

The "Moral Mythology" of C. S. Lewis

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ONE WAY of putting what Lewis saw his literary task to be would be to say that he wanted to lead his readers to a window, as it were, looking out from the dark and stuffy room of modernity, and to burst open the shutters of that window and point us all to an enormous vista stretching away from the room in which we are shut. He despaired, I think of finding any furniture, pictures, or objects, in that small room that would suggest what he wanted to say to us, so he insisted that we come to the window and look out.

It sounds odd to speak of "modernity" as a dark and stuffy room. Our common and rather blithe supposition is that the last century or two have witnessed our escape from the dark and stuffy room of tradition, and that the whole point of everything since the Enlightenment is, surely, that light has finally been let in, or better still, that we have at last come out into the light. It is the light of emancipation on all fronts. Having struggled free from the gods, we have struggled free from so much that tagged along with the gods. Fixed morality, for example, or the divine right of kings: that's all gone thank heaven. And not only those extreme doctrines but all hierarchic notions that went with them. We have burst, we might say, the great chain of being which linked us all for so many millennia right on up the scale from serfs and craftsmen to franklins, lairds, lords, dukes, kings, emperors, angels, archangels, seraphim, and God himself. That was an unhappy scheme of things that derived directly from a vision of God and things that we have supplanted. In place of that thickly-peopled, dancing, hierarchical vision of things, we have substituted the notions of outer space and equality and autonomy; and of course our vision of things has

turned out to be infinitely more accurate and satisfying than the fatuous picture which we jettisoned when learned that it was all false.

We have come into our real patrimony as human persons: alone in the cosmos, autonomous, self-defining at last. Our fathers toiled along, fondly supposing that the gods were there, and that they (our fathers, that is) were somehow accountable for their actions to the high tribunal of the gods. And they thought that there was angelic and diabolical traffic hurrying up and down the universe, and that there were bright celestial entities to be adored, and dark infernal entities to be dreaded. They thought that goodness and evil were huge fixities, and that the one was to be sought and the other eschewed, and that the end of the one was bliss and of the other damnation. For this reason they surrounded human behavior with all sorts of taboos, and cluttered things up with sacrifices every time they turned around, since (they thought) if they did not, they were in deep trouble. You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that, not because it was abnormal but because it was sin, and you might end up in Tartarus for your reckless way of living. It was all very tiresome and laborious, and we have at last got free of it all and found ourselves at home with the liberating truth, which truth is that we are gloriously alone, independent, and accountable to no one but ourselves. We are at last free to define what shall be good for us, without the help of priests or prophets or sibyls muttering "Thus saith the Lord" and other arcana at us. We now have the tools at our disposal to come at the plain truth of things: the analyst's couch, the test tube, the questionnaire, the computer—these will deliver us, where the aspergillum, the thurible, the

Gospel book and the crucifix failed. It will take us a very long time, of course, to clear the decks: perhaps we ought to say that we are only now approaching the beginning point. But that is reason for hope. We are getting on apace with the task of dismantling traditional orderings of society and morals, nay, and of family life itself, and as soon as we can get it all down, we can start building the real edifice, the temple of man—no, no, not of man, of course, but of persons.

The point I want to make at the outset is that Lewis struggled to find a way of speaking to an epoch with which he shared virtually no suppositions at all. He called himself an "old Western man," meaning thereby that his view of things was the view generally held and celebrated in the Judaeo-Graeco-Christian tradition of Western history. He witnessed with dread, even with sickness of soul, the program of modernity; and he tried to find a way to lodge in the modern imagination some reminder of an alternative vision of things.

