Considering *The Great Divorce* (Parts III, IV, & V)

J. R. Christopher

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Abstract
Part III is a close textual comparison of the English and American editions and the newspaper serialization. Part IV examines the underlying structure, comparing the encounters in Divorce with the organization of The Divine Comedy and concluding that Lewis's book is not as tightly and hierarchically organized, either artistically or theologically. This section also attempts to categorize Divorce using Northrop Frye's classification scheme laid out in The Anatomy of Criticism, and concludes with a debate about the merits of “destructive” criticism. Finally, Part V, considers a religious reading of Divorce, and how reading such a work is akin to the art of mediation, comprising contemplation, analysis, and colloquy.

Keywords

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Considering The Great Divorce

J.R. Christopher

Preface

The Great Divorce: A Dream, a small book by C. S. Lewis, appeared in England in 1945, and the following year in America. It had been published previously as a newspaper serial under the title of "Who Goes Home? or, The Grand Divorce" (10 November 1944 to 13 April 1945). My study of this book consists of five parts. The first two: "The Medieval Analogues" and "The Modern Analogues" - were read at Mythcon I and appeared in the Proceedings of that conference. The third part, "The Various Versions", was not suitable for reading, since it consists mainly of charts, but it is here reproduced in its proper sequence. The last two sections: "The Generic Artistry" and "The Religious Application" were read, of course, at Mythcon II and are here printed.

One Dantean allusion which should have been noted in the first part of this study appears in a conversation between the Ghost Artist and his friend; the latter is explaining the status of famous artists in Heaven (on pp. 75-76 of the English edition):

"But they aren't distinguished—no more than anyone else. Don't you understand? The Glory flows into everyone, and back from everyone: light and mirrors. But the light's the thing."

This I believe to be a generalized reference to Dante's II Paradiso, where the souls of the saved, the angels, and God are imaged as light. I do not know how many times Dante refers to mirrors—not having a concordance available—but in about an hour of looking I located the following passages (given by canto and line numbers): II:90, 97ff.; III:10; IX:21, 61; XI:127-128 (a reflection in a sword); XV:21, 61; XII:127-128; XVI:97-103 (a reflection in a sword); XVIII:114; XXII:118-120, 128 (reflections, though not involving mirrors). Some discussion of some of these passages appears in Allen Tate's "The Symbolic Imagination: A Meditation on Dante's Three Mirrors" (the three mirrors appear in II:97ff.).

And no doubt there is some resemblance between Macdonald's comments to Lewis that the vision he has seen is symbolic (p. 116), echoing the immediately preceding discussion of man's necessity for seeing things in time (p. 115), and Beatrice's comments to Dante that the organization of Heaven which he is perceiving is symbolic, fitted to his understanding (II Paradiso, IV:28-53).

Part III: The Various Versions

In Part II, I wrote of the modern works which were parallel to The Great Divorce and some which probably influenced it, but I omitted one analogue which Lewis acknowledges; he writes in his "Preface":

"...I must acknowledge my debt to a writer whose name I have forgotten and whom I read several years ago in a highly coloured American magazine of what they call 'Scientifiction.' The unbreakable and unendurable quality of my heavenly matter was suggested to me by him, though he used the fancy for a different and most ingenious purpose. His hero travelled into the past: and there, very properly, found the results of his ventures in their original bodies and sandwiches that no strength could bite—because, of course, nothing in the past can be changed, with less originality but (I hope) equal propriety I have transferred this to the eternal. If the writer of that story ever reads these lines I ask him to accept my grateful acknowledgment."

(pp.8-9)

Lewis also has a footnote on p. 112 about the bus increasing in size as it enters the border of Heaven:

"This method of travel also I learned from the

'Scientifictionists.'"

So far as I know, no one ever identified either origin precisely. But I would like to make a bibliographical point: the Prefaces are identical in the English and American editions of The Great Divorce; but the footnote exists only in the English edition.

This raises several questions about the various versions. Spot-checking has not revealed any changes in wording between the two hardcover editions, but the American version does have chapter numbers, fourteen of them. At this point I compared the specifications of the English edition, which are marked with large, dark capital letters, with the American chapters, with the following result:

CHART ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PASSAGE</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I seemed to be standing</td>
<td>p. 13</td>
<td>p. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not very long</td>
<td>p. 17</td>
<td>p. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A cliff had loomed up</td>
<td>p. 26</td>
<td>p. 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the solid people</td>
<td>p. 30</td>
<td>p. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For moment</td>
<td>p. 30</td>
<td>p. 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cool smooth skin</td>
<td>p. 45</td>
<td>p. 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although I watched</td>
<td>p. 49</td>
<td>p. 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sat still</td>
<td>p. 54</td>
<td>p. 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'where are ye going?'</td>
<td>p. 72</td>
<td>p. 76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This passage begins near the bottom of a page; it does not have a heavy, large capital, or a chapter number, but it does involve a skipped space just before it. (The parenthesis is mine.)

This conversation also p. 77 p. 83 X
One of the most painful p. 82 p. 90 XI
('Why did you bring') p. 87 p. 97
This passage in the English edition involves a skipped space like the earlier one. The American edition has the passage begin at the top of p. 97, so no space is shown. (The parenthesis again is mine.)

The reason why p. 97 p. 108 XII
I do not know p. 106 p. 118 XIII
And suddenly p. 116 p. 130 XIV

In short, the passages in the English edition marked with heavy capitals and the chapters in the American edition correspond perfectly. Except for two odd subdivisions, marked with skipped spaces, there seems to be nothing amiss in comparing the two editions. (It is true that the American edition uses double quotation marks instead of the single ones which I have shown on a few passages.) The difference between the American edition on p. 11 and the British on p. 13 is due simply to Macmillan Company using Roman numbers for the preliminary matter.

