Sacramental Unity in the Writing of C.S. Lewis: Romanticism, Imagination, and Truth in the Abolition of Man and That Hideous Strength

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SACRAMENTAL UNITY IN THE WRITING OF C.S. LEWIS:
ROMANTICISM, IMAGINATION, AND TRUTH IN
THE ABOLITION OF MAN AND THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH

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The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.
For my mom, dad, and brother – the best imaginable family.

And also for Vanessa Anderson and Joannie Watson, who never cease to inspire and encourage me.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract..................................................................................................................................................v

INTRODUCTION......................................................................................................................................1

1. AN IMAGINATIVE JOURNEY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEWIS’ S IMAGINATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO COLERIDGE’S IDEAS...........................................4

2. IMAGINATION, TRUTH, AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE ABOLITION OF MAN.................................................................................................................18

3. IMAGINATION, TRUTH, AND THE PATH TO CHRISTIANITY IN THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH.............................................................................................................29

4. THE MARRIAGE OF CHRISTIANITY AND ROMANTICISM: SACRAMENTAL UNITY AND LEWIS’ S CONVERGENCE OF IMAGINATION AND TRUTH................50

ENDNOTES............................................................................................................................................61

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....................................................................................................................................64

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH......................................................................................................................67
ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes C.S. Lewis’s concepts of imagination and truth, focusing mainly on his ideas as expressed in *The Abolition of Man* (1944) and *That Hideous Strength* (1945). I argue that these works demonstrate an essential connection between imagination and truth and that this connection reveals the fundamentally sacramental nature of Lewis’s imagination. Ultimately, I claim that this sacramental quality exhibits a unique fusion of romanticism and Christianity. Romanticism is relevant because of the importance of imagination to the movement of British romanticism in general and, in particular, to Coleridge’s work. Examining convergences and divergences between Lewis’s concept of imagination and Coleridge’s serves to elucidate the point I make about Lewis’s sacramental imagination and its ability to bring together the romantic primacy of imagination and the Christian veneration of truth.

I begin to address these topics by tracing the development of Lewis’s concept of imagination and paralleling it with his conversion to Christianity as he describes it in *Surprised by Joy* (1955). I then compare these developing concepts with Coleridge’s theory of imagination. Moving on to incorporate the idea of truth, I enter into analysis of *The Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength*, explaining Lewis’s concept of truth and his argument that a proper education should include forming the imagination in a way that will enable it to illuminate this truth. Finally, I enter into specific discussion of the sacramental nature of Lewis’s imagination and show how it fuses Christianity with romanticism.
INTRODUCTION

Considerable scholarly attention has been given to the relationship between C.S. Lewis and romanticism. Lewis is often proclaimed to be a unique advocate for the potential of unity of romanticism and reason, especially in works such as *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933), *The Allegory of Love* (1936), and *Surprised by Joy* (1955). Much of the analysis of Lewis’s romanticism surrounds his idea of imagination, in particular as it is evidenced in the agreements and disagreements between Lewis and his friend and fellow Inkling, Owen Barfield. In Lewis’s conversion story, *Surprised by Joy*, he refers to a “Great War” he and Barfield fought during the 1920s over their differing opinions on the nature of imagination. Barfield, a notable scholar of romanticism, and particularly of Coleridge, saw imagination as a means of conveying truth, whereas Lewis’s beliefs about the imagination at that time rejected any connection between imagination and objective truth. However, Lewis’s thoughts on this matter changed over time, as he progressed further and further into his conversion to Christianity. Restricting contemplation of Lewis’s theories of imagination to his “war” with Barfield results in an incomplete comprehension of these theories, since Lewis’s concept of imagination was never a static one: his ideas and expressions of imagination continued to grow and unfold before, during, and after his conversion. Lewis’s sense of imagination parallels his personal understanding of life itself, and the ongoing nuances of this understanding can be traced in both his fictional and non-fictional writings.

As Lewis came to a new understanding of truth as defined by Christianity, he came to a different and, in his estimation, a fuller definition of the imagination: he came to see myth as an invaluable and distinctly human avenue of understanding truth. His realization of the compatibility between imagination and truth, in fact, brought about the final stage in his embrace of Christianity. Lewis attributes his 1929 transformation from atheist to theist partly to his reading of *The Everlasting Man*, a book published in 1925 in which Roman Catholic convert G.K. Chesterton emphasizes the intrinsic correlation between mythology and Christianity. This
book introduced Lewis to the idea of Christianity as the “true myth” and played a crucial role in his conversion. He relates in *Surprised by Joy*: “Then I read Chesterton’s *Everlasting Man* and for the first time saw the whole Christian outline of history set out in a form that seemed to me to make sense” (223). As Lewis continues with his version of the story, he states that he became ultimately convinced of the truth of Christianity after a long, late-night conversation with his friends J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson in 1931. It was after this conversation, in which the three men discussed the issue of Christianity as the “true myth,” that Lewis finally accepted the faith he would spend the rest of his life defending.

A vast amount of criticism deals with the issue of Lewis’s Christian imagination, above all as it is expressed in the Chronicles of Narnia (1950-56), but an aspect of Lewis’s concept of imagination that warrants further investigation is the compatibility with and, in fact, the necessity of imagination to the post-conversion Lewis’s idea of absolute truth. In his group of philosophical essays published in 1944 as *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis deals specifically with the existence and importance of an absolute truth, which he calls the “Tao” and describes as “the doctrine of objective value” (18) and “Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Reason or the First Platitudes” (43); he expounds upon this idea of the Tao in the third and final book of his Space Trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, which was published in 1945. Both *That Hideous Strength* and *The Abolition of Man*, in their revelations of Lewis’s concept of truth, also strongly emphasize and exemplify the need for imagination in what Lewis sees as proper perception of this truth. In his preface to *That Hideous Strength*, written in 1943, Lewis describes the novel as “a ‘tall story’ about devilry, though it has behind it a serious ‘point’ which I have tried to make in my *Abolition of Man*” (*Strength* 7).

The goal of this thesis is to analyze Lewis’s ideas of imagination as they relate to the “serious point” made in *The Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength* and, furthermore, to posit that a study of this relationship reveals a central aspect of the Christian Lewis’s conception of reality: the convergence of romanticism and Christianity, and the sacramental vision of reality that reflects this convergence. These issues will be addressed in four chapters. In the first chapter, I will flesh out some of the similarities and differences between Lewis and romantic discourse on the imagination. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will focus mainly on the romanticism of Coleridge and his concepts of primary and secondary imagination, also using Barfield to elucidate these ideas. The next chapter of this thesis will contain, first, an analysis of
Lewis’s considerations of absolute truth in *The Abolition of Man* and, second, a reading of that book in light of the previously established relationship between Lewis and Coleridgean romanticism. I will, among other things, address these questions: Which aspects of Lewis’s thoughts on the nature of reality are compatible with Coleridge’s? Which aspects are divergent? I will use the two theories of imagination to explain the roots of these compatibilities and divergences. In the third chapter of this thesis, I will examine Lewis’s own use of myth to convey his message of objective truth in *That Hideous Strength*, seeking to further our understanding of both what Lewis calls the Tao and the importance of imagination. Finally, I will synthesize my discoveries in the previous chapters in order to examine the worldview that results from Lewis’s communion of absolute truth and imagination, a worldview which I call “sacramental.”
CHAPTER ONE

AN IMAGINATIVE JOURNEY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEWIS’S IMAGINATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO COLERIDGE’S IDEAS

*Imaginative does not mean imaginary.*

-G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*

The concept of “imagination” is pivotal to an understanding of C.S. Lewis’s life and writings; this concept is also critical to a consideration of British romantic thought in general and to Coleridge’s work in particular. While Coleridge’s actual definition of the term “imagination” can be traced specifically in several passages of his work, Lewis’s is more elusive: he refers to the concept frequently but does not highlight an established definition. *Surprised by Joy* contains, perhaps, the most complete treatment of Lewis’s thoughts on the imagination, since it traces their development through the years of his pre-conversion life. This chapter maps and analyzes the development of Lewis’s concept of imagination in order to propound a definition that attends to his post-conversion views, in the time of his composing *The Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength*, but which also encompasses the evolution of that definition throughout its previous stages. This entire explanation will, in fact, contain three separate definitions from various stages of Lewis’s development. First comes the definition Lewis uses while reflecting back upon his life in *Surprised by Joy* to explain how imagination worked in his conversion; next, the one he explains in *Surprised by Joy* as the definition he would have given during his atheistic stage; and, finally, the meaning implied by the Christian Lewis’s attitude towards imagination as a means of shedding light upon the truths of his chosen faith. Furthermore, this chapter then reviews Coleridge’s definition of the imagination, based mainly on his famous distinction between its “primary” and “secondary” modes in the *Biographia Literaria*, and employs Owen Barfield’s interpretations to bring Coleridge’s ideas into explicit contact with Lewis’s. These specific definitions will serve to pinpoint the areas in which Lewis and Coleridge...
are in agreement or at odds on the subject of imagination in order to provide a starting point for analysis of how this subject works with the ideas of *The Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength*.

In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis consistently speaks of his “imaginative life” as equivalent with his experiences of “Joy.” He describes these experiences as imaginative, and even romantic, in nature. The phrase, “surprised by joy,” is actually taken from one of Wordsworth’s sonnets, and Lewis mentions Wordsworth several times throughout this book, even saying that an explanation of the experience of imagination, or Joy, has already been “much better done by [. . .] Wordsworth” (16). However, “every man must tell his own tale” (16), so Lewis continues to tell the story of Joy in his own life. Joy recurs in Lewis’s story as a feeling of intense, usually fleeting, and seemingly insatiable longing for an ineffable, incomprehensible something. This longing, for Lewis, initially occurred most frequently in the recognition of beauty. He recollects three particular instances of Joy, or imagination, in his early childhood: the memory of a little garden his brother had planted in a biscuit tin, the “Idea of Autumn” (16) in Beatrix Potter’s *Squirrel Nutkin*, and a few lines from Longfellow’s poetry: “I heard a voice that cried, / Balder the beautiful / Is dead, is dead” (17). A prolonged absence of Joy happened throughout his later boyhood, but Lewis finds himself within an “imaginative Renaissance” (77) in 1911, at the age of twelve or thirteen, when he reads a headline that refers to *Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods* and begins his fascination with “northerness” that would continue to grow throughout the remainder of his life. This renaissance also brought about a renewed sense of Joy in the marvels of nature; Lewis delighted in unifying his imagination with the world around him, first “looking for scenes that might belong to the Wagnerian world” but eventually finding that “nature ceased to be a mere reminder of the books [and] became herself the medium of the real joy” (77). Throughout the rest of his boyhood, his adolescence, and the beginning of his adult life, Lewis treasured these experiences of Joy; looking back upon them in 1955 while writing *Surprised by Joy*, he presents them as synonymous with acts of his imagination.

These varied and intermittent sparks of Joy divide Lewis’s “imaginative life, [. . .] life as concerned with Joy” (78-9) from his everyday, “outer life” in such a drastic way that Lewis states: “I almost have to tell two separate stories. The two lives do not seem to influence each other at all. Where there are hungry wastes, starving for Joy, in the one, the other may be full of bustle and success; or again, where the outer life is miserable, the other may be brimming over
with ecstasy” (78). Although Lewis’s outer life will come into the picture later on in this chapter, it is his “secret, imaginative life” (78) that concerns us regarding the definition of imagination as it is equivalent with Joy; before going further into this definition, it must be distinguished from two other meanings of imagination that Lewis says belong to the outer life and not his inner appreciation of Joy. First, imagination can be explained as “the world of reverie, daydream, wish-fulfilling fantasy” (15), in which people see themselves in their ideal versions, in which every self is reflected in a mirror where all desires are fulfilled, and in which Lewis admits he often pictured himself “cutting a fine figure” (15). This meaning of imagination is distinct from Joy, because it is self-centered, whereas Joy involves longing for something outside of oneself. The second definition Lewis distinguishes from imagination as Joy does focus on something outside of oneself, but it lacks the sense of wonder that characterizes true Joy. He gives the example of Animal-Land, the imaginary world he had created in stories, drawings, and conversations with his brother. Animal-Land, he claims, is distinct from the wish-fulfilling fantasy world because he did not see himself as a part of it: “I was its creator, not a candidate for admission to it” (15). As such, it was similar to Joy in setting its sights on something outside of the self; but “there was no poetry, even no romance, in it. It was almost astonishingly prosaic” (15). On the other hand, Joy, or “imagination in a third sense, and the highest sense of all” (15-16), requires an experience comparable to “Milton’s ‘enormous bliss’ of Eden” (16). Lewis recalls the highest sense of imagination as “something quite different from ordinary life and even from ordinary pleasure; something, as they would now say, ‘in another dimension’” (17). The inventive imagination that is lacking in awe and the self-centered, fantasy-world imagination do not produce true Joy; they belong to Lewis’s “outer world” and are thus divorced from his inner, imaginative life.

Lewis writes *Surprised by Joy* and shares memories of his imaginative development “partly in answer to requests that I would tell how I passed from Atheism to Christianity and partly to correct one or two false notions that seem to have got about” (vii). With these objectives in mind, he writes with a critical eye that evaluates his own past self. It is important to remember that the definition of imagination as Joy we have highlighted in the preceding several paragraphs is Lewis’s estimation, at the time of writing *Surprised by Joy*, of how imagination had functioned in his earlier life. The understanding of imagination as Joy, as an intense longing for something unknown, cannot be applied as a definition of how imagination operated for the Christian Lewis,
nor can it be taken as a representation of his understanding of Joy as he perceived it along the way. His perceptions, and his attitude towards the imagination, underwent abundant changes. As a child, Lewis “was living almost entirely in my imagination” (15); he then experienced that Joyless period ended by the “imaginative Renaissance” and the splitting of his life into inner and outer modes. The Joy of this renaissance, originally elicited by Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods, led to a passionate regard for Wagner’s music and for Norse mythology. This passion, in turn, led Lewis to “a scholar’s interest” (165) in the subject. But as his intellectual prowess in the area increased, he found himself straying from the Joy that had begun it all: “Finally I awoke from building the temple to find that the God had flown. Of course I did not put it that way [at the time it was happening]. I would have said simply that I didn’t get the old thrill. I was in the Wordsworthian predicament, lamenting that ‘a glory’ had passed away” (165-6). After this realization, he continuously sought to produce that “old thrill” he could not help desiring so fervently. But Joy, writes Lewis as his 1955 self, is “a by-product” (168) that cannot be generated when it is sought as a “thrill” or a “state of mind” (168). He calls this misconception the “deadly error” he made before he understood the true nature of Joy: “Only when your whole attention and desire are fixed on something else – whether a distant mountain, or the past, or the gods of Asgard – does the thrill arise. [. . .] Its very existence presupposes that you desire not it but something other and outer. [. . .] For take away the object, and what, after all, would be left? – a whirl of images, a fluttering sensation in the diaphragm, a momentary abstraction” (168). For the Lewis writing Surprised by Joy, imagination must reflect upon something outside of the human mind and something outside of itself.

The relationship between mind and imagination was part of the fuel for Lewis’s “Great War” (207) with Owen Barfield. Lewis and Barfield met at Oxford in 1919, and Lewis describes Barfield as:

not so much the alter ego as the antiself. Of course he shares your interests; otherwise he would not become your friend at all. But he has approached them from a different angle. [. . .] When you set out to correct his heresies, you find that he forsooth has decided to correct yours! And then you go at it, hammer and tongs, far in to the night, night after night, or walking through fine country that neither gives a glance to, each learning the weight of the other’s punches, and often more like mutually respectful enemies than friends. Actually (though it never seems so at the time) you modify one another’s
thought; out of this perpetual dogfight a community of mind and a deep affection emerge.

This unique friendship, these “perpetual dogfights,” and Barfield’s ideas of a “different angle” worked on Lewis much like Joy worked on him: Barfield was able to pull Lewis outside of himself and get him to see certain issues in a new light. Lewis, in fact, declares that the “Great War was one of the turning points of my life” (207). It was just before and during this Great War that Lewis formulated the view of imagination that is the second main definition this chapter wishes to highlight.

