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“On Aslan’s Side”: Divine Sovereignty and Evil in the Fiction of C. S. Lewis

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The Narrative Apologetic

"Shasta grew up too far south in Calormen to know the tales of Aslan, the great Lion... but with one glance at the Lion's face, he slipped off his saddle and fell at his feet… The high king above all high kings stooped towards him" (The Horse and His Boy 52*).*

This excerpt from *the Horse and His Boy* is an example of the sort of introduction we see over and over in C.S. Lewis' writings between a naive individual and a powerful yet empathetic divine. The lonely orphan boy Shasta is abandoned by his companions after a harrowing journey and encounters Aslan who listens to the boy's complaints only for Aslan to reveal that the Lion has personally orchestrated every defining moment of Shasta's life. Throughout this thesis, I will explore this kind of narrative apologetics that Lewis frequently employs.

In his works of fiction, Lewis argues for the worthiness of divine sovereignty through depicting how God relates to relational trust, free will, and grief. We see these topics in all his works, but I am focusing on *Perelandra* and *The Silver Chair* because the divine is largely absent as a character in each work. Such absence forces the divine to prove his trustworthiness through actions rather than a verbal defense. Both works are installments in longer series. His audience's familiarity with the divine impacts how Lewis introduces new characters to the supernatural and how he develops the character of the divine further. The divine is developed from a mere fearsome being to one who is concerned with winning rather than compelling loyalty from humanity.

Perelandra, one of Lewis' early works of fiction, responds to *Paradise Lost*, which I explore in light of Lewis' *Preface to Paradise Lost*, particularly in how evil is personified as a decaying yet shrewd rhetorician, which I refer to as "the devil." First, I explore how the choice to submit to either the devil or the divine is presented to the reader and specifically how each entity

interacts with our individual will. Lewis presents our capacity for disobedience as proof of divine protection of our free will. I analyze the worthiness of each entity by what plans they propose in comparison to what they actually accomplish. Namely, how our superfluousness to divine providence reveals a genuine care for our wellbeing.

While *Perelandra* is intended for an adult readership, *The Silver Chair* is written for children which pushes Lewis to argue through narrative examples rather than direct exposition due to the limitations of his audience. Through a close reading, I unpack three scenes from each "act" of the book. In Jill's introduction to Aslan, Lewis argues for a personal divine. Their encounter with the Lady of the Green Kirtle further explores the devil as a rhetorician, but through experiential learning to cater to younger audiences. The final scene parallels that of *Perelandra* where, although the divine plan is not explained, it is proven to be a good plan by the prevailing of justice and relational repair.

Terms that I use throughout this work such as sovereignty, the divine, and providence have debated definitions. As this thesis is an exploration of Lewis' definitions of these concepts, I will define them by his works. By the divine, I refer to the omnipotent, all knowing God of Christianity that Lewis calls by several names in his fiction. The divine is frequently juxtaposed to the devil in Lewis' works as in the Bible, as two supernatural entities with agency who compete for human loyalty. John Randolph Willis observes that, for Lewis, "God is concrete and individual… [possessing] a determinate character… And men are exhorted to 'know the Lord,' to discover and experience this particular character" (*Willis* 22).

By sovereignty, I refer to the authority and unrivaled power of the divine, which he enacts through providence, that is, the orchestration of events toward a harmonious, just conclusion. Other narratives have argued for a progressive understanding of sovereignty that

moves from an "omnipotent Providence, to thinking that Providence depends on human actions" (Orr 8). But Lewis circumvents the competition between divine will and individual will by instead highlighting the relational interests of the divine. In Lewis' own words, the divine is "not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way," but an active influence in our development and participant in our challenges (*Problem of Pain* 41). In *The Silver Chair*, I will expand on how Lewis' conception of the divine personhood is one that is outside of our control or sway. Not only is the divine a different sort of being than us, but more powerful and actively interested in orchestrating our lives.

Surprised by Joy: a Conversion Framework

Lewis' own conversion explains his sensitivity for the impact of past trauma on our reactions to spiritual realities. While mine is not a biographical critique, I am interested in how his personal conversion story influences Lewis' narrative choices for the fictional conversions in his works. Several moments from his memoir, *Surprised by Joy,* are repeated in *Perelandra* and the *Silver Chair*.

In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes the death of his mother as his "first religious experience" that produces two attitudes in his life, both of which appear in his fiction. First is a phobia of human corpses. At his mother's wake, he describes her body as "it" and his "grief [is] overwhelmed in terror." And while he has little to say about his experiences in the trenches of World War I, his "view of corpses which had been formed the moment I saw my dead mother" endures through adulthood (195). Death as a separation of personhood from body appears in the Un-Man of *Perelandra*. The second attitude produced was a transactional relationship with the divine as a magician to negotiate with. The ten year old Lewis believed that, if he prayed enough,

his mother would resurrect and "when [God] had done what was required of Him… [He] would simply… go away" (21). This childhood assumption that the divine will may be bargained with is repeated in *The Silver Chair*, as well as the abuse Lewis endured in boarding school. His frustration with his "ridiculous" father who neither understands his son's experience nor carries a logical conversation stands in sharp contrast to Aslan and Maleldil. Both are authorities characterized by their empathy, command of rational thought, and inspiring sobriety.

Lewis repeatedly depicts insanity as the result of dalliances with evil. This is likely rooted in two weeks he spent caring for a friend "whom I had dearly loved" while this man "kicked and wallowed on the floor, screaming out that devils were tearing him" (202). His fear of being overcome by madness is reflected in the constant introspection of his characters, especially the opening narration of *Perelandra*. Yet his characters are often persuaded to submit to the divine in spite of their rational objections to what He commands. While Willis asserts Lewis is "essentially a rationalist," his fiction wrestles with faith in the absence of rationale (37). Oddly enough, his own reluctant conversion resembles the wallowing of his friend, as Lewis is brought to faith "kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape" (*Surprised by Joy* 229). This moment of confrontation in his memoir with "Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet" mirrors phrasing in *Perelandra* almost exactly when the narrator encounters an angel for the first time (228). Just as his phobia of corpses is rooted in that lack of animation which makes a human body human, Lewis' reverence for the divine stems not primarily from *who* the divine is, but an awareness of *what* the divine is: "Though it was a terror, it was no surprise to learn that God is to be obeyed because of what He is in Himself… In His nature, His sovereignty *de jure* is revealed" (237). In *The Silver Chair,* Aslan is not only a lion but a massive one, underscoring the divine's otherness *as* superiority. In

Perelandra, Maleldil is never given corporal form at all and, as a spirit, his otherness empowers him to be omnipresent in a way mankind cannot be.

Perelandra

"For though the healing what was wounded and the straightening what was bent is a new dimension of glory, yet the straight was not made that it might be bent nor the whole that it might be wounded." (Perelandra 215)

Similar to Milton's *Paradise Lost,* which aims to "justify the ways of God to men," (*Milton* 26), Lewis argues for the superiority of divine sovereignty through a close encounter with the devil. Ransom, having been smuggled to outer space once against his will, is asked to return to a different planet by the divine, Maleldil. However, Ransom is never given a reason for this journey. He meets the queen of Perelandra and discovers that, while she is intelligent, she has no concept of evil because she is an unfallen Eve. Weston, a narcissistic professor and old nemesis of Ransom's, crash lands on the planet as well. Shortly after his arrival, Weston is possessed by the devil and tries to convince the queen to disobey Maleldil. Ransom labors to impede a second occurance of The Fall.