I was bothered by the number of pages in the various chapters; the point in the following chart is not the difference in chapter length between the two editions (Macmillan used larger type than did Bleak), but the length of the "average" chapter:

CHART TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chapter</th>
<th>number of pages: English</th>
<th>American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(subdivided by a break)

"The footnote that gives the title of "The Great Divorce; miles per hour" was used only in the American edition.

The number of words per page is another matter. In Part I, the number of words per page is as follows:

English American

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chapter</th>
<th>number of pages: English</th>
<th>American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(subdivided by a break)
If we assume the basic unit in the English edition is approximately four to five pages long, then chapters I, VI, VII, VIII, and XIV are one unit long. Chapters II, V, XIII, and XIII are double units. And chapters IX and II are three units long (chapter IX approaches four units). In short, the chapters are quite irregular in length.

Next I decided to compare the chapters to the original paper version of the book which appeared in the English edition as "The Great Divorce, A Sequel to The Good Soldier, Sadow and "The Lilies of the Field" under the title of "Who Goes Home? or, "The Grand Divorce." 8  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>installation</th>
<th>date</th>
<th>chapter</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>American pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>10 Nov.1944</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>1-16</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>17 Nov.1944</td>
<td>II.A</td>
<td>17-21</td>
<td>6-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>24 Dec.1944</td>
<td>II.B</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>11-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>1 Dec.1944</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>17-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>8 Dec.1944</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>23-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>15 Dec.1944</td>
<td>V.A</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>30-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>26 Jan.1945</td>
<td>V.B</td>
<td>39-44</td>
<td>35-41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>5 Jan.1945</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>45-48</td>
<td>42-46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>9 Jan.1945</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>49-53</td>
<td>47-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>22 Jan.1945</td>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>54-58</td>
<td>53-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>26 Jan.1945</td>
<td>IXA</td>
<td>59-64</td>
<td>60-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td>26 Jan.1945</td>
<td>IX.B</td>
<td>66-71</td>
<td>67-71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>2 Feb.1945</td>
<td>IX.C</td>
<td>68-72</td>
<td>71-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV</td>
<td>9 Feb.1945</td>
<td>X.B</td>
<td>72-76</td>
<td>76-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XV</td>
<td>16 Feb.1945</td>
<td>X.C</td>
<td>77-81</td>
<td>83-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVI</td>
<td>23 Feb.1945</td>
<td>X.DA</td>
<td>82-87</td>
<td>90-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVII</td>
<td>2 Mar.1945</td>
<td>X.B</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>97-102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVIII</td>
<td>9 Mar.1945</td>
<td>X.C</td>
<td>92-96</td>
<td>102-107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIX</td>
<td>16 Mar.1945</td>
<td>X.CA</td>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>108-111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIII</td>
<td>3 Apr.1945</td>
<td>XII.B</td>
<td>101-105</td>
<td>111-117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIV</td>
<td>10 Apr.1945</td>
<td>XII.C</td>
<td>106-109</td>
<td>118-122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXV</td>
<td>10 Apr.1945</td>
<td>XII.D</td>
<td>109-113</td>
<td>122-127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXVI</td>
<td>13 Apr.1945</td>
<td>XII.C</td>
<td>113-118</td>
<td>127-133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As will be observed from this chart, my assumptions proved to be fairly accurate, although the fusion of the final chapter with some preceding material was unexpected.

I have reached two other conclusions based on this study. First, I conclude that the "accidents" often completely uncertain. I have noted above that at one point ghost is variously treated as capitalized and not, and that the second syllable of Macdonald is differently treated. Another passage which shows variance in capitalization is the beginning of the twenty-second installment; the newspaper uses capitals on the first line of text, as follows:

PRESENTLY THE LADY GOT
up and began to walk
away.

The English edition does not capitalize lady; the American edition does. So here the two books differ, and the newspaper can support neither.

Further, there are differences in punctuation. The newspaper and the American edition use single quotation marks around speeches; the English edition uses double. (These differences between publications are based on the House Rules of the various publications. 1) One interesting passage where the newspaper differs from the books is at the beginning of the twenty-first installment, where the punctuation twice appears of quotation point, close of quotation marks, and comma:

"Darling! At last!," said the Lady.

"Good Heavens!", thought I.

Both books drop the commas.

If I had to make estimates on Lewis's original text in these passages I have cited (and many others could be found), I would estimate that Lewis did not capitalize the second part of Macdonald, because he did not in his anthology of passages from that author (one point against the English edition). I would estimate he did capitalize Lady because it is also capitalized in the American edition (one point against the English edition). At this point it begins to look as if the English edition were not trustworthy, but the same argument as was produced for capitalizing Lady would also apply to Macdonald. On the other hand, both book versions). And if any argument can be made about the double vs. single quotation marks, the double marks are more likely correct, this I estimate on the basis of the one letter which I received from Lewis where he uses the double marks. 8

In addition to the questions of punctuation and capitalization, I conclude, secondly, that the chapter divisions are highly uncertain. It is true that the installments often break in the middle of conversations (four times to be exact), but the divisions between installments II and III, III and XIII, XIII and XIV, XVII and XVIII, and XVIII and XIX are not impossible. 9

Thus I am left with questions. Did Lewis write the book in twenty-three installments? Did he tell the book publisher to use fourteen sections or chapters? Were the skipped spaces in chapters IX and XI originally meant to be new sections, or are they installment breaks? Who established where the last chapter should begin? Did the publishers work from manuscripts, typescripts, or the installments? Why is the footnote on science-fiction writers only in the American edition? What sort of punctuation and capitalization did Lewis prefer?

