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Along for the Journey: Exploring the Transformative Storytelling of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams

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Along for the Journey: Exploring the Transformative Storytelling of J.R.R.
Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams

By

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Thesis

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Abstract

I will be exploring the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams. In each one of the novels I explore a journey that each main character must take. Their actions will bring them to a new, transformative life or a very literal death. There is much at stake. The readers must also be willing to take a good look at themselves because this journey is actually intended for them. I argue that each of these authors writes for the common reader with the intention of provoking an introspective look into life and its great meaning. The Christian background of each of the authors is the driving force for their storytelling. I will examine particular instances in each story where the character chooses to grow. These moments illustrate important lessons for readers that could lead to personal growth, purpose, and a renewed sense of self-worth. I believe looking at each of these authors, characters, and moments of maturation is a unique and worthwhile exploration.

Introduction

What is transformative storytelling for the notable authors J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams? What or who is undergoing a transformation? And how so? These are some of the questions I will attempt to answer throughout this thesis. These authors were friends, colleagues and men of faith; all of which play a role in their professional career as novelists. A link that has yet to be made between the authors is their main characters. The characters undergo a personal change throughout their journey in the story. Their conversion or transformation is relatable because every reader can understand growing pains and make this connection to the main characters. Readers find themselves connecting, even if for a moment to the experience of the character. I argue that it is for those moments of growth that these authors are driven to write for their readers. I believe it is for the reader more than the character that these stories provide reflection and growth on more than just a superficial level.

When recent readers' polls in Britain rated popular books, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* made the top of the list. One poll in particular led by a notable bookshop chain placed the book at the top of readers' choices as the book of the twentieth century (Duriez and Porter vii). The work has had outstanding recognition in the United States as well. It is no surprise that several movies topped the box office upon release and his prelude work *The Hobbit* has currently taken movie goers by storm and two more films are in the works for a trilogy. Tolkien is a major icon of fantastical works. Tolkien's close friend, C.S. Lewis, known popularly for his works *Chronicles of Narnia*, has also drawn mass appeal

and his works have grown into a movie franchise. Lewis' space trilogy also earned him recognition from science fiction readers. Lewis is popular for his theological opinions and apologetics work as a Christian author. While their personal beliefs as Christians, Tolkien a Catholic and Lewis a Protestant have greatly influenced their scope for character transformations and storytelling, they have successfully found respect and devotion from a vast range of followers including non-Christians. This means their works have an undeniable appeal and significance to the contemporary world.

Another author and close friend of the pair is Charles Williams. While Tolkien and Lewis have become house-hold names, Williams' day has yet to come. Williams' works also draw on his Christian faith and place the extraordinary in the ordinariness of life. While Tolkien's secondary world Middle Earth is considered fantasy, Lewis' space trilogy enters the realm of sci-fi, and Williams prefers haunting tales of the supernatural, an element of the gothic genre. All men were writing at a time of great global distress, the 1930's and 40's. Their pre-modern work with myth, fantasy, sci-fi and the supernatural were indulgent among their group of close friends, but their works would hardly remain undiscovered. Their love for their work and excitement for storytelling would become magnetic and is still very much attracting an audience. In order to appreciate the connection between these men, the Inklings must first be explored. The three were members of this elite intellectual group. This group would become the formative context for extraordinary storytellers.

In the early 1930's C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien were members of the Oxford faculty and would spend much of their time meeting with an intellectual group called "The Inklings". The group would meet at nearby pubs or Lewis' rooms at Magdalen. The group began as a small meeting of working writers where members could bring works in progress, read them aloud, and receive comments and criticisms that would allow for revisions. Tolkien said of the group's name: "It was a pleasantly ingenious pun in its way, suggesting people with vague or half-formed intimations and ideas plus those who dabble in ink" (Carpenter 67). Writing was central to the group and it consisted of an elite mix of writers including Lewis's brother Warnie, Owen Barfield, Hugo Dyson, Tolkien's son Christopher, J.A.W. Bennett, Lord David Cecil, Nevill Coghill, Commander Jim Dundas-Grant, Adam Fox, Colin Hardie, Dr. Humphrey Havard, Gervase Mathew, R.B. McCallum, C.E. Stevens, and Charles Wrenn. Six years into the group Charles Williams would join and become a close friend of Lewis.

Most meetings would consist of strong tea, beer, cigars, and a work in progress that someone would be called upon to share. Although criticisms were encouraged, and no comment too harsh, it was the writer's choice to take it or leave it. The group could even serve as editors:

They shared rough drafts with one another, fully expecting to revise their texts, sometimes adding, sometimes deleting, and sometimes adjusting the material. They might take all of the advice they were given, or sift through it and take one small part. Sometimes advice served as a spring board to new ideas; other times it sparked a reaction in direct opposition. The result was a constant and significant change (Glyer 102).

The Tuesday and Thursday meetings allowed for community, association, criticism, collaboration, and appreciation. It was here that Tolkien would share the manuscript for *The Hobbit* and Lewis would make the group roll with laughter during his reading of *The Screwtape Letters*. Great encouragement was offered along with frank criticisms. Lewis's review of *Descent Into Hell* would empower Williams. Lewis observes, "In sheer writing I think you have gone up, as we examiners say, a whole class...a thundering good book and a real purgation to read...I shall come back to it again and again. A thousand thanks for writing it" (50). Tolkien referred to Lewis's *Perelandra* as "a great work of literature" (53). Lewis's reading of *The Hobbit* he says is a "delightful time" (55). His public reviews of the work were glowing: "All who love that kind of children's book which can be read and re-read by adults should take note that a new star has appeared in this constellation" (Carpenter 65). Tolkien gave much of the credit to Lewis. Tolkien was a notorious non-finisher so his decision to press on was "chiefly due to the encouragement" of Lewis, "one of the handful of people who were reading the book, or hearing it read aloud to them, as it was being written" (Glyer 57). Tolkien would later write of Lewis the "unpayable debt that I owe to him...was not "influence" as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my "stuff" could be more than a private hobby" (Carpenter 32). The Inklings formed unbreakable bonds through their meetings and work together that would prove to be lasting friendships. They never did forget about one another. The Inklings largely led by Lewis created a book of essays presented to Charles Williams.

This served as a way for some of the Inklings to sound off on concepts popular to their storytelling.

While some critics argue the group to be a cult or followers of Lewis, the letters exchanged among members prove something entirely different. Their love for their work and dedication to genuine friendship is exemplified as they listened to one another, learned, and sought personal growth. As an adult Lewis found himself an atheist with little regard for superstitious, simple minded Christians. Despite this prejudice, Lewis continually found himself surrounded by Christians that he respected as intellectuals, so he engaged in discussions. He cites Tolkien as one of the main influences in his conversion to theism and later to Christianity. They would walk for hours and discuss belief. Lewis wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves: “I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ – in Christianity. I will try to explain this another time. My long night talk with Dyson and Tolkien had a good deal to do with it” (Carpenter 45). Their influences were no longer limited to work but were encouragements for every part of life.

Their friendships only grew stronger as the group grew especially the bond between Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams. Lewis explains this in his book *The Four Loves*: “In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets...we possess each friend not less but more as the number of those with whom we share him increases” (Duriez and Porter viii). Lewis describes the most meaningful times

with his friends: “My happiest hours are spent with three or four old friends in old clothes tramping together and putting up in small pubs – or else sitting up till the small hours in someone’s college rooms talking nonsense, poetry, theology, metaphysics over beer, tea, and pipes” (12). It is the intellectuals dream to find kindred spirits, ones who share the love of their work, faith, and theories that would only be shared behind closed doors for fear of being found a heretic; this would be Williams as Lewis would joke. It would never have been guessed that these men would form such friendships especially noting Lewis’s first impression of Tolkien. Lewis recorded in his diary: “He is a smooth, pale, fluent little chap...No harm in him: only needs a smack or so” (Carpenter 22-23). On the other hand, he is quite taken with Williams: “He is of humble origin (there are still traces of Cockney in his voice), ugly as a chimpanzee but so radiant (he emanates more *love* than any man I have ever known) that as soon as he begins talking he is transfigured and looks like an angel. He sweeps some people quite off their feet and has many disciples” (Carpenter 101). Williams indeed had followers. One of his lectures on *Hamlet* was so enticing that Tolkien’s students left his class to attend and Tolkien was left lecturing to only one student taking notes for the others (Duriez and Porter 13). It was really Lewis that connected the three.

The theme I wish to explore in three works will examine the journey each Christian writer highlights that proves that their character’s individual displays of sacrifice are not isolated phenomenon but shared in works by several Inklings authors: J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, C.S. Lewis’ *Perelandra* and Charles

Williams' *Descent into Hell*. The uniting concept for all three works consists of the Christian element of journey. Journey is understood in this context to be a conversion or transformation of a character for the better. By accepting a particular mission, a character will be led to a sense of purpose, maturation, and true sense of self-worth. In these works in particular, the characters are called throughout their journey to go beyond selfishness and narcissism by choosing virtue. Virtue is an inclination to do the good. In difficult or tempting situations, these characters will choose virtue over vice, good over evil, sacrifice over selfishness in order to experience a joy they had each missed.

The narrative structure not only leads the character to a conversion and rebirth, but actively involves the reader who is also along for the journey. The characters are challenged throughout to choose something other than their own self-interests. This makes for personal reflection for not only the character but also the reader who finds herself asking those same questions and wondering their own end. The Christian background of each author is sure to have impacted the imaginative meaning of each story. Inklings experts Colin Duriez and David Porter found that the story is what it is all about: "The presence of story, like language, is evidence of the image of God still remaining in fallen humankind...worlds of the imagination are properly based upon the humble and common things of life" (42). These other worlds can allow for God's creation to be better understood. If they believe this to be true, then it is reasonable to conclude that they also believe the reader to better understand themselves based on these worlds. That they must wish for readers to take their own journey and

evaluate their willingness to challenge their comfort, routine, and self-absorption by exploring these alternate realities. The questions asked and demands made are universal to readers. One cannot help but wonder if there is more to life and if particular lessons in life will lead to a fuller experience and understanding of ourselves. Our desires for the characters to succeed can become a desire for our own success.

The most well-known of the three works is *The Hobbit*. Scholars such as Peter Kreeft, Catholic-Christian author and Tolkien expert, examine *The Hobbit* and find journey and sacrifice to be a constitutive element of the work. For this reason, I think that we would find our reading of the work enriched if we hear it in dialogue with other works of the Inklings who also used this concept of journey as a means of salvation and growth in sacrificial love. The communal context of the Inklings and how they shared their ideas were fundamentally influenced by their Christian world view. They all show us that this concept of journey can best be captured by a story. They prove it is better to actually tell a story that is a journey and will lead the reader on their own journey rather than discuss journey merely as a topic of theological inquiry. The Inklings model an interdependent framework that nurtures growth and change. While this was embodied in the group, it was directly illustrated in their works. Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams were storytellers.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy work *The Hobbit: There and Back Again* Bilbo Baggins, a rather ordinary hobbit and resident of the Shire, a small village community within a world called Middle Earth, accepts the invitation for an

adventure. While Bilbo is known for his lazy, comfort seeking Baggins side, he is also a Took. Tookes are known for adventure, although Bilbo wants nothing to do with adventures. Despite his disinterest when the great wizard Gandalf invites him on an adventure, Bilbo's interest is peaked and he finds himself following along knowing that he will not return the same, if he even returns at all. Although everything he finds comfort in exists in the Shire, his hole in the ground, his endless breads and cakes, his solitude, Bilbo makes the journey. He resists initially only finding himself missing something. He knows his life is empty and is willing to sacrifice his short-term luxury for something more. Bilbo chooses the unknown. He will encounter opportunities for growth by choosing to practice particular virtues of mercy, humility, and charity. Bilbo must find himself in a world that seems it will swallow him up unless he exhibits fortitude to accept every challenge with the hope of converting his fear into a new sense of self.

