

THE IDEA OF THE GOOD, DUALITY AND UNITY: A STUDY OF C. S. LEWIS, J. R. R. TOLKIEN, AND CHARLES WILLIAMS

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Plato held that the Good is the supreme value of the cosmos and the legitimate object of the soul's eros; the pursuit of the Good, then, is the action by which a human life may be justified. "The Good is a universal and a fixed norm which the individual finds, and to which he must submit."¹ During roughly the three decades between 1925 and 1955 there grew up at Oxford a remarkable group of scholars and writers whose works were preoccupied with the pursuit of the Good. Moreover, this group was distinguished in that it took its definition of the Good not from speculative philosophy, but from traditional, orthodox Christianity. Three men stand out as the best representatives of the movement at Oxford: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams. Lewis and Tolkien were Oxford dons; Williams's entire adult life was spent as an editor for Oxford University Press, first in London and, after war broke out, at Oxford where he also held a lectureship in English literature. He and Lewis were Anglicans; Tolkien was a Roman Catholic. The literary works of the three cover a wide spectrum of genres, from science fiction to verse plays, from children's stories to supernatural mystery novels. Yet it may be generally stated that running strong and apparent throughout their entire literary corpus is an idea of the Good based on the teachings of traditional Christianity. This emphasis is a major factor distinguishing their work from much of the remainder of twentieth-century literature.

In fiction, "the technique for conveying pure goodness is one of the rarest of attainment."² Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams — the Oxford mythmakers³ — tried to convey the Good, both in its own quality and as the object of human striving, as a thing full of paradox, of duality within unity. It is a technique at which they succeeded admirably. This paper is an attempt to trace one particular set of dualities in the idea of the Good through their literary works. This duality may be expressed thus: the Oxford mythmakers held that the Good, or its representative, unites within itself the qualities of severity and largeness, great beauty and great dreadfulness. When men are confronted by the Good

the same duality is present; that confrontation comes as an occasion both of great terror and of great joy. First, the Good will be discussed in its own quality through an examination of supernatural beings in the fiction of Lewis and Tolkien. The same duality, as it affects the lives of men who are confronted by the Good, will then be traced through works by each of the three writers.

Each of the Oxford mythmakers was an impassioned apologist for the Good. Thus, characters of great goodness are often depicted in their works. In the fiction of Lewis and Tolkien these good characters may also be supernatural beings. Williams's understanding of the City, in his idiom, the geography of the beatitude for which goodness is the economy, is expressed in terms of human beings; he was no fantasist in the sense of populating other worlds with imaginary creatures. Thus his good characters are not supernatural but human. Setting Williams temporarily aside, through inspection of Lewis's and Tolkien's supernatural characters one may investigate their particular visions of the Good. These supernatural beings are especially illuminating to such an investigation, for they embody a goodness without taint or stricture of mere morality; morality, as such, belongs to fallen creatures. Unfallen natures reflect the Good more purely.

Aslan the Lion, perhaps C.S. Lewis's most memorable creation, dominates entirely the seven stories which compose *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The son of the mysterious Emperor-Across-the-Sea, Aslan created Narnia, the other worlds, and all their inhabitants. He is the ruler of all — either by his own hand or in the person of an appointed deputy — and he is the hope of all, the object of their worship and recipient of their prayers. He presides over Narnia's coronations, marriages, births, battles, deaths, and reawakenings. It is he who unmakes Narnia in *The Last Battle*. His influence is clearly pervasive, even though there are rather lengthy periods in Narnian history (and in the pages of the stories) when he neither speaks nor appears on the scene.⁴

Throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*, when Lewis wants to demonstrate the nature of Aslan, he uses the terms of beauty and dreadfulness. When the Pevensie children first enter Narnia magically from England and meet the Lion, Lewis writes:

People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time. If the children had ever thought so, they were cured of it now. For when they tried to look at Aslan's face they just caught a glimpse of the golden mane and the great, royal, solemn, overwhelming eyes; and they found they couldn't look at him and went all trembly.⁵

It is a commonplace to identify Aslan with God and, thus, the dread he inspires with the dread of the spiritual and numinous. Such an association may be partially justified. In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis distinguished the fear inspired by, say, a tiger from that which a ghost might inspire. One might fear the physical pain that the tiger's claws and teeth

could inflict; one would fear the ghost, however, simply because it is a ghost and not because of any anticipated pain.⁶ Lewis demonstrates this distinction in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*: Eustace Scrubb, an obnoxious English schoolboy who had joined the Narnian expedition to the world's edge along with two of the Pevensie children, is turned into a dragon by sleeping on a dragon's hoard and thinking dragonish-greedy thoughts. Efforts to change him back into a boy fail until Aslan intervenes. Eustace returns from his meeting with the Lion considerably chastened and describes the encounter to Edmund Pevensie:

Well, anyway, I looked up and saw the very last thing I expected: a huge lion coming slowly toward me. . . . So it came nearer and nearer. I was terribly afraid of it. You may think that, being a dragon, I could have knocked any lion out easily enough. But it wasn't that kind of fear. I wasn't afraid of it eating me, I was just afraid of it — if you can understand.⁷

The fear that Aslan inspires in Eustace parallels the fear of the numinous that Lewis describes in *The Problem of Pain*. It should be noted, however, that Aslan, as dreadful as he may be, is not unbodied and shadowy; if he does represent Deity, he is not immaterial but incarnate. Lucy Pevensie notices his visible, tangible paws. "'Terrible paws,' thought Lucy, 'if he didn't know how to velvet them!'"⁸ His roar is god-like, perhaps, but it issues from a lion's throat. "And when he opened his mouth to roar his face became so terrible that [the children] did not dare look at it. And they saw all the trees in front of him bend before the blast of his roaring as grass bends in the meadow before the wind."⁹ In *The Horse and His Boy*, there is an incident in which Bree the horse, philosophizing, tries to disembody Aslan's beauty and dreadfulness and make of him no real lion. In his best platitudinous style he is giving instruction on the use of the metaphor of the lion to describe Aslan's nature when the real Aslan, the actual Lion, appears. Aslan's words to Bree are revealing: "'Do not dare not to touch me. Touch me. Smell me. . . . I am a true beast.'"¹⁰ Whatever beauty and dreadfulness Aslan possesses are of the common and standard mode; they differ only in degree from the beauty and dreadfulness of other creatures. The Lion's attributes, in Charles Williams's phrase, are arch-natural, not supernatural.

The beauty and dreadfulness which the Pevensie children see in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* remain Aslan's leitmotifs throughout the other six books. Time and again his wild, musical voice, sweet breath, and "the living and strokeable gold"¹¹ of his mane reveal the Lion's unsurpassed beauty: almost as often as his various growls and his claws signify his dreadfulness. These terms become his epithets. When the children see him on their second trip to Narnia in *Prince Caspian*, "Aslan . . . stood facing them, looking so majestic that they felt as glad as anyone can who feels afraid, and as afraid as anyone who feels glad."¹² Man's dual response to the Good will be discussed later, but the effect that

Aslan has on the children in this passage well indicates the beauty and dreadfulness inherent in the Good. There are dozens of similar examples in the tales. Again in *Prince Caspian*, Aslan inspires the Telmarines, who are attempting to ravage Narnia, with a great fear. Their cheeks “. . . become the colour of cold gravy, their knees knocked together, and many fell on their faces.”¹³ Edmund, Lucy, and Eustace Scrubb meet Aslan at the world’s end in *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”*. It is a scene of searing poignancy unsurpassed by anything else Lewis wrote. But it is the old formula that he uses to depict Aslan. Aslan had first appeared to the children as a Lamb of great whiteness. But as the Lamb spoke, “. . . his snowy white flushed into tawny gold and his size changed and he was Aslan himself, towering above them and scattering light from his mane.”¹⁴

Aslan’s leitmotifs continue to appear in the later stories. Jill Pole, a girl who attended the same school as Eustace Scrubb, learns well the terrible severity of the Lion’s nature early in *The Silver Chair*. After finding herself in a strange country with Eustace, she quarrels with him. During their quarrel Eustace falls over the edge of a precipitous cliff (through Jill’s fault) and is saved only when Aslan rushes up and blows him far away into Narnia. Later Jill becomes very thirsty, but the Lion guards the only stream. She hopes that Aslan will become tame so that she may drink without apprehension. In effect, her desire is that Aslan stop being Aslan, a thing he cannot and will not do:

“Will you promise not to — do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.¹⁵

She must finally come and drink without any easy promises to assuage her fears. Aslan will remain true to his own nature, not to be ruled by the tremors of one impenitent little girl, for, like the One who is his model, “he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

Again, in *The Horse and His Boy*, a child discovers Aslan’s nature. Shasta, a boy fleeing northward to Narnia from Calormen, becomes heavily befogged and lost on the way. As he wanders aimlessly in the fog, he gradually becomes aware that Something is walking invisible beside him.

