

Transposition of Joy in C.S. Lewis

by

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A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
English - Literary Studies

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2014

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

C.S. Lewis's lifelong pursuit of 'Joy,' in addition to being the focus of two autobiographical texts (*Surprised by Joy* and *The Pilgrim's Regress*) is also manifested throughout his fiction writing. His earliest poetry demonstrates a development in Lewis's understanding and use of the term, from synonym of *Sehnsucht* to penultimate sign of the presence of God. 'Joy' is first considered in its semantic environment with careful attention given to Lewis's technical understanding of the desire. A close reading of his earliest poetry collection, *Spirits in Bondage*, shows a longing to be free from the tyranny of modern life, free to embrace a romantic vision of the world. *Dymer* (a narrative poem) cools this early passion with the uneasy reflection that longings of this kind are unnatural, destructive, or perhaps mere illusions. Lewis's subsequent conversion to Christianity marks a change in his attitude toward Joy. No longer the passionate yet blind Joy of *Spirits in Bondage*, nor the cold and suspicious rejection of Joy in *Dymer*, Joy in Lewis's *Poems* suggests a movement toward personal encounter. Together with *The Space Trilogy*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis presents a perspective of Joy that includes considerations of human ontology. One key connection between Joy's modality and human ontology is a process Lewis calls 'Transposition.' Transposition enables the experience of Joy as a byproduct of other desires; moreover it reveals the participation between the mind and body, and between the human and God. Joy is the focal point of these operations such that its fulfillment marks both the incarnation of God into human presence and the glorification of man into God's presence.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. John North for his guidance throughout this project. His encouragement and thoughtful critiques are stamped into each page. I would also like to thank him for the many Friday afternoon meetings spent reading drafts and discussing all things Lewis. Thank you to Dr. Norman Klassen for his willingness to be a second reader and also for the numerous conversations that helped shape chapters 4 and 5. Thank you to my wife Heather for her careful editing and proofreading, and steadfast support through the challenging portions of this paper. This thesis would not have been possible without her.

Finally, thank you to my children, family and friends, who put up with the long hours, hectic schedule, and pendulum moods. I am grateful for your patience.

Dedication

To Heather, Hannah, Calvin, Lydia, and Chloe for your patience, love and support.

Table of Contents

Author's Declaration.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Economy of Joy.....	5
Chapter 2: <i>Sehnsucht</i> in <i>Spirits in Bondage</i>	22
Chapter 3: Christianity and Joy.....	36
Chapter 4: Transposition and Joy.....	59
Chapter 5: Transposition of Being.....	76
Bibliography.....	89

Introduction

In *The Pilgrim's Regress*, C.S. Lewis crystallized his perspective on Joy, a special term he ascribed to a feeling of intense desire that came to him unsought throughout his life: "What does not satisfy when we find it, was not the thing we were desiring." Lewis made this search the business of his life. *The Pilgrim's Regress* and *Surprised by Joy* approach it from the autobiographical lens. His poetry (lyric and narrative) is rife with it, both before his conversion to Christianity and afterward. His later essays and apologetics (*The Weight of Glory*, *Christian Reflections*, *Letters to Malcolm* especially) reflect with maturity on the purpose of the emotion. Akin to *Sehnsucht*, the "longing for we know not what" ultimately became a purposeful longing. Lewis's journey to understand Joy ended with the recognition that the long sought after object was Christ himself. Lewis's exploration through his writing demonstrates a growth in his understanding of Joy from the earliest years of *Spirits in Bondage* to the mature reflections of *Letters to Malcolm*. The growth is marked by Lewis's steady realization that Joy is the transposition of the presence of Christ through all of his longings. Transposition indicates a relationship between Joy and the senses that house Joy. Thus the longing for God is hidden in longings for friends, family, Fairyland, fame, and many other experiences. His essay on the topic of transposition becomes a key to unlocking the modality of Joy: it exists as a byproduct, a residue, a signpost, and ultimately as the incarnation of the presence of Christ himself.

The frequent references to Lewis's life in this work do not proceed from a desire to connect autobiographical moments with literary ones. The goal is never to focus on a specific text as an example of a specific mental or emotional state in Lewis's experience. Instead, each work is considered first as it appeals to the imagination and senses and second as an example of the theme of Joy as Lewis considered it. It is because Lewis was so preoccupied with Joy that he writes so broadly about it.

Chapter 1, *The Economy of Joy*, defines Joy and places it at the center of a range of semantic ideas. *Sehnsucht* is considered as a synonym of Joy; German and English literature that reflect on longing are brought forward as examples both of the roots of the concept and of a literary lineage for Lewis. Novalis and George MacDonald feature heavily, both having influenced Lewis in his articulation of Joy and his love of romance.

Chapter 2, *Sehnsucht in Spirits in Bondage*, explores the articulation of *Sehnsucht* in Lewis's earliest work; it is a reading of *Spirits in Bondage* that seeks to understand the cycle as a frustrated movement toward the object of desire. Three sub-movements are present and correspond with Lewis's subdivision in the text. First, "The Prison House" suggests the attitude that mankind, against his own will and due to God's will, can never attain Joy – he is trapped by a cruel deity. This section presents different avenues for escape, culminating in the languid repose symbolized by sleep. The desire for escape into ultimate rest gives way to "Hesitation," a short section of three poems that expresses Lewis's distrust of his previous object of desire. Sleep, it seems, cannot keep out the nagging doubts and haunting experience of desire that penetrates past its lulling dreams. Jarred from this half-sleep or semi-consciousness, the poet seeks to escape from the cruel god as well as the unsatisfying indulgence in lower orders. Both have chained him from pursuing his true longing, the former by means of cruel withholding, the latter by illusion of fulfillment. This final push for independence uncovers a disturbing question for both the speaker of *Spirits in Bondage* and Lewis: What if the object of the desire is a person? Lewis makes it clear, both in the poetry and his autobiography, that this question haunted him; he was horrified lest *Sehnsucht* direct him to the god he had railed against.

Chapter 3, *Christianity and Joy*, opens by arguing that the haunting personality was both the impetus for writing his first narrative poem, *Dymer*, and also a catalyst for Lewis's

conversion to Christianity. In *Dymer*, *Sehnsucht* is exposed as destructive, illusory, and in need of transformation. Ultimately it is Dymer's self-sacrifice that slays his former longing and brings Lewis full circle in his struggle to understand Joy. Reborn, the desire becomes angelic, a foreshadowing of Lewis's subsequent conversion. Despite his concern that he must abandon his pursuit of Joy, Lewis finds that his conversion transforms his entire perspective. Joy was indeed pointing to a person, to an object of fulfillment, which he now associates with God. The poetry of this period, as well as his *Space Trilogy*, *Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Till We Have Faces* all demonstrate this new orientation of Joy.

