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### Images of Spirit in the Fiction of Clive Staples Lewis

#### Abstract

Shows how Lewis, in his fiction, “explores the phenomenology of Spirit through his creation of several numinous figures who reflect medieval paradigms.” These figures reflect both medieval allegorical meanings and Jungian archetypes.

#### Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S. Fiction—Representation of spirit; Spirit in Jung—Relation to C.S. Lewis’s fiction; Spirit in the Middle Ages—relation to C.S. Lewis’s fiction

# Images of Spirit in the Fiction of Clive Staples Lewis

## Charlotte Spivak

As a self-professed "dinosaur," C.S. Lewis often asserted his preference for what he called the "medieval model" of the universe. In his study *The Discarded Image* he laments the passing of that objectively ordered vision of life which he felt had given way to relativism and subjectivity in the modern world view. His fiction clearly reflects his love of the medieval perspective, emphasizing such themes as hierarchy, plenitude, divine presence, and romance elements such as the quest, magic, and mythic characters. Although the medieval elements in his fiction have been observed by critics,<sup>1</sup> particularly his use of Arthurian materials,<sup>2</sup> little attention has been paid to one significant medieval feature, i.e., Lewis' personifications of Spirit. As a passionate medievalist Lewis was also a Realist (as opposed to Nominalist), deeply concerned with the traditional dualism of Body and Spirit and completely committed to the reality of Spirit. He stressed this conflict in his fiction by creating a series of striking figures depicting Spirit in both positive and negative form. These numerous figures are at once allegorical in the medieval Christian sense and archetypal in the modern Jungian sense.

In *Miracles* Lewis admits the difficulty of defining Spirit, noting that in a general way "all that is immaterial in man (emotions, passions, memory, etc.) is often called 'spiritual.'"<sup>3</sup> More specifically, however, he asserts that Spirit may be seen as the "relatively supernatural element which is given to every man at his creation -- the rational element." (Ibid.) This gift of Spirit is divinely dynamic, capable of conceiving ideas and images independently of sense perception. Metaphorically it may be identified with light, illuminating the darkness of matter, and with wind, inspiring intellect and imagination. The imagining of spirit as light and wind is of course a Biblical topos familiar to medieval theologians, but it is also Jungian.<sup>4</sup> In his study of archetypes Jung identified Spirit with the wind as "an active, winged, swift-moving being as well as that which vivifies, stimulates, incites, fires and inspires."<sup>5</sup> More important, however, Jung explored the notion of Spirit as it has been concretely personified in myth, fairy tale, and medieval romance, finding that it most often assumes the guise of a wise old man or wizard. The classic literary example is Merlin although it also appears as doctor, priest, teacher, professor, grandfather, and occasionally it takes on the theriomorphic identity. "The Archetype of spirit in the shape of a man, hobgoblin, or animal, always appears in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc. are needed but cannot be mustered on one's own resources. The archetype compensates this state of spiritual deficiency by contents designed to fill the gap." (Ibid., p. 215) What this figure represents, then, are "knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness, and intuition on the one hand, and on the other, moral qualities such as good will and the readiness to help. (Ibid.)

In contemporary fantasy, the literary heir of medieval romance, the wizard is a popular but often superficial character.<sup>6</sup> Although Tolkien's Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* and Le Guin's Ged in *The Earthsea* trilogy are genuine representations of Spirit,

frequently the so-called wizards are simply sorcerers, clever wielders of magic but lacking depth of meaning. Lewis' wizards, however, are profoundly spiritual, and most are directly modeled on the prototypical medieval wizard Merlin, an ancient bearded sage, intellectual mentor and creative thinker as well as adept magician. Other images of Spirit in Lewis' fiction, particularly the theriomorphic, are equally profound and often draw their inspiration from medieval iconography. The god-like Aslan, most important and most complex of these personifications of Spirit in animal form, is influenced by the lion symbolism used to represent Christ and St. Mark in the Middle Ages. Similarly, the negative animal images of Spirit, like Shift the unscrupulous ape and Tash the clawed, vulture-like god, are inspired by medieval tradition of representing devils in degraded bestial form, like Dante's monstrous hairy Satan.

In his fictive works, then, Lewis explores the phenomenology of Spirit through his creation of several numerous figures who reflect medieval paradigms. Of the many human examples, most are based on Merlin. In the *Narnia* Chronicles, for example, as the old Professor he initiates the other-worldly adventures of the Pevensie children through his enchanted wardrobe. As Doctor Cornelius, who is part dwarf, he tutors the young Prince Caspian, acting out a role analogous to that of Merlin as Arthur's mentor. As the mystical Ramandu, whom the children aptly call "a retired star," he bears a magic firebrand, also associating him with the sun. There are several other examples. In the space trilogy we find a direct representation of Merlin as a wild Celtic giant with tremendous power and insight. The central embodiment of Spirit in the space novels, however, is not Merlin but the ultimately transfigured Elwin Ransom, Fisher-King and new Pendragon, aided in his mission by the totally spiritualized eldila who manifest no visible physical presence. On the negative side, the *Narnia* books also offer a great variety: the White Witch who does not realize that killing Aslan's body cannot kill his Spirit; the grotesque god surrogates Tash and Shift; and Uncle Andrew, a somewhat bumbling black magician whose wicked experiments unwittingly contribute to the founding of Narnia. The space trilogy puts forth in the person of Weston a demonically possessed and egomaniacal scientist and in that of Withers a soulless remnant of an administrator. Both *The Great Divorce* and *Till We Have Faces* also offer further variations on the personification of Spirit but it is useful at this point to look more closely at individual examples, starting with the *Narnia* Chronicles where they are drawn with exceptional clarity.

