

C.S. LEWIS
ON HEAVEN & HELL



**BEYOND THE
SHADOWLANDS**



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Beyond the Shadowlands

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FOREWORD

By Walter Hooper

This splendid book has corrected a serious error in my understanding of C. S. Lewis's works. I have claimed many times that "if you dropped me down onto a desert island with copies of Lewis's works, my life would be almost as rich as it is now." I was wrong. I should have taken to heart what Lewis said about friendship: "In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets."

Before I reached the end of the first chapter of this book, I found myself saying, "I look forward to reading this *again!*" Several times I took in my breath at some comment that seemed so natural for Dr. Martindale to make, but that illuminated something about Lewis I had never noticed before. As I went on, I knew the book would become one of my indispensables. Dr. Martindale has shed new light on works I thought I knew almost by heart. If I may paraphrase the passage from *The Four Loves*, I have learned from this book that "In each of those who write about Lewis there is something only that person can fully bring out. By myself I am not *large* enough to understand all Lewis means. I need others to show me what I would clearly miss if I read him alone."

The book is important in another way as well. Shortly after Lewis died, those who knew his works were far fewer than now, and they delighted in giving and receiving new light on Lewis's books. It was a time of pleasant civility when everyone was saying to the others, "What? You like Lewis?" Those who liked Lewis liked one another. Many of us hung on the latest issue of *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* and the other publications, eager to know what the others were thinking and saying about this remarkable writer. We took it for granted we needed one another.

But whatever attracted such an enormous number of fans to Lewis

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became, as well, a magnet for those who had different motives. Much of the early camaraderie seemed to have been lost for good. Before I had reached the end of this book, I knew it was a recovery of that friendship that ought to exist between those who love the same truth. It is the product of genuine appreciation and insight, a labor of love that well matches its subject, C. S. Lewis's brilliant illumination of Heaven and Hell.

INTRODUCTION

I begin with a confession. I have not always wanted to go to Heaven. I can see now that many myths had unconsciously crowded into my mind: Fuzzy logic conspired with pictures of stuffy mansion houses and ghosts walking on golden (therefore barren and cold) streets. Perhaps my biggest fear, until some time after my undergraduate years, was that Heaven would be boring.

I knew I *should* want to go to Heaven, but I didn't. I would have said that I want to go to Heaven when I die, but mainly, I just didn't want to go to Hell. My problem was a badly warped theology and a thoroughly starved imagination. I knew that in Heaven we would worship God forever. But the only model I had for worship was church, and frankly, I wasn't in love with church enough to want it to go on through ages of ages, world without end. My mental image was of Reverend Cant droning on forever and ever.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, quite unconsciously, Heaven was an extended, boring church service like those I had not yet learned to appreciate on earth—with this exception: You never got to go home to the roast beef dinner. What a way to anticipate my eternal destiny. But then I read C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*. It awakened in me an appetite for something better than roast beef. It aroused a longing to inherit what I was created for: that which would fulfill my utmost longings and engender new longings and fulfill those, too. After reading *The Great Divorce*, for the first time in my life I felt Heaven to be both utterly real and utterly desirable. It was a magnificent gift. Small wonder, then, that *The Great Divorce* has always been one of my favorite books because when I read it, it awakened me to my spiritual anorexia. I was starving for heavenly food and didn't even know I was hungry.

Since then I've read everything Lewis has written—at least everything published—and that reading has only expanded both my understanding of Heaven and Hell and my desire for Heaven. Fewer writers bring to any subject Lewis's theological sophistication, historical grasp, imaginative

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range, and clarity of expression. My labor and prayer in this study is that our understanding, wonder, and desire for Christ and his kingdom may take wing and soar toward Heaven and home until the day of his appearing, when all shadows flee before the light of his glory.

The Bible tells us plainly that we are “sojourners and exiles here” and that “our citizenship is in heaven.”¹ My problem often is that I don’t desire this heavenly home as though I were made for it and it for me. I often feel quite at home here on earth and dread leaving it. Lewis lived in firm belief that this world is transient and that the unseen world of Heaven is permanent. Conversely, theologian Wayne Grudem suggests that if some giant computer could print out our thoughts with those taking no account of the spiritual world in black and those with spiritual priorities in red, there would be precious little colored ink.² I know the problem firsthand. Lewis battles such stereotypes with weapons of logic, analogy, and imaginative worlds that shatter our rigid fortifications and call us to a new home, our true country, and our legitimate King. The fiction is the chariot we ride into that new country, and I use it liberally in this section to illustrate. But before we can even see into the distant promised land clearly, we must strip away the misconceptions that blur our vision.

In thinking about why I have been afraid of going to Heaven or have desired it so little, I have identified seven myths or false ideas I have held about it at one time or another and that Lewis’s thinking has helped dispel. They are seven forms of fear, really, each veiling a common human longing that has its legitimate fulfillment. In chasing these fears out of the jungle into good light, I have discovered that behind each is the one big fear: that some desire would be unfulfilled. If I went God’s way, I might lose out on something. What Lewis has helped me discover is that all desires are, at rock bottom, for Heaven. All of them. “There have been times,” says Lewis, “when I think we do not desire heaven but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else.”³ Even the earthly pleasures are but temporary signposts to the “solid joys” of Heaven. If we dig past the myths and fears, we will find something authentic and exhilarating to put in their place. Just as in the Bible every command is the backside of a promise, so every fear is the backside of a fulfillment.⁴ Here, then, are my hopes and fears, objectified into seven myths or errors and the truth behind them. Similarly, there are six myths about Hell. I haven’t held all of these, but each clari-

Introduction

fies something important about Hell, and each drives me back to the positive heavenly quality that Hell by definition excludes. The fictional glimpses of Hell serve the same purpose, salting our thirst for the living water.

