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## How Much Does *That Hideous Strength* Owe to Charles Williams?

CHARLES A. HUTTAR

The reappearance of Elwin Ransom in *That Hideous Strength* in 1945, seven years after he first walked into C. S. Lewis' fictional world in *Out of the Silent Planet*, alerted readers to the development in the author's mind, over that period, of his myth of cosmic warfare. That myth, together with the presence of Ransom as protagonist, made it reasonable to speak of the three novels (with *Perelandra* in between in 1943) as a trilogy, although it appears that Lewis did not at the outset foresee that the first book would have two sequels.<sup>1</sup> Several elements in the last of the three show Lewis' care to tie the series together,<sup>2</sup> but there were striking differences. *That Hideous*

<sup>1</sup> His immediate object in writing *Out of the Silent Planet*, besides fulfilling a promise he made to Tolkien, was to expose the evils of schemes of planetary colonization currently being promoted (Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends* [Boston, 1979], 65-6). See also C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, ed. by Walter Hooper, 3 vols. (New York, 2004-7 [hereafter *CL*]), 2:236, 255, 262, 594. Then, five years later, Lewis took Ransom on another voyage in space for a final encounter with one of the two villains in his first tale, Professor Weston. In the third novel the other villain is a prominent character who, now elevated to the peerage as Lord Feverstone, surmises what happened to Weston and puts his own spin on it—"murdered" (C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-tale for Grown-ups* [New York, 1946 (hereafter *THS* with page and chapter /section numbers)], 36; 2.1).

<sup>2</sup> From a long conversation with Ransom near the end of the first novel, the Oyarsa of Malacandra learns that the Bent Eldil's mastery of Thulcandra is not so complete as he had thought; a counter-insurgency is going on, involving even some of his own angelic colleagues (C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* [New York, 1965],

*Strength* is set in provincial England rather than out on the planets; it has a more complex plot, with two threads running concurrently in interspersed scenes and intertwined to a degree, finally coming together only at the end. In addition, there have been some remarkable developments in the protagonist's personality.

Considering these differences, it seems natural to ask whether Lewis' friendship with Charles Williams, eight years or so in duration, contributed, either consciously or not, to the making of the novel. Lewis famously deplored critics' speculating about such matters. He reported observing, with respect to his own books, that critics' guesses, however plausible they might seem, were often wide of the mark. As a literary historian with a considerable range of reading, he knew that resemblances a reader might casually take to indicate direct influence, even (to use a stronger term) derivation, could instead reflect a common debt to a larger tradition that was no longer well known, or to ideas and expressions that were in the air at a particular time, things that once went without saying and therefore left little documentation. There can be, he knew, instances of demonstrable influence. There are others in which a good case may be made, though lacking complete proof; critical arguments then must rely on factual support, sound judgment, precise definition as opposed to generalization, and, often, a reasonable degree of modesty in the claims made.

What do we mean by "influence"? Diana Glyer in *The Company They Keep*—"they" being the Inklings—has distinguished several kinds of influence and thus provides a useful overview of the question.<sup>3</sup> We are not

142); before, the Oyarsa had known only rumors of such matters (122). The journey to Mars in the first novel, initiated by men as unwitting servants of the Enemy, has not merely broken the barricade designed to confine the rebellion to Earth but also—an unforeseen consequence—made possible a two-way traffic that Maleldil had forgone. The title of chapter 13 of *THS*, "They Have Pulled Down Deep Heaven on Their Heads," calls attention to the irony (see especially pages 342-3, 346), as the great Powers from the other planets are enabled to enter through this breach. To Ransom's wound from the Un-man's bite on Perelandra, still bleeding when he returns to Earth (C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra: A Novel* [New York, 1962], 30), attention is called several times in the next novel, and his experience of "war" in Venus, together with certain knowledge gained there, establishes his authority to command the magician Merlin (*THS*, 321-2; 13.1).

<sup>3</sup>Diana Glyer, *The Company They Keep: C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien as Writers in Community* (Kent, Ohio, 2007). See especially her chapter "Influence: Assessing Impact" (27-45), which draws on broader studies in the sociology of writing communities.

now concerned with the flow of ideas from one mind to another through reading, or reciprocally in conversation, either of which may contribute to shaping a person's worldview. Lewis himself freely acknowledged having learned many important truths from both predecessors and contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> To "tell the truth as you see it"<sup>5</sup> was more important to him than being considered original. His friendship with Williams undoubtedly informed, or at least reinforced, some themes that are prominent in *That Hideous Strength*,<sup>6</sup> and that is part of what was meant by calling it, hyperbolically, "a Charles Williams novel written by C. S. Lewis."<sup>7</sup> But for present purposes, "influence" is defined more narrowly.

I do not intend here anything so ambitious as a comprehensive study of the question posed by my title. My purpose in this essay is threefold: in the first section, to augment the case that has been made for one debt to Williams; in the second, to narrow down the demonstrable range of Williams' influence in another area, that of the Arthurian material in *That Hideous Strength*; and finally, to point out a commonality in their theory of history that can probably not, however, be considered an instance of one-way influence, but rather an agreement that reflects their shared Christian worldview. That third study will lead to observations on the genre of fantasy in which they both worked.

<sup>4</sup>When asked in 1962 to list books that had "most" helped to shape his "vocational attitude and . . . philosophy of life," Lewis named ten (including a Williams novel), about evenly divided between philosophy and literature (Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* [New York, 1996], 752). Other names come quickly to mind, for example those of St. Augustine, Dante, Spenser, Milton, and in his own time Samuel Alexander, Edwyn Bevan, Owen Barfield, and J. R. R. Tolkien, but these are only the start of a long list, to whom a few specific debts in Lewis' writings can be identified, but whose deeper influence is incalculable.

<sup>5</sup>"Membership" (1945), in C. S. Lewis, *Fern-Seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*, ed. by Walter Hooper (London, 1975), 25.

<sup>6</sup>Corbin S. Carnell, "The Friendship of C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams: Its Felicity, Small Tensions, and Literary Benefits," in *Charles Williams Society Newsletter*, no. 34 (Summer 1984), 14-15, mentions the ideas of (to use Williams' labels) Coinherence, Substitution, Exchange, and the City, illustrated for example in the St. Anne's community and elucidated by Lewis in his "Williams and the Arthurian," in *Arthurian Torso*, ed. by C. S. Lewis (London, 1948 [hereafter *Torso*]), 143.

<sup>7</sup>Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York and London, 1974) reported this description, adding that it "is, of course, a wild exaggeration" (174).

There are other ways readers have (or believed they had) detected the presence of Williams in or behind the novel. Further investigation of these possibilities will not concern us here, but they deserve to be mentioned: Lewis' choice of genre, the portrayal of Ransom, the name of Bracton College and its focus on legal studies, the explanations about different kinds of magic, and explicit verbal allusions. As Charles Moorman has pointed out, Lewis' use of Arthurian myth in a work critical of modern culture links him not only with Charles Williams but also with T. S. Eliot.<sup>8</sup> To this list may be added the idea—embodied in Andrew MacPhee as an integral part of the St. Anne's community—that healthy doubt has a positive role in Christian practice. No doubt MacPhee represents Lewis' homage to his tutor, the freethinker William Kirkpatrick, who made a formidable logician of him, but MacPhee's role in "Logres" may also reflect Charles Williams' outspoken regard for the value of honest and bold doubt.<sup>9</sup>

### *Damaris and Jane*

The audience that St. Paul addressed in the public square of Athens consisted largely of dilettante intellectuals who "had an obsession for any novelty and would spend their whole time talking about or listening to anything new" (Acts 17:21).<sup>10</sup> This quality of noncommittal curiosity-

<sup>8</sup> Choice of genre: Green and Hooper, *Biography*, 175; Sanford Schwartz, *C. S. Lewis on the Final Frontier: Science and the Supernatural in the Space Trilogy* (New York, 2009), 18, 92-3, 96, 183 note 5. Portrayal of Ransom: David C. Downing, *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy* (Amherst, Massachusetts, 1992), 132-3; Glycer, *Company*, 172. Bracton College: Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, Ohio, 1994), 89. Magic: Clyde S. Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, 1964), 112. Verbal allusions: Downing, *Planets*, 132. Another verbal allusion to Williams must also be noted, Ransom's quotation from "one of the modern authors" (*THS*, 443; 17.4). Links with Eliot: Charles Moorman, *Arthurian Triptych: Mythic Materials in Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and T. S. Eliot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960), 152-3. For an excellent summary concerning Lewis' relationship to Williams as it may have affected his writing, see George Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times* (San Francisco, 1988), 176-9, 184, as well as Carnell, "Friendship?"