The first instance of the wise old man as representative of Spirit is Professor Kirke, who appears in the opening book of the series, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Kirke is an educator in the medieval scholastic tradition, with emphasis on Logic and on the authority of Plato and Aristotle. When the youngest of the Pevensie children, Lucy, first discovers Narnia, an enchanted world that she reaches through the wardrobe in his house, the others are disinclined to accept her account until the Professor scoffs at their incredulity. "Logic!" said the Professor, half to himself. "Why don't they teach logic at these

schools?"<sup>7</sup> At the end of the story, after all four children have spent time in Narnia, they share their experiences with the Professor, who is most receptive, but not at all surprised. Again he mutters, "Bless me, what do they teach at these schools?" (Ibid., p. 186) Professor Kirke turns out, of course, to be the boy Digory, hero of *The Magician's Nephew* and witness to the creation of Narnia. As the wise old man, however, he returns at the end of *The Last Battle*, where he patiently explains the higher reality of heaven, mumbling a variation on the educational refrain, "It's all in Plato, all in Plato! bless me, what do they teach them at these schools?" (Ibid., p. 170) His presence as an embodiment of insight and understanding — and classicism — thus frames the series.

In the second chronicle, *Prince Caspian*, the Wise Old Man appears as the learned Doctor Cornelius, who tutors the young prince, acting out a role for his royal pupil analogous to that of Merlin as Arthur's mentor. Doctor Cornelius is part dwarf and part human. Also in the medieval tradition he is a magician adept at astrology. A small, fat man, he looks much like a dwarf: "He had a very long, silvery pointed beard which came down to his waist, very ugly, and very kind. His voice was grave and his eyes were merry."<sup>8</sup>

For Caspian he is companion as well as tutor, and he tells the young prince all about the Narnia of long ago, whose very existence Caspian had begun to doubt. (Over a thousand years have elapsed since the Pevensie children first visited Narnia.) Doctor Cornelius is able, through his knowledge of medieval astrology and of magic, to impart to Caspian that advice and planning which are needed but cannot be mustered on his own resources. It is Cornelius' choice of timing, based on the fortuitous conjunction of the planets, Tarva and Alembil ("the great lords of the upper sky know the steps of their dance"). (Ibid., p. 45) and his choices of location, the mystical site of Aslan's How, that bring about the decisive battle between the Narnia forces and those of the usurping Miraz. And it is his decision to blow the magic horn at sunrise: "That sometimes has an effect in operations of White Magic." (Ibid., p. 92) As a result, the four children are summoned out of our world at the propitious moment to go to the aid of the Old Narnians, who have been in hiding for so long that their survival is a mere rumor. A positive image for the prince, who relies on his insight and information, Doctor Cornelius seems a threat to the wicked dwarf Nikabrik, who scorns him as "that old dotard in the black gown." (Ibid., p. 159) There is a natural antipathy between the dwarf, creature of the earth, and the wizard, a figure of Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* two versions of the Wise Old Man appear, both of them magicians, and both of somewhat remarkable origin. Both Coriakin and Ramandu, it turns out, are former stars, who once twinkled in the firmament but who are now earth-bound for a prescribed time. The children first meet Coriakin who is, however, invisible to them as are his muddled charges, the Monopods (creatures borrowed from popular medieval bestiaries and also called Dufflepuds), in the grip of the same enchantment. When Coriakin is restored to visibility, along with the single-footed creatures, by means of Lucy's intervention in the book of magical spells, he appears "as an old man, barefoot, dressed in a red robe. His white hair was crowned with a chaplet of oak leaves, his beard fell to his girdle, and he supported himself with a curiously carved staff."<sup>10</sup> His personal habits are

austere: he eats only bread and drinks only wine, both in small amounts. He is patient with the stupid and well-nigh unmanageable flock of Monopods. His role as their mentor has come about as a kind of punishment for some mysterious sin he committed as a star. As Lewis archly remarks, it is not for us to know what sort of sins a star can commit.

Coriakin clearly offers the lowly Dufflepuds their only contact with the life of the Spirit. Though their stupidity combined with their good-naturedness makes them lovable, they exist wholly on the level of matter and of literalness, without benefit of either reason or imagination. Their conversation does not even allow for strain or contention, for they continually assert such things as "water is powerfully wet," and they thrive on passionate agreement with one another. The heightened contrast between stellar guide and monopod follower makes for effective comedy.