Maleldil's character has been established in the previous book, *Out of the Silent Planet*, which means the audience enters the narrative with context for the divine. But the narrator is a self-inserted Lewis imagined prior to his conversion. We enter the story as the character Lewis encountered the spiritual realm as it intruded upon the mundane. This is set up through description of the rural English landscape until the encounter with an angel, become a sudden, erie intrusion upon the domestic: "I saw the thing I had feared so long to see" (17). This resembles the author Lewis' account in his spiritual memoir: "Unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me"

(*Surprised by Joy* 228). The author Lewis inserts himself into the narrative by operating as the narrator and has an encounter with *bigness*. This is a vital introduction because it sets the tone for every other encounter with supernatural forces or beings in the text hereafter. Angels are creatures entirely *other* from humans and exist on a different plane of reality from that corporal realm humans are bound to. Not only that, but the narrator realizes that the *other* is aware of him. We are not afforded the freedom to ignore the supernatural realm; we are either invited or forced to discover its impact on our life. When the narrator Lewis is reunited with Ransom in the second chapter, Ransom casually asks whether Lewis made it "through the barrage" alright and Lewis learns with horror that his anxiety before arriving was caused by malevolent supernatural influence (21). Negotiation is required when ignorance or apathy become impossible. That is what the narrator of *Perelandra* is processing in the opening section. He is on a physical journey from his own home to a place where he will be hosted in someone else's domain, while he is also on a psycho-spiritual journey from one perspective of reality wherein he possessed power through comprehension to another reality wherein he must negotiate with powers larger, more intelligent, more powerful, and entirely *other* to himself who in fact *rule* his world.

The Character of Evil

The surface of *Perelandra* consists of raft-like islands populated by fruit trees, gentle animals, and a human couple who have yet to meet one another. An island of rock is the only stationary land on the planet. While the queen is free to explore this Fixed Land, Maleldil has commanded her not to remain there overnight. She is presented with the choice to submit to Maleldil's rulership or submit to the devil through disobeying Maleldil's command. Maleldil never speaks directly in the novel so the primary supernatural voice we hear is the devil speaking

through Weston. Weston, when possessed by the devil, suffers a disfiguring seizure and afterward is used as a puppet by the devil. Because his body is animated by an unhuman spirit, Lewis no longer refers to him as the man Weston but as the "Un-Man." The Un-Man resembles Milton's Satan in that the character allows Lewis to depict the tools, motives, and rhetoric of the devil as an exploration of what occurs when creatures degenerate into evil.

The devil is a rhetorician, but not a philosopher. That is: the devil employs rhetoric in the endeavor to persuade his audience, but he has no intention of revealing truth nor using analytical thought to benefit mankind. From the beginning, we see the rationalist Lewis challenging his audience with a portrayal of analytical thought that does not assume its inherent goodness. Logic is used by the devil for evil ends as equally as by Maleldil and Ransom to lead hearers closer to truth. Ransom tries to protect the queen from the Un-Man's arguments, but quickly discovers that "thought was for [the Un-Man] a device necessary to certain ends… it assumed reason as externally and inorganically as it had assumed Weston's body" (128). So although the Un-Man employs rhetoric to persuade the queen, he is not capable of being persuaded himself. In an earlier conversation wherein Weston is describing the nature of the entity which will soon possess him, he describes it positively as a spirit. "The devil is a spirit," (93) replies Ransom, reminiscent of James 2:19: "Even the demons believe [God is spirit], and shudder." Simply because an entity is pure spirit does not render it trustworthy, in the same way, rational thought does not always render beneficial ideas. While Maleldil engages with Ransom's reasoning to bring him to the right conclusions, the Un-Man uses reasoning to introduce falsehood to the queen. Through "reason" Weston devolved into insanity and possession. Lewis presents rational thought as a tool as easily wielded for benevolence as for malevolence.

The Un-Man uses the tool of reasoning to tempt the Lady to distrust her chosen master,

Maleldil. How does he do this? By making her wish for a reality other than the present one. The Un-Man says, “The world would not have to be different– only the way you live. In a world where people live on the Fixed Lands they do not become suddenly separated.” The lady responds, “But you remember we are not to live on the Fixed Land.” (104). When the queen returns to reality, the Un-Man follows her attention and entices her imagination: “No, but He has never forbidden you to think about it. Might not that be one of the reasons you are forbidden to do it– so that you may have a Might Be to think about, to make Story about as we call it?” (104). He’s just told her that human women make up stories, and she wants very much to be like human women; note that he refers to story “as we call it” bringing to her mind human women with “we.” But he’s also introducing through verbal subtly a blatant rebellion, that is, to mature apart from God. Remember, Lewis is operating on the belief that the devil’s aim is for creatures to gain independence from the Creator that Lewis believes they cannot safely or healthily live without.

Ransom’s mistake is when he tries to play the devil at his own game of “what if” with questions that provoke the queen’s imagination. “Lady,” broke in Ransom, “will not Maleldil make you older in His own time and His own way, and will not that be far better?” (115) “Better” is the same as “if only.” But Ransom cannot win by reason. Reason is the pursuit of truth and order and the Un-Man is the antonym to truth. One reason that Ransom’s attempt fails is that the Un-Man is actually not using the logical progression of thought to reach a reasonable conclusion, but he is using logical progression that slowly departs from viewable facts in order to introduce unsupported concepts. For Lewis, the Un-Man’s favorite tool is distraction. When he mentions off-hand that the Lady ought to do something on her own so that her husband will love her more, she replies in faithful innocence that “how could anyone love anything more?” to which the Un-Man, exposed, must resort to a distraction: “I only meant that you could be more like the

women of our world" (106). When his motive is proven to rely on a worldview which does not align with the reality of unconditional divine love, he shifts focus. He's proved to be untrustworthy when his ideas aren't in line with God's reality. We see in the Un-Man's syntax, and his argument style, even in his torture methods that distraction is a favorite weapon of his. Even sheer annoyance he uses to torture Ransom with the monotonous repetition of "Ransom, Ransom" only to reply with "Nothing" when asked. On this, Ransom reflects that "if the attack had been of some more violent kind it might have been easier to resist." (123) The Un-Man is doing nothing more than annoying him until his frustration unravels to rage and his control loosens. But this also reveals Lewis' belief as to the nature of the devil himself: he not an inspiring rebel to rally behind. There is nothing of the tragic hero in Lewis' devil.

The devil of *Perelandra* is a personification of evil: evil itself has no substance. While the devil is a creature that anyone can become by *un*-becoming what they were designed to be, evil is not something at all. It is the lack or twisting of something already in existence. It is the decay of creation. Augustine's influence shows in Lewis' portrayal of evil as the absence of perfection just as death is the absence of animation and both. Lewis continually juxtaposes evil to health. And we know that Lewis believed death to be a separation of things that ought not to be separated. The Un-Man– that is, the possessed Weston– is described as looking "very like a dead [man]. The face which he raised from torturing the frog had that terrible power which the face of a corpse sometimes has" (110). Lewis believed that the devil is the alien, the Other, to be outcast as he has outcasted himself. It is a twisting of an existing substance, not the emergence of a new substance. The way he describes the Un-Man in the above quote focuses on how Ransom can't imagine communicating with this creature. The Un-Man is so *other* that Ransom realizes he can neither persuade nor reason with it; it seems to say to him that "I have features as you have

but there is not much in common between you and me… What appeal or threat could have any meaning– to that?" (110) What is in common between Ransom and the Un-Man is their humanity, but the otherness is not merely the foreign spirit animating Weston's body, but the degraded state of his body. Weston has become so malformed that Lewis changes his name to "Un-Man" to suggest that the professor's physical and mental crumbling has twisted him into an altogether different creature. In his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis describes Satan's fall as a natural entropy occurring when a created being chooses their own will in leu of God's will. Satan did not receive corporal punishment: he experienced the consequences of spiritual malnutrition.