<sup>9</sup> See Charles Williams, *He Came Down from Heaven* (1938; Grand Rapids, 1984), 33, concerning the example of Job. See also Alice Mary Hadfield, *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work* (New York and Oxford, 1983), 35-6; Glen Cavaliero, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1983), 19-20; and the reference to Voltaire on page 44 below.

<sup>10</sup> I quote from the paraphrase of Lewis' friend J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English: Student Edition* (New York, 1966). For the first installment of Phillips'

seeking characterized "all the Athenians," according to St. Luke's account, even the "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" who had heard Paul preaching of "Jesus" and "Anastasis" (the resurrection) and, taking these to be names of "outlandish" new gods, "strange to our ears," invited Paul to come to their gathering and tell them more (verses 18-20). Paul, ready to seize the opportunity, proceeded in quite sophisticated rhetorical fashion to use familiar elements of Hellenic culture, their shrine "TO GOD THE UNKNOWN" and the sayings of their own poets (verses 23, 28), as a springboard for proclaiming the gospel. The response was mixed. Some laughed, others invited him to return and tell them more, and there were a few converts: among them a member of the council, the Areopagus, named Dionysius and a woman named Damaris. We are told no more of those two, but it is evident that in making this commitment they ceased to be typically disengaged leisure-class Athenians.

Five centuries later, a Christian mystic who was versed in neo-Platonism began publishing in Greek, under the pseudonym "Dionysius the Areopagite," theological treatises that came to be highly regarded parts of the patristic heritage in both East and West. Fast forward another fourteen centuries to Charles Williams' novel *The Place of the Lion* (1933). In the second chapter, a woman named Damaris who is writing a doctoral thesis in medieval philosophy is invited to give a talk to a local "study circle" that meets monthly to receive "instruction . . . about thought-forms or something similar." The vagueness of this expression leaves Damaris wondering what she might possibly have to offer "these absurd creatures" with "their fantastic religion."<sup>11</sup> The group in fact consists of two or three adepts in a sort of latter-day Gnosticism based on a heretical variation on the Dionysian teachings, one genuine seeker who will conclude that this philosophy is not what he is looking for, and some society ladies given to fashionable pursuits with an intellectual veneer who "liked their religion taken mild—a pious hope, a devout ejaculation, a general sympathetic sense of a kindly universe."<sup>12</sup> In short, there are marked affinities between this

version, *Letters to Young Churches* (London, 1947), Lewis wrote an introduction (reprinted as "Modern Translations of the Bible" in C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. by Walter Hooper [Grand Rapids, 1970], 229-33).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Williams, *The Place of the Lion* (Grand Rapids, 1972), 20-1.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, *Place*, 74. There is a nice irony in Mrs. Rockbotham's suggestion that

study group and St. Paul's Athenian audience. Damaris Tighe, despite her supercilious attitude toward them<sup>13</sup>—she considers herself to be engaged rather in serious academic work—has much in common with them. Her doctoral work is serious only in the sense that she hopes it will advance her career. Finding textual parallels between Pythagoras and Abelard, or between Neoplatonic philosophers and the Christian commentators on Dionysius, is largely a “game” with words that she is “playing” (and even there, she does not insist on being accurate);<sup>14</sup> it does not occur to her that the things they write about might be real. She can lecture her father on Plato's doctrine of beauty, but that he should be “thrilled” by the beauty of butterflies she cannot comprehend.<sup>15</sup> She has “read a good deal about salvation . . . in all those tiresome texts” but can't see that the idea applies to her: “salvation . . . from what, I should like to know?” Only when one of the Ideas she studies takes physical form in a terrifying way and attacks her does she acknowledge her own need and cry out to be “save[d].”<sup>16</sup> Her “conversion” means a turning from the constricted world of her self-centeredness, her resentment at being “fretted” by others and her habit of using others instead of genuinely relating to them. In a burst of new

Damaris lecture on Plato because “Mr. Berringer told us that Plato wrote a good deal about ideas” (*Place*, 23)—a word she is using in the colloquial sense, not the philosophical; her learning has gone only so far. She clearly does not understand Damaris' title, “The *Eidola* [that is, sensory manifestations of Plato's Ideas] and the *Angeli*”; in her introduction of the evening's speaker it becomes “The Idler and the Angels” (30)—which may remind us again of the leisured Athenians.

<sup>13</sup> “What a curious collection! And I don't suppose any of them know anything. A warm consciousness of her own acquaintance with Abelard and Pythagoras stirred in her mind” (Williams, *Place*, 28).

<sup>14</sup> Williams, *Place*, 73. Accuracy in translation is not of paramount importance to her (19, 103). Williams will pick up this theme again in his portrayal of Lawrence Wentworth in *Descent into Hell*.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, *Place*, 25-6. Robert Gage comments on this scene in the context of his personal experience of the tension between abstract doctrine and “the sense of a tremendous Power and Glory undergirding every aspect of everyday reality” (“Ambiguous Reality: Science, Religion, and the Novels of Charles Williams,” in *Charles Williams Society Newsletter* no. 77 [Spring 1995], 7). In a later scene Mr. Tighe's barely articulate response to his mystical experience—“O glory everlasting! . . . I always knew they were real, but to think I should see them” (*Place*, 43)—affirms his knowledge of truths gained without “long intellectual training,” which therefore his daughter regards as “too silly” (26), even though they accord with Plato's teachings.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, *Place*, 37, 35, 133.

insight, she realizes that the academic trivia that have occupied her are less important than what philosophy meant to Plato and Abelard, “the love of wisdom”; and now it is more urgent still to act—becoming reconciled to her father, finding and rescuing Quentin from mortal danger and caring for him as he recovers. In those acts, she transforms from a student of philosophy into a philosopher.<sup>17</sup>

The leading female character in *That Hideous Strength*, Jane Studdock, is also working on a doctoral thesis, though sporadically. Like Damaris Tighe, she has ambitions for a scholarly career, with “notebooks and editions” (*THS*, 2) that must be brought into order in pursuit of that goal. But like Damaris, she finds herself manipulated into situations that lead to bizarre events she does not understand, and she resents their intrusion on her life. Repeatedly in the first few chapters, she puts up strong resistance to being “drawn in”: “I want to lead an ordinary life. I want to do my own work. It's unbearable! Why should I be selected for this horrible thing?” In the third section, we will explore the significance of Jane's word “selected.”<sup>18</sup> For now, we note that, like Damaris, she has isolated herself from important aspects of real life, including genuine relationships with other people and thus with her own self. She dwells in a kind of wasteland. What to her are intrusive events will prove in the long run to have a healing effect through a conversion experience that brings a greater wholeness.

It would be far too simple, however, to call Damaris a model for Lewis' character. If there are striking similarities, there are equally important differences. Intellectually, Jane is no match for Damaris, “not perhaps a very original thinker”; her quite considerable gifts lie in a different direction, and one of them, at least, according to the physician Grace Ironwood, she “cannot get rid of.”<sup>19</sup> But her research topic, “Donne's ‘triumphant vindication of the body,’” is in touch with real human concerns in a way Damaris's is not.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> “Conversion”: Williams, *Place*, 126 (the chapter title); “fretted”: 167; using: 39, 97-8, 126; “love of wisdom”: 171; reconciled: 169-70; rescuing: 172-8; caring: 197; transforms: 171-2.

<sup>18</sup> *THS*, 67; 3.3; see further page 41 below. Jane's husband Mark, in contrast, is too eager to be drawn into groups in which the relationships between people are only superficial. He thereby contributes to Jane's isolation and her disenchantment with marriage. See further Schwartz's discussion (*Final Frontier*, 102-3).

<sup>19</sup> *THS*, 2, 68; 1.1, 3.3.

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, however, it represents an ideal she is not wholly comfortable with,

It is her husband Mark with his facility for journalistic doublespeak who is content to play word games and who more closely resembles Damaris in his unconcern for truth and his preference for statistical abstractions, coupled with a disdain for real persons—a colleague’s advice that “you can’t study men; you can only get to know them” goes unheeded.<sup>21</sup> What saves all three characters is their turn from self-centered ambitions to a sense of duty that gives their lives purpose and their awakening to an energizing love in the context of true human relationships.