The second Wise Old Man in this novel is Ramandu. Unlike Coriakin, he is not at first actually invisible to the children, but rather he appears to them to be all light, resembling Dante's Beatrice. As Lewis describes him, the figure seen approaching Lucy "carried no light but seemed to come from it. As it came nearer, Lucy saw that it was like an old man. His silver beard came down to his bare feet in front and his silver hair hung down to his heels behind and his robe appeared to be made from the fleece of silver sheep." (Ibid., p. 179) Ramandu explains his descent to the amazed children, and Edmund sums up their astonishment by explaining, "Golly, a retired star." (Ibid.)

Like Coriakin, Ramandu has virtually no need for food or drink although he keeps a magically renewed banquet table for his guests. For his own ethereal part, he is sustained on a level beyond the merely physical. He even lives backward in time, daily growing younger. "Every morning a bird brings me a fireberry from the Valleys of the Sun, and each fireberry takes away a little of my age. And when I have become as young as the child that was born yesterday, then I shall take my rising again (for we are at earth's eastern rim) and once more tread the great dance." (Ibid., p. 180) The magic firebrand also associates him with the sun. Immortality is characteristic of the archetype of Spirit, and the device of living backward in time is one that T.H. White also used for his portrayal of Merlin in his Arthurian narrative. *The Once and Future King*. Furthermore, the children see another bird fly to Ramandu and place a live coal in his mouth. The symbolism of fire and bird combine to make Ramandu one of the most complex of all Lewis' Wise Old Man figures. Fire is an image of energy on the plane of spiritual strength, and the fire of the fire-air axis is also linked with purification and regeneration. In Christian symbolism, fire is associated with the advent of the Holy Spirit and the Voice of God.<sup>11</sup> Birds are also traditionally associated with soul and Spirit. In medieval iconography souls in Paradise are pictured with wings, and the soul itself is depicted as a bird awaiting freedom from the cage of the body. And in many myths flocks of birds have supernatural powers and individual birds whisper valuable advice to the hero in times of adversity.<sup>12</sup> Ramandu as star combines the images of fire and bird.

Spirit in the Narnian Chronicles is not always personified as a Wise Old Man but also unusual and appealing in the form of a theriomorphic guide. One of the most unusual and appealing images is Puddleglum, the marshwiggle, a central character in *The Silver*

*Chair.* Puddleglum is chosen as guide to accompany the protagonists, Jill and Eustace, on their quest for the lost Prince Rilian. At first, the two children are put off by his quite unspiritual appearance; "a long thin face with rather sunken cheeks, a tightly shut mouth, a sharp nose and no beard. It was wearing a high pointed hat like a steeple, with an enormously wide flat brim. The hair, if it could be called hair, which hung over its large ears was greeny-grey, and each lock was flat rather than round, so that they were like tiny reeds."<sup>13</sup> The marshwiggle's expression is described as solemn, so that "you could see at once that it took a serious view of life." (ibid.) His complexion is muddy, "the fingers of his hands were webbed like a frog's, and so were his feet which dangled in the muddy water. He was dressed in earth-colored clothes that hung loose about him." (ibid.)

In this book, which focuses on the conflict between appearance and reality, it is fitting that the spiritual guide be such an earthly looking figure, even as the ugly witch appears to be a stunningly beautiful lady dressed in green garments. The green witch herself immediately recognizes Puddleglum's qualities when she encounters his tramping through the waste lands of the north with Jill and Eustace. When he cautiously refuses to answer her prying query about the nature of their mission, she replies to the children, "You have a wise, solemn guide with you." (ibid., p. 76)

Puddleglum's insight, caution, prudence, and tenacity save the children from danger and death several times throughout the narrative. He notices the all important signs, which Aslan has counseled them to look for but which the children in their haste to spend a comfortable night at the castle of Harfang overlook. He is reluctant to stay at Harfang at all, but is overruled by his patient young charges. With his help they are able to escape from the giants at Harfang whence they proceed to the underground kingdom. In that dark realm Puddleglum stoutly maintains, "There are no accidents. Our guide is Aslan. (ibid., p. 134) And when the witch tries to persuade all of them that there is no Narnia, no overworld, no sun, and no Aslan, only Puddleglum can resist her potent mixture of subtle language, seductive music, and soporific incense burning in the fireplace. To thwart her spell, he commits an act of startling courage. He stamps out the fire with his bare feet, thus clearing the air of some of the powerful scent. Then he responds to the witch's vicious threat with an asseveration of faith:

Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things -- trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia. (ibid., p. 159)

The wisdom and resourcefulness that Spirit offers in moments of need are lodged in the likely form of

this muddy marshwiggle.