The inciting incident of this “war” was Barfield’s adoption of Anthroposophy, a philosophy begun in the early 20th Century by Rudolph Steiner, which focuses on the reality of a spiritual world and aims to use scientific principles in the understanding of spirituality while also claiming that sensory experience is not the most important form of knowledge. Lewis considered this viewpoint as an abandonment of the materialist convictions they had both previously espoused. Before Barfield’s adoption of Anthroposophy, they had both professed what Lewis calls “New Look” (201) intellectual ideas: modern psychology, rationalism, and a total rejection of anything that resembled romanticism. By the time of his beginning at University College of Oxford, Lewis had come to regard imagination as completely separate from intellect or reason. He claims that during his first two years at Oxford he “formed the resolution ‘of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense’” (201). Looking back on this period in Surprised by Joy, he characterizes this “good sense,” the intellectual “New Look” that he assumed, as “at that moment, a retreat, almost a panic-stricken flight, from all that sort of romanticism which had hitherto been the chief concern of my life” (201). During this time, when he was still, of course, a sound atheist, he defined imagination as “aesthetic experience” (205). And while he “talked about it under that name and said it was very ‘valuable,’ [. . .] it [Joy] came very seldom and when it came it didn’t amount to much” (205). This definition of imagination creates a chasm between reason and romanticism in Lewis’s mind and robs both sides of their essential worth. Imagination, when considered as fundamentally incompatible and unrelated to reason, loses its significance and its flavor; it becomes merely “imaginary” (170) and not imaginative. Reason becomes “a glib and shallow ‘rationalism’” (170) for Lewis, and he remembers: “Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be
real I thought grim and meaningless” (170). If imagination is mere “aesthetic experience,” then it is not only unreal, but it has no relation to the intellectual life or to the pursuit of knowledge.

This issue of knowledge and imagination makes up the bulk of Lewis’s and Barfield’s Great War. Both men had been strict “realists” before Barfield embraced Anthroposophy; they accepted as “real” only those things accessible and provable by the senses. Thus, they accepted the chasm between reason and romanticism. In the Great War, however, Barfield shows Lewis that this chasm does not only make imagination imaginary – but it also does not make sense. The strict “realist” Lewis and Barfield had not only considered aesthetic experience valuable but had also “maintained that abstract thought (if obedient to logical rules) gave indisputable truth” (208). Eventually, says Lewis, “Barfield convinced me that it was inconsistent” (208). How could “aesthetic experience” be “valuable” if it was not real? In fact, what would be the place of any abstract thoughts in a world in which only the concrete has existence? In raising these issues to Lewis, Barfield eventually convinced him “that the positions we had hitherto held left no room for any satisfactory theory of knowledge” (208). Barfield, influenced by the aforementioned Anthroposophical ideas of Rudolph Steiner, came to see imagination as synonymous with knowledge; and while Lewis never accepted Anthroposophism, he concedes in Surprised by Joy that “he [Barfield] changed me a good deal more than I changed him” (200) – and the Great War marked an important stage in Lewis’s concept of imagination and in his journey towards Christianity.

The Great War went on for several years, and it was not until 1929 that Lewis abandoned atheism for theism, “gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed” (228). There are several key factors of that admission that he highlights which resound centrally with our considerations of his changing concepts of imagination. He points to a number of factors that relate to his thoughts on imagination, in addition to the Great War with Barfield, as playing important roles in his recognition of God. First, his reading G.K. Chesterton’s The Everlasting Man furthered the admiration he already had for the Roman Catholic writer, and he progressed from thinking that “Chesterton was the most sensible man alive ‘apart from his Christianity’” to wondering if it was not the case that “Christianity itself was very sensible ‘apart from its Christianity’” (223). Then, shortly after finishing The Everlasting Man, an acquaintance whom Lewis knew to be a staunch atheist admitted that “all that stuff of Frazer’s about the Dying God […] really happened once” (224). It was this realization that ultimately brought Lewis to his
knees: that what he had once considered a story had, in fact, been reality. God moved from Lewis’s unreal realm of imagination or fantasy into the undeniable arena of fact. Although Lewis began to attend church at that time of his accepting theism, it was two more years before he definitively chose Christianity out of the “perplexing multiplicity of religions” (225). Lewis confesses that the final stretch of road from theism to Christianity “is the one on which I am now [while writing *Surprised by Joy*] least informed” (232), but there is one key aspect of it that demands mention here. In seeking the “right” religion, Lewis wanted to find a faith that made historical sense; he wanted a religion that answered the questions: “Where has religion reached its true maturity? Where, if anywhere, have the hints of all Paganism been fulfilled?” (235). With the help, yet again, of Chesterton in *The Everlasting Man*, he came to understand Christianity as the answer to these questions. Chesterton contends that “Christianity met the mythological search for romance by being a story and the philosophical search for truth by being a true story” (248), and Lewis found this idea attuned with his own thinking. He found himself accepting Christianity as the “true myth.”

Lewis’s ultimate acceptance of Christianity not only changed his outer life drastically, but it also brought him to a new era in his inner life of the imagination. In a way, the stark distinction between his two lives, like the distinction between what he had considered the myth of Christianity and the facts of history, disappeared. The two wildly separate lives ceased to exist, and reason and romanticism were one in Lewis’s mind. But, as he himself asks on the final page of *Surprised by Joy*: “What, in conclusion, of Joy?” He continues, saying that “the subject has nearly lost all interest for me since I became a Christian. I cannot, indeed, complain, like Wordsworth, that the visionary gleam has passed away. I believe [. . .] that the old stab, the old bittersweet, has come to me as often and as sharply since my conversion [. . .] But I now know that the experience, considered as a state of my own mind, had never had the kind of importance I once gave it. It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer” (238). When Lewis discovers God as the object of his longing, the longing itself is transformed by the Christian virtue of hope; when Lewis begins to believe that the ultimate goal of life lies in God, Joy no longer serves as the main “pointer” to this goal. His perception of a certain end, Christianity, changes his view of the means by which he will seek that end. This change will alter not only his outer life but also his inner, imaginative being: the definition of imagination
that emerges from his conversion is the one that characterizes the Christian Lewis so well-beloved for his children’s fantasies and other mythical works.

In a 1954 letter to the Milton Society of America, Lewis relates that “the imaginative man in me is older, more continuously operative and in that sense more basic than either the religious writer or the critic. It was he who made me first attempt (with little success) to be a poet. [...] It was he who after my conversion led me to embody my religious belief in symbolic or mythopoeic forms” (qtd. in Honda 1). While this “imaginative man” is the same Lewis who was guided for years by the hand of Joy, the imagination he refers to in this passage is different from Joy: imagination is no longer longing, but recognition of the truth Lewis found in orthodox Christianity. This third and final definition of Lewis’s imagination bears many similarities to imagination as Joy in that it acts as a pointer to the ultimate end of Christianity; but the nature of this imagination is distinct, and its meaning is scattered throughout Lewis’s numerous writings.

His preface to George MacDonald: An Anthology includes one of the most thorough and direct discussions of this imagination. Lewis describes MacDonald, whose Phantastes he also claims had originally “baptized” his imagination (Surprised by Joy 181), as the person who “does fantasy – fantasy that hovers between the allegorical and the mythopoeic [...] better than any man” (xxix). Lewis continues by clarifying what he means by this “fantasy” of which MacDonald exemplifies the zenith; he purports that this kind of fantasy is not necessarily a literary quality, but, in fact, it is beyond expression through words alone. It lies within a story, a “particular pattern of events” (xxx), which Lewis also calls “the Myth”: “In myth the imagined events are the body and something inexpressible is the soul: the words, or mime, or film, or pictorial series [that present the story] are not even clothes – they are not much more than a telephone” [xxxi]. This idea of “myth” of which words are “not much more than a telephone” makes up the final definition of imagination this chapter attributes to Lewis.

Imagination as myth is comprised of two aspects: the “imagined events” and the “inexpressible soul.” Without either quality, a story cannot fulfill Lewis’s standard of imagination. The events can be in any form: written words, spoken words, film, photographs, pictures, etc. But the soul, for Lewis, is delineated by his Christian faith. The soul of the imagination must be illuminated by what Lewis considered the true religion, the “true myth.” The convergence of fact and myth in Christianity is key to understanding this third definition of imagination. In a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves, Lewis states that “the doctrines we get out
of the true myth are [. . .] translations into our concepts and ideas of that which God has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely, the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection” (qtd. in Blamires 91). The history of Christianity confirms an intrinsic necessity for material actualization of spiritual realities: the “Word became Flesh” in order to redeem humanity. Lewis believes that human beings are comprised of both material and spiritual entities, body and soul; as a result, human beings are incapable of purely abstract thought and must use images to grasp and illuminate transcendent concepts. Imagination as myth acts as this link between the material and the transcendent. Speaking again of MacDonald, Lewis declares that “the quality which had enchanted me in his imaginative works turned out to be the quality of the real universe, the divine, magical, terrifying, and ecstatic reality in which we all live” (xxxviii). Whatever the form, imagination as myth employs a “particular pattern of events” to bring together the divine and the quotidian constituents of human existence in order to reveal what Lewis deemed the ultimate “reality” – the God of Christianity. In Lewis’s allegorical fantasy, The Pilgrim’s Regress, the mysterious voice of God proclaims: “For this end I made your senses and for this end your imagination, that you might see My face and live” (176). Lewis’s imagination as myth is a means by which human beings can pursue their divine destinies.

This idea of imagination as a conduit for transcendence brings Lewis into contact with Coleridge, whose renowned definition of the primary and secondary imagination identifies imagination as a participation in God’s act of creation. The entire definition, found in Chapter XIII of the Biographia Literaria, reads:

The Imagination, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (qtd. in Perkins 452)

This passage has undergone copious scrutiny from critics over the years, but the consideration at hand does not attempt to engage in this discourse; the concern here is with how Coleridge’s
understanding of imagination aids in our consideration of Lewis’s. First, Coleridge’s imagination, like Lewis’s imagination as myth, acts as a link between the infinite creator and his finite creations. The primary imagination is the means by which human beings perceive their own existence and their relationship to the outside world. This concept is one that Barfield’s interpretations of Coleridge can help to elucidate. Barfield remained interested in the ideas of knowledge and spirituality he and Lewis disputed during the Great War; these ideas, and his continued interest in the nature of imagination, are evident in his 1971 critical work, *What Coleridge Thought*. In this book, Barfield explains that “imagination at its primary stage empowers experience of an outer world at all” (81). Coleridge describes the primary imagination as “the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” Human perception, in this context, means the ability of human beings to recognize themselves as selves. In this sense, the imagination serves the same function as the act of thinking: it enables individuals to see themselves as individuals, possessed of an individual mind, and to identify themselves as part of the outer world of all creation. Coleridge describes the act of thinking as “the mind’s self-experience” (*Biographia* I, 85-56; qtd in Barfield 14), and, after quoting this description and several other of Coleridge’s passages, Barfield notes that “the expressions ‘act of thinking’ and ‘act of imagination’ are treated as equivalent” (16). For Coleridge, just as God’s act of creation brought forth the reality of the world so it could be perceived by human beings, so does the primary imagination re-create that world for the individual and allow each person to enter into outer reality.

Another important characteristic of the primary imagination, the characteristic that centrally distinguishes it from the secondary, is that its activity is involuntary, whereas the secondary imagination is “co-existing with the conscious will.” The act of the primary is an unconscious participation in the creative act of God that results in self-consciousness, while the will-act of the secondary raises this consciousness to another “degree.” To quote Barfield, imagination “at its secondary stage both expresses and empowers experience of that outer world as the productive ‘unity in multeity,’ which results in a whole and parts organically related to one another” (81). The “whole” and “parts” referred to here demonstrate Coleridge’s view of the world as a sundry collection of created things, which are all united in the mind of the creator, the “I AM.” The organic relation between these two entities that Barfield refers to means that, by the
activity of the secondary imagination, created beings can take on dynamic roles in their perception of the creator and of creation itself. The secondary imagination “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.” After human beings unconsciously perceive themselves as individuals belonging to a whole through the primary imagination, they can utilize the secondary to consciously examine the unity and the multeity of reality.

Coleridge’s idea of the primary and secondary imagination has several aspects that agree with Lewis’s concepts – and also several that disagree. What I have called Lewis’s imagination as myth can assume the acts of both the primary and secondary imagination: it both perceives and creates. Imagination as myth could be the formation of the story itself or the recognition and appreciation of a series of events that fits the criteria of Lewis’s “myth.” As previously stated, the “soul” of myth, for Lewis, is defined by Christianity. As such, a story that fits the criteria for myth is one that reflects what Lewis considers the true story of Christianity. A story told or perceived by imagination as myth is an expression of higher, divine truths. The same, as we have already established, can be said of Coleridge. For Coleridge, human beings could not perceive their relationship to the creator without the imagination. Unlike Coleridge, however, there is no distinction in Lewis’s understanding of imagination as myth between voluntary and involuntary acts. Lewis’s understanding has less to do with epistemology than Coleridge’s, since Lewis is not so much concerned with the actual workings of the imaginative mind-function itself, but more with the end of these workings. Lewis is more focused on the metaphysical purpose of the imagination than on its operation. For this reason, the longing of Joy lost an aspect of its significance when Lewis thought he found the goal of that longing; for this reason, Lewis’s imagination has less to do with an act of the mind than Coleridge’s and more with the truths those acts can illuminate.

Both Coleridge and Lewis are concerned with the imagination as something outside of the self, but there is a distinction to be made here as well. Coleridge’s primary imagination, synonymous with the act of thinking, serves the purpose of self-recognition. On the other hand, Lewis’s imagination understood both as myth and as Joy, demands an abandonment of self. Lewis relates in Surprised by Joy that his spiritual journey, paralleling his imaginative journey, and leading to Christianity, involved “total surrender, the absolute leap in the dark” (228). Lewis had always valued independence and “had always wanted, above all things, not to be ‘interfered
with”’ (228), but Joy compelled him to leave himself behind and seek where his longing pointed. Ironically, however, the Christian nature of Lewis’s imagination renders this self-abandonment equal to the recognition of one’s identity. The Gospels proclaim that it is only through giving of themselves that human beings will be able to realize their eternal destinies. In Lewis’s imagination as myth, this recognition of identity through self-abandonment is similar to Coleridge’s idea that imagination should procure a “willing suspension of disbelief” (Biographia VIV, qtd. in Perkins 452). Appreciating a myth involves accepting the story as worthwhile despite the fact that dragons, unicorns, and elves do not exist. In The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, the unimaginative, selfish boy, Eustace Clarence Scrubb, discovers the truth about himself through a self-abandoning, imaginative experience. Eustace is an unwilling and unbelieving passenger on the voyage through Narnia’s mythical waters. After taking some treasure from a dragon’s lair, the boy is magically transformed into one of the beasts, and through the loneliness and misery this transformation brings about, Eustace comes to acknowledge his selfishness. It is only through peeling away layer after layer of his dragon-skin, which represents the ugliness of his own former personality, that Eustace is able to reassert his humanity. Becoming a dragon holds a mirror up to Eustace and shows him a glimpse of himself, and it is only through abandoning this self that Eustace can realize his true identity; at the same time, he also begins to appreciate the beauty of Narnia itself. For both Lewis and Coleridge, imagination allows people to leave behind the ordinary rules of the “real world” in order to embrace fantastical stories or images that may, in turn, inform “reality.”

