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Abstract

Starting with a study of the character of Susan in *The Last Battle*, examines Lewis's views on innocence, sin, and maturity. Considers evidence from the *Perelandra* cycle and discusses Phillip Pullman's criticism of Lewis.

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—Attitude toward maturity; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Susan Pevensie; Lewis, C.S. Chronicles of Narnia; Lewis, C.S. Space Trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, *That Hideous Strength*); Pullman, Philip—Criticism of C.S. Lewis

A Darker Ignorance: C. S. Lewis and the Nature of the Fall

Mary R. Bowman

Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure. (Milton, *Areopagitica* 728-29)

WITH the recent publication of the last volume in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, C. S. Lewis has received a new wave of publicity—largely negative—as numerous articles and interviews have recorded Pullman's dislike of Lewis's work, especially the Narnia series. While his opinions are to a large extent a matter of taste and to that extent not matter for scholarly concern, some of his remarks reflect interpretations of Lewis's work that merit further exploration.

One issue that comes up repeatedly in Pullman's comments is the absence of Susan from the "inner" Narnia where the rest of the English visitors to Narnia find themselves reunited at the conclusion of *The Last Battle*. Pullman objects mightily to Susan's "exclusion" and what it seems to imply about Lewis's attitudes toward adulthood. Susan, he claims, "is shut out from salvation because she is doing what every other child who has ever been born has done—she is beginning to sense the developing changes in her body and its effect on the opposite sex" (qtd. in Eccleshare). In Pullman's interpretation, the adult nature of Susan's interests is the crucial point, and her being "shut out" reflects Lewis's profound disapproval, even horror, of maturation: "he turns away in horror, explicitly with *horror*, from the process of growing up." This disapproval, moreover, has a clear religious source and significance: "In other words, she's growing up. She's entering adulthood," says Pullman. "Now this for Lewis, was something [. . .] so dreadful and so redolent of sin that he had to send her to Hell" (qtd. in Wartofsky). "What he's saying," Pullman concludes, "is that growing up is something we must avoid at all costs,

that when you grow up you fall into the clutches of, well, lipstick and nylons, which means sexuality, which means Satan [. . .]” (Pullman).

I will eventually argue that this interpretation is misguided, but it is a valuable one to consider, not only because it has appeared so frequently in the popular press, but also because it raises important issues in Lewis’s work and brings together elements that criticism has not often connected. This interpretation is, in fact, a viable one, but it takes certain statements out of context and, more significantly, relies on certain crucial assumptions: assumptions about the nature of sin, the nature of the original prohibition, and about the incompatibility of wisdom with innocence. Readers familiar with Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* fiction will recognize a consistency between his comments on Lewis and the cosmology that informs his own books, and while it is not my purpose here to debate the theological issues themselves, I submit that it is essential in interpreting (and evaluating) Lewis’s fiction to attempt, at least, to identify the theological assumptions implicit within that fiction. (Indeed, it would be interesting to compare the two cosmologies, though it lies beyond the scope of my present project.) What will emerge is that Lewis disagrees not simply on whether the Fall was a fortunate one (I believe he does disagree with Pullman here) or on the necessity of growing up (I believe his view actually has much in common with Pullman’s), but on those fundamental assumptions about innocence, sin, and maturity. Following Pullman’s lead, my main concern will be with the Narnia series, but elucidating these assumptions will take me into other works, notably *Perelandra*.

Such prohibitions bind not

Pullman’s own assumptions about the nature of sin and its relationship to maturity—the assumptions that largely drive his reading of Susan’s exclusion from paradise—are spelled out in some detail in a Wisconsin Public Radio interview. For him, “sin consists largely of curiosity, or curiosity is largely the embodiment of sin”; the first sin, “the initial root of all [other sins, . . .] was curiosity. The serpent said, taste this and you’ll see what good and evil are like. So [Eve] did, and those things all came out of her initial sin of curiosity. That’s where it all began, and that’s what the Western Church has been saying for a long time” (Pullman). In other words, the Genesis account reference to the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2.17, KJV) means that the tree literally contains, or directly represents, this knowledge, and it was precisely desire for this knowledge that led Eve to transgress.

