

**Bridging the Past and the Present: The Historical Imagination in the Criticism and the
Narrative Poetry of C. S. Lewis**

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Abstract

C. S. Lewis is best known as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but Lewis's poetry tends to be treated separately from his other works, or as an antecedent to his more famous prose works. This thesis shows that Lewis's paradoxical views of literary history, cultural death, reason and imagination are reflected in his narrative poems. George Watson says that Lewis was "a paradoxical thing, a conservative iconoclast, and he came to the task well-armed" (1). He is both a traditionalist and a rebel against his times. I explain Lewis's paradoxes in terms of the concepts of history, memory, reason and imagination, and show that Lewis's position was a negotiation of his own historical and cultural context. Lewis's poems and scholarly work indicate that his approach to historical terms is first to underline divergence, and then to emphasize a use of seemingly polarized terms in order to unify them.

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Introduction

A. C. S. Lewis as Reader and Literary Critic

Clive Staples Lewis, or Jack as his friends called him, was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and was of Ulster stock. If one visits Belfast today, one can participate in a C. S. Lewis bus tour that surveys some “Lewisian” landmarks, such as the site of his birth, his childhood home Little Lea, Campbell College, and the famous St. Mark’s Church, on the door of which there is a very important and historic door handle carved in the form of an Aslan-like lion. Lewis was Irish, but most people associate him with Oxford and England, especially given the fact that most of his famous writings were published when he was permanently established there. Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, in their seminal biography of Lewis, point out that the first work to garner Lewis critical attention was *The Allegory of Love* (1936),¹ a scholarly book in which Lewis argued that “romantic love, something we assume as part of the nature of reality, is a relatively new phenomenon” (Hannay 4). *The Allegory of Love* established Lewis not only as a scholar, but also as a “writer of exceptional imaginative power.” He was praised for his “historical method,” his clear writing style, and for his ability to “keep imaginative control of the facts” (Green and Hooper 135). This early praise contains all of the difficult terms with which this thesis is concerned. Lewis’s historical method is challenging to define, as is his view of the interaction between imagination and reason.

A newcomer to Lewis’s approach to literary history is confused by his counterintuitive definition of historicism, which for him is “the belief that by studying the past we can learn not only historical, but metahistorical, or transcendental truth” (*The Discarded Image* 174). Lewis’s friend Owen Barfield, who held an anthroposophical² view

of history, and did indeed believe in metahistorical truth and the possibility of discovering it in the study of poetry and the development of human consciousness, clarifies this definition:

First of all, then, you will know that Lewis had no love for historicism. He held the view that in the history of man and of the universe as a whole, either there is no thread of development or that if there is any such, knowledge of it is firmly withheld from man [...]. He thought the fall of man was much more clearly to be detected than his rise, and he was out of sympathy with the whole assumption of the gradual ascent or evolution of man [...]. Words like *progress* and *evolution* irritated him. (Barfield, *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* 4)

It is therefore necessary, when reading Lewis, to define him generally as a historicist in the current sense of the term, as one who defines and considers cultural and social context in the discussion of literature, while recognizing that in Lewis's estimation this perspective is *a-*historicist.

Lewis can be included in the New Historicists' discussions, but postmodernist and poststructuralist theories inform the New Historicists' position, and it is important to note that Lewis did not know many of these theories, nor perhaps would he have cared much about them. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt emphasize New Historicism's focus on the specific historical moment, and on the specific artefact, and thus on all the historical factors bearing on the moment of artistic and cultural production (*Practicing New Historicism* 6); even further, they affirm, like Lewis, that "Poetry, in this account, is not the path to a transhistorical truth," but for them the proponents of transhistorical truth have often been those critics interested in psychoanalysis and deconstruction (7). Lewis, however, upheld the power and importance of the aesthetic object, whereas New Historicism

developed in the wake of many theories that have unsettled hierarchies and insisted on the democratization of cultural production, and so they “foster [...] the weakening of the aesthetic object” (11). Lewis would not have understood New Historicism’s adoption of certain Marxist terms, including the proposition that “every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices” (Veeseer xi); on the other hand, New Historicism explicitly addresses the old, so-called *a*-historicism of Lewis, Douglas Bush, and E. M. W. Tillyard, and criticizes them for their “monological and homogeneous constructions of a historical period” (Shea 125). Consequently, some critics have found fault with this aspect of Lewis’s thought, while others have critiqued Lewis’s refusal to build a literary canon. Yvor Winters, in his 1955 review of Lewis’s *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century*, for example, said that it was not the accuracy or the relevance of intellectual and cultural contextualization for writing literary history that needed to be challenged, but Lewis’s unwillingness to identify the major poetry of the period in question:

It is the critical mind that bothers me. It is my own conviction that one cannot write the history of poetry unless one can find the best poems. The best poems are the essential facts from which the historian must proceed. The background of ideas is important; the characteristic eccentricities of schools and poets are part of the material; but without the best poems, the history is not a history but an impressionistic and perhaps (as in this case) a learned essay. Lewis cannot find the poems. (Watson, *Critical Essays on C. S. Lewis* 213)

According to this reading, Lewis unwittingly anticipated the position of the New Historicists, who would later insist that canon-building is passé, and indeed, even impedes the critic’s ability to attain a holistic and accurate picture of the past.

Seen from this paradoxical perspective, Lewis's approach to literary history builds on the past in order to look forward to the future. Every critical work by Lewis might be read as his attempt to expunge what he called "chronological snobbery," "the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited" (*Surprised By Joy* 167). He claimed to have once believed this "heresy," and to have been cured of it by his friend Owen Barfield. To Lewis, those who subscribed to chronological snobbery often used "the names of earlier periods as terms of abuse" (*Surprised By Joy* 166). By contrast, and perhaps to overcompensate for this error, Lewis tended to elevate earlier historical worldviews over those of his own time. In his *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1954), for instance, Lewis put forward the very controversial idea that the concept of the Renaissance was greatly exaggerated by the humanists themselves, and has been romanticized by historians since then (Edwards, ed. *IV* 143,153).³ If Lewis did not detect a paradigm shift between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, he certainly identified a major cultural break between his own modern time and these periods. In *Studies in Words* (1960) Lewis argued that the meanings of words drastically change over time, and that an ignorance of these alterations can lead to gross modern misunderstandings of literary texts. Scott Calhoun believes that *Studies in Words* should be read alongside *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), a work in which Lewis maintained the importance of a reader's response to texts. Together,

...the books become a sort of valedictory address [...] encouraging [readers] to develop disciplined reading practices that will lift them out of their modern provincialism when encountering an older text and give them the eyes to see what others have seen, the way they saw it, and then return them to their

modern world with a greater appreciation of the human condition. (Edwards, ed. *IV* 82)

In Calhoun's observations the main outline of all of Lewis's literary criticism is apparent: reading should extract readers from their own limited worldview so that they can experience the joy of entering fully into the imaginary worlds depicted in old books. The modern reader should strive to understand the set of cultural and literary expectations held by the first generation of readers in the historical moment of the work's appearance, and this act should in turn elicit in readers a sense of wonder, awe, and respect for the past and its complexity. By immersing themselves in the cultural ethos of earlier epochs, readers would presumably undergo some kind of personal transformation that would broaden their vision and allow them to gain a fresh perspective of their own time.

In *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), Lewis suggested that a more fruitful approach to literature in history would be to "change one's clothes": "Instead of stripping the knight of his armour you can try to put his armour on yourself; instead of seeing how the courtier would look without his lace, you can try to see how you would feel *with* his lace" (62). This approach to literature meant that readers would not bring only a strictly "modern" frame of mind to a text, but also a flexible disposition that would allow them to expand their historical horizons. Lewis did not wish to conflate historical contexts and worldviews, but at the same time he recognized that historical periodizations and literary histories were arbitrary constructions (*De Descriptione Temporum* 1). The same holds true for the way Lewis treated the role of reader and literary critic, for while not wishing to blur the clear distinction between these activities, he wrote literary criticism in which he performed both activities well. Michael I. Edwards and Bruce L. Edwards say that one reason for Lewis's wish to keep the distinction between reading and criticism was that "the 'critic' tended to substitute a

jaded twentieth-century sensibility that prizes obtrusive secondary sources and morbid speculation above encounter with the primary text, therein supplanting real reading with tendentious interpretation” (Edwards, *IV* 164). Lewis’s emphasis on historical distinctions is his personal, and somewhat pessimistic, reaction to modernity; even further, by emphasizing the contrast between the terms, Lewis attempted to bring criticism and reading together in a fresh and productive way. In *The Discarded Image* (1964), Lewis described the medieval cultural “image” as alien to the modern mind. In emphasizing the *difference* between historical periods, Lewis hoped to foster a longing in readers to experience new and wonderful perspectives, or perhaps one should say old and wonderful perspectives, which existed beyond the reach of their restricted twentieth-century vision. Indeed, Lewis’s critique of his era’s “modern provincialism” was not idiosyncratic (Edwards, ed. *IV* 82). Bertrand Russell, a thinker of a radically different persuasion, had also identified what he called ““parochialism in time”” as one of the grave faults of the modern age (qtd. Dawson 16). According to some critics, Lewis attempted, in a somewhat cumbersome and perhaps confusing way, to build a bridge between reader and text, critic and reader, and past and present, by first drawing the borders between these manufactured binary terms with a thick and bold pen. Lewis, however, was simply trying to provide a timely corrective to what is now described as “presentism,” the tendency of the modern mind to judge the past by the absolute standard of the present.

B. The “Divergent Lewis”: Lewis as Poet and Lewisian Secondary Criticism

Owen Barfield said that when he met Lewis in 1920, Lewis had a “ruling ambition to become a great poet. At that time, if you thought of Lewis, you automatically thought of poetry” (*Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* 5-6). There are four extant narrative poems by Lewis.

The book-long poem “Dymer” was composed between 1922-1926, and was published in 1926, and is the story of a young man who sleeps with a goddess, “fathers a monster, and is eventually slain by his son” (Hannay 246). After Dymer’s death his son becomes divine. “The Queen of Drum” was first mentioned in Lewis’s diary on January 16, 1927, but it existed before this date in other forms. This poem relates the ambiguous adventures of the Queen of the mythical land of Drum: her kingdom is overthrown and she attempts to choose between the dubious realm of faerie and suffering in the real world. This poem was finished shortly after Lewis’s conversion to Christianity, but spans Lewis’s pre- and post-conversion years. The date of the composition of “Launcelot” is up for debate, but it is thought to have been composed early in Lewis’s literary career. The poem tells the story of the Round Table knights’ return from their Sangrail quest, particularly the story of Launcelot himself, “who tells Queen Guinever of his adventures in a variation of the Fisher King myth” (Hannay 250). It was never finished. “The Nameless Isle” is dated August 1930 in its fair copy (Lewis, *Narrative Poems* xii-xiii), and tells the tale of a sailor who is shipwrecked on a bewitched island. The poem is written in a modern version of Old English alliterative metre; “Dymer” is written in rhyme royal. It is Lewis’s use of form that connects the narrative poetry to the criticism he was known for. In *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis claims that the “matter inside the poet *wants* the Form: in submitting to the Form it becomes really original, really the origin of great work” (3). Here Lewis is speaking of Milton’s rigidity, but this statement also encapsulates Lewis’s own creative aim, which was to bring the present into a dynamic relationship with the past. It is interesting to note that Lewis related the term “original” to its root, the word “origin.” To Lewis, originality was developed through returning to one’s cultural roots.

Lewis's choice of the mythological chronicle, and his often tight adherence to traditional poetic form, moreover, came from a deeply rooted belief that the modern mind put too much emphasis on poetic genius and personality when evaluating originality and greatness. In his debate with E. M. W. Tillyard, Lewis called this modern emphasis the "personal heresy": "I shall maintain that when we read poetry as poetry should be read, we have before us no representation which claims to be the poet, and frequently no representation of a *man*, a *character*, or a *personality* at all" (*The Personal Heresy* 4).⁴ Lewis's poetic modes, and his abjuration of the personal heresy, pose a problem for the reader of his narrative poems. Many critics have read pieces of Lewisian biography into the narrative poems, especially into "Dymer," which was written in the wake of Lewis's World War I experiences. The poem also deals with the new psychology, and thus with concepts of memory and trauma, and reflects Lewis's struggles with anthroposophy and definitions of romanticism. Lewis himself allowed his life history, and his thoughts about historical movement in general, to permeate his narrative poems. The explanation for this paradox lies in Lewis's slight modification of the biographical approach in *The Personal Heresy*: "Let it be warranted that I do approach the poet; at least I do it by sharing his consciousness, not by studying it. I look with his eyes, not at him" (11). In what follows, I propose that Lewis's approach to reading might be adopted profitably to provide a fruitful reading of his own narrative poems.

Although "Dymer," "The Queen of Drum," "Launcelot," and "The Nameless Isle" are his only four extant narrative poems (*Narrative Poems* vii),⁵ Lewis lived and breathed various forms of poetry, and is most well known for his scholarship on the work of Milton, Douglas and Spencer. It should be noted that Lewis ever and always possessed a childlike delight in literature. Don W. King observes that poetry was "integral" to Lewis's life:

He did not sip or taste poetry in a casual, off-handed manner; rather it was for him a stream intricately weaving through his life becoming a literary well—a nourishing reservoir almost without bottom—one from which he drank deeply and passionately. (“Early Lyric Poetry” 234)

Based on statements like these, it would perhaps seem axiomatic to say that studying Lewis’s poetry is imperative for understanding his oeuvre, and that, as a corollary, Lewis’s narrative poems should be studied in light of his own reading, scholarship and criticism. But this, unfortunately, has not been the case. Lewis is perhaps best known as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and of other popular works of fiction and Christian apologetics, but his life as scholar, critic, and poet is less widely recognized. Don W. King, Joe R. Christopher, and John Bremer, among other critics, have contributed valuable and important work that seeks to bring Lewis’s poetry to the foreground of Lewisian studies, but the field is just beginning to develop. Don W. King notes that Lewis’s poetry has received mixed reviews, and that the general evaluation has been quite negative (“Early Lyric Poetry” 233-34). For example, biographer A. N. Wilson cannot understand how such a man as Lewis, “who had such an eye for excellence in the poets of past ages,” should have written, in “Dymer,” “stanza after stanza in which the verse is deadened by flat language, repeated clumsy enjambments and sheer technical incompetence” (101). The widespread dismissal of the poetry has doubtless been a key factor in preventing serious study of these individual poems in the light of Lewis’s own literary criticism.

Another important contributing element to this lacuna in existing scholarship is Lewis’s drastic ideological, philosophical, and spiritual change, which occurred when he converted first to theism, and then to Christianity, during the years 1929-1931. Lewis’s more famous works were written after this date, and most of the narrative poetry was written

before this time. His writings as a whole are often designated as pre- and post-conversion. Many critics and biographers have noted that there seems not to be one Lewis, but rather many Lewises. Humphrey Carpenter speaks of Lewis in terms of “compartments”:

“Certainly there are four aspects of his mind and work that deserve to be examined: let us call them the ‘Chestertonian’, the ‘boyish’, the ‘debater’ and the ‘poet’” (217).⁶ Barfield identified five C. S. Lewises, “L1 being a distinguished and original literary critic, L2 a highly successful author of fiction, and L3 the writer and broadcaster of popular Christian apologetics. [... And then there are] two different Lewises, the one before and the other after his conversion” (*Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* 120-121). Barfield says that by the end of Lewis’s life, one could distinguish two Lewises, one being imaginative and the other reasonable. He disliked the inability to ascertain exactly what Lewis believed with regards to history and poetic consciousness, and said that he was inclined to “attribute this conspicuous reticence to two causes, both of them connected with the dichotomy I have stressed” (97).

There is no doubt whatever that Lewis’s conversion experience was transformative, for, as Walter Hooper has said, it “affected everything he wrote afterwards” (*Narrative Poems* xi); however, this biographical demarcation has at times rendered an unjust evaluation of Lewis’s poetry. John Bremer says that the various poems by Lewis, “written at different stages of Lewis’s life, need to be assessed as if they were written by different men.” He despairs of finding a line of continuity throughout Lewis’s life: “My own opinion is that [...] no single view of ‘Lewis’s poetry’ is either possible or meaningful” (xxvii). George Sayer accuses the early poetry of *Spirits in Bondage* (1922) of “blasphemy” and misplaces a quotation from Lewis’s diary in order to make it seem that “Dymer” was written in a state of ideological confusion (Sayer 95, 94).⁷ He says that “at this stage of his life Lewis may not have known very much about God, but he certainly knew something of the Devil” (109). It is

also tempting to postulate that avid readers of Lewis hope to find seeds of the Christian Lewis in the early poetry, and are disappointed.

The goal, then, is to find an alternate position, one that does not consist of rejecting Lewis's narrative poems as unimportant, or accepting them uncritically, but separating them completely from the Lewis canon, or merely seeing them as an antecedent to his more famous prose works.⁸ If one reads the narrative poetry through the lens of Lewis's literary history, one can see more of their value, as they are "pastiche": "fondness for pastiche was arguably the major reason why his poetry was in the end a failure" (Carpenter 31). This label is derogatory if the goal of every poet is to find an "original" voice, but it produces a more fruitful discussion in light of the literature and history that Lewis lived and breathed. Owen Barfield identifies the hint of "pastiche" that exists in all of Lewis's writings, and asks, "*Was* there something, at least in his impressive, indeed splendid, literary personality, which was some how—and with no hint of insincerity—*voulu*?" (Gibb, ed. *Light on C. S. Lewis* x-xi). Yes, there is something *voulu* in the narrative poetry, for Lewis's explicit aim was to create literature that imitated the works that he loved. He deserves to be read on his own terms, namely with the understanding that the poems reflect the delight he took in the poetry of earlier ages he read. Green and Hooper note that, when Lewis taught in the classroom setting, "it was obvious [...] that one was listening not merely to a scholar of immense erudition, but to a lover of literature who had read every text he mentioned, and had enjoyed most of them" (140). As Lewis himself says in *An Experiment in Criticism*:

In good reading there ought to be no "problem of belief". I read Lucretius and Dante at a time when (by and large) I agreed with Lucretius. I have read them since I came (by and large) to agree with Dante. I cannot find that this has much altered my experience, or at all altered my evaluation, of either. A true

lover of literature should be in one way like an honest examiner, who is prepared to give the highest marks to the telling, felicitous and well-documented exposition of views he dissents from or even abominates. (86)⁹

It may be that Lewis's evaluation of his objective ability was mistaken. For our immediate purposes, however, it is important to note that throughout Lewis's life his delight in literature never changed, except perhaps to increase in volume. Lewis's approach to his scholarship is the most consistent aspect of his pre- and post-conversion writing.

