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### The Wonder of Passage, The Making of Gold: Alchemy and Initiation in *Out of the Silent Planet*

#### Abstract

Sees *Out of the Silent Planet* as a narrative of Ransom's spiritual development, using the imagery of shamanic initiation, alchemy, and medieval hermeticism. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, though not in later books in the series, Ransom's initiation and function are almost exclusively masculine.

#### Additional Keywords

Alchemical symbolism in *Out of the Silent Planet*; Initiation in *Out of the Silent Planet*; Jungian analysis of *Out of the Silent Planet*; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Ransom; Lewis, C.S. *Out of the Silent Planet*; Lewis, C.S. *Out of the Silent Planet*—Symbolism; Shamanic initiation in *Out of the Silent Planet*

*The Wonder of Passage, The Making of Gold*  
Alchemy and Initiation in Out of the Silent Planet  
John Hollwitz

like circle of artists today, gnostics considered original creative invention to be the mark of anyone who becomes spiritually alive. Each one, like students of a painter or writer, expected to express his own vision. The teacher's role was to guide and correct, not to teach. Whoever merely repeated his teacher's words was considered immature. Bishop Irenaeus [c. 180 A.D.] complains that . . . "they boast that they are the discoverers . . . inventors of this kind of imaginary wisdom and accounts of existence, and of other things mythical poetry. On this basis, like artists, they express their own insight--their own gnostic--by creating new myths, poems, rituals, and accounts of Christ, revelations, and accounts of their visions."

Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*

One cannot dismiss all the alchemists as insane. It seems to me more advisable to examine the motives that led a cleric of all people, to postulate a living revelation outside his credo, if the lapis were nothing but gold the alchemist would have been wealthy folk; if it were the panacea they would have had a remedy for all sickness; if it were the elixir they could have lived a thousand years or more. But all this would not oblige them to make religious statements about it.

C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*

Besides his work as a prominent Christian apologist, C. S. Lewis helped define a style of narrative which combined imagination and religion. Following George MacDonald and the anonymous tellers of fairy tales, and in the company of Charles Williams and J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis explored the genre that MacDonald had called "the fantastic imagination." Lewis was not a mythopoeist, and he was not a mythopoeist in the sense of J. R. R. Tolkien, and he made an interesting claim about its aesthetics. He insisted that mythopoeisis was immune to customary standards of literary excellence.

In his introduction to MacDonald's *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, Lewis distinguished between a fiction which is merely literary and one which partakes of myth. The distinction involves a sense of wonder, for the peculiar imagination of mythopoeia differs, somehow, from the customary mentation of daily consciousness. Lewis further distinguished between the formalities of conventional narrative and the unique aesthetic of mythopoeia: "To be understood at all, [a story] must be a series of events; but it must be understood that this series—the plot, as we call it—is only really a net whereby to catch something else. The real theme may be, and perhaps usually is, something that has no sequence in it, something more than a process and much more like a static quality, a transcendent—what Lewis referred was numinosity, transcendence—what he explicitly called 'soul': 'In poetry the words are the body and the 'theme' or 'content' is the soul. But in myth the imagined events are the body and something inexpressible is the soul: the words, or mime, or film, or pictorial series are not even

clothes--they are not much more than a telephone" ("Introduction" to MacDonald, p. 10).

Critics have examined Lewis' mythopoeic fiction from various literary, theological, and philosophical perspectives. His mythopoeic opus has been called allegorical, apologetic, eschatological, moral, didactic, ideological, fantastic. But relatively little of the criticism focuses upon the challenge that Lewis himself raised for readers of such literature: what kind of criticism is appropriate to a narrative genre which does not conform to customary critical standards? Can we avoid mythopoeic thinking in criticism without losing sight of the very methodological which sidesteps the ideational or stylistic hardware of this fiction—the "net," as Lewis called it—and offers another path of entry to the numinous experience at the core of such narrative?

The Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung suggested a critical heuristic which might provide such entry. Jung was not primarily concerned with literary analysis, but he was sensitive to the spiritual aspects of narrative, and he devised a method of cross-cultural study which served his purposes outside the practice of psychotherapy. Like Lewis, Jung claimed that stories emerge from deep within the psyche, from an intrapersonal core of insight. In an essay on fairy tales he explicitly identified this source as the "spiritual experience." Like Lewis, he believed that this spiritual source was disposed to unique narrative expressions; like Lewis, too, Jung was unconcerned with whether such narratives conformed to accepted literary standards.

Jung borrowed the technique of amplification from linguistic analysis to follow images and to gain access to their numinous meaning. Amplification is not psychodiagnostics. It is a logical technique of synthesis, a comparison between a set of symbolic products and their analogues in religious, artistic, or personal history. Dreams, stories, myths, even iconography can be studied by multiplying such comparisons. Jung used amplification as an alternative to reductive explanations in which an artistic product or a dream might be causally explained: he objected to "the purely personalistic attitude of medical psychology" on the grounds that it narrowed symbols to a specific meaning when, in fact, their impact is one of broadening and enriching. He found such reductions "misleading, limiting, inaccurate, and, perhaps, a little bit like amplification, which avoids the symbol to a meaning. It is rather a device for deepening the impact of a symbol, for expanding our sensitivities to its numinous origins. He gave an example of how his method might work:

What I do is this. I adopt the method of the philologist, which is far from being free association, and apply a logical principle which is called amplification. It is simply that of seeking the parallels. For instance, in the case of a very rare word which you have never come across before.

you try to find parallel text passages, parallel applications perhaps, where that word also occurs, and then you try to put the formula you have established from the knowledge of other texts into the new text. If you make the new text a readable whole, you say, 'Now we can read it.'