We are all familiar, of course, with Lewis' apologetic works. But apologetics was not Lewis' only gambit. He saw that the problem of speaking in behalf of Christian vision in this century was not solely a matter of countering argument for argument. He did this, of course, in works like *Miracles*, *The Abolition of Man*, and *Mere Christianity*. But the problem went deeper than the level which could be reached by polemic. It was a problem of imagination. That is, modern imagination is such that it has no way at all of even calling up the vision of things that Lewis (and all orthodox Christians) believed to be true. Things have happened in Western imagination in the last two centuries that have excised from it enormous assumptions that had been lodged in universal human imagination since the beginning of myth and history. Most of the qualities that invested the world and life for ten thousand years of human imagination have been jettisoned in our own epoch, and hence it is next to impossible for a man or woman whose

whole nurture has been modern to make any sense at all out of notions that are central to the ancient vision of things.

Let me illustrate this problem from my own experience of teaching prep school and college students over the last decade or more. I sometimes have given to a class the following list of words: majesty, magnanimity, valor, courtesy, grace, chastity, virginity, nobility, splendor, ceremony, taboo, mystery, purity. The reaction is generally a total blank, or embarrassed snickers, or incredulity. The entire list of words lands in their laps like a heap of dead basalt meteorites lately arrived from some other realm and they do not know what to do with them. And of course they do not know what to do with them, for they have never encountered them. The words are entirely foreign to the whole set of assumptions that has been written (or I ought to say televised) into these students' imaginations for the whole of their lives. Majesty? The man must be mad. Valor? What is that? Courtesy? What a bore. Virginity? Ho ho—there's one for you! Chuckle chuckle.

After I have gotten my reaction, I point out to them that this awful list of words names an array of qualities that any Jew, any pagan, and any Christian up until quite recently in history, would have not only understood, but would have extolled as being close to the center of everything. Their vision of reality presented them with a picture in which these things appeared as not only natural but blissful. This is almost impossible for these students to grasp. What possible picture of things can there be in which we may conceive majesty, for example, as anything other than the grotesque festooning of political popinjays and tyrants? Or how, pray, are we to understand virginity as anything other than an appalling denial of all that is natural, foisted upon the unhappy race by a coalition of impotent priests and frigid aunties? And ceremony, forsooth: don't we spend our lives trying to get things unstructured and spontaneous and creative and natural? Dear heaven, deliver us from all these Procrus-

tean beds that the ancients forced human life into.

To try to recommend majesty or virginity or ceremony to the imagination of these students as not only not repressive but, lo and behold as qualities that attend the fullest, most blissful, most hilarious forms of human experience—this is a task to daunt the most plucky spirit. Lewis undertook the task. He did it by the oldest method there is. He began to tell stories—indeed, it is misstating the case perhaps to refer to storytelling as a “method.” That makes it sound as though it is a mere technique, and that there needs to be some ulterior motive for the telling of stories. The ancient art of the bard, the *scop*, and the minnesinger needs no such warranty. When you have told a good story, you have done one of the highest and best things a mortal can do.

So I do not mean to denigrate Lewis’ achievement in fiction by making it sound as though it were just an apologetic gambit. He loved to tell stories, and he told good ones that can stand on their own feet as tales. But on the other hand, one ancient widespread idea in storytelling is that your tale shall be *dulce et utile*. Sweet and useful. The poet’s job is *docere et delectare*: to teach and to delight. There it is. To teach. Our own era is skittish about this, and begins to cluck and murmur about didacticism if a poet or dramatist gets to sounding moral. And of course it is bad art if you put your poetry at the service of some mere message you want to press on your hearers. But the ancient art saw no struggle between the teaching and the delighting, between the sweetness and usefulness. Your job, says Sir Philip Sidney to the poet, is to stir men to virtue by recommending it—by making it appear attractive and worth pursuing. And of course the idea here is not that you will be falsifying anything—putting a fraudulent sugar coating on some moral pill hoping thereby to bamboozle everyone into swallowing a scheme that will turn out to be bitter in their stomachs. You recommended virtue

because virtue was worth recommending. You celebrated valor, say, or magnanimity, or chastity, not because you wanted to defraud everyone but because these virtues represented human behavior brought to its real fruition. In modern terms it would be called authenticity. And, unlike his modern descendant, the storyteller of old was not afraid to extol goodness quite unabashedly. Chaucer’s knight was “a very perfect gentle knight”: it would be hard indeed to find a modern storyteller who began his account of his character that way. It is in this tradition, I think, that Lewis told his stories. He wanted to tell a good story, but he wished most earnestly that his story show us a landscape and a sequence of actions in which we might once more see at work a scheme of things that has more or less disappeared from contemporary imagination.