C. Reason, Imagination, and the "Great War" of C. S. Lewis and Owen Barfield

Lewis's view of epic poetry in its historical context cannot be separated from his friendship with Owen Barfield, whose poetic theory acted as the foil for Lewis's thought. Their "Great War," as Lewis called it, began sometime circa 1920 and lasted until about 1930, when Barfield had embraced the tenets of anthroposophy, and Lewis was on the verge of becoming a Christian (Thorson 9).¹⁰ Because Barfield saw knowledge and poetic consciousness as directly related, he tended to lean toward a metaphysical reading of history that was progressive: Lewis found it frustrating that the man who had saved him from chronological snobbery subscribed to a view of consciousness in history that risked returning to the heresy it first abjured (Hipolito 225). On the other side of the "Great War," Owen Barfield says that Lewis's isolationist view of history is extreme and problematic:

If Lewis is right, and all the process that some of us seem to perceive in the long story of mankind is begotten by fancy and ignorance, [...] there is in fact no joint pilgrimage but only a vast number of separate and self-contained ones, that seems to be about all we can do [...]. But is he right? Is the only

reliable knowledge we can claim always of staccato succession and causality, never of growth and metamorphosis? (*Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* 76-77)

Barfield points out the differences in their approaches to history, but Lewis tried to avoid the travesty of “critical evolution,” and in that very avoidance he shared something with Barfield (Williams 52). Furthermore, Paul Leopold observes that ““Everything Lewis wrote shows his awareness of the history of meaning stored up in words”” (qtd. Hipolito 225). Their agreements and disagreements led to the shaping of Lewis’s approach to literary history and to his poetic theory.

As Patrick Grant has noted, Barfield espoused a Coleridgean notion of Romanticism and the human mind, a mind that “does not merely look upon the world, but constructs it in perceiving it” (122). Barfield was attracted to the anthroposophical view of Romanticism because it seemed to solve the “problem,” for him, of the “Cartesian dichotomy between matter and mind”; in other words, it solved the problem of personal bifurcation by making this traditional polarity “dynamic, not abstract” (*on C. S. Lewis* 48 and 49). Barfield’s source was Rudolph Steiner, “whose early interest in Goethe had helped Barfield to find an alternative to the positivistic bias of modern science,” and to couch that problem in the context of Romanticism (Grant 122). To Barfield, human consciousness had evolved over time: what humanity perceived and internalized was changing. Lewis felt that, in losing the difference between what should be differentiated human faculties, Barfield moved dangerously close to chronological snobbery. Barfield, on his part, accused Lewis of being inconsistent, for it seemed to Barfield that Lewis believed, on one level, in a dynamic relationship between reason and imagination, while on another level he attempted to separate these mental faculties from each other.

And, indeed, it does seem that Lewis, conceptually at least, separated reason from imagination. Peter J. Schakel, in his book *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces*, points out that reason and imagination are not always easy bedfellows in Lewis's thought, while at the same time they both come into his aesthetic production (180). Schakel points to Lewis's poem "Reason," whose date of composition is unknown, to show that Lewis was often struggling with the relationship between these two terms.¹¹ Schakel argues that this poem reveals that Lewis's conversion might be seen as the true marriage of reason and imagination: "Lewis reached a harmony of imagination and intellect which enabled him to become a Christian" (181). Until that moment reason was the safe and beautiful aspect to Lewis, while the imagination seemed to him to be "dark and seductive" (179-180). It could be said that perhaps the marriage between reason and imagination was made *explicit* for Lewis during and after his conversion to Christianity, but I would argue that their paradoxical harmony exists in much of his literary criticism as well as in the narrative poems, both pre- and post-conversion. This seeming separation can also be brought together in fruitful dialogue. A "third Lewis," the one who utilized both reason and imagination, binds together the apparent contradictions pointed out by many critics (*Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* 94).

D. C. S. Lewis's Critical Context and His Relationship to Modernism

C. S. Lewis was reacting to and engaging with his literary critic contemporaries, and indeed to the aesthetic ideologies of his time. He was reading the writings of F. R. Leavis, I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot and E. M. W. Tillyard. And just as in the case of the Great War with Barfield, Lewis tended to emphasize his difference from these critics, rather than to acknowledge his similarities to them. In *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis demands that his

reader focus on how he or she is reading, and less on the literary object. He is often criticized for his “elitist” differentiation between the “few” and the “many” in this work,¹² but if one reads the text closely, one can see that Lewis is subtly criticizing the so-called literary “elite” of his day by implying that more people land in the category of the “many” than they realize.¹³ Some literary critics may be participating in the “egoistic castle-building” of the “many” when they too demand a certain “realism” in content (67). They are unable to use their imaginations, and unable to be open-minded about what they read and delight in it. Later in the work, Lewis labels this failure of imagination and lack of receptivity a “Misreading by the Literary” (74).

Lionel Adey points out that *An Experiment in Criticism* was written partly in response to “Leavisianity,” or the critical influence of F. R. Leavis, and his formalist New Criticism. Although a close reader of texts himself, Lewis saw the New Critical approach as the “equivalent of salvation by faith alone” (Adey 89), for the approach required the exclusion of many texts, and their historical contexts, in favour of closely reading a few texts only: “Lewis saw a willing suspension of judgement, unforced surrender to the work, as a prerequisite of consciousness in the reader” (91). Rather than unforced surrender, Leavis emphasized that the business of the critic is to “perceive for himself, to make the finest and sharpest relevant discriminations, and to state his findings as responsibly, clearly, and as forcibly as possible” (Leavis, *Revaluation* 15). Leavis’s choice of works was always “narrow” (1, 3). Lewis did not agree with Leavis’s critical emphasis, which was on the text and its interpretation, and not on historical context: both Lewis and T. S. Eliot deplored this “lemon squeezer” formalist method as deficient.¹⁴

Nor did Lewis subscribe to the “pseudo-biography” of E. M. W. Tillyard’s approach to literature, and his “at worst sheer psychological muck-raking” approach to literature

(Carpenter 59); he also disapproved of I. A. Richards' "psychological theory of value" (*Principles of Literary Criticism* 82). Lewis felt that, again, these approaches needed to be remedied through a focus on textual reception, and in the case of Tillyard, through a focus on the aesthetic object as opposed to the poet's "personality." Richards felt that the plethora of critical theories developed during his time could be united under the banner of psychology, a valuing system that included a study of the conscious and unconscious in aesthetic production (*Principles of Literary Criticism* 82); even further, his *modus operandi* involved some subscription to a belief in the progressive evolution of humanity's scientific knowledge: "It should be borne in mind that the knowledge which the men of A. D. 3000 will possess, if all goes well, may make all our aesthetics, all our psychology, all our modern theory of value, look pitiful" (4). Lewis believed that humanity's knowing *more* did not necessarily mean that it would know *better*, although he would have agreed that Richards' own approach would be periodized and even "discarded." This approach to poetry was very "I" centred, thought Lewis, for:

...the unhappy youth applies to literature all the scruples, the rigorism, the self-examination, the distrust of pleasure, which his forebears applied to the spiritual life [...]. The doctrine of Dr I. A. Richards in which the correct reading of good poetry has a veritable therapeutic value confirms him in this attitude. (*An Experiment* 10)

Lewis disliked critical work that forfeited humble textual reception in order to examine a poet's psychology or personality, for in the end, it was bringing one's modern self to a text, with one's modern psychological musings. The idea of a consistent human psychology resembled the Doctrine of the Unchanging Human Heart, and Lewis said that if one approached texts in this way, "We find not the Unchanging, but a fortunate resemblance to

our own modification” (*Preface to Paradise Lost* 62). And so in his debates with Dr. Tillyard, Lewis attacked Tillyard’s labelling of the poem as a “‘problem’ (for a poem is always a ‘problem’ to psychological critics),” as well as Tillyard’s “concealed major premiss” that poetry is “*about* the poet’s state of mind” (*The Personal Heresy* 2). Humphrey Carpenter points out that although Lewis’s attack “was partially justified [...], there are also grounds for supposing that Lewis’s attitude to it grew from something deep-seated in his own personality. In saying this one is of course falling into the very Personal Heresy that he attacked” (59). It is for this reason that Lewis could not erase the personal from his own narrative poems. The new psychology and its relationship to Barfield’s anthroposophy apply to both “Dymer” and “The Queen of Drum.”

In his reaction to current criticism and aesthetics, Lewis was participating in his tumultuous and questioning times. Rebellion and fragmentation are characteristic of the early to mid-twentieth-century literary movement known as modernism, and to its historical context. Of course, aesthetic production always enters a dynamic relationship with its times, and both shapes and is shaped by it. Lewis’s relationship to T. S. Eliot and modernist literature bears out this point. The literary movement of modernism is often described in terms of fragmentation (Esty 6).¹⁵ Bruce L. Edwards shows that Lewis was generally receptive to every type of literature, but “though he could applaud the ‘fresh, harsh energy’ of modern poetry, and could even praise Eliot’s poetry [...], his overall reaction was thoroughly negative” (*The Taste of the Pineapple* 13). Lewis realized that his own time had declared a break with the past from which there was no return. But he also realized that the main drawback of this modern attitude was an unjustified devaluation of earlier literature. Lewis aimed to redress the balance between the old and the new.

All in all, then, I am making an argument for a paradoxical Lewis, for as George Watson says, Lewis was “a paradoxical thing, a conservative iconoclast, and he came to the task well-armed” (1). He is both a traditionalist and a rebel of his times. His compartmentalization of history leads the critic to historical recovery, historical remembrance, and thus to an acknowledgement of historical continuity. His narrative poetry does the same, and also bridges the binary opposition of reason and imagination, with much more connective energy than Owen Barfield gives him credit for. C. S. Lewis is no “St. Clive,” and he must be called to task for his paradoxes and his at times artificial separation of terms, but this does not mean that he was not aware of the direction in which his own arguments or critical approaches would eventually take him. I should like to explain Lewis’s paradoxes in terms of the concepts of history, memory, reason and imagination. His scholarly work indicates that his way of approaching his separated conceptual and historical terms is first to underline divergence, and then to emphasize a use of seemingly polarized terms in order to unify them. This approach to Lewis will require that I situate him in his own historical-literary context, a move that he would approve of, and that I examine his life, personality and thought in relation to his poetry, a psycho-biographical approach that he decidedly would have avoided. In the end, however, I hope that his poetry will seem less of an anomaly and be seen as a more valuable part of his overall achievement.

Chapter 1

Cultural Death and Lewis's Mnemonic Response to Historical Separation

1.A. Introduction

On Sunday April 2, 1922, a young C. S. Lewis sat in his bedroom “by an open window in bright sunshine and started a poem on ‘Dymer’ in rhyme royal” (*All My Road Before Me* 15). 1922 was the *annus mirabilis* of literary modernism, with its characteristic shifting of literary form which was signalled by the publication of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* followed closely after these works, and was published in 1925. But in Oxford, Lewis, then a young man recently returned from the Great War, began a long narrative poem using the form which characterizes Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, as well as many other Renaissance poems (Hannay 246). While literary trends followed Ezra Pound’s injunction to “make it new,” Lewis decidedly wished to make it old in an effort to bring the present into a dynamic relationship with the past; and yet, his response could be called a negotiation of modernism, for he too was responding to his time and context with a kind of modernist dissatisfaction. Throughout his literary and scholarly career, Lewis valued how literature brought the reader as close as possible to feeling what it was like “from within” past worldviews and historical contexts: “But if that experience [of the past] had infused its quality into some other thing which we can get inside, then this other, more penetrable, thing would now be the only medium through which we can get back to the experience itself” (*Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* 1979, 11). This “more penetrable thing” was plastic and literary art: for Lewis, art did not merely exist for its own sake, but it existed in order that the reader might experience the transforming power of new perspectives. Even further, without this aesthetic “key,” the past remained inaccessibly locked behind a sealed door.

The Discarded Image, which was published in 1963 and represents Lewis's mature reflections on the subject, corroborated this image of the past. The work put forward the provocative idea that the medievalist backcloth had been utterly discarded, and was now alien to modern times. In the work's Epilogue, Lewis acknowledged his attraction to the medieval model, and said that his attempt to show this period as isolated from the present helped the reader to "regard all Models in the right way, respecting each and idolizing none." He attacked the modern belief that the current cultural model, being the latest, must necessarily be the best: "It is not impossible that our own Model will die a violent death, ruthlessly smashed by an unprovoked assault of new facts" (222). To Lewis, history tended to bifurcate, and once it had left behind a certain cultural model, it had committed itself to another path altogether. Lewis had two reasons for this approach to historical contexts. Firstly, the approach avoided any semblance of the belief in critical evolution and historical progression, or the idea that as the human race moves forward chronologically, it develops into a better, more enlightened, and more durable race, a belief which significantly narrows one's view of life, literature and history. Secondly, it was also a statement of what *is* in the modernist era. By pointing out the early twentieth century's tendency to push the past away, in order to be *avant-garde*, Lewis showed that this impulse resulted in massive cultural amnesia and had led to an impoverished understanding of literary texts. The medieval period had suffered cultural death¹⁶ because the modernist had pronounced it dead. The reader of English literature, Lewis claimed, should be dissatisfied with this state of affairs. Lewis felt that this rejection existed in the dramatic poetic formal changes that happened during the early twentieth century. Of course, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, among other modernists, used Dante as a model for their writing (Manganiello, "Dante Among the

Moderns” 15). The neo-Medievalism which characterizes many of the Inklings was perhaps not as abnormal as Lewis believed.

Lewis’s reaction to alternative views of history has invited much censure, and indeed his views seem to be at odds with a more linear, Christian view of history. The entire eschatology of salvation hinges on a more linear view of history: for the Christian, time has a beginning, a divine source, and a definite end. Lewis is known primarily as a Christian apologist whose faith informs his fiction. Humphrey Carpenter, in *The Inklings*, points out that Lewis needed to change his thinking about history and its effects in order to become a Christian, as for many years “he could not see ‘how the life and death of Someone Else (whoever he was) two thousand years ago could help us here and now—except insofar as his example could help us’” (44). J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson were instrumental in helping him see that in Jesus Christ the “old myth” about the Dying God had become fact. In his essay on “Historicism,” Lewis defined the term as the “belief that men can, by the use of their natural powers, discover an inner meaning to the historical process”; even further, a historicist is marked by the attempt to derive “from historical premises conclusions which are more than historical” (*Christian Reflections* 100-101).¹⁷ In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis pointed out that Virgil’s aim in the *Aeneid* is precisely to draw up a destiny-driven meta-history: “What Virgil puts forward in mythical form is precisely meta-history. The whole mundane process, the *fata Jovis*, are in labour to bring forth the endless and dedicated empire of Rome” (175). Virgil was a historicist, as his constructed history is nationally self-focused, proud, and developmental; so is the Christian view of history, it could be argued, with its “new Rome,” “new Jerusalem,” and fulfilment in Christ’s death and resurrection. The Christian view of history and Lewis’s view of historical movement seem to be at odds with

one another, and Owen Barfield would call this seeming contradiction an example of what he termed Lewis's "inconsistencies" (*Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* 78).

To complicate matters further, the view of history Lewis thought he was communicating was understood differently by many of his readers. Lewis saw himself as a critic who defined and considered cultural and social context in the discussion of literature, or what we today would call a critic who provides historicist readings of texts. Lewis, however, called this approach to literature *a*-historicist. Even further, he did not feel that his historical definitions were strict, despite the fact that *The Discarded Image* contains the definition and compartmentalization of the medieval backcloth. For example, Vidya Das Aurora, in his article "C. S. Lewis's Model of the Universe," suggests that Lewis completely dehistoricizes the medieval model, because he believed that "a body of autonomous unified ideas [can] be simply transmitted from one century, author, or textuality, to another," making an "essentially descriptive model" a "prescriptive one" (172). In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis "proves himself a more efficient systems builder than the medieval thinkers," and so he does a disservice to the real complexity of medieval thought (174). However, Lewis, in his inaugural lecture as the new Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Cambridge University, said that he had striven to be flexible in his conception of history, and that he wished "we could dispense with [historical demarcations] altogether," even though he knew that it could not be done (*De Descriptione Temporum* 1). He considered himself less like "a botanist in a forest than a woman arranging a few cut flowers for the drawing room" (2). Lewis's message here seemed to be at odds with the self-declared *a*-historicist stance developed elsewhere.

Can these seeming contradictions be reconciled in some way? Lewis did not understand history, and thus literature's interaction with history, in developmental terms, but

he thought an argument could be made for his belief in historical continuity, despite the description of tragic historical break and bifurcation in both his criticism and poetry. This line of thinking recalls the modernist trope of shellshock, and Lewis's own experiences of war trauma, which come up repeatedly in "Dymer," but also make their way into the other narrative poems. To Lewis, after a culture and a particular historical moment have been acknowledged as dead, the reader and poet might achieve continuity with previous eras through experience, imagination and memory: the reader then discovers, or perhaps re-discovers, the seeds of the past in his or her cultural makeup. The personal and collective "forgetting" of a bygone age is only traumatic if there is no humble recovery, through experience and memory, of what is forgotten; further tragedy occurs if declared cultural death provokes a personal or collective, but mistaken, belief in the ability to make progress without taking into account what transpired before.

1.B. Lewis's Understanding of Literary History and Poetic Movement

If C. S. Lewis had lived long enough to read David Perkins's *Is Literary History Possible?* (1992) he would have agreed with Perkins's assertion that all literary histories fail, but that our desire for them indicates they still serve a useful purpose by leading us to a greater understanding of our literary inheritance. Lewis compartmentalized periods, and defined them in great detail, emphasizing difference and the modern separation from the past. He tried to show that literary historians could become chronological snobs when they made the mistake of believing themselves to be superior to the past. Lewis hoped to democratize historical periods by compartmentalizing and defining them, for by giving his readers a sense of their complexity, they would be less likely to trivialize and dismiss the past. Even further, through his emphasis on historical difference, Lewis hoped to encourage

in the reader a longing to recover a sense of the cultural matrix out of which bygone ages emerged. Lewis thought once readers were open to the view of the equally reasonable and complex nature of all historical contexts, they would be more able to accept what the past had to offer.

The historical separation and the democratization of periods can be observed particularly in Lewis's theory of epic poetic movement. Lewis distinguished between the primary, secondary and metaphysical epic in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, and showed that the difference between them has to do with the epic's inherent awareness of historical movement (Ziolkowski 140). The Primary, or Homeric, epic is characterized by stock words and phrases, and by familiar language, which mark it as a genre lately developed from oral tradition: these facts make these epics less grandiose and more local in their views and aims (*Preface* 20-21).¹⁸ History, in the Primary epic, is nothing more than "constant aimless alternations of glory and misery [...]. Nothing 'stays put', nothing has significance beyond the moment" (30). The subject of the Secondary epic enters with Virgil (27), who writes so that events build and develop, so that "national, or almost cosmic, issues are involved" (34). This self-awareness leads the epic to require a sense of calling, for Aeneas is no longer fighting "for his own hand," but is a man "with a vocation, [a man] on whom a burden is laid" (35).¹⁹ The "historicist" sense of meta-history is here present, and in the next development of the epic genre, Dante made that meta-history metaphysical, taking it beyond time and space and into eternity: "The explicitly religious subject for any future epic has been dictated by Virgil; it is the only further development left" (39).²⁰ Note that, for Lewis, none of the epics and their contexts was better than the others: he merely described their differences, and moved on. The epics are labelled chronologically, from the first to the second to the third. Lewis did not elevate one view of history and destiny to be true, and the

other false. On the other hand, although the differences between the epics and their senses of history were emphasized, described, and compartmentalized, Lewis did not deny that each type of epic has antecedents. The Primary epic features great deeds; the Secondary epic features great deeds with meta-historical and fated meanings; and the metaphysical epic highlights great deeds that have eternal, spiritual ramifications.

