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"Some Kind of Company": The Sacred Community in That Hideous Strength

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Abstract
Detailed analysis of the good, or saved, characters in That Hideous Strength, the Company of St. Anne's. Notes the significance and symbolism of each, and speculates briefly about their post-novel futures.

Additional Keywords
Lewis, C.S.—Characters—The Company of St. Anne's; Lewis, C.S. That Hideous Strength—The Company of St. Anne's; Nancy-Lou Patterson
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The Sacred Community in That Hideous Strength

Nancy-Lou Patterson
"You keep talking of we and us. Are you some kind of company?"

"Yes, You may call it a company." [1]

C.S. Lewis wrote his Introduction to Paradise Lost partly to defend Milton against the charge that Satan is his most interesting character. He was well aware of the problems presented by evil characters presented in literature, and tried to overcome them by turning the story of Satan inside out, in The Screwtape Letters, so that the devil would present a humorous spectacle from a topsy-turvy point of view. In That Hideous Strength, he created his most elaborate portrait of evil, in the occupants of Belbury, headquarters of the N.I.C.E. A reading of his novel which deals solely with the evil characters [2] produces a sense of awful claustrophobia, like St. Teresa of Avila's vision of hell as a little niche in a brick wall, built just her size.

It is my intent in the present paper to give a reading of That Hideous Strength which deals exclusively with the good or at least saved characters. Lewis made nearly all of them members, early or late, of the household — the "company" — at St. Anne's Manor. Belbury and St. Anne's Manor constitute the most profound polarities; Belbury is a cluster with the dead or bodiless head, in which there is no allegiance, no loyalty, no brother or sisterhood, no principle of coherence, and in the end, no center. St. Anne's is, in absolute contrast, what? It is my task here to explore the answer to that question.

Margaret Hannay has given an excellent description of the company, in her study C.S. Lewis; she states that it succeeds by "Ranging an odd assortment of professors, housewives, gardeners, and elders with Merlin against a seemingly omnipotent, fascist bureaucracy," so that "the powerless, helped by divine power, against all expectations overcome their oppressors." [3] Clearly, this company is like the Fellowship of the Ring in Tolkien's great work The Lord of the Rings, with its elf, dwarf, wizard, hobbit, and human members ranged against the awesome power of Sauron, and like the Company of Logres in Charles Williams' Arthurian poem cycle, Tel Quel through Logres (1938) and The Region of Summer Stars (1944). [4]

The collection of differing, even ill-fitted parts to create a coherent whole is a figure for the body, in which each part differs and is meaningless on its own, but is indispensible to the whole. Some writers have suggested that the Inklings, the group of friends which included C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien among others, were something of a company, though the members themselves (perhaps from modesty) seemed to have denied this.

When Jane Studdock is first made aware of the actual nature of the company at St. Anne's, a young woman whom Jane admires, Camilla Dennistoun, calls it "Our little household, or company, or society, or whatever you will call it." (p.137) Grace Ironwood tells Jane of her former maid Ivy Mags that "She is one of our company." (p.168) The Director of the company, Elwin Ransom, asks Jane "to become one of our army," (p.174) and says of Merlin, "He is a member of the organization." (p.346)

What is the purpose of this company, household, society, army, organization? Andrew MacPhee, the gardener of St. Anne's Manor, puts the question plainly: "I'd be greatly obliged if anyone would tell me what we have done — always apart from feeding the pigs and raising some very decent vegetables." (p.460) The reply comes from Ransom: "You have done what was required of you," a paraphrase of the words of the returning master to his servants in The Parable of the Talents, told by Jesus in Matthew 25:21: "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Membership in the company comes by free will, and yet is a requirement; and it has a leader. Arthur Denniston clarifies:"Ransom was told that a company would in fact collect around him and he was to be its head." (p.138) It is this title "head," which makes the role of Ransom and of his company clear. An analysis of its membership, and the relations between them, suggests that they represent a paradigm of the Body of Christ.

In describing the church in Ephesians 4:14, St. Paul explains to his hearers: "There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." And in Ephesians 4:11-13, he continues:

And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Of this body, Jesus "is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body [is] fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth." (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Finally, the number of the company is twelve, the same as the number of apostles. Its true head, then, is Maleldil the Younger (the name used in this fantasy for the Second Person of the Holy Trinity), not Ransom; and in the company at St. Anne's there is no Judas, but only a potential traitor — Mark Studdock — who is saved in the end. These twelve persons will be discussed one at a time, in the order of their adherence to the company.

Well known to the readers of the first two volumes of Lewis' Interplanetary Trilogy, where he occupies the center of the narrative on every page, Elwin Ransom plays a much different role in That Hideous Strength. Here, he is still at the center, but this time the action is viewed not from his point of view but from that, alternatively, of Mark and Jane Studdock. His importance is only very gradually revealed to Jane, and Mark never meets him at all. The first reference to his defines his role precisely, though Jane (to whom the speaker presents the idea) cannot understand it when it is first revealed: "Our little household, or company, or society, or whatever you like to call it is run by a Mr. Fisher-King." (p.137) Nobody is to know, just yet, that Mr.Fisher-King is Elwin Ransom. Hats are given, of course; some may guess the riddle: "He is a great traveler but now an invalid. He got a wound in his foot on his last journey that won't heal." (p.137) At this point, readers of Perelandra may well prick up their ears, for Ransom acquired a wound in the heel in combat with the Un-man, the body of the scientist Weston in a state of diabolical possession, knocked down and saw that his heel was still bleeding. 'Yes,' he said, 'it is where the evil one bit me.'" [5]
The speaker who is describing Mr. Fisher-King to Jane continues with what for the initiated reader is a second clue: "He had a married sister in India, a Mrs. Fisher-King." (p. 137) Readers with very perfect memories might be expected to recall that in Out of the Silent Planet Ransom innocently revealed to his would-be kidnappers (Weston and an odious former schoolmate, Devine) that he has no living relatives near enough to note his absence, "Only a married sister in India." [6]

Jane finally meets him face-to-face about a third of the way through the novel:

On a sofa before her, with one foot bandaged as if he had a wound, lay what appeared to be a boy, twenty years old. (p. 171.)