At the end of the first of the three stories in his space trilogy *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis has his hero Ransom facing the problem of the disbelief that he will be sure to run into if he tries to tell anything about his adventures on the planet Malacandra (Mars). Here is the relevant section: “Dr. Ransom . . . soon abandoned . . . all idea of communicating his story to the world. He was ill for several months . . . and it looked very like a delusion produced by his illness, and most of his apparent adventures could, he saw, be explained psycholoanallytically. . . . But it was Dr. Ransom who first saw that our only chance was to publish in the form of fiction what would certainly not be listened to as fact To my objection that if accepted as fiction it would for that very reason be regarded as false, he replied that there would be indications enough in the narrative for the few readers—the very few—who at *present* were prepared to go further into the matter Anyway,” he continued, “what we need for the moment is not so much a body of belief as a body of people familiarized with certain ideas. If we could even effect in one percent of our readers a change-over from the conception of Space to the conception

of Heaven, we should have made a beginning.' ”¹

Now of course this is only an incident in a tale. But anyone who knows Lewis' work knows perfectly well that Lewis is here remarking on something that lies bang at the center of his whole effort in fiction. There is no getting around the notion that a very great part of what Lewis was about in his tales was the business of at least getting that “body of people familiar with certain ideas.” And those ideas were ideas entailed in the Christian vision. There is not the ghost of a chance, Lewis probably felt, that Christian orthodoxy is going to win the day in any public dialogue in our epoch. The Angelic Doctor himself could not carry the day now. The sheer weight and universality of the post-Christian secular consensus rules out any such possibility. Well, then: what ought the Christian apologist to do? If he happens to be a good storyteller, he might try telling some stories not so much with the idea of making converts to Christian faith—such stories are bound to be terrible—as of lodging once more in the imaginations of a generation of mere secularists some of the splendors that have gone out of the world these secularists know.

The best-known of the stories that Lewis told are the Narnia Chronicles. I read these tales to my children. Indeed, I include these stories in the syllabus for a course I teach in modern myth for college students.

This brings me to my title: the moral mythology of C. S. Lewis. I say this course I teach is called modern myth. That is a confusion in one way, for of course the particular set of works we study in this course can only be called “modern” inasmuch as they happen to have been written in our time. On every other accounting they are wildly unmodern. (I am speaking of the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Lewis.) The works of these men—and we are thinking particularly of Lewis here—are peculiar. It would no doubt be using language loosely to call their fiction “myth” in the strict sense. But we may say that these works, particularly

Tolkien's saga of Middle Earth and Lewis' Narnia Chronicles, partake of the mythic in that they lead us into what Auden has called a “secondary world” which is complete in itself.

You sometimes see these books displayed on the racks with science fiction. I suppose there is no very deep quarrel here, but I myself would not want to classify them thus, since the mark of science fiction is, usually, a projecting ahead of possibilities latent, or emerging, in modern technological society. They are precisely science fiction. The mythic quality that I am speaking of with respect to Tolkien and Lewis lies in its unabashed disavowal of the world of technology, and its return to a world, or worlds, already evoked for us in Mediterranean, Nordic, or other mythologies.

This is all quite obvious, and we might well ask whether these tales are anything more than trifles cobbled up by crotchety and eccentric dons who didn't have enough to keep them busy at Oxford. It is the supposition in this paper that they were more than trifles. I believe that in his mythic tales (and I will include here the “space” trilogy, the Narnia Chronicles, and Lewis' other mythic work, *Till We Have Faces*) Lewis has given us a body of literature that will last, and that will have to be reckoned with in the annals of English literature, in the long run. I believe that they will turn out to be more than a fad.

