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Abstract
Sees the search for the mythic, numinous image or experience as one strong motivation for reading fantasy (and other literature). Contrasts T.H. White and C.S. Lewis in terms of the presence of the numinous in their work.

Additional Keywords
Fantasy readers—Motivation; Lewis, C.S. Till We Have Faces; Myth in literature; Numinous in C.S. Lewis; Numinous in literature; White, T.H. The Once and Future King; Bruce McMenomy; Bonnie GoodKnight
Why do we read mythopoeic fantasy? Some of us may consider it a silly question to ask. We simply like it, and that's all, and there's no need to apologize for reading stories that take us out of this depressing, late twentieth century madhouse--this boring, plastic wasteland that our great grandparents thought would be a land of milk and honey. But, on the other hand, some of the obvious answers are that we like magic, romance, pastoral moods, enchanted islands, haunted forests, mist covered mountains, not to mention heroism, swordfights, heroines, villains, and necromancers. We have a love of the bullying and terror in old myths, and we like a universe that inspires awe or an imagined world more lovely and more challenging than this one. Some of us are necromancers. We have a love for the beauty and sacred being in a "living" context, a created or "secondary world" of course, but the next best thing to meeting the goddess in the woods, or seeing the burning bush on the mountain.

Evidently, C. S. Lewis felt that his famous encounter with George MacDonald's work had brought him into contact with the "numinous" world, or at least with some experiences of the "numinous." Most of us, I would guess, have had the same experience, if not from MacDonald, then from certain moments in reading The Lord of the Rings. But we probably would not have used the word "numinous" to describe our response--or at least I wouldn't, for it is only in the last two years that I have begun to think of my literary experience, and especially my reading of writers like Tolkien, MacDonald, and Lewis, in a way that made use of this word, "numinous." I've had a lot of academic training in literature, and, since my last years in graduate school were times when "myth criticism" was coming into vogue, I've spent a lot of time tracking down fertility myths, sterility myths, subconscious image clusters and the like. We found myths that inspire awe or an imagined world more lovely and more challenging than this one. Some of us are necromancers. We have a love for the beauty and sacred being in a "living" context, a created or "secondary world" of course, but the next best thing to meeting the goddess in the woods, or seeing the burning bush on the mountain.

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Importance of Being Earnest. Well, maybe... but I don't feel any specifically mythic experience in reading these things, or seeing them acted--unless you can call it a "mythic experience" to see how the ladies and gentlemen of Congreve's or Wilde's ages wished they might act, if they had the noise and the wit to do so.

No, I think the presence of myth in literature ought to mean something more than that. I read Tolkien or Lewis, or The Faerie Queen, partly because I want to encounter myth, not because I want to contemplate social behavior in a given context, as I would if I were to read War and Peace again. But I want the myth to be in some sense "alive" or a significant presence in the story's plot, and not just a pattern in the background, as the legend of Odysseus is just a kind of ghost in the background of James Joyce's Ulysses. (After all, the important thing about Ulysses is not that Joyce was following the events of The Odyssey, but that, like Frodo, Molly Bloom lives.)

It's easy to see that I am here arguing for a specialized purpose in the use of myth in imaginative literature, and I'm talking about myth in a more restricted way than some of our myth critics and theologians usually do. For Northrop Frye, any kind of meaningful plot pattern is a "myth," and for Mark Schorer or the late Paul Tillich, any important structure of ideological beliefs might be a "myth." For the literary theorist, George Whalley, "a myth is a direct metaphysical statement beyond science. It embodies in an articulated structure of symbol or narrative a vision of reality. It is a condensed account of man's Being and attempts to represent reality with structural fidelity, to indicate at a single stroke the salient and fundamental relations which for a man constitute reality." Despite the abstractness of this language, I find much to agree with here in Whalley's definition, especially when we find that Whalley's idea of the symbol is one which seems to claim numinous overtones. Whalley's use of the term "vision" also suggests the numinous dimension; but while Whalley includes the numinous in his definition, I am not sure that he makes it a necessary requirement for his concept of myth.

These are all useful definitions, and at least superior to the vulgar popular notion that a myth is simply a fanciful falsehood exploded by science, and hence cannot be "true." This latter stupidity is still abroad in these times, as I found to my regret when I taught a seminar in Tolkien and Lewis last spring and asked a group of apparently intelligent juniors and seniors in college to define a "myth." But I want to bring us back to what C. S. Lewis thought a myth to be, and I shall do this by referring to Lewis's late and little read (apparently) book, An Experiment In Criticism (1961).

