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Unearthing the Medieval Infrastructure of the Ransom Series (3) : That Hideous Strength

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Unearthing the Medieval Infrastructure of the Ransom Series (3) — *That Hideous Strength*

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Quhen the Sonne is at the hycht,
Att none quhen it doith schyne most brycht,
The schaddow of that hydduous strength ¹
Sax myle and more it is of lenth,
Thus maye ye Juge, in to your thocht,
Gyfe Babilone be heych, or nocht.

... Sir David Lindsay, “Ane Dialog Betuix
Experience and ane Courteour” (1555),

Lines 1750-1755

The image in this poem is that of the Tower of Babel, which casts a shadow over the earth (Gen. xi. 4-9). In the poem, that tower represents the arrogance and pride of the papacy and kings of the 16th century. ²

The story of the Tower of Babel, though no one’s favorite, is one of the most memorable stories of the Old Testament. Following directly after the account of the Flood, it describes how the people of Earth, who all spoke the same language, built a tower in hopes of reaching Heaven, but the Proprietor of that region put it to a halt by confounding their language. ³

As an etiology, the Tower of Babel story handily (though somewhat incredulously) explains one of the great mysteries of the ages: Why do people speak different languages? As allegory, it illustrates Saint Augustine of Hippo’s (354-430 A.D.) contrast between the City of Man and the City of God. A recurring theme in Western civilization, this contrast weighed heavily on the thoughts of one of Britain’s most notable public intellectuals of the 20th century, C.S. Lewis (1898-1963).

During his career, Lewis delivered numerous speeches and authored essays which addressed the various moral and philosophical issues of the early 20th century. In 1939 he began a series of “science fiction” novels in which his hero journeys first to Mars, where he encounters Good, then to Venus, where he combats Evil. In the final volume, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), Lewis’s hero turns back the forces of Evil on Earth.

In this third episode in the Ransom series, a megalomaniac secret society attempts to achieve

immortality by means of science. They hope to build a symbolic tower that reaches into heaven and connects with the gods. In the end they suffer a fate similar to that of the inhabitants of Babel: their speech is confounded, and their evil experiments are brought to a crushing end.

In his Preface, Lewis acknowledges the creative talents of Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950), author of the eugenicist novel *First and Last Men* (1930), though Lewis disagrees with his philosophy. He also refers to his own *The Abolition of Man* and J.R.R. Tolkien's (1892-1973) *Numinor*, a retelling of the Atlantis story (unpublished in 1945), as sources of inspiration.

Though Lewis claims that he based *That Hideous Strength* on Tolkien's *Numinor*, the details of this novel are obviously taken directly from the medieval concepts of Logres developed by Charles Williams (1885-1945). Honorable mention of Tolkien was likely an attempt to assuage his old friend, who was roiled by the growing relationship between Lewis and Williams.

Although a devout Anglican, Williams embraced the occult, belonging at various times to the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Rosicrucian Society. Williams' central doctrines of co-inherence, exchange, and substitution permeate both his prose fiction and his main poetic work, *Taliessin Through Logres*.

Logres and the Matter of Britain

Logres is an Old French name stemming from the Latin *Loegria*, a term given by Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1100-c. 1155) to the Welsh *Lloegyr*, a territory roughly congruent with the country that is now England. For Charles Williams, Logres, along with France, Rome, Caucasia, and Jerusalem, is a province of the Empire of Byzantium. (These symbolize poetry, the intellect, the Church, the flesh, and the Vision, respectively.) Although Logres is a real place, it also symbolizes that which is sacred, a combination of Christian and Celtic ideals.

To the southwest of Logres lies Broceliande, a forest that melds into the sea that wraps around the world. Its mistress Nimue (the Lady of the Lake) gave birth to the twins Merlin (symbolizing Time) and his sister Brisen (symbolizing Place). Entering this forest changes a person either for the better or for the worse. Lewis writes, "It leads down to the world of D.H. Lawrence as well as up to the world of Blake" (*Arthurian Torso*, 343).