Defying Dante's precedent of putting Hell first, then Purgatory, and finally Heaven—and defying Lewis's order in *The Problem of Pain*—I have put Heaven first. I think Lewis would not object to the rationale. Heaven is our natural home in that God created Heaven for us and us for Heaven. There all human personalities and potentials are fulfilled. Hell, on the other hand, is the dustbin of humanity, all ruins and perversions of what could have been, its occupants a grotesque parody of humanity. Since Heaven is the normative state (not the same as the normal or usual destination), Hell is better understood as its perversion. And if someone is going to read only a portion, I'd rather it be the part on Heaven. Purgatory I have put last because it is least important and can wait or be dispensed with as interest dictates.

The sections with numbered myths on Heaven and Hell may be read without the sections on fiction and vice versa, though clearing the undergrowth of misconceptions may help in reading the fiction, while the fiction unfolds and dramatizes the themes introduced in the demythologizing, nonfiction sections. Though reading straight through would be ideal, skipping around among the fictional works of most interest should not create much confusion. I have arranged the discussion of Lewis's fiction by simple chronology. Though contrary to custom, I have followed Lewis's usual practice in capitalizing *Heaven* and *Hell*. In his *Pilgrim's Guide*, David Mills provides a further rationale for the practice: "Heaven and Hell are places, like, say, Oxford and Grand Rapids. Or perhaps more to the point, to Lewis's point, they are destinations."⁵

Since Lewis's books appear in multiple editions, the page numbers in the endnotes won't correspond to every reader's copy. To help the reader navigate this troubled water, in addition to the page numbers matching the edition listed in the "Works Cited," I have included chapter numbers as marker buoys, along with dates for letters, and part and book numbers, where applicable. Chapter and page numbers are separated by a colon. For example, "10:145" in the Introduction's endnote #3 refers to chapter 10, page 145, and in chapter 1's endnote 24, "IV.9:174-175" refers to book IV, chapter 9, and pages 174-175.

A comment on the word *myth* might also be of use. Lewis uses the

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word freely in all of its meanings, and so have I. Even on the Contents page, I use *myth* in one of the ordinary senses of false beliefs for the numbered Myths and in “Demythologizing.” But I also use it to mean a story that organizes and carries special meaning in the term “Remythologizing.” See chapter 2, “Making the Myths of Heaven and Hell,” for a fuller discussion.

Finally, it might be useful to summarize here at the outset the essence of Lewis’s thought on Heaven and Hell:

- Heaven is being in the presence of God and enjoying all good things that flow from his character and creativity.

- Heaven is utter reality; Hell is nearly nothing.

- Although Heaven is a definite place, it is more relationship than place (not unlike the experience we have in our homes).

- All our desires are, at bottom, for Heaven.

- Heaven is the fulfillment of human potential; Hell is the drying up of human potential.

- We choose Heaven or Hell, daily becoming someone more suited for Heaven or someone who wouldn’t like the place even if it were offered.

- Hell is receiving our just desert; Heaven is all undeserved gift.

MAKING THE MYTHS OF HEAVEN AND HELL

*The Mythical Mode “can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of ‘commenting on life,’ can add to it.”*¹

C. S. LEWIS



Harry Blamires, a former pupil of Lewis and a considerable scholar, Hapologist, and author of fiction, remembers that Lewis’s friend “Owen Barfield once recommended to scholars the need for ‘unthinking.’”² We need the same gift when attempting to think of Heaven. All of our present categories will lead us astray. We are limited by a very small amount of time and can sustain very few close relationships. We do not live our lives for very long at a time with our eternal destiny in view, though we are commanded to try and rewarded when we do. In helping us get outside the box, Blamires points out that when we look up *caterpillar* in the dictionary or encyclopedia, we find it described in terms of the butterfly: what it *will* be. He suggests imagining how an angel looking up our own species might find us described, since our own “metamorphosis” will be far more radical than the caterpillar’s: “I cannot help wondering what an angel would find if he looked up *Man* and *Woman* in the *Encyclopaedia Caelestis*”.³

The name given to the larvae of the saved in their prepupal stage as terrestrial beings. They are two-legged, two-armed, two-eyed, and two-eared (and the most degenerate specimens are said to be two-faced). They are wingless. They have only a rudimentary sensitivity to reality. They tend to measure everything wholly on the basis of their immature understanding as creatures imprisoned in the space-time continuum.⁴

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But how do we “unthink” entrenched images and ideas, as Barfield suggests? The best way is to leave this world behind and go to a new one where we can start all over again without all the old assumptions and hang-ups. Where do we do that? In imaginative literature of the sort Lewis excelled at creating. And how do we, along with Blamires, think into our future? Again, through imaginative literature. The unique gift of good fiction is to appeal simultaneously to our intellects, imaginations, and emotions. It can deliver such an integrated experience that our mental landscapes are permanently altered.

This is one reason why Jesus always taught with stories. Indeed, much of the Bible is in narrative form. The advantage is in defying all the abstract categories that can foster legalistic applications. Almost any parable would serve to illustrate. As Colin Duriez so aptly puts it: “C. S. Lewis believed that heaven is probably unimaginable, even though we have the biblical images to take us as far as they can. Parable, allegory, and fiction are the closest that we can come to speaking of heaven. This is why he explored heaven so much through fantasy.”⁵ To put it another way, Lewis’s whole enterprise in helping his readers grasp biblical truth was a process of demythologizing the false and remythologizing the true.