Chapter 4, *Transposition and Joy*, draws from Lewis's sermon "Transposition" in order to consider the mode of Joy as it operates in Lewis's fiction and broader thought. In the sermon, Lewis suggests a peculiar relationship between richer and poorer media, such that the expression of the emotional life in the body has a transformative effect. Taking its cue from this analysis, this chapter shows that the mode of Joy is in fact a transposition of the presence of God into ordinary desires in human experience. What Lewis calls "flashes" or "slag" of Joy are in fact the same longings he felt for nature, human intimacy, belonging, knowledge, and many other things in his early life. He interprets these as carriers of Joy, sent to direct the soul to search for the element that could not be found in the earthly fulfillment. Chapter 4 closes by suggesting that, not only does transposition uncover the mode of Joy, it also suggests ontological implications for humanity. Instead of an ontology that sees emotional life as a mere development from bodily functions, or thought life as synapses and chemical reactions in the brain, Lewis considers transposition a more probable explanation of the relationship between richer and poorer media.

Chapter 5, *Transposition of Being*, considers the ontological implications of transposition. It shows how Joy (experienced in the present as a byproduct of other desires)

changes the human experience. *The Great Divorce* and *Till We Have Faces* showcase the ontological arguments presented in this chapter. Through these texts, incarnation is presented as the ultimate example of transposition, since it is the translation of the richest of mediums (the being of God) into the being of man. This establishes the foundation for Lewis's ontological claims regarding man's transformation – being drawn up into the godhead. Just as Lewis's conversion altered his approach to the whole dynamic of longing, so too, the final apprehension of Joy – as glorification of the person to a position in the presence of God – shifts the pursuit from a vague desire to a tangible relationship. Moreover, the expectation of longing, which was an unobtainable blend between “having” and “wanting,” is fulfilled in the paradigm of glory, where the two completely co-exist.

Chapter 1: The Economy of Joy

In recollecting his first meeting and subsequent relationship with C.S. Lewis, George Sayer (a pupil of Lewis at Magdalen College, Oxford) writes:

Even after I had been taught by him for three years, it never entered my mind that he could one day become an author whose books would sell at the rate of about two million copies a year. Since he never spoke of religion while I was his pupil, or until we had become friends fifteen years later, it would have seemed incredible that he would become a means of bringing many back to the Christian faith.¹

The popularity of C.S. Lewis today has prompted the release of *The Chronicles of Narnia* in motion picture, and his apologetic and theological writings are a common point of enthusiasm among Christians worldwide. In his time, Lewis was widely known for his radio broadcasts during the war.² The book produced from those broadcasts became *Mere Christianity*, arguably the broadest defense of the faith possible without losing the particulars. Despite this success, as Sayer suggests, Lewis was a very private person, tending not to engage in spiritual discussions unless otherwise prompted. In religious matters and questions he always considered himself an amateur, and was quick to point out this fact in his writing.³ Moreover, he disdained to focus on the merely autobiographical, finding it tedious. Speaking about his own autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis writes, “The story is, I fear, suffocatingly subjective; the kind of thing I have never written before and shall probably never write again.”⁴ His dislike of the public expression of the details of his life is overcome by another profound impetus. Speaking of a mysterious experience called Joy, Lewis says: “the central story of my life is about nothing

¹ Sayer, *Jack: C.S. Lewis and His Times*, xvi.

² *Ibid.*, xvi.

³ Lewis, *The Complete Signature Classics*, 6.

In the preface to *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes a typical warning: “the questions which divide Christians from one another often involve points of high Theology or even ecclesiastical history which ought never to be treated except by real experts. I should have been out of my depth in such waters; more in need of help myself than able to help others.”

⁴ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 7-8.

else.”⁵ His reticence to draw attention to himself is overcome for the purpose of explaining Joy.⁶ In fact, Lewis sums up the story of his life by suggesting that it was almost exclusively the search for Joy. He writes about the emotion in letters, novels, poems, apologetics, and literary criticism. But the crystallization of this term in Lewis’s thought includes a cluster of other terms that need to be assessed and distinguished. For, as Lewis says, “[he calls] it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure.”⁷ Understanding the semantic economy of Joy is a precursor to understanding its place in Lewis’s writing and conversion as well as its relationship to transposition. Transposition is “to move across,” “to interchange position,” or “to alter order.”⁸ It is also the title of an essay from *The Weight of Glory*, a collection of papers and sermons written by Lewis. He found transposition to be a useful term for describing the relationship between the mind and the body.

The phrase ‘economy of Joy’ suggests two things. First, Joy is semantically distinct primarily because Lewis chose this word to describe his feeling. One dictionary definition of joy is “a vivid emotion of pleasure arising from a sense of well-being or satisfaction.”⁹ Yet, this is not what Lewis had in mind:

Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief.¹⁰

Desire is the root of the emotion, not pleasure. Thus, when considering all the related emotional experiences, the German *Sehnsucht* comes closest to being a synonym for Joy. *Sehnsucht* means

⁵ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 20.

⁶ For this paper, I will be referring to Lewis’s conception of Joy with a capital “J.” This is how he referred to it in his writings.

⁷ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 20.

⁸ “transposition, n.” OED Online. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 7 December 2014.

⁹ “joy, n.” OED Online. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 7 December 2014.

¹⁰ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 20.

“yearning or wistful longing.”¹¹ The other aspect of the economy of Joy is the notion of a hierarchy of emotional experience. The quotation above hints at it: Joy may be characterized by pleasure, however, it may also arise from unhappiness or grief. The experience of pleasure is less complex than Joy because Joy shares in the qualities of a variety of emotional experience. To understand the full economy of Joy is to ascertain the nature of this hierarchy. Each layer adds to the significance of Joy and gives insight into its mode of operation. Of special note in this economy is the *Sehnsucht*. In one sense, using the word ‘hierarchy’ helps to give define Joy – helps to showcase its contours. In another sense, it obscures one aspect. There is no evidence to suggest that *Sehnsucht* is “less” than Joy, that it is semantically inferior. Almost the opposite case might be made. To isolate Joy from its normal usage seems puzzling when a perfectly suitable word – *Sehnsucht* – is already in use. However, in the final analysis, it is Joy that becomes more semantically diverse in Lewis’s thought, while *Sehnsucht* remains a complex but ultimately limited term. Thus, in order to establish a thorough definition of Joy, *Sehnsucht* must be considered. A number of examples from German and English literature will establish the foundation upon which a definition can be raised.

