the process of

settling the estate, something changed inside him: "Albert's death affected Lewis profoundly. He could no longer be in rebellion against the political churchgoing that was a part of his father's" life (Sayer 133). Lewis was forced to respect his father's public display of his private love of God, in the pew, on his knees. That same year, "Lewis became a professing, kneeling, praying Theist" (Como 52). Wilson found Lewis's conversion suspect. He claimed that Lewis's "'conversion' was a recognition that God was God. It was not a conversion to Christianity" (110). He also felt as though Lewis's last visit to Albert was "a great emotional business...reaching its climax. Lewis continued, throughout life, to be obsessed not only by his father, but also by the possibility that his life could be interpreted in a purely Freudian way" (110). Wilson goes on to further distort the facts, according to Beversluis, by saying that Lewis "could only come to terms 'with a Heavenly Father of his own projection when he had seen the last of his earthly father,' thus achieving 'redemption by parricide'" (12). Unfortunately, Wilson does not believe that Lewis's was able to abandon Freudian ideas, making his own attempt to interpret Lewis's life in a "purely Freudian way." It is curious that Lewis left his father's death, and the death of Mrs. Moore, out of his autobiographical *Surprised by Joy*. Beversluis criticizes Wilson for his speculations about the two omissions: "[According to Wilson, Lewis] omitted his father's death *not* as the now non-authoritative Lewis explains, because it was irrelevant but because he feared that hostile readers would explain his conversion on purely Freudian terms.... As for Mrs. Moore, Lewis omitted her *not*, as he explains, because she was irrelevant too but because, like Hippolytus in Euripides' play, he had by this time rejected and suppressed erotic love directed toward mother substitutes" (12). It seems that Lewis knew a biographer like Wilson would come along, and would be cause for some concern, because Wilson chooses to linger so long on the problems of these two relationships and seizes the opportunity to speculate about possible perversions with a

surrogate mother figure. All his other biographers and scholars, however, see *Surprised by Joy* as being primarily about his own life and thoughts, with these two relationships as secondary, though important, in his life.

Lewis had been given so many chances to take the leap into belief that he could no longer ignore them. He watched as his own dependable atheism, such a protection against the probing questions of believers, slowly died. Belief was the direction in which all roads led. He started slowly up the path and never again wandered from it. He found it pointless to try going any other way.

In later years, he even found skills developed as an atheist that were of great use to him as a believer:

...Lewis kept a distance between himself and the Christian church for nearly two and a half decades, and this kept him in touch with pagans, materialists, and unbelievers of all varieties...[this] became a marked asset once he became a Christian with missionary zeal. He knew...from experience what might awaken [non-Christians]. (Dorsett, "Keys to Effectiveness," 217)

As Lewis's faith grew, he naturally wanted to share it with others. He had witnessed the atrocities of World War I. He understood the loneliness and pain of lost spouses and children, the unanswered question "why," the cold churches and numbed hearts mechanically beating as their bodies mindlessly performed the tasks of everyday life. He wanted people to know God as a loving, beneficent, just, merciful Creator who will ultimately triumph over all evil. So, he addressed this audience at every opportunity, in fiction and nonfiction, using all the skills in his possession. Moreover, he endeavored to understand death. Kreeft eloquently comments on Lewis's endeavors to do so: "[In *A Grief Observed*, Lewis states that] 'Time is just another word for death' (28). There is never enough time. Time makes being into nonbeing. Time is a river

that takes away everything it brings” (“Argument” 258). Understanding and accepting the challenge set before him, C. S. Lewis dedicated the remainder of his life to reaching out to others with the life-giving message of hope and faith he had himself heard.

## CHAPTER 2

### *OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET*

Lewis's growing love of sacred scripture influenced his understanding of death. The idea of "good death" that he encountered in George MacDonald's *Phantastes* returned to his mind as he studied the centrality of Jesus Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection in the New Testament – humanity's *ransom* from death introduced by the Fall. This concept became the unifying element, in the character of Dr. Elwin Ransom, in *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. But rather than explicitly detailing the theological origins of these novels, risking the alienation of the very audience he strove to reach, Lewis employed his formidable skills as a writer to tell stories that were first entertaining, and included as overtone the presence of God. In *Out of the Silent Planet* Lewis details his ideas about the future of Fallen man: humanity can be redeemed of its evil only through submission to the will of God (Maleldil) at the expense of its own agenda. Lewis's characters face physical death, death to fears about the cosmos, death to imaginings about inhabitants of other planets, death to self-perceptions, and death to self-interest – all of which lead to transcendence and joy. However, Lewis's characters can also cause death – destruction of the land, kidnapping, human sacrifice, and murder. The novel's



conflict centers on the struggle between the two types of death in an unfallen world where death is only transcendent.

It is widely noted that the novels began with a challenge between Lewis and his close friend and colleague, J. R. R. Tolkien, to write the kind of stories they both enjoyed, of which there were few. Downing reminds us that “Lewis did not simply adopt fantasy as a didactic vehicle after his conversion; rather it was his love of fantasy, myth and romance that led him to Christianity in the first place” (35). Lewis had been working on what would become *The Allegory of Love: A Study in the Medieval Tradition*, and decided to set his “far-ranging mind, vivid imagination, and profound need to communicate the reality of his faith” to a “first-time experience of writing fiction” (Dorsett, *Essential* 9). And so *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) was born – a novel “written for people who would never read the Bible or enter a church...designed to draw unsuspecting materialists into a story that would tempt them to contemplate spiritual realities and the struggle between good and evil” (Dorsett, *Essential* 9). Lewis began with the idea of space travel, having read H. G. Wells’s *The First Men in the Moon*, a novel he loved for its fantasy, and David Lindsay’s *The Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), a novel he highly praised (Glover, *Art of Enchantment* 33). Lewis “disagreed with Lindsay’s philosophy, [however], which he described as being ‘on the borderline of the diabolical...[and] so manichaeian as to be almost satanic’” (Sayer 153). But Martha Sammons credits Lindsay with fatherhood of the entire Space Trilogy: “Lindsay gave him the idea that scientification could be combined with the supernatural” (19-20). Regardless of the source, Lewis was ready with a response to the unchecked proliferation of

the pulpy ‘scientification’ story begun by writers...who developed...*Amazing Stories*. Such science fiction dealt with the weird, amazing, romantic, and

technological, but its main purpose was to concentrate on science...not plot and character. (Sammons 14)

Lewis's "purpose in writing *Out of the Silent Planet* [was] as a serious answer to the Westonian or scientific view with its hope of defeating death...a writer with more talent and leisure might profitably engage in smuggling good news to people through romance" (Glover, *Art of Enchantment* 28). George Sayer notes that Lewis "had created the character Weston in response to such horrifying ideas as those presented in W. Olaf Stapledon's *First and Last Men*, a novel that describes the invasion of Venus by human beings who destroy the planet's inhabitants and whose object is, not only to preserve the human race, but also to create a superior being" (154). According to Sayer, Lewis wrote in a 1939 letter that "thousands of people in one way or another depend on some hope of perpetuating and improving the human race for the whole meaning of the universe – that a "scientific" hope of defeating death is a real rival to Christianity" (154). But Lewis's response to these ideas had to be made very carefully, as most readers run from the didactic and preachy: "The operation of religion in and through fiction must be subtle, for by drawing attention to itself it blunts its message. Lewis comes increasingly to prefer imaginative works with an underlying theme of spiritual significance to those of outright theology" (Glover, *Art of Enchantment* 28-9).

Douglas Loney quotes Lewis, from the essay "Christianity and Literature" (published in *Christian Reflections*): "Popularised science, the conventions or 'unconventions' of his immediate circle, party programmes, etc., enclose [man] in a tiny, windowless universe which he mistakes for the only possible universe. There are no distant horizons, no mysteries. He thinks everything has been settled" (Loney 14). Lewis's words describe the sterilizing, dehumanizing effect of the "scientification" of fiction, an effect we feel most strongly today as technology itself is glorified far beyond its intended purpose. Loney comments that this

popular science, made popular by casual discussion and extrapolation of the ideas put forth in articles written by research scientists, needs to be “expose[d] and ...counter[ed]” as a mutation of legitimate science that heavily influences our culture’s perspective (14). Lewis fought against the insidious growth of this mutation because such an end would exalt humans as beyond the power of God. Donald Glover aptly summarizes the book as “the story of a lone Christian’s growing understanding of the truth of Deep Heaven, of other worlds, of planetary influences under the guidance of superior celestial powers and his growth into fuller manhood, an expansion of his knowledge and his soul. It is an attack on ‘scientism’ and a statement of the power of love, hope, and charity” (Art of Enchantment 79).

What happened to us to make this “scientification” such a pervasive element of humanity? According to Clyde Kilby, Lewis found that a major cultural shift occurred “about 1800 AD” with the advent of the machine, “and that one consequence of the change was a developing notion that moral principles rust out like old machines and need to be replaced by newer ones. Hence our drift from the Tao, or universal moral order, into shifting, localized values” (26). As machines wore out and broke down, they were abandoned for newer, more advanced machines, and the promise of fewer workers. The machines, after all, would work long hours without pay, benefits, or complaints. Science and technology became the things to discuss – the factory owner singing their praises, the factory worker cursing their foundations. To return to the Tao, the universal system of moral principles, was to return to what were considered outdated values and standards of moral conduct. But Lewis explained in *The Abolition of Man* that the situation is not that simple. By merely asserting that the Tao is relative has no effect on its truth at all. Clyde Kilby makes another important point: “Lewis constantly and consistently seeks to make us conscious of something we are forever neglecting, that is,

man's true place in a universe endlessly overseen and directed by a God of love and of justice" (21).

Dr. Elwin Ransom, respected philologist, meets a worried mother anxiously waiting for her mentally disabled son to return from work. Ransom promises her he will try to find the boy and send him home. In passing The Rise, a house further down the road, Ransom hears a commotion and finds his way through the thick hedge to discover the boy, Harry, scuffling with two men. Surprised, the three cease their struggle and the men begin talking to Ransom (Out of the Silent Planet 13-14).<sup>4</sup> Linda Vance Lusk thinks

It is Ransom's ordinary decency and courtesy which make him keep the promise [to Harry's mother]. Lewis emphasizes the matter of the kept promise, yet it seems like such a small matter...but by keeping it Ransom rescues the son from certain death. The choice to be faithful to his word, moreover, leads Ransom into the circumstances by which he will save another world and help to save his own. (4)

Margaret Hannay makes the observation that "[Ransom] is a decent man who tries to do the right thing, although he does not think of himself as particularly brave" (91). In fact, Ransom struggles valiantly against his lack of bravery to get inside the hedge and see what is going on. Ransom recognizes Devine, an old schoolmate, and meets Weston, his accomplice, for the first time. Lewis moves the duality of human nature into the forefront of the mind of his rationalistic protagonist, but he resists belief in what he sees:

There was something about the whole scene...to convince him that he had blundered on something criminal, while on the other hand he had...the deep, irrational conviction of his age and class that such things could never cross the path of an ordinary person...Even if they had been ill-treating the boy,

Ransom did not see much chance of getting him from them by force. (OSP  
15)

They then look as if they are letting Harry go, but not without Weston's chilling comment: "You have given enough trouble for one night, Harry...And in a properly governed country I'd know how to deal with you" (OSP 16). Lewis begins building his case against the scientific and materialistic most effectively, reflecting the "survival of the fittest" style of so many obsessed with furthering themselves and their own ideas. In Devine, a man Ransom recognizes from school, Lewis embodies the sarcasm and snobbery of the English imperialistic elite. As the story progresses, we become aware that Devine's condescending attitude marginalizes the inherent rights of any being standing between him and monetary gain. With Harry released and gone home, under the auspices of feigned hospitality, Devine ushers Ransom into a room in the house that "revealed a strange mixture of luxury and squalor," a combination which makes Ransom uneasy and mildly suspicious (OSP 17). Loney comments:

Ransom's difficulty is that the [Rise] described in its 'luxury and squalor' is a microcosm of a world in which the luxury of a wholly good creation is everywhere tainted by the squalor of human sin: this is of course Lewis' Christian view of our broken world. (16)

This juxtaposition of "original good" and "parasitic evil," as Loney describes them, echoes the theme of death as transcendence or destruction, respectively. Every human character in the novels has the potential for both, but Ransom is the character who actively pursues the former and valiantly battles the latter. At each tunnel of death Ransom must choose, understanding the implications of the two alternatives: accept the challenge of the unknown and transcend his fear to the good beyond, or refuse the challenge and face evil destruction.

Lewis gets his intergalactic fantasy off the ground with Ransom's kidnapping. After some idle talk and false hospitality provided by Devine, he and Weston give Ransom a drugged drink, a knock on the head, and load him onto their space ship. He later opens his eyes and looks out into the most incredible sight he has yet beheld: "Pulsing with brightness as with some unbearable pain or pleasure, clustered in pathless and countless multitudes, dreamlike in clarity, blazing in perfect blackness, the stars seized all his attention, troubled him, excited him, and drew him up to a sitting position" (OSP 23). Lewis thus begins the thrilling, wondrous sensory experience of Ransom's flight to Malacandra that so shapes his psyche. Ransom feels incredibly, unnaturally light. He was "poised on a sort of emotional watershed from which...he might at any moment pass into delirious terror or into an ecstasy of joy" (OSP 25). Then he began to wonder at his situation. He had no idea where he was. "For the first time a suspicion that he might be dead and already in the ghost-life crossed his mind...but a hundred mental habits forbade him to consider this possibility" (OSP 24). Lewis duly arms Ransom with the Tao, the set of universal moral principles, which stand fast and support his careening mind: "why did the moon look so big? ... The thing wasn't the Moon at all; and he felt his hair move on his scalp... 'No,' replied Weston, 'it's the Earth'" (OSP 25-26). Ransom reels from the realization of where he is, thinking "Any change – death or sleep, or, best of all, a waking which should show all this for a dream – would have been inexpressibly welcome. None came. Instead, the lifelong self-control of social man, the virtues which are half hypocrisy or the hypocrisy which is half a virtue, came back to him" (OSP 27). Again, he clings to what he knows to regain his footing. "Ransom...had no idea that God was carefully planting his footsteps. Nor did he know that God was instrumental in his being refused a room at the inn or in the interference of the weeping woman [Harry's mother]; least of all in

his being knocked on the head” (Kilby 21). The blow he has been struck does not kill him physically, but it is a mortal wound to his ideas about who and what he is.