He could see the mane and ears and head of his horse quite easily now. A golden light fell on them from the left. He thought it was

the sun.

He turned and saw, pacing beside him, taller than the horse, a Lion. . . It was from the Lion that the light came. No-one ever saw anything more terrible or beautiful.¹⁶

Or yet again, when Aslan sings a Narnia that is “without form and void” into articulate existence in *The Magician’s Nephew*, to the English boy, Digory, his wordless song was “beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it.”¹⁷ Later, when the Lion speaks, “. . . it was a lovely and terrible shock.”¹⁸

Aslan’s dual goodness affects more than those who have consciously sought him. In *The Last Battle*, Emeth, a Calormene and a devout worshipper of the god Tash, passes into the Lion’s territory where he meets Aslan himself. Emeth says, “his hair was like pure gold and the brightness of his eyes, like gold that is liquid in the furnace. He was more terrible than the Flaming Mountain of Lagour, and in beauty he surpassed all that is in the world, even as the rose in bloom surpasses the dust of the desert.”¹⁹

In his novel *Till We Have Faces*, published immediately after the Narnia tales, Lewis develops the figure of Cupid, god of the Mountain, along lines suggestively parallel to Aslan. Cupid is known by the people of Glome, the kingdom in which the story is laid, as the Shadowbrute, the son of the goddess Ungit. The people of Glome practice a horrible little religion, and their understanding of Cupid is twisted (“bent,” Lewis would say) toward that horribleness. It was taught that Cupid required sacrifices of propitiation. Among the people there was some confusion about whether he devoured or ravished the sacrificial victim; the Priest of Ungit said he did both. But whether he was killer or ravisher, all the people were agreed that the god was the ugly, horrible Shadowbrute. In some respects, they were not far wrong; they knew of their god’s dreadfulness, but they had not learned the doctrine of his beauty. Princess Psyche, who becomes the sacrificial victim and bride of Cupid, gives the reader the first intimation of that divine beauty. She is describing to her sister, Princess Orual, the sound of Cupid’s voice. Instead of devouring her, he had bidden Psyche enter his mountain palace:

You could see it was god’s house at once. I don’t mean a temple where a god is worshipped. A god’s House, where he lives. I would not for any wealth have gone into it. But I had to, Orual. For there came a voice — sweet? oh, sweeter than any music, yet my hair rose at it too — and do you know, Orual, what it said? It said, “Enter your House. . . Psyche, the bride of the god!”²⁰

By threatening suicide and thrusting a dagger into her own arm to prove her willingness, Princess Orual cruelly compels Psyche to peep at Cupid with a lantern in direct disobedience to his command that he should not be seen. The lantern awakens him and he utters an aroused cry. Orual describes the sound of that cry:

The great voice, which rose up from somewhere close to the light,

went through my whole body in such a swift wave of terror that it blotted out even the pain in my arm. It was no ugly sound; even in its implacable sternness it was golden. My terror was the salute that mortal flesh gives to immortal things.²¹

Immediately Psyche is driven out to commence a weeping exile. When she is gone, Cupid appears momentarily to Orual in his divine brightness. That brightness was, as it were, “. . . a lightning that endured.”²² In its midst, Orual sees the god’s face:

Through this light stood motionless, my glimpse of the face was as swift as a true flash of lightning. I could not bear it for longer. Not my eyes only, but my heart and blood and very brain were too weak for that. A monster — the Shadowbrute that I and all Glome had imagined — would have subdued me less than the beauty this face wore.²³

Up to this point it is evident that Cupid is a being of great beauty and severity, but is he good? Princess Orual thinks him only the more of a cheat for using his beauty to steal away Psyche’s heart. About her Orual proclaims, “She is mine!” Orual would prefer anything, even the murderous Shadowbrute, to this heart-stealing god. But at the end of the novel Orual’s complaint and doubt about Cupid’s goodness are answered. Orual dreams that she is reading her complaint among the dead and realizes that the complaint — a dry, incessant, mindless grumble — is its own answer. When her complaint is answered, there remains for her to be judged by Cupid. Orual describes her reaction to his approach:

If Psyche had not held my hand I should have sunk down. . . The air was growing brighter and brighter around us; as if something had set it on fire. Each breath I drew let into me new terror, joy, overpowering sweetness. I was pierced through and through with the arrows of it. I was being unmade. I was no one. But that’s little to say; rather, Psyche herself was, in a manner, no one. I loved her as I would once have thought it impossible to love, would have died nay death for her. And yet, it was not, not now, she that really counted. Or if she counted (and oh, gloriously she did) it was for another’s sake. And he was coming. The most dreadful, the most beautiful, the only dread and beauty there is, was coming. The pillars on the far side of the pool flushed with his approach. I cast down my eyes.²⁴

Thus, Cupid is shown to be good; he is the definition of good in the context of the novel, no heart-stealer, but the legitimate object of the heart’s adoration and love. He is that for which hearts were made. As Aslan the Lion bodily represents the Good in Narnia, so Cupid is that Good in the imagined world of *Till We Have Faces*.

Aslan and Cupid are the only major “divine” figures in the writings of Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams that appear as actors upon the scene. As such, they are, perhaps, the truest reflections of the concept of the

Good. But there are other, lesser beings — angels, wizards, and men — in their works who may also be helpful in drawing a composite portrait of that goodness.

In the myth of Deep Heaven that C.S. Lewis writes of in *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength* (the space trilogy), he introduces creatures of light called *eldila* who are, apparently, angels. In addition, a particular sort of *eldil* called the *oyeresu* (singular, *oyarsa*) are the ruling or tutelary spirits of each of the planets. The myth tells that the universe and all its creatures were the creation of *Maleldil the Young*. The *eldila* (and everything else in the heavens save the creatures of bent and silent *Thulcandra*, *Tellus*) are the willing, obedient servants of *Maleldil*.²⁵ They are good as He is good, and though they lack the golden beauty which has been shown to be Lewis's favorite metaphor for the attractiveness of the Good, they are still impressive and frightening creatures. When *Elwin Ransom*, a Cambridge philologist and the protagonist of the space trilogy, meets the *Oyarsa* of *Malacandra* (Mars), Lewis writes:

Oyarsa passed between his subjects and drew near and came to rest, not ten yards away from Ransom in the center of *Meldilorn*. Ransom felt a tingling of his blood and a prickling of his fingers as if lightning were near him; and his heart and body seemed to him to be made of water.

Oyarsa spoke — a more unhuman voice than Ransom had yet heard, sweet and seemingly remote; an unshaken voice.²⁶

There are obvious reverberations from this passage in the descriptions of *Cupid* in *Till We Have Faces*, written over fifteen years later (associations of lightning, the unshaken, dispassionate voice). When the narrator of *Perelandra* encounters the *Oyarsa* of *Malacandra* at Ransom's cottage, the description is even more reminiscent of the leitmotifs for goodness which have been seen so far. The narrator says that the sound of *Oyarsa's* voice “. . . sent through me from chest to groin like the thrill that goes through you when you think you have lost your hold while climbing a cliff.”²⁷ Clearly, Lewis thought that the voice of the Good or its representative could be quite unnerving.