For that matter, what was Lewis's choice of title for the book? The installments appeared under "Who Goes Home? or, "The Grand Divorce." Did the American edition drop all subtitles for simply The Great Divorce.
In light of these uncertainties (although probabilities), I have not argued from the chapter organization of *The Great Divorce* (or lack of it) in my discussion of the book's structure which follows.

**Part IV: The Generic Artistry**

In Part I of this study of C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, I considered the parallels between it and Dante's *La Divina Commedia*. I should like to return to that discussion in a different form in this fourth part. I recall that when I was working on my doctoral dissertation on Lewis, and discussing with my supervisor at the University of Oklahoma some of my intentions, he suggested that I should consider the theological implications of Lewis's lax organization as compared with Dante's tautness. I suspected then, and I still suspect today, that the point was a personal one, since my professor was a Roman Catholic and I was an Anglican. At any rate, I never did quite consider the theological implications of Lewis's laxness in my chapter on *The Great Divorce*, yet I was allowed to get through my thesis without it.

For this reason, I have decided to tackle the problem in this way. I have assumed that the book is not extant. It was Lewis's practice at that time to destroy his MSS after a typescript had been made. I don't think Lewis wrote the book in 23 installments but I don't know. My guess is that The Guardian published as many words as they thought fit considering all the other things they had to get into a small newspaper.

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But certainly the point, in so far as it applies to artistic organization, is a valid one. I also recall that a number of years earlier I had taken by an enthusiastic Presbyterian student minister to Oklahoma City University (a Methodist school) to see the Bishop's Players (a Methodist touring drama group) put on a production of *The Great Divorce*. I had not at that time read the book, and what I recall of the evening is that a number of characters whom I never got identified tended to come onto the stage from various directions talking about topics I never quite got sorted out. We doubt if I had been sitting closer to the front, so I wouldn't have had to strain to hear the words, I could have enjoyed the performance more. But my impressions are all of chaos.

Let me be more specific. Dante organized *The Inferno* clearly according to the types of sins:

1. **Incontinence**
   A. The Lustful
   B. The Gluttonous
   C. The Hoarders, and Spendthrifts
   D. The Wrathful

2. **Violence**
   A. The Violent against their Neighbors
   B. The Violent against Themselves (the Suicides)
   C. The Violent against God, Nature, and Art (the Blasphemers, the Homosexuals, the Usurers)

3. **Fraud**
   A. Simple Fraud
   B. The Phantomery, and Seducers
   C. The Flatterers
   D. The Simoniacs
   E. The Sorcerers
   F. The Narrators
   G. The Hypocrites

The obvious point is that Hell punishes individual sins; Purgatory purges the roots of the Seven Deadly Sins. The artistic point I wish to make is the contrast of this with the Ghosts in *The Great Divorce*. There are nine sketches of Ghosts being met by Spirits or Angels who offer to help the Ghosts achieve salvation:

1. The Big Ghost, a hard employer, met by Lan, a band (pp. 28, 30-34—all page references to the Geoffrey Bles edition).
2. The Episcopal Ghost, an apostate bishop, met by Dick, an early friend (pp. 24, 35-43).
3. The Ghost dressed in finery, met by a naked spirit (pp. 55-58).
4. The grumbling Ghost, met by a Solid Spirit (pp. 67-68).
5. The artistic Ghost, a famous painter, met by another painter (pp. 59-62).
6. The Ghost wife, who wants back her husband, Robert, met by Hilda (pp. 77-81).
7. Pam, the motherly Ghost, who wants her son, Michael, met by her brother, Reginald (pp. 82-87).
8. The Ghost with the Red Lizard, met by an Angel (pp. 89-96).
9. Frank Smith, the Dwarf Ghost, leading a Tragedian dummy, met by his wife, Sarah (pp. 97-110).

Obviously these nine meetings add up to a suggestive number, even if two more than the Seven Deadly Sins. But though I have played with these meetings, and with some other episodes involving the Ghosts who do not meet anyone come from God to help them, I have not been able to find any pattern to them. For example, the Self-Righteousness of the Big Ghost is followed by the Apostasy of the Episcopal Ghost; then the meetings are interrupted by the accounts of the Avarice of Ikey and the Cynicism (intellectual Sloth?) of the Hard-Ridden Ghost; then the meetings are reversed and so on. First, I find little resemblance between these Ghosts' sins—their attitudes, as Lewis emphasizes them—and the emphasis of Dante's Inferno. Second, even though there is a closer resemblance to the attitudes being corrected on the stone ledges of Mount Purgatory, still there is no pattern which suggests Dante. It's not just a matter of Lewis not having an example of Gluttony; it's a matter of no structural plan upon which his edifice is built.

Let me illustrate this a different way. I am bothered by the placement, side by side, of the Ghost wife, who wants her husband returned to her so she can continue to "improve" him, and Pam, who wants her son returned to her so she can "love" him. The first of these scenes begins, "This conversation also we overheard" (p. 77), and ends with the Ghost wife's disappearance: "like a dying candle-flame" (p. 81); after this vanishing, the next section begins, "One of the most painful meetings we witnessed was between a woman's Ghost and a Bright Spirit who had apparently been her brother" (p. 82). The desire to control others, to have them, to possess them, is basic to both sketches. Whatever possessed Lewis to stick them side by side in that way? George MacDonald (the character in *The Great Divorce*) had even discussed them as parallel examples of a certain type of sin, one could understand it. Or if Lewis had written other scenes which were so clearly parallel, the juxtaposition of these two would not be so startling. As things are, I can only judge this to be an artistic error in planning (or failing to plan) the work.