Because evil is an absence and the devil is a personification of this, the Un-Man immediately introduces the idea of loss to the Lady. First, he does this through the concept of ownership. Before meeting the Un-Man, the Lady had no concept of "keeping" or "owning" a thing. She has all her needs met every moment, has no need to store up supplies, nor has any predators. She lives in complete trust. When the Un-Man discovers her intrigue in the women of earth, he makes earthly women sound attractive in a very specific lens:

> Their minds run ahead of what Maleldil has told them. They do not need to wait for Him to tell them what is good… because of their wisdom, their beauty is much greater than yours… because of their beauty the love which the men have for them is much greater than the King's love for you (106)

Notice the Un-Man's repeated use of possessive adjectives. "Their" connotes ownership, self-conceit, taking credit inherently due to them versus a gift given. "Run" reveals a value for task over relationship with the divine at His pace. "Do not need" again highlights this independence and separation from a divine whom they mature past the point of needing. And the only reason he introduces the women of earth to the Lady of Perelandra is to teach her to

compare herself to other females. So far, she has only had encounters with males, to whom she is clearly different. So the Un-Man introduces her to creatures like herself. Comparison becomes a tool to foster conceit and envy, because envy is an outworking of discontentment with oneself or circumstance. And once discontentment is sown, resentment can grow and rupture relational intimacy.

Second, the devil introduces the concept of lack to the Lady through an appeal to "the nobility of self-sacrifice" (132), that is, that lack can be holy if it is theatrical. But one must have ownership of something in order to sacrifice it. The Lady has never known lack and she does not think of the world in terms of ownership nor rights; she has access to all and all is good so why should she think of keeping a thing for herself when all is freely given and none seeks to take? Here is where the devil proves a cunning rhetorician in Lewis' imagination. By introducing the idea of self-deprivation, he carves a way for ego to enter her self-image. "And with the risk, of course, all the magnanimity, the pathos, the tragedy, and the originality" (131). Cowardice is a thing of ego; honor soured into reputation; an awareness of self, of one's possible nakedness or lack.

While Lewis' devil is personified *lack*, he is lack with agency. Although Weston appropriates the language of progress to imply creation; what Lewis actually depicts is a progression of entropy. He reflects in *Perelandra* how Milton depicts Satan digressing from "hero to general, general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and then to a thing that peers in at bedroom windows, and thence to a toad, and finally to a snake– such is the *progress* of Satan" (*Preface to Paradise Lost* 6). Weston believes himself to be a hero, the rebel who's the inventor, the builder, the martyr for real progress. But progress toward what end? When the devil possesses Weston and he becomes the Un-Man, the process violently destroys

Weston's body. Just as Ransom challenges Weston's assumption that the term "spirit" is inherently beneficial, the concept "progress" is challenged with the question of "to where are we progressing?" Lewis presents the narrative argument through Weston inviting a spirit into himself and that spirit revealing itself to be malevolent with the aim "that you may have Death in abundance" (*Perelandra* 114). In the same way, we watch Weston progress from a man in control of his mental faculties and in good health, to a mutilated corpse artificially animated and thrown into bouts of hysteria. Progress is a descriptor of movement but momentum is only as beneficial as the aim toward which it progresses. The desirability of the destination is vital to Lewis. The devil desires for all creatures to resemble itself as they degrade through relational isolation and rebellious independence misrepresented as individuality.

Up until meeting the Un-Man, the queen is entirely motivated by a desire for the king and for Maleldil's delight. At first, the Un-Man seems to appeal to her desire. "Would he [the king] love you more…" (105). But notice he is not asking whether her relationship with the king might benefit from her sacrifice. He does not want her to think of anyone's experience but her own. Thus, "love *you* more" truly means "owe you more." If only she sacrificed her wellbeing, she will ensnare the King in debt to her so all "the benefits his… all the risks hers." "His" and "hers" are possessive pronouns, and suddenly the King and Queen are not a team working for "us" or "ours" but individuals negotiating for "yours" and "mine." We see relational unity under attack.

The Un-Man attacks the queen's relationship with Maleldil not from any "serious hope of victory," as Lewis puts it in his *Preface to Paradise Lost* (6). The fall of Perelandra affords the Un-Man with little reward just at the fall of earth afforded Milton's Satan with little freedom. Lewis argued that Milton's Satan is a study of a creature's unraveling from politician to beggar. In his own work, Lewis' Satan devolves further until he is an inane meddler, defeated yet intent

to “annoy the Enemy whom he cannot directly attack” (6). Through linguistic gymnastics, the Un-Man tries to twist the queen’s worldview into confusion by “Your deepest will, at present, is to obey Him– to be always as you are now” (119). That is not true, but by sneaking this lie into the cadence as a prepositional phrase in a string of other phrases of truth, it isn’t noticed. He goes on to say that she is “now only His beast or His very young child” (119) . “Only” and “young” are loaded words for the Queen who desires to mature in the same way that “beast” and “child” are terms that we, the human audience, receive as derogatory. After infantilizing the queen, the Un-Man asserts that “the way out” of her ignorance “is hard” because it requires disobedience (119). But he bases this entire point on the unspoken assertion that all sentient creatures reach maturation by the same means. Humans progress from childhood to maturity through pain, separation that fosters independence, disobedience that necessitates punishment, and pain as a result of punishment that teaches discipline. Just because these are the ways one species have matured does not mean that all creatures ought to develop the same way.

The Un-Man says “[That way to maturity] was made hard that only the very great, the very wise, the very courageous should dare to walk in it, to go on– on out of this smallnes in which you live” (119). He is describing her present state negatively to make her dissatisfied with herself and feeding her images of another possible state to make her yearn for it but is telling her the only way to get what she yearns for is through disobedience. He does not tell her that there may be a way to mature without separation from Maledil’s intimate companionship. So we see that the only power that the devil has is concealment and distraction. The way to maturity through pain is difficult, but that venue was made difficult in order to discourage creatures from seeking maturity through it.

The divine’s purpose is not to prevail over evil; his plan is larger than the thrill of battle.

To pursue Maleldil is enough in and of itself. Evil's presence is a great divergence *from* the story, the plan, the direction. Although evil has been woven into the story, "yet the straight was not made that it might be bent nor the whole that it might be wounded" (215) In contrast, the devil's purpose is purely to diverge from Maleldil's in any way. He states outright that his aim is "that you may have Death in abundance" (114). Lewis's memoir establishes his view of death as a separation and an unnatural interruption because, when his mother died, "all settled happiness… disappeared from my life" (*Surprised by Joy* 21).

Masters & Free Will

Just as we explored in the previous section on the devil's progress, whether surrender is a horror or solace depends entirely on the entity to whom you surrender. Two masters are presented to the Queen in *Perelandra:* Maldil or the devil, whom Weston is possessed by. Although the Un-Man presents himself as a master to her in the guise of setting herself up as master. Each master is characterized throughout the work.

