CHAPTER IV

THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH: A VISION OF ORDER
In That Hideous Strength, the culminating volume of his 'space trilogy', Lewis creates a scientific foundation run by power-hungry bureaucrats. It threatens to usurp all power in England by its own clever manipulation of the media and by its brutal modification of individual human beings. According to Lewis, behaviourism is the real enemy of religion in the Twentieth Century. In his view, the application of behaviourist theory to human conduct is despicable because it involves scientists who lack values themselves but manipulate the values of others.

Lewis took his title That Hideous Strength from a Sixteenth Century poem by the Scottish Poet, Sir David Lindsay. He has, among other things, the Lyon King-of-Arms, that is the chief herald of Scotland. The hideous strength is the Tower of Babel. The clue to the drama in That Hideous Strength is 'Babel' which means chaos, disintegration. The book traces a return from outer space to earth; from the Utopian and ethereal realm of Paradisal Deep Heaven to the tawdry realities of a floundering marriage, political and scientific intrigue, and psychological warfare.
Lewis' feelings toward the social sciences can best be studied in his published reactions to the psycho-analytical and anthropological approaches to literature.\(^1\) He makes Mark in *That Hideous Strength* a sociologist and thereby heaps scorn on the possible and easy perversions of the profession. Of his attitude towards psycho-analysis and the mind-bending which becomes a perversion of it in Mark's brainwashing, we have ample evidence in some of Lewis' counselling letters: "Keep clear of psychiatrists unless you know that they are also Christians. Otherwise they start with the assumption that your religion is an illusion and try to "cure" it: and this assumption they make not as professional psychologists but as amateur philosophers. Often they have never given the question any serious thought."\(^2\)

Lewis made clear in a letter to Father Peter Milward that he had included in the novel *That Hideous Strength* untainted scientists and that Belbury included many nonscientists, so that he would not be accused of a blatant condemnation of science.\(^3\) The book belies his statements to the contrary and presents more vigorously than either of the preceeding parts of the trilogy, a condemnation of modern experimental science in nearly all its aspects: sociological, psychological, medical and clinical.
That Hideous Strength marks a return from Deep Heaven to the harsh realities of college politics, vivisection, brain washing and psychological terrorism, marriage of convenience, sexual perversion and demonic experimentation.

A step up from Mark and Jane are the forces juxtaposed in Belbury and St. Anne's. The powers at work in Belbury are represented in Fairy Hardcastle as brute violence and physical torture, sadism, sexual perversion. Frost is a pure intellect divested of human compassion and he diabolically pursues an inhuman aim in the guise of scientific experimentation. Wither is possessed by evil which saps all human feeling. He is a husk of a man still able to mouth platitudes and lead a movement. Filostrato and Straik are pawns; not wholly demonic, but deluded by pride and self-love into fanatically thinking their cause a purely scientific or righteous one. In Feverstone, power is represented as motivated by greed and pride in his skill at manoeuvring between the possible options. The company found at St. Anne's constitutes a sort of paradigm of charity. The household at St. Anne's can be said to be overwhelming in its plainness and ordinariness. Here in all the platitudinous, shop worn ordinariness, the jewel Charity is found. Ransom, the Fisher-king, is the custodian of the most sacred trust, namely, the order of Charity. He is the real Head of St. Anne's ruling the body in wisdom and charity. At Belbury the head is a
dribbling inanity at the centre. Belbury is a ghastly counterfeit of St. Anne's in all respects.

That Hideous Strength can be viewed as a conventional romance with Jane and Mark Studdock as joint protagonists. They were happy in the past. The story opens as their security starts crumbling and Jane is beset by strange, visionary nightmares. Jane is alone and musing in the flat which she and her husband occupy in Edgestow. It is a small university town where Mark holds a fellowship in Sociology. Jane is musing about the topic of marriage. Indeed matrimony is the first word in the book. The words which run through her mind are from the marriage rite in the Book of Common Prayer: "Matrimony was ordained, thirdly, for the mutual society, help, and conform that the one ought to have of the other."

Mark has always compulsively longed to be part of an inner circle. But those he had tried to enter have always been trivial or pernicious. This is the fact which he has never recognised. Once he gets swept up in the vile whirlpools of the N.I.C.E., his heroic fight is his gradually learning to make moral judgements in order to reject his involvement in the institution.