In order to specify what Lewis' achievement is in his mythic works, I will borrow a paragraph from Flannery O'Connor for my purpose here. She is writing about her own experience as a writer whose outlook is that of dogmatic Christian orthodoxy but whose audience shares nothing of this outlook with her. Her remarks, it will be seen, are applicable to Lewis' work. “The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this

hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind, you draw large and startling figures.”²

Lewis has, in effect, startled us by writing these stories. On one accounting they are terribly wrong-headed. His *Narnia Chronicles*, for instance, are full of things that ought to be eliminated, if we pay attention to the committees that sit somewhere deep in the labyrinthine reaches of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and tell us all what we may do with our souls and our children’s souls. There are all sorts of pernicious ideas in the *Narnia Chronicles*. There is a king, for example: this is bad, because it will lodge in our child’s imagination a notion that is utterly destructive of the egalitarian frame of mind we want to guarantee for him. Here we are, in his early, impressionable, formative years, regaling him with all these scenes of majesty. And of course the most pernicious thing about the business is that the king is utterly good. If we could have a bad king, it might be all right: that would dramatize nicely the very thing we want to suggest, namely that hierarchy and autocracy are evil by their very nature.

But there is worse: there is a bad sovereign—an usurper—and it is a woman. A wicked queen. A witch, in fact. Now this will not do at all. Here we are, in the 1970’s, trying assiduously to extirpate ten thousand years’ worth of mythology that all too often identified evil with woman’s influence. It is a long and baleful lineage, all the way from the stories of Eve and Pandora, to Delilah, Circe, Jezebel, and the witches of Salem, Massachusetts. It is, of course, part of the vexing universal male plot to keep women down, and here is Lewis serving it up to us again. These stories will not do.

As I say, Lewis has startled us by writing these stories. If we tested them by the assumptions that govern educational officialdom, we would have to reinstitute the Inquisition in order to stamp out their influence. But rather than trying to counter this supposititious assault on Lewis directly, let me point to a few of the qualities of the worlds evoked for us by Lewis in his mythic works. Perhaps that way we will be able to find an apologia for the moral mythology he has furnished.

There is at work in these worlds a moral order—fixed, serene, absolute, and blissful. We moderns, of course, do not like the smell of that: we prefer the imagery of quest, and of creativity, and of self-authentication, in which heroes seek but never find, and forge their own moral selves on the anvil of passion. For us, the imagery of a fixed moral order is stultifying. It keeps humanity chained in a perpetual childhood, grovelling in front of taboos and totems, everlastingly trying to live up to a scheme devised by some maleficent deity who knows nothing of what it means to be human. We want Prometheus. It is his defiance of the gods that we find to be compelling and suggestive. Nay, the act of Adam and Eve, hitherto understood as entailing a fall from freedom, ought now to be seen as the first authentically human act. Indeed, I have read in a New York paper of a rite that took place in a church just off Washington Square, in which the women drank apple juice at a Eucharist celebrating the liberating act of our mother Eve in declaring her emancipation from the sanctions imposed by her husband and the male deity. The notion that obedience and vassalage are in any way even compatible with authenticity and freedom is incomprehensible to us.

But in Lewis’ world (and, it might be added, in all mythic worlds and moral schemes until our own epoch), we find that the fixed order that presides so serenely and absolutely over the lives and acts of the creatures in that world, not only does not cramp the freedom and selfhood of those