The author skillfully prepares his argument as his protagonist wrestles with his own emotions. Grasping desperately at habitual composure and logic, Ransom engages Weston: “You mean we’re – in space...What for? ...And what on earth have you kidnapped me for?” (OSP 27) The ever evasive, condescending Weston will divulge none of the details of their destination but he exposes his diabolical philosophy by admitting his abduction of Ransom was, in his mind, necessary:

“My only defence is that small claims must give way to great. As far as we know, we are doing what has never been done in the history of man, perhaps never in the history of the universe...infinity, and therefore perhaps eternity, is being put into the hands of the human race. You cannot be so small-minded as to think that the rights or the life of an individual or of a million individuals are of the slightest importance in comparison with this.” (OSP 29)

And there it is – Lewis’s speculation on the result of the triumph of scientism. Weston’s shocking reply is nonsense to Ransom, who recognizes the megalomania immediately. Ransom’s moral foundation steadies his increasingly hysterical mind:

“I suppose all that stuff about infinity and eternity means that you think you are justified in doing anything...on the off chance that some creatures or other descended from man as we know him may crawl about a few centuries longer in some part of the universe.” “Yes – anything whatever.” (OSP 29-30)

Weston is a man “without a chest,” described in *The Abolition of Man*, devoid of human empathy. The machination of man is Weston’s plan, for without those characteristics which make man who he is – love, honor, dignity, reason, the grace of God – he is reduced to mere

machine. Weston's obsessive scheme echoes the plans being laid across the English Channel in 1938 by the new Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler.

Leaving room for Ransom to experience the awe of God's creation, Lewis leaves the conversation and conclusions at that. There is no sign of panic, confusion, or anger in Ransom. He is instead lured back to his gazing:

Stretched naked on his bed, a second Danae, he found it night by night more difficult to disbelieve in old astrology: almost he felt... "sweet influence" pouring or even stabbing into his surrendered body... The adventure was too high, its circumstance too solemn, for any emotion save a severe delight... immersed in a bath of pure ethereal colour and of unrelenting though unwounding brightness he felt his body and mind daily rubbed and scoured and filled with new vitality. (OSP 33-34)

According to Edith Hamilton, Danae was a Greek mythological character whose father, King Acrisius, was told that her son would eventually kill him. Rather than have Danae killed and risk retribution from the gods, Acrisius

had a house built all bronze and sunk underground, but with part of the roof open to the sky so that light and air could come through. Here he shut her up and guarded her. So Danae endured, the beautiful,/To change the glad daylight for brass-bound walls/And in that chamber secret as the grave/She lived a prisoner. Yet to her came/Zeus in the golden rain. As she sat there through the long days... with nothing to do, nothing to see except the clouds moving by overhead, a mysterious thing happened, a shower of gold fell from the sky and filled her chamber. (198)



And that is how Zeus made her pregnant. So, like Danae under her skylight, Ransom lay open and vulnerable beneath his. The language Lewis uses in this passage explicitly and implicitly describe the changes occurring in Ransom's psyche – the “stabbing,” “surrender,” “severe delight,” “unwounding brightness” all describe the penetrating power, the “impregnation” of Ransom by the spirits populating the cosmos (OSP 33-34). Lewis's language indicates the death of Ransom's presumptions about space, and his feelings that he will physically die from the intensity of his experience beneath his window on heaven.

Loney comments on the evolving nature of Ransom, bringing the Danae myth into focus by highlighting the life-giving force of the heavens' great power. Ransom's submission to the experience is key to the novel's progress:

The ‘surrender’ here is crucial, explicitly invoking the action of Ransom's will in the continuing process of his perspective's growth and development. By alluding to the myth of Danae, Lewis displaces the atheistic Wellsian ‘Presence’ of the void with St. John's image of the immanent God, who infuses life into all things living, ‘the light of men [which] shines in the darkness,’ (John 1:4-5) vital in himself and irresistibly imparting vitality to his creatures. (Loney 17)

The reader vicariously experiences the simultaneous terror and ecstasy of surrender with Ransom, and with him comes to doubt what was before presumed fact. Loney saw the absolute importance to the story of Ransom's surrender. Ransom's psyche could not long withstand the heavens' assault, surrendering to divine rain just as Danae endured her heavenly shower. Ransom begins to understand the necessity of his submission to this holy, relentless force – the necessity of dying to self. He is being drawn, as Lewis was fond of saying, “further up and further in”:

Ransom...became aware of ...a spiritual cause for his progressive lightening and exultation of heart...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...space was the wrong name. Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens – the heavens which declared the glory [of God]. (OSP 34)

Reveling in this "glory," the logical, reasonable Ransom is opening himself to the heavens' power to change. However, this openness is not without suffering. He overhears a conversation between Devine and Weston, but only Devine's voice is audible:

"You'll find he'll eat out of your hand at the first sight of a sorn...Human sacrifice, I suppose...It is understood that you are doing it all from the highest motives. So long as they lead to the same actions as my motives, you are quite welcome to them...When the time comes for cleaning the place up we'll save one or two for you, and you can keep them as pets or vivisect them or sleep with them or all three." (OSP 36)

Devine's sarcastic allusion to Weston's motives hint at his absolute moral vacuity.

Malacandra's inhabitants are merely obstacles in the way of his plunder. Devine's perverse final comment reveals Lewis's contempt for that set of aristocratic hypocrites that humor and then take advantage of the technically skilled and intellectually simple for personal gain. However deranged Weston's plan is, he still has some glimmer of humanity that Devine can only feign.

The mental wound Devine inflicts on Ransom proves invaluable. Ransom steals back to his room and its compelling window on the stars to contemplate the possible nature of a sorn. He fights encroaching hysteria as imaginary monsters creep through his mind: "The

same myths of “space” which had filled him with a dread of the illimitable night beyond Earth’s atmosphere now supply fantastic and horrible images for what these sorns might be...  
 ...for the remainder of the voyage to Malacandra, Ransom’s spirit writhes under the crushing weight of this new terror” (Loney 17). But Ransom’s old, reasonable man regains the upper hand. Ransom makes a plan for escape, for with a plan he might have a chance: “He could face death, but not the sorns. He must escape when they got to Malacandra, if there were any possibility. Starvation, or even to be chased by sorns, would be better than being handed over. If escape were impossible, then it must be suicide. Ransom was a pious man. He hoped he would be forgiven” (OSP 37). Lewis’s depiction of Ransom’s mental state of affairs, which he might have experienced himself or witnessed first hand in the trenches of World War I, helps to explain what may have happened to the faith of many soldiers. In the moment of panic, they turned away from God, choosing self-destruction over capture. Ransom makes sure he has the same option available, though even as he hides his weapon he mentally hesitates at the thought of using it.

The heavenly assault on Ransom’s spirit is relentless, eventually wearing down his agitation and self-possession. He is compelled to return to contemplation of the heavens: “...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 (OSP 41). Here, Ransom is thinking on a very high plane. The enormity of the justice, the terrifying goodness, the absolute perfection lying behind this veil gives us one of the images of the infinity of God conjured by Lewis that so help readers to broaden their perspective. Ransom’s mind is again flooded with the hope, the strength, the vitality, and the

intellectual renaissance he experienced when he first entered this tunnel of death. Loney has more to say about the subject of Ransom's "death" and the transcendence that follows:

In his account of the spacecraft's descent to the alien planet Lewis gives a symbolic representation of just how hard it may be to forsake an old point of view, in order to adopt a new one...the more difficult re-adjustment to be made is a matter of the mind and spirit. Ransom's outlook has been... redefined considerably since that evening in which Weston plucked him up bodily from the earth and bundled him off to Mars...[but there are other trials] Ransom must yet endure, the battle with his Wellsian fear of 'Otherness' chief among them. (18)

So Loney describes the crux of the matter: Ransom must continue in this process of dying to his fears and assumptions. John Lawlor suggests that "the progress of the book is Ransom's awakening to his true destiny; and in this process he has to be steadily corrected. He must lose his fears of 'space' as coldness, darkness, and hostility; of the creatures who people his imagined universe...and finally, he must shed his conviction that death is preferable to being handed over to 'an extra-terrestrial Otherness'" (51). He must choose faith over fear.

Ransom is soon forced to the threshold of his fear of alien beings. Once on Malacandra, he flees his captors. Hiding behind some vegetation, Ransom sees a creature "six or seven feet high and too thin for its height, like everything in Malacandra...It was something like a penguin, something like an otter, something like a seal" (OSP 55). As Loney suggests, Ransom's "dread of sentient extra-terrestrials must be confronted directly when he meets the hross Hyoi" (18). As Ransom lies there, pressing himself to the ground, his fear of capture becomes strangely "conventional, no longer felt as terror or hope by the fugitive" (OSP 55). He has just died another death – to his fears about otherworldly beings. He continues this

dying process as he meets and befriends the rational Hyoi (OSP 58). Lewis gives us a miraculous glimpse of peaceful, extra-terrestrial life. Lewis hints here at references to *Paradise Lost* contained in *Perelandra*, discussed in Chapter 3. More importantly for the moment, Lewis gives the reader a completely fresh look at human-alien relations. He introduces the possibility of respect for, and even endearment to, the one element mankind has been taught to fear without reserve. More than anything else that happens to Ransom on Malacandra, dying to that fear proves crucial to Ransom's survival. Loney notes:

[Ransom] soon acknowledges the fundamental likeness between man and hross which is expressed in the hrossian word 'hnau.' The word is glossed later in the narrative by Oyarsa, who explains to Ransom that both of them are "copies of Maleldil" (OSP 119). Thus the meaning of Lewis's word hnau is perhaps best rendered in English by the Biblical phrase, "the image of God."

(18)

The continuity between Ransom and his Malacandrian counterparts is something unexpected. Lewis was striving to remind readers of the universality of God's creation; that humanity, and all possible alien races, are part of a greater whole. It is fear alone that separates mankind.

Lewis continues his assault on comfortable humanity by having his protagonist embrace this alien race. Ransom actually goes to live with the hrossa, learning their language, culture, and humor, and develops enough familiarity with them to ask the questions that crowd his mind: "On Malacandra, apparently three distinct species had reached rationality, and none of them had yet exterminated the other two" (OSP 70). Lewis uses the distance between Malacandra (Mars) and the earth to contrast their gentle ways with the constant engagement of our planet's singular rational species in acquisition and repression through war. Ransom asks Hyoi which hnau rules: "'Oyarsa rules,' was the reply. 'Is he hnau?'" (OSP 70) Hyoi then goes

into a lengthy explanation, stating that the sorns, or seroni, would be better able to answer Ransom's question. Oyarsa did not die and had no young, so he differed from all hnau Hyoi knew. As best Ransom could make out, Oyarsa was an angel-like being and the only ruler of the planet. Hyoi explained further that each of the three species had its own talents, and the talents of each complemented the others, so that all contributed something valuable to the overall society (OSP 70). Ransom's growing shame at the hrossian questions about Earth and his efforts "not...to tell them too much of our human wars and industrialisms" caused him to feel "a sensation akin to that of physical nakedness" (OSP 71). This experience is not unlike Gulliver in his conversations with the intelligent horses in Book IV of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Kath Filmer explains the situation plainly and eloquently:

The full significance of the metaphor is apparent only in the unfolding "myth of Deep Heaven" which the protagonist, Elwin Ransom, uncovers in his visit to Malacandra, when he compares the innocence and peace of Malacandrian society with the social, moral and cultural depravity among humans upon the earth. Earth's "silence" is a metaphor for its spiritual "death," brought about by the fall and consequent influence of its tutelary spirit. (72)

It is interesting that Lewis chooses to magnify and satirize the Fallen nature of mankind through the innocence and self-control of alien beings. He effectively uses the distance between the planets, the unusual physical landscape, the vast differences in the inhabitants' appearance, and the even greater distance between mankind and aliens as moral beings to crystallize the idea that humans are bound to evil by their Fallenness. There is no way they can overcome it except by dying to themselves.

Lewis later goes into detail regarding the earth's "tutelary spirit," and the reason why the earth is called the "silent planet." The results of the Fall in Genesis 3 is interestingly

known and mourned by all the beings Ransom encounters in both novels. Ransom comes to understand that it is his Fallenness that prevents a common bond between himself and these gentle beings that consists of anything more than reason and communication. Their alien civilization typifies the ideal discussed and dreamt of, but never attained, on earth. The shame and separation he comes to feel in their presence is uniquely humbling, encouraging his desire to emulate their behaviors and attitudes.

Lewis introduces a twist on death at this point. Ransom's description of the huge, shark-like creature with snapping jaws greatly excites the hrossa (OSP 71). They call it *hnakra*, and everyone made ready to hunt him: "There had not been a hnakra in the valley for many years" (OSP 71). Lewis puts forth the unorthodox view that life might be lived more fully because death lies in wait for these creatures in the jaws of this fish. Ransom and Hyoi then prepare Hyoi's boat to hunt down the creature. Ransom asks Hyoi if his people ever made war on the other Malacandrians. Hyoi does not understand why such a thing would happen. "If both wanted one thing and neither would give it...would the other at last come with force? Would they say, give it or we kill you? ...[Over] food perhaps?" asks Ransom. "If the other hnau wanted food, why should we not give it to them? We often do" (OSP 74). As their conversation progresses, Lewis reminds his audience that life has a definite duration. When the lives of the hrossa are over, they know they will go to Him, their beloved, just as Christians are confident of their place with God. Each day is a gift of Maleldil, as is their existence, so they do not assert themselves as qualified to dominate another race. Because they are sensible, humble, and obedient to Maleldil and Oyarsa, the spiritual and mental deaths Ransom must endure are unnecessary. Hyoi's wisdom is expressed simply: "How could we endure to live and let time pass if we were always crying for one day or one year to come back – if we did not know that every day in a life fills the whole life with expectation and memory

and that these are that day?” (OSP 75-76). Ransom, irritated at his own greedy and selfish race, brings up the presence of the hnakra. Hyoi’s response is surprising: “I long to kill this hnakra as he also longs to kill me...And if he kills me, my people will mourn and my brothers will desire still more to kill him...The hnakra is our enemy, but he is also our beloved...the sign of the hrossa is a hnakra. In him the spirit of the valley lives” (OSP 76). Ransom never considered that a formidable enemy could be of benefit to a civilization. That death is at the door of the hrossa raises their collective consciousness to greater heights. But Ransom cannot understand this reasoning when it comes to their young. Hyoi explains:

“The hrossa would be bent hrossa if they let [the hnakra] get so near [the children]...No, hman, it is not a few deaths roving the world around him that would make a *hman* miserable. It is a bent *hman* that would blacken the world. And I also say this. 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.” (OSP 76)

Hyoi does not fear death. In fact, through Hyoi’s statement, Lewis invites the reader to consider how the presence of a deadly enemy can enrich one’s life. However, a hnau who seeks to destroy simply because he can, like human beings do, is much more terrible than a creature who is simply looking for a meal. It is evil in rational beings that is of concern to the hrossa, and Ransom understands how much more he must die to his own ideas to grasp this concept.

Lewis takes the idea of the presence of death enhancing life one more step – a step most soldiers in World War II could certainly relate to if they allowed themselves. As their conversation deepens, Hyoi recounts a moment that became the turning point in his life:

“I stood on the shore of Balki the pool, which is the place of most awe in all worlds...Because I have stood there alone, Maleldil and I...my heart has been



higher, my song deeper, all my days. But do you think it would have been so unless I had known that in Balki hneraki dwelled? There I drank life because death was in the pool. That was the best of drinks save one.”

“What one?” asked Ransom.