In C.S. Lewis' sci-fi work *Perelandra*, the second book of his space trilogy, philologist Ransom is summoned by the creature from the planet Mars known as the Eldila to leave at once to Perelandra, the planet Venus, in a coffin-shaped casket. Ransom is unsure of what he is called to do, but he sets aside his fear of what he will meet, the risk of never returning, or returning at a time when no one will be there to release him from the casket. Ransom must experience a rebirth even upon entering Perelandra as he learns to walk for the first time and experience the pleasures of a pure, uncorrupted planet. Ransom explores the planet, the Queen and Lady-Mother, and finds himself in an intellectual battle with his old rival Dr. Weston. In this battle between good and evil Ransom finds

himself defending the purity of a new race as Dr. Weston seeks to destroy it. Ransom is reluctant to accept that he is the only hope in preserving this race from the same fate and fall of earth through her original parents. Ransom must find the courage and positivity required to win this battle of wits and defend the Queen from corruption.

In Charles Williams's theological thriller *Descent into Hell* we find a series of characters that are trapped by their own self-loathing. In the small town of the Hill that is plagued by death from battles fought on the hill there are personal battles of good versus evil affecting all the members of the town except Peter Stanhope, local celebrity and poet. We follow closely as the town produces a play by Stanhope and in the process loses itself completely to narcissistic whims. Local historian Lawrence Wentworth unknowingly shares a home with a dead man, so worthless in life that he is never even named, who had hung himself in the home previous to Wentworth taking up residence there. Like the dead-man, Wentworth finds himself on a descent into hell because of his feeding every sensual desire, envy, and hatred for several friends. We cringe as Wentworth descends the rope into complete isolation in hell. Several other townspeople fuel their narcissism with continual praise and elitism. The main character Pauline is perhaps our only hope since she is aware of the haunting sins of her past and chooses to ask for help. Stanhope becomes the savior who is willing to take on Pauline's fears and encounters with a shadow that brings her face-to-face with herself and her self-loathing. Pauline wishes to ascend to the salvation that is

offered to her and even to carry others if it means they will experience the pleasure and joy that can be found in life through releasing one's demons.

The common element of these authors that has yet to be explored is their storytelling ability that draws readers to journey with the characters on an existential quest to maturation. Each of the main characters is created for something more than how they are currently surviving. These authors wish for readers to explore with the characters and search for something greater in life. With each journey we will find that the characters, like us, must identify their weaknesses, acknowledge how to overcome them, accept any sacrifices necessary to ensure their transformation, and enjoy the peace that comes with finding a greater purpose.

Journey to Maturation: A Hobbit's Growth in Virtue through Sacrifice

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* may be read in many different ways, as a bildungsroman, a tale of maturation and transformation, or a fairy story, a children's tale. However, Tolkenian scholars agree that Bilbo Baggins' journey through Middle-earth is only the beginning of a far greater epic tale, one that has sparked debate among critical scholars. *The Hobbit's* central character Bilbo Baggins is arguably the most virtuous and distinctively Christian character in the story, but some scholars find nothing particularly Christian about his actions. While this debate highlights scholarly confusion over the root, or motivation of Bilbo's actions, one fact is undeniable, *The Hobbit* and particularly Bilbo Baggins are essential to Middle-earth. Bilbo is the source of good that drives the plot and ushers in a new brand of hero. Although Bilbo Baggins is not youthful, he is immature and sheltered. His life has been all that is expected of a Hobbit, and that is not much. In order for Bilbo to grow, he must engage in an edifying journey that will challenge the core of who he is and prove that a Hobbit's purpose is for more than remaining comfortable in a hobbit-hole. In his heroic adventures at Gollum's cave, Mirkwood, and in the final battle, Bilbo demonstrates the virtues of mercy, humility, and charity. In each case, these virtues take on a distinctively Christian character insofar as they each rely on a Christian understanding of sacrifice. Ultimately, despite scholarly claims to the contrary, Bilbo's heroic actions in *The Hobbit* are best understood in terms of Christian virtue.

An interpretation of Bilbo's actions as particularly Christian morals and virtues in *The Hobbit* is a source of tension and debate. Critics of Tolkien identify that the battle between good and evil "drives the plot, giving it emotional power and resonance" (Morillo 110). The characters do not lack free will and "crucial characters exercise their free will at crucial times" (110). While this can be interpreted as a Christian understanding of free will and moral choice, the problem is that this is present in other philosophical and religious thought. This leaves critics questioning whether Bilbo's moral compass is strictly Christian in nature. Furthermore, some critics such as Brian Rosebury in his work *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment* only view *The Hobbit* as a children's adventure story that "makes no particular bid for internal realism, or for emotional or moral depth" (103). There cannot be more to Bilbo because his approach to evil is childish and silly. His meeting with Gollum is a comical exchange of riddles. Moreover, "even the villains lack a moral history or distinctive motive, and the forces of good triumph through superior guile, energy and luck" (103). Each conflict is seen as a battle of the wits, and Bilbo is extremely lucky every time. There is no hidden motivating factor that drives him and a moral compass is unnecessary in this light-hearted children's tale. Critics such as Morillo and Rosebury (and others like them) fail to recognize the inherently Christian moral virtues that readers of all ages can benefit from reading about in *The Hobbit*. These critics challenge the reading of *The Hobbit* as a journey of self-discovery only possible in light of Bilbo's Christian practice of virtue.

However, Bilbo's virtue must be Christian at its core because each of these virtues requires a commitment to sacrifice that can only be fully understood in sacrifice and ultimately love. Throughout Bilbo's expedition, he will find himself gradually maturing through each challenge as he learns to leave his comforts behind, face his fears, and sacrifice the material world for his valued friendships and the greater good. Tolkienian and Christian scholar Joseph Pearce challenges the simplification of the novel as a mere children's story. Pearce stresses:

Any dumbing down of the gravitas of its moral dimension would do much more damage to the integrity of the work than the graphic depiction of violence and the frightening presentation of the monstrous. At its deepest level of meaning – and great children's literature always has a deep level of meaning – *The Hobbit* is a pilgrimage of grace, in which its protagonist, Bilbo Baggins, becomes grown up in the most important sense, which is the growth in wisdom and virtue...and grows in sanctity. Thus *The Hobbit* illustrates the priceless truth that we only become wise men when we realize that we are pilgrims on a purposeful journey through life (2-3).

Pearce understands how much of the novel will be lost if we fail to recognize the moral dimension that highlights the deep level of meaning that Tolkien intends. The pilgrimage Pearce describes is the journey and transformation that Bilbo requires if he is to reach his full potential. Pearce wants Tolkien's readers to understand something about themselves:

We are meant to see ourselves reflected in the character of Bilbo Baggins and our lives reflected in his journey from the Shire to the Lonely Mountain...allowing our imagination, as readers, to follow in Bilbo's footsteps. In order to see the story as Tolkien wishes us to see it, we have to transcend the literal meaning of the story and ascend to the level of moral and anagogical applicability" (4).

Although we will not be meeting any goblins or elves, we will meet obstacles that require our will and determination to overcome. We will be challenged in ways

that we could never imagine, but as unexpected heroes ourselves, there is hope that we too can transform and ascend to a greater purpose. Pearce finds the existential reading that most scholars overlook, but that I wish to divulge.

Tolkien considered his works “fairy stories” and discusses this in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. Tolkien dismisses the term supernatural to describe his work and did not believe it to be reduced to an allegory. Instead he writes of his Secondary World:

Children are capable, of course, of *literary belief*, when the story-maker’s art is good enough to produce it. That state of mind has been called ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. But this does not seem to me a good description of what happens. What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful ‘sub-creator’. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed (Lewis 60).

Tolkien’s words here are essential because he is telling his readers what they need to know for reading his work. Readers must be willing to enter this other world, imagine it, and live in it. Tolkien can do more for his readers if they allow themselves to journey to this world. If *The Hobbit* is only a children’s story, Tolkien would not be interested in his reader’s ability to imagine like children his Secondary World. When we hand ourselves over to this world, we can gain the virtue it offers. For Tolkien, he images more for his readers than an entertaining

story. His work should engage with readers and their lives. If the readers have properly submitted themselves to the work, then they must take the journey with Bilbo and cannot finish the story unchanged. Readers will find they have more in common with Bilbo than they expect.

Bilbo Baggins is the unexpected hero, even for ten-year-old Rayner Unwin. Stanley Unwin, the head of Tolkien's publishing company, considered children to be the best judges of children's literature and gave his son Rayner one shilling to review the book; this is his review:

Bilbo Baggins was a hobbit who lived in his hobbit-hole and never went for adventures, at last Gandalf the wizard and his dwarves persuaded him to go. He had a very exciting time fighting goblins and wargs. At last they got to lonely mountain; Smaug, the dragon who guards it is killed and after a terrific battle with the goblins he returned home – rich (Zettersten 175)!

At 50 years old, with an average of three feet in height, we find the well-fed Bilbo at the beginning of *The Hobbit* at the peak of his comfortable, conventional Hobbit life. At this point, sacrifice is a concept Bilbo has never fathomed: “Bilbo Baggins is dedicated to the easy life and would find the prospect of taking up his cross and following the heroic path of self-sacrifice utterly anathema” (Pearce13). He has upheld his father's Baggins' name and is relieved to keep his mother's adventurous, troublesome Took side at bay. No one underestimates Bilbo as much as himself, but in Middle-earth, Hobbits are the most underestimated of all the races. However, readers will surely find that “the smaller than life Hobbits themselves evolve into legendary heroes around whose deeds, Tolkien would have us believe, the heroic human myths and romances of later times are woven

(Day 115). Initially, Bilbo does not appear to possess any superhuman qualities of a hero. Although Bilbo may not possess great physical strength, his keen Hobbit senses of hearing, sight, and smell are only some of his attributes. The qualities that are most sought after in a Hobbit are their quick, nimble, and quiet, abilities, excellent for sneaking about caves and mountains. Yet, Bilbo's real strength is deep within him, the bold, strong, fearlessness of virtue; this is not something many possess. Gandalf, Bilbo's family friend and powerful wizard, is the only one aware of Bilbo's value and defends his right to be the burglar for the company's mission to Lonely Mountain because, according to Gandalf, Bilbo is "one of the best, one of the best – as fierce as a dragon in a pinch" (17). Gandalf is the one who wakes Bilbo from his comfortable life. Likewise, Tolkien wishes to wake readers from their spiritual slumber. We are about to begin our journey with Bilbo and the company of dwarves. The company, 13 dwarves led by Thorin Oakenshield, is determined to win back their treasure from Smaug the dragon and all that is needed is an expert burglar, Bilbo. Gandalf's well-trusted wisdom and respectability earn Bilbo initial credit with the company (and with the reader), but here in the beginning, he has yet to earn the complete respect of the dwarves.

At this point, Bilbo is not considered a natural hero: "His life up to the beginning of the story has not demanded heroism" (Purtill 67). He has never been challenged to grow because he has always been in a protected environment (warmth and food), the comforts for an infant. His adulthood is inhibited: "Bilbo's Tookish side with his masculinity is being repressed in his womblike hobbit hole" (Rudd 111). Bilbo's hobbit-hole protects him but aids in keeping

him an infant and immature. Bilbo's initial reason for joining the journey is childish. One of the 13 dwarves, Bombur, compares Bilbo to a grocer as opposed to a burglar, which is his vain reason for proving the dwarves wrong (Tolkien 18). Above all, it is the dwarves' song of "pale enchanted gold" that "something Tookish woke up inside him", and he decides to join the journey (15). Gandalf seems to be the only one who expects anything of great use from Bilbo, so the dwarves and even Bilbo are surprised at his achievements. Bilbo's greatest achievements are found in his rise to heroism throughout the story. At first he appears an ordinary hobbit, but when heroism is demanded of him, he is motivated by his loyalty and love of friends (Purtill 77). Bilbo is aware of his limitations and maintains humility throughout, so this keeps him balanced and thoughtful in the stressful situations of Gollum's cave, Mirkwood, and the final battle. Bilbo's characteristic virtues are displayed several times throughout the novel and are evident in all of these dangerous events: "Courage, loyalty, and humility – courage toward dangers and enemies, loyalty and love to friends, humility with regard to his own qualities and achievements" (68). Through each of these events, readers will discover Bilbo's transformation taking shape. Bilbo experiences an awakening, a call to action that must be taken if he will ever evolve.