Jane's problem is less to reject evil than to recognize good as good. She finds what she is told of true marriage galling, deprading and repulsive. Before she is through, she has to accept a new concept of herself and a new picture of
her place in the scale of creation. She finally achieves, after repeated instructions from Mr. Fisher-King, a reorientation, a vision, and a religious experience. She meets Ransom and feels a flood of warmth and joy.

By using England as the Special World, Lewis demonstrates his concern to avoid repetition of effect. Ransom's extraordinary struggle is superimposed on the lesser, personal development story of Mark and Jane. As Kathryn Hume rightly observes, "By this stage in his development, he is far beyond ordinary mortal ken, let alone the usual romance hero." Renamed Mr. Fisher - King, he is Pendragon of Logres and True West. He is Wizard and spiritual rules with all the attributes of Jung's wise Old Man and Neumann's Higher Cultural Masculinity rolled into one. His adversary is an embodiment of the destructive powers of evil, the N.I.C.E.

The National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments, backed by the powers of Thulcandra, tries to create on earth a world which consists of 'the conditioned men'. The savagery of Lewis' attack can be seen in the remarks of one of the members of the N.I.C.E. about the purposes of the Institute:

Quite simple and obvious things, at first--sterilisation of the unfit, liquidation of backward races (we don't want any dead weights), selective breeding. Then real education, including pre-natal education. By real education I mean one that has no 'take-it-or-leave-it' nonsense. A real education
makes the patient what it wants infallibly: whatever he or his parents try to do about it. Of course, it'll have to be mainly psychological at first. But we'll get on to biochemical conditioning in the end and direct manipulation of the brain.\(^5\)

The central figure of the Institute is a guillotined scientist - Pioneer's head, kept alive and used to bridge a gap between man and supra-human daemonic powers called Macrobes. The company in the N.I.C.E. is a veritable devil's roster. In the peculiar pageant-like nature of this narrative, each one exhibits some variation on the theme of evil. Straik, the visionary, secularizing, radical priest is the very archetype of Twentieth Century religious radicalism. He speaks and thinks in fierce slogans. When Mark ventures to suppose that the Rev. Mr. Straik naturally looks for the fulfilment of these dreams in the next world, we have thus:

With every thought and vibration of my heart, with every drop of my blood ... I repudiate that damnable doctrine that is precisely the subterfuge by which the World ... has sidetracked and emasculated the teaching of Jesus, and turned into priestcraft and mysticism the plain demand of the Lord for righteousness and judgement here and now... In that name I dissociate myself completely from all the organised religion that has yet been seen in the world.\(^6\)

For Straik, the doctrine of resurrection refers to the coming order which the N.I.C.E. is ushering in, and "The Son of Man" refers to "Man himself, full grown -- has power to judge
the world — to distribute life without end, and punishment without end." Wither is the Deputy Director of the N.I.C.E. His very syntax is a vast and indeterminate mire quite devoid of meaning. Mark notes in his large face and watery eyes something rather vague and chaotic.

Fairy Hardcastle, the Head of the Secret police at the N.I.C.E., is the very archetype of the perversion of nature at work in Belbury. As Howard Thomas says, "She is, to be sure, a woman, but everything about her contradicts any image of feminity — that has ever existed in human imagination." The physiologist, Filostrato, also presents a variation on this theme of the unnatural, or repugnance towards nature. It is apt and ironic that he should be a physiologist, but his entire goal in life is to fumigate the earth. He is the one who wants to sterilize the earth from all these weeds and trees and leaves and eggs—all this fecundity. He says, "we do not want the world any larger furred over with organic life... all sprouting and budding and breeding and decaying."

Belbury is the very map of evil. The gnostic theme of disgust with nature and the flesh animates Belbury. In the meetings of the fellow and the private conversation, a murderous cynicism and a contempt for all traditional sentiment is discovered. The bleak discovery that Mark eventually makes at Belbury is that there is no centre at all: "The entire
enterprise is a shifting, sinister Kaleidoscope of perfidy. It is all a ghastly parody of the mutuality, trust, obedience, and joy at work in Charity, of which matrimony is the great case in point, or sacrament. "

In these college meetings, all sentiment is mocked. Old Canon Jewel, one of the fellows, tries feebly to put the case of the ancient wood Bragdon. But of course he is just a superannuated old fool who still attaches weight to such things as tradition and sentiment. So he is overridden. As the action moves along, this college business that seems so routine and normal thickens and hardens into Belbury, that is, a paradigm of hell itself.