He is "so strong" that "Now it was manifest that the grip of those hands would be inescapable, and imagination suggested that those arms and shoulders could support the whole house." (p. 171) In a word, he is like the sun, which holds the solar system in its orbiting tracks. He is the "Chief", the "Head", the centralizing force around which the action of the novel revolves. This solar imagery suits the title of "Director", which is used for Ransom as soon as Jane meets him. MacPhee, in a later passage, comments upon this title:

"I don't just remember how you came to be called Director; but from that title and from one or two other indications a man would have thought you behaved more like the leader of an organisation than the host of a house-party." (p. 243)

Ransom agrees. "It is, no doubt, an organisation; but we are not the organizers." (p. 243) As an image of kingship, Merlin ends on his knees in recognition of the Director's rank: "I am the Pendragon," Ransom tells him, and in response, combining metaphors of earth and sea, "as though a mountain sank like a wave, he sank on one knee." (p. 338) We are accorded a final portrait when we see "Ransom crowned," before he is translated to Perelandra.

The primary members of the household are Ransom — Mr. Fisher-King — the householder who has purchased this fine old manor with monies inherited from his sister for the purpose of assembling a company to await the outbreak of danger foretold by the Sura, his sister's spiritual director. In his house Ransom has two attendants. One is the gardener; there is a very large garden, one well beyond the care of an invalid. Was MacPhee the gardener of the former owners? Ransom says of him, "He is one of my oldest friends." (p. 224) Perhaps as a friend of Ransom's youth, he is now provided with a comfortable sinecure. Certainly MacPhee is modelled on Lewis' beloved tutor Kirkpatrick, who spent his spare time and old age in his garden.

And because Ransom is now an invalid, he also requires the services of a doctor. This is Grace Ironwood, clearly defined as, and performing the tasks of, a doctor. Her origins are obscure — some mystery or tragedy lies in her past — and one may ask why she is a resident in the house. A doctor who is the personal physician of a very wealthy person is not impossible, but her relationship with Ransom may go beyond that. Likely she was a previous acquaintance of Ransom's, recruited when his need befell him. She seems to have been based on Lewis' friendship with Jane McNeill, to whom That Hideous Strength is dedicated. In any event these necessary attendants are primary: they with Ransom form the three-personed nucleus of the company.

The first glimpse we have of Dr. Grace Ironwood is through Jane's preternatural foresight:

She saw Miss Ironwood, dressed all in black, sitting with her hands folded on her knees and then someone leading her into Miss Ironwood's presence and saying "she's come" and leaving her there. (p. 51)

The accuracy of her vision is proved some pages later, when

The hands which were folded on her knees were very big and boney though they did not suggest coarseness, and even when seated Miss Ironwood was extremely tall. Everything about her was big — the nose, the unsmiling lips, and the grey eyes. She was perhaps nearer sixty than fifty. (pp. 773-74)

It is very much a picture of a dreaded interview with a headmistress or even a mother superior. There is everything here of the female heirophant: the Isis-like posture, the stern visage, and most of all, the powerful hands. When Jane returns to St. Anne's manor for the third time, it is to stay. She has been tortured by the secret police of the N.I.C.E., and now has reached St. Anne's as a place of refuge and healing. Here at last we see "Miss Ironwood" in her healer's role: "She examined and dressed the burns, which were not serious." (p. 198)

Later, there is a discussion in the Blue Room (Ransom's chamber), in which each member of the company gives the reason each has joined it:

Grace Ironwood looked up with a set expression on her face, which had grown rather pale. "Do you wish...?" she began.

The Director laid his hand on her arm. "No," he said, "no. There is no need for all of these stories to be told." (p. 242)
Something secret lies in her past, which none but the Director may know. Has he rescued her in some way? Has she, too, fled from some evil or danger? All we learn, finally, of her background is that she is indeed a doctor: Dimble speaks of her as "the doctor who dressed the burns" which Jane has received.

In our last glimpse of Dr. Ironwood, we see her as the equal of Ransom: they are seated, "Ransom crowned, at the right of the hearth, Grace Ironwood in black and silver opposite him." (p. 457) When all the company have been dismissed by Ransom, Dr. Ironwood and the Dennistons remain: we may presume that they will see him depart for the Third Heaven and remain to perpetuate the company. The new and operative word in the last description of Grace Ironwood is "silver." We already know that Ransom is associated with gold: she in her silver is his counterpart and opposite, her Moon in balance to his Sun.

From the first moment he is mentioned, we are aware of Andrew MacPhee's role as gardener at St. Anne's Manor: Lewis describes him as Jane first sees him at the scullery door: "A tall grizzle-headed man, who wore gum boots and seemed to have just come from the garden, was drying his hands." (p. 201) These gardener's hands, like the healer's hands of Dr. Ironwood, are given special attention: "His own hand was very large and coarse in texture, and he had a shrewd hard-featured face." (p. 201) The honesty and expressiveness of the hands of these close attendants of Ransom constitute a motif which probably developed in individuals to one another exists through him.

