

THE FEMININE EXPERIENCE IN C. S. LEWIS'S RANSOM TRILOGY:
THE AMBIGUITY OF SILENCE AND VOICE

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Part I: A Philosophy and Methodology of Feminism

With a vast collection of C. S. Lewis books, articles, and multimedia materials already lining the shelves of bookstores and libraries worldwide, does any need exist for yet another study of the works of this British author? His scholarly texts on Renaissance and Medieval literature have long ago been addressed by the experts. Similarly, his popular pieces, consisting of verse, apologetics, fiction for both adults and children, devotional writings, and autobiography, have already been analyzed and critiqued by a horde of writers, including psychoanalysts, theologians, and paperback novelists. What more, the skeptic may ask, could be added to the Lewis files? As a writer and reader familiar with the existing works on C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), I believe that much can still be written about the Lewis canon before the possibility of contributing to a better understanding of these works can ever be exhausted. Not every angle has been taken. Not every revelatory work has been written. By filling in the gaps in criticism and simply offering more perspectives on the works of Lewis, those who appreciate Lewis, and even those who do not, can gain additional insight into the meaning, implications, and import of his writings.

My goal, then, is to help readers approach the works of Lewis from a feminist perspective, feminist criticism being one of the aforementioned gaps

in scholarship on the Lewis canon. Despite the recent surge in feminist critiques of texts written by males, few overt feminists have tackled an analysis of Lewis. This omission in criticism fails readers by never exposing them to a discussion of how Lewis portrays women in his books and what roles he assigns his female characters. Most readers never question the noticeable absence of dynamic female characters in some of his works or the significance of the dialogue he assigns them. A discourse on the female experience within the Lewis canon is left entirely unsaid, although the female experience is integral to human life. Surely Lewis, whose works are of wide appeal and who appears to have written pieces that are, thus far, of enduring quality, could not have done so if he had not touched on some elemental truths of the human experience.

A holistic representation of the truth of human experience must, in fact, incorporate an understanding of both the truth of the masculine experience and of the feminine experience, since the two genders are intrinsically interrelated. The human experience includes males and females interacting with one another in relationships. Throughout literary history, males have fortunately succeeded in writing about and publishing their experience, expressing the strictly masculine and therefore the masculine perspective on interaction with females. The male gender established and polished the style, the mental paradigms, and the vocabulary with which to write of the masculine experience.

While the men overwhelmed the printing presses, though, women remained largely voiceless. Like men, women experienced the political, economic, academic, spiritual, and social aspects of life; they, however, rarely saw their experience expressed in print, except through the writing of a male. Most women did not or were not allowed to participate in "nonessential" writing, save in journals or letters, and, when they did write novels or poetry, they either did not publish or were refused publication. For the most part, women did not develop a feminine framework for the writing of their experiences nor did they establish a significant female tradition of writing that would influence future female literature. The masculine half of the human experience thus gained a loud voice while the feminine half found a whisper or whimper, if any vocalization at all.

In the last several decades, that trend of female silence and silencing has been recognized, fought against, and partially reversed. Feminist critics and authors (both male and female) have sought to promote female writing, recover elements of the female experience that male authors did include in their works, and discover the female expression of the feminine voice. There is an inherent danger, however, in focusing on the feminine experience to the exclusion of the masculine experience, as some feminist critics do. Yes, the female experience is necessary to an understanding of the human experience, but the masculine experience is equally necessary. In the quest to find the feminine voice, the masculine voice cannot be ignored or suppressed in retaliation.

In this paper, feminist criticism therefore will be understood as the attempt to uncover and encourage the expression of the female experience as a vitally important aspect of the human experience.¹ The female experience ought not remain unvocalized because the human experience, including the search for an understanding of who humans are and what their place is in the world, can never be wholly realized until we realize the female experience in addition to the male experience. Recognizing the full humanity of women is necessary to completing not only the humanity of women but also the humanity of men. All humans are relational creatures, whose very being depends upon interaction with other humans, both males and females, as friends and family. When half of the members of the human community live with silenced experiences, all members suffer. Human interaction becomes warped by misunderstandings. Men misunderstand women, women misunderstand how to relate to men, and women even misunderstand how to relate to other women.

In order to facilitate an elimination of misunderstandings such as these, this paper will speak to the feminine experience in the writings of Lewis and relate that female experience, a combination of spiritual and social factors, to the human experience expressed in his works. I will examine what female characters do or do not exist in the Lewis works. If those characters speak, I will discuss their dialogue. I will remark on how those characters interact with other characters, whether they are characterized positively or negatively, and whether they are flat or round, dynamic or static. I will also compare the

female characters with the male characters and comment on what both groups represent. Lewis's depiction of women I will then scrutinize for development, for possible changes in presentation as Lewis himself matures as a person and as a writer.

Tracing changes in Lewis's treatment of the feminine experience, however, will not entail making the easy assumption that Lewis "progressed" from depicting women in one way to depicting them in another. Lewis was a complex person and writer, and my setting out to prove that he steadily developed from a misogynist into a feminist or vice versa would be simplistic and blatantly incorrect. Lewis, in fact, experimented with a variety of ways to express the feminine experience, and his works reflect a collection of diverse writing methodologies, not a pattern of one book building upon and developing the methodology used in one of his previous works. His canon is not a pyramid, with a foundation of early works, a rising development of works written in the middle of his productive years, and the last book being a culmination of all his works. Each piece is instead one point in a linear sequence, one more perspective on the same themes about which Lewis writes again and again. Like a painter who makes a series of portraits, each portrait of the same face but from a different angle, Lewis repeatedly addresses the same issues but from a slightly different perspective every time.

Throughout all of his texts, Lewis's dominant themes are the searching for joy (*Sehnsucht*), inclusion in the Inner Ring, balance between and integration of the spiritual and material, identity within oneself and in relation to the

community, and truth of Christianity. These themes weave throughout the varying frameworks Lewis utilizes in each text and unite the Lewis canon through topic, not conclusion. Indeed, Lewis treats the same topic on more than one occasion but each time arrives at a different conclusion or at no decisive conclusion. For this reason, I will follow my feminist methods section and synopsis of Lewis biography with three separate sections on Lewis's space novels. Each section will analyze one novel. Within a section, comparison of one novel with the other two is minimal; my unifying summary of the Ransom Trilogy follows the three self-contained sections.

The books I will examine are Lewis's first three works of adult fiction: Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength, published in 1938, 1943, and 1945, respectively. These three novels of Lewis's Ransom Trilogy are related through the continuance of characters, the repetition of theme, and the temporal progression of plot, but, as Lewis states in the preface of the latter two books, the texts can be read independently of one another. Walter Hooper remarks in his preface to The Dark Tower and Other Stories, "Lewis told me that he never at any time had any intention of writing three connecting novels or creating what some see as a single coherent 'myth'" (8). Lewis actually writes these first pieces as a sequence of stories dialoguing on the human experience. Each text dialogues with the others, not echoes the others. The recurrence of elements from one book in the next is part of the dialogue, one voice responding to the statements of the others, not one book restating and then developing previously expressed ideas.

In Out of the Silent Planet, for example, we find that Lewis includes few female characters and addresses the feminine experience from the masculine perspective. The portrayal of the feminine is ambiguous, sometimes presented as positive, sometimes as negative. The ambiguity continues in Perelandra, but here Lewis works with a predominantly feminine setting and a major female character, whose words and actions, though, are still interpreted by a masculine narrator and other male characters. Lewis switches techniques one more time in That Hideous Strength, in which he includes multiple female characters and a female protagonist whose voice and point of view alternate with that of the male protagonist. Ambiguity surfaces once more in this text, but less from irregularities in Lewis's portrayal of women than from Lewis's female characters voicing a story that contrasts with that which Lewis tells. Although my philosophy of feminism scarcely could be labeled deconstructionist, aspects of deconstruction are integral to my analysis of the third book of the Trilogy, for in that book we discover that Lewis allows his female characters the freedom to express their voices to the extent that they periodically undercut Lewis's own message.

Although he eventually dominates them, Lewis's female characters seek their social and spiritual identities in defiance of Lewis's proposal of a "self-effacement for women" that could "severely hinder their own self-actualization" (Bartlett 198). He frees them to think and speak of their struggles to be recognized as fully human, as socially and spiritually equal to men and as more than a mysterious "other" that mimics the masculine but is

somehow lacking. Out of the ambiguity of his musings on women rise female and male characters who, independently of their author, discover the importance of mutual sacrifice, communication, and relationships between the sexes. Lewis himself, when he refrains from anti-feminist depictions of women, promotes their full humanity by encouraging a "[l]iterary experience [that] heals . . . wound[s], without undermining the privilege . . . of individuality" (Experiment 140). He sometimes liberates his female characters and affords them high status while surrounding them with anti-feminist commentary. In vacillating between the silence and voice of the feminine experience, Lewis is paradoxical and his texts ambiguous.

Note

¹ The feminist scholar Margaret A. Farley observes, "There is a pluralism within feminism as in any other rich and comprehensive interpretation of humanity and the world" (44). Her perceptive comment allows for unique definitions of feminism to remain within the school of feminist criticism as a means of enhancing the depth and applicability of the school rather than of undercutting its usefulness by disunion. The definition of feminism that I use in this paper is one individualized feminist voice among many, not an attempt to represent the polyphony of all feminist voices. My personal definition of feminism, nevertheless, is a dialectic with other feminists. I adopt ideas from some and elaborate on my own ideas in defense against others.

In harmony with Patricia Spacks' proposition, for instance, I posit that a feminist critique should look at a text "for the nature of female experience in it—the fictional experience of characters, the deducible or imaginable experience of an author, the experience implicit in language or structure" (Todd 5). Spacks' approach, however, considers the feminine experience to be of "primary concern," whereas my conservative feminist approach considers the feminine experience to be a principal subcategory of the human experience. My differentiation between the relative importance of the feminine and human experiences is significant, for it distinguishes my feminism from that of many others.

Janet Todd, for example, argues against my view that feminism can remain viable even when integrated with discussion of the "common" human experience. She states that "the human or the humanist condition in general" should not be a part of feminist criticism (4). Todd, however, does resonate with me in response to her denunciation of feminist criticism that focuses on "a part of women like the vagina or the uterus [or on] an expression of women like sexuality or 'feminine writing'" (4). In her landmark work The Second Sex, French feminist Simone de Beauvoir heavily emphasizes in this manner the expression of women's sexuality, but she also raises provocative questions concerning how the role of woman took its present form, draws the reader's attention to the concept of woman as "the Other" (de Beauvoir xvi; Messer-Davidow 71), and warns against defining woman "exclusively in her relation to man" (de Beauvoir 143).

De Beauvoir decries women's "enslavement to the generative function" (117) and, like her American counterpart Virginia Woolf (Todd 18), adds that a change in "woman's economic condition" is a prerequisite for "the moral, social, [and] cultural" advances for women (de Beauvoir 725). Woolf complements de Beauvoir's statements by repeatedly stressing that women must have "money and a room of one's own" in order to avoid the fate of Shakespeare's mythical sister and in order to take their proper role in the artistic world, and she proposes that maternal responsibilities may hamper women's ability to express themselves artistically (22). The ideas of feminine artistic infertility and economics do, in fact, tie into a feminist analysis of

Lewis's works, for art and economics appear in Jane's story in the Ransom Trilogy. Both de Beauvoir and Woolf thereby provide the vocabulary for speaking on those issues.