Ransom is now nearly fifty and incurably maimed by a wound in his heel. Semi-bedridden he is no longer an active hero in the usual sense. Rather, he is the directing wisdom, the channel for the powers of good from supralunary spheres. Ransom defeats the institutional monster with Merlin's aid. Mercury and Philology combine to help Merlin inflict the curse of tongues on this modern Babel. The opposition to the N.I.C.E. is headed by Ransom and a little company of Christian, supported by the Oyarsa of each planet, the great eldila of the solar system. At the end, the Institute and its artifacts are destroyed by fire and earthquake. So for a time the danger to mankind is ended. The nightmare utopia does not come into existence.
Jane, who begins with the natural wish for self-determination, and very little notion that her womanhood, her flesh has much to do with anything, finds herself sent to school at St. Anne's. Her capacity to see manifest in her dreams, embroils her in the struggle against Belbury which is, in effect a struggle against Mark and all that entraps him. By being the agent of his destruction, Jane becomes the agent of Mark's salvation. Jane and Mark move back towards each other by noting the steps each is obliged to take.

Mark, having all but sold his soul, salvaged and delivered from the toils of Belbury, moves back towards Jane to whom he had been pledged in the sacrament of matrimony. It is the great school of Charity, but which sacrament has so far been a hollow form devoid of the solid meaning of which it is meant to be the vehicle. Again and again, it is the mere memory of Jane which plucks Mark by the sleeve, or reminds him of the reality of which Belbury is a ghastly travesty.

It is not for nothing that the last scene in the narrative fulfils what the first scene lacks -- that first scene with Jane, solitary and frustrated, musing on the words from the Prayer Book about matrimony. Now the two are delivered to each other in a scene of unabashed eroticism, baptized eroticism. Jane goes to Mark, into the very landscape of Venus: "... into the liquid and supernatural warmth of the garden and across the wet lawn (birds were everywhere) and past the seesaw and the
greenhouse and the piggeries, going down all the time, down to the lodge, descending the ladder of humility" to meet and love the penitent Mark who has arrived here, like a shriven pilgrim, thinking quite correctly, "Surely I must have died."12

The allegorical framework of The Pilgrim's Regress does not conveniently hold all that Lewis would like to present. The space fiction framework used in Perelandra does not wholly convey the materials. In the former, he required direct social criticism and in the later mythopoeic elevation to convey them. In That Hideous Strength the unity of theme and form are best judged by the smooth and unbroken development of the plot; the steady and unbelievable evolution of the central couple; the mounting suspense and the skillful incorporation of information. The last one flow naturally out of the story rather than protruding as an obstacle to the flow of narration.

The book follows the method of penetration higher up and further in. The story begins on the surface with a couple, symbolically representing opposite poles, sexually, intellectually and emotionally. There is the central motif in this book of the circle, and Lewis plays many changes of meaning around this central image. Jane and Mark share certain characteristics of modern environment which Lewis dislikes. They are cold, proud, petulant, each still anxious to be admired, "Within the bond of marriage, the circle of shared life, they represent in
Lewis begins on the simplest, most realistic, least complicated level, quickly developing what appears on the surface as a modern examination of marital difficulties against the backdrop of Common Room politics. He draws a convincing picture of the young people. Lewis can reveal from the inside giving us the assurance of absolute realism at the outset. He also sets up the natural progress of the narrative inward to what for Jane will be an increasing awareness of real spiritual values. For Mark, it is the illusion of having joined some meaningful circle.