Literary comparisons may be valid enough, but “influence” demands a more substantial argument. Fortunately, in this case we are not limited to inferences from the text alone. We have other evidence, from Lewis’ own pen, showing that the figure of Damaris had come to have a permanent place in his mind. Early in 1936, some four years after *The Place of the Lion* was published, it came into his hands, he read it in a day, and in a congratulatory letter to the author he called it “one of the major literary events of my life.” Williams’ reply came by return mail, saying that he had just finished reading the publisher’s proofs of *The Allegory of Love* and was on the verge of writing Lewis a similar letter of appreciation. Thus began a friendship that, in Lewis’ words, “rapidly grew inward to the bone.”<sup>22</sup> Lewis told his friend Arthur Greeves that he considered Williams’ novel “a really great book,” adding with reference to Damaris that “the reading has been a good preparation for Lent . . . for it shows me (through the heroine) the special sin of abuse of intellect to which all my profession are liable, more clearly than I ever saw it before. I have learned more than I ever knew yet about humility.”<sup>23</sup> The reading may well have brought back to mind a conversation several years earlier, probably in the late 1920s, in which his casual reference to philosophy as “a subject” was immediately taken up by his friend Owen Barfield: “It wasn’t a *subject* to Plato, . . . it was a way.” Lewis realized “[his] own frivolity.” Ethics had to be more

and that is part of her problem at the beginning of the story. In addition, she has “lost enthusiasm” for the work (*THS*, 2; 1.1).

<sup>21</sup> *THS*, 73; 3.4.

<sup>22</sup> C. S. Lewis, Preface, in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. by Lewis (Grand Rapids, 1966), viii, at the end of a paragraph telling how they came to meet. For that story see also Carpenter, *Inklings*, 98-101 (one of several accounts in the secondary literature) and Lewis, *CL*, 2:180-7 (the preceding quotation is from page 183).

<sup>23</sup> *CL*, 2:180.

than “theoretical,” he could “play at philosophy no longer,” and when “a philosophical theorem . . . became,” like the dry bones in Ezekiel, “a living presence,” he must “act upon” what he “objective[ly]” knew.<sup>24</sup> Not that the battle was won once and for all. Years later he confessed in the letter to Williams, “I know Damaris very well: in fact I was in course of becoming Damaris (but you have pulled me up). That pterodactyl . . . I know all about him: and wanting not Peace, but (faugh!) ‘peace for my work.’”<sup>25</sup> Months after that, having taken advantage of a bout of flu to reread “with undiminished enjoyment” *The Place of the Lion*, as well as Williams’ preceding novel *Many Dimensions*, he wrote another friend that “the first is of special interest to chaps like you (a B.Litt.!) and me (a don) because it is about a perfect bitch of a female researcher called Damaris who is writing . . . on the relation between ‘ideas’ in Plato and Angels in Abelard, without the slightest idea that it ever really meant anything.”<sup>26</sup> Another example of the same error is the Episcopal Ghost in chapter 5 of *The Great Divorce*, for whom God is no longer even considered a “Fact.” He breaks off a dialogue aimed (like all the conversations in that novel) at his salvation and quickly boards the bus back to Hell, having suddenly remembered he is scheduled to present a paper to his “little Theological Society down there.” And on Venus the don Elwin Ransom, realizing that debate will not suffice to protect the Lady from the sleepless Un-man, is “forced . . . to enact what philosophy only thinks.” At the beginning of the same novel Ransom’s friend “Lewis,” walking a dark country road, is assailed by terrifying doubt about his errand and fears “getting ‘drawn in’” by “sheer bad luck” to “mere speculations” that are coming true.<sup>27</sup>

In short, there can be little doubt that the lesson learned from

<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York, 1955), 225, 227, 226 (emphasis in original).

<sup>25</sup> *CL*, 2:183 (ellipsis mark in source); the closing phrase alludes directly to Williams, *Place*, 96. If I am right in seeing a hint of autobiography in Lewis’ portrayal of Jane Studdock, that’s in keeping with a practice observable elsewhere in his fiction. Well-known examples include the traveler John in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and the relationship between the dreamer/narrator and the “Teacher” in *The Great Divorce*. James Patrick, in *The Magdalen Metaphysicals: Idealism and Orthodoxy at Oxford 1901-1945* (Mercer, Georgia, 1985), 59, suggests that the craving of Jane’s husband Mark to belong to the “inner ring” reflects Lewis’ memory of his own ambitions at the beginning of his career.

<sup>26</sup> *CL*, 2:249, 245.

<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London, 1945), 42; Lewis, *Perelandra*, 148, 10.

Williams' Damaris had sunk deeply into Lewis' consciousness and was one of many ingredients in the making of *That Hideous Strength*. The "arid intellectualism"<sup>28</sup> displayed in Williams' novel, as well as at the Areopagus in Athens, reappears in the University of Edgestow—where lecturers who had "for years" spun their theories were "astonished . . . when what they'd been talking of . . . suddenly took on reality" and, once taken seriously, fostered the devastation wrought by the deceptively named N.I.C.E. (National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments). "*Trahison des clercs*," comments Dr. Dimble. "I'm afraid . . . none of us is quite innocent."<sup>29</sup>

### *Logres and Britain*

Long before Lewis and Williams met, the tales of Arthur and his knights had entered deeply into each writer's imagination. They were inescapably (for a youth with Lewis' tastes in reading) part of the literary culture of his formative years.<sup>30</sup> *That Hideous Strength* could well have included elements from Arthurian legend had Lewis and Williams never met, they fit so well the underlying premises of the work. One key element in the novel's structure, however, is the symbolic use of the names "Logres" and "Britain," for which Williams pointed the way. He was twelve years older than Lewis and already, by his mid-twenties, had begun shaping out of Arthurian lore the myth that he hoped would bring out its universal significance.<sup>31</sup> From an early stage of their friendship, Lewis became deeply and creatively familiar with Williams' mature Arthurian poetry. He published two reviews of *Taliessin through Logres*, suggested the title for *The Region of the Summer Stars*, and, drawing heavily on a typescript of Williams' own explanatory

<sup>28</sup> Glen Cavaliero's phrase (*Charles Williams: Poet of Theology* [Grand Rapids, 1983], 75). Charles Moorman makes much the same point in speaking of Damaris' "sterile scholarship" (*The Precincts of Felicity: The Augustinian City of the Oxford Christians* [Gainesville, Florida, 1966], 53).

<sup>29</sup> *THS*, 445; 17.4.

<sup>30</sup> See Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature since [1800]* (Cambridge, 1983), chapters 1-7. (The reading 1900 on the title page is obviously a misprint—see Preface, page vii.)

<sup>31</sup> In the general introduction to his edition of the poems (*Charles Williams, Arthurian Poets series* [Woodbridge, 1991]), David Llewellyn Dodds dates ca. 1912 the earliest notes by Williams on the subject (3). Williams thought that "the greater interpretations were not imagined" in "the love-romances" that came into being around Arthurian themes ("Malory and the Grail Legend," in *The Image of the City and Other Essays*, ed. by Anne Ridler [London, 1958], 191).

notes, gave a course of lectures on both cycles in the fall of 1945. These he proceeded to publish (no doubt revised), together with Williams' unfinished history of the Arthurian myth's development in tandem with that of the Grail Quest, in *Arthurian Torso*.<sup>32</sup> But Lewis had also known and loved these legends since boyhood and studied them in Malory's and several other versions. He knew them as well in Victorian and early-twentieth-century retellings; he knew a good deal of the scholarship that had grown up around them; and Arthurian themes and images, such as that of the wasteland,<sup>33</sup> had become pervasive in the literature of his time. Thus it is not surprising that, although several distinct Arthurian elements are woven into *That Hideous Strength*, only the symbolic use of the name Logres can be traced with certainty to Williams' influence. But Lewis does not simply borrow it, he adapts it to his own purposes.

Logres originally was simply a place name, designating (approximately) the region we now call England—derived, it was said, from the name of King Lochrine, son of the kingdom's putative founder, Brutus, a descendant of Aeneas. Lewis must have known this as an undergraduate from reading Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.<sup>34</sup> But already the

<sup>32</sup> The reviews, published in *Theology* in 1939 and *The Oxford Magazine* in 1946 (Oxford University Press having reprinted the book in the year of Williams' death), have been collected in Lewis, *Image and Imagination*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Cambridge, 2013), 125-36 and 137-42 respectively. See Dodds, *Charles Williams*, concerning the *Region* title (6) and the Oxford lectures (149). To the lectures as published in *Torso* Lewis gave the title "Williams and the Arthurian."