Another structural flaw, it seems to me, occurs in...
the sudden shift to allegorical presentation in the last two meetings. Up to this point the Ghosts have been simply ghosts; then a Ghost with a Red Lizard shows up, followed by a Dwarf Ghost, leading by a chain, and the shift in mode which I have mentioned. What I do object to is that this young man is the only Ghost in the whole book met by an angel—and he is the only Ghost saved. Every time I read the book I am left with the feeling that if all the angels and the redeemed souls, then more of them would have made that journey to the mountains. And I believe, in an artistic way, this last objection I have made is the most serious, for as his angel keeps the presentation of the choice between damnation and salvation. When he, with an artistic slip which could easily have been corrected by making the angel into a human soul, or by introducing an angelic being earlier—when he erred in his one presentation of salvation, he erred drastically in his artistic treatment of his theme.

I titled this part of my study “The Generic Artistry” because I felt that it was basically in contrast to the best example of the dream-vision tradition that Lewis eventually organized into a mode of presentation. This contrast to Dante is inescapable because of the extended parallels (traced in Part I) between La Divina Commedia and The Great Divorce. Certainly, Dante is a supremely well organized poet; and the Divine Comedy, with its one hundred cantos divided as even as possible into three canticles, each canticle ending with the word stelle, reflects its author’s passion for order, Lewis—well, in another connection: It is true that medieval art offends in its respect [to unity] more often than most art. But it failed of unity because it attempted vast designs with inadequate resources. When the design was modest—as in Gawain and the Green Knight or in the Bards’ Churches—or when the resources were adequate—as in Salisbury Cathedral and the Divine Comedy—the medieval art attains a unity of the highest order, because it embraces the greatest diversity of subordinate detail.

I am not certain what we should say of a book which attempts a modest design and doesn’t achieve even that. Certainly, a note from Lewis to his publisher, reprinted in his Letters, suggests a rarity of appreciation: “I am always amazed at the thinness of the story of Cinderella, The Great Divorce.” Perhaps I may simply suggest, speaking of the book’s artistry, that it is still weeping in the garden, without a fairy godmother in sight.

Appendix to Part IV: A Brief Study in Genre

A modern critic has suggested some interesting terminology for the generic study of prose fiction which I would like to apply, briefly, to George MacDonald and Northrop Frye. In his Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), discusses “Specific Continuous Forms (Prose Fiction)”, pp. 303-314; he establishes four types of fiction:

1. The Novel (short form: The Short Story)
   a. Introverted (i.e., depicts archetypical situations)
   b. Personal (i.e., deals with human character)

2. The Confession (short form: The Personal Essay)
   a. Introverted
   b. Intellectual (i.e., deals with ideas or philosophical worldviews)

3. The Anatomy (short form: The Dialogue or Colloquy)
   a. Introverted
   b. Intellectual

After Frye establishes these four modes, he discusses various combinations of them. For example, Melville’s Moby-Dick is a combination of the Novel and the Anatomy, “where the romantic theme of the wild hunt expands into an encyclopaedic anatomy of the whale” (p. 313). Finally, he reaches the Epic form, which combines all four types; Frye’s example is Joyce’s Ulysses:

If a reader were asked to set down a list of the things that had most impressed him about Ulysses, he might reasonably be somewhat as follows. First, the clarity with which the sights and sounds and smells of Dublin come to life, the rotundity of the cast, and the clarity of the dialogue. Second, the elaborate way that the story and characters are paralleled by being set against archetypal heroic patterns, notably the Odyssey. Third, the revelation of character and incident through the searching use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, the constant tendency to be encyclopaedic and exhaustive both in technique and in subject matter, and to see both in highly intellectualized terms.

Although I am not certain that the stream-of-consciousness technique is necessarily the same as the Confession (doesn’t it depend on how intellectual the thoughts are?); I can see that Frye’s point is well taken.

Before applying these terms to The Great Divorce, I would like to consider again Dante’s Divine Comedy. Obviously La Divina Commedia is prose fiction, but it is a “Continuous Form” and I see no reason why Frye’s terms may not be applied to narrative poetry. Thus, Dante’s poem, in Frye’s terms, is an Epic, for it embraces the whole life of the hero; his generic background, his emphasis on the relation of individuals to each other, and hence is social (although the society may be simply a single family). Because each individual has an idea fixed (his sin), they seem to approach the anatomy, but the idea is often not an intellectual idea (Sir Archibald with his attempts to prove an afterlife, may be one of the exponents of the wrong—e.g., mother love or example). The Romance genre is indicated by the use of the dream-vision traditions and by the book being a tale of ghosts (including Lewis, who falls asleep before sunrise). The Confessional matter is in Lewis’s relationship to George MacDonald: the discovery of Phantastes which led eventually to Lewis’s conversion. And The Anatomy genre is in the discussion of saving and Lewis—about the nature of saving and damnation (pp. 60-63, 68-69), of the dangers of natural affection (pp. 74-77), about the relationship of Heaven and Hell (pp. 101-113), and about the harrowing of Hell and universal salvation (pp. 114-115).

In his history of sixteenth-century English litera-
tured, Lewis welcomes the examina-
tion of The Great Divorce, for it is all Golden and all minor: a "safe-
guard against any tendency to make 'Golden' a eulogistic term." Likewise, a critic might welcome The Great Divorce as an example to not take Frye's Epic as meaning "great": The Great Divorce is an Epic, but "(as has been indicated earlier) a stunted and misshapen one."

A Second Addition to Part IV: Mythcon Discussion

As might have been expected, my paper on the limitations of the artistry of The Great Divorce provoked the most discussion of any of the four parts read at the two Mythcons. I add a qualification at the beginning of Part V, which I do not wish to anticipate here, but some summary of the critical dispute may be of interest.