Lewis moves between his two central characters and keeps their penetration into the circles of Belbury and St. Anne's approximately parallel. With this, Lewis keeps the pace steady and gives ample opportunity for the ironic comparison afforded by the structural and thematic parallels. One obvious use of the technique is the paralleled journey to Belbury. The parallel confrontation of Jane and Mark with their masters echo many similar scenes throughout the book. For example, the tramp's contraction with Merlin, Merlin's confrontation with Ransom, Ransom's and Merlin's confrontation with the Powers, and Wither, Filostrato, and Straik's last meeting with the Head.
The parallelings of characters are too numerous. Some are subtle enough to reveal Lewis' concern for showing the pervasive infiltration of power on the opposite sides of the battle. The Head and Merlin are both soiled magicians of an older order, fit for the use to which they will be put. Their deaths present the vivid contrast which concludes each antithesis. Alcasan, tortured and abused, the ultimate product of vivisection, ends as a heap of bones and flesh. Merlin, last seen on a horse galloping away from Feverstone, wins salvation as his translation is seen through Jane's vision.

The other great strength of That Hideous Strength is the group of human characterization found in the development of Jane, and especially Mark. In earlier works, Lewis' characters have either been men on the verge of spiritual elevation or beings of superior moral or immoral order like Ransom, the sorns, and Weston respectively. With Jane and Mark we have fallible and malleable human material. As we follow Jane and Mark, we feel some pity for their ignorance and pride: some fear for their stupidity, blindness and selfishness. Donald E. Glover rightly observes Lewis' characterization. "Through his careful delineation of both characters, but especially through Mark who as the worse but more tempted and freer agent shows the more dramatic human choice, we see the power of his characterization."14
It is apparent that Miss Ironwood and the Pendragon's approach to Jane presents a form of psychological treatment. But the treatment is Christian rather than scientific. It is meant to parallel and be a foil to Mark's psychological indoctrination and behaviour modification. Lewis' scorn for sociology may be felt in Hingest's statement to Mark:

There are no sciences like sociology ... I happen to believe that you can't study men you can only get to know them, which is quite a different thing. Because you study them, you want to make the lower orders govern the country and listen to classical music, which is balderdash. You also want to take away from them everything which makes life worth living, and not only from them but from everyone except a parcel of prigs and professors.\(^{15}\)

The powers at St. Anne's are less diverse and complex. Ransom as Director and Pendragon, fills the role of Christ. On the higher spiritual level, the forces in opposition are those of Satan, the Bent Eldil of Thulcandra. They operate through the medium of Frost, Wither, and the Head versus the powers representing God and Maleldil, who assist human forces devoted to good in their battle to overthrow Satan. The battle in the conclusion is an unequal one. The terrifying apocalypse which destroys Belbury and Edgestow places that hideous strength in the hands of the power which can legitimately and truly wield it.
Perelandra is Lewis' retelling of the tale of Adam and Eve. The devil once again avoids the male because of, what Milton called, his "higher intellectual", inorder to attack the female of the species. And this reincarnation of Satan woos the New Eve in what we now can recognize as the accents of feminism. It means that feminism is the preaching of the devil. In That Hideous Strength, Lewis strikes out against birth control, especially in the incident in which Merlin informs his master that the married couple who are the book's central characters, have missed through their selfish refusal to have children, the moment at which a great champion of Christendom might have been conceived:

Sir, said Merlin, be assured that the child will never be born, for the hour of its begetting is passed. Of their own will they are barren. I did not know till now that the usages of Sulva were so common among you. For a hundred generations in two lines the begetting of this child was prepared; and unless God should rip up the work of time, such seed, and such an hour, in such a land, shall never be again.\textsuperscript{16}

Lewis succeeds in making a body of reasoned theological doctrine perceptually available in quasi-realistic fiction. By embodying the doctrines in meaningful situations which coalesce as myth, he has contrived to transpose his opinion into images. Except towards the end of That Hideous
Strength, where the disembodied spirit is permitted to take matters out of the hands of human agents, the situations are steadily credible on their own terms.

The adventure which began with Ransom's journey to Malacandra in Out of the Silent Planet culminate in That Hideous Strength. It is the most anti-utopian volume in the trilogy in which Wells appears in person as Horace Jules, the figure-head director of the N.I.C.E. The dark spirits of earth inspire evil men, those who actually lead the N.I.C.E., to work to turn the world into a nightmare society where behaviour is scientifically manipulated. The N.I.C.E. is a fictional embodiment of Lewis' fears about the new science of man. This is set forth more directly in The Abolition of Man.

