Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION
Lewis's themes are many and various. He was frankly Romantic and wrote extremely good fantasy. He believed ardently in reason and, as a Christian, would argue that reason leads to faith. He exalted the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity, especially in *The Great Divorce* and in the Narnia stories.

Lewis was a supreme teacher in all his writings, his fiction, scholarly works, even his poetry. And he was didactic in a most appealing and memorable way. He taught his readers to love goodness, to obey God, to revere beauty as the creation of God, and to live harmoniously and unselfishly with others. He created real characters with whom his readers can identify. Ransom in the space trilogy, Lucy in the Narnia stories, Orual in *Till We Have Faces*—one of his most real and compelling characters—and others.

His early allegory, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, is subtitled "An Allegorical Apology for Romanticism, Reason and Christianity." Nearly everything Lewis ever wrote served as apologetics for these three things. At a time when it was fashionable to be counter-Romantic, he was unabashedly Romantic. He is notable for his preoccupation with Sehnsucht, the nameless, mysterious longing that is pleasurable and painful at the same time and which the language of discourse can hardly deal with. It requires music or poetry to express it.
Lewis’s themes are sometimes complex. They include the need to find beauty, the necessity of hope, faith and charity, the dangers of a secular social scientism, the deceitfulness of the self, the tendency of manipulate others, and the absolute necessity of believing in reason.

Lewis was bothered by science fiction of his day being mostly anti-Christian, promoting materialistic worldviews and the exploitation of other worlds. Admittedly influenced by the likes of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, which he read in his childhood, Lewis wanted to write his own space story that would include as its underlying theme a “spiritual adventure” with Christianity at its centre, though not overtly. He always based his science fiction writings on some or the other myth and this was quite unique. Lewis had begun to realize that myth is not false and that myth participates in truth. And all these different story lines, mythic story lines, each reflect the truth. He began to weave all these mythical realities – the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection – using a yarn called Science Fiction writing. Lewis was no longer believing in something that was up in the sky or perhaps a dream. He began to believe in real things brought down to earth by God when God’s Son became man. Lewis’s idea is that the myths and mythological figures of our world may represent in corrupted form spiritual realities to be found in a purer form in planes less fallen than
ours. Lewis, was thus, in search of those planes, perhaps lying on the other side of our own planet.

Space Travel is our modern term for a venture that has teased mortals since mythic antiquity. Daedalus and Icarus were early venturers, and their effort came to grief. For centuries, long before the actual development of airships and rocked propulsion, men laboured over elaborate designs for craft that might punch through the Earth’s atmosphere and take us to other worlds. The topic continues as a major theme for fiction, cinema, and TV series in our own epoch.

The attraction is obvious, incorporating elements of courage, thrill, the unknown – especially the vastly, or even the infinitely, unknown, curiosity, and of course that desire for conquest so characteristic of our species. But perhaps the most significant element is our desire to fly in the face of our finitude. Lewis says:

The idea of other planets exercised upon me then a peculiar, heady attraction, which was quite different from any other of my literary interests. Most emphatically it was not the romantic spell of Das Ferne. “Joy” (in my technical sense) never darted from Mars or the Moon. ... I may perhaps add that my own planetary romances have been not so much the gratification of that fierce curiosity
as its exorcism. The exorcism worked by reconciling it with, or subjecting it to, the other, the more elusive, and genuinely imaginative, impulse.¹

That is where Lewis’s treatment of the theme enters. However he was not even marginally interested in the technology that is the staple of modern space travel. Lewis was opposed to space exploration. He saw it more as a substitute for religion and, for some people today, it is. His attitude seems to have originated due to one of his students who strongly believed in space travel and was a member of the British Interplanetary Society (BIS). His ideas mirrored those of the Russian visionary Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, who wrote in 1911, “In all likelihood, the better part of humanity will never perish but will move from sun to sun as each one dies out in succession.”² Certainly that was the message in Olaf Stapledon’s Last and First Men,³ which fascinated and horrified Lewis.