Lewis felt that the break that Renaissance writers and artists tried to make with the medieval past proved illusory; in fact, Nevill Coghill recalls coming upon Lewis sometime in the 1940s, at which point Lewis smiled triumphantly at him and declared: “‘I *believe* I have proved that the Renaissance never happened in England. *Alternatively*, [...] that if it did, *it had no importance!*’” (Gibb, ed. *Light on C. S. Lewis* 60-61). Lewis identified a similar view in the modern sensibility: chronological snobbery. Critical evolution was baseless and directionless to Lewis,²¹ and so he admonished Renaissance and modern artists for their impoverished reading of literary history. In *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century*, Lewis rejected the claim of Renaissance poets that they had revived Classicism’s “true nature.” Their hatred for the Middle Ages, said Lewis, led them to emphasize poetic form to the extent that it crushed any semblance of the use of the imagination when approaching the classics (Hannay 144-45):

The humanists, then, brought to their reading of the ancients certain damaging preconceptions [...]. What they lost was the power, apparently common in the Middle Ages, of continuing [...] to respond to the central, obvious appeal of a great work. The medieval reader’s interests were often far closer than the humanists’ to those of the ancients themselves. Dante, accepting Virgil as his guide through hell and acclaiming him as the poet of that Italy for which

Camilla died, had read Virgil as Virgil wished to be read. (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* 26)

The humanists' reading was thus distorted, as they could not read medieval texts fairly, and reformed the Classical period in accordance with their own image of it (Adey, *C. S. Lewis: Writer, Dreamer and Mentor* 50). The humanists were the type of literary critics that Lewis disliked, those who thought in the evolutionary vein and accordingly saw man as standing ““at the top of a stair whose foot is lost in obscurity”” when they should have tried to see, like the medievals, that humanity humbly stood ““at the bottom of a stair whose top is invisible with light”” (Hannay 157). For Lewis, the idea of critical evolution was to be deplored in every age; however, he noted a difference between the humanist and modern versions of chronological snobbery. During the Renaissance, the medieval backcloth had not yet been discarded. The image was thrown away because of the “onslaught of new facts,” which implies revolutionary, enlightenment thinking. As Lewis said, “for us [history] falls into three [periods]—the pre-Christian, the Christian, and what may reasonably be called the post-Christian. This surely must make a momentous difference” (*De Descriptione*). In other words, to Lewis, Renaissance poets and moderns had both declared a break with a medieval past, but only the moderns were right, to a certain extent. This cultural gap was the largest and most tragic, because the shift in worldview models had led his age to judge earlier literature adversely for its scientific ignorance and its backward thinking, when it should have been judged on other terms altogether.

For Lewis, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* marked the dying, but not yet the death, of the discarded image, but the worldview shift became permanent sometime between the present and “the age of Jane Austen and Scott” (*De Descriptione*). At times in his literary criticism, Lewis showed that Milton continued to draw on the medieval image of the

universe with its humility and harmony, and at other times he showed that Milton was moving away from the medieval model of the universe. Earth was still the ““offscourings of creation”” for Milton, “the cosmic dust-bin,” and as such Milton was “the last historian of the old kind” (*Image* 63 and 179). Milton’s form-over-content approach to the epic was the result of referring to the old world model, for Dante was also concerned about poetic form. On the other hand, Milton’s angels are indicative of the fact that “Classicism has come in between” Dante and Milton, but even more, the philosophies of individualism and the love of liberty that are reflected in *Paradise Lost* indicate a paradigm shift in the presentation of man’s relationship to others, to God, and to the created world (*Image* 75 and *Preface* 7). Around the time of Milton, this change is a general “feeling”: “The modern feeling, I suspect, first appears in Bruno. With Milton it enters English poetry” (*Image* 100). This “feeling” grew as philosophies and science changed, and during the nineteenth century, the image officially expired, although it had been expiring for centuries: “somewhere between us and the Waverley Novels, somewhere between us and *Persuasion*, the chasm runs” (*De Descriptione*). The modern approach to Milton and his predecessors had become quite different from the approach of Victorian readers.

It is for this reason that Lewis defined and rejected what he called the “Doctrine of the Unchanging Human Heart”:

According to this method the things which separate one age from another are superficial. Just as, if we stripped the armour off a medieval knight or the lace off a Caroline courtier, we should find beneath them an anatomy identical with our own [...]. I held this theory myself for many years, but I have now abandoned it. (*Preface* 62-63)

It is in passages like these where Lewis's emphasis on difference and the compartmentalization of periods is most apparent. If readers approach texts in this way, they will merely find what they are looking for: "We find not the Unchanging, but a fortunate resemblance to our own modification" (63). Moreover, for Lewis this view of continuity led dangerously into the realm of critical evolution, or at the very least to a place of unchanging, static self-satisfaction. Having looked at the literature to affirm the self, a reader would indeed unsurprisingly discover that there is no need to change his or her views of the world whatsoever. In *Studies in Words*, Lewis spoke about the isolating power of context, and in particular how a word's context could affect its meaning. Throughout history, context has changed and so have the meanings of words: "when we read older literature, we may be completely misled" (Hannay 150). Do not assume the meaning of a single word is the same, and do not assume the human heart is the same, cautioned Lewis. To him, the modern age's break with the past confirmed that the critic could not approach literature in this way.

1.C. Seeming Contradictions: The Lewisian Approach to Literature in History and the Idea of "Historical Remembering"

But just when one thinks one understands Lewis, he complicates matters. It may seem that the criticism and poetry emphasize historical separation, categorization and difference, but on closer reading this constitutes Lewis's first step in reconstructing the past. Lewis pointed out that whereas people in the Middle Ages developed their culture in relation and often in continuity with previous civilizations, the people in the modern age tended to make a radical break with their cultural past. The medieval man "was an organizer, a codifier, a builder of systems"; he inherited "a very heterogeneous collection of books; Judaic, Pagan, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoical, Primitive Christian, Patristic. Or (by a different classification)

chronicles, epic poems, sermons, visions, philosophical treatises, satires” (*Image* 10-11). In other words, the medievals saw themselves as the inheritors of past wisdom. Many of Lewis’s fellow critics derided the medieval ability to ignore ideological contradictions. For example, says Lewis, in Cicero, “neither the Pagan sage (like Pythagoras), nor the Christian saint, could enter [heaven]. This was quite inconsistent with some Pagan, and with all Christian, authorities” (24 and see 71). But the medieval model borrowed what it wanted from the wisdom it was bequeathed, and this view of literature applied to its view of history: history, in the medieval model, does not break or die, and the present builds on the past. The medievals may have been historicists, but they remained humble heirs of the achievements of past ages. Despite feeling that Divine Revelation set them apart from their Pagan and Classical past, they always felt they were standing on the shoulders of giants.²²

This description sounds suspiciously like Lewis’s own approach to literature in history, at least in its humility, and he himself admitted to liking the medieval model exceedingly. Lewis repeatedly advised readers against approaching texts only with a modern mind-set, but he encouraged them to immerse themselves imaginatively in the cultural worlds of earlier periods so that they could gain a better understanding of the literature produced in the past. In a sense, the entirety of *The Discarded Image* is an exercise in being mentally supple so as to adapt or change one’s worldview. In his debate with Tillyard about the personal heresy, Lewis said that although one must approach the poet, one must strive to share “his consciousness” and not merely study that consciousness: “I look with his eyes, not at him” (11). If one looks with the eyes of a medieval, then one is reading literature as a blessed inheritor. And it could be argued that one cannot do this without seeing the relationship between the past and present. It would seem, then, that after acknowledging the break of the modern age with the discarded image, modern readers of literature are allowed

to approach past literatures as their predecessors and benefactors did: but this move requires a radical “remembering.” The modern world has forgotten the past so thoroughly, Lewis insisted, that it must begin to use its imagination to reconnect with previous ages.

Before his “conversion” from chronological snobbery, Lewis saw imagination as “disinterested fancy,” and by the term he seemingly meant that as a mental process, imagination could not lead one to rational assent of any kind (*All My Road Before Me* 57). Of course, through his friendship with Owen Barfield, and his rethinking of critical progression during the mid '20s, Lewis realized that imagination has the power to convey the “real” to the thinking subject (Hipolito 228); however, Lewis was already living this definition of imagination before defining it more consciously. In the criticism, then, imagination becomes the means to “remember” historical and cultural roots. The first step to historical remembering is to acknowledge the inherent differences between present and past cultural models. This acknowledgement should lead readers to lay aside “as completely as [they] can all our [their] preconceptions, interests, and associations” (*An Experiment* 18). Readers, then, will hopefully be able to “put on” another worldview through studying it: the imagination must get involved in the process so that readers can attempt to place themselves in the old worldview.²³ It is for this reason that in *The Discarded Image*, Lewis constantly called his reader to imagine the following scenario:

You must go out on a starry night and walk about half an hour trying to see the sky in terms of the old cosmology. Remember that you now have an absolute Up and Down. The Earth is really the centre, really the lowest place [...]. For distance you must now substitute that very special, and far less abstract, sort of distance which we call height; height, which speaks immediately to our muscles and nerves. The Medieval Model is vertiginous.

[...] For thought and imagination, ten million miles and a thousand million are much the same. [...] if you accepted the Medieval Model you would feel like one looking *in*. (98 and 119)

Lewis, with his vivid prose, asked readers to imagine themselves referring to a different model for the universe, and later he said that the more *imagination* “we have the better we shall know [the past]” (99).²⁴ It seems that to imagine oneself as belonging to the past also implies the ability to know something about it. But this proposition can be pushed even one step further: the act of imagination can help the reader to discover the vestiges of the past in his or her cultural makeup.

1.D. Trauma, Memory and the Ambivalence of Recovery in the Narrative Poems

Lewis’s own contact with war makes its way into the narrative poems, although perhaps especially into “Dymer,” whose hero intentionally suppresses violence by running away from it; however, by running, Dymer proves himself to be like the town, country, and age he is from. The title “Dymer” arouses in the reader the expectations of a story about a great hero, a king, or a kingdom, but Dymer is a kingdom unto himself, and exists in isolation. Dymer comes from a nation in which the gods are “smothered down / Forever” and that thus declares its absolute break from the past and tradition, but in reality, this nation is a nation of “Platonists,” which indicates that history is repeating itself (I.3.1-2 and 4.1). Dymer murders his schoolmaster in an act of rebellion against this state, and escapes the “Perfect City” (I.10): as he enters the natural world outside his realm of experience, he strips away his clothes:

And forthwith in the open field

He stripped away that prison of sad stuff:

Socks, jacket, shirt and breeches off he peeled

And rose up mother naked with no shield. (I.16.2-5)

This stripping is reminiscent of the approach to literature described in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, in which readers are encouraged to exchange their clothes for those of a past age: but in this case Dymer is escaping the “prison” of his past. He is not returning to former times, but is attempting to forget them, and so he does not put on new clothes, or metaphorically, a new outlook at all. It is interesting that he does this soon after killing someone in cold blood.

Margaret Hannay notes that World War I intrudes on this text many times, for when “Dymer escapes from the magician he is shot with a gun, a strange anachronism in a world where the sentries are armed with spears” (247-48). Dymer runs from this violence, but again is unable to truly escape, for he is hit and the pain clings to him “like a great beast with fastened claws” (VIII.1.7). This image recalls Dymer’s beast-son who must be faced and fought at the end of the poem: the performance of violence, even the violent passion of Dymer’s sexual encounter in the dark, does not allow for escape, but the need to face past actions. Both Margaret Hannay and Don King note that the words of the wounded soldier in Canto IV recall a “dialog from the trenches” (Hannay 248 and King 219): “‘They’ve done for me. / I’ve no hands. Don’t come near me. No, but stay, / Don’t leave me... O my God! Is it near day?’” (IV.12.5-7). In the soldier’s story it is of course revealed that Dymer’s actions led to a mass revolt in the Perfect City. Dymer is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people, and some even described with graphic language: “I saw an old, old man / Lying before my feet with shattered skull” (28.2-3). But Dymer listens to the story as though he is not the one answerable for this violence. He answers “no word. / His face was stone. There was no meaning in / His wakeful eyes” (35.2-4). Here is the forgetting of shellshock, of trauma imposed and violence performed, and it is no forgetting, but a hell of constant remembering.

He attempts to murder his past, but his personal breakaway is roundly questioned, and near the end of the poem an intentional return to the consequences of his actions is deemed necessary.

Hannay's observations about World War I trauma might be extended to "Launcelot," the unfinished poem in which ideas of glory and chivalry are turned to disillusionment through the experience of trauma. Lewis has captured historical change in process: the experience of the knights on the grail quest has made them unable to re-enter their personal and political relationships; at least, they are unable to do so according to old social scripts. The court at Camelot shares the feelings of the women and children who waited at home during the World War:

...it became

A custom in that empty court never to name

The fear all felt, and not to listen any more

For rumours, nor to watch the roads, nor pace the shore. (30-33)

Gawain and the other returned knights are "changed irrelevant" in the hall at Camelot, and are "Strange to their wives, unwelcome to the stripling boys" (54-55). The knights who did not ride on the quest seem to the court the most "courteous," and they are "loved the best" (66), for they can happily act according to the long-established cultural model. The returning knights suffer from traumatic knowledge gained from the wide world, and the reader knows that if each knight has a tale like Launcelot's, there is no going back to the visions of glory, and even of sanctity, that the quest for the Holy Grail inspired. This state of affairs calls to mind Siegfried Sassoon's bitter World War I poem "They":

The Bishop tells us: "When the boys come back

They will not be the same; for they'll have fought

In a just cause: they lead the last attack
 On Anti-Christ; their comrade's blood has bought
 New right to breed an honourable race,
 They have challenged Death and dared him face to face."

"We're none of us the same!" the boys reply.
 "For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;
 Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;
 And Bert's gone syphilitic; you'll not find
 A chap who's served that hasn't found *some* change."
 And the Bishop said: "The ways of God are strange!"

Here, the Bishop acknowledges the returning soldiers' horrific tribulations, but attempts to fit it into a now irrelevant social construction, an image, as Lewis would say, that must be discarded. There is an unbreachable chasm between the front and home. In "Launcelot," the knights' trauma is knowledge of the wide world that is irreconcilable with the cultural image of the families and roles they had left behind. They return to the former societal model to find it unchanged, but they are altered forever.²⁵

Launcelot and Guinever thus become the specific example of historical change in process; Guinever wonders if Launcelot's return will signal the "doom, or the redeeming, or the change of love" (82), and, out of these three options, "change" becomes the key word. The reader learns that, when Launcelot left on his adventure, the birds "made shrill with marriage songs" (126). Even after encountering the devastated land, the beautiful land he encounters next makes "liquid love / Wells in his heart." He thinks that "the breezes here

have passed my lady's mouth" (182 and 185). But by the time Launcelot returns to Guinever, his love for her is modified:

He came to her and took her by the hand, as men

Take tenderly a daughter's or a mother's hand

To whom they bring bad news she will not understand. (110-112)

They were once lovers, and now Launcelot treats Guinever platonically. Traumatic experience is transforming personal and political relationships.

The reader, then, is given a picture of the bifurcation of history in "Launcelot". History is taking a new turn, as the repression of memory and experience leads to disillusionment. Gawain is "unlike the Gawain they had known," and he either cannot, or *will not* give the court news of his adventures (39-40). The knights are thus somewhat aware of the historical change that is taking place. The lack of communication is based on breach of trust. At the beginning of the poem, Arthur acknowledges that he knew he was sending his knights to ruin:

"...The Sangrail has betrayed us all,

According the prophecy Pelles the king

Once made, that at the moving of this holy thing

Our strength would fail." But Arthur, who was daily less

Of speech, through all these winter days, gave answer, "Yes.

I know it, and I knew it when they rode away." (21-26)

Arthur is like the World War I commanding officer who sent his soldiers to die in No Man's Land for a false picture of patriotism and glory, a fallacious picture which he himself believed for a time. Gawain will not, it seems, remain at Camelot, but asks leave to withdraw from court and the Round Table, in order to return to his own estates (47-48). When the rest

of the knights return, “New divisions came, and new / Allyings” (63-64). Gawain and the other knights decentralize governmental power, a power that sent them on the quest in the first place. The knights are speaking in new tongues (59), but it is unclear as to whether or not their persistent taciturnity results from the absence of words, or from the absence of will, to inform their families and friends that the old ways are to be trusted no more.²⁶ In time, this historical turn could lead to a cultural forgetting much like the one explicated by Lewis in *The Discarded Image*.

The murder of personages in “The Queen of Drum” also signals the heinous death of an age, and in Drum these ends ring with a tragic finality. The deaths of the King of Drum and his archbishop are together the assassination of an old order: the King may be unattractive, old, ignorant and even backward, but his death is still shocking. He mutters “between dry gums” in the morning and when speaking to the Queen he peers into the Queen’s face with his “big grey face” and even snarls, but his death signals a bifurcation in the poem’s form. Sudden turns characterize this poem, as the Queen comes unlooked for upon the Council “And across those champions all / Change passed, as when sunlight leaves the wall. [...] And all at once the Queen was there” (I.6.195-7.1). The King dies, and the archbishop is also murdered brutally: as static and even as hypocritical as the archbishop is, he is kindly. His murder is described graphically, with every “sinew crack” recorded: “They beat upon his stomach till its wall breaks.” His death already seems unjust, but its manner makes it absolutely despicable. With the passing of a traditional regime, marked by a Divine Right King and the person who sanctions and blesses that Right, Drum enters a new, military age. The General becomes the Leader, the Duce, the Führer, and the Master, but never the King. The whole system of government has been turned on its head, and the fact that the poem shifts to focus on the Queen’s relationship to faery makes that change permanent.

The binaries continue to abound in “The Queen of Drum” in the images of night and day, which are related to the spiritual, or faery, and the physical, ignorance and knowledge, and humility and pride. Immediately in Canto I, one reads of the transition period “before daybreak, when the moon has set” (11) The King of Drum is “surprised by day,” and indeed the general feeling in the castle is that the day is burdened, as it is described as “heavy,” and those up and about have a “loathing for the dawn” (70). The Council of Drum meets by day to make their real, official and collective decisions for the kingdom, but their meeting in the day is not considered to be an enlightened one, as they meet in dark, carpeted rooms: “In the very old carved room, so thick of wall, / So narrow-windowed, here, an hour from noon, / Men work by lamplight in the month of June” (82-84). In Canto II the dining hall at the castle in Drum is also dark, “where the piled curtains sweep / Wine-coloured carpets ankle deep” (5-6). This darkness is contrasted with the outside world, where the “thrush sings: unobserved” (7). It is implied that the official goings-on of the day are shrouded in darkness and ignorance. In a world that upholds the value of the public life, the Queen’s private night-time activities in the realm of faery threaten to overturn an established order, both the old established order under the King of Drum, and also the new order under the General.

It is the Queen of Drum, then, who acts as a bridge between the two aspects of the binary; even further, her presence, beliefs, experiences and actions tend to invert these policed opposites. It is interesting to note that, as in the criticism, Lewis attributes this bridging to the Queen’s ability to remember the night, for she keeps “the memory of her nights alive / Though we’ve forgotten” as the archbishop puts it (II.147-48). At the beginning of the poem is a bracketed stanza that contains the voice of faery, entreating the reader and sleeper to not forget: “Quick! Let no awaking / Wash out this memory. Mark my face, / Know me again—join hands—its breaking— / Remember—wait!—know me...” (6-9).

