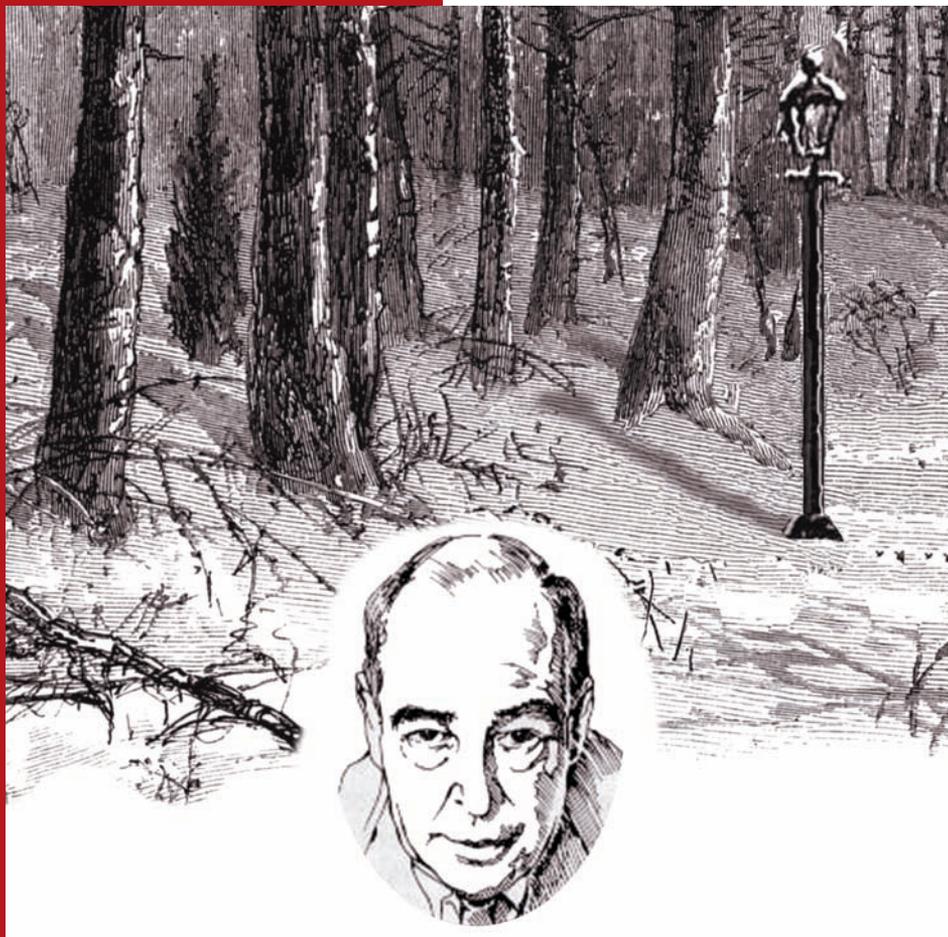


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THE LITERATURE OF C. S. LEWIS

COURSE GUIDE



Professor Timothy B. Shutt
KENYON COLLEGE

The Literature of C. S. Lewis

Professor Timothy B. Shutt

Kenyon College



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The Literature of C. S. Lewis
Professor Timothy B. Shutt



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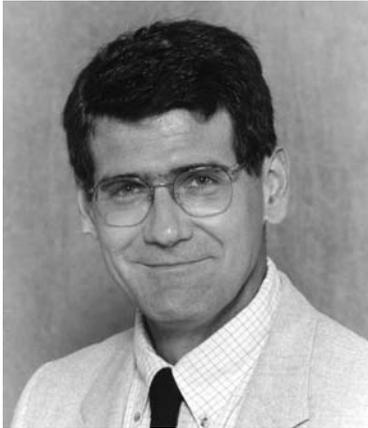
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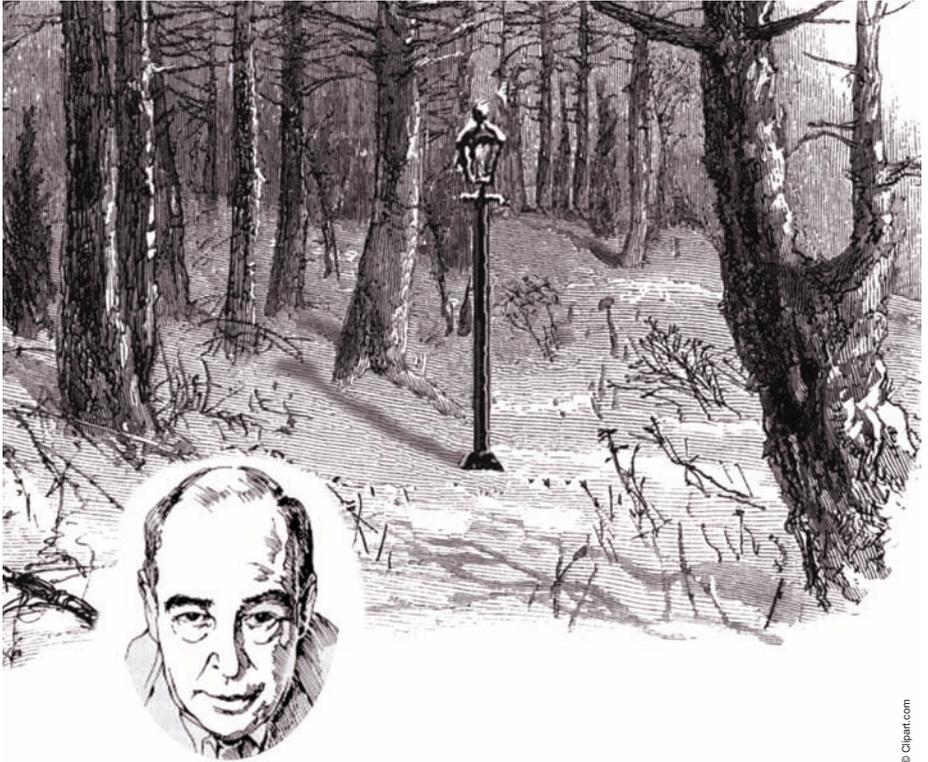
About Your Professor

Timothy B. Shutt

For eighteen years, Professor Timothy Baker Shutt has taught at Kenyon College, famed for splendid teaching, for its literary tradition, and for its unwavering commitment to the liberal arts. No teacher at Kenyon has ever been more often honored, both by the college and by students, for exceptional skills in the classroom and as a lecturer. Professor Shutt's courses in Kenyon's interdisciplinary Integrated Program in Humane Studies and in the Department of English alike are always heavily oversubscribed, and he lectures on Homer, Plato, Aristotle, the Bible, the Greek historians, Virgil, and Dante every year to a packed house.

Shutt is a native of Ohio, raised in Michigan and schooled in Connecticut. During his high school years at the Hotchkiss School, he was honored as an All-American swimmer and devoted much of his time to drama. He majored in English as an undergraduate at Yale ('72). After three years at St. Mark's School of Texas, where he taught English and history, and coached swimming, Shutt went on to graduate school in English, specializing in medieval literature and the history of ideas at the University of Virginia as a Du Pont Fellow. After earning his Ph.D. in 1984, Shutt spent two further years at Virginia as Mellon Post-Doctoral Research Fellow and took a position at Kenyon in 1986, where he has taught happily ever since, deeply enjoying his contacts with his students and the peaceful life of the Ohio countryside.

Shutt is a jovial extrovert and a polymath—a born teacher and lecturer—interested in nearly everything and everybody. In the Integrated Program in Humane Studies, he teaches literature, philosophy, history, art history, religious studies, and, at times, the history of science. He has written on military history, baseball, and birding in addition to his academic studies and gives regular talks at the Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon on migratory birds and on observational astronomy and the lore of the stars. He also works, when time permits, as a sports announcer for Kenyon football games, and for championship swimming meets nationwide, claiming longtime Detroit Tiger announcer Ernie Harwell as his inspiration. Shutt also travels regularly as a spokesperson for Kenyon, giving talks and lectures on behalf of the college from coast to coast. But his real vocation is reading and the classroom.



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Introduction

C. S. Lewis produced a body of work as diverse as it is beloved. He is known the world over for his cherished *Chronicles of Narnia*, but he is also the author of novels for adults, scholarly work, and the writings that rival his Narnia series in terms of continued popularity: his eloquent defences of Christianity.

A friend to J.R.R. Tolkien, Lewis spent much of his life at Oxford surrounded by academics who often held him in contempt for his Christian views (though few could fail to admire Lewis for his skills as a writer and his exhaustive knowledge of literature).

In this course, we will look at Lewis's life and examine the influences that would help to shape Lewis both as a man and as a writer. We will take an in-depth look at Lewis's science fiction trilogy, his *Chronicles of Narnia*, his apologetic and scholarly works, and his other writings. In doing so, we will come to understand the major thematic elements that mark Lewis's work. More importantly, perhaps, we will come to a finer appreciation of a writer whose true testament may be that which he strove for in all his major works: the evocation of "joy."

Lecture 1: C. S. Lewis: Reputation and Influence

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*.

There are few authors as admired and well-beloved as C. S. Lewis. More than a generation after his death in late 1963, Lewis's books sell as well as they ever have—far better, in fact, than they sold in his own lifetime.

In his own way however, few authors are more controversial. In *The Last Battle*, the concluding book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the series of tales for which Lewis has become best known, he writes of the reaction of the residents of Narnia as, at the end of their world, they come face-to-face with the Great Lion Aslan, that world's creator, destroyer, and judge. Some find their lifelong yearnings fulfilled and are themselves filled with love, and some react with loathing and terror. Lewis's work, of course, does not generate reactions of that potency and pungency, but it often generates reactions not too different in flavor. For with greater or lesser explicitness, Lewis's themes are almost always the same, and despite his manifest gifts as a writer, those themes are not to everyone's taste.

The greatest of these themes is what he himself termed "joy." His ability to evoke "joy," as he defines it, is perhaps his greatest strength as a writer—what his admirers most cherish in his work.

He first describes "joy" as sweeping over him as a child as "he stood beside a flowering currant bush." It is difficult, he continues, "to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me"—a blissful yearning or desire for he knew not what, only that, unfulfilled as it was, it was "itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." "I doubt," he continues, that "anyone who has tasted it would ever . . . exchange it for all the pleasures in the world." Later, in a moment that would shape the rest of Lewis's life, he read the following lines in Longfellow's "Saga of King Olaf":

*I heard a voice that cried,
Balder the beautiful
Is dead, is dead—*

"I knew," he says, "nothing about Balder, the Norse god slain by the trickster Loki, but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky. I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described" and then I "found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it."

In Dante's *Vita Nuova*—and there was perhaps no poet whom Lewis loved more—Dante tells us that at the age of nine he saw on the streets of Florence a surpassingly beautiful young girl, just his own age, named Beatrice Portinari. When he saw her, he was "changed within" and pursued

that vision for the rest of his life. (At the end of the *Divine Comedy*, Beatrice leads him to God's presence, to the heaven beyond space and time.) Lewis's vision of "joy" works in just that way, and Lewis pursued it in one mode or another for pretty much the rest of his life.

Lewis knew perfectly well that "joy" has many other names. The most common, I suppose, is religious experience, the felt presence of the "other," or to speak more plainly, the felt presence of—and yearning for—God. That felt "joy" and sense of presence lie behind almost all of his work.

Lewis characteristically works indirectly. He did not come to "joy" and all it meant to him through explanation or teaching, religious or otherwise. "Joy" can only be evoked. Lewis is, in that sense, a poet of "the other world," the world revealed by "joy," dreams, vision, imagination, myth, and story. All of which he takes with the greatest possible seriousness, not as a fabricated or illusory alternative to our world, but as a means of revelation. In this respect, he works like a Zen master, in a sense like Socrates and Plato—he doesn't want to explain something to us; he really wants to make us feel and see. Then we won't need any explanation.

That is why, I think, Lewis became a professor of medieval and Renaissance literature, why he so loved the classics of Greece and Rome, and for that matter, the ancient Hebrews and the early Christians. They believed in the other world just as he did. Lewis was a prodigious linguist, well-versed not only in English, but also in Greek, Latin, French, and Italian. He later became, according to a colleague, the best-read man in England, and past master of Old and Middle English, well-versed in Old Norse and German as well. But that is not, I think, what made him love the writers he loved. It was that other thing, their cultural openness to "joy" and all that it represented to him. Hence his love for Dante; for the nameless poet who wrote the Middle English *Gawain* and *Pearl*; for the nineteenth-century fairy-tale writer, George MacDonald; for Beatrice Potter; and for his personal friends, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien. All shared, at least in his view, the conviction that the other world was real, and in some sense more real, more revealing, than the ordinary world in which we live. Humility, I suppose, would have prevented his claiming the name for himself, but C. S. Lewis was a mystic, and what "joy" revealed to him became and remained the centerpiece of his work and life.

One of Lewis's favorite phrases, which he uses in many contexts, is "the inside is bigger than the outside." Consciousness itself, if you will, is the original, prototypical "other world." Inside our heads is everything we know, everything we perceive or imagine, and in a certain sense, the universe itself. Consciousness, indeed, acts as a kind of filter. Were it not so, we would be overwhelmed by all that perception reveals—the minute patterns of leaves and grass, the flicker of light on a sunlit pond. That unfiltered world is the "other world," opened to us in part in dreams and visions, in part by the processes of insight and creative thought, in part by story and imagination, and in part, as Lewis would have it, by myth and religious experience, by "joy" itself. We know more than we know, to put the matter paradoxically, and Lewis knew that to his bones. A world of overwhelming richness and meaning

lies just beyond our usual grasp. As he devoutly believed, this world can reveal to us truths and happiness we can come to know in no other way.

None of this would matter very much, save to Lewis himself, were he not so gifted a writer. For many readers, he succeeds as few other writers have in making that other world visible and evoking “joy.”

But Lewis’s fame rests almost equally, and far more contentiously, on his many works of Christian apologetics. “Apologetics,” I should mention, is in this context a technical word, meaning not “apology” but something more like “explanation” or, with regard to Lewis, “popular theology.” Lewis’s best-selling single book, in fact, is *Mere Christianity*, the written version of a series of broadcast talks on the BBC during World War II. His overtly Christian books are rivaled only by *The Chronicles of Narnia* in attracting popular regard and devotion. In both, and in all his fiction, he reveals another of his gifts as a writer—a gift for ferreting out the self-deceptions and self-indulgences that so often keep us from living up to our convictions.

Lewis’s first great popular success worked in just this mode. *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) purport to be letters of advice from a senior demonic tempter to one of his charges about how best to prevent a young Englishman from attaining salvation. This is, of course, an aspect of Lewis’s work that many readers find repellent—narrow, didactic, and even preachy. Others, however, respond with delight. The Anglican Church, of which Lewis was a member, has recently gone so far as to introduce a “minor” feast day in his name. But it is not only Anglicans who are taken with his works. Clyde S. Kilby of Wheaton College, a bastion of evangelical education, gained a large collection of Lewisiana—a collection now enshrined in the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton, where one may see, if one desires, one of the two claimants as the original “wardrobe” that proved to be an entrance to Narnia. Lewis inspires unwavering devotion from conservative Christians to this day, which is, of course, why he remains a controversial figure. Conservative Christians, to put the matter mildly, make many readers uneasy, and not least academic readers. That is, I suspect, why esteemed as they are, Lewis’s scholarly works remain to some degree underappreciated. The scholarly world, after all, is overwhelmingly secular, in our own time just as much as in Lewis’s.