Marilyn R. Schuster and Susan R. Van Dyne similarly provide a helpful thought process and terminology for discussing literature from a feminist perspective by commenting on "invisible paradigms" in "the larger cultural context that marginalize or trivialize the lives of all women" (7). This idea along with their concept of "internalized assumptions" alerts the critic to be sensitive to the absence, as well as to the distorted presence, of female characters (7-8). A text merits a closer reading especially when it contains either no female characters or a paltry number of flat, undeveloped female characters. These characters, often nameless and with little dialogue, may wordlessly disappear from the work and never have the opportunity to sound their voices. John Schilb likewise challenges the reader to be observant with his remarks, warning against a "token inclusion of women," a potential characteristic of Lewis's books (202). He further suggests, along with Keith M. Mary, that "a work may pay attention to women and still give signs of male authorship. Readers . . . still occupy themselves with his [a male narrator's] thinking more than hers [a female character's]," again an element in a reading of Lewis (Schilb 205; May 4).

In her 1938 address "Are Women Human?" Dorothy L. Sayers, a scholar of Medieval literature at Oxford and a contemporary and correspondent of Lewis, faults feminists for lacking an "*esprit de corps*" and for "insisting that

there is an aggressively feminist 'point of view' about everything" (36). She admits that "there is a fundamental difference between men and women, but it is not the only fundamental difference in the world" (33). Taking my cue from Sayers, this paper will make allowance for non-gender determined differences, such as differences in moral values, to be operative in the text. Further in agreement with Sayers, I maintain that equally erroneous with declaring women an "inferior class" is proclaiming them a "superior class," and they ought only be declared "a class at all . . . in a useful context" (33). The exception of a "useful context" I deem here to be analyzing Lewis's works from a feminist viewpoint not with the primary intent of exposing any misogynist tendencies Lewis might have, but, instead, for increasing the accessibility of his texts for female readers and for better interpreting his texts in relation to the human experience as a whole.

Again, the position I take in this paper is the positive promotion of the full humanity of women instead of the negative search "to end the subordination of women" (Felski 13). Mary McDermott Shideler rightly laments that "[i]ncreasing numbers of women are subverting their personal (and therefore their feminine) natures by seeking earnestly to determine . . . 'women's function in modern society' before they have examined . . . the function in our societies of individual persons, in contrast to classes of humanity" (12). "Literature . . . is . . . a medium which can profoundly influence individual and cultural self-understanding . . . , charting the changing preoccupation of social groups through symbolic fictions by means of which they make sense of

experience," of human experience, versus that of women only (Felski 7).

My feminism, moreover, as in most feminist texts, goes beyond the seminal stages of feminism, that promoted a "new interpretative framework" as remedial acknowledgement of women or as remuneration for past neglect of the female gender (Zikmund 26). I speak of inclusive language and inclusive interpretations (Russell 13), remarking on the tensions within the texts. In reference to inclusive language, however, I deliberately diverge from the French feminists' concept of "*écriture féminine*," female language, and "writing from the body" (Todd 53; Showalter 8). This preoccupation with sexual writing, derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, centers on necessarily gender exclusive features, generally forbidding a positive connection of the feminine experience with the masculine experience, and excluding male feminists who cannot identify with all feminine sexual experiences. I promote a theory of inclusive feminism, not exclusive feminism. Furthermore, I believe there to be far more involved in the feminine experience than sex or sexually motivated occurrences; "[m]enstruation is not the whole of the female experience" (Todd 97).

I also divorce myself from the British feminists' connection with socialism and Marxism (86-87). Like the psychoanalysts, the Marxists concentrate on only one portion of the feminine experience, that related to economics and class (Showalter 9), and often do not sufficiently acknowledge the importance of non-economic aspects, such as relational language. As Newton and Rosenfelt suggest in Feminist Criticism and Social Change, feminine

language and writing style and class/material factors do merit attention, but neither is adequate for explaining the whole of the feminist consciousness (Todd 90-91). As an American feminist, I can afford to interweave economic and linguistic considerations into my feminism as elements of that feminism without letting them be the conclusion of my analysis. Lewis, who selected a philologist to be the hero of his Ransom Trilogy, undoubtedly would support the importance of linguistic analysis, as the signifiers in a language reflect much beyond a one-to-one word correspondence.

In conjunction with American feminist Sandra M. Gilbert, my feminism works to "decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between . . . genre and gender" ("What Do" 36). I will look at the ambiguities surrounding the true experiences of storyless women. As delineated in The Madwoman in the Attic, which Gilbert coauthored with Susan Gubar, the feminist interpretation requires the critic to "examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated" for their female characters, to see more of women than a mythical, idealistic perfection or an irresistible seductress (17). Such breaking of stereotypes entails looking at "the silence, the marginality, the secondary status—of women" (Gilbert, "What Do" 35). The feminist view also investigates woman's historical anonymity and her lifestyle within a patriarchal society. I define patriarchy, that favorite feminist buzzword, as the societal system, including its institutions of religion and education, that creates and then

continues to perpetrate male domination at the expense of a full expression of the female experience.

Like Carolyn G. Heilbrun, an American compatriot of Gilbert and Gubar, I also use the terms "female consciousness" and "feminine identity" in my text (18) in order to speak of knowledge, whether held by men or women, of the feminist experience. I, too, will draw attention to issues of power struggles and marginalization of women if I should see them in Lewis's works, for female characters denied power and alienated from other characters are often indicative of anti-feminist sentiment and writing (18, 21). In addition, I cite Heilbrun's pertinent observation that a critic's similarities to an author about whom he or she writes may highly qualify that critic for the particular task before him or her.

Heilbrun gives the example of James Brabazon being especially qualified to write a biography of Dorothy L. Sayers because he shares Sayers's English culture and her religious beliefs, while Heilbrun herself can add the qualification of having "an understanding of women whose lives include risk and the desire for individual achievement in the public world, as well as, or in place of, marital love" (50). By the same token, I, as a Christian holding religious beliefs quite similar to those which Lewis described in his explicitly religious writings, can lend my Lewislike worldview to a feminist reading of his works.

Although my sympathy toward the beliefs behind his writings will not make me more likely to ignore or exonerate any misogynistic tendencies I

find in them, being attuned to his beliefs should increase my sensitivity to the author's original intentions. As William Empson suggests, I will make my own moral judgments in addition to studying those made by the author (613). I do consider the author's intentions of importance, but I will permit the reality of the printed words to override what the author may have thought he had communicated. My personal beliefs, furthermore, may augment my abilities to recognize influences of the church's culture in Lewis's writings and to hear echoes of the Bible or the church's language in his pieces, which will be particularly useful in noting traces of the historically patriarchal system of the Christian church. My own text, then, will be in dialogue with the Christian elements of Lewis's work, as well as with other feminists and with the reader, in order to review Lewis's texts from a feminist framework with the intent of enhancing the accessibility of his works for all.

Part II: Women and the Life of Lewis

Certainly the life of Lewis plays an important role in the formation of his text, in both what the text says and how the text says it. His works, however, cannot be read as biography, rather as pieces that do, at times, reflect his biography.¹ Lewis does not intend his "planetary romances" (Surprised by Joy 36) to be biographical books. He works in the realm of the imagination and transcends his individual experiences to write for a large, general audience. He creates characters who live and who can speak independently of Lewis's own experience. A summary knowledge of Lewis's interaction with women, then, should be sufficient to expose the reader to the mindset behind some of the anti-feminist statements Lewis writes and especially to explain the extraordinary degree of ambiguity with which Lewis treats his fictional female characters.

C. S. Lewis simply had limited interaction with women. His mother Flora (Hamilton) was a loving woman, but "[h]er closest contact with Jack . . . was when she took him into her bed at night if he was unwell, frightened by thunder, having a nightmare, or could not get to sleep" (Sayer 43). "The reading and storytelling was done by Lizzie Endicott," his nurse (43). Lewis's mother died of cancer when he was nine, and his father never remarried. The young Lewis's best friends were males, his brother Warren and neighbor

Arthur Greeves. He attended all-boys schools and was at one point privately tutored by W. T. Kirkpatrick. At the Malvern prep school Cherbourg, Lewis met his "first surrogate mother," Miss G. E. Cowie, who gave him "love and care to which he responded gratefully" (Sayer 67; Green 311), but the school, unfortunately, dismissed her because the headmaster disapproved of her embracing the boys and of protesting the school's policy of censoring the boys' letters home. Not surprising in view of the fact that he was denied exposure to a significant amount of tender emotion on the part of females, Lewis writes in his autobiography that he "learned to fear and hate emotion," a tendency that surfaces in his Ransom Trilogy (Surprised by Joy 33).

Mrs. Janie Moore, known as Minto, forged the next close relationship Lewis had with a woman. He met her through her son Paddy Moore, an army companion of Lewis. Paddy had asked Lewis to care for his mother and sister Maureen if Paddy should be killed. When that tragedy occurred, Lewis shouldered the responsibility of supporting Mrs. Moore and Maureen for years, and Mrs. Moore lived with him from 1921 until her death in 1951, a span of years encompassing his authorship of all three volumes of the Ransom Trilogy. The nature of the middle-aged Mrs. Moore's relationship with Lewis remains unknown. They may have had an affair; speculations abound, but researchers have not unearthed proof. In any event, Lewis maintained an unusual relationship with Moore. She was a controlling woman and not intellectually compatible with Lewis, and, in fact, interfered with his writing. He, nevertheless, appreciated her kindness and love, and

she served at least as another mother to Lewis.

Throughout his most productive decades of teaching and writing, Lewis had contact, much of it written correspondence, with female students and fellow female academicians and artists. He wrote to Medieval and Renaissance scholar Dorothy L. Sayers, who was connected with the "Inklings," a group of Christian, Oxford intellectuals of which Lewis was a member. Both she and Ruth Pitter, a poet and painter with whom Lewis corresponded and occasionally met, earned Lewis's respect and admiration, despite their femininity. When Lewis saw quality in women's artistic or academic work, he was quick and effusive in his praise, as exemplified in his June 1953 letter to the "American Lady" to whom he wrote lines that mocked reviewers' slighting remarks about women's writing when works such as Sappho's poems and the Magnificat show the reviewers to be blinded by gender bias (Letters 17).

Lewis, on the other hand, also wrote passages characterizing women as rather brainless and nonliterary, such as in An Experiment in Criticism, which describes "women who remembered a novel so dimly that they had to stand for half an hour in the library skimming through it before they were certain they had once read it" (2). Several of the few critics that have analyzed feminism in his work proclaim him "an anti-feminist" (Jewett 140) who writes "savag[e]," "nasty piece[s] of work . . . [in relation to] female characters," thereby "alienat[ing] half of his readership and edify[ing] none of it" (Filmer 133, 99, 96). Owen Barfield, one of Lewis's friends, answers the frequent

charge that Lewis was a misogynist by "conclud[ing] that C. S. Lewis was a misogynist on the theoretical level but was not so in his relationships with individual women" (Downing 150). Students Patricia (Boshell) Heidelberger, Jill (Flewett) Freud, and Rosamund Cowan all recall Lewis as supporting them emotionally and/or financially in their academic and artistic pursuits (151).

Then, in 1950, American writer and thinker Joy Davidman Gresham first wrote to Lewis (Dorsett 70). They met in person for the first time in 1952 and married in 1957. Just three years later, Joy died of cancer. She surely introduced a new understanding of the feminine experience to her husband, who had thought to be a bachelor for life, but in three short years she could not necessarily reverse the feminine stereotypes Lewis had held for decades. Lewis gained two stepsons by that marriage, one of whom explains, "Mother always said that her main contribution to Till We Have Faces [published 1956] was to teach Jack how to think and write from a feminine viewpoint" (Gresham 2). His words imply that Lewis had not known how to think and write from a feminine viewpoint before his "collaboration" with Joy (2), an idea I will explore in my critique of the Trilogy, all parts of which were completed at least ten years before Till We Have Faces.

Gresham maintains:

Jack was in no sense a misogynist. He liked lively and active minds irrespective of whether they be encased in female bodies or male bodies. He disliked frivolous, or worse still, deliberately idle minds,

also irrespective of the sex of the body which carried them.

