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C.S. Lewis' Space Trilogy: Metaphysical Theology in Science Fiction/Fantasy

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C.S. LEWIS' SPACE TRILOGY: 
METAPHYSICAL THEOLOGY 
IN SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY

by
Douglas L. Semark

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
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Douglas L. Semark
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SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY

Fantastic literature, more commonly called fantasy, is any work that deals with improbable or unreal characters, or whose action takes place in a non-existent space or time, or that utilizes scientific or physical principles that are either contrary to present understanding or not yet discovered. From this wordy description, it is evident that fantasy embraces a lot of literature. It ranges from fairy tales to utopian fiction. Currently, the most popular form of fantastic literature is referred to as science fiction.

Science fiction has roots at least as far back as 160 A.D. when Lucian of Samosata, in *True History*, wrote of a trip to the moon. In subsequent centuries, science fiction was found in diverse places: Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726); and with the social and technological changes of the Industrial Revolution (ca. 1760) came the possibility of real growth in the genre. Mary Shelley, Mark Twain, and Edgar Allen Poe utilized the fictional form at one time or another, but the first great specialist was the Frenchman, Jules Verne. The writing of *A Trip to the Moon* (1865), *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), and his many other books opened a new era of fictional inventiveness and speculation.
With the sudden realization, in the second half of the twentieth century, of many of early science fiction's predictions, science fiction has gained widening appeal as the foremost literary expression of the age.¹

Generally, the trend in science fiction has been away from gadgetry and hard scientific speculation and toward increasingly philosophical, social, imaginative, and personal statements. Perhaps this is the natural trend in the sophistication of the form, but it has the added effect of broadening the range of science fiction back to the base of fantasy from which it came; indeed, much of what has been called science fiction is more properly labelled fantasy, such as Professor Tolkein's books. It is not at all uncommon, and certainly quite accurate, to begin to speak of science fiction/fantasy, and that is how I will refer to it throughout the rest of this paper.

It should come as no surprise that in an age of science the presence of fantasy becomes more pervasive. Science, and its attendant technology, opens up vistas of possibilities and potentialities, and with those multiple pathways can come untold numbers of individual

and collective visions of journeys, adventures, and destinations. Frequently, when the future options appear frightening or inescapably dehumanizing, the threatening face of technological scientism causes another kind of fantasy—a fantasy that lacks computers, lasers, or even simple handguns but is rich with magic swords, wizards, rings, and telepathy—that tries to negate the prospect of the mechanized future for an alternate (past, future, parallel) existence that resides more in the kingdom of mythos than in the galactic empire of technos.

Science fiction/fantasy deals with these kinds of concerns and more, and in doing so becomes, whether the subject and action are placed in the future or not, a fiction of the (possible) future. Additionally, one of science fiction/fantasy's accomplishments is its ability to confront reality through a vehicle that is frequently radically discontinuous from the ordinary world. This approaches what Robert Scholes calls fabulation: fiction that offers a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one known, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way.¹ Fabulation, he says, assumes that there is more to reality than what meets the eye, and, like St. Paul, we see incompletely, as through a glass darkly. Through our senses, we create

many fictions, and the systematic organization of those fictions is what we call science. Like religious fictions of the past, science fiction/fantasy uses the same kind of narrative vehicle: an awareness of the now, which is incomplete (or a fiction), and an awareness of true reality, which is informed by dogma and speculation. Dante, of course, is the paramount of dogmatic fabulation: Swift and More are examples of speculative fabulators. According to Scholes, speculative fabulation has been on the increase and dogmatic fabulation has long been on the decrease. Science fiction/fantasy, because it deals with the relationships implicit between literature and society, becomes a structural fabulation. Scholes says that structural fabulation is an extension of speculative fabulation in which structuralist sensibilities are implicit—a quantum jump in fictional evolution. Thus, science fiction/fantasy is not just a fiction about the future, it is the imagining of the future.

In his book of speculative criticism, Paracriticisms, Ihab Hassan speaks of science fiction/fantasy in this way: It offers critiques of the human condition and fashions new myths from the old; going further still, it offers radical alternatives to the destiny we assume to

\[\text{1} \text{ibid.}\]
\[\text{2} \text{ibid.}\]
be our own. The best of science fiction/fantasy does not merely display "a mode of romance with a strong inherent tendency to myth," as Northrup Frye says; it brings, rather, intimations of a consciousness that has not yet found its myth. In short, the best of science fiction looms as true prophecy or vision.\(^1\) Thus, in slightly different terms, we hear Hassan saying many of the same things that Scholes said. Elsewhere in the book, Hassan declares that the Postmodern era, which now coexists with the Modern era but will be its ultimate successor, comes as the next quantum leap in the evolution of human awareness; science fiction/fantasy and the novel of silence are the literary progenitors of the Postmodern reality.

Assuming that there is something to what Scholes and Hassan are saying—and I believe there is—there are some crucial points to be raised. Freud, Adler, and Jung have drawn us deeper into the human mind than many of us have ever wanted to go; yet, our view of the human unconsciousness is exceedingly inadequate. In trying to appropriate the unconscious, we become overwhelmed by its depths, which seem much too complex, much too inclusive for a single corporeal entity to own. There is talk of "racial memory," "oceanic feeling," etc. The

speculation runs that if the unconscious and the dream lead to the past, can they not also lead to the future? Or again, is the child really father to the man?