MacPhee's identification as an Ulsterman, which is reiterated, has not excited much comment. Lewis, so long a resident in England, was an Ulsterman too, proud of and attached to his home and identity. Likely to have been teased for his brogue as a schoolboy, he longed for the green hills of his homeland and regarded the trip to England by way of Liverpool as a repeated via dolorosa. It is this motif which appears in Jane's next encounter with MacPhee, when he describes the travels between the worlds of the Director and sets forth the "interplanetary" situation. In conclusion he offers his personal and distinctive point of view—that it all may be a fantasy: "If anything wants Andrew MacPhee to believe in it, I'll be obliged if it will present itself in full daylight." (p. 236) When Jane, startled by this acerbic touch of skepticism, calls upon him to show loyalty, he "suddenly looked up with a hundred Coverters in his eyes." (p. 236) If ever Lewis showed a specific love and loyalty to his own roots it was here!

The relationship between Ransom and his two fundamental companions is summarized in his remark, made as MacPhee and Dr. Ironwood fall to arguing:

"If you two quarrel much more," said the Director, "I think I'll make you marry each other." (p. 245)

It is a joke, of course; coercion against the grain is no part of Ransom's role. But the note of authority is there, and the relationship of these two highly developed individuals to one another exists through him.

The next to join the company were probably the Dimbles: Cecil and Margaret, of whom we hear early on in the novel that

Cecil Dimble, a fellow of Northumberland, had been Jane's tutor for her last years as a student, and Mrs. Dimble (one tended to call her "Mother Dimble," had been a kind of universal aunt to all the girls of her year. (p. 29)

I think it likely that Ransom sought out Cecil Dimble and perhaps even settled at St. Anne's where he could be near this fellow academic, with whom, as it eventuates, he shares a profound interest in the "true" meaning (within the context of this fantasy) of Arthurian legend.

Dr. Cecil Dimble appears from time to time in the action of the story. Conference at St. Anne's frequently involve the whole group, who talk over their plans and fears in evident equality. In a significant scene the company discusses Jane's dream of seeing the Head of the N.I.C.E., who is, literally, a head, the severed head of the criminal Aicasan. Dimble's response is recorded:

"Then this filthy abomination," said Dr. Dimble, "is real—not only a dream. His face was white and his expression strained. (p. 239)

Dimble is not a man with Dr. Ironwood's iron control or MacPhee's skeptical reserve. As an effective communication, he is passionate, expressively visaged, as well as committed to serve an ideal.

The closest we come to the interior of Dr. Dimble's personality is in his confrontation with Mark. Mark demands to know where his wife has gone and Dimble hotly informs him that she has been tortured by the N.I.C.E. Mark's blustering response pierces Dimble's armor (which as we have seen already, is not very thick): "Dimble's conscience had for years accused him of a lack of charity towards Studdock." (p. 268) When Dimble recovers himself he offers Mark a chance to
leave the N.I.C.E. — he extends to him "a way back into the human family" — with risk, no security, just "a place on the right side." (p. 273) In this offer Lewis encapsulates the essential meaning of the company. The people who join it have a place on the right side. That place may be difficult, perilous, frustrating, insecure. But, in the end, there is no other. It is not surprising that Mark is unable, when the matter is put so badly, to accept. But the offer of salvation has been held out to him.

The role of Dimble (as well as Denniston) in the company is clarified when the gods indeed descend upon the Manor and it is Mercury who most affects these two men. "as they had stood, one on each side of the fireplace, in a gay intellectual duel." (p. 397) Dimble, as communicator and intellectual, is both learned and empassioned. Under the influence of her own most appropriate planet, Venus, Jane the seer has a vision of the Dimbles in her turn: they are "like ripe fields in August, serene and golden with the tranquility of fulfilled desire." (p. 399) In this scene, just before Ransom's departure, the Dimbles are the first to be dismissed: "He laid his hands on their heads: Cecil gave his arm to his wife and they went." The old scholar's wisdom is no longer required. He and his wife can depart in peace.

Like her husband, Margaret Dimble is close to Jane, of whom we catch an early glimpse as Mrs. Dimble sees her:

She had been particularly fond of Jane with that kind of affection which a humorous, easy-natured and childless woman sometimes feels for a girl whom she thinks pretty and slightly absurd. (p. 30)

Nevertheless, when Mrs. Dimble needs Jane's help, she asks to be allowed to stay with her. When she arrives she reports that Dr. Dimble has gone to his college to stay, because they have been turned out of their house! It is through her eyes, not Jane's, that we see the beginning of the terrible destruction of which the N.I.C.E. is capable. But there is hope: "Cecil and I are to go out to the Manor at St. Anne's." (p.89) "We have to be there so much at present," she explains. She and her husband have been regular visitors and now they will become residents.

We meet Mother Dimble again at St. Anne's Manor in the great kitchen there: "The comfortable form of Mrs. Dimble... was seated in a kitchen chair... engaged in preparing vegetables." As we have seen, vegetables, like other products of a garden, are signs of goodness in this novel. Even the adjective "comfortable" has a special resonance (for Anglicans in particular) because the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter," and the Order for Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer presages the Consecration with the beautiful if archaic saying: "Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him."

Lewis does not mean this character merely to represent a comfortable, motherly housewife. He gives her a powerful scene of her own. Again, she and Jane are alone. They have been sent to "the Lodge," to prepare it as a marriage chamber for Jane's former part-time domestic servant, Ivy Maggs, who now lives at St. Anne's too, awaiting her husband's release from prison. Jane is surprised at the zest with which the earthly task of preparing the bed for these renewed nuptials is taken up by her companion. "Mother Dimble, for all her nineteenth century propriety, or perhaps because of it, struck her this afternoon as being herself an archaic person." (p. 372) Margaret Dimble and her husband are warmly satisfied lovers. She knows more of nuptial pleasure than Jane does. Lewis reinforces this idea with a poignant descriptive sentence:

The frost had ended and it was one of those days of almost piercingly sweet mildness which sometimes occur in the beginning of winter. (p. 373)

This is a perfect figure for the relationship of the Dimbles. Lewis has prepared this passage as a revelation for Jane of the inherent dignity of the feminine role which she has heretofore rejected. He has chosen images of profound power to make his point.