This combination of fantasy and reality is, of course, diametrically opposed to the view of imagination the atheist Lewis held before his Great War with Owen Barfield. The Christian Lewis sees romanticism and reason as hand-in-hand pursuers of the truth he identifies with Christianity, whereas he had previously emphasized a chasm between intellect and imagination. For the Christian Lewis, imagination understood as myth encompasses the faculties of both reason and romanticism. In the mythical imagination, intellect and romance work together to perceive all kinds of truths. Mineko Honda describes this phenomenon, saying that “Lewis’s imagination is not opposite of reason nor in a lower position than it, but works side by side with reason, showing God’s Reality to man” (23). This revelatory power of imagination in conjunction with reason is something Lewis has in common with Coleridge, but Coleridge propounds a different hierarchy of reason and imagination. Honda explains that Coleridge’s
imagination “is the mediatory faculty between reason and understanding. ‘Understanding’ is the ‘faculty judging according to sense’” (21). In the Statesman’s Manual, Coleridge writes what Peter Schakel calls “his clearest and fullest definition of imagination: ‘That reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors’” (qtd. in Imagination and the Arts 4). According to this particular definition, the imagination incorporates “Reason in the Images of the Sense,” meaning that it links reason to understanding in a model of human perception that places reason at the top, followed by imagination and understanding. In Lewis’s model, imagination plays the similar role of conducting truth, but it is not considered “lower” than reason.

The relationship between imagination and truth is one that lies at the heart of Lewis’s concept of imagination as myth, and this is largely a result of Barfield’s influence during the Great War. Barfield declares that, although imagination can be used by a person who does not recognize its connection to truth, “a theory of imagination must concern itself, whether positively or negatively, with its relation to truth” (qtd. in Thorson 12). It is after the Great War, as he moves closer to his conversion, that Lewis accepts a positive relation between imagination and truth, and this relation also becomes important in his own use of imagination. This connection between Lewis’s concept of imagination as myth and his concept of truth is pivotal to an understanding of all Lewis’s writings. It is an issue he addresses in many of his critical, apologetic, and philosophical works, and it informs his own creation of myths in his fantasy stories. It is also a way in which Lewis’s concept of imagination answers more questions than Coleridge’s. In the theories of both Coleridge and Lewis, imagination functions as a conveyor of truth, but Stephen Thorson points out that although the Romantics acknowledged a connection between imagination and truth “they did not ask, much less answer, the question: ‘In what way is Imagination true?’” Even Coleridge, who had proposed a very high view of Imagination indeed, failed to complete his philosophical essay on the nature of Imagination and its relation to truth” (13). Coleridge’s definition of imagination quoted above by Schakel describes it as “consubstantial with the truths, of which they are conductors.” There are two major differences between this explanation of imagination and Lewis’s. First, for Lewis, myth is not consubstantial, but reflective, of truths; and, secondly, as Thorson reveals, Coleridge fails to address the nature of these truths themselves. As we have observed, Lewis recognizes the
potency of imagination only as a reflection of the truth he believes it to enlighten. A full account of Lewis’s views on truth and its relationship with imagination can be found in his *Abolition of Man*, which is the subject of the next chapter.
In Chapter One, I argued that Lewis’s idea of imagination as myth gives stories the role of leading humanity to the Christian truth he believed. In The Abolition of Man, Lewis writes with a different voice. In this book, originally a series of lectures given at the University of Durham in 1943, Lewis is speaking neither as the Christian apologist nor the imaginative storyteller. He claims that, “though I myself am a Theist, and indeed a Christian, I am not here attempting any indirect argument for Theism” (49). Peter Schakel observes that “Lewis writes in The Abolition of Man as a philosopher, attempting to make concepts and arguments clear and convincing and to persuade readers to adopt and follow them” (“Irrigating Deserts” 24). What, then, does this philosopher Lewis have to do with the Christian or the imaginative man we have discussed? The Abolition of Man contains Lewis’s thoughts on the existence and importance of an absolute, universal truth that informs conscience and determines right from wrong, and imagination plays a fundamental role in these considerations. This chapter has three main objectives: first, to outline the point Lewis intends to make in The Abolition of Man; then, to explain the crucial role of imagination in the understanding of this point; and, finally, to bring Coleridge into the picture again and to discuss the ways in which The Abolition of Man is in agreement or disagreement with romantic concepts of imagination and truth.

Lewis’s purpose in The Abolition of Man is to argue that a rejection of the underlying, essential truth he believes should guide all human actions will result in the destruction of human
society and, indeed, of human nature itself. He states that this truth has been recognized by humanity since the beginning of time and has been referred to under many different names: *Rta* by early Hinduism, the Good ‘beyond existence’ by Plato, virtue that gives strength to the stars by Wordsworth, and *Tao* by the Chinese. Lewis refers to this phenomenon simply as “the Tao” for the sake of “brevity,” but he asserts that this term includes the idea in all its forms: “Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental” (18). He relates that the Hindu instantiation of this concept “is constantly identified with truth, or correspondence to reality” (17) and describes the Tao in his own words as “the reality beyond all predicates. [. . .] It is the Nature, it is the Way, the Road. [. . .] It is also the Way which every man should tread” (18). Reality, for Lewis, is twofold: there are the particular, mutable workings of the earth, and there is also the universal, unchanging presence of the Tao. Only the Tao provides a proper construction for the mutable fabric of materiality. The Tao has inspired the common precepts enacted by civilizations throughout history; in fact, Lewis devotes an entire appendix at the end of the printed version of *The Abolition of Man* to “illustrations of the Tao” (83), in which he lists different versions of laws common to many diverse cultures. The “Law of General Beneficence,” for example, has sixteen negative and twelve positive embodiments that Lewis quotes: from the Biblical “Love thy neighbor as thyself” to the Ancient Egyptian “I have not slain men” to the Old Norse “Man is man’s delight” (84-7). Lewis is not attempting to provide an exhaustive list, nor is he endeavoring to prove the Tao’s “validity by the argument from common consent” (83). The Tao is beyond such contrivances; “its validity cannot be deduced. For those who do not perceive its rationality, even universal consent could not prove it” (83).

Lewis also equates the Tao with “Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical Reason or the First Platitudes” (43). In many ways, *The Abolition of Man* is Lewis’s exhortation for human society to return to the traditional values he sees rejected by “modernity.” It is appropriate here to remember the world which surrounds Lewis as he writes. In February of 1943, when the original lectures were given at University of Durham, London had been enduring German blitzes for over three years, and there seemed to be no end in sight for this atrocious war. At the same time, this world was witnessing immense changes and advances in technology and science. The 1940s saw the first electronic computer developed by engineers in the United States, the first operational jet airplane tested in Germany, and the first cardiac catheterization performed by a doctor in New York City. “Progress” was the word of the hour,
and “Innovation” abounded, but people everywhere were struggling with despair as a result of the ongoing violence and the widespread fear, poverty, and disillusionment.

Amidst this bloodshed and despondency, Lewis also saw a moral and spiritual poverty taking hold of modern society. Many things considered as beneficial to progress and innovation Lewis viewed as morally detrimental. In his book, *C.S. Lewis for the Third Millenium*, Peter Kreeft describes, perhaps rather drastically, the world as Lewis might have perceived it:

The essence of modernity is the death of the spiritual. A modernist is someone who is more concerned about air pollution than soul pollution. A modernist is someone who wants clean air so he can breathe dirty words. A modernist cares about big things, like whales, more than little things, like fetuses; big things like governments, more than little things like families and neighborhoods; big things like states, which last for hundreds of years, more than little things like souls, which last forever. (54)

Kreeft’s comments may sound somewhat general and pessimistic, but they do pinpoint the concerns Lewis means to highlight in *The Abolition of Man*. Lewis’s objections to modern ideas were a result of prioritizing: he was not opposed to scientific and technological advances, but he believed that such advances must be made according to the principles of spiritual and moral truths. With these ideas in mind, Lewis tries to identify the Tao as the foundation for these truths, and ultimately as the foundation for human choices. The Tao, identified with “Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Reason or the First Platitudes,” is the means by which human beings judge one action or another as the best course to take in a given situation; it is the basis for the formation of conscience and of the virtue of prudence. Without the guidance of the Tao, Lewis argues, there is nothing sufficient to inform the choices human beings make every day in the exercise of free will.

Lewis begins this argument by citing education as a main arena for either the rejection or the observance of the Tao. On the first page of *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis identifies a textbook, which he calls *The Green Book* for the sake of anonymity, and which he considers to be an example of education that rejects the Tao. The kind of education proposed by *The Green Book* repudiates the idea of “objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false,” which is the “doctrine” of the Tao itself (18). Lewis asserts that modern education, in the attempt to prevent youth from being “swayed by emotional propaganda,” has decided to “fortify the minds of young people against emotion” (13). This, in his estimation, is a
grievous mistake. Lewis agrees with the Aristotelian concept that “the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought” (16) – and what a pupil “ought” to like, for Lewis, is defined by the Tao. Lewis sees the Tao, and not a dismissal of all emotion, as the only way to protect students from propagandists: “The right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments” (14). The Tao, according to Lewis, is the only way to instill these “just sentiments” into the consciousness of human beings, and “just sentiments” are necessary to making those everyday decisions that people need conscience or prudence to determine.

Lewis uses the example of dying for one’s country. What makes a person decide that giving up life is better than preserving it? It must be because that person’s sentiment for his or her country is rooted in something that gives objective worth to the feeling; some sentiments are more “good” than others because their objects “merited those emotions” (15). The Tao is the object that justifies emotions. Nothing else, Lewis argues – not instinct, impulse, or societal compulsion – can offer a “ground of value judgments” (39). According to Lewis, there must be something on which to ground statements of value, statements of what is good and what is bad. “If it is rejected,” Lewis says of the Tao, then “all value is rejected” (43), for humanity cannot create value: “The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in” (44). The nature of reality is not constructed by humanity, but it lies in the blueprint of the Tao. “If we are to have values at all,” says Lewis, “we must accept the ultimate platitudes of Practical Reason [the Tao] as having absolute validity” (49). In other words, if anything is real, then there must be an absolute reality.

Lewis sees the failure to recognize this absolute reality as an imminent threat to humanity. He declares that “the practical result of education in the spirit of The Green Book must be the destruction of the society which accepts it” (27) and states that “a dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery” (73). Lewis believes that this elimination of the Tao will lead to what he calls “Man’s conquest over Nature” (53), in which human beings, rejecting the centrality of an absolute truth, will seek to define their own realities and their own ends. Lewis states that the people resulting from this conquest “are not men at all. Stepping outside the Tao, they have stepped into the void. [. . .] Man’s final conquest has proved to be an abolition of man” (64). Remembering the scientific age surrounding him, Lewis claims that a rejection of the Tao will inevitably result in power being
concentrated in the hands of a few “Conditioners” (75), or people who control the scientific means by which they plan to “conquer Nature.” This conquest will not aid in protecting the common good, but it will eventually produce “the power of some men to make other men what they please” (59). If human beings have no objective truth to be guided by, then not only will they be made slaves to their own chaotic desires, but they will also be prey to ends invented by the “Conditioners” that may not be in the best interest of those who are part of the “conditioned” (75). If human beings think they can manipulate nature with no consideration for “objective value” or “traditional morality,” then a dire consequence will come about: “At the moment, then, of Man’s victory over Nature, we find the whole human race subjected to some individual men, and those individuals subjected to that in themselves which is purely ‘natural’ – to their irrational impulses. Nature, untrammeled by values, rules the Conditioners, and, through them, all humanity. Man’s conquest of nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature’s conquest of Man” (67-8).

As already stated, educational systems play a major role in either the execution or the prevention of this apocalyptic “conquest.” Lewis warns against education in the spirit of The Green Book, which rejects the idea that “certain attitudes are really true and others really false” – but how, exactly, does it do this? And what does this have to do with Lewis’s concept of imagination as myth? For Lewis, imagination, and especially imagination as myth, must enter into the process of education; in fact, it is precisely through ignoring imagination that The Green Book destroys the validity of sentiment and thus destroys the idea of “objective value” found in the Tao. An education as propounded by The Green Book results in a phenomenon which Lewis calls “Men without Chests” (25), people produced by the idea that emotions have no validity. Although this phrase, “Men without Chests,” is indicative of the kind of obscure language that can make Lewis seem almost inaccessibly peculiar, the idea behind it is not an unknown or an unintelligible one. In his essay, “The Expression of Feeling in Imagination,” Richard Moran explains some of the dialogue in which philosophers have considered the “affect” (80) produced in human beings by their reactions to fictional episodes. Moran discusses these affects in terms of the relationship between “fictional emotions” and “fictional truth” (88), and it is this relationship that Lewis is examining in The Abolition of Man. His concept of “Men without Chests” is meant to clarify the importance of connecting emotion and truth. Interestingly, these “Men without Chests” are similar to the “New Look” intellectuals referred to in Chapter One, of
which Lewis himself was once a part. “Men without Chests” recognize no connection between imagination and reason, define truth strictly as empirically-proven facts, and condemn traditional morality as lacking an “open mind” (Abolition 48). They venerate rationality completely devoid of imaginative thought, and Lewis declares that “it is an outrage that they should be commonly thought of as Intellectuals. […] Their heads are no bigger than the ordinary: it is the atrophy of the chest beneath that makes them seem so” (25).

For Lewis, the “Chest” is the “seat of the emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments” (24-5). Emotions, in this sense, are distinct from passions. Passions are, strictly, the movements of sense appetite in human beings, whereas “emotions” arise from both body and spirit. Lewis identifies two facets of human nature, which he calls “visceral” and “cerebral” (25). Passion, the animal or “visceral” part of Man, and intellect, the spiritual or “cerebral” part, often conflict, but Lewis declares that “the head rules the belly through the chest. […] Chest – Magnanimity – Sentiment – these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal” (24-5). It is in this “middle element” of human beings that the function of imagination lies. Myths or stories, the products of imagination, appeal to the emotions; these emotions then have the ability to cause a person to like and dislike certain things. Lewis explains that “without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism” (24). For Lewis, imagination as myth takes on this task of training the emotions. In doing this, it has a special ability to appeal to the “middle element” by which “Man is Man” and form the attitudes of individuals.

Lewis believes that imagination can play to the emotions in order to form them in the way of the Tao. Schakel focuses on this aspect of Lewis’s imagination, naming it with Edmund Burke’s term, “moral imagination,” and identifying its function as connecting “abstract principles to everyday life, and to relate to the injustices faced by others as we imagine what they experience and feel” (“Irrigating Deserts” 21). In other words, the myths produced by imagination translate the seemingly intangible precepts of the Tao into humanly-understandable images, and these images, says Schakel, are what allow the principles of morality to be put into action: “Without the imagination, morality remains ethics – abstract reflections on principles that we might never put into practice” (21). Schakel’s observations help to explain why an educational system that rejects imagination also necessarily rejects the Tao; for without the
imagination, human beings would not be able to apply the universal truth of the Tao to the
situations of everyday life. The imagination has a unique capacity to speak to the “Chest” of
human beings, where body and spirit come together. The spirit, or the “cerebral” side of people,
and the body, the “visceral” component, parallel two aspects of the Tao: its universal,
transcendent principles that inform conscience and the particular, personal applications it has in
human action. The imagination offers a means of communication between these two aspects.

It is important to stress that Lewis is not emphasizing the validity of emotions in order to
claim that these emotions are ultimate ends in themselves. For Lewis, the emotions formed by
imagination are not equivalent with truth, with the Tao; they are “pointers” such as we discussed
in Chapter One, and they should fit into the process of education by bringing people into closer
communion with the Tao. This passage from Lewis, his last word in *The Abolition of Man*,
encapsulates his idea of the teleological nature of education:

> You cannot go on explaining away forever: you will find that you have explained
> explanation itself away. You cannot go on ‘seeing through’ things forever. The
> whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good
> that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is
> opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to ‘see
> through’ first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is
> transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To ‘see through’
> all things is the same as not to see. (81)

The pursuit of knowledge in education should be a progression towards one definite end.
Imagination, as it is forming human emotions, should help people to “see,” to understand.
Education involves many explanations, and many times it is necessary to ‘see through’ one thing
in order to understand another; but knowledge cannot be an endless progression that endlessly
clarifies transparencies. Progress must be progressing towards something. There must be an end,
and this end gives purpose to the progression. For Lewis, the emotions “trained” by imagination
are not ends in themselves, but they are the means to grasping the ultimate reality of the Tao.