In attempting to define his conception of myth, Lewis acknowledged that he intended a narrower meaning than the anthropologists usually had
for the word, and that he was working with an idea inspired by stories that had a "mythical quality," like that of Orpheus or Balder, or by such literary works as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, or Kafka's The Castle, which actually create "modern" myths. There are six characteristics that help to identify a myth for Lewis. First, the story exists exclusive of the art of its telling; we may get the same myth from either Hawthorne or Robert Graves, but the myth survives the experience. Second, the myth is enthralling for its own sake and not the narrator's skill at building suspense. Third, "human sympathy is a minimum," for we do not "project ourselves" into the actors and characters, but merely observe them (as Orual observes Psyche in her dream). Fourth, myth deals with the creatures of fantasy, with "impossibles and preternaturals," much as Tolkien's fairy tales must con-

tain magic and the realm of "Faerie." Fifth, the experience of such myth is solemn, even if the myth is "joyful;" there can be happy myths, but not comic myths (that is, fantastic stories arousing a primarily humorous response). Finally, and sixth, "the experience is not only grave but awe-inspiring. We feel it to be numinous." Our response includes the feeling that something terribly important has been explained to us.

It may seem to us that Lewis's six characteristics tend to overlap a little; but, at any rate, he wanted us to think of myth as something to be experienced, not simply as an intellectual concept, an abstract pattern, or a story to be allegorized. And he wanted an authentic myth to be identified by our sense of sacred or numinous awe, rather than through a study of the image itself. Perhaps he had no choice, for one man's numinous icon may be a "dead object" to another. At any rate, he has some important descriptions of our reactions to confronting the "numinous": we experience fascination, majesty, awfulness (in its meaning of being filled with awe), and a kind of dread as well. As Otto says, "The 'mystery' in the 'divine-daemonic object' involves more than simple wonder for the worshipper to appear; besides that in it which bewilders and confounds, he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac-element in the numen." For studying a literary treatment of myth, however, Otto's pursuit of the emotional response may lead us away from the books we want to talk about. A more helpful approach may be a recent study by Francis Huxley, The Way of the Sacred, which studies such things dealing with or transmitting a sense of the holy or the "numinous." Unfortunately, though, since we are here interested in the Arthurian myth and in T. H. White and C. S. Lewis, Huxley's book is not so helpful because it is a comparative religion study which attempts a "universalist" view.

More to the point is W. H. Auden's comment about the imagination's relationship to numinous myth. Meditating on the poet's goals, which is one of the obsessions of poets in our technological age of plastic and concrete, Auden writes that the "concern of the Primary Imagination, its only concern, is with sacred beings and sacred events. The sacred is that to which it is obliged to respond; the profane is that to which it cannot respond and therefore does not know. The profane

with its mythopoetic power, moments of numinous power, and "mythical quality." Lewis cites the episodes involving the Ents and the section on Lothlorien, in a casual reference in An Experiment in Criticism, written into the day of serious Tolkien study, and written an extended essay on The Lord of the Rings, he might have elaborated on and extended these comments. (iii)
is known to other faculties of the mind, but not to the Primary Imagination. Poems or works dealing with the secular are written by the author's Secondary Imagination (Auden is using Coleridge's terms, as we all have probably noticed). Auden then quotes from Charles Williams's book on C oleridge's terms, as we all have probably noticed). A description of the way the imagination reacts. Auden writes:

The response of the imagination to such a presence or significance is a passion of awe. This awe may vary greatly in intensity and range in tone from joyous wonder to panic dread. A sacred being may attract us by its beauty or its power, a wise, an octopus—beautiful or ugly—a toothless hag or a fair young child—good or evil—a Beartrix or a Dame Sans Merci—historical fact or fiction—a person met on the road or an image encountered in a story or a dream—it may be noble or something unmentionable in a drawing room, it may be anything it likes on condition, but this condition is absolute, that is arouse awe. 19

Actually, what Auden seems to be describing here is an imaginative response that all of us have had or experienced, probably from some passage in Tolkien, Lewis, Charles Williams, or George MacDonald. I would argue that this response is what the true fantasy writer must create in his readers. Otherwise, he is an artificer, or a genuine writer, but a faker or impostor using secondary imagination. In fact, I would say that the degree to which a fantasy writer creates (or recreates) a myth to which we experience an intensely numinous response, is a measure of his status as a fantasy or mythopoeic writer. For my imagination at least, there is little that is numinous in an industrious hack like Andre Norton, no matter how clever her plotting is. Similarly, Swann of A. E. van Vogt, like Katherine Kurtz are accomplished writers, and I do not doubt their good will, devotion to fantasy, or interest in myth; but their work has little of the numinous. On the other hand, I find this quality in writers whose conceptions and tales seem rather primitive by comparison with Swann or Kurtz: I mean in some of the swaggering fantasies of Robert E. Howard, of which I am no great fan; and in the goofy but remarkable early science fiction novels of A. E. van Vogt, like Slan, which I do admire in spite of the fashion of readers to de­ride them. 20