But his scholarly works remain superb. I am myself a medievalist by training, and on that basis, I would say that Lewis was the most accomplished medievalist of the twentieth century. His first scholarly book was *The Allegory of Love*, published in 1936, a study of “*amour courtois*” or “courtly love.” It has perhaps aged less gracefully than his later works, but is still very much worth reading. Some think that his *Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942) is the finest of his scholarly works, and the essays posthumously collected in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1966) deserve the closest and most attentive reading. Very few people these days read Lewis’s contribution to the *Oxford History of English Literature—English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1954; also known as “Shakespeare without Shakespeare”), but it contains much of his very best writing. For my money, though, the best and most useful of all is his last, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1964), completed right before his death and based on a series of lectures he several

times gave at Cambridge. This is his last word, the work of his autumn—calm, genial, and ripe—and I know of no better book on the subject, and indeed, to confess a personal debt, no work which has influenced me more in my own teaching and studies. And, of course, he wrote other scholarly studies, though none, in my view, of comparable heft. Acknowledged or not, C. S. Lewis remains a mighty presence in medieval studies and there are very few in the field who cannot profit from a rereading of his works.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. The works of C. S. Lewis are more popular and sell better now than they did a generation and more ago at the time of his death. What are the reasons for his continuing appeal to readers?
2. C. S. Lewis wrote works of many different kinds, apologetic and theological works, novels at least in theory for children, novels for adults, scholarly works of a variety of kinds, and poetry. And yet, his works seem to many readers more unified than their apparent variety might suggest. What accounts for this unity? How do his scholarly works and apologetical works help to illuminate his novels?
3. C. S. Lewis himself designated what he termed “joy” as in some sense the keynote of almost everything he ever wrote. What does Lewis mean by “joy” and how does he go about seeking to evoke “joy” in his readers?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. New York: Harcourt, 1976.

Other Books of Interest

Kort, Wesley A. *C. S. Lewis Then and Now*. New York: Oxford UP, 2001.

Lecture 2: Clive “Jack” Staples Lewis: Life and Career, 1898-1963

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis’s *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*.

Who then, was Clive Staples Lewis, or “Jack,” as he was known to his friends? He was born in Belfast, in what is now Northern Ireland, on November 29, 1898. His was a prosperous, upper-middle-class family, and Lewis was a second son. His older brother, Warren Hamilton “Warnie” Lewis, was born in 1895, and they remained close friends as long as they both lived.

Lewis and his brother began to write stories at an early age, Lewis about “Animal Land” and Warnie about a mythologized “India.” Readers of the Narnia tales will not be surprised to hear that “Animal Land” was full of what Lewis called “dressed animals.” Later on Warnie and Jack conflated their imaginary countries into a joint realm called “Boxen,” recalling, in their way, the imaginary countries of the Brontë sisters.

When Lewis was nine, his mother was diagnosed with cancer and “all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared” from his life. Florence Lewis died on August 23, 1908. Shortly thereafter, Lewis was packed off to a boarding school in England. In his autobiography, Lewis calls it “Belsen,” presumably with the Nazi concentration camp in mind, though its actual name was Wynard House. The place was run by the Reverend Robert Capron. This was the golden age of flogging in English schools, and Capron seems to have done little else. In 1910, Capron was sued for his excesses by an irate parent, and the school collapsed.

After a brief stint at the local day school in Belfast, Lewis was sent off to a small school in Malvern, Worcestershire, the same town that housed Malvern Prep School, where Warnie was in attendance. Lewis’s small school was called Cherbourg, “Chartres” as it appears in his autobiography, and he didn’t stay long before moving to Malvern, or “Wyvern,” as he calls it, from which his brother had recently departed to study at the home of his father’s much-beloved tutor. That left young Jack more or less on his own at “Wyvern.” Unlike his brother, he detested it. Flogging was bad enough, but what Lewis really loathed was the custom of “fagging,” in which older boys were delegated as official floggers and had the right to demand service from any boy younger than themselves. The popular, influential older boys were called “bloods,” and as Lewis has it, they ruled the school with a vindictive hand, in more or less constant pursuit of “tarts,” attractive younger boys who could be prevailed upon for sexual favors. Lewis’s later portrayals of evil, even of demonic beings, have much, I suspect, to do with his unhappy memories of “Wyvern.” His epitaph for the “bloods” is perhaps the most chilling passage he ever wrote:

"Peace to them all. A worse fate awaited them than the most vindictive fag among us could have wished. Ypres and the Somme ate up most of them. They were happy while the good days lasted."

In 1914, Warnie left Sandhurst to take his place in the British Expeditionary Force in France, and Lewis went to study with his father's old tutor. No one, perhaps, family aside, influenced Lewis more, and W.T. Kirkpatrick, known to the Lewises as "The Great Knock," began Lewis's education in earnest. He recognized Lewis's gifts at once and set him to read vast tracts of Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and German. Lewis thrived, and his gratitude found expression not only in his loving portrait of Kirkpatrick in *Surprised by Joy*, but in a whole series of utterly incorruptible, rigorously logical, skeptical, cantankerous Scots who populate his later fiction.

Soon enough, Lewis was ready for Oxford, where he spent a term in 1917. But war intervened. As an Irishman, Lewis was not subject to the draft, but he volunteered for World War I and found himself an "officer cadet" at Keble College, Oxford, where his roommate was Edward Francis Courtenay "Paddy" Moore. Moore and Lewis hit it off, and they made each other a promise that was to have a huge effect on Lewis's later life. If Lewis were killed in battle, Moore was "to take care of" Lewis's father. If Moore were killed, Lewis was to take care of Moore's mother.

Both went to war. Though he writes about his term at the front in a most self-deprecating manner, Lewis distinguished himself as a soldier. Commissioned, without much training, Lewis found himself stationed on the Western Front near Arras. His first reaction to being under fire was characteristic—"this is war, this is what Homer wrote about." He found, rather to his surprise, that he liked his fellow officers and men far better than he had liked the "Wyvernians," and it is no mean testament to how much he disliked "Wyvern" that he found life in the trenches preferable. On April 15, 1918, he was seriously wounded by a shell that obliterated his sergeant, standing by his side. Lewis had shrapnel wounds in leg, face, and lung, and for him the Great War was over. By late May he was back in England, where Paddy Moore's mother, Jane Moore, or "Minto" as Lewis called her, served as an ever-present angel of mercy.

Meanwhile, Paddy Moore himself was reported "missing in action," and by September, his death was confirmed. Lewis not only kept his promise to "look after" Paddy Moore's mother, but he lived with her until her death in 1951. This part of his life he kept a secret from his colleagues, and insofar as he could, from his friends. There has inevitably been speculation about the nature of Lewis's ongoing dealings with "Minto." She was a generation older than he, and clearly, he loved her devotedly and dearly. He habitually referred to her as his "adopted mother"—a phrase which, for a young man motherless since the age of nine, is clearly and deeply loaded in an emotional sense. Later echoes of "Minto" in his fiction are immensely flattering and Lewis, evidently and happily, served at her constant beck and call. Was she ever his lover? Some have thought so, but no one living knows.

His life at Oxford, official and unofficial alike, was much less private. His career as a student was one of the most distinguished on record. He took a

“first” in “Mods” and “Greats” (Greek and Latin literature, ancient history, and philosophy) and another first in English Literature. By the mid-1920s, Lewis had been elected a Fellow in English at Magdalen College at Oxford, a position in which he served happily for almost thirty years. Ever so slowly, he began to publish, first a pair of poetic works and then, with ever-increasing frequency, the scholarly works, the apologetical works, and the tales that were to make him famous.

Lewis in person was not what one would think of as a saintly personage. He was a big, portly man. His manner was bluff, loud, and hearty, and he loved food, beer, and tobacco (in Lewis’s fiction, only good characters smoke). And he was, with men at least, most convivial, very much a lover of ideas with a real gift for friendship.

The circle that formed around him has become celebrated in its own right. The “Inklings”—the name is a pun, of course: all writers are (or were) artists in ink and have an “inkling” of something worth saying—have generated a good deal of commentary in their own right. Another charter member, and Lewis’s closest friend for years, was J.R.R. Tolkien, whose work Lewis encouraged from the outset. Another member was Charles Williams, whose personal character and almost unreadable fantasies impressed Lewis and T.S. Eliot alike. Yet another of Lewis’s closest friends was Owen Barfield, and another Neville Coghill, both writers of some merit.

It was during the early 1940s that Lewis began his work as a Christian apologist, first on the air, and then in print. He earned not only acclaim, but a good deal of opprobrium in the process, not just because Christianity was out of favor in the academic world, but because Lewis’s relatively rigorous vision of Christianity was even less favored, and because his theology was popular, not rigorously academic. All of these issues came to a head in a debate at Oxford’s “Socratic Club.” Lewis took on the Australian Oxford philosopher, G.E.M., or Elizabeth, Anscombe on the subject of Lewis’s most ambitious theological work to date, his study of miracles. Anscombe was both a Christian believer and an academic professional philosopher. By all accounts, she thoroughly trounced Lewis in the debate. Lewis clearly felt deflated. The debate put at least a momentary stop to his works of apologetics, and he at least seemingly redirected his energies not only into scholarly works, but into fiction—specifically, *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

And now we come to Lewis’s last years, and to the relationship memorialized not only in Lewis’s own *A Grief Observed* (1961), but in the play and film *Shadowlands*. Lewis’s marriage to Joy Davidman Gresham posed a lot of problems for him. She was divorced, and the earlier Lewis had written firmly in favor of the strict Anglican teaching that remarriage after divorce was impermissible.

As his fame spread, Lewis responded to many letters from well-wishers and admirers, which is how he met Joy Davidman Gresham. She was a Christian convert from Judaism and had been a member of the American Communist Party. She was, by all accounts, brash, profane, self-confident, feisty, and very, very American. Not the sort of person likely to make a good impression among Lewis’s friends and colleagues at Oxford, which, so we are told, she did not.

Nevertheless, Lewis was charmed. Their correspondence began in 1950. She came to England in 1952 and came for good with her sons in 1953. In October 1956, she was diagnosed with cancer, and lacking the equivalent of a “green card,” she would very soon have had to leave England. If Lewis were to marry her, she could stay, and so he did, though he kept it a secret from his friends. Then her condition worsened, and in late 1957, Lewis persuaded one of his friends to perform a more or less illicit Anglican bedside ecclesiastical marriage. For a while, she recovered—Lewis believed miraculously. They enjoyed two happy years together, and then the remission ended. In July 1960, she died.

Lewis was devastated. *A Grief Observed*, which he wrote in response, is Lewis’s answer to the book of Job. The sometimes breezy confidence of his earlier apologetical works is gone, and that is perhaps why he first chose to publish it under a pseudonym as “N.W. Clark.” It is not my favorite of his works, but perhaps, heaven forbid, I have not suffered enough to give it its due. In any event, many readers have seen in Lewis’s subsequent works a mellowness and gentleness that was not there before, and the calm, ripe wisdom of *The Discarded Image* seems to me to bolster the case. It is not good for us, I suspect, to think that we’ve got everything right, and after Joy Davidman Lewis died, Lewis never seems to have felt that way again.

-
- 1919 *Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of Lyrics* (as Clive Hamilton),
written while a teenager and not very good
- 1926 *Dymer* (as Clive Hamilton)
- 1933 *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity,
Reason and Romanticism*
- 1936 *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*
- 1938 *Out of the Silent Planet*
- 1940 *The Problem of Pain*
- 1942 *The Screwtape Letters*
- 1942 *A Preface to Paradise Lost*
- 1943 *Perelandra*
- 1943 *The Abolition of Man: Reflections on Education with Special
Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of
Secondary Schools*
- 1944 *Beyond Personality: The Christian Idea of God*
- 1945 *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups*
- 1945 *The Great Divorce: A Dream*
- 1947 *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*
- 1950 *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
- 1951 *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia*
- 1952 *Mere Christianity*
- 1952 *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*
- 1953 *The Silver Chair*
- 1954 *The Horse and His Boy*
- 1954 *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*
- 1955 *The Magician's Nephew*
- 1955 *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*
- 1956 *The Last Battle*
- 1956 *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*
- 1958 *Reflections of the Psalms*
- 1960 *The Four Loves*
- 1960 *Studies in Words*
- 1960 *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*
- 1961 *A Grief Observed* (as N.W. Clark)
- 1961 *An Experiment in Criticism*
- 1964 *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*
- 1964 *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and
Renaissance Literature*
- 1966 *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*
- 1975 *The Dark Tower and Other Stories*

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Many readers and critics have felt that the early loss of Lewis's mother and his father's ensuing, debilitating grief find indirect expression in virtually all of his works of fiction. Do you find this claim plausible? What evidence might be advanced to support such a claim?
2. At a young age, Lewis was sent off to a series of boarding schools, which for the most part he loathed—so much so that he found that, to his amazement, he preferred life in the trenches in World War I, where, among other things, he first enjoyed extensive day-to-day contact with people outside of his own class. How do these experiences find expression in his works? How do they help to shape and color Lewis's views?
3. Lewis himself maintains that from childhood onward the heart of his life was not so much what he was doing as what he was reading. What might be some of the reasons for this state of affairs? How does Lewis's reading affect his writing?
4. Lewis claims that, again from an early age, he loved what he terms "northernness." What does this love of "northernness" have to do with "joy," and how does it find expression in his works?
5. Some have claimed that Lewis's early loss of his mother, his very close relations with his brother, Warnie, and the fact that throughout his schooling, during the War, and for most of his academic career, Lewis associated almost entirely with men, made him unsympathetic and unperceptive in dealing with women, to some degree in daily life and strikingly when he wrote about girls and women in his novels. Some, indeed, have claimed that Lewis showed himself to be more sexist even than might be expected on the basis of his life and background. Is there any truth in claims like these?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. New York: Harcourt, 1976.

Other Books of Interest

Lewis, C. S. *Letters of C. S. Lewis*. Ed. W.H. Lewis. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1966.

Wilson, A.N. *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*. New York: Norton, 1990.

Lecture 3:
Out of the Silent Planet:
Space Trilogy 1 (1938)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet*.

Out of the Silent Planet, published in England in 1938 and a bit later in the United States (1943 is the date listed in the Scribner Paperback edition), was C. S. Lewis's first major work of fiction.

Out of the Silent Planet is a book whose writing reportedly stems in part from a discussion with J.R.R. Tolkien, in which both Lewis and Tolkien decided that since they couldn't find enough of the sort of stories they liked being published, they should undertake to write some themselves. The results of that effort proved fruitful, and it was Tolkien himself who submitted *Out of the Silent Planet* to the publishing house that had just released *The Hobbit*. As it happened, they rejected the Lewis manuscript, but it was turned over to others and published on a small scale by Bodley Head shortly thereafter.

It is a science-fiction novel, and Lewis freely acknowledges his debt to H.G. Wells, author of *The War of the Worlds* and *The First Men in the Moon*. Lewis had greedily lapped up such tales as a child and continued to read science fiction as long as he lived. Two other science-fiction authors seem to have influenced *Silent Planet*—Olaf Stapledon, from whom he imbibed a number of ideas that turn up in his own work, and David Lindsay, who wrote the grim and turgid, but nonetheless highly original *Voyage to Arcturus*, from which Lewis claims to have learned what science fiction was really “good for”: the evocation of spiritual states of mind and states of being.

Out of the Silent Planet begins like a perfectly ordinary science-fiction novel. The protagonist, Elwin Ransom, a philologist from Cambridge (patterned, so some claim, on Tolkien and, others would argue, on Lewis himself) stumbles on a cynical and repellent former school chum named Devine, who has to all appearances made a lot of money “in the city,” and a great physicist, Weston, who according to Devine has “Einstein on toast and drinks a pint of Schrödinger’s blood for breakfast.” Weston, as it turns out, has not only built a backyard space ship, but he and Devine have traveled in it to the planet “Malacandra,” where they have encountered a group of aliens whom they call “sorns.” The aliens in their turn requested that Devine and Weston bring them someone to take to “Oyarhsa” to be a blood sacrifice, or so Devine and Weston imagine. When Ransom appears, Devine and Weston are in the process of hijacking a country boy as sacrificial victim, but Ransom’s arrival changes their plans, and they decide to offer up Ransom instead. Hence, Ransom finds himself most unwillingly launched as an interplanetary traveler.

Even this early, though, the names suggest that something else is afoot. The name “Devine” is clearly ironic; Devine himself is most certainly not. The theological resonances of the name “Ransom,” not to say, redeemer, are clear

enough, and as the philologist Ransom must know, the name “Elwin” derives from the Old English, and means something like “elvish joy” or “joy of the elves.”

Malacandra, meanwhile, turns out to be Mars, as designated in the “Old Solar” tongue, but not the dry and dusty Mars of brownish rock revealed to contemporary landers and orbiting scanners, but Mars as imagined by the nineteenth-century Italian astronomer Schiaparelli, who saw there channels he termed “*canali*” and by the well-heeled American Percival Lowell, who devoted his life to studying the plante. This is something more like the Mars of Edgar Rice Burroughs, an old and slowly dying planet whose inhabitants have withstood the effects of desertification by massive engineering works to preserve and channel what water remained. It is in one such canal or valley that Ransom and his evil comrades land. At this point, Lewis begins to depart from anything much resembling the usual science-fiction pattern.

