CHAPTER II

OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET: C.S. LEWIS' CONCEPT OF SPACE
CHAPTER 2
OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET: C.S. Lewis's Concept of Space

C.S. Lewis directly admits his interest in what lies beyond the limits of the science of astronomy. It is the reading of *A Voyage to Arcturus* sometimes between 1934, when Greeves mentioned it to him, and 1938, when he finished *Out of the Silent Planet* that sparked his enthusiasm for writing space fiction. C.S. Lewis' letter to Ruth Pitter indicates that he learned from Lindsay that planetary fiction was a good medium for the depiction of spiritual adventures.¹

C.S. Lewis was somewhat more explicit to W.L. Kinter in a letter in which he linked *A Voyage to Arcturus* and his planetary novels to earlier and classic models:

My real model was David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* wh. first suggested to me that the forms of "science fiction" cd. be filled by spiritual experiences. And as the *Furioso* was in some ways the science fiction of its age, your analogy works. But mind you, there is already a science-fiction element in *The Commedia* e.g. *Inferno* XXXIV, 85-114.²

Lewis may have been disillusioned by the reception of *The Pilgrim's Regress*, but he found new possibilities in *A Voyage to Arcturus*. We see in *Out of the Silent Planet* the same Christian on a journey struggling with vices, internal and
external, searching for truth, and meeting the ultimate reality at the conclusion of his spiritual and physical journey. *Out of the Silent Planet* is *The Pilgrim's Regress* in a new key. However, the elements of Lewis' personal dissatisfaction which inhabit the periphery of *The Pilgrim's Regress* have come into central prominence here: his disapproval of the machine age, his emphasis on the inhuman aspects of scientific research, and his recognition of the greed of modern materialism. "Lewis' intention then is to deal with matters of present concern: the dangers of "Westonism" and of the scientific dream of defeating death." He sends Ransom on a spiritual journey. Lewis forces him to go by Weston and Devine abducting him, and reveals to him the glory of Deep Heaven and the peace and community of non-human life among the sorns, hrossa, and pfiffigi. Using Weston and Devine as foils, he indicates, against the backdrop of the old mysteries drawn from the story of the Old One, Maleldil and the Bent One, the place a committed Christian can hold in other worldly action. In his letter to the Milton Society of America, Lewis places these books at one extreme of the symbolic and mythopoeic embodiment of his religious belief and *The Screwtape Letters* at the other.

Out of the three novels of Lewis' space trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* is closest to the traditional science fiction frame, giving considerable attention to the journey to Malacandra, though using little technical paraphernalia. But Lewis is not
interested in science except as a tool, and our attention shifts quite quickly from the external paraphernalia of the space ship to Lewis' reactions to Ransom's new environment and his development as the first interplanetary Christian.

Lewis probably intended the book initially as an exploration into a new form unfolding themes such as the necessity of moral choice, the virtues of simple love, loyalty and devotion, obedience to legitimate higher spiritual authority, all of which had appeared in The Pilgrim's Regress. In retrospect, we see that Lewis looked on Out of the Silent Planet as a prelude to Perelandra while indicating to W.L. Kinter that "No one else sees that the first book is Ransom's enfances (sic): if they notice a change at all, they complain that in the later ones he 'loses the warm humanity of the first etc.'\textsuperscript{5}

In an earlier letter, corresponding to Kinter's question about whether the triology was an epic, Lewis replied that he considered it Romance because "it lacks sufficient roots in legend and tradition to be what I'd call an epic. Isn't it more the method of Apuleius, Lucan, or Rabelais, but diverted from a comic to a serious purpose?"\textsuperscript{6}

In defending his attack on science in his reply to Professor Haldane, Lewis indicated that in the figure of Weston he tried for "farce as well as fantasy."\textsuperscript{7} Again he indicates that his aim was an imaginative response to what he saw as the
dangers not of science, but of a "scientism", which seemed intent on remaking the world and the universe without pity, happiness or freedom.\footnote{8}