The main point of all this is that we can see clearly what's wrong with some mythopoeic fantasy writers and novelists, and the animals that mythologize nature; neither has satire as a primary aim, by the way. Obviously, then, both T. H. White and C. S. Lewis present a good deal of mythopoeic (in this sense) in their work. Both create sentient animals and other beings that mythologize nature; and both use human characters inherited from myth and endowed with a larger than life existence. Merlin, Ransom (as the Pendragon), Eros and Psyche are some of the examples in Lewis; Merlin (again), Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere are some of the instances in White. But their mythopoeic works do not show the same concern with the "numinous." I now turn to a further exploration of this point. 21

When we compare T. H. White and C. S. Lewis as fantasy writers, we can start with the obvious point that as men they shared much in common. Both were lovers of the Middle Ages, especially the High Norman French Middle Ages, with their cathedrals and chivalric romances. Both had similar English educations, and a similar attitude of dislike for the modern world. Both were professional bachelors, although Lewis of course did marry late in life, and both had much of the born tutor or lecturer in them. Both were very much involved with the Arthurian legends, and used them in their imaginative writing. Their literary effort was a re-telling of Malory, and Lewis borrowed from the Arthurian matter for That Hideous Strength, and wrote criticism dealing with Arthurian romances, as well as editing and writing a lengthy commentary on Charles Williams's unfinished cycle of Arthurian poems. 22

But there are limits to these parallels. We know that White while apparently less of a recluse than Lewis, was less a scholar as well. Though there is some religious feeling in White's work, he had evidently no firm commitment to Christianity or any other religion. 23 A kind of resigned worldly acceptance, at once pessimistic and melancholy, runs through much of The Once and Future King, a romantic feeling very different from philosophic pessimism, although sometimes mistaken for it. There is very little of this kind of emotion in Lewis, who was always on guard against self-indulgence. Lewis's story does not seem to me to be an especially admirable kind. If we must choose despair or pessimism, then let us courageously choose to be stoics like the Anglo-Saxon warriors and not fiercely despairing Sartrian existentialists. 24

Moreover, White appears to have had sexual and emotional problems that he was never able to transcend. A friend hinted at White's difficult relationship in his biographer, Sylvia Townsend Warner, is
his characters talk interminably in empty rooms. whose sense of the brevity of life and the tragic 
Yet Yeult is a memorable and haunting character 
with Guinevere in making her sympathetic and cred­
par ticu larly, Robinson gives the im pression th at 
best book of the lo t, partly  because White is free 
and more im pressive if they showed some of the 
more candid: White was a 
over his work, nor Guinevere's. Robinson's narratives, this poem has many faults; particularly, Robinson gives the impression that his characters talk interminably in empty rooms. Yet Yeult is a memorable and haunting character whose sense of the brevity of life and the tragic nature of the "human condition" is expressed viv­
I might find White's lovers more tragic and more impressive if they showed some of the 
hard won wisdom of Robinson's Yeult.30 
If you have inferred that I do not like The 
Onc e and Future King very much, you are correct. The Sword in the Stone appears to me to be the 
best book of the lot, partly because White is free from his sexual obsessions here. Thus, the nostal­
gy of the white goslings, and the romantic nature which become so tiresome in the other three books are not out of place. In addition, White here, in The 
Sword in the Stone, presents some effective numinous images. These are sorely lacking in the 
other books. The Arthurian legend provides an immense range of possibilities for numinous imagi­
Malory has great success in making Merlin 
and the Grail legend numinous. Tennyson at least makes the death of Arthur a powerfully numinous event. But White does little with these events; Merlin is already on his way to becoming the bungling clown of the Walt Disney film. For the 
story of the Grail, White says, we must go to 
Malory.31 This is an abysmal confession of defeat. 
White succeeds in making the Arthurian ma­numinous only a few times. Once is when 
Lancelot finally performs his miracle.32 Another 
time is in The Sword in the Stone, when we meet 
Marian and Robin and see them as gods of the green­wood.33 The best instance of all, and one of the 
times when White successfully invents something 
not in Malory or another source, is the Nart's 
experience with the migrating geese.34 White 
charges a natural event until it becomes truly mythic and 
numinous. I had read about the flight of migra­
tory geese many times, but I had never experienced imaginatively what a flight with wild geese might 
be like. Let us avoid a mistake here: White 
doesn't necessarily show us what a goose feels on 
his long flight; but he shows us what a human 
would feel and see if he could fly with the geese. 
This is a great imaginative achievement, and it 
gives new life to the old human dream of living a free existence beyond all boundaries and the 
restraint of gravity.
It's a pity that White was not inspired like 
this more often in his Arthuriad. Too often, 
though, he merely romanticizes an imaginary Middle Ages, in a way that is hard to accept. But though 
the book is a great commercial success and appar­
tently much admired by many reviewers, The 
Onc e and Future King does not give much of a numinous 
dimension to the Arthurian legends. For that rea­son, I would contend that it is not in the front 
ranks of mythopoeic fantasies. It is wrong, as with Charles Williams's or Mary Stewart's treat­ment of the Arthurian theme, their versions at least preserve the numinous character of the legend.