What interested Lewis was the mystery of good and evil, and the particular relief into which the good and evil at work in a given man is thrown by finding itself confronted with the newness and strangeness at the far end of the journey. Actually, it is often the journey itself – especially in Perelandra – that begins to open up the theme. Is our traveller a man capable of being enraptured by that
which is rapturous? Does he know when he has come into the precincts of the holy? Does he hesitate with an appropriate humility and reverence before the wholly other that hails him on this turf? If so, he is a man who exhibits *aidos* – that Greek virtue the essence of which is one’s capacity to render the apt response in the presence of things – awe in the presence of awesome, horror in the presence of horrible, worship in the presence of the deity.

Lewis loved the theme of human encounter with other intelligent species, most of whom in his books – unlike in H.G. Wells – turn out to be glorious creatures of fathomless dignity, no matter what their shape. A related theme is the notion that there are whole stories in the universe that are not as yet part of human story, but that God is writing for some purpose.

The Space Trilogy is a fine demonstration of the genius of C.S. Lewis. *Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra,* and *That Hideous Strength* are tightly bound to each other, yet in a unique fashion. Although Lewis mentions that each book may be read alone, the true beauty of his story can only be seen by reading them all consecutively. A few things stand out to us as we read the trilogy. First, his views on myth are fascinating. He contends that ancient myths are not mere fables but are in fact usually rooted in history. Furthermore, things may have
happened very differently thousands of years ago than they do now. One thinks of the plethora of flood myths found in ancient civilizations around the world. Second, Lewis’s ability to create evil characters is almost diabolical itself. These characters are evil for the sake of being evil. Especially frightening is Weston in *Perelandra*, who uses intellectual arguments, school-boy taunts, and everything in between for his vile tools. In him is no appreciation for anything for its own value, but only for how it might advance his evil ends.

Finally, *That Hideous Strength* is Lewis’s attempt to put the ideas of *The Abolition of Man* into novel format. This leads the reader to realize that this story is not mere fiction; it embodies what could happen to a society that embraces total moral relativism. In that vein, one could construe this book as a prophecy—what the future might hold for us.

According to some critics, *Out of the Silent Planet* should not be considered a science fiction novel; it follows more in the footsteps of *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost* than it does with H. G. Wells and Jules Verne. The novel is anti-science fiction because the story wants to convince its readers that outer space is the supernatural heavens of religious myths and is full of spiritual beings, even beings who live in the void between planets. Essentially Lewis does this for
religious reasons, and not scientific, and the story reads like medieval philosophy. What C. S. Lewis attempts is to claim outer space for Christianity, which is pretty interesting since most Christians focus heavily on Earth and ignore cosmology.

Lewis wrote about *Out of the Silent Planet* in a letter, “I like the whole interplanetary idea as a *mythology* and simply wished to conquer for my own (Christian) pt. of view what has always hitherto been used by the opposite side.” In another letter Lewis wrote that interplanetary fiction can be created “for *spiritual* adventures. Only they can satisfy the craving which sends our imaginations off the earth.” *Out of the Silent Planet* depicts the cosmic significance of the individual's choices, the evils of social engineering, the absurdity of racism, and the limitations of man's appropriate power without mentioning any of these words.

According to Charles Moorman, C. S. Lewis has always been viewed as an “apostle to the sceptics,” meaning that his work was meant to be read and interpreted by skeptical laymen. Moorman contends that Lewis wants to draw mankind away from secularism and into the religious world. In order to do this, Lewis himself writes a science fiction novel: *Out of the Silent Planet*. His challenge was to translate the basic Christian tenets into “pseudo-scientific and mythical
terms," without losing the message he is working with. *Out of the Silent Planet* is the first example of such ideas at work. In fact, many of the characters in the book can be seen as direct parallels to Biblical figures.