In the course of the space trilogy, Ransom, though a man, also becomes a representative of more than mortal goodness. After his experiences on *Malacandra* and *Perelandra* in the first two books, he assumes something of the aura that heretofore in this examination has not been seen in a man. He begins to exhibit visibly the resultant quality of his redemption. When Ransom emerges from his “coffin,” in which he had returned from *Perelandra*, the narrator says:

I was silent for a moment, astonished at the form that had risen from that narrow house — almost a new Ransom, glowing with health and rounded with muscle and seemingly ten years younger. In the old days he had been beginning to show a few grey hairs; but now his beard which swept his chest was pure gold.²⁸

Ransom's more than mortal beauty is exhibited in *That Hideous Strength*, where it is matched by a wisdom and nobility equally surpassing normal human capabilities. In the scene in which Jane Studdock, the heroine, first meets Ransom there are echoes of the Narnia tales and *Till We Have Faces*. When she is conducted into his sitting room, ". . . instantly her world was unmade. . . all the light in the room seemed to run towards the gold hair and the gold beard of the wounded man [i.e., Ransom]." ²⁹ His voice, ". . . also seemed to be like sunlight and gold. Like gold not only as gold is beautiful but as it is heavy; like sunlight not only as it falls gently on English walls in autumn but as it beats down on the jungle or the desert to engender life or destroy it." ³⁰ *That Hideous Strength* was being published in 1945; surely in this passage the images of Princess Orual being *unmade* by her vision of Cupid and the particularly *golden* beauty of the Lion in the later works are prefigured. That understanding of the beauty and awful severity of the Good remained a constant for Lewis.

Upon turning from Lewis to Tolkien, one notes a different flavor and quality in the writings. Neither man looked kindly on allegorical interpretations of their works. ³² Yet Tolkien's romance, *The Lord of The Rings* is even less amenable to allegorical classification ('Aslan is Christ') than Lewis's books. J.W. Montgomery has presented a schema in table form of the differences among the Oxford mythmakers. According to his classification, Charles Williams writes "numinous novels as apologetic for the reality of the supernatural, C.S. Lewis writes "allegorical myths as apologetic for the comprehensiveness of Christian truth," and J.R.R. Tolkien writes "deep myths as apologetic for the vastness of God's kingdom." There is an increase in "mythopoeic impact" as one moves from Williams through Lewis and Tolkien. ³² This classification may be somewhat facile, but it does indicate the difficulties one faces when turning from one writer to the next. Though the three men shared friends, surroundings, and beliefs, there is a danger of forcing them all into one Procrustean bed. Applying this to the specific topic of the presence of supernatural beings of great goodness in *The Lord of the Rings*, one finds nothing like an Aslan or a Cupid. Tolkien's accent is peculiarly his own. Such characters would, perhaps, be too big for his vocabulary. For though his tale is magnificent in breadth and detail, its focus is mainly upon the earth and its peoples, not often upon the Great Ones. That Good to which Lewis gives "a local habitation and a name," Tolkien chooses to suffuse over the entire scope of his creation. With this caution in mind, then, those supernatural creatures which Tolkien does present may be examined to see how they reflect his vision of the Good.

In a key passage in *The Lord of the Rings*, the goodness of the Valar, guardians of Valinor, is at least affirmed propositionally:

Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced

him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing:
there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach.³⁴

This high beauty and good reside in the sphere of the Valar, eternally above the Middle Earth that may be scarred and destroyed by evil or folly.

The Valar are capable of rather great severity as well as romantic beauty. They banished the Noldor (among whom was Galadriel who plays such an important role in the events of the Third Age) for disobedience. The Valar permitted the destruction of the great kingdom of Numenor when it grew pride-bloated. They were, at the very least, the equipping power behind the efforts of the free peoples of Middle Earth to destroy the evil Sauron. Yet it is still true that only the vaguest outlines of the beauty and severity of these Blessed are shown. They are like silhouettes, sufficiently delineated to be recognizable, but lacking the full detail and familiarity of portraiture.

Tolkien does paint, however, one glorious portrait of a super-natural being in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is full in detail, embodying much of Tolkien's understanding of the Good. That figure is Gandalf the wizard. In the Third Age he was sent to Middle Earth by the Valar to be, along with the other wizards, steward of its common good and to help lead its free peoples against the machinations of Sauron.

Gandalf is an enormously broad personality; he contains the crochey old magician, entrepreneur in fireworks and smoke-rings, whom the hobbits of the Shire know, and also the ever-vigilant "gray pilgrim" who bears the burden of watchfulness; yet he is also the master of lore, a friend of tree and beast, "the only wizard who cares about trees."³⁵ Frodo grasps something of the breadth of the wizard's personality in the verses he composes after Gandalf falls in the caves of Moria.:

A deadly sword, a healing hand,
a back that bent beneath its load;
a trumpet-voice, a burning brand,
a weary pilgrim on the road.

A lord of wisdom throned he sat,
swift in anger, quick to laugh;
an old man in a battered hat
who leaned upon a thorny staff.³⁶

What is remarkable is that this wide variety of personas is believable while still presenting a unified character. Gandalf's breadth of personality is tolerable, perhaps, because he is not man (nor hobbit), but wizard, with wide bounds to his nature. These several roles may also be tolerable because the reader has as a firmly fixed constant the irascible, lovable personality of the old wizard.

Gandalf is not physically beautiful like Aslan, or even Ransom. His appeal is of a different sort. In the early part of the tale, he most often appears gray, stooped, and tattered. His wisdom, wit, and concern for the creatures of Middle Earth reveal his interior beauty; it is a beauty

of the heart. This is a step closer to the goodness that mere mortals may attain in the works of the Oxford mythmakers, but a sharp demarcation should be drawn here. Though Gandalf has the form of a man and his goodness resembles mortal goodness, he is not a man, nor is his kind of goodness attainable for a man. For there burns within Gandalf a shining flame of pure whiteness which is emblematic of immortal goodness. At moments throughout the narrative that flame is partially unveiled. Before Gandalf's fall in Moria, it is most often shown in a flicker of the eye or in a sudden, seeming growth to a menacing proportion. After the wizard endures a sort of death and is sent back to Middle Earth by the Valar, this shining emblem of interior goodness is unveiled much more frequently. Gimli, Legolas, and Aragorn, three members of the Fellowship of the Ring, meet an old, gray-cloaked figure in Fangorn forest whom they think to be the traitorous wizard, Saruman; Gimli starts to set upon him with an axe.

The Old man was too quick for him. He sprang to his feet and leaped to the top of a large rock. There he stood, grown suddenly tall, towering above them. His hood and his gray rags were flung away. His white garments shone. . . His hair was white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand.³⁷

It is Gandalf. From here to the end of the book he frequently unveils this white flame which is his leitmotif, as golden beauty is Aslan's. That whiteness becomes the incarnate metaphor for the hope of all Middle Earth against the literal and metaphorical Shadow of evil cast by Sauron.

True to what has been seen of the Good so far in this examination, Tolkien's Gandalf is capable of showing great severity. This severity is shown even in the children's tale, *The Hobbit*. Though good, Gandalf is an intrusion at Hobbiton; he upsets the established order, questions conventions:

"Good morning!" said Bilbo, and he meant it. The sun was shining and the grass was very green. But Gandalf looked at him from under long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the rim of his shady hat.

"What do you mean?" he said. "Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?"³⁸

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf's severity, portrayed humorously here, is shown in its more serious aspects. At the beginning of the tale Bilbo has planned to give up the One Ring to Frodo. After making elaborate preparations, however, he quails when the moment of relinquishment arrives. Gandalf implores Bilbo to keep his promise and give it up.

“Well, if you want my ring yourself, say so!” cried Bilbo. “But you won’t get it. I won’t give my precious away. I tell you.” His hand strayed to the hilt of his small sword.

Gandalf’s eyes flashed. “It will be my turn to get angry soon,” he said. “If you say that again, I shall. Then you will see Gandalf the Grey uncloaked.” He took a step towards the hobbit, and he seemed to grow tall and menacing; his shadow filled the little room.³⁹

This motif reaches it fullest development when Gandalf is shown as a great warrior, the White Rider, who again and again does battle with the Black Riders of Sauron, who confronts their Captain at the gates of Minas Tirith and sternly commands him to begone. Ransom experiences the terrible strength of righteous anger when he fights with the body of Weston on Perelandra. Gandalf displays the same implacable anger in his encounters with the Enemy.

But this is not the last word on Gandalf’s nature. For as the goodness of the Valar remains untouched by evil on Middle Earth, so in the wizard there is a joy equally beyond evil’s reach. His face is lined with care and sorrow, but “. . . under all there was a great joy: a fountain of mirth enough to set a kingdom laughing, were it to gush forth.”⁴⁰ In his Vision, *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis sees in heaven a woman who is one of the Great Ones of redeemed humanity. Lewis is told by his guide, George MacDonald, “Redeemed humanity is still young, it has hardly come to its full strength. But already there is joy enough in the little finger of a great saint such as yonder lady to waken all the dead things of the universe into life.”⁴¹ This is the same joy that is Gandalf’s on Middle Earth, made manifest in another imagined locale. It is, perhaps, the most salient characteristic of goodness.

