



Doors in the Air

C. S. Lewis and the Imaginative World

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THE IMAGINATIVE WORLD

Portal  *Editions*

Doors in the Air
Anna Slack

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PortalEditions, S.L.
C/ Aldave 24, bajo – 01012 Vitoria
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<http://www.portaleditions.com>
contacto@portaleditions.com

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'Harsh to the Feet of Shadows'
The Wild Landscape of the Real
in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*
and William Faulkner's *The Bear*

ALF SEEGER



*The grass, hard as diamonds to my unsubstantial feet, made me feel
as if I were walking on wrinkled rock, and I suffered pains like those of the
mermaid in Hans Andersen. A bird ran in front of me and I envied it.
It belonged to that country and was as real as the grass.
It could bend the stalks and spatter itself with the dew.*
—C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (25)

*[The Bear] ran in his knowledge before he ever saw it. It loomed
and towered in his dreams before he even saw the unaxed woods where it
left its crooked print, shaggy, tremendous, red-eyed,
not malevolent but just big, too big...*
—William Faulkner, *The Bear* (329)

THE TERM WILDNESS implies being untamed, and its overtones include everything from self-will and freedom to ferocity, if not outright savagery. Thoreau famously elevated wildness by saying that “in Wildness is the preservation of the World”

(644). For William Faulkner and C. S. Lewis, wildness takes on even more striking associations, becoming nothing short of the governing image representing the landscape of the real. In his short novel *The Bear*, Faulkner contrasts the worlds of untamed wilderness and civilization using images of stature and solidity. The Bear and the wilderness it embodies are big, full grown and mature, with human activities puny and evanescent by comparison. In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis' novel about a soul's encounter with Heaven, Lewis makes similar use of wildness as an image of the real. In contrast to the vastness and solidity of heaven, human nature is insubstantial and shadow-like, too tame to endure the wildness of reality. Faulkner and Lewis make use of such imagery to convey similar themes: reality is implacably wild, massive and solid, in fact too much so for humans to bear, unless they gain stature and grow wild themselves by forsaking the insubstantial trappings of civilization (Faulkner) or by surrendering to the wild Divine (Lewis). By examining the imagery of Faulkner's and Lewis' wild imaginative landscapes we can better understand these authors' attitudes towards humanity, nature, and reality—and the human potential for growing real.

“Bigger and Older than any Recorded Document”: The Imaginative Landscape of The Bear

He was sixteen. For six years now he had been a man's hunter. For six years now he had heard the best of all talking. It was of the wilderness, the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document: --of white man fatuous enough to believe he had bought any fragment of it, of Indian ruthless enough to pretend that any fragment of it had been his to convey;

bigger than Major de Spain and the scrap he pretended to, knowing better... (327)

Faulkner here voices Ike McCaslin's experience of the wild over and against the human, and in doing so sets the tone for what is to follow. The wild woods are big, “bigger and older than any recorded document,” wholly beyond human buying and selling. The white men and Indians succeed only in trading a “scrap” or “fragment.” The sentences themselves start short (“He was sixteen.”) and grow more and more massive—with images of mass themselves becoming more and more evident—as the story continues and the reader is brought into the wild of which Faulkner has spoken. Six years before, at age ten, Ike is brought to “the Big Bottom, the big woods” (329) to earn from the wilderness a name for himself as a hunter. When he leaves camp with Sam Fathers for his first excursion into the “tall and endless wall of dense November woods... impenetrable,” (330) he carries a gun too big for him; too long, too heavy, “man-size,” with which he hopes to bleed Old Ben the bear. The Bear has “loomed and towered in his dreams” (328) without his even yet having seen it, “tremendous, red-eyed, not malevolent but just big” (329). Too big for the dogs that run it, the horses that chase it, for the bullets blasted at it, and too big for a little boy with a gun that's too big for himself, even.

In his first confrontation with the Bear, Ike does not see, but feels Old Ben's gaze, and discovers himself and his weapon to be utterly impotent against this weighty presence; he and his civilized ways are too puny to oppose the Bear and the wilderness that it palpably embodies. Thus Ike begins his apprenticeship to the wild, “witnessing his own birth” (331) at age ten, not by attempting to make the woods any smaller, but through taking part in the woods' enormity and himself growing bigger and more substantial.

He entered his novitiate to the true wilderness with Sam beside him as he had begun his apprenticeship in miniature to manhood after the rabbits and such with Sam beside him...while the wilderness closed behind his entrance as it had opened momentarily to accept him, opening before his advancement as it closed behind his progress, no fixed path the wagon followed but a channel nonexistent ten yards ahead of it... (330)

What had formerly been an “apprenticeship in miniature” is now writ large, a small uncertain path that begins Ike’s initiation into the vast mystery of wilderness.

