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‘You Will Have No More Dreams; Have Children Instead’

*Or, What’s a Nice Egalitarian Girl Like You
Doing in a Book Like This?*

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Abstract:

“‘You Will Have No More Dreams—Have Children Instead.’ Or, What’s a Nice Egalitarian Girl Like You Doing in a Book Like This?” attempts to reconcile feminism with Lewis’ hierarchical view of marriage and gender roles in *That Hideous Strength*. I neither celebrate hierarchy as the Biblical model, nor excuse Lewis on the grounds that marriage to Joy saved him from sexism. Instead, I argue that Lewis’ view of obedience is a fluid and courtly one which the company at St. Anne’s exemplifies in complicated ways; that Mark as well as Jane Studdock needs to learn obedience and humility in order to save their marriage; that Jane’s true sin is not feminism, but a desire not to be “interfered with” by obligations to others; and that her conversion is meant as a model for seekers of both sexes, and is in fact modeled on Lewis’ own.

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“You Will Have No More Dreams; Have Children Instead:
Or, What’s a Nice Egalitarian Girl Like You Doing in a Book Like This?”

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“Supposing one were a *thing after all*—a thing designed and invented for qualities quite different than what one had decided to regard as one’s true self? Supposing all those people who, from the bachelor uncles down to Mark and Mother Dimble, had infuriatingly found her sweet and fresh when she wanted them to find her also interesting and important, had all along been simply right and perceived the sort of thing she was? Suppose Maledil on this subject agreed with them and not with her? For one moment she had a ridiculous and scorching vision of a world in which God Himself would never understand, never take her at her full seriousness. Then, at one particular corner of the gooseberry patch, the change came.”

—C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 318

My name is Jennifer, and I’m an egalitarian.

My parents brought me up to believe that no pursuit was closed to me by virtue of gender, and that I should choose a profession based on whether it would fulfill me and help others, not on whether it would tide me over until I found a husband. (I didn’t find one until I was 31, and I didn’t promise to obey him.) My husband and I took each other’s names and believe in dividing chores on the basis of interest and aptitude and taking equal parts in child-rearing. I postponed childbearing until after I finished my Ph.D., and now that I have a daughter, I make sure to buy her gender-neutral toys, encourage her budding interest in trains, and remind her frequently that she could be President if she wanted. (Since she holds British citizenship she could also be Prime Minister if she wanted, but that’s another story.) I believe in women’s ordination on both practical and theological grounds. I entered two professions—the ministry and teaching religion—that have traditionally been largely the domain of males (and that would both drive St. Paul nuts.) I wear my hair short, I wear pants to church, and my husband cooks. (Really well, too.)

And I love *That Hideous Strength*.

Let me repeat that. From the moment I first read it as a college student, I have loved *That Hideous Strength*. When I encountered it, I knew little about Lewis and nothing about the mythologies from Charles Williams and J. R. R. Tolkien out of which he constructs much of his symbolic resonance. I simply read it because it was the last volume of his space trilogy and I liked the first two, and I was hooked.

I was hooked on a novel written by an Oxford don who was, at least theoretically, a mostly lifelong bachelor; who frequently mentioned in his letters how much he disliked having to make conversation with women; who defended the doctrine of male headship in *Mere Christianity* (see also *Letters*, Vol. 2 392-397); and once wrote, in only a half-joking mode (and in mock-Chaucerian English) to fellow fantasy author E. R. Eddison that he had discovered Eddison’s works through reading a research thesis by “some poor silly wench that seeketh a B.Litt. or a D.Phil. when God knows she had better bestowed her time making sport for some goodman in his bed and bearing children for the establishment of this realm or else to be at her beads in a religious house” (Lewis, *Letters*, Vol. 2 535, 11/16/1942; spelling modernized). Furthermore, *That Hideous Strength* itself seems on first glance to be largely the story of a

woman who learns to save her marriage by abandoning her doctoral dissertation in order to obey her husband and bear his children. Shades of I Timothy 2:15! (“But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” [NIV].)