Thus duality of nature is a dominant theme in these supernatural images of the Good: beauty is intertwined with dreadfulness, severity with largesse. These supernatural creatures are imaginative representations of the Good in itself. But a similar duality may be seen in the way the Oxford mythmakers conceived that the Good affects the lives of men. Repeatedly in their writings, individuals who encounter a goodness from beyond themselves respond with both terror and joy. This terror and joy which the encounter with the Good inspires in the human heart may be best understood, however, if first something more is said about the view of man held by the Oxford mythmakers.

True to orthodox Christianity, their imaginative given, Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams held that man is fallen. But how specifically is he fallen? Here they added dimension to the mere *credo* of pride and disobedience. One of the many ways that man is fallen, their writings reveal, is that he shows a fatal tendency to build universes for himself. Out of pride, villainy, or foolishness (not simply innocent imagination), man wishes to be left to construct and to occupy a house of his own specifications; he wishes to reign over the facts, to decide what he does and what he

does not want to exist rather than submit to what does exist. In choosing to disobey the Prohibition against tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge and trying to become as gods, Adam and Eve were not merely refusing an arbitrary divine edict; they were substituting an illusory universe of their own for the real one that God had created. The idea is well expressed by Jeremiah: “ ‘For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water,’ says the Lord” (Jeremiah 2:13).

Some characters in the fiction of the Oxford mythmakers choose to “hew out cisterns for themselves” from motives of greed or villainy. Reginald Montague in Charles William’s *Many Dimensions* is a good example. In that novel, one of the William’s most accessible, the Stone of the Crown of Solomon is stolen away from its Moslem guardians. The Stone is, mystically, the First Matter of the Universe and displays many strange powers. For the Moslems in the novel it is an object of high religion. But when Reginald discovers that by wearing the Stone and wishing to be in a certain place one is immediately transported there, he thinks of nothing but forming a monopoly and exploiting the Stone as an advanced means of transportation. His lust makes him insensitive to any deep knowledge or being within the Stone. Thus he substitutes a cheap, vulgar universe for the incredibly rich one represented in the Stone. In Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet*, Devine, one of the men who kidnaps Ransom, thinks nothing of the different races that they find on Malacandra, nor of the absolutely interesting being they meet there, Oyarsa. Devine, like Reginald Montague, is totally dulled to the spiritual issues at hand. Great powers of Deep Heaven are about to act decisively in human affairs, and he, instead of joining or fighting those powers, is playing with golden baubles. In a note of sharp irony, Devine appears in *That Hideous Strength* as Lord Feverstone; the name is his definition.

This same greedy attempt to build a universe with themselves in the center may be seen in Gregory Persimmons and Simon Leclerc in Williams’ *War in Heaven* and *All Hallow’s Eve*. They are necromancers who try to subvert the patterns of the universe in order to gain spiritual dominance: Gregory Persimmons tries to use the Holy Grail to gain total control over a young boy, a usage contrary to the nature of the Grail; Simon Leclerc crowns his occult bid for power with the pronunciation of the spell of the reversed Tetragrammaton, a ritualistic un-saying of the name of God. Though these men seem more bizarre than the materialistic Montague or Feverstone, they too are trying to reign over the facts rather than submit to them.

Finally, in *The Lord of the Rings*, two beings as diverse as the learned wizard, Saruman, and the miserable cave-dweller, Gollum, try to use the One Ring violently to grasp power for themselves. They want that Ring so that, by its power, they may have Middle Earth their way. Saruman betrays the other wizards and the free peoples of Middle Earth by

repudiating his duty as a steward of the land to become an ally of Sauron. Gollum pursues the Ring wherever it goes, always hoping to clutch back “the precious” to himself. Saruman dreams of world domination, Gollum of petty revenge, but they both became the most pitiable and ridiculous characters in the tale.

But it is not only the wicked or power-crazed characters in the fiction of the Oxford mythmakers who try to build their own universes. Some ethically responsible persons show the same tendency because of their selfishness and folly. Here the writers’ thrusts come closest to home for the average reader. Not many would have the entire universe become their tool; more, perhaps, would have their wives, parents, or associates become so. In the views held by Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams, complacency and petty selfishness come in for quite as much criticism as megalomania.

This selfishness on the part of “moral” people is shown in the children’s stories of Tolkien and Lewis. The Shire, home of the hobbits, is a model of “domestic tranquility,” and, as such, it is good. It is the fitting home of comfortable merriment and physical satisfaction. But perspective is all-important, if one piece of the universe is to find its proper place. The Shire exists in a wider world, taking the domestic comfort of the Shire for the only world they will recognize. They refuse and despise the “adventures” brought by Gandalf. Adventures may be dangerous in the wide world beyond their ken and the hobbits are not interested in danger. C.S. Lewis gives an excellent picture of this same stubborn self-interest in *The Last Battle*. Shift the Ape has been masquerading Puzzle the Donkey, dressed in an ill-fitting lion’s skin, as Aslan. Aslan himself has not been seen in Narnia for a long time. Because of this many Narnians are deceived by Shift’s otherwise feeble masquerade. With the aid of the Calormenes, Narnia’s traditional enemies, Shift exploits for his own gains the loyalty of Narnians to the Lion. Many creatures are captured and enslaved “by Aslan’s orders,” among them a crew of Dwarfs. One night King Tirian and the English children, Jill Pole and Eustace Scrubb, rescue the Dwarfs from the Calormenes. They think that the Dwarfs, having been rescued from false rulers and a false Aslan, will gladly commit themselves to the old order of true Aslan and true king. But one of the Dwarfs says:

“I don’t think we want any more kings — if you *are* Tirian, which you don’t look like him — no more than we want any Aslans. We’re going to look after ourselves from now on and touch our caps to nobody. See?”

“That’s right,” said other Dwarfs. “We’re on our own now. No more Aslan, no more kings, no more silly stories about other worlds. The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs.”⁴²

Their suspicion is, perhaps, justifiable for a little while. But by permanently declaring a world in which “the Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs,” they are substituting their own “broken cistern” of a world for the “liv-

ing waters” of true order and hierarchy in the universe. At the end of the story many Narnians pass through the door of Puzzle’s stable only to find themselves in Aslan’s country. To those who had affirmed the facts of the world of Narnia — Aslan, king, love, food and drink — it is a paradise. But the Lion’s country appears to be only a stable to the Dwarfs. Even the glorious feast that Aslan gives seems only stable-fare. “They raised golden goblets of rich red wine to their lips and said, ‘Ugh! Fancy drinking dirty water out of a trough that a donkey’s been at! Never thought we’d come to this.’”⁴³ As Albany says in *King Lear*, “Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile: Filths savour but themselves” (IV, ii, 38-39). The Dwarfs have reached the self-imposed limits of their world; they do not believe it may be wider. In rejecting the world of Aslan they avoid not only his demands, but his rewards as well.

Lewis treats this same theme in *That Hideous Strength* and *Till We Have Faces*. Both Jane Studdock and Princess Orual try to build universes for themselves. Jane searches hard for a world of her own specifications. Those specifications are that she be respected, untouched, and, above all, undominated. She tries to hold “. . . that prim little grasp on her own destiny, that perpetual reservation, which she thought essential to her status as a grown-up, integrated, intelligent person.”⁴⁴ Orual’s case is similar. She defines how *she* will have Psyche. The relationship that they had had when Psyche was young and needed Orual like a mother has become her absolute value. It is a certain kind of love, but a patronizing kind that makes no room for Psyche ever to mature, for to please Orual she must always be dependent. Orual is as much pained by Psyche’s developing maturity and independence before her sacrificial marriage to Cupid as she is by the marriage itself. That development controverts the way Orual wants the world to be.

Damaris Tighe, the heroine of *The Place of the Lion* by Charles Williams, is very like Jane Studdock. The ultimate value of her world is attaining a Doctor of Philosophy degree for her studies in intellectual history. Damaris is ostensibly interested in Plato, in Abelard, and in her boy friend, Anthony Durrant. But in actuality Plato and Abelard are, for her, seldom more than entries to be collated on an index card. And though she likes Anthony, she puts off learning to love him until she has gotten her doctorate. The magazine for which Anthony works, had, at one point, published Damaris’ article, “Platonic Tradition at the Court of Charlemagne,” but her real topic is, as Anthony jokingly and accurately states, “Damaristic Tradition at the Court of Damaris.” In a perversion of the Renaissance doctrine, she has made herself “the measure of all things.” But she is not a microcosm of the greater world: to herself, she is the only cosmos there is. A lover may with some justification express such sentiments about the beloved, but when that love is self-love, as it is for Damaris, it is a heinous lie.