Whether it is more true that cultures or subcultures read about things because they are thinking about them, or that they think about things because they are reading about them, the consequences for the cultural consciousness are really about the same. If it is faddish reading and short-sighted, conventional wisdom that is being produced, it rises and falls quickly, leaving little or no lasting mark on the soul of humanity. However, there is another kind of reading, the kind that produces societal and cultural eras. For example, who or what brought about the Classical Period? Was it Classical writers and thinkers who came up with the ideas that ushered in a period that lasted millennia, or did they merely report on what everyone else was thinking? The answer is obvious: it was the introduction of the Classical ideas by thinkers and writers that presaged the era. What about the Baroque? Victorian? Modern and all its deviants: realism, fatalism, etc? Only the heart of the Dark Ages stands out as an era that brought its great thinkers behind it, slowly, almost grudgingly, a few at a time.

From the easy chair of hindsight, it is easily predicted when and why periods came about: the Romantic...
Period begins in 1798 because that is when Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads*. Of course, on our part that is not prediction but extrapolation. At the time of publication, however, *Lyrical Ballads* was true innovation. There could be no preconceptions about *Lyrical Ballads*; there were no preconceptions about Romanticism for decades to come. *Lyrical Ballads* was prophecy, it intoned a new age, it was creative imagination taking a new twist.

Prophecy, like madness, cannot be accurately predicted: it runs amok at times, it right-turns, it mutates, it quantum leaps, it doubles back. The new wave of today may not act like the new wave of the past or of the future. The logic and the forms can change or they can remain the same. It need not contain protest, be shocking, or destroy, although it may do all of these things. The point is that it is a non-linear phenomenon and the only sure thing about it is that it is the agent of impending, yet unseen, changes.

Are Hassan and Scholes really anticipating something? The Latin roots, *ante-*(before) and *capere*(to take), literally imply the appropriation of something before its time. An underlying assumption of this paper is that that possibility is real; they and a few others have demonstrated the need for closer attention to the deeper understanding of the quantum leap in
cultural/consciousness/fictional evolution, that prophecy of the literary and planetary culture of the future(s): science fiction/fantasy. In so doing, not only does the literature receive scrutiny long overdue, but the notion of fabulation and what is being broadcast, wittingly or not, by the authors and received and dreamed by the readers can be assessed to take stock of the seriousness of what science fiction/fantasy is communicating.

In demonstrating all this, it would be impossible to include the entire spectrum of science fiction/fantasy literature and thought. Therefore, the scope of this inquiry will be limited to a single, though critical and pervasive, element of science fiction/fantasy: metaphysical theology.

METAPHYSICAL THEOLOGY

This theology that I am referring to is theology in its wider sense—not merely thinking or speaking about God, but more a metaphysical theology such as Aristotle's First Philosophy (or Theology) that speaks of substance, causality, and nature of being as well as the existence of God. This metaphysical theology must be understood to be a de-Christianized theology in

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order for it to be seen in a clearer light. That is not to say that Christian or other parallels cannot or will not be drawn, but it must be remembered that I am viewing this literature as a potential harbinger of future consciousness and therefore cannot examine it in the dark mirrors of the past for first images.

Although this metaphysical theology denies the images of the past, at least initially, the questions that it is concerned with are not new. Four areas of urgent interest to metaphysicians and theologians over the centuries have been expressed in inquiries similar to these: What is the nature of creation? What is the nature of man? Does man act freely or is existence pre-determined? Is there a larger, controlling power in the universe and, if so, what is its interest or disinterest in man? Each of these questions will receive consideration in the examination of metaphysical theology in science fiction/fantasy. Before getting into that directly, they bear closer consideration on their own.

"What is the nature of creation?" might be restated, "What is the nature of existence?" All the things that we sense, or think we sense, have an existence of their own. They exist in time and space and the questions "Why?" and "How?" are immediately evident. Regardless of the theory proposed to deal with those two questions, the undisputable fact remains that things are there...
somehow. The creationist credits a Supreme Being with a deliberate creative act which contains closed hierarchies with man ensconced at the top. The evolutionist sees a multi-million year schema in which fortunate accidents and natural selection combine to create an ever-changing panorama of adaptive entities in an environmental test tube. The philosopher may think of existence in terms of perception, in which the perceived nature of things is merely the creation of the senses. The list of responses to the problem could go on and on, and to complicate matters even more, the inquiries do not become exhausted when the limits of time and space are reached.

For reasons that Einstein fairly clearly defined, a space traveller, hurtling through space at thousands of miles an hour, would arrive back on earth younger than someone who had stayed on earth and had been born at the same time. How does one realistically grasp the notion of the nature of existence if time suddenly becomes relative? Physicists and astronomers often puzzle over the intriguing mysteries of black holes and white dwarfs, tendering such incredible theories as power pumps and matter transfer points between parallel universes. If there might be duoverse, then why not

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1 See Forward, Robert L., "Einstein’s Legacy." Omni, I (March 1979), 54-59.
multiverse? Thus, the problem of the nature of creation compounds.

Ruling out infinite regression and solipsism, the potential for diversity in interpreting creation multiplies on a logarithmic scale. Whether it is the finger of God or the big bang that is the force of creation (as an act), about creation (as the product) the same multitude of questions applies: Does life exist on other planets? Does it exist on different planets at different times in a sort of evolutionary development of habitats, planets, and life forms/biology? Do universes exist concurrently, do they flow back and forth into each other like tides, or do they drain inexorably one to the next, never to return? Does more than one intelligent species exist;—if so, is there separate but equal rationality, emotion, and volition? Or is what we see merely the creation of unfaithful senses that delude us from any real appropriation of the nature of things? All of these questions and more comprise the subject matter of the quest to know the bases of existence and without the inquiry into the nature of creation the next three questions would have little or no meaning. The science fiction/fantasy that I will present gives an innovative variety of answers to the question, and it does so in a way that makes each variation plausible. Fiction outside of science fiction/fantasy has seldom, if ever, been
able to successfully do the same.