Faulkner uses images involving size to oppose the mature solidity of the wilderness to the stunted evanescence of civilization. He depicts the wilderness as something which “the little puny humans swarmed and hacked at in a fury of abhorrence and fear like pygmies about the ankles of a drowsing elephant” (329). Civilization is not merely small, but puny in the face of nature’s sheer power, and gnaws like a cancer at its edges. When Ike enters the big woods for the first time, he sees “the skeleton stalks of cotton and corn in the last of the open country” fade until the surrey in which he travels is “dwarfed by that perspective into an almost ridiculous diminishment.” (330) The spindly offshoots of civilization are a paltry parody of the woods’ impenetrably treed density. Ike may only gain a place in this immensity by becoming solid himself, by nourishing his growth on humility and endurance. He learns humility precisely by being humiliated, recognizing his own slightness compared with the “corridor of wreckage and devastation” (328) that the Bear leaves behind it; he gains endurance by forsaking his rifle, compass, and snake-stick—all human creations—to encounter the wilderness on its own terms.

Faulkner’s civilizers, in contrast, do not encounter wilderness on its own terms, but clear it, fragment it into smaller pieces, and bequeath it to future generations under the pretensions of ownership. Civilization, rooted not in humility and endurance but in an urge to perpetuate “ease, security, and pride” (383) is in contrast undersized and evanescent. When Major de Spain hears the mongrel-dog Lion repeatedly slam around the inside of his enclosure like a captive whirlwind, he “civilizedly” demands of Sam why it can’t be shot. Sam explains that this is the dog that will finally match the Bear, and the Major says “Dog the devil...I’d rather have Old Ben in my pack than that brute... You’ll never tame him. How do you ever expect to make an animal like that afraid of you?” (349). Sam responds, “I don’t want him tame.” Again, the only beings that can confront the Bear are those that meet it on its own terms; a “civilized” dog wouldn’t have a chance. Close proximity to a “cold and almost impersonal malignance like some nature force” (350) dwarfs and unsettles one (like de Spain) accustomed to the tameness of civilized life. Ike realizes that the dog is “bigger than a calf, bigger than he knew it actually was—the big head, the chest almost as big as his own” (367). Standing not like a dog, but a horse, Lion’s “bigness” consists not merely in physical stature but in the way he is powered solely by indifference. Uncaring of anything and with eyes that “blink sleepily at nothing,” Lion embodies undeliberating, blind natural force, like that in a waterfall. He is, like Old Ben, “not malevolent but just big. Too big...” (329). In Lion we see that the wilderness does not merely loom larger than life; civilization wanes smaller.

Faulkner pits human attempts at stature against the potent bulk of the wild ruthlessly. Ike perceives Major de Spain’s camp – clearing, house, barn, and tiny lot as but puny scrapings at the flank of wilderness. Removing the forest, humans scratch the surface of the ground and call the new-found openness and

translation of green woods into profitable green paper big. The solidity of the wild is then further transferred into things like the “big, airy, book-lined second-storey room with windows” (435) of Major de Spain’s after his deal with the timber company. But massive wilderness mocks civilized openness: human “bigness” is but superficial extension, expansive merely in its vacant vastness; the “bigness” of the wild is big in its substantiality, in its density, in its indomitable proliferation of life.

The Implacable Landscape of the Real: Heaven in The Great Divorce

“Do they like this place?” I asked.

“As much as they like anything,” he answered.

“They’ve got cinemas and fish and chip shops and advertisements and all the sorts of things they want...

The appalling lack of any intellectual life doesn’t worry them...I’ve fooled about trying to wake people up here...but they all seem to have sunk to the level of their surroundings.” (Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 4)

Lewis begins *The Great Divorce* in Purgatory, the subject of the above dialogue. This afterlife domain is dingy and dreary, its people generally bitter, selfish, and back-stabbing. Like the denizens of Plato’s cave, Purgatory’s tenants are largely content to observe the shadow-play on the wall and embrace its flickering two-dimensionality as the only real world there is—as dismal as that may be. A few, however (including the narrator) aspire to something more and arrange themselves in a line to wait for a bus to Heaven. Upon boarding, one passenger hints that this may not be a desirable destination for many of those on board: “Why on earth they insist on coming I can’t imagine.

They won’t like it at all when we get there, and they’d really be much more comfortable at home” (4). With this foreshadowing that Heaven might not turn out to be the clichéd ‘nice place where good people go when they die’, we encounter a motif found earlier in Faulkner, namely that one must leave what is comfortable in order to confront the substantial.