creatures: it is synonymous with it. All the creatures find their selfhood in a blissful hierarchical scale in which they have responsibilities of service running in both directions on the scale, up and down. The duty they owe to creatures above them is one of fealty, or of awe, and perhaps even of adoration. The duty they owe to those below is the duty of magnanimity. Either way it is a matter of service and obedience: the proper service offered in courtesy to the creature in question, in obedience to the hierarchic ordering of things. Let an example from Lewis' worlds illustrate this: in Perelandra the hero Ransom encounters celestial beings of inexpressible majesty called *eldila*. They are perhaps akin to angels in our story. The *eldila* charged with the oversight of any given planet are called *oyeresu* (the plural of *oyarsa*). Ransom meets two of these, Perelandra and Malacandra, better known to us as Venus and Mars. They are so terrible in their splendor that they have some difficulty in finding forms under which Ransom can even bear encountering them. Ransom, of course, assumes that all possible esteem is due these great deities, and he is right. But then, lo and behold, when the man and woman, who are king and queen of Perelandra, appear, the *oyeresu* do obeisance to *them*. There is no struggle for equal time. There is no eyeball to eyeball confrontation, no calculating who shall have precedence, no *ad hoc* committee to distribute authority to the whole caucus. No. There is, rather, the solemn, blissful, hierarchic dance of majesty encountering majesty, and of sovereignty joyously given and received. The man and woman are to the planet Perelandra what the unfallen Adam and Eve are to Earth. For their part, they offer courtesy to the *oyeresu* in obedience to a cosmic protocol, we might say, but just as obediently receive the obeisance of those *oyeresu* because it is their appointed burden and glory so to do.

Another example of this: in Narnia we find that the land is populated with dwarfs, fauns, dryads, centaurs, giants, and talking

beasts. It is their land. They are the rightful denizens of that world. But—it turns out that neither the land nor these denizens can be fully free and fully themselves unless there are sons of Adam and daughters of Eve (that is to say, humans) on the four thrones in the palace of Cair Paravel.

The point here is not to urge monarchy over democracy. It is, rather, to point out that Lewis has shown us a world in which a hierarchical ordering of things is seen in terms of courtesy, magnanimity, and obedience—as the guarantor of everyone's liberty, actually. He was not so much speaking of politics when he wrote about Narnia as picturing a world in which obedience and liberty were synonymous. But you cannot come at this idea via a democratic imagery, so Lewis gave that world the traditional, ancient ordering of hierarchy. It is principally a moral idea. And here again, any Christian or Jew is familiar with the paradox, and affirms the paradox, since he worships a god whose service is perfect freedom. That idea is contradictory on a syllogistic accounting, but it is there at the center of the mysteries. In Narnia we find that paradox played out in terms of animals, fauns, and human beings.

Lewis would be able to point, in this connection, to an oddity in the history of human sensibility by way of defense for his vision, and it is this: it has been the ages which assumed and acknowledged a hierarchical ordering of things that have produced the most splendid works of imagination. It is when the gods are enthroned in their heavens that you find tall heroes and noble heroines as figures in the stories. In Greek tragedy, in Nordic saga, in Shakespearean tragedy, and in thirteenth century figures of the Madonna crowned with gold, you find the paradox: those noble and blissful images of humanity emerged, not from the emancipated late centuries of human history, but straight from the ages when we saw ourselves as walking under authority, robed in the splendor that had been given us in the ordering of things, and bearing the burden of obedience. It is when you

have set mankind free from the fixed order that you start getting Willie Loman, and Andy Warhol's heroes. It seems anomalous that Achilles, Hector, Beowulf, Siegfried, Arthur and Macbeth are such magnificent figures—to say nothing of Antigone, Penelope, Deborah, and Cleopatra. They all had the gods peering over their shoulders. They ought to appear in their stories as crawling slaves.

But it is not just a hierarchical ordering of things that is at work in Lewis' mythic tales. I spoke earlier of the fixed moral order which presided over all the action in these stories. The idea of fixity is antipathetic to contemporary imagination, with its imagery of the dynamic, the spontaneous, the *ad hoc*, and the unstructured. Fixity seems to us to suggest repression, especially moral fixity. How can we ever grow up if we are told what is right and wrong?

The answer would seem to be obvious: we cannot. But Lewis' rejoinder here would be that which most prophets, philosophers, and poets would have given until quite recently. They would have all said, You grow into your real adulthood and wholeness and selfhood (if they had used those terms at all)—you grow up, in other words—by learning the steps in the dance. The dance is there. It is already choreographed. The music is playing. All creatures—all stars, all archangels, all lions and eagles and oak trees and oceans and grasshoppers—all are dancing, and the great thing is to learn the steps and move into your place.