By contrast, one way of looking at C. S. Lewis's achievement as a fantasy writer is to see the growing importance of the numinous quality in his work, and Lewis's growing ability to present powerful images of numinous myth in his fantasy. In a brief survey of Lewis's use of numin­uous images, I shall be forced to rely on bald 
assertion, for I do not have the time or space to 
support my comments with quotation and analysis. Thus, of course, should at least have the virtue of 
leaving plenty of room for disagreement.
We should remember more often than we do that Lewis began his literary career as a romantic poet in the tradition of Keats, Shelley, and William Morris, those twoagna from Lewis championed against the scorn of twentieth century anti-romantics like T. S. Eliot and Frank R. Leavis, the Cambridge don and editor of Scrutiny, 
who tried to relegate Milton and the Romantics and many of the major English novelists to a relatively minor importance. After his initial book of 
lyrics, Lewis published the narrative poem Dymer (1926), a readable but undistinguished attempt at 
quest romance in the manner of Keats's Endymion and Shelley's La esto r, both fairly early narrative 
poems which suggest the future development of those two poets. In the tradition of the quest romance, a romantic seeker or quester revolts against the 
mundane world and sets off on a journey which 
takes him into a numinous or mythic realm, where 
one eventually experiences some revelation about 
the purpose of life. The "quester," however, may 
pay for his knowledge or discovery with his life, as 
Shelley's poet does in Alcest or, or as Keats's 
poet and knight may do in the ballad "La Belle 
Dame Sans Merce." Lewis's Dymer also revolts and 
journeys into a mythological realm, and after dis­
cov er of the falsity of many of the images he 
encounters, Dymer finally meets a truly numinous 
being, and then dies. We do not pursue following this 
romantic pattern of Lewis's's en­counter with the numinous realm is not very sat­isfactory in this poem. Although Lewis had already 
read George MacDonald, he was not yet certain what the meaning of the numinous realm was, for it
would be some years until he announced his conversion to Christianity. Or at least that's the way it seems to me, for I remember Lewis's caution against reading autobiography into an author's performance.36 Maybe it's safer to say that Lewis simplyiko looked to Keats for some of his visionary powers and Shelley's visionary powers, so that he was wise to turn to prose for his later works. Or we might note that the quest romance in verse has become an obsolete form by the twentieth century, as the fact that Bunyan could not find a market for his great romances may indicate. Anyhow, Lewis is better at exposing the falsely numinous -- the romantic myths that delude -- in Dymer than in projecting a vision of the real numinous image.

Some similar criticisms can be made of The Pilgrim's Regress, a spiritual autobiography disguised as intellectual allegory in the tradition of Bunyan. This major imaginative effort is not as successful as it might have been, not because allegory is an archaic form in the twentieth century (although it is), and not because Lewis was not charitable in the book toward what he disliked, as he later said. Bunyan was not charitable toward some segments of English society, yet he wrote a great allegory. The major fault of The Pilgrim's Regress, as I see it, is simply that Lewis satirized intellectual fraud well, but was less successful in creating his religious beliefs in a visionary or numinous way. More Bunyan has some homely but mythic images like "The Delectable Mountains" and "The Celestial City" which inspire numinous contemplation, Lewis has "Mother Kirk," who should be guiding tutelary lady like one of George MacDonald's mythic mothers, but with a son doesn't quite cease to be a female don lecturing John and the reader. Bunyan is both more homely and more mythically convincing than Lewis. Had Lewis been able to create numinous images as good as his satire, his religious beliefs would be more worthy of comparison with Bunyan.