In his essay comparing *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and *Surprised by Joy*, David Jasper notes that *Sehnsucht* and Joy are “profoundly expressed in the poetry of Wordsworth and Hölderlin.”¹² Wordsworth’s “Surprised by joy – impatient as the Wind” impacted Lewis to the extent that he used it as the title for his autobiography:

Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind
 I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom
 But Thee, long buried in the silent Tomb,
 That spot which no vicissitude can find?
 Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—

¹¹ “*Sehnsucht*, n.”. OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press. 16 December 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/174907?redirectedFrom=Sehnsucht>>.

¹² MacSwain and Ward, *The Cambridge Companion*, 224.

But how could I forget thee?—Through what power,
 Even for the least division of an hour,
 Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
 To my most grievous loss!—That thought's return
 Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
 Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
 Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
 That neither present time, nor years unborn
 Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.¹³

The speaker's desire to share the surprising pleasure with the one he loves turns into a lament for that one and himself. *Sehnsucht* is expressed in "that thought's return / was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore. / Save one..." The self-chastisement at forgetting and the longing for grief – to continually feel the pang of loss so as not to forget – are hallmarks of Lewis's term Joy. Likewise, Hölderlin's poem, "*Zornige Sehnsucht*" (Angry Longing) suggests similar themes: *Soll ewig Trauern mich umwolken? / Ewig mich töten die zornige Sehnsucht?*¹⁴ This could be translated, "Will mourning forever cloud me? / Will angry longings forever destroy me?" The loss pictured here emphasizes the debilitating nature of *Sehnsucht*. The grief itself is eternal (*ewig*) and destructive. Yet the poet would rather continue dw killed by *Sehnsucht* rather than let go of his grief. In addition to the heart-wrenching aspect, Jasper suggests that both Hölderlin and Wordsworth pinpoint "the joyful anticipation which are the true homecoming."¹⁵ Wordsworth's joyous remembrance of Tintern Abbey is indicative of this:

-that serene and blessed mood,
 in which the affections gently lead us on,
 until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
 and even the motion of our human blood
 almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 in body, and become a living soul:
 while with an eye made quiet by the power
 of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

¹³ Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, 334.

¹⁴ Friedrich Hölderlin: *Complete Works*, Volume 1, 90-92.

¹⁵ MacSwain and Ward, *The Cambridge Companion*, 224.

we see into the life of things.¹⁶

Wordsworth identifies it as a mood (lead by the affections) that hushes, stills, and even suspends and gives a unique vision “into the life of things.” Wordsworth feels at home in his memory, is able to see the past (with its desires, joys, and beautiful landscapes) with unique perspective, and is able to experience again the pleasure of relationships.

These aspects of *Sehnsucht* – wracked longing for a person combined with the anticipation of homecoming – are also a feature of some of the earliest English literature. In the Anglo Saxon poem, “The Wanderer,” the speaker travels in search of his lord, longing for a time when he might return, and advising young people in the way they ought to live:

Ponne beoð þy hefigran	Then are the heavier
heortan benne,	the wounds of the heart,
sare æfter swæsne.	grievous with longing for the lord.
Sorg bið geniwad	Sorrow is renewed
þonne maga gemynd	when the mind surveys
mod geondhweorfeð;	the memory of kinsmen; ¹⁷

Like Hölderlin and Wordsworth, the Anglo Saxon poet identifies the integral connection between longing, sorrow, and the mind. “Wounds of the heart” are “heavier” than the wounds incurred by the body in battle. The longing for his master and the longing for an end to his wandering weigh on the wanderer’s mind. Additionally, like Wordsworth, the speaker suggests a special role for memory in evoking *Sehnsucht*. Sorrow is renewed by the memory of fallen kinsmen; the mind cannot but bring up these events. Thus, *Sehnsucht* is a cyclical phenomenon.

“The Wanderer” may be one of the earliest examples of the theme of *Sehnsucht* or longing in English. In German, another early poet to consider the theme at length was Novalis

¹⁶Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, 132-133.

¹⁷ Sean Miller, “The Wanderer,” *Anglo-saxons.net*, 2014, <http://www.anglo-saxons.net/hwaet/?do=get&type=text&id=wdr>.

(1772 – 1801). His novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is the source of the iconic *blaue blume*, a symbol of German romanticism, longing, and love.¹⁸ More than this though, Novalis inspired George MacDonald, who, in turn, inspired Lewis. MacDonald translated Novalis’s *Hymnen an die Nacht* (Hymns to the Night), and found the German writer particularly skilled at expressing the nature of longing and the romantic notions of faerie.¹⁹ In the third hymn, MacDonald translates the German phrase, *verlöschten Leben mit unendlicher Sehnsucht hing*²⁰ as “extinguished life with an endless longing.”²¹ Later he translates part of a poem as, “Divided from the loved, whom, broken-hearted, / Vain longing tosses and unceasing woe—”²² Here *Sehnsucht* is described as “vain” and given an active role in the suffering of the loved. Much of the *Sehnsucht* of the Hymns focuses on the life of Christ. Not only do the people surrounding Christ long for his return (Novalis pictures some at Christ’s tomb weeping), but Christ himself, “full of longing, [hastens] into thy father’s arms.”²³ It is clear from Novalis that *Sehnsucht* is an emotional experience with a definite object. This is in keeping with the notions of pleasure, pain, unhappiness and the rest. Each has a source, and in the case of the “lower” emotions, the source is frequently known to the subject. What is hidden from the subject is the means of alleviating the *Sehnsucht*. In the case of the followers of Christ weeping at his tomb, they have no power to dispel the longing (by bringing Christ back). The closest they can come to relief is to remain in a perpetual (cyclical) state of longing, to desire the desire itself. Novalis and especially MacDonald shaped Lewis’s imagination by vivid depictions of this romantic longing.

¹⁸ Van Dyke, *The Blue Flower*. In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis remarks that he became a “votary of the Blue Flower” after experiencing *Sehnsucht* as a child. The specific event was the view of a low line of hills from his nursery window, which were “unattainable.”

¹⁹ Macdonald, trans. “Novalis – Hymns to the Night,” *The Golden Key*, 1995, http://www.george-macdonald.com/etexts/hymns_to_the_night.html.

²⁰ Novalis, “Novalis: Hymnen an die Nacht,” *Spiegel Online*, 2014, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/hymnen-an-die-nacht-5237/4>.

²¹ Macdonald, trans. “Novalis – Hymns to the Night,” *The Golden Key*, 1995.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

MacDonald's first prose work, *Phantastes*, is a treasure-trove of *Sehnsucht*. This romance tells of the journey of Anodos into fairy-country. This journey is marked by many moments of longing. A number of these occurrences depict the nature of *Sehnsucht* and also demonstrate MacDonald's influence on Lewis's imagination. Early in his adventure, Anodos attempts to free a beautiful figure from its encasement in marble by singing a song. MacDonald records the close of the song, and the effect on the woman:

But words are vain; reject them all—
They utter but a feeble part:
Hear thou the depths from which they call,
The voiceless longing of my heart.