So why in the world do I like this book?

Well, I hope to explain why a nice egalitarian girl like me might like a book like this. And, as a matter of fact, what Jane Studdock (who starts out, at least, as a nice egalitarian girl as well) is doing *in* a book like this. But first, some words about what I am, and am not, trying to do. I am not trying to defend Lewis across the board (even though I like him.) That is, I am not going to try to argue that he *didn't* believe in male headship (at least until he got married himself!) or that he didn't claim difficulty in dealing with women as intellectual conversation partners. I'm also not claiming that *That Hideous Strength* is free from these influences. Lewis explicitly wrote the novel as a fictional working-out of the ideas he expressed in *The Abolition of Man*, and they were published almost simultaneously. One of those ideas—seen also in *Mere Christianity*—is the idea that there are objective standards in the universe, not only of right and wrong but of beauty and ugliness: “the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kinds of things we are” (Lewis, *Abolition of Man* 29; see Jacobs 174-180). And from these objective standards come an objective hierarchy, which is both implicitly and explicitly commanded in *That Hideous Strength*.

What I am going to argue is that one *can* interpret Lewis' argument in ways that don't require doing violence either to the book or to feminist sensibilities. In a way, I'm going to treat Lewis the way he did Milton—where he maintains in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* that, though Milton's other writings show him to be an Arian, *Paradise Lost* itself can be interpreted in a completely orthodox manner (Lewis, *Preface* 81-91). So, whether or not Lewis himself could be a sexist writer, I am going to defend the unpopular thesis that *That Hideous Strength*, while deeply imbued with the idea that hierarchy is at the root of the universe, is not a sexist book.

Two Views of Lewis and Gender Hierarchy

Why is this an unpopular thesis? Well, there are two other positions it's easier to take about Lewis' views on gender in general, and in *That Hideous Strength* in particular. Both of them involve recognizing an inherent sexism in Lewis's defense of gender hierarchy. One perspective celebrates that defense as part of a general conservative program against all the modern tendencies Lewis's works deplore—progressive education detached from reference to tradition and objective value, the irresponsible use of science as the answer to human problems, the democratic approach to public life which builds on the principle “I'm as good as you,” and the general abandonment of Christian orthodoxy and the Tao.

A strong version of this thesis was recently argued by Adam Barkman in the *Christian Scholar's Review* colloquium issue on “C. S. Lewis and Gender.”¹ In Barkman's view, Lewis supports the position that men and women are both intellectually and spiritually unequal. (Barkman considers this to be the Biblical position as well). Citing an essay Lewis wrote for the World Council of Churches, where Lewis indicated that women's emancipation was having the negative effect of a “lowering of metaphysical energy,” which is the “proper glory of the masculine mind,” Barkman argues, “The implication seems to be clear. Men, not wholly because of education, but by their very essence, are more suited for metaphysical, theological, and theoretical tasks than women, whereas women are more suited for practical and concrete ones. This, of course, need not entail value in terms of cognitive faculties, but given Lewis' earlier comments about the value of each sex, my suspicion is that Lewis implied this” (432-33).

Barkman also thinks Lewis contends that, when women are put in charge—i.e. the female Head of Experiment House in *The Silver Chair*—other modern problems naturally follow, such as “the lack of training in retributive justice, children not learning about Adam and Eve and the Bible, and girls not learning to curtsy” (430; also a problem that afflicts Jane Studdock). Furthermore, he views *That Hideous Strength* as an explicit working out of I Timothy 2:15 (429).²