The climax of the novel, That Hideous Strength, comes in the great banquet scene at Belbury where H.G. Wells alias Horace Jules, delivers a talk to the assembed dignitaries of the N.I.C.E. The scene also climaxes the caricature of Jules, who has been presented on and off throughout the novel as a conceited and dangerous man, who does not realise where the science he champions is taking mankind. Without any actual power, Jules is regarded with contempt by the working members of the Institute:

Jules! Hell's bells! said Feverstone, You don't imagine that little mascot has anything to say to what really goes on? He's all right for selling the Institute to the great British
public in the Sunday papers and he draws a whacking salary. He's no use for work. There's nothing inside his head except some nineteenth-century socialist stuff, and blah about the rights of man. He's just about got as far as Darwin. 17

At times Lewis' attack takes on a personal colouring, as when he describes, "Jules was a cockney. He was a very little man, whose legs were so short that he had unkindly been compared to a duck." 18 Years of good living and conceit, says Lewis, had interfered with certain original bonhomie. In That Hideous Strength, Lewis' hostility to the Wells-Stapledon-Haldane material become, even more overt. He shows what he believed would happen if these ideas are put into effect. To the public the N.I.C.E. may seem no more than an attempt to have science applied to social problems and backed by the whole force of the state. But ultimately it hopes to take over the human race, recondition it, control evolution, and finally make man a really efficient machine. Thus the situation of humanity as Lewis saw it in The Abolition of Man is foreshadowed in this novel.

All this means cutting man away from the animal, turning him into a species of giant brains, something like Stapledon's giant brains or Wells's Martians and destroying as much of the organic life of the planet as possible. It is a process of cleaning that Wells himself occasionally seemed to encourage. Filostrato explains:
This Institute-Diomio, it is for something better than housing and vaccinations and faster trains and curing the people of cancer. It is for the conquest of death: or for the conquest of organic life, if you prefer. They are the same thing. It is to bring out of that cocoon of organic life which sheltered the babyhood of mind the New Man, the man who will not die, the artificial man, free from Nature, Nature is the ladder we have climed up by, now we kick her away.\textsuperscript{19}

Hillegas rightly observes thus: "By showing the dark \textit{eldila} of earth as aiding the men of the N.I.C.E. so to create the New Man, Lewis presented a grotesque and sinister caricature of the vision so often identified with Wells. No anti-utopia exists which is more counter-wellsian than \textit{That Hideous Strength}.\textsuperscript{20}\textsuperscript{20}

The novel operates on several levels: cosmic, mythic, and realistic; and like any good fairy tale, it has an object lesson. As \textit{Perelandra} shows the attempted perversion of innocence and beauty in an untainted world, so \textit{That Hideous Strength} opens with a perversion of idyllic marital relationship. Mark and Jane become modern Adam and Eve, and their garden is the jungle of modern civilized academic life. Perversion is, in fact, the keynote of the parallelism which acts as the structure of the book.

The lesson in the novel is that, if we fail to love one another and serve God, we allow the grossest abuses of our common humanity to control our lives, perverting the clear dictates of good. Only with self-realization and submission does
the bliss brought by Venus descend to the bedchamber in the concluding pages of the book. The book works through two human characters to show the power of cosmic confrontations manifested on the human level. Donald E. Glover observes about Lewis' art thus: "Certainly by shifting the centre of focus from the near perfect Ransom of the conclusion of *Perelandra* to the imperfect fallen Adam and Eve of Mark and Jane, he humanizes his message."²¹

The drama in *That Hideous Strength* entails a clash between chaos versus order, ennui versus joy, impotence versus strength, sterility versus fecundity, cruelty versus mercy, cynicism versus fidelity. Hell, in a word, versus Paradise. Myth and poetry, medieval theology and vision, furnish us with variations on the theme, and Lewis set himself the task of dramatizing it all in local terms: a marriage, a career, a small college, a political experiment. Here is fiction attempting to see life steadily and see it whole.


6. Ibid., p. 92.

7. Ibid., p. 155.


12. Ibid., p. 476.


16. Ibid., p. 343.
17. Ibid., p. 48.