Furthermore, according to Lewis, imagination does not create the Tao, but it illuminates
it; he does not maintain that emotions generate truth. To accept this position would, for Lewis, be
to commit the fallacy Kreeft identifies as “Emotivism” (71). Lewis states in one of his essays: “It
must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of
truth. [. . .] Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition” (“Bluspels” 265; qtd. in Honda 27). The creation of myths through imagination produces “meaning,” which helps human beings to perceive truth, but imagination does not produce truth itself. Without truth, there would be no imagination; although, without imagination, human beings could not come to know truth. The mistake of Emotivism is the assertion that “moral dogmas are only feelings” (Kreeft 72) and the “reduction of goodness and badness to emotions” (68). As I have already stated, Lewis views emotions formed by the imagination as conductors of truth; they are neither its creator nor its equivalent.

In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis rebuts the theory of Emotivism by using a reference to Coleridge. He points to a passage in *The Green Book* in which the authors “quote the well-known story of Coleridge at the waterfall. You remember that there were two tourists present: that one called it ‘sublime’ and the other ‘pretty’; and that Coleridge mentally endorsed the first judgment and rejected the second with disgust” (2). Even though this is a slightly misconstrued version of the waterfall episode, it serves to illustrate Lewis’s point, which is that Coleridge rejected the idea of the waterfall as “pretty” because its magnificence was something more than that: something truly “sublime” that acted as a window to transcendent beauty. Lewis repudiates the interpretation offered by *The Green Book*, which goes as follows:

When the man said *This is sublime*, he appeared to be making a remark about the waterfall. Actually he was not making a remark about the waterfall, but a remark about his own feelings. What he was saying was really *I have feelings associated in my mind with the word “Sublime,”* or shortly, *I have sublime feelings.* [. . .] We appear to be saying something very important about something: and actually we are only saying something about our own feelings. (2-3)

This interpretation is a prime example of Emotivism and is diametrically opposed to Lewis’s ideas. Lewis argues that “the man who says *This is sublime* cannot mean *I have sublime feelings*” (3); such a conclusion would be illogical: “If *This is sublime* is to be reduced at all to a statement about the speaker’s feelings, the proper translation would be *I have humble feelings*” (3). In Lewis’s estimation, the correctness of calling the waterfall “sublime,” and the reason Coleridge embraces that description but scorns the term “pretty,” is found precisely in that feelings *do* say something very important about something. To reduce meaning or beauty or imagination to the
realm of “only our own feelings” is to abandon the ultimate truth of the Tao to which these feelings should lead.

Feelings, or emotions, as I have said, act in the “middle element” of human beings as the link between animal passion and spiritual intellect. In this way, they can bring finite Man into contact with the Tao and guide the actions of everyday life. This intermediary function of Lewis’s imagination is another idea he has in common with Coleridge. In an explanation of imagination as “the act of thinking” in the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge asserts:

> There are two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. In philosophical language, we denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the Imagination. But, in common language, and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary control over it. (Biographia I, 85 f; qtd. in Barfield 78)

The two powers referred to in this passage parallel Coleridge’s two modes of imagination: primary and secondary. In What Coleridge Thought, Barfield declares that “a cosmology, a philosophy, a psychology, which allows to imagination a ‘primary’ as well as a secondary role, must begin by recognizing two forces. These two forces will be its ultimate unquestioned contemporaries” (29). These powers, which are neither abstract nor material, are in Barfield’s words, “acts or energies” (33), that lie behind reality; they are opposites, but they function together to make up the world of nature and of human beings. With this inherent opposition at the heart of reality, at the heart of all existing things, the term “polarity” becomes crucial for Coleridge. He defines polarity as “the manifestation of one power by opposite forces” (Treatise on Method 479, qtd. in Barfield 35), and he sees polarity as constituent of reality.

These aspects of Coleridge’s theory of imagination bear many similarities to Lewis’s ideas. Both acknowledge an outside entity that has authority in the material world: Lewis’s Tao is a transcendent reality actualized in the natural world, and Coleridge’s “two powers” are “acts or energies” that lie beyond and within the quotidian realm. In addition, Coleridge’s conception of polarity suggests a vision of humanity analogous to Lewis’s view of human nature as a combination of body and soul, of spiritual and material portions. For both Lewis and Coleridge, there is more to “reality” than what can be seen with the eyes of purely physical sight. There is an immaterial part of reality as well as a sensibly tangible one. In his 1956 novel, Till We Have
Faces, Lewis explores the relationship between spiritual and material realities in retelling the myth of Cupid and Psyche; he examines the connections between reason and imagination, body and soul, rationalism and emotion. The myth revolves around the story of Psyche and her sister, Orual, who represent the two sides of reality: Psyche the spiritual and Orual the material. The tale is told from the perspective of Orual, who ultimately sees herself as identical with Psyche and realizes that truth can be found only in a marriage between the seen and unseen worlds. The following passage from Till We Have Faces reveals Lewis’s conviction that immaterial entities have real existence. Orual questions her beloved rationalist tutor:

“‘You don’t think – not possibly – not as a mere hundredth chance – there might be things that are real though we can’t see them?’

[He replies:] “Certainly I do. Such things as Justice, Equality, the Soul, or musical notes.”

“Oh, Grandfather, I don’t mean things like that. If there are souls, could there not be soul-houses? [. . .] Are there no things – I mean things – but what we see?” (142-3)

For Lewis, immaterial powers have as much reality as physical matter or empirical fact. For he and for Coleridge, truth is found in the fusion between matter and spirit, fact and fantasy. For both writers, imagination acts as the unifying power in a divided reality.

Coleridge advocates a “willing suspension of disbelief” for the reading of poetry, and this suspension allows the imagination to work its unifying magic and encourages belief in immaterial reality. The enjoyment of poetry, for Coleridge, demands stepping out of the everyday world and embracing the realm of possibility. Human beings can do this through use of the secondary imagination. The second half of the above quoted passage from Coleridge on the imagination elucidates this: “In philosophical language, we denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the Imagination. But, in common language, and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary control over it.” The imagination as understood by “philosophical language” is that active and passive intermediary between the active and passive powers that inform reality. And, while the secondary imagination, the voluntary one, is part of that intermediary, it is distinguished, in this case through the “common language,” as something with a “superior voluntary control” that gives it a role in the subject of poetry. As such, a study of poetical works must be incorporated into any instruction in the nature of imagination and its activities.
Coleridge’s understanding of imagination is closely linked with his understanding of the nature and purpose of poetry. In another section of the *Biographia Literaria*, found in Chapter XIV, Coleridge reflects upon the project he undertook with his friend Wordsworth in composing the *Lyrical Ballads* and explains the roots of that endeavor. He states that his conversations with Wordsworth during that time “turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of the imagination” (qtd. in Perkins 452).

Lewis certainly agrees with Coleridge on the importance of “the modifying colors of the imagination” and its ability to offer clearer understanding of truth. Lewis believes that appreciating fantasy stories can help to “train” human emotions in perception of the Tao. Unicorns, wizards, and dragons do not really exist, but tales of such mythical beings encourage the necessary belief in things unseen, especially for children. For this reason, Lewis subtitles *The Abolition of Man*, “Reflections on education with special references to teaching of English in the upper forms of schools”: he argues for the importance of imagination in truth-seeking for all ages but hopes to emphasize it particularly in the education of youth. According to Lewis, an education that truly educates must proffer insight into the Tao, an education that illuminates the Tao must recognize the importance of imagination, and an education that highlights imagination must include the study of fiction and literature. *The Abolition of Man* seeks to show, philosophically, how Lewis’s view of education is the best one. Although it is not itself a story and at face value maybe has little to say about myth-making, *The Abolition of Man* contains the story of human history which Lewis hopes to influence; it shows his views of how education devoid of imagination destroys not only individuals, but society as a whole. Just as Coleridge sought to appeal to readers during the romantic period by finding that balance between “the truth of nature” and the “modifying colors of the imagination,” Lewis employs imaginative stories as a means to shed light upon what he perceives as truth and to guide people into that light. In the next chapter, we will examine how Lewis puts his concept of imagination as myth into action; we will analyze how he embodies the philosophical point of *The Abolition of Man* in his own imaginative myth.
CHAPTER THREE
IMAGINATION, TRUTH, AND THE PATH TO CHRISTIANITY
IN THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH

The truth will make you free.
- John 8:32

The imaginative story of That Hideous Strength, the third and final novel in Lewis’s Space Trilogy, both continues and expands upon the ideas of his philosophical Abolition of Man, emphasizing the need for an absolute truth and the role of education in understanding and implementing its precepts. That Hideous Strength, subtitled “A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups,” furthers the idea of Lewis’s imagination as myth and the pedagogical function he believes it should serve. The fact, in itself, that Lewis chooses to parallel The Abolition of Man with a fantastical novel demonstrates his conviction that myth acts as a conduit of truth, and elements of the story itself also support this view. As my introduction states, Lewis described That Hideous Strength as a “tall story about devilry,” which “has behind it a serious ‘point’ I [Lewis] have tried to make in my Abolition of Man” (Strength 7). This chapter explores the portrayal of Lewis’s “serious point” in That Hideous Strength and highlights the relationship between this “tall story” and its philosophical underpinnings in The Abolition of Man. First, I examine the apt observations That Hideous Strength makes about Lewis’s contemporary surroundings in order to argue that this ability to critique reality through fiction exhibits Lewis’s connection between imagination and reality. I go on to analyze the protagonists of That Hideous Strength, Mark and Jane Studdock, and claim that the near-perdition of this couple exemplifies the destructive possibilities of an education lacking the imaginative formation and “trained emotions” Lewis highlights in The Abolition of Man, demonstrating also that the myth in That Hideous Strength is able to express Lewis’s ideas on the nature of objective truth even more fully than The Abolition of Man. Ultimately, I highlight an issue not addressed in The Abolition of Man that becomes
apparent in the “devilry” of *That Hideous Strength*: the association between Christianity and the Tao.

The first two installments of Lewis’s Space Trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*, were published in 1938 and 1943, respectively. The first novel introduces Dr. Elwin Ransom, a university professor, who is out on a walking tour when he is kidnapped by two wicked men, Weston and Devine. They bring Ransom with them in their spaceship to Mars, or Malacandra, where they intend to offer him as a sacrifice to the natives. Ransom escapes, however, and becomes acquainted with the inhabitants of the planet, whom he finds to be both intelligent and kind. He also discovers that Devine’s main interest in the planet is his desire for the gold that is abundant there and that Weston’s objective is the destruction of Malacandrian life to make room for human conquest; Ransom works with the natives to get these men to return to Earth before their plans can be enacted. Ransom eventually comes to meet the rulers of Malacandra, spiritual beings who have power over all the planets except for Earth, the “silent planet,” where the spiritual rulers had rebelled against the sovereign of the universe, Maleldil, who is synonymous with God. The spiritual being in charge of Malacandra, called “Oyarsa,” sends Weston and Devine back to Earth, using powers to ensure that the spaceship will self-destruct after it lands, in order to prevent further voyages. Even though Oyarsa offers Ransom the choice to remain in Malacandra, Ransom decides to return to his own planet. Before he leaves, he promises to help guard against further plans of the evil Weston and Devine.

Weston, however, continues to pursue his attempts at celestial conquest. In the second book of the Trilogy, Ransom is summoned by Malacandra’s Oyarsa and asked to travel to Venus, or Perelandra, where Weston has contrived a way to bring himself and is again stirring up trouble. Upon arrival in Perelandra, Ransom recognizes it as a world in a pre-lapsarian state; he finds that Weston has taken on the role of the devil, seeking to persuade the “Eve” of Perelandra to disobey one of the basic laws she has been given. Ransom must keep his promise to Oyarsa by striving to counter the temptations coming from Weston. Ultimately, he must engage in physical battle with Weston, and they struggle through a fierce, grueling, and terrifying combat, which ends with Weston dead and Ransom sustaining a wound in his heel that will pain him for the rest of his life. The reward he receives for this victory, however, profoundly surpasses the suffering he endured. Ransom’s actions had helped to preserve the Edenic condition of Perelandra, and the novel ends when he meets with the spiritual rulers of the planet, and they grant him a vision of
the “great dance” of the universe, which is an unfathomably spectacular perception of all the ultimate truth and beauty that lies at the heart of all existing things. Ransom then returns, somewhat sorrowfully, to continue combating evil and promoting good on his own planet, but the magnificence he had experienced in Perelandra would make it seem to him forevermore as his true home.

Ransom returns in *That Hideous Strength* as the “Director” of the “good side” in the fight between good and evil that characterizes the final novel of Lewis’s Space Trilogy. *That Hideous Strength* was published in 1945, two years after Lewis’s lectures at the University of Durham and a year later than these lectures came out in print as *The Abolition of Man*. *That Hideous Strength* differs from *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra* in that it takes place exclusively on Earth. Furthermore, it takes place on Earth somewhere near Lewis’s own time, largely in Lewis’s own realm of existence. In his own words, he chooses academia for the site of this story “not, of course, because I think fellows of colleges more likely to be corrupted than anyone else, but because my own is the only profession I know well enough to write about” (*Strength* 7). The plot centers on Mark Studdock, a sociologist at the imaginary Bracton College in the invented university of Edgestow, and his wife Jane, who is 23 years old and seeking to finish her doctoral dissertation on Donne. Jane and Mark play an important role in the battle of Ransom’s good side with the cruel and evil National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments, which is referred to by the ironic acronym, N.I.C.E. This organization has taken over the areas surrounding Edgestow, and they are seeking to bring about the destruction of life as it is known there, while Ransom and his colleagues strive to combat them. A central player in this combat will be none other than Merlin, the legendary wizard of Arthurian tales. The location of Merlin’s tomb is discovered at the beginning of the story, and it becomes clear that he will be resurrected to work either for good or for evil. It turns out that he assumes a position at Ransom’s side, and he is instrumental in the novel’s conclusion, which involves many of the evil characters being killed by wild beasts escaped from N.I.C.E.’s own laboratories, where they had been performing inhuman experiments, and much of the land they had controlled being engulfed in fiery explosions. When this battle is over and Ransom has completed his earthly tasks, he can finally return to the paradise of Perelandra, where he has been promised a place. His cause will be continued by his remaining colleagues, including the Studdocks, and the story ends with a sense of hope for restoration and renewal.
When *That Hideous Strength* was first published, World War II had finally come to an end, but civilization was faced with physical, cultural, spiritual, and psychological reconstruction. Especially since it was partially written before the ultimate victory of the Allies, *That Hideous Strength* can be considered a futuristic novel in many ways. Its images of Gestapo-like police, horrible suggestions of human experimentation, bizarre plans for future genetic engineering, and apocalyptic destruction of sections of humanity evoke an atmosphere similar to George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (published in 1946), Ray Bradbury’s *Farenheit 451* (1953), or Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932). Compared to the quintessential futuristic science-fiction novel, however, Lewis’s story comes to a more hope-filled conclusion, and its tone is one more of remedy than of warning. Joseph Pearce says *That Hideous Strength* “deserves a place of prominence alongside *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Animal Farm*, and *Brideshead Revisited* in the plaintive literature of postwar reaction against the myth of ‘progress’” (95). Although I would argue that Lewis’s novel is not so much “plaintive literature” as it is a call to action, I see the legitimacy of Pearce’s point in recognizing that *That Hideous Strength* does correspond with Orwell’s exhortations against a “Big Brother” government and Waugh’s study of a society filled with technological advance but devoid of religion or values. In addition, *That Hideous Strength*’s examination of evil, about which we will speak more later in this chapter, also aligns with the trends of some American fiction between and after the Wars, such as William Faulkner’s 1931 *Sanctuary* or Robert Penn Warren’s 1946 *All the King’s Men*. Although his outcome is certainly more positive, Mark Studdock’s initial, hypnotic attraction to the wicked N.I.C.E. bears many similarities to the downfalls of a Temple Drake or Willie Stark. *That Hideous Strength* takes its place among the ranks of mid-20th Century literature by its cognizance of current world affairs and keen exposé of contemporary human concerns through the lens of fiction.