We are familiar enough with similar ideas from common experience, but we do not often transfer it to the moral realm. That is, it is clear enough that a musician has grown to his fullest maturity and power (and hence freedom) when he has submitted, year after tedious year, to the rubric. It is at the far end of that "death" that he emerges in glorious mastery, wholly free now. Or the athlete: who is free to execute that glorious pole vault or those breathtaking gymnastics? It is the man who has bowed to the rubric. And that rubric

is fixed: if you want effect B (the freedom to soar like that) you must have discipline A (workouts, calisthenics). And so it is with all forms of achievement: we find that mastery and perfection and freedom and bliss are synonymous.

Lewis would argue that this is true morally. We mortal men have been furnished with the cues, as it were—the clues, or road signs—that will crowd us on towards the place of our real freedom. Those road signs are the moral law—such prickly maxims as "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," or "Thou shalt not steal." We do not like the peremptory sound of remarks like this, but Lewis would argue that we may bang our foreheads on the floor until we are black and blue, but our tantrums will not change one iota of the choreography. There is the dance, and there is only the dance, and if you want to see great and noble and free men and women, you have only to look and see those who have learned the steps. The saints would be the most splendid example. (I visited a monk in a Benedictine Abbey the other day, and as we sat in his room talking, I was arrested by his face. The man looking at me was a free man. From his eyes there shone that thing which is bought only at dreadful cost: pure charity, strong and gay. I compared this in my mind with the little pig-eyes and testy, surly faces of most of us as we muscle each other out of the way in ticket lines, traffic jams, and the Lexington Avenue subway.)

It is a paradox that we have difficulty grasping. We reject all the analogies (of musician, or athlete, or saint) and go on insisting with wearying iteration that what we want is the quest. That is what makes a man himself: the quest. And, so far so good. That is part of the truth. But the business gets truncated if we jettison the notion of any discernible goal for this quest. There is a City of God. Our own era is not eager for real clues as to how to get there since that might cramp our style. (I sometimes disturb my students by observing to them that, when in

the flush of Hermann Hesse-ian romanticism, they tell us that they want to be open to all experience, what they mean is, they want to be open to a few pleasures, e.g., travel, drink, and sex ordinarily. They are not thinking of being open to the experience of fidelity, say, or of domesticity, or of the religious life, or of being chained to a bed of cancerous pain. Ah—they hadn't thought of that.) It gets to looking as though our protestations of being on the big quest are simply an appealing way of saying that we do not want anyone telling us what to do.

The whole drama in Lewis' novel, *That Hideous Strength* is of a young man and woman—man and wife they are—who find themselves bundled all cock-a-hoop into charity when that is not at all what they wanted. What they wanted was self-determination. Actually that was what they had, and they were both entirely miserable—Mark the husband, a slave grovelling before anyone who might be of use to him in advancing his professional academic career, and Jane the wife, pinched and testy for having been stereotyped as a woman when what she wanted was to be an intellectual. Both of them are in pell-mell flight from stark obviousness, you might say: from the plain, meat-and-potatoes business of being husband and wife to each other as that has been understood and enacted by good and humble men and women since the beginning of time. That was just the trouble: that plain and ancient road was too bourgeois. What Mark wanted was what cupidity always wants—titillating prizes at any moral cost. In his case, it was the tawdry reward of being in the inner circle; and to get there was worth any moral prostitution. What Jane wanted was what dissatisfaction always wants—namely, anything but this. They find their way, or rather their way is found for them, through opposite roads, Mark through Belbury, which is a community in which we can see brought to diabolical fruition all the canons of secular millenarianism; and Jane through St.

Anne's, a community where we see dumpy ordinary people living in purity and harmony and joy because they have learned their lessons well.