Unfortunately perhaps, the social mores of the time meant that he met far more active minds in men than in women, who were mostly oriented by their environmental training towards pursuits which did not interest him. . . . Remember that Jack was never without a female presence in his life from his undergraduate days till 1960. His attitude towards women in academia has been very much misunderstood, and deliberately misconstrued at times. I believe he disliked the idea of gender segregation in academia. The attitude did not change after his marriage, because the only direction his marriage might have moved his thinking towards was the position he already held. However it is important to bear in mind that he evolved his thinking over the years of his life just as do the rest of us. (1)

Writer Kathryn Lindskoog reiterates Gresham's sentiments saying, "Lewis was wonderfully free of the misogyny typical of many males at Oxford" (Letter 1) and intimates that Walter Hooper, editor of many recently published Lewis books and literary adviser of the Lewis estate, has concocted and perpetuated a myth of anti-Lewis feminists (Lindskoog *Light*, 98). The feminists who write on Lewis's works, can, of course, still find anti-feminist tendencies in his writings and yet not be anti-Lewis critics. Kath Filmer laments Lewis texts' "recurrence of female images which are in varying degrees denigratory and offensive" (133), but her writings praise Lewis in other areas; she also recognizes the Lewis paradox, that he both "exalt[s] womanhood and . . .

loathe[s] it [as] . . . something unutterably 'other'" (135).

In my conclusions about feminism and Lewis, I do not attempt to reconcile these contradictions in Lewis's writings, the polarities of his praise of women and his censure of them, because Lewis himself never reconciled the opposing views he simultaneously holds about women. He had relatively little intimate and extended contact with women, except through written correspondence, and his books reflect his unfamiliarity with the feminine experience. Preceding Joy's editing and the clarification she brought concerning the feminine, Lewis's interplanetary novels especially manifest the confusion he felt about women. He presented women as mysterious because they often were mysterious to him. He created foolish female characters and brilliant female characters, both placed in hierarchical and patriarchal environments, because those are the types of women Lewis met and the environment in which he met them.

Ambiguity concerning women clouds the Trilogy, as puzzlement and ambiguity characterized Lewis's personal experience with women. When Lewis's female characters resist this ambiguity and then voice a story at odds with the commentary surrounding them, we can admire the author's craftsmanship, since he surmounted some of his own limited exposure to women and formed female characters live enough to fight his paradigm of thinking. Through extensive reading and open-mindedness to learning from what contact he did have with women, Lewis permits his female characters to live a feminine experience on their own, an experience of self-discovery and

connection to community that Lewis had never had himself. He successfully leaves his "tiny world" and "transcend[s] [him]self," as he had always encouraged his readers to do (Experiment 140-1).

Note

¹ Many fine works have been written about the life of Lewis, and I refer my readers particularly to the definitive biography on Lewis, Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis, by George Sayer. The detailed C. S. Lewis: A Biography, by Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, also provides essential information on the life of Lewis and is referenced in almost every book written on Lewis. Kathryn Lindskoog's Light in the Shadowlands offers provocative questions about the Lewis documents, texts, and estate and balances some of the more traditional writings on Lewis with startlingly new, cutting edge research. Finally, Lyle W. Dorsett's And God Came In supplies the reader with an excellently researched and well written presentation of the life of Joy Davidman Lewis.

Part III: Out of the Silent Planet

Beginning our analysis with the first book of the Ransom Trilogy, Out of the Silent Planet, we find a text that quite simply ignores much of the female experience. Feminist critic Kath Filmer dryly notes, "It is very easy to discuss the treatment of women in Out of the Silent Planet. . . . There are none, except for a passing mention of Elwin Ransom's sister in India and a brief scene in which a village woman entreats Ransom's help in locating her mentally disabled son" (96). Filmer goes on to remark that even the planet on which the male characters land is a masculine planet with a masculine deity (96). She accurately assesses the basic lack of female characters, although she does overlook the barmaid, the unpleasant innkeeper, and the dead Miss Alice, all mentioned in the first few pages of the text (Out of the Silent Planet 7-8).¹ These characters at least avoid Lewis's denigrating modifier "only," placed in front of the phrase "a married sister," and an uncomplimentary description, such as that given the old woman concerned with her son's whereabouts (17).

The old woman had a "monotonous voice and [a] limited range of . . . vocabulary" in comparison with Ransom, a philologist, and "was trembling and nearly crying" (9). Negating Ronda Chervin's idea that the old woman brought out the unselfish hero in Ransom (5), the protagonist felt "bound" by

his "unfortunate promise" to help the old woman (Out 11). The uneducated, burdensome, and nameless woman, furthermore, provokes Devine's outburst of "Poor woman be damned" (12). Verlyn Flieger believes the elderly female character to be significant because "her inability with words . . . foreshadows Ransom's later inability to translate Weston in the climactic scene at Meldilorn" (50). But, for the critic seeking an expression of the feminine voice in this novel, Lewis does not offer much at the start. "[S]ilent women . . . do not explore the power that words have for either expressing or developing thought" (Belenky 24), and these few female characters at the beginning of Out of the Silent Planet are silent and powerless to the extreme.

From all initial appearances, then, Out of the Silent Planet has nothing to offer concerning the female experience except silence. Notably lacking are female characters and female characters in dialogue. Filmer, however, could afford to broaden her definition of how an author may address the female experience. Out of the Silent Planet does, in fact, contain pertinent references to femininity, although these references do not all promote the full humanity of women. In keeping with traditionally male references to a weapon, a "bellicose mood," and an "experience of the War," Devine dreams of "the most expensive women," classifying them as pleasures in the same basic category as "ocean-going yachts" and "a big place on the Riviera" (Out 37, 30). Later he makes crude remarks about interbreeding with the creatures on Malacandra (34). The character of Devine, however, is "bent" in Malacandrian terminology, or "evil" in earth's vocabulary, and Lewis does

not hold him up as a model of virtue.

The hero, Ransom, on the other hand, demonstrates a sensitivity to the feminine, recognizing feminist imagery, taking some upon himself, and attempting to learn more about it in the creatures he meets on Malacandra. While in the spaceship with Devine and Weston, for example, Ransom reflects of space that "[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" (32). On the planet, too, the narrator carefully notes femininity in the landscape, seeing an island as a "woman's breast" (105), and remarks on the fact that Malacandrian mythology "associates some idea of the female with Venus" (111).

Without any female characters in the text to reflect the feminine side of the human experience, Ransom assumes certain aspects of traditional femininity himself, thereby giving the story a more complete representation of humanity. "Stretched naked on his bed, a second Danaë," Ransom "surrender[s]" his body to the mystical universe (31). He does his own cooking (33) and takes "the baby" of risk that Devine and Weston force upon him (30). Once on the planet, he subsequently assumes a role of receiving nurturing as well, for he thinks of "nurseries" and curls into the fetal position, "dr[awing] his knees up and hug[ging] himself" (50).

Ransom's love for life, though, does not embrace Weston's distorted idea that the human race must be preserved at all costs, even with a price of deliberately (and unnecessarily) extinguishing individual human life, such as

the lives of Ransom or of other species, like the Malacandrians (138).

Chervin, in discussing the concept of heroism in relation to the character of Ransom, remarks that "Ransom is shown to be a man without special physical strength" (1). A male hero lacking extraordinary physical strength not only is uncommon in literature but also displays a more feminine side, since few feminine heroes are characterized by great physical strength.

Although Lewis's hero seems to be sensitive to the feminine, however, the "ideal" society in which the author places his hero reflects a much more ambiguous representation of women, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Describing Ransom's first meeting with a *hross*, the narrator explains, "It was like a courtship—like the meeting of the first man and the first woman in the world; it was like something beyond that; so natural is the contact of sexes, so limited the strangeness, so shallow the reticence, so mild the repugnance to be overcome, compared with the first tingling intercourse of two different, but rational species" (Out 56).

With the use of the words "so natural," "so limited," "so shallow," and "so mild," this statement apparently intends to downplay the negative feelings of two different creatures meeting for the first time, but it makes a Miltonic assumption that a "strangeness," "reticence," and "repugnance," all negative words, are undoubtedly part of that first contact between a man and a woman (Milton 98). The assumption, though, is flawed. Surely not every time a male first meets a female or a female first meets a male must they overcome a degree of repugnance. Not every male baby cries when first handled by a

female doctor or nurse or placed in his mother's lap. Critic Thomas Howard also notes that Lewis parallels meeting a *hross* with "greet[ing] other selves—*any* other selves" (81). Echoing Simone de Beauvoir's reference to woman as the "Other," Howard's own observation about the words of Lewis highlights Lewis's perhaps inadvertent comparison of a *hross* to a woman, both creatures who are like man but are not man.

Lewis's somewhat negative impression of a man's first meeting with an "Other" continues with the narrator musing that "the rationality of the *hross* tempted you to think of it as a man. Then it became abominable—a man seven feet high, with a snaky body. . . . Nothing could be more disgusting than the one impression; nothing more delightful than the other" (Out 58). Considering that the narrator delivers this description shortly after the previous one, which compares a woman to a *hross*, and that literature commonly describes woman as like man yet with variations in shape and mind that make her fundamentally the non-man and the "Other," this passage does not reflect well on women.

The obvious similarities between man and woman, who are both human and who can complement each other rather well, often does prompt one to "think of [a woman] as a man," despite the differences. Indulging in this "temptation," though, hardly need lead to a feeling of "disgust." Pleasure can exist in difference; all that is like man, but yet not man, does not necessarily contradict the idea of being "pleasurable." Educator Parker J. Palmer wisely notes that "the act of knowing *is* an act of love, the act of entering and

embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community" (8).

The narrator's negative portrayal of the "Other," whether woman or *hross*, cannot be considered a definitive statement on the "Other" in Out of the Silent Planet, however, because a variety of passages present a seemingly positive impression of them. Ransom's thoughts concerning "loathsome sexless monsters" indicate that his character perceives gender undifferentiation to be negative, that gender differentiation must be at least neutral, if not positive (Out 35). Sometime later, Ransom even expresses pride that he learned to know "a male from a female *hross* at sight, and even individual differences were becoming plain" to him (65). Ransom studies the female *hrossa*, in addition to the male. He observes who talks to whom (71), who cares for the *hrossa* cubs, how the female *hrossa* interact with him and why (65), what feelings the female *hrossa* express (70), and what domestic chores they do (77). His actions are certainly not those of a misogynistic hero or of a hero ignoring the feminine experience.

Ransom attempts to learn about how Malacandrians handle gender differences and roles, too, and discovers a society that treats its multiple species with equality, although traces of human attitudes, presumably the author's attitudes, toward females surface in the words of the Malacandrians. Ransom questions the *hrossa* as to their mating habits and finds that they "love," find "pleasure" in "begetting of young" (72-73), and are "naturally

monogamous;" with respect to mating, the females have equal status with the males (74). Ransom perceives each of the three species, the *hrossa*, the *pfifltriggi*, and the *sorns*, as treating each other equally, specializing in what they do best and never trying to rule over the other two species. The *pfifltriggi* and the *sorns*, in fact, agree to learn the language of the *hrossa* for the sake of practicality, not worrying about favoritism or rank (114).

Ransom does not mention, although the reader may consider it of importance, that the interspecies equality does not necessarily extend to intraspecies equality. When Ransom asks a *pfifltriggi* "Does no one keep your people at their work, Kanakaberaka?" the *pfifltriggi* answers, "with a piping noise which was apparently his equivalent for a laugh," "'Our females'" (116). Even in this "ideal" society, the females are portrayed as bossy and are the brunt of jokes. Struggling to understand what the *pfifltriggi* think of females, Ransom pursues the issue and questions, "'Are your females of more account among you than those of the other *hnau* among them?'" (116), to which the *pfifltriggi* responds, "'Very greatly. The *sorns* make least account of females and we make most'" (Out 116). If making the most of females means presenting them as bossy to a man who is desperately trying to understand the fundamentals of a culture unknown to him, even if that presentation is part of a joke, the society does not treat females as fully *hnau*.