Ransom queries Weston, who characterizes the Force's nature by what it commands of him:

> "...[So] the things the Force wants you to do are diabolical … How far does it go? Would you still obey the Life-Force if you found it prompting you to murder me... to sell England to the Germans... to print lies as serious research…?"
>
> "Yes," [says Weston]."
>
> "God help you!" (95)

Weston doesn't understand surrender because he's proven in the previous book, *Out of the Silent Planet*, that he has no qualms with dishonesty or murder, which he deems "petty

ethical pigeon-holes" (95). Engaging in unethical behavior is not a sacrifice for him. He, like the Lady with Maleldil, has only been submitting to the Force because he believes that he agrees with its aims and rationale. Although he uses the language of noble surrender, he is not interested in losing credit for any future achievements: "It's a question of surrendering yourself to [the Force]– making yourself the conductor of the live, fiery, central purpose– becoming the very finger with which it reaches forward" (95). There is a double meaning to the word "conductor:" a conductor who leads an orchestra or a conductor which allows electricity to travel from one substance to another. Weston believes himself to be the former: "In so far as I am the conductor, I am it. I am the Universe. I, Weston, am your God and your Devil. I call that Force into me completely–" and he's possessed. It is not that he is in league with the ultimate mover and force, but he IS that ultimate force. He wishes to be worshiped as a god. His bravado reveals itself in his assumption that he could "call" the Force that it was at his beckon. When he calls the Force into himself, he expects to absorb its power in order to wield it by "making himself a conductor." He never intended to surrender his freedom to the Force. He expects to manipulate his role in the Force's plan (or providence), believing the Force is an impersonal entity that can be "called" at his whim. Instead, he is absorbed into the Force and his body wrenched from his control to be wielded by the Force.

The devil absorbs free will completely until no individual agency remains. Ransom describes the effects of Weston's union to the Force as a digestive process akin to the progression of decomposition:

> Weston was not now a man at all. The Force which had begun to eat away his humanity had not completed their work. The intoxicated will which had been slowly poisoning the intelligence and the affections had now at last poisoned the whole psychic organism [and]

had fallen to pieces. Only a ghost was left. (130)

Whereas the divine is a relational entity, the devil is one of removal and overcomes Weston's command of his own senses likened to intoxication. Lewis chooses to use substance abuse in combination with decomposition, "eat away… poisoning… fallen to pieces" to show that Weston has lost an integral piece of his humanity. That piece is free will. Free will is such a vital part of humanity in Lewis' depiction that, without it, Weston is a "ghost," a spirit separated from his body through death.

Weston's encounter with a supernatural entity results in his own destruction, but Ransom's encounter with the supernatural ends in clarity and rest, revealing a difference between these two beings. First, he becomes aware of a supernatural presence after wondering whether he'd not been abandoned by the divine:

> He could not understand why Maleldil should remain absent when the Enemy was there in person. But while he was thinking this, as suddenly and sharply as if the solid darkness about him had spoken with an articulate voice, he knew that Maleldil was not absent… The darkness was packed quite full. (140)

The divine engages with Ransom, but does not interrupt his progression of thought, it is arguing with him and affording him the space to think his own thoughts. For all its presence "seemed to press upon his trunk so he could hardly use his lungs," it does not encroach on his ability to reason. This restraint is proven when, faced with the solution of a physical wrestle with Un-Man, Ransom has the ability to reject this idea from the divine, at least initially. Only through a further analysis does he realize the necessity of a "crude, materialistic struggle" to overcome evil. And "now he knew it. The Presence in the darkness… was putting these truths into his hands" (144). The fact that he is capable of recognizing what is the Presence's influence and what are his own

thoughts show that he is still control of his own mind. If he found no distinction between his thoughts and divine thoughts, his consciousness would have been absorbed into the divine's in the same way Weston's was lost to the Force's. If it never occurred to Ransom to distinguish between the divine's thoughts and his own, his inability to exercise self awareness would reveal a suppression of his individual will by the divine's.

Hereafter, the presence of the divine makes no attempt to take control of his thoughts but rather responds, casts an opinion, gives Ransom an impression of the divine's attitude toward Ransom's ideas. Lewis' language grows more and more specific as the encounter progresses until the divine of *Perelandra* is an unmistakable sentient entity. He writes, "the Voice– for it was almost with a Voice that he was now contending" (146). Ransom's experience of the divine is through a two-way conversation. Lewis uses "contend" to describe this interaction to evoke a struggle, a debate, a grappling reminiscent of Jacob's wrestling match with the angel of God in Genesis. It endures for an entire chapter because, while the divine "patiently and inexorably … [brings] him back to the here and now" (145), it also waits for Ransom to come to his own conclusions. The moment of Weston's submission to the Force is loud, theatrical, and violent, but Ransom's submission to the divine occurs off the page. He is told by the divine voice to "walk twenty paces" from his enemy and go to sleep. This is illogical and dangerous given the coming duel, but Ransom obeys: he rests.

When the Lady chooses to obey Maleldil's commands, she is presented with the free choice to do so at every consecutive command; whereas the moment Weston surrenders to the Force's will, he forfeits his choice ever after. Dependence is not slavery so long as independence can still be chosen. There are no measures that keep her from remaining on the Fixed Island overnight, but the destruction of Weston's body and psyche render him incapable of living apart

from the Force's animation of his members. The Un-Man wrongfully casts Lady's dependence on Maleldil's daily provision as an invasion of her free will and presents the concept of independence as a superior lifestyle because: "there can be no gifts, no keeping, no foresight while you live as you do– from day to day" (138). She herself admits that she cannot imagine disobeying Maleldil except as walking " out of his will is to walk into nowhere" (116) and characterizes her relationship with the divine as an ongoing conversation: "Maledil is not putting much into my mind about them" (105) and companionship: "How could He [let go of my hand a little] He is wherever we go." Their relationship is uninterrupted communication and presence. Un-Man questions whether she knows what His will actually is:

> "Are you certain that He really wishes to be always obeyed?"
>
> "How can we not obey what we love?"
>
> "The beast that ran away loved you."
>
> "I wonder," said the Lady. "If that is the same. The beast knows very well when I mean it to run away and when I want it to come to me. (116)

The Lady's critique of the Un-Man's allegory clarifies her theory of leadership that followers seek to understand the desires of their masters and anticipate the intention behind their actions or commands. Knowing Maleldil's intentions aids us in obeying him, because our aim is His delight and companionship just as his aim is our delight and safety and care. The crux of the Lady's trust in Maledil lies in her belief in "This strange and great good He intended for me" (105).

But the Lady does not know what the "strange and great good" is that Maleldil plans for her– we've watched him reveal ideas to her little by little throughout the story, but never all at once– and Un-Man pounces on this limitation. He attacks her trust in the divine by asserting that her individual, limited perception is the ultimate reality. That her experience in fact defines

reality. So if she cannot see reason in the divine's commands then the divine is not rational. Un-Man is teaching her to regard her own faculties of understanding and logic as the measure of what is worth obeying, of what is reasonable, of what is good:

> These other commands of His– to love, to sleep, to fill this world with your children– you see for yourself that they are good. . . you cannot see where the goodness of [the command not to live on the Fixed Land] is. No wonder.. . . It is mere command. It is forbidding for the mere sake of forbidding. (117)

Ransom responds to the Un-Man's argument by drawing her mind back to her deepest desire which is Maleldil's delight through her obedience. If Maleldil desires her delight, He cannot be the tyrant that Un-Man proposes. Ransom points out that the law does not exist to boast Maleldil's supremacy, but to prove the quality of her obedience. "What you call obeying Him is but doing what seems good in your own eyes also. Is love content with that?" (118). Ransom ties obedience to love because love is not fearful submission but freely chosen surrender. If surrender is not freely chosen, it is slavery. She puzzled earlier how she cannot "step out of [Maleldil's] will save into something that cannot be wished" (116) but Ransom points out that she has not yet stepped out of her own will at all. How does this apply to providence? Lady has a plan for her life and so does Maleldil; his desire is for her to choose His providential plan for her life over her own. As of yet, she has only been obeying "because [the rules] are His will, but not *only* because they are His will. Where can you taste the joy of obeying unless He bids you to do something for which His bidding is the only reason?" (118). Here the word "reason" takes on a double meaning as both the justification of a purpose and the ability of rational thought. She has been trusting her own reasoning not Maleldil's; if she obeys by not staying on the Fixed Land overnight, even though she doesn't understand the reasoning behind this command, she believes that Maleldil has

a plan even if he doesn't tell her. She doesn't have to understand why Maleldil's commands are good in order to trust that they are good.

