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Abstract

Explores the influence of *The Faerie Queene*, one of the works C.S. Lewis was particularly involved with as a scholar, and the literary and Biblical traditions it drew upon, on Lewis's Ransom trilogy and in particular on *Perelandra*. Ransom is identified with the Red Cross Knight.

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—Influence of Edmund Spenser; Lewis, C.S. *Perelandra*—Sources; Lewis, C.S. Spenser's Images of Life; Spenser, Edmund *The Faerie Queene*—Influence on C.S. Lewis



SPENSERIAN IN SPACE:
THE FAERIE QUEENE IN
C.S. LEWIS'S *PERELANDRA*

PAUL R. ROVANC

IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT C.S. LEWIS'S FIRST AND LAST published books of criticism pay tribute to Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.¹ His landmark *Allegory of Love* (1936) dedicates its final chapter to this 16th-century romance-epic, and his posthumously published *Spenser's Images of Life* [SIL] (1967), closes with a testimony to a lifelong admiration for the poem: "*The Faerie Queene* never loses a reader it has once gained. [...] Once you have become an inhabitant of its world, being tired of it is like being tired of London, or of life" (140). Between these two poles, we have not only the section of his *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1954) dedicated to Spenser's poem (378-93, *passim*), but also, less obviously though perhaps more profoundly, Lewis's celebrated Space Trilogy, also known as the Ransom Trilogy, consisting of *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945). During those years in which Lewis was, in his own words, "an inhabitant" of Spenser's Faery Land (SIL 140), he was also exploring the vast reaches of our solar system, where he discovered wonders and perils no less great. As he unfolds his three-part space romance, he often seems to move between its world and that of Spenser's poem as subtly as Spenser's characters move between historical Britain and the realm of Faery, drawing the unwitting modern reader into the Renaissance poem's gravitational field.

Yet, as Janice C. Prewitt pronounced in 2004, "Few critics of Lewis's adult fiction acknowledge Lewis's heavy debt to Spenser" (30). While Katherine Gardner briefly surveys Lewis's writings on Spenser, especially *The Faerie Queene* (1-2), she does not mention the Space Trilogy or any of Lewis's other fiction since no direct mention of Spenser is made in his fictional works. In a four-part article entitled "Re-imagining Life: C.S. Lewis and *The Faerie Queene*," however, Brenna R. Ferry draws numerous connections between Spenser's poem and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, arguing

¹ According to John Bremer's entry on Spenser in *The C.S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia*, "It was primarily due to Lewis that Spenser recovered his position as one of the foremost English poets—sharing the honors with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton" (383). With specific reference to *The Faerie Queene*, Bremer's entry on *Spenser's Images of Life* asserts that Lewis's approach to the poem in that work of criticism "caused a revolution in Spenserian studies and helped restore Spenser to the first rank of English poets" (385).

in her Part One that Lewis “borrowed Spenser’s system of storytelling, mythopoeic charm, and images of good and evil,” refitting them for modern readers (24). Although she makes no mention of the Space Trilogy, her demonstration that Lewis’s other successful novel series is replete with Spenserian influence enhances the likelihood that some of the same also filtered into his science-fiction sequence.

Lewis’s *Perelandra*, the focus of this article, builds around the quest of Red Cross Knight on behalf of the lady Una in Book I of Spenser’s poem. *That Hideous Strength*, a space romance laced with strands of a sinister plot to bend all love to an agenda of social engineering, takes much of its inspiration and material from Books III and IV of *The Faerie Queene*, with occasional allusions to other parts of the poem in both novels. The first and shortest book of Lewis’s trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*, lays the groundwork for the unlikely series of events which position Dr. Ransom, as unlikely a character as the young rustic destined to become Red Cross Knight who arrives at Gloriana’s court in Spenser’s *Letter to Raleigh*, to become an interplanetary redeemer. In this respect the first novel plays an analogous role in Lewis’s trilogy to Spenser’s letter as a prologue to the main action of the poem, which thrusts the reader forward *in medias res*.²

As David C. Downing comments, “The two most obvious sources of *Perelandra* are the first three chapters of Genesis and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*” (129). He then adds, “The other masterpiece of English poetry whose influence is most apparent in *Perelandra* is Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*,” for which he summarizes examples:

The descriptions of the floating islands as paradisaic gardens [in *Perelandra*] recall the Garden of Adonis ([*Faerie Queene*] bk. 3), and Lewis’s depiction of the dragon and tree with golden apples closely resembles Spenser’s Hesperides. [...] Lewis’s floating islands reverse the moral valance of Spenser’s Wandering Islands (bk. 3 [sic]),³ which are unsafe places where knights should not dally. *The Faerie Queene* may also have provided Lewis with the idea of having people travel through oceans on the backs of dolphins,⁴ though that tradition is older than Spenser. (130-31)

² Spenser’s *Letter to Raleigh*, published in 1590 with the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*, was according to *The Spenser Encyclopedia* “apparently occasioned by Raleigh’s request for some idea of the poet’s ‘general intention and meaning’” (DeNeef 581). Its usefulness as an analogy for the relationship of *Out of the Silent Planet* to the rest of the Space Trilogy rests in its providing essential background narrative to the poem rather than in its problematic claim, discussed by DeNeef, “to expound the poet’s ‘whole intention’” for *The Faerie Queene* (581).