Because no females are given any dialogue in which they express their viewpoints or in which they make humorous remarks about males, the author provides only a slanted perspective on what appears to be a quite

human concept of femininity, the stereotypical bossy female. David Downing, agreeing that it is justified to compare the female Malacandrians with human females, maintains that the statement of the *pfifltrigg* "implies that women are somewhat out of their element among that world's thinkers [the *sorns*, the philosophers of Malacandra] and most at home among males who work with their hands [the *pfifltriggi*, the miners of Malacandra]" (147). He further sustains the idea that the "phrasing also suggests that males define the character of each species, while the females serve as adjuncts to the males" (147). The former idea of Downing supports reading the text as representing women less capable than men in an important aspect of the human experience—that of thinking, of philosophizing, and of using logic. The latter idea reveals the text as upholding the traditional idea that females are defined as the "Other" in relation to males.

Lewis thus presents a mixed portrait of femininity in Out of the Silent Planet. In a letter to Sister Penelope, Lewis insists that "[t]here ought spiritually to be a . . . woman in every man" (Letters of C. S. 237), and his hero Ransom does display that ideal. Ransom exhibits a sensitivity to the feminine, adopting the nurturing role of mother himself at times and making the effort to investigate how the Malacandrians establish gender roles. Lewis, though, places Ransom in an "ideal" environment which appears far more egalitarian with reference to its species than it does with reference to the genders within the species. Such stereotyping of females as bossy suggests more of a manifestation of the author's unconscious human

opinions in the story than it does a deliberate attempt by Lewis to include bossy females in his ideal, Malacandrian world. Furthermore, in Out of the Silent Planet, the antagonists Weston and Devine are the only human characters to speak negatively of women with any degree of seriousness. Ransom is sensitive to the feminine, and the Malacandrians are portrayed ambiguously in relation to the feminine. Women characters, of course, do not have a voice in the text. Only in the next book of the Trilogy do we actually hear females dialogue.

Note

¹ Out of the Silent Planet will hereafter be abbreviated as "Out."

Part IV: Perelandra

Perelandra, the second book of the Ransom Trilogy, thankfully offers the feminist reader and critic far more feminine material with which to work than does Out of the Silent Planet. In contrast to the first book of the Trilogy, the second book not only includes more than a fleeting mention of female characters but also presents a female character who maintains a prominent role throughout the first three quarters of the book to the exclusion of any other indigenous anthropomorphic Venusian creatures. Unlike Out of the Silent Planet's masculine Malacandra, which was governed by a male spirit, Perelandra is feminine and governed by the female spirit Venus. Perelandra becomes a feminine setting for the Venusian counterpart of Eve, dubbed the Green Lady by the narrator. Through her dialoguing with the male characters of Ransom and Weston, the Green Lady gives voice to the feminine experience and provides evidence for evaluating Lewis's perception of the female experience, his belief in the concept of the "mother-goddess aspect of femininity" (Filmer 97), and his representation of the feminine in his myth of the initial experience of life on Venus.

Our feminist analysis of Perelandra begins with an examination of the feminine environment with which Lewis endows the planet. As the hero Ransom discovers soon after arriving on the planet and finding himself

immersed in water, Lewis's Venus is primarily liquid. Most of the planet is ocean, upon which float mats of seaweed-like plants. The Green Lady lives on the floating mats and heeds the warning of Maleldil, the ruling spirit, never to spend the night on any firm land she might discover. According to Kath Filmer, the imagery of *Perelandra*'s geography as unfixed and unstable manifests the first of many "misogynist" elements of this novel (96). She suggests that Lewis's description of the "unreliable" floating mats, certainly not *terra firma* of the feminine environment is, "perhaps, a subtle reminder of Lewis's view that women are fickle and unreliable and not solid like chaps" (96). If Filmer goes rather too far in her accusations of misogyny in the depiction of the feminine environment, she does rightly explore femininity not just in the characters but also in the environment in which they exist, as well as suggest that Lewis's description of the feminine environment may contribute something to our knowledge of his perception of the feminine experience as a whole.¹

Lewis, moreover, incorporates much sensual imagery, particularly that of color, smell, and taste, into the passages about the Perelandrian landscape, and all those images tend to enhance the idea of the planet as feminine. The lush flora and fertile fauna thrive in a world as colorful as "the centre of a rainbow" (*Perelandra* 38).² Numerous lines detail the "gurgling tubes and exploding bladders" of "vegetable broth" (39), the globes of fruit which Ransom holds in his hands and from which he sips the "voluptuous" juice (42), and the warmth and new smells that surround the protagonist (44).

Even refraining from the excessive treatment psychoanalysts give these lines, such details are important in their support of the representation of the planet as teeming and flowering with life and making the most of its reproductive abilities. The author writes of a planet exuding sex, but not in a vulgar sense. When the evil-minded Weston questions whether Ransom could live on Perelandra with a beautiful woman in "sexless innocence" (87), Ransom scoffs that "sexless . . . [is] about as good a description of living in Perelandra as it would be to say that a man had forgotten water because Niagara Falls didn't immediately give him the idea of making it into cups of tea" (88). Perelandra thus abounds with sexuality, but in a spiritual and physical way that transcends lustful acts.

Lewis stresses the reproductive role of the Green Lady, too, portraying her as a mother-goddess. A mass of creatures follow this Mother Nature figure wherever she goes (54), and she herself tells Ransom, "*I am the Mother*" (66). Looking at the Green Lady causes Ransom to feel orphaned and to long for the sight of "the great Mother of his own race thus, in her innocence and splendour" (152).^{3, 4} "There was in her face [the Green Lady's] an authority, in her caresses a condescension, which by taking seriously the inferiority of her adorers made them somehow less inferior—raised them from the status of pets to that of slaves" (65). This "gracious" (67) and commanding woman carries herself like a queen, unnerving the normally composed Ransom (60), authoritatively dismissing both Weston and Ransom when their presence bothers or wearies her (132), and holding herself apart with "a note of

deliberate courtesy, even of ceremony, in her speech" when she realizes that "she [i]s not addressing an equal," not another queen's messenger, but "a commoner" (67).

Lewis here creates a female character that displays royalty in demeanor and deportment and also has a command over language, although Lewis characterizes her in a mixed fashion, sometimes showing her empowered and confident in her use of language, but at other times unpracticed and childish. In the passage quoted at the end of the previous paragraph, for example, we see the Green Lady's ability to employ queenly speech when she deems it appropriate. Her character further demonstrates a high status by being in direct communication with the great spirit Maleldil, who advises her (61-62, 75). In some instances, she exerts power by withholding communication, with "her stare level and unafraid, communicating nothing" (55). She quickly discourages meaningless chatter, moreover, in exchange for profound discussions (75), in contrast with the females mentioned by the *pfifltrigg* in Out of the Silent Planet, females who do not enjoy high status among the philosophizing *sorns*. The Green Lady expresses herself with creativity and assurance, using a broad spectrum of communication methods—singing (59), speaking, initiating conversation (59), shouting (54), and asking questions (57).

The strength of her communicative abilities are so strong that they periodically overwhelm Ransom, who feels that when she speaks, "vast choral music [i]s all about him," causing a sense of "awe" to overcome him

(66). Her words communicate not only her individual wisdom and power but also, in the sense that she is a mother of language, the power of masses of spirit behind her, for it was "not she, or not she only, who had spoken" (66). Ransom cannot always distinguish who is talking when he dialogues with her (63), for her language has an exceedingly powerful presence, as well as a satiating effect (63), which again reveals the nourishing role of the Mother, whose language "fill[s]" Ransom (63). The Green Lady speaks with certainty and self-confidence in her knowledge, on multiple occasions remarking, "Of course" (66, 77).

Her ultimate command over language consists in naming Ransom, christening him "Piebald" (78), thereby giving him a Venusian identity and, with the bestowal of the laughable name, defining his status in Perelandra as inferior to her own. Feminist Mieke Bal views the giving of proper names to people as an act of exorbitant power, for naming involves forming and creating identity and character (106). Ilana Pardes goes on to explain that naming, particularly that done by Eve, "May be perceived as a trace from [a] . . . mythological phase in which mother goddesses were very much involved in the process of creation" (45). The Green Lady, as a mother-goddess, manifests her creative power in naming/renaming Ransom, as Eve names her sons. The parallel with Eve becomes even more apparent with the narrator's reference to Paradise Lost (Per 128) and during the discussion about Eve that Ransom has with the Green Lady (67).

The parallels Lewis makes between Eve and the Green Lady are part of his tendency to waffle between characterizing women either as angels or monsters, seductresses or madonnas, stereotypically easy to understand or entirely mysterious, perfectly good or perfectly evil. Lewis echoes Betty Friedan's theory concerning the feminine mystique when he describes the Green Lady "doing something with her mind, perhaps even with her muscles, that he [Ransom] did not understand," giving him the impression that "she seemed more strange to him than before" (64). Questions overwhelm the confused Ransom. Is this woman "a goddess carved apparently out of green stone, yet alive," the perfect "[b]eautiful, naked, shameless, young" pagan goddess (64), or is she "another myth coming out into the world of fact—perhaps a more terrible myth, of Circe or Alcina," a monster (54)? Is she "an idiot," "an evil spirit that mock[s] men" (55), "like Artemis or . . . a Maenad" (64), or a nymph with "her hands occupied in plaiting together some blue flowers" (59)?

Perhaps, on the other hand, she is not of pagan mythology, rather of Christian tradition; she is a "Madonna" (64) and worthy of a "halo" (68). Unlike the Lilith of George MacDonald, an author who greatly influenced Lewis's writing, the Green Lady does not tempt Ransom to lust; "desire [was] a thousand miles away from his experience," in fact (59). The Green Lady, moreover, resists Weston's logic (116), willingly teaches Ransom things he does not know (77), and accepts his teaching her (59). And she also is a Miltonic Eve. Like Milton's Eve (Milton 98), her reflection fascinates her (Per

138). In both instances, however, she turns from looking at herself to another, in Milton's case, to Adam, in Lewis's case, to the environment around her. Here, though, Lewis does not describe the Green Lady to be like Peggy in his short story "The Shoddy Lands," a girl who admires her body to a disgusting extreme. The negative result of the Green Lady's interaction with Weston becomes not self-centeredness but a squelching of her positive question-asking (125) and a false sense of "Duty" and self-sacrifice (131) similar to that of the mother in The Great Divorce (92).

Lewis may sometimes describe the Green Lady in idyllic terms, granting her sovereignty, poise, and verbal power, but he undercuts that characterization in other instances, such as her previously mentioned susceptibility to Weston's sophistries. By the very fact that Ransom must come to Perelandra to help the Green Lady, who, like Eve, apparently cannot resist evil on her own, the female becomes a weak protagonist, in this case acted upon more than completing action herself.⁵ The narrator delineates how "green" she is in more ways than just her color. Faced with the challenge of conversing with more than one person at a time, she noticeably has "no notion of how to glance rapidly from one face to another or to disentangle two remarks at once" (Per 113). She may sometimes speak with authority, but her interpersonal communication skills need polish.

The narrator pokes even more holes in the characterization of the Green Lady as a female in command of language. "[H]er replies . . . beg[i]n to repel Ransom" (70), and she makes "apparently witless" remarks (66). When she

first encounters Ransom, Ransom leads the way into conversation, and she obligingly follows with a question (57), a foreshadowing of her later, continual "I do not understand" (62) and "I do not know---" statements (63, 65). Childishly laughing and pointing at him, although the narrator claims "there was nothing of the child" in her (61), she treats her meeting with Ransom with considerable irreverence in view of the fact that it is the first contact she has had with a member of his species (55, 56).

In addition, the Green Lady and Ransom struggle to communicate clearly with one another (62-63), and she, vacillating between "youth" and "oldness" (59, 60-61, 67-68), constantly asks questions, demonstrating a naïveté to the point of stupidity. Dabney Hart posits that the difficulties Ransom and the Green Lady have with communication result from the fact that they "use words in different ways" (35). The text remains ambiguous here; this may be another reference to the Green Lady's inability to use language well with any consistency or it may reveal Ransom's inability to communicate himself to a female or to understand her distinctively feminine way of communicating her experience.