The same technique will work in the study of visual images, rituals, and narrative symbols.

When the technique is applied to Lewis' space trilogy, the novels resonate with mythological motifs which are varied but surprisingly consistent, both within the narratives themselves and within his other writings. *Out of the Silent Planet*, the first novel of the trilogy, introduces many such motifs; Lewis returns to them, elaborates them, and resolves them in *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength*. The same images appear in his apologetics, his journals, and his correspondence. An amplificatory reading of this first novel—an attempt to reconstruct, in part, its implicit references—suggests a useful way to apprehend the ineffable nature of mythopoetic narratives, and perhaps to locate these narratives in Lewis' thinking as a whole.

In *The Literary Legacy of C. S. Lewis*, Chad Walsh notes Lewis' use of rebirth imagery in *Out of the Silent Planet*. Walsh identifies this imagery as an "archetype" which defines Ransom's early character development.<sup>8</sup> Walsh is correct, but he fails to pursue this important insight to the conclusion that the novel warrants. An amplification of the novel's imagery reveals that Lewis focuses upon three motifs throughout the story. The first and most important is the motif of rebirth which Walsh identified, though Elwin Ransom's transformation in the novel is a particular kind of rebirth: it is specifically a shamanic initiation, a rebirth into an order of leadership and of a specifically masculine encounter with the divine. Within this initiatory context, the novel contains a number of subtle references to the rites and symbols of medieval mysticism, especially of alchemy, represented as a kind of developmental process with profound religious and initiatory overtones. Finally, Lewis combined the shamanic and alchemical symbolism with familiar mythological motifs which help to specify his intentions for Ransom, and which presage Ransom's accomplishments in the remaining novels of the trilogy.

The rites of initiation have been well described by anthropologists like Mircea Eliade, who distinguished several categories of initiatory ordeals. The first consists of obligatory rites within a cultural group, such as those which attend an individual's transition into adulthood or perhaps from one stage of adulthood to another. But there are two others: one of them is initiation into a secret society, exclusive by sex, vocation, or both. Another is the initiation of the shaman.<sup>9</sup> The three types of initiation are structurally similar, but shamanic passage is distinguished by its spiritual intensity. It commits the candidate to a special relationship with the sacred. The shaman is the emissary to the gods, the designated mediator between man and the divine. Eliade considers the distinguishing feature of a shamanic initiation to be its requirement of a special journey, one of which none other is capable, to the world of the spirits. The journey is undertaken in a condition of ecstasy; it may be unwillingly endured; and it can have three components:

one or more preparatory visions, sometimes accompanied by physical illness; the journey itself, imaged as a literal movement; and a period of instruction in the ways of the spirits, which completes the transformation and qualifies the candidate as a healer and ambassador to the spirits.<sup>10</sup>

Ransom's experience in *Out of the Silent Planet* contains each of these features. The novel divides into three unequal movements which correspond to the stages of initiation. The first includes his abduction and prescient vision; the second describes the space flight itself; the third covers his experiences on the planet itself, where he discovers a new identity, learns the ways of heavens, and attains a special relationship with the supernatural.

The story begins in an uncanny atmosphere laden with illusion, deception, and danger. A thunderstorm has just subsided. Daylight is failing; the distinctions of the waking world are blurred. We accompany a traveller (anonymously called "the Pedestrian"<sup>11</sup>) who has just been denied access to an inn on whose owner (no longer present) he had depended for hospitality. On behalf of a distraught woman, and partly in search of hospice for himself, he forces entry to the Rise, where he meets Weston and Devine, the story's villains. Ransom senses that they are involved in some faintly criminal activity. By his chance intervention, he interrupts a young man's abduction and unknowingly causes his own, instead—the first of many puns in the trilogy on the name 'Ransom.'

These early events have two purposes. They associate the novel's events with transformation, and they establish that the world through which Ransom wanders is peculiarly masculine in nature. The landscape of the story suggests several features which were classically associated with the Greek god Hermes, who was both the patron of wanderers and a god of night.<sup>12</sup> Hermes was also a god of deception, a guide who paradoxically leads astray.<sup>13</sup> So it is with Ransom: wandering in one direction, he inadvertently meets Weston and Devine; he is summarily dispatched to Mars; and he ultimately learns, to his surprise, that these accidental events had been fore-ordained by a power greater than any of them.

This first episode includes other resonances of the Hermes mythologem. Hermes was a god of chance, considered responsible for fortuitous happenstance and windfalls. Sometimes the 'windfall' (as Ransom becomes, for Weston and Devine) is a result of robbery. In fact, all those who share in the early coincidences of *Silent Planet* are figurative or actual thieves. Ransom is the only honest man among the three, and even he turns into a thief. Lewis suggests that he does something faintly criminal when he "must break into the garden if only to retrieve [his] pack" (p. 10). Weston actually calls him a thief (p. 13). But once inside, he is no longer the robber. He is suddenly the thing stolen, the windfall for Weston and Devine—another of the paradoxical ironies of the story. "His dropping in is delightfully apropos," says Devine (p. 13). This theft is reversed at the end of the novel, when Weston and Devine are themselves abducted.