The bus soon begins to rise and its passengers quail as they are transported ever nearer to Heaven and its impending sunrise:

I glanced around the bus. Though the windows were closed, and soon muffled, the bus was full of light. It was cruel light. I shrank from the faces and forms by which I was surrounded. They were all fixed faces, not full of possibilities, but impossibilities, some gaunt, some bloated, some glaring with idiotic ferocity some drowned beyond recovery in dreams; but all, in one way or another distorted and faded. One had a feeling that they might fall to pieces at any moment if the light grew much stronger...and still the light grew.” (17)

This harsh luminescence is in fact only twilight—not even direct sunlight—but it proves more than the passengers’ frail forms can take, and one begins to recognize that the substantiality of those on the bus is open to question. Their faces are “distorted” or “faded”—somehow less than fully real.¹³⁶ After surmounting a massive cliff, the bus lands and the passengers—cursing and pummeling one another—exit the bus.

136. The significance of the face as interface with the real is suggested in this passage in the utter insufficiency of these passengers to meet reality on its own terms. Likewise, in Lewis’ novel *Till We Have Faces*, only divinities are understood as equipped with true faces of their own: “How can they meet us till we have faces?” (294).

I got out. The light and coolness that drenched me were like those of summer morning, early morning a minute or two before the sunrise, only that there was a certain difference. I had the sense of being in a larger space, perhaps even a larger sort of space, than I had ever known before: as if the sky were further off and the extent of the green plain wider than that could be on this little ball of earth. I had got “out” in some sense which made the Solar System itself seem an indoor affair. (20)

Getting “out” of the bus is for the narrator unprecedented in its effects and not merely a case of his exiting something by a method by which he had previously entered. Rather, it finds a parallel in Ike’s entering the wild—a far larger kind of world—by abandoning the puny gnawings of the civilized. The surface scratchings of the cleared forest are for Ike more confining than an enclosure of trees, a surrounding with no substance—not vast but empty. However, the openness of being “out” is for Heaven’s visitors double-edged. It gives the narrator “a feeling a freedom, but also of exposure, possibly of danger.” (20) As we shall see, this danger is not merely imagined.

In Heaven’s early morning twilight, the narrator is astonished to discover that he can see right through his fellow passengers. They are “fully transparent...smudgy and imperfectly opaque when they stood in the shadow of some tree. They were in fact ghosts: man-shaped stains on the brightness of that air” (20). When they move, the grass refuses to bend beneath their feet and the dew-drops won’t budge; like civilized humans in *The Bear*, the passengers are revealed as ephemeral figures when juxtaposed with the real. The narrator soon perceives the grass not only under his feet, but through his feet as well, and thereby discovers himself to be a phantom like the

others. A few moments later, his perception is reoriented from figure to ground and he experiences the situation the other way around.

The men were as they had always been; as all the men I had known had been perhaps. It was the light, the grass, the trees that were different; made of some different substance, so much solidier than things in our country that men were ghosts by comparison. (21)

Lewis’ Heaven has the enormity of Faulkner’s densely treed wilderness. Shadow-life is, by comparison, a defective sort of being, orders of magnitude removed from complete reality.

For Lewis’ narrator, being a phantom isn’t easy in the face of Heaven’s solidity. Even the simple action of trying to make his way to a grove of trees proves inordinately difficult and tormenting:

The grass, hard as diamonds to my unsubstantial feet, made me feel as if I were walking on wrinkled rock, and I suffered pains like those of the mermaid in Hans Andersen. A bird ran across in front of me and I envied it. It belonged to that country and was as real as the grass. It could bend the stalks and spatter itself with the dew. (25)

Like Faulkner’s wilderness, Lewis’ Heaven is a perilous place for those who, built of frailer stuff, do not “belong” to that country.

Though many of the bus passengers are repulsed and angry at the painful “bait and switch” they perceive to be happening, Heaven’s sharpness and solidity are not ontological extravagances aimed to cause suffering to the phantom-footed; they

merely embody Being and Reality as they are to be encountered in themselves, on their own terms, unblunted. This novel circumstance provides at least one occasion for humour, as the narrator watches one of the passengers attempt the ostensibly simple task of making his way to an apple tree:

Here [the Ghost] was checked. Round the Tree grew a belt of lilies: to the ghost an insuperable obstacle. It might as well have tried to tread down an anti-tank trap as to walk on them. It lay down and tried to crawl between them but they grew too close and they would not bend... The wind seemed to be rising. I saw the Ghost wring its hand and put its thumb in its mouth—cruelly pinched, I doubt not, between two stems of the lilies when the breeze swayed them. (47)

This encounter would seem to lend new significance to the biblical injunction “Consider the lilies!”