Lewis loved myth from his earliest childhood, especially Norse. Myths of dying gods who sacrificed themselves for others powerfully captured his imagination. The action and emotion rang morally true, but he thought them “lies breathed through silver” until his friends Tolkien and Dyson explained on an extended walk around the Magdalen College grounds in the wee hours that the old myths were “a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination.” As David Downing summarizes it:

They argued that one of the great and universal myths, that of the dying God who sacrifices himself for the people, shows an innate awareness of the need for redemption not by one’s own works, but as a gift from some higher realm. For them, the incarnation was the pivotal point at which myth became history. The life, death and resurrection of Christ not only fulfilled Old Testament types but also embodied—literally—central motifs found in all the world’s mythologies. . . . No more were his beloved Greek myths, Nordic sagas and Irish legends mere escapist tripe unworthy of a thinking person. They became reservoirs of transrational truths; they provided insights, admittedly partial and distorted, about realities beyond the reach of logical inquiry. In Christianity, the

Making the Myths of Heaven and Hell

true myth to which all the others were pointing, Lewis found a world-view that he could defend as both *good* and *real*. It was a faith grounded in history and one that satisfied even his formidable intellect.

For Lewis, Christianity would thence become the fountainhead of all myths and tales of enchantment, the key to all mythologies, the myth that unfolded itself in history.⁶

Of course, using the term *myth* in the precincts of Christianity is understandably going to raise red flags and get the hackles up on some who have defended Christianity against the charges that it is “only a myth.” Before venturing further, the first thing to remind ourselves of is Lewis’s commitment to defending the truth of Christianity. No one was more convinced of it than he, and few have paid such a price without suffering physical torture and martyrdom. Against his nature as a bookish stay-at-home man, he traveled and spoke to diverse audiences. This resulted in a massive correspondence that obliged him to labor one to two hours each morning at a task he prayed to be delivered from but never was. Perhaps harder, he bore for nearly thirty years the scorn of many in the Oxford scholarly community, including his own college, who felt that he had violated the unwritten code of staying in your own academic field and not popularizing for the unlearned. Add to this the rampant disbelief of atheists and agnostics and the unavoidable jealousy in that very closed community.

The second thing, and more to the point, is getting down some definitions. Lewis uses the term *myth* in its two most common forms, plus a third specialized sense, much as he used the term *joy* in its ordinary sense of “happiness” and in the special sense of “longing and desire,” which confusingly means the lack of something versus its possession. Similarly, *myth* usually means either ancient stories formerly believed but now seen as fictions or something false, which only the ignorant or foolish would believe. This makes for tough sledding when the two are linked by a true believer like Lewis into an apparent oxymoron like “Christian myth.” In the third sense, as in “Christian myth,” Lewis means a story that embodies values, that gives us at once an imaginative experience and relates truths of the most important kind. In this meaning, it shares something with the first definition in that the myths embodied the beliefs and values of a culture. The importance for Lewis is clear from the opening account of his literary taste and conversion. The importance for those who may not share those tastes may not be obvious at first, but the effort of understanding it pays

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off because it explains why we love his fiction and why it has been so hugely successful.

In “Myth Became Fact,” Lewis observes a basic human problem that myth solves. Ordinarily, we cannot *have* an experience and *think* about the experience at the same time without fundamentally altering it. We can’t kiss a beloved and think about kissing without ruining the moment. We can’t laugh at a joke and discuss the principles of effective humor at the same time. In one case we are *in* an experience, and in the other *outside* it examining it. The unique contribution of mythic writing is in allowing us to have an experience while getting insight into elemental truth. Here is how Lewis puts it in his essay “Myth Became Fact”: “What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is the *about which* truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level.”⁷ We see this in the application of Jesus’ parables to innumerable life situations, which is why “he said nothing to them without a parable.”⁸ Fortunately, we can receive this benefit without understanding how myth works, but wanting to know how things work is part of being human, as well as a means of doing the thing ourselves. The mythic element in Lewis’s fiction is the very thing that has captivated millions with “wonder and delight.” His work, like few others, arouses our elemental longing for heavenly satisfactions and vibrates many other cords of authentic human experience.

Lewis cautions that we should not confuse mythic writing with artistic writing. Myth, in Lewis’s special sense, works because it is a certain kind of story and can be effective in literary writing, painting, or even dull prose. His fullest definition occurs in *Experiment in Criticism* in the chapter “On Myth,” where he lists six characteristics. Myths: are “extra-literary”; don’t depend on the usual storytelling techniques of suspense and surprise, and may in fact have a sense of the inevitable; don’t foster identification with the characters, though we feel “a profound relevance to our own life”; deal with the supernatural; are solemn; and raise a sense of awe attaching to characters or worlds unlike us (like angels, ghosts, or gods).⁹

Myth also involves what Lewis terms a “world picture” or understanding of value, meaning, and significance. Obviously, these can be mistaken beliefs. Lewis’s writing renders two signal services. First, the nonfiction demythologizes false beliefs, in two ordinary senses of the term “myth”: exposing error and knocking the props from under modern

myths like progressive evolution.¹⁰ In general, he remythologizes in his fiction, all of it meeting the above six criteria. Unlike any other writer I know, Lewis's nonfiction is often mythic and remythologizing, too, as anyone who has read "The Weight of Glory" must know. Clearly, anything meeting these standards will take us to the realm of ultimate issues where questions of Heaven and Hell are never far away. And since Lewis's work is both high quality literature and thoroughly Christian, he prepares the mind, will, and emotion to receive ultimate truth.