Although I have suggested that Cecil and Margaret Dimble became members of the company before them, it is obvious that Arthur Denniston and his wife were forced from their home and repaired there too. I think it likely that Denniston was recruited by Dimble, that he may have married Camilla just before taking up residence at St. Anne's.

We learn of Arthur when a senior colleague, Curry, tells Mark that "Denniston was your chief rival" (p. 16) for the fellowship at Bracton College which Mark now holds; here we are told plainly, were we able to recognize the clue, that Lord Fervestone (formerly Dick Devine), to be revealed as a major architect of the N.I.C.E., has personally recruited Mark, and for some reason other than academic ability, to his Bracton appointment. Mark does not learn until well on into the novel that his chief qualification even for this appointment has been his marriage to Jane.

Curry gabbles unheedingly about Arthur — "A brilliant man... but he seems to have gone quite off the rails... with all his Distributivism and what not. They tell me he's likely to end up in a monastery." (p. 17) And so, in a sense, he does, for St. Anne's Manor is very like a religious community; a large house with a large garden and a wall, containing a group of people
who share the household tasks from the most humble to the most lofty and are gathered under obedience to a superior and in mutual loyalty to a sacred central authority higher still, who has by some means or other called them all together.

The Dennistons try to explain their present allegiance to Jane: "We don't belong to Grace Ironwood. She and we both belong to someone else." This someone is Elwin Ransom. "Jane saw it once that both the Dennistons were the sort of people she liked." (p. 135) Lewis seems to suggest here and elsewhere that they are also the sort of people Jane and her husband might have been, had she married someone else. She — and even Mark — were intended to be this sort of people. Exactly what sort of people are these? They are people who are capable of making, with wisdom and accuracy in their decision to do so, an absolute commitment.

I think it possible that Denniston and his wife originally joined the household, in fact, to be employed: perhaps Arthur, having failed to win a fellowship, first went to St. Anne's to work as a resident research assistant. He may, like the young George MacDonald, have gone to the great old country house to put its library in order. The narrator states that "Dimble and... [Ransom] and the Dennistons shared between them a knowledge of Arthurian Britain which orthodox scholarship will probably not reach for some centuries." This is a central tenet of the fantasy. (p. 245) In such a great house, a wife would be able to join her husband in the apartments provided for him. What precisely was Camilla's task is not made clear but at least she acts as receptionist for Dr. Ironwood.

Arthur Denniston and his wife Camilla are, along with Grace Ironwood, the only people who remain with Ransom as he readies for his departure. As Jane's Venus-inspired vision indicates, Camilla is an essential element in this picture.

In That Hideous Strength we meet and hear of Camilla for the first time when:

the door opened and Jane found herself facing
a tall woman of about her own age. (p. 70)

Here Camilla is the guardian of the door in the wall of St. Anne's. She is also a mirror image, like and yet not like of Jane. Camilla is very much committed, to Arthur Denniston (as Jane is not to Mark) and to St. Anne's (as Jane very much fears to become). After questioning Jane and learning that she comes from Dr. Dimble, Camilla admits her, carefully locking the door, and goes ahead of her along the garden path, where walkers can only precede one at a time. She is familiar with its labyrinthine way, and leads Jane as easily through this great image of conditional access as if she were Ariadne in the palace of Minos.

Inside the equally labyrinthine house, Camilla leaves Jane to wait, and when she reappears,

Jane now conceived for her that almost passionate admiration which women, more often than is supposed, feel for other women whose beauty is not of their own type. (p. 73)

I cannot guess how Lewis came to know of this capacity of women so to admire one another but it is quite true in my own experience. Lewis thought that this was the way women sought to perceive themselves, through the eyes of others.

In contemplating the magnificent garden sequence which introduces Jane (and the reader) to the Manor at St. Anne's for the very first time, one seldom notes that Camilla accompanies and indeed leads Jane through it. She is its natural denizen, that Lady in the Garden, whether Eve, or Venus, or Mary, who is almost ubiquitously present in paradisical symbolism. When MacPhee has opened Jane's eyes to the interplanetary dimensions of their situation, Camilla enters, and "Jane seized her friend's hand." Together the two young women go out into a cold starry night and climb "to the very summit of the garden." There they see the Moon as "the huntress, the untamable virgin." (p. 237)

Later, when Jane returns from the fulfillment of her visionary task to find the household fast asleep, she sees that Camilla is "curled up in an attitude which was full of grace, like that of an animal accustomed to sleep anywhere." (p. 341) This reference to natural grace, beauty which requires no artifice, is Lewis' characteristic mode of describing Camilla, but his use of the exceedingly resonant phrase "full of grace" — elsewhere associated with the angelic salutation as the opening phrase of the rosary: "Hail Mary, full of grace," cannot be accidental. Camilla, the married woman, retains the purity, the spiritual virginity, which Jane in her own marriage has feared to lose.