Moreover, for Pullman, knowledge such as that obtained from the forbidden tree is critical to human development; the inseparability of knowledge and sin, in his reading of Genesis, renders sin an absolute prerequisite for maturity. Though innocence is lost, that loss is a necessary step toward growth:

The way I see it is that the loss—and it is a loss—of the innocence and the grace that we are born with, is something that’s a necessary stage that we all have to go through, and far from lamenting it, we should welcome it, we should accept it as a necessary stage, and we should then go on to the next part of our development, because human beings in the middle part of their lives, as we are, are on a sort of spectrum, on a sort of ladder if you like, a spectrum that leads from the innocence of childhood, if we are lucky, to, at the other end, wisdom. (Pullman)

Crucial here is the idea that this wisdom cannot be combined with innocence, and could not have been gained without the Fall: “[T]he point is that innocence, we have to leave it behind. Innocence cannot be wise. [. . .] And furthermore, wisdom cannot be innocent.”

In short, thinks Pullman, the Prohibition was specifically a prohibition to know and therefore a prohibition to mature, and its violation was necessary before humanity could explore and develop its full potential. In this sense Pullman regards the Fall as a *felix culpa*, a “fortunate fall.” (Though he uses the term in the WPR interview, he makes it clear that the happiness of the fall lies in the human growth that it enabled; his idea of the *felix culpa* thus differs from the traditional idea, which emphasizes the miracles that it inspired: the Incarnation and Resurrection.)

Implicit in this interpretation is the additional assumption that the Prohibition was permanent. When Steve Paulson suggests “that if Eve had never taken a bite from the apple, if she had never developed that self-consciousness, that knowingness between good and evil, then we would be nothing today, we would be living in some state of innocence that would be totally dull,” Pullman concurs: “That’s the clear implication of the story. We would still be pets. We would still be children” (Pullman). Without disobedience, human beings would never have acquired knowledge of good and evil, and thereby wisdom and maturity.

Pullman reads the Prohibition, in fact, much as Milton’s Satan does, and as his Eve does after she has begun to accept Satan’s arguments. In *Paradise Lost*, it is Satan who takes the Prohibition to mean that “Knowledge [is] forbidd’n” and that it is “sin to know” (4.515, 517) and who assumes that the rule prevents development, being “invented with design / To keep them low whom Knowledge

might exalt / Equal with Gods” (4.524-6). He succeeds in persuading Eve that the injunction is unjust and therefore not to be obeyed: “what forbids he but to know,” she concludes moments before taking the fatal bite, “Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise? / Such prohibitions bind not” (9.758-60). But Milton himself elsewhere suggests that it is even now possible for “virtue” to “kno[w . . .] the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejec[t] it,” that it is possible to “see and know, and yet abstain” (*Areopagitica* 728-29).

Lewis, good Miltonist that he was, sees things much more as Milton does. (And he dismisses the Blakean notion that Satan is the true hero of *Paradise Lost* as “wholly erroneous,” *Preface* 94.) While Pullman’s theological views shape his own fiction, and rightly so, any commentary on Lewis’s fiction that treats such ideas as a given is highly susceptible to error, for Lewis disagrees with Pullman on these fundamental assumptions. For Lewis, the Prohibition was not about knowledge at all; it was not permanent; far from being a bar to wisdom, it was a vehicle to it; and mature wisdom is absolutely compatible with innocence—or would have been in an unfallen world.

Different laws in different worlds

In his own analysis of *Paradise Lost*, Lewis takes pains to emphasize his understanding that for Milton (as for Augustine before him), the Prohibition was arbitrary; the point of the forbidding was to give Adam and Eve an opportunity to obey God in a meaningful way—not to keep anything of particular importance from them:

All idea of a magic apple has fallen out of sight. [. . .] The idea that the apple has any *intrinsic* importance is put into the mouths of bad characters. [. . .] Satan assumes that knowledge is magically contained in the apple and will pass to the eater whether those who have forbidden the eating wish or no (IX, 721 et seq.). Good characters speak quite differently. For them the apple is ‘sole pledge of his obedience’ (IV, 428) [. . .]. The view that if the apple has no intrinsic magic then the breach of the prohibition becomes a small matter—in other words that the Miltonic God is making a great pothor about nothing—is expressed only by Satan. [. . .] St. Augustine considers the disobedience heinous precisely because obedience was so easy. (*Preface* 68-69)