Also note the parallel to the Un-Man's assertion "forbidding for the sake of forbidding" whereas Ransom argues that obedience is tested for the sake of obedience "bids you to do something for which His bidding is the only reason"). The Lady's revelation of this distinction is a summary of *Perelandra's* thesis: "We cannot walk out of Maledil's will: but He has given us a way to walk out of *our* will" (118). Possessive adjectives are used to describe each entity's will, implying that free will is retained for both mortal and divine. Yet the divine will remains superior: "Is Maleldil a beast that we can stop His path, or a leaf that we can twist His shape?" (121). With Lady's statement, Lewis' argument is clarified: that free will may choose against divine will, but cannot escape the creativity of divine providence. That is, that "whatever you do, [Maleldil] will make good of it" (121) The divine's sovereignty is as creative as our free will is complete. For our free will to be complete, there must be consequences to our choices, that even if good comes from our rejection of divine command, it will "not [be] the good He had prepared for you if you had obeyed Him. That is lost forever" (121). His will exists regardless of ours, it's a matter of us surrendering our will to His. So Maleldil regards the free will of his followers in a vastly different light than the Bent One and we see the character of each master through their revealed motives.

The Silver Chair

"Don't you mind him," said Puddleglum. "There are no accidents. Our guide is Aslan." (The Silver Chair 215*).*

As the fourth installment in The Chronicles of Narnia, *The Silver Chair* is the first book not to feature the Pevensie children. Eustace helps Jill escape schoolyard bullies by asking the

divine, Aslan, to let them into Narnia. Finding themselves on Aslan's mountain, the children are separated and Jill meets the divine alone. He commands her to find the lost prince Rilian by following signs that she is to recite to herself and her two companions, Eustace and Puddleglum, a Narnian marshwiggle. They succeed, only after missing all the signs but the last.

Jill is Given a Task: the Introduction

Although Aslan is an established character for readers, Lewis centers *the Silver Chair's* narrative around a newcomer's introduction to Narnia. Much in the same way he did for *the Voyage of the Dawn Treader,* which included excerpts of Eustace's first personal narration in his journal. *The Silver Chair* is the first book in the series involving none of the Pevensie children.

While Aslan, Eustace, and Narnia are no strangers to the audience, Jill is. But Aslan proves that Jill is no stranger to him: "She knew at once that it [Aslan] had seen her, for its eyes looked straight into hers for a moment and then turned away– as if it knew her quite well and didn't think much of her" (21). As if Aslan is saying, "I am neither subservient to you nor harbor malevolent intentions toward you." Why would Lewis choose to introduce Jill to the divine this uniquely and dower way? How Jill encounters Aslan reveals as much about Jill's character as it does Aslan's.

First, we learn that Aslan is powerful and Jill is a fearful, anxious girl accustomed to abusive power. Remember that she and Eustace fled into Narnia to escape bullying. "If I run away, it'll be after me in a moment," thought Jill. "And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth" (21). Not only does Jill note Aslan's physical power first, but she expects that because he can harm her, he will. But both scenarios Jill considers assume that the Lion is interested in harming her. But when Aslan does look at her, he "turns away [. . .] and didn't think much of

her" (21). Is Lewis' divine an uninterested deity? No, he's a clever one. Veiled in her fear, lies Jill's vanity. She wants things her own way; she is saying "my will be done" when she flounced on the edge of the cliff to prove her superiority to Eustace only to let him fall off the edge after which, instead of facing her guilt (thirst), she assumes there is another way to fix her mistake. "I suppose I must go and look for another steam then," she says. "There is no other stream," said the Lion (22). He answers Jill's vanity with simple, self-sufficient finality. Lewis introduces us to the divine through the eyes of someone who doesn't know His name so that every reference to Aslan is "the Lion." This emphasizes his wildness and his otherness to Jill's humanity. He is a sentient "other." A rational animal. A divine beast. The degree to which Aslan's will is distinct from Jill's is visualized through their differences of both biology and size. Remember also the manner he answered her: "there is no other stream," a reply that assumes truth. Not only is his will entirely independent from her own, but he is her authority. And "it never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion– no one who had seen his stern face could do that" (23). As in the previous quote, this is a constant attempt by Lewis to impress a sense of "other;" that we are dealing with creatures unlike us.

The second attribute Jill discovers about Aslan is his benevolence and we discover Jill's sensitivity. When Jill grows thirsty, she becomes aware of her necessity for what she can only receive in Aslan's presence. And while Aslan seeks her welfare, he does not always seek her comfort. "If you are thirsty, you may drink." Aslan had said previously, which he now repeats as, "Are you not thirsty?" (22). Jill's introduction to the divine is a fearsome, wild creature who is in repose, who is rational, and who is aware of her desires. He already knows she is thirsty. Encountering a frightening creature with designs divergent from her own produces understandable fear in Jill, compounded by the realization that he knows her designs, but here

she encounters that he may in fact wish to fulfill her needs. “You may drink,” is an invitation that leaves her her free will; he does not command her. But Jill tests the bounds of his invitation. She asks if he will move away while she drinks. She cannot get what she needs without the presence of the divine and the divine is not subject to her will so it will not move for her. Aslan’s refusal clarifies that we are not to mistake his benevolence for propriety. Jill realizes that “She might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience” (22). “Convenience” is a loaded word because it implies selfishness, a self-serving mind. It is a word we use in a service economy and evokes an employee-customer relationship. That is not the relationship Aslan has to Jill. He may be gentle, but he is not genteel. He is kind, but he is not polite. In Lewis’ own words, “We have a father in heaven, but not a benevolent grandfather who simply wants everyone to have a good time on earth. [. . .] almost an element of ferocity about it [. . .] He is not to be mistaken for mere kindness” (*Willis* 26).

Having read the previous Narnia books, we immediately accept that Aslan is all-knowing, but Lewis makes a point to isolate Jill in order that she only learns Aslan’s character from Aslan himself. Had Eustace been present, she may have learned to trust the Lion by virtue of Eustace’s trust. Or she might have learned he is benevolent by listening to a conversation between Eustace and Aslan. But she is introduced to a creature who knows her intimately and whom she knows nothing at all about. She is left alone by her own folly and is thirsty. “All this is done in order to provide Jill with the same kind of necessary conversion experience that Eustace had in the previous book,” in that both Eustace and Jill come to a relationship with Aslan through helplessness and through water (*Wilson*). Eustace was thrown into the pool, Jill must drink from the stream.

Through this introduction, Jill begins to understand how Aslan is a gentle and trustworthy

authority. He does not attack her when she drinks. Even more, he waits till she has drunk her fill. Only when she has seen this gentleness, does he compel her: "Come here," said the Lion. And she had to" (23). Lewis is arguing for obedience to the divine motivated through worthiness not fear. Notice how Jill's earlier fear of the Lion makes her "frightened in a rather different way" and this reverence becomes her reason to trust him. Lewis is depicting a divine authority whose trustworthiness is clearly evident upon introduction. For a girl who has endured abuse from authorities– bullying peers and neglectful school faculty— Aslan wins her loyalty through his restraint.

But what does this intimately specific introduction mean for Jill? Only moments after discovering this creature is to be obeyed, she challenges the wisdom of her involvement in his plan:

> Could there be some mistake? Because nobody called me and Scrubb, you know. It was we who asked to come here. [. . .] We were to call to Somebody– it was a name I wouldn't know– and perhaps Somebody would let us in. And we did, and then we found the door open. (25)

She seems to have forgotten that Aslan is to be feared when she dares to suggest that the divine made a mistake. Aslan calmly reveals that there was a divine plan before her plan existed: "You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you," said the Lion" (25). Lewis is writing for a young audience in a format designed to be read aloud so he employs repetition. But he remains aware of his adult readership too. Parents and maturing adults alike know how easily we forget truths we've recently discovered. Jill has forgotten that Aslan does not share her plans for her life, but in being reminded of his providence, she learns his sovereignty. But if Jill only called to Aslan because he compelled her to, how do we know she retains any free will at all?