“Death itself in the day I drink it and go to Maleldil.” (OSP 76-77)

Lewis eloquently grants the reader a glimpse at true, holy nobility. The certainty of death in the jaws of the hnakra elevates Hyoui’s mind to a higher plane of reverence, gratitude, and understanding for life. His courage and integrity move Ransom to silence. Clyde Kilby comments: “Greater...is the victory of a will which chooses good over evil” (25). Evan Gibson adds “the meeting with Hyoui and the introduction to the culture of his species make a great difference in Ransom’s acceptance of danger... [The danger Hyoui describes] is danger which gives a zest to life, making its colors more vivid and its song more melodic” (Spinner of Tales 29).

Lewis allows Ransom to experience this paradox of death magnifying life as he, Hyoui, and Hyoui’s brother Whin begin the hnakra hunt. An eldil (an angel) comes across the water to their boat and summons Ransom to Oyarsa. The hunters immediately sight the hnakra, and the excitement of the hunt blots out Ransom’s memory of the summons. He wants to “leave a deed on his memory instead of one more broken dream,” an unfortunate, prideful turn (OSP 81). Ransom, Hyoui, and Whin succeed in killing the huge fish. As the great monster’s life ebbs blackly into the water, Ransom feels a oneness with the hrossa that his former fear of “otherness” made impossible. As they rest together on the shore, Hyoui reflects: “‘This is what I’ve wanted all my life’. They were all hnau. They had stood shoulder to shoulder in the face of an enemy, and the shapes of their heads no longer mattered. And he, even Ransom, had come through it and not been disgraced. He had grown up” (OSP 82). Gregory Wolfe

comments that “more than the elimination of a dangerous predator, the hunt for the hnakra is ritual or drama in which the glory of the kill is matched by a love for the power and grace of the hnakra” (67). Sammons comments go further: “‘Something in the air’ or society of the hrossa begins to work a change in him. But it is the killing of the hnakra that really makes him feel ‘grown up’ into a new sort of freedom and courage” (92). Lewis strengthens Ransom immeasurably by standing him bravely in the face of death to experience the vitality of valor. He now understands the hnakra’s status as the symbol of the hrossa – it signifies courage. The hrossa accept its presence, and their responsibility to defeat it if it threatens, as part of the balance and poetry of life and death.

Lewis abruptly ends the victorious moment by returning Ransom’s mind to his presence as Fallen man on this unfallen world. Hyoi is dying at Ransom’s feet. Weston and Devine have found them. “Ransom was deafened by a loud sound...a terrestrial, human and civilized sound; it was even European. It was the crack of an English rifle” (OSP 82). Desperately Ransom tries to explain to his gasping friend: “‘They can throw death at a distance...We are all a bent race...we are only half hnau’” (OSP 82). But even now, the hross is fair and gentle. “‘Hman, hnakrapunt’” is the last thing Hyoi says, honoring Ransom as a brave one among the hrossa. Ransom tries to face his fate courageously: “‘I am in the hands of your people, Whin. They must do as they will. But if they are wise they will kill me and certainly they will kill the other two.’ ‘One does not kill hnau...Only Oyarsa does that’” is Whin’s reply (OSP 83). Though Weston has killed Hyoi, Lewis shows how an alien being exemplifies the transcendent love to which Christ calls humanity. The example is largely lost on Ransom, who sees only that he has brought destruction to this noble race.

The author drives home the consequences of Ransom’s disobedience: “‘All this has come from not obeying the eldil [who beckoned before the hnakra hunt]...you must go now’”

(OSP 83). Overwhelming guilt and sadness plague Ransom as he begins his difficult journey. Weston and Devine had been pursuing him, and if he had obeyed and gone on to Meldilorn, Hyoi would now be alive. Nevertheless, Maleldil turned the evil to suit his purpose – Hyoi took that “best of drinks” and went on to Him. Loney says the Malacandrian standard of honor and courage is the one Ransom knows he must adopt:

when the hnakra hunt ends with Weston’s murder of Hyoi...Implicit is the contrast between the great-hearted hrossian hunters and the human murderers...Ransom confesses to the dying hross that men are only “half hnau” (OSP 82). What had been the measure of normalcy for Ransom is itself measured against the celestial standard, and found wanting. (18)

This is one of Ransom’s most crucial deaths because he now sees himself as part of Fallen humanity, possessing all the cruelty and depravity included in the designation, and knows he must do something with his vision. Coupled with the thin air starving his lungs, this new understanding brings Ransom to the brink of despair. He somehow manages to get to the cave of Augray, the sorn, who is to help him on to Meldilorn. Looking in, “he discerned a chamber of green rock, very lofty. There were two things in it. One of them, dancing on the wall and roof, was the huge, angular shadow of the sorn; the other, crouched beneath it, was the sorn himself” (OSP 90). By surrendering to the singular task of finding Augray’s cave, and then setting his resolve to the task of entering and meeting Augray, Ransom manages to get through another tunnel of death to the transcendent reward beyond. Gibson observes that, instead of giving in to his feelings of hopelessness, Ransom goes from being the victim to being “his own executive”: “From now on he determines his own actions, faces danger and suffering by his own choice, and masters his fears as they beset him... Fear is not dead, but its paralyzing grip has been broken” (Spinner of Tales 29).

Lewis brings Ransom to the point of actually having to do what he resolved to do. Confronted with the very creature he was brought to satisfy, Ransom summons all his courage and makes the great leap from fear to faith. “‘Come in, Small One,’ boomed the sorn. ‘Come in and let me look at you.’ Now that he stood face to face with the spectre that had haunted him ever since he set foot on Malacandra, Ransom felt a surprising indifference. He had no idea what might be coming next, but he was determined to carry out his programme [of getting to Oyarsa at Meldilorn]” (OSP 91). Ransom’s inertia leaves him mentally open, helping him to see that Augray is not a being who would request sacrifices; he is wise, compassionate, patient, and obedient to Oyarsa. They talk at length, and the conversation eventually turns to eldila. Augray explains: “To us the eldil is a thin, half-real body that can go through walls and rocks: to himself he goes through them because he is solid and firm and they are like cloud” (OSP 95). Kilby notes that “Lewis emphasizes the overwhelming reality of the living God compared to what we ignorantly call reality” (25). They also speak of the speed of light, how to relate that to the speed of eldila and Maleldil, of other beings on Malacandra, and of Thulcandra, the planet from which Augray thought Ransom came. Ransom does not recognize the name. Augray takes him up to the harandra – the barren, uninhabited surface of Malacandra – to show Ransom Thulcandra through a kind of telescope. At first it looked like only “a bright disk about the size of a half-crown...[then] markings appeared, and below them a white cap...he recognized what they were – northern Europe and a piece of North America...There everyone had lived and everything had happened... ‘Yes,’ he said dully to the sorn. ‘That is my world.’ It was the bleakest moment in all his travels” (OSP 96). Lewis shows us a chilling loneliness we can only imagine. All of Ransom’s own kind – bent, broken, evil, greedy, petty, insincere, Fallen – inhabit that silent world to which he might never return. And he is responsible for the death of his beloved friend, Hyoi. Even as his life ebbed away, Hyoi

showed nothing but forgiveness and acceptance – Hyoi was transcending physical death to the joy of oneness with Maleldil. But in this stark moment, Ransom finds only destruction in himself, in his race, in his very planet. Ransom sees in himself none of the transcendent qualities he so admired in Hyoi. Ransom’s Fallenness overwhelms him, purging him of pride and putting to death his opinions about himself and the human race as a whole. He has only Oyarsa’s call to Meldilorn to keep him from despair. Augray sympathizes with Ransom, gladly offering to take Ransom to see his planet’s ruler. He criticizes the hrossa for sending him so far alone:

“If you died on the harandra they would have made a poem...and they would have put in a fine speech for you to say as you were dying...all this would seem to them just as good as if they would’ve used a little forethought and saved your life by sending you the easier way round.” “...I think the way [the hrossa] talk about death is the right way.” “They are right not to fear it, Rensom, but they do not seem to look at it reasonably as part of the very nature of their bodies – and therefore often avoidable at times when they would never see how to avoid it.” (QSP 97-98)

To Augray, the hrossa over-romanticize death, but this is one connection humans have with the hrossa. It is an honorable thing for terrestrial warriors and conquerors to nobly eulogize brave men, though only physical death is honored in this way. Ransom is quieted by the giant’s sensible speech – not having realized before how near physical death he had been on his journey to Augray – and begins sorting through the philosophical differences between the somns and the hrossa to occupy his overtaxed mind.

Lewis begins returning Ransom to his former state of elation as a gift for obedience. They set off for Meldilorn with Ransom riding comfortably on Augray’s shoulder, eighteen

feet up. They were so near the planet's surface as they traveled, and the terrain was so dream-like, that Ransom thought "the brightness through which they walked was almost that of heaven – celestial light hardly at all tempered with an atmospheric veil" (OSP 99). After the hellish experience of staring in disbelief at his remote, inaccessible world, Ransom needed comfort and renewal. "He felt the old lift of the heart, the soaring solemnity, the sense, at once sober and ecstatic, of life and power offered in unasked and unmeasured abundance" as the unfiltered rays worked upon his body (OSP 99). Lewis again eloquently describes the joy of being alive, so near death yet not dying.

Finally, having faced so many terrifying situations since his abduction, Ransom obediently prepares for his judgment. After arriving on the island of Meldilorn, a utopian land teeming with representatives of every Malacandrian race, Ransom is summoned by the planet's ruler: Oyarsa the great angel, agent of Maleldil. Oyarsa explains that the worlds are all places in heaven, accessible always to him, with the exception of Thulcandra. "It alone is outside the heaven, and no message comes from it" (OSP 119). Oyarsa then tells Ransom of a great angel who governs Thulcandra. "It is the longest of all stories, and the bitterest. He became bent. That was before any life came on your world" (OSP 120). The bent angel wanted 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...  
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. 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...in Thulcandra. (OSP 120)

So we reach the source of destructive death: the Bent One, or Satan. He controls Thulcandra, though Maleldil makes good come of his evil doings. To listen to the Bent One's destructive counsel, as Fallen humans do, is to be bent.

Ransom is silent for a long time, considering the truth Oyarsa has spoken. The angel's crushing scrutiny has laid bare the true nature of the human race. All of Ransom's contentment and illusions are gone:

"Our world is very bent. The two who brought me...thought you were a false eldila, I think. There are false eldila in the wild parts of our world; men kill other men before them – they think the eldil drinks blood. They thought the sorns wanted me for this or for some other evil...I was in terrible fear. The tellers of tales in our world make us think that if there is any life beyond our own air it is evil." (OSP 120)

Lewis puts in Ransom's mouth a clear explanation of the destruction wrought by human fear. The evil of the Bent One depends on this fear.

The author describes in plain terms the goals of humanity as represented by Weston and Devine. Oyarsa wants to know why they came to Malacandra in the first place, why they came again bringing Ransom, and "to hear of Thulcandra and Maleldil's strange wars there with the Bent One" (OSP 121). Ransom tries to relate his abductors' plans in plain terms, telling of Devine's concern for gathering "sun's blood" (gold) on Malacandra so he can control others on Earth. Then Ransom gets to Weston: "The other means evil to you. I think he would destroy all your people to make room for our people; and then he would do the same with other worlds again. He wants our race to last for always, I think, and he hopes they will leap from world to world" (OSP 122). Oyarsa is incredulous. "Is he wounded in his brain? ... Does he

think Maleldil wants a race to live forever?” (OSP 122) Ransom explains that Weston does not even know of Maleldil, but he certainly means evil to Malacandra:

“If you can prevent [our kind from coming here again] only by killing all three of us, I am content.” “If you were my own people I would kill them now...[but] it will not be necessary,” [said Oyarsa]. “They are strong, Oyarsa, and they can throw death many miles and can blow killing airs at their enemies.” “The least of my servants could touch their ship before it reached Malacandra...and make it a body of different movements – for you, no body at all,” [said Oyarsa]. (OSP 122)

The promise of the ultimate triumph of Maleldil (through Oyarsa) gives Ransom needed confidence. What has he to fear with that kind of help? Kilby agrees: “Equally under the sovereignty of God were Weston and Devine and their evil intention to carry off Ransom as a hostage, as they supposed, to the ‘natives’ of Malacandra... Indeed, Ransom did not understand until long afterwards that the hnakra was made to appear when it did so that he might have opportunity to escape his captors” (22).

Lewis satirizes Fallen humanity with the arrival of Weston and Devine at Meldilorn. The hrossa bring them into Oyarsa’s presence. Hyoi’s brother Whin describes the nature and tragedy of Hyoi’s death to the angel, killed by a “coward’s weapon when he had done nothing to frighten them” (OSP 125). Oyarsa addresses Weston, asking why he killed one of Oyarsa’s hnau. Magnifying the ridiculousness of the human mind, Weston addresses the gathered assembly as though they are savages, pretending to pay homage to a false eldil like the ones Ransom described to Oyarsa. Doing his best B-movie imitation, Weston addresses Oyarsa’s voice as though a squatting, dozing hross ventriloquist is projecting it into the air. Employing a series of exaggerated gestures and trinket offerings, Weston does his best to convince the



ventriloquist to fear and obey him. Weston's imperialistic philosophy comes through even though he cannot at the time be taken seriously: "You no do what I say, [great big head man in sky] come, blow you all up – Pouff! Bang!" (OSP 126) Oyarsa poses his question about Hyoi's murder again. "'We kill him,' [Weston] shouted. 'Show what we can do. Everyone who no do all we say – Pouff! Bang! Kill him same as that one. You do all we say and we give you much pretty things. See! See!'" (OSP 126). An uncontrolled wave of laughter overtakes the crowd as Weston dangles a cheap necklace before them, dancing and gesticulating. Ransom's embarrassment becomes mortification. He tries to help Weston understand the sudden din, but Weston will not listen to such an imbecile. When the noise subsides, Weston divulges the "truth" about Ransom's presence on Malacandra, declaring Ransom the "bent man" with evil intentions (OSP 129). Weston's enormous pride in his scientific genius has engulfed his reason. He spells out how he would have them destroyed if they do not obey him. Gibson writes: "Lewis is ahead of his time as he shows the fallacy of such faith [in science] by creating a man whose genius had lifted him above all his contemporaries in his chosen field, but whose specialization had made him unable to cope with anything beyond his own discipline" (Spinner of Tales 31).