In "a certain part of Broceliande," according to Williams, lies Carbonek, the castle where the Sacred Spear and the Grail (a serving tray) are kept. It is the home of King Pelles, the Fisher King, one of a line of guardians of the Grail. He is wounded by the Dolorous Blow, accidentally delivered by Sir Balin with the Sacred Spear. The wound issues a constant flow of blood, symbolizing both the Fall, a spiritual and physical injury suffered by all mankind, and the Passion, mankind's redemption by exchange. Perceval visits this castle, but he fails to ask the questions that would have healed the Fisher King and saved his lands from destruction: "Whom does the Grail serve?" and, "Why does the

Spear continue to bleed?" Beyond Carbonek lies Sarras (symbolizing Heaven), the furthest point west beyond the sea-forest Broceliande.

Logres ultimately proves to be unstable and degenerates into Britain. Though Logres fails, a remnant is saved: Galahad, Perceval and Bors. They sail to Sarras with the body of Perceval's sister Blanchefleur, who has given her life blood in order that another woman may live.

The Figure of Merlin and the Pendragon

Merlinus Ambrosius is thought to be an invention of Geoffrey of Monmouth. He was possibly a real person, the son of a nun and a demon, though other sources (Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*, ca. 9th century) claim that his father may have been a Roman consul (subsequently "demonized" by a newly liberated populace). The paradoxical link with both God and the Devil gave Merlin great wisdom and power derived from the two opposing forces; he has legendary status in the Arthurian sagas as the last Druid.

After King Constantine II died, Vortigern had his son and heir Constans killed; then he seized the throne. However, Vortigern's alliance with the Saxon invader Hengist failed, and he fled into Wales. Constantine's two remaining sons, Aurelius and Uther, returned from exile. Aurelius burned Vortigern's fortress and became king but was later poisoned, leaving Uther to become king.

As a boy, Merlin came into the court of King Vortigern, who tried to build a fortress, but every day its walls fell down. Merlin told him that this was because of a pool of water that lay underneath, where slept a red dragon (symbolizing the Britons) and a white dragon (symbolizing the Saxons). Merlin prophesied that the Boar of Cornwall (Uther's son Arthur) would drive the Saxons out. Prior to the birth of Arthur, Merlin and King Uther saw a comet whose tail was in the shape of a dragon. Merlin gave Uther the surname Pendragon, and the dragon became the symbol of Uther's kingship.

Medieval Cosmology

The appearance of a comet in the sky was an omen in many ancient cultures (the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes eleven observations of comets during the Anglo-Saxon period, from 679 A.D. until 1114 A.D.). Comets were unpredictable elements in what was otherwise a very stable, organized universe. In medieval cosmology, the Heavens comprised a system of seven concentric spheres, each sphere contained by the bigger ones and containing the smaller ones. At the center was Earth. The spheres were wholly transparent, but one planet was fixed in each of them, so their revolving movement became visible. From large to small and thus increasingly distant from Earth, these spheres and their planets were called the Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn.⁴

Whereas Charles Williams refined and perfected the Arthurian sagas that developed throughout the Middle Ages, C.S. Lewis refined and developed the system of medieval cosmology that he so admired. He gave a detailed analysis of this Model in *The Discarded Image*. He elaborated on the idea of ruling planetary spirits in *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. In *That Hideous Strength*, the planetary spirits descend to Earth to deal a crushing blow to the society of demons, princes of the powers of the air.

The Dream of Scipio

Among the sources of the medieval Model, Lewis cites the *Somnium Scipionis* (*The Dream of Scipio*), part of Cicero's *Republic*, written around 50 B.C. In this dream, Africanus Major leads his grandson Africanus Minor up to the heights to look down on Carthage. These heights are, according to Lewis, the *stellatum*, the prototype of the medieval Model of concentric spheres. Cicero also makes the Moon the boundary between eternal and perishable things. Here live the demons. Significantly, he establishes a heaven that is reserved for statesmen, exactly the kind of prejudice that Lewis abhors.

Several hundred years later Macrobius (fl. ca. 430 A.D.) wrote a commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis*. Macrobius notes that Scipio's dream contains three useful elements: some elite or venerable person appears and gives advice about the future; it gives literal truths about celestial regions; it shows us truths concealed in an allegorical form.

Yet Macrobius' commentary carries a larger importance than its interpretation of dreams: it spells out a neo-Platonist theology in which God, Mind, and Soul make up the Trinity. "Where Christianity sees Creation," writes Lewis, "neo-Platonism sees, if not exactly a Fall, then a series of declensions, diminutions, almost of inconstancies." Macrobius expands Cicero's ethics from secular to religious, from social to individual, from the outer life to the inner life (*The Discarded Image*, 60-69).