The recognizable contemporary images Lewis employs in *That Hideous Strength* demonstrate the influence of his surrounding world, but they also indicate his desire to effect change in that world. While Lewis was not in a position to hold sway over any scientific endeavors, to challenge Hitler to one-on-one combat, or even to make an impact in any of the real fighting, he was able to speak loudly through his writing. *That Hideous Strength* contains some of Lewis’s same misgivings about the modern world as Chapter Two discusses regarding *The Abolition of Man*. To begin with, N.I.C.E. embodies Lewis’s fears about the danger of
science and technology unchecked by morality: N.I.C.E. is the model of what Lewis would consider misuse of scientific and technological advances. The progressive age in which Lewis lived makes it impossible to refer to every advance that was being made at the time, but it is safe to say that many of them, good and bad, were connected with the war efforts. A particularly prominent concern around the year of 1945 was, of course, the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan in an attempt to end the fighting. Lewis never expressed an anti-bomb opinion, but he was a self-proclaimed traditionalist and certainly objected to nuclear plants destroying the countryside he often enjoyed (“On Living in an Atomic Age”). Several scholars have argued that Lewis’s situating the N.I.C.E. headquarters at a place called Belbury in That Hideous Strength echoes a debate that occurred regarding the construction of an atomic factory about ten miles from Oxford, in a town called Blewbury (Downing 138). This may or may not be true, but the evil of Belbury is undoubtedly conveyed in their disregard for the value of historical and natural treasures in their area. However, the most profound horrors of N.I.C.E. are more reminiscent of the grim offenses of Nazi Germany during World War II rather than the controversial atomic concerns. Even though Lewis states in The Abolition of Man that “the process which, if not checked, will abolish Man goes on apace among Communists and Democrats no less than among Fascists” (73), he uses imagery in That Hideous Strength that brings to mind many of the Nazis’ infamous terrors.

Lewis even goes so far as to compare the N.I.C.E. police to the Gestapo; these police, who call themselves the “sanitary executive” (129) of the organization, are known to perform cruel testing on animals and even on human beings. They underhandedly commandeer prisoners from the state penitential system and perform “humane remedial treatments” (154) upon them, and although Lewis does not provide detail into the gruesome nature of these treatments, the reader is led to know that they are, decidedly, anything but humane. Miss Hardcastle, the leader of this “sanitary executive” is a sadistic, freakish character who delights in her appalling interrogation methods. She practically begs to be able to work these “methods” on Mark, and she sickeningly delights in burning Jane’s shoulders and chest with a cigar (153). Like Nazi propagandists, N.I.C.E. controls all but two of the newspapers in their area (67) and are thus able to cover up their heinous actions. It was not until the 1960s that all the details of Nazi medical atrocities during the war were made public, but a portion were revealed during the Nuremberg Trials that began in 1946; Lewis would have been aware of some particulars in the years prior,
since German science had been somewhat suspect even during World War I, and some of the Nazis’ actions were released as World War II came to a close (Baron). Lewis’s at least partial awareness is evident in That Hideous Strength when Miss Ironwood tells Jane that N.I.C.E.’s endeavor to re-enliven the severed head of the criminal, Francois Alcasan, is an experiment already tried by a German scientist “before the first war” (183).

This attempt to “resurrect” an already deceased human being directly represents Lewis’s idea of “Man’s conquest over Nature.” Ransom, the protagonist of Out of the Silent Planet and Perelandra, who has reached an almost saint-like status in the third novel, loses sleep at night with worry over the dire possibilities of this conquest. His previous adventures in outer space have given him an other-worldly wisdom that makes him stand apart from other people.

Ransom is a character who represents many of Lewis’s own views, as well as the views of those whose thoughts he admired. There is certainly an element of both J.R.R. Tolkien and Charles Williams in Ransom: he is a philologist, like Tolkien, and has an aura of holiness that Williams is reported to have possessed (Downing 132). The combination of these factors, along with Ransom’s unique experiences within the Trilogy, make him the voice of wisdom and qualify him for the position as Director of the good side in That Hideous Strength. His comments about the danger of science that despairs of objective truth and seeks to establish the “old dream of Man as God” echo Lewis’s own voice in The Abolition of Man.

The high-ranking N.I.C.E. officials’ attitude towards their “scientific” endeavors also expresses Lewis’s belief that such a “conquest over Nature” will result in “the power of some men to make other men what they please” (Abolition 59). Filostrato, the Italian scientist in charge of experiments with the “Head,” tells Mark: “The power will be confined to a number – a small number – of individual men. Those who are selected for eternal life. […] All that talk about the
power of Man over Nature – Man in the abstract – is only for the canaglia. You know as well as I do that Man’s power over Nature means the power of some men over other men with Nature as the instrument” (175). N.I.C.E. publicly declares itself an organization for the betterment of the people, but Filostrato reveals that their scientific exploits are not for the purpose of improving the world for all human beings but for channeling power into the hands of a few. The canaglia, or the common people, only serve as a disposable stepping stone to gaining universal control. With Hitler and Stalin fresh in the minds of Lewis and his contemporary readers, the images of a leadership ostensibly for the people, but realistically only for themselves, must have been particularly poignant. Hitler had promised a better Germany but produced a slave-state; the entire world was made to suffer as a result of his conquests, and even the inner Nazi circle launched conquests against each other. The “power of some men over other men” is not limited to the Conditioners over the canaglia: the Conditioners vie for power amongst themselves. When high-ranking Nazi officials believed Hitler had accrued too much power, they planned to assassinate him (DeWeerd); similarly, N.I.C.E. executives are constantly turning on one another, most notably in the organization’s final hours, when Straik and Wither betray and decapitate Filostrato to supply themselves with a new Head.

In addition to these war-related images, the emphasis on marriage in That Hideous Strength poses another of Lewis’s critiques of his contemporary culture: his concerns about the impact of modern “progress” on the traditional family. Although Lewis himself did not marry until he reached his fifties and reportedly never became fond of interacting with children, he retained strong views on the nature and purpose of marriage and its role in society. These views were, of course, influenced by the Christian faith he embraced upon his conversion, but they actually sound much more compatible with Roman Catholic convictions than with 20th Century Protestantism, because Lewis was not in accord with all of the Church of England’s edicts regarding marital issues. One of these issues that has direct implications in That Hideous Strength is the moral status of artificial birth control. Prior to the 1930s, all Christian denominations had considered the use of contraceptives to be an immoral act, but the Church of England reversed that position at the Lambeth Conference in 1930, and almost all other Protestant churches followed suit the next year. Despite these changes, the Roman Catholic Church never officially approved birth control, and many Protestant pastors continued to speak out against it; it is also an issue not universally agreed upon by Muslims, and although the Hindu
religion encourages large families, it does not have any specific prohibitions against contraception (O'Grady). Due to the Lambeth conference, the issue was still a fairly new one during the 40s and 50s, when Lewis wrote most of his Christian apologetic works. He himself believed the use of artificial birth control to be immoral, although he never addresses the issue quite directly in his apologetics. His preface to *Mere Christianity* states: “I have also said nothing about birth control. I am not a woman nor even a married man, nor am I a priest. I did not think it my place to take a firm line about pains, dangers and expenses from which I am protected; having no pastoral office which obliged me to do so” (ix).

Although Lewis does mention birth control, or “exercises of power, especially in breeding,” in *The Abolition of Man* as one of the ways by which the few will take control over the many (56), his most blatant comment about the issue is found in *That Hideous Strength*. The very beginning of the novel makes clear that the Studdocks wanted “to have no children, at any rate not for a long time yet” (12), and it is later confirmed that they had been employing artificial birth control to ensure this. The reawakened Merlin, working in conjunction with the good side in *That Hideous Strength*, often receives special, unexplained insights. When he first sees Jane, he declares to Ransom:

Sir, know well that she [Jane] has done in Logres a thing of which no less sorrow shall come than came of the stroke that Balinus struck. For, Sir, it was the purpose of God that she and her lord should have between them begotten a child by whom the enemies should have been put out of Logres for a thousand years. [. . .] Of their own will they are barren: I did not know till now that the usages of Sulva were so common among you. (276)

Merlin’s alignment of being barren “of their own will” with Sulva, the evil lord of the moon, makes a strong statement of Lewis’s views on birth control. Naïve of the commonalities of the modern world, Merlin is shocked by the normalcy of something he views as a crime. The matter of this child destined to be born plays a small but important role in the plot of *That Hideous Strength*, and the novel’s comedic ending involves Jane and Mark, having followed their individual paths to salvation, meeting again “in some place of sweet smells and bright fires, with food and wine and a rich bed” (380) and “Venus herself” (374) overhead; at this point, Lewis tells the reader that both Jane and Mark had learned to truly love one another, and Jane finally “thought of children” (380). This ending and other elements of the plot make the fictional *That
Hideous Strength a more outspoken herald than his non-fiction writings of a point Lewis meant to make about an aspect of his contemporary reality.\(^5\)

Marriage is a theme that underlies the entirety of That Hideous Strength. The Studdocks, who are relative newlyweds at the beginning of the novel, have found themselves bored with their marriage before it has scarcely begun. The first passage of the story reads:

“Matrimony was ordained, thirdly,” said Jane Studdock to herself, “for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other.” She had not been to church since her schooldays until she went there six months ago to be married, and the words of the service had stuck in her mind. […] In reality marriage had proved to be the door out of a world of work and companionship and laughter and innumerable things to do, into something like solitary confinement. For some years before their marriage she had never seen so little of Mark as she had done in the last six months. Even when he was at home he hardly ever talked. […] Why had he married her?” (11-12)

That Hideous Strength tells the tale of Jane and Mark’s individual salvations, how each comes to perceive the truth, and how this ultimately results in the salvation of their marriage. Neither character has much initial foundation in what Lewis would call truth: both appear as products of the “modern” educational system discussed in Chapter Two, and neither could be described as even remotely “imaginative” at the beginning of the story. However, by two radically distinct pathways, the Studdocks come to appreciate imagination as they come to understand truth. As such, they are both able to fulfill their roles in combating the demonic powers that have taken control of Edgestow through N.I.C.E.

In That Hideous Strength, the salvations of Jane and Mark Studdock, as well as the reasons they need to be saved in the first place, are largely a result of education. Lewis’s role in academia put him in place to argue his ideas about education and how important it is for the world in general, as he does in The Abolition of Man, and the role he assumed as a fiction writer gives him the opportunity to share these ideas on a different, more imaginative level. Both Jane and Mark’s journeys towards understanding the truth parallel aspects of Lewis’s conversion, especially regarding the importance of imagination. As such, they also illustrate Lewis’s point in The Abolition of Man. Mainstream academia in Lewis’s time was characterized, as he explains in Surprised by Joy and expounds upon in The Abolition of Man, by those New Look intellectuals
who tended to overemphasize rationality at the expense of imagination. Lewis sees many scholars of his time as the epitome of the “Men without Chests” described in Chapter Two:

It is an outrage that they should be commonly spoken of as Intellectuals. This gives them the chance to say that he who attacks them attacks Intelligence. It is not so. [. . .] It is not excess of thought but defect of fertile and generous emotion that marks them out. Their heads are no bigger than the ordinary: it is the atrophy of the chest beneath them that makes them seem so. (Abolition 25)

In *That Hideous Strength*, the Studdocks are products of these kinds of “intellectuals”: Mark, as the fellow of a college, may in fact be one himself. As the story progresses, however, they each come to perceive the validity of emotion and appreciate the function of imagination, just as Lewis did in his own life and as he challenges others to do through *The Abolition of Man*.

When the story begins, Mark takes no notice of natural beauty or the simple pleasures of his life: “Walking down to Bracton College, [. . .] he did not notice at all the morning beauty of the little street that led him from the sandy hillside suburb where he and Jane lived down into the central and academic part of Edgestow” (14). His mind was on the “very different matter” that occupies all of his concern during the beginning of the novel. Mark is constantly trying to build himself up in the eyes of his co-workers and gain entrance into various “inner circles,” and this leads him from Bracton to N.I.C.E., where he thinks his position will be one of importance. He gradually works his way through different layers that each appear, at first, to be the “inner circle” – but each one seems to give way to another level that must be penetrated. As he goes through these levels, he begins to abandon any scruples he originally possessed: he starts drinking too much, abandoning his former colleagues and friends, staying away from home for long periods of time with no consideration for Jane, and – finally – breaking the law. Mark becomes one of N.I.C.E.’s propagandists, who write untruthful articles in the newspapers in order to deceive citizens; when he does this, it “was the first thing Mark had been asked to do [by N.I.C.E.] which he himself, before he did it, clearly knew to be criminal. But the moment of his consent almost escaped his notice” (127). His self-centered concern with being liked, accepted, and “in” with those in authority overshadowed his values, and these values were too weak to stand up against the temptations of power N.I.C.E. seemed to offer. These temptations cater to Mark’s pride and self-importance, and they also work on his likes and dislikes. Since Mark was not strong in his understanding of what Lewis would consider truth, or the Tao, he had never quite learned to
“like and dislike what he ought” (*Abolition* 16). As he began to spend more time with N.I.C.E., “the pleasures of conversation were coming, for Mark, to have less and less connection with his spontaneous liking or disliking of the people he talked to. He was aware of this change – which had begun when he joined the Progressive Element in College – and welcomed it as a sign of maturity” (167). Just as “Men without Chests” are mistaken for intellectuals because of their over-rationality, so Mark mistakes his perverse liking for people who are liars, murderers, and charlatans for “maturity” simply because these people seem important and powerful to him.

Although his convictions are not very strong, Mark does maintain a few of his own honest likings for things of beauty in the world, and it is these honest likings that eventually save him from total servitude to N.I.C.E.’s evil. Mark enjoys the quaint loveliness of Cure Hardy; he says “he could not help rather liking this village” (85). While this does not quite prevent him from agreeing to play his part in its destruction, it makes him begin to question the desirability of an organization that wants to demolish historic architecture, make trees out of metal, and remove all organic life from the face of the earth (169-70). When he first tries to leave N.I.C.E., Mark thinks “sometimes about Jane, and sometimes about bacon and eggs, and fried fish, and dark fragrant streams of coffee pouring into large cups” (211). Mark witnessed countless horrors during his time with N.I.C.E., and he had recently seen the epitome of these horrors in his audience with the Head; but instead of desensitizing him, somehow these terrors reawakened a sense of wonder that had previously lain dormant within him. Unfortunately, his first, almost unconscious attempt at escape is thwarted by N.I.C.E. capturing him and returning him to Belbury. However, he had already begun an internal reconstruction that will help him to endure the final onslaught.

The final onslaught of N.I.C.E., their last attempt to turn Mark into a soul-less, mindless drone like Wither or Feverstone, is an attempt to “educate” him in “objectivity.” N.I.C.E.’s meaning of objectivity is drastically opposed to the objectivity Lewis defines in connection with the Tao in *The Abolition of Man*; in fact, Frost’s endeavors to make Mark “objective” are meant to destroy any remnants of that sort of truth that may still remain in his consciousness. Frost tells Mark that “Objective Man” is a person in whom all emotions and values are nothing but chemical phenomena (253-6), and he continues by saying that this total “objectivity of mind” will enable some individuals to become “all head” (256); eventually, “in the new age [envisioned by N.I.C.E.], what has hitherto been merely the intellectual nucleus of the race is to become, by
gradual stages, the race itself” (256). In this “new age,” education will be limited only to the chosen few. When Mark says he “had thought rather vaguely that the intelligent nucleus would be extended by education,” Frost replies: “That is pure chimera. The great majority of the human race [. . .] [have served their] function by acting as a kind of cocoon for Technocratic and Objective Man” (256). The new age visualized by Frost and his colleagues means destruction for the many but victory for the few; as atrocious as the idea truly is, for Mark, “here surely at last (so his desire whispered to him) was the true inner circle of all. [. . .] The fact that it was almost completely horrible did not in the least diminish its attraction” (257). The temptation to comply with Frost seizes Mark “like a tide sucking at the shingle as it goes out” (256) – but Mark is able to resist. He is able to resist because of that reawakening of wonder and appreciation for simple pleasures that had begun to come to the surface of his being.