³ The Wandering Islands are actually described in Book II. i.51.5; xii.10-12. They are not mentioned in Book III. Acrasia’s Bower of Bliss is on one of these floating isles.

⁴ Lewis, however, consistently uses the term “fish,” not dolphin, to describe the sea creatures ridden by Ransom and Weston in *Perelandra* (158-71).

Downing also notes that in *Spenser's Images of Life*, Lewis "points out several motifs in the poem that reappear in his own *Perelandra*" (131). These motifs include "medieval and Renaissance speculations that 'aquatic elemental spirits' may actually exist [...] (*SIL* 129)" reappearing as mermaids in *Perelandra*'s seas; "the Renaissance love of literary pageants found in Spenser (*SIL* 127)" recurring "in the Great Dance sequence at the end of *Perelandra*"; and Florimell's imprisonment "in a dark cave (bk. 3) as 'very like an allegory of the descent of the soul into material embodiment' (*SIL* 126)" reappearing in "Ransom's descent into the subterranean cavern in *Perelandra*" (131).⁵

Spenser's influence on *Perelandra*, however, is more encompassing than the scattered though significant incidentals that Downing summarizes. Prewitt detects a more holistic Spenserian agenda in Lewis's writing something closer to a "mythic romance" (56, 57) than a conventional novel in order "to present myth in a non-mythic way to a public resistant to the acknowledgment of any idea as 'truth'" (56). Moreover, both authors' characters, Prewitt writes, are "emblems, representations of ideas or patterns of human behavior" rather than "realistic" (58). Applying Prewitt's observations more specifically to *Perelandra*, we can see that while the situation of the trilogy's second novel takes *Paradise Lost* as its premise, its plot, Ransom's preventing the Venusian Eve from falling by defeating the Satanic Un-man, points to pervasive rather than incidental Spenserian influence. Moreover, in both works the transformation of the unlikely protagonist renders each emblematic of a mythic pattern of human aspiration, the growth of the Christian Everyman into Everyman in Christ.⁶

For readers unfamiliar with Spenser's poem and its accompanying letter, *The Faerie Queene* consists of six completed books and two *Cantos of Mutabilitie* published as an unfinished seventh book. Each completed book centers on a titular hero who allegorically represents the virtue central to his or her book. (Book IV, The Legend of Friendship, has two heroes, since friendship cannot exist alone). Book I, The Legend of the Knight of the Red Crosse, or Of Holiness, from which Lewis draws significantly in *Perelandra* and which will therefore be our primary focus, locates its backstory in *The Letter to Raleigh*, where on the annual feast of Gloriana, Queen of Fairies, "a tall clownishe younge man" enters and asks "a boone," to be granted during the course of the feast. Enter "a faire Ladye in mourning weedes" whose "father and mother an ancient King and Queene, had bene by an huge dragon many years shut vp in a brazen Castle" and asks Gloriana for a champion. To the Queen's amazement and the fair lady Una's dismay, "that clownishe person vpstarting, desired that aduventure" (717). Having already promised to fulfill his boon, Gloriana grants the request, and the lady accepts him as her champion on the condition that he

⁵ Although I develop a quite different interpretation of this "descent" later in the present essay, I do not argue that it need negate Downing's connection here.

⁶ Cf. Col. 1:28.

wear the armor she has brought in her train, which Spenser informs us “is the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul” (717). Donning the armor has a transformative effect on the unnamed young man: suddenly “he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the Lady,” after which, Spenser’s *Letter* informs us, “beginneth the first booke, vz. *A gentle knight was pricking on the playne. & c.*” (717). The groundwork laid, Book I unfolds the quest in which, through twelve cantos of allegorical adventures, a still very imperfect Red Cross Knight grows by fits and starts to become the Knight of Holiness, and learns his true identity in order finally to slay the dragon and deliver Una’s parents.

The trilogy’s Elwin Ransom is, like Red Cross Knight, both an Everyman Christian warrior and a flawed potential Christ figure.⁷ In *Perelandra*, he responds to the incredulity of his friend, Lewis as narrator, who is retelling his story: “I know!” exclaims Ransom. “You are feeling the absurdity of it. Dr. Elwin Ransom setting out single-handed to combat powers and principalities. You may even be wondering if I’ve got megalomania” (23). After a pause, he adds, “But when you come to think of it, is it odder than what all of us have to do every day?” (24). The heroes’ quests in poem and novel alike, then, reflect the extraordinariness of the ordinary in our everyday moral and spiritual struggle through a representative of elect humanity who attenuates us to the realization that we exist simultaneously on two levels.