Tolkien shows readers that the first step in transformation is to give to others what we seek. In the case of Gollum, the creature requires great mercy even though Bilbo would initially seek to harm him. Bilbo's first great trial occurs when facing Gollum, but his act of mercy is critical to Bilbo's growth.

When entering a cave for shelter, a separation from the dwarves occurs after a battle with goblins, leaving Bilbo alone to escape from the caves. Bilbo unintentionally finds and keeps the creature Gollum's ring when entering his lair. Gollum, a flesh-eating creature and keeper of a magical ring of invisibility, represents a shadow of Bilbo, which confronts Bilbo with subconscious fears that are embodied in Gollum. Gollum is isolated in the darkness of the caves while hunting and consuming the most evil goblins. His obsession with the ring has cost him any sense of his humanity. Like the dwarves desire for treasure, Gollum seeks fulfillment in the ring, his "birthday-present" (Tolkien 81). Tolkien states that Bilbo wore it "till it tired him...galled him" and sometimes put it on "when he could not bear to be parted from it any longer" (81). It is his beautiful, precious, golden ring. The narrator indicates that when Bilbo stumbles upon the ring, "it was a turning point in his career, but he did not know it" (68). From the moment Bilbo fiddles with the ring in his pocket, he immediately experiences a new found confidence. The touch of the cold, smooth metal is reassuring to Bilbo. Perhaps this is because he images the moment when he will take back the dwarves treasure from Smaug and recalls the dwarves' song: "Goblets they carved there for themselves / harps of gold; where no man delves" (Tolkien 15). At this point, Bilbo is still driven by the treasure, but this does not last much longer. There was a glimmer of hope found in the ring that drove Bilbo onward in the cave. If he has found this ring, then he may have another fortune in the dwarves' treasure. Although he may not have considered meeting Gollum a fortune, this is an opportunity for maturation.

The next step in Bilbo's transformation is facing the vices he has been blind to up until now. Upon meeting Gollum, Bilbo meets his double. Gollum lives alone in a cave underground. We quickly recognize his shameful vice: "Sneaking to achieve his ends by deception rather than direct confrontation" (Ruud 115). Bilbo's own life is strikingly similar. His isolation in his hobbit hole and his deceitful encounter and exchange with the trolls, his attempt to rob them and prove himself to the dwarves earlier in the story, confronts the reader with Bilbo's life reflected in Gollum. Gollum represents the extreme of Bilbo's life in the shire, a lonely, petty existence that does not contribute to the world. However, Bilbo begins to sacrifice his comforts and status for the greater good. This is evident in his two reactions to Gollum. First, Bilbo found that Gollum sounded miserable from this loss of his ring. The narrator states that Bilbo "could not find much pity in his heart, and he had a feeling that anything Gollum wanted so much could hardly be something good" (82). Bilbo is desperate to escape Gollum in this moment and is driven to make the most courageous act of his life. He leaps over Gollum with the ring of invisibility on and escapes; this displays a new Bilbo who takes risks. Although this is a stunning moment of Bilbo's strength, the real courage is found in his mercy. Bilbo feels he must defend himself but his inner dialogue reveals the tension of this moment:

He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword...And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering...And then quite suddenly in another flash, as if lifted by a new strength and resolve, he leaped (Tolkien 87).

Bilbo is invisible with the ring and has the opportunity to kill Gollum, but he ultimately comes to terms with Gollum, “pitying the creature and sparing his life rather than killing him when he has the chance” (Rudd 115). Even though Bilbo can easily slay Gollum, he recognizes him as a “fellow creature deserving of his pity, he has come to terms with his shadow” (115). Bilbo spares Gollum and is merciful. Peter Kreeft in his work *The Philosophy of Tolkien* discusses pity and mercy. Kreeft states: “It is mercy, not justice or courage or even heroism, that alone can defeat evil” (217). Tolkien believes “that strange element in the World that we call Pity or Mercy...is also an absolute requirement in moral judgment since it is present in the Divine nature” (218). This moment of mercy is rooted in sacrifice because Bilbo is willing to risk sacrificing his life to spare Gollum, a creature with the intent to kill him. If caught by Gollum, he will have to defend himself and risk killing Gollum or being killed, but he avoids this possibility by leaving Gollum. The final leap to freedom is Bilbo’s mercy and sacrifice for Gollum. Bilbo’s transformation is rooted in his moral decision of mercy for Gollum even though Gollum would not have offered the same to him.

Bilbo’s descent into the darkness of Mirkwood forest continues his maturation through his battle with fear and the virtue of humility to overcome it. Gandalf leaves the company as they enter Mirkwood forest. When Bilbo awakes after a night in the forest with the dwarves, he is without the company and entangled by a giant spider. The encounter with the spiders is that of a “trickster figure” (Rudd 118). Bilbo is resourceful: “invisibility, his craftiness, his verbal insult that madden the creatures and his stone-throwing that hobbles them” (Rudd

118). Although this is not the typical heroic approach for a rescue, Bilbo combines his agile abilities as a hobbit with the ring to avoid direct confrontation. Bilbo is not conventional as he displays his version of being a hero: “Cleverness again becomes evident as he leads the spiders off on a wild chase to rescue his friends; from now on the dwarves expect him to figure out what to do as a matter of course; his stature as a hero has begun to develop noticeably” (Petty 100). Bilbo’s heroic actions involve: “Personal courage, a sense of responsibility toward his friends, and willingness to sacrifice himself for the good of the whole group. In Mirkwood, “the acts of greatest courage are achieved by its smallest protagonist” (Day 130). Bilbo feels a duty to the dwarves and a responsibility to lead now that Gandalf has left. Gandalf’s absence is Bilbo’s opportunity to rise to the leadership role and be the hero. Bilbo has confidence after his survival of Gollum, and the killing of his first spider. Now the narrator reveals Bilbo’s change: “He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder” (Tolkien 156). When he finds the dwarves dangling upside down wrapped in spider webs, he feels an obligation to the dwarves and Gandalf. His final struggle to save the company required the revelation of the ring and its power even though he regretted the decision in the moment: “He was rather sorry about it, but it could not be helped” (164). This moment is vital to their survival so the ring must be revealed. Bilbo’s great sacrifice is revealing the existence and power of the ring; he has had an aid in defending the company. Bilbo’s strength is found in his humility to show the dwarves the ring’s power. Tolkien’s friend C.S. Lewis states what it takes to be humble: “To take off a lot of silly, ugly, fancy-dress in which

we have all got ourselves up and are strutting about like the little idiots we are” (Kreeft 215). Bilbo must recognize, like the dwarves, he has more to offer: “Wits, as well as luck and a magic ring” (Tolkien 166). There is more to Bilbo’s strength than the ring. His duty and loyalty to his friends has required great sacrifice, nearly his life in rescuing them.

Bilbo’s final act of heroism is found in his charity. This is the greatest virtue because it requires total selflessness. The ability to give is a “moral virtue, the actualization of charity...a practical necessity” (Kreeft 215). Bilbo is capable of giving now that he has left the Shire and accepted his role in the adventure. The greatest treasure is the Arkenstone, a great white gem that belonged to Thorin’s father Thrain. This was the one treasure Thorin desired above all else. Since Bilbo is sent alone into Smaug’s cave to scout for treasure, he is soon mesmerized by the Arkenstone, the Heart of the Mountain:

It took all light that fell upon it and changed it into ten thousand sparks of white radiance shot with glints of rainbow. Suddenly Bilbo’s arm went towards it drawn by its enchantment. His small hand would not close about it, for it was a large and heavy gem; but he lifted it, shut his eyes, and put it in his deepest pocket (Tolkien 237).

Bilbo may have believed Smaug’s warning that the dwarves are not willing to share the treasure, so Bilbo’s intuition to keep the Arkenstone is an example of his new, independent self. He is no longer relying on his hobbit-hole for comfort or waiting for Gandalf and the dwarves to rescue him. Like the dwarves, Bilbo is “lured by the dragon’s gold and tempted to hoard, but he learns the value of gift-exchange through his (albeit dubious) bestowal of the arkenstone on the lakemen” (Milbank 130-31). In order to ensure peace among the men in Lake-town, the

foot of the mountain, and the company, Bilbo gives the Arkenstone to Bard, the leader of Lake-town. Bilbo was “attracted by its glitter and sought to hide his possession of it from the dwarves, but he freely gives it to the lakemen to use as a mean of cementing peace between themselves and the dwarves” (131). His decision to give away the Arkenstone is a risk to his friendship with the dwarves, but it must be done for the fighting to cease. Bilbo is finally uniting and balancing the Baggins and the Took. He applies careful judgment with sneaky tactics to give the stone to Bard, and says he is “willing to let it stand against all” his share of the treasure (Tolkien 273). The Elvenking, king of the wood-elves, is present for his share of the treasure too, but is soon in wonderment at the sacrificial act and finds Bilbo to be one “worthy to wear the armour of elf-princes” (273). Like Gandalf has always believed, there is more to Bilbo than anyone expects. In Thorin’s final moments before his death inflicted by Smaug, he meets with Bilbo and admits that if dwarves “valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world” (290). Bilbo leaves a final gift with the Elvenking, a necklace of silver and pearls that Dain, the cousin of Thorin, had given him. He wanted to repay the Elvenking for the “hospitality” Bilbo was shown when staying in the Elvenking’s castle earlier in his journey (295). The treasure becomes secondary to Bilbo because he realizes that “the greatest gifts any of us receive are the people who have been put into our lives for us to love” (Kreeft 216). Thorin could have killed Bilbo for taking the Arkenstone to Bard, but he is willing to sacrifice his life and his treasure to ensure peace and even returns to the dwarves to take responsibility for his actions.

Bilbo's act of charity and selflessness saved everyone and brought them into a deeper understanding of friendship, loyalty, and love.

Ultimately, Bilbo comes to a fuller understanding of himself through the encouragement and faith of Gandalf in accepting his adventure. We are not aware of Bilbo's capabilities, or any hobbits for that matter, in the beginning:

These qualities develop gradually before our eyes and theirs. Thus while we smile at them as hobbits, we seriously accept their heroic development and the magic surrounding it. Tolkien himself explains this approach in his essay, "On Fairy-stories": "There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away (Petty 94).

The magic of Bilbo's transformation makes way for the liberating of Middle-earth from evil in Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. Bilbo's journey in *The Hobbit* is only the beginning of sacrifice ending the reign of evil. Bilbo's challenge to continue his adventure through all of the obstacles proves that Bilbo is willing to do what is necessary to achieve the goal of the company. His greatest acts of heroism are met with the virtues of mercy, humility, and charity. Bilbo exemplifies these virtues because they are all performed out of sacrificial love for neighbor. Bilbo's awakening to the dangers of Middle-earth reveal that there is more to the world than his hobbit-hole. Philip Martin, a fantasy scholar, wrote:

That in the subtitle of the *Hobbit, There and Back Again*, Tolkien 'Knows that there and back again is the very heart of adventure. To journey through Middle-earth is not just a series of stops...It is a journey through a mythic place...To leave home in perilous...Fantasy is about going elsewhere. We journey afar and then return – tracing a circular path of discovery' (Bramlett 36).

The actual bravery of Bilbo is continuing on after every obstacle with the same dedication and fulfillment of duty for his company. He only returns home once the journey is complete, but this return is an entrance as a new, mature Bilbo. To begin to grasp Bilbo's motivation throughout his journey, we must begin with the Christian understanding of sacrificial love. This love conquers Bilbo's love of self and comfort to protect an even greater love for friendship.