Although neo-Platonist theology seems to be the antithesis of Evolutionism, Lewis recognizes the dangers of a well thought-out philosophy that achieves the status of a religion. He believes that the Pagan resistance to the Church started in about 205 A.D., with the birth of Plotinus, and lasted until about 533, with the first reference to pseudo-Dionysius. Lewis identifies this with the neo-Platonic school, which made a deliberate response to Christianity. "The last, and neo-Platonic, wave of Paganism which had gathered up into itself much from the preceding waves, Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic, and what not, came far inland and made brackish lakes which have, perhaps, never been drained" (*The Discarded Image*, 48).

Concerns with the Present

Lewis notes that one of the main characteristics of the Middle Ages was a love of learning from books (*The Discarded Image*, 5). During the late Renaissance, a wave of new learning began to challenge the authority of the ancients. Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Galileo Galilei advocated careful scrutiny of nature instead of analysis of ancient texts. They claimed that by studying the physical world, we could become “masters and possessors of nature.” This was the beginning of Scientism.

A century later, many intellectuals of the so-called Enlightenment claimed that science could not only enhance the quality of human life, it could even promote moral improvement. This idea was expanded by some French philosophers who claimed that science could substitute for religion.

During the 19th century, a system called Positivism grew out of David Hume’s empiricism and skepticism. Its founder, August Comte, claimed that the only valid data is acquired through the senses. The task of science was to demonstrate how all phenomena are subject to invariable natural laws, and to reduce these laws to the smallest possible number. Comte also believed that each branch of knowledge passes through three stages: the theological or fictitious stage, the metaphysical or abstract stage, and the scientific or positive stage. Hence Positivism. He believed that through the advancement of human understanding religion would fade away, philosophy and the humanities would be transformed into a naturalistic religion, and all human knowledge would eventually become a product of science.

In the early 20th century, a group known as the Vienna Circle, whose attitude toward philosophy was based on that of Ludwig Wittgenstein, enhanced the fundamental tenets of Positivism with symbolic logic and semantic theory. They called this approach Logical Positivism. In this system, there are only two kinds of meaningful statements: analytic statements, which are true and don’t require validity testing, and empirical statements, which can be verified by experimentation. A third type of synthetic statements, which assert or deny something about the real world, cannot be established as valid by the definition of words or symbols they contain; they merely reflect the speakers’ feelings.⁵

Following on from this logic, Ethical Subjectivism holds that there are no objective moral properties, and that ethical statements must be arbitrary because they do not express immutable truths; they only imply someone’s attitude, opinion, personal preference or feeling. Thus, for a statement to be considered morally right simply means that the speaker or listener believes it, or *values* it.

In a 1943 essay entitled “The Poison of Subjectivism,” Lewis argued that the notion that people can create their own values presents a serious problem for humanity. He noted that some contemporary politicians found it acceptable to condition society through eugenics, psychological

manipulation, state education, and mass propaganda, justified by their self-made values. His solution to this problem would be an objective standard of good by which men's actions could be measured reliably.

The Abolition of Man

By that time (1943), Ethical Subjectivism had begun to make inroads into education. Spearheading this movement was a textbook called *The Control of Language: A Critical Approach to Reading and Writing*, by Alec King and Martin Ketley (1939). In response to its proposed use in the state schools, Lewis expanded "The Poison of Subjectivism" into a series of three lectures, published as *The Abolition of Man* (1944). This little book contains not only a biting critique of *The Control of Language*, but also a condemnation of the larger issues that affected the scientific and philosophical establishment of his time.

Lewis claims that King and Ketley attempt to subvert students' attitudes by teaching that all statements of value, such as calling a waterfall "sublime," are merely statements about the speaker's feelings, an example of Logical Positivism at work. Lewis notes that this is a philosophical position rather than a grammatical one, however, it contradicts the traditional philosophy of education.

Ancient philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle and Augustine, believed that the purpose of education was to train children in "ordinate affections." Lewis claims that the attempt to "debunk" all sentiments is like trying to "amputate the heart." Such amputation produces "men without chests."