In his recorded discussion with Kingsley Amis and Brian Aldis on the subject of science fiction which applies to Out of the Silent Planet, C.S. Lewis says: "a science fiction story forced its moral on the reader, and in science fiction, only the first journey to a new planet interests imaginative readers."\footnote{9}Out of the Silent Planet is a romantic fantasy. It is a piece of science fiction introducing three characters who reappear in later novels. It is focused on a space journey to a new world for the purpose of material and scientific exploitation. Devine wants gold, and Weston's scientific experimentation will lead to human colonization and the consequent destruction of the inhabitants. On another level, it is the story of a lone Christian's growing understanding of the truth of the Deep Heaven, of other worlds, of planetary influences under the guidance of superior celestial powers and his own growth into fuller manhood leading to an expansion of his knowledge.

One of the first features which strikes a reader fresh from The Pilgrim's Regress is a marked improvement in characterization. Weston and Devine may remain rather rigid stock villains like Mr. Sensible and Gus Halfways, but Ransom and Hyoi develop as their relationship deepens. The Oyarsa of Malacandra, though distant, is more personable than Reason or
Wisdom. The dialogue becomes a true exchange rather than a prelude to discourse, and the action of Ransom is given a psychological depth not attempted in the characterization of John. There is excitement and tension generated by Ransom's fears, his growing perception of the world he inhabits, his journey to Meldilorn which is both a physical test and a symbolic approach to truth and power.

Another important feature of *Out of the Silent Planet* is Lewis' use of setting. In contrasting an acknowledged allegory with an acknowledged piece of science fiction, the reader will expect the usual difference. In the former, the scene is stereotyped: bogs, unscaleable mountains, houses and castles of various vices, the homely cottage of virtue. In science fiction, we face a similar stereotype, perhaps better known to the modern reader: complex mechanical paraphernalia, weird vegetation, and planetary inhabitants, special effects. As Donald E. Glover rightly observed, "Lewis, however, both disappoints and pleases us in that order. The specialized descriptions are held to a minimum because apparently they do not interest Lewis. But the description of scenery with its imaginative creation of flora and fauna, shows Lewis' real strength." What in *The Pilgrim's Regress* is confined to John's vision of the Island is here unleashed in the intensely imaginative production of the harandra, harandramit, and Meldilorn. The full elaboration of this technique is to be found in *Perelandra* where
Lewis' imaginative ingenuity could perhaps have profited from the curb placed on it later in the writing of the Narnia stories.

The book's meaning centres on a perceptive, intelligent, moral human being thrust unwillingly into an alien world where he expects to be a sacrificial victim. He is clearly not an everyman because he was elected to make contact with the forces of Deep Heaven, and we admire his ability to rise to the occasion, feeling as we do the reader's identification with and empathy for the outcast in an alien world. Guided by good feeling and good sense and by Christian faith and obedience, he makes his journey toward truth and self-understanding and experiences his moment of epiphany, although it is not a dramatic one since our attention is shifted to Weston's feeble attempt at the communication of his sick science.

Lewis finds sheer pleasure in creating an other world, landscaping it, peopling it, providing it with a history and purpose. Here for the first time in prose fiction, Lewis puts his literary credo into action by stirring the deeper imagination: "He is giving us, too, that glimpse of possibilities, the vision of the ultimate source of desire, which governed his imaginative life and with which he hoped to infect the lives of others." 11

There are moments that approach awe in the book: when Ransom perceives that earth is a gap and space an intense and radiant reality or when Ransom approaches Oyarsa. The
problem rests in the conflicting claims of excitement and those of deeper imagination, we have a book of information vying with the deeper imagination. There is no adequate fusion of the imaginative and didactic elements in *Out of the Silent Planet*. Since critics see Lewis as theologically oriented, the book becomes for them a battle-ground for the exegesis of symbols.

The idealized world of Malacandra loses some of its mystery by being so thoroughly explained that there is too much suggestion and too little suggestiveness. And there is a feeling of anticlimax, as though the whole story may be a prelude to something more, or at least more than the conclusion gives us. So if the book is Ransom's enfance, it stands as a portion of the sense of having caught, however briefly, the ineffable and longed for experience of otherness which was so close to Lewis' own imaginative experience.