Before long, the narrator encounters Heaven’s own inhabitants. He calls them “the solid people” and “the bright people” interchangeably, for they are both. When they approach, “the earth shook under their tread as their strong feet sank into the wet turf. A tiny haze and a sweet smell went up where they had crushed the grass and scattered the dew” (23). These actions, which would be of little consequence under different circumstances, attain significance here in light of what the visitors in contrast cannot do. For the Bright People’s feet, the grass is soft and pliant, though dangerously sharp and unyielding to the toes of unreality. The Solid People’s behaviours reveal that they are (like the Bear) at home where they are; they are made of the same stuff. Like the Bear, they are not only solid, but big as well. For those who wore clothing, their robes “did not disguise [...] the massive grandeur of muscle and the radiant smoothness

of flesh” (24). Thick with reality, these beings are Presences to be reckoned with; to confront them is to encounter the numinous. Their brightness, solidity, and enormity consequently induce fear in the fragile visitors, many of whom flee to the bus while others huddle together for protection. These dwellers of the real are thus no more like the friendly angels that one finds atop a Christmas tree than Old Ben is like a cuddly teddy bear. They are fair and perilous; like the lion Aslan, they are terrible and wonderful at the same time.

Heaven is, like Faulkner’s wilderness, not just solid but vast—and such vastness demands finer perceptions than the gross sensibilities one had back on earth:

Before me green slopes made a wide amphitheatre, enclosing a frothy and pulsating lake into which, over many-coloured rocks, a waterfall was pouring. Here once again I realized that something had happened to my senses so that they were now receiving impressions which would normally exceed their capacity. (46)

These sublime encounters reveal natural wonders that echo the massive Bear in Faulkner: “On earth, such a waterfall could not have been perceived at all as a whole; it was too big. Its sound would have been a terror in the woods for twenty miles” (46). If human perception in its native form is halting and unable to assimilate such a whole, this deficiency likewise suggests why in Faulkner humans only succeed in gnawing at the flanks of the wilderness and apportioning a “scrap” or “fragment” of the wild. We literally cannot see the forest for the trees and have to send the whole into a reducing valve that renders it into halting pieces made meaningful on our own diminished terms.

Likewise, it is the frailty of Purgatory that renders Heaven's waterfall into something not only impossible to assimilate but outright fearful. Crucially, the "terror" that the waterfall evokes is not motivated by any sort of agenda. Like Faulkner's dog Lion who would "blink sleepily at nothing" the reality of Heaven possesses the utter indifference of a natural force. Like the Bear, the waterfall is "not malevolent, just big." In Lewis' novel *Till We Have Faces*, the narrator Orual invokes similar imagery of torrents of water in motion as a metaphor for the implacable indifference of ultimate reality: "the Divine Nature wounds and perhaps destroys us merely by being what it is. We call it the wrath of the gods; as if the great cataract in Phars were angry with every fly it sweeps down in its green thunder" (Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 284). But it would be a mistake to construe divine indifference as negating all possibility for human-divine relationship. Annie Dillard simultaneously secures both by asserting that "God needs nothing, asks nothing, and demands nothing, like the stars. It is a life with God which demands these things" (43). Lewis shared this practical emphasis on the costs of living life with God, which helps account for his image of the divine as a wild, beautiful, perilous place. A place is something that one must relate to concretely with one's feet literally on the ground. A painful place can be abandoned in terror by an act of self-exile, or it can become a vale of soul-making wherein shadows are gradually transformed into substance. As philosopher Jack Turner emphasizes, wilderness is a condition, whereas wilderness is a place. By interacting with a wild place on its own terms, one eventually becomes wild oneself. The beauty and seeming cruelty of Heaven's terrain thus ultimately prove therapeutic; they moreover make abstractions like one's so-called "relationship with God" or "being in God's presence" viscerally present rather than merely pale abstractions.

In addition to its solidity and vastness, Heaven demonstrates its reality by not representing anything but itself. One of the bus passengers is a famous artist who, awestruck at the magnificence of the waterfall and surrounding landscape, says "I should like to paint this." One of the Solid People replies that it would not do any good, for:

When you painted on earth—at least in your earlier days—it was because you caught glimpses of Heaven in the earthly landscape. The success of your painting was that it enabled others to see the glimpses too. But here, you are having the thing itself. It is from here that the messages came. (83)

In Platonic terms, in Heaven the prisoner has left the Cave behind him and emerged into full sunlight, and what he sees is no longer mere shadow-play but the real thing. To represent it would be (for a Platonist) to move one step further away from the real because the non-derivative reality of Heaven does not shadow-forth anything else. It just is, non-referring and sufficient in itself. Like the wilderness in Faulkner, it is "older than any recorded document"—or piece of artwork, for that matter—for such representations merely map territories already existent.

Nature and the Task of Growing Real

"Will you come with me to the mountains? It will hurt at first, until your feet are hardened. Reality is harsh to the feet of shadows. But will you come?" (Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 39)

As we have seen, in *The Great Divorce* and *The Bear*, Lewis and Faulkner both depict the real as something that exceeds the merely human, and especially as a wildness which transcends society or civilization. Although this transcending distinction invokes images of size, there are shades of difference that are important to distinguish in each novel. In Lewis' Heaven, vastness and solidity epitomize the ultimate degree of reality or substance, whereas Faulkner's Bear embodies massiveness or bulk, a sheer "bigness" that endures over time. Though I risk over-schematizing these distinctions by laying them out side-by-side, see Table 1 for a summary of how the real and the less-than-fully-real tend to be depicted in each novel.