Journey to Rebirth: A Space Traveler's Guide to Selflessness through Trial

Of the three authors I am discussing, C.S. Lewis is perhaps the most evangelical in his works. His use of Christian language and themes appears openly in his widely acclaimed space trilogy, especially in the second book of the series, *Perelandra*. While J.R.R. Tolkien employs fantastical elements and Charles Williams explores the supernatural, Lewis approaches the reader with inherently Christian elements. While many readers would find Lewis' trilogy in the science fiction section, I will argue that the work is best characterized as Christian myth. Few scholars have approached the work in this particular light possibly because doing so would require a Christian perspective to best understand the main character, Ransom, and his motivation. However, Lewis does not write for the faithful Christian reader, but the unsuspecting reader in search of adventure, space exploration, a "what if" approach to life's greatest mysteries or myths. More than a second installment of a science fiction trilogy, *Perelandra*, is a myth of Adam and Eve. Lewis' belief in myth is generally misunderstood by the wider culture to be false events or fairy tales. However, Lewis challenges readers to reimagine the definition of myth and mythical events as a representation of factual events using the approach of the science fiction genre. I will examine how Lewis' reimagining myth challenges the reader to rethink their conceptions of the world and their place in it. Lewis has a message for all readers of every background and belief which can be discovered by accompanying his main character, Ransom, on his journey. Readers will find it

impossible to miss Lewis' Christian message and are invited to wonder what each lesson means to their personal experience and belief.

First, we must consider *Perelandra* as a work and its place in genre. There is great debate among scholars as to what *Perelandra* works best as in terms of literature. The several categories considered include: poetry or prose, fiction, science fiction or scientifiction, fantasy, science fantasy, mythology. Writer and researcher Jared Lobdell, author of *The Scientifiction Novels of C.S. Lewis: Space and Time in the Ransom Stories*, identifies the Ransom stories as a kind of science fiction. He claims, "Because it is syncretistic, it becomes a kind of 'show-and-tell' tour of the author's world, and because the syncretism is religious, it is a tour of the author's religious world" (2). While I agree that the Ransom stories do allow us to consider an alternative beginning to a perfect race unlike our own and therefore portray certain Christian truths, I do not believe that Lewis' work in itself is a complete understanding of his religious system. It shares certain characteristics of this approach but it fails to more completely encompass his project.

More appropriate genre(s) to consider would be Christian fantasy or myth. Colin Manlove defines Christian fantasy as "a fiction dealing with the Christian supernatural, often in an imaginary world" and that authors such as Lewis present "the case for a Christian vision of reality" (Duriez and Porter 77-78). In *Perelandra* Lewis does not just take us to an imaginary world but to a world that could or should have existed. The planet Venus is a possibility that moves Lewis from fantasy to myth. Lewis believed that myth is always "fantasy dealing with

the impossible and preternatural” and that at the heart of Christianity “is a myth that is also a fact – making the claims of Christianity unique. But by becoming fact, it did not cease to be myth, or lose the quality of myth” (160). He would, like Tolkien, distinguish myth from allegory and concentrate on the restorative value of myth that Lewis says recovers “the rich significance which has been hidden by the veil of familiarity...By dipping them in myth we see them more clearly” (161). According to Walter Hooper, Lewis re-imagines the story of the “Fall of Man” and gives us the story of “Paradise Retained” (221). Lobdell furthers this opinion by naming Lewis’ fiction “imaginative reconstruction” which asks the question “What would it be like if...” (89). *Perelandra* is an answer to the wonder about the fall of man and what would it be like if the temptation of pride and disobedience were avoided and our first parents, Adam and Eve, were successful.

Popular Christian Catholic author Peter Kreeft gives a more accurate reading on Lewis’ purpose and contribution through this work. *Perelandra* is more than an imaginative reconstruction of the story of Adam and Eve. Kreeft states: “We find here in poetic form a radical alternative to the dehumanizing world view that has starved and crushed our souls for centuries, especially this darkest of centuries” (166). Kreeft is referring to reductionism or what Lewis calls “Naturalism”, the belief that nothing but Nature exists. In short: “Thought is only cerebral biochemistry, love is only lust, man is only a ‘trousered ape’, religion is only myth, consciousness is only an epiphenomenon of matter, life is only the candle’s brief and pointless sputter between two infinite expanses of

darkness” (166). Kreeft’s claims for Lewis’ re-mythologizing in *Perelandra* give a conviction to the work that is worthy of Lewis, after all he is credited as a great apologist of the 20th century. In fact, he even saw his own projects as a form of myth in which “a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination”, thus “myth prefigures Christianity and Christianity fulfills myth” (Norwood 71).

Above all, Lewis’ work is meant for more than a science fiction novel or fantasy. He was challenging the contemporary culture and only the complexly layered notion of myth could adequately fulfill this need. Kreeft claims that Lewis is ultimately concerned with the conflict between two world views: nihilistic reductionism and Christianity. I, however, disagree that Lewis would be reduced to a single argument in the culture. Instead, I believe Lewis is exposing certain Christian truths discussed by the wider culture and giving the answers a fresh perspective. He allows his characters to wonder what the reader wonders and feel the challenges and questions of life we all struggle with. If Lewis is simply dismissing contemporary culture, then he would be dismissing the average reader and distancing Christianity and its attainability even further from readers. Lewis knew that he could draw more than Christian readers but that his appeal especially in science fiction or fantasy genre would captivate even the most hardened hearts and avid atheists. His apologetics would span beyond a Christian genre and saturate all his works. He truly would bring the Christian teachings on the value of the human person’s purpose to a space trilogy that would relate the Christian faith to culture through literature.

To begin to show how Lewis approaches the reader through myth, I must give you a background and framework to *Perelandra*. Published in the late 1930's and early 1940s, the trilogy features a narrator, Lewis, recounting the experiences of space traveling physicist Elwin Ransom as he travels to Mars, Venus, and Earth. This is Lewis' favorite work in the trilogy and displays perhaps the greatest spiritual growth of Ransom. A characteristic of Ransom that is essential to understanding his motivation throughout the works is his undeniable devotion to the Christian life, which happens to resemble Lewis' own ideology. Given that Lewis' personal faith experience consists of his conversion from atheism to devout Christianity, it is fitting that his protagonist also undergoes a spiritual journey of maturation. Through his journey Ransom comes know his purpose, accept his purpose, and carry out his purpose with the practice of virtue.

Ransom's initial reaction is to resist this call to fulfilling his purpose out of a fear of the unknown, but his curiosity and wonder are gifts that draw his intellect and will to action. There are several scenes throughout the work that provide examples to Ransom's virtuous nature. Ransom proves that through cooperation with God's plan we can increase our virtuous qualities in order to fulfill our purpose. Therefore we will examine Ransom's use of virtue in particular situations that allow him to cooperate with God's plan and fulfill his purpose. In fulfilling this purpose and undergoing this transformative journey, the practice of virtue is indispensable and only comes as the result of sacrifice. Lewis shows us that journey entails a cost and this cost is the sacrifice of who Ransom

was to who he can become—who God wants him to become. Consequently, what Lewis hopes the reader will become.

Philologist Elwin Ransom has been summoned to Perelandra (Venus) because the Black Oyarsa of Thulcandra (Satan) has been said to be planning an attack on the planet. Ransom understands both the vernacular of space and the vernacular of earth which makes him a primary candidate for a mission back to space. Ransom calls upon his friend Lewis to seal him in a coffin-like box to be transported to Perelandra. Upon entering this world Ransom is in awe of the perfection of nature in its beauty, smells, and tastes. His senses are truly enveloped with the sensuous pleasures of the unspoiled world. Ransom meets a naked woman he calls the “Green Lady,” Tinidril, and is struck by a beauty and purity that he has never known. Tinidril is the Eve of this unfallen world and simply by asking questions Ransom makes Tinidril grow “older.” Tinidril’s innocence will be challenged when she is tempted by the new arrival to the planet, Dr. Weston. Weston is a physicist who challenged Ransom in his last visit to space and will now attempt to ruin Ransom, Tinidril, and the future of Perelandra. Weston does not remain himself for long as he is possessed by the devil and morphs into a hideous site referred to as the “Un-man.”

Now Ransom finds himself facing a clever devil in exchanges to win Tinidril and decide the fate of Perelandra. Ransom does not see how he fits into this struggle since he could never match the Un-man intellectually or physically. Ransom has been summoned to be the savior of Perelandra and protect it from the assaults of evil that will make it fall as earth did. In order for Ransom to be

successful, he has to accept his purpose on Perelandra, remain steadfast through the trials of the Un-man, and rise up against a force he would never believe he could beat. Ransom's success comes through his acceptance of grace from Maleldil, God. He is not expected to face this task alone but to rely on the grace of God that comes through his creation. This empowerment leads Ransom to grow in his faith and practice of virtue. Ransom matures from a thin, weak, balding philologist with Christian beliefs to a man of God fulfilling his mission with unfailing heroic virtue throughout every suffering. Ransom's particular moments of maturation are surged with virtuous qualities that motivate his success. These moments begin with Ransom's acceptance of his call to go to Perelandra despite the uncertainties, his fortitude when he undergoes intellectual challenges from the Un-man that test his faith, and finally his offering of mercy to the Un-man and his decision to end him. Through these instances are found Ransom's true character and faith that lead him through a dark, demonic trial to an outcome so great he returns to earth rejuvenated in body and spirit.

As the storyteller Lewis makes the journey with Ransom in the text as himself as he tells the story of Ransom which signals that we too must follow him and accept the intellectual challenges that may affect our own will on earth. While the temptations of the Un-man make Tinidril "older," scholar Donald Williams believes the same thing can happen to us as readers. Williams describes how other scholars such as Peter Schakel believed Lewis himself became older through his reading of MacDonald: "When imagination as spiritual experience encountered the true divine Spirit, in the quality of Holiness, a transformation was

initiated” (48). Lewis believed literature can expose the truth and reinforce it to the reader:

Literature can expand the horizons of and deepen our capacity for experience, it can open our eyes to Christian truths which might otherwise have escaped us or had less impact had we only read the Bible, it can transmit and reinforce the collective experience and wisdom of human civilization, and it can be the great antidote to the spirit of the age...if we read as aesthetes rather than humble receivers of the author’s intent, or as self-conscious pursuers of culture rather than seekers of truth, it can have the very opposite effect and be a horribly corrupting influence (53).

Lewis believed a storyteller wields great power and can promote good as well as evil. Lewis’ promotion of truth transcends the Christian reader to all people of goodwill, anyone searching for purpose among the chaos of the world. Lewis’ *Perelandra* is an experience for the readers to make a transformation and mature with Ransom. Ransom will not return to earth before he undergoes a complete change, a change the reader is invited to make, but this begins with a first step in willingly accepting an unfamiliar journey. There are several particular scenes in which C.S. Lewis shows Ransom’s steps toward complete transformation and growth. I will examine his character and determine what Lewis hopes we will gain from each lesson.

First, Lewis intends for readers to experience the fear and uncertainty of accepting one’s purpose and the strength needed to make the journey to transformation. We meet Ransom through the character of Lewis who questions this rather sudden decision of Ransom’s journey to *Perelandra*. Lewis’ own fear is one we feel as a trip to space, to an unknown planet, for an unknown purpose, in a mysterious transporter, a large coffin-shaped basket, seems all too

overwhelming and inconceivable. Because this is Ransom's second trip to space, he has already undergone a change so although the details of this trip have yet to be revealed, he is all too certain of his need to accept an undefined mission that can surely result in his death. While Ransom displays an unfaltering faith in God and willingness to sacrifice his life or at least his life on earth, his friend Lewis doubts that the rumor of a Dark Lord is even true. Lewis plays an advocate of the secular world as he questions the existence of evil while accepting an existence of good. If there is a good, then there must be an element when there is an absence of good. According to Lewis scholar David Downing, Lewis embraced the Augustinian concept of evil as the absence of good rather than the opposite. This view appears several times upon Ransom's arrival on Perelandra, but is first introduced through Ransom's friend Lewis. Ransom's belief in the presence of good and the absence of good is present later in the conflict between Ransom and Weston.