The plot becomes, after the cleverly understated opening, spasmodic and episodic, built upon a predictably regulated series of parallel encounters between Ransom and the hrossa, sorns, pfiffiggi and oyarsa. The narrative and descriptive sections alternate in a way which characterises both allegory and science fiction. The characters, although more fully realized as individuals than in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, suffer from over simplification and lack of psychological motivation. The trial scene serves as an example.
Lewis intends to parallel Ransom's anticipated trial, which has presumably been the impelling force from the beginning, with the real trial of Weston. This culminating scene, the summation of Lewis' condemnation of scientific materialism and planetary exploitation, fails to convince us for two reasons. First, Weston has never successfully come alive as a villain, and hence these antics are comic but unrelated to the central theme. Lewis is hardly allowing him sufficient force of personality to permit a realistic trial. He is a pasteboard figure, more easily disposed of than Sensible, Broad or the brown girls of *The Pilgrim's Regress*. There is further a quality of staginess about all the major scenes, and their very inevitability reduces suspense and tension in the conflicts. The inevitability is not that of a fated encounter but is a natural progression projected from the moment we realize, when Hyoi offers Ransom the ritual drink and Ransom perceives the meaning of *hnaǔ*, the ground rules of the planet and universe we have been transported into. Weston cannot win, and hence, comic though he may be, we cannot take him seriously as either villain or buffoon.

Lewis has displayed remarkable skill in descriptive writing. His descriptions of the world Malacandra and its inhabitants, of Deep Heaven, are highly evocative. They do in fact stir the imagination:

The Earth's disk was nowhere to be seen: the stars, thick as daisies on the uncut lawn, reigned perpetually
with no cloud, no moon, no sunrise to dispute their sway. There were planets of unbelievable majesty, and constellations undreamed of: there were celestial sapphires, rubies, emeralds and pin-pricks of burning gold; far out on the left of the picture hung a comet, tiny and remote: and between all and behind all, far more emphatic and palpable than it showed on Earth, the undimensioned, enigmatic blackness.  

Though Lewis does not adhere to the science fiction form of Wells, or the fantasy form of Lindsay, he uses many of the conventional planetary techniques which he would modify in Perelandra and discard altogether in That Hideous Strength.

Lewis is caught in his theme, unable to express his anti-"Scientism" in an essentially mechanical and scientifically oriented form. Further, his interest is more in the message than in the form, although at the outset, his loyalties seem equally divided between the excitement generated by the creation of another world and the transcendence of earthly greed and egotisms through spiritual progress. More time is spent on Ransom's education, his enfance than on an active encounter between Ransom and Weston. The tone of the book is passive: Ransom receiving the Law, rather than being active and militant as in Perelandra. Taken within the context of the trilogy, it is a natural prelude to later matters, but taken alone, it seems incomplete and somewhat an apprentice work. Out of the Silent Planet is the lightest of Lewis' narrative. The nature of his
achievement here will not be found by looking for dense dramatic complexity, nor for the subtleties in human situations -- those well-proved components of the modern novel."\(^{13}\) Rather, we discover what Lewis is about only by doing what we do by with any narrative or drama, namely by watching closely what the artist is up to and forming our impressions accordingly.

The action unfolds in a plain linear way, the way the action does in most adventurous stories. We find a university don off on his walking holiday alone in the English countryside, looking for a night's lodging at a farm. Complications arise in an entirely plausible way, and before we know where we are, we are away from Earth altogether, en route to a planet. Later in this narrative, we find Ransom ready to collapse upon discovering that he is in a spaceship heading away from earth. We find that he wishes that death or sleep, or best of all waking from this dream, might come to his rescue. Nothing comes. "Instead, the lifelong self-control or the hypocrisy which is half a virtue, came back to him..."\(^{14}\)