The Fall, consequently, had nothing to do with the acquisition of knowledge per se: “The Fall is simply and solely Disobedience—doing what you have been told not to do: and it results from Pride—from being too big for your boots, forgetting your place, thinking that you are God” (70-71). The tree is called “the

tree of knowledge” not because it contains knowledge in itself or even because desire for knowledge leads to eating it, but because knowledge of good and evil necessarily follows from the act of disobedience: Milton says elsewhere that “[i]t was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil from the event”—“event” here carrying its Latin meaning “outcome” (*Christian Doctrine* 993). Lewis does not comment on this point specifically in the *Preface*, but it will become evident in his fiction that he follows Milton on this point as well.

The understanding of the Prohibition that Lewis so clearly explicates in Milton’s poem appears in his own fictional temptations. In *The Magician’s Nephew*, Digory is sent to bring an apple from a distinctly Miltonic garden. The garden sits at the top of a “steep green hill” (156) and is bound by a “high wall of green turf” with “high gates of gold, fast shut, facing east” (157). These few details already echo Milton’s paradise, which sits at the top of “a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides / With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild, / Access deni’d” (*PL* 4.135-37); and which has “One Gate [. . .] only [. . .] and that look’d East” (4.178). The importance of *Paradise Lost* as a pretext becomes even more pronounced after Digory enters the garden through the gates, as the inscription on them instructs (“Come in by the gold gates or not at all” [*Magician’s* 157]), and discovers that the witch Jadis has arrived there before him. Digory “guessed at once that she must have climbed in over the wall” (159-60), in defiance of the instructions and in clear imitation of Satan, who

Due entrance [. . .] disdain’d, and in contempt,
At one slight bound high overleap’d all bound
Of Hill or highest Wall, and sheer within
Lights on his feet. (*PL* 4.180-83)

She has also eaten one of the apples, as the Satan-possessed serpent claims to have done (9.575-612), again in violation of the directive on the gates (“Take of my fruit for others or forbear”).

Thus, although the scene lacks the primal force of the Edenic temptation because Digory is not the progenitor of his race, it is patterned after the earlier scene and, at least on an individual level, is infused with the same drama. It is therefore significant that neither the tree itself nor the temptation has anything to do with knowledge. Aslan assigns no such meaning to the fruit; Digory is told rather that it is needed to plant a tree that will “protect” Narnia from the witch (*Magician’s Nephew* 142). Digory is tempted at first by the mere look and smell of

the apple, not by any metaphysical powers it may possess: “he couldn’t help looking at it and smelling it before he put it away. [. . .] A terrible thirst and hunger came over him and a longing to taste that fruit” (158). It is the witch herself who identifies the inherent power of the fruit, which imparts not knowledge, but eternal life: “It is the apple of youth, the apple of life. [. . .] Eat it, [. . .] and you and I will both live forever and be king and queen of this whole world” (161). Neither eternal life nor worldly power proves to be very tempting to Digory, so Jadis appeals to his fear of losing his dangerously ill mother: “But what about this Mother of yours whom you pretend to love so? [. . .] [O]ne bite of that apple would heal her” (161). It is only this last appeal which presents a genuine temptation for Digory, a “most terrible choice” (162).

Lewis’s belief in the arbitrary nature of the Prohibition is clearly reflected in this scene, for the seemingly essential details of the Edenic situation are altered. The forbidden fruit is associated not with knowledge, but with life, and Digory is tempted not by curiosity but by a child’s desire not to lose his mother. The test is one of trust, as C. N. Manlove has explained:

The act that Digory must carry out is one of obedience. His errors before were of self-will: he would determine the future and bring it to pass. That is the temptation himself and then the Witch put before him at the garden: why should he trust Aslan, why should he not take another apple for himself, why should he not use the apple he has plucked to help his sick mother rather than take it back for Aslan’s uncertain purposes? He refuses: he gives himself back into Aslan’s hand. (176)