Lewis anticipates this by his choice of setting. Jill encounters Aslan on a mountaintop forest (which is revealed as heaven in *the Last Battle*) "where the air is clear and [her] mind is clear" (27). She meets the divine in a setting where she is most in control of her faculties and in her right mind. Or in other words: where she is least enchanted or intoxicated. Aslan intentionally meets Jill in a low-stimulus environment to ensure the decisions she makes are freely chosen.

The gentleness of a powerful, fearsome being is implicit evidence. He's direct, honest, yet patient and encourages her curiosity and even her questions in doubt. He allows for Eustace to fall off the cliff so that Jill will weep until she realizes her thirst, allowing a scenario that reveals to Jill her desires that only Aslan can satisfy. By "calling" to her, He means that He allowed her to be bullied so that she would desire an escape to His country. He compels by giving a desire, whereas the Witch, an equivalent to the devil, compels through twisting desires. Aslan knows her limitations as a child when he breaks down her task into small, manageable goals: "Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night, and when you wake in the middle of the night" (27). He knows that she will be distracted: "And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs. . . Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters" He then gives her assurances to cling to when her perception fails her (27). But this assurance would have no weight if he had not shown himself to be a trustworthy creature first.

Queen of the Underland: Encountering Evil

> It was a dreadful question. What had been the use of promising one another that they would not on any account set the Knight free, if they were now to do so the first time he happened to call upon a name they really cared about? On the other hand, what had been

> the use of learning the signs if they weren't going to obey them? Yet could Aslan have really meant them to unbind anyone– even a lunatic– who asked in his name? (167)

Their internal debate is the same Ransom wrestles with over the absurdity of a physical solution to conquering the Un-Man in *Perelandra*. We are watching obedience endure even in absurd circumstances that threaten (and in Puddleglum's case, require) physical harm. The basis of the children's trust is being tested. Is it founded in the character of the divine or only in the rationality of his commands? We saw Lewis portray this test in *Perelandra* when Ransom exclaims to the Lady that the fact she doesn't understand Maleldil forbidding to remain on the fixed island is an opportunity for her to really trust him. "Yet could Aslan have really meant…" is reminiscent of the serpent's challenge to Eve only in the Underland, Eustace, Jill, and Puddleglum have brought the evil with them: they are their own tempters and sources of doubt. They are questioning the reason for Aslan's command and guessing at his motives in commanding them. The Un-Man in Perelandra does the same when questioning the spirit behind the law. But the very query assumes the commander is rational being and goes further to wonder if the command is motivated by our good or if the plan itself is good or if its madness. We hear Lewis' fear of madness here again. The question resurfaces as to whether the divine master is (1) good and rational or (2) evil and rational or (3) good and insane. The children begin to question the facts of their world's hierarchy as they know it, wondering whether the queen of the Underland is equal to Aslan in power.

> But then, supposing this was the real sign? They had muffed three already; they daren't muff the fourth.
>
> "Oh, of only we knew!" said Jill.

> "I think we do know," said Puddleglum
>
> "Do you mean you think everything will come right if we do untie him?" said Scrubb.
>
> "I don't know about that," said Puddleglum. You see, Aslan didn't tell Pole what would happen. He only told her what to do. That fellow will be the death of us once he's up, I shouldn't wonder. But that doesn't let us off following the sign" (167).

Now we understand that Jill and Eustace haven't learned to trust Aslan quite yet, because they still assume that their obedience will render immediate comfort and safety. When Puddleglum replies to Eustace's comment about "everything turning out right" with ambivalence, the quality of the Marshwiggle's trust is revealed. He doesn't need to see the outcome of his obedience to be certain that Aslan's commands are good and He is benevolent. In a way, he doesn't even try to understand Aslan's reasoning, it is enough for him that task is required of him and the Master is worthy of his loyalty. In any other situation, we are tempted to view Puddleglum as a simpleton operating on blind faith, but we'll see in the consecutive scene how blind faith conquers the devil when the Witch twists the party's need for rational explanations against them. Puddleglum is faithfulness to the end when he remembers that "Aslan didn't tell Pole what would happen;" the children are clinging to comfort that Aslan never promised them, whereas Puddlelgum truly "sees the worst and tries to put the best face on it." Aslan told Jill on the Mountain to pursue the Prince Rilian until they've either found and returned him home, died in the attempt, or gone back to England. None of those include a promise of physical safety and, in fact, suggest the very opposite. That the children put their faith in an assurance that Aslan never offered leaves them vulnerable to a crisis of faith when obeying him conflicts with retaining this assurance of protection. As in *Perelandra*, "It will kill us outright, we say, yet the task remains" (112). Aslan is an adult to them and yet commands absurd things. This is Lewis exploring the idea of our

obedience to the divine through a child's lens who still assumes authorities are to be revered and are less callused by adult cynicism and too young for adolescent rebellion just yet. Yet how are we to discern which authority is worth obeying when both are more powerful and clever, as the Witch and Aslan are to the children? Just as we explored in our discussion of *Perelandra*, obedience without free will is slavery. Even Lewis uses the word "slave" to describe Rilian's relationship to the Witch. And earlier, Lewis refers to the Lady of the Green Kirtle as "Witch-Queen;" this highlights her otherworldly power as a witch and status as queen in a similar way to Lewis' repeated reference to Aslan as "the Lion" on the mountain. She is a force to either contend with or submit to. The Witch is also referred to as the "Queen of Underland" similar to "the Underworld." Lewis often references Greek and Roman mythology in his fiction– from the satyr Mr. Tumnus to the appearance of Bacchus to his retelling Cupid and Psyche in Till We Have Faces– and the Lady of Green Kirtle is likely a female Hades. Their journey by boat to the Underland mirrors crossing the river Styx.

When Rilian struggles to ignore the compulsion of the Witch's voice resembles addiction or trauma recovery and Lewis' connection between evil and illness surfaces once more. Enchantment becomes a metaphor for mental illness as Rilian tries to recover from years of induced insanity within a few minutes. Even though he sees his abuser clearly and knows what she's done to him, he is still compelled to submit to her ("he shivered") the way a trauma survivor struggles to reject thought patterns when encountering a trigger.

The witch not only closes the door, but locks it even though the troupe is already entombed in the underground chamber. Liberty is not offered under her rulership. Immediately, she defines reality by asserting that Rilian's restraints were his "only safety" which resembles Aslan's statement that "there is no other stream." Any parallel between each ruler serves our

evaluation of them. Notice how dependance is created or satisfied by each. Jill was afraid and grew thirsty by her own choices whereas Rilian's distress and desire for freedom was imposed through magic; Jill's is natural and not imposed supernaturally by Aslan. Rather, Aslan offers satisfaction for her desire with at least outward ambivalence as to whether she accepts. The Queen and Aslan are both powerful, clever beings who wield supernatural power to their own ends, but only Aslan takes pains to do so without manipulation. By accurately portraying the limitations of a child's discernment, Lewis highlights Jill's vulnerability when encountering both Aslan and the Queen of Underland. Each acknowledge her weakness– Aslan recognizes her thirst, the Witch comments on her age– and respond to them differently. A contrast is drawn between orchestration and manipulation; manipulation is performed by an evil character who needs servants whereas Aslan is so powerful he does not need to manipulate followers because he doesn't need followers at all.