A variation on this theme arises when, much later, Ransom in Malacandra must make the journey to Meldilorn, where the Oyarsa dwells, although there are various reasons for perhaps not going. "He made a strong resolution, defying in advance all changes of mood, that he would faithfully carry out
journey to Meldilorn if it could be done. This resolution seemed to him all the more certainly right because he had the deepest misgivings about that journey.\textsuperscript{15}

In other words, Ransom knows enough to realise that when action is necessary, it must be supported by something more solid than inclination, since more inclination will be wafted quite away at the first puff of adversity. In the temptation scene that follows immediately, when various misgivings and plausibilities arise to deflect Ransom from his task, he keeps going, and thinks back on his first day in Malacandra: "Then all had been whimpering, unanalysed, self-nourishing, self-consuming dismay. Now, in the clear light of an accepted duty, he felt fear indeed, but with it a sober sense of confidence..."\textsuperscript{16}

The principal character Weston's assumption is that his point of view is right at least partly because it is what is happening. The mediator and agent of the progress, in Weston's view, is science. "...all educated opinion-for I do not call classics and history and such trash education—is entirely on my side."\textsuperscript{17} says Weston. Here the common charge is that Lewis is anti-science. It is not science itself that Lewis warns about. After all, science is a certain method of inquiry into certain kinds of data. It is neutral, like economics or psychology or literary criticism. According to Howard Thomas, "What Lewis fears is scientific materialism raised to a philosophy and imposed on society and morals."\textsuperscript{18}
Where Weston, the doctrinaire scientific materialist, refers to all this bliss as rays that never reach us down on Earth, Ransom's experience is described thus:

A nightmare, long engendered in the modern mind by the mythology that follows in the wake of science, was falling off him. He had read of 'Space': at the back of his thinking for years had lurked the dismal fancy of the black, cold vacuity, the utter deadness, which was supposed to separate the worlds. He had not known how much it affected him till now—now that the very name 'Space' seemed a blasphemous libel for this empyrean ocean of radiance in which they swam ... No: Space was the wrong name. Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens—the heavens which declared the glory...

The Wellsian fantasy of a universe "peopled with horror" is, perhaps not the only way. The proper place for Lewis' work may be on the shelf next to Wells, since they both wrote about space travel. But the whole set of interests that animate Lewis' fiction is very far indeed from what we find in Wells.

It is through his contact with one of the pfiffigi that Ransom glimpses something of what is meant by our planet being called Thulcandra, the "silent planet". Later, in conversation with the Oyarsa of Malacandra, Ransom learns the story of how this silence fell, and it sounds very like our story.
of the fall of Lucifer. According to that story, the Oyarsa of our world was brightest and greatest:

He became bent. That was before any life came on your world... It was in his mind to spoil other worlds besides his own. He smote your moon with his left hand and with his right he brought the cold death on my harandra before its time; if by my arm Maleldil had not opened the handramits and let out the hot springs, my world would have been unpeopled... There was great war, and we drove him back out of the heavens and bound him in the air of his own world as Maleldil taught us. There doubtless he lies to this hour, and we know no more of that planet: it is silent.20

But to make one world a mere allegory of another would be to dishonour it. Ransom is studying a monolith made by the pfifltriggi, and on it he finds a picture of what turns out to be our solar system. On each planet there rides a little winged figure. One holds a trumpet: it is Mercury. Another seems to have udders or breasts: it is Venus. The third has a blank. The figure might be Earth, which has cut itself off from the Dance enjoyed by other planets and their tutelary intelligence. "And what an extraordinary coincidence," thought Ransom, "that their mythology, like ours, associates some idea of the female with Venus. No, Not at all extraordinary, if we are following the sense of the drama. If there is Venus at all, then she will look the same in all possible worlds."21 Lewis carries this imagery to its completion in Perelandra.
It is very much as though Ransom is being sent to school in Malacandra. He is the pupil. Ironically, the "scientist", Weston, has no curiosity whatsoever about this world. He is entirely blinded by his prior fixation on the megalomaniacal theories which he has chosen to adopt. Ransom, who has no particular axe to grind is in a position to learn something. "There is a question of teachability at work in the drama, which of course a subdivision of the larger theme of hubris versus modesty or humility."