Later, when the King meets his Queen, with her eyes “sharp of sight from far away: [...] alien eyes” (49, 52), in another bracketed sequence the King decides not to pursue her thoughts: “Whispers the King, ‘Touch not, lest it should wake / The enormous tooth that once ceased to ache’” (58-59). The Queen accuses all in the council of hypocrisy, and claims she has met them in faery and they are merely denying this fact, but it becomes abundantly clear that they have entirely forgotten their nightly experiences (I.7.262-264).

In “The Nameless Isle,” the sea captain lands on the magic island after a traumatic shipwreck which makes him question his remembrances: “How long I lay, lapped in my weariness, / Memory minds not,” says the protagonist. And, “trouble it is to me / To remember much of that mixed sweetness / The smell and the sight and the swaying plumes” (59-60 and 93-94). The entire poem is preoccupied with the interaction of trauma, memory and history, for although the king and queen of the isle have undergone the same historical experience, they have remembered it differently. The captain first meets the queen of the isle, who claims that this “sweet country” was stolen from her (172); the king later says that “Half the island / Wrongly [the queen] has ravished. I am its rightful lord” (478-79). For each of them, however, the fracturing of their relationship revolves around the contest for their daughter and for the magic flute. The queen says that her husband is a crafty wizard who is “cold at heart” and an enemy of the wildlife she so tenderly nourishes; even further, she emphasizes his old age and abhorrent appearance: “If I saw shaking the skin upon his throat, / Or the rheum dropping from his red eyelids, / Or his tongue mumbling in the toothless gums, / By loathing I would lose my life” (173, 182-85). He is both thief and kidnapper to her, and there is no doubt that this memory is tied to the damaging loss of both flute and daughter. She sends the sea captain to regain both flute and daughter.

The king, however, claims that it is the “witch-hearted queen” that detained his precious daughter; his story is at odds with the queen’s, and both king and queen have rendered a half-truthful picture of the other. The wizard king is not at all grotesque, it turns out, but is majestic and young (400-02). According to the king, it is the queen who is both thief and abductor, but his picture of his wife, as “ravisher” of nature, does not completely align with the sea captain’s experience of the witch queen as mother to the flora and fauna on the enchanted isle. The king directly relates his memories to his traumatic experiences: ““Weary it is to me / To remember much. Miseries innumerable / Have ruled in this realm”” (587-89). It is difficult because he has tampered with his own memories, and because he is repressing not only part of the island’s history, but also his love for his wife. It appears, then, that the sorcerer is right in saying that ““All things are other on their inner side”” (485), for the same goes for his memory of the history of the island. To Lewis, this line applies to all readers of historical narratives: one must attempt to experience cultural memory from inside of it, for only then can different historical contexts come together.

The king and queen of the isle are thus representative of two different perspectives on history, and their reunion in the recovery of their daughter marks the beginning of a new era. The poem ends with a kind of dialogue reminiscent of the conversation from the Song of Songs in the Bible:

Hic: “They dear bosom is a deep garden
Between high hedges where heat burns not,
Where no rains ruin and no rimes harden,
A closed garden, where climbs no snake.”
Illa: “But they dear valour is a deep, rolling,
And a tower tolling strong towns awake.” (658-663)

The isle's lord and lady are reunited, and their daughter is united to the shipwrecked sailor: a double marriage, and a double convergence of the male-female binary. This poem is the only one out of the four that highlights a definitive reconciliation of terms in its structure and ending: "we recognize that the poet is speaking of reconciliation between lord and lady and thus with the rest of creation, coupled with a great sense of being released from bondage and returning back home" (Kawano 33). The bifurcation of histories, their divergence, is followed by life, love, recovery and convergence. This optimistic happy ending fits with the positive hope of return and historical recovery that exists in Lewis's literary criticism.

1.E. Conclusions

It is clear, then, that all four narrative poems share in Lewis's depictions of historical cultural models, and his belief in both the loss of and recovery of history. Even further, it is clear that "Dymer" is not the only poem to exhibit a connection to the historical and cultural loss experienced by Englishmen and women as a result of World War I. Every one of the narrative poems is linked in terms of their engagement with history as trauma, repression, memory and recovery. Despite seeing history as bifurcated, and describing this bifurcation in terms of cultural death, Lewis, in the end, emphasized historical continuity. He denied the Renaissance as a movement while claiming that cataclysmic change had occurred in his own modern time. As a Christian he saw history as redemptive, and as linear, at least somewhat, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, but when he approached literature in history he packaged off the historical periods in ways that made them self-contained, and even alien, from his own historical context. The terms of both continuity and loss are problematic, and make it appear that Lewis did not know his own mind, but he was attempting to mourn cultural loss while simultaneously holding firmly to the roots of a modern literary

inheritance. Lewis wished to give credit where it was due. He divided his history into tight compartments, but in so doing hoped to connect the reader to the past, in order to bring about a reader-history convergence.

Donald T. Williams says that “Lewis saw the great literature of the past as a repository of cultural *memory* and wisdom that could help us rightly order our response to the world in terms of healthy and appropriate stock responses” (50, emphasis added).²⁷ The historical imagination, then, leads the reader of literature eventually to acknowledge human and historical continuity: this belief is evident in both Lewis’s criticism and poetry. To Lewis, this experience leads the reader to two aspects of poetry, language and human understanding that have remained the same: stock responses, and the allegorical form. To Lewis, allegory “is not merely a medieval phenomenon; it generally belongs to the human mind” (Martin, ed. *Reading the Classics* 271). Poetic stock responses have everything to do with fundamental human experience, and are the acknowledgement that “love is sweet, death is bitter, virtue is lovely” (Williams 50). Our hearts may not be the same, as our cultural backcloths are incompatible. However, after the modern reader has admitted historical difference, he or she can better see what is shared with the past. In *The Allegory of Love* Lewis said that readers can understand their “present, and perhaps even [their] future, the better if [they] can succeed, by an effort of the historical imagination, in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which the allegorical love poem was a natural mode of expression” (1). In this passage Lewis highlighted historical difference, and even the fact of cultural death, but he also opened the reader’s mind to the prospect of historical continuity that exists through the imaginative act of recovering the past. On this crucial point, Lewis challenged the celebrated slogan of modernism—“make it new”—which was understood as an exhortation to advance novelty by discarding tradition. At the same time, however, he

seemed to invoke T. S. Eliot's seminal essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and the modernist poet's insistence on the importance of cultivating a "historical sense" which "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (37).

Chapter 2

Romanticism and Myth: Lewis's "Great War" with Owen Barfield and the Development of Poetic Consciousness in "Dymer" and "The Queen of Drum"

2.A. Introduction

Owen Barfield dedicated *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, published in 1928, "To C. S. Lewis: 'Opposition is true friendship,'" a dedication that was reaffirmed in 1962 when the volume was re-issued. This inscription speaks to Lewis and Barfield's "Great War" over the nature of historical and mental development. Barfield felt that a theory of poetry must also be equal to a relevant and accessible theory of knowledge (*Romanticism Comes of Age* 130). His thought tended to elicit reactionary responses, either for its illustration of the simultaneous empiricism and metaphysics of the imagination, or for its affinity with the thought of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), the founder of anthroposophy. Barfield claimed that science, broadly defined, can be seen in relationship with the humanities, but that current trends polarized these approaches to knowledge²⁸: "It is in this connection [between science and the humanities] that the distinction has been drawn between a 'positive' Romanticism on the one hand and on the other, [...] 'negative' Romanticism" (*Romanticism Comes of Age* 21). Barfield said that it was this "border" between psychology and philosophy that interested him the most (11).

Barfield derived his Romantic paradigm from his anthroposophical reading of Romanticism. Rudolf Steiner, whom Barfield called the "hero of my tragedy," since it was he who personified Romanticism "grown up" (*RCA* 35, 14), believed that the human intellect can be described as the combination and interaction of three "souls," the Sentient Soul, which feels emotions and experiences the external world via the senses, the Consciousness Soul, which is the human ability to reason empirically, and the Intellectual Soul, which is the

metaphysical aspect of the human intellect, the aspect that contains the faculty of the imagination (13). This phenomenological structure can be discovered through a return to self that is objective and open, hence the use of the term “*anthroposophia*, because the essence of [anthroposophy] is that it is developed out of man himself by his own powers and of his own free choice” (38-39). Barfield believed that Rudolf Steiner had solved the problem of the duality between subjective and objective experience, because anthroposophy viewed the Consciousness and Sentient Souls in relationship, as mediated by a developed and aware Intellectual Soul. The imagination, in other words, was the source of both empirical and metaphysical discovery and growth. Barfield felt that Romanticism, as seen through the lens of Rudolph Steiner, was not merely a late-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century anachronistic phenomenon, but a relevant philosophy. One can begin to see, from this brief outline, where Lewis took issue with Barfield’s poetic theory as it relates to history, and as well to Lewis’s definition of Romanticism. The main sticking point was Barfield’s view that eras are not historically bound, but are in direct dialogue with the present day. Despite these areas of disagreement, both Lewis and Barfield were attempting to combat chronological snobbery in different ways: Lewis relegated the past to its own context and refused to judge it based solely on present knowledge, whereas Barfield showed that the past is directly related to the present, and that it is relevant and therefore to be respected, because of the natural progression of historical development.

Early on in Lewis and Barfield’s “Great War,” their conversations centred on the concept of “the Christina dream,”²⁹ a concept they derived from the mistaken daydreams of Christina Pontifex in Samuel Butler’s 1903 novel, *The Way of All Flesh*, a novel which Lewis viewed as escapist, and Barfield as pedagogical (Hipolito 222). On May 24, 1922 Lewis recorded in his diary that he and Barfield took a walk and “began with Christina

dreams: I condemned them—the love dream made a man incapable of real love, the hero dream made him a coward. He took the opposite view and a stubborn argument followed” (*All My Road Before Me* 39). Many critics have shown that this debate was relevant to “Dymer”: of course, the discussions of Lewis and Barfield fit with the 1920’s interest in psychoanalysis, which prominently figures into Barfield’s linguistic theory. In the 1950 Preface to “Dymer,” Lewis stated that the poem had arisen from these discussions, and his “hero, therefore, had to be a man who had succumbed to [the allurements of Christina dreams] and finally got the better of them” (4). Barfield envisioned humanity progressing in real time towards complete self-consciousness, whereas Lewis saw this belief as a mistaken Christina dream. “Dymer” dealt with the true nature of joy, but it could be argued that “The Queen of Drum” continued this discussion.

At the beginning of “Dymer,” the poem and the protagonist himself are put forward by the narrative voice as “the unfashioned clay / Ready to both our hands; both [reader and narrator] hushed to see / That which is nowhere yet come forth and be” (1.1). Dymer is on an aesthetic journey of self-discovery, but by the end of the poem his journey of cultural rejection, search, and eventual fight and death reveals that his seeming isolation and interiority have dire consequences for the people he left behind in “real time.” It could be argued that “Dymer” and “The Queen of Drum” represent both the danger and allure of Barfield’s return to poetic and empirical consciousness, or the return to self, as well as of the false promise of Christina Dreams. Not only do Barfield’s views serve as a main reaction point for Lewis’s own literary history and poetic theory, but also Dymer can be read as “the figure of the poet struggling to achieve his poetic destiny” (Milne 171). Marjorie Milne’s argument can be pushed further if the conflict and collaboration between Lewis and Barfield are used to draw out the concept of “poetic destiny” in more detail. The threat and attraction

of Barfield's development of poetic consciousness, as well as Milne's argument regarding "poetic destiny," might be extended to the Queen in "The Queen of Drum" as well, especially when the Lewisian relationship between myth and history is made clear. There is a difference, for Lewis, between the appeal of Faerie, the third path the Queen might take, and the true attraction of beauty, for "the poem suggests that fairy land is the realm of dreams" (Christopher, "Three Views of Faerie" 20). Owen Barfield's anthroposophical reading of history and poetic consciousness might be used to read this third way. Barfield's beliefs pushed Lewis to consider his definition of myth and imagination. Myth, to Lewis, was the meeting point between imagination and history, and was the antithesis to the Christina dream in the sense that it encapsulated the beauty of a communicable truth. The path of myth is Lewis's third way.

2.B. Opposition is True Friendship: C. S. Lewis and Owen Barfield's Theory of History and Consciousness

According to Rudolph Steiner, the human intellect can be described as the combination and interaction of three "souls," as described in the introduction to this chapter. Barfield's own experience of this truth came via his experience of poetry in his early twenties: "without any particular exertion or theorising on my part, I had had two things strongly impressed on me, firstly that the poetic or imaginative use of words enhances their meanings and secondly that those enhanced meanings may reveal hitherto unapprehended parts or aspects of reality" (10). When he later stumbled upon Steiner's anthroposophy, he noticed a similar effect in Steiner's writings: "this effect was independent of belief. Something happened: one felt wiser. This was a fact" (13). Romanticism as a philosophy corresponded with Barfield's personal experience of the world, and with his reading about

consciousness and history, and this excited him and prompted him to re-read the Romantics with greater attention.

Upon revisiting *Romanticism Comes of Age* in the later 1960s, Barfield became aware of the problems inherent in choosing the Romantic paradigm. He felt that Romanticism had become Janus-faced, looking either backward or forward. Conventional critical accounts described Romanticism as being either about the revival of a classical past or about its transcendence into the metaphysical. “It is with this half of the movement, and its subsequent history, that I am principally concerned” (25-26), said Barfield, and he believed that it is only in true transcendence that the Romantic impulse will discover its “vocation” (22). He acknowledged, however, that “cosmic explanations [...] tend to entail a spineless relativism,” and thus that anchorage in the past is absolutely necessary: “‘Where do we go from here?’ and the question: ‘How did we get here?’ cannot fruitfully be considered in isolation from one another” (21). This statement contains the beginnings of just *how*, according to Barfield, Romanticism comes of age, since it exists both in history and beyond time. Romanticism matures when it asks, like Goethe, just *how* the faculty of imagination acts as “a vehicle of truth or knowledge” (29-30). Since interiority will indeed affect not only one’s external relationships, but also society, one must be aware of the real realm between the subjective experience of interiority and exteriority.³⁰

Like Steiner, Barfield believed that the imagination is one of the “*Urphänomene*,” or prime phenomena, which are neither objective nor subjective, and so the faculty itself lies on the border between two realms (*RCA* 36-37). To Barfield, individuals engage with a spiritual energy that is simultaneously outside and inside them, but this mystery does not excuse them from describing the experience as explicitly as possible. Barfield observed that this process was begun by the nineteenth-century Romantics, and that Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the

chief catalyst of this idea. Barfield believed his own era had rejected this progress towards a unity between the Consciousness and Intellectual Souls. He called his age the “age of the Consciousness Soul,” and he mourned this focus on mere empiricism: “The Imagination is the marriage of spirit and sense. [...] The Consciousness Soul is cut off from knowledge. Does it wish to know again? Then it must become the Imaginative Soul” (*RCA* 79).

Coleridge had contributed to the awakening of the Imaginative Soul in human consciousness, and so Barfield made a plea for Steiner’s method of knowledge, a method that was, in essence, “systematic imagination” (*RCA* 37), a term which for them incorporated both empiricist method and the metaphysics of the Intellectual Soul. It was time, said Barfield, to rectify the modern emphasis on empiricism, for the modern ban on imagination to be lifted, and for the three souls to work in combination.

One can see that Lewis would take issue with several aspects of Barfield’s thought, namely the idea of the development of a collective consciousness, the progress of historical views, and the lack of a border existing between the metaphysical and the physical. Barfield and Lewis accused each other of being inconsistent. The reason why Barfield “cured” Lewis of his chronological snobbery was because Barfield firmly believed that the changes in human consciousness that he observed were changes in perception, and not changes in human nature, for “nature is not, and never has been, [...] independent of man’s mind” (Thorson 13). Barfield treated all minds throughout history with a profound respect, and this approach brought Lewis to abjure the “uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to [his] own age” (*Surprised by Joy* 167). In Lewis’s view, Barfield’s approach to poetry and language in history led him dangerously close to chronological snobbery in the end. Barfield’s theory, moreover, denied God’s transcendence, and in general got rid of hierarchies of all kinds. In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis noted that, in the Middle Ages, the

Intellectus, or the role of understanding, was placed over and above the power of reason, and that Coleridge inverted this “traditional order” by putting imaginative reason above understanding (157). How, Lewis wondered, could Barfield claim to believe in a democratic approach to historical periods, while claiming that progress in knowledge had occurred as well? Barfield, on the other hand, found it difficult to marry Lewis’s eventual belief in imagination and divine revelation with his desire to draw borders between reader and text, and between past and present. But, as Steven Thorson notes, Lewis was not rejecting the possibility of “finding meaning in history in any sense whatever”; he simply meant that man could not, again ““by use of his natural powers, discover an inner meaning in the historical process”” (Thorson 23, emphasis added).

Lewis’s concept of myth further teases out Barfield’s and Lewis’s respective approaches to Romanticism and poetic consciousness. In the preface to the third edition of *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, Lewis says that what he meant by Romanticism in that text is “a peculiar recurrent experience” which he calls Joy in *Surprised by Joy (Regress 7)*.³¹ The experience of joy unites Lewis’s pre- and post-conversion periods, because he often experienced it when reading the literature he loved. For the 1920s Lewis, the problem lay in what was a narrative fiction and therefore not true, and what was myth and therefore mirroring the truth in some mysterious way; in other words, the very definition of myth was at stake. Myth as something untrue was delusional and even dangerous, and Lewis and Barfield’s conversations about Christina dreams fit into this category. Lewis associated the false promise of Christina dreams with Barfield’s optimistic view of the development of human consciousness, and thus with his view of human progress in history. The experience of joy, on the other hand, led one to experience truth, and this process was often mediated by myth. As R. J. Reilly says, in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* there is a divine element in John’s

Romanticism which shows that even Pagan myth contains a divine call: “We may now fairly expand this to read that many things, romantic longing and pagan myth among them, are sent by God to arouse in man that desire for the wholly other which is Himself” (110). *The Pilgrim’s Regress* is itself a story about the difference between the dangerous Christina Dream, which amounts to the illusory “brown girls,” or false daydreams of happiness, and the experience of joy that leads John to the truth about the Landlord (*Regress* 30). When John, later in the story, gains maturity through his experiences, he acknowledges the difference between true and false Romanticism:

“I have *tasted* what you call romantic trash; you have only talked about it.

You need not tell me that there is danger in it and an element of evil. Do you suppose that I have not felt that danger and that evil a thousand times more than you? But I know also that the evil in it is not what I went to it to find, and that I should have sought nothing and found nothing without it.” (102)

One can hear the voice of Jack Lewis here. The joy experience led him to seek metaphysical and spiritual truth, and along the way he was tempted to believe in presentations of truth that proved to be delusional and false. But he recognized that the impetus led him to something real, and that experience could teach him to differentiate between true and false representations of spiritual reality. Myth, for Lewis, came to represent a means to recognize this truth, and thus it became one bridge between past and present. The narrative poems, written in the mode of the mythological chronicle, are aesthetic expressions of this desire to bridge the past and present in such a way that accounts for both historical difference and continuity. “Dymer” and “The Queen of Drum” were written during the time of Lewis’s attempt to discover the true Romanticism. They reflect his Great War with Barfield, a

discussion which sought to discover just how history, poetic consciousness, and phenomenological and metaphysical truth were interacting with each other.