On the other side of the argument from Barkman are those who *also* recognize in Lewis a defender of gender hierarchy and, for that reason, write him off. This writing-off can occur on different levels. The mildest level is what I call “Yes, Lewis was a sexist, but he grew out of it.” This position is taken, for example, by Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen in an essay in the same colloquium as Barkman’s. She argues that Lewis’s writings from the 1940s and 1950s, including *That Hideous Strength* as well as *Mere Christianity* (1952) and his 1948 essay against women’s ordination,³ display a commitment to “an essentialist and hierarchical reading of gender that was rooted as much in pagan mythology as it was in a Biblical anthropology” (396). Van Leeuwen attributes this, not only to Lewis’s intellectual training as a scholar of the classics and medieval literature, but to a combination of personal factors—including the early loss of his mother, the all-male atmosphere of his schooling and of life as an Oxford don, and his complicated relationship with Janie King Moore. But she argues that his marriage to an intelligent and egalitarian woman caused him to move towards a more non-hierarchical view, seen in his later works—*Till We Have Faces* (1956), *The Discarded Image* (1964), and *A Grief Observed* (1961). So, on this view, it is only the early Lewis which needs to be written off (including *That Hideous Strength*.)

A stronger dismissal comes from A. N. Wilson (whose famous biography’s warts-and-all approach was widely decried by many Lewis fans who thought Wilson spent too much time on the warts).⁴ Wilson argues, among other attempts to correct sanctified/sanitized myths of Lewis, that he was not “saved by Joy” from sexism and that she was neither as intellectual, nor as good for his writing, as many Lewis fans claim. Instead, in Wilson’s narrative she remains to the end a pushy and obnoxious New York divorcée whom Lewis, after a lifetime of complaining about having to talk to his friends’ wives, repeatedly foisted conversationally on those same unwilling friends. While he admits that Lewis’ love for Joy changed him psychologically, Wilson describes the chilling effect she must have had on Lewis’ conversations with the Inklings: “She knew nothing of medieval literature, was ‘no high-brow,’ and in disputation seemed quite unable to distinguish between vigor and rudeness, strength of expression and obscenity or profanity” (273).

Wilson also points out, and rightly so, that our conventional image of Lewis as a confirmed bachelor startled into romantic life by Joy is erroneous. From the time he was in his early twenties (1921), he had been on close terms with Janie King Moore. She was the mother of his friend Paddy, who died in World War I, and was 26 years his senior. There was only a brief period between her death in 1951 and the beginning of his friendship with Joy. He was also a faithful and involved letter-writer for many years to a number of intelligent women, including Dorothy L. Sayers, Daphne Harwood, Ruth Pitter, his student Mary Neylan, and Sister Penelope (Wilson 275; the second and third volumes of the *Collected Letters* bear out this assertion throughout).

When Lewis wrote both *That Hideous Strength* and the talks which became *Mere Christianity* he and Mrs. Moore had been living together for over twenty years. Whether or not they had a sexual relationship, it is an undeniable fact, from the evidence both of his letters and

the small portion of his diary which we have extant (published some years ago as *All My Road Before Me*), that they spent a great deal of time in conversation about the practical running of the household and that he did an immense amount of housework—even as he was writing in *That Hideous Strength* that the men and women at St. Anne’s do the housework on separate days because otherwise they would quarrel (*That Hideous Strength* 167).

While I agree that Lewis’ personal relationships, especially with Mrs. Moore and Joy, cast long shadows over his writing, I want to reject both of these approaches (see on this point Glycer 482). I freely admit Lewis was a defender of traditional hierarchies, including those of gender. And I also admit that he puts some obnoxious comments into the mouths of characters in *That Hideous Strength*. But I neither want to agree with him on all aspects of his gender theory, nor write him off as a sexist dinosaur. I want instead to look more closely at what Jane Studdock’s conversion to Christianity actually entails in *That Hideous Strength*, what part obedience and hierarchy play in that conversion, and see what we all can learn from Lewis’ ideas about obedience and humility—even self-avowed professing egalitarians.