Perhaps the point with which to begin is the prepared question, intended to start to discussion; Warren Hollister asked:

Might the salvation of the young-man-ghost be the result of expression of Lewis's Augustinianism? In Augustine, salvation is not, after all, a matter of individual choice but of divine grace. We cannot even choose to accept or reject this grace, since the acceptance of grace itself requires grace. The implication that the angel represents sufficient grace and that redeemed souls represent insufficient grace is consistent with Augustine. To suggest that this arrangement is unsymmetrical or unfair is Pelagian. The angel kills the red lizard.

It is true enough that a paradox is involved in Christian belief at this point: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for God is watching you." But I do not believe that Lewis was Augustinian enough (or Calvinistic enough) to give only one side of the paradox, nor do I find him giving major stress to God's initiative. In Mere Christianity, Book IV: Beyond Personality, Ch. 7: "Let's Pretend!" Lewis states that man plays at being God in order to be saved, and then in the last paragraph reverses his field:

In a sense you might even say it is God who does the pretending. This is a Woman-Personal God, so to speak, sees before Him in fact a self-centred, greedy, grumbling, rebellious human animal. But He says, 'Let us pretend. That the Son is a mere creature, but the Son... Let us pretend in order to make the pretence into a reality.'

But my point is strengthened in that Lewis spends twelve paragraphs on man's imitation of Christ, and only one on God's saving grace given to man; Lewis admits the paradox but emphasizes the individual's approach to God.

An even clearer example of Lewis refusing to be involved in the question which Hollister raises appears in a footnote on p. 71 of the Geoffrey Bles edition of The Problem of Pain:

Theologians will note that I am not here intending to make any contribution to the Pelagian-Augustinian controversy... Where the initiative lies in any instance of such return [to God] is a question on which I am saying nothing.

In short, I believe Hollister advances an interpretation of the imagery of The Great Divorce which is not typical of Lewis's approach elsewhere.

Three related problems were raised in discussion by Jerry Pournelle: (1) Are not all the ghosts damned through pride? (2) Are the sins of the first ghost and the last ghost deliberately parallel? (3) Admitting that The Great Divorce is not well organized, why make such an issue of it? (Logically the last paragraph contradicts the first two. Perhaps Pournelle was not arguing an absolute artistry on the basis of points one and two.) I will consider the questions in order, not that the discussion at the meeting was this orderly, nor that I was especially coherent.

I think in a basic sense Lewis would have agreed that all of the sketches of the damned were

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{...if we are to hold the doctrine of the Fall in any real sense, we must look for the great sin on a deep and more timeless level than that of social morality.}
\end{align*}
\]

This sin has been described by Saint Augustine as the result of Pride, of the movement whereby a creature (that is, an essentially dependent being whose principle of existence lies not in itself but in another) tries to live in its own, to exist for itself. Such a sin requires no complex social conditions, no extended experience, no great intellectual development. From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the centre is opened to it. This sin is committed daily by young children and ignorant peasants as well as by sophisticated persons, by solitary no less than by those who live in society; it is the fall in every individual life, and in each day of each individual life, the basic sin behind all particular sins: at this very moment you and I are either committing it, or about to commit it, or repenting it.

Thus Lewis writes in The Problem of Pain, Chapter V: "The Fall of Man" (pp. 82-83 of the Bles edition). In this sense each Ghost in The Great Divorce is proud. In the discussion between the Naked Spirit and the Ghost dressed in finery,

'Friend,' said the Spirit. 'Could you, only for a moment, fix your mind on something not yourself?'

(p. 57)

And Macdonald comments later about the Naked Spirit summoning unicorns:

'It will maybe have succeeded,' he said. 'Ye will have divined that he meant to frighten her; not that fear itself could make her less a Ghost, but if you own it, at a moment off herself, there might, in that moment, be a chance. I have seen then saved so.'

(p. 70)

But, although the point about all of the Ghosts being proud is well taken, it may not be useful as a statement on the artistry: Gracia Fay Ellwood commented in the discussion at the meeting that if they were all proud, still the problem of arranging their different modes of pride remained.

I am not certain that I can agree so certainty with Pournelle's suggestion that the first and last Ghosts were deliberately parallel; in fact, I am not certain I know what he meant. If I remember the Mythcon discussion correctly, he made the point two or three times, but neither Gracia Fay Ellwood nor myself, nor any of the others, picked it up—probably because we were not certain, without checking a text, that we knew which Ghosts came when. I assume from the context of my paper he was speaking of the Ghosts who were not by Spirits: thus the Big Man (or Big Ghost) and the Dwarf Ghost would be the two under consideration. The Big Ghost insists four times that he has not received his rights—his just due, as a man who did his best; instead of belligerency, the Dwarf (through his Tragedian persona) projects self-misery, in order to gain pity. Both want something: what a considerer justice, and what the other considers pity or love. Both refuse what is offered in the place of what they want: charity. 'I'm not asking for anybody's bleeding charity,' says the Big Ghost.

'Then do. At once. Ask for the Bleeding Charity. Everything is lost for the asking and nothing can be bought.'

(p. 32)

Charity in the sense of agape or spiritual love is also offered the Dwarf:

'Love!' said the Tragedian striking his forehead with his hand: then, a few notes deeper, 'Love! Do you know the meaning of the word?'

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Beyond these points (which are perhaps what Pournelle had in mind), I do not see much resemblance. The Ghosts have opposite personalities: hardiness, demanding justice, vs. self-torment, demanding pity. One is met by a former employee, a murderer who more mentally murdered his employer even eight years: the other is met by a saint. If I wanted to argue for a balance in organization here, I would suggest not only the parallels but also the opposite dispositions. I am doubtful of such a thesis: the major artistic difference is not the antithetical content but the mode of presentation. The Ghost shows no quarreling in his demands for what he believes to be justice; the Dwarf and the Tragedian are divided—the Dwarf can almost succumb to the Lady's appeal to enter into joy, while the Tragedian speaks only in its role. (This difference in mode is between all the Gallows Ghosts and the almost opposite, as the Ghost in finery on p. 57, waver in the position they hold; unlike the Big Ghost.)