There arose a slightly crashing sound. Like a sudden apparition that comes and is gone, a white form, veiled in a light robe of whiteness, burst upwards from the stone, stood, glided forth, and gleamed away towards the woods.²⁴

The singer's desire is for the woman frozen in marble to come alive. He recognizes that his words are too poor a medium to convey his feeling, that "voiceless longing" is the only substantial sound of the heart. Moreover, the words proceed from the depth of "longing." The idea that longing, *Sehnsucht*, or Joy is a particular depth of emotion brings to mind the idea of transposition mentioned earlier. That is, at particular intensities, emotions (even opposite emotions like pain and pleasure) transform into longing. MacDonald describes this intensity as an overflow of wonderment in another passage:

But as soon as I looked out of the window, a gush of wonderment and longing flowed over my soul like the tide of a great sea. Fairy Land lay before me, and drew me towards it with an irresistible attraction.²⁵

²⁴ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 40.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

The longing described here is immediate. Unlike *Sehnsucht* brought about by the steady survey of the memory, as in the earlier examples of Wordsworth, here the feeling is immediate and powerful, nearly drowning the speaker.

Not only this, but MacDonald highlights another feature of *Sehnsucht*: it is irresistible.

Connected to this, Anodos also finds longing to be insatiable:

And my heart fainted with longing in my bosom. Could I but see the Spirit of the Earth, as I saw once the in dwelling woman of the beech-tree, and my beauty of the pale marble, I should be content. Content!²⁶

The hope of final contentment – of truly possessing the object sought for – is always deferred in the economy of Joy. Here Anodos exclaims that it would only take one sight of the Spirit of the Earth to content him. Yet, he is thwarted in that desire. Later in *Phantastes*, while exploring a palace, Anodos finds a library in which the books he reads come to life, or rather, he experiences the accounts first hand. In one such book, he describes a world of winged beings who (among other things) possess a peculiar foreknowledge of their death

The sign or cause of coming death is an indescribable longing for something, they know not what, which seizes them, and drives them into solitude, consuming them within, till the body fails. When a youth and a maiden look too deep into each other's eyes, this longing seizes and possesses them; but instead of drawing nearer to each other, they wander away, each alone, into solitary places, and die of their desire.²⁷

It was observed earlier that *Sehnsucht* is directed toward an object. Novalis suggested Christ as a common object of longing. MacDonald has also shown that longing is often directed toward a person. In the romance, these creatures experience a longing for “they know not what.” It is so powerful that it drives them away from one another, into solitude, and ultimately to their death. Not only this, but the longing “possesses them.” The implication is that this kind of longing is of

²⁶ Ibid., 67.

²⁷ Ibid., 83-84.

a more intense variety than mere desire for pleasure, friends, or lovers. It bypasses the will.

Later in *Phantastes*, MacDonald expresses the strangeness of being possessed by longing:

I heard a few wondrous tones coming I knew not whence. But they did not last long enough to convince me that I had heard them with the bodily sense. Such as they were, however, they took strange liberties with me, causing me to burst suddenly into tears, of which there was no presence to make me ashamed, or casting me into a kind of trance of speechless delight, which, passing as suddenly, left me faint and longing for more.²⁸

These lines are an echo of Lewis's description of the kind of desire brought about when he first saw his brother's toy garden: "It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what?... before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone."²⁹ "Passing suddenly" is the common thread. In suggesting that the music might not have affected "the bodily sense," MacDonald is pointing to the transcendent feature of *Sehnsucht* and Joy. These experiences do not depend primarily on the operation of the senses. Sometimes, as is the case with the toy garden, they enter through the senses, but Lewis also reflects on Joy as a desire to participate in the inner circle, or "to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside."³⁰ He is referring to the common desire for recognition by those who are superior to us, an experience Lewis knew well in his school years. While at Malvern, he "worshipped"³¹ the BLOODS of his school, a student ruling class. The desire for acceptance by these older boys, to be praised by them, is not spurred by a particular sensory experience, but by a need for belonging.

One final quote from MacDonald uncovers yet another aspect of *Sehnsucht*:

We weep for gladness, weep for grief;
The tears they are the same;
We sigh for longing, and relief;

²⁸ Ibid., 108.

²⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 19.

³⁰ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 16.

³¹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 38.

The sighs have but one name.³²

The conflation of two emotions into one experience – hinted at by Lewis’s idea of transposition – signals both the complexity of human experience of emotions, and the place of longing as a site in which the emotions grow together. While this will be discussed at length in chapter 4, for now it is important to recognize that *Sehnsucht* itself suggests the translation of our emotional experience into our bodily experience. The tears of gladness and of grief use the same channel of expression in the bodily medium.

In addition to the influence of MacDonald and Novalis, Lewis mentions that his articulation of what he calls Joy “has been much better done by Traherne and Wordsworth, but every man must tell his own tale.” Thomas Traherne, an English clergymen and mystic, wrote a number of poems on the theme of longing. “Desire” may be one of the poems Lewis had in mind when he suggested Traherne was better suited to describe Joy:

For giving me desire,
An eager thirst, a burning ardent fire,
A virgin infant flame,
A love with which into the world I came,
An inward hidden heavenly love,
Which in my soul did work and move,
And ever, ever me inflame
With restless longing, heavenly avarice,
That never could be satisfied,
That did incessantly a paradise
Unknown suggest, and something undescribed
Discern, and bear me to it; be
Thy name forever praised by me.³³

Traherne adds to longing a final, significant feature: otherworldly object. So far, *Sehnsucht* has been considered as possessing an object (as in base emotions), possessing an unattainable object, and possessing no discernable object. Traherne takes it a step further and suggests God for the

³² Macdonald, *Phantastes*, 150.

³³ Traherne, *Poetical Works*, 108.

object of our longing. This poem bears all the markings of longing so far discussed: intense desire, restlessness, impossibility of satisfaction, necessity, the unknown, and the indescribable. Yet, he also elevates two truths: that man is born with the desire and that it is a desire for heaven (or God). Traherne expresses this more explicitly in stanza VIII of “The Anticipation:”

Wants are the fountains of Felicity;
No joy could ever be
Were there no want. No bliss,
No sweetness perfect, were it not for this.
Want is the greatest pleasure
Because it makes all treasure.
O what a wonderful profound abyss
Is God! In whom eternal wants and treasures
Are more delightful since they both are pleasures.³⁴

This hope of fulfillment points to a mature perspective on Joy that Lewis arrived at after his conversion and points beyond the unknown of *Sehnsucht*. It is a fulfillment that does not simply remove longing, but sees it fulfilled because the eternal want is met by an eternal God.