The audience is promptly brought back to Lewis's concept of death as transcendence. He writes the funeral ceremony of Hyoi and two other hrossa as a reverent, holy celebration of life and death. The funeral dirge, beautifully sung by the hrossa, is an emotionally stirring experience for Ransom. "A sense of great masses moving at visionary speeds, of giants dancing, of eternal sorrows eternally consoled, of he knew not what and yet what he had always known, awoke in him with the very first bars of the deep-mouthed dirge, and bowed down his spirit as if the gate of heaven had opened before him" (OSP 130). Gibson comments: "All creatures know that it is not Maleldil's way to make a world last forever. But

this is not a cause for grief or fear. Beyond death lies the joy of a better and brighter life” (Spinner of Tales 45). Finally, Oyarsa said, “Let us scatter the movements which were their bodies. So will Maleldil scatter all worlds when the first and feeble is worn” (OSP 131). Then the bodies of the dead are “unmade” in a flash of light and gust of wind. Devine crudely remarks to Ransom, “God! That would be a trick worth knowing on earth... Solves the murderer’s problem about the disposal of the body, eh?” (OSP 131)

Lewis, through the voice of Oyarsa, pinpoints the problems of the scientific philosophy that so pervades the earth: death is in every thought and action. But Oyarsa also has the ability to bring death through the power of Maleldil. Lewis’s contrast between Weston and Oyarsa mocks the self-importance of humanity before the truth of man’s obvious moral vacuity and general foolishness. Oyarsa addresses Weston, confronting him with the truth of his evil intentions of destruction for all inhabitants of Malacandra: “I did not know that the Bent One had done so much in your world...If you were mine, I would unbody you even now...by my hand Maleldil does greater things than this, and I can unmake you even on the borders of your own world’s air...Let me see if there is anything in your mind besides fear and death and desire” (OSP 133).

But death and desire are the only things in Weston’s mind. His criticism of Ransom for abandoning the human race at a crucial moment is Lewis’s way of satirizing the artificial solidarity practiced by thieves and pirates. Weston addresses Oyarsa defiantly:

“I know you kill us,” he said. “Me not afraid. Others come, make it our world....” But Devine jumped to his feet and interrupted him. “No, no Oyarsa,” he shouted. “You no listen to him. He very foolish man...We little people, only want pretty sun-bloods. You give us pretty sun-bloods, we go back into sky, you never see us no more. All done, see?” (OSP 133-134)

Again, Lewis uses Devine to represent greed for its own sake. Devine's feeble attempt to divert Oyarsa from Weston's agenda only augments the aforementioned ridiculousness of humanity. Oyarsa is quite interested in Weston's plans, so he silences Devine and bids Weston go on. Weston readies himself for the verbal battle. "He believed that the hour of his death was come and he was determined to utter the thing...which he had to say" (OSP 134).

Weston would rather be destroyed valiantly defending his cause than hear the truth and live. Weston will not die to himself; he sees himself as being more important than anything else that exists: "Weston is himself unwilling to suffer the adjustment in perspective necessary to allow entrance to the marvelous new perceptions Ransom enjoys" (Loney 18). Weston's walls of education and intellect are too high to see over – he does not value obedience and surrender because his will and self-interest are his God.

Weston voices a brilliant account of the liberties man has taken with his fellow humans, and with the earth. Lewis gives Weston elegant, prosy explanations that expose the intrinsic evil of man; Ransom's Malacandrian translation of Weston's speech simplifies the underlying truth. Lewis never leaves his point: man brings evil death because he can. Weston relishes his task, explaining how "we have many bent people and we kill them or shut them in huts," and "we have many ways for hnau of one land to kill those of another, and some are trained to do it" (OSP 135). Because of the results of humanity's consistent, destructive will, Weston has the common illusion that humans can control the universe. He reasons, "it would not be the act of a bent hnau if our people killed all of your people" (OSP 135). Eventually Lewis brings Weston to the real meat of his presentation, to the thing that drives him to conquer:

"Life...has ruthlessly broken down all obstacles and liquidated all failures and to-day in her highest form – civilized man, and in me as his representative, she

presses forward to that interplanetary leap which will, perhaps, place her for ever beyond the reach of death.” (OSP 135)

Is Weston willing to be destroyed to bring humanity beyond mortality? Or does he so want the notoriety for saving the human race that he would naively risk his life? Lewis reflects back to the reader those familiar historical personalities who have striven to do what Weston now attempts. Ransom’s translation deflates Weston’s high-flown language, clarifying Lewis’s chilling intent:

“He says that if he could kill you all and bring our people to live in Malacandra, then they might be able to go on living here after something had gone wrong with our world. And then if something went wrong with Malacandra they might go and kill all the hnau in another world...and so they would never die out... Because of this it would not be a bent action...for him to kill you all and bring us here. He says he would feel no pity...he will not stop trying to do all this unless you kill him.” (OSP 135-136)

Loney comments that “the same man who here claims ultimate pre-eminence for the abstraction ‘Life’ had been more than willing to bring a human sacrifice (as he thought) to the sorns, had considered Harry’s life negligible, had murdered Hyoi. As Oyarsa demonstrates in the diagnosis which follows Weston’s performance, the absurdity and cruelty of Weston’s philosophy derive ultimately from a flaw within his perspective, a kind of blurring of the spiritual vision” (Loney 19). Weston’s presentation is brought further into focus by Gilbert Meilander: “when Ransom has to translate Weston’s philosophy into the language of the unfallen Malacandrians, it is impossible for him to make Weston’s program sound anything other than terribly evil. The image of the Malacandrian community casts a clarifying light on programs and ideals which are potentially dangerous and destructive” (53). Oyarsa then asks

Weston a series of questions regarding this race he so staunchly defends, but Weston answers only negatively. “Having no use for anything other than materialistic and scientific values, Weston believed the peoples of Malacandra to be ignorant and backward, yet he had no answer to Oyarsa’s query about the superman’s fate when all planets had finally died” (Kilby 26). Finally, Oyarsa understands.

“Strangel...You do not love any one of your race...Any kind of creature will please you if only it is begotten by your kind as they now are...what you really love is...the very seed itself...I see now how the lord of the silent world has bent you. There are laws that all hnau know, of pity and straight-dealing and shame and the like, and one of these is the love of kindred. He has taught you to break all of them except this one...This one he has bent...and has set it up, thus bent, to be a little, blind Oyarsa in your brain. And now you can do nothing but obey it...[the Bent One] has left you this one because a bent hnau can do more evil than a broken one.” (OSP 138)

Oyarsa voices the issue he finds most dangerous to humanity, a crucial element of the theology of St. Paul – pride is the evil that makes Weston the distortion of divine creation that he is. Weston, “having credibly chosen darkness over light, ...loses the ability to see at all” (Loney 19). He chooses it as his vocation, creating for himself a lofty goal of saving humanity from physical death. But he cannot escape the Tao, the firm foundation on which the novel is written. “The law of nature, or the moral law, turns out to be the main undergirding of Lewis’s ethical position... They are statements of value, not statements of fact. They are given as the moral structure of the universe. Not even God can disobey them” (Willis 104). Downing comments on Weston’s bent ideas: “The philosophy of scattering the seed as a sacred obligation could easily justify experiments on animal and human subjects, as well as

extermination of other species, whether on our own planet or on others...[but] such a goal serves no ultimate purpose” (38). Weston also wants humanity to know that it was he who opened the door to the cosmic world and ensured the future of humanity. Lewis wrote in his essay “The Poison of Subjectivism” that

This whole attempt to jettison traditional values...is...like trying to lift yourself by your own coat collar. Let us get two propositions written into our minds with indelible ink.

- (1) The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of planting a new sun in the sky or a new primary colour in the spectrum.
- (2) Every attempt to do so consists in arbitrarily selecting some one maxim of traditional morality, isolating it from the rest, and erecting it into an unum necessarium.

...[Thus], all idea of ‘new’ or ‘scientific’ or ‘modern’ moralities must...be dismissed as mere confusion of thought...Either the maxims of traditional morality must be accepted as axioms of practical reason which neither admit nor require argument to support them and not to ‘see’ which is to have lost human status; or else there are no values at all, what we mistook for values being ‘projections’ of irrational emotions. (Christian Reflections 74-75)<sup>5</sup>

The Tao is brought to bear on the subject again. Its abandonment brings chaos. Oyarsa refers to Weston as bent because he has set up one traditional moral law as the only governing rule in his mind. Weston’s megalomania makes him feel justified to do anything to satisfy his obsession to “further the race.” Because *Out of the Silent Planet* was published in 1938, Lewis was very timely in his message about the evils of purported racial supremacy. The Nazis in Germany were gaining power as Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor, giving them the

opportunity to further their plans for the domination by the Aryan race. Doris Myers observes: "In the character of Weston, Lewis shows that this single-minded search for knowledge can lead to outright criminality, and he raises the emotional ante by making the issue the deliberate sacrifice of people we know – Harry or Ransom – rather than the destruction of property or anonymous people's lives" (43). Gibson notes that Weston's speech "shows it to express a death-dealing philosophy which says that might makes right and that man, as nature's greatest accomplishment, must annihilate all other creatures which are barriers to his conquest of the stars" (*Spinner of Tales* 45). Wolfe says

The modern prejudice against the past, which sees history as one long ascent from darkness and savagery to enlightenment and democracy, is embodied in the character of Weston. With all the moral superiority of a Victorian missionary, Weston preaches his faith in the evolutionary will to power of the human race...it is evident [by the end of the novel] that Weston's...language is quite literally nonsense. (68)

Lewis's friends helped him to get over the "chronological snobbery" that is so aptly described by Wolfe. Maybe this is one of the greatest threats Weston represents – that so many readers see themselves looking down the annals of time in condescension. As a scientist, one would think he would give credit to those on whose shoulders he stands. Instead, Weston's ego has so overshadowed his intellect that perhaps he cannot clearly think in concrete terms. Certainly, his language is no longer concrete. Sammons looks at the section from Ransom's point of view: "The sense of duty and responsibility which increases as he goes to the Oyarsa reaches its full strength in his conversation with the eldil and as he translates for Weston. The narrator notes how very much changed Ransom is after his return from Mars" (92).

Fear, and its role in destruction, are explicated further as Oyarsa asks Weston why he thinks the Malacandrians, whose world is older and more dead, have not invaded Earth? Weston laughs and boastfully doubts their ability to do so, but Oyarsa is unaffected by his conceit. The angel explains the destruction the Bent One wrought on the surface of Malacandra thousands of years before, and the evil he attempted to put into their minds. “He would have made them as your people are now – wise enough to see the death of their kind approaching but not wise enough to endure it...but one thing we left behind us on the harandra: fear. And with fear, murder and rebellion. The weakest of my people do not fear death. It is the Bent One, the lord of your world, who wastes your lives and befouls them with flying from what you know will overtake you in the end. If you were subjects of Maleldil you would have peace” (OSP 139). But Weston rejects Oyarsa’s wisdom, unwavering from his chosen path of destruction and self-importance. Downing comments that “A program of helping evolution do its work could also be used to justify all manner of atrocities against other species or against ‘inferior’ members of the human species. Such a theory comes dangerously close to Hitler’s dream of a ‘master race,’ a parallel that Lewis underscores in *That Hideous Strength*,” the final novel of the Space Trilogy which takes place on earth (39). At least one critic did not appreciate Lewis’s characterization of Weston and points out one of the novel’s flaws. Glover comments that “Weston has never successfully come alive as a villain, and his antics are hence comic but unrelated to the central theme. Lewis is hardly allowing him sufficient force of personality to permit a realistic trial...Second, there is a quality of staginess about all the major scenes and their very inevitability reduces suspense and tension in the conflicts...Weston cannot win, and hence, comic though he may be, we cannot take him seriously as either villain or buffoon” (Art of Enchantment 83). Weston is, however, Lewis’s



satiric element, used to reflect the true nature of humanity back to the reader. Perhaps Glover thinks Weston cannot be taken seriously because he too closely describes human nature.

The novel closes with another near-death experience for Ransom. Oyarsa's decision to send them home next day brings up a terrible problem – the orbits of Malacandra and Earth are misaligned, making a return to Earth almost impossible. Both Weston and Devine would rather be killed now by Oyarsa than asphyxiated in the space ship. “All this I know,” said Oyarsa. ‘And if you stay in my world I must kill you: no such creature will I suffer in Malacandra... My sorns and pfifltriggi will give you air and food for ninety days. But they will do something else to your ship’” so that it cannot return to Malacandra (OSP 140). He then describes to Weston the “unmaking” of Hyoui and the other dead hnau. The same is promised for their space ship on the ninetieth day. If they are on it, they will also be unmade.

Oyarsa gives Ransom the opportunity to stay on Malacandra. Ransom chooses to go back to Earth, taking his chances with Weston and Devine. Though terribly flawed, his planet is home. Oyarsa promises to send his eldila to protect Ransom. “They will not let the other two kill you,” (OSP 141). Ransom had not thought of that, and was grateful Oyarsa had. Then the angel concluded the interview with an unexpected commission:

“You are guilty of...a little fearfulness. For that, the journey you go on is your pain, and perhaps your cure: for you must be either mad or brave before it is ended. But I lay also a command on you: you must watch this Weston and Devine in Thulcandra if ever you arrive there. They may yet do much evil in, and beyond, your world...Be courageous. Fight them. And when you have need, some of our people will help...It seems to me that...the siege of Thulcandra may be near its end.” (OSP 142)

Lewis hints at a subsequent novel, including Ransom, Weston, and Devine, with Oyarsa's commission for Ransom to "watch" and "fight" these two evil men with the help of the eldila. The reader can assume that Lewis has much more business with the three of them, especially Ransom. Though he is a Fallen human, his sufferings on Malacandra have made him useful to Maleldil. Ransom has adopted the "vertical standard" of these righteous, alien beings as a result of being there. He is cautiously thankful that he may see Maleldil return to Thulcandra, mindful of bent human nature but trusting in Maleldil's infinite mercy. He may be accepting his fate in the company of angels, but he is still human, and will still have to make the terrifying journey back to Earth, and live with his divine commission for the rest of his natural life.

How hopefully Lewis writes this crowning segment of the novel. Much has happened to our protagonist, things that will not become evident for some time. Ransom has died many deaths in his travels – he has loved, lost, and been judged by an angel of God. He accepted these deaths reluctantly, but once they were shouldered, they brought him to the transcended state of redeemed man. They tempered his mettle into something steely, a character and constitution that can withstand even greater heat and pressure, ever more challenging trials. Glover says "The book means the triumph of compassion, loyalty, obedience, and faith over the forces of greed, intolerance, egotism, and misguided 'idealism'" (Art of Enchantment 80). Ransom practices these virtues, according to his choice, at each juncture. His many opportunities to fail are righted by the guiding hand of Maleldil, given freedom by Ransom's surrender of will. Ransom will need all the character, obedience, and trust he can muster to overcome the challenges that are yet to come.

The situation becomes desperate on the return trip to earth. The chances that they will make it back successfully are slim. Weston, Devine, and Ransom each do their duties and are civil, but only Ransom is open to the spiritual cleansing of this near-death experience. Though

he should be gravely concerned with his situation, Ransom is so changed by all that has happened that he wants to share his experience with everyone:

He could not feel that they were an island of life journeying through an abyss of death. He felt almost the opposite – that life was waiting outside...ready at any moment to break in, and that, if it killed them, it would kill them by an excess of its vitality. He hoped passionately that if they were to perish they would perish by the ‘unbodying’ of the space-ship and not by suffocation within it.” (OSP 145)

Ransom now sees that death is another part of life. Without the changes brought on by submission to the minor deaths each day brings, and even to physical death when the time comes, human beings are destined to become as bent as Weston is. Weston rejects death in all its forms, glorifying life at all costs. But Ransom, having accepted death in all its forms, has found life. “For now he was convinced that the abyss was full of life in the most literal sense, full of living creatures...Often the sense of unseen presences even within the space-ship became irresistible. It was this, more than anything else, that made his own chances of life seem so unimportant” (OSP 145). Ransom has spiritually grown so much that he has little concern for himself, but the real test has only now come. He must actually face physical death. With only two days’ air left, “There was nothing for Ransom to do. He was sure now that they were soon to die. With this realization, the agony of his suspense suddenly disappeared. Death, whether it came now or some thirty years later on Earth, rose up and claimed his attention” (OSP 149). Having abandoned his fear of death completely, Ransom promptly falls asleep. When he awakens, he is alone. Weston and Devine immediately fled upon their landing. Ransom next becomes aware of an incredible sound - rain on the roof! He left the

ship joyfully, barely noticing the flash of light and gust of wind that was the craft's disintegration, and went in search of a pub and a pint (OSP 149).