"What is the nature of man?" In discussing the nature of creation, the prospect of there being more than one intelligent life form was briefly touched upon. In our experience, there is only one intelligent species, and that collective humanity is rather abstractly referred to as "man." If there really were Martians or Venusians or Vulcans, they would call us Earthlings or Terrans or their equivalent name for inhabitants of the third planet from the sun, but, certainly, they would not give us their cognate for "man." Each race would think of itself as the true man; therefore, what is the nature of man?

There is more to this question than just the consideration of biology. Cannot man also be defined in terms of behavioral and cultural attributes, as well as religious, social, moral, and legal specifications? Of course, the answer to all of these approaches has to be "Yes." Again, is the nature of man constant, generation to generation, century to century, planet to planet, universe to universe? Once more we see the options stretching toward infinity and the science fiction/fantasy I will present gives some interesting commentary on this question.

"Does man act freely or is existence predetermined?"
In Christian theology, this is a controversy as old as the church. It is free will versus determinism; it is
being able to choose between heaven or hell versus no choice in a system of election and predestination. The metaphysical theologian, however, has a less strict and less dogmatic structure to deal with and, unlike his sectarian counterpart, an indistinct base upon which to stand. While the Christian (or Hebrew or Moslem) theologian has scripture and tradition to draw upon, while the logician has mathematical percepts and probabilities and precedents to utilize, while the astrologer has an occult science and the stars and planets for guides, metaphysical theology gives its theologian no such presuppositions.

B.F. Skinner's behavioral models of stimulus-response would lock us into an environment that controls us; E.O. Wilson would have us believe that our genetic heritage determines not only whom we are but what kind of person we are; Noam Chomsky says that deep inside us lies the capability for creation on the verbal level and that mysterious "deep structures" make us able to generate novel grammatical structures and, thus, novel, independent thought. Science, psychology, philosophy, religion—truth or mumbo-jumbo?—do they all really seek to explore, explain, and define the same things?

Is it inherent in the prophetic disposition of science fiction/fantasy to begin to turn the tables on the scientists, psychologists, philosophers, and religion—
ists? In other words, if science fiction/fantasy is a door to the quantum leap of human consciousness evolution, is it possible that freedom of action, determinism, or syntheses thereof will begin to reveal themselves as indigenous (or artificial) elements of reality? These are intriguing and important questions and it is easy to see the necessity of pursuing this theme in the examination of science fiction/fantasy.

"Is there a larger, controlling power in the universe and, if so, what is its interest or disinterest in man?" This two-part question is the logical extension of all the others. If one considers the nature of creation, the problem of causality is an ultimate concern. In pursuing man's nature and in figuring the extent of man's freedom, the problem of a formative and controlling agency must be faced again and again.

These, then, are the four main queries that I will employ in the discussion to follow. Because the questions are consistent, however, does not mean that the answers will be. As it develops, metaphysical theology does not become homogenized; far from it, it shows the greatest measure of its maturity by the multiplicity of its vision. A one-celled amoeba is not as well developed, adaptable, and, for the most part, interesting as a more complex organism with specialized cells. Singly, these specialized cells would be useless and inferior to the
crude but complete amoeba, but when they are organized into a living thing their diversity combines in a synergistic biology that makes the total organism much more amazing and miraculous than the individual parts. We should not be amazed, then, to find that in the evolution of metaphysical theology in science fiction/fantasy, it becomes a more complex corpus with many diversified parts. There are still some science fiction/fantasy "amoebas" around, too; but in the main evolutionary stream, the flow is constantly expanding. As thematic components become more sophisticated, they sometimes mutate, giving us forms and ideas that serve as visions of the future. I do not mean "future" in a purely historical sense, but the future in terms of realities and consciousness that is not yet fully seen or perceived.

One important thing to bear in mind is that the presence of the motifs of metaphysical theology does not have to be planned as an integral part of the story by the author. In fact, one focus of this investigation is the belief that, wittingly placed or not, metaphysical theology is an inherent component of science fiction/fantasy and its importance should not be minimized. An important aspect of the dawn of a new age—say the transition from Modernism to Postmodernism, as in Hassan—is the new age's ability to break through in amazing previews of itself by using the media of art, music,
literature, etc., without the prior consent of the mortals who made them. Hence, Isaiah speaks of the coming of Christ with incredible prescience yet never knows Him or His time; Blaise Pascal prefigures the developers of computers by 300 years yet never knows that his computer is anything more than a clever device.

Now that the groundwork has been done, it is time to get to the fiction itself. Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963) was a prolific writer. His breadth of publication is astounding, running from literary criticism to apologetics to education to children's literature. His science fiction/fantasy series, variously called "The Space Trilogy," "The Ransom Books," or "The Perelandra Series," will constitute the set of books I will investigate. This group of books displays the scope, idea, and vision of science fiction/fantasy and certifies science fiction/fantasy's candidacy as the fiction of the future.

C.S. LEWIS' "SPACE TRILOGY"

The Lewis space books consist of Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength. The brilliance of his work lies not so much in his writing as in the way he leads both the Christian adherent and Christianity's religious and non-religious opponents through the solar system to lesson after lesson in metaphysical theology. Many Christian groups have sought to
elevate Lewis as a paradigmatic example of the intellectual exercise of honest Christian fidelity. Antagonists have pointed to Lewis as an example of an intellectual who had to continually breach or overlook doctrinal inadequacies in order to maintain scholarly and creative integrity. As in most such partisan debates, it has been sectarian interest rather than honest inquiry that has yielded these views, and both of them seem to miss the real riches of Lewis' work.