<sup>33</sup> In *That Hideous Strength* Dr. Filostrato, one of the N.I.C.E. scientists, enthusiastically expounds his idea of "the conquest of organic life" (202; 8.3). Himself a eunuch (72; 3.4), he views "breeding" with "disgust" (198-9; 8.3). In contrast, Ransom delights in the coming of Venus to St. Anne's (chapter 17) and calls the people "accursed" who dwell on the Moon where "the womb is barren" (321; 13.1). On this matter in relation to Jane Studdock, see pages 2, 327-8, and 455; 1.1, 13.3, 17.6. Similarly infertile is the "arid intellectualism" discussed above, which Lewis perceived as one of the dangers of life in the academy. Ransom's adopted name of Fisher-King, another allusion to the wasteland theme, is the focus of Jeannette Hume Lutton's discussion of how *That Hideous Strength* relates to earlier 20th-century treatments of the theme, especially T. S. Eliot's ("Wasteland Myth in C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*," in *Forms of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Third International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film*, ed. by Jan Hokenson and Howard Pearce, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy 20 [New York, Westport, and London, 1986], 69-86).

<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories [sic] of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Sebastian Evans, Everyman's Library 577 (London and New York, 1912), 3-4; 1.3.

name carried romantic Arthurian associations for him. In a 1916 letter to Arthur Greeves, he rhapsodizes on Malory's "mystical . . . forests of 'Logres & of Lyonesse'";<sup>35</sup> later he would have come across it in *Gawain and the Green Knight*, Milton, Swinburne, and no doubt elsewhere. Nevertheless, the special meaning of Logres in *That Hideous Strength* can only have come from Williams.

The word's established usage as a mere toponym was the starting point for Williams: in the years following Uther Pendragon's death, Logres was only "a storm of violent kings at war." But then he expanded it to include all of Britain, now freed "from the pagans and tyrants" in "the first movement of the mystery." Thus he converted it into a symbol, and that may have helped open up for Lewis the possibilities of Arthurian myth as a framework for his third novel of cosmic conflict. Lewis in turn altered the symbolism, following hints provided in Williams' cycle. "Logres," Williams explained in a preface to his 1944 poems, "is Britain regarded as a province of the Empire with its centre at Byzantium." (The allegorical map printed in the earlier volume, showing the Empire as a human body with Logres as its head, graphically presents the same idea.) "The argument of the series," Williams continued, "is the expectation of the return of Our Lord by means of the Grail and of the establishment of the kingdom of Logres (or Britain) to this end by the powers of the Empire and of Broceliande," powers whose differing strengths—creative energy and divinely directed order—might unite and bring about, as Lewis explains in his unpacking of "The Calling of Taliessin," "a complete and balanced humanity." Logres thus represents the ideal of a true Augustinian "city," Rome and Zion conjoined.<sup>36</sup> Great poetry and Arthur's victory at Mount Badon together "impose the city on chaos"; the bard Taliessin has a role in both. But success is not guaranteed, and in fact the experiment does fail. The Fisher King—Williams uses this traditional title only in his prose history, not in the poems—is wounded in Carbonek, the unity of the Round Table is broken, Arthur's nephew-son rises against him, and "Logres is overthrown and . . . becomes the historical Britain." Williams gives the same summary in poetic form in the "Prelude" that opens *Taliessin through Logres*, section 1 describing the kingdom at its founding, section 2 its fall. Chaos is come again, but out of the wreck two

<sup>35</sup> *CL*, 1:230.

<sup>36</sup> See Moorman, *Precincts* 57.

good things emerge: the Grail is achieved through other means and by it the wounded king is healed before it is removed from our world; and the Company of Taliessin survives to play a role parallel in its different way to Galahad's—"the king's poet's [Taliessin's] household" following "spiritual roads" first "in Logres and [then in] Britain," those "called and thrall'd / by Taliessin's purchase and their own will / from many a suburb, many a waste"—a "City" in Williams' sense of the image, a saving remnant to keep the ideal alive.<sup>37</sup>

In a subtle adaptation of Williams' *schema*, Lewis in his tale bestows the title Logres upon a "company" similar to this, those at St. Anne's Manor,<sup>38</sup> and he revives the ancient title of Pendragon for its Head.<sup>39</sup> He differs from Williams in setting over against Logres the parody "city," Britain. In a conversation near the end of the novel that owes much to

<sup>37</sup> "Kings at war": Williams, "The Calling of Taliessin," in *The Region of the Summer Stars*, 2nd ed. (London, 1950), 8. All of Britain: following Geoffrey's account of Arthur's conquests—see Williams, "The Figure of Arthur," in Lewis, *Torso*, 28-9. "Pagans," "mystery": Williams, "Figure," 82. Preface, 1944: Williams, *Region*, vii. Lewis' unpacking: "Williams and the Arthuriad," in *Torso*, 102, 110-11. Only in prose history: Williams, "Figure," 67-8. Logres overthrown: preface, in Williams, *Region*, viii. Summary in poetic form: Williams, *Taliessin through Logres* (London, 1938), 1-2. Company of Taliessin: Williams, *Region*, 36-41; Lewis, *Torso*, 141-4. "Many a waste": Williams, *Region*, 19. City image: see Moorman, *Precincts*, 57-8. Moorman describes Damaris Tighe's "conversion" from "the 'exclusiveness' of the tiny world she has created for herself" to "the ways of the City" (53).

<sup>38</sup> They refer to themselves several times by Williams' keyword "Company" (not capitalized in Lewis' novel).

<sup>39</sup> The idea of "an unbroken succession of Pendragons" (Ransom being the seventy-ninth), some of them "well known to history, though not under that name" (*THS*, 442; 17.4) is an example of Lewis' penchant for reshaping an inherited mytheme. But it may owe something to Williams: he "had suggested that the Pendragon was related to the Plantagenets," says Clyde Kilby (*Christian World of Lewis*, 111), but he offers no documentation, nor have I found any elsewhere. It is possible that Kilby learned this directly from Lewis in conversation. There are, of course, the well-attested efforts of monarchs from Henry II in the twelfth century down to James I in the seventeenth, though with diminishing effect, to strengthen their authority through development of an Arthurian cult (see James P. Carley, "Arthur in English History," in *The Arthur of the English*, ed. by W. E. J. Barron [Cardiff, 2001], 50-57; E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, new ed. [Cambridge, 1964], 111-14; James Douglas Merriman, *The Flower of Kings: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in England between 1485 and 1835* [Lawrence, Kansas, 1973], 35, 49-50), but there is, so far as I know, no record of their claiming the title Pendragon.



Williams,<sup>40</sup> Cecil Dimble expounds the perennial tension within society that the names Logres and Britain symbolize, an opposition that will keep recurring: the present victory is by no means final.<sup>41</sup> Within his novel, Lewis distills “Britain” into a concentrated manifestation that he names Belbury—“Bel,” evocative of the Babylonian idol in the apocryphal story of Daniel and also of the “hideous” tower, (Ba)bel, in Genesis 11, a classic instance of Augustine’s City of Man (*De civ. dei* 16.4); and “bury,” literally fortress in its oldest sense, as in the name Glastonbury.<sup>42</sup>

By prominently identifying the source of his title, Lewis invites careful consideration of the ways the Babel story in Genesis may inform his novel. Most obvious is the confusion of tongues at the banquet, but that is not the only connection. The builders of Babel planned “a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.” Genesis 11:9 punningly links the name to a Hebrew word meaning ‘confusion,’ but the cognate of Hebrew *babel* in the early Semitic tongue Akkadian, which was spoken in the Shinar region where the story is set, means ‘gate of God.’<sup>43</sup> This provides a clue to understanding the symbolism. In Eden, Adam and Eve walked with God whenever (we suppose) God chose to visit them. With the Expulsion, that privilege was lost. But now overweening humans want to undo the Exile and regain the gateway to God’s presence—this time at *their* command. They want access to heaven whenever they like.<sup>44</sup> Quite early in *That*

<sup>40</sup> Moorman sees an echo here of Williams’ *Descent into Hell* (*Precincts* 53, 70).

<sup>41</sup> *THS*, 441-4; 17.4. “Est-il trop tard pour retrouver . . . cette autre Angleterre?” “Is it too late to recover . . . this other England?” C. S. Lewis, “What France Means to Me,” in C. S. Lewis, *Image and Imagination*, preface by Walter Hooper (New York, 2013), 144, 146.