Ransom in short order escapes from the clutches of Devine and Weston and finds himself among an otterlike species of “*hnau*” or rational being, who call themselves the “*hrossa*.” It would be difficult to imagine beings less like “aliens” as ordinarily conceived. The *hrossa* are something more like human-sized semi-aquatic teddy bears, thoroughly kind, devoted to boats and water, oral epic poets in their spare time, and generally far nicer than most human beings. They live in a loose and peaceful confederation of something like tribes, and philologist that he is, Ransom delightedly sets himself to learning their language. It has a lot of “h” sounds.

The *hrossa*, he finds, defer to a rather different sort of being, which they call “*eldila*,” or “*eldils*,” and Ransom has a hard time figuring out just what an “*eldil*” might be, or for that matter, even seeing one. Though their voices are audible to him, he can see them only as “tiny variations of light and shade which no change in the sky accounted for.” They are, in fact, what we would term “angels,” though angels conceived in high medieval style not as winged, draped human figures, but as disembodied intelligences, living minds without bodies. They appear to “*hnau*” on Lewis’s account, which again follows medieval and Renaissance theory, either by directly manipulating “*hnauish*,” human brains, or by assuming some sort of airy manifestation or “vehicle.”

Out of the Silent Planet was the first of C. S. Lewis’s books that I read myself, at my mother’s long-forgotten recommendation, during spring vacation when I was fifteen, and I vividly remember the chill, and even the shock, that came over me at this point in my reading. Lewis had combined two worlds of narrative and imagination I had assumed were utterly separate: (1) the interplanetary world, the scientific world, and (2) the world of theology and myth. Having thus far read with pleasure in a willing suspension of disbelief couched in scientific terms, I was now forced to admit to that world beings of an utterly different order, and to take them seriously in a way I had never taken them before. That was Lewis’s game, and the hook was set.

Lewis later encounters the much-dreaded sorns, which turn out to be another sort of *hnau*, equally benign, but by no means so cuddly, who inhabit the frigid red highlands or “*harandra*,” and who are as devoted to rationality and scientific contemplation as the “*hrossa*” are to poetry and song. They are tall, pale, birdlike, and gawky—perhaps the first of Lewis’s fictional tributes to his much-beloved tutor Kirkpatrick, a sort of interplanetary Ulster Scotsmen (the

“hrossa,” by contrast, are clearly Welsh, Malacandran moms and dads, if you will, Lewises and Hamiltons).

A sorn at last takes Lewis to the Oyarsa at his central shrine at “*Meldilorn*,” a templelike space swarming with eldils, where Ransom encounters yet a third species of hnau, the dwarfish, not to say froglike, “*pfiffltriggi*,” who are devoted to closework and manual crafts, and there, once again, he encounters Devine and Weston. They, as it turns out, have grossly misconstrued the nature of the Oyarsa, who, far from being the bloodthirsty god or idol they expected, is the angelic intelligence whose charge it is to govern Malacandra. The Oyarsa is the being, once again following medieval tradition, who was worshipped by the Greeks as Ares and by the Romans as the god Mars, and who himself bears allegiance and does the will of the greater god, Maleldil—who is, for Lewis, God Himself. (Here and elsewhere Lewis adopts the standard medieval view—not the Middle Ages we have been taught about—that Graeco-Roman paganism was not simply wrong, but incomplete. Hence the Greek gods, for most medieval thinkers, are not demons, and still less are they nothing at all. Instead, as Lewis portrays them, they are angelic beings misconceived, but for all that with very much the character that the Greeks and Romans attributed to them. In the long contest between Christianity and classical paganism, many prisoners were taken, and the final shape of orthodox Catholicism, and Anglicanism too, for that matter, owes far more than is generally supposed to the religious beliefs and practices of the Greeks and Romans, a fact of which the medievalist Lewis was most acutely and delightedly aware.)

In the ensuing conversation, the Oyarsa of Malacandra explains to Lewis where he himself has come from, and why the earth, or “*Thulcandra*,” is the “Silent Planet.” For Malacandra is an unfallen world, a world whose inhabitants are without evil, and whose languages have no word for “evil.” In explaining the motives of Devine and Weston, who want to exploit and colonize Malacandra, Ransom is forced to use the word “bent” as the closest possible Malacandrian equivalent, and Lewis is near his satiric fiercest in having Ransom translate Weston’s explanation of his plans and motives into Malacandrian terms, which reduce them to self-seeking and folly. Weston sounds, in Ransom’s translation, like the worst sort of selfish and self-regarding colonial administrator.

The Oyarsa of Thulcandra, though, as Ransom learns, was by no means unfallen, and long before human history began stirring up a war in the heavens, blighting the Moon, drying up the Malacandrian highlands, and generally causing as much trouble as possible until he was confined to Earth, where, “bent” as he is, he continues to rule, accompanied by a swarm of bad eldils who do his bidding. Rumor has it, so Ransom is told, that Maleldil has taken grave steps to rectify the situation, but about that the Malacandrians know little and are eager to learn more. The Oyarsa of Earth, of course, is the devil and the bad eldils attendant demons. To avoid infection, the Oyarsa of Malacandra gives Weston and Devine the choice of being “unmade” at once or sent home, and Ransom reluctantly decides to go home with them, under eldilic protection. And so the story ends.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis seeks to present an unfallen world. This has historically been considered an almost impossibly difficult task. Does Lewis succeed? Do the hrossa, the sorns, the pffiltriggi, and the edila seem convincingly unfallen, totally and entirely good?
2. The conventions of science-fiction writing are based, if not on truth, then on plausibility—a science-fiction story is supposed to be scientifically credible, moving beyond what we know but not outside what we know. One of the most powerful effects of *Out of the Silent Planet* comes from Lewis's decision to start out writing what feels like science fiction, and then to introduce into his science-fiction world elements that derive from religious conviction. The effect—and this, I take it, is entirely intentional—is to make us regard the religious ideas that Lewis introduces in much the same way that we regard the science-fiction elements he has already established (that is to say, as plausible, as at least potentially true). This is a kind of literary two-step—does it work?
3. When he wrote *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis worked from an already well-established vision of what Mars might be like. What does his portrayal owe to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century speculation about Mars?
4. The edila, as we discover, are angels, and the Oyarsa of Malacandra turns out to be the angelic governor of Mars—and in some sense what on earth was misperceived as the god Ares or Mars. What do you make of Lewis's portrayal of the angels? What sources is he working from?
5. In what sense can Malacandra be considered a crystalization of Lewis's love of "northernness"?
6. In what sense can the figures of Weston and Devine be considered to satirize colonialism? What do they want to do to Malacandra?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *Out of the Silent Planet*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Other Books of Interest

Downing, David C. *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Lecture 4:
Perelandra:
Space Trilogy 2 (1943)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra*.

Lewis waited several years before penning the next book in his trilogy, and they were years that changed his life. When he wrote *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis was an obscure Oxford don. By the time *Perelandra* was published, he was a small-scale national figure, in large part because of his broadcast talks and because of *The Screwtape Letters*. It is not clear that he had any further such works in mind when he began *Out of the Silent Planet*, but during the early 1940s, he devoted a lot of attention to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, publishing his *A Preface to Paradise Lost* in 1942. His work on Milton, coupled with his earlier interplanetary labors, seems to have suggested to him the possibility of a voyage to Venus and of his writing a prose *Paradise* (so to speak) *Not Lost*. And so he did.

Perelandra is, many would argue, the most lyrical of Lewis's novels, and in his portrayal of Venus, Lewis draws upon many of the things that he most loved. As Malacandra is a sort of apotheosis of the "northernness" he had loved life-long, so *Perelandra* is a world of sweetness and water, a recollection of Lewis's Belfastian affection for the sea and for the gentle landscape of his native Ireland and County Down.

The tale begins with Ransom being sent off to *Perelandra*—this time by angelic means through the agency of the Oyarsa of Malacandra. Ransom has been summoned to *Perelandra* by Maleldil himself in order to forestall a demonic invasion of that unfallen realm and the corruption of its rational inhabitants, a *Perelandran* version of Adam and Eve. The fallen Oyarsa of Thulcandra seeks to extend his dominion, and Ransom is sent off to resist whatever persuasions the "Bent Oyarsa" might propose.

Venus is entirely cloud-covered, in Lewis's fiction as in real life. But in real life, what lies beneath is as close to the conventional image of Hell as anywhere ever discovered, dark and viciously hot. Lewis's Venus, though, is quite literally paradisaical—a gentle and benign planet covered almost entirely by warm seas on which roam a series of hospitable "floating islands" bathed in cloud-refracted gold and silver light. Ransom arrives and is delighted, feeling that he has entered the world of myth, basking, as Lewis puts it, following Milton, in a "Sober certainty of waking bliss." All of this is charmingly evoked. But things grow more complicated.

Ransom meets the *Perelandran* Eve, Tinidril, or the "Green Lady"—beautiful, human in form, and brilliant green. Lewis has set himself a formidable task—portraying a fully human, unfallen being entirely without sin or anything even remotely like sin. And he does a very good job in portraying her,

more persuasively, I would venture, than Milton did with his Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Never “had Ransom seen a face so calm, and so unearthly, despite the full humanity of every feature.”

“I come in peace,” says Ransom.

The Green Lady looked quickly at him with an expression of curiosity.

“What is peace?” she replies, never having known anything but peace to trouble her cloudless alert, inner silence.

Conversation with Ransom, however, complicates and enriches her life, and introduces her to self-consciousness: “I have never done it before—stepping outside of life into the Alongside and looking at oneself living as if one were not alive.”

Soon enough, she faces other challenges. Ransom was transported to Perelandra by angelic agency; Weston, by contrast, plops into the sea in a space ship like the one that took Weston, Devine, and Ransom to Mars. This time, though, Weston is seeking the destruction of the Green Lady and of Perelandra. Like Adam and Eve before her, it turns out, the Green Lady has been given a single divine command. Perelandra is mostly water-covered. There is, however, a bit of “Fixed Land” the Lady may visit, but she is forbidden to stay the night. That command, of course, will become the focus of the possessed Weston’s attack. He is, in effect, the Serpent in the Garden. And those attacks, Ransom suddenly realizes with a quailing, faltering spirit, are precisely what he has been sent to Perelandra to help the Lady to resist.

The attacks begin quickly, as Weston employs all the ingenuity in his demonic master’s power to persuade the Lady that Maleldil does not mean what he has said—that God, so to speak, will be pleased with her if she undertakes on her own responsibility to violate his seemingly arbitrary command, that in so doing she will be acting heroically, will become older and wiser, will, in effect, “grow up.” And Ransom has a hard time even making himself heard. One of Lewis’s nicest touches is to make the unfallen Lady totally unschooled in the art of paying attention to two people at once. And the possessed Weston never sleeps. Slowly, ever so slowly, Weston’s words begin to take effect. In her “unselfconscious radiance,” in her “frolic sanctity,” the Lady is tempted. Weston employs argument, of course, but Lewis is clear in suggesting that evil has no interest in logic, truth, or subtlety as such. When the Lady is asleep, and the demon possessing Weston has no cause to be persuasive and plausible, it amuses itself by casually mutilating Perelandran animals or taunting Ransom. In writing about *Paradise Lost*, Lewis suggests that in portraying Satan, Milton does not sufficiently emphasize the numb, dumb malice of evil will. In portraying Weston, Lewis hopes to do better.

Ultimately, Ransom realizes that he must kill Weston once and for all so that the demon possessing Weston will have no toehold on the planet. This proves to be a most difficult process, not least because from time to time Weston’s demon seemingly departs, leaving the quivering remains of what was once Weston himself to speak. But demons invited in are not so easily invited out, Lewis suggests, and in the end, however reluctantly, Ransom puts an end to Weston and to temptation alike.

It all makes for a powerful story, but in one sense at least, the implied theology is surprising. The suggestion seems to be that in the end, had Ransom not intervened, Weston and the devil within him would have triumphed. The Lady's victory, in that sense, is not entirely her own. But perhaps, Lewis would suggest, that is always the case. Our victories always require help, and that is why a ransom is needed.

In his battle with Weston and Weston's possessor, Ransom at last comes to the "Fixed Land," where he and Weston are swept by the waves into dark, subterranean—or sub-Perelandran—caves. His final encounter with Weston takes place far underground, as slack-jawed and limp-limbed, Weston makes one final attack, in company with a giant, insectoid monster that fills Ransom with loathing—"a huge, many legged, quivering deformity." Ransom nevertheless takes care of Weston, and at once, the demon departs. And so does all sense of menace and loathing. All that Ransom—or for that matter Lewis—"had felt from childhood about insects and reptiles died at that moment." Apparently, Ransom concludes, all such fears have been, "even from the beginning," a "dark enchantment of the enemy's." There is nothing to fear. The Green Lady is saved. And this time Paradise is not lost.

The Perelandran Adam, Tor, meanwhile, has heretofore been as little in evidence as Adam himself during Eve's temptation before the Tree of Knowledge, but in the concluding chapters of the book, Tor and Tinidril are reunited, and Ransom joins them in a triumphant celebration on the "Fixed Land," which they are now free to inhabit and make their own.

Presiding over the celebration, in addition to the Perelandran Adam and Eve, are the Oyarses of Malacandra and Perelandra. Their depiction is one of the most moving things Lewis ever wrote, drawing upon pagan and Christian tradition alike, and evoking ideas stretching back for centuries, if not millennia. Lewis loved the traditional image of the cosmos as a vast and orderly spiritual dance, the celestial reflection of divine order. In his portraits of Malacandra and Perelandra, mighty angels who are also Mars and Venus, Ares and Aphrodite, Lewis captures much of what he loved.

Ransom is overwhelmed. "My eyes have seen Mars and Venus. I have seen Ares and Aphrodite." And he asks, "how they were known to the old poets" of earth. Their answer cuts very close to the heart of Lewis's vision. "There is an environment of minds as well of space," and the universe, at last, "is one"; indeed, "in the very matter of our world, the traces of the celestial commonwealth are not quite lost." The "Muse is a real thing" and our "mythology is based on a solid reality than we dream." So Ransom claims, and so, I do not doubt for a moment, Lewis too devoutly believes.

There is a great deal going on in this passage. Lewis recalls not only the Hebrew prophets, centuries of angelic lore, the Homeric hymns in praise of the Greek gods, the passionate precision of scholastic theology, and the cosmic intimations of Plato; he recalls Dante's *Paradiso*, heavenly sphere by heavenly sphere, the otherworldly vision of the *Pearl* poet (and even the vigorous greenness of Sir Bercilak, the otherworldly Green Knight), the enchanted garden of the medieval French *Roman de la Rose*, the Garden of the Hesperides, and even the fuddled joyful visions of Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where Caliban claims that "the clouds methought would open and

show riches / Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked, / I cried to dream again" (3.2.138-40).

Ransom has no need to dream. He knows. Perelandra is preserved, in part through his good agency. He is, once again by angelic potency, sent home to earth, ready to work on behalf of Maleldil in the Silent Planet.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. In addition to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, what other works did Lewis draw upon in writing *Perelandra*?
2. In *Perelandra*, where does Lewis come closest to evoking the beauty and "joy" that he sought in so many of his works?
3. Lewis's writings combine elements of Christianity and ancient mythology. Discuss how Lewis is able to successfully blend these two worlds.

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *Perelandra*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Other Books of Interest

Downing, David C. *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.

Lecture 5:
That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups:
Space Trilogy 3 (1945)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*.

It may well be that when Lewis wrote *Out of the Silent Planet* he had no further interplanetary fantasies in mind. When he wrote *Perelandra*, though, the case was different, and I have no doubt that by the time Ransom left Venus, Lewis knew that he would have to bring his chronicle to earth. In *That Hideous Strength*, he does. Whether the novel as a whole is quite as successful as the preceding two in the series is an open question. Though there are wonderful things in it, my own impression is that it is not. It is certainly longer—in part, I suspect, because setting his tale in an English university town suffering from contemporary problems forced Lewis to confront day-to-day complications in a more or less uncongenial quasi-realistic mode. *That Hideous Strength* is the only Lewis novel whose action takes place in Lewis's own space and time, and that does not seem to have played to his strengths. This world is not Lewis's strong suit, and the best parts of *That Hideous Strength* are, unsurprisingly, the parts that are the most otherworldly.