Another point in support of this argument is the transfiguring of Ransom's view of the sorns. At first the sorns seem threatening and grotesquely awkward to him. But with the clearing of his vision, they seem more like full-rigged ships before a fair wind. 'Ogres' he had called them when they first met his eyes. 'Titans' or 'Angels' he thought later would have been a better word for them. He had thought them spectral when they were only august.

It turns out in the judgement before Oyarsa that Ransom has not been altogether teachable, however, and that he is capable for certain very small refusals on his own part. But in the serene and implacable light of sheer fact, which seems to be the order of things in the Oyarsa's presence all sorts of semi-conscious missteps and quite well-intentioned detours turn out to be blameworthy. Weston's dronings and
posturings dwindle and shrivel to their proper size here. Lewis has chosen the dramatic technique of having Ransom translate Weston's glibberings into the speech of Malacandra, and in this phraseology what seems important and impressive in Weston's mouth emerges in Ransom's perspective as silly at best and blasphemous at worst:

Among us, Oyarsa, there is a kind of hnaus who will take another hnaus' food and-and things, when they are not looking. He says he is not an ordinary one of that kind... He says we know much. There is a thing happens in our world when the body of a living creature feels pains and becomes weak and he says we sometimes know how to stop it... Because of all this, he says it would not be the act of a bent hnaus if our people killed all your people. 23

In a visit with the sorns, Ransom learns a bit about hierarchy, and it is an idea wholly unlike Thulcandrian ideas of power struggle. He finds that the sorns, astonished at his account of human wars and slavery, conclude either that humans have no Oyarsa ruling them, or more probably, that all this trouble is because each one wants to be a little Oyarsa himself. Over against this is the Malacandrian scheme of things in which each order is ruled by the next higher order: beasts by hnaus, hnaus by eldila, and eldila by Meldil, the lord of it all.

Ransom finds everyone on Malacandra slightly perplexed by the Thulcandrian obsession with "lifting and
carrying things." Indeed, they have a law, it seems, never to speak much of sizes and numbers. In this light, somehow the entire scientific and mercantile enterprise seems to dwindle. Further, Ransom finds that these creatures are bemused by their being only one sort of intelligent life of Thulcandra: They thought this must have far-reaching effects in the narrowing of sympathy and even of thought. The ancient poets may have known what they were doing after all in peopling their tales with fauns, gods and dryads and titans as well as men.

The only analogy, perhaps, for an experience like the Thulcandrian experience would be that of reading the myths which point us to once-inhabited, but now inaccessible landscapes which plant us in a certain tentativeness of attitude about our own familiar scenes. And from the hrossa, Ransom learns something about pleasure—how it is full-grown only when it is remembered, and how this remembering is itself the fruition of the pleasure. The hrossa, for instance, do not keep on copulating throughout their lives: that is a pleasure appropriate specifically to the time of child-bearing; there is no question of endless repetition.

There is something incomprehensible, from the hrossa's point of view, about the mere repeating of pleasures such as hearing a lovely line of poetry over and over. "For the most splendid line becomes fully splendid only by means of
all these lines after it; if you went back to it you would find it less splendid than you thought. You would kill it. We find this theme appearing again and again in Lewis' fiction, under many modalities. It always implies that at least part of the key to the nature of evil is that it represents a refusal of fact - the fact that obliges us to stay with the story as it moves towards its denouement. The amassing of money, for example, by miserliness or theivity, would represent one variation on this theme, for the only thing money can do is to guarantee some sort of repetition of pleasure, and the warding off of contingency. By the same token, sexual promiscuity would represent the mere amassing of pleasurable experiences, with no regard to how the pleasure fits into the total pattern of human life. Again, gluttony or drunkenness would be variations on this theme of the mere repetition of pleasure to the point of surfeit.