<sup>42</sup> In the Scottish dialect of the 16th-century poem from which Lewis derives the title of his novel, the word “strength” means a fortress (*Oxford English Dictionary* [hereafter *OED*], s.v. *strength*, §10). Sir David Lyndsay is imagining the Tower of Babel as a late medieval castle, though fantastically tall. But in the story itself Lewis uses the word with its common modern meaning (*THS*, 340, 341, 346; 13.5).

<sup>43</sup> Identifying the source: on his title page. Confusion of tongues: *THS*, 409-13; 16.1. “A city and a tower”: Gen. 11:4, emphasis supplied. Akkadian etymology: “Babel,” in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. by David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids, 1992), 66.

<sup>44</sup> A few chapters later Jacob dreams of a ladder whose top reaches to heaven with angels going up and down (Gen. 28:12), but this is not something Jacob has built, or even imagined until it is *given* him: it is, to use an image from Lewis, what Maleldil sends (*Perelandra*, 68-70). Standing at the top is Maleldil, Yahweh, speaking to Jacob,

*Hideous Strength*, Lewis establishes the parallel between the aims of the N.I.C.E. and those of the tower-builders in Genesis, when Lord Feverstone dazzles Mark Studdock with a vision of “Humanity” gaining “power . . . to take control of our own destiny.” In the preceding chapter, the narrator had satirized architectural tastes in speaking of the organization’s aim to build for its headquarters a tower rivaling “the skyline of New York.”<sup>45</sup> Alongside the somewhat playful chauvinism on display there, Feverstone’s speech is utterly serious and, to the narrator, a display of hubris.

In this context of the two Augustinian cities with their competing views of human destiny, we may consider more fully what I called in the preceding section Jane Tudor Studdock’s conversion experience. Jane has inherited a gift of clairvoyance through dreams, “seeing” events as they occur elsewhere or will soon occur. To gain access to the information thus available to her, the N.I.C.E. seeks to entrap her by using her husband as bait. When the fear these dreams produce in her, intensified by the sight in real life of a distasteful face she had dreamt of, Professor Frost’s, drives her to join the St. Anne’s community, an invitation she had vehemently resisted, and then to place her talent at their disposal instead of Belbury’s, her conversion—her membership in the “City”—has begun. From a fearful refusal to be “drawn in” to what her enlightened outlook considers “darkness,” she moves to agreeing to guide their search for Merlin, whom she has seen in a dream, and then, having submitted to a servant role, discovers the possibility of a true self more splendid than the self-image she had tried so hard to guard.<sup>46</sup>

who awakes and pronounces this place “the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17). In contrast, the builders of Babel insist on having things in their control—not only the path to heaven, but their own safety and comfort on earth, their desire not to be “scattered.” In this way they are reenacting our first parents’ sin, that of violating the Ban—in the one case, eating the forbidden fruit, not trusting God’s plan but substituting their own timetable for the rise in status that would eventually happen if they remained faithful; in the other, refusing to accept the consequent punishments, including exclusion from Paradise: they seek to break *that* ban. Ironically, the story ends with their being “scattered abroad throughout the earth” (Gen. 11:9), the very thing they worked so hard to avoid.

<sup>45</sup> *THS*, 35, 13; 2.1, 1.4.

<sup>46</sup> Inherited a gift: *THS*, 65-6; 3.3. Sight in real life: 153; 6.5. Vehemently resisted: 127-30; 5.3. Membership in the “City”: see note 36 above. “Darkness”: *THS*, 88; 4.5. Agreeing to guide: 266-7; 10.4. True self: 377-8; 14.6.

### *The Limitations of Historiography*

Dr. Dimble's discourse about Logres vs. Britain is interrupted by the resident skeptic, MacPhee, who notes that "this new history of yours . . . is a wee bit lacking in documents." On the contrary, replies Dimble, "it has plenty," but

you do not know the language they're written in. When the history of these last few months comes to be written in *your* language, and printed, and taught in schools, there will be no mention in it of you and me, nor of Merlin and the Pendragon and the Planets. And yet in these months Britain rebelled most dangerously against Logres and was defeated only just in time.<sup>47</sup>

In Dimble's view, both historiography as it is practiced and history as it is taught<sup>48</sup> have serious limitations. This view is shared by Lewis and Williams, though there is no reason to suppose that either one got it from the other. But it is a clear inference from one of the key themes in the whole trilogy, the inadequacy of naturalistic thinking, and here in *That Hideous Strength* it is made explicit.

MacPhee's common-sense objection turns out to be rather naïve, on several grounds. "History" generally refers to what historians produce, as in the middle part of Dimble's reply. At its best, it is the end product (or rather, an interim report subject to correction, as in any science) of, first, diligent searching out of evidence (written records—what MacPhee insists on—and other kinds of evidence, ranging from material objects including, now, DNA, to people's memories and oral traditions handed down); then of weighing the reliability of the evidence and interpreting it to learn what it reveals; and then of analyzing it so as to synthesize larger patterns. But "history" can also refer to "the aggregate of past events,"<sup>49</sup> everything that has ever happened, whether or not it was recorded *and* the records have survived. It is obvious that the first of these two senses for "history" can be

<sup>47</sup> *THS*, 442, emphasis in original; 17.4.

<sup>48</sup> When Lewis wrote that speech of Dimble's, he had just finished giving lectures at Durham that would appear in book form (*The Abolition of Man*) with the description "Reflections on Education" in the subtitle (for the dating, see Hooper, *Companion*, 232, 331).

<sup>49</sup> *OED* s.v. *history*, §7b.

only a subset, an extremely small one at that, of the second. That an event has no documents does not mean that it never happened—though it's true that centuries-long oral tradition, the sort of thing Dimble was drawing on when MacPhee interrupted him, is hard to verify. We can understand MacPhee's suspicion. Moreover, the existence of documents does not assure us that it did happen. Mark Studdock and others at Belbury busy themselves fabricating spurious records,<sup>50</sup> contrary to fact but (Dimble supposes) papers that future historians would have to sift through and try to evaluate, while perhaps unaware of the great amount of superior evidence lost in Edgestow's destruction.

In his 1950 essay "Historicism," Lewis goes much farther along this line, pointing out that "the past as it really was in all its teeming riches" includes not just things humans have done and said and thought, now irretrievable, but trillions of events, moment by moment, only a fraction of which even registered on human consciousness, let alone being remembered, and fewer yet ever being recorded. Most of "history" in that sense "remain[s] wholly unknown to us."<sup>51</sup> But—and here is the point that concerns us now—Omniscience (Lewis takes that doctrine at face value; the word is not hyperbole) knows. God knows. Getting a firm grip on that idea may help us understand the first part of Dimble's reply to MacPhee, about documents written in a language that "you do not know."<sup>52</sup> He may have in mind here the biblical imagery of things written down in heaven, as for example in the books to be used at the Last Judgment (Revelation 20:12) that record the truest and most pertinent information about earthly events. Such information is outside the range of any historian's investigation—"documents," to be sure (continuing the trope), but not ones we can access.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> The effect of their journalistic work begins to be seen in the conversations Mark overhears in a village pub (*THS*, 248-49; 10.2). Lewis considered newspaper articles "possibly the most phantasmal of all histories" (C. S. Lewis, "Historicism," in *Fern-Seed and Elephants*, 63).

<sup>51</sup> Lewis, "Historicism," 51, 55.

<sup>52</sup> I am deliberately setting aside, for the moment, the main line of argument in Lewis' essay, in order to explicate Dimble's puzzling statement.

<sup>53</sup> Obviously resembling Lewis' rejection of Historicism, in some ways, is the distrust of "metanarratives" which many see as one characteristic of postmodernist ways of thinking. But there are important differences. Considering Lewis' varied critiques of modernity, viewed by some as prescient in the light of philosophical developments since his time, a carefully nuanced study of these similarities and differences is much to

Lewis' immediate object in the essay, however, is to refute what he calls Historicism, the belief that by one's "natural powers," one's "learning and genius," it is possible to discover an "inner meaning of the historical process." He names several nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers who represent that view. The "meanings" they claim to have discovered may differ radically (e.g., Marxism, evolutionism, manifest destiny), but they agree that there is "some ultimate, transcendent necessity in the ground of things," knowable by purely naturalistic methods. In our day, they have myriads of followers who have absorbed that presupposition uncritically. Lewis agrees that history has meaning, but he argues that only the Creator knows it fully and it is only "by divine revelation" that we can know it even in part.<sup>54</sup> Fundamental to his case are three observations: what historical knowledge we can have is highly, and to a crippling degree randomly, selective; second, the meaning of the whole course of history must take into account a similarly vast array of events in a future whose duration, let alone its contents, we can only guess at;<sup>55</sup> and third, divine purpose plays a decisive role overall.