Marjorie Hope Nicholson, a contemporary of Lewis's and notable scholar, makes the case for Lewis as mythmaker, commenting on one of his earliest works of fiction in her study *Voyages to the Moon* (1948):

Out of the Silent Planet is to me the most beautiful of all cosmic voyages and in some ways the most moving. . . . As C. S. Lewis, the Christian apologist, has added something to the long tradition, so C. S. Lewis, the scholar-poet, has achieved an effect in *Out of the Silent Planet* different from anything in the past. Earlier writers have created new worlds from legend, from mythology, from fairy tale. Mr. Lewis has created myth itself, myth woven of desire and aspirations deep-seated in some, at least, of the human race. . . . As I journey into worlds at once familiar and strange, I experience, as did Ransom, "a sensation not of following an adventure but of enacting a myth."¹¹

Lewis believes that in Christ's incarnation, the three elements of myth, truth, and fact come together. In *Perelandra*, the second book of the space trilogy, the hero, Ransom, must fight the Un-man, Weston. On the outcome of this fight rests the destiny of a world. The narrative voice recognizes the mythic quality of the story as Ransom, under God's direction, does what Christ did in a more profound act for our own world:

Long since on Mars, and more strongly since he came to *Perelandra*, Ransom had been perceiving that the triple distinction of truth from myth and of both from fact was purely terrestrial—was part and parcel of that unhappy division between soul and body which resulted from the Fall. Even on earth the sacraments existed as a permanent reminder that the division was neither wholesome nor final. The Incarnation had been the beginning of its disappearance. In *Perelandra* it would have no meaning at all. Whatever happened here would be of such a nature that earth-men would call it mythological. All this he had thought before. Now he knew it. The Presence in the darkness,

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never before so formidable, was putting these truths into his hands, like terrible jewels.¹²

What Lewis is up to can scarcely be put better than in these words concluding “On Stories”:

In life and art both, as it seems to me, we are always trying to catch in our net of successive moments something that is not successive. Whether in real life there is any doctor who can teach us how to do it, so that at last either the meshes will become fine enough to hold the bird, or we be so changed that we can throw our nets away and follow the bird to its own country is not a question for this essay. But I think it is sometimes done—or very nearly done—in stories. I believe the effort to be well worth making.¹³

In remythologizing Heaven, Lewis develops six major themes through a breathtaking array of characters and situations: 1) Christ is the center of all things; 2) Heaven is utterly real and our earthly life its shadow; 3) Heaven flows from the character of God, which means it is fully integrated and love reigns supreme, accompanied by goodness, justice, mercy, and creativity; 4) here humanity finds the fulfillment of its created potential—it is our true and natural home; 5) all of our longings are at their core for Heaven; and 6) we choose Heaven by choosing the preeminence of Christ. These themes are biblical, and reading them in Lewis’s fiction takes me back to that great original not only with deeper understanding but with new depth of passion.

RECLAIMING THE HEAVENS FOR HEAVEN: *Out of the Silent Planet*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?*¹

P S A L M S



Lewis's Ransom trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*) is perhaps the first work to combine science fiction and theological heft.² Lewis didn't begin with a Christian message and then decide on science fiction as a good way to smuggle it in. As David Downing tells us, and Lewis himself recounts in his autobiography and many letters, something of the reverse is true.³ Lewis was a lifelong fan of fantasy literature of all kinds, but especially the mythic past. When, on a late night turn around Addison's Walk in Oxford, his friends Tolkien and Dyson helped Lewis make the connection of Christian truth with ancient mythology, the keystone for his conversion slipped into place.

In the Ransom series, Lewis simply reverses the process. Lewis's fiction shimmers throughout with mythic overtones because it was so integral to his imagination. As much of the literary critical work on Lewis shows, his fiction is a veritable remythologizing of ancient and medieval stories and outlooks recast in modern settings with supreme relevance. Similarly, as readers of his fiction all know, Lewis didn't merely tack on a Christian theme; rather, his thought was so fully integrated and his Christian commitment so deep that he would have been artificial and superficial had he attempted to leave it out. The Christian element, as much as the mythic,

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suffuses this and other works as the very mark of the author's integrity. He is true to his own principle that "the only moral . . . of any value . . . inevitably arises from the whole cast of the author's mind."⁴

Clyde Kilby aptly summarizes the direction the theological themes take in the trilogy: "Perhaps we could properly say that the aim of *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra* is to indicate what might have been and of *That Hideous Strength* to indicate what might yet be."⁵ That is, the first two show what a world might have been unwounded by sin, and the third shows the hellish nightmare of sin run amuck. We could say with equal validity that the first two also foreshadow what Heaven will be like as a sinless, harmonious place and the third what Hell will be like as a place permanently marred by the ravages of sin.

Though the first of the trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*, does not deal with Heaven and Hell directly, it puts into imaginative perspective several key connected themes:

- harmony with an unfallen creation (between created beings and their environment);
- harmony with other created beings from animals to humans, angels, and God;
- the loss that comes by sin;
- death as necessary to the new and better thing God wants to do;
- humanity and this present creation (universe) as provisional in the context of God's bigger plan;
- God's care for individuals and details (even the grossly sinful people, like Weston, who is shown mercy by the Oyarsa, who sees hope in him despite his "bentness" or sinfulness);
- humility about what we don't know (for example, by our physical limitations to what we can see; Lewis provides a view beyond time and space to give us an inkling of what may be, including dimensions of Heaven hard to imagine);
- the heavens as gloriously full instead of empty.