Deceptions, chance, and illusion are but one aspect of the god Hermes. In the classical era the mythologem also represented masculine power. Hermes personified the creative essence of the psyche, an

essence that Kerenyi called "the mysterious abyss of the active seed." Hence the Greeks and others marked crossroads and thresholds (both sacred to Hermes) with ithyphallic monuments, 'herms,' which symbolized not a literal phallus but rather the phallos of essential creativity (Kerenyi, pp. 82-83). Ransom is brought to an awareness of this psychological and spiritual phallos through the Hermes-like misdirection and thievery in the first stage of the novel, and Lewis implies his sense of this masculinity by associating Ransom's transformation with Ares: he is transported to the masculine world of Mars.

Lewis employs detailed initiatory imagery to describe this transportation as a transformation. Here, and throughout the trilogy, the first stages of the transformation are associated with water, with an immersion in almost a baptismal-like bath, from which Ransom will emerge renewed. In archaic rites, immersion in water was equivalent to a return to the maternal womb, following a cycle of symbolic death, reformation, and rebirth, a pattern which recurs throughout religious history and may even be the fundamental symbol of spiritual transformation:

Breaking up all forms, doing away with all the past, water possesses this power of purifying, of regenerating, of giving new birth; for what is immersed in it 'dies,' and, rising again from the water, is like a child without any sin or any past, able to receive a new revelation and begin a new and real life.<sup>14</sup>

Out of the Silent Planet begins with a rainfall, the first of several that occur throughout the trilogy. The water seems to Ransom to have inundated the world (p. 7). Lewis frequently refers to immersion in the trilogy. In addition to its initiatory meanings, water becomes an important part of the trilogy's use of alchemical symbolism.

Alchemy represents in part a development of the Hermes mythologem into the Christian era, where it enjoyed a peculiar popularity and almost a para-religious status.<sup>15</sup> The alchemical equivalent to the original Hermes was a complicated and elusive spirit called Mercurius, an agent of profound transformation who, as it happened, was often associated with water and the symbolism of immersion. Occultist texts and iconography of the middle ages depicted Mercurius among other things as a bath through which human or human-like figures passed in a progress of death, decomposition, and renewal. One of the most famous of these texts, the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, coincidentally (or not) evokes crucial events in Lewis' trilogy. In the *Rosarium*, a miraculous rain of dew—a form of Mercurius—covers a decaying hermaphroditic corpse. The rain corresponded to a stage of the alchemical process called, mysteriously, the 'whitening' (*albedo*). The 'whitening' produced in turn a 'reddening.' When the transformation is complete, the corpse is revived as a union of the Red and the White, a union which the anonymous author described as the union of Mars and Venus. Lewis seems to subject his hero to a similar process. He places Ransom in a mercurial countryside, removes him through a series of hermetic events, and sends him to the planets associated with red and white—to Mars and subsequently to Venus.

Ransom's journey appropriately begins with deception, trickery, and abduction. Initiatory candidates were sometimes forcibly separated from

their old world and carried to a sacred space necessary for the rites themselves (*Eliade, Rites and Symbols*, pp. 8-9). In specifically shamanic initiations, the sacred space may be the terrain of a dream or vision, which is itself a sign of the candidate's impending ordeal. Sometimes the vision is voluntarily induced. More often, especially for shamans, the vision is involuntary, often accompanied by inexplicable illness, absent-mindedness, and "prophetic dreams and sometimes seizures" (*Rites and Symbols*, p. 35).

Compare Ransom's voyage to Mars. He has been drugged, and he receives a prophetic vision which foretells his transformation and presages important events that occur later in the trilogy. He feels ill as a result of the drug (p. 21). The vision concerns a walled garden, itself an archetypal image. In alchemy the walled garden is identified with the miraculous *lapis*, the Philosopher's Stone, another symbol of Mercurius and of the transformation which Mercurius permits.<sup>16</sup> A similar image appears elsewhere in the trilogy. Meldilorn, on Mars, is a sacred garden; in *That Hideous Strength*, Merlin (who in the middle ages was also identified with Mercurius) emerges from an enfolded wood and travels to St. Anne's, which Lewis describes as a protectively walled garden for the company of Logres.

In the vision Ransom notices a severe contrast between light and dark. In religious terms, light and dark express tension between the mundane world and the supernatural sphere of the gods and spirits. In alchemy and various mystical teachings, light and dark represent the two sides of God.<sup>17</sup> The conflict, of course, runs throughout the trilogy. Here, the light and dark are separated by a wall. Weston and Devine are determined to breach the wall, despite Ransom's protests, but the vision indicates limitations to anyone's ability to enter this world of his own volition. Though Weston and Devine succeed in forcing a door, they are seized immediately and returned to the world of light, as they are returned to earth later in the novel. But Lewis places Ransom in an interesting position relative to Weston and Devine. In the vision, he remains partially outside the wall, and later he will become the door, the conduit of the gods. Perched on the barrier, he keeps a foot (literally and figuratively) in each of the opposite worlds. This is a peculiarly shamanic position to occupy. Mexican shamans, for example, demonstrate their spiritual powers by daring feats of balance.<sup>18</sup> The vision suggests that Ransom's position is risky. He thinks, "My left leg will drop off if it gets much darker" (p. 18). In fact, bodily injuries often occurred in shamanic initiations, in which suffering and sometimes partial dismemberment can testify to a shaman's spiritual power. The leg wound that Ransom receives in *Perelandra* becomes a badge of office in *That Hideous Strength*, a symbol of his linkage between man and the spirits.