Out of the Silent Planet, the first book in the series, is the tale of a philologist named Ransom who, while on a walking tour, stumbles upon and is abducted by two men engaged in a secretive and doubtfully "scientific" mission to Mars. The chronicle of his adventures and subsequent return comprise the bulk of the book.

This book offers detailed insight into the question about the nature of man. It also touches on the nature of creation and whether or not there is a controlling power in the universe. In the consideration of these questions, bear in mind, as in the example of the amoeba and the complex organism, that the possibilities that are presented are only very small parts of the whole; furthermore, it is an as yet unperceived whole. Part of the understanding is the assumption that science fiction/fantasy opens up vistas of increasingly diverse possibilities.

Lewis has populated Mars with three distinct,
intelligent life forms: sorns, hrossa, and pfifltriggi. Each species has particular traits and abilities that are peculiar to it; for example, the sorns are more intellectual, the hrossa are poets and arcadians, and the pfifltriggi are artisans. Ransom devotes a great deal of his time trying to figure out which race is the dominant one. He is, of course, thinking with the narrowness of an earthman's mind. He figures that since there is only one dominant species on earth, it must be so elsewhere.

When his abductors, Weston and Devine, attempt to deliver him to the sorns, Ransom, who is as ignorant of the sorns intentions as his captors are, runs away and eventually comes into contact with a hross. His feelings at the encounter are a revelation:

Then something happened which completely altered his state of mind. The creature, which was still steaming and shaking itself on the back and had obviously not seen him, opened its mouth and began to make noises. This in itself was not remarkable; but a lifetime of linguistic study assured Ransom almost at once that these were articulate noises. The creature was talking. It had a language.\(^1\)

This sudden awareness of another intelligence is followed by a sort of courtship ritual in which Ransom and the hross attempt to assess each other.

Neither dared let the other approach, yet each repeatedly felt the impulse to do so himself, and

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yielded to it. It was foolish, frightening, ecstatic and unbearable all in one moment. It was more than curiosity. It was more like a courtship—like the meeting of the first man and the first woman in the world; it was like something beyond that; so natural is the contact of sexes, so limited the strangeness, so shallow the reticence, so mild the repugnance to be overcome, compared with the first tingling intercourse of two different, but rational, species.

In short order, Ransom develops an affinity for the hross and begins to pick up the language; but hardly has the incredible novelty of the encounter worn off when Ransom is again considering the relationship of the hrossa to the sorns. He wonders if the sorns are only semi-intelligent cattle belonging to the hrossa or, worse, if the hrossa are the cattle of the sorns.

Later, Ransom learns, while in conversation with the hrossa that have adopted him, that there are not just sorns and hrossa, but the pfiffltriggi as well. What is more, all three seem to belong to a more inclusive classification called "hnau." Ransom is told that he is hnau also. When he asks which of the hnau rules, the puzzling reply is that Oyarsa, who is not hnau, is the ruler and only the sorns could adequately say what Oyarsa was. From this, Ransom reasoned that the sorns must be more intelligent than the hrossa and therefore must be the real rulers of the planet, no matter how secretly they went about it.

1loc. cit., p. 56.
Ransom nurtures this misconception most of the time that he is on Malacandra, or Mars. After living with the hrossa for a while and having some adventures with them—the last of which ends in tragedy for his friend, the first hross he met, by Weston's and Devine's hands—Ransom sets off for Meldilorn, the seat of Oyarsa, to answer the Oyarsa's summons. Upon meeting a sorn, who becomes Ransom's transport to Meldilorn, he still seeks to know which species rules. First, he asks the sorn if its kind rules the hrossa because they are smarter than the hrossa. The sorn replies that Oyarsa rules the hrossa. Then Ransom asks who rules the sorns. The sorn replies that Oyarsa does. Finally, Ransom asks if Oyarsa is a sorn, and the sorn replies ruefully that Oyarsa is not a sorn, he rules all hnau, he rules everything on Malacandra, and he is not embodied the way hnau and the animals are embodied.

The confusing thing for Ransom, coming from a planet in which there appears to be only one kind of hnau which not only rules the planet but itself as well, was that he had never considered the potential of the query, "What is the nature of man?" All of the sub-questions, ranging from "Does biology determine what 'man' is?" to "Is there a hierarchy of which 'man' is only a part, even an inferior part?" must surely impose themselves. A little later, in a sort of theo-
logical discussion with some sorns, the idea that Ransom's race, the people of Thulcandra, the silent planet, do not know their proper orientation is articulated by a learned sorn:

There must be rule, yet how can creatures rule themselves? Beasts must be ruled by hnau and hnau by eldila and eldila by Maleldil. These creatures have no eldila. They are like one trying to lift himself by his own hair—or one trying to see over a whole country when he is on level with it—like a female trying to beget young on herself.

Eldila are kind of like spirits of light and Oyarsa are the greatest of the eldila; Maleldil is the Supreme Being. The thought behind the elder sorn's statement is that Thulcandra (earth) is unnatural, out of harmony with the rest of the universe, and in chaos. Because Thulcandra is bent, or contaminated by evil, it is alienated from the rest of creation and its inhabitants are under the onus of a corrupt leadership. Since they are essentially alone they have a myopic view of things and they cannot help but turn inward in a futile incest of the species. Incest is an unhealthy intercourse that ultimately breeds inferior stock; hence, the species that is cut off from intercourse with the rest of the galaxy is bound to become stigmatized scientifically, socially, theologically, etc. Out of the illusion of being sole occupants of the universe spring such ideas as the inherent right of the race to dominate creation.

^loc. cit., p. 102.
by virtue of superior might and intelligence, the mani-
est desty of the race to rule the stars, and the
ultimate inheritance of eternal life—either on an
individual or a racial basis. These are the kinds of
ideas that Weston uses as the philosophical sop for his
"scientific" program of planetary conquest and genocide.