As suggested in "The Poison of Subjectivism," Lewis believes that all cultures have a common objective set of values. He calls these the Tao. He asserts that modern attempts to do away with traditional morality always proceed by arbitrarily discrediting one part of the Tao and using it as grounds to "debunk" the others. He finds this attitude unacceptable. "The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour," he writes, "or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in" (*The Abolition of Man*, 44).

According to Lewis, "debunking" statements of value will ultimately result in the majority being controlled by a small group who rule by a "perfect" understanding of psychology, and who in turn are ruled only by their own whims. The controllers will no longer be recognized as human, their patients will be robot-like servants, and the abolition of Man will have been completed.

How can a small group of "controllers" bring about the abolition of Man? Lewis suggests two possible ways: science and magic.⁶ Both science and magic represent attempts to subdue nature to man's will. Whereas science has succeeded, magic has failed. Yet both magic and science differ from earlier wisdom: "For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied

science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men; the solution is a technique” (*The Abolition of Man*, 77). Typical of his ongoing commentary on “post-modern” attitudes, Lewis uses his philosophical argument to comment on the spreading eugenics movement of his day.

Dramatizing *The Abolition of Man*

The Abolition of Man is not easy reading. Lewis uses “a horse tranquilizer of logic,” as one critic puts it, to get his point across. A span of two or three pages often separates his pronouns from their referents. In order to clarify the argument, this author once devised a stage play, the *dramatis personae* of which included Lewis himself as the Narrator, the Audience, the Publisher of *The Control of Language* and its Authors, and Schoolboys #1 and #2. The Chorus of Philosophers included Orbilius (114 B.C.-14 B.C., Horace’s tutor and noted disciplinarian), St. Augustine, Plato, Wordsworth (!), the Hindus, the Chinese, and the Hebrews.

Admittedly, Lewis did a much better job of dramatizing his own *Abolition of Man*. In *That Hideous Strength*, Wither and Frost are the “Green Book” Authors, The Head is its Publisher (along with the powers that control him), Mark and Jane are the Schoolboys, and Ransom is Lewis’s alter ego. The fictional Lewis is the Narrator. Lewis expands the Chorus to include Charles Williams and Owen Barfield, among others.

That Hideous Strength: A Modern Dystopia

A scientist, my dear friends, is a man who foresees; it is because science provides the means to predict that it is useful, and the scientists are superior to all other men.

... Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825)

That Hideous Strength begins in a sleepy college town which is about to become the center of operations of a sinister organization called the National Institute for Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.). Bragdon Wood in Edgestow is the spot they have chosen to build their research facility (these are fictional locations). In the center of the wood stands Merlin’s well, where the legendary wizard lies buried but not dead.

Mark Studdock, a sociology professor, is a member of the progressive element in Bracton College (a fictional institution). Jane, his wife of six months, begins to have strange dreams which she does not understand. However, the N.I.C.E. plan to use Jane’s dreams to find Merlin and put his sorcery to use for their own evil purposes. They lure Mark into their inner circle as “bait” in hopes of drawing Jane in, too.

A conservative group at nearby St. Anne's (not all of whom are connected with the college) also recognize the value of Jane's dreams (which reveal the horrendous activities of the N.I.C.E.) and attempt to persuade her to join them. Their director, Dr. Elwin Ransom (the hero of *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*) has assumed the office of the Pendragon, the symbolic custodian of the estate of Logres. The heroes at St. Anne's find Merlin first (or rather, he finds them). He submits to the authority of the Pendragon, who commands him to destroy the N.I.C.E. This he does with the help of the planetary ruling spirits, who descend to Earth and empower him. Mark, having been taken prisoner by the N.I.C.E., is freed in time to join Jane at St. Anne's.

Characters and Plot. Perhaps the most important motif taken from Charles Williams in *That Hideous Strength* is the idea of an ancient ideal (Logres, the fallen kingdom of Arthur) kept alive by a small company of the faithful (the community at St. Anne's). Dr. Cecil Dimble makes this explicit in his brief outline of history: "Something we may call Britain is always haunted by something we may call Logres... After every Arthur, a Mordred; behind every Milton, a Cromwell... the home of Sidney—and of Cecil Rhodes... What they [outsiders] mistake for hypocrisy is really the struggle between Logres and Britain" (Chapter 17).