Pournelle's third point—why such an emphasis on the lack of organization in The Great Divorce when it is so obvious?—was echoed in a question tossed me at dinner, after the discussion: "Why bother to write about a book when you dislike it?" I was moved at the time to protest that I did like the book, but I suppose this does not really answer the question of why destruction? One critic believes a book to be worthless and he is called upon to give an evaluation of it, he will say what he believes; but (1) if he believes a book to be poor, why should he spend time attacking it when he can be writing on a book he believes to be good? or (2) if he believes a book to be interesting (or good) in some ways but seriously flawed in others, why should he stress the flaws when he writes about it?

The first of these two questions does not really apply to me since I do find some good in The Great Divorce (as will become clear in the next part), but I think there is at least one answer to the question, in the case of some critic's malicious enjoyment of attacking what is popular: a serious critic, in my opinion, may want to show a prospective writer the sort of thing to avoid, or to teach a reader how to recognize certain types of typical flaws. (No doubt few actual critics, myself included, ever analyze flaws with completely pure motives; man is usually not that saintly.)

C. S. Lewis, in An Experiment in Criticism, argues against this sort of criticism: he believes there is value in it.

The second question—why stress flaws instead of merits—is also possible of answer, but I would want again to give a dam to my practice. Only one of my five sections stresses flaws; or it is oblique. It is possible that he is concerned with merits as with literary (and religious) tradition, publication, and religious use, I will admit (what I believe most of us have been taught) it is far harder to write than critical attack. Most criticism assumes the work is worth studying, or else the critic would not be bothering to write, and then goes ahead with some type of study of minutiae. For

If I call this a pornographic poem, I must be understood to mean a descriptive, not a dyslogistic, term. I mean by that this poem, in my opinion, is intended to arouse the appetite it describes, to affect not only the imagination but the nervous system of the reader. And I may as well say at once—but who would willingly claim to be a judge in such matters?—this seems to me to be very nearly perfect in its kind.

But perhaps it is a valid criticism of my criticism to say that I should have tried to show (more directly than I do in the fifth part) what the literary merits of The Great Divorce were; even the pointing to qualities which one cannot fully explain is often helpful in such cases (the latter is also possible of answer, but I suspect that the book is poorly organized, anything else I says is suspect.

This still leaves a question of proportion. How much space should this given to against the book's organization? If the book is four-fifths successful and one-fifth poor? Should I have just said what I thought about the book's flaws in organization is a personal one: the lack of structure in a student essay or a book I read than some? Thus, I do not think that Pournelle was foolish in his questioning of my approach; I suspect instead that the reason for pointing out the dismerits of a work is simply to validate the criticism as not one-sided. For example, Lewis in discussing the writings of George MacDonald comments: "The texture of his writing against MacDonald is undistinguishable, at times fumbling ("Preface" to George MacDonald: An Anthology)." Lewis had made this admission, who would trust what else he said in favor of MacDonald's writings. Wouldn't I have special pleading for one of his favorites? Thus (if my view of the book is correct) unless a student of The Great Divorce says loudly that the book is poorly organized, anything else I says is suspect.

But let me more directly speak to the point at issue. One reason for pointing out the dismerits of a work is simply to validate the criticism as not one-sided. For example, Lewis in discussing the writings of George MacDonald comments: "The texture of his writing against MacDonald is undistinguishable, at times fumbling ("Preface" to George MacDonald: An Anthology)." Unless Lewis had made this admission, who would trust what else he said in favor of MacDonald's writings. Wouldn't I have special pleading for one of his favorites? Thus (if my view of the book is correct) unless a student of The Great Divorce says loudly that the book is poorly organized, anything else I says is suspect.

I suppose one of the reasons I felt a necessity to document my charges against the book's organization is that I am an academician—and one of the things I am constantly saying to students is that they should back up what they say. The temptation to generalize without adequate support is constant, but it leads to intellectually shoddy work. It is the difference between a Darwin and an Alfred Russell Wallace. (I am being unfair to Wallace, of course.)

But the other reason I wrote so thoroughly on the book's flaws in organization is a personal one: lack of structure should be given to blame as a very general pattern of poems and fictions. I suspect this is related to a generic ability called by aptitudinists Structural Visualization. At any rate, when my aptitudes were tested when I was in junior high school, it was suggested I should be an architect or a sculptor. For this reason or another, I am more interested in structure than in all other aspects of literature than in literature itself and I am more interested in structure than in literature itself and I am more interested in structure than in literary institutions than in mine, and that we shall simply have to allow room for our disagreements over the seriousness of my charges to continue over. If he had said that the Great Divorce was not good and I denied all validity to my charges that would have been a different matter. Then our minds (if we both had read the book with attention) would have been discut over the communication that, understanding, was impossible. Is difference in degree of emphasis among humans inevitable; difference in kind of thought is frightening. (Not that we don't meet it sometimes.)
When I was explaining at the meeting why I suggested that I should rewrite The Great Divorce so that the young man with the lizard was mentioned as getting on the bus, etc., I admitted I had forgotten to mention it.

Halfway through my life, I found myself standing in a bus queue in a long, mean street; evening was closing in, and soon enough a rain was falling—my head was damp; no treat I had foreseen the miles of wandering in everlasting evening mist, on foot.