The Eldila, an invisible force on Malacandra, represent Angels. The Oyarsa represent more powerful angels, or archangels. The Oyarsa of Thulcandra obviously represents Satan, or Lucifer, as he has fallen from grace and is confined to Earth. Maledil, the ruler of the universe, is also an obvious parallel, God. Lewis also takes the image of outer space and connects it with the concept of Heaven when he describes the Oyarsa as being omnipresent, with the ability to preside over any planet they choose. Images of harmony and dissonance are also central to the novel. As Ransom learns more about Malacandra, he begins to see how the three races of Malacandra (*seroni, hrossa, and pfiffiggi*) live in harmony and understand each others' strengths and weaknesses. While the Malacandrans live in harmony without any one race trying to subordinate another, Ransom sees the exact opposite situation on earth, where everyone is self-serving and the race as a whole sees only itself as worth perpetuating. On Malacandra, the term *hnau* is used to describe rational beings, which include the three aforementioned races. Using a collective term to refer to the
Malacandrans and all other rational creatures reinforces the unity shared by the Malacandrans, something which the humans lack.

*Out of the Silent Planet* can also be viewed as a criticism of racist expansionism.10 Weston, who wanted to perpetuate the human race by moving from planet to planet, saw the humans as superior to all other beings, and thus as possessing the right to conquer planets and leave them as they die. Also, seeing as none of the races in the book look like humans, Weston and Devine make rash assumptions, such as the fact that the sorns are ignorant "primitives" or "brutes"11 when in actuality, they are the most learned race on Malacandra.

Lewis stated that his primary sources of inspiration for *Perelandra* were Stapeldon’s *Last and First Men* and an essay in J.B.S Haldane’s *Possible Worlds*;12 Lewis felt that both men took the prospect of human space travel seriously and did so with an atheistic, immoral worldview that Lewis desperately wanted to counteract. In *Perelandra*, he addresses traditional Christian concepts as well as modern social morality; the end result is a book that reads somewhat like a traditional fantasy novel combined with both classical and biblical mythologies. Lewis was keenly interested in Medieval beliefs, particularly in attempts to reconcile pre-Christian beliefs with those of traditional Christianity. He was also fascinated in the distinction
between natural and supernatural phenomena, which he contended did not exist. The religious theme behind *Perelandra* is Christian.

*Perelandra* is one of the most religiously relevant fantasy novels ever written. It contains within its pages the Creation legend of Adam and Eve, set in our time but in a different world. *Perelandra* is a story of an unspoiled world, the Garden of Eden denied to the residents of earth but still open to the two inhabitants of Perelandra. C.S. Lewis uses this unspoiled planet to retell the biblical creation myth of Adam and Eve. Weston plays the role of the serpent sent to tempt the woman who is to become the mother of the world into rejecting God's will. Ransom is sent by the Oyarsa to challenge the evil one and to save Venus from the fate of Earth.

In *Perelandra* the creation story occurs on three different planets, Mars, Earth, and Venus—with three different endings. Mars never suffers temptation and its peoples, or hnaus, never fall away from God (Maelidil). Earth humans fall, but the believers are ransomed by the Son of God. Venus is a different story altogether. The Venus story involves obeying God by avoiding stays on "fixed land" overnight, rather than not eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil (gaining reason). Any fixed land is not to be inhabited overnight, by decree of Maelidil (God).
The devil is the Bent Eldil and is very crooked indeed. The Perelandrian Adam and Eve are Tor and Tinidril, also called King and Queen or Father and Mother of the planet. The Venus-Eve is green-skinned and lovely, needing to wear no clothes, because the hnaus have not sinned and separated from God through wilful disobedience as on earth (Thulcandra). They find everything good and commune daily with sentient animals. The description of learning by Tinidril is quite interesting: when you learn, you are being made older. Maelidil speaks to her constantly, making her older. When Ransom arrives on Perelandra, dialogues with him make her older.