To search for meaning is intrinsic to human nature. Lewis grants that historians by their natural powers can detect trends.<sup>56</sup> He has his historian Cecil Dimble, for example, generalize, from what he thinks observable in many different fields of inquiry, "that the universe . . . is always hardening and narrowing and coming to a point[,] . . . choices [becoming] more

be desired. Meantime, Merold Westphal, "Onto-theology, Metanarrative, Perspectivism, and the Gospel," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. by Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids, 2005), briefly offers useful observations in that direction (147-51).

<sup>54</sup> Lewis, "Historicism," 44-5. In the Great Dance in *Perelandra* "the secular generalities of which history tells—peoples, institutions, climates of opinion, civilizations, the arts, sciences"—are "ephemeral coruscations," "minute" and "momentary," which have "significance" only as part of the whole of reality (218). But they do have significance, as I note in the next paragraph.

<sup>55</sup> Lewis uses here an analogy that appears several times in his writings: the whole course of history is like a stage play, with God as the Author (but allowing for a good deal of improvisation on the actors' part). Or rather, he gives us in quick succession three analogies (a rhetorical device he commonly used), the other two being a journey and a life. Each is a process in time whose end point is hidden. "We have no notion what stage in the journey we have reached. Are we in Act I or Act V? Are our present diseases those of childhood or senility?" ("Historicism," 53).

<sup>56</sup> Lewis, "Historicism," 44-5.

momentous," and a neutral position such as that occupied by Merlin in the fifth century is now less possible.<sup>57</sup> Lewis is far from belittling sound academic work. At the onset of World War II, he assured his fellow-scholars and aspiring scholars at Oxford that although their work might seem irrelevant in a time of national crisis, and even though literature, art, mathematics, and biology might all be "comparative trivialities" (see note 54), the "learned life," the pursuit of "knowledge as such," could be a "vocation" contributing to their own well-being, to the larger community, and to the divine purposes.<sup>58</sup>

But the historian's legitimate work is one thing, Historicism is another.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *THS*, 333-4; 13.4. Robert Boenig has called attention to Lewis' use of the same idea a little later in his commentary on one of Williams' poems (Lewis, "Williams and the Arthurian," 172; Boenig, *C. S. Lewis and the Middle Ages* [Kent, Ohio, 2012], 124-5). The notion appears again in Lewis' work in quite different contexts. In "The Decline of Religion," he uses it to illustrate a more general principle: "When the Round Table is broken every man must follow either Galahad or Mordred: middle things are gone" (*God in the Dock*, 220; cited by Schwartz, *Final Frontier*, 187 note 14). In *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (London, 1947), he proposes a similar pattern of "sharpen[ing]" over a longer historical period (140-1). The possible relationship between such ideas and Owen Barfield's teachings about "original participation" and subsequent alterations in human consciousness (with which Lewis was acquainted long before he met Williams) would be worth investigation, for which Stephen Thorson's observations in "Barfield's Evolution of Consciousness: How Much Did Lewis Accept?" in *SEVEN: An Anglo-American Literary Review*, 1998, 22-31, offer a promising starting point.

<sup>58</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-time," in *Fern-Seed and Elephants*; the quotations are from pages 27 and 33. Part of that contribution could lie in combating "the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone" (35)—a theme to which Lewis would return in *That Hideous Strength* in connection with Mark Studdock's betrayal of the scholar's responsibility to truth.

<sup>59</sup> To avoid misunderstanding, we must note that Lewis frequently worked as a historian in the usual sense, as well, identifying trends and patterns in the ordinary course of human events. So much is evident in his lecture "concerning historical periodization" (*De descriptione temporum* [Cambridge, 1955]), the Latin title of which he borrowed from Isidore of Seville, and in the main division headings in his volume in the "History of English Literature" series (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century excluding Drama* [Oxford, 1954]), which was commissioned following the success of his *Allegory of Love*. In both tomes Lewis masterfully combines the subdisciplines of literary history and criticism. We may note especially his long account (*The Allegory of Love* [New York, 1958], 60-6) of the "new state of mind" (60) that arose in late antiquity and enabled the development of allegory as a genre. In Augustine's surprise when he observes Ambrose reading silently, Lewis detects "the birth of a new world . . . a transition more important" than those that "our works of 'history'" usually take notice of (64-5). Charles Williams, who we recall had read Lewis' book before it was even published, would quote

The first two of the observations listed above make it plain enough, from the sheer quantity of unobtainable data and the randomness of what we do have, that “the meaning of history,” in Lewis’ sense of the term, cannot be discovered by one’s natural powers. The third, God’s purposeful role, declares that “the meaning of history” is itself a meaningless term if thought of from a purely naturalistic standpoint.<sup>60</sup> For Lewis, then, if real “meaning” is to be found, revelation is the necessary starting point; reason and imagination—also divine gifts—are the means for discerning more; and fiction and poetry are the most satisfactory modes for expressing what is (still only imperfectly) discerned. In the first volume of his cosmic trilogy, he clears away one false idea of meaning, that represented by Weston’s rant at Meldilorn, as well as false nightmarish notions of extraterrestrial existence that Ransom has absorbed from his early-twentieth-century milieu.<sup>61</sup> Near the close of the second volume, *Perelandra*, Lewis turns to revelation and employs a highly poetic medium, the language of paradox rather than analytical statement, to set forth a traditional Christian vision of cosmic as well as human destiny.<sup>62</sup> Then in the third volume he depicts the evil consequences of an opposing, naturalistic vision, another figment of the sort that Lewis would label Historicism: a vision of “Man on the throne of the universe” in place of God.<sup>63</sup>

*That Hideous Strength* does not stop there: it goes on to demonstrate that vision’s error. Mark Studdock may at first find it highly seductive, but it proves by the novel’s end to be an empty promise, believed in only by those members of N.I.C.E. who are themselves dupes. Those more fully initiated,

that passage from it in a work of his own and suggest that in his view it might, after all, hint at an operation of divine grace in the world (Williams, *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* [Grand Rapids, 1968], 77-8).

<sup>60</sup> In the 1970s Jean-François Lyotard arrived, by a different route, at a conclusion similar to Lewis’, that, in Gary K. Browning’s words, “the real cannot be subsumed into the rational” (Browning, *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives* [Cardiff, 2000], 68).

<sup>61</sup> Chad Walsh, “The Reeducation of the Fearful Pilgrim,” in *The Longing for a Form: Essays on the Fiction of C. S. Lewis*, ed. by Peter J. Schakel (Kent, Ohio, 1977), comments on this aspect of Ransom’s “reeducation” (66, 68).

<sup>62</sup> The prose Ode in the final chapter of *Perelandra* (214-18) consists of twenty stanzas, each expressing a truth that is only a partial truth. See for example page 215, where the pattern of meaning familiar to us in the idea of the “Fortunate” Fall is immediately qualified in the next stanza.

<sup>63</sup> *THS*, 204; 8.3.

Wither and Frost, recognize that they are only tools of the more powerful “macrobes,” who are well above them on the chain of being.<sup>64</sup> In short, the conflict is between spiritual Powers. No wonder its “documents” (if any) are in no human language. The Pendragon also, at St. Anne’s, takes instruction from higher beings, the Oyeresu who are faithful to Maleldil and work to carry out, finally, his will.<sup>65</sup> As Chad Walsh observes, St. Paul characterizes the conflict as not merely human, but “against organisations and powers that are spiritual . . . the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.”<sup>66</sup> Thus Dimble’s reply to MacPhee together with Frost’s comments to Studdock (see note 64) bring into focus a principle that underlies the novel’s structure, the reality of history being shaped not by earthly forces alone but in part by an invisible world of spiritual beings, both good and evil. Across the three parts of Lewis’ trilogy, the warfare has grown in intensity. In *Malacandra* it hovers in the background, an event of the distant past kept alive in memory through the sacred carvings but manifest only in the ruined upper reaches of the

<sup>64</sup> In chapter 12, Frost begins Mark’s initiation with instruction about the spirit that speaks through the artificially maintained human “cortex and vocal organs.” His awareness of the implications for historiography may be compared with that of Dr. Dimble. As the effect of microbes “on human life” has “made up a large part of history,” though this was unknown “till we invented the microscope,” so macrobes, “organisms above the level of animal life” (not in an evolutionary sense but belonging to a higher order), have had since “primitive times” a “far greater” effect, “equally unrecognized. In the light of what we now know, all history will have to be rewritten. The real causes of all the principal events are quite unknown to historians; that, indeed, is why history has not yet succeeded in becoming a science” (299-300, emphasis original; 12.4). As the plot unfolds we find Frost and Wither speaking of directions they have received from above (282; 11.2). In the dog-eat-dog world to which they have committed, the most any man can hope is to occupy that throne merely as the chosen vicegerent, with no rival (400; 15.4). Yet well before the close we as onlookers can see how seriously their very selfhood has become eroded (394-96, 399-400; 15.3, 4). They have chosen a path that can lead only to destruction.