The most central theriomorphic manifestation of archetypal Spirit is Aslan himself, the god-like lion who created and rules Narnia. Aslan appears in each of the Narnia Chronicles in a wide range of roles in respect to the human protagonists. When asked by Shasta, in *The Horse and His Boy*, "Who are you?" he identifies himself in the scriptural tradition of the godly "I am." Since the several meetings of Shasta with Aslan serve to illustrate the many-faceted relationship between the great lion and all of his subjects, these examples will serve as a paradigm of his nature throughout the Chronicles. The youthful Shasta has several encounters with that he presumes to be several different lions. All of these encounters have been terrifying to him. As he laments his misfortunes to the mysterious Voice in the dark, he learns that there has been only one lion, and the Voice belongs to that one lion.

I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, Aslan has been present as a spiritual force throughout Shasta's life, offering protection, advice, and inspiration. When daylight comes and Shasta sees the lion, a golden light seems to emanate from that figure at once terrible and beautiful.

Throughout the Narnian Chronicles Aslan appears in moments of need to offer the moral strength and spiritual insight needed for the occasion. The presence of the lion is an invisible force, and he breathes the power to create, to heal, to stir, and to resurrect. He breathes life into the creatures turned into stone by the white witch, he comforts the weeping Lucy, he dies for the offending Edmund, and he romps with the joyous creatures following Bacchus. He is Spirit in its differing manifestations.

There are, then, several positive images of Spirit in the Narnian Chronicles, ranging from the anthropomorphic to the theriomorphic and including magicians, retired stars, and a professor as well as a lion and a marshwiggle. There are negative images as well, however, who proffer bad advice, who distort the truth and who abandon the honest seeker to his own weak devices. The principal negative Wise Old Man is Uncle Andrew, whose experiments in magic first propel the boy Digory to the Wood between the Worlds whence he begins the adventures that culminate in the creation of Narnia. Uncle Andrew is capable of cruelty -- he permits a guinea pig to explode, and of callous indifference -- he is willing to leave Digory's friend Polly stranded in a strange world. But although negative, he is too inept to warrant a strong adjective like demonic or even evil. A petty, vain man, although prompted by selfish motives, he is too concerned with his own health to take the risks requisite for a really demonic wizard. He is essentially a comic figure, and on creation day in Narnia he finds himself planted as a tree by some innocent talking animals who want to make a pet of him.

Much more dangerous than Uncle Andrew is the ape, Shift, in *The Last Battle*. Shift is a serious perversion of the Wise Old Man archetype. As he acquires political power by exploiting the innocent donkey, Puzzle, he tries to convince his reluctant followers that he is really a man, not an ape. To the trusting, naive Puzzle, he is "clever." The relationship of corrupt guide and innocent follower is obviously an ironic inversion of the Caspian-Cornelius and the Monopod-Coriakin association. When Shift's scope of influence moves beyond that of the simple donkey, he demonstrates his new role by donning garish attire. Lewis shows him decked out in flashy clothing -- a scarlet jacket and jeweled slippers which do not fit because they are worn on the ape's hand-shaped hind feet. Whereas the positive manifestation of Spirit becomes more ethereal with access of power, the negative embodiment of Shift turns toward material ornamentation Ramandu and Coriakin, in contrast, live on bread and wine and go barefoot. Shift's ugly plot to pass off Puzzle as a fake Aslan is unfortunately successful for a time and contributes to the downfall of Narnia.<sup>15</sup>

Almost as various as the archetypal images of Spirit in the Narnia series are those that occur in Lewis' space trilogy. These three narratives take place on three separate planets: Malacandra (Mars), Perelandra (Venus), and Thulcandra (Earth), the "silent planet." Spirit exists in each of these settings and Lewis' exploration of the concept is subtle and imaginative. Dr. Elwin Ransom, hero of the trilogy, travels to the planet Malacandra in *Out of the Silent Planet*. There he encounters four strange new species, none of them anything like the human race except in their possession of the rational faculty. The hrossa, furry black creatures who resemble seals, are poets and musicians, with gentle manners and deep personal feelings. The gnome-like pfifftriggi work with their hands, creating things both useful and ornamental out of a variety of natural materials. The Seroni are mysterious elongated figures who are strong on reason and intellect. These three separate races are associated with three of the four different medieval elements as well as with three facets of human nature. The emotional hrossa are close to the sea, the physical pfifftriggi are associated with the earth, and the intellectual seroni live high in the mountains where the air is rarefied.

The fourth species are eldila. They represent the spiritual dimension of the Malacandrian world, and their element is fire. Lacking physical mass, the eldila can go through solid walls and rocks. They are perceptible to human senses only as light in movement. Light is, in fact, to them what blood is to other creatures. Lewis' description of their appearance is in terms of light. Ransom feels "as if lightning were near him" and he detects "the merest whisper of light."<sup>16</sup> The chief eldil who rules the planet is called the Oyarsa, a word that, Lewis explains in the last chapter, comes from the twelfth century writings of Bernardus Silvestris. This medieval Platonist identifies the Oyarsa as the tutelary spirit of a planet. As is evidenced later in the space series, every planet has its own Oyarsa, and the one on Malacandra is depicted as a "winged wavy figure." (Ibid., p. 110-111)

As creatures of Spirit, associated with flame and light, and able to pass through solids without difficulty, the eldila also have the unique ability to "unbody" a person who has died. Before the astonished eyes of Ransom and his fellow travelers from earth, the body of the hrossa who has died from a gun

wound totally disappears from the funeral bier, along with two other corpses. "Ransom closed his eyes to protect them from a blinding light and felt something like a very strong wind blowing in his face, for a fraction of a second. Then all was calm again, and the three biers were empty." (Ibid., p. 132) Spirit is here imagined as both wind and light.