Through the action of *Out of the Silent Planet*, C. S. Lewis illustrated the two categories of death: as transcendence (dying to self in order to live in oneness with Maleldil); and as destruction (bringing about the death of innocent beings, morality, and civilization). Both categories exist because mankind is Fallen, but the former is the way to joy and the latter, the way to hell. Ransom has suffered many intellectual deaths: to his right to himself, to his thoughts about self-determination, to his inflated opinions about the human race, to his fear of the unknown, to his overconfidence in his own abilities. Ransom also cannot deny that his life is clearly not his own. He has accepted redemption and is intent on doing Maleldil's business. Lewis thus prepares the reader for something more on this theme of dying to live – *Perelandra*.

### CHAPTER 3

#### *PERELANDRA*

World War II introduced the horrors of megalomania and fascism, unfolding in both Europe and the East, to the everyday lives of Europeans and Americans. As Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and China, and Adolf Hitler invaded France and bombed London, C. S. Lewis was at work giving lectures in Wales on John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and sheltering London children from the bombing. He later published the lectures as *A Preface to Paradise Lost* in 1942. *Perelandra* was published the following year, written for fellow Christians for whom Lewis's theology could be "carried in through the front door" (Downing 46). The novel's inspiration "and... 'parentage' of... both its 'form' and its content matter, clearly indicate Lewis's indebtedness to Milton's epic poem" (Christensen 68). Sammons notes "*Perelandra* arose partly as a result of *Preface to Paradise Lost* when Lewis started thinking about the purpose of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and realized it was to instill obedience. He also became interested in the nature of an unfallen Adam and Eve" (22). Downing comments further that, instead of a Paradise Regained, "*Perelandra* is the story of 'Paradise Retained,' of an Eve who is able to resist the tempter long enough for Ransom to destroy him" (46). Gibson also points out that Lewis said "*Perelandra* is not Genesis revisited," but the Perelandrian queen's

temptation does parallel that of Eve in the third chapter of Genesis (Centrality of Perelandra 125). The novel has a distinctly Miltonian flavor, addressing the power of evil to bring destruction and what good must do to defend itself. Kreeft considers the struggle between transcendence and destruction: “The biblical account of the Fall in Genesis 3 explains our present experience as a scientific hypothesis explains observed data. The data here are very strange: that we alone do not fit the world of time and death, that we do not obey the advice of our own psychologists to accept ourselves as we are” (“Argument” 260). Even with the heavily Christian themes, Lewis manages to avoid didacticism until the closing pages of the novel. He uses this work to effectively illustrate the dual nature of death by challenging Ransom to wrestle with his own Fallenness, and by presenting an unfallen alien race with the same temptation that caused the Fall of mankind. Lewis presents a candid look at humanity’s pervasive discontent, the sinister power of temptation, and the terrifying effects of absolute evil.

With *Perelandra*, Lewis creates a myth expounding on God’s larger plan for man and his Fall. He explicated his ideas in the essay, “The Grand Miracle”:

The sin, both of men and of angels, was rendered possible by the fact that God gave them free will: thus surrendering a portion of His omnipotence (it is again a deathlike or descending movement) because He saw that from a world of free creatures, even though they fell, He could work out (and this is the re-ascent) a deeper happiness and a fuller splendour than any world of automata would admit... Let Man be only one among a myriad of rational species, and let him be the only one that has Fallen. Because he has Fallen, for him God does the great deed; just as in the parable it is the one lost sheep for whom the shepherd hunts. (Miracles 147)

For Lewis, it is the free choosing of good, when the choice of evil is also possible, which brings one to the transcendence of joy. His continued return to the correct choices, made by Fallen yet redeemed Man, made through surrender to God's (Maleldil's) plans, keep the novel progressing forward. Sending such a being, a sinful human, to a distant Eden to assist another rational species in their struggle against the Bent One allows humanity the opportunity to do things differently. Lewis dares ask the question, *What if a rational being was tempted and did not fall?* "In a letter Lewis revealed that *Perelandra* does indeed work out a supposition: what *if* there were an unspoiled paradise undergoing some temptation? What *if* angels were like unto the pagan gods?...Why, then we would have *Perelandra*" (Como Branches 126). Sammons adds: "One of Lewis's main goals in writing, in fact, was to give the Christian story fresh excitement by retelling it as a new myth" (23).

Lewis reprises Elwin Ransom as hero in *Perelandra*, but this is a much different man than the scholarly philologist of *Out of the Silent Planet*. Ransom's near-death experiences account in part for the change, but the bulk of his growth as a man has come from surrendering his will to Maleldil, and from denying his own agenda. He is visited often by the Oyarsa of Malacandra, by whom Ransom is eventually "commissioned to travel to another planet to engage in some sort of combat with dark forces" (Downing 48).

Lewis (the author) writes himself into the story (a technique he employs at the close of *Out of the Silent Planet*) as the friend Ransom calls on to help him get off in his transport. He terrifies the reader with his description of the curiously monumental challenge of simply traveling from the train station to Ransom's cottage. After being bombarded with anxious thoughts and imaginary terrors, Lewis (the character) describes his harrowing journey of deadly terror:

I was past the dead factory now, down in the fog... There was a little empty house by the side of the road, with most of the windows boarded up and one staring like the eye of a dead fish... the black enmity of those dripping trees – their horrible expectancy... the further terror of madness itself” (Perelandra 13-14)<sup>6</sup>.

Lewis prepares the reader for the ensuing fight against evil with this foreboding prelude. The fight represents good versus evil, submission versus sedition, transcendence versus destruction. Ransom must face death at every turn, whether it is death to some part of himself or the termination of his natural life, remaining willing to endure the darkness of the tunnel to attain the greater good at its end. The evil that pursues him is supernatural, seeking only to bring him to ruin. Ransom’s greatest challenge of the novel is to doggedly remain obedient, focused on the transcendent nature of the trials he endures, while fighting against that evil power seeking to destroy both himself and the alien race he is commissioned to help. Even his friend, Lewis, is thus challenged, “fighting his way down to Ransom’s cottage in the country to meet him... being opposed by principalities and powers. Finally, it is not some huge spiritual vision that enables Lewis to keep going. It’s ‘some reluctance to let Ransom down’” (Howard, Culture Without Chests 11). This reluctance is the same human decency, self-control, and fortitude later employed by Ransom that echoes the virtues of every brave soldier fighting in the war.

Lewis reintroduces death rather directly as his character, upon entering the cottage, trips over a coffin in the living room. When Ransom returns and “Lewis” sufficiently recovers himself, puzzling over Ransom’s holy commission, they move the coffin (in which Ransom is to be transported to his interplanetary destination) out into the garden. Ransom explains: “When the Bible used that very expression about fighting principalities and powers and



depraved hypersomatic beings at great heights, it meant that quite ordinary people were to do the fighting” (*Perelandra* 21). Lewis prepares the reader for what Ransom will endure, doing so to encourage those who are war weary and disheartened to persevere. In another surrender, Ransom “‘dies’ again when he travels naked to Venus (*Perelandra*) in a coffin with a dark bandage over his eyes. A coffin is a kind of ark in that it is a container for temporary safety” (Carnell 69). This element of hope is present in Ransom’s willingness to get into the box in the first place, the protection it affords him from incineration en route, and finally its prompt dissolution upon his landing in the Perelandrian sea.

Then Lewis abruptly shifts from Fallen earth to unfallen *Perelandra*, and the change is one of the most magnificent in modern literature. Nurturing his idea of an unfallen race, Lewis lavishes his imagined Venus with every sensual delight imaginable. Gibson describes its power, because “for many readers the golden sky, the rainbow-colored storms, the paradisiacal floating islands are a reality which no amount of scientific evidence that Venus is too hot to be habitable will destroy” (*Spinner of Tales* 46). Lewis extends this “severe delight” to his trusty protagonist. Ransom feels:

the strange sense of excessive pleasure which seemed somehow to be communicated to him through all senses at once...he was haunted, not by a feeling of guilt, but by surprise that he had no such feeling. 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 (*Perelandra* 33).

Having accepted the challenge of the casket and the unknown planet to which he was sent, Ransom again receives Lewis’s reward of joy, untainted by sin. Everything around him, in fact, is pure and unadulterated. But Ransom is human, an inherently flawed being. Christensen

observes that indeed “one of the aims of Lewis’s book is to reveal the difference between prelapsarian and twentieth-century man” (70). Though he is there to help, he also has the power to hinder.

Lewis makes this point initially through humanity’s temptation to gluttony. Having found a floating island covered with a magnificently fragrant forest, Ransom discovers a yellow fruit that looks appealing. Upon tasting its juice, he is transported: “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” (*Perelandra* 37). Lewis wants his readers to understand the dramatic difference between terrestrial food, tainted by the Fall, and the fantastic experience of this unfallen fruit. Gibson remarks that “The yellow gourds create a gustatory sensation of delight beyond description” (*Spinner of Tales* 50). One is patterned on life eternal, the other on inevitable death and decay. Ransom immediately wants another – a perfectly natural human reaction. Here, however, mankind’s habit of over-satiation does not fit. He decides not to eat another golden sphere, unknowingly exemplifying redeemed humanity: “to repeat a pleasure so intense and almost so spiritual seemed an obvious thing to do... But...it appeared to him better not to taste again” (*Perelandra* 38). Lewis challenges his audience to consider Ransom’s self-restraint for a very good reason – overindulgence deadens the sensibilities. Meilaender comments: “Whether we try to secure means for repeating the pleasure at will or turn from what is given to something else which is desired – Lewis thinks that we will eventually lose the capacity for delighting in what is received” (18).

Ransom is tempted to gluttony again in another part of the forest. Ransom sees, from a distance, a shimmering ball. Moving toward it, he found the object to be a bubble which he could not resist touching: “Immediately [he was] drenched with what seemed an ice-cold

shower bath, and his nostrils filled with a sharp, shrill, exquisite scent that somehow brought to his mind a verse in Pope, to 'die of a rose in aromatic pain.'...all the colors about him [suddenly] seemed richer and the dimness of that world seemed clarified" (*Perelandra* 42).

Lewis again allows Ransom to experience something so fantastic that it is almost overwhelming. Even the most pedestrian elements of this holy world are incomprehensibly better than those of the earth: "The garden planet pours forth its wealth with Edenic guiltlessness and the very air breathes delight. Although in no sense sinful, Venus is a sensuous lady" (Gibson, *Spinner of Tales* 50). Forgetting himself, Ransom desires another aromatic bubble shower, but quickly regains his composure. He is being cautioned against self-indulgence by some undetected force. He remembers something from the opera – the wish a patron had to hear a scene repeated:

'That just spoils it,' was his comment. But this now appeared to him as a principle of far wider application and deeper moment. This itch to have things over again, as if life were a film that could be unrolled twice or even made to work backwards...Was it possibly the root of all evil? No: of course the love of money was called that. But money itself – perhaps one valued it chiefly as a defence against chance, a security for being able to have things over again, a means of arresting the unrolling of the film. (*Perelandra* 45)

Everything eventually comes down to a choice – "a defence against chance," or trust in God. The latter option offers no guarantees of pleasures or comforts before enjoyed, but does promise unexpected satisfaction beyond imagination. Katherin Rogers puts it this way:

to sin is not to choose evil per se, but to choose the wrong good...One might cling to an old good, repeating and repeating it, flinching from any new good that God might offer. Or one might

simply refuse the good that presents itself because one desires a different, and perhaps a lesser, good. (85)

A “sin” is what archers call a missed mark. It has a similar meaning here, as choosing the “wrong good” is to intentionally miss the mark God intended one to hit. Lewis helps his readers grasp this new kind of death that is sinister in its subtlety – the direction of one’s attention away from the fact that “only right actions make us happy,” and the only right actions are those born of surrender to God’s will (Rogers 84). All else is meaningless distraction. Lewis is refining Ransom’s sensibilities, killing off the old notions of independence and self-determination. As the novel progresses, Lewis revisits this idea of human control and willfulness, developing and expanding it to its climax.

The author now introduces the Green Lady: “she...had to not only portray perfect goodness, but had to be both a pagan goddess and a virgin!” (Sammons 23). This alien woman personifies terrestrial goddess myths and the possible perfection of a yet-unspoiled Eve that so intrigued Lewis in the early 1940s. Sayer elaborates: “Jack’s idea is that the myths and mythological figures of our world may represent in corrupted form spiritual realities to be found in a purer form in planes less Fallen than ours” (181). Lewis’s heroine makes manifest these myths, in humanoid form, and something more:

Never had Ransom seen a face so calm, and so unearthly, despite the full humanity of every feature. He decided afterwards that the unearthly quality was due to the complete absence of that element of resignation which mixes, in however slight degree, with all profound stillness in terrestrial faces.

(Perelandra 49)

Lewis urges his audience to consider the unusual, holy beauty of this unfallen, rational creature, and the realm of possibilities she represents. Myers comments:

Lewis suggests the numinous quality of her presence and her unfallen state by describing her in terms reminiscent of Dante's encounter with Matilda at the entrance to Eden (Purgatorio Canto 28). Just as Dante saw Matilda on the other side of a brook, Ransom sees Tinidril [the Green Lady] on an adjacent island, "as if on the other side of a brook." Matilda was singing and plaiting flowers; so is Tinidril. Matilda's head was bowed with modesty, but then she looked straight at Dante. Tinidril walks with bowed head, but when Ransom calls her, she looks him "full in the face" (65-66).

Though she possesses human form and rationality, she is completely alien to Ransom. Lewis lingers over the contrast between the two beings and their polar-opposite worlds. His protagonist must be on guard against his own nature in the presence of this unfallen being, for "when he meets her, Ransom has the impression of a precarious innocence. Her purity and peace are not bred into her genes; they are not inevitable and may easily be lost" (Burgess 77). The Green Lady possesses free will, the major identifying link between Ransom and herself. It proves to be one of the determining elements of the novel's conclusion.