<sup>65</sup> Note Ironwood’s and the Pendragon’s references to their higher “authorities” and “Masters” (67, 164, 229, 341; 3.3, 7.2, 9.4, 13.5) and the report at St. Anne’s that eldils frequently visit the Pendragon (220-1; 9.3).

<sup>66</sup> Walsh, “The Reeducation,” 65-6; Eph. 6:12 in Phillips’ paraphrase. (In *Perelandra*, 24, Lewis alludes explicitly to this verse and offers his own translation of part of it: “depraved hypersomatic beings at great heights.”) Already current in the philosophical discourse of St. Paul’s day were some of these terms (more familiar in the King James rendering: “principalities” and “powers”), which pseudo-Dionysius would later take up in classifying the angelic orders.

planet. On Perelandra the Bent Eldil, now himself present by invitation in an Earthling's body ("I call that Force into me completely"),<sup>67</sup> changes his strategy from physical destruction to moral corruption—which fails. In the third novel, the threat is massive destruction and corruption combined.

It is important to understand that the two sides are not evenly matched: Lewis repudiates Manichean dualism. God alone is omnipotent and omniscient.<sup>68</sup> Thus the "meaning of history"—insofar as Lewis finds it revealed, though still but in part—includes, ultimately, the defeat of evil. If we think of *That Hideous Strength* as Lewis' attempt to model (based on a fictional premise) the sort of history that historians cannot write, we will see why its form could not be other than "what many consider an incongruous mixture of the realistic and the supernatural."<sup>69</sup> Judging such incongruity to be a literary fault suggests a limited awareness of reality.

From Lewis' treatment of these themes more than once in other writings,<sup>70</sup> we can see that they are not mere contrived premises for a fictional thriller, but strongly held beliefs. Nor does Lewis confine himself to speculations about the life and activities of the higher creatures, whether God's enemies or God's agents. He draws from Scripture a grand narrative of the Deity himself at work. The pattern hinges on what he designates

<sup>67</sup> Lewis, *Perelandra*, 96; contrast the *involuntary* demonic possession of Alcasan's head in *THS*.

<sup>68</sup> From created beings, even of great intelligence, some things are hidden (compare note 2 above). In addition, the capacity to know may be forfeited by an insistent rejection of truths one is given—in Dantean terms, "the good of the intellect" is lost (*Inf.* 3.18). "Those who call for Nonsense will find that it comes" (*THS*, 445, completing the preceding statement, "Those who have forgotten Logres sink into Britain"; 17.4). Both these facts contribute to the collapse of the N.I.C.E. Most crucially, Wither is taken by surprise when "powers more than human . . . come down to destroy Belbury," since his "dark Masters" had relied on "the belief that Tellus was blockaded" and thus at "their mercy" (420; 16.4). Note also the failure of their attempts to spy on Jane's dreams (278-9; 11.2); Frost's reversion to a subhuman state (426; 16.6); and what Merlin cries out "above the riot of nonsense" in the banquet room, "They that have despised the Word of God, from them shall the word of man also be taken away" (418; 16.2). See further note 88 below.

<sup>69</sup> Schwartz, *Final Frontier*, 91.

<sup>70</sup> Regarding "Nonsense" (see note 68), compare his accounts of Satan's intellectual decay (C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* [London, 1942], 96) and of the "utter failure" of Hell's Intelligence Bureau to find out God's "real motive" (C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters, with Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, rev. paperback ed. [New York, 1982], 86), the concept of "Love" being beyond their grasp (81-2, 87).

"the central event in the history of the Earth"<sup>71</sup>—indeed, of the universe—consisting of God's life on earth in human form.<sup>72</sup> He ventures farther, working from hints found in Scripture to identify other patterns of divine activity. One example is Lewis' understanding of certain pagan agricultural myths as a "real but unfocussed gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination,"<sup>73</sup> helping, along with other influences such as that noted by Paul when he preached in Athens, to open people's minds in many cultures to receive the fuller revelation that would eventually come. The idea of divine action on a personal level also appears with some frequency. Already in *Perelandra* Ransom has a sense of calling; all the more in *That Hideous Strength*. It is in these terms that he lays before Merlin the magician's present daunting task.<sup>74</sup> Jane Studdock cannot have intended the word that came out in her frantic cry already quoted, "Why should I be *selected* . . .?" but she spoke better than she knew.

In writing of patterns such as this, Lewis was not practicing Historicism (though that charge has been advanced).<sup>75</sup> That is, he was not claiming to have found them by his "natural powers," but working from a basis of divine

<sup>71</sup> Lewis, *Miracles*, 131.

<sup>72</sup> See C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *God in the Dock*, 63-7. Of the universe: when Ransom expresses surprise at finding an inhabitant of Venus "shaped like women of [his] own kind," she explains, "Since our Beloved became a man, how should Reason in any world take on another form? . . . Among times there is a time that turns a corner" (Lewis, *Perelandra*, 61-2). See also Lewis' poem "The Turn of the Tide," in *Poems*, ed. by Walter Hooper (London, 1964), 49-51, and my commentary on it (Charles A. Huttar, "C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and the Milton Legacy: The *Nativity Ode* Revisited," in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 2002, 326-35).

<sup>73</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, 161n.

<sup>74</sup> *THS*, 343-4. Though reluctant, Merlin accepts the task: "God's will be done." Had he foreseen it? Presumably Lewis knew the 13th-century romance in which Merlin says, "Our Lord has chosen me to serve Him in a way that I alone could do" (Robert de Boron, *Merlin and the Grail*, trans. Nigel Bryant, *Arthurian Studies* 48 [Woodbridge, 2001], 70). We may have here one more instance of Lewis' seeing mythic potential in a tale of the merely marvelous and weaving it into his new creation (as he did with Apuleius in *Till We Have Faces*). See further note 86.

<sup>75</sup> Owen Barfield confessed to being "bothered by Lewis' summary dismissal of historicism" ("C. S. Lewis and Historicism," in *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, ed. by G. B. Tennyson [Middletown, Connecticut, 1989], 67), especially since Lewis' own practice seemed to him possibly inconsistent with his theory. Barfield said he was not so much offering a settled opinion as hoping to encourage dialogue on an important topic. The present remarks are a response to that invitation.

revelation to see what further insight truths found in Scripture might lead to. That endeavor, to know God better by seeking to perceive God at work in ways not explicitly stated yet consistent with scriptural teaching, falls within the discipline of theology.<sup>76</sup> Given that God's purpose is to redeem humankind, that God's self-revelation toward that end is not restricted to those cultures that gave us the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and that (to use Lewis' rephrasing of James 1:17) "no good work is done anywhere without aid from the Father of Lights,"<sup>77</sup> Lewis puts forward a History of Religion radically different from the standard textbook accounts built on naturalistic foundations, which dominated the field in his day and still do.

He had done this already, long before. Much like Dimble in *That Hideous Strength* but on a grander scale, the aged hermit named History in book 8 of *The Pilgrim's Regress* combines knowledge of the past such as one can find in historians' books with an awareness of God's unseen hand at work in events. Thus the account he gives the pilgrim John of the history of human thought has an extra dimension concerning God's revelation to "Pagans" through "pictures" varied according to the changing needs of cultures through the ages. His account differs from what "is commonly thought," "so unlike [says John] the accounts I have heard."<sup>78</sup> The allegorical name History suggests that this figure is more than just a historian who

<sup>76</sup> It is a discipline requiring both boldness and humility and having definite rules. As Lewis notes ("Historicism," 46-7), those who glibly declare some calamity, usually one that befalls others, to be "God's judgment" are practicing Historicists, although they may claim biblical precedent for doing so. Their logic is flawed: what a particular Old Testament prophet was inspired to say on a particular occasion cannot be universally applicable, when other places in Scripture reject such an application in other instances. Compare the irony in the irreligious, ambition-driven Curry's calling "providential" his survival from the Edgestow disaster (*THS*, 448; 17.5).