When Ransom is being interviewed by Oyarsa, he
relates Weston's motives:

...the other means evil to you. I think he would
destroy all your people to make room for our
people; and then he would do the same with other
worlds again. He wants our race to last for always,
I think, and he hopes they will leap from world to
world...

Oyarsa replies,

Is he wounded in his brain?
Does he think he could go to the great worlds?
Does he think Maleldil wants a race to live forever? 2

That final question, among all others, begs the question,
the ultimate racial question, and brings the problem of
the nature of "man" into dramatic focus. Taken in the
narrow scope of racial identity, "man" is biologically
exclusive, self-centered, and sees meaning only in terms
of its selfhood and continuing existence. Seen in the
broader context of typology, in which general types
are emphasized rather than tightly defined individual
groups, "man" is an inclusive, interactive, and coop-

1loc. cit., p. 123.

2ibid.
ervative assemblage of different races fulfilling complementary functions; hence, on Malacandra the sorns, hrossa, and pfiflriggi are all hnau working in different functions, and they immediately recognize humans as a kind of hnau—each type distinct, yet all hnau. Not surprisingly, the humans do not recognize the three Malacandran races as their equals. It is no wonder the sorns were struck by the fact that there was only one kind of hnau on Thulcandra; one was moved to say, "Your thought must be at the mercy of your blood...For you cannot compare it with thought that floats on a different blood."¹

I have given only sketchy mention of Maleldil, the Supreme Being, but fuller examination will have to wait inasmuch as Maleldil is a factor in all three books. Suffice it to say that Maleldil's interest in the events of the story seems to be expressed largely through the office of the eldila, particularly the Òyarsa, the greatest of the eldila. The next book gives greater expression of this and it also offers more commentary on the nature of man.

Perelandra, or Voyage to Venus, presents the continuing adventures of Ransom as related by the narrator of the book, Lewis. This Lewis is no more to be confused

¹loc. cit., p. 103.
with C.S. Lewis the author than the Chaucer of *The Canterbury Tales* is to be confused with their author, Geoffry Chaucer. It is merely a device that adds a certain amount of intrigue and credibility to an apparent fiction and can increase the levels of meaning in a story. This second book, as mentioned above, continues to pursue the question of man's nature and the problem of Maleldil; additionally, it brings into full bloom the inquiry into the nature of creation, both as event and as product, that was hinted at in the previous volume. It brings to the fore the debate concerning free will and determinism.

The story opens with Lewis going to Ransom's house in response to Ransom's request. To his chagrin, he finds that Ransom is preparing, with supernatural aid, to go to Perelandra (Venus) and that he needs Lewis' help both to leave and when he returns. The Reason for Ransom's going is that he has been ordered from "higher up," ostensibly by Maleldil. It seems that the bent Oyarsa of Thulcandra is attempting to invade Perelandra and introduce evil into it, and, even though he cannot escape Thulcandra himself, he will send someone or something to do his dirty work. Ransom's mission is to see that the evil plan fails.

As it turns out, Perelandra is a new world; new, at least in the sense that it is inhabited by the first two of its human-like creatures. Obviously borrowing
from the Judeao-Christian myth of Adam and Eve, author Lewis presents a variation of Eve's temptation in which the Queen Mother of Perelandra has the advantage of an advocate (Ransom) as well as a tempter.

Perelandra is a world covered largely by seas which have large floating islands of vegetation. The humanoids live upon these islands. There are some landmasses, but Maleldil has forbidden the king and queen to spend the night on them. It is around this command that the temptation revolves.

Ransom's first contact on Perelandra is the queen who has been separated from and is looking for her mate. Almost immediately, the antagonist arrives in the form of Dr. Weston, who has been "taken over" by bent powers, and the contest begins.

The importance of the Green Lady is manifold. In the first place, she serves as a prototype for the next step in Maleldil's creation and it is incredibly important that she not be a failure, as the prototype on Thulcandra was. Secondly, she functions as an object over which good and evil can wage their war, and as such she symbolizes the battlefield, which in real terms is much larger than any one person. Thirdly, she represents the unformed innocent for whom the learning of good and evil cuts to the very heart of the free will/determinism debate. Finally, she is the vehicle by which Ransom is
tempered and formed and disciplined by Maleldil into a
useable vehicle himself.

As was implicit in the three life forms on Malacandra,
collectively called hnau, the nature of man is surely
more a matter of type than of a biological specificity.
In conjunction with the idea of type, the notion of each
race having a definite place and time was introduced, and
with the presentation of the Green Woman into the typolog­
ical picture a developmental scheme is seen. The
idea that seems to be forwarded is that as creation
moves ahead so does the nature of man. Hence, we move
from old Malacandra with its three hnau to Thulcandra
with its one, imperfect hnau to Perelandra with its
one, potentially perfect hnau. This idea of successive
creation of planets, planetary life, and associated
world spirits is not unknown even in Christian theology. ¹
The implication is that the creative act is becoming
more complex, potentially more dangerous—witness the
failure on Thulcandra—and more complete. In a sense,
this is an Aristotelian² sensibility in which things
are continually "becoming" rather than emulating a
state of "being" or a static model. It is the "form"

¹Origen treats on this idea in his De Principiis
(date unknown) but since the Middle Ages these ideas
are considered heresy.

²Aristotle, in Poetics, elucidates these sympathies
as a response to Book X of Plato's Republic.
of creation that is being dealt with in these successive creative acts, seeking the direction in which creation is capable of reaching its complete fulfillment and displaying its distinctive nature. This is not a concern for individual acts, features, or details per se, but with the total range and potential of the figure or idea carried out to its fullest attainment if it were permitted to do so.