The images which Lewis brings to his task in this story are powerful indeed. I have mentioned how Mark and Jane were fending off the plain, ordinary, well-trodden, ancient business of marriage. This is central to Lewis' whole vision. Ordinari-ness. What we human beings need, Lewis would urge, is not the blazing of new trails but rather the grace to walk the well-trodden trails well. He took F. R. Leavis to task, in his *Preface To Paradise Lost* for Leavis' notion that what human sensibility needs is ever finer and finer discriminations and new qualities of emotions. In rejoinder, Lewis lauds what he calls "stock responses." You have a more trustworthy index of good and evil in the natural shock or anger or outrage or uneasiness of some peasant in the face of an event that is shocking or outrageous, than in the bloodless, amused response of the sophisticate. That is precisely the trouble: sophisticates, who pride themselves in having seen everything and in being thereby unshockable, are precisely sophisticated, and to sophisticate something is (OED) "to mix with some foreign or inferior substance; to render impure; to adulterate." It is ironically fitting that we now use the term affirmatively.

In any case, both Mark and Jane are sophisticates. The way of salvation for them lies in walking down, down, down the hill of humility, right down into the valley of ordinariness, where men and women love each other and trust each other and acknowledge their protohistoric need of each other. It is more than interesting, too, that Mark's salvation from the toils of Belbury lies in his remembering Jane. It is the memory of Jane, as a woman and as his wife, with her woman's body, that rescues Mark and jolts him with the vision of plain, healthy, stark, external reality when he is about to be traduced utterly by the finely-tuned sophistications of

Belbury. And we find Jane, again and again, plucked from the toils of her unhappy and sophisticated imagination, by the sight of ducks and farmyards and meadows with sunlight on them, which she sees out of the train window.

The way of health, in the moral mythology of C. S. Lewis, lies along the well-trodden path, and not in newly-blazed trails. I suppose that if Lewis had lived long enough to see the phenomenon of "happenings" in New York in the 1960's he would have started in horror (Lewis was shockable) and have said that we were seeing quite vividly dramatized the imagination of hell. For hell, in Lewis' vision, would be the place that is ultimately unstructured. It would be the place of final fragmentation and randomness and inanity, and that is what was extolled in the happenings in the 1960's

It may be appropriate to finish this brief canvas of the moral mythology of Lewis by itemizing a half-dozen brief scenes from the Narnia Chronicles which furnish something of the particular angle, or flavor, that comes through in Lewis' mythology. In each case, scenes, or at least echoes, from much more ancient tales, not to say scriptures, will be recognized. Lewis clearly has, as a backdrop for his imagination, an order of things far from new.

Item: Edmund, in *The Place of the Lion*, becomes enslaved to the evil queen through his inordinate desire for Turkish delight candy, and becomes a traitor in betraying the rightful lord, Aslan.

Item: Eustace, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, is a truculent, bumptious,

thoroughly spoiled child who has been brought up by very modern, very emancipated parents, and hence supposes that anything he wants is his. He turns into a dragon sitting avariciously on a pile of gold, and has to have his whole scaly hide ripped off of him by the claws of Aslan before he is saved.

Item: *Mother Dimble*, in *That Hideous Strength*, is a fruitful, big-breasted, wife, and it is she, not a Mrs. Grundy, who stands over against the goddess of mere carnality who appears in a vision to Jane.

Item: In *The Silver Chair* the children lose their way and get into trouble because they ignore clue after clue that Aslan has scattered in their way. In the end, they have to be rescued by the self-immolation (it is literally a burnt-sacrifice) which the damp and gloomy hero Puddleglum makes of himself for their salvation.

Item: The evil in Belbury consists, not in a stark invitation to grotesquery and bestiality. It presents itself by little and little, in a refinement of one's sensibility so that one becomes accustomed to alternatives to naturalness. The apotheosis of all this is a chamber of horrors at the end where all the bloodless, cerebral people who have pontificated so sententiously about how they will re-make humanity in the name of science, are all slipping about in a donnybrook of blood and entrails, clawing at each others throats.

Item: The golden lion Aslan, the lord, appears in one scene as a lamb, on a beach, offering to the children a breakfast of fish which he has cooked over an open fire.*

*C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, 1965), pp. 152-154. *Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in *Mystery and Manners* (New York, 1969), pp. 33, 34.

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