Lewis allows his readers to experience the company of this unfallen being through her friendship with Ransom. They discuss many things, and as he comes to know her, Ransom realizes that she is actually listening to Maleldil much of the time. The first time this occurred, he felt that "the garden world where he stood seemed to be packed quite full, as if an unendurable pressure had been laid upon his shoulders" (*Perelandra* 53). Maleldil and the Green Lady are not separated because she is not a Fallen being. Ransom is an invited guest in *Perelandra*, but as a Fallen (though redeemed) man, he is uncomfortable in the presence of Maleldil. Gregory Wolfe observes: "As a perfect creature, she is at one with her Creator... the Green Lady has a perfect 'intuition of being.' That is why she can [eventually] take even the

evil thoughts of the Un-man and find in them something that bespeaks the goodness of Maleldil” (68-69). Lewis has Ransom *feel* the great weight of Maleldil’s glory and terrifying goodness, of which he would later write in the essay *The Weight of Glory* (1949). He wants everyone to believe in the constant presence of God.

Ransom’s self-control is tested with the ostensibly innocent mention one day of linear time. The concept was at first lost on the Green Lady, but suddenly she understands: “This is great wisdom you are bringing...this looking backward and forward along the line and seeing how a day has one appearance as it comes to you, and another when you are in it, and a third when it has gone past. Like the waves...I have never done it before – stepping out of life into the Alongside and looking at oneself living as if one were not alive” (*Perelandra* 52). Ransom inadvertently exposes the division in his mind between himself and Maleldil, caused by Fallenness, introducing dangerous concepts without noticing that he is tempting her to independence.

The ancient world of Malacandra is connected to the infant world of Perelandra through the Green Lady’s descriptions. Maleldil tells her that, since His Incarnation on earth, all rational creatures are now created in His form. When the time comes for the Malacandrians to go to Him, there will be no more of their kind. Ransom is greatly saddened by this news (*Perelandra* 54). Lewis returns to the death motif with the imminent extinction of these benevolent creatures so precious to his protagonist. Their demise is certainly transcendent, because they are not fallen, but Ransom is challenged to see it this way. This challenge is all the greater because Ransom still feels the sting of guilt for his friend Hyoi’s death. Ransom is tested further when he must answer the Green Lady’s question about the nature of death, a word he has unknowingly brought into her world. Ransom tries to explain: “With us they go away after a time. Maleldil takes the soul out of them and puts it somewhere

else – in Deep Heaven, we hope...’ ‘I wonder,’ said the woman, ‘if you were sent here to teach us death.’ ‘You don’t understand... It is horrible. It has a foul smell. Maleldil Himself wept when he saw it... There may be such a thing [in our world] that you would cut off both your arms and legs to prevent it happening – and yet it happens: with us” (*Perelandra* 58).

Ransom must continue the painful process of dying to his own ideas, even when his emotions are in rebellion against his mind. He is in the lamentable position of humanity’s spokesman, reminding the reader of the far-reaching consequences of the Fall. Lewis warns against dismissing these effects because, like the Tao, ignorance of or inattention to them does not affect their existence at all. With all his efforts to the contrary, because of his very nature, Ransom cannot help changing some part of her innocence. Hannay notes that the Green Lady is not a child: “The words she does not know are carefully chosen: ‘pain,’ ‘death,’ and ‘evil’ mean nothing to her...she is ignorant only of those things that oppress us, leaving open the possibility that she knows of glorious things we cannot understand because of our fallen nature” (95). Kilby adds: “Forever replete with the fulness of abundant life, the Green Lady suggests our own fearful emptiness because of ceaseless death in life” (29).

Ransom eventually sees the full effect of his mere presence in this pristine world as the Green Lady describes the changes occurring in her mind – that she is walking herself instead of being carried by Maleldil, and she could turn away from what is given if she wanted to:

“One goes into the forest to pick food and already the thought of one fruit rather than another has grown up in one’s mind. Then...one finds a different fruit and not the fruit one thought of...the very moment of the finding, there is in the mind a kind of thrusting back, or a setting aside...you could send your soul after the good you had expected, instead of turning it to the good you had

got...it is I, I myself, who turn from the good expected to the given good..."

(Perelandra 59-60)

To his horror, she considers the "unrolling of the film" – examining her dying naivete about her walk with Maleldil and the state of her openness to the unexpected good Maleldil sends. Meilaender says, "Ransom, somewhat to his own shame, helps [the Green Lady] to a new understanding...The Lady learns...that events are not simply waves Maleldil sends toward her; rather, she herself plunges into the wave" (17). Lewis presents his audience with a precarious situation that Ransom did not anticipate. He introduces two of the most suspect features of the personality of Fallen man – the ideas that "it is always possible to seek ways to assure ourselves of repeating a pleasure...It provides a measure of independence"; and, "even when one pleasure is given, it is possible to turn from what is given to something which is preferred" (Meilaender 18). Lewis presents the universal difficulties of free will through the natural behaviors of his hero. Though the Green Lady is holy and unfallen, she is not invulnerable to the blunders of a well-meaning human because she possesses free will. And Maleldil does not prevent Ransom from affecting her mind. According to Thomas Talbott, "an environment in which wrong choices are possible and therefore the highest moral virtues can be cultivated may require that persons be free, if they so choose, to inflict suffering upon each other and to do so without divine interference" (39).

If keeping his own flaws in check were not enough to exhaust Ransom, Lewis returns the parasitic evil of humanity to the cosmos with the arrival of Professor Weston. Lewis left the issue of Weston and Devine unresolved at the end of *Out of the Silent Planet*, so he was bound to conclude their stories somewhere in the Trilogy. Ransom surveys the evidence of Weston's landing on Perelandra, considering his deadly philosophy:



It is the idea that humanity...must at all costs contrive to seed itself over a larger area: that the vast astronomical distances which are God's quarantine regulations, must somehow be overcome...But beyond this lies the sweet poison of the false infinite – the wild dream that planet after planet, system after system...can be forced to sustain, everywhere and for ever, the sort of life which is contained in the loins of our own species – a dream begotten by the hatred of death upon the fear of true immortality, fondled in secret by thousands of ignorant men and hundreds who are not ignorant. (Perelandra 70)

Lewis returns to what he considers is the greatest and most insidious of all sins – that of pride – in this explanation, expressing the killing effect of such willfulness to protract a race as ridiculously mistaken as ours. Meilaender explains: “to treat a created thing as something more than that is to destroy its true character. To seek in any created thing a complete fulfillment of the longing which moves us is to make of it an object of infinite desire and, because it is only a created thing, a false infinite...it is intended by the Giver to be a source of delight... But in the end it will be poison for the person who gives his heart only to it” (18). Rogers describes Weston's mindset this way:

Real death, self-negation, is the greatest evil and is rightly feared by all men... Man is offered an eternity of perfect joy in God's presence, but he turns from this, preferring the impersonal immortality of an everlasting succession of human generations. In striving to achieve this lesser good he will, Lewis says, be willing to commit acts that render him evil and so incapable of accepting the greater good. (86)

Lewis thus lays the foundation for the major conflict of the novel, suggesting the task facing Ransom. The death motif is to be physically manifested in, and through, Weston. Even his name is suspect: “Weston’s name is generally taken to be derived from ‘western,’ suggesting degenerated modern Western science as well as symbolizing death or the death wish” (Buning 293).

Ransom and Weston’s face-to-face meeting is staged with the Green Lady present. Weston is armed with a pistol, and his reaction to their nudity is predictably condescending and priggish, “immediately dismiss[ing] her as a savage” without further attention to her (Lusk 6). If Lewis had allowed her to talk to Weston, things would have turned out differently. He may have shot her on the spot, or possibly humored her as one does the village idiot. Lewis distracts Ransom away from Weston’s purpose to his feigned concern about Ransom’s doings with the natives: “Allow me to tell you that I consider the seduction of a native girl as an almost equally unfortunate way of introducing civilisation to a new planet [as the murder of a Malacandrian]” (*Perelandra* 75). Lewis tempts Ransom again: this time, to become entangled in Weston’s megalomaniacal plan because his subversive persuasion is so effective. But Ransom gathers his wits and valiantly resists, bringing them round to the point of Weston’s presence there, encouraging him “to begin and end as soon as possible whatever butcheries and robberies you have come to do” (*Perelandra* 76).

There is something different about Weston. Lewis has transformed him from the short-sighted, buffoonish yet brilliant scientist of *Out of the Silent Planet* who openly discussed his plans with Ransom, to a more sinister, plotting, subtly diabolical enemy: “Weston illustrates the centripetal force of a self-seeking will that is so inward turning that its egoism is blind to all outward conditions. Ransom felt that he was in the presence of a monomaniac” (Gibson, *Centrality of Perelandra* 131). Weston holsters his pistol and begins his clever verbal assault:

“Man in himself is nothing. The forward movement of Life – the growing spirituality – is everything...I should have been wrong in liquidating the Malacandrians. It was a mere prejudice that made me prefer our own race to theirs. To spread spirituality, not to spread the human race, is henceforth my mission...the final disengagement of...freedom, that spirituality, is the work to which I dedicate my own life and the life of humanity. The goal, Ransom... Pure spirit! The final vortex of self-thinking, self-originating activity.”

(Perelandra 78-79)

Lewis exposes the alluring, pantheistic double-talk so often used to sway weak-minded folk from their firm foundation of humility. Weston’s persuasion reminds us of the speeches of the serpent in Genesis and in *Paradise Lost* – standing out just as starkly against the backdrop of this innocent world. “Lewis points out that to the proud man God is the final enemy. The Creator is always infinitely superior to the creature. But a god who can be reduced from the Creator of the universe to its soul – is much more manageable to the proud man” (Gibson, Centrality of Perelandra 131). To make his point unmistakable, Lewis shows the bending and twisting of the truth that Weston willfully performs:

“Your Devil and your God...are both pictures of the same Force. Your heaven is a picture of the perfect spirituality ahead; your hell a picture of the urge...which is driving us on to it from behind...The next stage of emergent evolution, beckoning us forward, is God; the transcended stage behind, ejecting us, is the Devil....” “And you are saying...that angels are devils who’ve risen in the world,” [said Ransom]. “It comes to the same thing,” said Weston (Perelandra 80-81).

This shocking statement is an explication of the effects of scientism and moral relativism, the abandonment of the Tao that Lewis warns us of in *The Abolition of Man*. Weston is giving his life over to this evil, spiritual Force, and in return, it feeds his burgeoning ego. He is even prepared to kill Ransom if needed, “ready to falsify his experiments if that would somehow serve the Force he worships” (Hannay 93). However, the most horrifying part of Lewis’s exposition of the evil that costs Weston his life is yet to come.

Weston takes the next logical step in his climb to self-supremacy: he ensures his own destruction, mistakenly assuming he will share in the new state of the universe. The last stages of dialogue between Ransom and Weston culminate with the certainty of this end. Holding fast to the Tao and his wits, Ransom somehow manages compassion for the deranged physicist:

“What proof,” said Ransom... “have you that you are being guided or supported by anything except your own individual mind and other people’s books?” “...Guidance, you know, guidance,” croaked Weston...his face, now the colour of putty, wore a fixed and even slightly twisted grin. “... Things coming into my head. I’m being prepared all the time...a fit receptacle for it...It’s a question of surrendering yourself to [the main current] – making yourself the conductor of the live, fiery, central purpose.” (*Perelandra* 81)

Lewis parallels the Green Lady’s walk with Maleldil and the communications between the Bent One and Weston in a cruel way. They are both being prepared, but one is to be exalted and the other destroyed: “to Ransom’s horror, [Weston] takes his final step beyond that of a servant or tool, to that of identification” (Patterson 6): “I *am* the Universe. I, Weston, am your God and your Devil. I call that Force into me completely...” (*Perelandra* 82). Weston compares himself to God by using the referent, “I am.” And with a writhing and twisting

“spasm like that preceding a deadly vomit,” Weston is mortally wounded by the evil that now possesses him. The old Weston struggles to regain control over his own besieged body, begging Ransom for help. But then he is gone, falling to the ground as if dead, lost to the evil spirit that has overtaken him (Perelandra 82-83). Howard describes Weston’s descent:

We watch in horror Weston’s progress from...even praiseworthy qualities...right down to the final stages, namely imbecility, inanity, brutishness, and the last whimpers of self-pity before annihilation. It is a dreadful picture of something that Lewis believed was true, namely that the state of damnation is a state next to non-being. The souls in hell are idiots (compare Dante)...Evil has leached away and leeched away all the good solidity that God made when he made man in his image, and has left only this gibbering, imbecilic trace (Looking Backward 94-95).

Ransom shows compassion on what was once a man, only to see that human caring cannot be received. Rogers graphically describes Lewis’s latest deadly image:

Weston has become a lack or a perversion of a man, a walking corpse with just a few scraps of decaying psyche still clinging to it.... Even the physical body of the Un-man is a negation of what a human body ought to be, for a human body ought to be the tool of a human soul. Though it is walking and talking, Weston’s body looks like that of a dead man. (88)

Weston’s plan to be an agent for the “conductor” failed to include the possibility of his own negation. Gibson comments: “The mighty spirit which takes charge of Weston’s body, thereafter called the Un-man, may not be a referent of anything which Lewis believed could actually happen...But behind the...[evil] of the book is the principle that we live in a hostile environment...The heart of the matter is in the will” (Gibson, Centrality of Perelandra 130).

And Lewis assures us that the assault on our psyche is relentless, so the will must be set in one direction or the other. Weston's willfulness, born of pride, made him a likely choice for the dark side: "It was because Satan had been confined to Earth, and could not himself travel to Perelandra that he taught Weston the Perelandrian language and sent him as his emissary...[and had him] acting henceforth as the mere mouthpiece of the Bent Eldil of Earth" (Kilby 28). Richard Purtill refers to Weston, now the Un-man, as "a mere puppet manipulated by Satan, his own personality superseded and almost destroyed" (78).

Lewis has firmly established the line of demarcation between Fallen and unfallen beings. Though Ransom inadvertently influences the Green Lady in regrettable ways, with divine grace he manages to deny his own Fallenness and accept the challenge to be her defender. The two of them represent the destiny (through innocence and transcendence) of Perelandra, and their wills are (with some trepidation on the part of Ransom) on the side of Maleldil. Weston, by taking into himself the evil persona of the Bent One, represents death, destruction, and hell. Lewis calls him the Un-man from that point onward – the antithesis of a living, breathing, made-in-the-image-of-God human being. Patterson tries to describe what makes him so horrible:

The horror lies in the dual presence, and most particularly, dual voices of a middle-aged Cambridge scientist and the devil...This...duality, equivocality, and monstrosity, is based directly upon the passages depicting demonic possession in the Gospels. Jesus encounters "the devil" (Matthew 4:1), "the tempter" (4:3), and "Satan" (4:10) in person...These biblical passages clearly form the direct prototypes for Lewis's depiction of the Un-man, whose double voice, sometimes arguably that of the human Weston, and sometimes clearly demonic, makes him both equivocal and monstrous, because he not only

speaks with two voices, but combines identities that should not be combined.

(4-5)

Because Weston's old personality occasionally surfaces during the ensuing battle, and he still possesses the familiar physical form, Ransom struggles with his feelings about the Un-man. Satan uses these human aspects of Weston to work his evil. He cannot do it without the vehicle of Weston's personality and body. Ransom knows he is dead yet un-dead, and the simultaneous compassion and repulsion keep him reluctantly in conflict with and pursuit of his nemesis through this section of the novel.