When the greedy physicist Weston arrives, the three-way conversations among Tinidril, Weston, and Ransom make her older still. She finally lies down exhausted and falls asleep while Ransom and Weston fight. Ransom defends Tinidril in the garden by fighting the devil-possessed Weston (Un-Man) for her sake when Tor is absent. On earth, Adam failed to save Eve from gaining reason at the hands of the devil and then took reason upon himself as well by eating its fruit.

Ransom's willingness to stand against the Un-Man by decree of a spiritual Voice around him allows him to defend Tinidril, defeat the devil in the garden, save Paradise, and save God from having to come
down in the form of a man to save humanity. The discussions among the major characters suggest various criticisms of faulty logic, false religions, and pseudo-sciences and are most interesting. Weston is the serpent of reason in *Perelandra* but fails to seduce Tinidril.

Possessed by evil, he is a startling image. Ransom follows a trail of mutilated frogs to find Weston standing alone with vacant eyes, ripping frogs open down the back with his long fingernails and tossing them aside to writhe in agony. In the end, Weston the Un-Man is all mocking repugnance, but Ransom perseveres and slays Weston, after crushing his head with a stone and suffering a bruised heel in the battle (directly from the Bible).

After the battle, the Voice tells Ransom that his surname is no coincidence. He was chosen to defeat the Un-Man. Elwin Ransom ransomed the humanity of Perelandra, preventing their separation from God. One might say that *Perelandra* is a “what if” story: What if Adam and Eve had NOT eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? How might they have chosen differently? What did God intend the world to be like, before the Fall? Considering Genesis, Perelandra is quite an alternative that asks, “What if?” If we accept Genesis, we might ask, “What if this could have occurred on earth? How would our lives be better? What can we do to offset earth’s
creation story and its consequences?" If we do not accept Genesis, then we might ask how the concept of good vs. Evil and avoiding temptation into bad choices or unhealthy activities might change our personal stories.

The identification of angels with planets, and thus with the pagan gods for which they were named, is proof that Lewis was no puritan. He was the product of a typical English education, dominated by the languages and literature of ancient Greece and Rome. He would have found it hard to look upon Olympian gods as simple abominations. Trying to reconcile his Christian faith with his intellectual training he once wrote, "Monotheism should not be regarded as the rival of polytheism, but rather as its maturity." The Oyarsa in these novels do not ever pretend to a divine status, they explicitly acknowledge their subordination to Maledil, the Christian God.

On Mars Ransom imagines that "the distinction between history and mythology might be itself meaningless outside the Earth" (Out of the Silent Planet 186). Astrology, the idea that the movements of celestial bodies had a direct influence on human destiny, was a major part of European and indeed worldwide intellectual life before the Enlightenment relegated it to the realm of the absurd. Yet once in
space Lewis’s hero “found it night by night more difficult to disbelieve in the old astrology: almost he felt, wholly he imagined ‘sweet influence’ pouring in or even stabbing his surrendered body” (34).

Lewis spent most of his life as a professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature at Oxford and Cambridge. During World War II he became famous for his radio broadcasts promoting his robust, good-humoured, and broadly orthodox vision of Mere Christianity. His studies and his religion were always intimately connected. The European literature of those times was thoroughly Christian and his ability to empathize with the men and women who wrote it gave his scholarship and his fiction a rare and occasionally beautiful, distance from the “modernity” of the thirties, forties, and fifties.

Lewis recognized that Behaviourism was the real enemy of religion in the twentieth century. The great quarrel between science and religion that began around the time of Galileo acquired a new impetus in the twentieth century with science speculating even more boldly about origin of the universe and the descent of man. This generated a further conflict between theology and science. The application of behaviourist theory to human conduct was found despicable by Lewis, because it involved scientists lacking in values themselves but manipulating the values of others. This idea is given creative
embodiment in *That Hideous Strength*, where Lewis creates a scientific foundation run by power-hungry bureaucrats. This foundation threatens to usurp all power in England, and attempts a brutal modification of individual human beings. The behaviourists in Lewis's novels are literally possessed by devilish agents:

‘Quite simple and obvious things, at first – sterilisation of the 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…’ (44)

The ethical issue before Lewis in these novels seems to be to find whether or not human beings are capable of finding values to replace those of the religion. His view is that they have not, and will not. They are incapable of reasoning their way to any ultimate, be it Truth, Beauty, or Goodness. That is why, according to Lewis, man must turn back to God and to the teaching of Christ. Ranged on the
other side are those who observed that humanity must create its own values through its reasoning. For scientists, there is no science of values but science fiction has provided a matrix in which values implicit in science are explored. Lewis entered the ethical debate on this issue both with philosophical books like *The Abolition of Man, The Problem of Pain*, and *Miracles*, and with his Space Trilogy.

While Lewis uses the literary methodology of the writers of science fiction to justify the ways of God to skeptical man, in *That Hideous Strength* he shifts his emphasis to some extent away from the silent planet myth developed in the first two novels. The primary structure of the myth is still retained. Ransom is still the hero and there are allusions to Weston, the physicist, and the Moon as Earth’s battle perimeter. Charles Moorman says that Lewis in *That Hideous Strength* abstracts from the Arthurian myth. Lewis takes the figure of the wounded Fisher-King from the Grail legend and in his personage has portrayed a new Ransom. The identification of Ransom-Fisher-King with the Pendragon can also be said to extend the implications of Lewis’s theme. By making the triple identification, Ransom - Fisher-King - Pendragon. Lewis completes the pattern of joining the Grail (Mr. Fisher-King) with the ideal kingdom (the Pendragon) with Deep Heaven (Ransom, the Voyager). The Arthurian
myth is used both as a complement to and as an incorporated element of the silent planet myth. The reason for this incorporation is that in *That Hideous Strength* which is a novel about people on Earth, the *seroni*, the *hrossa* and *oyersu*, all of which function perfectly on Mars and Venus, could not be forced into the new context. Lewis here could manage an extension of his myth in terms more suited to earthly situations:

Through the Arthurian myth Lewis conveys the impression that we are dealing not merely with the moral struggles of Jane and Mark Studdock, but with issues of momentous importance, issues that once split the kingdom and destroyed the civilization whose unification could have brought about the Second Coming.15

Lewis's Space Trilogy thus conveys a deeply felt religious idea in terms of a fictional frame which highlights the effective use of religious and moral fantasy and techniques of science fiction, fairy tale, and Arthurian legend.

The subject of hell has intrigued the Christian church throughout its nearly 2,000-year history. This doctrine has long been a source of scholarly debate, resulting in widely varying conclusions, depending on the guiding church tradition or interpretative method used. The
evangelical church’s consensus on hell is that it exists, and that it represents alienation from God. Details as to the exact nature and duration of hell, however, are open to speculation, limited only to one’s imagination and religious preconceptions. C.S. Lewis’s stylized treatment of heaven and hell in *The Great Divorce* is a masterful work of fiction. It is a slim allegory filled with jaw-dropping truths and vivid imagery – all set in a deceptively simple narrative framework. Some of the central strains of Lewis’ thought – desire, joy, the weight of human choice – appear with devastating effect. One of Lewis’s goals was to demonstrate that heaven and hell were diametrically opposed to each other; the story-arc of our lives leads inevitably to one or the other. Thus, the two sides of eternity figure prominently in Lewis’ myth. Lewis writes in the preface:

I beg the readers to remember that this is a fantasy...the transmortal conditions are solely an imaginative supposal: they are not even a guess or a speculation at what may actually await us. The last thing I wish is to arouse factual curiosity about the details of the afterworld. (7-8)

As this book demonstrates, however, fantasy can be an effective tool for proclaiming the gospel. Lewis’ theological perception (*Mere*
Christianity) and vivid imagination (The Chronicles of Narnia) come together here in an astonishing vision of heaven and hell.