It is clear from a brief observation of both English and German poets, that longing or *Sehnsucht* is very closely linked to Lewis’s Joy. Having considered examples of the expression of *Sehnsucht*, this paper establishes a definition of it in order to place the emotion in the context of Joy. Following this is the final step of distinguishing Joy’s trait of “fulfillment” (as briefly alluded to in Traherne’s poem).

In *Toward a developmental psychology of Sehnsucht*,³⁵ Susan Scheibe *et al.* describe six characteristics that make up *Sehnsucht*. They are summarized in the following way:

- a) utopian conceptions of ideal development; (b) sense of incompleteness and imperfection of life; (c) conjoint time focus on the past, present, and future; (d) ambivalent

³⁴ Traherne, *Poetical Works*, 84.

³⁵ Scheibe, Freund and Baltes, “Toward a developmental psychology,” *Developmental Psychology*, Vol 43(3), 778-795. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17484587>.

(bittersweet) emotions; (e) reflection and evaluation of one's life; and (f) symbolic richness.³⁶

It is not necessary that all 6 characteristics be present before an experience is called *Sehnsucht*. As suggested above, *Sehnsucht* is similar to longing and desire such that the two ideas are always semantically present in *Sehnsucht*. However, as Scheibe *et al.* point out, *Sehnsucht* also evokes the qualitative framework: ambivalent emotions. While *Sehnsucht* (like Joy) can have the quality of pain, pleasure, or both (bittersweet), desire and longing do not possess this semantic dimension. Instead, in regular speech, qualifiers are used to identify the qualitative dimension, as in the phrase, “it was a painful longing.” This does not mean that *Sehnsucht* or Joy identify with a particular qualitative aspect in every utterance, but only that *Sehnsucht* and Joy are semantically complex enough to carry the qualitative without explicit reference.³⁷ The idea of complex and simple emotions is extended to the rest of the words associated with Joy. Pain and pleasure are more basic than desire, but less basic than sensations in the finger. Pain can be extended to include mental or emotional experiences, but chest palpitations are uniquely physical. This is the first step of Transposition that Lewis discusses in *The Weight of Glory*: emotions can be transposed into sensations. Lewis says,

...the very same sensation does not merely accompany, nor merely signify, diverse and opposite emotions, but becomes part of them. The emotion descends bodily, as it were, into the sensation and digests, transforms, transubstantiates it, so that the same thrill along the nerves *is* delight or *is* agony.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ This idea is central to a later discussion on the significance of transposition, and will be revisited. For now the purpose is to show that the internal testimony of a person experiencing a complex emotion like *Sehnsucht* is enough to suggest the qualitative aspect. It may feel like a pain in the chest and the emotion of grief while also imparting the special essentiality of Joy: longing for the longing. In contrast, “desire,” considered in itself, will lack complexity in experience. Desire may include a physical phenomenon (chest pain) and the qualitative component of pleasure, but it will not convey the antithetical feeling of grief or unhappiness and still remain “desire.”

³⁸ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 103.

The transformation of sensations by the emotions establishes the paradigm of lower and higher orders discussed in chapter 4. For the present, it is enough to note that the paradigm means two things. First, our minds, emotions, and bodies are connected in such a way that one can be represented by another. The body “digests” emotion. Second, sensations are not merely signifiers or symbolic, but participate in the emotion. The higher order is emotional life, and it is complex enough that the lower order – physical or sensory life – must often duplicate its usage in order to “become part of” the emotion.

Sehnsucht and Joy transform not only sensations, but also emotions. This is why Scheibe can include ambivalent emotions as a characteristic of *Sehnsucht*. Just as the thrill along the nerves *is* agony, the agony *is* *Sehnsucht*. This realization is what set Lewis on a quest to understand the “what” of *Sehnsucht* (and later Joy). In his experience, he continually detected a foreign emotion that descended through other emotions into the sensations. His poetry is full of examples of *Sehnsucht* that is transposed. In “Victory,” Lewis writes the following stanza:

For these [monuments] decay: but not for that decays
The yearning, high rebellious spirit of man
That never rested yet since life began
From striving with red Nature and her ways.³⁹

The speaker is lamenting the effort of poets to create a memory of Roland that will endure. Songs fade, and monuments fall. This stanza is the turn, in which the poet says that, despite this, the human spirit will not decay. Like a Phoenix, it finds rebirth and is raised, “till the beast become a god.”⁴⁰ The yearning of man’s spirit “never rests” because it is locked in a struggle with cruel nature. It is this cyclic struggle that becomes the means for the rebirth of the spirit. Thus, the yearning to overcome becomes desirable itself, because it elevates the beast.

³⁹ Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

Transposition is present in the ideas of rebirth and the progress of transformation from beast to god. In rebirth, the creature passes from life to death and back to life. The beast, likewise moves from a position of mortality, step by step until it has become immortal.

Sehnsucht and Joy have a third characteristic beyond the essential and qualitative: a sense of fulfillment.

There came a sudden glimpse of spirit faces,
A fragrant breath to tell of flowery places
And wider oceans, breaking on the shore
For which the hearts of men are always sore.
It lies beyond endeavour.⁴¹

In “Dungeon Grates,” the speaker reflects on the prison of materialism, and the search for beauty, power, and meaning in existence. This stanza shows three ideas of interest. First, the connection between the sensations and longing: a glimpse of spirit faces, and a fragrant breath “tell” of places that man has never seen but nevertheless longs to see. Second, the ambivalence of “sore” indicates the transposition, by *Sehnsucht*, of sensation of soreness in the bones. The physical sensation of soreness is elevated to an emotion of longing. Third, the fulfillment is withheld. The speaker laments that the desired shore is “beyond” their grasp. The poem continues by explaining that many have tried to find it but failed. And while there is a resolution to this poem that serves our discussion of *Sehnsucht* and Joy, it is important to consider the characteristic of fulfillment first. Lewis found it crucial to an understanding of Joy. He described it in this way: “it [Joy] is that of unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.”⁴² Later in the autobiography he distinguishes Joy from aesthetic pleasure by saying, “it must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing.”⁴³ In “Dungeon Grates” the phrases “always sore,” and “beyond endeavour” highlight this third aspect of *Sehnsucht* and

⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴² Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 20.

⁴³ Ibid., 62.

Joy: it is never fulfilled. It is not the passive sense of unfulfilled, as in, “the event did not come to pass.” Rather, it indicates an active thwarting, as if attempts to reach *Sehnsucht* and Joy were stopped short or deflected; or, that the desired destination is out of reach. Despite the hopelessness of *Sehnsucht* and Joy, Lewis argues that it is still “more desirable” to chase after what cannot be had rather than be satisfied in some other desire.