His transformation into this link begins in the second major section of the novel, the space flight, which corresponds in several details to the visionary journey of shamanic ecstasy. Eliade reports that many archaic cultures had a mythological explanation for the visionary quality of the experience. They believed that the gods have withdrawn from earth, that the *mana* which once pervaded the material world had receded. "This belief forms part of the general conception of the decadence of shamans. . . . according to this view, the 'first shamans' really flew through the

clouds on their horses and performed miracles that their present-day descendants are incapable of repeating" (*Shamanism*, p. 67). The trilogy expresses the same idea. Earth was once open to the spirits, but something happened to shut us off, to seal man within the silent planet. The calamity was the Fall, the victory of the dark Eildil. Since then, the world has been progressively desacralized, and Ransom's task is to reverse this situation.

The reversal begins with his experience of space itself, which is alive with numinosity. Ransom's response to his literal journey is presented in terms which are consistent with the novel's earlier imagery. In the Christian mystical tradition, God is imaged paradoxically as a light so intense that it is beyond human comprehension, an impenetrable darkness.<sup>19</sup> Ransom moves in outer space through extremes of light and dark (p. 31), as his vision had foretold. Lewis compares the light to a kind of primordial water, a matrix of creativity and, subsequently, of rebirth, for the divine light which pervades space is a cleansing bath. Lewis calls it "the womb of worlds" (p. 32) in which Ransom experiences a rejuvenation:

There, totally immersed in a bath of pure ethereal color and of unrelenting though unwounding brightness, stretched his full length and with eyes half closed in the strange chariot that bore them, faintly quivering, through depth after depth of tranquility far above the reach of night, he felt his body and mind daily rubbed and scoured and filled with new vitality (p. 31-32).

Walsh makes this passage the central moment of Ransom's transformation, though Walsh does not realize that this imagery is paradoxical. Ransom is in the womb of worlds, awaiting rebirth, but he is also imaged as the womb itself. Throughout the flight, Lewis describes his hero in feminine terms. Ransom assumes functions traditionally attributed to the feminine. He is, for instance, the ship's cook. The immersion in the light-filled ocean of space suggests an identification with the mother, and Lewis pictures him as a woman impregnated by the divine light. Sunlight has been associated with the masculine and with logos, but Lewis takes the association a step further: he identifies the light with gold. He calls Ransom "a second Danae" who feels "sweet influence" pouring into or even stabbing into his surrendered body" (p. 31).

According to the mythologem, Danae was the daughter of Akrisios, who had her shut up in a bronze tower (metal, like the spaceship) in an attempt to evade an unfavorable prophecy. Zeus loved Danae and visited her in the form of a shower of gold. The result of their union was Perseus. As the womb, Ransom is Perseus' mother; in the womb, he is the embryonic Perseus and also the son of the golden light, an alchemical identification to which Lewis will return at frequent intervals in the trilogy. The imagery surrounding Ransom thereby amounts to a symbolic androgyny whose purpose is suggested in both initiatory and alchemical symbolism. Initiatory candidates are often made symbolically bisexual, particularly in rites which oversee boys' transition to manhood (*Eliade, Rites and Symbols*, p. 25). Alchemy contains the same idea. The *Rosarium Philosophorum*, which focuses on the renewing bath, states that the transformation requires the merging (called the *coniunctio*) of masculine and feminine principles. But the *Rosarium*, like other texts, emphasizes that the first appearance of the symbolic androgyne is by no

means the achievement of the goal. Much work is still required. Similarly, Ransom's experience aboard the space ship is not complete: Lewis' imagery suggests that Danae's child has been conceived, though not, perhaps, brought to birth.

But some movement has occurred, and Perseus is beginning to emerge. Ransom is working in the ship's galley. He has overheard Devine's and Weston's plans to use him as a human sacrifice, and he seizes a knife for protection. In a startling passage, Lewis suggests that his new masculinity is aggressive: it is connected with Mars, the god of war, towards whose planet the three are travelling.

[Ransom] had the feeling that one sailing in the heavens, as he was doing, should not suffer abject dismay before any earthbound creature. He even reflected that the knife could pierce other flesh as well as his own. The bellicose mood was a very rare one with Ransom. Like many men of his own age, he rather underestimated than overestimated his own courage; the gap between boyhood's dreams and his actual experience of the War had been startling, and his subsequent view of his own unheroic qualities had perhaps swung too far in the opposite direction (p. 37).

The descent to the planet emphasizes that this mood is not a short-lived illusion, as Ransom fears. It is the first deliverance of a new man: "They had the experiences of a pregnant woman, but magnified almost beyond endurance" (p. 38). The birth finally occurs on Mars, in the third and longest of the novel's initiatory sections.

Ransom's deliverance begins with his escape from Weston and Devine. The escape is motivated by a complicated series of deceptions. Weston and Devine were mistaken in assuming that the Martians wanted a human sacrifice; Ransom is deceived in believing them and in mistaking the sons for wizards. This episode, like the abduction with which the story began, suggests the Hermes figure: Hermes was the patron of wizards and the mythological originator of the flesh sacrifice (Kerenyi, p. 77). Again, the deception is useful, for it gives Ransom the impetus (through terror) to flee alone into the Martian forest.