Thus, there are the sorns, hrossa, and pfifflriggi of Malacandra who are as complete as they can be under the limitations of their created potential: distinctive races with limited talents and limited time; life on Malacandra is waning after the abortive attack on the planet’s surface by the bent Oyarsa of Thulcandra and their time is drawing to a close. Next there is the human race on Thulcandra, a newer prototype with a number of shortcomings precipitated by the presence of evil. Finally, there is the new race of Perelandra with the potential of realizing either evil or good with the assistance of the former, fallen race: Weston for evil, Ransom for good, and the form on Perelandra hangs in the balance. Choosing evil, the form is usurped; choosing good, the form reaches toward fulfillment.

It is prudent to keep two things separate here: First, the two books, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*, work as a unit in laying out the principle
of the developing nature of creation, although what is in the first book is not evident until the second book is read. Second, although there is much in the first book to inform the notion of the nature of man, it is in the second book that the real development of the nature of man as promise and potential is given. Granted, neither premise is exclusive of the other, but I think that there is enough of a difference in scope and development that the two should be inspected independently as well as conjunctively.

For example, if "hnau" translates as a rough equivalent of "man," then a number of observations about the nature of man could be gotten from the first book: biology is not the sole determiner of what is "man" and what is not; all forms of man seem to have language and it seems to be possible for other kinds of men to learn it, etc; nonetheless, these things are really dealing with particulars, whereas in Perelandra universals are being expounded. Out of the Silent Planet is history; Perelandra is poetry. Even though Ransom, Weston, and the Green Lady are important characters in Perelandra, it is the plot that is the focus of the book. Within that frame it attempts to present a heightened and coherent imitation of nature, particularly the nature of man as form.
In that perspective, when the long duel between Ransom and Weston is detailed—in prose that more than adequately abjures the demeaning repugnance of unmasked evil—it is not the individual incidents, moving as they may be, that are of the most importance but rather the disclosure of the relationship between unchecked evil and man in an unrealized form. Again, it is not so important that it took two savage attempts for Ransom to destroy Weston's body and the evil that had invaded it; it is important to note that Weston, helpless and totally out of control of himself, demonstrated the abject brutishness and treachery incumbent upon the man whose nature has been absolutely defiled, while Ransom demonstrated how desperate the struggle must be for man to reach fulfillment. It was not enough to merely repudiate the evil that was present; neither intellectual refutation nor spiritual confrontation were enough to either spare the Green Lady and her progeny or to deliver Ransom from the impotence of his "accidental" (obstructed and unfulfilled) race. What it took, after a monumental internal debate, was for Ransom to seek to cast out and destroy the very embodiment of evil that had trespassed on the unsullied sphere of Perelandra. Although the actual destruction of Weston's body is somewhat repellant, it is necessary and it serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it eliminates the threat of evil from the
inhabitants of Perelandra without those inhabitants having to participate with the evil except to resist it. On the other hand, it allows Ransom and his bent race an opportunity to serve the cause of Maleldil and, being the first race bent by evil, it is the race that turns again and smites evil in its tracks.

Having been tested and found worthy, reunited with the king, and full of the radiance of a thing developing as Maleldil intended, the Queen Mother, along with the King Father and the rest of the planet, is consecrated by the assembled Oyarsa of the galaxy, minus that of Thulcandra, of course. A new era in the "becoming" of creation is unveiled. Ransom, whisked back to Thulcandra, cannot relate to the dutiful Lewis any concrete observations that bear consideration. Perhaps the point is this: one can only imagine how grand hnuu ("man") might become if the form is seeking its culmination at last.

Before leaving Perelandra, the interlocking questions of free will/determinism and the understanding of Maleldil must be brought up. On the face of it, it is obvious that Maleldil has a hand in what is going on: Ransom is summoned to Perelandra by Maleldil; it is Maleldil's commandment concerning the fixed lands that serves as the test; Maleldil commends the consecration of the new world by the Oyarsa. Underneath all that, the
actual details of the encounter between good and evil on Perelandra seem to be left to individual choice: Weston, with some pretext of pseudo-scientific messianism, comes to the new world apparently at will; with only a rote awareness of Maleldil's command, the Green Woman seems to be at complete liberty to disobey once she knows it is possible; Ransom's travail with Weston is almost totally left to his discretion and invention. Even at the point where Ransom decides that Weston must be physically destroyed, it is quite ambiguous as to whether or not supernatural influence is being felt. Under the extreme duress of the internal debate, "Almost the Darkness said to Ransom, 'You know you are only wasting time.'"¹ The narration continues: "The Voice—for it was almost with a Voice that he was now contending—seemed to create around this alternative an infinite vacancy."² Then later, "'It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom,' said the Voice."³ It is obvious that there is a good deal of ambiguity in this scene. Plausible arguments can be made either for the wooing of Ransom's reason by the superior will of Maleldil or for a self-induced semi-mystical experience in which outside help is manufactured by the mind to

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²loc. cit., p. 146.
³loc. cit., p. 147.
assuage the fears that accompany a terrible decision that is made alone. I suppose this is one that could go either way.