Ambiguity permeates the text, as shown in Ransom's confusion about the Green Lady's identity and role. When he first sees her, he never considers that the creature could be a woman. He thinks her "not merely man-like, but a man," trying to categorize her according to that most familiar to him, his own species and gender (Per 53). He soon marvels at his discovery that "the green man [i]s not a man at all, but a woman" (54). The narrator wonders at

the shock Ransom feels when he discovers the green person's gender and can only conclude, "It is difficult to say why this surprised him so" (54). Ransom's surprise at the Green Lady's gender actually is not as inexplicable as the narrator indicates. In Out of the Silent Planet, when Ransom first meets a *hross*, he instantly compares the *hross* to his own point of reference, man, and, ascertaining difference, finds it disgusting. His relief comes in thinking of the *hross* as like man, but "other." It is not so baffling, then, that Ransom repeats the same pattern in Perelandra, especially because this time he discovers the epitome of man-like "Other," the female.

Lewis has created a dynamic character, nevertheless, so Ransom develops in his perception of the other. Shortly after meeting the Green Lady, Ransom deliberates how she can have "a face so calm, and so unearthly, despite the full humanity of every feature" (56). He demystifies her unusual physiognomy by attributing its unearthly quality to an "absence of . . . resignation," considers that "idiocy" may be a factor, and then retreats to concluding that "it might be immortality . . . some condition of mind to which terrestrial experience offer[s] no clue at all" (56). Despite his choice to take refuge in temporarily declaring the Green Lady mysterious and waiting before learning to know her, the protagonist seems to become aware that the mystery of the other can be solved.

The other is not permanently indecipherable. Ransom soon recognizes that the Green Lady is shaped like he is (61), and, more importantly, he begins to attribute differences between man and the other to a difference in

experience, more than to physical difference. He discerns, "[T]he word 'human' refers to something more than the bodily form or even to the rational mind. It refers also to that community of blood and experience which unites all men and women on the Earth" (56). Ransom not only recognizes the importance of the human experience to the definition of the human identity but he also classes women with men, instead of relegating women to an "other" category. He has come to the point where he can now see beyond human gender differences to the common human experience that binds men and women together. Perhaps he will next expand this inclusive worldview to his interaction with other species. He is, of course, already light years ahead of Weston's narrow view of relationships and experience.

The text, unfortunately, now once again flips from an inspiring, open view of the human experience to a more restrictive view of femininity. The Green Lady's dialogue scarcely reveals her own perception of her identity. She indicates awareness that she is a mother figure as well as a wife, but she does not detail any of these relationships nor define her relationship with Ransom, despite the fact that Ransom narrates the tale of his relationship with her. More strongly defeating the recognition of females as fully human is the passage that Lewis pours into the mouth of Weston. Weston makes the most strongly feminist statements of the book, but, because he is the villain of the text, anything he says is negated by its identification with his wickedness. Ransom, on the other hand, refutes Weston's feminism and lends credibility to anti-feminism because he is the protagonist of Perelandra. Lewis writes:

Ransom tried to convince her that children were fruit enough. But the Un-man asked whether this elaborate division of the human race into two sexes could possibly be meant for no other purpose than offspring?—a matter which might have been more simply provided for, as it was in many of the plants. A moment later it was explaining that men like Ransom in his own world—men of that intensely male and backward-looking type who always shrank away from the new good—had continuously laboured to keep women down to mere child-bearing and to ignore the high destiny for which Maleldil had actually created her. It told her that such men had already done incalculable harm. . . . It was at this stage that it began to teach her many new words: words like Creative and Intuition and Spiritual. . . . [S]he . . . laughed for a whole minute on end. (131-32)

In this paragraph, Ransom seems to support the idea that women should be content with child-bearing as their main purpose in life. Weston is mocked for his "ludicrous" pontificating about the existence of more reasons behind sexual division than reproduction, and accusations against a tradition of patriarchy are scorned. Positive words often ascribed to a feminine understanding of the human experience, words such as "Creative," "Intuition," and "Spiritual" (Belenky 54), are dismissed. Finally, the female herself rejects feminism, labeling it foolishness. The narrator does not even make an effort to explain why Weston's ideas are evil in this case; apparently the reader is supposed to find the argumental flaws to be self-evident. If all of

Lewis's writing exhibited such staunchly anti-feminist traits, there would be no need for any lengthy feminist treatment of Lewis's works. All could be summarized in a few paragraphs concluding that Lewis is a misogynist.

Lewis, however, retains an ambiguity concerning women's issues in his text. Seventy pages after the lashing he gives to feminist ideas, he handles a discussion of the differences between gender and sex in a rather indecipherable manner. Like scholar and professor Nancy Linton, who emphasizes the difference between the physicality of sex and the culturally determined elements of gender, Lewis/narrator distinguishes between the two (lecture). For him, gender is a broad concept that includes sex as one of its minor facets. Difference in "reproductive functions" and "in strength and size" is not the pivotal issue, says Lewis, as would many feminists (Per 200). He goes on to explain, though, that "the real polarity," the "fundamental polarity which divides all created beings," is gender, something quite apart from sex (200). While eliminating sex as the basis for making division between male and female, Lewis retains the binaries and does not allow for the masculine experience and the feminine experience to be anything but an experience of opposites. Lewis appears to contradict his ideal of masculine in the feminine and feminine in the masculine (Letters of C. S. 237), one of the impressive qualities of his hero Ransom.

We can see further undercutting of the female experience and ambiguity in the passage in which the narrator describes the Green Lady's new sense of duty as false. In the landmark work Women's Ways of Knowing: The

Development of Self, Voice, and Mind, Belenky et al. posit that women for whom "the care and empowerment of others is central to their life's work" "draw out the voices and minds of those they help to raise up" and "often come to hear, value, and strengthen their own voice and minds as well" (48). From this perspective, the Green Lady's concern with Duty is positive. Through sacrificing for her husband and her future children, she can help both them and herself. She can strengthen her own voice and clarify her identity. By receiving "the constant grace of self-knowledge and acceptance," which educator Parker J. Palmer declares in his book To Know As We Are Known, the Green Lady will be "liberate[d] . . . to live a larger love" (11).

The narrator, though, denounces the "noble" look on the Green Lady's face, calling it "a great deal too noble," for he says that the Green Lady's thoughts about martyrdom will lead to a "dramatic conception of the self [that] [i]s the enemy's true aim" (Per 139). Selfishness is an odious quality, but a clear self-concept is not synonymous with selfishness. The narrator goes too far here in describing self-discovery as evil promoted by Weston/Satan and in condemning the Green Lady for being open to expanding her self-knowledge. As Colin Manlove observes, the Green Lady "has no sense of self" (260), and, if Thomas Merton is correct in thinking that "the purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically . . . in relation to his world" (3), then the Green Lady's acquiring some self-identity and autonomy is a good thing.

Learning to recognize the self is a natural part of maturation; the Green Lady herself comments on how she matures throughout the time Ransom and Weston stay with her. Donald E. Glover points out that Ransom, in fact, assists the Green Lady in "explor[ing] the nature of consciousness and self-awareness" (175) when his presence causes her to "[step] out of life into the Alongside and [look] at [her]self living as if [she] were not alive" (Per 60). The text's plot, therefore, reveals the positive story of a woman finding her identity, while the narrator's words harshly judge the Green Lady's behavior and put a negative cast on her actions.

Further reducing the status of his protagonists, Lewis concludes Perelandra with a portrait of the Green Lady that negates much of the power—verbal, maternal, spiritual, and sovereign—which he had earlier granted her. Lewis snatches away the last vestiges of her empowerment after stripping her of a consistent characterization as wise and skilled. In the last section of Perelandra, Lewis finally gives the Green Lady a name. She is Tinidril, Queen of Perelandra, and her husband is Tor (211). One would think that giving the Green Lady a proper name, particularly one with a royal title, would raise her status even higher than it was, but she carries this name only after she unites with her husband. Only in her husband's presence, then, does she gain a solid identity. Her status depends upon his. Her "richness of womanhood" pales in comparison to that "splendour of virility" of her mate (207), for "it was not of the Queen that he [Ransom] thought most" (205).

True, in response to Ransom's query about the "justice" of the queen being tempted while the king was not, the king responds, "I am Oyarsa not by His [Maleldil's] gift alone but by our foster mother's, not by hers alone but by yours, not by yours alone but my wife's—nay, in some sort, by gift of the very beasts and birds" (209). He speaks of the importance of relationships to the life experience on Perelandra and acknowledges his debt to others, including his wife. Yet, acknowledgement of his debt to his wife does not recognize her as "fully *hnau*;" he classes the woman who resists terrible temptation as analogous to the beasts and birds. Possibly he believes, as does Margaret Hannay, that the temptation "is something of a sham," since the Green Lady "would never knowingly consent to do anything that displeased Maleldil or the King" and Ransom, who resists the great temptation to do nothing, comes to assist her when she is in danger of falling (Hannay 95; Lusk 6). Hence, Tor does not praise his wife's heroism.

The capstone to the negatively portrayed feminism at the end of the story appears with the arrival of the second female character in the book. The male Oyarsa, Malacandra, and the heretofore unseen female Oyarsa, Perelandra, come and speak with Ransom. In their first conversation which Ransom overhears, Malacandra patiently instructs his consort to love Ransom, and she, in turn, exclaims, "'How great is your knowledge!'" (Per 195). In a relationship paralleling that of Tinidril and Tor, Malacandra plays the prominent role of knowing adviser and Perelandra the supporting role of his admirer. Perelandra has a proper name and freedom to narrate her story, but

she proves to be decidedly subordinate to male deities. She explains how she made all of the planet according to Maleldil's instructions. She, moreover, "was not set to rule them [Tinidril and Tor], but while they were young [she] ruled all else" (195-96). In contrast to Ransom's initially negative reaction to "all this [being] taken from [her]," she acquiesces with joy, saying, "Blessed be He" (196).

Perelandra, then, agrees to the "place" assigned her. She is the archetypal mother figure whose sole function is to raise a child/world to maturity and then to release that child/world. She must allow her offspring to become even greater than she. When Malacandra parallels Perelandra's offspring and its mother to "the singing beast . . . [and] the dumb dam who suckled him," Perelandra makes no objection (196). Although the narrator condemned the Green Lady's developing picture of herself as a potential martyr for her husband and her children, a sacrificial mother is exactly the role the Green Lady's own mother-goddess plays. Either the book contradicts itself or the portrayal of the maternal role remains unclear, and textual ambiguity reigns once more.

Through placing the prominent female characters of Tinidril and Perelandra in a feminine environment, then, Lewis does speak of the feminine experience. His attempts to address the female experience produce a tangle of textual paradoxes, however. His Green Lady wields linguistic power and has the authority of a mother, goddess, or saint. She dialogues extensively with both Ransom and Weston, she teaches Ransom, and she

resists Weston's temptations. She is a dynamic character, moreover, acquiring a solid self-identity, a proper name, and an official title by the end of the story. If anything, remarks Downing, Lewis manifests sexism not by portraying females in a negative manner, but by idealizing them past the bounds of reality (147-48). Tinidril's new rank and status, though, belie the other Tinidril, the Tinidril whose alter ego often regresses to incompetence and reveals a gullibility and innocence verging on idiocy and the Tinidril whose identity depends upon her union with a male character of overshadowing presence.