That Hideous Strength, as has often been observed, was written to some extent under the influence of Lewis's much-admired and—as he believed—saintly friend Charles Williams. In its more or less matter-of-fact depiction of spiritual powers at work in the here and now, it has, for good and ill, much the character of Williams's fiction. The tale begins at the fictional Bracton College in the fictional University of Edgestow, which must decide whether to sell an ancient College property, Bragdon Wood—the resting place of the Arthurian Merlin—to the newly founded and heavily funded “National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments,” or N.I.C.E., for short. Some folks, though, don't want to sell Bragdon Wood and even have their doubts about N.I.C.E. And so the tale begins.

One of the problems with the story is that in writing about matters so close to home, Lewis is often, I suspect without recognizing it, seduced by the temptation to indulge his own prejudices and dislikes. The arguments are not really *ad hominem* (or *ad feminam*), but it is not hard to see in *That Hideous Strength* the residue of the disputes and disappointments that form part of any academic life. It is all, sadly, often a bit too close to home to bear the full metaphysical weight that Lewis wants it to bear.

The protagonists, Mark and Jane Studdock, for example, illustrate at least part of the problem. Lewis lived and taught at a time and place when women academics were few and far between. He lost his mother very young, spent most of his childhood and adolescence surrounded entirely by males, and except for Mrs. Moore and her daughter, and much later, Joy Davidman, he seems to have had very few close relationships with women, and fewer still

with women who were his equals in learning and achievement. It shows Jane Studdock, a perennial graduate student, stalled more or less permanently with her dissertation, is meant to be a sympathetic character. And to some degree she is. But Lewis's portrayal is dated and patronizing. The problems with Mark Studdock, a young sociologist at the College, are quite different. One of Lewis's real-life temptations was a yearning to be part of "the inner ring" in pretty much any group in which he found himself. A cheapjack psychological reading, I suppose, might propose that the yearning goes back to Lewis's miserable days at "Wyvern," where he was neither "tart" nor "blood," or for that matter, "good at games." In any case, Studdock's desire to ascend to the "inner ring," to gain and keep a position in N.I.C.E., is the engine that drives Lewis's plot, and by implication, does service, for this novel at least, as the easiest way for an ordinary person to go damnably astray. I may be morally tone-deaf here, but in my experience, that particular temptation is not so widely compelling as Lewis believed. (It may be, though, that I myself am such an obviously poor candidate for any "inner ring" that the blindness is mine and not Lewis's—I simply don't know.) There is no doubt, though, that tempted as he was, Lewis deeply loathed such jockeying for position and found it horrifyingly and pervasively corrupting.

N.I.C.E. itself serves as a grab-bag of Lewis's *betes noires*. The goal of N.I.C.E., as it portrays itself, is "a constructive fusion of state and laboratory." Lewis deeply mistrusted what he termed "scientism," if not science (many contemporaries thought that he mistrusted science itself, though Lewis vigorously denied it). The rise of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin and the more or less doctrinaire socialism of many, if not most, of his academic colleagues, filled Lewis with even greater distrust. He disliked "meddling" in all guises, disliked state "meddling" even more, and disliked state "meddling" in the name of science most of all. "Scientific" Marxism as practiced by Stalin, and "scientific" "final-solution" anti-Jewish "eugenics" as practiced by Hitler and his cohorts give some indication as to why. We don't get far into the novel before the agenda of N.I.C.E.—a bitterly ironic acronym on Lewis's part—is made a good deal clearer.

The speaker is "Lord Feverstone," none other than Devine from *Silent Planet*, whose cynicism, social skills, and lack of scruple have elevated him in the meantime not only to a peerage, but to a position of power in N.I.C.E. itself. He outlines its program as follows—it is a sort of "cleansing" of the planet, beginning on a small scale with obvious measures like "sterilization of the unfit, liquidation of backward races," and "selective breeding," before proceeding to the final goal of eliminating "organic life." This end in view, we later learn, N.I.C.E. has procured and wired up the guillotined head of a French-speaking physician executed for poisoning his wife as a first step toward freeing human consciousness from any sort of bodily confinement. But by the end of the book, we learn that the force really animating the head and directing N.I.C.E. is once again the "Bent Eldil" himself. This is all a bit heavy-handed at times. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis had portrayed Hell as an all-embracing, back-biting bureaucracy, and N.I.C.E. is much the same thing in more nearly terrestrial terms.

The countervailing forces are better drawn and more persuasive. It is harder, I suppose, to caricaturize those whom one admires and approves of. They are led, we find, by Ransom himself, now virtually ageless and angelic, though suffering still from an incurable wound in the heel inflicted in his final battle with the possessed Weston on Perelandra. There is a scriptural (and Miltonic) reference here to the notion derived long ago by Christian interpreters from Genesis 3.15 that Christ will “bruise” the serpent’s head, and the serpent in turn will “bruise” Christ’s heel, and also a reference to the Grail legend, in which the healing of the wounded “Fisher King” will bring restoration to the “Wasteland.” Ransom is, in short, a secondary cosmic redeemer or “ransom,” and is the Fisher King as well, being himself now a “fisher of men.” Around him a coterie of believers has gathered, and Jane Studdock is soon among their number, for she is a woman who “dreams dreams”—a woman gifted with second sight. And one of the things she dreams about is Merlin resting in Bragdon Wood. That is why N.I.C.E. is interested in Mark Studdock—to get at Jane to call up Merlin and restore him once again to life, so that, magician that he is, he can call upon the celestial powers to do the devil’s work on earth. Ransom and his followers, though, get to her first, and in the meantime even Mark Studdock begins to have second thoughts about N.I.C.E. and so avoids the final catastrophe that befalls N.I.C.E. and all its members.

And here, for my money, is where the story begins to get good. Lewis is once again on his home turf, dealing with the Middle Ages, Arthurian legend, and angelic beings, and the pace of things picks up dramatically. Merlin is roused, and Lewis’s portrayal of Merlin reveals not only his sense of humor at something very close to its best, but once again, his unrivaled knowledge of the flavor and texture of the medieval world. Past master of languages that he is, Lewis has Merlin speak in medieval Latin and provides translations (sadly, the Latin has been cut in some recent versions of the novel, and its omission is a real loss—Lewis knows his business here, and is in fact as gifted a translator of medieval Latin as I have ever read; if you ever doubted the suppleness, sophistication, and precision of Latin, Lewis will convince you otherwise).

The woods and fields rise to Merlin’s call, and he breathes the air of ancient Celtic Britain when the Roman legions had been called home and the pagan Anglo-Saxons fought with Arthur. Nature, for Lewis, is on the side of the angels, and when the planetary gods are summoned, they work not on the behalf of N.I.C.E., but to destroy it. The descent of the gods is the best thing in the book. Perelandra and Malacandra we have already met, but Lewis outdoes himself in their depiction. Once you read it, their characters are fixed for you forever. We have not, though, met “Viritrilbia,” the lord of language, wit, and meaning, “the white-hot furnace of essential speech,” the “herald, the messenger, the slayer of Argus,” whom “men call Mercury and Thoth.” And then the silent, brooding blackness of Saturn or “Lurga,” of time itself, endless, ageless, and ancient, wise and grim beyond thought of thought. And then “Glund-Oyarsa, King of Kings,” known “to men in olden times as Jove,” as Zeus, as Jupiter, festive, calm, magnanimous, and joyful. It is all grand stuff, and in its denouement an expression of Lewis’s final optimism, in spite of misgivings and resentments, in spite of the debris of personality.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. What were Lewis's major thematic concerns in writing *That Hideous Strength*? How successful was he in evoking these themes?
2. Why does Lewis's fiction seem to be more successful when set outside the world in which he lived?
3. How was Lewis's treatment of women in his fiction influenced by the events of his life? How might his treatment of women in his fiction have been different if he were writing today?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *That Hideous Strength*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Other Books of Interest

Downing, David C. *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Lecture 6: *The Chronicles of Narnia:* Large-Scale Structure

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Kirk H. Beetz's *Exploring C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Now we turn to the fictional works that more than any other have ensured Lewis's name and reputation—*The Chronicles of Narnia*, which have long since become children's classics. It has been suggested that after his fateful debate with Elizabeth Anscombe, Lewis redirected his energies back into his scholarly writing on the one hand and into myth and story on the other. Whatever the truth of that suggestion, his later works of both kinds reveal a consistent calm richness and depth that his earlier writings show less consistently despite the brilliance of their best moments. The occasional shrillness of *That Hideous Strength* simply disappears. Lewis had, it seems, recentered himself, and *The Chronicles of Narnia* reveal it. He worked on the Narnia stories from the very late forties through the mid-fifties, publishing one a year from 1950 through 1956. The order in which he wrote and published them, however, is not the order in which they are now ordinarily read, and before we begin to discuss *The Magician's Nephew*, which in Narnian time begins the sequence, though it was the second-to-last tale published, it may be worthwhile to take a look at both the order in which the works were written and published and the different order in which they work together in terms of Narnian chronology. The first to appear, and the first to be written, was *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, originally published in 1950. It begins with an image—a faun, that is, a satyr-like half-man, half-goat, and a Victorian lamppost in a winter woodland—which Lewis reports had come to him many, many years before. Lewis then published *Prince Caspian*, which takes place, in Narnian time, many centuries after the events chronicled in the previous work. Next was *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which many think is the best in the series and which again includes Prince Caspian. It takes place, in Narnian time, three years after the events of *Prince Caspian*. Lewis then completed *The Silver Chair*, published in 1953, which chronicles events taking place when Caspian is a very old man, seventy years, more or less, later. In the course of *The Silver Chair*, Lewis describes a Homeric “blind poet” coming forward at a court celebration and singing “the grand old tale Prince Cor and Aravis and the Horse Bree, which is called *The Horse and His Boy* and tells of an adventure that happened in Narnia and Calormen and the lands between, in the golden age when Peter was High King in Cair Pair Paravel”—that is to say, many centuries before, shortly after the time of the events narrated in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Lewis is shifting the scene a bit, and returning to the span of Narnian time that he began with. *The Horse and His Boy* was next to appear, in 1954.

It then appears that Lewis more or less rethought the entire project: two tales about the times of King Peter, three about the times of Prince, and later

King, Caspian, it was time now to round off the collection with an account of the creation of Narnia and an account of its end—a Genesis and an Apocalypse, if you will, so that the whole story might be told and Narnia might function more or less completely as a parallel universe or other world.

Hence *The Magician's Nephew*, the Narnian creation story, first in the series chronologically, but sixth to be written and published. It appeared in 1955.

And in conclusion, last to be written and last in chronology both, *The Last Battle*, which appeared in 1956. *The Last Battle* revisits many of the themes that Lewis explored in *That Hideous Strength*, but revisits them, in my view, with far greater deftness and generosity. It is the best book in the series, rivaled only by the high points of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and if *The Discarded Image* is not, it is the best book Lewis ever wrote.

PUBLISHING / NARNIAN CHRONOLOGY

The following is a full chronology of the books in publication order and then by internal chronology, by Narnian chronology, listing first their actual date of publication, then the main earthly visitors to Narnia in each tale, and then the approximate earthly time at which they left. Narnian time, though, as Lewis repeatedly emphasizes, moves at a different, faster rate than earthly time, and the next two columns note various Narnian characters whom Lewis discusses and a rough Narnian date, beginning with the year 1 or 0 for the events chronicled in the tales.

As published:	LWW	1950	By Narnian Chronology	TMN	1955	Digory, Polly, Frank, Helen	1905		0
	PC	1951		LWW	1950	Peter, Susan, Edmund, Lucy	1940		1500
	VDT	1952		HB	1954	Peter, Susan, Edmund, Lucy	1940	Cor	1520
	SC	1953		PC	1951	Peter, Susan, Edmund, Lucy	1943	Caspian	2500
	HB	1954		VDT	1952	Edmund, Lucy, Eustace	1943	Caspian	2503
	TMN	1955		SC	1953	Eustace, Jill	1947	Rilan	2570
	LB	1956		LB	1956	Eustace, Jill	1948	Tirian	2800

It is worth noting that others have advanced slightly different dates both for events in Narnia and for the corresponding events on earth. Lewis, for the most part, doesn't give exact dates and gives no concrete Narnian dates other than the three Narnian years that he says have elapsed between the events of *Prince Caspian* and those of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

What aspects of Lewis's works are particularly suited to children's literature?

Suggested Reading

Beetz, Kirk H. *Exploring C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia*. Osprey, FL: Beacham's Sourcebooks, 2001.

Lecture 7:
***The Magician's Nephew* (6):**
Narnia 1 (1955)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew*.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, Lewis revisits the time of his own Belfast childhood, though the story begins in England rather than in Ireland. A boy named Digory Kirke (yet another salute to “The Great Knock”) lives in London with his formidable aunt, his most disagreeable Uncle Andrew, and his dying mother. Digory's father is far away, in India with the foreign service.

The situation is much like Lewis's own must have been at the time shortly after his mother was diagnosed as fatally ill. Digory, however, has a friend, a young girl named Polly from a house a few doors down, and together, through no fault of their own, they come afoul of Uncle Andrew.

Uncle Andrew has gained control of several magic rings that, so he believes, allow those who wear them to travel to and return from other worlds. He has already tested their power on a guinea pig, which has vanished without a trace. He is unwilling to undertake so uncertain a journey himself, so he persuades Polly to try on a ring, and Digory goes to rescue her.

Soon enough, they find themselves in another world, called Charn, but it is a world almost entirely lifeless, presided over by a swollen, red-giant sun, a world almost petrified. They find themselves in a hall of statues that seem to represent a dynasty of rulers, growing ever more selfish and cruel as time passes. At the center of the room hangs a bell, beneath which is the following message:

*Make your choice, adventurous Stranger,
Strike the bell and bide the danger,
Or wonder, till it drives you mad,
What would have followed if you had.*

Against the advice of Polly, Digory succumbs to temptation and strikes the bell—the result of which is to recall to life the last and cruelest of the petrified rulers—the beautiful and wicked Queen Jadis—who quickly informs the children that the whole palace in which they find themselves is about to collapse. She leads them outside to the lifeless realm that was once her city and her world. It now lies dead and silent because, as Jadis informs the children, Jadis spoke “the Deplorable Word,” the effect of which was to “destroy all living things except the one who spoke it.” Milton's Satan, who like Jadis “felt himself impaired,” maintains that it is better to reign in hell than to live in heaven. Jadis quite clearly would agree; she spoke the word and “a moment later” was “the only living thing beneath the sun.”

Lewis thus begins the *Chronicles* with a demonic antitype to the creation. For Lewis, God creates through the Word—“‘Let there be light’ and there was light” (Gn. 1.3)—and creates in order that there might be other beings than Himself. Jadis does the precise contrary. She *uncreates* through the word—not in order that there may be other conscious beings, but that she may be the only conscious being existing in the world. That, for Lewis, is the true demonic impulse—that all may be “I.” Evil is in this sense a diminishment of being, both outside in Charn and even more so, within—which is, by the way, precisely the analysis of evil offered by the medieval theologians and by Plato and St. Augustine before them. Evil is not a power in its own right. It is in this view, instead, a kind of ontological shortfall, the extent to which a thing or a person is less than it could be or it should be.

Through a series of mischances, meanwhile, Jadis finds herself in London with both the children and a much taken-aback Uncle Andrew, who suddenly confronts much more than he bargained for. She immediately sets out to take over our own world as well. In the ensuing fracas, not only does Digory at last and with some understandable difficulty succeed in containing her and removing her from London, but because the magic rings take with them anyone in physical contact with those who wear them, he succeeds in taking from London not only Jadis, but both Polly and himself, Uncle Andrew, and a London cabbie and his horse. All find themselves not in Charn, but in a Narnia yet unborn. And Lewis proceeds to chronicle its creation.

In the planetary tales, God is designated “Maleldil” and his son, “Maleldil the younger”. Neither Malelil, though, makes any direct appearance in any of the three interplanetary works. In the *Chronicles of Narnia* Lewis takes a different and more successful tack.