The condition of a fugitive was also associated with both Hermes and the medieval Mercurius.<sup>20</sup> In addition, fear and flight are important parts of adolescent rites of passage in archaic cultures. Often this fear is instilled through a series of deceptions, and initiations sometimes take the form of complicated practical jokes perpetrated on the candidates. Sam Gill has studied the phenomenon of ritual disillusionment in these cultures:

The enigma is darkened by the fact that the adepts of the society often go to great lengths to deceive the initiates, to set them up for the disillusionment they will suffer. Occasionally these acts of chicanery are carried out with such hilarity that the success of the deception is threatened. The whole business of religious initiation, when conducted in this way, takes on the appearance of little more than a cruel joke, a miserable hoax.<sup>21</sup>

Ransom is in a comparable position. He too has been abducted to an unknown world; he faces an ill-founded fear of physical death. Moreover, he anticipates the same fate which initiatory candidates

are often made to believe would be theirs, and which appears consistently throughout shamanic traditions, a fear of being eaten by other-worldly beings.<sup>22</sup> His experiences during the flight have a number of similarities to traditional initiatory practices. Isolation in a forest is a typical theme of these rites, as is fasting (Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 43, 129), and Lewis calls attention once again to water by emphasizing Ransom's thirst.

Ransom's situation changes abruptly on the bank of a stream. He has been in a hysterical condition, but he discovers reserves of courage which surprise him. Lewis suggests the emergence of a second personality, a 'new' Ransom coexisting with the 'old' Ransom (p. 47), and he particularly notes Ransom's achievement of a new state of masculinity--the same change of status that dominates archaic initiations. The new man appears after Ransom's first nightfall on the strangely masculine world of Mars: "Muttering, half whimpering to himself, he thought of men going to bed on the far distant planet earth--men in clubs, and liners, and hotels, married men, and small children who slept with nurses in the room, and warm, tobacco-smelling men tumbled together in forecassles and dug-outs" (p. 50). Lewis describes Ransom as a child within this new world. He rests by a stream in a fetal position, desiring protection and containment which come to him not from the literal world of "warm, tobacco-smelling men," but from some fundamental element within himself which emerges in an exhausted delusion of the protective company of other men:

The tendency to talk to himself was irresistible. . . . 'We'll look after you, Ransom. . . we'll stick together, old man.' It occurred to him that one of those creatures with snapping jaws might live in the stream. 'You're quite right, Ransom,' he answered mumbly. 'That's not a safe place to spend the night. We'll just rest a bit till you feel better, then we'll go on again. Not now. Presently' (p. 50).

The actual transformation occurs overnight. He falls asleep as the old Ransom, under the care of the imaginary men, but when he awakens, he is quite different. For a moment he seems confused as to which man--old or new--he actually is:

Then he remembered with inexpressible relief that there was a man wandering in the wood--poor devil--he'd be glad to see him. He would come up to him and say, 'Hullo, Ransom.'--he stopped, puzzled. No, it was only himself: it was Ransom. Or was he? Who was the man whom he had led to a hot stream and tucked up in bed, telling him not to drink the strange water? Obviously some newcomer who didn't know the place as well as he (p. 51).

The new Ransom is at home on Mars, and he reveals an aggressive self-sufficiency. The night before he had feared to drink the water; in the morning he brushes his fears aside. From this point in the story Ransom abandons the confusion and terror which characterized his old self: "The delusions recurred every few minutes so long as this stage of his journey lasted. He learned to stand still mentally, as it were, and let them roll over his mind. It was no good bothering about them. When they were gone you could resume sanity again" (p. 51).

One particular incident offers a symbolic description of Ransom's transformation and suggests the nature of his future development in this novel and in *Perelandra*. Mars is a world of striking colors,

particularly of reds, blues, and purples. Red is often associated with energy, masculinity, and aggressiveness.<sup>23</sup> Red is also important in costuming during initiatory rites, where it can be associated with the power of the sun.<sup>24</sup> The same power which figured prominently in Ransom's voyage to Mars. Blue has opposite values suggesting the feminine and the heavens which surround the sun.<sup>25</sup> The color that especially impresses Ransom is purple, the dominant color of Mars' vegetation. Purple, a combination of blue and red, may represent a symbolic union of masculine and feminine, an extension of the androgynous imagery which Lewis used in the Danae passage of the space flight.<sup>26</sup>

Lewis associated purple with the Martian trees. Trees are prominent alchemical symbols,<sup>27</sup> and they are also important in shamanic traditions. In initiatory visions a candidate may be hung on a tree to await his rebirth; often an ascent of a tree is part of the formal shamanic rite, an analogue to the celestial journey.<sup>28</sup> In purple, neither red nor blue is distinct; each color sacrifices its integrity within the union. Instead of remaining clearly 'masculine' and 'feminine,' the colors combine in a manner which clearly represents neither. The event corresponds to Ransom's symbolic androgyny on the space flight, which was also a preliminary conjunction of the two principles. He tried to eat bark that he pulled from one of the trees, but he could not swallow it, could not incorporate the red and the blue and, perhaps, the condition which the two colors represent. Some further refinement is required to bring the transformation to a close.

Rituals of passage suggest how Ransom's transformation could be concluded. Shamanic initiation is not complete until the candidate has been instructed in the particulars of his or her new life. Ransom's meeting with the three classes of Malacandrian life serves this function: representatives from each class expose him to a different aspect of the masculine world to which he has been carried.