Fortunately for all of us, Lewis, after trying the quest romance in verse, and then the quest romance in allegory, found a form more suited for quest romance in our century -- the science fiction voyage to another planet. His inspiration here was David Lindsay's A Voyage to Arcturus, a novel full of numinous and visionary imagery and projecting Lindsay's remarkable romance, which deserves to be better known. It is also worth pointing out that it was for encouraging Lewis to write the Ransom trilogy, those quest romances which conclude with numinous mythic epiphanies.37

Numinous events occur near the ending of both Out of the Silent Planet and Perelandra, when Ransom confronts Oyarsa in the first, and when he sees the "Great Dance" in the second. Moreover, Perelandra takes place on a planet which is by its very nature sacred or numinous (and wholly convincing as such), and the mere creation of Perelandra allows the novel to triumph over Lewis's unsatisfactory resolution of the plot, with the interminable fight between Weston and Ransom.38 That Hideous Strength, the third Ransom novel, abounds in numinous beings and events, despite a large portion of satire. Ransom and Merlin both have a mythic and numinous stature here, and there are brilliant set pieces like the chapter called The Descent of the Gods. However, the intention of creating a numinous scene and the achievement are not the same thing, and the epipany with which the novel ends, "Venus at St. Anne's," is not quite in the right tone to be wholly successful.

If numinous mythic images play a large part in the Ransom trilogy, they plan an even greater role in the Narnia series. The Narnia series follows the tradition of Victorian children's stories as developed by Lewis Carroll, MacDonald, and James Barrie, where on one level the child is the symbol of the soul in its quest for the divine. Lewis's "chronicles" of Narnia might be called Without too much exaggeration the "Bible of Narnia," for Lewis fills the series with numinous and sacred events in the history of Narnia that recreate many of the sacred and numinous events in our Christian Bible. The primary numinous conception is Aslan, the transcendent Christian God who becomes immanent and incarnate in Narnian time, and Whose appearances in Narnia become progressively more solemn and arouse greater awe as the Narnian books continue. Like the revelations of God in the Bible, the appearances of Aslan in Narnia tend to "play off against each other," if I may use so awkward a metaphor, so that our awareness of Aslan's earlier actions adds resonance and power to each new act.

In fact, by his treatment of the numinous event in Narnia history, Lewis has helped to renew the numinous power of our own Bible for us. This result is much the same as that which Milton hoped to get by writing Paradise Lost; but there is perhaps more tact in Lewis's method, for Lewis does not pretend to be "recreating," or re-envisioning the Christian Bible, as Milton did, but rather presenting a Narnian mythic event analogous to the Biblical event.

The most important numinous events in the Narnia books are fairly obvious: the crucifixion and resurrection of Aslan in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe; the creation of Narnia in The Magician's Nephew; the apocalyptic end of Narnia in The Last Battle. In addition, Lewis's demons have a mythic and numinous quality in the Narnia books, an aspect they seldom have in the Ransom trilogy: at least this is so of the White Witch and of Tash in the first and last books of the series.

However, my personal selection for the most successful numinous vision in the Narnia books is a passage inspired by the Celtic myths rather than the Christian Bible. This is the end of The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, with its haunting mythic images of the "world's end." After that for many days, without wind in her shrouds or foam at her bows, across a waveless sea, the Dawn Treader glided smoothly east. Every day and hour the light became more brilliant and still they could bear it. No one ate or slept and no one wanted to, but they drew buckets of dazzling water from the sea, stronger than wine and somehow wetter, more liquid than ordinary water, and pledged one another efficiently in the fragrant air. And one or two of the sailors who had been oldish men when the voyage began now grew younger every day. Everyone on board was filled with joy and excitement, but not an excitement that made one talk. They neither they said the less they spoke, and almost in a whisper. The stillness of that last sea laid hold on them...39

Limitations of space preclude further quotation, but the entire concluding chapter of this book is a series of wonders and marvels equal to the best passages in any modern fantasy writer. Lewis brings alive in us our dreams of a lost earthly paradise in the "uttermost west," and combines it with our longing for a last happy passage to man's Country, to Paradise and Christian -- for a permanent home in a land beyond time or death. The "mythic quality" of this final chapter would have pleased Lewis himself, I think, had he found it another writer.
creative writer, and triumphed.

Here Lewis took on the task of recreating a myth that has the numinous quality he spoke of in An Experiment in Criticism, and a myth that is by common consent a potent story greater than any like it, or at least as potent. It is the story of Psyche, from Apuleius in Latin and from Keats and William Morris in English, very little has been done with the mythic story which combines much of the best in the pagan and Christian worlds.40 As we know, part of Lewis’s success comes through this development of the complex character of Orual; but a good part of Lewis’s success comes through his use of numinous images in the novel.