Many readers, for all sorts of reasons, will simply not give their children a book that speaks directly of Jesus or of Christ. And for many other readers, perhaps for almost all readers in our culture, those names bear a highly charged range of pre-existing associations. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis speaks often of the “Great Lion,” of Aslan, who—because he is not directly identified as who he in fact is—is in some sense the most successful and engaging fictional portrayal of Christ ever written. In portraying Aslan, Lewis is able to emphasize features like strength and joyfulness that for many readers do not directly attach themselves to Christ. He is able to shed the associations gathering round two thousand years of religious art. And he is able to detach Christ from the bearded, robe-clad, Roman-empire associations that can make him a historically distant figure. Instead, Lewis is able to draw upon our powerful, and powerfully positive, cultural vision of the lion as greatest, most noble—most dangerous and calmest and most regal—of beasts. It is a vision that short-circuits many sorts of resistance and reconceptualizes the divine in a new and, for many readers, a highly attractive context. In some strong sense, Aslan is Narnia, and in large part it is the figure of Aslan whom readers of the tales have come to love.

As they stand in the Narnia yet to be, Jadis observes, “This is not Charn.” “This is an empty world.” “This is Nothing.” But not for long. Aslan can create from nothing, and he creates by song. To Digory, we are told, “Aslan’s song was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard,” and

others soon join the original voice, “cold, tingling, silvery voices,” and “the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars.” Lewis has in mind here, I think, a famous passage from the book of Job, memorably illustrated by William Blake. God asks Job from the whirlwind “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” When “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (38. 4,7). Digory and Polly can answer, “Right here.”

And then the sun, “which laughed for joy as it came up.” Lewis here recalls another passage, from the psalm that he considers “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world”—Psalm 19, in which, in the translation Lewis preferred, the sun “cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course” (5). And then they see “the Singer himself.” It “was a Lion.” Soon he sings into being grass and trees and animals. Lewis has in mind here, of course, not only Genesis, but Milton’s account of the creation of the animals in Book VII of *Paradise Lost* (“now half appeared / The tawny lion, pawing to get free / His hinder parts, then springs as broke from bounds” [463-65]). “Fauns and Satyrs and Dwarfs” come forth as well, and with them Naiads and Dryads and “gods,” for here, as in the space trilogy, Lewis’s Christian vision includes the creatures of classical mythology, classical paganism, and folklore.

Such a world proves not to everyone’s taste, though. Jadis flees as best she can, and Uncle Andrew is discomfited and baffled. Digory and Polly, by contrast, and the cabman and his now-talking, soon-to-be-winged horse love it.

Aslan makes of the honest cabman the Adam of Narnia and summons his wife “from the middle of a washing day” to be his Eve. Jadis, however, is still at large. In the first of many instances of repentance we encounter in Narnia, Digory takes responsibility for awakening her in Charn, and hence, ultimately, for her being in Narnia. He is forgiven. And of Aslan he makes a request. He wishes for “some magic fruit of this country to make Mother well.”

Here, of course, Lewis confronts in fictional terms what must once have been his own dearest wish, perhaps none other dearer. And after a magic journey to an enclosed, Edenic mountain garden on the back of the now-winged horse, “Fledge,” Digory comes upon the fruit of a tree that is not forbidden. He has been ordered by Aslan to bring to him some fruit of the paradisaical tree to plant in Narnia in order that its beneficent influence may, for a time at least, keep the witch Jadis away. But Jadis herself already stands beside the tree, the fruit of which, so we are told, can grant the “heart’s desire,” and she seeks to persuade Digory merely to snatch some fruit, to return to his own world with the fruit to cure his mother. This time, though, he resists temptation. And when he returns to Aslan, he learns that, tempted as he was, it was well he did so. For it is possible to “find your heart’s desire and find despair.” Had he snatched the fruit and returned to earth, his mother would indeed have recovered, but not to her happiness and not to his—rather to their misery—and he thus begins to learn that “there might be something more terrible even than losing someone you love by death.”

But because he has resisted temptation, Digory is allowed to take the fruit back with him, and his mother recovers to happiness and health. He and Polly, meanwhile, plant the seeds from the fruit, which grow into a tree that,

while not magic, produces the best apples in England. When at last the tree is felled in a storm, Digory, now long-since grown up and a distinguished professor, has a wardrobe made from its wood, as a happy commemoration of his adventures in Narnia. Ever afterwards, when he or Polly reflect upon those adventures, “the thought of all that golden goodness, and the feeling that it was still there, quite close, just round some corner or just behind some door, would come back and make them sure, deep down inside, that all was well.” Which is, I take it, for Lewis the effect of “joy” in retrospect.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Why does Aslan create Narnia by singing? What is the fact that he sings Narnia into being meant to imply?
2. What is Jadis's motive in destroying Charn?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *The Magician's Nephew*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1955.

Other Books of Interest

Beetz, Kirk H. *Exploring C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia*. Osprey, FL: Beacham's Sourcebooks, 2001.

Lecture 8:
***The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1):**
Narnia 2 (1950)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

If *The Magician's Nephew* chronicles the creation of Narnia, is Narnia's Genesis, so to speak, then *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is Narnia's redemption and resurrection story—in that sense, I suppose, Narnia's gospel. It was the first of the tales that Lewis wrote, and the first to appear. Because of its subject, it remains in some strong sense the heart of the series.

The story begins with the four Pevensie children—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy—removed to the country house of an “old professor” to avoid the Nazi “Blitz” in World War II. It is a big, mysterious old house, and the “old professor” is none other than Digory Kirke, present, though they of course did not know it (and I suspect, neither did Lewis when he began to write the story), at the very creation of Narnia.

Exploring the house and playing hide and seek, the youngest of the children, Lucy, one day steps into a wardrobe (a detached closet, a piece of furniture to hang clothes in). It is, in fact, the wardrobe made from the apple wood of Narnia, stemming from the paradisaical fruit that Digory was allowed to take back from his adventures to cure his dying mother. And it leads Lucy to Narnia too—a Narnia, though, in which many centuries have passed since the coronation of King Frank the cabbie and Helen the Queen. Jadis, however, still remains, and she has gained control of Narnia, ruling it not with “the Deplorable Word,” but with cruelty, and confining the realm to an unending winter. By prophecy, four “children of Adam” will break her spell, and she is most eager to prevent them from doing so. Hence, she has set out standing orders that any humans who turn up are to be handed over to her.

The first person, the first “hnau,” if you will, whom Lucy encounters in wintery Narnia is a faun named Tumnus (a good Latin name for a classical creature), and though he is kind to her, he intends at first to turn her over to Jadis. But he cannot. He repents and sends her back to safety. Lucy breathlessly reports her adventures to her older siblings, who don't believe her. Her brother Edmund is particularly skeptical and takes the opportunity to tease her.

A few days later, though, playing hide and seek, he has occasion to step into the wardrobe. He finds himself in Narnia, but does not encounter Tumnus the faun. Instead, he encounters Jadis, who has made away with Tumnus and has gone to investigate the report of “sons of Adam” in Narnia. She tempts Edmund with “Turkish Delight,” a Victorian sweet, and encourages him to return to Narnia with all of his siblings so she can contain the threat to her power. She promises Edmund that if he does so he will be a prince and ultimately king—and have all the “Turkish Delight” he can eat. Edmund is game.

He does not, once he returns, want to admit that Lucy was right, that she had indeed been to another world, and so continues to tease her until a few days later, by seeming happenstance, all four children find themselves in Narnia. Tumnus, they find, has been captured, and it later turns out, petrified. Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy are taken in tow by a pair of virtuous talking beavers, who are much afraid of Jadis, whom they know as the "White Witch," and who believe that "Aslan is on the move" to break her spell over Narnia. Edmund, however, cannot abide such talk and slips out of the beavers' lodge to escape and to turn his sisters and brother over to Jadis.

He does not get the reception he hopes for. He comes alone, and by report, Aslan has already landed. The Witch sets out at once, the now-unwilling Edmund with her, to kill the beavers, capture his siblings, and go to the "Stone Table," where she hopes to offer Edmund and his sisters and brother, if she can catch them, as a sort of human sacrifice, ensuring that her power will not be broken.

But Aslan has come. The beavers have escaped, and with them the other children. As the Witch makes her way to the Stone Table, the enchanted, century-long winter she has inflicted on Narnia ends. All is not well, though. Edmund has betrayed his sisters and brother, and, as the Witch reminds Aslan when she arrives at the Stone Table, by the rules of the "Emperor-beyond-the-Sea," God the Father as he appears in Narnia, "every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey" and "for every treachery I have right to kill." Edmund's life, in short, is forfeit. Aslan, however, intercedes.

He offers to die in Edmund's place, and Jadis rejoices. Aslan then goes through his own Gethsemane, attended by the grieving Lucy and Susan, who do not yet know what is to take place. And then he is bound, mocked, and finally sacrificed at the Stone Table, Jadis taunting "you have given me Narnia for ever, you have lost your own life and you have not saved his. In that knowledge, despair and die." And die he does.

But when dawn comes, he is resurrected, explaining to the women at the tomb, Susan and Lucy here in Narnia, that by the ruling of the Emperor, "when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start backwards." Edmund is saved, Tumnus and the many others whom Jadis has petrified are brought back to life, and at last Aslan himself destroys Jadis the Witch. Peter, Susan, the repentant, much-chastened, and redeemed Edmund, and Lucy come to reign as kings and queens in Narnia, with Peter above all as High King. The "golden age" of Narnia begins.

Many years later, hunting the "White Stag" in the forests, they come upon the almost unremembered place where they entered Narnia. It looks familiar, they investigate, and find themselves back in England, where no time at all seems to have passed.

Many themes, of course, are at work here, beyond the clearest and central themes of repentance, atonement, and resurrection. First, we need to consider the nature of the wardrobe itself. Here, if anywhere, the inside is truly bigger than the outside, a stand-alone closet becomes a world.

This is for Lewis a far-reaching metaphor. The surface of life, or the apparent surface, can open to reveal realms far richer, which it would take a lifetime, more than a lifetime, to explore—so the wardrobe suggests, and so Lewis believed.

The repentance and redemption of Edmund could hardly be clearer. He begins with a character much like that of Jadis, but he comes to recognize as much, and accordingly comes, as Lewis would argue, through grace, to life-transforming change.

Lucy, by contrast, stands among the chosen from the beginning, not least in her refusal to deny her experience of Narnia even when no one else believes her. This sort of integrity and courage seems to have had a special meaning for Lewis, living as he did in a social context where believers were few and far between. Her very name suggests her nature, for “Lucy” derives from the Italian “*lucia*” and the Latin “*lux*,” meaning in both cases, “illumination” or “light.” And Lucy from the outset is “enlightened” by the fictional equivalent of a special grace. “Aslan reveals himself to her by preference,” and throughout the tales, as a result, she is stalwart in her faith and in her convictions.

In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante attributes his own salvation in part to the mediation of his patron saint Lucia, to divine illumination, the religious experience, if you will, which brings to life a living faith. Lucy’s chosenness also, and by design, I think, seems to follow a scriptural pattern. In Genesis, and indeed later, God seems to show a preference for younger brothers and sisters—Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and later David—and for disempowered women as well, not only Mary but Mary Magdalene, and the whole array of women whose life Jesus touches in the gospels. (It is likewise, I suspect, no accident that the High King’s name is Peter.)

On a much more pedestrian level, Lewis’s portrayal of the good beavers, like his portrayal of Frank as the Cabbie and King of Narnia, reveals Lewis’s affection for ordinary folk and for ordinary life. England is a class-conscious society, and more so in Lewis’s day than in our own. In fairness, Lewis himself is conscious of class, as in his circumstances he had to be. But he tried never to forget that class and virtue are not and never were the same things, and throughout the tales he is at pains to demonstrate as much.

Finally, much of the charm of Narnia itself derives from the “Talking Beasts” that populate it. Lewis himself had always been intrigued by what as a child he called “dressed animals,” and in fact his childhood writings, almost entirely about the imaginary land of “Boxen,” are inhabited by “dressed animals.” In Narnia, he returns to that childhood fascination with all of his adult powers. In Narnia, as the horse, Bree, points out to “his boy” Shasta, it makes as much sense to talk about “a horse and his boy” as it does about “a boy and his horse.” Both are free, rational, fully conscious creatures.

On another level, the talking animals of Narnia speak by their very nature of what, to me at least, is one of the most attractive aspects of Lewis’s character, his deep and abiding affection for animals, and his consistent kindness to animals. In Narnia, Lewis’s affection gives them voices, among them some of the most memorable voices in the tales.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Discuss Lewis's treatment of time in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. How does this work into his theme that the "inside is bigger than the outside"?
2. What role does memory play in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*? What might Lewis be suggesting?
3. Is it important to Lewis's themes that Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy are children? How does the fact that they are children relate to Lewis's Christian themes?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1950.

Other Books of Interest

Beetz, Kirk H. *Exploring C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia*. Osprey, FL: Beacham's Sourcebooks, 2001.

Lecture 9:
***The Horse and His Boy* (5): Narnia 3 (1954) and
the Prince Caspian Trilogy: *Prince Caspian* (2): Narnia 4 (1951)**

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *The Horse and His Boy* and *Prince Caspian*.

The next book in the series—the fifth written—is very different, and lighter, in tone. *The Horse and His Boy* does not directly chronicle grand theological events like the creation and redemption. Instead, it tells the story of a noble prince regaining his inheritance and a brave and feisty princess fleeing to escape a loathsome arranged marriage—much more the usual stuff of fairy tale and fantasy. Aslan appears, of course, but the focus more than in the other tales is upon this world, on Narnia itself. Or, more precisely, on Calormen.

Narnia is unmistakably a parallel to England—English in weather, English in custom, English in landscape. And the neighboring, allied kingdom of Archenland is little different, a Wales, or Scotland, or Ireland. Calormen is very different indeed. It is not part of “the green North.” Instead, it is dry and hot (“*calor*” in fact means “heat” in Latin). It is something very much like the Islamic world as perceived by “Christendom,” by the medieval Christian West, and that raises problems of a sort for Lewis but also provides him with opportunities, which he delightedly—and I would argue, effectively—seizes.

Lewis has fun with Calormen throughout, but the main focus of the story is the situation of its central character, Shasta, the adopted son of a poor and cruel Calormene fisherman who turns out to be the lost crown prince of Archenland—a sort of rags-to-riches escape story. The story also distantly echoes Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* when Shasta—or Cor to give him his true given name—encounters his identical twin brother Corin. Lewis writes here, for the most part, with a theological light touch. There is, again, nothing so theologically monumental in the work as the creation and redemption we encounter in the two previous works.

But Aslan does make his appearance, and in a variety of ways. He appears as a series of lions, driving Shasta and the Narnian horse, Bree, and the Tarkeena Aravis and her mare, Hwin, together as they flee. He appears as a wonderful cat who comforts and protects Shasta as he awaits his fellows in the frightening tombs outside of the Calormene capital of Tashbaan. He appears once again as a lion near the very end of the escape when Shasta and Aravis have to ride faster in order to warn Archenland of Prince Rabadash's invasion.

And he finally reveals himself directly. Lewis's point here, as I take it, is that providence works at all times to shape our ends, to weave into the best possible pattern the thread that our choices make of our lives. And beyond that, to speak in Narnian terms, Aslan is present and active on our behalf in ways

that we don't recognize at the time, or don't necessarily realize afterward. What seemed to humans and Narnian horses alike a series of more or less random events turn out in retrospect to have been intricately guided by Aslan throughout.

In one mode or another, Aslan shapes and perfects all the central characters. Some need more work than others. The wise mare Hwin, an equine portrait of something close to Lewis's ideal Englishwoman, is humble, self-effacing, courageous, generous, and wise, in character and temperament very like "Mother Dimble" in *That Hideous Strength*. She recognizes Aslan at once. For her male counterpart Bree, things are more complicated. He has been a prized warhorse, and he is proud. But at the end of the tale, he shows something close to unreflective cowardice, and is shamed into humility, if not, perhaps, into wisdom. The case with Aravis is different. She has been firm and courageous throughout, as befits a Calormene noblewoman. But her background and training have bequeathed to her moral weaknesses as well. She is proud of her lineage and position and initially regards Shasta with scorn. And worse, she is at times heedless of the effects of her actions on her social inferiors. She too is brought to wholeness. Shasta fares better and learns primarily to trust in Aslan, who has watched over him, so he finds, since his birth. Some have argued that he learns to overcome a sexist disregard for Aravis, and by implication, for women, but I am not sure that in his attitudes there are, if not a direct reflection of Lewis's own, then something close to a direct reflection of what he took, more or less unreflectively, to be the attitudes of almost all boys of his time. Victorian Belfast and even mid-century Oxford did not share our attitudes here.