The Complicated Nature of Obedience

When we first meet Jane, she has been married for six months and is bitterly reciting the phrase out of the *Book of Common Prayer* marriage ceremony that says, “Matrimony was ordained, thirdly, for the for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other” (*That Hideous Strength* 13). But neither she nor Mark have been getting much mutual society, help, and comfort out of each other—Jane because Mark is busy trying to climb the academic ladder of power as a sociology fellow at Bracton College, and Mark because Jane’s great desire to maintain her own independence within marriage has made her defensive and unwilling to give fully of herself. This is seen most clearly in the scene (44-46) where Mark comes home to find Jane sobbing and frightened from her visions. Mark senses in her at that moment humility and a lack of defensiveness that he finds appealing, and regrets that he sees in her less and less often. But in the morning Jane’s fear of being “what she most detested—the fluttering, tearful ‘little woman’ of sentimental fiction running for comfort to male arms” (46) makes her angry that she has let her vulnerability show, and she retreats (and, to give her her due, Mark is not trying to meet her halfway.)

Jane and Mark’s conversions are both deeply entwined with the healing of their marriage. In fact, their conversions are partially predicated on correcting their views of marriage and gender relations (though this is more obvious in Jane’s case than Mark’s; see Sammons 103). Clearly, gender relations and gender differences are, for Lewis, one important key to the proper order of the universe (see Kreeft 173-179, Meilaender 155-156). We have already seen this at the end of *Perelandra*, where Ransom senses, when he meets the *Oyérsu* of Malacandra and *Perelandra*, that one is masculine and the other is feminine, though they are not male and female in any human sense (Lewis, *Perelandra* 199). But *That Hideous Strength* goes beyond *Perelandra* with a portrayal of God as ultimately masculine, overpowering a universe which is ultimately feminine in its act of submission.

This formed part of Lewis’ disagreement with Eddison, whom Lewis believed conceived of God in feminine terms. He thus accused him of being a “very stinking heretic in philosophy, as if forsooth because the First Fair [God] produceth an infinite beauty and hath self-sufficiency it must needs be feminine, when it is a thing openly manifest to all but disards and very goosecaps that femininity is to itself an imperfection, being placed by the Pythagoreans in the sinister column with matter and mortality”—which he further proved by the example that men

want to withdraw into the society of other men, whereas women would rather spend time with men than with other women (*Letters*, Vol. 2 543; 12/29/1942). He has Ransom say as much when he explains to Jane, after she encounters the pagan Venus in the lodge, that the only proper gendered response to God's demand on her soul is to be either a vowed virgin or a "Christian wife:"

There is no escape. If it were a virginal rejection of the male, he would allow it. Such souls can bypass the male and go on to meet something far more masculine, higher up, to which they must make a yet deeper surrender. But your trouble has been what old poets call *Daungier*. We call it Pride. You are offended by the masculine itself: the loud, irruptive, possessive thing—the gold lion, the bearded bull—which breaks through hedges and scatters the little kingdom of your primness....The male you could have escaped, for it exists only on the biological level. But the masculine none of us can escape. What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it. You had better agree with your adversary quickly (*That Hideous Strength* 316).

Lewis emphasizes repeatedly the need for Jane to learn obedience both to Mark and to God—and Jane is repeatedly *and* explicitly told that these obediences are related. Lewis criticizes here the overwhelming modern desire for equality as the prime right of autonomous individuals, which he attacks at more length in the essay "Membership" (published in 1945, shortly before *That Hideous Strength*): "I do not believe that God created an egalitarian world. I believe the authority of parent over child, husband over wife, learned over simple to have been as much a part of the original plan as the authority of man over beast. I believe that if we had not fallen...patriarchal monarchy would be the sole lawful form of government" ("Membership" 19). Since we *have* fallen, Lewis says, those higher up in the hierarchy must be prevented from abusing their power by the "legal fiction" of equality. But in the spiritual realm, "equality is a quantitative term and therefore love often knows nothing of it. Authority exercised with humility and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits move" (21).