The first of these meetings, the encounter with the hross, has both mythological and shamanic components. Lewis describes the hross as a fish-like animal. It has skin like a seal's, a "beaver-like or fish-like tail," and it resembles a penguin, an otter, or a stoat (p. 54). Ransom is assisted by fish-like creatures in both *Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. Here, he meets the hross at a time when he believes himself in danger, and the hross seems to rescue him. The episode introduces an important mythological motif. Several traditions associate a fish with abductions. According to one, a marvelous musician was beset by the avaricious crew of a ship on which he had booked passage. He asks to sing a song before being thrown overboard. His song is so beautiful that it attracts a school of dolphins (sea-going mammals, like the hross) who rescue him when he jumps. A similar tale was told of Dionysos. According to the Homeric Hymn devoted to him, Dionysos had once been kidnapped by pirates (who intended to hold him for ransom). He manifests himself to them as a god, unleashes wild animals, causes wine to overrun the ship, and finally turns his captors into dolphins. Decapitation and dismemberment became Dionysos' punishment of choice for his opponents. Lewis introduces a strikingly similar motif, and by the end of the space trilogy Ransom has become a Dionysian character. His ultimate victory against Weston's forces includes beheading, and in other details the slaughter at the Institute closely

resembles the vengeance exacted on the pirates in the Hymn.<sup>29</sup>

The instruction of a shamanic candidate may be carried out by supernatural beings who often take the form of animals (Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 92ff). The hrossa, Ransom's first teachers, teach him the Old Solar language, of which they are the guardians and artisans. In the trilogy this language is the sacred tongue, the speech of which all others are corrupts. Such languages are traditionally the prerogatives of the priest, for they give the shaman a necessary access to the gods. Ransom occupies the same position; he will later suspect that he was sent to Perelandra chiefly because he was the only human who spoke the language.

In addition, the hrossa help him confirm his new manhood. They teach him to channel the aggressive energy which he has discovered in an appropriate direction. He becomes (like Dionysos) a master of fish. During the hnakra-hunt, Ransom remains on the point of the boat, a place of honor among the hrossa since he will always be in the critical position for the kill. This is also the place of greatest danger. His willingness to accept the position testifies to the change that has taken place within him. An eldil commands him to abandon the hunt, and he disobeys, feeling compelled to prove his courage to himself and to the hrossa. He succeeds by killing the monster, but he also incurs a guilt—he unwittingly causes Hvo's death. The episode is the first instance of a paradox which recurs in both subsequent novels. In each, a symbolic or actual crime must be committed in order to permit growth. The crime may be original sin (the dilemma of *Perelandra*) or the Grail hero's unacknowledged guilt (suggested in the Fisher-King and Merlin imagery of *That Hideous Strength*).

The kill concludes his tutelage under the hrossa, and his experience with the horns constitutes a further stage of instruction. During his journey to them, he experiences acute cold and shortness of breath, two notable features of shamanic journeys (Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 113, 412ff). The horns serve an important initiatory purpose in the novel. Shamanic candidates require more than contact with instinctual powers of the animal kingdom. Their apprenticeship includes what Eliade called "a course of theoretical and practical instruction" which develops their ability to carry on "the transmission and perfection of speculative thought" (*Shamanism*, p. 88), which is exactly the province of the horns. They are the planetary historians, writers, and scientists (p. 69), and they serve functions complementary to those of the artistic hrossa. Together, the two species provide a complementary package of functions, an integrated whole, and Ransom receives intense exposure to each.<sup>30</sup>

The third and final stage of his instruction occurs on Meldilorn. The episode is a resume of events and characters; it concludes his transformation and indicates the course of his future ordeals.

Ransom's visit to the island culminates his whole development. Meldilorn is the center of the masculine world. Its color is striking red and it is the seat of Oyarsa, the spiritual principle of the planet, Ares himself. The piffltriggi, the third sample of Malacandrian life, complete his instruction, in the sense that he computes the identity of the planet from their engravings—he literally learns his place from them. The piffltriggi are also important for their function in Martian life. They are the miners and gold

craftsmen. Lewis describes them as dwarf-like miners, and they correspond to creatures from mythological and alchemical legend. Mercurius, for example, can appear as a dwarf, especially when the alchemical context in which he appears includes mining in the cycle of death and rebirth.<sup>31</sup> Many European and African traditions considered mining to be a religious ceremony. The smith was often responsible for removing ore from the earth, as well as for fashioning it, and ore was not inert matter. It was often considered to be living material with a pattern of growth analogous to humans, although its growth took far longer. Minerals were sacred, and because of this numinosity mining was not just a mechanical operation. It was a participation with the sacred. Hence miners were often shamans, expected to liberate ore from the earth—to interrupt and then artificially to accelerate the development of a mineral embryo.<sup>32</sup> The piffltriggi perform this task on Mars. When Ransom first meets the creature, it is not working with gold, but instead carving an image of him. Ransom, however, is a form of gold, or at least is born of gold, as Lewis suggested in the Danae passage. Literal gold does figure in the concluding sections of the novel. Lewis calls gold "sun's blood" throughout the story, and the image is appropriate, for the blood of the sun was a conspicuous and remarkable symbol in alchemical texts, where it represented transformed masculinity. According to the alchemist Michael Maier, gold is the sun hidden within the earth.<sup>33</sup> A startling version of this image appears in a famous alchemical illustration, also from the *Rosarium Philosophorum*. In this illustration, Mercurius is pictured as a lion biting into the sun, whose blood spills to the ground. Edward Edinger interprets the picture as the transformation of one masculine principle (the sun) by another (the lion).<sup>34</sup> The alchemical image describes the transformative process to which Lewis has subjected his hero, who has also been seized by a powerful masculine principle. The lion devours the sun and transforms it into its refined essence; the old Ransom has "died" on Mars and has been reborn, a new man. In both cases the product has something to do with transformed masculinity. It is not surprising in the novel that Ransom finds his portrait strange, because the artist did not intend a naturalistic image: the piffltriggi is a specialist in "sun's blood," not interested in depicting the old Ransom of earth, but rather in capturing the new man, to suggest an essence which has been freed and which would be forever recognizable on the masculine world of Mars. "No," said the piffltriggi. "I do not mean it to be too like. Too like, and they will not believe it--those who are born after" (p. 110).