By cheerless, lightless shopwindows: for I, meandering, could find no way out of dingy lodging houses, with easy access, fences littering, ill-kept vacant lots, redbrick warehouses, A bookstore or two with flyspeck windows pil’d with old bestsellers, but the queue arouses my hopes—Here’s life! Here’s someone!

But even better than an imitation of Lewis (which would probably fail to catch many of his merits even if it was correct as some of his faults) would be an original work which showed what I sought for in organization.

Part V: The Religious Application

These fragments I have shored against my ruins—T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land, 1. 431

My dismissal of The Great Divorce in Part IV of my study may have sounded final, but it should be pointed out that I discussed only one type of artistry there: that of structure or organization, in analyzing fiction, one also discusses characterization, setting, symbolism, point of view, style, and theme. If my structural analysis has left the fiction in fragments, they may be fragments of the whole.

But I do not intend to attempt a full, formal analysis of the literary merits of The Great Divorce. I have added what I believe to be Lewis's major flaws—and very serious faults they are: I would now like to consider some of the book's merits, but merits of an essentially non-literary nature. I recall an article by Hythnym on that I was discussing whether I would keep my plans for future parts of my paper, and my view of the lack of essential organization in The Great Divorce; she replied that she could understand what I meant, but it was not something she was interested in. Yet I feel certain, from her two essays on the Chronicles of Narnia, that she is quite open to certain types of literary effects. Another anecdote may be even more to the point of what I am attempting in this section. A friend of mine who lives in a suburb of Dallas, Texas, underwent much psychological stress a few years ago when he and his wife left their rigidly structured, fundamentalist Church, which was in the process of de-Churching (its term for excommunicating) a minister who was a friend of theirs. My friend and his wife joined one of the 'underground' Churches in the Dallas area, but at the time of which I speak he found The Great Divorce, which he had read with the Day of the Day. Since his master's degree is in physics, not in literature, he offered me no comment on the aesthetics of the book, but he found something he needed at the time in the book, probably in the pictures of Ghosts concerned with their rights and not concerned with love.

Therefore, I would like to turn to the question of how a person reads a book in a religious manner. One answer (which is fairly adaptable to Lewis's book) is set forth in Louis L. Hertz's The Poetry of Meditation, which attempts to demonstrate the indebtedness of the Metaphysical Poetry of the Seventeenth Century to the religious art of meditation. Hertz summarized the essence of a meditation as three-fold:

1. Composition (memory): that is, the person meditating on (even a meditation on his own sins will take the form of an allegorical picture of sins besieging himself like a castle).
2. Analysis (understanding): the meditator will ask what the meaning of the scene is, what he gets from it, and what the proper response to the subject matter is.
3. Colloquy (affections, will): the meditator, probably in a prayer addressed to God, will attempt to arouse the proper emotional response to the scene which he had first visualized.

But when he and his wife left their rigidly structured, fundamentalist Church, which was in the process of de-Churching (its term for excommunicating) a minister who was a friend of theirs, they found a Church of the First Church, which was in the process of de-Churching (its term for excommunicating) a minister who was a friend of theirs. My friend and his wife joined one of the 'underground' Churches in the Dallas area, but at the time of which I speak he found The Great Divorce, which he had read with the Day of the Day. Since his master's degree is in physics, not in literature, he offered me no comment on the aesthetics of the book, but he found something he needed at the time in the book, probably in the pictures of Ghosts concerned with their rights and not concerned with love.

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he begins to abandon the directly literal and the generic, he may consider the relationship of these presentations to those other, more fully symbolic images discussed, he writes, by Lewis himself. The religious reader, on the other hand, picturing the scenes in his heart, will ask himself the degree to which he himself is motivated by Shame or Lust. Sir Philip Sidney's 'How like a god am I' in his long, measured epic, he writes; the Christian (or the Moral Theist of any persuasion) is advised by the Holy Spirit to look into his heart as he reads.

If this is so, checking finds the presence of sin, the subject of the third step, the colloquy with God, is decided. A confession of his sin to God, a prayer for grace, an exhortation to himself to avoid the sin (based on the example of damned souls in The Great Divorce)-- these are the proper emotional responses for the conclusion of this meditation.

At this point it may seem that my subject matter is exhausted: we have run through the three points of a meditation, and that's the end of it. However, rather than stopping, I should like to reconsider and add to the experience. I have said that the discussion of the first point by saying that the whole setting of The Great Divorce reflects the traditional topic of meditating on the Last Judgment, but somehow in my development, I got into a discussion of the types of sins presented. Of course, these topics are related. As Dante said of The Divine Comedy, the subject is "Man, as by good or ill deeds, in the exercise of his free choice, he becomes able to rise to the height of Justice." But my point is that the religious reader of Lewis's book has more to meditate on than just the character sketches.

To begin with, a number of Lewis's images of Heaven and Hell are far from traditional. For example, Heaven is far larger than Hell--even though the latter is in the process of continually moving away (p. 112-113, for size: p. 20, for the division of Hell). Likewise, Heaven is hard and real, the saved souls are "Solid People", while the damned are pale, transparent Ghosts (p. 103). It seems Lewis has an interesting comment on related symbolism in his Preface to the second edition of The Screwtape Letters:

"the really licentious image is Goethe's Faust, which really exhibits the ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration upon self which is the mark of hell. The humorous, civilised, sensible, adaptable, the hitherto helpers who have strengthened the illusion that evil is liberating.

A little man may sometimes avoid some single error made by a great one, and I was determined that my own symbolism should at least not err in Goethe's way. For humour is a way of presenting one's self without seeing yourself from the outside. Whatever else we attribute to beings who sin through pride, we must not attribute this. Satan said to the serpent, feel this force, feel this vanity. We must picture hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, whereas everyone here is a greater concern for those where some lives in the deadly serious passion of envy, self-importance, and resentment.