Perhaps Ransom's most clearly delineated perception of eldlic presence occurs during one of his solitary walks on the planet:

In the most abstract terms it might be summed up by saying that the surface of the island was subject to tiny variations of light and shade which no change in the sky accounted for. If the air had not been calm and the ground weed too short and firm to move in the wind, he would have said that a faint breeze was playing with it, and working such slight alterations in the shading as it does in a corn-field on the Earth. Like the silvery noises in the air, these footsteps of light were shy of observation. Where he looked hardest they were least to be seen: on the edges of his field of vision they came crowding as though a complex arrangement of them were there in progress. To attend to any one of them was to make it visible, and the minute brightness seemed often to have just left the spot where his eyes fell. He had no doubt that he was "seeing" -- as much as he ever would see -- the eldila. (Ibid., p. 109.)

The eldila are for Lewis the exemplar of pure Spirit. Allied to fire and to wind, they are perceived as light in movement. Whereas several other archetypal images of Spirit are embodied as specific animals or people, in the case of the eldila the Spirit is depicted in its own unalloyed transcendental nature.<sup>17</sup>

In *Perelandra*, the sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet*, the main embodiment of spirit is negative -- an evil human. This villainous figure starts out as the same scientist, Weston, who kidnapped Ransom for his spaceship journey to Malacandra in the first work of the trilogy. In this volume Weston has traveled independently to the young unsettled planet of Perelandra for the purpose of corrupting the newly created king and queen. The two men ultimately battle to the end over the fate of this future mother of a new race who will populate the world, the Green Lady whose innocence Weston is determined to destroy. In the progress of the battle, which at first is waged with words and will power but which eventually becomes a matter of blows, Weston loses his humanity altogether and becomes the vehicle of a diabolic Spirit, which Ransom subsequently calls the Un-Man. Ransom is filled with horror to realize that the face with "an expressionless mouth and unwinning eyes" <sup>18</sup> is no longer human. Then comes the "conviction that this in fact, was not a man: that Weston's body was kept, walking and undecaying, in Perelandra by some wholly different kind of life, and that Weston himself was gone." (Ibid.) The twisted face, the eerie voice, are in Weston's body, but are not Weston. Ransom recognizes this un-man as a formidable enemy. "It is a spirit, and you are only a man," (Ibid., p. 204.) His inner voice warns. And as Spirit, this "something which was and was not Weston" (Ibid., p. 106) is tireless and seemingly indestructible. When it suddenly speaks Aramaic from the first century, it is as if it had

always been in existence and perhaps always will be. Ransom is actually able to kill the Un-Man -- although he needs to kill him twice -- and he even erects a respectful monument to the body of Weston, once a physicist of repute on earth before his occupation by an evil Spirit on Perelandra.

Several images of Spirit appear in the third volume of the trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, both a longer and a much more complex novel than either of its predecessors. The plot of this book concerns the climactic struggle between the forces of good and evil on this planet. The evil forces are organized into a corrupt technological society in Britain, with the ironic acronym N.I.C.E., while the good try heroically to maintain the spiritual values of Logres, the Arthurian idealized image of what Britain should become. Once again Lewis uses both anthropomorphic and theriomorphic images, in both positive and negative manifestations.

The central negative image of the Wise Old Man is the Deputy Director of N.I.C.E., the corrupt scientific group. An aged authority named Wither, he is the person to whom all the unfortunate members of his murky Institute look for leadership and inspiration. Wither is also a man evil in soul. He is not a crude animalistic figure like the Un-man but rather he is an ethereal type, who drifts about mysteriously, "creaking and humming" with a "vaguely parental expression on his face."<sup>18</sup> His words are vague and slippery, and his physical presence somewhat eerie. On at least one occasion the young protagonist Mark finds him to be in two locations at once. And clearly he never sleeps. It is as if an uninhabited body floated about on earth, while the soul has gone beyond. Lewis' description of him suggests that this may be literally the case.

Bad men, while still in the body, still crawling on this little globe, would enter that state which, heretofore, they had entered only after death, would have the diuturnity and power of evil spirits. (Ibid., p. 204.)