2.C. Defining Romanticism and Poetic Consciousness in “The Queen of Drum” and “Dymer”

Both “Dymer” and “The Queen of Drum” are dealing with Barfield’s Romantic ideology and approach to history, and both poems are evidence of discussion of the ideology and not of decision about it one way or the other. Despite their ambivalence, however, the lasting tonal impression made on the reader is one of scepticism, which was Lewis’s attitude towards Barfield’s thought during the duration of their friendship. “Dymer” seems to provide more of an answer to the predicament of anthroposophy. There is a difference, in “Dymer,” between Lewis’s later understanding of myth and the idea of being mistaken. In his *Six Modern Authors and the Problems of Belief*, Patrick Grant says that Owen Barfield was attempting to revalue the contribution of the Romantics,

in their repudiation of a positivist idolatry of objects. The imagination, they were able to show, is active perception itself. [...This led man to a place where he] could use his imagination to re-invest with meaning the world which a sceptical self-consciousness and scientific positivism had drained of significance other than the measurable. (123)

Here one sees reflected the Consciousness Soul, the soul of reason and empiricism, and the Intellectual Soul, or the realm of the imagination. In “Dymer,” however, Lewis is concerned that these definitions do not lead one into the realm of distorted and egocentric imaginings.

Dymer’s sexual encounter is not only the event on which the poem’s plot hinges, but it also provides the crux of the Barfield discussion. But, as Murphy points out, Dymer has

actually made a mistake about the person to whom he has made love: he has formed the dream of love into his own, desired perception of it (76). This was not the meeting of equals; it was, in fact, a sexual encounter between a goddess and a mortal man. Murphy argues that Dymer's hamartia is his objectification of the woman in the cave (76), but perhaps even more so it is his misinterpretation of the power dynamic, for he goes into the enclosure as a hero, at least in his own mind. In other words, Dymer has fallen into the trap of both types of Christina dreams, the dream of love and the dream of heroism: he cannot re-form reality in his mind, nor can he purposefully advance the state of his own consciousness.

It is interesting to note the correspondence between the female nature of the Christina dream as Barfield and Lewis labelled it, and the female protagonist in "The Queen of Drum." They named this type of psychoanalytic daydream, this attempt at self-progress through time, after a female character, and this association with the feminine may have led Lewis to connect the Christina dream with Barfield's prioritizing of the Intellectual Soul over the Consciousness Soul. In line 191 of Canto I, the reader learns that the King is the one who announces the Queen's entry to the council chamber: "(in his hand a paper shook) / Laboured, faltering, to speech, with shifty look / Settling towards a blank dismay" (I.6.191-193). The King is afraid of his wife and her emotional power, here associated with the power of faery. Immediately at the opening of the seventh section of Canto 1, the Queen's female presence is imposed on a male world:

A flash of eyes, a flash of hair,
Nostril widened, teeth laid bare,
Omens of her breathing, and
Robe caught breastward in one hand,
Tall mid their seated shapes: a hush

Of moments: then the torrent rush

Of her speaking. (I.7.2-8)

If the Queen is representative of the Christina dream, then she threatens here an established order that is male, and supposedly based on reason, or what Barfield would call the Consciousness Soul.³² This is a woman caught up in the passion of her emotions, the power and energy of which can be felt in words like “flash” and “torrent rush.” Her emotion and passion, combined with the might of the unknown dominion of faery, invert an established male order: usually the one standing in a council chamber is the one of less importance, and those seated are the authorities. But here, the Queen exerts a kind of control over the room, as she is “Tall mid their seated shapes.” She towers over them. Later she fails to control her rage as her “breast shook, and scalding came / Tears of deep rage. Bit thro’ the lip, clench hand.” Just before these lines, in brackets once again, is the phrase “(curses on the frame / Of woman!)” (I.7.308-310). This time the attribution of the thought in the brackets is unclear, as it could be the King or the narrative voice. The Queen is aligned with the imaginative sphere, which in Barfield’s theory is where human consciousness is heading. What she represents could be the unreal, that is, a symbol of the rejection of reason altogether. To exclude the faculty of reason as a mode of knowing was an approach which Lewis was never willing to take.

Barfield found the Romantic ideology wanting in its articulation of exactly how or why the poetic and aesthetic impulse operates in the individual human intellect. Marjorie Milne notes that the character Dymmer can be read as “the figure of poet struggling to achieve his poetic destiny” (171), and “The Queen of Drum” must be investigated for its discussion of poetic consciousness as well. In Canto III, the Archbishop questions whether or not he has been ““in that place,”” the kingdom of faery, and again, following in brackets, ““(We’ll call it

so / Though wrongly)''' (43-44). The ambiguity inherent in the development of consciousness hinges on the word "place," for what is this particular point or position in space? In this poem, the poet is dealing with the potential for the existence of places, in the plural: mental, spiritual, or metaphysical places as mediated by the aesthetic or imaginative realm of faery, which here can be aligned with poetic consciousness. To Barfield, imagined realities are no less real than reasoned concepts, but to Lewis the question which remained was how to show that imagined realities were true. At the beginning of the Great War between Lewis and Barfield, imagination for the former was no more than "'disinterested fancy'" (*All My Road Before Me* 57), and was equated with whimsical musings and daydreams. It is clear in both "Dymer" and "The Queen of Drum" that Lewis is playing with other, weightier, definitions of this term, and that Barfield's theory was helping him to rethink imagination's role in human consciousness.

In "Dymer," Lewis's scepticism about the development of poetic consciousness is further illuminated by the figure of the magician, which many critics and even Lewis himself attributed to the personality of W. B. Yeats (*Narrative Poems* 6, Sayer 107). Green and Hooper note that Lewis read the early Yeats and hoped to become a poet like him: Lewis even met Yeats twice when Yeats lived in Oxford in 1921 (Green and Hooper 21, 67; see Wilson 48). There was a definite link between Yeats' theosophy and Barfield's anthroposophy. In *Romanticism Comes of Age*, Barfield speaks of how the development of consciousness in history is a "progress from phenomena to general principles, and from those general principles back again to phenomena" (11). It is this eternal return to general principles that allows Barfield to respect human consciousness in all ages, but the circular and progressive view here also echoes Yeats' gyres in "The Second Coming," and Yeats' view of history in *Ideas of Good and Evil*. If Dymer can be read as a figure of the developing

poet, as Milne would have us think (171), then his encounter with the magician amounts to a failure of the development of poetic consciousness, or a failure of a certain way of thinking about poetry. At the beginning of Canto VI, Dymer has apparently left behind the Christina dreams of love and heroism, the false way of looking at these concepts: “‘I’ll babble now / No longer,’ Dymer said. ‘I’m broken in. / Pack up the dreams and let the life begin’” (VI.2.5-7). There is one more dream left to die: Lewis’s dream of being a great poet, like Yeats. The magician comes across as impressively spiritual:

It was a mighty man whose beardless face
 Beneath grey hair shone out so large and mild
 It made a sort of moonlight in the place.
 A dreamy desperation, wistful-wild,
 Showed in his glance, and gait: yet like a child,
 An Asian emperor’s only child, was he
 With grave looks and bright solemnity. (VI.7)

This description is a view of “Yeats as I saw him,” said Lewis (*Narrative Poems* 6), but the magician’s impressiveness is immediately undercut by his attachment to a strange and violent anachronism: a gun. In stanza ten the reader learns that this awe-inspiring man shoots the larks, because they “‘interrupt [his] dreams too long’” (10.5). But the magician makes an argument for his own dream world, a world in which “‘the fool is free from scorning voices’” (26.1), a line which evokes Lewis’s frustration with the critical voices surrounding his poetry, including his own. Dymer is lulled to sleep by the magician, and dreams strangely, only to wake and realize that to pause there is to avoid reality:

“...Your land... your land
 Of dreams,” he said. “All lies! ... I understand

More than I did. Yes, Water. I've the thirst

Of hell itself. Your magic's all accursed." (VII.11.4-7)

When he tries to leave, however, the magician is crouched there "with levelled gun," and Dymer must run for his life: one can read here the betrayal of the dream of a developed poetic consciousness. It is the death of one more Christina dream.

That being said, it should be noted that "Lewis accepted Barfield's concept of 'internalization.' Or at least he accepted a version of it" (Thorson 25). Thorson notices a big difference between them, however: "For Lewis, internalization remained a history of change in man's *ideas*. But for Barfield [...] it was more than that; it was an actual evolution of man's *consciousness*" (26). In "Dymer" we have seen that the hero would like to think that his consciousness can evolve or has evolved, be it a consciousness dream about love, heroism, or a consciousness representative of aesthetic expression. For Lewis, true internalization exists in the concept of myth, in his own understanding of this term, as well as in humanity's ability to understand the truth inherent in narrative myth. This revelation, moreover, comes from the top down, so to speak: truth takes a course from the metaphysical and inserts itself into history through the expression of myth ("Myth Become Fact" 66). In Barfield, man changes through an evolution of consciousness; in other words, the trajectory of progress moves from the bottom up. To Lewis, humility was required to accept myth's revelations. An acknowledgement of this truth leads to the rebirth so often illustrated in a mythic history (Milne 171). Upon discovering that his lover was a goddess, Dymer acknowledges his smallness and rejects the falseness of the previous view of himself: "'I called myself their lover—I that was / Less fit for that long service than the least / Dull, workday drudge of men or faithful beast'" (VIII.10.5-7). But it is precisely through this moment of self-recognition that Dymer grows to greatness, for he knows it is his role to

confront the monster, his son. Consequently, Dymer, in Murphy's view, must take responsibility for his own actions:

But before departing, the goddess has one more lesson for him, and that is along with ceasing to romanticize or reject nature, and ceasing to romanticize or reject the supernatural, he must also cease to romanticize or deny death because it is both the natural result of human life and a link to the supernatural world. (76)

According to this reading, the goddess's revelation of herself constitutes the climax of the poem, and one could confidently identify this transformation scene as being the crucial turning point where Dymer ceases to be a story about Christina dream and becomes myth. Dymer's death leads to the monster's rebirth as a god: "All in a moment, all his story done. / ... But that same moment came the rising sun" (IX.30.6-7).

This reading of "Dymer" can be applied to the denouement of "The Queen of Drum," for there, too, the definition of myth is at stake. Does myth mean the falseness of the Christina dream, and the falseness, according to Lewis, that exists in Barfield's notion of the progress of consciousness in human history? Lewis is against the idea that man can progress from the bottom up based on his own powers alone. One can read the ending of "The Queen of Drum" as the protagonist's enacting her own salvation, so to speak; however, there is a real risk that the Queen has been fooling herself about the realm of dreams, and that she will be damned: " 'This thirst will burn my body in the rotting grave'" (III.88). "The Queen of Drum" spans Lewis's pre- and post-conversion years, and it seems that the poem's ambivalence hinges on the difference between joy, the experience that came as the result of a top down transfer from myth into history, and the unrealistic Christina dream. Here, then,

lies the difference between definitions of Romanticism proposed by Lewis and Barfield, and their respective views of how this nineteenth-century aesthetic movement relates to history.

2.D. Conclusions

C. S. Lewis ends his appropriately titled poem “On Vulgar Error” with “So, when our guides unanimously decry / The backward glance, I think we can guess why” (60). To Lewis, an evolutionary view of human consciousness is a type of Romanticism that is too “forward-looking” on the trajectory of history. In Chapter 1 we saw that the backward glance is necessary for the humble reception of literature, and here we see that the backward glance is also necessary for the reception of the truth inherent in narrative myth. In *Romanticism Comes of Age*, Barfield points out this difference in the conventional definition of Romanticism:

As a literary movement, then, the Romantic Revival seems to me to have fallen into two fairly distinct halves. On the one hand the pursuit of what I will call pure Romance and the attaching to this of high human value. Strangeness and distance, these are the essence of this pure Romance. It is the cult of ‘far away and long ago’. [...] The other half of the movement is metaphysical. It comes forward with a new theory of poetry, which it sees for the first time more as a religion than a pastime. It makes much use of such words as *genius*, *imagination*, *creative*, filling them with meaning.... (25-26)

Of course, as we have seen, Barfield admitted to being concerned with the second “half of the movement, and its subsequent history” (26). Lewis’s own brand of Romanticism foregrounds the cult of the far away and long ago, but as we have also seen, there are good reasons for his desire to place emphasis on the past and its inherited wisdom. In the second

kind of Romanticism, the very words that Barfield pulls out illustrate Lewis's fear. "Genius," "imagination" and "creativity" are very personal, and at times extremely egocentric, terms of reference, and for Lewis this focus is related to the false view of self that exists in Christina dreams. Both "Dymer" and "The Queen of Drum" illustrate the danger in adopting a false view of the self and the development of consciousness. Barfield, however, definitely influenced Lewis's definition of imagination, and he even convinced Lewis that the imagination was an organ of meaning equal to that of reason: myth came to represent the intersection of imagination with time, or history's intersection with the metaphysical and spiritual realm. Just how imagination and reason are playing themselves out in Lewis's literary history and his narrative poems is the subject of the next chapter. But for now it is important to note that both Barfield and Lewis were trying to combat the malady of chronological snobbery, each in their own ways. As Donald T. Williams says, "Lewis and Barfield [...] are liberating, freeing us from the shackles of our own limitations to learn without prejudice from the wisdom of the ages" (52).

Chapter 3

Reason, Imagination and “The Nameless Isle”: Reading C. S. Lewis as a Poet and a Critic of His Own Time

3.A. Introduction

On Friday, the 25 June 1922, C. S. Lewis recorded in his diary that “After tea I walked in the fields towards Forest Hill, neglecting a beautiful coloured evening in favour of idle Christina dreams about refuting Eliot and Stein. Returned in a dissatisfied mood, and began to re-read MacDonald’s *Lilith*” (*All My Road* 418). In this passage one can see how the term “Christina dream” came to mean fancy, or a false daydream; moreover, it reveals that Lewis’s relationship to his own historical context and modernism is another aspect that must be teased out in relation to his literary history, criticism and narrative poetry. Lewis was against the new poetry and the concept of “l’art pour l’art” (*All My Road* 29), and he retained this conviction throughout his pre- and post-conversion years.

In a way, Lewis can be seen as anticipating a host of recent modernist criticism that has challenged definitions of this literary movement in a bid to show that the period was one of complexity, difference, and inconsistency. Lewis’s tendency to separate the present from the past is a quality of modernism, for as Carl E. Schorske says in *Thinking with History: Exploration in the Passage to Modernism*, the “platform of [modernism’s] intellectual identity” is its “rupture from history as a continuous process” (4). Of course, as we saw earlier, many modern writers did not see themselves as necessarily breaking with the past, so while modernism’s “intellectual identity” was characterized by historical rupture, its aesthetic expression did not see history in the same way. Robert Scholes would call this seeming contradiction a “paradoxy” of modernism (xi). Barfield made much of Lewis’s “inconsistencies,” and thus of his paradoxes, but in a way these inconsistencies align Lewis

with the fragmentation that characterizes modernism (Esty 6); however, Lewis was no literary modernist. His negotiation of his times signals a connection to his own time and context, but in his scholarly and creative writings he most definitely set himself against his modern era: he characterized himself as *a*-historicist, and he was most definitely *a*-modernist as well. Lewis shares modernism's focus on the use of language and poetic form. As Doris T. Myers says, it is absolutely necessary to "locate [Lewis's] works in the context of early twentieth-century language controversies" (xii). In the wake of World War I, language was increasingly perceived as devoid of meaning, and as a means of social construction and control. Modern poetry's so-called "formlessness" reflected this current lack of confidence in language, and so it also reflected, somewhat, a rejection of the past. Of course, Lewis's answer to poetic and linguistic revolutions was to return to past forms, both in his reading and in his writing.

In Chapter 1 we saw that historical memory can bridge the gap between past and present in Lewis's criticism, despite the fact that his bifurcation of history seemingly indicates a non-transference from past to present. In that chapter, we saw that a reader needed to make a definitive use of the historical imagination in order to discover the roots of a literary inheritance. In Chapter 2 we investigated the foil for Lewis's historical and epistemological thought, and attempted to define what, for Lewis, imagination was *not*. In both chapters, the concept of imagination was drawn out as a means of bridging the gap between the poet/critic and reader, and between past and present. In this chapter, we shall investigate the imagination and reason binary in Lewis, in the hopes of producing yet another third term, or a place of convergence, which seems to be, for Lewis, the ability for and the use of language. Both reason and imagination seek to communicate themselves as mental faculties, and both are used in the construction of an aesthetic object. In Lewis's case, his

dedication to reason can be seen not only in the narrative poems' engagement with ideas but also in his use of systematic form. The use of the mythical chronicle and the fantastical aspects of the poems indicate a use of imagination: language unites imagination to reason. It may be that Lewis's conversion facilitated this "marriage" of reason and imagination; however, this thesis has been attempting to show that Lewis's whole aesthetic and critical program was characterized by the effort to find bridges between bifurcated terms. His exploration of the relationship between reason and imagination was made necessary by his historical context. The narrative poems, by this estimation, can be re-valued as cultural and aesthetic productions, worthy of study for how they at once reflect and react to their own time and place.

3.B. We Are the [Old] Movement: C. S. Lewis's Negotiation of the Modern Age

In *The Pilgrim's Regress*, Lewis's protagonist, John, experiences the tyranny and violence of the aesthetic and ideological "new movement": "'Well,' said John, ducking to avoid a retort that had been flung at him, 'if you are really old enough to remember that war, why do you pretend to be so young?' 'We are young,' they howled; 'we are the new movement; we are the revolt'" (54). Literary modernism and its approach to literary history, although characterized by revolt, became the dominant aesthetic stream during mid century. Lewis saw what was missing in these approaches and thus rebelled against the original revolt by becoming a "conservative iconoclast" (Watson 1). Although he tried to distance himself from his literary environment, Lewis was nevertheless a product of the modern age of fragmentation (Manganiello, "Dante Among the Moderns" 15). As George Watson says, Lewis shares in an "essential modernity"; that is, the iconoclast necessarily depends on the aspects of modernity he challenges in order to make sense of his own dissent (4).³³ Both

Lewis and the modernists share time and context, while reacting to their cultural environments in very different ways. Jed Esty points out that Lewis and the Oxford Christians rebelled against the “popular realism of the Victorians,” while eschewing the “alienated virtuosity of the modernists” (121-122). Lewis reacted to Victorianism, just as the modernists did, while at the same time he represents an unconventional negotiation of his cultural context, one that involved the return to a literary and linguistic past that predated both modernism and Victorianism.