Ransom. The beauty of the novel as a genre is that it enables the author to split his personality into two or more characters. In *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis casts himself as Ransom, a battle-wise champion of Good versus Evil, blessed with eternal youth, but also suffering a never-healing wound on his heel.

When we meet him (now for the third time) in the heart of this novel, Ransom has taken the surname Fisher-King, though the "bruised heel" (i.e., the Dolorous Blow) was inflicted not by an impetuous knight but by the Devil himself, in the form of the Un-Man, on Perelandra.

It is here, to Perelandra, that Ransom returns at the end of the novel, to be healed in a place called Aphallin. This is Avalon, the mystic isle where Arthur is taken to be healed. The word is taken from the Welsh *Afallon*, the abode of dead heroes in the Celtic version of Elysium.

Mark. On the other hand, Lewis illustrates his own road to salvation in the character of Mark. Captured by the N.I.C.E., Mark is taken to the "objective room," where all symmetries, all patterns that we have been conditioned to approve are set askew⁷ (Chapter 14). To sit in the room is the first step towards "objectivity," the process whereby all human reactions in a man are deadened so that he might become fit for the society of the Macrobes.⁸

Lewis bases Mark's "advancement" toward the inner ring of the Institute on Dante's *Inferno*. As Mark ascends through various layers of bureaucracy, he is actually descending into hell, moving downwards through the lower rings. Finally, in an epiphany, he learns the truth, which leads to his conversion. This echoes Lewis's own conversion as recounted in *Surprised By Joy*.

Jane. Unlike Mark, who earnestly desires the elevated status and remuneration that his association

with the N.I.C.E. would presumably bring, Jane has no desire to join the company at St. Anne's. She doesn't want "to be drawn into anything." The pressing issue for Jane is how to spice up her marriage, which is now in the doldrums. When we first meet Jane (page 1, line 1), she is mulling over the words of the Anglican wedding ceremony: "Matrimony was ordained, thirdly, for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have for the other [both in prosperity and adversity]."⁹ Soon afterwards we learn that she is doing her doctoral thesis on Donne, who pioneered a type of grim love poetry.¹⁰ When we see her for the last time, she is on her way to fulfilling the first ordainment of marriage. Besides serving as a textbook model of character development, Jane has dreams.

There are seven significant dreams in *That Hideous Strength*. Each dream serves as a signpost in the plot, a Chestertonian device that keeps the audience informed while Jane remains in the dark. Jane's dreams do not fit within the medieval typology that developed from Homer through Cicero to Macrobius (she does, however, qualify herself as *somewhat* elite—her maiden name is Tudor). The medieval typology dealt with prophetic or revelatory dreams; these concern the future. Jane's "dreams" give information about the present: they are not dreams, but visions, examples of the spiritual gift of Knowledge.¹¹

The reader will recall that *Out of the Silent Planet* began with Ransom's dream of an enclosed garden. In *That Hideous Strength*, the narrator (the fictional Lewis) approaches Bragdon Wood through a series of quadrangles: Newton (dry and gravelly), Republic (green, grassy, soft, alive), Lady Alice (humble, domestic, mossy, Protestant), and the Fellows' bowling green (which lies across the bridge). As Ransom's dream of the garden served as a preface to his adventures on Malacandra, these gardens serve as a preface of what is about to happen to Jane. Her marriage is dry and gravelly: over 534 pages, Mark and Jane utter a scant 18 lines of the blandest dialogue to one another (they do, however, *think about* each other quite often). Based on Plato's *Republic*, the next quadrangle represents the society at St. Anne's. Thirdly, Mrs. Dimble (though her first name is Margery, not Alice) is the model of a good wife: humble, domestic, Protestant. Lastly, Merlin accuses Jane of shirking her marital duties, of not "crossing the bridge" unto procreation:

"Sir [says Merlin to Ransom], you have in your house the falsest lady of any at this time alive... she has done in Logres a thing of which no less sorrow shall come than came of the stroke that Balinus struck. For sir, it was the purpose of God that she and her lord [Mark] should between them have begotten a child by whom the enemies should have been put out of Logres for a thousand years...for a hundred generations in two lines the begetting of this child was prepared...[but] the hour of its begetting is passed. Of their own will they are barren" (Chapter 13).