Ransom proves himself to be of this essence at the conclusion of the novel. The debate during the trial on Meldilorn outlines Lewis' philosophy of science; the dialogue is a thinly-veiled restatement of personal convictions which he voiced more fully in *The Abolition of Man* and to which he would return in *That Hideous Strength*. The trial may be chiefly important because of the position in which it places Ransom. Hermes is in the air on Meldilorn, for positions are once again reversed: Weston and Devine are now the kidnap victims, delivered to the Oyarsa and then transported to earth (as Ransom's vision had foretold). During the trial Ransom serves a shamanic role as translator, the mediator between the spirit-like archon and the other humans. The debate concerns man's relationship to nature. Weston and Devine argue for mechanism and materialism, for a world from which gold should be plundered, from which the sacred has vanished--a restatement of the belief which



characterized many shamanic cultures. Ransom represents the living agency of nature, and he continues in this capacity throughout the trilogy.

Ransom's transformation in the novel, and the role he serves as mediator between the natural and supernatural worlds, suggest in turn positions which Lewis developed in his non-fiction and in his correspondence. The novel is personal, if not in some sense autobiographical. Malacandra, Mars, the world to which Ransom is reborn, is quintessentially masculine. The novel is almost entirely without women. Ransom was sent on his journey by a woman, Harry's mother, but the only other female in the novel is an hross child. This is a world with which Lewis was familiar. Until his own marriage later in life, he found the epitome of human relationship in collegial masculine friendship, which he honored more than friendship with women, more even than marriage. A recent biographer writes:

From quite early in his life he had strong views on the subject. He believed that full intimacy with another man could only be achieved if women were completely excluded. 'A friend dead is to be mourned; a friend married is to be guarded against, both being equally lost,' he wrote in his diary in 1922. He also felt that it was not the done thing for male friends to discuss their domestic or personal problems. 'I speak of my own affairs with some difficulty,' he wrote to (Owen) Barfield. . . and don't think it conduces to the right sort of intimacy (male intimacy) to do so v. [sic] often.<sup>35</sup>

Elsewhere Lewis consistently identified essential manhood with confrontation and battle. His attitude suggested a certain defensiveness, even militancy, and he recognized this attitude quite consciously. Observe some of the metaphors with which he described the ideal relationship among men. In his memoirs, Lewis wrote that as a child he and his friends formed a union against their oppressors, school teachers, and images of masculine solidarity and conflict dominate:

We stood foursquare against the common enemy. I suspect that this pattern . . . has unduly biased my whole life. To this day the vision of the world which comes most naturally to me is one in which 'we two' or 'we few' (and in a sense 'we happy few') stand together against something stronger and larger. England's position in 1940 was to me no surprise; it was the sort of thing that I always expect. . . . The concern aroused in me by a battle (whether in story or in reality) is almost in inverse relation to the number of combatants.<sup>36</sup>

War is consistently his metaphor for life. He traced male friendship historically to the co-operation of the males as hunters or fighters, and he associated survival with both militancy and the exclusion of women:

Long before history began we men have got together apart from the women and done things. We had to. And to like doing what must be done is a characteristic that has survival value. We not only had to do the things, we had to talk about them. We had to plan the hunt and the battle. When they were over we had to hold a post mortem and draw conclusions for future use. . . . We enjoyed one another's society greatly: we Braves, we hunters, all bound together by shared skill, shared dangers and hardships, esoteric jokes--away from the women and children.<sup>37</sup>

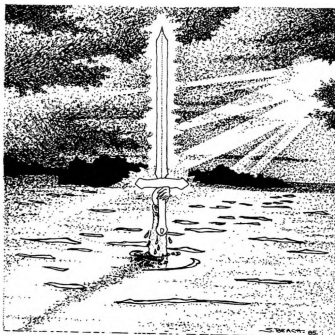
Lewis brings this attitude to his formal theology. Religion was clearly a man's business. In perhaps his foremost apologetic essays, Lewis compared creeds according to which is "manliest",<sup>38</sup> and he decided in favor of Christianity. The events which bring Ransom to Mars recall symbolically the story of Lewis' conversion from atheism. The account is filled with allusions to trickery and double meaning, of a misguidance which turns out true. He presents God as a deceptive paradox ("The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation."<sup>39</sup>), and his sense of his self-control over his destiny proved an illusion: "I can't express the change better than by saying that whereas once I would have said, 'Shall I adopt Christianity?', I now wait to see whether it will adopt me. . . ." "God is a trickster, an invisible guide who points out the road in many ways--through philosophy, through literature, and even in chess, a game of war (Surprised By Joy, p. 238). Lewis found Christianity to be the "manliest" religion because it accurately describes life as a cosmic battle: Christianity is "a civil war, a rebellion," and Christ called for spiritual war: "Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage." He concludes: "God will invade, all right. . . ." (Mere Christianity, pp. 51, 56).