As we would expect, many of the same themes will recur in the other two books, especially *Perelandra*. In discussing *Perelandra*, I will focus on the first three themes and for *Out of the Silent Planet* the last five.

SPACE AS HEAVEN

Lewis saw God as "the glad Creator," to borrow the words of his beloved Spenser. Everywhere, if we have eyes to see it, the world blazes with the

*Reclaiming the Heavens for Heaven:
Out of the Silent Planet*

glory of God. If we look down, we may even “see the universe in a grain of sand,” says Blake; if we look up, “the heavens declare the glory of God,” as the psalmist announces. But it was not always so for Lewis, looking into the vast reaches of space. In his years as an atheist, the emptiness of space was, in fact, one of the reasons for his unbelief, as he lays it out in the beginning of *The Problem of Pain*. Space seemed to him then a vast, empty waste without life, and even our own planet, perhaps the only one supporting life, was void of life for millions of years and may be so again when the sun runs out of fuel and life on earth has vanished. The Oyarsa of Malacandra (angelic ruler of Mars) puts his finger on the problem, knowing how the limitations of time and space and our relatively minute position in space handicap our imaginations. As he explains to Ransom: “My people have a law never to speak much of sizes or numbers to you others, not even to *sorns* [the most philosophic of rational creatures on Malacandra]. You do not understand, and it makes you do reverence to nothings and pass by what is really great.”⁶

But this and all dark views of creation were illumined by the light of Christ at Lewis’s conversion. Everything took on a new significance, redolent of eternity. The sky itself became to him a mythic element in God’s creation: “If God chooses to be mythopoeic—and is not the sky itself a myth—shall we refuse to be *mythopathic*?”⁷ In *Miracles* Lewis offers a view of creation as intentionally analogical and subject to mythologizing: “It is not an accident that simple-minded people, however spiritual, should blend the ideas of God and Heaven and the blue sky.”⁸ We do, in fact, get life-giving light and heat from it that makes the earth fruitful. Besides that, the sky is the thing we see that most suggests infinity. “And when God made space and worlds that move in space, and clothed our world with air, and gave us such eyes and such imaginations as those we have, He knew what the sky would mean to us. And since nothing in His work is accidental, if He knew, He intended. We cannot be certain that this was not indeed one of the chief purposes for which Nature was created.”⁹

With his conversion, Lewis began to look into space with new eyes, and his transformation of empty space into a womb of teeming, vibrant life is one of his great gifts in helping us to imagine Heaven and one of the unique contributions of *Out of the Silent Planet*. Lewis didn’t have to look far for a model of the heavens swarming with life. Throughout his work, he makes fulsome use of the medieval worldview, which includes the “doctrine of Plenitude.” As George Musacchio explains: “It means that, because

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of God's very nature, the universe is full of all the multivarious kinds of life possible. An omnipotent and benevolent God would of course create a plenitude, a fullness, of life and energy and goodness through His creation, not wasting all that space out there beyond our ken."¹⁰ Without believing the medieval worldview as an article of faith, Lewis transforms it into an imaginative insight into God's splendor in elements of creation known to us but scarcely imagined and little understood.

Before he ever gets to Malacandra (Mars), the space-traveling Ransom, though kidnapped by evil scientists, sees the error of his old view of space:

A nightmare, long engendered in the modern mind by the mythology that follows in the wake of science, was falling off him. He had read of "Space": at the back of his thinking for years had lurked the dismal fancy of the black, cold vacuity, the utter deadness, which was supposed to separate the worlds. He had not known how much it affected him till now—now that the very name "Space" seemed a blasphemous libel for this empyrean ocean of radiance in which they swam. He could not call it "dead"; he felt life pouring into him from it every moment. How indeed should it be otherwise, since out of this ocean the worlds and all their life had come? He had thought it barren: he saw now that it was the womb of worlds, whose blazing and innumerable offspring looked down nightly even upon the earth with so many eyes—and here, with how many more! No: Space was the wrong name. Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens—heavens which declared the glory—the

*"happy climes that ly
Where day never shuts his eye
Up in the broad fields of the sky."*

He quoted Milton's words to himself lovingly, at this time and often.¹¹

On leaving "the heavens" for the gravitational pull of Malacandra, Ransom is loath to leave the newfound glories behind, and "sensations of intolerable height and of falling—utterly absent in the heavens—recurred constantly. . . . Suddenly the lights of the Universe seemed to be turned down. As if some demon had rubbed the heaven's face with a dirty sponge, the splendour in which they had lived so long blenched [sic] to a pallid, cheerless and pitiable grey."¹²

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They were falling out of the heaven, into a world. Nothing in all his adventures bit so deeply into Ransom's mind as this. He wondered how he could ever have thought of planets, even of the Earth, as islands of life and reality floating in a deadly void. Now, with a certainty which never after deserted him, he saw the planets—the “earths” he called them in his thought—as mere holes or gaps in the living heaven—excluded and rejected wastes of heavy matter and murky air, formed not by addition to, but subtraction from, the surrounding brightness.¹³

Conversely, when he is journeying to Meldilorn much later in the story and is nearly free of the Malacandrian atmosphere, nearer the heavens, “he felt the old lift of the heart, the soaring solemnity, the sense, at once sober and ecstatic, of life and power offered in unasked and unmeasured abundance. If there had been air enough in his lungs he would have laughed aloud.”¹⁴ In the heavens, as in Heaven, even the most ordinary of experiences are sublime and all the senses keener.