It becomes even clearer that Lewis regards the specifics of the Prohibition as inessential surface features when we turn to *Perelandra*, which even more directly than *The Magician’s Nephew* explores the nature of the Prohibition, of sin, and obedience. There, the Prohibition does not involve fruit at all, but land: the Lord and Lady of Venus are commanded to spend their nights on the floating islands only; they may visit the fixed lands only during the daytime. The Lady herself observes the accidental nature of the rule when she learns that this particular prohibition never applied on Earth: “There can, then, be different laws in different worlds” (74). Margaret P. Hannay, in her seminal analysis of the influence of *Paradise Lost* on *Perelandra*, relates this important detail to Lewis’s comments in the *Preface to Paradise Lost* (quoted above) rejecting the notion of a “magic apple” (86). And it is clear that there is nothing inherently sinful or dangerous about the fixed lands. As Manlove observes, “[d]uring the temptation [. . .] it is actually one of Ransom’s strongest arguments that the prohibition should have no inherent

significance at all, save that Maledil forbids it” (68). The Lady herself comes to understand that the temptation is, fundamentally, about trust:

“The reason for not yet living on the Fixed Land is now so plain. How could I wish to live there except because it was Fixed? And why should I desire the Fixed except to make sure—to be able on one day to command where I should be the next and what should happen to me? It was to reject the wave—to draw my hands out of Maledil’s, to say to Him, ‘Not thus, but thus’—to put in our own power what times should roll toward us . . . as if you gathered fruits together to-day for to-morrow’s eating instead of taking what came. That would have been cold love and feeble trust.” (208)

In his fiction Lewis repeatedly follows Milton in making disobedience not an expression of curiosity but a lack of trust, a not allowing God to be God.

What would have happened

An equally significant aspect of the Prohibition as Lewis understands it is that it was never meant to be permanent. The Lady of Perelandra implies this in her explication of the Prohibition: “The reason for not *yet* living on the Fixed Land is now so plain,” she begins (208, emphasis added); “yet” suggests a temporary restraint. After the temptation is successfully resisted, her obedience and trust tested and proven true, the rules are changed, and the Lord and Lady not only are permitted to live on the Fixed Land but are given complete dominion over the planet. Ransom comes to understand that “*this* island had never been forbidden them, and that one purpose in forbidding the other had been to lead them to this their destined throne” (203-04).

In the same way, Digory’s temptation is about deciding the when and where for himself; he is not to be denied help for his mother entirely. Aslan explains to Digory and Polly that the “sin” or “fall” of Jadis has to do with intention and timing: the fruit is now “a horror to her” because

“That is what happens to those who pluck and eat fruits at the wrong time and in the wrong way. The fruit is good, but they loathe it ever after.”

[. . .]

“Things always work according to their nature. She has won her heart’s desire; she has unwearied strength and endless days like a goddess. But length of days with an evil heart is only length of misery and already she begins to know it. All get what they want: they do not always like it.” (*Magician’s* 174)

It is made clear to Digory that he risked the same horror himself when he considered yielding to the witch’s temptation: “Understand, then, that it would

have healed [your mother]; but not to your joy or hers. The day would have come when both you and she would have looked back and said it would have been better to die in that illness” (175). But it is immediately made equally clear that the crucial factor in such an event was the lack of permission, not the apple itself, for Aslan continues: “That is what *would* have happened, child, with a stolen apple. It is not what will happen now. What I give you now will bring joy. It will not, in your world, give endless life, but it will heal” (175). Having resisted the temptation to take an apple without permission, Digory is rewarded with exactly what had tempted him: his mother’s return to health.

In this way Lewis demonstrates that the Prohibition was not a permanent ban on anything of value: knowledge, life, or anything else. Nor did it impose stasis. Rather, it is the beginning of a process. One of the most original and fascinating aspects of *Perelandra* especially is its exploring the question “what would have happened if Eve had said no?” As John S. Tanner puts it, “*Perelandra* envisions the prospect of progress without a fall” (131). In this Lewis is once again following Milton’s lead. Milton’s Raphael describes for Adam the possibility of growth that is available to humankind as long as “ye be found obedient” (*PL* 5.501):

[. . .] time may come when men
With Angels may participate, and [. . .]
[.]
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improv’d by tract of time, and wing’d ascend
Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice
Here or in Heav’nly Parades dwell. (5.493-500)

Lewis cites this same passage in discussing one of the many points of agreement between Milton and Augustine: “If there had been no Fall, the human race after multiplying to its full numbers would have been promoted to angelic status (*De Civ. Dei*, XIV, 10). Milton agrees” (*Preface* 68).