There are four married couples and a male and female celibate pair whom Ransom jokingly threatens with marriage. The sexual balance is perfect except for one final and essential pairing: Ransom and Merlin. It is notable that Ransom, so obviously heterosexual in Jane's response to her first meeting with him, has no female attachments. Despite the many identifications of this character, because he is a philologist, with Tolkien, and the plot structure which makes Lewis a narrator-character in the framing of the action, I very much suspect that Ransom is an idealized version of Lewis himself. Here we have a Lewis who is truly celibate, truly free of female entanglements, truly able to enjoy that perfect male friendship, Ransom and Merlin meet as equals, and turn their gazes by mutual assent not, after testing and salutation, towards one
The second animal to appear in the novel is the jackdaw, whimsically named Baron Corvo, which of course means "crow," and is the pseudonym of Frederick William Rolfe (1860-1930), the writer whose novel, Hadrian VII (1904) was something of a sensation. Its use is a whimsy of Lewis' or perhaps of Ransom's. We first see Baron Corvo when Jane is ushered for the first time into Ransom's chamber: "On one of the long window sills a tame jackdaw was walking up and down." (p.171) He is part of the setting, and an element which Lewis had enjoyed in private life; he wrote in his letters a charming description of such a bird, and he was to make a jackdaw a feature of the Narnian creation scene in The Magician's Nephew.

Perhaps because of Lewis' special delight in jackdaws, he gives him a little scene in the festival of fecundity that ends the novel: "What's the matter with the Jackdaw?" said Dr. Dimble." (p.468) And his wife replies:

"Another love affair," said Mrs. Dimble. "It sounds as if Jack had found a Jill." (p.468)

With this, the loving couple are dismissed from the narrative.

It is Ransom himself who introduces Jane to the mice. These are exquisitely described as "dainty quadrupeds, almost, when they sat up, like tiny kangaroos, with sensitive kid-gloved forepaws and transparent ears" (p. 181). Lewis seems to be reflecting a personal delight in these charming observations, or perhaps suggesting a new understanding on the part of Jane. Ransom explains, as these guests consume the crumbs of his single meal, that "obedience and rule are more like a dance than a drill — especially between man and woman where the roles are always changing." The mice wish to eat, the Director wishes to dispose of the crumbs each has a need which the other is empowered to fulfill. This whimsical demonstration of so great a meaning as the reciprocity of marriage, in which, surely, one partner is not a mouse while the other is a man, has probably blunted the force of this central teaching of Lewis', and allowed readers to misinterpret his concepts of obedience.

Like the jackdaw, the mice make a final appearance in the general nuptials at the end of the novel when their scufflings and squeakings are heard by Ransom.

"It's my friends behind the wainscot," he said.

"There are revels there too —"

"So geht es in Sautzeputzhausel!"

"Da singen uns tanzen die Mausel!" (p. 470)

"So goes it in Sautzeputzhausel house: The singing and dancing of mice." This whimsical refrain, from an eighteenth century German folksong, depicts a
"topsy-turvy world" where snails bark and table and chairs get drunk [9]. Well befitting the reversal of summer and winter with which the novel concludes.

Lewis has portrayed one animal in That Hideous Strength who is truly a major character and who plays a truly significant role in the narrative. This is the bear, Mr. Bultitude. His name comes from the father in Vice Versa by Fredrick Anatay (1856-1934), a work which Lewis had enjoyed: he and his brother had so nicknamed a favorite bear of theirs at the Whipsnade Zoo. [10] The use of literary allusion is probably intended to parallel the use of Baron Curvo as the name of the jackdaw, in a household heavily populated by academics.

Mrs. Maggs introduces Mr. Bultitude to Jane by speaking of him, in the bathroom:

Inside, sitting up on its hunkers beside the bath and occupying most of the room, was a great, smelly, wheezy, beady-eyed, loose-skinned, gor-bellied brown bear...
(p.199)

Presently Jane again finds Mr. Bultitude, "this time on his hind legs, meditatively boxing a punching-ball." The association of bear with boxing recurs in The Horse and His Boy, in which Corin Thunderfist boxes the Lapsed Bear of Stormness into becoming a "reformed character." [11] Bears formed a staple ingredient in the finely-spun edges of Lewisian fantasy: Bultitude himself is pronounced to be one of the Seven Bears of Logres, an invention which is not elaborated in the text but which suggests a long line of Logrean bears, one great, one smelly, one wheezy, one beady-eyed, one loose-skinned, one gor-bellied, and now, Bultitude himself, the quintessentially brown bear of this latest incarnation of Logres.

The novel is within about a hundred pages of its conclusion when this bear begins his development into a full participant in affairs rather than an onlooker or resident symbol. After "a very agreeable morning investigating the turnips," (p. 379) he "approached the garden wall" — one thinks of the bees in Beorn's garden in The Hobbit — and of "someone stickier, sweeter, more yellow than honey itself" — suggesting a "pre-Adamite" apprehension of a God whose judgements are, in the words of the Old testament, "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." (Psalms 19:10)

Now Mr. Bultitude goes over the wall and directly into the path of two men in a van from the N.I.C.E. who are searching for a bear which has escaped from the laboratory menagerie. They render him unconscious and, muttering "Christ" at appropriate intervals, drive off toward Belbury with the deafening creak of the van's springs. But presently, Merlin releases him, along with the rest of the animals and the human prisoners:

He laid his hand on its head and whispered in its ear, and its dark mind was filled with excitement as though some long forbidden pleasure were suddenly held out to it. (p. 436)

We do not see the bear again until he is sighted by a doomed resident of Belbury,

a great bear rising to its hind legs as he came in sight of it, had met him in the doorway — its mouth open, its eyes flaming, its forepaws spread out as if for an embrace. (p. 441)

At this point every shred of domestication drops away and we see Mr. Bultitude as in reality a bear always is, a wild, untamed, and totally unabashed force of nature.