The Great Divorce upholds the scriptural teaching that those who end up in hell put themselves there by ultimately refusing to receive the redemptive grace God makes available to them in Christ. This is in contrast to teachings that present God as a vindictive monster rather than as the loving Creator-Redeemer revealed in the Bible.

In Lewis’ “imaginative supposal,” even in hell, lost souls remain free to accept God’s grace, and yet do not. The story chronicles the responses of a busload of hell’s inhabitants to an imaginary tour of heaven. It offers a window into the fallen human psyche – with its pettiness, vanity and capacity for self-deception – where some humans keep finding creative ways to say “no” to God’s “yes” for them in Christ, through pride and selfishness.

The Great Divorce is entertaining and full of wisdom. Most of all, it makes one think. Lewis weaves imagery with dialogue as he illuminates Christian concepts of heaven and hell with clarity and beauty. The novel has stimulated an interest for many in seeking greater theological understanding regarding creation, reconciliation, and redemption. It has inspired deeper reflection beyond the narrow confines of literalism and the equally treacherous ditch of pure symbolism.
Lewis’ genius emerges here. Others have tried to deal with heaven full-on and approach hell’s horror in a more categorical manner. While such approaches will always falter, Lewis’s more modest aims result in pictures that resonate in the heart and reveal.

*Till We Have Faces* explores the themes of love, companionship, and fidelity that appear in some of Lewis’s other writings for children and adults, such as in *The Four Loves*, and in his series of novels for children, *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

*Till We Have Faces* begins as a historical novel set in the mythical kingdom of Glome. The king’s daughter, Orual, is a princess but she is also extremely ugly. Her father the king hates her for that reason. Ironically, it is clear that she is ugly only because she looks like her father who is a great and admired warrior. Lewis, in this novel, shows a remarkable ability to get into a woman’s mind and soul. He shows a strong, intelligent woman fighting to find a place for herself in a society that values her sex only if they are pretty. Considering that the story was published in 1956, before the women’s liberation movement, this is an even more remarkable achievement.

The novel – many-layered and the most complex and mature of all Lewis’s fiction works – portrays its characters as complicated human beings. This is a tale of the deepest emotional needs, of jealousy and
sacrifice. The characters have many inner struggles in their process of finding who they are. The theme of the book, thus, is finding one’s true self and knowing oneself as one really is. Lewis defended his choice of title by describing the novel’s importance to the human condition in a letter to Dorothea Conybeare, explaining that the idea behind the title was that a human being must become real before it can expect to receive any message from divine beings; “that is, it must be speaking with its own voice (not one of its borrowed voices), expressing its actual desires (not what it imagines that it desires), being for good or ill itself, not any mask.”

*Till We Have Faces* examines love—deep, consuming love that can destroy a relationship if left to itself. It examines the self-perceived truth that can become cloaked in jealousy and protectiveness. It examines spirituality, not the traditional relationship with God, but rather the internal holiness and sanctity that every person must find to discover their own being. It is a powerful, moving story that causes the reader to evaluate and think through their personal love, truth and spirituality, and the driving force behind each one.

*Till We Have Faces* is definitely a book that focuses on character development. Lewis has done an outstanding job at having contrast in his characters, while still keeping his characters at a human
level. It is hard for a person to have a true perspective regarding their own life. In Orual’s case, she does not realize what kind of person she truly has been until she is nearly dead and spilling out her complaints to the gods. In that moment of clarity, she realizes she has not been noble, brave, or selfless. She was flawed and wrong, and so many lives were altered because of it.

As mentioned earlier, *Till We Have Faces* is a novel that works on many levels. There is the story of Orual’s struggles as she grows up. There is a deeper level of an unloved and unwanted child searching for affection and finding it in her feelings for an elderly slave (who becomes a teacher and a father to her) and then for her incredibly beautiful baby sister, Psyche, who becomes the centre of her life and therefore the centre of this story.