Although Lewis “admired” many modernist works (Martin, ed. 245), including some of the poetry of T. S. Eliot, for the most part he disdained the new literature. He “knew his poetry was too ‘naïve’ to be fashionable” (Kreeft 6-7). Kreeft goes on to quote extensively from one of Lewis’s first poems, entitled “A Confession”:

I am so coarse, the things the poets see
Are obstinately invisible to me.
For twenty years I’ve stared my level best
To see if evening—any evening—would suggest
A patient etherized upon a table;
In vain. I simply wasn’t able. (*Poems* 1)

Kreeft shows that Lewis’s poetic expression exists in opposition to the “fashionable” modernist poetic trends of his time, for in the lines above, Lewis refers to T. S. Eliot’s “Prufrock.” In “A Confession,” Lewis objected to modernism’s endless search for novelty and its accentuation of the idiosyncratic, as exemplified in the metaphysical conceit of comparing an evening sky to an etherized patient. Lewis celebrates instead “stock responses,” which honour a fundamental human experience, and are the acknowledgement that “love is sweet, death is bitter, virtue is lovely” (Williams, Donald T. 50). To Lewis,

modernist poetry encapsulated contextual particulars, not universals. In the *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis again brought up the central metaphor in “Prufrock,” of the patient on the operating table, saying that it had been praised for being so ““pleasantly unpleasant.”” Nay, said Lewis, even in this case “the stock response to pleasure cannot be depended on” (56). It is interesting to note that, in theory, T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis were in agreement about the poet’s relationship to tradition. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot says that the poet cannot write apart from literary tradition, and that in some sense the poet is derived from it (37, Daigle-Williamson 490). To Lewis, Eliot paid lip service to the value of the past, while still subscribing to a type of modernist chronological snobbery, and indeed, vestiges of Eliot’s chronological snobbery can be seen when he says that “the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show” (38). Lewis was being unfair to Eliot, for as we have seen, in his essay Eliot proclaimed that the past authors were “that which we know”: “the historical sense I noted above,” said Eliot, “compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe and Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (37). For Lewis, Eliot’s break with stock responses, his focus on cultural particulars, and his self-focused, nihilistic tone, especially in poems like “Prufrock,” made him characterize the past as devolved. “The Nameless Isle,” with its optimistic and conclusive ending, encapsulates Lewis’s specific tradition-oriented reaction to Eliot and modernist poetry.

Lewis’s approach to modernism and his modern age is related to his approach to reading and literature as well, because in his view, an era’s literary mood affected one’s personal ability to be receptive to what the past had to offer. Lewis disliked modernist

pessimism, stasis and nihilism, but he also disliked the approach to literature of certain modernists that was characterized by a sense of superiority and specialization. Lewis thought that anyone could cultivate his or her reading and critical skills. Lewis attacked, for example, in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, what he considered to be Eliot's pretentious critical approach to Milton:

Let us consider what would follow if we took Mr. Eliot's view seriously. The first result is that I, not being one of the best contemporary poets, cannot judge Mr. Eliot's criticism at all. What then shall I do? Shall I go to the best contemporary poets, who can, and ask them whether Mr. Eliot is right? But in order to go to them I must first know who they are. And this, by hypothesis, I cannot find out. (9)

Poets cannot be the only critics, Lewis maintained, nor did Eliot's current and fleeting critical acceptance necessarily make him the best reader and critic of poetry. In fact, modernism's "antiromanticism" made one unable to respond to literature properly:

For whatever reason—a materialistic philosophy, antiromanticism, distrust of one's unconscious—gigantic inhibitions have, with astonishing rapidity, been built up. The response [to literature] which was once easy and indeed irresistible now needs to be liberated by some sort of mental *ascesis*. (*Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* 13)

An *ascesis*, a rigorous and even religious mental self-discipline, was needed in order for a reader to overcome the limits of his or her exclusively modern assumptions and bridge the gap with the literature of the past.

To Lewis, the stock response to literature was one of delight, and involved a childlike humility in the reception of texts: this strategy, he contended, was directly opposed to a

modernist posturing. In *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis scoffed at the trend in literary criticism then fashionable to speak of literature as “childish” or “infantile”: “we must make sure that [these terms] refer only to those characteristics of childhood which we become better and happier by outgrowing; not to those which every sane man would keep if he could and which some are fortunate for keeping” (71). He went on to explain the difference between “childish” and “childlike,” and implied that those who shirk a childlike delight in literature might actually end up more childish than they realize. As we saw in Chapter 1, it is for this reason that Lewis often called his readers to a kind of historical remembering, a use of the imagination in which readers put their contemporary assumptions on hold in order to experience the past (see *Discarded* 98).³⁴ By contrast, the modern critic often distrusts primary and secondary sources from the period under study (*Preface* 29), and he or she is often patronising in his or her approach to discredited myths. The literature of earlier ages often does not itself treat the past in a patronising manner. For example, in *Paradise Lost* Milton treats Adam and Eve with respect: “I wanted an Adam and Eve whom I could patronize; and when Milton made it clear that I was not to be allowed to do anything of the sort, I was repelled” (*Preface* 116). In other words, the end of literary reading is to come to worldviews that are surprising, different and thus transformative: “[Lewis thought that] a good literary work takes us into meanings not normally or often perceived by us” (Duriez 128). Lewis felt that a modernist approach to current and past literary expression did not allow for this kind of personal remaking, when in contrast, literature should contribute to the “enlargement of our being” (Martin, ed. 24).

3.C. The Marriage of Reason and Imagination and the “Dialectic of Desire”

For Lewis, the essential enlargement of being had to do with the relationship between imagination and reason. Owen Barfield put the question best, for both of them, when he said that “the use of imagination is one thing; a theory of imagination is another. A theory of imagination must concern itself, whether positively or negatively, with its relation to truth. Is it, for instance, or can it be, a vehicle of revelation?” (*Romanticism Comes of Age* 97). Lewis openly preferred the medieval discarded “image,” a cultural image that was sown together by known facts and imagined threads when the facts fell short of completing the tapestry. Barfield felt that the Middle Ages prioritized form and logic to the *detriment* of imagination (69), but Lewis felt that the “human imagination has seldom had before it an object so sublimely ordered as the medieval cosmos” (*Discarded Image* 121). He admitted that the cosmos might have been “a shade too ordered,” but for the most part, the backcloth actually championed the use of both imagination and reason, and that Dante was the prime example of this flexibility within an aesthetic of order. Dante’s *terza rima* was defined and tight, his philosophy systematic, and his theology strictly Thomist, but his imagination was allowed to move within these formal constraints, for “The most vivid presentation [of the medieval realizing imagination] is by Dante”:

In *Inferno*, XXXIV, the two travellers find the shaggy and gigantic Lucifer at the absolute centre of the Earth, embedded up to his waist in ice. The only way they can continue their journey is by climbing down his sides—there is plenty of hair to hold on by—and squeezing through the hold in the ice and so coming to his feet. But they find that though it is down to his waist, it is *up* to his feet. As Virgil tells Dante, they have passed the point towards which all

heavy objects move. It is the first ‘science-fiction effect’ in literature.

(*Discarded Image* 141-42)

For Lewis, strict and systematic form was related to the use of reason: because of its secure hold on the medieval mind, form leant itself to an expansion of the imagination. Lewis noted that this type of imagination was “characteristically medieval,” and was not, therefore, exactly like the type of imagination envisioned by the Romantics. It was, in fact, a “realising imagination” (*Discarded* 206), a term that implies the cooperation of imagination and reason. Lewis wished to promote a realizing imagination, as opposed to Barfield’s conception of the relationship between reason and imagination, which prioritized the Romantic notion of the imagination over the empirical “Consciousness Soul” (79).³⁵

Perhaps a better way of putting things is to say that both Barfield and Lewis were striving to understand the relationship between imagination and reason. Whereas Barfield saw reason as being ineffective when it failed to interact with the imagination, Lewis was able to isolate the separate function of both faculties in an effort to bring them together in some complementary way. In the end, Lewis came to see that both imagination and reason played important roles in mental operations: imagination worked from the top downwards, while reason worked its way from the bottom up. Lewis’s education led him to this perception of the separate and complementary roles of reason and imagination. In his youth Lewis had two teachers whom he described in *Surprised by Joy*, one named Smewgy and the other named Professor Kirk: “Roughly, one might say (in medieval language) that Smewgy taught me Grammar and Rhetoric and Kirk taught me Dialectic. Each had, and gave me, what the other lacked” (120). Professor Kirk questioned and probed everything the young Lewis said, and taught him to strive for descriptive and logical precision, which to Lewis was like “red beef and strong beer” (111). The definition and goals of reason never changed for

Lewis, but, as we saw in Chapter 2, Barfield helped Lewis to define imagination as a mental faculty, and as evidence of the metaphysical workings of the brain, but, as Colin Duriez notes, for Lewis the function of the imagination was to produce creative work (95). In this respect, Lewis's position resembles that of Coleridge, who distinguished imagination from "Fancy, but also from Fantasy as the psychologist understands that term" (*Surprised* 164). Indeed, imagination came to take on a higher meaning for Lewis.

Both Colin Duriez and Steven Beebe show that imagination, for Lewis, can be related to a sermon he once gave on what he called "Transposition." Lewis defined "transposition" as "an adaptation of a richer to a poorer medium." As Colin Duriez explains the definition, "no denigration of the poorer medium is implied, only an assessment of its necessary limits" (Duriez 211). An understanding of the higher concept is needed, said Lewis, in order to understand the lower medium too: "It is no good browbeating the critic who approaches a Transposition from below" ("Transposition"). This statement signals the primary difference between Lewis and Barfield: Barfield believed that imagination as a mental faculty led from a low, empirical and factual basis to a highly developed metaphysical perception. For Lewis, on the other hand, imagination was the means by which metaphysical truth was transposed into easily understandable terms, which usually meant into the form of myth, allegory or narrative. It is interesting that, in this sermon, Lewis underlined the complexity of a transposition event, for the "transposition of the richer into the poorer must, so to speak, be algebraical, not arithmetical" ("Transposition"). For all of his simplistic comparisons and aphorisms, Lewis knew that his language was catching only a faint glimpse of the process he was describing. Also, his comparison of Transposition to mathematical procedure showed that reason and imagination could not be permanently separated from each other.

3.D. “The Nameless Isle” and the Marriage of Reason and Imagination

According to Stephen Logan, “Lewis works as a poet both when engaged in metaphysical speculation and when analysing the minutiae of poetic style. His theory [...] is nuanced by the same awareness of the potentialities of language” (MacSwain and Ward, eds. 36). Metaphysical speculation and poetic style can be related to imagination and reason in Lewis’s thought and poetry. In “The Nameless Isle” we see the dialectic and the marriage between reason and imagination played out the most clearly. Walter Hooper gave “The Nameless Isle” its name, and the ominous sounding title makes the reader expect that the poem will continue the narrative poetry’s discussion of ambiguity, death and bifurcation. However, “The Nameless Isle” is heading towards the reconciliation of binaries and bifurcation, and towards concepts of marriage and harmonization. A ship’s captain finds himself in the realm of faery, but unlike the situation in “The Queen of Drum,” this protagonist’s adventures in a magic land are detailed and known. The relationship between imagination and reason is played out in the poem’s very fabric, as it is structured on the male-female binary: in this case, the Lady of the land represents the allure of imagination, as well as the containment of truth in imagination, while the Magician and lord of the land represents the pros and cons of reason as a mental faculty. Peter Schakel points out that in Lewis’s poem “Reason,” imagination is represented as a dark and seductive force:

But how dark imagining,
Warm, dark, obscure and infinite, daughter of Night:
Dark is her brow, the beauty of her eyes with sleep
Is loaded, and her pains are long, and her delight. (*Poems* 81)

At the beginning of “The Nameless Isle,” the lady is most definitely represented as an object of desire: the captain wishes to “ravish” her (111), and she is connected to the land, to the

nature surrounding her. The earth is “wanton,” the wood “juicy,” and the soil is “insatiable” (97, 99). Her sexual allure takes on the fullness of motherhood when she nurses all the wild beasts and plants of the land, like a figure of Mother Nature: “I / Saw how she suckled at her sweet fountains / The tribes that go dumb” (128-130). Her breasts are full, “No maiden’s breasts, but with milk swelling” (117). The earth, the so-called inanimate world, comes alive in its wish to be fed as well: “I saw the branches bend towards her breast, thirsting [...] all things that lived / As for sap, sucking at her sweet fountains (133, 135-36). The lady’s connection to the dangerous and ambiguous picture of imagination is evident in the captain’s initial sexual attraction to her. On the other hand, the fact that she is loving and nurturing all of creation, and indeed participating in its growth and development, shows that, to Lewis, imagination has another, fuller meaning that sets it apart from the dangerous allure of the Christina dream.

In addition, the sea captain questions his encounter with the lady in a manner that recalls the concept of the Christina dream, and thus recalls Lewis’s struggle to attain a definition of imagination. Her story, as delivered to the lost mariner, is only partly true, but the evidence she presents is convincing, for it makes sense that the lady of the isle would, like Mother Nature, be the source of life. The lady claims that the magician of the island has usurped her rightful authority, that he has kidnapped her daughter and turned her child to stone, and that he has stolen her magic flute: “Flowers loved it well / And rose upright at the ripple of the note / Sound-drenched, as if they drank, after draught, sweet rain” (201-203). Her mesmerizing beauty stands in her favour, and the convinced mariner argues with the dwarf, saying that she is the isle’s “right lady” (343). He briefly questions whether or not his encounter with the queen, and the mission entrusted to him, is “a dream’s burden,” but the physical existence of the queen’s gift, a sword, lies there as proof: “At my feet, flashing, that

fallow sword / Lay to my liking” (233-34). Her appearance to the sea captain is one that is sensory in nature, for physical proof and his emotions and physical reactions, his observations and experience, are proof of their meeting. His sensory experience connects it to an empirical truth, and to reason; his emotions and desire associate the meeting with the dangerous aspects of fancy and imagination.

Her story, however, is only partly true, and the magician, as a figure of reason, can only be trusted partially. The lady of the island equates the sorcerer with reason when she commissions the sea captain to cut off his head and rescue her daughter (222), for the head contains reason’s operative organ. At first the king of the island rectifies the untruths in the lady’s tale, by saying that ““Second counsels, my son, are best”” (413). His story seems plausible, and his demeanour is calm and even-keeled, which lends credibility to his story that he used to be married to the queen of the isle, and that they have had a falling out. His appearance immediately discredits the lady, for far from being ugly and hideous, the magician is stately: “There stood in stole that stately fell / And swept beneath, the sward, a man. / The beard upon his bos’ m burnt-gold in hue” (402-04). The magician, like a true empiricist, accuses the sea captain of listening to his sexual desire, imagination and emotions as opposed to listening to the truth: ““It was your loins that told you, / And your belly, and your blood, and your blind servants / Five, who are unfaithful”” (434-36). The mariner’s five senses have failed him in this case, says the sorcerer, and the magician goes on to explain that he would rather his daughter be turned to stone than to have her ““labour in a land of dread, / Tangled in torments”” (463-64). It is to be supposed that the magician sees his other atrocities as acts of mercy as well: he is associated with turning people to stone, but he calls his magic draught a ““chalice of peace”” (460). His existential view of life reveals that he too does not have the complete picture. Reason without the imaginative heart and soul leads one

to an inability to live a full and hope-filled life. Both the queen and king of the isle seem to have missed something that the other has to offer, and so when the magician says again, that ““Second counsels, oh son, are best. / All things are other on their inner side”” (484-85), one feels that this pronouncement goes for him and his philosophy as well. The sorcerer’s reason needs the other “side” of mental processes, the imaginative faculty.

Reason and imagination are both trustworthy mental faculties according to Lewis, but in “The Nameless Isle” it is evident that the two need to work together in order to temper each other, which is why the motif of this poem is marriage. In the other poems, especially in “Dymer,” it seems that Lewis was struggling with the place of imagination in the operations of the mind, which led him to cultivate a persistent tone of uncertainty. But here the ambiguity is resolved when the sorcerer decides to “run quickly / West to the woodland, to the wild city” to his “waiting bride” (588-89). She rides back with him, “the lady of the land, lily-breasted” (632). This marriage leads to another, for the flute’s music brings to life the daughter of the lord and lady, and she weds the young sea captain: the dwarf brings the resurrected daughter to the mariner, “blushing as it were a bride mortal, / To hold to her heart my head as I kneeled” (580-81). It is evident that Lewis has worked his way to a reconciliation of binaries in this narrative poem, and that, consequently, fragmentation and bifurcation are not the end of the story. In “The Nameless Isle,” Lewis is determined to reconcile opposing terms.

3.E. The Production of a Third Term: Lewis on Language and Form

A study of the criticism and narrative poetry reveals that the meeting point of past and present, and the centre term of reason and imagination, is language. Language is both form and content to Lewis, two terms that are related to reason and imagination. In a recently

discovered critical fragment by Lewis, entitled “Language and Human Nature,” Lewis defines language generally as “the system of vocal noises *meant* (in the psychological sense) to *mean* (symbolic sense)” (25), and of course poetry, as a production of imagination and reason combined, shares this third term of language. Steven A. Beebe points out that Lewis, in this fragment, attempted to “debunk the theory that meaning occurs only by association”; in other words, some meaning of language is fixed and objective, while another part of the meaning of language can be associative. There is thus both evidential meaning and psychological meaning (Beebe 12, 15). In the literary criticism, Lewis “liked best to pursue question of artistic form,” especially in Dante (Kranz 2), and in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* Lewis dedicated an entire essay to Dantesque similes. Bruce L. Edwards points out that the focus on poetic form and device was related to a work’s effect on the imagination: “Lewis read the works of others with a view to the inherent *quality* of the work. Whether prose or verse, all works were ‘poetry’ to him in the sense that the ‘feel’ or ‘taste’ was primary” (11). Thus, when Barfield asked the question, “is Reason dependent on Speech?” (*Romanticism Comes of Age* 68) Lewis would have answered with a resounding “yes,” but would have insisted that the transposition of the imagination’s truth content is dependent on speech as well.

Lewis’s concern for linguistic and poetic form can be related to his investigation of Platonic forms, which intrigued him for their ability to bring together reason and the metaphysical. In his comprehensive study, *C. S. Lewis and Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Adam Barkman argues that Lewis’s philosophy can be described as roughly neo-Platonist (5), and Don W. King has noted that Lewis’s “deeply felt Platonism” might explain the figure of the pilgrim in his poetry, who searches for both the eternal and the real (“Early Lyric Poetry” 247). In “Dymer,” “The Queen of Drum,” “The Nameless Isle,” and

“Launcelot” the central figure is depicted as being such a seeker. Don King notes that, in the early Lewis, this poetry of search takes shape in its discussion of the realm of faery, and thus it parts from the notion of Platonic forms somewhat. The notion of Platonic forms encompasses the concepts of reason and imagination in Lewis: “Lewis agreed with such philosophers that the truly philosophical life will utilize not only reason, but also the imagination and other faculties of the soul to probe physical, metaphysical and mythological reality for answers as to how one ought to live” (Barkman 5). Jane Hipolito observes that Lewis showed Barfield the connection between Aristotle’s concepts of active and passive reason, active reason being the generation of new concepts, and passive reason being the use of a previously generated concept in a new situation. To Lewis, active and passive reason were linked to the prosaic and the poetic (227). His neo-Platonism, and the *less* bifurcated relationship between imagination and reason in this mode of thought, leads one to recognize again why poetic form would be so important to Lewis. Like Platonic forms, strict poetic form requires the use of reason and understanding, as well as the use of imagination. As we have already seen, this concern for poetic form was ideological for Lewis: it had to do with the correct negotiation of his time, which had made its break with the past. At a time when language was breaking down, and fragmenting, both the pre- and post-conversion Lewis was attempting to show that language could still *mean*, could yet hold content, and could simultaneously inspire the imagination.