Rather than the “tall clownishe younge man” of the *Letter to Raleigh*, Ransom is a portly middle-aged philologist who, far from “desir[ing] the aduerture,” as does Red Cross Knight (717), has been kidnapped into his first interplanetary quest. Spenser’s denoting of Redcrosse’s newly provided armor as “the armour of a Christian man” identifies the “Gentle Knight” of Canto i, Book I as a Christian Everyman inexperienced in the use of the arms he has received, yet extending a tradition of spiritual warfare that takes its origins in identification with Christ and His saints. His armor bears “The cruell markes of many’ a bloody field / Yet [paradoxically] armes till that time did he neuer wield” (I.i.4-5). While the absurdity that the fate of a kingdom—even a world (for Una’s parents, “ancient King and Queene,” signify Adam and Eve and therefore collective humanity)—should hang on someone so unfit hardly occurs to the unreflective Redcrosse, Ransom is

forced to perceive that his own coming to *Perelandra* was at least as much of a marvel as the Enemy’s [i.e., the Un-man’s]. That miracle on the right side, which he had demanded, had in fact occurred. He himself was the miracle. [...]

⁷ I use the term Christ figure, following Frye et al., to designate “A literary character reminiscent of Christ, enriching the work in which he appears by suggesting typological or allegorical interpretations” (106). Lewis informs readers in a brief preface to *Perelandra* that “none” of his “human characters” in the book “is allegorical” (6), a matter which I discuss toward the end of this essay.

He, Ransom, with his ridiculous piebald body and his ten times defeated arguments—what sort of a miracle was that? (141)

Lewis's protagonist thus seems every bit as unlikely a world savior as Spenser's.

Downing interprets "Ransom's piebald body [as] an image of his divided self" (113). His bi-colored condition further "recalls his dream in *Out of the Silent Planet*, in which he found himself straddling a garden wall—half a citizen of a fallen world, half a citizen of Deep Heaven" (113). Red Cross Knight also exhibits this duality of both nature and citizenship when on the Mount of Contemplation the up-to-now unnamed novice learns from the Hermit Contemplation of his true identity as St. George and his final destiny as the New Jerusalem (I.x.61). The hermit further reveals the secret of Redcrosse's birth "from ancient race / Of Saxon kinges" (I.x.65), a lineage obscured from infancy through his abduction by a fairy, who leaves her "base Elfin brood" (I.x.65) in his place, and of his subsequent discovery and adoption by "a Ploughman" (I.x.66). Though as a result "now accompted Elfins sonne," Redcrosse is in fact a "faire ymp,⁸ sprong out from English race" (I.x.60).⁹ The hermit therefore counsels him to follow the path to "The new *Hierusalem*, that God has built / For those to dwell in, that are chosen his" (I.x.57), where waits "ordaind" for him "a blessed end: / For thou emongst those Saints, whom thou doest see, / Shalt be a Saint and thine owne nations frend / And Patrone" (I.x.61). Much like Red Cross Knight as Saint George, Ransom in realizing his true identity as "a citizen of Deep Heaven" also becomes a savior of his nation in *That Hideous Strength*, after having first saved a planet in *Perelandra*. Both divided, unlikely, and relatively unknowing characters grow into greater consciousness of their respective natures and destinies to become deliverers of both a kingdom and a world.

Though Ransom possesses no clue from the beginning as to why he has been sent to *Perelandra*, he has "a sensation not of following an adventure but of enacting a myth" (47). Redcrosse's quest, which coalesces with that of the Cosmic Dragon-Slayer,¹⁰ could not be described better: he has undertaken a task beyond his

⁸ Defined in the *OED* as "Scion (especially of a noble house)" up to the 17th century, and thereafter as a literary archaism ("imp" 3).

⁹ Therefore, when Redcrosse emerges from a period of spiritual hibernation through the influence of the enchanter Archimago to fight Sans Foy ('Faithless'), the poem relates, "the sleeping spark / Of *natiue* vertue gan eftsoones reuiue" (I.ii.19; emphasis added). His true English identity, representing his noble birth, breaks through the layers of his fallen, "base Elfin," identity. Ironically, the result of this victory is yet another degree of division from his true self, as the fallible Redcrosse, having abandoned Una, now acquires Sans Foy's paramour, Duessa. This alternating pattern of conflict between the hero's two identities culminates in his growing identification with Christ in his defeat of the Satanic dragon, sealing his true identity as St. George, patron saint of England.

¹⁰ As Mircea Eliade summarizes, "a familiar paradigmatic myth recounts the combat between the hero and a gigantic serpent, often three-headed, sometimes replaced by a marine monster

ken to ransom a kingdom that also signifies a world by delivering its king and queen, Una's parents, from the power of a Satanic dragon. Ransom begins to comprehend why he has been sent to Perelandra when he sees a small craft floating on the planet's sea (81-82): the evil scientist Weston, soon to become the Un-man, has arrived. Weston, the narrator explains,

was a man obsessed with the idea which is at this moment circulating all over our planet in obscure works of 'scientification' [...] ignored or mocked by the intellectuals, but ready, if ever the power is put into its hands, to open a new chapter of misery for the universe. It is the idea that humanity, having not sufficiently corrupted the planet where it arose, must at all costs contrive to seed itself over a larger area [...]. This for a start. But beyond this lies the sweet poison of the false infinite—the wild dream that planet after planet, system after system, in the end galaxy after galaxy, can be forced to sustain, everywhere and for ever, the sort of life which is contained in the loins of our own species—a dream [...] fondled in secret by thousands of ignorant men and hundreds who are not ignorant. The destruction or enslavement of other species in the universe [...] is to these minds a welcome corollary. In Professor Weston the power had at last met the dream. (81-82)