At the outset of this chapter it was suggested that *Sehnsucht* differs from Joy in its fulfillment. Here is where the economy of Joy takes an autobiographical turn in its semantic significance for Lewis. For, though the terms represent the same thing, Lewis writes of a time when Joy itself came to mean something more. Its fulfillment suggests a development beyond the idea of *Sehnsucht* in chapter 15 of *Surprised by Joy*:

But what, in conclusion, of Joy? For that, after all, is what the story has mainly been about. To tell you the truth, the subject has lost nearly all interest for me since I became a Christian. I cannot, indeed, complain, like Wordsworth, that the visionary gleam has passed away. I believe (if the thing were at all worth recording) that the old stab, the old bittersweet, has come to me as often and as sharply since my conversion as at any time of my life whatever. But I now know that the experience, considered as a state of my own mind, had never had the kind of importance I once gave it. It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer.⁴⁴

What was once profoundly interesting for Lewis, to the point that he says his life’s story is about “nothing else,” loses all interest after his conversion.

Lewis struggled to reconcile the nature of *Sehnsucht* with his experiences of other desires. Specifically, Lewis saw that all other desires had the peculiar characteristic of possessing a real object or fulfillment. Joy did not, or so it seemed. It is precisely this search for an object for Joy that drove Lewis to pursue many different avenues of fulfillment. Describing the various attempts he made in his search, Lewis remarks: “Every one of these impressions is

⁴⁴ Ibid., 238.

wrong... For I myself have been deluded by every one of these false answers in turn, and have contemplated each of them earnestly enough to discover the cheat.”⁴⁵ He tried re-reading literature that first aroused Joy. He tried food, walks, conversation, and work. Each failed to yield the piercing pang he felt in unsought moments. In the preface to *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, Lewis considers the strange dialectic produced by the search for an object of desire:

The only fatal error was to pretend that you had passed from desire to fruition, when, in reality, you had found either nothing, or desire itself, or the satisfaction of some different desire. The dialectic of Desire, faithfully followed, would retrieve all mistakes, head you off from all false paths, and force you not to propound, but to live through, a sort of ontological proof. This lived dialectic, and the merely argued dialectic of my philosophical progress, seemed to have converged on one goal....⁴⁶

Lewis experienced this “fatal error” enough to discern the presence of a “dialectic of Desire.” That is, *Sehnsucht* became a tool for reasoning through his emotional experience, and he no longer immediately looked for the “fruit.” Put another way, his experience of *Sehnsucht* taught him the experience was ontological. It could not be rationalized, but must be lived through. By living through it, that is, suspending the search for an object of the desire and simply giving free reign to the longing, Lewis recognized a change in his perception of the relationship between the body and spirit. He no longer saw them as separable, distinct, or unrelated, but flowing in and out of each other. Of course, by the time Lewis had written *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, he was already a Christian, and was describing the new-found perspective of his past struggle over *Sehnsucht*.

The implication of the necessity of living through Joy meant that Lewis would never be satisfied by reason. As Lewis says, his philosophy and his experience needed to go hand in hand. However, Joy, in its suggestion of a true fulfillment for longing, plagued Lewis in his

⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, xiii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, iv.

early years. He was desperate to find Joy, thwarted at each turn, and gradually overcome by a rational mindset. It is to those years, and more specifically to his articulation of *Sehnsucht* in his early poetry (*Spirits in Bondage*) that this paper now turns.

Chapter 2: *Sehnsucht* in *Spirits in Bondage*

In the last chapter we considered a definition for Joy, the technical term that Lewis used to describe a feeling of intense longing. In exploring the presence of longing in both German and English literature the essential nature of joy is revealed as closely related to *Sehnsucht* and yet possessing a fundamental difference. While *Sehnsucht* suggests an experience of desire more desirable than the fulfillment of said experience, Joy ultimately suggests the final fulfillment. This chapter considers *Sehnsucht* as expressed by Lewis in his earliest poetry in order to show that the longing and objects which he pursued at that time set him on a course to encounter a personality which he did not want to encounter. This interpretation of *Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of Lyrics* highlights the place of longing and demonstrates a development in the poet's thought.

The development follows three stages roughly corresponding to the three sections of the book. In the section titled "Prison House" Lewis explores two kinds of captivity: by a malicious deity and by a cruel nature. The deity is deemed malicious because the poet's longings are aroused and never satisfied. Likewise nature's cruelty thwarts his search for fulfillment. The cruelty directly affects the imagination because it focuses all attention on the immediate sensory experience. For Lewis, nature is only concerned with survival. Mysterious longings for unknown objects leave the poet vulnerable to the harsh realities of nature. Lewis discusses the theme of "red" or "cruel" nature in "Satan Speaks," "Victory," "Ode for New Year's Day," and "Ballade Mystique." Lewis suggests that the harsh realities of nature were not the first things to trigger longing as a child; rather, the vision of his brother's toy garden gave him the longing which the real garden did not. For Lewis, the modern focus on realism in nature flew in the face of all of his longings. The second section titled "Hesitation" takes the poet's resolve to slumber, a longing for oblivion, and reframes it and reawakens the urgency of longing. The final section

titled “The Escape” suggests death as the solution to the problem of longing and the captivity at the hands of God and nature. In the final analysis the personality against which the poet has been fighting throughout *Spirits in Bondage* lingers. Moreover it is the inescapability of this personality that points Lewis in the direction of fulfillment. *Spirits in Bondage* is a showcase of unfulfilled longing yet it foreshadows a period in Lewis’ thought in which longing will have ultimate rest. This rest will not come about as a result of succumbing to oblivion, nor as a result of selfish isolation, suggest the two poles of *Spirits in Bondage*.

In *Surprised By Joy*, Lewis notes that his attempt to find the source of the experience of Joy led him to all kinds of pleasures. He searched for it in Norse literature, poetic expression as a young man, the rationalism of Kirkpatrick (the old family tutor), priggishness, and the experience of nature.⁴⁷ Just as Orual (in *Till We Have Faces*) cannot penetrate the purpose of the gods – “Why don’t they speak clearly?”⁴⁸ – Lewis does not discern that the lack of fulfillment of *Sehnsucht* pointed beyond itself. “The complaint was the answer,” writes Orual in the conclusion to the story. Lewis could have written the same about Joy. The key to understanding the puzzle it presented was the unsatisfactory nature of all natural objects in which it was experienced. Lewis’s attempt to formulate a natural explanation of the phenomenon of *Sehnsucht* permeates his early poetry – particularly *Spirits in Bondage*, which was part of his concentrated effort to satisfy the desire for recognition as a poet of national import. In the preface to *Spirits in Bondage*, Walter Hooper sums up Lewis’s approach to Joy at the time:

Those who have read his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, may recall that it is an account of how he passed from

⁴⁷ Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, xiii. Speaking about his search for the object of desire, Lewis says that “inexperienced people” mistake it for a number of things, including “hillsides,” “romantic tales,” “erotic suggestions” or even “real magic.” His point is that “every one of these impressions was wrong. The sole merit I claim for this book is that it is written by one who has proved them all to be wrong.... I know them to be wrong not by intelligence but by experience.”