What is Lewis's definitive word on woman in Perelandra? His final statement can only be one of ambiguity, the same concluding statement we reached after an examination of Out of the Silent Planet. At times, Lewis presents an autonomous, empowered female character with a secure identity, while at other times his character appears fatuous. Feminist statements are placed in the mouth of Weston/Satan, but Ransom, too, helps Tinidril discover herself, a contradiction in the text since Weston and Ransom are supposed to oppose one another and have different ends in mind. The Green Lady seems to be progressing toward a higher status, but the end of the book paradoxically undercuts the progress she makes. In Perelandra, therefore, Lewis builds his female character only to frustrate the culmination of her development at the end of the book, once again revealing an equivocal attitude toward women and the feminine experience.

Notes

¹ My major criticism of Filmer's insistence that Perelandra "seems to have been designed to give all Lewis's misogynist views full rein" (96) is that she indulges in what feminist Mieke Ball calls the "retrospective fallacy" (108). Filmer freely admits, "Lewis's images are, after all, contextually sited in the autotelic surface structure of meaning where they can be accepted as apt and reasonable" (97). She then bases her accusation of misogyny on the part of Lewis on her knowledge of his later works. She writes, "Only when these images are seen in the further context of Lewis's fictional *oeuvre* does their polemic and their misogynist purpose become readily apparent" (97). I protest, with Bal, that such "projection" onto "previous textual elements" is, at best, a dangerous, and often inappropriate method of analysis (108). Such a method, applying a retrospective lens, does not allow for a dynamism in the author's thinking.

Douglas Gresham, Lewis's stepson, emphasizes that Lewis's thinking "evolved . . . over the years of his life," as does everyone's thinking (1). Lewis had limited involvement in intimate relationships with women, and, when he did have such involvement, that relationship likely had a profound effect on his thoughts, thereby making possible a radical shift in his way of thinking about women, whether positively or negatively. I, therefore, hesitate to base a statement concerning anti-feminine passages in any one of Lewis's books primarily on knowledge I may have of his other books, which is precisely what Filmer does here. I analyze each book by Lewis independently of other

Lewis books. Only after I have examined a book as a self-contained unit do I synthesize my analyses into a summarizing statement on the continuity or the discontinuity in the Lewis canon.

² Perelandra will hereafter be abbreviated "Per" in the citations.

³ Although David Holbrook would undoubtedly interpret this passage as an unveiling of Lewis's own longing for his dead mother, the text supports interpretations that are not psychoanalytic. Lewis, for example, may include these lines for the purpose of characterizing the Green Lady as ideal and maternal, a role model Ransom appreciates and wishes for his own fallen world.

⁴ Ransom does, incidentally, resemble a child in need of mothering at the beginning of his life on Perelandra. Like an infant, he is birthed in fluid, the seas of Venus (Per 35), arrives naked (29), must learn to walk in his new environment (41), and exhibits habits of a "schoolboy" (40). Only much later does he reason with the Green Lady and show ability with logic and higher learning. In the feminine environment of Perelandra, then, Ransom receives nurturing more than assumes a serious nurturing role as he does in Out of the Silent Planet.

⁵ Critic Gregory Wolfe addresses the passive/active issue remarking, "[T]he Un-man, acting like a God, sets the Green Lady in his own story, thus controlling her like a character in a work of fiction" (69). Interestingly, Satan/Weston does not even try to tempt Adam or the King. Satan/Weston only tempts the women, whether because the women are weaker by nature

and more susceptible to succumbing or because the women take the lead and influence the course of how the prelapsarian couple will act. Most likely Lewis maintains the position that the women are more susceptible to the fall because he characterizes the Green Lady as not strong enough to resist temptation much longer (Per 134). She neither acts for Weston nor against him.

Part V: That Hideous Strength

Published in 1945, That Hideous Strength is the last and longest of the Ransom books and takes an entirely new angle on the expression of the feminine experience. In Out of the Silent Planet, Lewis speaks of the feminine primarily through male characters. His male narrator and male protagonist comment on meeting the "other," and at times Ransom assumes a maternal role. Then, in Perelandra, no males fulfill the maternal role, for the book is steeped in the feminine, with a feminine setting and a female protagonist. Lewis creates a text that speaks of the feminine through the mouths of a female character and the male characters dialoguing with her or observing her. Finally, in That Hideous Strength, Lewis experiments with yet a third perspective on the feminine by including in the book a variety of female characters, each of whom symbolizes a different model of womanhood. Each of these flat, static female characters serves as a foil to Jane Studdock, the female protagonist of the book, highlights how Jane differs from her, and offers the dynamic character of Jane an option of a type of woman whom Jane can choose to become.

Whereas the first two books of the Trilogy treat the feminine experience from either the male-dominated Malacandrian experience or the female-dominated Perelandrian experience, this last book seeks to combine the male

and female experiences. Male and female characters continually interact throughout That Hideous Strength, and the narrative generally alternates between a male's viewpoint, that of Mark Studdock, and a female's viewpoint, that of Jane Studdock. The book does not present a culmination of Lewis's efforts in writing of the female experience, however. As the third book in a three volume series, That Hideous Strength develops ideas only touched upon in the first two books, but it introduces a decidedly different perspective on the female experience by incorporating into it more and greater variety of female voices than the previous two books had and by integrating those voices with the masculine voices of the book. Lewis arranges the three books linearly, not pyramidally, but elements of the first two books do, of course, reappear in the third.

In That Hideous Strength, for example, the character of Mother Dimble parallels the character of the Perelandrian Green Lady. Like Tinidril, Mother Dimble is the archetypal mother, as well as the archetypal wife, and offers Jane one viable option of a feminine role Jane can assume for herself. As in Perelandra, Lewis presents the role of mother as an idyllic role and one which Jane would be wise to emulate. Again, though, Lewis portrays the ideal mother ambiguously, as an empowered, fully human woman and, paradoxically, as a woman subordinate to men because she is lacking in some respects. Mrs. Dimble, for instance, demonstrates the former role with an extraordinary ability to sense the inner state of other people and thereby reveals a successful "shift into subjectivism" which Belenky et al. laud as an

integral part of a woman's positive development of self and subsequent ability to relate better to others (54).

Indeed, Mrs. Dimble already has learned to listen and respond to the knowledge her intuition gives her. When Jane wears a new hat to her home, Mrs. Dimble immediately notices the hat and realizes that the purchase signifies something is "wrong" (That Hideous Strength 29-30).¹ Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Dimble helps Jane by having a "strictly feminine" conversation with her (30). The older woman's words are "indefinably comforting" because they connect Jane, who feels isolated, with a larger conception of the common female experience (30). Mrs. Dimble's supportive speech and presence, moreover, remind Jane of a "Nurse or Mother" (30), and, in fact, everyone calls Mrs. Dimble "Mother Dimble" in recognition of her status as surrogate mother to all who need her. Similarly emphasizing her maternal role, Mother Dimble's first name, Margery, only appears in the text several pages after her identification as Mother Dimble and after the mention of her husband's first name (29, 33). This mother figure intuitively understands the true nature of Jane's inner turmoil by surmising the unhappiness of her marriage, senses that "Jane seem[s] to be preoccupied," is alert to Jane's impending fainting spell while Dr. Dimble notices nothing (31), and notes her own husband's veiled exhaustion (281).

The same woman who exhibits wisdom in understanding the needs of people, however, does not participate in intellectual discussions nor demonstrate significant linguistic capabilities, although she is the companion

to a scholarly husband and attentively listens to him. When Dr. Dimble discusses Arthurian legend with Jane, Mrs. Dimble responds to her husband's musing by saying, "What a horrid idea," and she later scoffs, "Merlin's mantle indeed!" not exactly substantial contributions to the dialogue (32). When Dr. Dimble attempts to talk seriously with her, Mrs. Dimble evidences an ability to philosophize and a familiarity with academia but "with the ease born of long practice avert[s] the danger, ever present in her house, of a merely literary turn being given to the conversation," thus avoiding scholarly discussion once again (284). She admires her husband's involvement in an "intellectual duel" (321), but nevertheless views her own maternal and wifely role as excluding participation in the repartee.

Although the wisdom and comfort of her voice alone is enough to prompt a phone call by Jane, Mother Dimble remarks that nobody can possibly listen to the stream of words women pour forth, not even women themselves (303), and neither she nor her husband think it appropriate for a husband to share his workplace experiences with his wife (29). Conversation between husbands and wives, say the Dimbles, must be limited to domestic issues or to other affairs outside the working environment. Even secure in her own identity, Mrs. Dimble does not expect her own husband to listen to her (76-7), for she does not value her voice as an important part of who she is, and she denigrates herself as "only an angry old woman with sore feet" (76). Mrs. Dimble, like the Green Lady, asks questions to the point of appearing dimwitted (370), and she makes feeble attempts to justify her repeated telling

of a single story (283). Linguistically, then, Mrs. Dimble is lacking in practice, if not in capacity as well.

The narrator and the other characters, nonetheless, see Mother Dimble in a consistently positive light, despite her verbal weaknesses. She may appeal to her husband for help when her fear of bats overwhelms her and express the female experience as one in which a woman "love[s], honour[s] and obey[s]" along with being concerned about "figures . . . petticoats and waltzes" (168), but she excels at connecting with those around her and at being sensitive to their emotional and physical needs. She and her husband symbolize "the tranquility of fulfilled desire" (322) in spite of their childlessness, and, at the end of the book, her true high status reveals itself. A flame-colored dress transforms "this provincial wife of a rather obscure scholar, this respectable and barren woman with grey hair and double chin" into "the servant of some pre-historic goddess of fertility—an old tribal matriarch, mother of mothers, grave, formidable, and august" (363). Such a description is particularly complimentary, at least from the perspective of the characters themselves, considering that the events at St. Anne's happily conclude with the Venus of earth, a goddess of fertility, blessing each of the couples involved.

If Mother Dimble sets before Jane the option of submissive wifehood and motherhood, the character of Fairy Hardcastle presents the opposite extreme. The lesbian Hardcastle will be neither a wife nor a mother. She most certainly is not concerned with her figure, with petticoats, or with waltzes, as is Mrs. Dimble. She is fat and uncorseted, wears a black uniform, has short,

cropped hair, speaks with a deep voice, and smokes a cigar. Instead of waltzes, she enjoys torturing and conducting painful experiments on human beings. When Jane comes face to face with Hardcastle, the young wife therefore confronts the repulsive and vulgar reality of what she could become if she rejects all femininity. Like the two "petrifying" women who paralyze the astronaut in Lewis's short story "Forms of Things Unknown" (Dark Tower 128, 132), Hardcastle so horrifies Jane that the young clairvoyant is left speechless (Hid 155). Jane must consider that if she carries too far her detestation of kissing, being touched, talking of children, and crying, if she always refuses her husband's attempts to comfort her, and if she insists on dressing in "severe clothes" in order to reject her feminine image (28), she could be in danger of completely losing her connection to the feminine experience and of totally dissolving her feminine identity as Hardcastle has done.

A third foil to Jane, Grace Ironwood "represents the unswerving loyalty and devotion of a celibate" (Wolfe 70). The surname Ironwood characterizes Jane's first impression of the woman as a cold, harsh intellect, something like the impersonal, scholarly "thin woman" of Lewis's short story "Ministering Angels" (Dark Tower 120). Jane is initially "rather repelled" that her doctor is a woman, not a man (Hid 45), and dislikes her black dress, stiffness, and "stifled emotion" (64). Ironwood originally represents the disquieting "other" to Jane because Ironwood is purely feminine and untouched by man. Kath Filmer points out, "Despite the fact that she is a fully qualified physician,

Grace Ironwood is never afforded the courtesy title 'Doctor'; she is always called 'Miss' to emphasize her femininity and virginity" (102).

Soon, however, Jane realizes that Ironwood is really characterized more by her first name Grace than by her last name. Grace tells her "the whole truth" of the situation and reassures Jane that "[t]here is nothing wrong with [her]" (Hid 64). Grace encourages Jane to listen to her "'mind's eye'" as a perfectly acceptable and positive way of moving "from passivity to action, from self as static to self as becoming, from silence to a protesting inner voice and infallible gut;" Jane's "growing reliance on [her] intuitive processes [are] . . . an important adaptive move in the service of . . . self-definition," which the emotionally and psychologically hurting Jane desperately needs (Belenky 19, 54). Grace the doctor helps to bring about healing by affirming Jane in her search for a better understanding of herself and of truth through an intuitive feminine experience.