Despite such flaws, if flaws they be, *The Horse and His Boy* is a rousing story, and Lewis seems to have as much fun telling it as he does any of the Narnian tales.

Though *The Horse and His Boy* comes third in the series in Narnian time—Peter is still High King in Cair Paravel and Narnia is still in its "golden age," it was the fifth of the tales to be written and to be published, and in a sense it stands apart from the main events Lewis depicts in Narnia itself. More than any of the tales, I suspect, Lewis wrote it simply because the story itself caught his imagination. Hence, in part, its distinctive lightness in tone.

Before *The Horse and His Boy*, Lewis published a trilogy about events taking place during and immediately after the reign of King Caspian the Tenth, many centuries in Narnian time after the "golden age" had passed. So many centuries, in fact, that Cair Paravel, the castle of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, is so thoroughly a ruin that they don't recognize it when they return to Narnia, and so many centuries that "Old Narnia," the Narnia of dwarfs and dryads and talking beasts, is taken by most contemporary human Narnians to be nothing more than a fable.

This, I take it, is in and of itself a major part of Lewis's point. First of all, the adjective "old" had for Lewis a powerfully positive charge, as in "Old English" or "Old Norse." He spent his life studying and loving old languages and literature. But beyond that, the mythical, disbelieved, but nonetheless real and still living "Old Narnia" parallels for Lewis the situation of Christianity itself in what is to him a resolutely secular world that has in large part abandoned Christian

belief as old and outmoded—something once believed and now rejected and forgotten. Hence, Prince Caspian's yearning for Old Narnia and his love of tales of Old Narnia—and all the more his discovery that contrary to all expectations and beyond all hope, Old Narnia still in fact exists—parallels Lewis's own process of conversion. Sometimes, Lewis implies, the old stories are the truest after all.

The central thrust of *Prince Caspian* in some respects recalls the plot of Hamlet. Caspian is the legitimate king of Narnia, though admittedly king in a dynasty that long ago secured Narnia by conquest. Nonetheless, Caspian is the son of King Caspian IX—and, as he discovers, the current king, his uncle Miraz, killed Caspian's father to ascend the throne, at first calling himself "Lord Protector" (a sly allusion to Lewis's distaste for Oliver Cromwell and the Parliamentary side in the English Civil War). Caspian is in no immediate danger as long as Miraz has no other heir, but the birth of Miraz's son puts Caspian's life in danger, and he and his much-beloved tutor flee.

The invading "Telmarine" dynasty exemplified by Miraz and Caspian have, so we are led to believe, shown little regard either for the original Narnians or for Aslan, and that is how Caspian has been raised. His tutor Cornelius, however, teaches him otherwise, and though very different in physical character, he doubtless is in some sense a fond recollection of Lewis's beloved tutor Kirkpatrick. Cornelius is also, so he reveals to a delighted Caspian, a half-dwarf, "the smallest, and also the fattest, man Caspian had ever seen." Old Narnia is real after all, and that is, of course, where they flee.

Cornelius and Caspian flee to the woods, which the Telmarines dislike and fear, and soon enough they encounter Old Narnians in abundance, among them one of Lewis's most engaging characters, Reepicheep, "a gay and charming martial mouse" who wears "a tiny little rapier at his side" and twirls his "whiskers" like a moustache. He is unwaveringly courtly, utterly fearless, and expresses himself with elegant perfection. And like the cavalier poet, Richard Lovelace, he loves honor above all—or above all save Aslan himself.

In fact, Reepicheep represents Lewis's evocation of the other, non-Cromwellian side in the English Civil War, the aristocratic, Episcopalian, and royalist cavaliers with whom his sympathies manifestly lie. And he gets the tone exactly right. That is just how the cavaliers seem to have seen themselves, and beyond question, Reepicheep talks like they talked and wrote.

When Aslan returns, he at first reveals himself only to Lucy, who is faced with the task of telling her fellows that she has seen him and that he seeks to guide them in a direction other than that they propose to take. They don't believe her, vote against her, and she goes along with the vote. Aslan appears again and says that Lucy must follow him whether she can persuade her brothers and sister or not, and must bear the opprobrium of their doubt. This is a relatively straightforward allegory. His followers are supposed to follow Aslan's direction whether other people believe them or not, and when Lucy does so, all goes well.

During the battle, however, just before Aslan arrives, to decide it, Aslan takes Lucy and Susan on a liberating journey through the nearby countryside, calling to those who love him in company not only with the girls, but with Bacchus, the Graeco-Roman god of wine, and often enough of joyful irrationality and excess.

Not a companion that one would be inclined to expect for Aslan. But not all restraints are good restraints. The role of Bacchus is to dissolve them. Lewis's vision of Christianity not only retained great affection for the old Graeco-Roman world, and indeed, a sort of respect, for old Graeco-Roman paganism, but also celebrated what he thought of hearty good cheer, very much including wine, or by his own preference, beer and ale. At Aslan's direction, Bacchus frees people from unnecessary and mean-spirited rules and confinement.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. In its inversion of expectations, how is the title of *The Horse and His Boy* important to Lewis's themes?
2. Discuss the correlation of countries in the real world with the countries in Narnia. What does this reveal about Lewis's perception of his world?
3. *The Horse and His Boy* is as much a celebration of pure adventure as any of Lewis's other books. Are the thematic concerns so prevalent in his other books any less apparent here?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *The Horse and His Boy*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1954.
———. *Prince Caspian*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1951.

Other Books of Interest

Beetz, Kirk H. *Exploring C. S. Lewis, The Chronicles of Narnia*. Osprey, FL: Beacham's Sourcebooks, 2001.

Lecture 10:
The Prince Caspian Trilogy (Continued):
The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (3): Narnia 5 (1952) and
The Silver Chair (4): Narnia 6 (1953)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and *The Silver Chair*.

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

Next in the Narnia series is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, some think the best in the series and all told one of the best books Lewis ever wrote. At its heart it is an exploration story, but an exploration story of a certain kind, for the *Dawn Treader* sails to the very end of the world, to Aslan's own country, and that makes the tale allegorical in a way that recalls many great works of fiction and theology and many of Lewis's own favorites. As in Celtic tales of the other world, in the medieval *Sir Orfeo* or the medieval Welsh *Mabinogion*, the voyagers step out of our world altogether. As in works such as the Middle English *Pearl* or Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the voyagers travel to the very limits of human experience in a voyage to God Himself.

The tale takes place three Narnian years after Prince Caspian ascends to the throne, and he sets out on his journey, at least putatively, to find what became of seven nobles sent out to sea by Caspian's usurping predecessor Miraz. On another level, the motive is a simple desire for exploration and adventure, and on another, an effort to journey to Aslan's own country, which reportedly lies "in the utter East."

Lewis introduces a new earthly character. His name is Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and as Lewis tells us, "he almost deserved it." He is the cousin of the Pevensies, but his parents are "very up-to-date and advanced people," sanctimonious (they don't eat meat and don't drink or smoke, all bad signs in Lewis's world), and they are resolutely progressive and secularist. Not Lewis's kind of folks at all. Eustace, we are told, likes books if they are "books of information" and have "pictures of grain elevators" and "foreign children doing exercises in model schools." I presume that what Lewis has in mind here is pre-war Soviet self-celebration and the like.

To his horror, Eustace finds himself transported with his cousins Lucy and Edmund to Narnia, into the sea right next to the *Dawn Treader*. He is both terrified and appalled, but he and his cousins are soon fished out of the water, and there is no readily apparent way back. Eustace is a hypochondriac and shirker, and when the *Dawn Treader* lands on an island, he slinks away, hoping to avoid work. Soon enough, he encounters a dragon, which almost immediately dies. Eustace finds the dragon's hoard, and enchanted by the prospect of wealth, falls asleep and awakens to discover he has been transformed into a dragon himself.

In a way, Eustace has been a dragon—greedy and malicious—all along. It takes a physical transformation, though, to bring him to recognize his

dragonish character. As a dragon, he suddenly finds he'd like to get along with people after all. But only when he consents to have Aslan claw away his dragonish scales, layer by painful layer, does he become a human again, and indeed, a far nicer human than he was before.

The voyage continues, and the voyagers arrive at "the island of the voices," voices that turn out to be one-legged and one-footed creatures—Dufflepuds. After being transformed into one-legged beings, they requested that they be made invisible to conceal what they took to be their ugliness, and the magician controlling the island obliged. They now want to be made visible again. Here Lewis seems to become, uncharacteristically, a bit cutesy, and the Dufflepuds seem to me a rather uncharitable depiction of the English lower classes. But the process by which they are disenchanting and rendered visible is very good. The charm can be revoked only by a "little girl" who will consent to enter the presiding magician's house and undo the magic that binds them. Lucy consents, and the temptations she undergoes come close to the heart of Lewis's moral and theological vision.

Lucy is first tempted by a spell that promises to "make beautiful her that uttereth it beyond the lot of mortals." Lucy, who has always felt herself rather plain, is deeply tempted, but as she is about to utter the spell, she sees the face of a Lion in the magic book she is reading, and, saved by grace, she turns the page.

The next temptation is a spell that "would let you know what your friends thought about you." Lucy gives way and finds that one of her friends is less fond of her than she had supposed. She is hurt, and when Aslan appears, she asks whether her ill-gained knowledge has spoiled her friendship. Aslan replies, enunciating one of Lewis's great principles: We are, on a spiritual level, to know only what concerns us, not what concerns other people, and "no one is ever told what would have happened" had they done otherwise.

The third temptation turns out not to be a temptation at all, but rather an intimation of heaven. Lucy reads a story in the magic book, "the loveliest story I've ever read or ever shall read in my whole life," and when she meets Aslan, she asks if she will ever be read it again. "Indeed, yes," Aslan replies, "I will tell it to you for years and years." And that, I suspect, is precisely the story Lewis seeks to tell.

The conclusion of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is very close to the high point of all of Lewis's writings. It has been Reepicheep's lifelong aim to go to "Aslan's country." At his birth, a dryad prophesied the following:

"Where sky and water meet,
Where the waves grow sweet,
Doubt not, Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the utter east."

The voyagers attain it, and Reepicheep's plan is fulfilled. "While I can, I sail east in the *Dawn Treader*. When she fails me, I paddle east." When I can paddle no longer, "I shall swim east with my four paws. And when I can swim no longer, if I have not reached Aslan's country, or shot over the edge of the

world in some vast cataract, I shall sink with my nose to the sunrise and Peepiceek will hear of the talking mice in Narnia.” “[M]y belief,” Lewis continues, “is that he came safe to Aslan’s country and is alive there to this day.”

This is strong stuff. Reepicheep, like Elijah, is in effect swept to heaven alive, and this, it need hardly be said, is a very strong sign of divine favor. In terms of the *Chronicles* it suggests that Reepicheep embodies some of the characteristics that Lewis admired most. Most notable among them are utterly unswerving commitment and something close to fearlessness, which is, I suppose, for Lewis, the obverse of utter, unswerving commitment and faith.

At the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Aslan tells Edmund and Lucy that they will return to Narnia no longer, but that there is a way into his country in all worlds. “Oh Aslan,” says Lucy, will “you tell us how to get into your country from our world?” “I shall be telling you all the time,” he replies.

The reason why the children were called to Narnia in the first place, Aslan tells them, was so “that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.” And that is as close as Lewis comes in *The Chronicles of Narnia* to a straightforward explanation of what it has been about.

The Silver Chair

The last of three books in the Caspian trilogy, if so we may call it, is *The Silver Chair*, which for the most part consists of a meditation on obedience and an underworld journey reminiscent of *Sir Orfeo* and various enchantment narratives, Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and the underworld journeys of Dante and Aeneas. It also introduces another of Lewis’s great Narnian characters, the “marsh-wiggle” Puddleglum.

The term “marsh-wiggle” is, to my ears, a bit cuter than it needs to be, but Puddleglum himself is not. He lives in the Narnian marshlands—a Narnian counterpart to the East Anglian fenlands that were the spiritual homeland of English Parliamentary puritanism during the English civil wars. As Reepicheep is a portrait of cavalier sensibility, so Puddleglum is a portrait of the best partisans on the other side. His heart is pure, his conviction is absolute, his sense of duty unshakeable, and his pessimism all but unrelieved, but Lewis likes and respects him, and he represents Lewis’s tribute to an admirable temperament much different from his own.

In *The Silver Chair*, Lewis introduces the last of his child voyagers to Narnia, Jill Pole, Eustace’s schoolmate at “Experiment House.” As the tale begins, they are both seeking to escape a group of bullies. They suddenly find themselves not in Narnia, but in what is apparently part of “Aslan’s country,” where after immediately falling from grace, Jill encounters Aslan himself, lying in a regal pose in front of a stream. Jill is thirsty, and Aslan invites her to come and drink. But she is frightened and decides to “look for another stream, then.” Aslan tells her that “There is no other stream,” and she overcomes her fears and drinks. Jill thereupon is given four commands, which will enable her to save the former Prince Caspian’s son and heir, Prince Rilian, who has been imprisoned by a sorceress much like Jadis in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Once in Narnia, her fellow voyagers are to be Eustace and Puddleglum, who proves the most stalwart of the three.

In an underground world, they finally encounter Prince Rilian, enchanted twenty-three hours out of twenty-four. During the twenty-fourth, he is bound to a silver chair. The last of the four signs that Aslan gave to Jill is that the first person they encounter who asks them to do something in Aslan's name will be, despite appearances, the prince they are seeking. As he thrashes, bound in the silver chair, Rilian asks in Aslan's name that Jill and Eustace and Puddleglum release him, and at Puddleglum's insistence—Rilian looks pretty dangerous—they do. Lewis's point, as I take it, is that divine commands are to be followed in spite of distraction, prudence, or even reason itself.

Releasing Rilian from his bonds, though, does not end the voyagers' problems. Rilian's enchanter, "the Lady of the Green Kirtle" and "the Queen of Underworld," appears and promptly attempts not only to reenchant Rilian, but to enchant his rescuers as well, persuading them that their memory of a world above is an illusion. Once again, it is the stalwart Puddleglum who prevails, and his answer to the Lady's enchantments represents something close to Lewis's last-ditch defense of his beliefs. Driven into a corner, Puddleglum speaks: "Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. . . . That's why I'm going to stand by the play-world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it." They break the enchantment, free Rilian and the Underworld, and are able to return to Narnia.

Lewis is arguing against the materialism that dominated so much of the intellectual life of his day, the notion that the world is filled with physical stuff and nothing more. Lewis suggests that he would maintain his faith in the world beyond, his faith in Aslan, his Christian faith, even if he were persuaded it was false. I am not sure quite how to take this. Does Lewis mean to argue that his faith has become so profound that no conceivable argument could be more persuasive? Or does he mean something else, something closer to what Puddleglum himself seems to argue? In any case, it is clear that Lewis maintains his convictions not only because he believes they are true, but also because he believes that even if they weren't true, they would lead those who held them to a richer and better life.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Discuss why exploration stories resonate so strongly even for modern readers. Why does this type of story lend itself so well to Lewis's writing?
2. Discuss the importance of characters' names in Lewis's works.
3. How much of Lewis's personal philosophies are voiced through his characters? What characters seem particularly representative of Lewis?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. New York: HarperCollins, 1952.
———. *The Silver Chair*. New York: HarperCollins, 1953.

Other Books of Interest

Beetz, Kirk H. *Exploring C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia*. Osprey, FL: Beacham's Sourcebooks, 2001.

Lecture 11:
The Last Battle (7):
Narnia 7 (1956)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*.

The Last Battle is Lewis's most daring book and, at least arguably, his best. His most daring book because over the course of it, he destroys the world he has evoked for us, kills off his most sympathetic characters, and presumes to describe the Kingdom of Heaven and what it is like to be redeemed. At least arguably his best because by and large he succeeds.