When Jane argues to Ransom at their first meeting that she thinks love means "equality and companionship," Ransom replies, in language explicitly echoing "Membership," "We must all be guarded by equal rights from one another's greed, because we are fallen. Just as we must all wear clothes for the same reason. But the naked body should always be there underneath the clothes, ripening for the day when we shall need them no longer. Equality is not the deepest thing, you know." Jane makes the thoroughly modern point that people are equal in their souls, but Ransom says, "That is the last place where they are equal. Equality before the law, equality of incomes—that is very well. Equality guards life—it does not make it. It is medicine, not food [a direct quote from "Membership"]. You might as well try to warm yourself with a blue-book" (*That Hideous Strength* 148).⁵

Furthermore, Ransom explicitly rejects equality in marriage, saying "Courtship knows nothing of it; neither does fruition. What has free companionship to do with that?" He blames Jane's progressive modern education for never having taught her that "obedience—humility—is an erotic necessity" (148)—just as, the narrator makes clear, it has never taught Mark the proper responses he should be making to Jane as well as to the N.I.C.E. When Jane admits she is no longer in love with Mark, Ransom advises her that "you do not fail in obedience through lack of love, but have lost love because you never attempted obedience" (147). As Jane journeys home from this meeting on the train she begins to think both (for the first time) of how she has wronged Mark, as well as how she can picture placing herself in obedience to Ransom and

therefore ultimately to Mark: “Her beauty belonged to the Director. It belonged to him so completely that he could even decide not to keep it for himself but to order that it be given to another, by an act of obedience lower, and therefore higher, more unconditional and therefore more delighting, than if he had tried to keep it for himself” (153).

Yet all along, there are a number of complicating factors to this commanded obedience. The first is the short but significant comment Ransom makes regarding the mice who eat up his crumbs from the floor at the end of his conversation with Jane: “You see that obedience and rule are more like a dance than a drill—specially between man and woman where the rules are always changing” (149). As Gilbert Meilaender has commented in his study of Lewis as an ethicist, this sentence in itself does not cancel out all of Lewis’ statements in favor of hierarchical marriage, but it certainly adds a degree of ambiguity to what that hierarchy means (Meilaender 151, 158).

The second factor is the rules of Ransom’s own household at St. Anne’s, which Jane herself seizes on as being quite “democratic” in practice (*That Hideous Strength* 168); no servants, alternating days of housework and garden-work for women and men, and all the inhabitants—including Ivy Maggs, Jane’s former housekeeper—interacting with each other on an equal basis of friendship and accountability. For all her theoretical commitment to equality, Jane finds actually being placed on an equal footing with Ivy disconcerting, and attempts to put Ivy “in her place” several times before Mother Dimble corrects her, commenting “you were never goose enough to think yourself *spiritually* superior to Ivy” (168). Even then, Jane still finds the comparison insulting between Mark’s situation at the N. I. C. E., which she feels as a horror but one “that carries a certain grandeur and mystery,” and Ivy’s husband’s imprisonment for petty theft (183).

One small clue to the philosophical basis for Ransom’s household is the remark made early in the story by Curry (one of the “Progressive Element” at Bracton) that Arthur Denniston, once Mark’s chief competitor for his sociology fellowship, now seems “to have gone off the rails since then with all his Distributivism and what not” (19). Distributivism was a social and economic program advanced in the early 20th century by G K Chesterton and other Catholic writers, arguing that property should be decentralized into small, self-sufficient units, not concentrated in the hands of either the government or large corporations. This certainly seems to describe St. Anne’s, held up as a small and local foil to the institutional, conglomerate N.I.C.E. (see Lobdell 117-121). It also implies that Arthur—unlike Mark—is putting his sociological training to proper use, helping facilitate the St. Anne’s community, rather than propping up an illegitimate institution with lies and generalizations (see Jacobs 170). The third factor is the Dennistons’ marriage itself, which exemplifies a kind of courtly egalitarianism—seen particularly in their conversation when they picnic with Jane before she comes to St. Anne’s (*That Hideous Strength* 113-117)—and is also held up as a model of a properly fruitful marriage relationship (both in the “mutual help, society, and comfort” which the Dennistons obviously have of each other, and the implication that Camilla is pregnant with their child).