Neither Mark, nor Lewis as the narrator, ever names “imagination” as the power that saves Mark from N.I.C.E.’s dark path, but its role is evident in the sentiments that influence Mark’s final decision. The ultimate stage of Mark’s N.I.C.E. “education” involves being confined to the “objective room,” a room that, to “a man of trained sensibility” would have seemed at once “ill-proportioned, not grotesquely so, but sufficiently to produce dislike. It was too high and too narrow.” Mark, not having the luxury of those trained emotions, “felt the effect without analyzing the cause and the effect grew on him as time passed” (294). He gradually notices the perversities of the room, from its lop-sided structure to the “peculiar ugliness” of the strangely patterned ceiling to the weird paintings that line the walls. Some of these paintings contain surrealistic images such as “a young woman who held her mouth wide open to reveal the fact that the inside of it was thickly grown with hair” or “a giant mantis playing a fiddle while being eaten by another mantis,” but some of them had more subtle eccentricities: “Why were there so many beetles under the table in the Last Supper? [. . .] What was the curious trick of lighting that made each picture look like something seen in delirium?” Mark realizes that “compared with these the other, surrealistic, pictures were mere foolery. Long ago Mark had read somewhere of ‘things of that extreme evil which seem innocent to the uninitiated,’ and had wondered what sort of things they might be. Now he felt he knew” (296). He comes to know that the purpose of the objective room is so “that whole system of instinctive preferences, whatever ethical, aesthetic, or logical disguise they wear, is to be simply destroyed” (294); but the room actually has the opposite effect on Mark.
Mark’s imagination, his ability to recognize certain things as ugly or beautiful and to act according to his own likes or dislikes, makes him aware of:

something else – something he vaguely called “Normal.” [. . .] He had never thought about it before. But there it was – solid, massive, with a shape of its own, almost like something you could touch, or eat, or fall in love with. It was all mixed up with Jane and fried eggs and soap and sunlight and the rooks cawing at Cure Hardy and the thought that, somewhere outside, daylight was going on at that moment. He was not thinking in moral terms at all; or else (what is much the same thing!) he was having his first deeply moral experience. He was choosing a side: the Normal. “All that,” as he called it, was what he chose. If the scientific point of view led away from “all that,” then be damned to the scientific point of view! The vehemence of his choice almost took his breath away; he had not had such a sensation before. (297)

For the first time in his life, Mark is experiencing the “just sentiments” Lewis talks about in *The Abolition of Man*; he is allowing himself to be overtaken by Joy and guided by the valid kind of emotions that lead to the Tao. This first encounter with what Lewis would call the Tao, Mark’s “first deeply moral experience,” is one in which Mark taps into the sentiments his “modern” education had almost destroyed, and these emotions also uncover his conscience, which will not permit him to give in to Frost’s temptations; he knows he cannot do what N.I.C.E. asks of him. When he finally escapes from their clutches, his freedom also rejoices in the discovery of imagination. On his way home, he “found a serial children’s story which he had begun to read as a child but abandoned because his tenth birthday came when he was half way through it and he was ashamed to read it after that. Now, he chased it from volume to volume [in *The Strand*] until he finished it. It was good. The grown-up stories to which, after his tenth birthday, he had turned instead of it, now seemed to him, except for *Sherlock Holmes*, to be rubbish.”

Mark’s journey leads him through unspeakable horrors before he finds the path that brings him to a childlike appreciation of beauty and a new desire to love his wife, but Jane herself has quite a different experience. She finds herself in association with the enemies of N.I.C.E., whose stronghold is at a country house in the town of St. Anne’s. Instead of coming to know the beauty of truth by seeing its opposite, as Mark does, Jane comes into contact with Ransom and his colleagues, who are in touch with the real source of truth and beauty. But her acceptance of it is no less gradual than her husband’s, and her “conversion” also relies largely on
embracing the imaginative side of her being she has long sought to suppress. Jane, at the beginning of the story, considers herself “a modern person” (60), never to be taken in by the ridiculousness of romanticism or sentimentality. Her first visit to St. Anne’s begins speaking to her imagination, but she dismisses it. Walking through the garden on the way to Ransom’s house, Jane reflects that “it was like the garden in Peter Rabbit. Or was it like the garden in The Romance of the Rose? [. . .] Or like Klingsor’s garden? Or the garden in Alice?” These imaginative musings are interrupted by Jane’s “rational” side, however, and she chides herself: “What frightful nonsense she had been thinking for the last minute or so! She shook off all these ideas about gardens and tried to pull herself together” (60). Jane’s attempts to “pull herself together” successfully preclude her from recognizing the validity of her imagination until she meets Ransom, and “her world was unmade” (140).

Ransom, as I have already stated, exudes a singular quality of holiness; this quality is due, in part, to the fact that he has already seen “heaven” in his journey to Perelandra. His experiences there, and the trials he faced and overcame, resulted in his soul being, in a sense, saved – even though he was not yet dead. This state of his soul makes his physical appearance extraordinary. As Jane is about to meet him for the first time, Miss Ironwood warns her: “He will appear to you, Mrs. Studdock, to be a very young man: younger than yourself. You will please understand that this is not the case. He is nearer fifty than forty. He is a man of very great experience, who has traveled where no other human being ever traveled before and mixed in societies of which you and I have no conception” (138). Jane finds this to be the case when she finally sees Ransom, and his presence has an astounding effect on her:

How could I have thought him young? Or old either? It came to her, with a sensation of quick fear, that this face was of no age at all. She had (or so she had believed) disliked bearded faces except for old men with white hair. But that was because she had long forgotten the imagined Arthur of her childhood – and the imagined Solomon too. [. . .] At that moment, as her eyes first rested on his [Ransom’s] face, she forgot who she was, and where. [. . .] Her world was unmade; she knew that. Anything might happen now. (140) Ransom revives Jane’s imagination, and her conversation with him results in her final abandonment of the “rational” principles she had planned to use to defend herself against his appeal.
Ransom would, indeed, appeal to Jane for help. He returned to Earth after his journeys through deep-space in order to fulfill his role in the battle between good and evil on his home planet, a role which involves the destruction of N.I.C.E. Part of his role is also to bring Jane onto his side and use the power she has been given for good instead of evil. Jane’s power is the ability to dream realities. At the beginning of the story, she sees Francois Alcasan, the dead man who would become N.I.C.E.’s Head, in a dream and then finds a real picture of him in the newspaper the next morning. Her horror at this occurrence brings her to seek advice from her friends, the Dimbles, who recommend that she visit the house at St. Anne’s; it is there, of course, that she has that first encounter with Ransom. During that encounter, she also has her first experience with the real source of Ransom’s authority and his holiness: the deep-space creatures Lewis calls *eldils*. Eldils are the purely spiritual beings, the rulers or Oyarsas of the planets with whom Ransom had come into contact during his celestial travels. Their spiritual nature makes them similar to angels. In *That Hideous Strength*, Ransom now keeps in constant communication with these creatures, and they are the ultimate power by which Maleldil, the name for God in the language of the eldils, will bring about the triumph of good over evil in the battle between Ransom’s party and N.I.C.E. The advent of an eldil’s coming to visit Ransom produces the following sensation in Jane: “She was really thinking simply of hugeness. Or rather, she was not thinking of it. She was, in some strange fashion, experiencing it. Something intolerably big, something from Brobdingnag was pressing on her, was approaching, was almost in the room” (147). This meeting with Ransom and the “hugeness” with which he communicates inspires Jane to recognize the reality she did not previously believe was portrayed in her dreams. She became willing to put those dreams, which she had previously considered “foolish” and “insensible,” at the service of Ransom’s cause.

Jane’s willingness to serve the good side is put to the test right after she first meets Ransom, and the result is an even further embrasure of her imagination. On her way home from St. Anne’s, Jane is captured by Miss Hardcastle, the captain of the N.I.C.E. police, and tortured. N.I.C.E. knows of Jane’s dreams, and they hope to use them for their own purposes: to predict their enemies’ plans. Miss Hardcastle and the other officials are ignorant of Ransom’s position as Director of their opposition, and they have no idea where this opposition is even based; they hope to ascertain this information from Jane. But Jane, with her mind still focused on Ransom, refuses to speak, even when Miss Hardcastle repeatedly burns her with cigars and makes other
threats. Through a providential turn of events, Jane is able to escape from N.I.C.E. and returns to St. Anne’s. She arrives there exhausted and in pain, and she sleeps for hours while her wounds are attended to. Upon waking, her imagination also comes alive. She asks to read the *Curdie* books, *Mansfield Park*, and Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, books the sensible, rational Jane would certainly not have allowed herself to enjoy (160). The *Curdie* books, written by George MacDonald, the author who “baptized” Lewis’s imagination, make a particular suggestion about the state of Jane’s mind – or rather, the state of her “chest,” her heart. The awakening of her imagination makes her a part of Ransom’s company at St. Anne’s, and her recognition of the truth in her dreams enables her to use them for good and play her part in the destruction of N.I.C.E.

For Jane, and for Mark, recognition of truth, of what Lewis calls the Tao in *The Abolition of Man*, does not come all at once in a bolt of lightning or a revelation of thunder. There is not one, single moment in which either of them makes an isolated choice that decides their destiny: for each of them it is a progression of choices and an evolution of understanding that brings them to their state at the story’s end. As this chapter has, so far, endeavored to demonstrate, *That Hideous Strength* is able to depict and illuminate aspects of reality, even though it is itself a fictional story. These aspects of reality are evidenced in the critiques of Lewis’s contemporary world contained in the story; the connections between *That Hideous Strength* and the real world are also seen in the way it coincides with Lewis’s ideas in *The Abolition of Man*. However, the interpretations of Lewis’s myth I have already given in this chapter begin to show that, in fact, *That Hideous Strength* is able to go beyond the concepts in *The Abolition of Man* and give an even clearer picture of how the Tao works in human actions. Peter Schakel argues that *That Hideous Strength*, due to its imaginative nature, contains “practical advice Lewis did not include in *The Abolition of Man,*” and he continues by saying that myths in general are more able to instill the principles of “practical reason” into all people, but especially children. “The term ‘practical reason,’” says Schakel, “refers to a union of abstract universals with everyday meaningfulness; meaning, for Lewis, is conveyed by the imagination. [. . .] The imaginativeness of stories enables children to form and internalize ‘sentiments,’ those complex combinations of feelings and opinions that provide a basis for action or judgement” (*Imagination and the Arts* 169). *That Hideous Strength* is not a story for or about children, but it is a story in which childlikeness plays a part and in which the subtleties of human actions are revealed more than is
even possible in *The Abolition of Man*. Myth has the ability to make known the intricacies of everyday life and the nuances of the Tao itself. Just as Mark and Jane do not always have clear black and white choices between “right” and “wrong,” so does perception of the Tao itself become gray in the area of human actions.

Another clarification made in *That Hideous Strength*, which is not present in *The Abolition of Man*, is the connection between the truth, or Lewis’s Tao, and the God of Christianity. Whereas Lewis does not use any kind of Christian vocabulary in *The Abolition of Man*, *That Hideous Strength* is filled with references to Lewis’s chosen faith. Members of N.I.C.E. explicitly identify Christians as their enemies, and Ransom makes clear that Maleldil, the ruler of the eldils, is one with the Christian God. With God on Ransom’s side, on the side of the Tao, that leaves the “devilry” to N.I.C.E. *That Hideous Strength* makes one particularly strong claim that *The Abolition of Man* does not touch upon: that a rejection of the Tao not only causes a misunderstanding of reality but also invites devils into the midst of humanity. In the story, the Head that many N.I.C.E. officials believe to have been resurrected by “science” is really animated by the presence of evil eldils – of devils. Only Frost and Wither, at the center of N.I.C.E., know the truth about this Head; everyone else, even the scientist Filostrato, is under the impression that Alcasan is somehow speaking out of his once-dead mouth. Frost, in a final attempt to gain Mark’s allegiance, tells him the truth: “Filostrato and Wilkins are quite deceived about the Head. They have, indeed, carried out a remarkable experiment by preserving it from decay. But Alcasan’s mind is not the mind we are in contact with when the Head speaks” (253). Frost and Wither intend to use the devils, which Frost names “macrobes” (253), to facilitate their conquest for power, but Ransom knows otherwise; he knows why their contact with the macrobes will inevitably result in their own destruction.

Ransom’s knowledge of Maleldil also equips him with a unique understanding of the devilry that opposes him. His frequent contact with the good eldils keeps him informed in the affairs and rules of the spiritual world of which they are a part. As such, he understands the nature of the bad eldils better than anyone else on Earth, including Wither and Frost. Ransom knows how and why the “hideous strength” that has taken hold of N.I.C.E. can only destroy them. “That hideous strength” is a phrase that evokes a profoundly Biblical meaning. It comes from a poem by Sir David Lyndsay, which describes the Tower of Babel. Lewis’s use of the phrase draws a parallel between the sin of Babel and the sin of N.I.C.E.: both attempt to make
themselves equal to God. N.I.C.E. seeks to build Man into God, just as Nimrod’s people sought to construct a tower to reach heaven, in defiance of God’s greatness. In both situations, however, seeking to overreach God brings Hell crashing about the ears of the offenders. Ransom explains the reasons for Belbury’s unavoidable downfall:

The Hideous Strength holds all this Earth in its fist to squeeze as it wishes. But for their one mistake, there would be no hope left. If of their own will they had not broken the frontier and let in the celestial Powers, this would be their moment of victory. Their own strength has betrayed them. They have gone to the gods who would not have come to them, and pulled down Deep Heaven on their heads. Therefore, they will die. (291)

N.I.C.E. is poised to enact their horrific plans for the world, but there is hope for their adversaries (and for the innocent people who would have been annihilated), because the good eldils are in touch with Ransom; only they have the power to defeat the other-worldly evil behind the Head and its minions. The “mistake” Ransom refers to actually occurs in the previous novels of Lewis’s Trilogy. Weston and Devine, who kidnap Ransom in Out of the Silent Planet, are, in fact, leaders of the incipient N.I.C.E. Since it is Ransom’s contact with the eldils that ultimately allows N.I.C.E. to be defeated, and it is the evil act of N.I.C.E. members kidnapping Ransom that brought the contact about in the first place, it is clear that their own sin brings about their ultimate demise.

The “hideous strength” that makes a human being presume to rival God flows from and feeds on the rejection of the Tao against which Lewis warns his readers. Dismissing the reality of an objective “right” and “wrong” ultimately conjures up the powers of Hell. Frost’s death depicts the hopeless end of a man who had reduced good and bad to the meaningless realm of chemical phenomena, who considered all value mere emotion, and all emotion worthless. Frost has locked himself in the “objective room,” emptied gallons of gasoline onto the floor, and cast a lighted match onto it:

Not till then did his controllers [the devils] allow him to suspect that death itself might not after all cure the illusion of being a soul – nay, might prove the entry into a world where that illusion raged infinite and unchecked. Escape for the soul, if not for the body, was offered him. He became able to know (and simultaneously refused the knowledge) that he had been wrong from the beginning, that souls and personal responsibility existed. He half saw: he wholly hated. The physical torture of the burning was not fiercer than his
hatred of that. With one supreme effort he flung himself back into his illusion. In that attitude eternity overtook him as a sunrise in old tales overtakes and turns them in to unchangeable stone. (355-6)

This is undoubtedly a ghastly and heartbreaking scene, but by emphasizing the reality of damnation, Lewis is simultaneously highlighting the possibility of salvation. Frost’s final refusal to accept the truth would not be so horrible if it weren’t for the fact that he could have made a different choice.