From the outset, Lewis emphasizes the wily skillfulness of the Un-man, and Ransom's underestimation of his foe. The Un-man has taken the stores and the collapsible boat Weston brought with him the morning of his arrival when Ransom comes looking for him. His search leads him to wade into the surf off the Fixed Land, and a huge, silvery fish like the ones the Green Lady rides comes to provide transport. He travels through the night on his swimming mount, and Lewis allows him to briefly return to his former enchantment with Maleldil's creation. Musing on ancient myths as distant truths, Ransom reminds the audience of the importance Lewis places on myth as unfallen and, perhaps, otherworldly:

The cord of longing which drew him...seemed to him at that moment to have been fastened long, long before his coming to Perelandra, long before the earliest times that memory could recover in his childhood, before birth, before the birth of man himself, before the origins of time. It was sharp, sweet, wild, and holy, all in one, and in any world where men's nerves have ceased to obey their central desires would doubtless have been aphrodisiac too, but not in Perelandra. (88)

Ransom longs for Eden – not just the place, but the state of being at one with Maleldil. The satisfaction of this longing is the joy that Lewis sought all his life – that lost connection to God Himself, manifested through both constant spiritual communion with Him and through the physical senses. Lewis, through Ransom, longs for pre-Fallen nature, but gives us the only possible substitute under mankind's circumstances: redeemed man, in an unfallen world where myth is truth and reality, given the opportunity to help prevent humanity's mistake from happening to another rational race. According to Meilander,

Lewis attempts to take the Fall into sin and its effects upon human nature seriously...And without [the realization that God is Lord over us], without the desire for something better, we have lost an essential ingredient in our humanity...If we fail to keep alive that desire for a better, richer, and more satisfying community in which personality is found, we may become "men to whom pebbles laid in a row are more beautiful than an arch." (82-83)

This deep longing keeps Ransom choosing the tunnel, risking the loss of some part of him, every time. The transcendence (through redemption) he experiences each time is a taste of what will satisfy that longing.

Reestablishment of Ransom's spiritual stability is necessary because he presently discovers his adversary, the Un-man, and a possibly grave error in his interactions with the Green Lady back on the Fixed Land. He finds the Un-man in the act of persuasion – attempting to convince her that she should at least think about living on the Fixed Land (*Perelandra* 89). His speech is ridiculous to the Green Lady. Maleldil has forbidden her and her missing husband, the King, from living on the Fixed Land, and it is folly to speak of disobeying Him. The Green Lady cannot understand the Un-man's curious habit of frequently repeating himself and pronouncing nonsense every time. In the course of their



dialogue, she mentions that Ransom “has already told me things which made me feel like a tree whose branches were growing wider and wider apart. But this goes beyond all. Stepping out of what is into what might be and talking and making things out there...alongside the world” (*Perelandra* 89). Ransom is horrified that he is expanding her mind in ways that are not necessarily good simply by being human, and Fallen. She has realized her free will, a very powerful discovery that can lead her either closer to Maleldil or further away from Him. The Un-man later capitalizes on this insight, inadvertently imparted to her by the well-meaning Ransom, to twist and use to his advantage.

The Un-man goes about his purpose on *Perelandra* – to make the Green Lady fall. Lewis’s creativity in this section of the novel matches that of the luxuriant prose of the first descriptive chapters, recasting the story of Genesis 3 in a palatable way. The Un-man uses his persuasion as a cleaver, striking at the connection between the Green Lady and Maleldil in an attempt to destroy her dependence on Him. With genteel subtlety, the Un-man attacks: “Since [Ransom] and I have come to your world we have put many things into your mind which Maleldil has not. Do you not see that He is letting go of your hand a little...He is making you a full woman, for up till now you were only half made – like the beasts who do nothing of themselves. This time, when you meet the King again...you will be older than he and who will make him older...Would he not love you more if you were wiser than he?” (*Perelandra* 90). The author reconnects the human thirst for superiority to the great evil at its root in this passage. Finding the Green Lady resistant, the Un-man comes at her another way: “you could become more like the women of my world.... Their minds run ahead of what Maleldil has told them. They do not need to wait for Him to tell them what is good, but know it for themselves as He does. They are, as it were, little Maleldils. And because of their wisdom, their beauty is as much greater than yours as the sweetness of these gourds surpasses the taste

of water” (Perelandra 91). Lewis recasts the Temptation of Eve in a way the audience can understand, but the Eve of this story is different. The Green Lady’s response is revolutionary: “How beautiful is Maleldil and how wonderful are all His works: perhaps He will bring out of me daughters as much greater than I as I am greater than the beasts” (Perelandra 91). Gibson comments on

the Un-man’s attempt to change to sin the innocence of Tinidril. His initial attempt to get her to fondle in her imagination a forbidden situation – a picture of living on the fixed land – simply as a bit of fiction, would hold out to her the advantages of disobedience. He also suggests that her new knowledge will make her superior to the King, picturing to her the women of earth, who, he claims, are far superior to the men in grasping imaginative possibilities. In each aspect of the temptation the Un-man tries to tarnish her imagination by separating it from reality and stimulating her individual will to act independently. (Centrality of Perelandra 132)

Ransom, witnessing the exchange, is still torn between his feeling that something is terribly wrong and yet very familiar about the Un-man: “Something which was and was not Weston was talking; and the sense of this monstrosity, only a few feet away in the darkness, had sent thrills of exquisite horror tingling along his spine, and raised questions in his mind which he tried to dismiss as fantastic...At the same moment he was conscious of a sense of triumph. But it was not he who was triumphant. The whole darkness around him rang with victory” (Perelandra 92). Maleldil silently urges his agents on, through endurance and faith, toward final triumph over the incarnate evil that has invaded this holy place. Ransom, especially, needs His presence to bolster his courage for what is to come.

The Un-man represents death, and death he brings. The next day, Ransom discovers that the creature had torn open the skin of a frog and left it to die:

up to this moment Ransom had as yet seen nothing dead or spoiled in Perelandra, and it was like a blow in the face. It was like the first spasm of well-remembered pain warning a man who had thought he was cured that his family have deceived him and he is dying after all. . . . The thing was an intolerable obscenity which afflicted him with shame. It would have been better, or so he thought at that moment, for the whole universe never to have existed than for this one thing to have happened. (*Perelandra* 93-94)

Ransom reels from the effects of evil in this pristine world. He finally understands something of the nature of evil – if once it gains purchase in the mind and goes unchecked, evil quietly expands until it completely overtakes the mind of its victim. That victim is then used as a tool to bring destruction to the world. Ransom eventually finds the Un-man, ripping open the back of yet another multicolored frog: “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. . . . this, in fact, was not a man. . . . It did not defy goodness, it ignored it to the point of annihilation” (*Perelandra* 95). Lewis clarifies the status of what was Weston as truly un-dead, no longer man. Ransom no longer struggles with the nature of this creature as he

finds the Un-man at the end of the path of mutilated frogs and realizes that here is not Weston but a walking corpse. The dead stare, the devilish smile, the terrible power of the face, give Ransom his first insight into the character of whole-hearted evil. Lewis presents the dark *eldils* of Earth in all three books of the space trilogy as being life-destroying. The Un-man constantly

demonstrates this characteristic when out of the sight of the Lady. (Gibson, Spinner of Tales 56)

Lewis makes this evil thing believable because it is so sophisticated in the presence of the Green Lady, carefully phrasing its questions so that they massage her mind into relaxation, while impishly destroying whatever it can grab. This persuasive approach is a popular choice for Satan's terrestrial agents, perfectly familiar to his audience. The reader reaches a realization alongside Ransom:

As there is one Face above all worlds merely to see which is irrevocable joy, so at the bottom of all worlds that face is waiting whose sight alone is the misery from which none who beholds it can recover. And though there...were a thousand roads by which a man could walk through the world, there was not a single one which did not lead sooner or later either to the Beatific or the Miserific Vision. He himself had...only seen only a mask...of it; even so, he was not quite sure that he would live. (Perelandra 96)

Ransom is taken aback. He did not really expect Weston's possession to be complete and irreversible. But it is. Kreeft comments that "Heaven and Hell are not escapisms: they make earth more, not less important to Lewis. Life acquires a new profundity and its decisions an awesomeness" (C. S. Lewis 27). And the contrast between good and evil, because of the presence of heaven and hell, is all the starker. "And what makes this picture of evil especially compelling is that irrationality, mindless destruction are precisely what characterize the genuinely evil men in the real world – the Hitlers and Stalins and Maos" (Rogers 89).

Considering the possibility of physical death at the hands of the Un-man, Ransom understands that he must somehow overcome his paralyzing fear and defend the Green Lady against the creature.

The author gives his hero the capacity to face the situation. He finds the Un-man spinning deadly yarns for the Green Lady. He confronts her directly. "Do not listen to him...send him away. Do not hear what he says, do not think of it" (*Perelandra* 97). Lewis develops further the possibility of her wrong choice with her doubtful expression and attention to the Un-man's lies. The creature shoots back at Ransom: "when you asked [Ransom] to teach you Death, he would not. He wanted you to remain young, not to learn Death...it is for this that I came here, that you may have Death in abundance. But you must be very courageous" (*Perelandra* 98). The Un-man makes her a tragic heroine who must disobey Maleldil, going to great lengths to ensure the legacy of her ancestors. It constantly spins tales about the Green Lady in which all depends on her action, her sacrifice, and the glory that will be hers if she will only disobey as Maleldil wants her to (*Perelandra* 101-104). Glover notes that "the enemy uses the narrative tools of characterization, analogy, and allusion to stir her imaginative soul to sacrifice. She will be invited to become a new type of Christ figure, saving her descendants by her noble disobedience" (*Bent Language* 178). Gibson posits that the Un-man "attempts to lead her will into a deification of her own reason" (*Centrality of Perelandra* 132). Wolfe goes further: "this 'play' [the Un-man has written for the Green Lady] is...a blasphemous usurpation of divine providence: the Un-man, acting like a God, sets the Green Lady in his own story, thus controlling her like a character in a work of fiction" (69). Lewis gives Ransom the voice of reason, her constant companion steadfastly interjecting the truth when he can politely insert it. The action takes place among the three of them, but the real duel is between Ransom and the Un-man, with everything at stake.

Ransom is finally moved to act. After many days of relentless persuasion, to the point of destroying birds to make garments for him and the Green Lady, the Un-man produces a mirror. He convinces her to look into it, frightening her:

“I feel...my heart is beating too hard. I am not warm. What is it?” [she asks].

...‘It is called Fear,’ said Weston’s mouth. Then the creature turned its face full on Ransom and grinned...‘It will go away,’ said the Un-man, when Ransom interrupted. ‘It will never go away if you do what he wishes. It is into more and more fear that he is leading you.’ ...[The Un-man continues]: ‘A man can love himself, and be together with himself. That is what it means to be a man or a woman – to walk alongside oneself as if one were a second person and to delight in one’s own beauty.’ (Perelandra 117)

Ransom listens in disbelief as the idea of the alongside, which he had inadvertently imparted to her early in the novel, is used by the Un-man to pry open her mind. The enemy stops at nothing to ensure cleavage and separation between the Green Lady and Maleldil. The Un-man attempts to teach her pride, Lewis’s definition of the greatest of all sins. If she is prideful, she will place herself (as Eve did) on the same level as Maleldil, worshiping herself instead of Him. “What Ransom fears above all else as he watches her encounter herself in a mirror, is her love of her own soul” (Glover, Bent Language 179). Kilby adds: “In many ways Lewis makes it clear that the inveterate call of the self toward its own interests is the key to the Fall of Man” (30). In his essay, “Christianity and Literature,” Lewis describes the magnitude of the situation: “pride does not only go before a fall but is a fall – a fall of the creature’s attention from what is better, God, to what is worse, itself” (Christian Reflections 7). The Un-man’s tactic is too much for Ransom, who has twice before felt that he must stop all this: “Ransom concludes that the attack is no longer a temptation but a third degree...Lewis believed that whether temptation enters through the imagination, the reason, or self-centered contemplation, the essence of sin is not so much in the doing as in the decision prior to the

act” (Gibson, Centrality of Perelandra 133). Then, suddenly, everything makes sense to

Ransom:

the parallel he had tried to draw between Eden and Perelandra was crude and imperfect. What had happened on earth, when Maleldil was born a man at Bethlehem, had altered the universe for ever. The new world of Perelandra was not a mere repetition of the old world Tellus [Earth]. Maleldil never repeated Himself.... When Eve fell, God was not Man. He had not yet made men members of His body: since then he had, and through them henceforward he would save and suffer. One of the purposes for which He had done all this was to save Perelandra not through Himself but through Himself in Ransom. Here in Perelandra the temptation would be stopped by Ransom, or it would not be stopped at all... “It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom.... My name also is Ransom,” said the Voice. (Perelandra 123-126)

Lewis astounds the reader with this climactic passage. Ransom is Maleldil’s agent on whom the fate of a world rests, and his divine commission is spoken directly to him. “His name was Ransom and he was being called upon by Maleldil to ransom this fresh and joyous planet and its two...inhabitants from the curse which had visited Earth” (Kilby 30). Lawlor says “The *psychomachia* which follows [the mirror scene] is Lewis at his best. In the end, the question ‘Lord, why me?’ is not answered but transcended.... What has to be done is now seen with final clarity. It is a struggle to the death. For Lewis the moralist ‘courage is every virtue at the breaking point’” (57). He must “take on the heroic task which is to be willing to stake his own life as ransom for the Perelandrian world” (Christensen 71). According to Glover, Lewis wrote Owen Barfield “in late 1940 or early 1941” about “the relationship of man to death and

the human temptation to accept it as an escape as opposed to the divine freedom which Christ possessed by undergoing full life and death, themes which trouble Ransom in his fight with Un-man" (*Art of Enchantment* 92-93). Lewis mercifully grants Ransom the assistance he requires to go about his task. "No sooner had he discovered that he would certainly try to kill the Un-man tomorrow than the doing of it appeared to him a smaller matter than he had supposed.... The fierce light which he had seen resting on this moment of decision rested in reality on all. 'I have cast your Enemy into sleep,' said the Voice. 'He will not wake till morning...sleep. Your sister sleeps also'" (*Perelandra* 127).

The final conflict of the two novels opens with a contemplative Elwin Ransom foreshadowing his role of Mr. Fisher King in *That Hideous Strength*. "He felt pretty certain that he would never again wield an un-maimed body until a greater morning came for the whole universe, and he was glad that [his body] had been thus tuned up to concert pitch before he had to surrender it. 'When I wake up after Thy image, I shall be satisfied'" (*Perelandra* 128). These are not the fractured thoughts of a fearful man, but the peaceful meditations of one whose will is not his own. Considering his probable death, he looks over his life: "'All said and done,' he thought, 'it's been worth it. I have had a time. I have lived in Paradise'" (*Perelandra* 129). He sets out to find his enemy, but first comes across the sleeping Green Lady. He laments the death of innocence that occurred in the Fall of Man: "As he stood looking down on her, what was most with him was an intense and orphaned longing that he might, if only for once, have seen the great Mother of his own race thus, in her innocence and splendour. ... 'Never in all worlds, that. God can make good use of all that happens. But the loss is real'" (*Perelandra* 129). Even if Paradise can be regained, or retained on Perelandra, nothing can ever undo the damage that was done in the Garden of Eden by the Mother and Father of Earth. Perhaps this is the source of the ubiquitous resignation Lewis found in terrestrial faces.