It is what Dante sardonically called the privilege of Ptolema, the "privilege" of early damnation in hell while the body still functions on earth.<sup>19</sup>

The other ironic image of Spirit is the grotesque head of Alecton, an obscene object maintained by an elaborate system of tubes, wires, and pumps. The vulgar physical head, severed from the body of an executed murderer, is a mockery of the idea of Spirit and the scene in which its worshippers genuflect and chant is grimly satirical. The ultimate fate of the detached head is one of the nicest ironies of the book, however. The lovable bear, Mr. Bultitude, is stirred by the wizard Merlin to consume the flogging thing as a nice salty, sticky repast. What more fitting end for an anti-Spirit than to be breakfast for a bear!

The two positive manifestations of Spirit in *That Hideous Strength* are Ransom and Merlin, both very significant and central characters. Ransom is indeed the central character in the trilogy, the ordinary man -- the Pedestrian -- who is called upon to fulfill the awesome role of savior, first to an innocent unfallen world, Perelandra, then to our own all too fallen world, currently in the malignant grip of N.I.C.E. Ransom becomes a numerous figure in *That Hideous Strength*, taking on an Arthurian as well as a Biblical role. He is now not only the Christ figure to "ransom" mankind but also the Pendragon who rules over the

spiritual kingdom of Logres. He is the Fisher-King, a mysterious personage who does not age, who lives on bread and wine, and who emanates a palpable spirituality. He reminds Jane, one of the main characters, of both Solomon and Arthur, and to her his voice sounds of "sunlight and gold." Lewis describes Ransom as "a bright solar blend of king and lover and magician." The word "king" is itself rich in connotation -- "with all linked association of battle, marriage, priesthood, mercy, and power." (*That Hideous Strength*, p. 143.) Ransom is no longer an ordinary man: the Pedestrian has become transfigured. By the end of the novel, he has even moved beyond the physical realm entirely. His mission at St. Anne's accomplished, he waits to be taken back to Perelandra.

In spite of Ransom's own spiritual quality, however, he needs the aid of a Wise Old Man of even greater depth, a being more elemental and ancient than himself. Even a king and a god needs a magician. Ransom needs no less than the ultimate wizard, Merlin himself, whom Lewis depicts as a being possessing eldritch energy from Atlantean times. The body of Merlin has lain uncorrupted under Bragdon Wood for 1500, "side-tracked" out of our one-dimensional time for centuries. When he is roused from his profound sleep, he appears before the company of St. Anne's as a wild Celtic giant, learned in Latin but uncouth in manner. Speaking medieval Latin, his voice resounds "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." (Ibid., p. 272.) As Dimble describes him: "He is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our modern point of view, confused. For him every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact.... His magic worked in with the spiritual qualities of Nature, loving and reverencing then and knowing them from within." (Ibid., p. 286)

Lewis carefully distinguishes Merlin's magic from the magic of the Renaissance or of a more modern times. His is not *goetia*, the art of Paracelsus, Agrippa, and Bacon, a forbidden art which led to the losing of one's soul. Merlin's is an "older Art", which is a "different proposition." Lewis explains elsewhere that he regards Renaissance magic and science as one, developing from the same motives and using the same techniques.<sup>21</sup> Lewis, admittedly a "dinosaur" in the twentieth century, rejects both this kind of magic and science as one, as potentially dangerous to the welfare of the spiritual nature of man.<sup>22</sup> What Dimble calls the "modern point of view" about the confusion of matter and spirit is, for Lewis, quite mistaken, for what seems to be confusion is inherent in the medieval model of the world, a world in which matter and spirit are one.<sup>23</sup>

Lewis' last work of fiction, *Till We Have Faces*, is quite different in tone and content from the earlier works of fantasy. This novel is essentially a retelling of the classic myth of Cupid and Psyche from the viewpoint of Psyche's older sister, Orual, who is as ugly as Psyche is beautiful. As Psyche manifests the qualities of personal grace and gentleness, so Orual reveals herself to be an unpleasant, aggressive individual, resembling the formidable goddess Ungit in behavior as well as looks. It is Psyche, as befits her name, who bodies forth the qualities of soul or Spirit, and Orual who is earthbound in her self-centered physicality. Psyche can see the god of the West Wind who rescues her from the sacrificial tree, and she sees the magnificent gold and amber palace given her by the god of the Grey Mountain. Orual is unable

either to see or to comprehend the godlike nature of Psyche's mysterious husband. When at last she becomes able to see the god, she becomes like Psyche, but this happens only at the end of the book. "The air was growing brighter and brighter about us; as if something had set it on fire. Each breath I drew let into me new terror, joy, overpowering sweetness. I was pierced through and through with the arrows of it. I was being unmade. I was no one."<sup>24</sup> So Orual describes her realization of the presence of Spirit. On one level, at least, the entire book concerns Orual's gradually developing awareness of the nature of Spirit. For most of her life she acts out the destructive role of Ungit, devourer of those who love her, but eventually she learns to recognize spiritual reality.