The character Lewis continues his temptation to change Ransom's mind and Ransom disarms him by admitting he agrees with Lewis: "You are feeling the absurdity of it. Dr. Elwin Ransom setting out single-handed to combat powers and principalities. You may even be wondering if I've got megalomania" (Lewis 23). Lewis' response is just as shocking as he admits that "quite ordinary people were to do the fighting" in Sacred Scripture (24). This is what C.S. Lewis wants the reader to understand through Ransom; that ordinary people, the overlooked and unexpected heroes are capable of greatness if they accept their God-given purpose because through him all things are possible. Ransom definitely agrees

that he is ordinary and has been chosen, but he does not yet understand the magnitude of his purpose: “Don’t imagine I’ve been selected to go to Perelandra because I’m anyone in particular. One never can see, or not till long afterwards, why *any* one was selected for *any* job” (24). This display of humility is something that is lacking in his opponent Weston. In fact Ransom’s humility is so great he does not even desire to know what his purpose on Perelandra will be: “No idea at all what I’m to do. There are jobs, you know, where it is essential that one should *not* know too much beforehand ... things one might have to say which one couldn’t say effectively if one had prepared them” (26). Perhaps Ransom fears that knowing his purpose will deter his willingness to take the journey and decides to trust that he will be able to face anything that will come.

His trust begins with his journey in a coffin that leads his friend Lewis to wonder about practical concerns such as air, food, and water. Ransom’s response is either total faithfulness or naivety as he says, “The Oyarsa of Malacandra himself will be the motive power. He will simply move it to Venus. Don’t ask me how. I have no idea what organs or instruments they use. But a creature who has kept a planet in its orbit for several billions of years will be able to manage a packing-case!” (27). As a Christian employing both faith and reason, Ransom does not blindly obey, but rather he freely chooses to accept despite his fear of the unknown:

If you mean, Does my reason accept the view that he will (accidents apart) deliver me safe on the surface of Perelandra? – the answer is Yes...If you mean, Do my nerves and my imagination respond to this view? – I’m afraid the answer is No. One can believe in anaesthetics and yet feel in a panic when they actually put the mask over your face. I think I feel as a

man who believes in the future life feels when he is taken out to face a firing party. Perhaps it's good practice (27).

This passage is key to Ransom's faith. He feels like a martyr, someone challenged in their faith and accepting a certain death because of it. While his will is to accept the mission, his reason will never assure him that it is the best decision. The term virtue can be applied to his hopeful thought that this entire journey in faith is "good practice". Donald Williams analyzes Lewis' belief of virtue: "Virtue is not so much a finely as a *rightly* organized response of the whole person, including understanding, emotion, and will ... 'imagination is present for the sake of passion'" (50). Lewis is teaching that a practice of good habitually will result in a willingness to do good. Ransom is willing to follow in faith because it is a good practice for what faith requires which is trust in God's will from the whole person. These good practices become habits which enlarge our capacities to do the good so therefore good practices are no longer a burden but a joy. Although Ransom sounds wonderfully confident in his passion to do the good whatever it may be, he must begin and display this passion while having his faith truly challenged before we know what he is capable of.

In another key passage central to this developing theme of journey, Lewis presents notions of sacrifice as gain. He wants to reader to see the physical and spiritual benefits of self-denial. Ransom must die to self in order to begin his transformation and his journey to Perelandra. Ransom begins this by sacrificing confront and certainty as he is transported by coffin which is symbolic of his necessary death to his old self in order to be reborn again on Perelandra. Scholars have dubbed *Perelandra* a baptism with subthemes of romance, hope, and birth

(Norwood 68). In order for Ransom to experience a rebirth and baptism he leaves his former life on earth behind with preparations for an unknown return and death by writing a will. This acknowledgement of no return brought a “shadow of approaching separation and a kind of graveyard gloom” (Lewis 28). His friend Lewis believed this to be a “fatal operation” (28) with “no real belief” that he would ever see Ransom again (29). Lewis had no idea that their next meeting would be one in which Ransom was changed more than ever before. This transformation of character would only be possible through a rebirth which began in the coffin.

The next step in Lewis’ vision of the spiritual journey is an awakening. Ransom must awake after his death to self. As Ransom’s coffin begins falling toward Perelandra he is “awakened” and “swallowed up in the prodigious white light from below which began to penetrate through the semi-opaque walls of the casket...just as the white light was about to become unbearable, it disappeared altogether” and the temperature begins to warm. He has no control over his motionless body, the casket dissolves on Perelandra, and he enters the world for the first time to experience all of the pleasures of the senses. The sights of the sky were pure, flat gold and the fresh water was “almost like meeting Pleasure itself for the first time” (35). Here we encounter an Augustinian notion that “evil may come into a perfect world not because there are positive veils attempting to seduce him but because he is tempted to cling to good things desired over good things given” (Downing 89). Ransom must be careful not to be the tempter or tempted at his first experience of pleasure. C.S. Lewis is presenting a common

struggle of indulging the senses and instead of showing the negative consequences he chooses to show the benefits of self-control and care for the body.

Ransom must be temperate while his body encourages him to “repeat a pleasure so intense and almost so spiritual seemed an obvious thing to do...all seemed to commend the action. Yet something seemed opposed to this ‘reason’” (Lewis 42). Downing claims this one of the predominant themes of *Perelandra*: “Humans long for godlike sovereignty over their lives to maximize pleasure and security, to wall out pain and uncertainty. But only when they learn to accept vicissitudes and vulnerability as inherent to the fabric of life can they truly be free” (89). Downing believes this is in the experience of the fruit and Ransom’s moment of realization that it is better for him not to taste again because “perhaps the experience had been so complete that repetition would be a vulgarity – like asking to hear the same symphony twice in a day” (43). This practice of temperance is an avoidance of gluttony which can be a hindrance to Ransom’s mission. He must be able to serve and he cannot serve well if he is serving himself first by fulfilling every desire above need. Ransom learns through his vulnerability that he must rely on his faith rather than his senses. He is learning to breathe, smell, walk, fall, feel frightened, exhausted. Ransom must shed his old self and begin again with the purity of *Perelandra*. The reader is experiencing a baptism as well: “The vivid sights and smells and sounds with which Lewis has baptized the senses of our imagination surely must have a real existence somewhere” (Gibson 46). There must be a *Perelandra* to hope for and this

suggestion from C.S. Lewis leads readers to wonder of the possibility of eternal happiness in Heaven.

An integral step in the spiritual journey that Lewis presents is coming to term with questions of ultimate meaning in one's life. When Ransom's interests and distractions of Perelandra fade, he is left with a desire to find his purpose. Lewis is aware of life's distractions and shows how man must eventually wrestle with questions about his purpose. Ransom's time on Perelandra has been spent in awe of the pleasure to the senses, but Ransom comes to find that his solitude becomes a persistent reminder that he must be here for a purpose and that purpose cannot just be spent enjoying the pleasures the planet offers. Lewis shows that silence and solitude are essential preconditions to finding his purpose. Recognizing his solitude, Ransom wonders if he is brought here to be the first inhabitant, but no matter what "he knew that he was part of a plan. He was no longer unattached, no longer on the outside" because he is experiencing "his country" (Lewis 50). This attachment he feels to nature stems from a natural inclination to know his creator and experiencing the creator through his creation. Lewis would later refer to this as a dance:

By dance Lewis seems to mean the interlocking and constantly shifting relationship of all created things. Nothing moves at random. All are a part of the pattern and contribute in perfect harmony to the beauty of the whole. Each contributor is not only eternal but also unique...Each individual also has a unique place in the universe – a place which no one else can fill, and for which each one was made (Gibson 137).

Ransom knows that he is here to serve a unique purpose and has not arrived to the planet by accident. He is eager to find what plan is in store for him and meet it with the same enthusiasm as when he arrived.

Now that Ransom has turned over his thought to finding his purpose, he is now open and ready to discover it. This is what Lewis is suggesting all along to his readers – to be open to a greater purpose in life than simply living and dying. Ransom’s purpose is one that will be instrumental in preserving an entire race; a purpose greater than could have been imagined: “‘That is why I have been sent here. He failed on Malacandra and now he is coming here. And it’s up to me to do something about it.’ A terrible sense of inadequacy swept over him” (Lewis 82). Ransom immediately admits he is weak and unable to solve the problem. His self-doubt causes him to suddenly resort to other options to save Perelandra such as enlisting the help of the *eldila*, angelic creatures; however, he soon finds this impossible. Ransom’s surprise is expected since he initially mistook his role to be that of “angelic advocate for the uninstructed Lady”, but he soon accepts his role as “representative of Maleldil and the responsibility for doing what he can and what must be done, not for himself but for mankind” (Glover 180). An intellectual challenge is intimidating for Ransom, since he believes Weston, now the Un-man, is skilled in manipulation and at a greater advantage. It does not yet occur to him that he may have to physically fight the Un-man.

Next, Lewis shows us that we can be our greatest enemy by doubting our abilities and strengths. Although we recognize the Un-man as the enemy on Perelandra, Ransom’s greatest challenge is himself. He must overcome himself

and his self-consciousness if he is to achieve success. Tinidril refers to Ransom as piebald and this becomes an image that reflects his interior division: “An image of his divided self. Though he has submitted to the will of Maleldil, even to the point of risking death in traveling to Perelandra, he still has within him his natural self, his own will for control, safety, and self-reliance...half a citizen of a fallen world, half a citizen of Deep Heaven” (Downing 113). Even though Ransom has discovered his purpose, he is not confident that God has made the best decision with him: “No one, in Lewis’ view, is to be allowed to stay mentally and morally assured, for assurance is not the birthright of mortal man” (Manlove 263). Lewis knows that it would be completely unrealistic for readers to imagine accepting a great challenge in a matter of moments. Instead, he shows the reader that Ransom, like all of us, will doubt and fall many times before he can accept his fate. Ransom must have faith and experience times of doubt to find out for himself what he is capable of. Ransom has already felt discouraged by the satanic presence of the Un-man because of the “confrontation of persons and intellectual or moral decisions...it is apparent that the conflict is to be one of minds and wills rather than of bodies” (Gibson 47-48). Initially, the conflict is a spiritual warfare of intellect. This is where Lewis allows for intellectual challenges and claims against Christianity.

While some critics such as John Tanner claim that the only temptation in Perelandra involves Tinidril, I believe Ransom is actually subject to an even more strenuous form of temptation. Ransom’s temptation is greater because his faith and ultimately hope is challenged. The Un-man rejects Ransom’s Christian

ideals: “Will you always try to press everything back into the miserable framework of your old jargon about self and self-sacrifice” (Lewis 96)? The Un-man knows that Ransom may be influenced by his faith to sacrifice himself for Perelandra, even though Ransom has not even considered this end himself. In this moment the Un-man becomes entirely possessed: “I am the conductor of the central forward pressure of the universe, I am it. Do you see, you timid, scruple-mongering fool? I *am* the Universe. I, Weston, am you God and your Devil. I call that Force into me completely...A spasm like that preceding a deadly vomit twisted Weston’s face out of recognition” (96). Any sign of Weston is now completely erased and he has transformed into an unrecognizable sick man with the face of a corpse. Ransom accepts that there is no longer a trace of Weston in the Un-man. While the Un-man is undergoing his transformation of full demonic possession, Ransom is slowly changing himself. He has struggled with his purpose and is afraid to accept all it will require so he deludes himself into thinking that this is a battle of wits or that he is just a witness to the temptations. Ransom experiences a slow progression to realizing his purpose.

Now that the Un-man is in full possession of Weston, Ransom accepts Weston’s death so “any hatred he had once felt for the Professor was dead. He found it natural to pray fervently for his soul. Yet what he felt for Weston was not exactly pity...pity was almost swallowed up in horror” (130). The decay of the Un-man, Ransom thought, could be his destination or Tinidril’s, so prayer and mercy for Weston’s soul is Ransom’s Christian response. A sense of abandonment and hopelessness begins to tempt Ransom as he witnesses

temptations and remains helpless. He wonders what many of us wonder: Where is God in suffering? Suddenly, Ransom receives his answer: “While he was thinking this, as suddenly and sharply as if the solid darkness about him had spoken with articulate voice, he knew that Maleldil was not absent. That sense – so very welcome yet never welcomed without the overcoming of a certain resistance – that sense of the Presence which he had once or twice before experienced on Perelandra returned to him” (140-41). Ransom is God’s representative and God is with Ransom in this suffering. He is the miracle, the savior, the one who can destroy the Un-man and ransom Perelandra even with his “ridiculous piebald body and his ten times defeated arguments” (141). His mission is clear and God is with him even among the suffering:

As long as he did his best – and he *had* done his best – God would see to the final issue. He had not succeeded. But he had done his best. No one could do more...he must not be worried about the final result. Maleldil would see to that. And Maleldil would bring him safe back to earth after his very real, though unsuccessful, efforts...It was in God’s hands. One must be content to leave it there. One must have Faith (141).