And the final complicating factor (see Meilaender 152-153, 158) is that Mark also learns obedience and humility by what he suffers—principally, a proper humility towards Jane. His converted attitude to Jane takes the form, not of realizing that Jane ought to *submit* to him, but realizing all the ways in which she is his spiritual and emotional *superior*—a fact to which he learns his proper response should be a courtly deference, rather than a peevish selfishness. Even as he is being sucked further into the Inner Ring at Belbury, he realizes that Jane represents something antithetical to its power: “Her mere presence would have made the laughter of the Inner Ring sound metallic, unreal. . . Jane in the middle of Belbury would turn the whole of

Belbury into a vast vulgarity, flashy and yet furtive” (171). He begins to move towards conversion after his arrest for Hingest’s murder chiefly by considering the sort of reality which Jane, as well as his sister Myrtle and old friends such as Denniston, represented to him: they were “the four biggest invasions of his life by something from beyond the dry and choking places” (247). He suddenly sees how he had meant to manipulate Jane into becoming a great hostess who would enable his rise to power, rather than letting her flourish as her own person and in her own way, with “deep wells and knee-deep meadows of happiness, rivers of freshness, gardens of leisure” within her which “he could not have entered but could have spoiled” (247).

After Mark’s conversion, while traveling from Belbury to St. Anne’s, he continues to realize how badly he has both objectified Jane for his own pleasure and tried to possess her for his own motives. He decides—in perhaps the most unselfish thought he has had about her so far—that he must “give her her freedom.” And, he realizes anew that he lacks something which she possesses, and that furthermore, he cannot possess or command her: “When she first crossed the dry and dusty world which his mind inhabited she had been like a spring shower: in opening himself to it he had not been mistaken. He had gone wrong only in assuming that marriage, by itself, gave him either power or title to appropriate that freshness. As he now saw, one might as well have thought one could buy a sunset by buying the field from which one had seen it” (360).

The narrator comments that the “same laboratory outlook upon love which had forestalled in Jane the humility of a wife, had equally forestalled in him, during what passed for courtship, the humility of a lover. Or if there had ever arisen in him at some wiser moment the sense of ‘Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear,’ he had put it away” (380). As he arrives at St. Anne’s this last defense crumbles, and he realizes how much the “lout and clown and clod-hopper in him” has taken advantage of Jane’s vulnerability, trampling on her personality, using rather than enjoying her, and behaving as if he was “native to that fenced garden [of her personality] and its rightful possessor.” He feels ashamed to present himself at St. Anne’s before her “friends and equals” (381), and it is in this humble mood that he is ushered into the lodge by Venus to await his wife. (If this is male headship, please sign Edwin up.)

The Sin of Autonomy

Furthermore, despite the fact that Jane’s salvation is partially predicated on her being willing to enter into the obedience—and children—which her marriage demands, her deepest sin is *not* simply having the audacity to finish her doctoral dissertation. It is true, as numerous letters attest, that Lewis generally thought female scholars at Oxford inferior to male ones—despite his lengthy, intelligent, and courteous correspondence with former pupil Mary Neylan, whom he obviously respected, and gently encouraged towards her conversion. But in fairness to Lewis, he intensely disliked research degrees in general, and thought it was a consummation devoutly to be wished that *no one* should finish their dissertations. (This is part, though not all, of what lurks behind his comment to Eddison; see also *Letters*, Vol. 3 1235.) He makes his views on Jane explicit in a letter to his friends Daphne and Cecil Harwood, who had accused Lewis of just this prejudice: “Re: Jane, she wasn’t meant to illustrate the problem of the married woman and her own career in general: rather the problem of everyone who follows an *imagined* vocation at the expense of a real one. Perhaps I should have emphasized more the fact that her thesis on Donne was all derivative bilge. If I’d been tackling the problem which Cecil thinks I had in mind, of course I’d have taken a woman capable of making a real contribution to literature” (*Letters*, Vol. 2 669-70; 9/11/1945).⁶