If Jill's introduction to Aslan on the mountain is Lewis' characterization of the divine, the troupe's encounter with the Lady of the Green Kirtle in the Underland is his characterization of the devil. We encounter both supernatural characters in their domains. The Lady of the Green Kirtle is ruler of the Underland and has fashioned her surroundings to her preferences. Elements noted in Aslan's country are directly paralleled in the description of the Underland in order to contrast the masters by the evidence of their rulerships, that is, the lands they cultivate. Aslan's country is quiet and the air is fresh whereas the Lady's chambers are full of "a very sweet and drowsy smell" accompanied by the "steady, monotonous thrumming" of her mandolin that lulls the children into an enchantment that grows stronger "the less you noticed it [and] the more it got into your brain and your blood" (173).

Note that the witch uses magic to obscure their free discernment while Aslan deliberately

waits to speak with the children until their heads are clear and their wills are their own. The fact that he respects and fosters their free will proves his trustworthiness because he is not threatened by their intellect, and may even want their reasoning faculties to mature. Even though they are serving Aslan, they are choosing to serve him: the witch is not interested in their free choice, she is not interested in their freedom at all. She is not creating followers, she is creating slaves.

They have just been ordered to do an absurd thing by someone they trusted. The fact that it turned out well is somewhat irrelevant to their primary lesson, because they needed to learn to trust in the absence of understanding to learn real reliance on Aslan's perception of reality and not their own. Rilian's freedom– like Jesus' appearing to the disciples upon resurrection– is an unnecessary yet generous assurance that their trust is well founded.

Lewis writes: "all through the conversation which followed, that smell grew stronger, and filled the room, and made it harder to think" (173). By stating the effects of the enchanting powder– which bear strong resemblance to psychosomatic drugs– we are prompted to interpret the following scene in the context that the "devil is a liar." Young audiences need to remember that the witch's argumentation is not to be trusted because however pregnant her logic, she is barren in ethos; there is nothing trustworthy in her person.

Just as the Un-Man uses distraction to draw the Lady's mind away from observable facts, the evil in *The Silver Chair* makes itself less and less noticeable with "a steady, monotonous thrumming that you didn't notice after a few minutes" (173). "Steady, monotonous" also highlight repetition as a device of temptation. In *Perelandra*, the Un-Man uses the repetition of Ransom's name as a means of torture until Ransom discerns his aim is to arouse Ransom's anger to undermine his command of argumentation with the Lady. While we know the Witch has enslaved the Prince, she distracts the troupe from this fact and draws attention to their own

needs. If *Perelandra's* devil worked on Ransom's annoyance, the Witch manipulates the troupe's fatigue. Her "thrumming" soothes their tension and promises relief through relaxation.

Not only is the green powder inhibiting on the troupe's cognitive awareness, but the music seems to have a physical affect too: " the less you noticed [the music], the more it got into your brain and your blood," which evokes illness, poison, and infection. While the Un-Man is compared to a corpse and described as a distortion, the Witch presents an alluring face of evil. Could Lewis be aware of how his young audiences might interpret her as a maternal figure? For a child, their mother is a person who offers safety and relaxation. To depict the devil as an untrustworthy mother is deeply unsettling to a child, heightened by the fact that she employs physical and rhetorical means to manipulate the children. A child can rarely match an adult's argumentative skills, and a mother is to be believed. But the troupe struggles to "notice" the presence of the Witch's magic at all. Attention is the devil's battleground since the devil uses distraction as a tool of manipulation and means of maneuvering victims.

The Witch mimics logical progression but bases it on false assertions. She creates a syllogism based on the fact that since premise A: "I've heard you say Narnia when you're tied up" is true and since premise B is also true: "you are very sick" the conclusion logically follows that what Rilian said while tied up is the product of insanity and thereby fictitious (173). What we know is that the cause of his illness is her enchantment. When the Witch goes on to assert that Narnia is a product of Rilian's hallucinations, Puddleglum states his own experience he has "happened to have lived [in Narnia] all my life." "Indeed," said the Witch. "Tell me, I pray you, where that country is?" (174). Her question has no connection to Puddleglum's truth claim. It's a redirection and, actually, a nonsense question since the assertion in question is not where Narnia is, but whether Narnia exists. Puddleglum's physicality bears witness to the existence of a habitat

outside the Underworld given that his body is clearly designed for swampland.

Eustace recognizes evil– he was once a bully himself– and mocks the Witch as “silly” (174). But he allows himself to be drawn into the argument by asserting that they met her in Narnia. So far they have been trying to convince the Witch to admit that they are right and this is their mistake. Her motive, as a personification of evil, is never going to convert to their aims. They ought to be reminding each other of the truth that they three know and ignoring the Queen altogether. She is putting on logic like the mask that the Un-Man does. She reframes both Rilian and Eustace’s truth claims in the framework of her construction of reality: that everything they believed they experienced in Narnia is from a dream. All they say hereafter will be reinterpreted through this lens. Verbal argument is no longer a useful weapon for them. Lewis shows his young audience a way out of such hopelessness by having Puddleglum enact a *physical* solution of stomping out the Witch’s fire. Only have after the spell is broken and they remember the existence of Narnia does he give reasoning to support his actions: "I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia" (181). Had he spoken while the spell endured, his comrades would interpret it through the Witch’s rhetoric and hear nonsense. What he truly exemplifies is a kind of absurd loyalty. Puddleglum neither believes nor even entertains that he might be insane. He is a realist who knows he has and will never believe something he’s made up. Skirting her arguments altogether, he dismisses her value as an authority at all. He’s saying, “If you are a creator, you’re a bad one because we can make a more pleasant world than you can” by “four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow.” He's mocking the devil and triumphing through the humility of laughing at his own absurdity.

The dialogue with the Witch is crafted to exhaust and unnerve its young readers. Children

have a short attention span which Lewis serves when he teaches them how manipulation happens by letting them experience it through fiction. We also tend to remember lessons in the context of story: hence Puddlelgum's victory is when he stamps out the flame not when he gives his speech. While what he says is rallying, it serves to explain why he acted the way he did.

Healing of Harms: Sovereignty as Relief

The final chapter of *the Silver Chair* could be read as a betrayal if not for the final scene. We are relieved along with the children and Puddleglum to finally spend a night in comfort, wake to good food, and enjoy a trip not on foot. Puddleglum finally receives affirmation from the children and Rilian is reunited with his father. But all this is suddenly cast into shadow by Caspian dying moments after seeing his son. Why would Lewis allow Eustace to witness the death of his old friend, Caspian, without a chance to say goodbye? This is a somber choice for a children's book. The children took part in the grotesque execution of the Queen of Underland, its true, but why sour the sweet ending of this narrative with the death of a character young audiences have followed through two prior books? He may be honoring the preteen audience of this book. Or this bittersweet ending must be how the story concludes because it offers experiential proof for Aslan's trustworthiness as an authority. Even though the company fears for their lives as they obey and release Rilian in his ravings, Rilian in turn protects them by killing the queen; even though Puddleglum is injured, the company is rescued by his sacrifice and he is tended to by a physician; even though Caspian dies, he is resurrected in Aslan's country; and even though Eustace and Jill return to the same moment of abuse, they are armed with a new strength of weaponry, divine approval, and bravery.

Instead of rushing to a resolution, Lewis allows the children to sit with their grief. This

scene reveals Lewis' sensitivity for the developmental process of children and a value for honoring their often overwhelming feelings. Jill expresses her need for comfort and the divine responds with His presence, revealing Lewis' understanding that relational trust is communicated as much through physical companionship as through verbal affirmation. We see this in Aslan's later assurance that he will not "always be chiding" Jill (235). He then gives her permission to cease processing the lesson she has learned in order to give her young adult brain time to recover. And he offers relational security.