In the works of the Oxford mythmakers, by far the fullest portrayal of man’s attempt to “hew out cisterns” for himself comes in Charles

Williams's *Descent Into Hell*. Lawrence Wentworth is a prominent military historian living on Battle Hill, the scene of the entire novel. Wentworth desires two things: to best England's other leading military historian, Aston Moffatt, and to have as his mistress Adela Hunt, a young, rather foolish girl of the Hill. Both desires are denied him. Moffatt — not Wentworth — receives a rare honorary Knighthood for History, and Adela, who had been seeing Wentworth in a vaguely flirtatious manner, is taken over by a handsome and thoroughly conceited man. Wentworth's response to this frustration of his desires is to imagine and will for himself a new "Adela", a phantasmal succuba which is completely submissive to him. Because she is a creature of his own will, his desired universe, she is completely gratifying. But because she is not one of the facts of the real universe, she is completely empty, a trick. This "Adela" talks to Wentworth. "She was saying eagerly: 'Yes, yes, yes: better than Eve, dearer than Eve, closer than Eve. It's good for man to be alone. Come along, come along: farther in farther in: down under, down under.'"⁴⁵ This is Wentworth's subjective experience of what Williams objectively describes: "He sank into oblivion; he died to things other than himself; he woke to himself."⁴⁶ This turning inward into self is the descent into hell from which Williams derived his title for the novel; it is his definition of hell.

Myrtle Fox, a silly young woman in *Descent Into Hell*, inadvertently pronounces one of the major convictions of the Oxford mythmakers about the nature of the confrontation between man and the Good: the Good may seem terrible. In the first chapter there is a discussion among the residents of Battle Hill about how they will costume the Chorus in their production of the new pastoral by Peter Stanhope, a famous poet who also lives on the Hill. When Mrs. Parry, the producer, suggests that the Chorus be costumed as trees Miss Fox begins to rhapsodize on the comforts of Nature:

"Nature's so terribly good. Don't you think so, Mr. Stanhope?"

. . . He turned his head and answered, "That Nature is terribly good? Yes, Miss Fox. Do you mean 'terribly'?"

"Why certainly," Miss Fox said. "Terribly — dreadfully — very."

"Yes," Stanhope said again. "Very. . . but when I say 'terribly' I think I mean 'full of terror'. A dreadful goodness."

"I don't see how goodness can be dreadful," Miss Fox said, with a shade of resentment in her voice. "If things are good they're not terrifying, are they?"⁴⁷

This dialogue specifies the doctrine of the terrible Good which reverberates throughout the work of the Oxford mythmakers. They contend that when men are confronted with pure goodness — and especially those men who try to inhabit phantasmal, self-made universes — it comes to them as something terrible, that is, precisely, full of terror. Though this is neither the sole nor the ultimate word these writers had to say about the Good, an evaluation of the concept of the terrible Good

will lead deep into their thought.

The encounter with the Good is terrible to men because it comes as an invasion of their self-made universes. No matter how beneficial or even pleasant the eventual consequences of that invasion may be, man perceives correctly that the old order is doomed. This motif is found literally or metaphorically in works by all three writers.

As has been mentioned before, Tolkien's Gandalf invades the complacency of the Shire in *The Hobbit*, questioning conventions, unsettling the peace. He invades Bilbo's life in particular, bringing with him a boisterous crew of uninvited dwarfs to occupy Bilbo's house. They are representatives of that Good which eventually destroys Smaug the Dragon and recovers his vast hoard hidden under Lonely Mountain. But, like poltergeists, the intrusive dwarfs turn Bilbo's house topsy-turvy and, with it, his identity as a hobbit in the process. There is a similar invasion in Tolkien's allegorical "Leaf by Niggle." Niggle, like Bunyan's Christian, is a little man with a long journey to make. But, unlike Christian, Niggle does not think very often about his journey. He is a painter, and what time he can get free of Mr. Parish, a neighbor with a bothersome leaky roof, Niggle spends painting his one great landscape. He rushes to finish his painting before he must leave on his journey; it is the world of his choosing. But one day, when the work is far from done, the Inspector of Houses appears at Niggle's door. He wants to requisition Niggle's painting for canvas and wood to repair Parish's leaky roof. This is bad enough, but suddenly a second intruder appears:

Very like the Inspector he was, almost his double: tall dressed all in black. "Come along!" he said. "I am the Driver."

Niggle stumbled down from the ladder. . . "Driver?" he chattered. "Driver of what?"

"You and your carriage," said the man. . . You start today on your journey, you know."⁴⁸

The ultimate outcome of the intrusive journey is joyous: Niggle is made purgatorically clean and is put literally into the landscape which before he had only been able to paint. But the initial intrusion of the Driver into his studio remains the bleakest, most terrible moment of Niggle's life.

The motif of invasion by the Good is prominent in Lewis's fiction. How Princess Orual's and Jane Studdock's personal universes are invaded has already been shown. Cupid invades the relationship between Orual and Psyche. More important, Orual thinks that the god has invaded the place in Psyche's heart that was rightfully her own. In *That Hideous Strength*, Ransom is not the only invasion in Jane's life, for he is merely a representative of greater Powers, who are themselves the representatives of Maleldil. Late in the novel Ransom tells Jane something about herself and this invasion:

"Your trouble has been what the old poets called *Daungier*. We call it Pride. You are offended by the masculine itself: the loud, irruptive, possessive thing — the gold lion, the bearded bull —

which breaks through the hedges and scatters the little kingdom of your primness. . . What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it.”⁴⁹

In *Descent Into Hell*, Pauline Anstruther’s world is literally invaded by an image of herself, a doppelganger, whom she sometimes sees and whom she is terrified to meet. Pauline, the heroine of the novel, fears that if there is ever a face-to-face confrontation, she must either go mad or die. But her inexorable double will not leave her alone. Only when Peter Stanhope compacts with Pauline literally to carry her terror in her place is she finally enabled to meet the doppelganger. This is William’s doctrine of Substituted Love: all substitutions, he thought, participate in the Substitution of Calvary and thus bring some sort of salvation. But it is important to see that in salvation terror is not negated, still less it is comforted away; it is borne by another, and even this comes as a tremendous wrench to man’s self-made world.

All of *The Place of the Lion* by Williams is a giant metaphor for the concept of terrible invasion by the Good. In that difficult novel, the great Platonic Ideas — the Lion, the Snake, the Eagle, and others — actually gain entrance into England, that is, the Archetypes invade the ectypal world. These Energies begin to absorb back into themselves their ectypes. For instance, in the chapter “The Coming of the Butterflies,” Anthony Durrant watches thousands of butterflies being absorbed back into their Archetype. These Archetypes threaten by this act to pull the phenomenological world to its primordial shreds. The Ideas are utterly terrible and utterly fascinating. Dora Wilmot, a woman who eventually comes under the influence of one of the Archetypes, expresses well man’s reaction to the invasion. At a meeting of a group that had been discussing thought-forms, Dora suddenly catches sight of the Archetypical Snake, massive and coiling. She exclaims, “It’s too — o let’s get away.”⁵⁰ Her elliptical “It’s too — ” may be taken as a perfect epigrammatic expression of human terror in the face of invasion from Beyond. It *is* too — too big, too powerful, too blindingly pure and brilliant, too utterly different from men. This leads to a second reason why the Good is terrible to men.