At Ransom's recognition "it's up to me to do something about it," he feels "A terrible sense of inadequacy [sweep] over him" (82). Ransom's sense of urgent responsibility (and perhaps also inadequacy) is reflected in Lewis's stated motive for writing the trilogy, which was, as Downing relates, "because he feared that Evolutionism was beginning to capture the popular imagination" (36). 'Evolutionism,' which Lewis also called 'Westonism' (37), was his term for "a philosophy that projects Darwinism into the metaphysical sphere, speculating that

(Indra, Herakles, and others; Marduk)" (37). This myth of the Cosmic Dragon-Slayer is well represented in biblical and extra-biblical messianic traditions: "the Hebrews interpreted contemporary events by means of the very ancient cosmogonic-heroic myth, which, though it of course admitted the provisional victory of the dragon, above all implied the dragon's final extinction through a King-Messiah" (38). As Eliade specifies, Hebrew literature "gives the Gentile kings (Zadokite Fragments, IX: 19-20) the characteristics of the dragon: such is the Pompey described in the Psalms of Solomon (IX:29), the Nebuchadrezzar presented by Jeremiah (51:34). And in the Testament of Asher (VII:3) the Messiah kills the dragon under water (cf. Psalm 74:13)" (38). The argument for Spenser's Canto xi of Book I, "The knight with that old Dragon fights," invokes "the great dragon, that olde serpent, called the deuil and Satan" of Revelation 12:9 (qtd. 137nArg.1), placing Redcrosse's duel directly in this ancient mythic tradition. Significant for Lewis's anthropomorphic transformation of the dragon of tradition into Weston, who presently becomes the Un-man, is the biblical association of the monster with human rulers and finally, in the Book of Revelation, with the often anthropomorphized Satan. In that biblical text, notes David Aune, the term "*Dragon*" is "used nine times" as "a designation for Satan" (Rev. 12:3 n.).

humankind may eventually evolve into its own species of divinity, jumping from planet to planet and star to star" (36). Thus he explained in correspondence to Roger Lancelyn Green,

What immediately spurred me to write was Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* [1931], and an essay in J.B.S. Haldane's *Possible Worlds* [1927], both of wh. seemed to take the idea of such travel seriously and to have the desperately immoral outlook wh. I try to pillory in *Weston*. I like the whole inter-planetary idea as a *mythology* and simply wished to conquer for my own (Christian) pt. of view what has always hitherto been used by the opposite side. (*Collected Letters* [CL] II 236-237)

Elsewhere Lewis elaborated that the tip of the goad for him to write *Out of the Silent Planet* was

the discovery that a pupil of mine took all that dream of interplanetary colonisation quite seriously, and the realisation that thousands of people, in one form or another depend on some hope of perpetuating and improving the human race for the whole meaning of the universe—that a 'scientific' hope of defeating death is a real rival to Christianity. (CL II 262).

In other words, Lewis sees himself as writing anti-materialist polemic, much as Spenser took it upon himself to write anti-Catholic polemic—the latter in the interests of Protestantism, the former in those of a unified Christian worldview. Many of Redcrosse's main adversaries bear allegorical reference to Roman Catholicism as a threat to English Protestantism—and therefore, under Elizabeth, to crown and nation as well. Duessa, for example, whose seduction of Redcrosse leads to his imprisonment in Orgoglio's dungeon, is described as "clad in scarlot red, / Purpled with gold and pearle of rich assay, / and like a *Persian* mitre on her hed / Shee wore" (I.ii.13), linking her to the apocalyptic Whore of Babylon,¹¹ who "was araied in purple & skarlat, & guilded with golde, & precious stones, and pearles, and had a cup of golde in her hand, ful of abominations, and filthines of her fornication," described in Revelation 17:4, and whom the marginal gloss in the Geneva Bible used by Spenser and much of his audience identified as "the Antichrist, that is, the Pope with the whole bodie of his filthie creatures [...] whose beautie onely standeth in outwarde pompe & impudencie and craft like a strumpet" (17:4 n. f). After Redcrosse's rescue by Prince Arthur from Orgoglio's dungeon, "all the floore" is found to be covered "With blood of guiltlesse babes, and innocents trew, / Which there were slaine, as sheepe out of the fold" (I.viii.35). The alliance between Duessa and Orgoglio, who

¹¹ This title is not in the biblical text but appears in the chapter heading for Revelation 17 in the Geneva Bible.