If the atmosphere around Malacandra disappoints Ransom by comparison to space, the surface of the new planet gains by comparison to earth. His first and lasting impression sums it up: “Before anything else he learned that Malacandra was beautiful.”¹⁵ This “exquisitely beautiful” landscape features an ocean that is “‘really’ blue,” not just a reflection or effect of “certain lights,” with shores of “pinkish-white vegetation,” a horizon purple in the distance, and beyond “upright shapes of whitish green,” and farther yet a “rose-colored cloud-like mass.” In short, he likes it. The environment of Malacandra is not only beautiful, but life-sustaining and spirit-refreshing. Even the ground cover is nourishing.

Lewis's contemporary Evelyn Underhill Moore, herself a writer of spiritual books, praises *Out of the Silent Planet* for its “delightful combination of beauty, humour, & deep seriousness” and what Lewis thought his best contribution, “the substitution of heaven for space.”¹⁶ We use the same word, *heaven*, to describe both the sky and the place of eternal abode for the saved. His revisioning gives us a kind of *a fortiori* presentation: If something is true of the lesser, how much more in the case of the greater. The heavens we see will “melt with a fervent heat” at Jesus' second coming, but the redeemed will spend eternity in the permanent Heaven.

Beyond the homonyms “heaven” and “Heaven,” there are two other important links to Heaven in this book. The first is *Maleldil*, the word used interchangeably for God and Jesus, and the second is the ruling spirits or angels, called *eldila* (plural for *eldil*), who people the heavens and move

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at Maleldil's command. The *eldila* perform many of the biblical tasks of angels and have in common that grandeur about them that the art and literature of the past several centuries has blunted. The *eldila* strike terror or at least awe in the wise. Only the foolish and spiritually ignorant, like the evil Weston, dare to bandy words and attempt to manipulate them, of course to no avail. The *eldila* move at speeds faster than light and have insubstantial bodies. One of the philosophic creatures of Malacandra, a *sorn*, explains to Ransom that bodies are motion. If they move at one speed, you smell them, at another you see them, and faster yet, you don't perceive them at all. The highest order of all, God, moves so fast that he is everywhere at once and may be said to rest and "have no body at all."¹⁷

When the *eldila* speak, their voices sound "inorganic," and they assume forms such as dim lights when they wish humans to, in some sense, see them. These powerful beings are sometimes given the position of ruling a world. Such a ruler, even when human, is called the "Oyarsa." In perfect humility, the Oyarsa of Perelandra, an *eldil*, prepares the planet for rule by the humanlike creatures Maleldil puts there and gladly helps the humans learn how to run it. The *eldila* may well be doing what God's angels do for us. We are certainly looked after by some of them, and Scripture promises that we, too, will reign with Christ—help run things. Through the *eldila*, the door of Heaven is cracked a little further open.

Despite their goodness, even the creatures of Malacandra with physical bodies terrify Ransom at first, not only with the natural fear of the unknown, but intensified by the monstrous sense of "the other." As with his prejudice about space, Ransom has been conditioned by contemporary fictional representations of creatures in other worlds. In H. G. Wells's science fiction and that of his contemporaries, the inhabitants of space are grotesque, monstrous, and malevolent, invoking fear in human visitants. "The tellers of tales in our world make us think that if there is any life beyond our own air it is evil," says Ransom to the Oyarsa of Malacandra.¹⁸ Similarly conditioned, Weston and Devine saw only projections of their own prejudice in past encounters with the Malacandrians, and Ransom overhears their horrific reports of *sorns* as demon gods requiring human sacrifice (him!). Ransom expects the worst. But in the event, the three rational species of Malacandra—*sorns*, *hrossa*, and *pfifiltriggi*—all prove to be unfallen, skilled, intelligent, hospitable, and even delightful upon further acquaintance.

For example, soon after meeting the large, black, furry, seal-like

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hrossa with “glossy coat, liquid eye, sweet breath and without teeth,” Ransom learns that looking at them as rational animals with “the charm of speech and reason,” rather than animalistic humans, it seems “as though Paradise had never been lost and earliest dreams were true.”¹⁹ They live in harmony with each other and their environment, as well as with the spiritual world of the *eldila* and *Maleldil*.

On his journey to Mars and later to Venus, Ransom finds beauty, harmony, hospitality, and vitality. Even bolder words are needed: He finds splendor and glory. This view of creation is part of what Christ redeemed in Lewis himself. When Ransom returns to earth from *Malacandra*, he presents to his sole confidante a rationale for publishing his story and a good part of Lewis’s reason for writing these books: “If we could even effect in one per cent of our readers a change-over from the conception of Space to the conception of Heaven, we should have made a beginning.”²⁰

NO HEAVEN ON EARTH

Besides suggesting many of the values and characteristics of Heaven, Lewis’s book shows the futility and perversity of trying to create a heaven on earth. Lewis was alarmed to find students, scientists, and serious writers propagating the idea that the hope and meaning of the universe was wrapped up in human colonization of space coupled with the evolutionary myth that we will get better and better until we become divine and immortal, at least as a species. H. G. Wells popularized this notion in his science fiction. Lewis’s character, the scientist Weston, holds exactly this view.