In addition to Mother Dimble, Fairy Hardcastle, and Grace Ironwood, several minor foils move throughout the text. Camilla Denniston models a "straight," "forthright," "valiant" role that attracts Jane (Hid 63); "Jane conceived for her that almost passionate admiration which women . . . feel for other women whose beauty is not of their own type" (63). Interestingly, Camilla and her husband also represent a couple under the influence of Eros, one type of love which particularly frightens Jane, for she understands that Eros, as explained by Lewis in The Four Loves, cannot be controlled by reason (Wolfe 70; Lewis 107). She fears what she cannot control with her mind.

Ivy Maggs, too, serves to highlight differences between herself and Jane which Jane might profit from observing. To Jane's disgust, Ivy Maggs is one of those "fluttering, tearful" women who cry and look "for comfort to male arms" (Hid 46, 75), but Maggs knows how to reach out for help when she needs it. Friends surround her when her home is taken away and her husband jailed. She also has learned how to communicate openly with animals, as well as with humans. She and Mr. Bultitude can understand one another, and she attracts animals in the same way the Green Lady attracts them in Perelandra.

Finally, there is the female character of the goddess of love herself. Venus, with her dwarves, first appears to Jane as a vulgarly voluptuous woman and mocks Jane's fear of the physical, material side of love. In The Four Loves, Lewis describes this same deity as "a . . . mischievous spirit, far more elf than deity" (100) and protests that "we are all being encouraged to take Venus too seriously" (97). The "solemnisation of sex" which he denounces (Four Loves 97), however, does appear at the end of That Hideous Strength, when the women ceremoniously prepare their beds and Venus reappears as an "inhumanly beautiful" woman to bring about an element of eros in the relationship of the Studdocks (Hid 382).

When most of these female characters are gathered together to try on dresses, Mrs. Dimble remarks on the absence of a mirror in the room, and Jane remembers that Ransom mentioned their "being mirrors enough to see another" (362). Ransom's suggestion reveals why all of these female

characters are present in the text. Just as the Green Lady's mirror in Perelandra helps her to define herself, all of these female characters in That Hideous Strength play off one another and thereby help to define each other. Each of the foils reflects certain characteristics that she shares with Jane and provides Jane an option. Jane can reject an undesirable option by deliberately becoming unlike that model. She can, for example, renounce the unfeminine qualities of Fairy Hardcastle and avoid becoming a similarly cruel woman mesmerized by her own power but isolated from relationships with other people.

Jane can, on the other hand, become more similar to the many other positive female characters portrayed in the text. Like Mother Dimble, she can work toward rescuing her faltering marriage and become a better wife and mother. Jane will never be a Mother Dimble, of course, because she has already developed her verbal skills far beyond those of Dimble. She cannot now suppress those skills, nor does the text expect her to suppress them. She dialogues intelligently with Dr. Dimble, and he encourages her in her scholarly thinking. Dimble may not promote profound thinking in his own wife, but he does think well of his students of either gender (29). Jane's difficulty in being an intellectual woman does not lie in her interest in academics; rather, she must be careful of the pride and excessive self-sufficiency they may engender. She must not become so much a creature of the mind that she loses touch with others and deserts the relationships that are important to her very existence.

In some respects, Jane can even surpass Mother Dimble in fulfilling the maternal role. Mother Dimble reached the pinnacle of figurative motherhood through nurturing students and friends, but Jane can literally reach the "glories of motherhood," praised by Lewis in his book Miracles (66), if she and Mark stop using contraceptives, use for which Merlin condemns her to decapitation. She can combine her reproductive maternal function with the intellectual powers she shares with Grace Ironwood. Like Grace, who invests her time and talents into helping the community in which she lives, Jane can assist her fellow humans by giving her learned opinions and her clairvoyant interpretations, but she does not have to live the disciplined life of a celibate. Too, she can learn from the patient and submissive love Ivy Maggs has for Mr. Maggs and can join with her husband Mark in mimicking the passionate love modeled by the Dennistons and their patroness Venus. Each of these positive feminine foils, then, exemplifies a trait that Jane can benefit from adopting for herself.

The traits of obedience and eroticism, however, become one of the central thematic tensions of the text. Jane resists both obedience and eroticism, and, in her resistance, brings into question Lewis's knowledge and sensitivity to the feminine experience, as well as exposes the now familiar ambiguity of the author's expression of the feminine experience. Lewis integrates the Christian theme of obedience and submission to Christ, for example, into the relationships about which he writes throughout the entire text. Contradicting the narrator's opinion in Perelandra, in which martyrdom is a self-righteous

temptation Tinidril has to resist, submissive martyrdom becomes a positive quality in That Hideous Strength. Mother Dimble and Jane seek to compliment one another by attributing martyrdom to each other (Hid 76). The only time the author presents submission and obedience as negative actions, in fact, occurs when Mark foolishly and slavishly obeys the evil hierarchy of the N.I.C.E. for the purpose of gaining admittance to the Inner Ring, a self-seeking goal which Lewis blasts in many of his works and particularly in The Weight of Glory (93-105).

Jane muses on and resists the sacrifices she feels women must make upon entering the married state (Hid 72), and she openly opposes the Director's idea that she ask her husband for permission to stay at St. Anne's. The Director comments that Jane and Mark do not "fail in obedience through lack of love, but have lost love because [they] never attempted obedience" (147). Obedience becomes such a central issue to the text that Lewis capitalizes the word and specifically speaks of the word's meaning (147). He even goes so far as to have the Christlike Director prescribe obedience as an "erotic necessity" (148). The obedience described here is not that of mutual submission; the females, lower in the author's Chain of Being, submit to the males, at the top of his earthly hierarchy. Lewis encourages women's submission to what he conceives of as the most fully human—man. Equality does not represent his relational ideal.

Ambiguity is reintroduced with Jane's observation that the Director runs a rather "democratic" household (168) and by the fact that Jane is more perceptive than her husband, vocalizes her opinions throughout much of the

text, has a psychic gift others lack, is strong in resisting torture, and leads others in action against the N.I.C.E. Anti-feminist characteristics of the book, however, soon resurface in the text with such force and frequency that the glimpses of a liberated Jane are most likely due more to Lewis's ability to create a living character than to any deliberate attempt on his part to undercut the words of his narrators or to include empowering references to women. If contemporary author Alvaro Mutis is correct in his explanation that once he has created a round, living character he can no longer exercise complete control over that character, perhaps the glimmers of feminist sentiment in That Hideous Strength are the result of Jane's independent actions, not of Lewis's intentions.

By allowing a heteroglossia of voices in his text, Lewis risks losing some of his authorial control to his characters, who have intentions that diverge from his (Pardes 129). In That Hideous Strength, unlike Out of the Silent Planet and Perelandra in which Lewis limits female polyglossia, the plurality of female characters permits voices to be heard that are not the voices of Lewis. Just as Perelandrian Weston, certainly not a voice of Lewis, makes convincing feminist arguments with which the narrator/Lewis disagrees, female characters in That Hideous Strength present ideas about their full humanity that conflict with those of Lewis.

From time to time, female characters introduce ambiguity into the text by rebelling against the repressive thinking which Lewis imposes upon them, but Lewis ultimately masters their resistance. The author forbids Jane to

continue her quest for self and instead makes her be a docile subject to her husband. Lewis represents her resistance to feminine stereotypes as a fault which she outgrows, and he concludes the book with each female character submitting to a male character for the express purpose of happy reproduction. The end of the book is a nauseating statement that procreation is the ultimate and only joyous ending to any male and female relationship. The horses mate, Mr. Bultitude "takes" his stereotypically interfering female mate as the Director commands (Hid 375, 377), the elephants mate, and all the humans find their spouses.

When Jane justifiably sputters, "But—but—am I a bear or a hedgehog? [that I must also run to my 'own marriage chamber' ?]" (379), the Director commands her to obedience and to have children instead of dreams. To Lewis, male and female relationships exist only for this end. In response to MacPhee's protest that "[t]his . . . is becoming indecent," I concur with a resounding "Amen!" (376). Lewis's depiction of utopian male-female relationships is simply not "decent," not appropriate. Of course the physical side of love figures as an important part of male-female relationships, but Lewis sadly misses out on the multi-facetedness of women and the importance of male-female relationships in the context of a larger community.

Jane's newly discovered "me" is "a thing, a made thing, made to please another and in Him to please all others" (319); her inner being is a thing, an object for other subjects, not a person for relating to other people. Eventually,

even "the little idea of herself which she hitherto called me dropped down and vanished, unfluttering, into bottomless distance," for she is "a thing after all—a thing designed and invented by Someone Else and valued for qualities quite different from what [she] had decided to regard as [her] true self" (318). Everyone "had all along been simply right and perceived the sort of thing she was, a "sweet and fresh" thing (318). As an objectified "walled garden" of delights for men, Jane's desire, says the author, should be to "desire the enjoying of her own beauty [a]s the obedience of Eve" (62-3). She must embrace passivity, not activity. She must stop fleeing the masculine.

According to the Director, "There is no escape. If it were a virginal rejection of the male, He [Maleldil] would allow it. Such souls can bypass the male and go on to meet something far more masculine, higher up, to which they must make a yet deeper surrender" (315). Jane must not be "offended by the masculine," although it is "loud, irruptive" and "possessive" (315-16). "[T]he masculine none of us can escape. What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it" (316). Obviously Lewis presents a hierarchy. He creates a binary operation, and woman exists in the unprivileged, bottom half of the fraction. The higher up the hierarchy one moves, the more masculinity and the less "weak" femininity one finds.

After indoctrination like this, no wonder Jane exhibits a sad, self-effacing "humility" and expects that nobody will "be particularly interested in what she sa[ys]" (303). The "new humility," one that causes her to question her ability to contribute to the community, is even supposed to be "pleasant to

her" (303)! This idea was undoubtedly penned with the same Lewis mentality that wrote about the "reverence . . . which nearly all women feel for jewelry," a manner of thinking familiar with only the stereotypes of the female experience (362). Lewis's shallow Jane has nothing of true significance to offer in verbal exchange. Then again, maybe she does. When the narrator, through the quasi-divine mouth of the Director, ceases to intrude with repressive remarks about women, for example, we see Jane actually tackling the task of communication and often succeeding in it.

Jane, in fact, develops in her ability to communicate through speech, intuition, and writing. At the beginning of That Hideous Strength, we see Jane (and Mark) floundering to communicate themselves clearly in speech, for instance. They have "inexplicable" and "puzzl[ing]" quarrels, with origins which cannot be "put . . . into words" (44). Jane does not explain her feelings to Mark, "and . . . , in any case, could not have explained them" (44). She has not yet learned how to express her voice freely to her husband and remains silent when open communication is perhaps the only way for him to understand how he can help. The premarital "endless talks" of the Studdocks are no more, and Jane lives in the silence of "something like solitary confinement," anticipating the occurrence of quarrels (13, 46). Her dread of speech and its unknown and unpredictable powers even manifests itself in one of her first dreams about the N.I.C.E. The dream not only discloses information about the organization but also forces Jane to confront her fear of "a language like Spanish," both the language of Alcasan's head and the

representation of Jane's need to work through her linguistic fears to find peace.

At the beginning of his work with the N.I.C.E., Mark worries how to respond to "Jane's questioning face;" he does not have to concern himself with any spoken questions, though, since Jane does not yet feel free to talk with him (89). If she does talk, she does so in an uncontrolled outburst and uses the "sharp frightened voice" which Mark intensely dislikes (89). At this point, her voice resembles the repressed woman's angry, shrill voice of which Carolyn Heilbrun writes (15). The single form of communication with which Jane can comfortably wield control is that of silence, so she withholds information from her husband and thereby inhibits the development of their relationship (Hid 89). Jane later explains to the Director that "Mark never takes any notice of what [she] say[s]," and the narrator reports that Mark reciprocates with the misunderstanding that she does not listen to him (145).