Instead of a permanent barrier, then, the Prohibition and the resisted temptation present something more like a crossroads, from which two roads lead to the same desired good—knowledge, mother’s health, a settled home—but in very different ways. As the Lady puts it, Ransom arrived ““at that day when the time of our being young drew to its end, and from it we must now go up or go down, into corruption or into perfection”” (208). Development of some kind would necessarily follow; the issue is of what kind. And though the Perelandrian prohibition and temptation did not mention “the knowledge of good and evil” at

all, the King makes it clear that, on Venus as on Earth, knowledge follows from either choice, “from the event,” in Milton’s terms. The unfallen do not continue ignorant of good and evil; quite the opposite: through their obedience they have acquired knowledge superior to what they would have gained had they disobeyed, and indeed superior to what humans on fallen Earth have. The King explains,

“We know these things now. [. . .] We have learned of evil, though not as the Evil One wished us to learn. We have learned better than that, and know it more, for it is waking that understands sleep and not sleep that understands waking. There is an ignorance of evil that comes from being young: there is a darker ignorance that comes from doing it, as men by sleeping lose the knowledge of sleep. You are more ignorant of evil in Thulcandra now than in the days before your Lord and Lady began to do it. But Maleldil has brought us out of the one ignorance, and we have not entered the other.” (209)

Once again a passage of Milton’s lies behind Lewis’s: Adam himself makes it clear that there is something impaired about the knowledge that he and Eve have gained by their disobedient choice:

“[. . .] since our Eyes
Op’n’d we find indeed, and find we know
Both Good and Evil, Good lost, and Evil got,
Bad Fruit of Knowledge, if this be to know[.]” (9.1070-73)

As Charles A. Huttar points out, it is natural for residents of Earth to adhere to the notion that only by a knowledge of evil can we fully appreciate the good. Since our whole experience bears witness to this obvious truth, it takes a great effort of the imagination, assisted perhaps by rigorous logic, to consider the possible existence of beings on this or any other world who might know and fully savor good per se, alone, by itself. (126-27)

Perelandra posits the existence of just such beings.

Although Aslan tells Lucy, more than once, that “no one is ever told what *would have happened*” (*Voyage* 136; cf. *Prince* 137), in both *The Magician’s Nephew* and *Perelandra* Lewis allows us a glimpse, albeit indirect, of what might have happened on Earth. He creates new worlds, with new Prohibitions and new temptations, where a different choice is made.

Too old for fairy tales

Having eliminated the crucial assumptions—the Prohibition was about knowledge, the Fall was about curiosity and therefore was the only path to maturity and

wisdom—as foreign to Lewis’s conception, let us return to the opening question of Susan’s status at the end of *The Last Battle*. If knowledge and growth are not inseparably linked to sin, why would Susan’s growing up exclude her from salvation?

First of all, we should be more precise about Susan’s degree of maturity. Pullman states unequivocally that Susan is growing up, but the immediate context calls that into question. Granted, Jill does say that Susan is ““interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up”” (*Last Battle* 135). But immediately Polly—who is considerably older than Susan or Jill and has already lived a full life—contests that characterization:

“Grown-up, indeed,” said the Lady Polly. “I wish she *would* grow up. She wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now, and she’ll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay that age. Her whole idea is to race on to the silliest time of one’s life as quick as she can and then stop there as long as she can.” (135)

The implication is that Susan is not in point of fact grown up, nor is she growing up in what we might call an optimal way. She has fixated at a stage along the way, a stage characterized not only by her interest in adult things, but also by her rejection of, even disbelief in, what she regards as childish things. Says Eustace, ““whenever you’ve tried to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says ‘What wonderful memories you have! Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children’”” (135). Though she has actually been in Narnia herself, she no longer regards it as real.