The danger of “Westonism” I meant to be real. What set me about writing the book was the discovery that a pupil of mine took all that dream of interplanetary colonization quite seriously, and the realization that thousands of people in one way and another depend on some hope of perpetuating and improving the species for the whole meaning of the universe—that a “scientific” hope of defeating death is a real rival to Christianity.²¹

In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Weston is impervious to beauty and intelligence in other forms than his monomaniacal philosophy of progress, and he’s certainly blind to goodness. He is not yet fully in the bent Oyarsa’s (Satan’s) control, as happens in *Perelandra*. The Oyarsa of *Malacandra* tells Weston that he is only “bent,” unlike his sidekick Devine, who is “broken”

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and has become merely greed personified. “He is now only a talking animal,” says the Oyarsa.²² The one good quality left to Weston that gives the Oyarsa hope for him is loyalty to his species, though he has perverted it, as happens to all things not subordinate to God. What would space as settled by Weston and Devine look like? Nothing but cosmic killing fields, peopled by the deluded and self-centered.

In virtually all of the science fiction written before Lewis, space was something to be gotten over or through, and space creatures were grotesque and evil, with earthlings as good guys. This, too, Lewis deliberately countered in his science fiction. The other planets are all ruled by good Oyaresu (plural of Oyarsa) under the direct guidance of God. Only earth, the silent planet, has been cut off from their society by our “bent Oyarsa,” Satan, who has rebelled against God. The Oyarsa of Malacandra is eager to learn what God has done to counter this evil and ultimately save those of earth. The Oyarsa’s wish alludes to 1 Peter 1:12, which says these are “things into which angels long to look.” Ransom explains the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, a plan that fills even the Oyarsa with admiring wonder.

On his own planet, the Oyarsa is fully aware that evil has entered in Weston, who kills some of the good creatures of Malacandra and would eliminate them if he could to make way for earthlings. Thus, Lewis counters the false view of making Heaven on earth (or from it), seeing rightly that sinful beings would propagate sin, not progress, except in the most blatantly technological of terms. This, of course, is a very necessary clearing of the jungle to make way for the garden, the new Eden, the true Heaven.

DEATH AS THE GATEWAY TO HEAVEN

If we do not come to Heaven in *Out of the Silent Planet*, we come at least to the threshold in the Malacandrians’ view of death, which these unfallen creatures welcome. They die, not because of sin, but because Maleldil (God) is in the process of remaking all of his creatures and even the universe itself. Using “drink” as a metaphor for life experiences, Hyoui explains to Ransom that on one occasion he was alone with Maleldil by Balki pool in which the *hnéraki* lived that could alone bring an early death to hrossa. “That was the best of drinks save one.” Ransom asks, “Which one?” and Hyoui replies, “Death itself in the day I drink it and go to Maleldil.”²³ Here is an embodiment of the apostle Paul’s passion for his eternal destiny: “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.”²⁴

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This view is affirmed again by the sorn, Augray, carrying Ransom to Meldilorn: “A world is not made to last for ever, much less a race; that is not Maleldil’s way.”²⁵ As Ransom explains Weston’s diabolical belief in perpetuating human life by exterminating living creatures beyond earth planet by planet and so on forever, the Oyarsa of Malacandra exclaims at his ignorance, “Does he think Maleldil [God] wants a race to live for ever?”²⁶ In Lewis’s view, God never does the same thing twice. He always multiplies the goodness when he makes a new creation, moving not to an improved model of the old, but to a whole new order of being that incorporates and subsumes the old. As he explains in *Mere Christianity*: “People often ask when the next step in evolution—the step to something beyond man—will happen. But on the Christian view, it has happened already. In Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is to be put into us.”²⁷

This idea is repeated toward the end, as the hrossa sing a dirge over the dead bodies of the three killed hrossa, whose bodies they have brought to Oyarsa to unmake: “Let it go hence, dissolve and be no body. . . . Let it go down; the *hnau* [rational, soul] rises from it. This is the second life, the other beginning. Open, oh coloured world, without weight, without shore. You are second and better; this was first and feeble.”²⁸ The Oyarsa responds: “Let us scatter the movements which were their bodies. So will Maleldil scatter all worlds when the first and feeble is worn.”²⁹

The Oyarsa critiques the people of earth who are “wise enough to see the death of their kind approaching but not wise enough to endure it.” By contrast, “the weakest of my people does not fear death. It is the Bent One [Satan], the lord of your world, who wastes your lives and befouls them with flying from what you know will overtake you in the end. If you were subjects of Maleldil you would have peace.”³⁰

NOTES

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1. John Donne, *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne*, ed., with Introduction, Charles M. Coffin (New York: The Modern Library, 1952), 501.
2. C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 16:228.
3. *Ibid.*, 15:213.

INTRODUCTION

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2. Wayne Grudem, "The Unseen World Is Not a Myth," *Christianity Today* 30, no. 10 (July 11, 1986), 24.
3. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 10:145.
4. Christopher Mitchell treats this idea superbly in his article "The 'More' of Heaven and the Literary Art of C. S. Lewis," *Christianity and the Arts* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 40-44. See also C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed., with Introduction, Walter Hooper (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 84; Joni Eareckson Tada has an excellent section on this point in *Heaven: Your Real Home* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), 26-29.
5. David Mills, *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), xiii.