There are three especially important instances of the numinous in Till We Have Faces. The first of these is Psyche's valley or the mysterious palace of Eros, which is shown to Orual and us only briefly, but which is wholly convincing. In addition, the palace of Eros is employed to show us and Orual that the transcendental "other world" does exist, although Orual is not yet able to concede the existence of that world. "And now let that wise Greek whom I look to as my reader and the judge of my cause, mark well what followed," Orual writes, to prepare the reader for her first sight of the palace, at a time when she still tries to cling to her scepticism. "There stood the palace, grey -- as all things were grey in that hour and place -- but solid and motionless, wail within wail, and arch and arcing miraculous, and it, a labyrinthine beauty. As she had said, it was like no house ever seen in our land or age. Pinnacles and buttresses leaped up -- no memories of mine, you would think, could help me to imagine that the unbelievably tall and slender, pointed and prickly as if stone were shooting out into branch and flower..."41

Lewis's writing is doubly impressive here because of the restraint and austerity of the imagery and tone. Because of our natural expectations about an enchanted valley and a mysterious palace, we were anticipating a description that was lyrical and probably something ethereal and full of Celtic exaggeration. Instead, Lewis makes us visualize the palace in terms of solidity and mass; we feel that the world of myth is "real" and substantial, while the world of prosaic existence, Orual's Glome, is shifting and mutable illusion. It is part of the success of Till We Have Faces that the "numinous" world is not only made to seem more vivid than the world of "common sense" reality, but the numinous world is also conceived as the only source of explanation for the confusion of our "common sense" world.

The second important numinous moment comes when Orual recognizes Ungit, the barbaric goddess, is not just a figment of human superstition, but her own shadow self, the selfish and possessive demon within her, whose existence she has tried to deny, as she has denied the existence of the transcendent realm. This dream scene is especially effective since Ungit has not appeared as a numinous demonic reality earlier in the story.

The final important vision of the numinous is in Orual's final revelatory dream, when she sees Psyche undergoing her sacrificial ordeal. Here the reader joins Orual as both spectator and participant in a ritualized re-enactment of the myth, which lends depth and meaning to her redemption story much like the story of Parsifal or Galahad discovering the Grail -- and much like the story of Christ's Passion. Orual is a seeker who has had to endure purgation and suffering in order to confront the numinous world at last. Her dream vision of Psyche's trial is one of Lewis's most impressive imaginative achievements. In a surprising way, Till We Have Faces can be seen as a more complex version of the quest romance of Dymer: it has a seeker who must have illusions destroyed before she can at last confront a true vision of the "numinous." But the greater power and beauty of Till We Have Faces is a measure of how much Lewis had grown as an imaginative writer from his unsuccessful effort with Dymer.

I would conclude by saying that perhaps not all will agree with me on what is or is not numinous in the work of Lewis or T. E. H. White, or any other fantasy writer. But I think we ought to use this conception of myth, or rather Lewis's conception, in order to think about the aesthetic achievement of the mythopoetic writers we study. This idea that there are "innumerable" numinous moments something that may help us to see the differences between Lewis and White, or even between a lesser fantasy writer like Alan Garner and the facile imitators -- the Lin Carters -- which Lewis, Tolkien, and others may deplore. But we should remember too that no story can have the feeling of the numinous about it all the time. It is something that is likely to be there only on special occasions, as it is in Till We Have Faces. As Lewis wrote in another context, "In life and in art both, as it seems to me, we are always trying to catch in our net of successive moments something that is not successive."42 Though Lewis meant then a certain kind of excitement, his statement is equally true of that solemn awe we should feel when we meet the truly numinous event.

FOOTNOTES

1 "Secondary world" is a phrase from Tolkien's frequently quoted essay on fairy stories. I explain "numinous" below; the term is used by C. S. Lewis occasionally, but he got it, as did everyone else from Rudolph Otto's book The Idea of the Holy, which appeared in Germany in 1917. I use the translation by John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923; reprinted in paperback, 1969).

2 As is well known, Lewis's contact with George MacDonald was with Phantastes in his late teens. See the biography by Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper.


6 Cambridge, England; Cambridge University Press, 1961. The fact that Lewis made this little book an attack on F. R. Leavis and his followers, the "Vigilant School of Critics," and Lewis's proposal that we judge a book by the different ways it can be read, both worked against much notice, being taken as the final expression of the numinous.

7 An Experiment in Criticism, p. 42.

8 An Experiment in Criticism, p. 44.

9 An Experiment in Criticism, p. 44.

10 An Experiment in Criticism, p. 44.


12 As is well known, Lewis's contact with George MacDonald was with Phantastes in his late teens. See the biography by Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper.