An alternate model of the process of growing up is implied elsewhere in the Narnia series. At the end of *Prince Caspian*, for example, Peter tells Edmund and Lucy that he and Susan will not be returning to Narnia because “[Aslan] says we’re getting too old” (215). Though the idea strikes the younger children as unbearable (““What awful bad luck. Can you bear it?”” Lucy asks Peter), Peter’s own comment suggests that he is acquiring a different understanding: ““It’s all rather different from what I thought. You’ll understand when it comes to your last time.”” When Lucy and Edmund are themselves “too old” to return to Narnia, readers are privy to their conversation with Aslan and thus get a fuller picture of the transition they are beginning to undergo:

“You are too old, children,” said Aslan, “and you must begin to come close to your own world now. [. . . T]here I have another name. You must learn to know me by that

name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.” (*Voyage* 215-16)

The final words of Aslan suggest very strongly that the children are not expected to reject or forget Narnia as they grow, but they are instead meant to grow into a more adult understanding of who Aslan is and of what their experiences in Narnia have taught them, much as the King and Queen of Perelandra have developed a more mature understanding of their own innocence without leaving it behind.

Writings external to the Narnia books suggest that Susan’s current rejection of childish things is a normal part of growing up, but significantly, not a final stage. In the dedicatory letter to Lucy Barfield prefaced to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis tells his goddaughter, “*I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still*” (iii). He confidently expects that the non-fictional Lucy will become “too old” for Narnia just as her fictional namesake does. Just as confidently, however, he expects this to be a transitional stage, not a final destination, for he continues: “*But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can then take it down [. . .] and tell me what you think of it.*”

Lewis’s view of growing up is presented still more explicitly in his essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children.” Responding to the idea that an adult who enjoys fairy tales is to be “scorned and pitied for arrested development,” Lewis argues that it is the scorners and pitiers who are arrested:

Critics who treat *adult* as a term of approval, instead of as a merely descriptive term, cannot be adult themselves. To be concerned about being grown up, to admire the grown up because it is grown up, to blush at the suspicion of being childish; these things are the marks of childhood and adolescence. And in childhood and adolescence they are, in moderation, healthy symptoms. Young things ought to want to grow. But to carry on into middle life or even into early manhood this concern about being an adult is a mark of really arrested development. When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up. (25)

Though this essay preceded *The Last Battle* by a few years, the passage could very well be describing Susan. Peter, Digory, and Polly—all older than Susan but still believers in Narnia and Aslan—have presumably moved past the stage of dismissing their childhood experiences as “funny games,” but Susan has not.

Lewis continues by characterizing growing up as a process of accretion rather than replacement:

[S]urely arrested development consists not in refusing to lose old things but in failing to add new things? [. . .] I now enjoy Tolstoy and Jane Austen and Trollope as well as fairy tales and I call that growth: if I had had to lose the fairy tales in order to acquire the novelists, I would not say that I had grown but only that I had changed. (25-26)

This accretion is not mere accretion, moreover, but includes deepened relationships with the “old things”: “I think my growth is just as apparent when I now read the fairy tales as when I read the novelists, for I now enjoy the fairy tales better than I did in childhood: being now able to put more in, of course I get more out” (26).

It is this accretive type of growth that Peter, Lucy, and Edmund (and Lucy Barfield) are expected to achieve: “to come close to [their] own world” and “to know [Aslan] better there”; “to start reading fairy tales again.” And it is this model which Susan resists: she has “race[d]” to her current adolescent state and wants to “stop there as long as she can.” Nylons and lipstick and invitations have not been added to her other interests and tastes, but have replaced them: “she’s interested in *nothing* now-a-days *except* nylons and lipstick and invitations” (*Last Battle* 135, emphasis added). As Robert Houston Smith puts it, “[f]or Susan, being grown-up means regarding God, beauty, and imagination as worthless fantasies” (176). It is not, of course, my purpose to argue for or against any particular model of growth; one is at liberty to consider Lewis dead wrong on this score. What must be recognized, however, is that within Lewis’s understanding of what it is to be grown up, Susan has a very long way to go yet, and the sentence that for Pullman marks her as the most grown-up of the group would, from Lewis’s perspective, mark her rather as the most immature.