The Good terrifies men not only because it comes as an invasion of their accustomed universes, but also because they perceive that invader, though good, to be utterly alien to themselves. It does not come as the Good they had expected. In philosophical language, it is the Other. In an essay on Charles Williams, Mary McDermott Shideler wrote,

“Many of us. . . have been visited by the irresistible sense of the Other, indescribable and heavy with ecstasy or dread, and by this invasion of our complacencies we have known, in astonishment, that we are confronting something or someone infinitely different from ourselves.”⁵¹

In *Descent Into Hell*, Pauline Anstruther senses this Otherness in Peter Stanhope’s verse play. That play, she thinks, is the work of a man who,

though he has not seen his own doppelganger, has contemplated the nature of a world in which such things can be and has infused that alien nature into his poetry. The speech that he had given to the part of the woodcutter's son particularly affected Pauline:

If only the woodcutter's son had not learned the language of the leaves while they burned in the fire! There was no doubt about that speech: the very smell and noise of the fire was in it, and the conviction of the alien song that broke out within the red flames. So perhaps the phoenix cried while it burned.⁵²

Ransom has this same sense of Otherness about the *eldila*, Princess Orual about Cupid, Damaris Tighe about the Archetypes. This alien Good brings in with it a new framework, a new design for the universe, as it were, to limited human understanding, a non-Euclidian geometry of goodness. After Peter Stanhope has expounded the doctrine of Substitution to Pauline, "a violent convulsion of the laws of the universe took place in her mind; if this [Substitution] was one of the laws, the universe might be better or worse, but it was certainly quite different from anything she had ever supposed it to be."⁵³ Kierkegaard defined dread as the apprehension of possibility; and this is the effect of the invasion by the alien Good: it throws all the doors wide open.

Nor is this goodness particularly to men's liking, even to those who had supposed they were of the Good's party. In his play, *The House of the Octopus*, Charles Williams has a character called the Flame, *Lingua Coeli*, say that ". . . heaven's kind of salvation [is] not at all to the mind / of any except the redeemed, and to theirs hardly."⁵⁴ Far from the soporific, undemanding peace that Myrtle Fox in *Descent Into Hell* imagines that she finds in Nature, this peace ". . . not only passes our understanding; it far overpasses what we anticipate or welcome."⁵⁵ Whatever else the peace brought by the invading Good may be, it is not — not at first, anyway — "days joined each to each by natural piety." The reaction of the narrator of *Perelandra* to meeting the Oyarsa of Malacandra in the hallway of Ransom's cottage exemplifies this notion:

I had no doubt at all that I was seeing an *eldil*, and little doubt that I was seeing the archon of Mars, the Oyarsa of Malacandra. . . all those doubts which I had felt before as to whether Ransom were a pioneer or a dupe, had for the moment vanished. My fear was now of another kind. I felt sure that the creatures were what we call "good", but I wasn't sure I liked "goodness" so much as I had supposed. This is a very terrible experience. . . Here at last was a bit of that world from beyond the world, which I had always supposed I had loved and desired, breaking through and appearing to my senses: and I didn't like it, I wanted it to go away. I wanted every possible distance, gulf, curtain, blanket, and barrier to be placed between it and me.⁵⁶

There is another component of the terrible Good besides invasion and Otherness: to use Tolkien's phrase, the Good is terrible to men because

it brings upon them, in all its clarity, “the doom of choice.” This Good drives men into unavoidable either/or positions; it eliminates all middle ground, destroys the neutral area between heaven and hell. Shideler wrote a dictum about Williams that also might be applied to Lewis and Tolkien: “Williams believed that we are free to accept or reject the Christian world view, but not to evade the choice, because evasion is equivalent to rejection.”⁵⁷ Each of the Oxford mythmakers believed, imaginatively as well as doctrinally, that there comes a time when the voice of the Good says to each man, “he who is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30). Choice is demanded.

There is an incident in *The Lord of the Rings* when Eomer, captain of the calvary of the kingdom of Rohan, meets Aragorn, rightful heir to the throne of Gondor, near Rohan. Each man is suspicious of the other. Aragorn demands that Eomer tell whether he is friend or foe of Sauron, the Dark Lord. Eomer replies that Rohan is neutral, “serving no foreign lord, good or evil.” In response, Aragorn awesomely unveils his kingly nature and purpose, demanding, “Will you aid me or thwart me? Choose swiftly!” Eomer, astonished, asks:

“What doom do you bring out of the North?”

“The doom of choice,” said Aragorn. “You may say this to Theoden, son of Thengel [King of Rohan]: open war lies before him, with Sauron or against him. None may live now as they have lived, and few shall keep what they call their own.”⁵⁸

In desperate times, Tolkien is saying, there is little room for hesitation, and none for neutrality.

In *That Hideous Strength*, Professor Dimble, one of Ransom’s company, remarks that the middle ground between the side of good and the side of evil is disappearing. The world seems to be polarizing — wheat and chaff, sheep and goats;

Good is always getting better and bad is always getting worse: the possibilities of even apparent neutrality are always diminishing.

The whole thing is sorting itself out all the time, coming to a point, getting sharper and harder. Like in the poem about Heaven and Hell eating into merry Middle Earth from opposite sides.⁵⁹

Choice-making is the dominant theme of Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*. In that story spirits from hell are brought on a “celestial omnibus” to heaven. They may choose whether they will remain there and give up their sin or keep it up and return to hell. Each soul is permitted either, and each soul is capable of both. If the spirits choose heaven, no matter how uncomfortable giving up their sin and facing a new reality may be, all their life, viewed in retrospect, will have been heavenly; if they choose hell, no matter how finely or pleasurably they have lived, it will *all* have been hellish. Choice, in Lewis, is retroactive. The terrible decision stands for all time.

“The doom of choice” is also to be found in Charles Williams’s work. Pauline Anstruther must choose between the world as Peter Stanhope

presents it — a world of Substitution and Exchange — and the world as presented by her fear of the doppelganger. Objecting to the doctrine of Substitution, Pauline says, “Would I push my burden on to anybody else?”

“Not if you insist on making a universe for yourself,” Stanhope answered. “If you want to disobey and refuse the laws that are common to us all, if you want to live in pride and division and anger, you can. But if you will be a part of the best of us, and live and laugh and be ashamed with us, then you must be content to be helped.”⁶⁰

In *All Hallows' Eve*, Williams shows the consequences of choice by contrasting the responses of the two dead women, Lester Furnival and Evelyn Mercer, to the City in which they find themselves. Lester chooses the path of shame, forgiveness, and reconciliation. There is a young girl, Betty Wallingford, toward whom Lester had been coolly patronizing. When Betty is sent into the City of the dead by Simon Leclerc, the necromancer, Lester is able to follow her back into the world of the living and to confess to her that old pride and negligence. Later, she substitutes herself for Betty to bear Leclerc's magical conjurations. Evelyn, on the other hand, chooses hatred, fear, and despair. She babbles incessantly in order not to have to face the awful silence of the City. She hates and despises Betty, wanting to destroy her. She even turns on Lester, her only friend. The City's terrible finality solemnizes choice: Lester becomes a vibrant, radiant woman's soul, Evelyn becomes worse than a grumbler; she becomes a grumble. Williams thought that man's ultimate choice is whether he will know all that is as good — or evil. In his play, *The Death of Good Fortune*, Mary, a character representing Wisdom, says:

And you, great ones, you must always make your choice, or always, at least, know that the choice exists — all luck is good — or not; even when the ninth step is nine times as difficult as the first.⁶¹

Similarly, Lewis says that ultimately all of life will be seen to have been either heaven or hell, and that the outcome rests upon the choice of each individual soul. This infinitely alien Good, once it has invaded a man's life, must either become his all in all, or else there will be for him no good at all.

“The doom of choice” brings with itself one further terror: the Good is terrible to men not only because it demands a choice, but also because it demands that further reponse be made on the basis of that choice. To choose costs, and it may hurt as well. In *The Last Battle* mere choosing is not enough to satisfy Aslan. The Lion calls those who would follow him not only to pass through the door of Puzzle's stable, but to come “further up and further in” into his country, always extending the motion of their choosing. And in *The Great Divorce* the saints are always progressing toward the mountains where they will meet the Good which is their “fountain of living waters.”

Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is dominated by images of sacrifice and of the quest. Frodo Baggin's choice to align himself actively with Gandalf and the Company of the Good is barely a beginning. Frodo is compelled by duty and necessity, once the quest has been accepted, to see the task through to the end, to cast the Ring, his treasure and burden, into the Cracks of Doom. Though choosing the Good lays the task upon Frodo, that quest itself is a flight into the stronghold of evil — a descent into hell — on a road as narrow and tenuous as a spider's strand. It is a bleak and, seemingly, a bootless act. Frodo asks at the beginning to *The Lord of the Rings*, "For where am I to go? And by what shall I steer? What is to be my quest? Bilbo went to find a treasure, there and back again; but I go to lose one, and not return, as far as I can see."⁶⁴ He is right; his quest is not a pursuit of a treasure, a beatific goodness — that comes later — but a desperate and costly struggle to foil an Enemy who seeks to take away the common goodness that makes life worth living now. As it was with Ransom, so Frodo is not unscathed when his quest is fulfilled. Wounded by the sword of a Black Rider, missing a finger by the treachery of Gollum, and, most of all, utterly wearied by the long-borne burden of the Ring, Frodo must leave Middle Earth to find healing in the land of the Valar. When Sam, Frodo's servant, learns that his master must go away he says:

"I thought you were going to enjoy the Shire, too, for years and years, after all you have done."