⁴⁸ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 294.

atheism to Christianity; or, as he says, the story of how his early stabs of ‘Joy’ or ‘inconsolable longing’ were interpreted as a desire for one thing after another until, when he became a Christian in 1931, he saw that ‘Joy’ had all along been a pointer to, and a longing for, God. But ‘Joy’ was pointing elsewhere when these poems were written.⁴⁹

“Joy was pointing elsewhere” coincides not only with Atheism and Agnosticism, but a grim view of the world. As Hooper expresses in the rest of the preface to *Spirits in Bondage*, Lewis’s early creations, such as Loki, of “Loki Bound,” projected a dualistic frame of mind, in which life is either an utter horror and pointless, or else exhilarating and full of meaning. This bifurcation is one of the key features of *Sehnsucht* as understood in Lewis’s early work.

“Irish Nocturne” exemplifies the poet’s mood in the first section of the cycle, “Prison House.” Beholding an evening scene in Northern Ireland Lewis writes:

Bitter and bitter it is for thee, O my heart,
Looking upon this land, where poets sang,
Thus with the dreary shroud
Unwholesome, over it spread,
And knowing the fog and the cloud
In her people’s heart and head
Even as it lies for ever upon her coasts
Making them dim and dreamy lest her sons should ever arise

And remember all their boasts;
For I know that the colourless skies
And the blurred horizons breed
Lonely desire and many words and brooding and never a deed.⁵⁰

The night landscape appears as a shroud of death. The poet calls it “unwholesome.” It is a spiritual cloud preventing the hearts of the people from rising. In the midst of this, the poet recognizes that *Sehnsucht* is present. Just as the poet feels trapped by his longings, the Irish people are trapped by theirs. In both cases these lonely desires fail to accomplish anything

⁴⁹ Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, xiv.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

beyond “many words” and “brooding.” *Sehnsucht* is a negative experience in this context, for, the hope of the poet is for action. Yet everything has faded away and become useless, even the sky, whose colour is not compelling but colourless. The desire has a debilitating effect on the people because it is rooted in despair. In other words, though the poet hopes to stir up “deeds,” he is struck by the difficulty of such a task. This debilitating longing is connected to an earlier poem in the *Spirits in Bondage*, called “French Nocturne” in which a wartime vision plays out a similar lament. While gazing at a plane that appears to fly “straight into the moon” the poet reflects;

False, mocking fancy! Once I too could dream,
Who now can only see with vulgar eye
That he’s no nearer to the moon than I
And she’s a stone that catches the sun’s beam.⁵¹

The hard truths of a wartime mood descend on the poet and suffocate his imagination. The lingering question in “French Nocturne” appears in the last stanza; “What call have I to dream of anything?”⁵² These two nocturne poems point to the same spiritual reality in the life of the poet; that the war, the cruel realities of nature, or the uncaring hand of God suppresses dreams and longing to the point that the poet wonders what right he has to desire these experiences. The poet can remember a time when he used to dream and when he used to desire, but the hardness of life, death, and war cultivates a doubt in such dreams. What good are they? They give nothing tangible for man to grasp. The moon is merely “a stone” that reflects the light of the sun. To dress it up as the seat of mystical power that can control the hearts and minds of men, is to establish false hopes and aspirations sure to disappoint. Instead of giving in to longing and seeking it at all costs, the grim realities of life reign in the imagination. Fancy is both false and

⁵¹ Ibid., 4.

⁵² Ibid.

mocking; though the vulgarity of an unimaginative perspective is lamented here, it is nevertheless adopted.

Set against the vision of these nocturnes, Irish and French, are poems like “Victory.” It takes the other view of man’s spirit. As considered in chapter 1, this spirit is “yearning, high, rebellious” and “never rest[s]...striving with red nature and her ways.”⁵³ While the nocturnes suggest inability, “Victory” praises the ambitions of the human race and predicts an ascent to god-like status. These two moods, the one despairing and the other determined, reflect the tension present in the first section of *Spirits in Bondage*. “Apology” for instance, inclines to despair, as in these lines:

Go you to them and speak among them thus:
“There were no greater grief than to recall,
Down in the rotting grave where the lithe worms crawl,
Green fields above that smiled so sweet to us.”⁵⁴

The poet disdains to tell the old tales of the glory of men, though the people around him beg him to tell of the green grass and flourishing landscapes. He perceives that to do so is to “build a heaven of dreams in real hell.”⁵⁵ In other words the despair of longing for green fields is poignant because the present world is “pale and cold, / No hope is in the dawn, and no delight.”⁵⁶ Here the poet reflects on the magnitude of grief that accompanies longing. His desire makes the recollection unbearable and thus unspeakable. The poem “In Prison” reflects the same despair:

I cried out for the pain of man
I cried out for my bitter wrath
Against the hopeless life that ran
For ever in a circling path.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 19.

The poet is reflecting on the broader cycle of *Spirits in Bondage* which is characterized by these four experiences: pain, bitterness, hopelessness and endlessness. Each is a prison. Each causes the poet to cry out. It leaves no room for escape from the cycle of grief. In contrast, “To Sleep” is a determined search for a suitable residence for the god Sleep. More than this, the poet sacrifices “his own drowsy flowers”⁵⁸ in the hope that the god will honour his worship and grant rest, peace and freedom from pain:

So may he send me dreams of dear delight
And draughts of cool oblivion, quenching pain,
And sweet, half-wakeful moments in the night
To hear the falling rain.⁵⁹

As an alternative to the poems of despair in this first section of *Spirits in Bondage*, “To Sleep” looks forward to dreams of dear delight instead of shrinking back from the nightmares of existence. While it still suggests escapism – that *Sehnsucht* ultimately leads us to oblivion – it nevertheless is hopeful that the desire for rest will be rewarded by a “friendly” face and not a “frightful mask.”⁶⁰

“Ocean’s Strand” is the vision of a successful piercing of the veil (into a place of peace, rest, freedom, and beauty). This poem follows “The Philosopher,” which is a prophecy of the kind of hero that can finally reach the “forbidden land” of longing:

“That he may live a perfect whole,
A mask of the eternal soul,
And cross at last the shadowy bar
To where the ever-living are.”⁶¹

“Ocean’s Strand” takes up the theme of movement prompted by the reflections of “The Philosopher” and puts it into action. “Leave,” and “go forth,” the speaker cries, “on”⁶² through

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁶¹ Ibid., 28.

the experiences that might tire the human soul into the presence of the swooning Nereid. Here is peace, tranquility, and the dead of noon – the end of all things. “Ocean’s Strand” is a movement from the intense and raucous labour of the world, through the noises of nature to the stillness of the spirit of water. It is not the chaotic experience of a storm at sea that the speaker longs for – and that the heroic man adventures toward – but the ending of all chaos in the hidden recesses of the human soul. This idea of languid rest (not even thoughtful meditation) echoes Lewis’s earlier embodiment of Loki, who sees all acts of creation by Odin as fundamentally problematic, and filled with pain and loss: “In all the universe the harshest law, / No soul must ever die.”⁶³ Here in “Ocean’s Strand,” the soul comes close to that ultimate rest, a paralytic, drowsy, thoughtless dreaming.