The use of an imitation of Old English alliterative metre in “The Nameless Isle” makes the reader pay attention to the concreteness and necessity of language, while also enhancing the musicality of the poem. The central symbol of the flute is associated with the linguistic third term shared by both reason and imagination. At the beginning of the poem, the ship is described as rolling on the deep, “while the rigging rang like music” (6), and

indeed, the entire poem seems to be dedicated to musicality. The sea captain finds the flute early on in the poem (269), but finds he cannot produce any music. On his “second thoughts” he decides to keep it anyway, and his second thoughts end up saving everyone on the island (278). The dwarf is the one who makes beautiful music with the flute, and thus leads everyone on the island to reconciliation:

He laid his lip to the little flute.
 Long and liquid, —light was waning—
 The first note flowed. Then faster came,
 Reedily, ripple-like, running as a watercourse,
 Meddling of melodies, moulded in the air,
 Pure and proportional. Pattering as the rain-drops
 Showers of it, scattering silverly, poured on us,
 Charmed the enchanter that he was changed and wept,
 At the pure, plashing, piping of the melody.... (516-524)

This passage is one of Lewis’s best, for it combines the form of alliterative metre, and themes of reason and imagination, in a successful passage characterized by its musicality. First, the alliteration, the focus on the “l” sound, then the use of the “f” sound, and then the use of the “r” and so on, is sweet-sounding and full: it is indeed musical in its very form, but then the content of the passage is about music as well, so he has harmonized reason (form) and imagination (content). The passage speaks of the form of music, as it is “pure and proportional,” or in other words systematic, just like dialectical reason, but the “silvery” music has the power to change all who hear it, including the enchanter and master of the island.

The dwarf, as the agent of change on the island, and as the proper wielder of the flute,

is the foil and fulfilment of the sea captain, and therefore also represents the third term of language as form. The dwarf's story mirrors that of the sea captain: he has lost his shipmates to the sorcery of both the lord and lady of the island. He both confirms the menacing fear of the wizard on the island, while enlightening the sailor about the true nature of the lady he has just met: "She who dwells in the wood / Is the second fear in this strange country" (349-50). The dwarf apparently lurks "Twixt the devil and the deep" (360), the lord and lady, who can be read as reason and imagination. The dwarf says he is afraid of both "stone and sty" (361), the stone representative of the magician and the sty representative of the lady and her animal menagerie. At first, the dwarf represents an aversion to reason and imagination, at least as they are isolated from each other, and so he is the sea captain's "faltering, faint-hearted guide" (373). The dwarf personifies the sailor's fear, as the mariner himself wishes to "creep aside out of the way" (380), and so the dwarf speaks of the captain's distrust of the queen, and confirms his horror of the wizard. The seafarer wants to run from the task at hand, but he keeps to it. The dwarf cannot use his words when he at first encounters the wizard, but at the same time he catches the flute that is thrown by the sea captain: "The silly dwarf / Caught and kept [the flute]. He was cold at heart / Whimpering and woebegone" (410-412). Then, just as the sailor is about to drink the magician's draught, the dwarf finds his voice, in the music of the flute, which ends up being the courage that brings the lord and lady of the island together: "All things, ogre, have an other side," says the dwarf, as he gives a melodic voice to the flute. The dwarf is himself transformed into an elf, his mates are brought back to life, and marriage and reconciliation ensue. It is his ability to find a voice, in the form and content of music, which leads to this transformation. At the end of the poem, the newly transformed elf makes a third term in the boat back to England, for he and his flute represent the integration of reason and imagination in language as form.

In C. S. Lewis's early poetry a consistent theme is speechlessness, and the tragic loss of language: this concern is related to the loss that occurs as the result of cultural death and historical bifurcation.³⁶ Like the dwarf early on in the poem, the early Lewis wished for words that would express the marriage of reason and imagination, but felt it was impossible to find them. But he discovered it in the form of language itself. Thus, in "The Nameless Isle," there is a focus on the recovery of language. When the beasts are transformed back into men, they have "tongues to talk with" (620). Furthermore, at the end of the poem the lord and lady fall "straightaway [...] to talk, those two. Their tale was sweet in all our ears" (642-43). And formally, the poem becomes a dialogue between the queen and king of the island. The dialogue, of course, emphasizes a male-female binary, but it is also evidence of their remarriage: "When either in arms other folded / Fondly and fairly, fire-red was she, / Fire-white the sage" (671-72). They are different, but are now reconciled, and transformed in their reconciliation. It was of the utmost importance to Lewis, that speech and tight linguistic form facilitate their reconciliation.

3.F. Bifurcation and Convergence: C. S. Lewis as Narrative Poet

Of course, all four narrative poems share the use of traditional poetic form and a focus on language as the meeting point between reason and imagination: it is noteworthy that "The Nameless Isle" makes this connection the most explicit. "The Nameless Isle" contains bifurcation and binaries, but it is the only poem that comes to a successful reconciliation of terms, and thus the only poem that brings the reader to a happy ending. Roland M. Kawano argues that "The Nameless Isle" is the only of the four narrative poems that can be defined as post-conversion, and he draws on the poem's Christian imagery in order to prove that Lewis writes about reconciliation because he himself had become reconciled to God (29). This line

of argument coincides with the attempt to bifurcate Lewis into a pre- and post-conversion writer; however, the poem does seem to exhibit a clearer understanding of the relationship between binary terms. The ambiguity and even hazard of faery in “The Queen of Drum” is addressed without fear in “The Nameless Isle.” The adultery and breaking of relationship that characterizes “Launcelot” can be contrasted with the themes of reconciliation and marriage in “The Nameless Isle.” And whereas in “Dymer” the poem’s hero must die in order to achieve the balance between past and present, and between reason and imagination, the sea captain in “The Nameless Isle” witnesses the harmony brought about by his own hand. Indeed, the mariner has the opportunity to participate in this newfound love, as he himself marries the daughter of the island’s lord and lady.

Some critics of Lewis’s literary criticism have noticed, moreover, a difference between pre- and post-conversion Lewis, especially between the Lewis who participated in the personal heresy debate with Tillyard (published together in 1939), and the Lewis who wrote *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961). *The Personal Heresy* is focused on the poem as aesthetic object, and on dialectic and debate, and therefore on reason, but *An Experiment* is focused on reading and reception, and seemingly then on imagination and the transformation of the reader (Schakel 164). But Lewis never recanted his position on the personal heresy for his entire life; furthermore, an examination of his criticism as a whole indicates that reception and reading were always of great importance to him. It is more likely that this seeming difference in Lewis reflects his ability to focus on his given topic, an ability that gives the impression that he contradicted himself, and that the divide between pre- and post-conversion Lewis is greater than it actually is. It is perhaps more accurate to say that, in Lewis, there were several processes at work simultaneously: his desire to write poetically, a “strand of moralism” that involves the correct approach to literature and historical context,

and a love of the past literatures (Martin, ed. 245). Therefore, although both the criticism and the narrative poems indicate some development in Lewis's thought, they most certainly do not indicate a break in it. The same idea works for the narrative poems: even though it is most clearly expressed in "The Nameless Isle," it is evident that, in each of the narrative poems, Lewis is working towards bridging the past and the present through a recovery of reason, or form, and imagination.

3.G. Conclusions

Owen Barfield felt the Inklings, including C. S. Lewis, would have fared better "if they had sought a reconciliation between reason and imagination" as he himself had striven to do through his anthroposophical approach to history and poetic consciousness (*Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* 65). But "The Nameless Isle," and indeed the corpus of narrative poetry, shows that this indeed was Lewis's goal from the outset: he just arrived at their reconciliation through his own process. Peter Kreeft points out that "the romantic-rational blend was far from automatic" (9) in Lewis, but even this statement shows that the romantic-rational blend was always the goal. In "The Nameless Isle," it is evident that linguistic and poetic form are the third term shared by both reason and imagination, and it is evident from the criticism that Lewis elevated past poetic forms over the modern free verse of his own time. Colin Duriez says that "the subject of Lewis's context is a complex one. Key elements come out if we focus upon Lewis's formative years, roughly the 1920s and 1930s. His work is illuminated by his biographical context and by the intellectual currents surrounding his scholarship" (48). Lewis's formative years include the time of high modernism: we cannot call him a modernist,³⁷ for both chronology and literary taste work against this designation. But his reaction to his times provides evidence of the fact that he is a product of his age. He

paradoxically shares the modernist sense of a break with the past, but he mourns at the same time the cultural death that results from this break. To Lewis, acknowledging cultural death was only the first step towards recovering the past, and to learning from it. A use of reason and imagination together was needed to retrieve a comprehensive literary history. Adam Barkman mines Lewis's inaugural lecture at Cambridge, *De Descriptione Temporum* (which literally means "a description of the times") in order to define Lewis's sense of being an Old Western Man:

An 'Old Western Man' is (1) one who is either pre-Christian or Christian, but not post-Christian, (2) one who does not worship technology, (3) one who does not possess an atheistic hope in the grand evolutionary myth, (4) one who is not skeptical concerning Reason and does not despair of objective values, (5) one who champions Stock Responses in the arts, (6) one who embraces tradition and is not ignorant of history, and (7) one who endorses a hierarchical concept of existence as opposed to an egalitarian one. (256)

Lewis's negotiation of his times is one that can be therefore described, from one vantage point, as reactionary, conservative and traditionalist. However, Lewis's approach can also be described as a unique reading of his own historical era, one that probes and challenges the ideological, philosophical and literary changes which made up the fragmented cultural conditions of the first half of the twentieth century. If we describe Lewis's negotiation of his cultural conditions in this way, his narrative poems require revaluation and close reading as representatives of an important, even if marginalized, twentieth-century voice.

Conclusion

Peter Kreeft admits that Lewis can be described as the “victim of his many-sidedness. The many-sided man runs the risk of disunity” (43). Lewis was a polymath, and as such wrote and read poetry, novels, cultural criticism, Christian apologetics, philosophy, literary criticism, literary history and scholarship: this many-sidedness led him to hold some seemingly contradictory positions, and it must be admitted that Lewis’s thought must at the best of times be described in terms of paradox. Owen Barfield felt that his friend was bifurcated in his thought: “Besides combatively logical Lewis, there is gently imaginative Lewis. And they do sometimes seem like two completely different men” (*Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* 94); furthermore, Kreeft feels that Lewis’s imagination does not permeate his apologetics very well, and that Lewis’s rationality was unable to “overcome the remoteness from ordinary life of his novels” (43). However, this thesis has been attempting to establish continuity in Lewis’s thought, through an investigation of his criticism and early narrative poems. As Patrick Murphy has observed, many critics wish to see “a false dichotomy” in Lewis, even as early as in “Dymer,” when in fact that poem is neither “realistic” nor “romantic” (66). And Barfield himself, in the end, corroborates this convergence, for he says that the “third Lewis” is the place where imagination and reason could “come together and work more or less in harmony. Of course there *was* that third Lewis: the Lewis of *The Personal Heresy*, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, *The Allegory of Love*, *History of English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, and such essays as ‘Psycho-analysis and Literary Criticism’” (94). In other words, the place to begin an overall assessment of the trajectory and development of Lewis’s thought is in his literary criticism, for it is there that Lewis’s imagination and reason are working together. But in his scholarship and literary criticism the

reader runs into new problems, for his imagination and reason seem to be put to use in order to separate his reader from the past and its literature.

It is evident that Lewis's bifurcation of history was his attempt to bridge past and present, reason and imagination, and reader and poetry in complex ways. After Lewis emphasized the difference between historical contexts, he hoped that the reader would desire to re-learn from the past and its literary wisdom. It was re-learning, because "whatever we have been, in some sort we are still":

Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we have been, in some sort we are still. Neither the form nor the sentiment of this old poetry has passed away without leaving indelible traces on our minds. We shall understand our present, and perhaps even our future, the better if we can succeed, by an effort of the historical imagination, in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which the allegorical love poem was a natural mode of expression. But we shall not be able to do so unless we begin by carrying our attention back to a period long before that poetry was born. (*The Allegory of Love*, 1958 1-2)

The Allegory of Love was Lewis's first published work of literary criticism, and it may be true that his reaction to the modern outlook on the past is more pronounced in other works. However, the essential elements of this thesis's analysis are contained here: this passage indicates Lewis's sense of cultural loss in his times, and the assumed neglect of the reader. An "effort of the historical imagination" is necessary in order to reconstruct a "lost" state of mind. But in the end, Lewis wishes to emphasize historical continuity. It is also evident that bifurcation and convergence are the main themes in the narrative poetry, and that the poetry

is concerned with these matters *because* of Lewis's own historical context. Patrick Murphy complains that Lewis's poetry is often read only in relation to "Lewis's large and immensely popular canon of prose" (65). It is often treated, in short, as working space and scratch paper, and even as juvenilia. But the narrative poetry should be valued more on its own terms, and as a product of Lewis's own time and place. In negotiating the concepts of reason, truth, imagination and language, the narrative poems, along with the literary criticism, serve as a bridge between a pre- and post-conversion Lewis, and they also act as minor but nevertheless important aesthetic objects written in reaction to a high modernist poetics.

A. C. S. Lewis as Literary "Theorist": The Current Significance of Lewis's Work

I have been attempting to situate Lewis in his own time and place, a move which Lewis would have approved, and a move which will hopefully be seen as relevant to discussions about modernism and its historical context. However, once Lewis's approach to literary history and criticism has been established, the question of its current relevance remains, in the wake of postmodernism, New Historicism and deconstruction. As Robert MacSwain has noted, Lewisian scholars themselves are "sharply divided over the value and significance of his work" (1). Lionel Adey feels that Lewis's work, in general, is not helpful to current readers of literature, but that "where Lewis was an authority, as on Spenser and the late medieval Scots, he continues to enlighten us" (58). The question of Lewis's ongoing significance is much too large to answer here, but it is to be hoped that this thesis might act as an initial step towards engaging it, for if his criticism and narrative poetry are of contextual importance, then the following step would be to place his thought in relation to twentieth century critical movements in general. Perhaps a modest gesture towards taking this next step might be in order here.

Stephen Logan points out that to call Lewis a literary theorist depends on our definition of the term: Lewis himself would not have called himself a “theorist,” and indeed the term’s meaning has evolved since his time. On the one hand, “if literary theory is understood as the practice of reflecting philosophically on the nature and function of literature, then there seems little doubt that Lewis made a contribution to literary theory” (29). On the other hand, says Logan, if the term literary theory takes on late twentieth-century senses of the term, then his contribution and title “become doubtful, and even preposterous” (30). Lewis would not have been interested in conversations about what literature is and is not, for example. What is more, says Logan, the contrast between traditional and contemporary forms of literary theory is moral, philosophical, ideological, and even metaphysical. Deconstruction, New Historicism, and postmodernism’s goals are, at their root, ideologically opposed to Lewis’s goals: rather than reaffirming and revaluing tradition and stock responses, these literary theories are interested in challenging canonical and historical narratives of any sort.

That being said, there are, perhaps surprisingly, many similarities between Lewis and the New Historicism: “‘I began with a desire to speak with the dead,’” said Stephen Greenblatt once (Veaser ix), and Lewis himself would have shared this desire. Lewis also would have assented, although perhaps with some reservations regarding the Marxist nature of the language, that every aesthetic act is embedded in “a network of material practices” (Veaser xi). *The Discarded Image* is also evidence of the fact that Lewis believed, with the New Historicists, that literary and non-literary texts exist in a symbiotic relationship. Stephen Greenblatt calls this the “poetics of culture”: “we need to develop terms to describe the ways in which material—here official documents, private papers, newspaper clippings, and so forth—is transferred from one discursive sphere to another and becomes aesthetic property”

(11). Lewis would call this the “backcloth” to literary expression; moreover, he saw the medieval model as very poetic. For Lewis, the problem with modern literature was precisely having fragmented cultural conditions as its backcloth. Rather than being characterized by order and the realizing imagination, it was characterized by fragmentation. For this reason, poetry cannot hold any transhistorical truth, and Lewis shared this belief with the New Historicists as well: “Poetry, in this account, is not the path to a transhistorical truth, whether psychoanalytic or deconstructive or purely formal” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 7). Lewis would have heartily agreed with this demystification of history.

Lewis and the New Historicist both focus on the details surrounding the individual and the specific historical encounter; on the other hand, this shared focus also highlights the differences between them. Lewis would have agreed that “the task of understanding then depends [...] on an encounter with the singular, the specific, and the individual” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 6). A detailed historical knowledge should lead one to a “meaningful encounter with a text,” one that leads the reader to be transformed by the past, for the reader should “feel at once pulled out of our own world and plunged back with redoubled force into it” (17). But this focus on the marginal and specific is the meeting point between New Historicism and deconstruction. While refusing to make the deconstruction of narratives its goal, New Historicism is still committed to “unsettling the hierarchies” (11), which includes the unsettling of definitions of terms like “text.” Lewis’s focus on the details and specificities of culture did not lead him to merge literature with other cultural manifestations. The New Historicists do not necessarily wish to talk about literature and art, but about “representations” of culture (17). Although the New Historicists see major differences between their position and deconstructionist theory, they admit that they share with deconstruction a focus on the forgotten and the marginal.

On the other hand, like the postmodernists, Lewis did not participate in a “traditional” notion of canon building³⁸; in addition, David C. Downing argues there are more similarities between Lewis and postmodernist theories than it would originally seem. Lewis seems like one who paints arbitrary and contained pictures of historical contexts, but as we have seen, he is constantly complicating his own definitions. While Downing admits that Lewis is still “a foundationalist among anti-foundationalists,” and that, unlike Barthes, Lewis would never conflate the reader and writer of texts (176, 175), he points out that Lewis was all about de-centring critical strategies (177).³⁹ Downing shows that, whereas Lewis might have taken issue with Jacques Derrida’s desire to build a metaphysics without centring it on something spiritually transcendent, he agreed with him and Michel Foucault in denying that *history* has a centre (170), and that its meaning might be uncovered. Also like Derrida, Lewis believed that if one stepped out of an experience, one only did so to enter another realm of experience, and that therefore true objectivity was impossible (171). As we have seen, Lewis encouraged his reader to leave his or her worldview behind in order to experience another. Of course, many critics have noted that this mandate assumes a kind of objectivity, an objectivity that allowed one to suspend one’s worldview to the point that it would not detract from one’s reading and understanding of an old literary text. But in the end, Downing shows that Lewis’s thought shares some similarities with that of the postmodernists (177).

Many critics believe that Lewisian critical paradox has something to offer the critical reader today, who lives in the wake of postmodernism and deconstruction: “For we live in a period of fashionably arcane literary inquiry,” says Bruce L. Edwards, “which by turns has declared the death of the author, affirmed the authority of readers over the stability of intended meaning, and interrogated the text with such ruthlessness that ‘in the end, there is no’ text left” (*The Taste of the Pineapple* 28). In other words, Lewis’s literary criticism could

perhaps be seen to offer a constructive alternative to the confusing multiplicity of current critical theories, which are sometimes fraught with their own contradictions. Edwards says that Lewis's approach to reading and textuality can be placed against "this radically skeptical notion": "At the heart of his criticism [...] is a stance he would call *rehabilitative*. This rehabilitative stance manifested a reverence for the past, a principled skepticism of one's own period's mores and dogma, and a profound propensity for recovering and preserving lost values and ideals" (30). In other words, Lewis's paradoxes are not to be criticized but celebrated. For Edwards, moreover, Lewis's desire to "have it all" in a critical approach is actually balanced, and answers the scepticism which characterizes deconstruction and postmodernism. Colin Duriez feels, moreover, that Lewis's criticism can be applied to all three critical "dominant emphases," which are the "author-centred, text-centred, [and] reader-centred" approaches (117). Duriez maintains that Lewis's corpus appeals to all three streams of thought. Rather than see him as contradictory, Duriez prefers to present him as a critic whose work can complement some of the focal points found in current theoretical approaches.