The climactic fight between Ransom and the Un-man begins with a hard, left-handed punch. The enemy did not see Ransom coming, busying itself with the mutilation of a helpless bird (*Perelandra* 129). Lewis wastes no time in getting the Un-man to its devious feet, taunting Ransom:

“Do you not know who I am?” [said the Un-man]. “I know *what* you are,” said Ransom... “You think He will help you, perhaps?... Could He help Himself?” – and the creature suddenly threw back its head and cried in a voice so loud that it seemed the golden sky-roof must break, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani.*” And the moment it had done so, Ransom felt certain that the sounds it had made were perfect Aramaic of the First Century. The Un-man was not quoting; it was remembering. These were the very words spoken from the Cross, treasured through all those years in the burning memory of the outcast creature which had heard them, and now brought forward in hideous parody; the horror made [Ransom] momentarily sick. (*Perelandra* 130)

Lewis impels the reader to understand the true nature of evil. This is not an imp with horns and a fork; this is the Evil that put Christ to death and enjoyed the experience that tortured and exterminated Jews and Russians with relish. This is destruction – evil death without reserve. The Un-man grabs Ransom and the combat turns from words to fisticuffs.

The battle is a physical contest of middle-aged professors, though one represents death in abundance and the other, life in the same measure. In the midst of it all, Ransom has an important revelation: “its bodily strength was merely that of Weston... Weston... was fat; his body would not take punishment well. Ransom was nimbler and better breathed. His former certainty of death now seemed to him ridiculous... There was no reason why he should not win – and live” (*Perelandra* 131). They continue in this fashion uninterrupted, as Maleldil had

put the whole of the planet to sleep. After what seems a thousand clashes together, something comes over Ransom: “a torrent of perfectly unmixed and lawful hatred...The joy [he felt] came from finding at last what hatred was made for...Bleeding and trembling with weariness as he was, he felt that nothing was beyond his power, and when he flung himself upon the living Death, the eternal Surd in the universal mathematic, he was astonished...at his own strength” (*Perelandra* 132). Lewis allows Ransom to seriously injure the Un-man, but not enough to keep it from fleeing at its first opportunity. Ransom doggedly pursues his enemy on the back of a huge, silvery fish, day and night, struggling to maintain consciousness against the physical agony of his many wounds, and fighting to keep his faith despite the incredible effort involved in continuing the chase. After what seems an eternity, Ransom finds the Un-man, but Weston’s personality has momentarily surfaced. Lewis gives him the opportunity to express a final point about life and death: “We are born on the surface [of an infinite globe with a thin rind of time over it] and all our lives we are sinking through it. When we’ve got all the way through then we are what’s called Dead...What do you people in the rind care about us?” (*Perelandra* 143-144) Weston is near physical and spiritual death, seeing only the value of living as long as one can because to him the life beyond is black nothingness. Ransom wonders if this is still Weston, or if it is again the Un-man. Suddenly they come upon the Fixed Land, and are plunged into darkness. “Horror of death such as he had never known, horror of the terrified creature at his side, descended upon Ransom...‘Are you there, Weston? ...Say a child’s prayer if you can’t say a man’s. Repent your sins. Take my hand. There are hundreds of mere boys on Earth facing death this moment. We’ll do very well.’...‘I can’t bear it’ [said Weston/the Un-man],” and Ransom is dragged off his mount and down into the water by his returned enemy. (*Perelandra* 145-146)

Lewis stages the last scenes of the battle in complete darkness, in a cave inside the Fixed Land. As Ransom comes up to the ocean's surface, his lungs starving for air, Lewis revisits his ambivalent feelings about dying in the trenches of World War I. Joe Christopher describes the action by saying "Ransom symbolically dies – that is, he nearly drowns – as he enters the underground caverns" (96-97). Then he is out of the water and fighting with all his strength to best the Un-man. Ransom somehow strangles it, imagining its destiny, and waits for morning. To pass the time, Ransom recites many epic poems and long works, realizing about twelve hours later that there will be no sunrise because he is in a cave (*Perelandra* 148). Deciding to find his way out, Ransom stumbles about and finds a passage upwards. As he progresses through the vertical tunnel, he finds a fiery pool in a chamber of the great cave and rests, his mind crowded again with doubt. Then the Un-man returns, this time with a great crawling creature. Ransom, enraged, approaches him with a large stone: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, here goes – I mean Amen,' said Ransom, and hurled the stone as hard as he could into the Un-man's face. The Un-man fell as a pencil falls, the face smashed out of all recognition," and Ransom threw the Un-man into the subterranean lake of fire (*Perelandra* 155-156). Ransom's last utterance to the Un-man before killing him gives credit for the action to Maleldil, where it belongs. The disposition of Weston's body could be symbolic of casting Satan back into hell, or it could be something far more hopeful:

Finally, Ransom throws the body (dead or alive; we are not sure) into the fire, where it is presumably rendered unusable for the demon, and – as none of the living knows the fate of the dead – perhaps even then, saved from Hell by the intervention of Maleldil through this cleansing action of the aptly named Ransom. This final, therapeutic act by Ransom, in causing the body to be

burned, may be interpreted as some sort of expiation or exorcism which will free not only the body but the soul. (Patterson 11)

Lewis returns to his fantastic, kaleidoscopic imagery in the description of Ransom's emergence from the mountain and his lengthy "Sabbath," a convalescence that was "a second infancy, in which he was breast-fed by the planet Venus herself: unweaned till he moved from that place" (*Perelandra* 159). The author has brought his hero through countless brushes with physical death, only to resurrect Ransom once all adversity has been faithfully faced. He has only to bear a wound in his heel, an injury he does not remember receiving but was constantly bleeding – "nothing he could do would stop it. But he worried very little about this" (*Perelandra* 160). Downing observes "When the protracted combat is finally over, Ransom has been wounded in the heel, but he has crushed the Un-man's head...[echoing the] promise that a Redeemer would come to atone for Adam and Eve's sin by crushing Satan's head after being wounded by him" (51). The last thing Ransom does before leaving the mountain is write an epitaph for Weston in its translucent cliffs.

*Perelandra* ends with the appearance of the Oyarsas of both Malacandra and Perelandra, with the reuniting of the King, Tor, and the Green Lady, Queen Tinidril, and their appointment to rule the planet. They all express gratitude to Ransom for his submission to Maleldil to prevent the fall of Perelandra. Queen Tinidril addresses him:

"As soon as you had taken away the Evil One...my mind was cleared...The reason for not yet living on the Fixed Land is now so plain...why should I desire the Fixed except...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' – to put in our own power what times should roll towards us.... 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?" (*Perelandra* 179)

Lewis accomplishes much with this passage. "[Here] the reader may understand the Scriptural teaching of daily dependence on God and daily expectation from Him of some new value, of looking forward rather than backward, indeed of recognizing...that actually the only time that is real is *now*" (Kilby 31-32). Lewis further assures the reader that Ransom's accidental influence of the Green Lady was part of the plan, and that the entire planet has been saved by Maleldil because Ransom obeyed, risking his life, carrying out his divine commission to its end. Ransom brought death as transcendence to Perelandra, and in so doing, gained redemption for himself: "The movement of the plot is...deliberately and inevitably moving to the catastrophe...which brings Ransom out as victor, resurrected and reborn, spiritualized and made numinous...[Lewis] concentrates upon the myth of innocence and temptation, the demands of human submission and obedience to divine authority, and the enlargement of human personality and soul consequent to the successful passage through trial and testing" (Glover, *Art of Enchantment* 95). And Purtill adds: "By successfully passing the test that Adam and Eve failed on our world, the Green Lady and the King enter into a new relation with the angels and with nature...they have faced temptation and overcome it...Our state is that of fallen but redeemed man, with the consequence that if God's work is to be done at all, it must be done by us; not by angels, not by miraculous intervention, but by our own stumbling and flawed efforts" (78-79). Finally, Carnell adds: "After the truly horrible violence of Ransom's subterranean struggle with the Un-man, he is given a vision of the glory that has been and will be" (70).

*Perelandra* is a great novel simply in its imagery. Audiences are brought to towering heights and terrifying lows on the prose of C. S. Lewis. Sayer says "Weston is one of the most

powerful and convincing representations of demonic possession in European literature” (181). Lawlor observes: “*Perelandra* remains Lewis’s most ambitious attempt to portray Deep Heaven itself – and more, that Final Cause which is all but unimaginably greater: and all this consistently in language which, above all exultant, is yet firmly concrete” (58). But its theme of death is one of its most valuable elements. Ransom’s submission to being sent to Perelandra in the first place sets the tone for the novel. His continual effort to face his own Fallen nature and endure death (psychological or physical), starkly contrasted with the holy, unfallen planet to which he is sent, encourages the reader to consider their own behaviors in the same light. But it is Ransom’s duel against absolute evil, in defence of the unfallen nature of the mother of this world, that makes him take the road out of himself and into the transcendence that only risking imminent physical death can bring. “Ransom (to some extent) plays the role of Christ not because he allegorically represents Him but because in reality every real Christian is really called upon in some measure to *enact* Christ” (Downing 52). Christensen says “the point of the work is to show how an ordinary human being, in his redeemed condition, may establish himself in a position which excels that of the classical epic hero. In this way, Lewis continues where Milton leaves off...Lewis’s Ransom...epitomizes man in his state of spiritual rebirth as a result of Christ’s atoning death...gradually he conquers his ingrained fear and learns to trust the Almighty” (73). In facing his Fallenness and defeating the Un-man, Ransom transcends all fears of death. The final message of the book is one of great hope, promising the worthy rewards earned by faith and perseverance. “Christian theology does not know how all the various strains of human life are finally to be reconciled in the life of God. What it does know – believes itself to know – is that such reconciliation is a real prospect, because in Jesus Christ existence moves not toward death but toward resurrection. What therefore defines Christian authorship in such a context is hope” (Hartt 28-29). And returning to the issue of free will,

and the Green Lady's choice to resist her tempter, Rogers says "Satan has taught the King and the Green Lady about evil that they may worship God more freely" (90). The King and Queen of Perelandra, along with the eldila, joyfully celebrate their freedom from evil and the transcendence of its deadly influence, which came to pass because of a skinny, obedient, fallible professor – a Fallen human.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Without being morbid, C. S. Lewis wrote of the value and the danger of death in its many forms in two of the Space Trilogy novels – *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. He knew from experience the finality and mystery of physical death, but was also intrigued by the suffering and spiritual evolution he underwent himself in his journey toward Christian conversion and beyond. Death was threatened in every personal change. His ideas about death can be divided into two categories: transcendent death and destructive death. Humanity's free will to choose either, coupled with its fallen nature, are the ingredients Lewis employs to convey his urgent message.

Transcendent death is that which is surrendered to at the will of God, resembling or emulating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through identification. This choice leads to redemption and is the type continually chosen by the two novels' protagonist, Professor Elwin Ransom. According to Meilaender, "Love, therefore, is 'that mystical death which is the secret of life.' Life requires that the self be not grasped but given up. Through self-giving we find our true selves; for it makes community possible, and we cannot be ourselves until we have left isolation and entered into fellowship...love must be sacrificial because it is seeking to



be active in sinful people in a sinful world” (63-64). Kreeft adds, “we can possess the universe only by renouncing possession; it reveals its beauty to us only if we let it be itself, gloriously independent of us” (C. S. Lewis 18). Ransom ultimately experiences great joy and true community with the King and Queen of Perelandra because he is willing to let Maleldil have His own way.

Destructive death is that which is voluntarily chosen by egocentric mankind without regard for the dire consequences. This choice leads to hell and is the sort continually chosen by the two novels’ antagonist, Professor Edward Weston. The unchanging moral principles of the Tao, as defined by Lewis, are abandoned. “The result is the present situation of a bare, isolated ego and a mathematical, valueless universe in naked confrontation” (Kreeft, C. S. Lewis 16). Meilaender comments on the gifts given those who join in community to follow God, as Ransom did with the Perelandrian monarchs: “Lewis’ vision of ideal community is heightened and clarified by what he has to say about the polar opposite of such community – which is, ultimately, hell.... Hell is, therefore, a retreat into the self, a denial of community” (87). Weston’s isolation, caused by his burgeoning ego, allowed Satan to overtake his body. Weston represents death, eventually suffering both spiritual and physical death, because he sought to avoid dying at all costs. He put himself at the center of his own universe, not believing that he needed to die to anything.

The Fall of Man divided humanity from God in every way imaginable. In Christian theology, Jesus Christ’s Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection repaired the rift between God and humanity. However, each human being must choose to accept and believe in the rejoining of God and man for it to be effective in one’s life, risking the suffering of some type of death. Because of free will, mankind is just as capable of choosing to remain autonomous, rejecting

the redemption of Christ and the transcendent quality of death. Lewis felt that making the correct choice was one of humanity's greatest challenges:

every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you...into something a little different from what it was before...all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is...joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other." (Mere Christianity 86-87)<sup>7</sup>

Lewis's idea that this progress is continual supports his characterizations of Ransom and Weston. His goal was to instruct his audience in these ideas by entertaining their minds while he enlightened their souls.

Kreeft aptly sums Lewis's argument: "Modern man's crisis...is one of disintegration, of alienation. He has split his own being, having split it from its source and center; and he finds his reason detached from his heart, the sciences from the humanities, analytic philosophy from existential philosophy, producing more and more men who are either computers or psychedelomaniacs. Lewis's romantic rationalism shows that the two mental hemispheres *can* coexist happily and fruitfully in one man and one philosophy" (Kreeft, C. S. Lewis 41). The novels effectively portray the importance of death as a way to redemption from Fallen human nature and the finality of eternal destruction for those who glorify themselves. If the Incarnation of Christ brought redemption for all men, attainable by surrender to death in its

many forms, then mankind has the chance to experience the joy Lewis sought all his life – oneness with the Creator through transcendent death.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Lewis, C. S. Miracles: A Preliminary Study. New York: Macmillan, 1947. Additional citations will be from this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis, C. S. The Abolition of Man. 1944. New York: Touchstone, 1996. Additional citations will be from this edition.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis, C. S. Surprised by Joy. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955. Additional citations will be from this edition.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis, C. S. Out of the Silent Planet. 1938. New York: Scribner, 1996. Additional citations will be from this edition.

<sup>5</sup>Lewis, C. S. Christian Reflections. Walter Hooper, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967. Additional citations will be from this edition.

<sup>6</sup>Lewis, C. S. Perelandra. 1944. New York: Scribner, 1996. Additional citations will be from this edition.

<sup>7</sup>Lewis, C. S. Mere Christianity. 1943. New York: Macmillan, 1967. Additional citations will be from this edition.

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