The shift from space to Deep Heaven is only in the service of the higher theme, which is surely that there is a story afoot in all worlds, and that to escape from the silence of our own worlds into the clarity and luminescence of another may be to find ourselves suddenly face to face with our own story, only in a clear light and with starker colours. Howard Thomas rightly observes: "Perhaps one way of saying what Lewis' achievement is in Out of the Silent Planet would be to say that he has pressed the genre "space fiction" into the
service of ancient mythic and poetic themes, so much so that the
designation, space fiction, no longer really applies very well,
since at least part of what has occurred in the drama has been
the waking up, from its merely scientific torpor, of our notion
of what space is."^25

There are several stages in the process of tackling
this problem squarely. First, the reader has to be made to
feel a presence, which it would not be tactful explicitly to
assert. Thus Ransom, Lewis' Earthly protagonist, once
"shanghaied" by unscrupulous scientists into a space ship, was
made to feel extremely well and to look out with pleasure from
the ship's dark side, where he could see planets of unbelievable
majesty, and constellations undreamed of, celestial sapphires,
rubies, emeralds and pinpricks of burning gold. As the nights
passed, he found his former assumption that beyond the Earth's
atmosphere was only cold, black vacuity rapidly disappearing.
Instead, it seemed to him more and more difficult to disbelieve
in the old astrology: "almost he felt, wholly he imagined,
'sweet influence' pouring or even stabbing into his surrendered
body."^26

Despite the danger of meteorites hinted by the
constant tinkling of small particles of world-stuff on the outside
of the hollow shelf, fear was impossible On the side of the
ship flooded by the sun he was totally immersed in a bath of
pure ethereal colour and of unrelenting though unwounding brightness. He lay stretched with eyes half closed in the strange chariot that bore them, faintly quivering, through depth after depth of tranquility, feeding his mind and body daily and filled with a new vitality.

Gradually he came to realize that the word space was a blasphemous libel for this empyreal ocean of radiance in which they swam. So strong is the illusion that when, in arriving on Mars, the ship ceases to be a chariot gliding in the fields of heaven and it becomes a dark steel box dimly lighted by a slit of window, and falling out of the heaven into a world. In the words of Wayne Shumaker, "We are astonished, if we pause to think about the matter, that our interest in space has become so intense as to make the arrival on a planet seem anti-climatic and depressing and the planet itself a half-obscene lump inferior to the space it displaces."27

In the second stage, the planet also is redeemed by the disclosure that it is informed with friendly spirit exactly as space had been. Gradually as Ransom's grotesque expectations are corrected by experience, he learns the organic life of Mars is observed by hundreds or thousands of almost invisible eldila. The recognition culminates in an audience with the Cyarsa, or planetary intelligence, who informs him, in a sweet and remote voice that he and his two evil companions have been watched since long before their space ship entered the thin martian atmosphere.
There has been no time when Ransom was alone, no place where his actions were secret. Oyarsa says, "There is nowhere else...Malacandra, like all worlds, floats in heaven. And I am not 'here' altogether as you are, Ransom of Thulcandra. Creatures of your kind must drop out of heaven into a world, for us the worlds are places in heaven... I and my servants are even now in heaven." Only the Earth does not throng with intelligent and friendly spirits. Elsewhere in the universe, mortal beings can sense vitality in the apparently empty spaces about them.

The discovery is borne out on the turn trip to Earth during which Ransom perceives that the space surrounding the ship is more really vital than the air within it. Because the ship swims in intense light, he can see no eldila; but, he heard, or thought he heard, all kinds of delicate sound, or vibrations akin to sound, mixed with the tinkling rain of meteorites, and often the sense of unseen presences even within the space-ship became irresistible... He and all his race showed small and ephemeral against a background of such immeasurable fullness. His brain reeled at the thought of the true population of the universe, the three-dimensional infinitude of their territory, and the unchronicled aeons of their past; but his heart became steadier than it had ever been.