Keeping such imagery in mind, it might be worth asking why Lewis and Faulkner use these particular images and not others. Why is size so important? What is so significant about solidity? And why is wild nature the basis for Lewis' imagery of Heaven, the very locus of the supernatural?

One reason both authors use imagery involving size and solidity is probably that such images invoke familiar sensations to call our own stature into question. With respect to size, Faulkner does not merely state that civilized human beings are small in the face of wilderness. Rather, he writes of "the shaggy tremendous shape" that speeds "with the ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive" and leaves "a corridor of wreckage and destruction," (328) and thereby conjures up images that make one actually feel puny in the face of such a force. In conjunction with the woods' being "older than any recorded document," such size implies a significance and endurance in the wild that civilization (in the narrator's view) lacks. Civilization is thus revealed to be temporally ephemeral, like an annual weed that releases its seeds and then passes away. Lewis' imagery, in contrast, may derive its effectiveness from the fact that solidity is, as Elaine Scarry argues, "the key

experience for percipient creatures" (14)—a literal "touchstone" for reality. Whenever possible we make distinctions regarding the real and the illusory by touch-confirmation. Thus, by depicting altered tactile sensations with respect to seemingly familiar objects, Lewis radically defamiliarizes one's understanding of what is real and what is not. His emphasis is therefore on the physically ephemeral nature of human beings in face of the real.

Table 1. The Real and the Less-than-fully-real in *The Bear* and *The Great Divorce*

	The Bear	The Great Divorce
The less-than-fully-real:	Civilization, the urge to "tame" wild landscapes and wild creatures	Purgatory, unredeemed humanity, human commodity-culture
Depicted as:	Puny, underdeveloped, temporally ephemeral	Insubstantial, shadow-like, physically ephemeral
The real:	Wilderness, the Bear	Heaven, its wild creatures, and the Solid People
Depicted as:	Sheer size, bulk, endurance	Solidity, vastness
Realized by:	Relinquishing the trappings of civilization	Surrendering the self and one's "souvenirs of Hell"

In either case, it is critical to understand the relational nature of both size and solidity. Only by contrasting things of different sizes or by interacting with the solid does the experience of vastness or hardness occur (e.g., a table is hard to my hand, but soft to a diamond drill). Alone, the Bear is just the Bear. It only appears big because, when juxtaposed with the human, civilized beings look puny; thus by confronting the one with the other Faulkner reveals the true nature of each as they reciprocally determine one another. Likewise, Lewis' Heaven isn't hard or soft; it just is. The relationship that inheres between real feet and real grass is comfortable; in contrast, the interaction of shadow-feet and real grass is painful, something shadows are not built for. By depicting the solid as grass too painful to tread, Lewis undercuts our understanding of ourselves as solid in the first place and demonstrates that our primary interactions with the world where the grass feels solid (yet pliant) under our feet are obtained precisely because we are shadows interfacing with more shadows. To depict the divine through the use of the sensuous is therefore effective because such imagery inverts our everyday empirical expectations. An image of grass too sharp to tread is an incisive tool for depicting our frailty before the divine nature. At the same time, the possibility of growing solid—for building up calluses, as it were—makes this sort of imagery all the more relevant to Lewis' purpose. He does not conceive the divine as something wholly Other, but merely as something infinitely more—more solid, more real, a realm consisting in pure actualized being, whereas the human remains a potential, a becoming (and one hopes, a “becoming real”).

For both Lewis and Faulkner, reality in no uncertain terms demands that one—if he wishes to dwell there—“become fully real himself,” and not the other way around. The reason for this constraint is that the real cannot accommodate to something less real without losing that which makes it real in the

first place. For Faulkner, a cleared and fragmented wilderness is not wilderness anymore—it is just a flimsy, fleeting construct, a parody. Nor can a “civilized” or “tame” dog endure an encounter with a wild bear (no, the bear will most certainly not “play nice”). Similarly, for Lewis, Heaven cannot be brought, even in pieces, down into Hell (which is precisely what Purgatory becomes when made into a permanent residence) because, simply put, “it cannot fit.” Lewis' teacher George MacDonald, represented in the novel as one of the Solid People, demonstrates this impossibility by plucking a blade of grass for use as a pointer and having the narrator kneel and look to a tiny crack in the ground. “I cannot be certain,” he said, “that this is the crack that ye came up through. But through a crack no bigger than that ye certainly came” (137). When the narrator objects that he saw massive cliffs during the ascent, MacDonald replies:

“Aye. But the voyage was not mere locomotion. That bus, and all you inside it, were increasing in size...All Hell is smaller than one pebble in your earthly world: but it is smaller than one atom of this world. Look at yon butterfly. If it swallowed all Hell, Hell would not be big enough to do it any harm or to have any taste.” (138)