Ransom, who discovers manhood on the war-god's planet, will champion the rightful king against the forces of Satan. This is the mission, too, of Lewis the apologist. But Lewis, the mythopoeist, senses that something else is necessary, that a Mars-like manhood is not enough in spiritual life. In the color symbolism of archaic initiation, red (the color of the planet Mars) represents an intermediate stage of transition between an old condition (boyhood) and a new one (maturity).<sup>40</sup> As if in agreement, Lewis took his mythopoeia and his hero beyond the planet Mars, into an arena supposedly inimical to manhood and to the great battle which was his metaphor for spirituality in both life and art. He sent Ransom to the feminine world of Venus, to further adventure and further transformation, and he ultimately concluded the trilogy with a woman hero. He took himself to another world, too--to the world of Joy, of marriage, in which he discovered something of the feminine and, perhaps, a different kind of spiritual imagination.

#### NOTES

- 1 George MacDonald, The Gifts of the Child Christ: Fairy Tales and Stories for the Childlike, ed. Glenn Edward Sadler, two volumes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964).
- 2 C.S. Lewis, "Introduction" to George MacDonald, Phantastes and Lilith (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), p.10.
- 3 C.S. Lewis, "On Stories," in Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), p.15.
- 4 C.G. Jung, "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales," in The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, vol. 9.1, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, trans. R.F.C. Hull, twenty volumes, Bollingen Series XX (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953-1979), Para. 393. (Hereafter, individual volumes in The Collected Works will be identified with the abbreviation CW followed by the volume number and paragraph reference.)

- 5 Despite his fondness for literary classics, Jung was a fan of the fantastic. He describes H. Rider Haggard as a favorite author, and he is said to have enjoyed popular detective fiction.
- 6 Jung, "The Synthetic or Constructive Method," CW 7, para. 122.
- 7 "The Tavistock Lectures," CW 18, Para. 173.
- 8 Chad Walsh, The Literary Legacy of C.S. Lewis (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), p.26.
- 9 Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p.2.
- 10 Mircea Eliade, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series LXXVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).
- 11 C.S. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet (London: John Lane, 1938; New York: Macmillan, 1965), p.7. Further page references will be noted in the text.
- 12 Karl Kerényi, Hermes, Guide of Souls. The Mythologies of the Masculine Source of Life, trans. Murray Stein (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1976), pp.14-15 and passim.
- 13 Rafael Lopez-Pedraza, Hermes and His Children (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1977), p.46.
- 14 Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, trans. Rosemary Sheel (New York: World Publishing, 1958), p.194.
- 15 Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art, trans. Barbara F. Sessions, Bollingen Series XXVIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).
- 16 Jung, "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy," CW, Para. 155.
- 17 Cf. Jung, "Introduction to the Religious and Psychological Problems of Alchemy," CW 12, Para. 22.
- 18 Cf. Barbara Meyerhoff, "Balancing Between Worlds: the Shaman's Calling," Parabola (Spring, 1976): 6-13.
- 19 Ernst Benz, "Color in Christian Visionary Experience," in Ernst Benz, et al., Color Symbolism. Six Excerpts from the Eranos Yearbook, 1972 (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1977), pp.96ff.
- 20 Jung, "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy," CW 12, Para. 547.



- 21 Sam Gill, "Disenchantment," Parabola 1:3 (1976):7.
- 22 Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, pp.9-10, 22.
- 23 Benz, op cit., p.99; Rene Hughé, "Color and Interior Time," in Benz, p.142.
- 24 Dominique Zahan, "Colour Symbolism in Black Africa," in Benz, pp. 67, 72-73.
- 25 Rene Hughé, "Color and Interior Time," in Benz, p.142; Jolande Jacobi, "Pictures from the Unconscious," unpublished mimeograph, p.17.
- 26 Jacobi, p.18.
- 27 Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God, four volumes (New York: Viking Press, 1954), volume 1, Primitive Mythology, pp. 256ff; Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, pp. 93-94; Shamanism, pp. 125ff.
- 28 Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p.14.
- 29 The Homeric Hymns, trans. Charles Boer (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1970), pp.13-17. According to legend, Dionysos had once been dismembered, cooked, and miraculously reassembled. The shaman often undergoes a similar transformation during his ecstatic journey, and a similar theme recurs in alchemical symbolism. In one text, for example, the death of a hermaphroditic figure is depicted as the dismemberment and cooking of a king. Perseus, with whom Ransom had been identified, also incurred Dionysos' wrath; fortunately for Perseus, the two reconciled. For further discussion of decapitation motif in ritual initiations see Eliade, Shamanism, pp. 53ff.
- 30 The horns particularly probe Ransom's memory. "It is better to remember," they tell him (p.100), and they exhaustively explore his origins and recall him to his true nature. The inquisition may be consistent with the novel's shamanic imagery. As Eliade showed, the shamanic journey constitutes a reconstruction of the initiate's personality, symbolized as a dismemberment and reassembly—a re-membering—of his or her body. It is a remembering which Ransom sorely needs, because, as Lewis reminds us, he had for a time lost sight of his human nature (p.88). Cf. Eliade, Shamanism, pp.53ff and passim; Rites and Symbols of Initiation, pp. 90-91.
- 31 Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," in The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, CW 9, I, Para. 268.
- 32 Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy, trans. Stephen Corrin (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 25-42.
- 33 Cited in Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius," CW 13, Para. 273.
- 34 Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy," Quadrant (Summer 1978):20.
- 35 Humphrey Carpenter, The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), p.164.
- 36 Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955), pp. 32-33.
- 37 The Four Loves (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), pp.94-95.38 C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p.58.
- 39 Surprised by Joy, p.229.
- 40 Cited in Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, C.S. Lewis: A Biography (New York: Harvest Books, 1976), p.106.
- 41 Dominique Zahan, "Colour Symbolism in Black Africa," in Benz, op cit., p.73.

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