He chooses out of his own free will to cooperate with God’s plan and hope for his survival and return to earth. He must rely on his faith because he cannot reason how this will work out in his favor. He does not realize how much more God will be asking him to do or how he will manage to complete the task. At this time he believes he must do his best and this outlook alone allows him comfort: “A mild flood of what appeared to him to be cheerful and rational piety rose and engulfed him” (143). Although Ransom is feeling a sense of reassurance among his doubt, it is in this moment that he realizes what else may be asked of him.

His purpose so far has been a spiritual combat against the Devil, but a physical combat may eventually be necessary although it does seem to Ransom to be savage, dangerous, a slow, painful death. If God sent his only son to redeem the world through his passion and death, why would Ransom not be asked to do the same? God will save Perelandra through Ransom. Once again doubt overtakes him: “Mercy...Lord why me? But there was no answer...Terror and disgust overcame him...did I ever win a fight in all my life” (146)? Ransom begs for Mercy because he is not up to the task and gives up in his mind as says “it would be all right because he would repent later on” and be forgiven like St. Peter (147). Among these doubtful thoughts he hears the Voice tell him: “It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom...my name also is Ransom” (148). He can find his identity in Christ and become Christ-like in order to complete his mission. The issue now becomes his choice and the matter must be decided for the final time. Ransom finally accepts the mission and all it contains, even his likely death:

There had arisen before him, with perfect certitude, the knowledge ‘about this time tomorrow you will have done the impossible’...it was going to be done. He might beg, weep, or rebel – might curse or adore – sing like a martyr or blaspheme like a devil. It made not the slightest difference. The thing was going to be done...the future act stood there, fixed and unaltered as if he had already performed it...Predestination and freedom were apparently identical (149).

He has been sent here for this task, he finally discovered it to its fullness, and he must accept it because this is his purpose and there is no other way. There is a freedom in this because now he understands why he is here and how much his

existence matters. He is not simply a witness or representative, but a force of God, an instrument that is allowing to be used to his fullest extent possible.

Finally, Lewis shows the peace that comes when one accepts a greater purpose here on earth and cooperates with it. When Ransom awakes the next day, he is completely renewed, at peace for the first time, and will now readily accept all that will come with his mission. In Sacred Scripture when a mission is accepted a new name is given; for Ransom, his new identity is revealed through his renewed body. He understands completely that his mission will now be a physical combat. He notices his physical change that now mirrors his spiritual transformation that aligns with God's will:

The sunburn on one side and the pallor on the other had decreased. He would hardly be christened Piebald if the Lady were now to meet him for the first time. His colour had become more like ivory: and his toes, after so many days of nakedness, had begun to lose the cramped, squalid shape imposed by boots. Altogether he thought better of himself as a human animal than he had done before...he was glad that the instrument had been thus tuned up to concert pitch before he had to surrender it (151).

He is pleased to find himself feeling so fit and comfortable on a day that may be his last. Ransom is even happy now that he has accepted his purpose: “‘A good breakfast on the morning you’re hanged,’ he thought whimsically...filled for the moment with such pleasure as seemed to make the whole world a dance. ‘All said and done...it’s been worth it. I have had a time. I have lived in Paradise’” (151). This time in paradise is his hope for heaven and he can experience this joy and paradise forever for all eternity. His end does not seem all that grim anymore; in fact, he even seems willing to die. It is through Perelandra that Ransom finds “Christian hope confirmed in an object: paradise exists; the rebirth is real”

(Norwood 74). If he did not hold out hope through the temptations to doubt, he would never experience paradise and the true joy that hope brings.

Ransom had every reason to believe in himself because he truly can match the Un-man in physical combat now that he has a renewed will power. He is shocked when he finds it a fair match and when he has the Un-man on the run for his life. It is through this fight that Ransom realizes “what hatred was made for” and this brought him joy (156). He could and should hate the evil that is the Un-man and this drives him to follow the Un-man to a chase on the water. The waves Ransom is riding in pursuit of the Un-man is his “choosing to meet the wave that is rolling his way and clearing the last obstacle to the fulfillment of his destiny” (Schwartz 588). When the Un-man and Ransom are near drowning, Ransom decides to show the Un-man mercy as he finds a glimpse of Weston in him. While the Un-man has tears on his cheeks and begs for mercy, Ransom seems to think Weston has come back and pities him enough to remain with him while they drown. Ransom does not fear dying, while the Un-man is terrified. Ransom offers comfort: “Take my hand...We’ll do very well” (Lewis 171). Just as Ransom is willing to accept his mission, he is willing to accept his death. This extension of himself only allows the Un-man to get away, but it was a risk that Ransom was willing to take if it meant granting mercy to the Un-man.

Ransom’s final task will be the salvation of Perelandra, but he must imitate Christ’s passion and sacrifice. Ransom will “set aside fears and feelings of abandonment to complete the task given to him” (Downing 118). The entire world is dependent on Ransom’s choice to pursue the Un-man on an island: “He

descends into hell – a black cave with a fiery pit, shared with the Bent Eldil – to save it and emerges into Paradise in its full glory” (Norwood 74). Before Ransom can arise he must overcome his fear – a belief that the Un-man is more powerful than God. Ransom crushes the Un-man’s face with a jagged stone and ends the threat to his own life and the life of Perelandra. Even Ransom in all his ordinariness and smallness is able to defeat a great power because he had faith in God’s power above all. When Ransom finally lets go of his self-doubt and fear, he can embody his true self and emerge “almost a new Ransom, glowing with health and rounded with muscle...In the old days he had been beginning to show a few grey hairs; but now the beard which swept his chest was pure gold” (Lewis 30). Through his sacrifice he is given new life and vigor: “As Ransom is absorbed into Maleldil’s purpose, he grows a more human and sound character; Weston’s absorption reduces him to a caricature and then a pathetic dummy” (Glover 180). Ransom’s sacrifice is necessary to his physical and spiritual health.

Ransom experienced pleasure of the senses while on Perelandra but did not experience any peace until he accepts his purpose. Although his mission left him with a wound to his heel that will not heal, Ransom is “human, wise, and in spite of his wound, more whole than most of us academicians. Ransom is being completed by suffering, risk, trust, receptivity, and the scattered as well as the gathered community” (Carnell 71). Ransom’s transformation on Perelandra demonstrates that the virtue of fortitude “has become a permanent part of his nature. Although fear touches him at times, it never turns him from his purpose” (Gibson 51). C.S. Lewis’ storytelling mesmerized critics: “Mr. Lewis has created

myth itself, myth woven of desires and aspirations deep-seated in some, at least of the human race...As I journey with him into world as once familiar and strange, I experience, as did Ransom, sensation not of following an adventure but of enacting a myth” (Downing 155). C.S. Lewis’ response to Ransom as a Christ figure is that “every real Christian is really called upon in some measure to *enact* Christ” (Downing 52). Lewis wants the reader to make this journey and reach our full potential. Peter Kreeft states Lewis’ approach: “Christianity calls on men to become not just better men or even Supermen but to become Christs, to share in divine life – an infinitely greater transformation than any current secular fad” (16).

These notions of baptism, rebirth, response to God, becoming other Christs that Lewis gives are not distinct theological terms because the idea of the narrative points towards intimations of the divine at work in human affairs. The narrative opens us to the Christian world view in the indirect way afforded by the literary method. Lewis’ project was not to impose distinct theological concepts but to relay them implicitly through narrative with things that have a connection with our ordinary human experience of doing the good and growing as human persons. Lewis shows that on a very natural human level human beings already have an orientation towards God and towards the divine, but that we struggle to realize our potential. Ransom becomes a sign of hope to readers. Lewis does not want to create the impossible or discourage secular readers, but to suggest that we may have been designed for something greater in this life and careful thought and reflection on that idea alone can draw a reader to a journey of self-discovery. We

are not Ransom and Lewis is not concerned with the “what if” of Adam and Eve alone. He desires for a very ordinary reader to know that his very ordinary life is anything but ordinary. That just as his story presents a unique approach to space adventure there is a unique approach to examining life. C.S. Lewis like Tolkien and Williams does not wish to pressure readers into a love for Christ, but simply begins with a path in which we can make a journey to self-knowledge. Lewis wants readers to desire to know their purpose, take the necessary steps in finding it, accept it with all their will despite doubt and uncertainty, and go the distance in completing any task they are designed to meet.

Journey to Salvation: An Ascent to Virtue through Bearing One Another's Burdens

Charles Williams has yet to receive the critical reviews and popular praise that his friends J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis have earned. He is most notably a poet, novelist, literary critic, and even some consider him a theologian. Of the three authors, Williams is most difficult to categorize and his novels are even more challenging in terms of genre. Literary critics have argued Williams' genre and the worth of his fiction. I believe understanding his genre, unique as it may be, is key to appreciating his fiction. It is not the fairy story of Tolkien or Lewis' remythologizing. Williams is his own entity entirely and deserves credit for that. While he may have been overlooked in the past, I believe his works are invaluable and something altogether other.

Descent Into Hell, one of Williams' final works, embodies the otherness of his work. His everyday setting and ordinary characters allow readers to fit right into the story; it all seems so familiar. Despite this average scene, his plot and characters develop frighteningly supernatural elements. While most critical commentaries address central character Lawrence Wentworth's descent into Hell, I will examine another character that I believe to be central to the work, Pauline Anstruther. I believe Williams intends for her ascent to salvation to be the centerpiece and means for readers to consider similar choices that lead to joy, freedom, and peace. Pauline decides to change her life and experience joy for the first time when she accepts the sacrifice of another character Peter Stanhope. Williams shows readers that sacrifice is love and by accepting one another's sacrifice we will be more willing to make our own. This life of sacrifice is for

Pauline a journey that must be made to be released from her self-loathing and free to begin a new life.

In order to have a better understanding of what Williams is doing in this work, we must first examine his genre. This genre will be specifically his because of his personal uniqueness as a devoted Anglican Christian fascinated by the mystery of the supernatural. There is debate among scholars regarding the genre of his fiction and I will determine what best suits his novel *Descent Into Hell*. John L. Stewart dubs Williams enthusiasts collectors of “fantastic” fiction, while Barbara McMichael refers to his works as supernatural “mystery” novels. One might assume it would be easy enough to label Williams as Gothic and end it there. Glen Cavaliero describes the Gothic novel as a “heightening of emotional or imaginative experience, either through terror or through aesthetic appreciation; or through both” (54). Although his work is fantastical, supernatural, imaginative, and chilling with references to the occult, this does not say enough about what Williams is doing with his work. Williams does not want to shock readers into a transformation, but guide them to new realizations through imagination. Mary McDermott Shideler offers insights from C.S. Lewis on Williams’ novels as a kind of “spiritual science fiction” with Williams as the “romantic theologian”. Williams does not use theological language in his work, however, we are introduced to elements of a supernatural nature such as ghosts and doppelgangers. The “supernatural shockers,” Shideler says, are “adventure stories” and “become vehicles to convey provocative insights into the nature of the world and of man” (Shideler 8). Now Shideler is saying something worthy of

the novel. Williams seeks to send a message to readers. He is not looking to reach a particular audience of science fiction fans, Christians, or an occult following, rather he seeks to reach the ordinary. Despite the eccentric supernatural elements, John Heath-Stubbs regards Williams work as logical and “subject to the same laws which apply to our everyday experience. And the people to whom they occur are everyday people” (8). Williams places the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Notable critic Thomas Howard seems to best understand what Williams is doing with his work although he does not believe Williams can be classified. Williams is not necessarily trying to say something new, but to “wake the rest of us up once more to the tang and bite of human experience” (4). Human experience and behavior is what interests Williams above all. There is more to be found in the ordinariness of life that is simply overlooked and waiting to be uncovered. Williams believes everything carries a deeper meaning:

The ordinary stuff of our experience seems both to cloak and to reveal more than itself. Everything nudges our elbow...He saw a correspondence between commonplace things and ultimate things. Everything supplied him with parables and images. An image points to something beyond itself...Everything keeps rising towards heaven or plummeting towards hell. The whole conflicts of heaven and hell crops up at our elbow a thousand times a day (5).