It is thus not a case of injustice or a lack of compassion for the Hell-bound that keeps Heaven out of Hell, but rather their incommensurable degrees of reality. The larger container cannot fit into the smaller. Heaven cannot fit into Hell, and Hell cannot endure the reality of Heaven. One may only inhabit the place to which his nature is attuned.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the imaginary landscapes of both *The Great Divorce* and *The Bear* is the identification of ultimate reality with wild nature. That is to

say, the real is precisely that world which people did not make. Through his use of nature as an image for Heaven, Lewis anticipates many of the concerns that arose with postmodernism, in particular, the cultural slippage already well-underway from objective to subjective conceptions of truth. Such a trend, in Lewis' view, drains aura from anything not made by people, ultimately disenchanting both nature and the supernatural:

It is a disastrous discovery...that we exist. I mean it is disastrous when instead of merely attending to a rose we are forced to think of ourselves when looking at the rose...It is disastrous because, if you are not very careful, the colour of the rose gets attributed to our optic nerves and its scent to our noses, and in the end there is no rose left. (qtd. in Honda 91)

In striking contrast to a postmodern view that characteristically locates meaning in subjective encounter, both Lewis and Faulkner represent human society as a false source of value, a bleak, two-dimensional projection. Lewis' Hell is a grim, Prufrockian wasteland, resembling an urban slum; like Major de Spain's civilized enclave in *The Bear*, it sprawls but does not genuinely fill the space it occupies.

In their fascinating study *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C. S. Lewis*, Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara elaborate on the monochromatic bleakness of man-made Hell in contrast to the vibrant landscape of Heaven:

The imagined hell is a big, gray city full of "dingy lodging houses, small tobacconists, hoardings from which posters hung in rags, windowless warehouses, goods stations without trains..." The most important

point may be that it is a city always expanding, "leaving more and more empty streets." It has no neighbourhoods and no community. Each street that might have been a neighbourhood is largely empty, having at most only one or two people. By contrast, heaven is green. It is a world of nature, untouched by human corruption. (143)

Lewis' Hell, in fact, spreads out endlessly because just wishing for more space makes it appear; because the denizens of Hell so little abide one another's presence, they each continually wish themselves into spatial isolation and psychological alienation. The ever expanding shallows of Hell would seem to bear out Ken Wilber's aphorism, "you can never get enough of what you don't really need." As a result, the inhabitants of Hell are enclosed in what amounts to a miserable, human-contrived virtual reality. Some schools of thought such as nineteenth-century Decadence and contemporary transhumanism would gladly embrace the possibilities of such a world that is "nature-free," that is to say, devoid of any givens, deformably plastic, and awaiting artful inscription from without by the human subject. But as ecophilosopher David Abram points out, humanity divorced from its relationship with the more-than-human world becomes lost in a hall-of-mirrors. If we interact only with our own "electronically-generated vistas and engineered pleasures" we become that much less substantial for it. Neil Evernden likewise reminds us of the importance of feeling wonder by putting ourselves in relationship with a world that exceeds ourselves and own productions: "The shock of encountering something which is other is the shock of being alive: isn't it amazing that there is that, and not just me" (112). Ultimately, we become less-than-human when the only world to which we bow is the one we make ourselves.

In a striking challenge to the anthropocentrism so often associated with Christianity, Lewis' Heaven is in fact not made for people all—at least not for the tamed denizens of human society. To live in such wild places, one must become wild himself. And the bus stop is only the beginning. For Lewis, the ultimate touchstone of reality is represented not just by nature, but by the wilderness deep in Heaven's mountains (the grass of Heaven, so painful to the tourists, is revealed to have really been only foothill boundary-scrub). The fact that we must accommodate ourselves to the terrain of Heaven and not expect it to adapt to us shows that Lewis' cosmic drama is centred on embracing values not human-created but (to his mind) objective. In *The Practice of the Wild*, philosopher-poet Gary Snyder crucially points out that the root of the word "wild" implies foremost a sense of being "self-willed" (9). This conception of wildness epitomizes both Aslan and the divine landscape in *The Great Divorce*, for each possesses a self-willed reality inherent to itself which radiates outward. For Lewis, the feeble posturings at self-will exercised by the phantoms fail precisely because, as dependent creatures, their own reality is derivative and consequently too frail to provide a source of genuine internal agency. In fact, what they mistake for self-will is really just the activity of habit and vice controlling them (hence the depiction of vices in personified and domineering forms such as the lizard perched on one phantom's shoulders). The phantoms are in fact tamed by the vices which rule them, which further accounts for their failure to endure much wildness. Such limited creatures are, unlike Aslan and Heaven, not the sources of reality but ones who must feed upon it in order to become fully real themselves.