CHAPTER 1—THE MYTHS OF HEAVEN EXPOSED

1. Colossians 3:1-4 (New Living Translation).
2. 1 Corinthians 2:9.
3. C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 2, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004), to Warfield M. Firor (August 17, 1949), 971.
4. C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed., with Introduction, Walter Hooper (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 83.
5. Psalm 16:11.
6. Harry Blamires, "Heaven: The Eternal Weight of Glory," *Christianity Today* 35, no. 6 (May 27, 1991), 33-34. The original prints *lovingkindness* as one word.
7. John Newton, "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," *Hymns for the Living Church* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope Publishing Co., 1974), 209.
8. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 9:44. I have chosen the Simon & Schuster edition because, unlike many recent versions, it includes Lewis's valuable explanatory Preface to the 1961 edition, along with the 1959 addition, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast."
9. David W. Fagerberg, "Between Heaven & Earth: C. S. Lewis on Asceticism & Holiness," *Touchstone* 17, no. 3 (April 2004), 33.
10. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 4:39.
11. *Ibid.*, 9:95.
12. Fagerberg, "Between Heaven & Earth," 31.
13. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 12:73.
14. *Ibid.*, 12:74.
15. Christopher Mitchell, "The 'More' of Heaven and the Literary Art of C. S. Lewis," *Christianity and the Arts* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1998), 43.

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94. *Ibid.*, 8.
95. *Ibid.*, 11.
96. Lewis, "Answers to Christianity," *God in the Dock*, I.4:49.

CHAPTER 2—MAKING THE MYTHS OF HEAVEN AND HELL

1. C. S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," *Of Other Worlds*, ed. with a Preface, Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 38.
2. Harry Blamires, "Heaven: The Eternal Weight of Glory," *Christianity Today* 35, no. 6 (May 27, 1991): 32.
3. *Ibid.*, (Celestial or Heavenly Encyclopedia).
4. *Ibid.*
5. Colin Duriez, *The C. S. Lewis Encyclopedia* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 88.
6. David Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert: C. S. Lewis's Journey to Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 147-148.
7. "Myth Became Fact," in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), I.5:66. See also "Is Theology Poetry?" a stunning piece in a collection of stunning pieces in *"The Weight of Glory" and Other Addresses*, ed., with Introduction, Walter Hooper (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). For a good scholarly study, see Maria Kuteeva's chapter, "Myth," in *Reading the Classics with C. S. Lewis*, ed. Thomas L. Martin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000).
8. Matthew 13:34.
9. C. S. Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 43-44. This statement from one of Lewis's notebooks might be helpful: "A Myth is the description of a state, an event, or series of events, involving superhuman personages, possessing unity, not truly implying a particular time or place, and dependent for its contents not on motives developed in the course of action but on the immutable relations of the personages." Walter Hooper, "Past Watchful Dragons," quoted in Charles Huttar, ed., *Imagination and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 286.
10. "Is Theology Poetry?" in *"The Weight of Glory" and Other Addresses*, 83, gives a short, effective response to the evolutionary view.
11. Quoted in Duriez, *C. S. Lewis Encyclopedia*, 155.
12. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 11:144.
13. C. S. Lewis, "On Stories," in *"On Stories" and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 19-20.

CHAPTER 3—RECLAIMING THE HEAVENS FOR HEAVEN: OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET

1. Psalm 8:3.
2. The series is often called the "space trilogy," but the last of the books stays at home in England.
3. David Downing, *Planets in Peril* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 35.
4. C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," in *"On Stories" and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 42.
5. Clyde Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 89-90.
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7. C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), I.5:67.
8. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 16:158.
9. *Ibid.*
10. George Musacchio, *C. S. Lewis: Man & Writer* (Belton, Tex.: University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, 1994), 53. This book contains excellent discussions of the Ransom trilogy, especially Lewis's extensive use of the medieval worldview.
11. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 5:32.
12. *Ibid.*, 39.

Notes

13. Ibid., 40.
14. Ibid., 99.
15. Ibid., 42.
16. Evelyn Underhill Moore, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 2, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004), to C. S. Lewis (October 26, 1938), 234, n. 34; and letter to Mrs. Stuart Moore (Evelyn Underhill), (October 29, 1938), 235.
17. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 94.
18. Ibid., 121.
19. Ibid., 58.
20. Ibid., 154.
21. C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 2, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004), to Sister Penelope SCMV (July [August] 9, 1939), 262.
22. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 20:139.
23. Ibid., 75.
24. Philippians 1:21.
25. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 16:100.
26. Ibid., 18:123.
27. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), II.5:62. Lewis didn't believe in evolution; he merely grants it here to make a larger point. For his views on evolution see the satirical poem "Evolutionary Hymn" and the essays "Is Theology Poetry?" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed., with Introduction, Walter Hooper (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) and "The Funeral of a Great Myth" in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967).
28. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 19:131.
29. Ibid., 19:132.
30. Ibid., 20:139-140.

CHAPTER 4—PARADISE REGAINED: PERELANDRA

1. Genesis 3:17 and Revelation 22:3.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 1:18.
3. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 18:119.
4. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 1:10.
5. Ibid., 1:13.
6. Ibid., 1:19.
7. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 18:122.
8. Ibid., 72.
9. C. S. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 33.
10. Ibid., 110.
11. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1955), 237.
12. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 11:149.
13. Lewis says in *A Grief Observed*, "Heaven will solve our problems, but not, I think, by showing us subtle reconciliations between all our apparently contradictory notions. The notions will all be knocked from under our feet. We shall see that there never was any problem." (New York: Bantam, 1976), 4:83.
14. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 17:214.
15. Though sexless, the Oyaresu of Mars and Venus are gendered, male and female, respectively.
16. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 16:197.
17. Ibid.

CHAPTER 5—THE FULFILLMENT OF HUMAN POTENTIAL: THE GREAT DIVORCE

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914-1963)*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1979), February 22, 1944, 501. Lewis uses "Xt" to abbreviate "Christ."