“gawe her gold and purple pall to weare, / And triple crowne set on her head full hye” (I.vii.16), reflects the marriage of Mary Tudor to Philip I of Spain and their Catholic regime under which Protestants were persecuted and martyred (Rovang 91; Hamilton 109 n. 35.9, cf. 104 n. 6.2-5). Both Lewis and Spenser therefore create a vulnerable and flawed protagonist pitted against an overpowering, dominant force — Lewis’s contemporary,¹² Spenser’s recent history in his England but still considered a living threat.

As a life-bearing planet, Perelandra is in its vulnerable infant stage under an original Adam- and Eve-like pair who have yet to produce any offspring. Like Spenser’s Britomart, who is to found with Artegall both a nation and a royal line, Tinidril, the Perelandran Eve, is separated from her king. In a striking inversion of the poem’s reflection of Queen Elizabeth in several of its heroines, the Perelandran queen seems to reflect not only the biblical Eve and Spenser’s Una, but also the poem’s Britomart, Belphoebe, and even Acrasia. While she and the safety of her world comprise together the object of Ransom’s quest, she is at the same time, like Una to Redcrosse, his companion and guide from whom he becomes perilously separated. Where Spenser gropes for a frame of reference, divine or human, in which to place Belphoebe, “Such as *Diana* by the sandy shore / Of swift *Eurotas*, or on *Cynthus* greene / [...] Or as that famous Queene / Of *Amazons*” (II.iii.31), Ransom’s mind reels in the presence of Perelandra’s Green Lady:

There was no category in the terrestrial mind which would fit her. Opposites met in her and were fused in a fashion for which we have no images. [...] Beautiful, naked, shameless, young—she was obviously a goddess [...] yet at any moment she might laugh like a child, or run like Artemis [aka Diana; cf. 31.1, above] or dance like a Maenad. (64)

On her floating island surrounded by animals she is compared to Circe (54), thus rating her also as a kind of unfallen Acrasia, the fairy temptress analogously owing to Homer who inhabits an enchanted floating isle in Spenser’s Book II. (This latter connection gains additional strength from the fact that Circe’s isle in Homer’s *Odyssey* does not float).

Weston’s very purpose becomes to make the Perelandran Eve fall by convincing her to abandon this floating land for the fixed against the decree of their creator, Maleldil. As Downing notes, “in Spenser the wandering islands are to be avoided by the righteous” (91). Here we see an example of Lewis’s creative adaptation of Spenser’s symbolism to his own work, for from reading Spenser we would expect Perelandra’s floating islands to signify “relativism, instability, being

¹² This contemporary force will take on a more defined institutional shape as the N.I.C.E. in *That Hideous Strength* to threaten British political and spiritual freedom in striking parallelism to Spenser’s view of the threat of Roman papal domination to English liberties.

driven by the caprices of the moment," and the fixed land "absolutes, eternal truths, anchoring oneself in unchanging realities" (91). Yet in *Perelandra*, Downing points out, "the emphasis is not upon stability vs. instability, but upon relinquishing control and accepting what is given" (91). Hence, the primal couple hold dominion over their planet, paradoxically, only by refusing absolute sovereignty over their personal existences. As *Perelandra*'s King Tor puts it, "No fixed land. Always one must throw oneself into the wave" (210). Weston, therefore, in his role as tempter, is of the Devil's party without knowing it, eventually incarnating the Satanic Un-man, a strong parallel to Spenser's dragon¹³ that holds Una's parents, the "ancient King and Queene," captive.

In an antithetical sense to his adversary, who while fancying himself an agent of interplanetary enlightenment actually embodies the "angel of light" Paul warns of (II Cor. 11:14), Ransom consciously realizes that he is an extension of God's incarnation in Jesus:

When Eve fell, God was not Man. He had not yet made men members of His body: since then He had, and through them henceforward He would save and suffer. One of the purposes for which He had done all this was to save *Perelandra* not through Himself but through Himself in Ransom. If Ransom refused, the plan, so far, miscarried. For that point in the story, a story far more complicated than he had conceived, it was he who had been selected. (144-45)

A growing fullness of identity emerges in both Red Cross Knight and Ransom with the Christ they gradually figure forth. The disembodied voice of Maledil the Younger, the novel's cosmic Christ, tells him, "It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom," presently adding, "My name also is Ransom" (147-48).¹⁴ Redcrosse also comes to understand his true identity as George, the dragon-slaying patron saint of England, and in the course of his three days of battle with the beast, he, to use Lewis's term, "*enact[s]*" Christ (CL III 1005). A significant absence in both works is the specific mention of Jesus or Christ by those names. Yet Christological detail suffuses both heroes' quests, with the effect that the human protagonist becomes an extension of Jesus's incarnation. As Lewis explains in a letter to one of his readers, "Ransom (to some extent) plays the role of Christ not because he allegorically represents Him (as Cupid represents falling in love) but because in reality every real Christian is really called upon in some measure to *enact* Christ" (CL III 1005). Clearly, this calling is also

¹³ See the final two sentences of note 10, above.