The description of the scientist's house is full of symbolic suggestions about two cultural patterns, one decayed and
the other dominant. The intellectual soundness of the older humanistic culture is hinted by the light. The amenities encouraged by the humanistic value system are implicit in the neglected lawn, the right-hand path leading in a gentle sweep to the front door and a hospitable porch, and the missing pictures, furniture and carpet. The dominant scientific culture is characterized by the barred gate, the disfigured and commercialized left-hand path, the absence of light, the concentration of activity in back premises, the red glare of the furnace, the contrast of two luxurious armchairs with the surrounding litter, and the artificial and unappetizing nourishment.

There is significance, too, in the hedge through which Ransom must pass in order to gain access to the Oyarsa. It is the initial obstacle to the performance of any unpleasant duty, beyond which one's way becomes clearer. Comprehension of these and other similar implications is necessary neither to the absorbed following of the surface narrative of adventure nor to an appreciative understanding of Lewis' basic meanings in the trilogy. The suggestions will work on the reader unconsciously, through tonality.

C.S. Lewis, the master craftsman of romances, who pushed beyond and above the usual limits of this form, has received no recognition except from critics like Irwin who says
that romances are indeed what he has given us in his planetary triology. Lewis has created in Out of the Silent Planet a perfect romance of the conventional type. In Perelandra an extension and development of the form on a higher psychological and cosmic plane has been achieved.

All the three novels: Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hiededus Strength lock together structurally into one romance whose hero, "Elwin Ranson, has a cosmic stature similar to that of Blake's Albion: both represent England at one level, at others both are "Fallen Man" and "Eternal Man" -- and Ransom further carries within him aspects of Christ, Raphael, Arthur and Guardian of the Grail."³¹

The broad, smooth road to Sterk has to be abandoned by Ransom. The narrow, difficult path through a hedge overgrown with thorns and nettles brings him to the Rise, and the iconography of spiritual journeys enables us to notice the symbolism of the narrow path of righteousness and the possibilities suggested by the name of Ransom's destination. Just before events sweep Ransom off his feet, Lewis acknowledges "The last thing Ransom wanted was an adventure", but he hears the boy in need of help and attempts to render it, however ineffectually. Before long, he is bundled aboard the spaceship. Kathryn Hume cites here the example of a birth of a hero given by Northrop Frye: "Northrop Frye associates the literal birth of a hero with water imagery; in my experience, water, a standard
symbol of the unconscious, often appears when the incipient hero is about to enter the Special World."\(^{32}\)

Ransom's trip from his own to the new world is more prolonged than most such romance transitions because Lewis describes the steps by which Ransom comes to turn from "a heady, bounding kind of fear" to his ecstatic submission to the beauty of the heaven. Ransom is lost, has no conscious notion of his destination, and finds much that is beautiful in the abstract terrifying because of its potential threat. All this throws him into a brief and unexplained state of fragmented personality and temporary entrancement with his physical being.

At this stage in the ego's development, both reactions make sense: even as the ego is beginning to be aware of the many component parts of the psyche, the child is going through the process of exploring and loving its own body. Ransom is recapitulating such early stage of development which in his life on Earth was apparently not carried out in appropriate relation to Faith. When on earth, he was adult in mind and body, but fearful; and though a practising Christian, not inspired. Living among the Malacandrian hrossa, Ransom's mixture of respect and contempt for them forces him to join in the hnakrahunt lest he should forego his self-respect.

Ransom's timidity is finally laid to rest. He faces the water-dragon and helps defeat it. As Lewis baldly puts it,
"He had grown up." Now that basic mental growth is completed, the energies he once frittered away in fears can feed his spiritual development. He goes to Meldilorn, learns the true nature of the universe, and submits to that higher power which he had baselessly feared. Having reached this atonement with the Oyarsa of Malacandra, Ransom is able to choose aright the perilous return to the earth with Weston and Devine, though he is given the option of staying.