In Lewis' portrayal, the divine is not a cold instructor nor distant deist god, but an invested parent. When Jill is introduced to Aslan we discover that he correctly assesses her physical need for water, in the concluding chapter, Aslan is someone who anticipates children's psychosocial need for a respite from the emotionally-saturated environment of a grieving Narnia so that they can process overwhelming emotions. The overstimulation of this sudden loss becomes another reason that Aslan remains largely silent in this scene before Caspian is reborn. Lewis reveals his familiarity with death by portraying a response to grief that honors it. Lewis describes Aslan as more real and solid than even the grief that they're experiencing. Aslan is aware of her desires and her loneliness.

> "I wish I was at home," said Jill.
>
> Eustace nodded, saying nothing, and bit his lip.
>
> "I have come," said a deep voice behind them. They turned and saw the Lion himself, so bright and real and strong that everything else began at once to look pale and shadowy compared with him.' (236)

The adjectives to describe Aslan could correspond with each level of the harrowing journey the children have been on. Asland is bright: they have just escaped from the underworld,

which is dark and one of Jill's greatest fears. Aslan is real: they and Rilian have escaped from an enchanted that blurred reality and a witch that tried to break their understanding of the real world. Aslan is strong: they have just spent the night sleeping and eating, very tired and weak, and their tiredness was the reason they gave into temptation at the Giant's castle too. Aslan is all the things that they have been really wanting when they were tempted along the way. This is reminiscent of Lewis' description of how joy in *Surprised by Joy* is a signpost toward the real desire, but joy itself is not the object desired. The object desired is the divine himself. This is why Aslan answers their plea for safety and comfort with his presence, because by his presence, they gain true safety and comfort. Lewis seems to continually describe the devil as pale and shadowy, which reminds me of the way his inner child is scared of the dead and the dark.

But the death of King Caspian introduces the quandary of why Aslan, as the initiator of their quest ("if I had not been calling to you"), didn't orchestrate the children's journey so that Rilian and his father could experience a true and lasting reunion. However, if the children returned Rilian in time for Rilian and Caspian to have days, even years together, Eustace and Jill would never see Rilian resurrected in Aslan's country. Lewis' audience, like the children, may never realize that another world exists wherein no powers challenge the permanent safety, justice, and satisfaction that Aslan provides. Knowing this puts a different lens on the grief we face in the current world. The stakes of current discomfort diminish in the revelation of future security.

> "Jill forgot about the dead King of Narnia and remembered only how she had made Eustace fall over the cliff, and how she had helped muff nearly all the signs, and about all the snappings and quarrelings. She wanted to say "I'm sorry" but she could not speak. Then the Lion drew them toward him with his eyes, and bent down and touched their pale

faces with his tongue, and said,

"Think of that no more. I will not always be scolding. You have done the work for which I sent you into Narnia." (236)

The "work" that Aslan sent Jill into Narnia for is concluded at Jill's very moment of self-awareness because, just as Rilian is freed from an enchanted (inaccurate) understanding of his own state, Jill is confronted with an accurate view of herself. That is, her own pride and yet helplessness. She has already drunk from the stream– a reference to the living water imagery in the gospels– which enables her to approach the divine relationally whereas in this final chapter, she is not coming to an awareness of her need but of her immaturity. At the stream, she realized that she had desires that she could not satisfy without Aslan's presence. With her remembrance of her mistakes, she discovers her inadequacy or lack of perfection or "holiness." For Lewis, the presence of holiness immediately brings a revelation of human fault because this description of Jill's thoughts resemble Lewis' thoughts in Perelandra when he encounters an Eldilla in Ransom's house. Could this choice on Lewis' part reveal that the divine– as Lewis understands him and is not solely concerned with the completion of the task given but the welfare of the person completing the task? Yes, because Aslan is aware of what his presence provokes in Jill and, rather than ignoring it, he acknowledges her internal confession and honors her repentance by giving her permission not "to think of" her regrets anymore. He is forgiving her. And given that Jill proves practically useless throughout the story– except as the bearer of memory of the signs, which she fails at– Jill's purpose in Narnia may not be to complete the task but to receive forgiveness. Aslan has forgiven her for her disobedience, but in telling her not to think of her failure anymore, he is inviting her to forgive herself as well. She is a girl who has suffered bullying and it made her selfish, defensive, and fearful. Jill gains companionship in Narnia

through completing a task wherein she must collaborate and abdicate control and comfort, and she must also be brave. Aslan's benevolent provision is proven through Jill's healing *as well as* their safe return to Aslan's country after freeing Rilian, proving Aslan's reference in "the work for which I sent you into Narnia" as twofold.

Jill asks Aslan if they may go home now, and he replies "Yes. I have come to bring you Home" (237). Notice the capitalization of "home" in Aslan's reply. Jill is talking about England because it is the only home she is familiar with. Aslan is talking about the mountain where the children will find rejuvenation. As children do, Jill is using the only language she has to express her grief by asking to return to familiarity. She is reaching for comfort.

So Aslan takes the children home and shows them Caspian's rebirth on the mountaintop, proving the enduring effects of what they accomplished in Narnia. He didn't have to show them this proof of his goodness. They could have done all that for Rilian to be reunited with his father only for his father to die in his arms, but Lewis doesn't let the story end there (although we in the temporal never see the eternal results of our "pointless" obedience). Aslan takes them to his country for the express purpose of showing them Caspian resurrected. This is the first time that Eustace gets to talk to anyone in Narnia that he knows. Then, after asking so much of Eustace and Jill, Aslan gives them a gift by ordering them to punish the very bullies that they'd otherwise be returning to. As a result, the school itself is reformed which is a long-term solution to their problem, an eternal result of temporal obedience. Because of their obedience in one world, they experience release in another.

Conclusion

Although I am familiar with Lewis' theological works, I only discovered his nonfiction as

an adult and knew him as a storyteller first and foremost. Other readers of his theology have bemoaned to me how difficult they find it to follow his writings. But I've never found this myself , perhaps because of my familiarity with his worldview as expressed through his narrative works. *The Chronicles of Narnia* captured my imagination first, and my mind second. From childhood, I have never seen a conflict between my imaginative mind and my spiritual awareness: not that the spiritual is manufactured by the imagination, but that the imagination is influenced and inspired by the spiritual. An imaginative narrative can sometimes explain the spiritual to our material minds better than a direct argument. A dozen safety professionals may tell you the bridge is safe, but you will not believe them until you test it yourself and experience it holding your weight. That is what a story does. By experiencing the narrative, you experience the fruition of trust. Such experiential persuasion is exactly what I see Lewis seeking to accomplish in his works of fiction. My own life is proof that his arguments have benefited readers.

I read *Till We Have Faces* in my freshman year of college. Three years later, a death in my family sparked deep, internal upheaval that led me to question what I'd believed my entire life about the character of God. I reread *Till We Have Faces* and discovered far more in common with Orual than I had previously. And she challenged God with more vitriol than I ever had. Yet Lewis depicted a divine who respected her nonetheless, who was not threatened by her anger, nor usurped by her doubt. I read *Perelandra* and found the same divine there, and *the Silver Chair*, and *the Horse and His Boy,* and *Job*, and *Isaiah*, and *the Confessions of St. Augustine*, and Thomas Traherne: all describing a deity capable of withstanding my anger without removing His affection. This is a God I could wrestle with. Lewis's characters shared my need for an adult-sized God; how the answers I received in youth would not fill the broadening questions,

doubts, challenges, and griefs of adulthood. Orual and Jill and Ransom all impressed upon me how it is not God's size that must grow, but my perception of His true size. The works of Lewis are not scripture nor are they perfect, but they speak of a Truth whom I know.

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