*The Great Divorce* is Lewis' one phantasy set in the afterlife. The author is the narrator and protagonist in this dream vision of the shadowy world awaiting the newly dead between Heaven and Hell. For those who will be saved, it is the Valley of the Shadow of Life; for the damned, the Valley of the Shadow of Death. In the vision Lewis encounters two kinds of figures, Ghosts and Spirits. The newly dead are all referred to as Ghosts once the narrator realizes that they are no longer living people. The Spirits are the angelic presences who have come to the Valley to try to educate the Ghosts concerning the reality of Heaven. The Ghosts are transparent: "man-shaped stains on the brightness of that air."<sup>25</sup> The grass, hard as diamonds in its reality, does not bend under their phantom feet. In contrast, the Spirits are not transparent but solid. Lewis refers to them both as Solid and Bright. One is described as "naked and blindingly White." (Ibid., p. 38) In keeping with their phantom nature, the Ghosts can disappear entirely. In one striking episode, an irate Ghost "which had towered up like a dying candleflame snapped suddenly. A sour, dry smell lingered in the air for a moment and then there was no ghost to be seen." (Ibid., p. 89.) The Spirits, emblems of reality, are also often described in terms of light and flame, but theirs is the glow of eternity. It is not until near the end of the book that Lewis realizes that the Spirits are Angels, and at the moment of his discovery he refers to them as both "flaming" and "burning." (Ibid., p. 99.) The image is drawn from medieval angelology.

Lewis' guide in his dream vision is George MacDonald, the phantasiast in whose works he had discovered while only a boy a magical union of the qualities of imagination and holiness. MacDonald explains much to Lewis about the nature of the shadowy place and its occupants. He points out, for instance, that for those who choose to remain it will have been Hell from the beginning, while for those who choose to move on up the mountain to salvation, it will have been Heaven all along. MacDonald also explains the difference between the spiritual and the physical body. The body must die in order to be reborn a Spirit. "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." (Ibid., p. 104) Like the discovery of the "real" Narnia in the concluding chapter of *The Last Battle*, the reality of the spiritual body renders the merely physical ephemeral and illusory. Ultimately only Spirit is real.

MacDonald is himself an example of the Wise Old Man figure. Guide and mentor, he serves both to explain and inspire. His person is charged with numinosity, and Lewis' description of him recalls that of Ransom and Ramandu: "On one of the rocks sat a very tall man, almost a giant, with a flowing beard. I had not yet looked one of the Solid People in the face.

Now, when I did so, I discovered that one sees them with a kind of double vision. Here was an enthroned and shining god, whose ageless spirit weighed upon mine like a burden of solid gold; and yet, at the very same moment, there was an old weather-beaten man, one who might have been a shepherd — such a man as tourists think simple because he is honest, and neighbors think "deep" for the same reason. His eyes had the far-seeking look of one who has lived long in open, solitary places; and somehow I divined the network of wrinkles which must have surrounded them before re-birth had washed him in immortality." (Ibid., pp. 64-5.) Viewed in his natural body MacDonald is a Wise Old Man, a concrete, archetypal image of Spirit. Reborn in a spiritual body, he is Spirit itself, radiating pure light.<sup>26</sup>

In all of his works of fiction, then, Lewis explores the phenomenology of Spirit. In his seven Narnia Chronicles, the space trilogy, *Till We Have Faces*, and *The Great Divorce*, he creates a series of numinous figures through whom Spirit manifests itself. Although these fictive images are artistically differentiated, taking on an impressive variety of forms, they all share in the same basic configuration of meaning. They all represent "the relatively supernatural element which is given to every man at his creation — the rational element."

Many are variants of the traditional mythic wizard. For these Lewis uses the popular medieval figure of Merlin as model. These also most closely reflect what Jung delineates as the archetype of Spirit as Wise Old Man. Many others assume animal form, for which Lewis turns to medieval iconography, based on an elaborate scheme of symbolism including many examples from the animal world. Many more are imagined species. Here Lewis relies on his own highly imaginative interpretation of the higher, suprahuman orders in the medieval chain of being. For all of these positive manifestations of Spirit the prevailing metaphor is light, ranging from the solar implications of the lion and of the life-renewing fireberry to the bright but totally disembodied eidola.

But Spirit can become perverted, the rational made irrational, the hierarchy of values inverted. The severe head of the criminal Alcasan as object of worship is a grotesquely vivid example. Other instances include the witch Jadis, whose utterance of the Deplorable Word destroys a world, and the scientist Weston, whose perverted rationality completely dehumanizes him. At times the conflict of appearance and reality may obscure an inversion in either direction. On the one hand, Shift the ape in human garb and Puzzle the donkey in a lionskin take on the misleading appearance of being informed by Spirit, while on the other, muddy, swampy, gaunt Puddleglum, who looks unspiritual, turns out to have the noblest endowment of Spirit of all, the only one who can defend the reality of the sun deep underground where the sun never shines.

Underlying all of these characters is the profound conflict between mere matter and the divine gift of Spirit which alone can enlighten matter. All are projections of that gift of Spirit to man "at his creation." For Lewis as a dedicated Christian and philosophical Realist, the conflict is of supreme importance, as it had been in the Middle Ages when it generated both theological debate and popular art and literature. Lewis therefore turns to medieval writers, including Dante, Bernardus Sylvesteris, and the romancers, as well as to the medieval model, for literal "inspiration."