His dreadful task accomplished, the bear returns home. But he is not alone: Ivy reports "a strange bear; another one" who is refreshing himself in the kitchen. "She is the future Mrs. Bultitude," Ransom says calmly, and after laying his hands on her hand and blessing her, he sends the couple away to their nuptials: "Take her, Bultitude. But not in the house." (p. 470)

In the first chapter of That Hideous Strength, we learn that Jane has "a woman who comes in twice a week." This implies that Ivy Maggs has at least four other days free to work. I think, from the familiarity with which she is regarded both by Mrs. Dimble and at the Manor, that she may have spent two days a week at each of these other households. It is thus not surprising that when the Dibles and she are turned out of their homes simultaneously, they repair together to St. Anne's for refuge.

It is Mrs. Dimble who tells Jane that "You've lost Ivy Maggs." Presumably Ivy has called her senior female employer, either to beg assistance or to inform her that she cannot come to work, perhaps both. And, Mrs. Dimble adds, "She's gone out to St. Anne's." I conclude that Ivy's three employers are fated to meet and that her role as nexus in their meeting is more than casual, though she does not know it. It is Ivy who best deals with Mr. Bultitude, and indeed, with MacPhee, both of whom she treats with amiable bullying. The bear responds only to his master, to Ivy, and to Merlin. Mrs. Maggs' presence in that august company suggests that she is a considerable personage. It is not for nothing that Lewis compares her to a "pert fairy" and a "dapper elf," taking these terms from Milton's Comus.

When Jane comes to St. Anne's for the third and final time, exhausted and in pain, she is "received by a woman in pyjamas and an overcoat who turned out to be Mrs. Maggs." (p. 193) Ivy has risen in the night at the sound of knocking, thrown on an overcoat, and answered...
Jane are p a r a lle ls in a ll but s ta tio n . Ivy is , however, earth. Often re fe rre d to by th e phrase "th e s a lt of th e
wood and water." The n a rra to r says th a t "much of Ivy's
fundamental decency and lo y a lty are p a rt of her id e n tity as a person who is
shared, certain tasks (serving, healing, gardening) seem to be delegated to those most expert in their
practice.

It is for Ivy that Jane and Mother Dimble prepare the Lodge as a marriage chamber, or as Jane, not quite
reformed, thinks: "Ivy Maggs and her jailbird husband." Jane cannot yet accept that even she, like the Dimbles
and Ivy, is "one of the Director's charities." Ivy and Jane are parallels in all but station. Ivy is, however,
Jane's spiritual superior in her forgiving acceptance of her husband's weaknesses. Her fundamental decency
and loyalty are part of her identity as a person who is often referred to by the phrase "the salt of the
earth."

It is in this role, a preserver of what is traditional and permanent, that she is seen intuitively by the bear as being like one of the "little deities of wood and water." The narrator says that "much of Ivy's conversation was the expression not of thought but of feeling." (p. 381) As a person who is intuitively in tune with the fundamental moral law which — in Lewis' view — controls the universe, Ivy is in a stronger moral position at this moment than Jane.

The first descriptive passage Lewis gives of Jane has to do with her clothing: "She liked her clothes to be rather severe and in colours that were really good on serious aesthetic grounds." (p. 10) She has had six months of almost perfect isolation from her husband, a period in which a person with a true scholarly vocation would have been on well on with the task. But she has done nothing. And now she is troubled with dreams.

Jane is neither ill-educated nor of inferior intellect — Lewis does not mean that when he says that she is "not perhaps a very original thinker." (p. 10) Rather, she is profoundly intuitive: she sees, not only in dreams, but in intuitions and even in visions, what is hidden from conscious thought. The truths she sees are not original with her: how could they be? But they are true. In her own way she is as gifted in prophetic powers as Merlin: apparently, at least for the purpose of this fantasy, the use of these gifts is licit and even necessary.

When the Dennistons press her to join their company, but request that she ask Mark's permission before doing so, they touch upon her deepest fear, the fear that has kept her from being able to offer a full welcome to Mark even after marriage. At the very hour of her conversion — which takes place in the garden — she wonders: what if everybody who ever "had infuriatingly found her sweet and fresh when when she wanted them to find her also interesting and important" were right? But at that moment she encounters God, and understands herself to be "a made thing, made to please Another and in Him to please all others." Lewis thought that in God's presence, everyone was "feminine." This is why his central character, Jane, whose conversion is a watershed in his novel, is a woman.

Jane is one of those dismissed by Ransom before his departure: "Your husband is waiting for you in the lodge. It was your own marriage chamber that you prepared." (pp. 472-473) And in the final scene of the novel we see her: "And now she was half way to the lodge, and thought of Mark and of all his sufferings." (p. 476) It is the first time in all the novel that she has thought, really thought, about Mark in such a way. He had hoped, after all, to find much of the acceptance he sought so desperately and unrewardedly at Belbury, in her, and now he will. "Obviously it was high time she went in."

The most important subject of Jane's dreams has been Merlin, or as he is called here by his formal Latin name, Merlin Ambrosious. The passage which introduces the site of his hidden burial chamber is reserved for the narrator, but the buried Merlin himself first appears in a dream of Jane's. In the first direct description of Merlin in the novel, he is wearing the garb of a tramp whose encampment he has encountered, having emerged naked from his tomb as is appropriate to a new birth from the "parachronic state" in which he has so long lain. Merlin rides on ahead of his seekers to the very portal of St. Anne's, and, admitted through the scullery door by its guardian MacPhee, he bursts into the midst of the company, brought, as it were, by the wind.

Levius' description of the Magus is as a force of nature:

his great mass stood as if it had been planted like a tree... and the voice, too, was such as one might imagine to be the voice of a tree, large and slow and patient, drawn up through roots and clay and gravel from the depths of the Earth. (p.334)

There is a touch of Treebeard here, Merlin is — like
MacPhee and Ivy—profoundly in touch with the earth.