Lewis' use of imagery rooted in tangible nature is more than just an occasion for his representing allegorical truth, however, and more than a blank screen for his projecting a

morality play. Lewis held too much regard for nature for that. In his book *Miracles*, Lewis explains that prior to his conversion his earliest and strongest objections to theism were in fact nature-oriented and aesthetic. In particular, he did not like the idea of nature being anything other than self-sustaining. To him at that time, the notion of nature as a created artefact demeaned it:

"If Nature herself proves artificial, where will you go to seek wildness? Where is the real out-of-doors?" To find that all the woods and small streams in the middle of the woods, and odd corners of mountain valleys, and the wind and the grass were only a sort of scenery, only backcloths for some kind of play, and that play perhaps one with a moral—what flatness, what an anticlimax, what an unbearable bore! (68)

Lewis later came to the paradoxical realization, however, that if nature were in fact a divine creation, then like a human being it could perform as a fellow character in the cosmic drama, similarly flawed but redeemable. "How could you ever have thought that it was merely a stage-set for the moral drama of men and women? She is herself. Offer her neither worship nor contempt. Meet her and know her" (70). Even as Lewis topples nature from the pedestal of pantheistic deity, he nonetheless reveals his deep affection for it and for non-human ways of knowing and perceiving. In a fascinating passage from *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis demonstrates an uncanny capability to enter into the otherworldly world of Mr. Bultitude, the zoo-escaped bear who now lives comfortably at the Manor:

Mr. Bultitude's mind was as furry and unhuman in shape as his body. He did not remember, as a man in

his situation would have remembered, the provincial zoo from which he had escaped during a fire, nor his first snarling and terrified arrival at the Manor, nor the slow stages whereby he had learned to love and trust its inhabitants. He did not know that he loved and trusted them now. He did not know that they were people, nor that he was a bear. Indeed, he did not know that he existed at all: everything that is represented by the words I and Me and Thou was absent from his mind. When Mrs. Maggs gave him a tin of golden syrup, as she did every Sunday morning, he did not recognize either a giver or a recipient. Goodness occurred and he tasted it. And that was all. Hence his loves might, if you wished, all be described as cupboard loves: food and warmth, hands that caressed, voices that reassured, were their objects. But if by a cupboard love you meant something cold or calculating you would be quite misunderstanding the real quality of the beast's sensations. He was no more like a human egoist than he was like a human altruist. There was no prose in his life. The appetencies which a human mind might disdain as cupboard loves were for him quivering and ecstatic aspirations which absorbed his whole being, infinite yearnings, stabbed with the threat of tragedy and shot through with the colours of Paradise. (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 306)

However different Mr. Bultitude might be from Old Ben (the latter being, of course, vastly wilder), one nevertheless cannot miss how Lewis still acknowledges Mr. Bultitude's inherent value, his own creaturely uniqueness, and his irrevocable alterity. He is his own "furry and unhuman" self—nei-

ther a disposable resource nor a human product—and thus must be neither over- nor undervalued, but regarded as a fellow creature unlike us. Likewise, nature in Lewis' *Heaven* is in fact a fellow creature—divinized. Further amplifying the comprehensiveness of Lewis' salutary vision, his imagined landscape of the real is not just inhabited by people, but by wild, more-than-human creatures. Lewis' robin belongs in the dew-spattered meadows of *Heaven* because it is made of the same wild stuff. In Faulkner, Ike is likewise called to become a more-than-cultural human being through an initiation that makes him like the non-human creatures of the big woods. The uncageable wildness of his hunting dog is epitomized by its name—"Lion"—which, like Aslan, is definitely "not a tame lion." Like the Solid People, the tourists on the bus are called to become more-than-human precisely by having to learn how to endure a rugged more-than-human landscape.

The Aesthetic of Relinquishment in Lewis and Faulkner

'Growing real' is more than just a nice idea: it is the task appointed to us all. For Lewis, we are "made for infinite joy"—which requires that one grow solid enough to endure unbroken communion with the divine. For Faulkner, the calling is more visceral, to become "Men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive... the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter..." (327).¹³⁷ Crucially, the key to growing real in this way lies not in what one brings with him, but in what one

137. It is worth recalling that the word humility derives from humus, which refers to soil; humility thus implies literal "grounding" and being brought physically "down to earth."

leaves behind. Environmental scholar Lawrence Buell writes of how such an “aesthetic of relinquishment” has guided narratives of voluntary simplicity in environmental writing from Thoreau’s *Walden* through Wendell Berry. Speaking of “two forms of relinquishment,” Buell states that:

...the more familiar is relinquishment of goods, of material trophies. Faulkner’s Ike McCaslin lays down gun, compass, and watch in order to find Old Ben; later he tries to extricate himself from the curse his tribe has cast on the land by forgoing his inheritance. The more radical relinquishment is to give up individual autonomy itself, to forgo the illusion of mental and even bodily apartness from one’s environment. (144)