Here the medieval infrastructure of *That Hideous Strength* becomes strikingly clear: Jane is not only a type of Mary; she also represents the figure of Perceval in the Arthurian legends. Coming to another enclosed garden at St. Anne's, she compares it with a garden which Parsifal encounters when he approaches the magician Klingsor's (who has stolen the Holy Lance) castle in Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882). But Jane is on a quest of her own—how to recover the vitality of her marriage, which has become a virtual wasteland. Yet when she meets Ransom (the Director at St. Anne's), she remains reticent, failing to “ask the question” that would heal the Fisher King. Worse, she fails to bear the child that would save the kingdom from destruction.¹²

Lewis has been criticized for attempting a treatise on marriage, when in fact (his critics say) he knew nothing about the subject. (*That Hideous Strength* was written in 1943 while Lewis was still a bachelor.) However, Lewis lived for most of his adult life (from 1921 to 1951) with an older woman (Janie King-Moore) and her daughter. This author does not wish to speculate about the relationship, which was Lewis's personal business. For the public record, it fulfills a vow he made with his fellow bearer of arms (Paddy Moore) during World War I, that if one were to die in combat, the other would take care of the fallen one's family. Can we think of anyone besides St. John who has literally fulfilled the Injunction of the Cross: “*Mulier, ecce filius tuus... ecce mater tua*”? (Jn. xix.26-27). Lewis's descriptions of the domestic arrangements at St. Anne's surely have their roots in the Lewis-Moore household at The Kilns.¹³ As something of a “detached participant,” he was perhaps uniquely qualified to dissertate on the subject.

Merlin. Some critics suggest that the figure of Merlin is modeled on W.B. Yeats, whom Lewis met at Oxford. However, after careful thought, it becomes evident that Lewis modeled this character on the person of his friend Charles Williams. Williams was charismatic, larger than life; Lewis's Merlin was a huge man physically. Williams had been termed “the last magician”; Merlin was “the last Druid.” Williams, a Christian, was deeply involved in the occult, the supernatural, and other apparent contradictions to his faith (both Williams and Yeats belonged to the Order of the Golden Dawn); Merlin was a paradox of a man, having a godly mother and a devilish father. The ability of Lewis's Merlin to influence people is remarkably like that of Williams. It is unlikely that W.B. Yeats would have generated that much admiration on the part of C.S. Lewis.

Dimble. Dr. Cecil Dimble was modeled on Professor Clement C.J. Webb (1865-1954), an Oxford historian and philosopher with an interest in theology. (“C.J.” was cited in *Out of the Silent Planet* as giving the Greek source of the word *Oyarsa*.) Lewis mentions Webb as one of “five great Magdalen men who enlarged [his] very idea of what a learned life should be” (*Surprised By Joy*, Chapter 14). Webb and his wife Eleanor lived at Holywell Ford, a medieval mill house across the water from Magdalen College in Oxford. Dr. Cecil Dimble and his wife were evicted from such a house by the N.I.C.E.

Filostrato. One of the evil scientists who serves the N.I.C.E., Filostrato reveals an important

character trait in Chapter 8, strangely praising an aluminum tree in Persia. This reminds us of Greek writer Flavius Philostratus II (c. 165-250 A.D.), who theorized that art depends on the imagination rather than imitating nature (*Engl Lit 16th C*, III/2, 320). (Such a theory leaves the artist free to exceed the limits of Nature, the artistic equivalent of Subjectivism.) Another of Lewis's plays on words, "Filostrato" was coined by Giovanni Boccaccio for use in *Il Filostrato* (1335-1340). It means "the one who is vanquished by love."¹⁴

Conclusion

Lewis defines the Middle ages generally in terms of a love of books, a love of organizing things into systems, and belief in a cosmology that "breathes life" into the planets (*The Discarded Image*, 11-12). Elsewhere, he writes that the "real interests" of the Middle Ages were Christian mysticism, Aristotelian philosophy, and courtly love ("William Morris," in *Selected Literary Essays*, 223). Moreover, he downplays the significance of the Renaissance, maintaining that many aspects of the Middle Ages persisted well into the 18th century.