His stories are simply stories, not theological claims or warnings, but a presenting of what may be lingering among us, heaven or hell. There is no mention of God or the devil, but we are presented with choices and we watch where the choices of the characters lead. These choices and decisions ultimately model what we are faced with every day. We choose to love ourselves or to love others more. Each

of these choices determine a little more where we will end up eternally, with ourselves in agony or with others in love. Howards describes this view: “We are all in route to either heaven or hell, and the direction we travel depends on the choices we make and the attitudes and habits we form, and every word we say” (7). Each choice is an opportunity to grow in virtue and live for something more or a choice of selfishness which is not living at all. Williams saw only two ends: salvation or damnation. Both are images that everyone believing or not can picture: heaven as the state of perfection, peace, joy and hell as solitude, unrest, dread. These images are not meant for believing readers, rather “he was speaking to a world that does not know Christianity, or that has become bored with it, or knows its superficial features...he had something fresh to say and he said it in a fresh style” (Shideler 45). Williams has his characters explore and model these preconceived images of salvation and damnation. Williams describes both paths and leaves the reader to discover the opportunities taken or pitfalls made in every decision of his characters.

Above all, Williams does not want us to believe we do any of this on our own. He believes in the “principle of exchange and substitution and co-inherence” (12). Williams intends to prove that we are all interdependent and we can choose to bear another’s burdens. Christians would identify an offering or accepting of co-inherence as Charity. Howard provides examples:

I can just try getting this cup of water in the middle of the night for my spouse who is thirsty, even though God knows I am too sleepy to budge, I will have gone through a very small lesson in Charity. I may of course refuse, in which case I will have missed a lesson. The difficulty here is that this refusal turns out to be more serious than my merely having

missed a lesson. I have lost ground. I am not where I was. I am a step back...less prepared to pass the next lesson since I have contributed by my refusal to an inclination, already too strong, to pass up the lessons. It is so much easier just to stay in bed here. It is much, much nicer. How comfortable and warm it is here...and wake up in hell, says Williams (13).

Of course this particular decision is not what Williams claims will earn damnation but he does hint that salvation and damnation are chosen in the little things.

Change occurs with every seemingly simple “yes” or “no”. These moments present decisions that lead toward good or bad, growth or deterioration, heaven or hell. T.S. Eliot writes of William’s work: “He makes our everyday world very much more exciting, because of the supernatural which he finds always active in it” (Hadfield *Charles Williams* 93). Alice Mary Hadfield believes this supernatural in the natural “gives the novels their depth and speed, for situations and characters grow from a single concept...The books make an instant impact upon the reader; they are quick and enthralling, glancing sometimes at a possibility, sometimes penetrating it, and always carrying you and me and our everyday work into our origins and ends” (93). Williams, like Lewis and Tolkien, takes his readers on a journey to examine our choices and where they lead. Many readers will find this to be more disturbing than the supernatural elements present. Williams called his own novel “a strange fantasy in a new style” (142). Jacob Sherman refers to this genre as “theological realism” for “the distinctive way they render the spiritual dimensions of everyday events concrete and intelligible” (54). Williams was unafraid to do something new. His theological concerns are presented in a truly unique fashion by combining supernatural elements with ordinary people and ordinary situations. He creates a meditation on life’s choices

and their effect on our end. Williams' work is an existential call for personal transformation.

Descent Into Hell takes place in the town of Battle Hill. Citizens are preparing a play created by local man and famous playwright Peter Stanhope. He is not the only notable figure in the town. Mr. Lawrence Wentworth is a local historian of military history in constant rivalry with a more talented historian, Mr. Aston Moffatt. Wentworth's pride and narcissism make it difficult for him to maintain any healthy relationships. A good portion of the novel follows Wentworth's descent into hell. He is in constant competition with Moffatt and refuses to recognize him as superior. Meanwhile, his love interest Miss Adela Hunt is being wooed by another. Wentworth is too proud to admit his love for Adela and loses her altogether. He spends his days in solitude and obsesses about her so much that he imagines a spirit or likeness that fulfills his every desire. Wentworth is offered countless opportunities to choose salvation, but he refuses every time. As he descends the rope to hell, there is another character that ascends to salvation. Miss Pauline Anstruther is a young woman new to town and there only to care for her ailing grandmother who is not fond of her or anyone for that matter. Pauline is shy, fearful, and hiding a most peculiar secret. Pauline has a doppelganger, an exact likeness of herself that she has seen since she was a girl, only the encounters are becoming frequent since she has moved to Battle Hill. Although she has only viewed it from a distance outdoors, she fears that she may come face to face with it one day. She does not allow this to keep her from joining the play, but it is really all she can think about. Every walk home or time

spent with others is spent thinking of her fear. Pauline has been completely preoccupied with fear and with no signs of hope until she meets Stanhope. Stanhope offers to bear her burden and take on the fear of the doppelganger so Pauline can be at peace. Through his sacrifice, Pauline is able to bear the burden of another. Pauline's transformation is a process and growth that Williams hopes for his readers. Wentworth's descent is a lesson of when one chooses self, while Pauline is the heroine who proves that sacrifice leads to joy and freedom.

Williams opens the novel with the townspeople working on the production of Peter Stanhope's play. Although it is sure to be disappointing, like many of their other stage productions, Stanhope allows them to use his work and even gives them any advice they seek. He calls himself an optimist, is often neglected, and, as the narrator states, is "everyone's second thought but no one's first" (Williams 11). Williams poses a question through his characters discussion about audience: "Mrs. Parry said, 'You must consider your audience. What will the audience make of the Chorus?'" Adela responds, "It's for them to make what they can of it. We can only give them a symbol. Art's always symbolic isn't it" (13-14). Williams' novel is his art, his symbol, and he wants us to know that we are to make of this journey what we can. The conversation continues: "Intertwine...harmonize. So you must make it easy for them to get into harmony. That's what's wrong with a deal of modern art; it refuses – it doesn't establish equilibrium with its audience or what not. In a pastoral play you must have equilibrium" (14). Williams presents us with co-inherence from the very beginning. We are to take part in this conversation, this play, this novel. We are

to be intertwined with the characters and the town. Williams wants us to know our role from the very beginning. This will be existential and he will call on readers for personal reflection following the examples of Wentworth and Pauline.

Williams presents Pauline in the most ordinary light. She is young and generally silent. She is only in Battle Hill because both of her parents died a few years earlier, she has no money, and her uncle decided that she should live with her ailing grandmother as a caregiver. Pauline's participation in the play occupies her time. We do not realize she will have a central role to play in the novel until Stanhope looks at her for the first time: "She felt as if his eyes had opened suddenly" (15). Stanhope and Pauline's discussion turns to a deeper topic than just the play. Their discussion is one Williams wants us to have in order to grow. A conversation Pauline must have if she is to understand her burden. This theme is of the terrible good. Shideler writes: "Williams showed himself to be profoundly oppressed by the agonies and tragedies of human existence, its confusions and uncertainties and the monotonies that dog all our ways...It reflected his considered judgement that the contradictory extremes of our lives are inextricably bound together" (7). The discussion begins when Miss Fox states: "We've only to sink into ourselves to find peace – and trees and clouds and so on all help us. One never need be unhappy. Nature's so terribly good." Stanhope responds, "Very...I think I mean 'full of terror'. A dreadful goodness." Puzzled by his addition of terror and dreadful Miss Fox responds, "I don't see how goodness can be dreadful...if things are good they're not terrifying, are they?" Pauline joins the conversation: "And if things are terrifying...can they be good?"

Looking down at her Stanhope answers, “Yes, surely” (16-17). At this point Pauline has not revealed the source of her tension, but she is clearly concerned about the terrifying and just how it can be considered good. A question many readers are asking themselves. Critic John Stewart believes Williams asks his readers to confront the “‘terrible good’ of life and learn to accept all facts, however cruel and irrational, as joyous” and to give up “the last illusion of reason, that because man must desire and must even know the universe to be reasonable, therefore it is reasonable” (162). It is only through this, Stewart claims, that a reader can “accept God’s difficult justice, learn to obey Him, and participate in the joy of His divine love” (162). While Pauline or the readers do not immediately consider all of these aspects, they are left with a broader understanding of suffering. That maybe their terrible can bring about some good. This is the beginning of Pauline’s salvation. Her consideration of this possibility is her first step in transformation.

Now we wonder just what is so terrible about Pauline’s life and anxiously await this revelation. Pauline’s terror begins with the thought of walking home:

It was the cry of her loneliness and fear, and it meant nothing to her mind but the empty streets and that fear itself. She went on. Not to think; to think of something else. If she could. It was so hopeless. She was trying not to look ahead for fear she saw it, and also to look ahead for fear she was yielding to fear. She walked down the road quickly and firmly, remembering the many thousand times it had not come. But the visitation was increasing – growing nearer and clearer and more frequent. In her first twenty-four years she had seen it nine times; at first she had tried to speak of it. She had been told, when she was small, not to be silly and not to be naughty. Once, when she was adolescent, she had actually told her mother. Her mother was understanding in most things, and knew it. But at this the understanding had disappeared...She had refused to speak any more to Pauline that day, and neither of them had ever quite forgiven the

other. But in those days the *comings* – as she still called them – had been rare...they had been more frequent, as if the Hill was fortunate and favourable to apparitions beyond men; a haunt of alien life. There had been nine in two years, as many as in all the years before. She could not speak of it to her grandmother, who was too old, nor to anyone else, since she had never discovered any closeness of friendship. But what would happen when the thing that was she came up to her, and spoke or touched? So far it had always turned aside, down some turning, or even apparently into some house; she might have been deceived were it not for the chill in her blood. But if some day it did not..." (21).

Pauline fears the fear of her visitations. She meets her doppelganger in the street, the coming of her likeness, although it never approaches her. She also fears this meeting she believes to be inevitable. She has dealt with this fear and anxiety for twenty-four years, but she has never encountered it so frequently or found anyone who understands her. Pauline has been isolated in her fear causing her to distance herself more from the people of Battle Hill. She fears they may judge her harshly for such an unreasonable occurrence. She is plagued by her fear. She counts down the number of houses until she approaches her home, longs to stay indoors, clings to the front door as if it is her protector, and covets the peace everyone else has. Her encounter with the doppelganger is eerie and we realize her true unrest:

She would *not* run; she would *not* keep her eyes on the pavement. She would walk steadily forward, head up and eyes before her...seventeen, sixteen...She would think of something, of Peter Stanhope's play – 'a terrible good'...Her heart sprang; there, a good way off – thanks to a merciful God – it was, materialized from nowhere in a moment. She knew it at once, however far, her own young figure, her own walk, her own dress and hat – had not her first sight of it been attracted so? Changing, growing...It was coming up at her pace – doppelganger, doppelganger: her control began to give...she didn't run, lest it should, nor did it...She was biting back the scream and fumbling for her key (22).

It is here for the first time that she begins to distract herself with something, Stanhope's play. She substitutes her fearful thoughts for something for a

moment, but this is not enough to suppress her fear. Howard defines a doppelganger as a “double-goer,” a “special kind of ghost which seems to be yourself dogging your own footsteps” (188). Howard claims Pauline is “terrified to face herself and what she has made of herself...It is about the plain stark reality of human behavior” (188). However, what Pauline is terrified to face of herself is something that she does not directly reveal. Her apparent unrest and dissatisfaction with life, the death of her parents, taking care of her aunt, living in a new town, lack of close friends or love, are all factors she would rather ignore. It is Stanhope that displays the peace of salvation in the novel.