It is a version of this latter form of relinquishment—namely, relinquishment of the autonomous self—that seems to concern Lewis in his preface to *The Great Divorce*:

You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind...if we accept Heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell. (viii)

This is not because the “souvenirs of Hell” are not permitted in Heaven (questions about what is “allowed” do not arise in Lewis’ eschatology); such souvenirs are simply too ephemeral to endure there—lust, selfishness, desire for control, and greed are too small, wispy, and evanescent to last long in the realm of ultimate solidity. The shadow-like consistency of un-

redeemed mortal flesh and blood cannot penetrate into Deep Heaven, “Not because they are too rank, but because they are too weak” (114). If one must see this failure in moral terms, it is not so much an ethical morality as an ontological morality where so-called “sins” are really deficits in reality.

What makes the passengers on the bus into shadows is their lack of moral substance, which is not cured by adding a series of contrived virtues, but only through their recognizing their insufficiency and relinquishing themselves to the divine nature. For instance, when one of the narrator’s companions on the bus meets a man who had murdered a friend of his during his life, he asks, “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” The other replies, “No. Not as you mean. I do not look at myself. I have given myself up. I had to, you know, after the murder” (27). Only by one’s surrendering himself and dying to his old nature, can he be re-shaped into divine stuff. This is a point upon which the Solid People will accept no compromise. When a passenger’s various vices and attachments appear as projected beings (such as a lizard on his shoulders), the Solid People repeatedly ask, “May I kill it?” If surrender occurs, the being is killed, but is re-birthed as a redeemed creature solid enough to easily tread the grass of Heaven. Before long, those unwilling to surrender themselves find it intolerable to stay in Heaven any longer and return instead to the familiar (if not ‘comfortable’) misery of Purgatory.

Similarly, when Ike begins his apprenticeship to the wild and witnesses “his own birth” at age ten, this birth only commences once he begins to put his “civilized” self to death. Ike recognizes that to become solid like the wild he must engage it on its own terms and forsake the civilized security of rifle, snake-stick, and even compass. To even see the Bear (let alone, “bleed it”), he must first make himself into the same sturdy stuff, where like may recognize and confront like. Until

Ike does this, the relationship remains asymmetrical and only he himself remains visible, though perhaps as something no more substantial than a mist flitting through the trees. It is not as if Ike's gun, compass, and snake-stick are not permitted in the woods; rather, the Bear simply refuses to disclose itself until Ike surrenders them and truly begins to inhabit the wild, attuning himself to the woods' solidity without the mediating artifacts of civilization. In doing so, he begins to grow real—wild, solid—himself. One that refuses to leave such things behind remains an uninitiated tourist, oblivious to the wild as it is uncloaked. This was indeed the purpose of Ike's coming to the Big Bottom in the first place, "to earn for himself from the wilderness the name and state of hunter provided he in turn were humble and enduring enough" (328).

In *The Great Divorce* and *The Bear*, Lewis and Faulkner reveal that what we think is real is really just a shadow, a filmy metaphor for the solidity of reality—something Plato argued 2500 years ago. But for Faulkner and Lewis, the real does not lay, as Plato thought, in the realm of abstract universals, but in eminently concrete singularities—a massive bear that moves through the woods like a freight train, grass whose dew threatens to penetrate like shrapnel. In stark contrast, civilization and Purgatory/Hell are attenuated realities, halting approximations that we call 'good enough' in our Procrustean attempts to bring the real down to our comfort level. Lewis' Heaven and Faulkner's woods are both far from safe; nonetheless, these are the places we are meant to belong. Both authors call us—through humility, big-heartedness, and surrender—to grow into something that can endure such realities: a perilous calling, but for them the only truth worth growing into. The especially difficult part about fulfilling such a demand is that until we actually encounter the real in its wild, unmitigated vastness and solidity, we continue to think ourselves solid and

real enough as we are. Only when we tread real grass and feel it slice our insubstantial feet and we perceive that the Bear's gaze looks not at us, but stares right through us, do we come to the painful realization that, ontologically speaking, we do not even suffice to play the role of the chained watchers of shadow-play on the walls of Plato's Cave—for we are the shadows ourselves.

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Screwtape in Middle-Earth
Variations on a Theme

ANNIE BIRKS



Separate approaches to fiction

AMONGST THE LITERARY colleagues and friends of Lewis, one of the closest was certainly J. R. R. Tolkien. Although both were committed Christians, these two authors bear witness to rather dissimilar approaches to literature: Tolkien tended to exclude all explicit references to religion in his stories whereas Lewis openly used his faith as inspiration for his works of fiction. This paper¹³⁸ will highlight areas which appear to illustrate either convergence or divergence in the treatment of temptation

138. This paper is based on an earlier version in French which was given at the Tolkien conference in Rambures, France, June 2008.