Jane's desire to finish her dissertation is not really predicated on contributing to scholarship, which would be the sign that she *had* a vocation in this direction, but on having something to do which will enable her to feel independent. Throughout *That Hideous Strength* it is her independence, her desire to not to be interfered with, which comes in for the most criticism, and in the face of which her submission is commanded. This is seen early on in her struggle against her *true* vocation, which for most of the book is to be a seer and visionary. When Grace Ironwood explains the nature and importance of Jane's dreams to her, her first response is, "I want to lead an ordinary life. I want to do my own work. It's unbearable! Why should I be selected for this horrible thing?" (66). She resists any idea of joining the company at St. Anne's for this reason, thinking as she leaves, "She would not get 'mixed up in it,' would not be drawn in. One had to live one's own life," at which point the narrator adds, "To avoid entanglements and interferences had long been one of her first principles. Even when she discovered that she was going to marry Mark if he asked her, the thought, 'But I must still keep up my own life,' had arisen at once and had never for more than a few minutes at a stretch been absent from her mind" (72).

It turns out that this "fear of being invaded and entangled" is "the deepest ground of her determination not to have a child" (73). Having a child will also become her rightful vocation. In fact, her avoidance of that vocation up to this point has meant that, according to Merlin, a "child by whom the enemies should have been put out of Logres for a thousand years," possibly a future Pendragon, will not be born (278; see Sammons 65). In effect, in opening herself to the possibility of children, she is being commanded to live out the "triumphant vindication of the body," not simply study it intellectually. Just like seeing visions, having children is an act that is deeply engaged, communal, and invasive. As ethicist Amy Laura Hall once wrote, "[Children] make interminable demands on our reserves of unconditional love and test our ability simply to remain present" (Hall 31).

Jane's desire not to be entangled also affects her attitude towards men, whom she suspects as always out to trap her into such entanglements and then dispose of her. She even thinks this about poor Arthur Denniston, probably the least sexist character in the novel, when he comments that Ransom (known as Mr. Fisher-King at this point) would make her get Mark's permission to join with the company at St. Anne's: "For a moment she looked on Mr. Denniston with real dislike. She saw him, and Mark, and the Fisher-King man... simply as Men—complacent, patriarchal figures making arrangements for women as if women were children or bartering them like cattle... She was very angry" (117).

Her journey towards becoming entangled begins when—partially because of her infatuation with him—she allows Ransom to command her, placing herself in obedience to him as a stand-in for obedience to Maledil before she journeys with Dimble and Denniston to meet Merlin. Yet the non-coercive nature of this command is also emphasized: "She had long ceased to feel any resentment at the Director's tendency, as it were, to dispose of her—to give her, at one time and in one sense, to Mark, and in another to Maledil—never, in any sense, to keep her for himself" (233). By learning love and obedience together in relation to Ransom, she is able to apply the lesson first to Maledil, and finally to Mark, as she comes to realize that her defensiveness in general—and against men in particular—has caused her to misunderstand the nature of reality "all the way up." As she ponders her experience with the pagan Venus and Ransom's words about cosmic gender differences, she realizes that she had been conceiving of the spiritual world in

the negative sense—as some neutral, or democratic vacuum where differences disappeared... Now the suspicion dawned on her that there might be differences and contrasts all the way up, richer, sharper, even fiercer, at every rung of the ascent. How if this invasion of her own being in marriage from which she had recoiled, often in the very teeth of instinct, were not, as she had supposed, merely a relic of animal life or patriarchal barbarism, but rather the lowest, the first, and the easiest form of some shocking contact with reality which would have to be repeated—but in ever larger and more disturbing modes—on the highest levels of all? (315).

(“Triumphant vindication of the body,” indeed.)