Given the scenario of the book and the seeming tension between elements of free will and determinism, traditionalists could create pandemonium: Calvinists enjoining Arminians, naturalists dissenting from romanticists and fighting with realists, the Mahayana upbraiding the Hinayana, the pragmatist calling to task the mystic. However, the fundamental metaphysical truth here is not one of contradiction but of complement. Without the exercise of free will, the characters would have little effect on the development of the plot. With the presence of individual volition, the plot works because the ability of man as a form to develop both accidentally and as intended toward fulfillment is central to the book. Hence, while Maleldil is the initiator, it is the nature of creation (in this case, man) that it be free to develop without *deus ex machina*. It is true that Maleldil has set the parameters and to that extent things are determined, but it is just as true that those parameters include the possibility of failure, as in the case of the inhabitants of Thulcandra, which is brought on by the necessary risk of the exercise of free will. This is not, in any strict sense, the same type of problem that Christian dogmas nit-pick about when they deal with free will/determinism, but, hearkening back to my admoni-
tion about de-Christianizing all this, it is more readily apparent just what the assemblage of all possible positions (or locus) on the issue is. That is a rather complex way of saying that each dogmatic, partisan approach to the free will/determinism problem probably touches on a point of validity here and there and that the incorporation of those points into a more complex pattern reveals the path or pattern of the inter-relationship between the exercise of free will and the strictures of determinism. What is presented in *Perelandra* is not a confusing picture in which disparate elements clash but rather like a musical piece in which the score may appear to the eye to be unharmonic but in reality it is enharmonic—perfect intonation. Maleldil's over-all function as initiator cannot, indeed should not, be denied because Maleldil serves to give direction and purpose to the plot. The actions of the individual characters, only because they are actions of free will, give meaning to that direction and purpose. The locus that cuts through the plot of *Perelandra* and through the volumes of dogma and philosophy is not an either/or proposition but one of balance and complement.

Because of the complexity, breadth of content, and actual cosmic space of the previous two books, *That Hideous Strength* seems an anticlimax. Since *Perelandra* leads one to believe that the hnaus of Thulcandra are almost passé,
inasmuch as the Thulcandrans have been superseded in attainment and purpose by the Perelandrans, it seems odd that the final book of the trilogy should deal so exclusively with the bent hnau. It is possible that Lewis felt it was expedient to come back to earth to make a moral and spiritual lesson, not to mention a commentary on his time. This didactic purpose notwithstanding, the exercise of free will and the created purpose have been united in the form living on Perelandra. The failure of the form to realize its promise, because of the "accident" on Thulcandra, must be examined in greater detail. That *Hideous Strength* presents a mini-drama in which the hnau of Thulcandra are caught in a squeeze between the evil forces holding sway on earth and the redemptive efforts of Maleldil.

By mini-drama I mean to refer to the fact that the consequences of what happens on Thulcandra at any given point in its history is only a small part of the total drama that is being played out; likewise, what happens on Thulcandra through the entire course of its brief sojourn in the solar system is but a bit part in the larger drama of the cosmos. That is to say we appear large to ourselves and perhaps to our time; but, compared to the vast evolutionary flow of our race, we are but a brief moment and, in the perspective of time and space, we are but a speck of dust on a slightly larger
speck of dust. That is not to say that we, as a race or as individuals, are unimportant. The very point, it seems to me, is that what we do, individually and collectively, does matter and it matters even in the diminution brought by time and space.

In *That Hideous Strength*, the ubiquitous Ransom is again a major character; however, he is replaced as the central actor by Mark and Jane Studdock, husband and wife, who follow widely ranging paths to come to the same end.

Simply stated, the story goes like this: Mark is a young scholar who is flawed by ambition; his overriding concern in his relationships is to work his way toward the "inner circle" where the real power lies and where the real decisions are made. Jane is an unsatisfied woman, ex-scholar, and "gifted" with dreams that come unbidden to reveal events and situations that are unrelated to her life and experiences. The people at the N.I.C.E., which is an acronym for a quasi-governmental, pseudo-scientific organization that is really just a front for evil's latest attempt to decimate Thulcandra, know of Jane's gift and they seek to employ Mark as a means of gaining access to her. While Mark is away being seduced by N.I.C.E., Jane falls into the company of the Dimbles who direct her to Ransom. Ransom uses her gift to gain information that eventually nets them the recently restored body of Merlin, the sorcerer and
magician, who has to redeem himself for some improprieties in the past. With advice from the assembled Oyarsa, Ransom and Merlin direct the undoing of the N.I.C.E., from which Mark escapes by the skin of his teeth with a singular appreciation for the folly of his ways. Mark and Jane are reunited, Ransom is swept into the heavens—to Perelandra no doubt—Merlin is gone, and the world is spared, though certainly not redeemed.

That summary may be a bit too simple but it supplies the basis upon which the important issues may be raised. After all, this third book is quite different in subject matter and plot development when compared to the other two; it is longer in logos but shorter in mythos than the others. The book holds up, though, because the entire structure of it is predicated on the groundwork of the previous two. Certainly, the visitation of the Oyarsa to Ransom's room could be understood without reading the other books, but how much richer and deeper is our understanding having been with Ransom to Meldilorn to see Oyarsa or having been in the Alpine meadow on the fixed lands of Perelandra to see the planetary magnates appear in their awesome, terrible beneficence to consecrate the planet and its inhabitants. Again, the malevolence of the N.I.C.E. can be reasonably understood on the strength of the presentation in the book, yet how much more intense it becomes when we have seen earthmen
murder a horse and talk blithely of eradicating a planet's species in order to propagate the bent knau of Thulcandra or when we have heard a song say that humans are at the mercy of their blood or we have witnessed the obscene display of depraved behavior by Weston's body under evil's control. Of course we understand evil on a terrestrial level, but seeing it through the eyes of the universe is another thing. It is the metaphysical reality of it that is the key. Late in That Hideous Strength, Grace Ironwood, Ransom's associate, speaks these words:

'The laws of the universe are never broken. Your mistake is to think that the little regularities we have observed on one planet for a few hundred years are the real unbreakable laws; whereas they are only the remote results which the true laws bring about more often than not; as a kind of accident.'