B. C. S. Lewis, Critic and Poet: A Man of His Age

In the end, says Peter Kreeft, Lewis's romantic rationalism coexists happily with the fragmentation of Lewis's modern age:

Modern man's crisis, all seem agreed, is one of disintegration, of alienation. He has split his own being, having split it from its source and centre; and he finds his reason detached from his heart, the sciences from the humanities, analytic philosophy from existential philosophy [...]. Lewis's romantic rationalism shows that the two mental hemispheres *can* coexist happily and fruitfully in one man and one philosophy. (41)

In other words, an argument can be made for convergence in Lewis's thought, despite his tendency to compartmentalize terms and historical periods. His tendency to bifurcate and define, as we have seen, was informed by modern cultural circumstances, and also existed in reaction to them. He emphasized differences between historical epochs, not in order to claim that modern culture was superior in calibre to previous cultures, but to spur readers to enter imaginatively into past ages and retrieve the wisdom contained there. In this way, he remains the twentieth century's "conservative iconoclast" and some critics claim he is to be applauded for this approach: "His reputation which, almost uniquely among critics of his time, has grown since his death, is based not on assent but on an admiration for his courage in defying fashion [...]. His age, one feels, needed him" (Sayer 7). As we saw in the previous section, and indeed from Kreeft's words above, Lewis's conservative iconoclasm may have something to contribute to current theoretical discussions, but in the end, Lewis should be studied first as a man of his own times (MacSwain and Ward, eds. 32). A more fruitful discussion would revolve around an examination of how his paradoxical "conservative rebellion" can add to our understanding of modernist criticism. In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis says that "delight" in a cultural model is often expressed by the artists of the period, for in the medieval backcloth "delight in the Medieval Model is expressed by Dante [...] rather than by [...] Aquinas. [...] Every Model is a construct of answered questions. The expert is engaged either in raising new questions or in giving new answers to old ones" (18). Lewis is more interested in raising new questions in his era, and giving new answers to old questions. It is for this reason that he challenged the new poetry of his time with four narrative poems fashioned in traditional forms, and it is for this reason that these poems should be studied.

“When either in arms other folded / Fondly and fairly, fire-red was she, / Fire-white the sage” (“The Nameless Isle” 671-72). Lewis was not expressing delight in his current cultural model, but delight in an old one, while at the same time engaging with the struggle of his historical moment to define and explain imagination and reason. This image from “The Nameless Isle” represents his project throughout the narrative poems: he was attempting to emphasize both difference and continuity between historical periods and concepts. The lady and lord of the isle are both represented by fire, but are different in colour. They represent at once the fundamental difference between imagination and reason, and the fact that they are meant to work in harmony with one another. Lewis asks us to read him on his own terms, which are his own historical conditions:

But among lovers of poetry the question admits two answers. You may do which you please. There are two ways of enjoying the past, as there are two ways of enjoying a foreign country. One man carries his Englishry abroad with him and brings it home unchanged. [...] In the same way there is a man who carries his modernity with him through all his reading of past literatures and preserves it intact. (*Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, 1979, 2)

So too the reader today might be encouraged to read his poetry leaving his or her metaphorical “Englishry” behind. To foster this constructive attitude towards the past might lead contemporary readers to change their valuation of his poetry. Don W. King criticizes “The Queen of Drum” for expending plot in favour of prosody (*C. S. Lewis, Poet* 153), but as we have seen, Lewis’s reasons for emphasizing the use of language and stock themes and forms were based on the idea of generating the third term between past and present, and between imagination and reason. Patrick Murphy points out that if “Dymer” stands up as

“proficient” and “interpretable,” then it is a “successful piece of literature” (67). Indeed, all four narrative poems stand up as proficient and interpretable, and even valuable in terms of how they reflect Lewis’s personal reaction to twentieth-century cultural conditions. Lewis’s narrative poems and criticism complement each other, because together they make his poetry the product of his specific cultural context, and continue to be relevant to our study of it.

Endnotes

¹ Lewis wrote to R. W. Chapman on 18 September 1935, saying, “‘I have now finished my book *The Allegorical Love Poem* and am in search of a publisher.’ After outlining the chapters, he went on to say: ‘The book as a whole has two themes: 1. The birth of allegory and its growth from what it is in Prudentius to what it is in Spenser. 2. The birth of the romantic conception of love and the long struggle between its earlier form (the romance of adultery) and its later form (the romance of marriage)’” (qtd. Green and Hooper 132-33).

² Anthroposophy is a spiritualist movement that was founded by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), and is considered, by its proponents, to be a path of knowledge that leads one into the universe (Franceschelli 5). Anthroposophy is dedicated to education, science and culture, and to the development of the whole, self-realized human being.

³ Lewis corroborates this view many times elsewhere. For example, in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis’s autobiography or life meditation, depending on one’s view of it, he says that he does “not much believe in the Renaissance as generally described by historians. The more I look into the evidence the less trace I find of that vernal rapture which is supposed to have swept Europe in the fifteenth century” (61).

⁴ Of course, if one reads to the end of this debate, Lewis’s seemingly extreme statement is explained and even somewhat modified. Lewis loved dialectic and debate, and so he often states his position in the most extreme way possible, before engaging at length with definitions and details. Also, it is important to note that T. S. Eliot, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” makes a similar point about the impersonality of the poet (42).

⁵ Lewis first attempted a narrative poem at the age of fourteen, a poem which he entitled *Nibelung’s Ring*. It was never finished. While at Malvern College, Lewis attempted to compose a lyric text entitled *Loki Bound*, which was to be recited to music. At the time, Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* had captured his imagination. Just before returning to “Dymer,” Lewis started a long narrative poem on *Medea’s Childhood*, but it too never materialized (*Narrative Poems* vii-ix).

⁶ Lionel Adey titles his biography *C. S. Lewis: Writer, Dreamer and Mentor* and explains his thesis in this way: “In [the correspondence with Arthur Greeves and in what remains of the family library] can be seen the emergence of an almost dual personality, the one a romantic, preoccupied with visionary moments when he both sees and longs for a beauty that is remote and austere, the other a rationalist, who exercises power and practices unarmed combat by means of counsel, instruction, the probing of assumptions, or destructive counterargument. The Dreamer, emanating from longing for his lost mother, finds expression in his fantasies and early poems. The Mentor, originating in unwilling identification with his father, a politically minded lawyer, impelled him to tutor and advise students and counsel the many who sought his advice in consequence of his religious broadcasts and apologetics” (2).

⁷ In the entry from Tuesday, 18 January 1927, Lewis notes that after writing “Dymer” he feels in a complete “muddle”: “undigested scraps of anthroposophy and psychoanalysis jostling with orthodox idealism over a background of good old Kirkian rationalism. Lord what a mess!” But he

then goes on to say that he hopes his next poem, which became “The Queen of Drum,” “might write itself so as to clear things up—the way ‘Dymer’ cleared up the Christina dream business” (*All My Road Before Me* 431-32). So although he seems confused ideologically at this point in time, he claims that *Dymer* helped cure him of his own brand of romantic idealism, which is hardly censure for this poem. King also will not accept (early) Lewis’s reading of this poem, which was that Dymer was to be a “‘man escaping from illusion,’” and makes sure to say that the poem is “stripped of religious dogma” (214). There seems to be, in general, an acceptance that pre-conversion Lewis’s intentions can be questioned, and that his post-conversion intentions are more reliable.

⁸ Don W. King’s main argument is that Lewis’s poetry is important insofar as it prepared him to be a vivid, and indeed poetic, writer of prose (*C. S. Lewis, Poet* 224). I heartily agree with this argument, but wish to expand the value of the poetry a little further.

⁹ George Watson points out that *The Allegory of Love* was mostly written when Lewis was an agnostic, and that religion does not seem in the way for Lewis at all: “As he often remarked, his criticism did not arise out of his religion. On the contrary, it was religion that arose out of a love of literature, more particularly of literary myth” (2), and so one must speak about religion, but not necessarily along *with* it in any way.

¹⁰ The narrative poems I am dealing with are from this period as well.

¹¹ “Reason” goes as follows:

Set on the soul’s acropolis the reason stands
A virgin, arm’d, commercing with celestial light,
And he who sins against her has defiled his own
Virginity: no cleansing makes his garment white;
So clear is reason. But how dark imagining,
Warm, dark, obscure and infinite, daughter of Night:
Dark is her brow, the beauty of her eyes with sleep
Is loaded, and her pains are long, and her delight.
Tempt not Athene. Wound not in her fertile pains
Demeter, nor rebel against her mother-right.
Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother,
Who make in me a concord of the depth and height?
Who make imagination’s dim exploring touch
Ever report the same as intellectual sight?
Then could I truly say, and not deceive,
Then wholly say, that I BELIEVE. (*Poems* 81)

¹² In his biography of Lewis, Lionel Adey says that “How far the *Experiment in Criticism* is or will remain influential is not easily determined. It was a needed corrective to a strain of evaluative criticism that, while encouraging students to form and justify honest opinions, encouraged arrogant, premature, or superficial judgments by those needing to read more widely with more open minds. Yet Lewis’s own division of readers into ‘literary’ and ‘unliterary’ poses a similar danger of encouraging elitism” (277-78).

¹³ “Secondly, if we are to use the words *childish* or *infantile* as terms of disapproval, we must make sure that they refer only to those characteristics of childhood which we become better and happier by outgrowing; not to those which every sane man would keep if he could and which some are fortunate for keeping” (*An Experiment in Criticism* 71)

¹⁴ Green and Hooper point out that Lewis respected Leavis, and recommended him for a chair position at Cambridge soon after Lewis himself arrived there, saying, “‘I know it’s risky: but “malcontents” have before now been tamed by office.’ With their diametrically opposed opinions on literature and criticism, Lewis and Leavis have often been set up as deadly enemies ready to spring metaphorically at each other’s throats at the first opportunity. Aware of this, Lewis, who was the last person to bear any ill-will on account of a purely literary disagreement, was inclined to treat the supposed hostility as a joke—with the aid of an amusing nightmare about being introduced as ‘Dr Leavis’ to give some important lectures” (289).

¹⁵ Willa Cather once complained that “‘The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts”” (qtd. North, *Reading 1922* 3).

¹⁶ Martin Ball uses the term “cultural death” in his article “Cultural Values and Cultural Death in *The Lord of the Rings*” (*Australian Humanities Review*). It is a useful term to describe Lewis’s approach to historical movement.

¹⁷ Again, Lewis defines “historicism” counter-intuitively. It is therefore necessary, when reading Lewis, to define him generally as a historicist in the current sense of the term, as one who defines and considers cultural and social context in the discussion of literature, while recognizing that in Lewis’s estimation this perspective is *a*-historicist.

¹⁸ This does seem to be the case, in all actuality. Ulysses’ story is one of homecoming, to the little island of which he is master.

¹⁹ It is interesting that Dante seems to share Lewis’s sense of Primary and Secondary epic. Dante puts Ulysses in hell, perhaps for merely being an “enemy” of Rome, but Ulysses himself tells Dante and Virgil that he is there because of his curiosity and greed near the end of his life: he wishes to explore the ends of the earth and become great, “All human worth and wickedness to prove” (Sayers, XXVI.99). He pushes the bounds of what should be his own, local view of place and history, and in so doing loses his life.

²⁰ In *What is a Classic?* T. S. Eliot agrees with Lewis's idea that with Virgil, the epic grows up: for Eliot, if there is one word to describe the word "classic," "it is the word *maturity*" (10). He then goes on to speak about the universal nature of the *Aeneid*, which might have made Lewis squirm uncomfortably in his seat.

²¹ In *De Descriptione Temporum* Lewis speaks of the permeating nature of chronological snobbery: "Why does 'latest' in advertisements mean 'best'? Well, let us admit that these semantic developments owe something to the nineteenth-century belief in spontaneous progress which itself owes something either to Darwin's theorem of biological evolution or to that myth of universal evolutionism which is really so different from it, and earlier." In his poem "Evolutionary Hymn," Lewis's speaker sarcastically asks "Evolution" to lead "us / Up the future's endless stair: [...] / Groping, guessing, yet progressing, / Lead us nobody knows where" (*Poems* 55).

²² T. S. Eliot echoes this sentiment in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" when he says "Someone said: 'The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did.' Precisely, and they are that which we know" (38).

²³ This is confirmed in Lewis's pastoral work, *The Problem of Pain*. He speaks about cultures with superstitions, both past and present, and the feeling of the numinous: "The earliest men almost certainly believed in things which would excite the feeling in us if we believed them, and it seems therefore probably that numinous awe is as old as humanity itself" (19). This comment implies that it still exists in human beings, even if we see ourselves as separated from those cultures.

²⁴ Lewis, it seems, tried to teach literature this way in the classroom as well, and he would be frustrated by lectures that refused the attempt to bring students to a greater knowledge of the past. In "The Last of the Wine" Lewis's speaker says "You think if we sigh, drinking the last decanter, / We're sensual toppers, and thence you are ready to prose / And read your lecture. Need you? Why should you banter / Or badger us? Better *imagine it thus; suppose...*" (*Poems* 40, emphasis added).

²⁵ In *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot makes a connection between the Fisher King myth, and thus the Grail legend, and a fragmented post-World War I society: "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (V.423-425). The opening of "Launcelot" evokes Eliot's poem, with its discussion of the changing of seasons. The opening of *The Waste Land* could be inserted in place of the first lines of "Launcelot":

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers. (1-7)

Eliot uses winter and snow to symbolize the repression of trauma in a post-World War I England. Many of the permanently altered knights in “Launcelot” return in the spring, and to the court at Camelot, that spring must have seemed cruel as well.

²⁶ Dr. Donald Childs has observed to me that, in a sense, the knights can be compared to the World War I poets, who struggled to bridge the communication gap that existed between home and front. Their writing was often in “a tongue civilians [did] not know, a mixture of sorrow and jest peculiar to the soldier” (E-mail, 8 July 2013).

²⁷ In “A Confession,” the speaker tells of being “Compelled to live on stock responses, / Making the poor best that I can / Of dull things... peacocks, honey, the Great Wall, Aldebaran, / Silver weirs, new-cut grass, wave on the beach, hard gem, / The shapes of horse and woman, Athens, Troy, Jerusalem” (*Poems* 1). It is interesting to note that stock responses cross cultural and historical barriers in this poem, as the Great Wall, Athens, Troy and Jerusalem are all mentioned.

²⁸ Barfield engaged the disastrous effects of the split between these “two cultures,” as C. P. Snow would describe it (Snow, “The Two Cultures”).

²⁹ This term is interchanged with “Christian dream” and “Christiana dream” throughout the critical literature as well as Lewis’s writings.

³⁰ There is a whole other discussion to be had about how Barfield’s theory relates to his idea of a collective unconsciousness. And of course, in this mode Barfield is not so far from both the occultism of Yeats and the psychology of Jung: “Then would come the arguments of Freud’s onetime collaborator, Carl Jung, for whom the shared features of the world’s myths are testimony to the ‘collective unconscious,’ the one mind in which all our minds participate and from which well up the ‘archetypes’ or common images of humanity. Lewis would not have been influenced by Jung [...] but he would have seen very similar arguments in the prose and poetry of Yeats. As early as 1911 Yeats had written ‘that the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.... This great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols’” (Jacobs 141-142).

³¹ In *The Pilgrim’s Regress* the experience of joy is described in this way: “While he strained to grasp it, there came to him from beyond the wood a sweetness and a pang so piercing that instantly he forgot his father’s house, and his mother, and the fear of the Landlord, and the burden of the rules. All the furniture of his mind was taken away. A moment later he found that he was sobbing, and the sun had gone in: and what it was that had happened to him he could not quite remember, nor whether it had happened in this wood, or in the other wood when he was a child” (24).

³² In *Romanticism Comes of Age*, Barfield notes that “The consciousness soul will only say ‘I know’, when it can add: ‘because I have experienced’” (128).

³³ It is interesting to note that in his book, *Paradoxy of Modernism*, Robert Scholes makes an argument for inherent paradox in modernism, as a way to account for the fragmented and opposing movements that exist at beginning to mid-century: “I am using the word to indicate a kind of confusion generated by a terminology that seems to make clear distinction where clear distinctions cannot—and should not—be made. In particular, I shall be examining the terminology that has been deployed in definitions and discussions of Modernism in literature and the other arts—a terminology generated at the time when what we know as Modernism was establishing its place in the culture of the English-speaking world, and sustained by the critics and scholars who sought to interpret Modernism and teach others about it. This terminology was based on apparently clear and simple binary oppositions—high/low, for instance, or old/new—which turns out, upon examination, to be far from simple and anything but clear. Taken together, these oppositions often function to suppress or exclude a middle term forcing many admirable works into the lower half of an invidious distinction” (xi-xii). The tendency of fragmentations, separation and binaries produces the need for reconciliation and harmonization: Lewis fits into this discussion nicely, while not himself being a modernist at all.

³⁴ Quoted on page 36 of this thesis.

³⁵ In *Romanticism Comes of Age*: “There is a concrete thinking (experience alone can prove it), which is independent of the senses, and there is an abstract, logistic thinking, which is entirely dependent on them. But between these two there is an intermediate stage, at which consciousness takes the form of pictures or images. In the history of mankind that intermediate stage contains the mystery of the Myth. It still contains to-day the mystery of Poetry, and with that the whole great mystery of Meaning. It is Imagination. Imagination is the marriage of spirit and sense. [...] The Consciousness Soul is cut off from knowledge. Does it wish to know again? Then it must become the Imaginative Soul” (79).

³⁶ For example, in his poem “The Planets,” C. S. Lewis associates the death of the gods with the death of language:

Distance hurts us,
And the vault severe of vast silence;
Where fancy fails us, and fair language,
And love leaves us, and light fails us
And Mars fails us, and the mirth of Jove... (*Poems* 15).

³⁷ Sebastian D. G. Knowles, in his 1990 book *A Purgatorial Flame: Seven British Writers in the Second World War*, is one of the only critics to attempt to call the Inklings types of modernists: “The Second World War did not mark a hiatus in British literature; the progress of literary thought continued through into the forties. This study will center on the war work of seven British modernists: Woolf, MacNeice, Eliot, Tolkien, Lewis, Williams, and Waugh” (xiv).

³⁸ As observed in this thesis' introduction, Yvor Winters, in his 1955 review of Lewis's *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century*, said that it was not the veracity of Lewis's facts that bothered him: "It is the critical mind that bothers me. It is my own conviction that one cannot write the history of poetry unless one can find the best poems. The best poems are the essential facts from which the historian must proceed. The background of ideas is important; the characteristic eccentricities of schools and poets are part of the material; but without the best poems, the history is not a history but an impressionistic and perhaps (as in this case) a learned essay. Lewis cannot find the poems" (*Critical Essays on C. S. Lewis* 213).

³⁹ Marsha Daigle-Williamson quotes Dabney Hart as saying that "It is a 'splendid irony [...that] this conservative Christian medievalist encouraged radical reassessment in all his writing'" (504).

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