The novel is very different from the myth although it follows the basic storyline. The myth allows Lewis to comment on how destructive we can be to those we love and how we can do the wrong thing with the best of intentions. And it gives Lewis a place to write about his deepest concern, which is man’s spiritual journey. Orual begins by hating all the gods. Halfway through the book she meets the gods and hates them even more as she seems to lose what she loves most in the world. However, we are only halfway through the novel.
The tone changes and darkens as Orual learns to live with terrible loss, live with it and triumphantly reach a higher level in the world than she could ever have imagined as a child.

Most authors would have stopped there with Orual becoming a kind of warrior princess. Lewis keeps going, taking us with Orual on a vast spiritual journey into the very depths of her soul that at last reveals the meaning of the title “Till We Have Faces.” The tone changes to a mystical dream in the final sections of the book as Orual at last confronts the gods, tells them what she thinks of them, and then realizes that she is confronting the depths of her own soul.

*Till We Have Faces* is a story quite unlike many others of its kind, and shows its “heroes” with less god-like qualities and more human traits. Orual’s father continually threatens his servants and overall, Orual herself. Yet he is not the “villain.” Often times the person with the loathsome mannerism is the one whom everyone is supposed to hate. But aspects of this alleged “villain” are contained in every character in the novel. Perhaps the main point C.S. Lewis was trying to get across was that in spite of all of humanity’s good traits, no person is perfect. The truth is evident—humans are predominantly sinful beings, with more wrongs than rights. *Till We Have Faces* gives clear examples of this fact.
The Dark Tower is an eerie tale that follows a group of academics as they explore an alternative reality through the use of a “chronoscope” (like a telescope but with time instead of space). As expected, what they find at the other end of the chronoscope is not pleasant. It portrays a scary juxtaposition of the future and the past in an oppressive and evil form. One of the group suddenly finds himself transported into the alternate time. It is just as he is starting to get a grip of where he is that the manuscript ends.

The construction of the tower is significantly important. Lewis’s time-lines are quite coherent in terms of the science fiction of his generation; he was seriously interested in science fiction long before it was fashionable. In terms of the law that “Any two time-lines approximate to the exact degree to which their material contents are alike” (90) the tower is obviously a repeat, on a grand scale, of the ‘Othertimers’ successful but small experiment with a railway shed constructed in the same space as ours. However, although Lewis was a reader of all sorts of science fiction, he himself was not interested in writing the technical side: he wrote in 1955 that “The most superficial appearance of plausibility – the merest sop to our critical intellect – will do.... I took a hero to Mars once in a space-ship, but when I knew better I had angels convey him to Venus.”17
How Lewis would have explored the threat from the Othertime world remains unknown. The text mentions an "idol" whose face is, in some way, recognizable to the Cambridge observers, and which is, the narrator says, "still there" at the end of the events to be narrated. How Lewis intended to follow up this foreshadowing is unclear; he may have intended to suggest links to contemporary world events, or may have had no precise idea in mind. The story could be interpreted as the germ of *That Hideous Strength*: the Stingingmen and Jerkies could parallel the Conditioners and the Conditioned as described in *The Abolition of Man*. The idol with many bodies and one head may express Lewis' horror, expressed in many of his works, at the absorption and suppression of the individual into a collective controlled by a single will: in *Perelandra*, referring to a similar loss of individuality, he speculates that "what the Pantheists falsely hoped for in Heaven, the wicked really receive in Hell" (217).

One thing Lewis wanted to accomplish as a Christian writer was not so much any sort of overt Christianity -- much of which we have today in "Christian fiction" -- but books where the Christian worldview was "latent," as he explained in his essay "Christian Apologetics" in *God in the Dock*: "What we want is not more little books about
Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects—with their Christianity latent.” 18

To conclude with Dabney Hart’s remarks about Lewis,

“...Readers find that Lewis is strikingly different from other Christian authors they’ve read in that he’s never anything that could be called pious. He’s serious, and at the same time he’s lighthearted because he has great joy in everything he has to say about the faith.” 19
References