¹⁴ Ransom's first name, Elwin, also seems significant: *El*, Hebrew 'God', and *wine*, Old English 'friend' = 'God friend', as in, for example, the Anglo-Saxon name Aelfwine—'elf friend'. Following the first victory of his quest over the monster Errour, Redcrosse is said to go "forward on his way (with *God to friend*)" (I.i.28; emphasis added).

modeled in *Redcrosse* as the Everyman Christian who becomes the Knight of Holiness in order to participate in his Savior's redemptive conquest over evil.

This enacting takes on a specifically analogous pattern as the hero in each story defeats his Satanic adversary in a three-day series of battles that eventuates in an increased awareness of dependency on and identification with Christ. On the first day, both Ransom and Red Cross Knight draw first blood by means associated with their own strength. As Ransom's prep-school boxing lessons return to him, "he found that he had delivered a straight left with all his might on the Un-man's jaw" (152), causing it to bleed from the mouth. Before long, Ransom realizes that the physical strength of his opponent "was merely that of Weston. On the physical plane it was one middle-aged scholar against another" (155). He concludes, "There was no reason why he should not win—and live."

Red Cross Knight's first day of encounter with his adversary, too, emphasizes his human ability. Though the knight's first stroke fails to pierce the dragon's armor, the creature takes note: "neuer [before] felt his imperceable brest / So wondrous force, from hand of liuing wight" (I.xi.17). For his third, more successful, attempt of this encounter, "three mens strength vnto the stroake he layd" (I.x.20). The actual wounding, however, is a result of the providential glancing of the spear off the armored neck onto a momentarily exposed area under the left wing (20.6-8).

The first day of conflict ends aquatically for both heroes. The Well of Life into which *Redcrosse* falls (I.xi.29) "restore[s]" and "renew[s]" (I.xi.30) so much so that on the second day "new this new-borne knight to battell new did rise" (I.xi.34). For Ransom, however, water is the medium in which he battles Weston after pursuing him through the Perelandran sea on the back of a fish (which we might be tempted to interpret Christologically were it not that Weston is riding one too). During his final underwater struggle, however, reaching the end of his strength, Ransom "decided to stop holding his breath, to open his mouth and die" (172). With the "abstract proposition, 'This is a man dying,'" before him, "Suddenly a roar of sound rushed back upon his ears" and Ransom "was breathing again" (172). Then, not knowing how, he finds himself "astride of the enemy" and achieves an apparent, but not final victory over his adversary by maintaining a strangle hold "Even when he was quite sure that it¹⁵ breathed no longer" while "nearly fainting himself" (172). Where *Redcrosse's* "baptized hands now greater grew" (I.xi.36) following his emergence from the Well of Life, yet not sufficient for final conquest over the dragon, Ransom comes through a symbolic death by water into renewed, yet incomplete, success against his foe. As Carol Kaske puts it, "On the second day, [...] the most that can be said for the knight's achievement is that he gives as good as he gets; he remains in a state of grace, as he does not on the first day, but he is still not Christ" (630). Both

¹⁵ Following the word "enemy" quoted above, Lewis subtly shifts the pronoun reference for Weston / the Un-man to neuter as the former's identity is taken over by the latter.

developments reflect the baptized mortal's enhanced yet incomplete conquest over evil. Ransom's uncertainty over whether "the spirit which had spoken to him was really Weston's" anymore (173) indicates that Weston, antithetically to Ransom, is now becoming more strongly identified with the dehumanizing cosmic malignity called the Un-man.

The three days of Redcrosse's dragon fight, intermitted with his restoration by the Well and the Tree of Life, identify it with the three days between Christ's death and resurrection, during which He overcomes the Old Dragon, as Satan is called in Revelation chapter 19. After his resurrection at the Tree of Life on the third day, Redcrosse promptly dispatches the dragon that he has only antagonized up until that point (xi.53-54). As Kaskas summarizes, at this final stage the knight "neither retains (52.2) nor incurs any wounds, and his first and only blow kills the dragon." Redcrosse's "task," she asserts, "to kill once for all a dragon symbolizing Satan, to rescue the king and queen of Eden from the dragon's brazen prison, and to restore them to their realm (*FQ* I.vii.43.3-9; xii.26.1)—has been shown to typify the Harrowing of Hell," as do also "Further Christological details of the third day—such as the knight's killing the dragon by stabbing through a mouth opened to devour him ([xi.]53)" (630-631).

Ransom's final conquest of the Un-man in a fiery subterranean passage also reflects Christ's Harrowing of Hell in very human terms. When, having crossed a hot underground river, he peers over the edge of a cliff: "The fire appeared to be thousands of feet below him and he could not see the other side of the pit in which it swelled and roared and writhed. His eyes could only bear it for a second or so" (180). The other infernal flames that assault him, however, are psychological:

Suddenly and irresistibly, like an attack by tanks, that whole view of the universe which Weston (if it were Weston) had so lately preached to him, took all but complete possession of his mind. He seemed to see that he had been living all his life in a world of illusion. The ghosts, the damned ghosts, were right. The beauty of *Perelandra*, the innocence of the Lady, the sufferings of saints, and the kindly affections of men, were all only an appearance and outward show. What he had called the worlds were but the skins of the worlds: a quarter of a mile beneath the surface, and from thence through thousands of miles of dark and silence and infernal fire, to the very heart of each, Reality lived—the meaningless, the un-made, the omnipotent idiocy to which all spirits were irrelevant and before which all efforts were vain. (180)