I argued at the beginning of this course that what people most love Lewis for is his ability to evoke "joy," the felt presence of God, and, in that sense, heaven itself. *The Last Battle* is above all where he does it, and very few works have attempted the same with even a shadow of success—Dante's *Paradiso*, the Middle English *Pearl*, a few lines from the greatest of the so-called "meta-physical" poets—the list is not a long one. To succeed at all in the most difficult of genres is a noteworthy and praiseworthy achievement.

Beyond being, at its conclusion, an evocation of heaven, *The Last Battle* is a grim and often painful satire on the events of Lewis's own time. It begins with the devising of a false god, as Lewis's own letters reveal, a vision of an "anti-Christ." An ape named "Shift"—shifty, shifting for himself, and shifting people's beliefs from truth to falsehood—has as a servant and putative friend a donkey named "Puzzle," who is indeed puzzled by what Shift does and becomes a puzzle to those who encounter him. Shift one day finds a lion-skin and decides that if he can dress Puzzle in it, he can persuade people—talking Narnian animals and humans alike—that Puzzle is Aslan, and because Puzzle does whatever Shift tells him to do, Shift can accordingly take on divine powers to gratify his own desires. And that is just what he does, with the compliance of a cynical detachment of Calormenes eager to exploit Narnia's resources for their own ends.

On one level, Lewis is clearly responding to the messianic totalitarianisms of his own time. Shift, in a sense, recalls Hitler and Puzzle those whom Hitler deceived. But more clearly still, Shift recalls Stalin and Puzzle recalls the proletariat, befuddled and bamboozled, in Lewis's view, by those who claim to speak and work on their behalf.

In deference to his Calormene collaborators, Shift redesignates the lion-skin-clad Puzzle not as "Aslan," but as "Tashlan," thereby conflating "Aslan" with the traditional Calormene god, "Tash." Tash is no Aslan, however. Instead, he seems to recall gods like the Canaanite Moloch and the Aztec Huitzilpochtli, both of whom demanded human sacrifice. Lewis's satiric targets here are several—on one level, the absolute claims advanced by Nazism and Communism alike; on another, the claims of academic syncretists who

claimed that, in effect, all gods were the same, or at a minimum, were constructions answering the same fundamental human needs.

Having been invoked, Tash in fact comes, suggesting Lewis's chilling belief that those who call on evil powers, even in jest or disbelief, are answered. So too, though, are those who call upon Aslan, though not always in a way that makes things right in the world before us.

As events proceed, King Tirian, the last king of Narnia, is appalled. His closest friend and counselor, the unicorn Jewel, gives voice to the feelings of both: "If we had died before today we should have been happy." The "worst thing in the world has come upon us." Nevertheless, they try to resist, and Tirian, calling on Aslan, succeeds in calling Jill and Eustace to his side for one final adventure. The odds are long, but they are game, despite the overwhelming difficulties before them, willing, as Tirian puts it, to take "the adventure that Aslan" will "send them."

Their efforts, though, end in complete and utter failure. Shift has housed his false "Tashlan," Puzzle, inside a stable, and as the last battle commences, the Calormenes and their allies plan to shove their surviving attackers inside as a "burnt offering" to "Lord Tash." In the end, all are killed or thrust inside, Jill, Tirian, and Eustace among them—including, significantly, a young Calormene warrior who chooses to go inside of his own volition, out of his "great desire" to serve Tash, whom he has been told is inside—and "if it might be, to look upon his face." But what they find within is not what they expect. Inside, they find not the dark interior of a stable, haunted, as it may be, by Tash himself. Instead, they find wide green fields and sunlight and a gentle early summer day. Nonetheless, the doorway remains, and outside all is dark and as before, guttering fires and the Calormene military mop-up. Not only that, they see before them all the earlier visitors to Narnia save Susan, all in the youthful prime of age. Tirian, in particular, is surprised. "It seems, then," he says, "that the Stable seen from within and the Stable seen from without are two different places." Just so, says "Lord Digory," Professor Kirke from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, now restored to vigorous youth, "Its inside is bigger than its outside." And "Queen Lucy" continues, "In our world too, a Stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world." Though they do not yet realize it, Jill, Tirian, and Eustace are dead and in heaven, in "Aslan's country" once and for all. But Lewis's claim, "the inside is bigger than the outside," has even wider resonances, or perhaps merely more mundane and specific resonances, than that. That is his claim with reference to the world revealed by joy as a whole, and not only beyond the grave, but here and now. Church services and doctrinal formulations, after all, do not make an immediate appeal to very many of us. It is Huck Finn's claim, for instance, that unlike people, hogs really enjoy going to church because they get to lie on the cool floor. Lewis's claim, though, is that here too, the inside is greater than the outside, that a life of faith and conviction reveals riches once undertaken that are inconceivable from outside. Dante says that it gets easier to climb Mt. Purgatory the farther you go. Lewis is in effect making the same claim. The inside is bigger than the outside all through.

Later, the whole party encounters the young Calormene who voluntarily entered the stable in order to meet Tash face to face. The ensuing discussion is one of the most far-ranging in the Narnia tales. The young warrior's name is Emeth, Hebrew for "faith," and that, of course, is no accident. He tells his tale in the high Calormene style. Once inside the stable, he tells us, "I went over much grass and many flowers and among all kinds of wholesome and delectable trees till lo! in a narrow place between two rocks there came to meet me a great Lion." In "beauty he surpassed all that is in the world even as the rose in bloom surpasses the dust of the desert." Then "I fell at his feet and thought, 'Surely this is the hour of death, for the Lion (who is worthy of all honour) will know that I have served Tash all my days and not him.'" But "the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, 'Son, thou art welcome.' But I said, 'Alas, Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash.' He answered, 'Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me,'" for "I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him." Emeth is overwhelmed, but as he says, since as he puts it, "truth constrained me," I "have been seeking Tash all my days."

"'Beloved,' said the Glorious One, 'unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.'"

Throughout Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Dante is troubled by the question of the "virtuous pagans"—what happens to people, from a Christian perspective, who do the best they can without Christian belief? This is Lewis's answer, an answer he reiterates in his account of the last judgment as Narnia is at last destroyed, not by wickedness, but in the end by Aslan himself. As their world is closed up, all the conscious creatures that ever lived in Narnia swarm through the stable door. And "as they came right up to Aslan one or other of two things happened to each of them. They all looked straight in his face." And "when some looked, the expression of their faces changed terribly." And "all the creatures who looked at Aslan in that way . . . disappeared into his huge black shadow," and Lewis says he doesn't "know what became of them." But "the others looked in the face of Aslan and loved him, though some were very frightened at the same time. And all those came in at the Door" and remained there for good and for all.

As they go further "in and higher up," Narnians and earthlings alike discover that Narnia is not gone after all. In fact, all "of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door." And so too, for that matter, England as well. "It's all in Plato, all in Plato, bless me," says Professor Kirke. Lewis's heaven is among other things the Platonic world of forms, the mind of God, which all that is imperfectly reflects.

The humans and Narnians meet Tumnus the Faun, Reepicheep, Aravis and Cor and Hwin and Bree. And they learn without doubt that they are dead and are, as Lewis suggests, "beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. The world of Narnia is one of the most beloved in all of literature. Discuss the effect that the death of this world in *The Last Battle* is intended to have on readers.
2. Discuss ways in which children and adults might have different reactions to Narnia. Are children more likely than adults to respond emotionally to Lewis's "dressed animals"?
3. How is Lewis's desire to evoke "joy" central to the concerns of *The Last Battle*?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *The Last Battle*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1956.

Other Books of Interest

Beetz, Kirk H. *Exploring C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia*. Osprey, FL: Beacham's Sourcebooks, 2001.

Lecture 12: *Till We Have Faces* (1956)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*.

The Last Battle was published in 1956, bringing *The Chronicles of Narnia* to a close. In the same year, Lewis published his last completed novel, *Till We Have Faces*, a novel likewise addressing Christian themes, but addressing them in a more cryptic way. It is a novel written for adults, a novel drawing in most inventive ways on Lewis's profound knowledge of the ancient world, and it is, I think, one of his best.

It is set in the world of the ancient Greek hinterlands, some time, presumably, in the third or fourth century BC, and takes place in a barbarian land within the Greek cultural orbit, somewhere to the north of Greece in the fictional land of Glome. The narrator, as we later discover, is the Queen of Glome, a woman named Oural, and the opening sentence of the novel reveals its striking difference in tone from any of the Narnia tales. Oural writes, "I am old now and have not much to fear from the anger of the gods." The tale remains within a polytheistic world throughout, but as the case of Emeth in *The Last Battle* suggests, one can be saved by Aslan without knowing his name.

As his relationship with Joy Davidman developed, through her cancer, her recovery, and ultimately her death, Lewis's vision of Christianity changed to some extent and his view of women changed profoundly. Oural is a much richer and more rounded character than, for example, Jane Studdock, and Lewis's vision of God is both sweeter and rougher in *Till We Have Faces* than in any of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

His immediate source for *Till We Have Faces* is the mythological tale of Cupid and Psyche—Love (indeed, divine Love) and the Soul—as told by the Latin writer Apuleius in *The Transformations of Lucius*, otherwise known as *The Golden Ass*.

The Golden Ass is the story of a man who is magically transformed into a donkey—and the life of a donkey in the world of the Greek-speaking Roman Empire is not a life to be envied. He is returned to human form by the ministrations of the much-beloved Egyptian goddess Isis, portraits of whom in a maternal role are often argued to be the ultimate prototypes of that favorite subject of Renaissance painters, the Madonna and Child—not the sort of place one would expect Lewis to be looking for inspiration. But as we know, he loved the classics, and loved the tale of Cupid and Psyche in particular. Long before he began his novel, he had considered this an allegory of the relation between the human soul and the divine, between the human soul and "joy," as it were.

Lewis's knowledge of the ancient world is profound, and his portrait of Glome and the people within it is a portrait of Hellenism, cultural Greekness, and its effects. Oural's father is a thuggish but effective barbarian warlord, happiest on the hunt and with his fellow soldiers, brave enough and strong enough, but irremediably crude. I suspect that Lewis's model here is someone like Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great and a most formidable warrior in his own right. It was he who broke the power of the Greek city-states once and for all. Oural, his oldest daughter and the narrator, is hideously ugly, a figure of contempt to her father, who strong-bodied as she is despite her face, finally decides to live veiled, allowing no one to behold her ugliness. His next daughter, though, Psyche, is so transcendently beautiful that the people of Glome worship her as a goddess. Her character matches her beauty, and she is the light of Oural's life.

Meanwhile, as much to keep her out of his sight as for any other reason, Oural's father buys a red-headed Greek slave as a tutor to keep Oural occupied. The "Fox," as Oural refers to him, is one of Lewis's finest characters. If you want to get the feel of "Greekness" in all its glory—and in its besetting weaknesses too—the Fox as portrayed in *Till We Have Faces* is a very good place to start. He is a philosopher, a skeptic, devoted to reason and self-control, and a man of great kindness. But he doesn't know everything, as he himself comes at last to recognize.

The presiding Goddess of Glome is a figure called "Ungit," a barbarized version of Aphrodite, who is worshipped in Glome by blood-stained priesthood and whose representation is a blood-stained and featureless rock. For all of this the Fox has measureless contempt. He is a Stoic, more or less, and to the limited extent that he is willing to countenance any gods at all, those gods are invisible and faceless—the harmonic forces that run the cosmos.

The gods and goddesses of Glome are jealous, however, and the worship of the flawless and flawlessly gentle and kindly Psyche as a goddess offends them. A plague strikes. The priests of Glome know who must be sacrificed to put it to a stop—none other than Psyche herself. Psyche's father, terrified that he might be named as the necessary victim, is willing to go along with the sacrifice. Psyche is led up to the mountains and tied up to be violated or consumed by whatever god inhabits the heights. Psyche's devoted sister Oural is nauseated almost beyond endurance, and after a bit of time, ascends the mountain to gather Psyche's remains.

But there are no remains. Psyche, though a bit disheveled, is thriving in her mountain glade. She believes that she inhabits a palace and that her invisible divine lover comes to her in glory every night.

This is not what Oural has counted on, and though she does not recognize the fact, she is insatiably jealous. It is she, Oural, who should be Psyche's joy. And so, making use of emotional blackmail, she forces Psyche to violate the one command her lover has imposed on her. Psyche is not to look upon him as he comes in darkness. She violates the command, loses her lover, and is forced to depart into exile. And Oural, of course, loses her too.

Heartbroken and embittered, Oural makes the best of her life by becoming, after her father has died, the best queen that she possibly can. And one of

the most moving passages in all of C. S. Lewis's work is the postscript to the novel purportedly written by "Arnom, priest of Aphrodite." He says, this "book was all written by Queen Oural of Glome, who was the most wise, just, valiant, fortunate, and merciful of all the princes known in our parts of the world." What the book in fact contains would not on the face of things reveal that. Oural retains, all but life-long, her resentment of the gods, and her bitter conviction that the adorable Psyche has been taken from her unfairly.

And that, in a sense, is Lewis's stern point. God's ways are not our ways, and divine justice is not human justice. There is something radically and totally incommensurable about the irruption of the divine into human life. Psyche is one of God's chosen. She bathes in joy from first to last. Even when she is to be sacrificed, she accepts her fate. And Oural is jealous life-long. She, too, as things turn out, is one of the chosen, but hers is a far more difficult road, and until the very end of her life, she does not know she is traveling it. That is not to say that she is not a strikingly good woman and a strikingly good queen. It is to say that though God loves virtue and virtue is what God loves, virtue is not God. God is God. The incommensurability remains. And Oural hates it.

Elsewhere in his writings, Lewis talks about what he calls "thick" and "thin" religions. "Thick" religions are religions of blood, not so much interested in ethics, but religions of sacrifice and of fear. Religions, in fact, like the worship of Ungit as a blood-stained sacrificial stone. "Thin" religions are religions like deism, or like Stoicism, for that matter, which reduce God as much as possible to a governing force and ethical commands. Christianity, Lewis claims, is both "thick" and "thin," and from his perspective, uniquely both "thick" and "thin." That double character is in large part what he explores in *Till We Have Faces*.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. In what ways does *Till We Have Faces* reflect a change in Lewis's view of women?
2. Discuss any differences in style, tone, and theme between Lewis's adult fiction and his children's fiction. What are the similarities?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1984.

Other Books of Interest

Kenney, E.J., trans. and ed. *Apuleius, The Golden Ass or Metamorphoses*. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Lecture 13:
Apologetic Works: *Mere Christianity*,
The Problem of Pain, Miracles

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce* and *Mere Christianity*.

To this day, C. S. Lewis's explicitly Christian apologetic works remain among his most popular and influential.

Lewis's project in his apologetic works is to encourage his readers, first of all, to take Christianity seriously. Many times, or so he believes, potential believers hesitate because of a series of reluctances that are by and large unfounded, or in some instances, unworthy.

As he himself well knew, and as indeed the gospels themselves suggest, there are sometimes significant social and even professional costs to proclaiming explicit Christian belief. Lewis himself paid a real and ongoing professional price for his commitments and for his writings. He was always, so we are told, a controversial figure at Oxford, and in taking on the spirit of the place and the age as he did, he proclaimed himself to many of his overwhelmingly secular colleagues at the university an intellectual lightweight, a grandstander, and a moral and political dinosaur.

Lewis, to some degree, enjoyed fighting what he clearly saw as the good fight. He generally gave as good as he got and often enjoyed it. But his clearly articulated and very public Christian beliefs cost him—cost him promotion at Oxford, so many have argued, and cost him in many instances easy relations and the good will of his peers. Convinced and articulate Christian belief remains, as it was in Lewis's day, to some degree at least an impediment to professional advancement in the academic world.

There is a whole array of major problems with Christianity so far as the academy is concerned. First, the Christian claim to unique access to truth has long offended against the notion of free enquiry. Didn't science advance in the teeth of Christian opposition? Didn't Galileo endure papal censure? Don't some Christians to this very day passionately resist the teaching of Darwin in schools?