"So I thought too, once," Frodo said. "But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them."⁶⁵

This is the price of fulfilling the choice for Frodo, a terrible Good.

A similar idea of choice extended and fulfilled in sacrifice appears in Williams's *Many Dimensions*. The appearance of the Stone of Solomon and the proliferation of fragments of it, hewed by greedy hands, brings England to a diplomatic, moral, and spiritual crisis. Though good in itself, the Stone incites avarice. To put a stop to these ill effects a great burden is laid upon Chloe Burnett, one person who responds to the Stone with submission rather than greed: she must sacrifice herself, give herself up to the Stone as a willing channel for its reunification and departure from this world. Chloe succeeds gloriously in the task. The types of the Stone return into the One, the One then passes through the resigned pathway of Chloe's soul and disappears into the realm from which it first came. But Chloe's success costs her her life. Ultimately, perhaps, that loss is not great, "not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed" (Romans 8:18), but it is real loss while it lasts. If, as Williams implies, there lies for her a greater beatitude ahead, it is equally true that the common beatitude which is on the hither side of death is irretrievably gone.

Though the concept of the Joy of the Good is the hub out from which

radiate all the rest of their imaginative attitudes and thought, it would not be possible to trace the theme fully in a paper of this format. Instead, each writer's major and most productive metaphor for the Joy of the Good will be outlined to show how they variously conceived of the "fountain of living waters" at the back of things.

Tolkien's concept of the Joy of the Good is well expressed in his idea of the Consolation of the Happy Ending. The exposition of this idea comes in his important essay, "On Fairy-Stories," that, together with "Leaf by Niggle," comprised the volume called *Tree and Leaf*. In trying to define the best effect of fairy-stories, Tolkien posits that it is just the opposite effect of tragic drama. For this effect of fairy-stories he coins the term *eucatastrophe*, literally, "a sudden turn for the good."

The consolation of fairy-stories, the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale): this joy, which is one of the things that fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially "escapist" nor "fugitive." In its fairy-tale — or otherworld — setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.⁶⁷ This analysis is suggestively similar to the doctrine of the terrible Good. But here Tolkien's emphasis is not on the overturning, but on the bliss, not on the adjective, but on the substantive.

Tolkien gives examples of *eucatastrophe* in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. After Smaug the Dragon is slain in *The Hobbit*, a great battle breaks out over his treasure between the free races — men, elves, dwarfs, and one hobbit — on the one side and the servants of Sauron — goblins, orcs, and ferocious, wolf-like wargs — on the other. The battle goes very badly for the free races. They begin to be clutched by despair. "‘It will not be long now,’ thought Bilbo, ‘before the goblins win the Gate, and we are all slaughtered or driven down and captured. Really it is enough to make one weep, after all one has gone through.’"⁶⁸ But just when all seems lost, Bilbo catches sight of great squadrons of Eagles winging down from the North to aid the free races; salvation breaks through in an instant. The servants of Sauron, against all hope, are routed. The Eagles continue to be harbingers of *eucatastrophe* in *The Lord of the Rings*. They appear at the battle for Minas Tirith, the capital of Gondor, bringing hope to the free armies just when they are about to fall before the assault of Sauron's forces. After the Ring has fallen into the subterranean fires of Mount Doom it erupts and literally comes to pieces about the heads of Frodo and Sam. Their death seems inevitable. But just as they fall down to die, Gwaihir, Lord of the Eagles, swoops down and, again against all hope, bears the hobbits off to safe-

ty. Frodo and Sam are saved.⁶⁹

Still deeper consolation follows in Tolkien's concept of the Happy Ending. Reunited with Gandalf, Aragorn, and the other friends of the quest after the fall of Mount Doom, Frodo and Sam hear the great poetry of the lay of "Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom":

And all the host laughed and wept, in the midst of their merriment and tears the clear voice of the minstrel rose like silver and gold. . . until their hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness.⁷⁰

Plato held that Good is ". . . the divine — that is, the perfect — bond . . . which unites unlike and opposed parts of virtue (Politicus, 316a)."⁷¹ This is the precise effect of Tolkien's Happy Ending: it opens our vision — often without warning, like a thief in the night — out onto the great marriage and unity of contrarities in the Good. In Tolkien's understanding this comes as deep consolation for deep wounds.

No single term quite defines Charles William's apprehension of the Joy of the Good. For him that Beatitude was one of communal and communicated glory (Substitution, Exchange, Co-inherence) shared among individuals in some finely structured pattern of organization (the City, the Empire). Similar to St. Paul's description of the church as Christ's body, William's concept is organic: individuals are to express their own functions while participating vicariously or actually in the functions of all other members. For example, the ascetic, whose native motion is the denial of images of the Good, participates in the affirmation of images characteristic of the romantic; and the romantic, in turn, shares in the ascetic's motion of denial. This interdependence is shown in "Bors to Elayne; on the King's Coins," a poem in William's Arthurian cycle:

. . . this abides —
that the everlasting house the soul discovers is always another's;
we must lose our own ends; we must always live in the habitation
of our lovers, my friends shelter for me, mine for him.

.....
for the wealth of the self is the health of the self exchanged. What
saith Heracleitus? — and what is the City's breath? " — dying each
other's life, living each other's death."⁷²

In "The Vision of the Empire," another poem in William's Arthurian cycle, Byzantium becomes a symbol for the structure of the Joy of the Good. All the Empire's provinces, in turn, are imaged as parts of a body:

The organic body sang together;
the Acts of identity adored their Lord;
the song sprang and rang in Byzantium.

O you shoulders, elbows, wrists,
bless him, praise him, magnify him forever;

you fittings of thumbs and fingers,
bless ye the Lord;
sockets and balls in knees and ankles,
bless ye the Lord;
hips, thighs, spine in its multiples,
bless him, praise him, magnify him forever.⁷³

This conveys William's understanding of the Joy of the Good in liturgical language. But the same Joy is a theme in works without that accent: Pauline Anstruther in *Descent Into Hell* finds it in the doctrine of Substituted Love; Lester Furnival in *All Hallow's Eve* finds it in the City where she is permitted, though dead, to participate redemptively among the living; Chloe Burnett in *Many Dimensions* finds it in submission and sacrifice to the Way of the Stone. Williams's concept of the Joy of communicated Good among the organic body of mankind was constant.

Joy is the key term in C.S. Lewis's creative vocabulary, as it was a key term in his own life; the artist and the man coalesced. In his autobiographical *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes what sort of experience Joy, in his definition, is:

It is that of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction . . . it must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is a kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is.⁷⁴

This is Joy in the aspect of seemingly unquenchable longing. It shares with Tolkien's description of the consolation of the Happy Ending a transcendence of normal categories of pleasure and pain.

Psyche has intimations of the Joy in *Till We Have Faces*. During her last interview with Orual before she is sacrificed, Psyche confesses that she has always longed for death. Orual uses this to blame Psyche for not loving and not wanting to remain with her own sister. She thinks that by "longing for death," Psyche means a morbid longing for annihilation, a hiatus of all these tiresome relationships, but Psyche responds:

No, no, no. . . You don't understand. Not that kind of longing. It was when I was happiest that I longed most. It was on happy days when we were up there on the hills. . . with the wind and the sunshine. . . where you couldn't see Glome Of the palace. Do you remember? The colour and the smell, and looking across at the Grey Mountain in the distance? And because it was so beautiful, it set me longing, always longing. Somewhere else there must be more of it. Everything seemed to be saying, Psyche, come! But

I couldn't (not yet) come and I didn't know where I was to come to. It almost hurt me. I felt like a bird in a cage when the other birds are flying home.⁷⁵

As a child Psyche had imagined the wonderful palace that a great king would build for her on the Grey Mountain, Cupid's mountain. Now, however, she begins to intuit that there was more than mere childish fancy in those fantasies:

The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing — to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from . . . my country, the place where I ought to have been born. Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longing? The longing for home? For indeed it feels not like going, but like going back. All my life the god of the Mountain has been wooing me. . . I am going to my lover.⁷⁶

There is no reason, *a priori*, why Psyche's longing Joy should be fulfilled by Cupid. He might as easily be the cruel, horrible Shadowbrute as the radiant god of the Mountain. Joy might be a longing for a non-existent Good, a false step, a misleading clue. But, in fact, Psyche's intimations and longings are justified in the novel. Cupid, Good Himself in the context of the story, is the true object and fulfillment of her Joy. Psyche finds her god, her lover, and her palace.