These thoughts, Ransom soon comes to realize, are mental shock troops preceding the appearance of Weston's animated body, which is accompanied by a huge insect-like creature: "he became convinced both that the Un-man had summoned this great crawler and also that the evil thoughts which had preceded the appearance of the enemy had been poured into his own mind by the enemy's will"

(181). Therefore Ransom's Harrowing of Hell takes on the dimension of a psychomachy, which, counter to the enemy's intention, propels him to final victory: "The knowledge that his thoughts could be thus managed from without did not awake terror but rage" (181). Shouting "Get out of my brain. It isn't yours, I tell you!" he selects "a big, jagged stone" which he slings "as hard as he could into the Un-man's face" with the declaration, "'In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,'" a formula suggesting a new level of spiritual dependency and identification. The Un-man "fell as a pencil falls" (181), echoing the anaphoric dramatization of the fall of Spenser's dragon after Redcrosse's lance "Ran through his mouth with so *importune might*, / That deepe emperst his darksom hollow maw" (I.xi.53; emphasis added):

So downe he fell, and forth his life did breath,
 That vanisht into smoke and cloudes swift;
So downe he fell, that th'earth him vnderneath
 Did grone, as feeble so great load to lift;
So downe he fell, as an huge rocky clift,
 Whose false foundation waues haue washt away,
 [...]
So downe he fell, and like an heaped mountaine lay.
 (I. xi. 54; emphasis added)

The "importune might" that fells the dragon takes "The weapon bright" as its grammatical subject, an ambiguity which seems intended to make readers consider whether the power behind the weapon belongs to Red Cross Knight or to God. Una's response in the last two lines of Canto xi, "Then God she prayes, and thank her faithfull knight, / That had atchieude so great a conquest by *his* might" (55), also seems to carry purposeful ambiguity, though the poet's intention is arguably to lead readers to ponder a prime theological paradox. Hamilton comments, "There is a deliberate equivocation in **his**: it refers both to God and to his knight" (147n55.8-9). In action that reframes the paradox, Ransom's fatal head blow to the Un-man, while delivered with all his might, is, as indicated by the threefold invocation with which he thrusts it, also divinely guided and empowered. Both fatal strokes, therefore, subtly intimate the undiscernible line between human and divine in deeds of faith. Cross-referencing Philippians 2:13, where Paul tells his audience, "it is God which worketh in you, both the wil and the dede," Hamilton comments on Spenser's lines 8-9, "Human might and God's grace merge as the knight is revealed in the lineaments of Christ, the dragon-killer, even as Michael, the dragon-killer of Rev. 12.7, is identified by the Geneva gloss as Christ" (147n55.8-9). As the earthly Jesus depended on the divine in, not apart from, his humanity, so now does Red Cross Knight, so now does Ransom, so also does, at some level, each believing Christian. As Kaske relates, "When Red Cross emerges [...] from the precinct of the Tree in a

magically complete identification with the risen Christ, he is exhibiting physically and completely what happens to every communicant spiritually and to some extent" (638). Both characters harrow Hell not merely in imitation of, but ritual participation with, Christ. This important point is further borne out in terms of the saints' mythic participation in Christ's cosmic victory by the Geneva gloss mentioned above by Hamilton, which identifies the "Michael & his Angels" of Revelation 12:7 who overcome the dragon as "Jesus Christ and his members, as Apostles, Martyrs, and the rest of the faithful" (v. 7 n.k). In this interpretation, which Spenser's construing of the dragon fight strongly indicates he was aware of, the cooperation of Christ and his "members" in the dragon's defeat is just as indistinguishable as the pronoun reference "his might" ascribing credit for the "great [...] conquest" of the poem's dragon (I.xi.55).

Only as the now-victorious Ransom is recovering from his wounds does he discover the most pernicious, which is never to heal: "It was a wound in his heel. The shape made it quite clear that the wound had been inflicted by human teeth—the nasty blunt teeth of our own species which crush and grind more than they cut" (187). These two woundings complete the identifications of Ransom with Christ and of the Un-man with the Old Dragon, which makes its first appearance in Eden. In the *Protoevangelion* ("first gospel") stated in Genesis 3:15, God predicts to the serpent that has just brought about humanity's fall: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Authorized Version). This text has been understood by historic Christianity as foretelling Christ's wounding by, but ultimate defeat of, the Devil.¹⁶

In both Spenser's and Lewis's tales, therefore, a flawed mortal hero comes, through the course of an extended battle with a Satanic adversary, into an inextricable identification with Christ—God in man. Lewis's Un-man presents a tragic parody of this process: Where Ransom in dependence on God comes into a willing (though unanticipated) union with Christ, which fulfils his true identity as Ransom, Weston, both by "invitation" (146) and through willful self-reliance, becomes the helpless tool of Satan, possessed rather than united, the Un-man, deprived of his potential for good. As Ransom includes in Weston's epitaph, "HE GAVE UP HIS WILL AND REASON / TO THE BENT ELDIL" (188).¹⁷ While Red Cross Knight learns his true

¹⁶ Irenaeus, for example, quoting this verse, comments that Christ has "in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam, and trampled upon his head" (5.21.1, p. 548).