The searchers now return, to find the household cast into sleep, and to see Ransom and Merlin together: "there they were, the pair of them... The man who had been dug up out of the earth and the man who had been in outer space." (p. 342) Jane's horror is echoed by MacPhee, who phrases aloud what all the company fear:

"It gives me little pleasure, I assure you, to see yourself dressed up like something out of a pantomine and standing hand-in-glove with that yogi, or shaman, or priest, or whatever he is." (p. 344)

Lewis, in referring to Merlin explicitly as a shaman, must have been well aware that the two contrasted figures in red and blue, "the man who had been dug up out of the earth and the man who had been in outer space," exactly embody the level of consciousness, and to the transcendent powers above the level of consciousness. Bringing these forces together in Merlin and Ransom creates the psychic energy, the supernatural force capable of resisting and in the end destroying the demonic outbreak of the N.I.C.E.

In response to protestations, Ransom declares: "He is a member of the organisation, and I must command you all to accept him," (p. 346) Merlin has proved to be friendly not to the N.I.C.E. but to the company. Dr. Dimble explains the situation to his wife: Merlin, he says, "is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our modern point of view, confused." He will thus be able to act as a receptacle to collect and then direct the spiritual forces poured upon him by the planetary intelligences when, through the breach in the quarantine between devil-occupied earth and the rest of the cosmos, which was opened by the scientist Weston's space ship, they descend from Deep Heaven to Thulcandra, Earth.

Merlin, like Ransom, MacPhee, and Grace Ironwood, has significant hands:

The Druid sat in a chair facing [Ransom]... his legs uncrossed, his pale large hands motionless on his knees, looking to modern eyes like an old conventional carving of a king. (p. 353)

The hands of the magician (or druid, or shaman), the hands of the king (Ransom, the Pendragon), the hands of the healer, and the hands of the gardener are all alike in their licit, natural, good, and even holy operations.

When the hour has come, Merlin "received the powers into him" (p. 405) and "He looked different next day... No one doubted that his final severance from the body was near." Merlin has lain in an enchanted state, suspended from death, for centuries before the awakening. His departure, the severance of body from spirit, is long overdue.

It is Merlin who saves the three captives at Belbury: Mr. Bultitude, Tom Maggs, and Mark Studdock. Soon after, Edgestow goes up in a great holocaust and is buried under a wave of earth, the fundamental medium of Merlin's magical art. The character of Merlin is as complete a figure of fantasy as could be imagined, almost as fantastic as the apotheosized Ransom, whose place he takes as the focussing lense of divine power. Lewis has surrounded these two figures with very finely drawn portraits of natural people who are in the act of surpassing themselves.

As we have seen, Ivy and Jane are doublets in their plight as deserted women. We now turn to the first of the two deserted husbands. The story of Tom Maggs is soon told, but it is related relatively late in That Hideous Strength, and by Ivy herself:

Mr. Maggs had stolen some money from the laundry he worked for. He had done this before he met Ivy and at a time when he had got into bad company.

Ivy tells this story straight forwardly and without apology, as she says herself, "I always say, you can't expect to know everything about a boy till you're married, not really." (p. 373)

A little later there is terrible news: Grace Ironwood brings it to the Director:

"Ivy is back, sir," she said. "I think you'd better see her. No: she's alone. She never saw her husband. The sentence is over but they haven't released him. He's been sent to Belbury for remedial treatment."

In Ivy's agony we come closer than at any other moment of the novel to the full horror of the N.I.C.E. and all that it stands for.

When Merlin releases the bear, along with the other animals, he also releases Tom Maggs, along with the other human prisoners. To Tom he hands a note for Ivy: "Come as quick as you can to the manor at St. Anne's." (p. 435) And in due course he arrives; Ransom willingly provides for them: "Mother Dimble has put you both in the little room half-way up the stairs." (p. 470) They are not "upstairs," perhaps, but neither are they ever to be entirely "downstairs" again. And Ransom sends Ivy to her husband with his own kiss: "Don't cry. You are a good woman. Go and heal this man."

It is important to remember, in discussing Mark Studdock and his relationship to his wife, Jane, that he becomes one of the saved characters. Ransom sends Jane back to him, but he is a changed, or at least...
changing man. It is notable that Lewis gives almost nothing in the way of description of Mark. Jane is described as she appears to Mark: his "eyes rested on her with indolent, early morning pleasure" (p. 52) as she brushes her hair. But of him, we learn only his inward and humiliated version following a quarrel:

The upshot of it was that Mark gave himself a very bad cut while shaving (and saw, at once, a picture of himself talking to the all-important Wither with a great blob of cotton wool on his upper lip). (p. 53)

And indeed, the only direct portrait we get of Mark confirms his fears:

On his way up the wide staircase Mark caught sight of himself and his companion in a mirror... the blob of cotton wool on Mark's upper lip had been blown away during the journey, so that it looked like one half of a fiercely up-turned moustache.

He is going up a very wide staircase indeed, rising at the diabolical N.I.C.E. where it were better not to rise, and the "false moustache" is a vivid figure for the falsity of his position in such a place. We do not really "see" Mark until more than halfway through the novel, when "For the first time in many years he saw himself as a man like Diable saw him." (p. 268) This moment is probably the beginning of Mark's salvation, though he resists the old scholar's offer to come to St. Anne's.