In C.S. Lewis' space trilogy, anti-utopia assumes a new and different appearance. One reason for this change of course is that, instead of being a reaction to utopia from a disillusioned left, the trilogy is an attack from a conservative, Christian right. "At the same time the trilogy is a kind of Paradise Lost employed to teach Christian doctrine to a sophisticated but unsuspecting twentieth century, and thus, more than any other anti-utopia it generates an enveloping myth."34

If in Brave New World and Nineteen Eighty-Four Wellsian science fiction moves further from myth to satire, in Lewis' trilogy it returns very much to myth again. Yet the trilogy, though anti-Wellsian, owes as heavy a debt to Wells, a debt which is especially natural in view of Lewis' strong and genuine interest in science fiction, including the pulp variety. The very Wellsian idea of travel to other worlds provides the chief myth of the trilogy.
The steel globe with shutters in which Ransom travels is Bedford and Cavor's sphere. Many of the details of the journey, such as the constant tinkling of meteorites on the steel shell of the ship and the pulsing vitality of space come from Wells' lunar voyage; and the riot of vegetation on Malacandra is inspired by Wells' marvelous imaginings of the rapid growth of vegetation in craters at the dawn of a lunar day. The climax of the book comes in the interview with the Oyarsa, the ruling spirit of Malacandra, which is reminiscent of Gulliver's audience with the king of Brobdingnag, or more so, Cavor's audience with the Grand lunar:

His mind, like so many minds of his generation, was richly furnished with bogies. He had read his H.G. Wells and others. His universe was peopled with horrors such as ancient and medieval mythology could hardly rival. No insect-like, vermiculate or crustacean Abominable, no twitching feelers, rasping wings, slimy coils, curling tentacles, no monstrous union of superhuman intelligence and insatiable cruelty seemed to him anything but likely on an alien world... He saw in imagination various incompatible monstrosities — bulbuous eyes, grinning jaws, horns, stings, mandibles. Loathing of insects, loathing of snakes, loathing of things that squashed and squelched, all played their horrible symphonies over his nerves.\(^{35}\)

Unlike the other worlds of C.S. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet is less overtly Christian, and should appeal to a wide readership by the sheer beauty of its style and images.
The inner action of this novel is two-fold: it is partly a Bildungsroman, effecting the re-education of Ransom, and through him of the reader; and partly a physical and intellectual defeat of human-racist expansionism. Ransom, an ordinary decent literary scholar, is kidnapped by the ruthless physicist, Professor Weston, and his capitalist collaborator Devine, and taken in Weston's secret spaceship to Mars, for Weston mistakenly believes that the 'primitive natives' of Mars have demanded a human sacrifice in exchange for gold.

The trial scene in the climax is one of the clearest, wittiest and most striking portrayals in imaginative fiction of the clash between human-racist expansionism and the opposing school of thought -- the school now represented chiefly by the ecology movement. Oyarsa pities the human race for --

I see now how the lord of the silent world has bent you. There are laws that all hnau know, of pity and straight dealing and shame and the like, and one of these is the love of kindred. He has taught you to break all of them except this one, which is not one of the greatest laws; this one he has bent till it becomes folly and has set it up, thus bent, to be a little blind Oyarsa in your brain. And now you can do nothing but obey it, though if we ask you why it is a law you can give no other reason for it than for all the other and greater laws which it drives you to disobey. 36

Out of the Silent Planet is a tale of a journey to another planet and encounters with other races. To this extent,
Lewis owes a debt to H.G. Wells, for there is much here that is reminiscent of him: pseudoscientific explanation, sociological concerns, and many more specific details. Yet Lewis uses the trappings of science fiction for his own purpose — moralistic fantasy.

Perhaps one way of saying what Lewis's achievement is in Out of the Silent Planet would be to say that he has pressed the genre 'space fiction' into the service of ancient mythic and poetic themes — so much so that the designation, space fiction, no longer really applies very well, since at least part of what has occurred in the drama has been the waking up, from its merely scientific torpor, of our notion of what space is.


6. Ibid., p. 78.


8. Ibid., p. 77.

9. Ibid., p. 88.


11. Ibid., p. 81.


15. Ibid., p. 98.

16. Ibid., p. 100.
17. Ibid., pp. 29-30.


20. Ibid., p. 140.

21. Ibid., p. 129.


24. Ibid., p. 84.


29. Ibid., p. 171.


32. Ibid., p. 508.