## Notes

- 1 While most critics recognize the medieval influence on Lewis' fiction in a general way, very few have investigated any particular dimension of it. Most of the critical writing about Lewis has been theologically oriented, with stress on the Christian meaning and background. Sister Mary Josephine Beattie's dissertation *The Humane Medievalist: A Study of C.S. Lewis' Criticism of Medieval Literature* (University of Pittsburgh, 1967) is devoted to his criticism but also includes one chapter on his use of medieval romance themes in his fiction. William D. Norwood's dissertation *The Neo-Medieval Novels of C.S. Lewis* (University of Texas at Austin, 1965), parts of which have been published as articles, is actually primarily concerned with the Christian experience in Lewis' fiction. He applies the four levels of medieval interpretation to facets of Christian faith expressed in the novels. Walter Hooper's "Past Watchful Dragons: The Fairy Tales of C.S. Lewis" concentrates on the Narnia Chronicles, with one section devoted to hierarchy in Narnia. The essay appears in Charles Hutter, ed., *Imagination and the Spirit: Essays in Literature and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971). The word "Spirit" in the title of this work refers directly to religious faith. None of the essays included deals with medievalism. More recent full-length studies of Lewis, books by Evan Gibson, Chad Walsh, Margaret Hannay, Thomas Howard, and Donald Glover, all focus primarily on the Christian meaning. Glover is also concerned with reader response. Peter O. Schakel's *The Longing for Form* (Kent State University Press, 1977) is an important collection of essays on the fiction of Lewis, but none is directly concerned with medievalism.
- 2 For the best treatment of Arthurian themes in Lewis see Charles Moorman, *Arthurian Tryptich: Mythic Materials in Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis and T.S. Eliot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1960).
- 3 See Appendix I to *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1948).
- 4 For example, Acts 2:1-4 where the Holy Spirit is described as coming from the sky with a sound like a violent blast of wind.
- 5 C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen Press, 1959), p. 210.
- 6 For a survey of Merlin figures in modern fantasy fiction, see my article "Merlin Redivivus: The Celtic Wizard in Modern Literature," *Centennial Review* 22 (1978), 164-178.
- 7 Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, p. 45.
- 8 Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, p. 41.
- 9 Cf. the antagonism between the wizard Prospero and the earthly Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.
- 10 Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, p. 137.
- 11 The association of Spirit with the symbolism of fire and flames is both ancient and widespread. J.C. Cooper offers a useful summary in his *Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978): "Fire manifested as flame symbolizes spiritual power and forces, transcendence and illumination, and is a manifestation of divinity or of the soul, the pneuma, the breath of life; it is also inspiration and enlightenment. A flame resting on the head, or surrounding it, like the nimbus, represents divine power, potency of soul or genius, the head being regarded as the seat of the life-soul. A flame leaves the body at death."

- (p. 66)
- 12 Birds often accompany the mythic hero on his quest, giving him advice and aid. Christian art traditionally depicts the soul as winged, but the bird as symbol of the soul is universal.
- 13 Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, p. 59.
- 14 Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, pp. 138-139.
- 15 Interestingly, in Jung's discussion of a hylozoistic conception of Spirit he mentions that the word "soul" is cognate with the Greek word meaning "quick-moving, changeable of hue, shifting," hence also has the meaning of "wily" or "shifty."
- 16 Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 119.
- 17 A recent critic argues that Lewis' eldila are influenced by the church fathers' description of the nature of angels and the role in God's plan. See John Willis, "The Eldila in the Space Trilogy," *CSL*, 11 (1980), 1-5.
- 18 Lewis, *Perelandra*, p. 110.
- 19 Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, p. 127.
- 20 Cf. Dante, *Hell*, trans., Dorothy Sayers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949), Canto XXXIII, ll. 121-32. "How now," said I, "art already dead?" And in reply: "Nay, how my body fares In the upper world I do not know," he said. "Such privilege this Ptolmaea bears That oft the soul falls down here ere the day When Atropos compels it with her shears."
- 21 Lewis regards Renaissance magic and science as essentially one and the same. See *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 87: "The serious magical endeavor and the serious scientific endeavor are twins: one was sickly and died, the other strong and thrived. But they were twins. They were born of the same impulse."
- 22 As a self-proclaimed "dinosaur" Lewis would probably have been astonished -- and dismayed -- at the large number of C.S. Lewis "clubs" and "societies" which have come into being recently, particularly in the United States.
- 23 See Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).
- 24 Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, p. 307.
- 25 Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, p. 27.
- 26 Cf. Dante, *Paradise*, trans., Barbara Reynolds and Dorothy Sayers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), Canto XXX, ll. 46-51: As lightning startles vision from the eyes, So robbing them of their capacity Objects appear too strong to visualize. So now a living light encompass me; In soul so luminous I was enrapt That naught, swathed in such glory, could I see.

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