Jane and Mark Studdock, characters who both started out on a path that could definitely have ended as Frost’s did, find the culmination of their spiritual journeys in Christianity. For Mark, his decisive rejection of N.I.C.E. is brought about by Frost’s demand that he desecrate a crucifix. The final stages of Mark’s “education in objectivity” had involved Frost requiring him to perform certain obscene and emotion-killing acts, the last of which is the command to “trample” on a large crucifix and “insult it in other ways” (331). It is not faith per se that keeps Mark from performing this act, but an alignment of Christ on the cross with that concept of the “Normal” he had previously experienced coupled with the realization that, if Christianity were nothing but a fable, then “why was the crucifix there? Why were more than half of the poison-pictures religious” (332)? Mark’s conscience decides that he would rather side with the Normal than the Crooked, and he says in response to Frost’s demand: “I’m damned if I do any such thing” (334). Circumstances then intervene and prevent Frost from reacting to this decision, but Mark is not faced with temptation again within the story. It is after this decision, and after he witnesses the destruction of Belbury, that he indulges in his imagination by reading the children’s story and returns to Jane. It is clear that he has escaped the clutches of Hell.

Jane’s regard and respect for Ransom ultimately leads to her acceptance of Christianity. In the company of Ransom and his colleagues, she witnesses the beauty of the truth in a way she never has before, and she comes to understand and embrace it gradually. When faced with death on the night they go out seeking Merlin’s tomb, Jane begins to think of Maleldil: “The world had already turned out to be so very unlike what she had expected. [. . .] Maleldil might be, quite simply and crudely, God. There might be a life after death: a Heaven: a Hell” (231). These ideas continue to mature in her mind as she spends more time with Ransom’s people, but even as she is beginning to believe in the truth of Christianity, she has difficulty identifying what she sees as two sides of this faith: “On the one hand, terror of dreams, rapture of obedience, the tingling light
and sound from under the door [when the eldils visit Ransom], and the great struggle against imminent danger; on the other, the smell of pews, horrible lithographs of the Saviour (apparently seven feet high, with the face of a consumptive girl), the embarrassment of confirmation classes, the nervous affability of clergymen” (231). Jane cannot, at first, recognize the relationship between the majestic power of spiritual reality and the everyday, ordinary practices it inspires; how can the “alarming and operative realities” of the eldils be part of the same religion as “fat Mrs. Dimble saying her prayers” (231)? It is, ultimately, her marriage to Mark that will allow her to see the connection between these two aspects of Christian truth. While speaking with Ransom about her vision of Venus and what it means to be a “Christian wife,” she finally asks him outright: “You mean I shall have to become a Christian” (313)? And when he answers in the affirmative, she replies: “But – I still don’t see what that has to do with . . . with Mark” (313). As time goes on, however, she comes to see that giving herself to Mark in marriage is the way in which she can give praise to God through her own, ordinary life; she comes to see that the exhilarating, super-reality demonstrated by the eldils can be present in human beings through their recognition of the truth and their obedience to it in their everyday actions.

*That Hideous Strength* ends, as it had begun, with marriage: this epic tale of wizards and devils, untold horrors and inconceivable wonders, ends with something utterly commonplace. However, unlike at the beginning of the novel, Jane and Mark’s marriage has taken on a magical quality. Their individual journeys throughout the story have brought them to a new understanding of truth, which has resulted in a new understanding of themselves; finally, they find they have a new understanding of love. As Lewis himself discovered on his path to Christianity, the Studdocks realize that Joy is best achieved through an abandonment of self. When they meet at the end of the novel, they no longer love each other selfishly, but each is thinking of the other: Mark wants to “set Jane free” (358), since he sees himself as unworthy of her goodness, and Jane is ready to give herself in “obedience” to her husband (378). Their conversions, like Lewis’s, involve accepting the validity of emotion and allowing imagination to thrive; after they have abandoned their “modern,” over-rationalistic mindsets, they are able to see the truth in all its splendor. Their previously boring marriage has been transformed, and they meet in the “supernatural warmth of the garden” in the last scene of the novel (380). Nourishing the imaginative side of reality enables human beings to see the supernatural wonders present in ordinary life. For Lewis, the ability to connect the ordinary and the extraordinary is the
imagination’s fundamental purpose. Lewis uses his own myths to reveal the fusion of natural and supernatural powers that constitutes truth for human beings. Since Lewis unifies truth with Christianity, I will argue in the next chapter that his imagination as myth, seeking to bring together spiritual and material realities, can be most properly named the “sacramental imagination.”
CHAPTER FOUR

THE MARRIAGE OF CHRISTIANITY AND ROMANTICISM: SACRAMENTAL UNITY
AND LEWIS’S CONVERGENCE OF IMAGINATION AND TRUTH

We know the meaning of all the myths. We know the last secret revealed to the perfect initiate. And it is not the voice of a priest or a prophet saying “These things are.” It is the voice of a dreamer and an idealist crying, “Why cannot these things be?”

-G.K. Chesterton, The Everlasting Man

The term “sacramental imagination” has been used in reference to C.S. Lewis and a number of similarly-minded authors, such as G.K. Chesterton, George MacDonald, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams. The term indicates that, for these authors, the imagination functions like a Christian sacrament: it expresses spiritual truths through material signs. The concept has been particularly emphasized in the works of Chesterton and MacDonald; I believe that Lewis’s representation of sacramentality as it relates to his concepts of truth and imagination in The Abolition of Man and That Hideous Strength warrants further and more extensive consideration than it has been given. An understanding of sacramentality is essential to Lewis’s perception of truth, and imagination, as the previous chapters have argued, plays a fundamental role in humanity’s ability to recognize truth. Chapter One has offered three definitions for Lewis’s developing concept of imagination, and this final chapter will add one more to the list. This fourth definition is not a new one, but it adds what we have considered in Chapters Two and Three to the meaning of Lewis’s imagination as myth. This chapter seeks to synthesize what I have presented in Chapters One, Two, and Three about Lewis’s imagination as myth and how it relates to his idea of truth, or the Tao. I will, first, explain meanings of the term “sacramental” and demonstrate how these meanings are present in Lewis’s works. This will culminate in the argument that Lewis’s imagination as myth, which brings together spirituality and materiality, is most properly called a “sacramental imagination.” Finally, I will contend that Lewis’s
sacramental myths unite Coleridge’s ideas of imagination with Christian concepts of truth in a way that produces a unique fusion of romanticism and Christianity.

The term “sacrament” evokes a variety of different meanings. The English word is derived from the Latin sacramentum, which means “solemn oath,” and sacramentum is used in Christian Latin as a translation of the Greek musterion, or “mystery” (O.E.D.). “Sacrament” also has a range of meanings within the religious world, but they have in common the idea of a mysterious, sacred, spiritual reality being translated into humanly visible, material signs. Rolland Hein explains that “traditionally, Protestants reserve the term to refer to baptism and the Lord’s Supper; Roman Catholics use it to describe seven essential rites of the Church” (Harmony Within 45). Further, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that “sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature” (1084). A sacramental view of reality explores the mystery of both its material and immaterial aspects: materiality is unveiled and found to be an expression of the divine, and immateriality is revealed to be a potent and authoritative reality. In baptism, for example, the cleansing with water signifies a spiritual cleansing that has actual effects on a person’s soul. Lewis’s view of reality as defined by the Tao encompasses both this materiality and spirituality. As explained in Chapter Two, Lewis believes that the Tao is a supernatural force that must be translated into the realm of human action. Within the context of The Abolition of Man and That Hideous Strength, Lewis reveals his view of the relationship between the spiritual and the material, a view that must ultimately be called sacramental.

The first key feature of Lewis’s sacramental vision of reality, a feature to which I have already alluded in the previous chapters, is the idea that spiritual truths are a real, existing part of the world. Immaterial reality pervades the atmosphere of Lewis’s stories, in which spiritual entities are not figments of the imagination or shadows of things that are; such entities have real existence, and they actually wield more power than material beings. Lewis looks to the supernatural as the driving force behind the natural. In The Abolition of Man, he declares that the transcendent Tao must act as a guide for deeds performed by humanity. In That Hideous Strength, the eldils, although they cannot be seen with the naked eye, have power over the happenings of Earth. In fact, it is the eldils who bring about the major events of the story. Regardless of whether everyone at N.I.C.E. knows it or not, their Head is not truly being kept alive by science but is animated by the bad eldils; these bad eldils gain control of the physical
workings of N.I.C.E. and its members. The same is true at the other side of the battle: Ransom’s
down of N.I.C.E. and its members. The same is true at the other side of the battle: Ransom’s
does not come from any material sources, but directly from the authority of the good
eldils with whom he is in league. The importance of these immaterial beings turns the story into
something beyond merely a tale of earthly war, and it becomes an account of spiritual conflict
manifesting itself on a human battlefield.\(^9\)

The fact that this spiritual battle is fought on human soil displays another sacramental
quality. Even though spiritual entities have command over material ones, materiality is not
rendered unnecessary by this dominance. Just as the transcendent reality revealed through a
Christian sacrament must be exhibited through a physical sign, so must the supernatural powers
of the eldils be carried out through earthly means. In *That Hideous Strength*, Ransom explains
that he has become “a bridge” through which the eldils can communicate with human beings,
and he tells Merlin that it is only through the eldils that N.I.C.E. can be destroyed. But Merlin
fears the strength of the supernatural eldils, saying, “What will become of this? If they [the
eldils] put forth their power, they will unmake all Middle Earth.”\(^{10}\) Ransom replies: “Their naked
power, yes. [. . .] That is why they will work only through a man” (288). According to Lewis, the
power of supernatural truth must function through a physical intermediary. This is a profoundly
Christian and a profoundly sacramental idea. Not only do the sacraments bring spiritual goods
into material being, but Christians believe that God himself became man in order to redeem
humanity through his physical death and resurrection. In *That Hideous Strength*, when his
colleagues admit that they fear the eldils more than they fear God himself, Ransom explains that
“angels [which are similar to eldils] in general are not good company for men in general, even
when they are good angels and good men. It’s all in St. Paul. But as for Maleldil [God] himself,
all that has changed: it was changed by what happened at Bethlehem” (259). When the Christian
God became a baby in the manger, he became more accessible, more embraceable, to human
beings, and he himself acted as that intermediary needed to bring together spiritual and material
realities. This belief is an important one to the Christian view of sacramentality. Christians view
the sacraments as representative of actions performed by Jesus in his time on Earth, such as
baptizing, forgiving sins, and breaking of bread. In reflection of these beliefs, and of the
importance of the Christian idea of God becoming man, the events of *That Hideous Strength* take
place “ever so near Christmas” (259).
Lewis’s view of reality as expressed in *That Hideous Strength*, which is informed by ideas of the Tao in *The Abolition of Man*, depicts the world of human beings as an interaction between spiritual and material realities. The presence of these two realities requires the existence of sacraments, for if spiritual beings are real, and if they are to guide physical reality as Lewis says they should, then there must be something to link these two different modes of reality together. A sacrament is the connection between divinity and humanity, the means by which human beings’ physical bodies can be in touch with their spiritual souls. In Christian theology, it is the sacraments that allow human beings to communicate in a special way with divine power. For Lewis, the imagination plays a role like that of a Christian sacrament; imagination is not equal to a sacrament, but its function is essentially sacramental: it acts as the link between spiritual and material realities to lead human beings to their divine destinies. As I have explained in the earlier chapters, imagination played this role for Lewis himself and for Jane and Mark Studdock in *That Hideous Strength*; I have also mentioned the importance of recognizing the primacy of spiritual reality for Orual’s eventual salvation in *Till We Have Faces* and the significance of imagination for Eustace’s change of heart in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. All of these characters, and many others throughout Lewis’s prolific career, parallel Lewis’s own conversion story and its debt to imagination.

For Lewis, imagination, which recognizes the spiritual worth of material things, is necessary for a true and full understanding of reality; as such, imagination must be incorporated into education, as he contends in *The Abolition of Man*. An education devoid of imagination will result in human beings who do not understand their true natures: the fact that they are composed of body and soul and that they have a spiritual destiny to be realized after death. The attainment of this understanding (which is meant, ultimately, to lead to the attainment of that spiritual destiny) is the fundamental role of Lewis’s imagination; it is essentially the same role of an actual sacrament, which is essentially the same role of God becoming man: to save the souls of human beings. The fundamental task of Lewis’s sacramental imagination is, then, the recognition of truth, which leads to the salvation of souls. This salvation, however, begins with functions that seem somewhat less immense. G.K. Chesterton describes George MacDonald’s imagination as “the gift of illuminating the ordinary; of finding in something trivial a type of the eternal” (“George MacDonald” 25), and it is this same gift that Lewis himself admired in MacDonald and that defines the everyday functions of Lewis’s own sacramental imagination. Aristotle once said
that philosophy begins with wonder, and the perception of truth begins in this same place for Lewis. The sense of Joy that “surprised” Lewis with its correlation to truth and the new appreciations of beauty and simple pleasures that coincide with Jane and Mark’s conversions signify a key aspect of Lewis’s sacramental imagination: the illumination of the ordinary into something extraordinary and even divine.

The imaginative awareness of this extraordinary-ordinary, or the recognition of what Chesterton calls “adorable trivialities” (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 184), is evident in the sense of wonder that characterizes Lewis’s concept of imagination as equivalent with Joy that I explain in Chapter One. Lewis affirms in *Surprised by Joy* that Joy, or imagination, involves a sensation like “Milton’s ‘enormous bliss’ of Eden” (16), and yet the experiences that produced this extraordinary bliss were astonishingly ordinary: a garden in a biscuit tin, reading *Squirrel Nutkin*, witnessing the beauty of nature. The “Coleridge at the waterfall” scene in *The Abolition of Man* (2) recognizes this same sense of extraordinary-ordinary, as do several episodes I describe in Chapter Three from *That Hideous Strength*, such as Mark’s desire for “bacon and eggs, and fried fish, and dark fragrant streams of coffee pouring in to large cups” (211) and Jane’s musings on *Peter Rabbit* and *The Romance of the Rose* and *Alice in Wonderland* that are inspired by Ransom’s garden path (60). Lewis argues that Coleridge demands for the waterfall to be “sublime” and not “pretty,” because its beauty reflects the greatness of truth. Also taking into consideration the meaning of “sublime” as to “transform into a purer or more idealized form” (*O.E.D.*), what Lewis is pointing out in the waterfall scene is that identifying the extraordinary qualities of the physical world leads human beings to an appreciation of the supernatural realm. Through wonder, human beings can glimpse divinity through the magnificence of earthly creations. It is this feeling of wonder that Lewis appeals to in his myths. His stories appeal to the child in every reader; they appeal to the desire for magic and wonder that he believes should be awakened within every human soul. For Lewis, the desire for wondrous things that is encouraged and enflamed by the sacramental imagination is nothing more or less than a desire for the supernatural destiny he envisions for all humanity.

The importance of being able to recognize the supernatural dimension of everyday reality is revealed in *That Hideous Strength* through the explanation of history as “the struggle between Logres and Britain” (367). This explanation occurs as Dr. Dimble unfolds Ransom’s connection to the legendary King Arthur, whose realm is called Logres. Dimble reveals that “there has been
a secret Logres in the very heart of Britain all these years: an unbroken succession of Pendragons. [. . .] In every age they and the little Logres which gathered round them have been the fingers which gave the tiny shove or the almost imperceptible pull, to prod England out of the drunken sleep or to draw her back from the final outrage in which Britain tempted her” (367). In That Hideous Strength, Ransom is the Pendragon, his small band at St. Anne’s is the “little Logres,” and N.I.C.E. is the opposing “Britain.” The idea of Logres, carrying with it all the mystery and glory of Arthurian legend, signifies those people who recognize the spiritual infusion in materiality. Britain, on the other hand, represents those human beings who do not acknowledge the authority of supernatural realities. The Pendragon, like the Christ of Christian theology, leads his people to an appreciation of spiritual goods, whereas those who oppose the Pendragon, such as N.I.C.E., declare themselves strict materialists who have no need for immaterially founded truths. While Ransom is instructing his supporters in the truths of Maleldil and the cosmic mysteries he witnessed in deep-space, N.I.C.E. officials are deceiving and clouding the minds of everyone under their influence: even the few who know the true nature of the Head do not reveal it to others. But as Chapter Three has already shown, this feigned materialism only backfires and ends ironically in handing over control to the evil eldils. For Lewis, the human race cannot escape from the supremacy of immaterial reality. If a person chooses to reject the validity of truth found in the Tao, or Christianity, or the laws of Maleldil (which all refer to the same truth), then he hands himself over to the opposing, evil power.