13 Cambridge, England; Cambridge University Press, 1961. The fact that Lewis made this little book an attack on F. R. Leavis and his followers, the "Vigilant School of Critics," and Lewis's proposal that we judge a book by the different ways it can be read, both worked against much notice, being taken as the final expression of the numinous.

14 An Experiment in Criticism, p. 42-43.


17 An Experiment in Criticism, pp. 42-43.

18 Otto, p. 31.

is an American paperback reprint from Dell Laurel Books, New York, 1976.


19 Auden, p. 55. The quotation from Charles Williams is from Witchcraft, but Auden gives no definite reference.

20 I could have chosen other writers, but I have used Swann as a whipping boy before. He has produced numerous fantasy novels over the last few years: I am mainly familiar with Green Phoenix, The Not-World, Day of the Minotaur, The Forest of Forever, and The Goat without Horns.

21 George Colvin, "Watership: Up or Down??", Mythprint (June 1975), pp. 11-12. Mr. Colvin was probably correct in being suspicious of Watership Down because of its instant popularity and the lavish praise bestowed on it by a variety of reviewers, all of whom seemed to think that the work had vast didactic and ecological importance for American readers. But the humorless romanticism of Watership Down should have clearly indicated to Mr. Colvin that the work was not meant to be a beast fable. Whatever their faults, beast fables usually contain some flashes of humor and wit.

22 I do not mean to disparage Thurber's work, however, which I admire (in small doses) a great deal. Thurber's didacticism is presented in biting satirical images and sharp verbal wit. The same cannot be said of Beatrix Potter's work, though, at least so far as I am familiar with it.


24 Adams credits the work of R. M. Hockley for much of his information about rabbits.

25 Lewis's most extended discussion of the Arthurian material is in his commentary on Williams's unfinished cycle of Arthurian poems in the book called Arthurian Torso, originally published in 1948, after Williams's death. These commentaries, together with Williams's important poems on the Arthurian material, Taliesin through Logres, and The Region of the Summer Stars, are published together in paperback volume by Wm. Berdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974.

26 Sylvia Townsend Warner's biography is a remarkably candid and compassionate study of the troubled T. H. White, and especially his religious, sexual, and literary struggles: it is T. H. White: A Biography (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), and it sets a standard so high that there may never need to be another biography. On White's flirtations with Roman Catholicism during his Irish years, see Warner, 118-174; 170-171 discusses White's final exasperated rejection of the faith.

27 Perhaps I am unduly harsh here in this statement, but what I call a "soft, romantic melancholy," seems to be a major flaw in many English writers, and White seems to be much closer to Tennyson in spirit on this point than would appear at first to be the case. White's characteristic pessimism seems to me to be partly a result of his childhood, when he was not happy or full of much love, and partly the result of his adult loneliness and inability to find a stable relationship with a woman. White was rather courageous, maybe because of his melancholy, and perhaps it is pointless to complain about a writer's temperament. But among fantasy writers, E. R. Eddison, Poul Anderson, and David Lindsay are not Christians, but their works espouse a courageous stoicism that I find admirable.

28 See David Garnett, "Introduction," to America at Last: The American Journal of T. H. White (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965, pp. 11-12. Also, see Warner, pp. 28-29 for a discussion of White's homosexuality. Most of the time, White seems to have been a closet homosexual rather than a practicing one, at least as far as his biographer's information is concerned.

29 This is clear from White's own journal in America at Last, where he was accompanied by a niece on the trip to America. But David Garnett also points out in his introduction that White had a tendency to drink excessively, and a niece helped to control his toping (Garnett, p. 9). See also Warner, pp. 200; 317. Obviously, White in his later years was a man of abundant lore on many themes, much like Merlin in The Sword in the Sword.
1969), pp. 7-91. The entire last canto, Canto IX of Dymer, concerns Dymer's encounter with numinous beings: first he meets a Miltonic angel figure who yields his armor and post to Dymer; then Dymer confronts his beast-like "son" or shadow self (in the Jungian sense of "shadow") and the meeting transforms the brute into a figure of awe. This confrontation, which ends Dymer's life by sapping all his energy, is nevertheless a victory, for Dymer is restored to psychic unity at the end.

36 C. S. Lewis, Of Other Worlds, in the essay, "On Criticism," pp. 43-58, warns critics against unwarranted biographical speculation. See especially, pp. 50-56.

37 In "On Science Fiction," in Of Other Worlds, pp. 59-73, Lewis calls the Voyages to Arcturus that "shattering, intolerable, and irresistible work," words that indicate a strong response to David Lindsay's flawed classic (p. 71). In "Of Stories," an essay in the same collection, pp. 3-21, Lewis praises Lindsay's planet Torrance as "a region of the spirit," in a paragraph discussing the appeal of the novel for him (p. 12). Somewhere, Lewis remarks that Lindsay's book helped Lewis to see the value of other planets as spiritual symbols.