Indeed, from Lewis’s own comments on the meaning of growing up, we can see that he actually agrees with Pullman on an important point: that “the loss of the innocence [. . .] that we are born with, is something that’s a necessary stage that we all have to go through, and [. . .] we should accept it as a necessary stage, and we should then go on to the next part of our development” (Pullman). Where they disagree is on the nature of that stage, precisely what losses it entails, and whether lipstick and nylons are an adequate synecdoche for it. Were it not for fifty years’ anticipation, Lewis might almost be replying to Pullman:

It is, of course, true that the process of growing does, incidentally and unfortunately, involve some more losses. But that is not the essence of growth, certainly not what makes

growth admirable or desirable. [. . .] Some critics seem to confuse growth with the cost of growth and also to wish to make that cost far higher than, in nature, it need be. (“Three Ways” 26)

Nothing of the child about it

The question of Susan’s apparent maturity has been worth spending some time on because of the crucial issue of the relationship between maturity and loss of innocence. While in a fallen world growing up does entail some losses and a kind of innocence may be among them, the notion that a prelapsarian innocence was necessarily childlike and ignorant is one that Lewis directly dismisses.

Even within the Narnia books there is an admixture of childhood and adulthood in the children that might call such an assumption into question, though this is not an issue dealt with centrally in these books. Manlove remarks (with disapproval) that “Lewis, basically, wants his children to behave like adults. They are to grow up spiritually [. . .] but also they are to learn to manage their world. [. . .] We have to see them at once as children and as ‘grown-up’ in relation to Narnia” (122-23). While Manlove regards this as a flaw (“In asking us to believe in his children both as children and as adults, Lewis is sometimes in danger of forfeiting our belief in them as either” 123), it might also suggest that Lewis held less firmly than some to the idea that being a child and having adult responsibilities are contradictory.

Looking outside the Narnia series, we can see Lewis addressing this issue more directly, notably in his comments on Milton’s prelapsarian innocents, and in their Venusian counterparts. In fact, he describes the experience of reading *Paradise Lost* as having jolted him out of the common preconception of Adam and Eve’s childishness. He “had come to the poem,” he reports, with just such an expectation, “associating innocence with childishness” and “hop[ing] to be shown [Adam and Eve’s] inarticulate delight in a new world which they were spelling out letter by letter, to hear them prattle.” In so doing, he states, he was expecting “something which Milton never intended to give and which, if he had given it, would have gratified a somewhat commonplace taste in me and would have been hardly consistent with the story he had to tell.” Having rid himself of these preconceptions, Lewis comes to conclude that “[t]he whole point about Adam and Eve is that, as they would never, but for sin, have been old, so they were never young, never immature or undeveloped. They were created full-grown and perfect” (*Preface* 116).

This idea that paradisaical innocence and even inexperience are coupled with adult intelligence and judgment becomes a key element in the depiction of the Lady of Perelandra. What Manlove observes but regrets in the Narnia children is made explicit in the Lady: she is a mixture of the childlike and the adult, unknown on the fallen Earth, as revealed in her reaction to one of her learning experiences: “At this point she clasped her hands and a smile such as Ransom had never seen changed her. One does not see that smile here except in children, but there was nothing of the child about it there” (61). And as critics have often observed, she is not the naive child of Lewis’s pre-Milton expectations, but rather, as Wayne Shumaker describes her, “a creature without much experience of life but endowed with enormous intellectual power” (61). Similarly, Manlove observes a mature intellect at work during the temptation that coexists with her innocence:

She is both gulelessly trusting and intellectually rigorous during the temptation: though she trusts both to be speaking the truth and, knowing nothing of evil [. . .], cannot perceive the moral difference between the arguers and their arguments, she is at the same time of a razor-sharp lucidity that demands that a case made be thoroughly water-tight. (61)