¹⁷ In attempting to discern between the persons of Weston and the Bent Eldil possessing him, Ransom reflects, "There was no doubt a confusion of persons in damnation: what Pantheists falsely hoped of Heaven bad men really received in Hell. They were melted down into their Master, as a lead soldier slips down and loses his shape in the ladle held over the gas ring. The question whether Satan, or one whom Satan has digested, is acting on any given occasion, has in

identity as St. George on the Mount of Contemplation prior to engaging the dragon, he actually experiences unification with Christ during the extended course of the battle. Both men, in identifying with Christ become saviors of the primal couple—Redcrosse of the King and Queen, Ransom of the Green Lady and her king.

The two authors, therefore, detail strikingly analogous schematics of the growth of the Christian Everyman into Everyman in Christ. Both writers present profoundly theological interpretations of St. Paul's teachings, as expressed, for example, in Galatians 4:19 and Colossians 1:28b-29: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you," and "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (Authorized Version).

Readers familiar with Lewis's Preface to *Perelandra* will by now have recalled his insistence that "All the human characters in the book are purely fictitious and none of them is allegorical" (6). By this statement Lewis could simply mean that he does not intend any kind of coded reference to specific persons. It seems likely that he is disclaiming, for example, that Weston is a veiled portrait of one of his colleagues. If, however, as is also possible, he means "allegorical" in a broader sense than that, I offer that he is indicating the world of his story to be a self-contained one into which the reader can imaginatively enter with no flatfooted drawing of connections with his or her own, yet which illumines the reader's understanding of the mundane reality which it parallels as truly extraordinary. Lewis reminds us that *The Faerie Queene* is "much more than a fairy-tale, but unless we can enjoy it as a fairy-tale first of all, we shall not really care for it" (*Studies* 133). He cautions against analyzing the poem "detail by detail for clues to its meaning as if we were trying to work out a cipher. That is the very worst thing we can do. We must surrender ourselves with childlike attention to the mood of the story" (137). We may safely assume that he intends us to approach his space romance in the same way.

In *Spenser's Images of Life*, Lewis explains that mention of "historical allegory" in Spenser criticism "is usually taken to mean that the whole of *The Faerie Queene* is a *roman à clef*, which can be understood only when you have found the historical interpretation" (16-17). Lewis carefully distinguishes that this is not the allegory of the poem: "The movement of the interpreting mind is from real people into the work of art, not out of the work to them" (17). He illustrates: "We should not say 'To appreciate Belphoebe we must think about Elizabeth I'; but rather 'To understand the ritual compliment Spenser is paying Elizabeth, we must study Belphoebe.'" The result of this approach to reading the poem, Lewis concludes, is "the recovered work of art," "a simple fairy-tale pleasure" (17), not a system of

the long run no clear significance" (173). In a deeply significant parodic contrast to Ransom's identification with Maleldil, Weston loses his identity in an inseparable confusion with his possessor.

symbols that exist for the sake of something outside the poem. Yet this world of glass undoubtedly, when we enter it, moves us to reflect more deeply and incandescently on the world whence we came.

As previously noted, at one point in the novel Ransom acutely experiences “a sensation not of following an adventure but of enacting a myth” (47). Could it be that we are too? Ransom, like Red Cross Knight, becomes a living emblem of the Everyman Christian, the Christ-life unfolding itself in many a life set in sharp relief through the myth, hence setting our personal existences in the kind of stunningly elevated perspective that can only be attained through a well-told story. From these correspondences we may surmise that Lewis’s creation of his own fictional other world and his suggested approach to our reading it are inspired directly by his reading of Spenser’s “delightfull land of Faery” (VI.Proem.1). His apparent goal may be compared to Spenser’s stated one in the *Letter to Raleigh*: “The generall end [...] of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” (714), the variety of which Book I focuses on being Holiness, growth into lived-out identification with Christ. Lewis’s recognizable strategy, too, may be compared with Spenser’s stated one to render this “generall end [...] most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for profite of the ensample” (715). In embracing an analogous goal and strategy, Lewis is not only extending the influence of *The Faerie Queene* to a modern audience, but, like Spenser, enticing his readers into the spiritually and morally shaping influence of the story by refitting the unfolding of the Christ-myth in its teleology of man in Christ to the appetites of contemporary readers. More can, and in another article will, be said about Spenserian parallels in *That Hideous Strength*, the third book of the trilogy. In *Perelandra*, however, space functions, as does Spenser’s Faery Land, to provide a setting removed from yet reflecting the reader’s everyday experience, to represent the fundamental spiritual struggle to overcome evil with good in its true colors. Both Redcrosse Knight and Ransom are potentially each one of us, and we are all, like them, beyond our own resources, commissioned cosmic dragon slayers.

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