<sup>77</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York, 1958), 110. Other texts affirming the divine self-"witness" include Acts 14:17 and Psalm 19:1-4. Pagan creation myths, says Lewis, "at first had almost no religious or metaphysical significance," but when "the idea of true Creation and of a transcendent Creator" (*Reflections*, 111) starts to emerge, as it does in Plato, Lewis attributes this "amazing leap" (80) to divine guidance. For another example, see note 73 and accompanying text.

<sup>78</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity Reason and Romanticism*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids, 1958), 153, 155. In Lewis' special use in this allegory, "Pagans" refers not only to those in ancient times who "had not heard of the Landlord [that is, God]" but also to all, down to the present, who allow God no place in their way of life or of thought (153).

tells the story: he comes closer to being an embodiment or repository of "history" in the fuller sense of the term set forth in Lewis' essay.

*The Pilgrim's Regress* was written in 1932, and when Lewis later encountered Charles Williams' work he recognized someone who shared his belief that a history is woefully incomplete if it does not take into account what God has done and is doing. Even though they arrived at this view independently,<sup>79</sup> it seems possible, given their close friendship, that in their fuller developments of it there was some degree of mutual indebtedness. I find no basis for being more specific about who owes what to whom. But in 1939 Williams published *The Descent of the Dove*, a brief look at which will point up both similarities to and differences from Lewis' work.

Williams gave his book the audaciously oxymoronic subtitle "A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church." The wind, we know, blows where it will—and nowadays we have instruments to measure it, track it, and even predict it. But on the work of the Spirit we have no insight by natural means. There are documents—Williams cites them sparingly in his book<sup>80</sup>—but they are the testimony of persons who claim to have experienced the Spirit's work, and such claims have to be weighed with a judicious mixture of sympathy and suspicion (in variable proportions, of course, according to the nature of the document). But to narrate the acts of the Spirit, by definition unseen (John 3:8) yet understood by faith to be real, seems close to being a contradiction in terms. A conscientious historian could easily settle for what we might call the MacPhee approach, even while realizing that it tells only part of the story, perhaps only the tip of the iceberg.<sup>81</sup> Evidently, doing that did not interest Williams.

<sup>79</sup> Lewis' ideas on the matter had been coming into focus for several years, starting before his return to Christian faith. In addition to the influence of G. K. Chesterton, which Lewis himself often cited (see for example Lewis, *Surprised*, 223; Hooper, *Companion*, 752), his association with others at Magdalen College who resisted the secularist view probably contributed (see James Patrick, *The Magdalen Metaphysicals*, 42, 56-7, 82-3, 101, and [especially] 128-36).

<sup>80</sup> See for example pp. 6, 28, 88, 90, 232-3 in *The Descent of the Dove* (Grand Rapids, 1958). "There are many records" of achievement in what Williams called the way of rejection of images, but "of the affirmation, for all its greater commonness, there are fewer" (Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante* [New York, 1961], 232).

<sup>81</sup> Even that is farther than Damaris Tighe, for all her learning, was willing or able to go.

What Williams does with his conception is far removed from the sort of pious narrative a casual reader might expect. The Church is an institution at once divine and, all too fallibly, human. The Holy Spirit inspires, instructs, energizes it for its task; when it goes astray, brings it back, although not without human consent.<sup>82</sup> The institution may be an instrument in the Spirit's hands, or it may be part of the problem. The Holy Spirit is unpredictable (just as Aslan is not a tame lion), and Williams' book accordingly reflects this quality. T. S. Eliot in his review of the book called attention to Williams' even-handedness, "his tendency to be balanced and just."<sup>83</sup> This is seen in his refusal to favor one particular party—on successive pages he gives due credit to Luther, Loyola, Xavier, and Calvin, each of whom "it pleased our Lord the Spirit . . . to convulse . . . with himself." The revival movements of John Wesley and Alphonsus Liguori share a page together; in quick succession General William Booth and the Oxford Movement, St. Jean Vianney and the miracles at Lourdes are all acknowledged. When an excess of dogmatism needed to be checked, the church would be given in England Elizabeth I, in France the "sheer intelligence" of Montaigne, for whom Williams considered "inspired" not too strong a word. When the church had become "an evil parody of itself," there would be a Voltaire to cry (even if "not in the name of Christ"), "Destroy the Infamy."<sup>84</sup>

Lewis appreciated Williams' book,<sup>85</sup> but as a historian by profession (among other roles), he thought it important not to mingle the two kinds of history-making. "The historian," he said, "is not at liberty to dispose his fable as he would wish," and Lewis is careful to observe proper academic discipline when writing history. For other insights, gained through theological study and reflection, he has the vehicle of fiction at his disposal; hence he uses so-called fantasy, as in *That Hideous Strength*, to convey a deeper kind of truth.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>82</sup> But may even grant to those who err the privilege of contributing positively to the whole history, as Williams suggests with regard to the Montanist heresy (*Dove*, 34).

<sup>83</sup> T. S. Eliot, "A Lay Theologian," in *New Statesman and Nation* 18 (1939): 865.

<sup>84</sup> Successive pages: 164-77 (172 for the quotation). Wesley and Liguori: 205-6. Booth et al.: 221-2. Elizabeth I: 179. Montaigne: 191. Voltaire: 201-2.

<sup>85</sup> See his letters to Rhona Bodle, 24 October and 3 November 1949 (*CL*, 2:988, 993).

<sup>86</sup> "Not at liberty": Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 66). His demarcation between the two

In the theater at Athens long ago, there was a "machine" that would let a god down onto the stage to cut through a hopelessly tangled plot. It was not exactly incredible—audiences understood that the gods all had their own competing agendas—but it was a desperate expedient, one that the best dramatists avoided. If *That Hideous Strength* were a novel in the realistic tradition, Lewis would be open to the same criticism. Why does a seasoned after-dinner speaker suddenly, without knowing it, start uttering gibberish? The gods have descended—though not by way of stage machinery. Frost's session in Mark's cell initiating him into the Institute's secrets is unexpectedly aborted by news of the pseudo-Merlin's arrival, and Mark, left alone, undergoes and resists severe diabolical temptation.<sup>87</sup> Even earlier, mysterious things have begun to happen. Merlin surprises both sides by awaking on his own instead of waiting to be aroused, and here Lewis has his fictional character Ransom explicitly discern divine action: Merlin's "returning at this moment" was "planned and timed long, long ago."<sup>88</sup> Three men leave Northumberland College; Fairy Hardcastle sends men to tail two of them but an unforeseen interruption prevents her having someone follow Dr. Dimple straight to St. Anne's.<sup>89</sup> Jane Studdock is abducted and tortured but escapes when the car's engine fails, Hardcastle is caught up in the riot she herself has engineered, and a couple of strangers headed in the direction of St. Anne's offer Jane a lift. She arrives, burnt but safe. Lewis is careful to provide enough realism in his narrative that readers predisposed to deny miracle can explain these escapes by happenstance; but when impending doom repeatedly takes a sudden turn to eucatastrophe,

genres is borne out in a letter of 17 July 1953 (*CL*, 3:349): "I'm not committed to a real belief in Arthur, Merlin etc: all that comes in a *story* [Lewis' punctuation and emphasis]. I haven't the faintest idea whether there was a real Grail or not." Lewis considered it a "blessing" that so little is known about Merlin. Writers of fiction thus "have a free hand!" (*CL*, 2:673 [26 September 1945]).

<sup>87</sup> *THS*, 304, 314-15; 12.4, 7.

<sup>88</sup> *THS*, 262; 10.4. Lewis' transference from Arthur to Merlin of the motif of a departed hero returning at a time of great need is another example of his using inherited story elements in new ways (compare note 73). That motif is widespread in folklore. Frederick Barbarossa (whom Grace Ironwood mentions, *THS*, 441) is another such hero. See Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, 217, 221-2.

<sup>89</sup> Dabney Adams Hart comments on the irony of Hardcastle's dismissing as a "nonentity" (*THS*, 277) the historian whose special study is Romano-Celtic Britain. *Through the Open Door: A New Look at C. S. Lewis* (University, Alabama, 1984), 81.

can one be sure that it “just happened”? Or might fantasy, after all, be a way of coming closer to telling the whole story?