The plot of That Hideous Strength, and the importance of recognizing the existence of Logres, exhibits the connection Lewis makes between truth and romanticism. When Lord Feverstone calls Mark an “incurable romantic” (110), he is using the term pejoratively and means to indicate that Mark is too imaginative and does not understand the workings of the real world. This view of romanticism aligns it with an overly ideal, imaginative, unrealistic view of reality and places it in opposition to reason, which would be defined by those who think like Feverstone as the correct, realistic, empirical perspective. This kind of a perspective is, as I have said in previous chapters, comparable to the beliefs of the New Look intellectuals described in Chapter One and the outlook Lewis himself adopted for a period of time before his conversion. In such a view, romanticism cannot lead to an understanding of truth, since truth is understood only as empirical, material fact. Lewis’s sacramental imagination erases such an opposition between truth and romanticism by showing that imagination can lead to truth. Imagination, for
Lewis perceives the essential connection between the physical reality known through empirical sciences and the immaterial beauty appreciated through more romantic sensibilities. When the wizard Merlin is resurrected and offers himself in allegiance to Ransom, the Pendragon, it is clear that magic and physical action must work together in order to defeat the evil of N.I.C.E.

The idea of “magic” that Lewis expresses in *That Hideous Strength* and *The Abolition of Man* warrants further explanation. He makes a distinction between what he calls “Renaissance magic” (Strength 198) and the magic of the Middle Ages. While he describes the “magician’s bargains” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as “a process whereby man surrenders object after object, and finally himself, to Nature in return for power” (Abolition 76), he associates medieval magic with “wisdom” and maintains that its main objective “had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue” (77). When Merlin’s revival is first predicted in *That Hideous Strength*, it is not clear which kind of magic he represents. At first, N.I.C.E. is desperately seeking him because they are sure he will be on their side, and the St. Anne’s company searches for him only to prevent his union with their enemies. Upon further consideration, however, Dr. Dimble and Ransom agree that there is not much “common measure [. . .] between ceremonial occultists like Faustus and Prospero and Archimago and their midnight studies, their forbidden books, their attendant fiends or elementals, and a figure like Merlin who seems to produce his results simply by being Merlin.” They decided that “Merlin’s art was the last survival of something older and different. [. . .] It had probably differed from Renaissance Magic profoundly” (198).

The difference between Merlin’s magic and Renaissance occultism is that Merlin’s arts do not endeavor to manipulate reality, whereas the “forbidden” studies of Faustus and the like are identified with N.I.C.E. and the “conquest over Nature” they intend to bring about. Merlin’s powers hearken back to a time in which, according to the fictional history in *That Hideous Strength*, the composition of reality differed from that of the modern world. Dr. Dimble says the following about Merlin and his world’s relationship to modern humanity:

He is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our modern point of view, confused. For him every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one’s horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something dead – a machine to be worked, and taken to bits if it won’t work the way he pleases. Finally, come the Belbury people, who take over that view from the
modern man unaltered and simply want to increase their power by tacking onto it the aid of spirits – extra-natural, anti-natural spirits. Of course they hoped to have it both ways. They thought the old *magia* of Merlin which worked in with the spiritual qualities of Nature, loving and reverencing them and knowing them from within, could be combined with new *goeteia* – the brutal surgery from without. No. In a sense Merlin represents what we’ve got to get back to in some different way. (283)

Lewis does not specifically identify the event which caused the change from Merlin’s old order to the modern state of being, but the highlighted characteristics of Merlin associate him with the pagan/Celtic facet of Arthurian Britain rather than the Christian/Roman side, in which case the split between old and new orders can be connected with the birth of Christianity. This connection would also explain why Ransom reveals to Merlin that “one of the purposes of your reawakening was that your own soul should be saved” (286). These elements of *That Hideous Strength* suggest that, prior to the incarnation of Christ, there was a union between immaterial and material realities that allowed Merlin to commune directly with the inner spirituality of the physical world. But because the Christian world no longer has that kind of fusion between spiritual and material that characterized the pagan order, Merlin, who lived on the cusp of both worlds, must redeem himself through obedience to Christianity. In other words, Ransom will not permit him to manipulate nature through his own means in order to destroy N.I.C.E., but he must allow himself to be guided by the eldils, and, ultimately, he must accept his own physical death.

In a reality composed like Lewis’s account of Merlin’s pagan world, there would be no need for sacraments, since there would be no divide between the divine and the human in need of connection. With the advent of Christianity, however, it becomes necessary for human beings to access their spiritual destinies through materiality in order to participate in the redemption attained by Christ through his physical life, death, and resurrection. Christian humanity should aspire to a union between their bodies and their souls, but Christianity proclaims that this union will only be perfected after physical death – in heaven. This is why Dr. Dimble says that “Merlin represents what we’ve got to get back to in some different way.” Human beings in the modern times of *That Hideous Strength* are still seeking a union between spiritual and material realities, but they cannot reach that union as Merlin was once able to “simply by being Merlin”: they must wait for heaven to attain it perfectly. On Earth, therefore, human beings must be in need of a unifying force to act as intermediary between the transcendent and the physical. In Christian
theology and liturgical practices, such an intermediary is called a sacrament. For Lewis, as I have already claimed, the imagination also acts sacramentally, as an intermediary between spiritual and material reality, or, in *That Hideous Strength*, as a connection between Merlin’s magical paganism and Ransom’s adherence to Maleldil’s truth. Lewis’s sacramental imagination is, therefore, both profoundly Christian and profoundly romantic: it brings together the truth of Christianity and the romanticism of Merlin’s Arthurian world. In addition to the romantic images a reference to Logres automatically evokes, Merlin’s supernaturally fused world is shown to be an imaginative and romantic one, in which “gods, elves, dwarfs, water people, fate, [and] longaevi” (282) wandered the face of the earth. The organic relationship between nature and super-nature, between materiality and spirituality, in this pagan world sounds very similar to the “unity in multeity” I describe in Chapter One as an aspect of Coleridge’s concepts of imagination, and it also does not seem very different from the union sought by Lewis’s sacramental imagination. How is that pagan unity differentiated from the unity sought by Lewis or Coleridge? It is the answer to this question that also distinguishes Lewis’s imagination from Coleridge’s. As I have said in Chapter One, Coleridge’s theories fail to address the nature of the truths “conducted” by imagination, whereas Lewis’s ideas of truth are vital to his concepts of imagination.

This is not to say that Coleridge’s imagination cannot also be considered as sacramental. On the contrary, Robert Barth makes the connection between a sacrament, which he defines as “a sensible sign” (39), and Coleridge’s idea of a “symbol,” which is that produced by the imagination. Barth explains:

A sacrament – Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, the Eucharist – involves the union of a subject and an object, the faithful recipient and the material sign in which the grace of God is mediated to the Christian. So does a symbol. A sacrament is one of the ways in which God shares divine power with the human family, allows them to act in God’s name and with God’s power; it is a finite participation in the infinite creative act of the I AM [which parallels Coleridge’s definition of the primary imagination I pointed to in Chapter One]. So, for Coleridge, is a symbol. (39-40)

Barth is highlighting the sacramental aspect of Coleridge’s imagination by showing that symbols, the images produced by imagination, serve a function like that of a Christian sacrament; Coleridge’s imagination, like Lewis’s, acts as an intermediary between divine and
human realities. Further, Barth draws another parallel between Coleridge’s idea of symbol and the Christian sacraments by arguing that both involve “an encounter, through sensible reality, with God [. . .] the ultimate reality and the source of all unity” (40). This sounds similar to Lewis’s idea of the Tao and his belief that the power of imagination can bring human beings into communion with truth, which he identifies with God. As I have already argued, the fundamental difference between Lewis and Coleridge on the matter of imagination and its connection with truth lies in Lewis’s emphasis on understanding the nature of truth more than the nature of imagination. Lewis’s works, as I claimed in Chapter One, do not contain as many clearly stated definitions of imagination as Coleridge’s. While Coleridge spends a considerable amount of time explicitly analyzing and defining his concepts of imagination, Lewis focuses more on clarifying his idea of truth.

For Lewis, pure romanticism has to be redeemed by a Christian, sacramental imagination, just as Merlin’s reawakening and his obedience to the Christian mode of reality will save his soul, since what he had done in his previous pagan existence was not enough to do so. This is the difference between the pagan unity of Merlin’s original era and Lewis’s sacramental unity: A unity in multeity that does not thoroughly consider and explain the truth in which everything is to be unified does not take into account the true nature of reality as Lewis sees it. The different aspects of reality must be united in something, and for Lewis, this something is defined by the Tao, or God, or Christian truth. It is this truth that his sacramental imagination seeks to illuminate. Lewis’s sacramental imagination seeks to redeem the romantic imagination by uniting it with truth. His myths, exemplified by That Hideous Strength, encourage the “willing suspension of disbelief” that accepts the imaginative existence of resurrected wizards, heads animated by dark spiritual beings, and goddesses who descend upon country cottages, but Lewis’s myths also link this “disbelief” to belief in the real, supernatural reality these romantic images reflect. Lewis’s sacramental imagination enables people to be romantic without abandoning the reason or the orthodoxy of truth. Furthermore, this sacramentality lends a universal relevance and an everyday usefulness to Lewis’s imagination: universal, since Lewis considers sacramentality a characteristic of reality itself, and thus a fundamentally sacramental imagination is applicable to all eras of history and all situations of life – and everyday, since not only dragons and wizards and elves are causes for wonder, but Lewis’s imagination also transforms fried fish and soap into objects of wonder and ordinary life into a romantic story.
Through his romantic myths, Lewis hopes to motivate a confidence in the spiritual dimension of material reality that will inspire people to take that “leap in the dark” he believes can lead to salvation; he hopes to awaken his readers to the faith he himself discovered in the “true myth” of Christianity.
This idea is evident in Lewis’s essay, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” which appears in the 1969 Selected Literary Essays. The focus of the essay is on the nature of metaphor, and the two invented words in the title are metaphorical terms Lewis discusses in the essay.

2It is important to remember that Coleridge’s definition of imagination I am here comparing to one of Lewis’s is not representative of every romantic understanding of the term; it is not even representative of every Coleridgean understanding. Coleridge and the other writers of the romantic period have numerous, diverse ways of defining imagination. I am simply focusing on one here in order to highlight the point I am endeavoring to make about Lewis.

3What Lewis calls “the well-known story of Coleridge at the waterfall” occurs in Dorothy Wordsworth’s Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland. The episode actually reads:

A lady and a gentleman, more expeditious tourists than ourselves, came to the spot; they left us at the seat, and we found them again at another station above the Falls. Coleridge, who is always good-natured enough to enter into conversation with anybody whom he meets in his way, began to talk with the gentleman, who observed that it was a majestic waterfall. Coleridge was delighted with the accuracy of the epithet, particularly as he had been settling in his own mind the precise meaning of the words grand, majestic, sublime, etc. and had discussed the subject with William at some length the day before. “Yes, sir,” says Coleridge, “it is a majestic waterfall.” “Sublime and beautiful,” replied his friend. Poor Coleridge could make no answer, and, not very desirous to continue the conversation, came to us and related the story, laughing heartily. (65)

The actual issue for Coleridge here was not, as Lewis claims, that the tourists made a mistake between “pretty” and “sublime” because one did not understand the nature of beauty as a pointer to the divine; it is, in fact, a mistake in the precision of terminology that dismayed Coleridge because of his belief that “majestic,” “beautiful,” and “sublime,” each have distinct meanings.

This does not, however, invalidate the point Lewis makes when he refers to this passage. His refutation of Emotivism stands separately from his misinterpretation of Dorothy’s recollection.

4Although Lewis did not serve in the military during World War II, he did fight in the front lines of World War I. He enlisted in the British Army in 1917, shortly after his 18th birthday, and remained until 1918.
Lewis’s emphasis on birth control in this semi-futuristic novel could even be considered prophetic, since the subject became an even larger moral concern with the occurrences of the 1960s.

Wither is the Deputy Director of N.I.C.E., a character who has given himself so entirely over to evil that he seems to have lost any control over his actions; he has essentially killed himself before his death:

The manner and outward attitude to men which he had adopted half a century ago were now an organization which functioned almost independently like a gramophone and to which he could hand over his whole routine of interviews and committees. [. . .] [Wither’s] face had no expression; the real man was far away suffering, enjoying, or inflicting whatever such souls do suffer and enjoy or inflict when the cord that binds them to the natural order is stretched out to its utmost but not yet snapped. (248)

Feverstone (who was the Devine of *Out of the Silent Planet* before he becomes known as Lord Feverstone in *That Hideous Strength*) is another high-ranking N.I.C.E. official whose involvement in evil is so great that he, like Wither, finds himself with little or no remaining control over his own actions. At the end of the story, he is unable to stop himself from driving into the fiery pit near Belbury (354).

Much of Frost’s language about “objectivity” as he explains it to Mark (252-6) actually sounds similar to Lewis’s language in *The Abolition of Man*; Lewis and Frost are using similar phrases and terms but making diametrically opposed points. This observation brings to mind the idea, most famously propounded by St. Augustine in the fourth century, that evil has no existence in itself. St. Augustine argues in *De Civitate Dei* that only the “good” has real existence and that the nature of evil is the privation of a good.

In fact, one of the main reasons Mark is originally invited to join N.I.C.E. is that he is married to Jane; they hoped to induce him to bring her to Belbury so they could gain control over her and use her dreams to further their conquest.

Although a detailed treatment of this idea does not enter into my discussion at hand, it is important to clarify that immaterial reality is not equal to what Lewis calls the Tao. The Tao represents only the transcendent existence of good that must be transformed into action, and Lewis does not believe that all immaterial realities are good. The bad eldils, although they are immaterial, have – in a way similar to Satan and the fallen angels of Christian theology – chosen to reject the authority of Maleldil (God) and thus have rejected the goodness which Lewis would align with the Tao.

“Middle Earth” is a term that refers to the place where mortal beings dwell. It may sound familiar to you as the name of Tolkien’s world in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*; in Tolkien’s fictional history, Middle Earth was originally populated by not only human beings but also elves and dwarves and other mythical beings.
Lewis also uses the term “Numinor” in That Hideous Strength, which is another of Tolkien’s words (although Lewis misspells the word – it should be “Numenor” – as a result of the fact that none of Tolkien’s works had yet been published, and Lewis had only heard it spoken aloud); it refers to the land which was the origin of western civilization, which was destroyed before the dawn of recorded history (similar to the myth of Atlantis). Although Tolkien of course meant Numenor to be fictional, Lewis amusingly refers to it as a historical fact in That Hideous Strength.

In addition, Downing states that Tolkien also “conjectured that Lewis’s ‘eldils’ were derived from his [Tolkien’s] ‘Eldar’ and that the names for the king and queen of Perelandra, Tor and Tinidril, were influenced by two of his characters, Tuor and Idril” (134).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marisa White was born in Ormond Beach, Florida. She attended Christendom College in Front Royal, Virginia and received her B.A. degree in English Language and Literature in the spring of 2006. Her academic interests lie mainly in the area of 20th Century British Christian Literature, especially George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, Dorothy L. Sayers, Evelyn Waugh, and Graham Greene. She finishes her M.A. in Literature at Florida State University in the spring of 2008 and looks forward to pursuing doctoral studies.