MacPhee delivers a lengthy discourse on cross gender communication during which he proclaims that "women speak a language without nouns," a language that differs from men's language and hence causes communication problems (167). He argues from a foolish and patriarchal perspective, but the feminist reader need not take him too seriously because MacPhee entertains the other characters with his irrational arguments, too. MacPhee's statements contain a thread of truth, though, in the idea that males and females do not always achieve the same level of success in communication. Jane's communication problems gradually diminish, for example, as those of the

N.I.C.E. and her husband increase. Mark finds himself surrounded by people whose words either signify nothing or tell untruths. The meaningless babble becomes an actual Babel at the dinner during which words come to communicate only confusion, and the downfall of the N.I.C.E. begins.

Jane at St. Anne's, on the other hand, sees the development, not the degeneration, of communication. During her first visit to St. Anne's, she learns to express herself to Grace Ironwood, who encourages her to continue with her quest of finding her voice. Later at St. Anne's, Jane experiences language developing and refining itself to the essence of communication, reminiscent of that in Aldous Huxley's *Second Foundation*. The end of That Hideous Strength describes how "the lord of Meaning himself, the herald, the messenger, the slayer of Argus, was with them: the angel that spins nearest the sun. Viritribia, whom men call Mercury and Thoth" (322). With his arrival among them, all the residents of St. Anne's, presumably Jane included, became "extraordinarily witty" and speak with "plays upon thoughts, paradoxes, fancies, anecdotes, theories laughingly advanced yet (on consideration) well worth taking seriously" (321). "[S]uch eloquence, such melody . . . , such toppling structures of double meaning, such sky-rockets of metaphor and allusion" spill from their inspired mouths (321). Jane participates in this culmination of communication and develops her spoken voice.

At the same time, she goes about developing a Romantic sensitivity to intuitive communication, a means of communication which was already part

of Jane's life before her involvement with St. Anne's but to which she becomes more closely attuned after she works with the intuitive communicators Mother Dimble and the Director. In the opening scene of That Hideous Strength, Jane predicts that Mark will call and cancel dinner at home, which he indeed does awhile later, and, through feeling, she accurately assesses that she had interrupted an important conversation of the Dimbles (45). Jane instinctively sees the corrupt character of Lord Feverstone, while Mark remains deluded (48). Ronda Chervin points out, "Disgust with evil is implicit sensitivity to the good, something more developed in her character than in that of Mark" (emphasis added, 6). Jane, furthermore, can "feel it [Mark's attitude] even if he d[oes] not express it in words" (Hid 82). When Mark lives under the influence of N.I.C.E.'s communicative methods, Jane listens to the distortion of his words "only with half her mind" and divines truth "from something in his face," which holds more honesty than his verbiage (89).

Midway through the book, Jane makes the important discovery that she must evaluate her intuition with the same care that she evaluates the rest of her life. Her "habitual inner prompter" tells Jane to refuse the Dennistons' offer of help, but Jane suddenly discovers and responds to a second intuitive force, "an impulse of honesty," and confesses another of her painful dreams to Camilla's sympathetic ear (115). Jane realizes that she must be sensitive to the origins of her intuitive impulses. If guided by a conscience concerned with morality and immorality, her intuition might at first cause her

temporary pain; it might embarrass her by requiring her to ask for help. Ultimately, though, the benefits of receiving help would far outweigh the embarrassment. An instinct of selfish and immediate self-preservation might, on the contrary, result in temporary comfort but later serious pain. Being committed to nothing (115) would provide Jane the temporary reassurance of changeless psychological security, but she would miss developing the relationships that come only with an investment of self.

Jane's self remains elusive, though. Argentine Jorge Luis Borges writes that all people hide their "ser" or "yo" from others, live with multiple selves and voices, and never actually know their true identity. Jane's life resonates with Borges's ideas, for "she was so divided against herself that one might say there were three, if not four, Janes" (150). The first Jane is intuition "receptive of the Director" and "tak[ing] [Jane] utterly off her guard, shak[ing] [her] out of the modest little outfit of contemporary ideas which had hitherto made her portion of wisdom, and swe[eping] [her] away on the flood tide of an experience which she did not understand and could not control" (150). The second Jane, on the other hand, disapproves of the emotional tendencies of the first Jane and seeks to control her emotions and experiences. The third "moral Jane" evaluates from the perspective that there is a standard of right and wrong outside of her own opinions and believes that standard ought to be obeyed (151). Finally, the fourth Jane embodies a joy which transcends the experiences of all the other Janes (151).

The confusion of "the whole inner debate" would be enough to overwhelm anybody (151). Fortunately, Jane has the vehicle of the pen through which she can sort out the various strains of the dialogue. Her attempts to master the various voices within her and then to express those voices particularly reveal themselves in her development of written communication, a form of communication through which she addresses some of the most disturbing tensions in her life. Through writing or refusing to write, Jane deals with her interior cacophony or delays handling the panoply of voices. Through writing, unlike the empty propaganda Mark writes for the N.I.C.E., Jane uncovers and explores issues that would be too difficult for her to investigate in the direct forms of spoken or felt communication. Writing provides her sufficient distance from the problem so that she can then treat it somewhat objectively and maintain a psychological and emotional equilibrium.

Several paragraphs into the story, for instance, Jane debates with herself whether to work on her doctoral thesis on Donne. "[H]er plan had been to lay great stress on Donne's 'triumphant vindication of the body'" (14). She thus introduces the reader to the central issue of the tensions between body, spirit, mind, and emotion in the text as a whole. Lewis scholar Thomas Howard explains that "Donne's poetry and prose Devotions are, of course, shot through with the lively awareness that the flesh is the very mediator of meaning to us mortals, and Jane apparently finds this idea intriguing" (125). Indeed she does. Her dilemma at St. Anne's has much to do with her

hesitation to accept the Director and Mrs. Dimble's proposition that wifehood demands of her a physical, bodily submission to Mark. She fears the material side of Venus, as evidenced by her first impression of a vulgar Venus surrounded by cavorting dwarves. She emphasizes her dedication to furthering her scholarly research as the reason she wants to postpone having children (Hid 14). Her appeal to the importance of the mind, however, veils her fear of and aversion to forms of physical affection (30), which are a more important factor in her voluntary childlessness.

Jane has always assumed the spirit and mind to be superior to the body. She wants spirituality to be divorced from the material, "[s]omething civilised, . . . or 'spiritual' which did not want to possess her, . . . something without hands that gripped and without demands upon her" (316).

Interaction with the Director prompts Jane to question whether there is such a thing as a dichotomy of spiritual and material. The Director teaches her that the spiritual is not "some neutral, or democratic, vacuum" in which "sex and sense [a]re . . . transcended" (315); instead, he emphasizes, the spiritual and physical work together to form the holistic reality of relationships. Jane's frustration with her work on Donne and her desertion of the work to go buy a hat intimate that she has begun to sense the impossibility of sustaining a separation between mind and body and seeks relief by fleeing the issue for a time.

Demonstrating a Romantic bent, which Lewis defines in his preface to The Pilgrim's Regress, the author keeps the theme in view by later describing Jane

as walking between "the towers and spires of Edgestow . . . and the old windmill on the horizon" (33); he places Jane in a precarious balance between the extremes of mind isolated from emotion and emotion isolated from mind. The towers and spires of Edgestow symbolize the distilled intellectualism of the university there and the N.I.C.E.'s cold, emotionless scientism to which the imbalanced academia opens itself. The members of the N.I.C.E. do not even remember that their peers have families or concerns apart from science (38). The windmills, on the other hand, represent both the close-minded backwardness which may characterize Faulkner-like peasantry and the impassioned lunacy of Don Quijote attacking windmills. Jane must find an identity that integrates both emotional and intellectual activity.

Mrs. Dimble, too, remarks on the centrality of the matter and spirit tension in Jane's life. She says, "Spirit and matter. . . . That explains why people like the Studdocks find it so difficult to be happily married" (284). Jane has tried to expunge the physical/material from her marriage, rejecting Mark's offer of arms to support and encourage her. Mark has ignored the spiritual and mental needs of his wife. He rarely talks to her, and the "one thing . . . able to keep him awake after he had gone to bed . . . did not keep him awake for long" (14). Their deteriorating relationship entails nothing of the "mutual society, help, and comfort" which Jane remembers that the Book of Common Prayer prescribes for the married state (Hid 13; Howard 123).

The Studdocks' marriage stifles Jane. Mark withholds information about financial matters from her, retarding her involvement in their economic

situation and denying her the economic freedom which Virginia Woolf so adamantly promotes (Hid 102). Until his epiphany while undergoing "initiation" with Frost, who previously demonstrated emotionless cruelty by meddling with Jane's mind, Mark also selfishly planned Jane's career as being one of hostessing for his guests (247) and made the mistake of "assuming that marriage, by itself, gave him either power or title to appropriate" the "freshness" of Jane (360). (I, of course, would argue against Lewis here that marriage even in conjunction with something else would never give Mark the "title to appropriate" anything from Jane.) Mark echoes Perelandra in its idealization of women by holding his wife up as "sacrosanc[t]" (381), and he therefore doubts whether he should even touch her, except with a passionless "laboratory outlook upon love" (380). Even after discovering that "he love[s] her now," his only idea as to the demonstration of that love is to "release her" (381). Mark still views Jane as an object, albeit a loved object.

Will the Studdocks ever achieve "the mutual society, help, and comfort" for which Jane yearns? Perhaps. Lewis seems to think so, for he concludes the book with Mark and Jane, both humbled and thinking more highly of the other, coming together under the blessing of Venus. If their marriage should take on a new mutuality, though, Jane will probably be the motivator. She has evolved from being a closed character of "coldness" (381) to one who can successfully communicate with others. She has learned to voice her emotional and physical needs to Mother Dimble and the Director and has come to a better understanding of her role as a wife and potential mother.

She has become an essential contributor to a connected community of people at St. Anne's, which has helped her to refine and use her clairvoyant abilities. Mark has not made such profound developments, but at least he now looks beyond himself and seeks to understand his wife's point of view. With Jane's personal growth and improved communicative abilities and Mark's receptivity to an altered viewpoint, the two are on the path toward a more mutual, communicative relationship.

As opposed to Out of the Silent Planet and Perelandra, which open with a male perspective, That Hideous Strength begins with the female point of view and allows Lewis to set up a dynamism in both his male and female characters. Whereas the changes in the characterization of the Green Lady develop subtly in Perelandra, in That Hideous Strength, the reader can easily trace the progression of Jane's search for self. Although the roles of males and females do not change, as the Director claims in the text (149), Jane does change from a woman who is hesitant to voice her needs to a woman who shares her problems with others. Lewis helps the reader to follow this change by offering Jane's point of view and, starting in the first few paragraphs of the book, openly discussing the issues of marriage.

Confirming the hypothesis put forth in Women's Ways of Knowing, Jane, like "many women," learns the "'real' and valued lessons" of life not through her "academic work but in relationship with friends and teachers, life crises, and community involvements" (Belenky 4). She learns from the feminine foils surrounding her, the crisis she experiences with Fairy Hardcastle and

with her dysfunctional marriage, and the community at St. Anne's. Her "move away from silence" does directly relate to her new sensitivity to things "intuited" (54), and, as she improves in her ability to express herself, she increases the efficacy of her voice and draws nearer to her husband. In That Hideous Strength, Lewis drapes his often anti-feminist opinions over those of his protagonist Jane, but he creates her as such a round, living character that he allows her the independence to speak of the feminine experience in ways he himself does not endorse.

Note

¹ In the citations that follow, That Hideous Strength will be abbreviated as "Hid."