At first Jane resents this connection of the love she owes Mark to the love she owes God, thinking that “‘Religion’ ought to mean a realm in which her haunting female fear of being treated as a thing, an object of barter and desire and possession, would be set permanently at rest and what she called her ‘true self’ would soar upwards and expand” (318). Yet her conversion comes as she understands that God desires to possess her and entangle her fully and yet, in that very possession, to set her free. She realizes that she is both “a person (not the person she had thought), yet also a thing, a made thing, made to please Another and in Him to please all others, a thing being made at this very moment, without its choice, in a shape she had never dreamed of. And the making went on amidst a kind of splendor or sorrow or both, whereof she could not tell whether it was in the moulding hands or in the kneaded clay” (319).

What she is given is not a possessive God who barter her like a camel, but a God who gives her the opportunity to embrace *both* her true vocations—as visionary and as wife and mother—and who restores to her a chastened husband who now wishes to enjoy, not control, her. Some have commented (see Jacobs 258) that unlike Mark, Jane *is* asked to give up her career in order to exercise her vocation, but that ignores the fact that at the end of the book, Mark’s career is also in shambles (despite Curry’s ambitions to re-found Bracton). We don’t know what his vocation will turn out to be; perhaps he will put his sociological training in service to the community at St. Anne’s, as Denniston has done.

Lewis and Conversion

What Lewis pictures in Jane’s submission is, in the end, a model, not just for *female* Christians, but for all Christians. Mark has learned the same lesson, from a different angle, in his own journey. In a sense, we are *all* Jane at the crucial moment; we *all* have to learn that only in humility will we find freedom, that only in Maledil’s will can we find perfect peace, and that it is impossible as members of the Christian community to call ourselves our own. (Which *is* Biblical). Ironic, in the end, that the sexist Oxford don described the conversion of the egalitarian feminist scholar in almost the same words and images as he described his own:

I had always wanted, above all things, not to be interfered with. I had wanted — mad wish — to call my soul my own. I had been far more anxious to avoid suffering than to achieve delight. ... You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not see then what is now the most shining and obvious thing: the Divine humility will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which

will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? The words *compelle intrare*, compel them to come in, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation (*Surprised by Joy* 228-229; see also *Letters Vol. 2* 180).

¹ Less extreme versions of Barkman's thesis are put forth by Sammons and Kreeft. Sammons concludes that Jane "has to learn that true freedom is found in subjection to her husband and to the will of God" (103; see also 56). Kreeft equates the two subjections more fully, noting that once Jane finally understands that "gender goes all the way down to positive and negative electrical charges, and all the way up into the angels, and perhaps even the Trinity" she "is converted, accepting God as her spiritual husband" (177).

² See one of Lewis's later (4/7/1944) letters to Eddison: "We and your Honor in the like fashion do together so hate the androgynous and petrol-nourished monsters of this Age" that there was no sense in pursuing the issues where they disagreed spiritually until "that said monster be put down" (Lewis, *Letters*, Vol. 2 612).

³ The essay on women's ordination is now known by the unfortunate title "Priestesses in the Church," although that title was actually given to it by Walter Hooper, instead of Lewis's originally more innocuous "Notes on the Way" (see Jacobs 254).

⁴ See also Henthorne, as well as Holbrook's Freudian study arguing that the Narnia tales exemplify Lewis' misogyny and sado-masochism and thus are violent and harmful to children. For more evenhanded treatments of sexism in Lewis see Myers (especially 457) as well as Jacobs 252-262.

⁵For a dissenting opinion on the value of equality to Lewis, see Deschene, who argues that while finding monarchy and hierarchy satisfying on the level of myth and literary archetype, Lewis thought them unworkable on the practical level, and believed that hierarchy would always resolve itself into domination and totalitarianism because of the Fall. Thus Deschene claims him as a democrat and egalitarian in practice if not in theory.

⁶ In an unpublished paper delivered to the New York C. S. Lewis Society, John Granger comments that Lewis thought the metaphysical poets were over-studied in general, and that Jane's choice of Donne for a thesis topic marks her out from the beginning as a dilettante, not a serious scholar. Alan Jacobs points out, however, that the fact Jane is a student of seventeenth-century literature, while her husband is a social scientist, may have something to do with why each of them chooses the sides they do (178).

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