Stanhope is the character that displays the freedom that is found in peace. He is kind, compassionate, and humble despite all of his success and the obvious failure the town’s play production will be. He is the good character. The one readers look to for hope that someone will be the hero. Stanhope’s most heroic practice will come in the form of sacrifice. He will be “at the disposal” of goodness and act as a “kind of buffer between Pauline Anstruther and a certain fear that haunts her, in much the same way that he is here offering his play for the use of the locals on Battle Hill” (185). Howard claims the center of Williams’ novel is charity and it is found in Stanhope. Charity put into practice is something Williams would discuss as co-inherence. Stanhope will bear the burden, the fear, of the doppelganger for Pauline. According to Williams’ *Essential Writings in Spirituality and Theology*, there is a part to be played the one who is burdened and the one accepting the burden:

The one who gives has to remember that he has parted with his burden, that it is being carried by another, that his part is to believe that and be at peace...The one who takes has to set himself –mind and emotion and sensation – to the burden, to know it, imagine it, receive it – and sometimes not to be taken aback by the swiftness of the divine grace and the lightness of the burden (224).

Pauline will find difficulty in allowing Stanhope to take on her burden and really letting it go to him. While she transfers her fear to him, he must be willing to accept the burden and all the difficulties it will bring.

Stanhope realizes Pauline is burdened by some anxiety and fear and encourages her to share it with him. She tells him quite suddenly expecting him to think she is insane, but he just asks her questions and never judges her. In fact, he asks her if anyone has ever carried her fear before. She struggles to understand exactly how someone could meet her doppelganger, but Stanhope explains:

‘It can be done, you know,’ he went on. ‘It’s surprisingly simple. And if there’s no one else you care to ask, why not use me? I’m here at your disposal, and we could so easily settle it that way. Then you needn’t fear it, at least... ‘But how can I not be afraid?’ she asked. ‘It’s hellish nonsense to talk like that’... ‘It’s no more nonsense than your own story,’ he said (Williams 97).

Stanhope shows Pauline that it is more ridiculous to be paralyzed and not accept help than it is for her to allow him to try his method. He continues to explain:

I’ve taken this particular trouble over instead of you. You’d do as much for me if I needed it, or for any one. And I will give myself to it. I’ll think of what comes to you, and imagine it, and know it, and be afraid of it. And then, you see, you won’t (97).

This is how Stanhope’s act of charity will work. He will make the sacrifice for Pauline to relieve her of her burden. He begins this practice immediately, even at the play practice:

He recollected Pauline; he visualized her going along a road, any road; he visualized another Pauline coming to meet her. And as he did so his mind contemplated not the first but the second Pauline; he took trouble to apprehend the vision, he summoned through all his sensations an approaching fear. Deliberately he opened himself to that fear, laying aside for awhile every thought of why he was doing it, forgetting every principle and law, absorbing only the strangeness and the terror of that separate spiritual identity (100).

According to C.N. Manlove, Stanhope does more than feel Pauline's fear, he summons it: "Putting himself at Pauline's disposal he must remove his feelings: he must cut out the self-distancing from the experience" (172). She must remember when she is alone that he is the one carrying this parcel for her and that she cannot be afraid. Her burden will be lighter because he will substitute himself for her. His goodwill will carry a burden that she can no longer bear herself. His sacrifice is made for her at a crucial time. She has finally exposed the truth to an acquaintance, a sign that she has lost all hope and does not believe anything worse can come her way. Even if the entire town believes she is crazy, she will at least not have the burden of the secret. Stanhope's sacrificial offering is the first act of charity she has experienced and her choice to accept it is her next step toward salvation. She could maintain her pride and not accept the help, but she is desperate and willing to try anything.

Pauline's walk home after the exchange is her first experience of freedom without the burden of fear she experiences every time she walks outside. She is at peace for the first time:

She realized she had been walking along quite gaily. It was very curious...She wondered whether anything would come into sight. But why was she so careless about it? Her mind leapt back to Stanhope's promise, and she knew that, whatever the explanation might be, she had been less bothered for the past ten minutes than ever before in any solitude

of twenty year...She had promised to leave it to him; very well, she would. Let him – with all high blessing and gratitude – get on with it. She had promised, she had only to keep her promise (Williams 103).

Pauline has made a promise to Stanhope and keeping that promise takes priority over her fear. She will focus on her appreciation for him rather than what the agreement was made over. Her ascent to salvation continues but not without temptations to despair. Mrs. Lily Sannile is a local woman and a witch: “She is an evil sorceress whose specialty is telling people nervous and hasty stories that will paper over any fears these people may have, thus making them feel that all is well when perhaps their fears are the very warning they need that all is very far from well” (Howard 199). Pauline’s peace is disturbed that very evening by a visit from Mrs. Sannile.

Pauline identifies her first sin or act of selfishness that she was aware of. She had taken money from her mother to buy herself sweets and then she met her doppelganger for the first time. Her selfishness had led her to face her horrid self and she has been haunted by it ever since. She felt so much after this conversation with Stanhope that she did not understand it all: “Guilt or shame, servile fear or holy fear, adoration or desperation of obedience, it burned through her to a point of physical pain” (Williams 107). She had to be thankful for Stanhope even though he assisted her in summoning all of this suppressed pain and the reality of her selfishness. Stanhope tells her that she is peace. It is just when she is realizing this peace that is found through forgiveness that Mrs. Sannile calls on her. As Mrs. Sannile attempts to remind Pauline of her fear, Pauline informs her that she is much better. Mrs. Sannile begins to tempt her

with selfishness and narcissism: “Take care of yourself. Think of yourself; be careful of yourself. I could make you perfectly safe and perfectly happy at the same time. You really haven’t any idea of how happy you could be” (108). Pauline could abandon Stanhope, his sacrifice, and salvation to choose herself. She could doubt his promise and continue to search for something that could never satisfy her. Mrs. Sannile continues: “If you will come with me, I can fill you, fill your body with any sense you choose. I can make you feel whatever you’d choose to be. I can give you certainty of joy for every moment of life. Secretly, secretly; no other soul – no other living soul” (109). Mrs. Sannile’s promises consist of Pauline choosing herself and her own desires over everything. She will live and die for herself. This will only lead to her descent into hell, isolation, pain, and despair. Pauline resisted but the temptations continued:

Peace had given her new judgment, and judgment began to lament her peace...a voice slid into her ear...it spoke of sights and sounds, touches and thrills, and of the entire oblivion of harm; nothing was to be that she did not will, and everything that she willed to the utmost fullness of her heart, should be. She would be enough for herself. She could dream for ever, and her dreams should forever be made real (110).

She is given the option to continue to have her burden carried by Stanhope or she could choose to never face her selfishness and eventually be consumed by it. Mrs. Sannile adds: “You’ll never have to do anything for others any more” (110). These words startle Pauline. She had been promising herself that she would bear the burden of another just as Stanhope had done for her. She had made an oath. She could not betray such a promise. She bids Mrs. Sannile goodnight and runs in the house. She remains on the path to salvation. Her resistance to temptation aided her ascent. She was now ready to commit to

another. She would make the necessary sacrifice for someone else and choose to live for more than herself.

Pauline's sacrifice will be offered for her protestant ancestor. She will take on the fear he experienced some 400 years before, "thus enabling him to die the noble death of which she has read in her history books" (Robinson 46).

Pauline experiences reconciliation: "She discovers the unity of eternity, and she is able to make the reconciliation. The benefits of a deed of love and the self-sacrifice made in the present can be received in the past because all time is ultimately one" (McMichael 68). Early on in the novel, when Pauline's grandmother tells Pauline about her ancestor, she does not initially understand his sacrifice. He was a Protestant martyr under Mary Tudor in the sixteenth century and was burned at the stake. Pauline says, "It was a terrible thing...How he could shout for joy like that". Her grandmother responds, "Salvation...is quite often a terrible thing – a frightening good" (56). Now that Pauline understands the good of sacrifice she is faced with making one:

She knew what she must do. But she felt, as she stood, that she could no more do it than he. She could never bear that fear. The knowledge of being burnt alive, of the flames, of the faces, of the prolongation of pain. She knew what she must do...Behind her, her own voice said: 'Give it to me, John Struther.' He heard it, in his cell and chains, as the first dawn of the day of his martyrdom broke beyond the prison...He stretched out his arm again: he called: 'Lord, Lord!' It was a devotion and an adoration; it accepted and thanked...he called out: 'I have seen the salvation of my God'...Her heart was warm, as if the very fire her ancestor had feared was a comfort to her now (169-170).

At first Pauline seems to resist the calling and retreat out of fear. However, she firmly calls out to her ancestor and seeks his burden with great determination.

Because of her sacrifice, she is brought joy: "She knew now that all acts of love

are the measure of capacity for joy” (171). She offered her joy and peace to her ancestor and paid her debt. He accepted her sacrifice just as she had accepted Stanhope’s sacrifice. Williams shows us that sacrifice has more meaning than we may think (Sherman 57). A life of love requires dependence on others. This leads us to liberation from self and only then can we experience true unity.

Williams is a story-teller and we as readers can choose to follow the story of Wentworth’s descent or Pauline’s ascent. While some readers may be fascinated by the descent, I believe Pauline’s ascent is refreshing. Williams chose to offer readers hope. In Hadfield’s *An Introduction to Charles Williams* Williams is described as a storyteller that “liked belief to be demonstrated in action” so he must have believed we can all achieve salvation if we look for opportunities to change (77). Hadfield states:

This kind of life is produced by, and produces, a sense of crisis working on the mind and heart. Everything is on the point of change; an enormous and hardly graspable threat or ‘other’ quality rises in every detail on which the mind turns; our very existence all but slips from us at times in the pressure of crisis and becoming – becoming what, we dare not say, but either something wildly different from ourselves, or sheer loss (77).

Williams believes we must change and grow if we wish to come out of ourselves and live for something more. We each have an other that we can become, an enhanced, bettered version of ourselves. We can mature and reach perfection at every opportunity of sacrifice or we can choose to remain the same. Our salvation rests on our choices. Pauline’s journey was one Williams hopes we will be inspired to take and Wentworth’s is a warning to us. Our salvation depends on our willingness to take the journey to growth and maturity.

Conclusion

My work here has a risk of sounding preachy, and I'm sure at times I do. However, this is the risk I am willing to take when exploring Christian authors – the same risk these authors took when writing each of these novels. How do we reconcile a reflective literature with obvious religious themes? Better yet, why must we? Readers have taken these works for what they are: interesting or exciting stories. That is one of the intentions of the writers, to tell a good story. On the other hand, their faith and their readership is on their mind, maybe even inseparable. They refuse to separate their two loves: their personal faith and their readers. As the overwhelming popularity of these authors (especially Tolkien and Lewis) suggests, the mingling of stories with religiosity will stir readers. There will surely be a range of emotions when exploring such serious subjects of morality and salvation. If a reader is confused, conflicted, or even angry, at least they are feeling something or thinking something. That is what literature should do for us. Stir us. Affect us. It should mean something to us. These stories will not cause overnight conversion to Christianity and a sudden relationship with Christ. They will not do this and they do not intend to do this. There is something much subtler happening – an invitation to conversion. Conversion begins with questions, thoughts, exploration, and eventually action. It is a gradual experience. We see our characters take practically a lifetime to even realize they want to change. This acknowledgement may seem miniscule, but in reality it is the most important moment. These moments of desire were felt by each author and that is the moment they write for. Am I more than a bag of bones that is a drain on the earth? This question of purpose should inspire an enthusiastic “yes”

from us. Even if we do not know all of the “why” yet, that is because we are still on our journey. Maybe the characters give us a sense of hope because they reached their destination and we have yet to reach ours. But at least we are not battling orcs, aliens, and ghosts. Our biggest challenge, one our characters come to realize, is ourselves. It is simpler to live for nothing. We do not have to care, or try, or hurt. But where the risks are high so are the rewards. Each character gained love and they had never had that before. For this, Bilbo trades treasure, Ransom trades safety, and Pauline trades love of self. What will we trade in order to gain love?

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