One of the striking consequences of this combination of moral innocence with intellectual maturity is the Lady’s ability to learn, without the loss of innocence. We have already seen that she can acquire the knowledge of good and evil by resisting temptation better than by succumbing to it, but even before the temptation begins we observe her growth, a process that she repeatedly describes as “getting older.” This is a much-discussed aspect of *Perelandra* but one worth briefly reviewing here. From her first conversation with Ransom, she is exposed not only to new ideas and new information about other worlds, but to new perspectives on her own experience and knowledge she already has. As Robert F. Brown puts it, Ransom “unintentionally becomes an agent accelerating her maturation in self-consciousness” (56). She perceives the passage of time in a new way, “seeing how a day has one appearance as it comes to you, and another when you are in it, and a third when it has gone past”—an insight she describes as “great wisdom” (*Perelandra* 60). She becomes aware for the first time of her possession of free will: “this [. . .] is the glory and wonder you have made me see; that it is I, I myself, who turn from the good expected to the given good. Out of my own heart I do it. One can conceive a heart which did not [. . .]. I thought that I was carried in the will of Him I love, but now I see that I walk with it” (69). In fact, it is this early

growth and maturing understanding of her obedience to the Prohibition that helps her resist the temptation once it begins:

“This makes me older far [. . .]. We cannot walk out of Maleldil’s will: but He has given us a way to walk out of *our* will. And there could be no such way except a command like this. [. . .] I knew there was joy in looking upon the Fixed Island and laying down all thought of ever living there, but I did not till now understand.” (118)

Thus although the Lady is never *immature*, she can, and does, become *more* mature than when she started. The Un-man observes as much in his attempt to convince her that disobedience will further the process:

“He is making you older—making you to learn things not straight from Him but by your own meetings with other people and your own questions and thoughts. [. . .] He is making you a full woman, for up till now you were only half made—like the beasts who do nothing of themselves.” (105)

This is a tempter’s strategy, but like so many of his arguments, it is based on an element of truth, as Ransom recognizes:

Certainly it must be part of the Divine plan that this happy creature should mature, should become more and more a creature of free choice, should become, in a sense, more distinct from God and from her husband in order thereby to be at one with them in a richer fashion. In fact, he had seen this very process going on from the moment at which he met her, and had, unconsciously, assisted it. This present temptation, if conquered, would itself be the next, and greatest, step in the same direction: an obedience freer, more reasoned, more conscious than any she had known before, was being put in her power. (133)

This increased wisdom, of course, is also perilous, as the Un-man’s ability to use it in his temptation shows, but it is important to be clear that for Lewis it is the *danger* of losing innocence, not the loss itself, that is integrally linked to maturity.

Conclusion: the great divorce

Susan’s interest in “grown up” things is therefore not inherently sinful, any more than it is necessarily dependent on rejecting her childhood interests and beliefs. Why then is she, apparently, shut out or excluded from Heaven, and consigned to Hell? The crucial thing for Lewis is that she does it to herself, that it is a choice she makes. After all, Peter says that Susan “is no longer a friend of Narnia” (*Last*

Battle 134), not that Narnia or Aslan is no longer a friend of Susan. Like the first parents on Perelandra, Susan has reached “that day when the time of [her] being young drew to its end, and from it [she] must now go up or go down” (208); the Perelandrians chose one path, Susan the other.

In a sense she is like the dwarfs. She is not present in the stable because of her lack of belief; the dwarfs, though they are actually in the stable, cannot see what it really is, cannot see or hear Aslan, cannot taste the food and drink he provides: evidence, Aslan tells Lucy, of “what I can, and what I cannot, do” (147), a perverse testament to the dwarfs’ free will. Lewis is no Calvinist; grace is not irresistible. If Susan no longer believes in Aslan, even Aslan cannot save her. Like the dwarfs, she has “chosen cunning,” or in her case nylons, “instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison” (148); and in this, as Robert Smith has suggested, both dwarfs and adolescent human resemble the residents of Hell in *The Great Divorce* (176, 199).

But Susan’s ultimate destiny is not known: though the others were killed in a railway accident, Susan was not there—ironically, because of her very lack of interest in Narnia. She is, therefore, not (yet) in Hell; the only logical conclusion is that she is alive and well back in England. Her father and mother, who by coincidence were on the same train (138), have arrived safely in the “real” or “inner” England, though they have never heard of Narnia and are presumably quite adult: Peter, Edmund, and Lucy can see them “waving back at them across the great, deep valley” (182). Whether Susan ever joins them will be determined by her own choices; she has her whole life ahead of her, with time finally to grow up indeed.

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