While Lewis's text has no mention to the demons in the book he is discussing and to the damned in The Great Divorce, the general point lies in his choice of images for the afterlife. Notice, for example, this appearance of the Huns in the third act of George Bernard Shaw's Man and Superman:

--it is true that the world cannot get on without me; but it never gives me credit for it. I have never done anything. All I do is to help. Lewis in his character sketches shows evil as a healthy, joyous, and loving, as love, as joy. In fact, the quality which Shaw's devil identifies with himself and Hell--joy, love, happiness, beauty--are precisely the qualities which Lewis (at least indirectly--the point about the really licentious image is Goethe's way) has colored the British and American concepts of good for almost two centuries.

Shaw, like Lewis, has a larger moral than Hell, as solid, as more real, is an attempt to symbolize orthodox belief: good exists by itself, evil is only a parasite. Lewis in his character sketches shows evil as a healthy, joyous, and loving, as love, as joy. In fact, the qualities which Shaw's devil identifies with himself and Hell--joy, love, happiness, beauty--are precisely the qualities which Lewis in his character sketches shows evil as a healthy, joyous, and loving, as love, as joy. In fact, the qualities which Shaw's devil identifies with himself and Hell--joy, love, happiness, beauty--are precisely the qualities which Lewis (at least indirectly--the point about the really licentious image is Goethe's way) has colored the British and American concepts of good for almost two centuries.

To conclude, the religious reader of The Great Divorce may well find himself, in his imaginative entrance into Heaven, in unfamiliar territory. This analysis will ask, in part, if Lewis's Romantic concept of salvation is consistent with the religious reader's powers of seeing yourself from the outside. Whatever else we attribute to beings who sin through pride, we must not attribute this. Satan said to the serpent, feel this force, feel this vanity. We must picture hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, whereas everyone here is a greater concern for those where some lives in the deadly serious passion of envy, self-importance, and resentment.

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term in 1932 (p. 326). However, the term was revived by Stargait Stories from 1939 to 1953 (p. 325).

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CHAPTER V

The Great Divorce


2. Lewis mentions something similar (but not the same) in An Experiment in Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961). Ikon is said to mean "any representational object, whether in two dimensions or three, which is intended as an aid to devotion", he comments:

a. A painting or an ich is itself a work of art, but that is logically accidental; its artistic merits will not make it any better.

b. The reader will not find the religious purpose of the painting in itself, but to stimulate and liberate certain activities in the worshipper.

c. A crucifix exists in order to direct the worshipper’s thoughts. The painting, in this case, also had better not have any artistic excellences, subtle-

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b. The reader will not find the religious purpose of the painting in itself, but to stimulate and liberate certain activities in the worshipper.

c. A crucifix exists in order to direct the worshipper’s thoughts. The painting, in this case, also had better not have any artistic excellences, subtle-
ties, or originalities which are not independent on itself. Hence devout people may, for this purpose, prefer the crudest and emptiest icon. The emptier, the more permeable, and they want, as it were, to pass through the material image and go beyond. The characterization by types fits somewhere between realistic individualism and Lewis's "crudest icon"; those who know Graham Hough's Preface to "The Faerie Queene" (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1963) will recall his circular chart of literary types (p. 107), where "morality, literature and romance of types" appears at 2:30 on his clock (halfway between naive allegory at 12:00 and Shakespearean balance of theme and realism at 3:00, or--closer to my earlier comparison--halfway between novelistic realism (p. 1:30) and "emblem or hieratic symbolism," about 10:30.

I am bothered, however, about the non-artistic emphasis which Lewis has in his mention of icons. Extending this to literature, one would have to argue that the poorest literature may be the most useful religiously. I doubt that this is so. (In fact, in so far as a reader is bothered by Lewis's artistic errors in The Great Divorce--why only one Ghost is met by an angel, and why only that soul is saved, for example--the reader cannot use the work at all.) I see only one problem with meditation based on well-written works: some readers may be so delighted with the work that they will not stop to meditate (like Lewis's suggestion that some will be distracted by the beauty of the icon). For these readers, a fast (upward) with religious contemplation (not the act of love, as enjoined in Lewis's An Experiment in Criticism, p. 37) is that of the episcopal Church (such as Bishop James Pike was, in the Protestant Episcopal Church) will feel attacked, even though he can turn it aside with an admiration of the wit or a discounting of the passages because of the author's known biases. On the other hand, conservatives are likely to enjoy the "roasting" of a liberal. Lewis presumably meant the passage to affect the less certain who are between the two positions. But whatever response a reader makes to the satire, to make religious use of it in meditation (as I am suggesting in this essay) is more difficult. If the religious reader is a conservative, then he might use it as an examination of himself for heretical tendencies. (Perhaps if he is a liberal, he is not likely to be using anything by Lewis for the basis of meditation.) And I have no doubt that Lewis considered each of the intellectual qualities distorted in the Bishop of Worms (p. 89), My comparison is perhaps downward from religious meditation (not the final mystical step of contemplation) to literary reading.


7. My examples of those sins have been emotional--Shame and Lust. The clearest example of an intellectual sin (the Bright Spirit refers to "sins of the intellect" on p. 37) is that of the Episcopal Ghost. It is easy to read this dialogue as Lewis's conservative view of liberal Christianity. Lewis once wrote, "I am not especially high--nor especially 'low,' nor especially anything else"--here Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. vi; I take the last phrase to be a litote.) Indeed, Lewis...

WHAT THIS CONVENTION NEEDS IS SOME CULTURE....

WHAT THIS CONVENTION NEEDS IS SOME SOCK AND BOFFO!

I don't know about all this, Sir," said the Teacher.

"Do you understand all this, my Son?" said the Teacher.

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