A far more serious offense, though, from the vantage point of many academics, is the Christian claim of access to moral truth, the claim that Christianity teaches beyond possibility of dispute what is right and wrong. This offends in all sorts of ways. First, it offends in the abstract by suggesting that moral concepts are in the last analysis expressions of God's will and not, as generally believed in the academy, pragmatic sanctions that time and experience have revealed contribute to the easy flow of society, and in a more sinister sense, naked human constructs reflecting the will of those in power to maintain their position (men over women, one race over another, the upper classes over the lower, one sexual preference against others,

capitalists against proletarians, Westerners against the non-Western other—aren't our moral ideas to a large extent an expression of our desire to oppress, and shouldn't they be questioned at a minimum, if not resisted and overthrown, as a result?) The default position for many academics is to assume that stated moral norms are invidious masks for the will to power and should be suspect on that very account. Such norms are all the more pernicious when "thus saith the Lord" stands behind them. That, from the time of Rousseau, if not from Machiavelli onwards, has been taken as the keynote of priestly oppression on behalf of the ruling class.

With regard to the most obvious sticking point, Christian teachings about sexuality, the case is all the more severe. Christian teachings about sexuality, or certainly some Christian teachings about sexuality, are strict—more strict, indeed, by a considerable margin than the teachings of pretty much any society on record, and more strict, beyond experiential question, than the actual practiced norms of any society—strict heterosexual monogamy, or nothing. No society on record, to my knowledge, has even come close to living up to that.

In undertaking a defense of Christianity, Lewis certainly has his work cut out for him, and he undertakes the task with skill and relish. First of all, by his sheer learning, his writerly skill and intelligence, he to some degree defuses the notion that accepting Christianity is a mode of intellectual suicide. His shrewdest defense, though, is Kantian, making use of the insights of the greatest of Enlightenment philosophers—one of the greatest philosophers simply—Immanuel Kant. Kant's philosophical contribution is immense, and some aspects of his thought, as Kant himself was well aware, mitigate against traditional Christian belief. But others do not, and it is upon those that Lewis draws.

What Lewis draws upon most clearly and heavily is Kant's notion that in effect our "truth-detector" and our "goodness-detector" are built in, part of the package by which we think, and that there is no getting beyond them to assess them. This is the problem of recursivity—any judgment we make about the process of judgment is made *by the process of judgment*, whether judging questions of truth or of goodness, and hence presupposes the process of judgment by which the judgment or anything else is made. The very construction of our minds includes provisional notions of what is true and what is good that we have to draw on if we are to think or act at all, even to criticize those notions. If you criticize them to the point of rejecting them altogether, you are simply deluding yourself. You have still made use of them to make and rely on that very conclusion.

Lewis maintains that our "truth-detector" and "goodness-detector" are a tell-tale rift in our confinement within nature, and indeed, for Lewis, evidence of a world beyond in their own right. If our world works the way Kant says it does, then truth and goodness are the necessary precondition of thinking. Whether truth and goodness are God as traditionally conceived is another question. But in that Kantian sense, they are there for us, and that gives Lewis a place to start.

And start he does, speaking in terms far less abstract and repellent than I have spoken here. Because if once he can establish that the true and the

good are something real, part of our experience, something that, try as we may, there is no way to get beyond or get past, then his case is more than half made. I don't know whether Lewis finally succeeds in his defense of Christianity. But he does, I think, succeed in arguing that we can't dispense with notions of truth and goodness. Maybe God does have a determinate character. Maybe Christian teaching is true at all levels. I don't know that Lewis has proved that, and I don't know that anyone can prove that. Even Christian tradition says no one can. But Lewis has, I think, deflected the most damaging *a priori* objections to his position and cleared for himself a field in which he can argue his case on its merits.

Lewis began his apologetical work, as we noted before, in a series of broadcast talks on the BBC in World War II, and these talks were published first, in slightly revised form, as three separate short works: *The Case for Christianity* (or as published in England, *Broadcast Talks*) in 1943; *Christian Behaviour*, again in 1943; and *Beyond Personality* in 1945. They were later published all together as *Mere Christianity*, by which Lewis means Christianity focusing on those beliefs that transcend sectarian divisions. This remains one of his most popular and best-selling works. Throughout *Mere Christianity*, and to a varying extent in his other apologetical works as well, Lewis writes for the general reader, and his tone is a good deal less formal even than mine has been here.

His other major apologetic works include *The Problem of Pain* (1940), in which Lewis seeks to answer the question of why an omnipotent God of infinite goodness allows suffering, and *Miracles* (1947), which as its title suggests addresses the miracles that many have found to be impediments in reading the gospels. Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), written more or less in conjunction with *Perelandra*, also contains a good deal of apologetic material. And of course, the bookstores are full of apologetical and devotional writings excerpted from Lewis's other works.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Discuss how Lewis's Christianity affected his social and academic standing.
2. Does Lewis's writing style, geared as it is to the "general reader," speak to his views on social equality?
3. How did Lewis's undeniable skill as a writer help to support his defense of Christianity?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *The Great Divorce*. New York: Macmillan, 1946.

———. *Mere Christianity*. (Revised and enlarged version of C. S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*; C. S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour*, and C. S. Lewis, *Beyond Personality*). 1943, 1945, 1952; New York: Macmillan, 1970.

Other Books of Interest

Lewis, C. S. *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. Harcourt Brace, 1964.

———. *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. 1947; New York: Macmillan, 1978.

———. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.

———. *Reflections on the Psalms*. Harvest Books. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958.

Lecture 14: Other Works

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Allegory of Love*.

C. S. Lewis's worldwide reputation was the immediate result of his broadcast talks and the works stemming from them (ultimately collected in *Mere Christianity*) and from *The Screwtape Letters*, a novel he published in 1942 that stemmed from a series of fictional letters he published in the *Manchester Guardian*. The letters are purportedly written by a senior devil, Screwtape, to his young protégé, Wormwood, who has been charged with corrupting a young Englishman during World War II (the Englishman is ultimately killed in an air raid and, despite Wormwood's efforts, dies redeemed).

The Screwtape Letters was a resounding commercial success, and the work established Lewis's reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. Suddenly, he was a public figure, and so he remained, to greater or lesser degree, for the rest of his life.

The underlying themes of the work suggest that Hell is fundamentally and irremediably uncreative and, of course, totally and absolutely selfish. Devils are, in effect, soul-eaters, and ravenously hungry, for human souls and for each other, relishing every twist and turn of resistance on the part of those consumed.

They cannot create, but they can and do enjoy thwarting the will of those created, turning the energies of those they consume to their own will and pleasures. This gruesome idea goes back a long way—certain gnostic groups advanced something like it well more than a thousand years ago. But Lewis's immediate source, so he suggests, is David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, which features scenes of similar spiritual "consumption."

Lewis published another more or less directly spiritual novel in 1945, this one called *The Great Divorce*. In this short work, the premise that Lewis works from is that folks in Hell can from time to time take a spiritual holiday and visit Heaven. They can even stay in Heaven if they give up whatever reigning obsession drove them to Hell. But very few do, and that is, of course, Lewis's point. Hell for Lewis is chosen, and his belief, as he implies here and elsewhere, is that people get as many chances as will do them any good. After a certain point, though, further chances do not help. (The "great divorce" itself is of course the gap between Heaven and Hell, and more specifically the choices that prevent attendance at the messianic "bridal feast" between redeemed souls and redeemer.)

We have already mentioned Lewis's account of his own conversion, *Surprised by Joy*, an indispensable source for Lewis's account of his own early life and the genesis of his religious ideas. Also very much worth reading

is his late work, *The Four Loves* (1960). *The Four Loves* is as much a work of informal psychology as it is a work of direct apologetics—though here, as elsewhere in Lewis’s work, the distinction is not easy to draw—and in it he takes as his starting point the distinction the classical Greeks made between four different sorts of love (all deeply characteristic of human life).

The least familiar, as a term, if not in actual fact, is *storge*, in effect natural affection, stemming ultimately from mother love, our love for what is familiar. *Eros* is familiar enough to need no gloss—erotic love and desire are things that everybody knows—and so, almost equally, *philia*, fellow-feeling and the love and regard between friends, something, which it is worth underscoring, the ancients valued more highly than we if what they wrote on the subject is to be trusted (it was their belief that *philia* contributed far more to human happiness than *eros*). The last is *agape*, in its ideal form a selfless, even a self-sacrificing love and regard for others, translated in Latin as “*caritas*,” and most often in English as “charity.” At a slightly lower pitch, *agape* finds expression in a general good will, the ongoing disposition to treat other people respectfully, which we generally designate by calling someone a “nice” person. “Nice” is not a word which gains much respect, but there in fact is a lot to be said for being nice. Lewis arranges the four loves in a sort of hierarchy dependent on the spiritual value of each—all loves have some spiritual value, but *agape* has most, and *philia* next most.

We now turn to the most neglected of Lewis’s works. Lewis really was one of the great critics of the century, with an unsurpassed knowledge of his subject. To some degree, though only a slight degree, Lewis gears down in his fiction and his apologetical works, and it is revealing to read him operating at something close to full power. It is not that his language is more ornate and forbidding. Lewis’s scholarly books are as inviting and readable as any in that forbidding genre—so much so that they repay study on that ground alone, as examples of how to say complex things in straightforward and engaging ways. What sets his scholarly works apart is his dazzling, if understated, erudition. His Oxford peers were not always his friends, but even they recognized that virtually no one had read more than Lewis, almost always in the original language, whatever that language might happen to be. Unless you read one of his scholarly books, his range of learning is hard to imagine.

Lewis’s first full-length scholarly book was *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*, which came out in 1936. The focus of the study is “courtly love,” a tradition familiar from tales of Lancelot and Guinevere, Tristan and Isolde, and the like. Lewis devotes particular attention to the *Romance of the Rose* and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. He has many interesting things to say, but this work, more than his scholarly studies, does at times seem a bit dated. Lewis grew up as a late Victorian, and in that cultural context the courtly tradition loomed a bit larger than at present.

I have colleagues who think that Lewis’s next scholarly work, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, is Lewis’s best. I am not sure that I agree, but Lewis has a lot of interesting things to say about Milton—his sense of what sort of man Milton was is especially persuasive. “He is a neat, dainty man,” a “fastidious man, pacing in trim gardens. He is a grammarian, a swordsman, a musician with a predilection for the fugue.” And of course, it is in the *Preface* that

Lewis introduces his far-reaching and valuable distinction between “primary” and “secondary” epics—epics, that is to say, like those of Homer, which derive from oral tradition, and epics, like those of Virgil and of Milton, which quite consciously derive from and seek to correct an existing epic tradition.

Another factor sets *A Preface to Paradise Lost* apart. In discussing Milton’s account of the war in heaven and the fall, Lewis has perforce to deal with Christian themes, and that makes of *A Preface* a quasi-apologetical work as well as a scholarly work in a sense that his other scholarly writings are not. Many readers have in particular admired Lewis’s discussion of Milton’s depiction of the temptation of Eve; here, so they would argue, not his literary and scholarly knowledge, but also his deep practical knowledge of human psychology come most effectively into play. And of course, at the same time he was working on *A Preface*, Lewis was working on *Perelandra*, where he addresses the issue of temptation from a different perspective and with different results.

The largest and least often read of Lewis’s scholarly studies is *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1954), commissioned as Volume III of *The Oxford History of English Literature*. The title itself, so one might argue, is forbidding and the work is a hefty volume. But here, more than anywhere else, Lewis’s learning is on display. Besides accomplishing with exemplary thoroughness the aims its title suggests, *English Literature* is as persuasive and detailed a cultural history as I have ever read. If you want a detailed sense of what life was like and what people were thinking about in the England of the Tudors, I know of no better place to start. And Lewis addresses not only designedly literary works. He also addresses—at length—the religious controversialists and the pamphleteers of the time, of which, as one might expect, there were many, often involved in heated and scabrous pamphlet wars of mutual abuse which make talk radio look positively decorous.

One of the greatest, most outrageous, and gleefully unfair of these last was a man named Thomas Nashe, author, most famously of the *Unfortunate Traveller*, which is in some passages at least as disturbing a book as I have ever read. The Reformation was, among other things, a hideously cruel age, and Nashe, to put the matter mildly, is not squeamish in describing it.

Here is Lewis on Nashe, as an example of any *English Literature* is not only informative, immensely so, but fun to read. The “very qualities which we should blame in an ordinary controversialist are the life and soul of Nashe. He is unfair, illogical, violent, extravagant, coarse: but then that is the joke. When a half drunk street-corner humorist decides to make a respectable person (say, from Peebles) ridiculous, it is useless for the respectable person to show that the charges brought against him are untrue—that he does not beat his wife, is not a cinema star in disguise, is not wearing a false nose. The more eagerly he refutes them, the louder the spectators laugh.”

This is a side of Lewis we don’t often see and don’t often think of, but it is there. He is a whole man, and a man who seeks to tell the truth about the whole wide range of his reading and experience. And that shows as clearly in his scholarly writing as anywhere else.

I have saved my favorite book for last, and *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1964) was in fact the last book Lewis completed with his own hands and the last published during his lifetime. In it we see the ripe fruit of his reading and reflection, and a sort of graceful distillation of all that he had said or implied in his other works. The book derives, so he tells us, from a course he taught in his later years, and taught, so others tell us, to a consistently packed house. It is an evocation of the worldview assumed by Western writers and painters from late antiquity through the Renaissance, to pass away only with the Enlightenment, a worldview Lewis deeply cherished and knew to his bones and beyond. In evoking the greatest works from that tradition, Lewis unwittingly, I think, evokes his own at his best, and I can think of no better way to close this series of lectures than to quote him as he speaks of “the tranquil, indefatigable, exultant energy of passionately systematic minds bringing huge masses of heterogenous material into unity. The perfect examples,” Lewis continues, “are the *Summa* of Aquinas and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*; as unified and ordered as the Parthenon or *Oedipus Rex*, as crowded and varied as a London terminus on a bank holiday.” That is Lewis too. Especially that passionate, exultant energy.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. How is Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost* both a critical and apologetic work?
2. What facets of Lewis's writing and personality does he reveal in his critical writings that are not so easily seen in his other work?
3. In what ways does *The Discarded Image* reveal the best of Lewis?

Suggested Reading

Lewis, C. S. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

———. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Other Books of Interest

Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*. The University of Durham Riddell Memorial Lectures, Fifteenth Series. New York: Collier, 1962.

———. *The Discarded Image: An Introduction of Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

———. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*. *The Oxford History of English Literature*. Vol III. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

———. *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*. Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1966.

———. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.

———. *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

COURSE MATERIALS

Suggested Readings:

- Beetz, Kirk H. *Exploring C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia*. Osprey, FL: Beacham's Sourcebooks, 2001.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- . *The Great Divorce*. New York: Macmillan, 1946.
- . *The Horse and His Boy*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1954.
- . *The Last Battle*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1956.
- . *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1950.
- . *Mere Christianity*. (Revised and enlarged version of C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*; C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour*, and C.S. Lewis, *Beyond Personality*). 1943, 1945, 1952; New York: Macmillan, 1970.
- . *Out of the Silent Planet*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- . *Perelandra*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- . *Prince Caspian*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 1951.
- . *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- . *The Silver Chair*. New York: HarperCollins, 1953.
- . *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1976.
- . *That Hideous Strength*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- . *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1984.
- . *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. New York: HarperCollins, 1952.

Other Books of Interest:

- Downing, David C. *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.
- Kennedy, E.J., trans. and ed. *Apuleius, The Golden Ass or Metamorphoses*. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- Kort, Wesley A. *C. S. Lewis Then and Now*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*. The University of Durham Riddell Memorial Lectures, Fifteenth Series. New York: Collier, 1962.
- . *The Discarded Image: An Introduction of Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

COURSE MATERIALS

Other Books of Interest (continued):

- . *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama. The Oxford History of English Literature.* Vol III. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- . *Letters of C. S. Lewis.* W.H. Lewis (ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1966.
- . *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer.* Harcourt Brace, 1964.
- . *Miracles: A Preliminary Study.* 1947; New York: Macmillan, 1978.
- . *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories.* Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1966.
- . *A Preface to Paradise Lost.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- . *The Problem of Pain.* New York: Macmillan, 1962.
- . *Reflections on the Psalms.* Harvest Books. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958.
- . *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature.* Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Wilson, A.N. *C. S. Lewis: A Biography.* New York: Norton, 1990.

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