Lewis was not alone in this latter sentiment. In the preface to a book entitled *The Medieval Imagination* (1985), Jacques le Goff (1924-2014) argues that the Middle Ages extended much longer than is commonly believed. "Generally," he writes, "one can argue that certain fundamental structures persisted in European society from the fourth to the nineteenth century, bestowing a coherent character on a period of some fifteen centuries" (*The Medieval Imagination*, 21).

Le Goff describes the medieval world in terms of space (forests, fields, gardens, seigneuries, cities) and time (liturgical time, bell time, the time of labors, the academic year, the calendar of holy days, generations, the succession of kings, the Last Judgment, eternity). He adds that no useful study of the Middle Ages can fail to ascribe an important role to the Church and religion: "Life in the Middle Ages was dominated by a struggle between two opposing powers, God and the Devil, though the one was subordinate to the other" (*The Medieval Imagination*, 13-22).

It is no coincidence that Lewis chose the works of Charles Williams as a model for *That Hideous Strength*. Merlin and his sister were symbols of the medieval elements of Time and Space; the Pendragon was the protagonist in the struggle between Good and Evil that continually shifted between Logres and Britain. Lewis's own admiration of the medieval Model of the Universe sounded in perfect counterpoint with Williams' model: in *That Hideous Strength*, the planetary spirits participate in that struggle.

Le Goff summarizes why we should be interested in the Middle Ages: It is "the source of what we are today: our roots, our childhood, our dreams of a primitive harmony that was only recently within our grasp... we cling to nostalgic memories of what our grandparents still knew. The sound of living voices binds us to the Middle Ages" (*The Medieval Imagination*, 23).

It is these “living voices” that C.S. Lewis hoped to sustain in writing *That Hideous Strength*: living voices that speak a unified language whose discourse is steeped in the Tao; voices kept alive by that small but potent Company of Logres, led by the Pendragon; voices who by their faith and perseverance continually thwart the building of new Towers of Babel and their resultant confusion of language; voices that remind us that true science is a quest for knowledge rather than power; living voices inspired by that still, small Voice that whispers righteousness in the hearts of all who will hear.

Notes

- 1 “Strength” refers to a stronghold or fort.
- 2 Sir David Lindsay, c.1490-c.1555, is not the same as the 20th century author of *A Voyage to Arcturus*.
- 3 Josephus attributes this act of defiance to the arrogant tyrant Nimrod. Estimates of the tower’s height range from 211 m to 7,600 m. The number of resultant languages is believed to be 72.
- 4 Uranus was discovered in 1781, Neptune in 1846, Pluto in 1930. Pluto was later demoted to a “dwarf planet,” even though it has five moons.
- 5 Representative works include *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards (1923), and *Language, Truth, and Logic: An Introduction to Logical Positivism*, by A.J. Ayer (1936). These authors assert that the symbols which play an important role in our life are the source of all our power over the external world.
- 6 Magic is widely believed to have been prevalent during the Middle Ages, though it reached its apogee during the Renaissance.
- 7 One is reminded of Yoko Ono, whose “art” exhibit so impressed John Lennon that he eventually married her.
- 8 Note the play on words—Macrobes, the opposite of microbes, and Macrobius, the neo-Platonist.
- 9 “Solemnization of Matrimony,” from the 1662 Anglican Book of Common Prayer. The same words were heard when Prince William married Kate Middleton in 2011.
- 10 John Donne’s poetry created the illusion of listening to the very voice of passion that has become conscious of its power to generate rational thought. Both W.B. Yeats and the young T.S. Eliot emulated him.
- 11 Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) gave the most complete medieval definition of the seven spiritual gifts. See Isaiah xi.2.
- 12 See Ellen Rawson, 1983. “The Fisher-King in *That Hideous Strength*.”
- 13 In his own diary, Lewis’s brother Warren quips that “she rescued him from the twin evils of bachelorhood and matrimony at one fell swoop!” C.S. Lewis and Joy Davidman were not married until 1957.
- 14 Boccaccio was a member of the Bourgeois class that helped bring about the dissolution of the Middle Ages. In “What Chaucer did to *Il Filostrato*” (*Essays and Studies*, Vol. xix, 1932), Lewis argues in favor of a “medievalization” of Boccaccio’s work. This was done in order to make it more palatable to an English audience, which “never really had a renaissance.”

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