Thus the perspective is shown; we, like St. Paul, see as through a glass darkly, but the face of reality looms much larger than the mere reflection in a temporal glass. Through the bits and pieces of metaphysical theology that are gleaned from experiencing the first two books, the larger lessons can be honed down to applicable size in the final book.

The questions on the natures of creation and man have largely been exhausted in the previous books. It

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was already observed that Thulcandra is an outcast in the universe because it is a place where the intention of creation has gone awry, where the exercise of free will and the predeterminism of the form have failed to form a synergy. As such, it has been both the base of possible infection of other planets and the source of its own undoing in trying to contaminate other worlds. Also, it has been a sore spot, a blight in the solar system that eventually would have to be cleansed and healed. That *Hideous Strength* presents what is, at most, only a beginning and not a final cleansing; the entire issue remains problematical.

As for the issues of free will/determinism and the problem of Maleldil, the book offers little that is new. What is given, instead of additional theory, is a demonstration of the consequences of free will when the wrong choices are made and what kinds of resolutions can be had for the alienation wrong choices cause between Creator and creation. The book is not a compendium of all the possible consequences or resolutions but it demonstrates some possibilities.

A couple of examples will serve to demonstrate this. Mark Studdock's woes come about from his inability to use his freedom of choice judiciously. Whenever he has a choice between forsaking the N.I.C.E. and their policies, his desire to be in the inner circle compels

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him to choose to stay even when he suspects he should get out. Despite his consistent record of wrong decisions, he is surprisingly spared from the final destruction of the N.I.C.E. at Belbury during the Babel-like death orgy. His deliverance is due largely to the intercession of Jane, Ransom, and Merlin. His thoughts as he made his way to St. Anne's were these:

...he was going to see Jane in what he now felt to be her proper world. But not his. For he now thought that with all his life-long eagerness to reach an inner circle he had chosen the wrong circle. Jane was where she belonged. He was going to be admitted only out of kindness, because Jane had been fool enough to marry him.

That puts it rather nicely. He had not been forced or duped into his untenable position, he had chosen it for himself. More than that, he was aware of the unworthiness of his posture and equally aware of the grace that had spared him his just end. With this second chance, Mark has the opportunity to choose for the good—the good being the created form wilfully attaining the fulfillment and purpose of its creation. Thus, the dissonance between the creation and the Creator can, at least on an individual basis, be overcome.

The second example is a bit more complex in that it deals with the reason for Maleldil's incursion into Thulcandra's space. Traditionally, Thulcandra had been

\[\text{loc. cit., p. 360.}\]
alienated from the rest of the universe and left to be the battlefield between good and evil. Since it was a domestic war, meaning there was no outside interference, it remained to be seen whether the original error of free will could be resolved within the race itself. The outlook was bleak and it looked as though the final outcome would be negative. However, as the power of evil grew, it committed a sin as old as sin itself, the sin of hubris. Like Eve, Creon, Caesar, Napoleon, Catherine, Hitler and thousands more, evil and its agents extended their hands too far, overstepped their bounds, and brought the judgement of the universe upon themselves. They should not have trespassed on Perelandra. With that transgression, the embargo against Thulcandra was ended and the access to the power of Maleldil through the planetary Oyarsa that was gained was the wherewithal to undo the N.I.C.E. and its evil lords.

That Hideous Strength does not present the panorama of the other books, nor does it offer the startling insights concerning the scope of metaphysical theology, but it does give a well-written, earth's eye view of some of the ramifications of that metaphysical theology in individual and racial terms.

To conclude this examination of Lewis' books, I should bring to light some of the attitudes of the man himself. It can be argued that since Lewis was a Christian
and an apologist he is an easy mark for the extraction of theological material. There is truth to that, of course, but keeping in mind the de-Christianized nature of metaphysical theology, it actually makes analysis more difficult. Lewis knew of the tendency to see everything he wrote as an orthodox statement and he was not totally sympathetic toward it. He wrote,

> It is sobering and cathartic to remember, now and then, our collective smallness, our apparent isolation, the apparent indifference of nature, the slow biological, geological, and astronomical processes which may, in the long run, make many of our hopes (possibly some of our fears) ridiculous.

About charges that science fiction was escapist he wrote

> Hence the uneasiness which they arouse in those who for whatever reason, wish to keep us wholly imprisoned in the immediate conflict. That perhaps is why people are so ready with the charge of "escape!" I never fully understood it till my friend Professor Tolkien asked me the very simple question, "What class of men would you expect to be most preoccupied with, and most hostile to, the idea of escape?" and gave the obvious answer: jailers. ...But there is perhaps this truth behind it: those who brood much on the remote past or future, or stare long at the night sky, are less likely than others to be ardent or orthodox partisans.

If that does not convince one that there is more to science fiction/fantasy—not just his, but the genre at large—than mere reiteration of Christian or partisan dogma, Lewis goes on to say this:

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2loc. cit., p. 67.
We must not listen to Pope's maxim about the proper study of mankind. The proper study of man is everything. The proper study of man as artist is everything which gives a foothold to the imagination and the passions.

Lewis seems to give assent to the notion of a metaphysical reality beyond the scope of a myopic Christianity; even if he does not, it would be no less apparent in the structure of his works.

I must reiterate that these are only a fraction of the possibilities and that the evolutionary maturity of both science fiction/fantasy and metaphysical theology is enhanced by the multitude of their components. That Lewis has been able to deliver so much informative fantasy concerning the nature of creation, the nature of man, the free will/determinism debate, and the problem of deity is a great credit to him, but it is also a great credit to the race that these ideas can be articulated and understood. It bodes well for mankind as it approaches the next quantum leap toward the future.

\[1\text{loc. cit., 65.}\]
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