40 William Morris's treatment of the story in The Earthly Paradise is little known, although Lewis as an avid reader of Morris himself probably read Morris's version. Morris's version stresses his longing for an enduring and satisfying romantic love; Morris hoped to find this experience in his marriage to Jane Burden, but at the time he wrote he knew the majority of the stories in The Earthly Paradise, Morris had begun to learn that his marriage was tragically frustrated and loveless, for Jane had really loved Morris's treacherous and charming friend Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Morris was discovering, in the days when divorces were rare, that he was chained to an empty marriage with his faithless wife. Consequently, the Morris version, like most of The Earthly Paradise is filled with a bitter, unrelieved romantic longing. There is some of this in Morris's late prose romances, but the heroes in these later books are like Morris himself, strong men who relieve their frustrations in fierce heroic actions and quests. Keats's treatment of the Psyche story is not a narration to "Praise the Psyche."


A CONFERENCE REPORT

Reported by Susan F. Jones

((On the question of what is the best descriptive term to use when speaking of the Inklings and Dorothy Sayers, see the Editorial on page 21. — G.G.))

On March 21-24 a conference celebrating the achievements of the Oxford Christian Writers was held on the Messiah College campus in Grantham, Pa. Held in conjunction with a course on the Oxford Christians (taught by Dr. Robert B. Ives), the conference featured a variety of speakers and a potpourri of additional activities designed to foster hobbit-style fellowship. Dr. Ives, the conference coordinator, must be a wizard in disguise, for he managed to bring together Dr. Clyde S. Kilby of Wheaton College, Dr. James T. Como of York College (CUNY), Dr. Nancy Tischler of Penn State's Capitol Campus, Dr. Thomas Howard of Gordon College, and Miss Cheryl Forbes, assistant editor of Christianity Today.

Rather than presenting "academic pedantic di­

chotomies," each of the speakers gave both help­

ful surveys of the current scholarship on C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, J. R. R. Tolkien and Dorothy L. Sayers, as well as stimulating papers on key topics related to these writers.

On Monday Jim Como gave an extensive review and assessment of books about C. S. Lewis. At the morning chapel Tom Howard spoke on "The Moral Mythology of C. S. Lewis." The afternoon and evening were pleasurably spent over tea, songs, readings, and a hobbit dinner which included enough mushrooms to satisfy even the most voracious appetite. Cheryl Forbes capped the evening with her able survey of Dorothy L. Sayers' life and works.

Tuesday morning was full as we heard Tom Howard, in his inimitable fashion, review the literature available on Charles Williams; Nancy Tischler discuss Sayers' BBC passion plays; and Clyde Kilby forcefully plead with us to read Lewis and to discover anew the power of myth and the reality that "the heavens are not dead -- they are alive! The afternoon brought a special treat: a reader's theater production of Charles Williams' play "The Three Temptations." In the evening Tom Howard captivated the conference with a lucid overview of Williams' use of Arthurian elements. For many, the paper itself embodied some of the glory of Logres.

By the time Wednesday came, the conference was in "high gear" and eager to hear Nancy Tischler's presentation on "God, Women and Creativity," in which she discussed the "integrating principle" found in all the Oxford Christian writers. Cheryl Forbes both sang and spoke in the college chapel service. Her text, "The Beloved," challenged Messiah's student body to be "creative as well as Christian in the everyday world." During the afternoon the conference was invited to a Tumus Tea Party in Narnia, along with a group of local children. Over dinner that evening Nancy Tischler presented a fascinating paper entitled "Dorothy and Beatrice." Bringing this very full day to a close, Jim Como spoke on "Cultism and Christianity: C. S. Lewis in the Post-Christian World." Ably covering Loges's social and personal impact, Como also succinctly outlined the major elements crucial to Lewis's thought.

On Thursday, the final day of the conference, Cheryl Forbes demonstrated how in his Arthurian poetry Charles Williams combined both pagan and Christian elements as well as both intellect and feeling. Jim Como closed the conference with his paper "The Militant Intellect: C. S. Lewis as Rhetorician."

In addition to this fine variety of papers and activities, conference participants were also able to view some rare manuscripts from the Wade Collection at Wheaton, as well as an art exhibit of scenes from the Narnia tales, painted by Barbara Walter, a young artist from Pearl River, New York. Although with a full schedule, the conference combined serious scholarship with a casual tone of informality and at times even merriment. A very good time was had by all!