When Mark is by his own free choice, saved, the cold-hearted tempter Frost prepares to conclude the ritual initiation to which he has been submitting Mark. The final task of the ordeal is to desecrate a crucifix. For the first time, Mark refuses. He says to Frost, "It's all bloody nonsense and I'm damned if I do any such thing." (p. 418) These words are absolutely, literally true. The N.I.C.E. is about to become a "bloody nonsense" - a bloody mass of people who can speak nothing but nonsense - and Mark would indeed have been damned if he had done what Frost wanted him to do. From this moment, by his refusal, Mark is, unknown to himself, a member of the company.

Merlin finds Mark unconscious and awakens him with "water dashed in his face" - like a rough baptism - Mark and Merlin go "out under the stars, bitter cold and two o'clock in the morning, Sirius bitter green, a few flakes of dry snow beginning to fall." (p. 437) In ancient Egypt, Sirius was the herald of the flood of the life-giving Nile. In twentieth century England, its brilliant form is a characteristic element of a winter night. For Mark, it makes a cold but long-needed awakening.

Finally, as Mark makes his way toward St. Anne's and the company, he reflects that "He was going to be admitted only out of kindness, because Jane had been fool enough to marry him." (p. 447) Of course, he had been admitted to Belbury for the same reason, though not out of kindness! While he is at this nadir of humility, Mark, like Jane, encounters Venus. "He looked up and perceived a great lady standing by a doorway in a wall." (p. 475) This great doorkeeper-goddess now admits Mark to his true marriage chamber, saved, shriven, baptized, and ready for his proper nuptials.

One objection to That Hideous Strength has concerned the inclusion of Arthurian motifs: I have attempted to prove elsewhere that the chivalric ideal of adventure and exchange, and the symbolism of the Waste Land, are present throughout the trilogy, and reach their logical florescence and conclusion in this third volume. [12]

Furthermore, I believe that there is an explanation for Lewis's use of a treble role, and a treble name change for Ransom in That Hideous Strength. When Jane is first told of Ransom's existence he is called "Mr. Fisher-King." The title means something very specific: that the owner and chief resident of St. Anne's Manor is a wounded leader whose enirones are threatened with ruin, decay, sterility, and death. In consequence, this is the first title we hear, the title which predicts the direction and main action of the plot.

As Jane draws nearer and is ushered into the presence of this man, a new title springs into being and replaces the first. This is the title of Director. Here is a very specific twentieth-century term and it has a specific meaning too. Ransom is the Director of the company. In this role his suffering and helplessness do not interfere; a Director does not act — he or she directs. Indeed, in the climactic moment when the supernatural beings descend, it is not he who is filled with their power and ultimately consumed, but Merlin.

I conclude from this that while Ransom's role and position as Fisher King cannot be handed on directly to another holder, but is a singular visitation upon himself which he has not invited and cannot escape, the Directorate of the company of St. Anne's Manor can continue to function with a new incumbent: I have nominated Grace Ironwood for this position. In the cool, ongoing aftermath, she will be the silver reflection of the former, golden wielder of that directorial power in an hour of great need. But there is likely to be need again someday, and there may be any number of Directors of this quiet company, awaiting that hour.

Which brings me to Ransom's third title, that of Pendragon. It is at this point that critics have become
most restless. Not one Arthurian title, but two! Surely this is overkill, gratuitous excess! But I think it was done deliberately and effectively and points to a third theme in the story, that Ransom is the inheritor of the crown of the secret kingdom of Logres, which has continued since the days of Arthur during the rise of mere Britain. Ransom thus has a third title to pass, the title of Pendragon. Merlin's condemnation of Jane and Mark for failing to produce a child who would — the reader is forced to conclude — have been a Pendragon who would have become public, open, known, and somehow triumphant, reveals what the Pendragon could, at some point, be. But this does not come to pass. Therefore, we conclude that when Ransom departs, there will be yet another private, secret, unknown Pendragon to take his place.

Lewis has given a powerful hint of this inheritor in the name of Arthur Denniston. Camilla remains with Arthur in the Blue Room of the Director to await his departure to Venus. I think that she will be a full partner of the next Pendragon and probably the mother of the next after that, taking Jane's place in that role. Ransom has said to her: "We in this house are all that is left of Logres. You are carrying its future in your body." (p. 279)

My point is that the Director of the company of St. Anne's and the Pendragon need not be and perhaps had been for one time only combined in a single personage, the unique interplanetary traveller, Ransom. As Fisher King he is to be transported to Aphallon on Perelandra, there to await whatever Malchizidec and Arthur and their like await. As Director he is to be replaced by Grace Ironwood, ever Ransom's equal and co-worker and now Director in his stead. And as Pendragon he is to pass on that title and role to a married man who with his wife will rule in secret, worthily and well.

And what of Jane and Mark? By fullfilling, late and reluctantly, at least one of the roles assigned to each — she to as seer for the company, and he (very belatedly) to join her as consort and protector — they have entered into salvation. She has allowed herself to be taken into the company, and he has at last joined the only true inner ring which he has always sought. Will they remain in the company as it continues its watchful role in the quiet country house? Lewis doesn't tell us, but I know what I would do!

ENDNOTES

[1] C.S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength (London: The Bodley Head, 1945), p. 79. All subsequent references to this work will be cited in the text.

[8] "In His Own Image," Peter Luke, Hadrian VII (Harnham: Theatre Royal, 1959), no page. This theatrical programme was lent to me by Professor Walter Martin and Patricia Martin, whose aid is gratefully acknowledged.
[9] Otto Bockel, Handbuch des Deutschen Volkstadiens (Mühlheim: Georg Olms Verlagbuchhandlung, 1967 [1908]), p. 339. The translation and resource materials for the interpretation of this folksong were provided by Professor Gisela Brude-Firnau (Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages, University of Waterloo), who remembers singing it as a child. To her, heartfelt thanks!

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