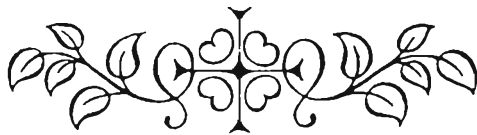
The notion of the fulfillment of longing Joy is also apparent in *The Last Battle*. As the creatures in the story progress "further up and further in" into Aslan's country, they begin to realize that they are in a country exceedingly like Narnia, except that this Narnia somehow seems more real. They are befuddled, however, because they had seen Aslan unmake Narnia. How could it still be? Digory, the first boy ever to reach Narnia, resolves their quandary. He says that the old Narnia, ". . . was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here."⁷⁷ Reaching this real place, this home, is, for Lewis, the Joy of the Good in all its fulness. Jewel the Unicorn expresses this Joy with certainty:

I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Bree-hee-hee! Come further up, further in!⁷⁸

As is true of Tolkien's concept of the Happy Ending, Lewis's concept of Joy is a doctrine of consolation. Joy is a thirst; it was made to be quenched and, Lewis says, it shall be quenched. Additionally, it should be underscored that the real Narnia — the locale of Joy — does not belong to a nameless land; it exists in *Aslan's* country. The Good is, for Lewis, and for Tolkien and Williams, a Person, and goodness is that to which He has given His own name.

Thus it has been shown that as in Plato's philosophy and in orthodox

Christianity, so in the fiction of the Oxford mythmakers the idea of the Good plays an absolutely central role. Moreover, it may be seen that duality runs throughout the various artistic expressions which they gave to the idea of the Good. When Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams approach the Good in its own quality by portraying characters of great goodness, supernatural or otherwise, this duality is expressed as beauty united with dreadfulness, severity with largesse. When that Good impinges upon human life, the duality is seen in the terror and joy with which men respond to its touch. Finally, it may be seen that for the Oxford mythmakers the Good was not a two-pronged abstraction — not merely an ultimate Value — but something personal, alive, and active. This is where their thinking about the Good shows most clearly the influence of Christianity: Lewis and Tolkien frequently embodied this personal Good in a representative, a Gandalf or an Aslan, while Williams tended to show that Good as a Life shared among the members of a redeemed company; but either approach is consonant with Christianity, since the Church has always taught that Christ is as equally present in the community of believers as he was in the flesh. The concept of a personal Good, containing and uniting dualities within a single nature, links together the works of the Oxford mythmakers artistically and thematically. That concept would seem to be one of the most important things to recognize in their fiction.



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Endnotes

¹ Raphael Demos, *The Philosophy of Plato* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), p. 77.

² Anne Ridler, ed., *The Image of the City*, by Charles Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. xliv.

³ Many names have been suggested for the collective body of writers in the Christian tradition during these years at Oxford — the Oxford group, the Oxford Christians, Christian Romantics. The literary discussion group to which Lewis and Tolkien belonged was called “The Inklings”. The name “Oxford mythmakers” was suggested by Marjorie Evelyn Wright in “The Vision of Cosmic Order in the Oxford Mythmakers,” in the Festschrift, *Imagination and the Spirit*, ed. Charles Huttar (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Willaim B. Eerdman Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 259-76. The name seems just, considering the mythic quality of many of their works and the strong interest each man had in the relationship of myth and Christian truth.

⁴ See Lewis’s chronology of Narnian history reprinted in Walter Hooper’s “Past Watchful Dragons,” in *Imagination and the Spirit*, pp. 298-301.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1970), p. 123. This and all subsequent references to books in *The Chronicles of Narnia* will be to the pagination of the widely-distributed Collier paperback editions.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1940), pp. 4-5.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* (1952; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1970), p. 88.

⁸ Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, p. 125.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161. One is reminded in this contest (as Lewis himself must certainly have been reminded) of Amos 1:2 — "The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers."

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (1954; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1970), pp. 192-93.

¹¹ C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (1951; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1970), p. 209.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹⁴ Lewis, *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*, p. 215.

¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (1953; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1970), p. 17.

¹⁶ Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, pp. 159-60.

¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (1955; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1970) p. 99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (1956; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1970), p. 164.

²⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956), p. 113.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

²³ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, pp. 172-73.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

²⁵ Maleldil's positional counterpart in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is Aslan, but his role in the space trilogy is far less active than the Lion's in those stories.

²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938; rpt. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 119. This and all subsequent references to books within the space trilogy will be to the page numbers in the Macmillan paperback editions.

²⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (1943; rpt. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁹ C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (1945; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 142.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

³¹ In the foreward to the Ballantine paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien wrote, "I cordially dislike allegory in all of its manifestations and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence" (p. xi). In a letter dated December 29, 1958, Lewis wrote, "If Aslan represented the immaterial Deity in the same way in which Giant Despair represents Despair, he would be an allegorical figure. In reality, however, he is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, 'What might Christ become like if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in *that* world as He actually has done in ours?' This is not allegory at all. So in *Perelandra*." W.H. Lewis, ed., *Letters of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966), p. 283. However, Lewis wrote *The Pilgrim's Regress* and Tolkien wrote "Leaf by Niggle," both allegories.

³² John Warwick Montgomery, *et al.*, *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974), p. 29. Montgomery also includes G.K. Chesterton in his schema as one who writes "theological novels as apologetic for the irresistibility of orthodoxy."

³⁴ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, III, p. 244.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 86.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 466.

³⁷ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, II, pp. 124-25. Compare with the description of Christ in the Revelation of John: "In the midst of the lamp-stands [stood] one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength" (Revelation 1:13-16).

³⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (1937; rpt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), pp. 17-18. This and all subsequent references to *The Hobbit* will be to page numbers in the American paperback edition by Ballantine Books.

³⁹ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, I, p. 60.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, III, p. 34,

⁴¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1946), pp. 108-09.

⁴² Lewis, *The Last Battle*, p. 73.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴⁴ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, p. 151.

⁴⁵ Charles Williams, *Descent Into Hell* (1937; rpt. in paperback from the 1949 edition by Pelligrini & Cudahy, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p. 86.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Tolkien Reader* (1963, rpt. from *Tree and Leaf*, New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1966), pp. 95-96.

⁴⁹

⁵⁰ Charles Williams, *The Place of the Lion* (1931; rpt. from the 1950 edition by Pelligrini & Cudahy, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p. 33.

⁵¹ Mary McDermott Shideler, *Charles Williams*, in the series *Con-*

temporary Writers in Christian Perspective, ed. Roderick Jellema (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 13.

⁵² Williams, *Descent Into Hell*, p. 94.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵⁴ Charles Williams, *Collected Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 250.

⁵⁵ Shideler, *Charles Williams*, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Perelandra*, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Shideler, *Charles Williams*, p. 44.

⁵⁸ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, II, pp. 43-44.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, pp. 293-84.

⁶⁰ Williams, *Descent Into Hell*, p. 99.

⁶¹ Williams, *Collected Plays*, p. 194.

⁶² Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, I, p. 100.

⁶³ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, III, p. 382.

⁶⁴ Tolkien, *The Tolkien Reader*, p. 68.

⁶⁵ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 270.

⁶⁶ In the epilogue to "On Fairy-Stories" Tolkien suggests that the *eucatastrophe* of "primary," that is, actual history lies in the story of the Incarnation, and that the *eucatastrophe* of that particular story comes at the Resurrection. "But this is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men — and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused" (*The Tolkien Reader*, p. 72). This declaration shows that, for Tolkien, the terror or joy of the Good was not only an artistic doctrine, but a primary truth.

⁶⁷ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, III, p. 286.

⁶⁸ Demos, *The Philosophy of Plato*, p. 54.

⁷² Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis, *Taliessin Through Logres: The Region of the Summer Stars: Arthurian Torso* (1938, 1944, and 1948 respectively; rpt. in one volume Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 62, 63.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁷⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1955), pp. 17-18).

⁷⁵ Lewis, *Till We Have Face*, p. 74.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

⁷⁷ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, p. 169.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.