Lewis bolsters this view in “Noon,” the poem which follows and expands on the final scene of “Ocean’s Strand.” Here, at noontime, the hour “drags heavily,” creatures “swoon and sink as if dead,” flowers can barely lift “weary” petals, and the music of the place is the drowsy drone of a bee.⁶⁴ The poem climaxes with the vision of a maiden asleep beneath the shade, “drunken with the excess / of the noontide’s loveliness.”⁶⁵ This is the high-noon of man’s heroic, romantic vision to be free from the tyranny of existence. Two poems later, the speaker of “Sonnet” continues the reverie with the question: “Why could a man not loiter in that bower / Until a thousand painless cycles wore, / And then – what if it held him evermore?”⁶⁶ It is a form of escapism that ends not with the acquisition of some greater experience, or relationship, but the eradication of any sense of acquisition. It is, in one sense, the antithesis of longing – the destruction of it. This early approach to the puzzle of longing was one of Lewis’s solutions to

⁶² Ibid., 29.

⁶³ King, *Poet: The Legacy*, 267.

⁶⁴ Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, 31.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 33.

the problem of recurring desire. In essence he says, “If the longing cannot be fulfilled (or is always withheld), I will escape the cycle.”

Of course, the poet’s attempt to escape from prison through these dream-like visions did not fully account for Lewis’s experience of nature. This is why he includes part two of *Spirits in Bondage: Hesitation*. The opening poem, “L’Apprenti Sorcier,” is the opposite of the subdued, quiet, slumbering world of “Noon.” Here “the music of the mighty sea thunders with a deeper roar.”⁶⁷ Tides “leap,” “dark enormous breakers rise and fall with deafening thunder,”⁶⁸ and elemental people cry out. The central idea, which flies in the face of earlier resolutions of escape embodied by the Nereid, is expressed by these elemental people:

“Leap in! Leap in, and take thy fill
Of all the cosmic good and ill,
Be as the Living ones that know
Enormous joy, enormous woe
Pain beyond thought and fiery bliss.”⁶⁹

The romantic, heroic vision of undisturbed sleep is jarred awake. The speaker “strives to waken” from this second vision “because I feared the flood.” Instead of the sleep of death is the pain of life. Instead of misty, vague, and carefree dreams of the minutiae of gardens is the knowledge of enormous joy and woe, as well as pain. Instead of the local, morally indifferent society of bees and birds is the all-encompassing battle of good and evil. Finally, instead of cool refreshing waters in which to languish, the speaker flees from “fiery bliss.”

“Alexandrines” (which follow “L’Apprenti Sorcier”) takes this fearful sentiment one step further by suggesting not only vivid, dreadful involvement in the messiness of life, but the dangerous chance of meeting with personality. On three occasions Lewis extends past the regular twelve-syllable line, the most notable emphasizing the vivid fear: “And I fear to cross the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 40.

garden, I fear to linger there.”⁷⁰ The line is pushed to fourteen syllables, which emphasizes the terror felt by the speaker (fear appears twice in the line), and mimics the awkward lingering the speaker feels in the garden. Also, the poem begins with an elegiac, but ends in heroic rhyme scheme. The switch happens in a line that ends in the phrase, “the gaping flags between” which prompts one to ask which kind of poem this is? Lewis is signaling a mood between the elegiac and heroic, one that participates in both and yet is neither. The poem’s lack of resolution in its meter and rhyme mirror the uneasiness with which the speaker passes into the house, fearful of meeting the one who will doom him. Both “L’Apprenti Sorcier” and “Alexandrines” lead Lewis to the realization that his longing is drawing him into a confrontation with something beyond the experience (and something potentially outside of nature). He fears now the same “silent garden house” because there is a room in which:

Someone’s always waiting, waiting in the gloom
To draw me with an evil eye, and hold me fast –
Yet thither doom will drive me and He will win at last⁷¹

The horror of this impending doom is captured beautifully in the next poem, “In Praise of Solid People,” where the speaker suggests that those who give no thought to the longings of their souls, and are not troubled by the realization that they are trapped by a malicious spirit who will never give them fulfillment, ought to be envied. Here the silence is not welcomed, but the occasion for mock dreams that beguile the speaker.⁷² This poem closes the section called Hesitation, and Lewis’s remarkable ability to capture the anxiety of the mind is seen in the second to last stanza:

And still no nearer to the Light,
And still no further from myself,
Alone and lost in clinging night

⁷⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 44.

-(The clock's still ticking on the shelf).⁷³

The light is a solution to the problem of *Sehnsucht*. Lewis could not envision an object that fully satisfied his desires, and felt that every attempt to grasp this light was thwarted by a dark and callous God. Also, the speaker realizes that he has made no progress to evade, avoid, or fulfill the presence of longing in his own experience. The heroic spirit of “The Philosopher” and “Ocean’s Strand” has not moved, and in fact, now haunts him. The section closes, “Then do I envy solid folk / who.... Are not fretted by desire.”⁷⁴

This haunting of desire, and the despair that some malevolent force makes it forever unreachable, gives way, in the third part (Escape) to visions and inklings of this personality in a different light. The vision begins with confidence reinstated by “Songs of the Pilgrims” in the refrain:

“But, ah God! We know
That somewhere, somewhere past the Northern Snow
Waiting for us the red-rose gardens blow.”⁷⁵

The critical line comes near the end, when the Pilgrims say, “we seek and seek your land. How have we sinned?”⁷⁶ This question becomes the focal point for Lewis’s transformed perspective of *Sehnsucht*. “How can it be wrong to long for your country” is, in essence, the question: “How can it be wrong to long for you?” This question stimulates a reassessment of the personality that has haunted Lewis throughout this period. The next two poems in *Spirits in Bondage* carry forward this renewal with visions of this personality. In “Songs,” it is “the bright footprints of God,”⁷⁷ and in “The Ass,” we hear of the donkey as “a mask of God.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, “Our

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 51.

Daily Bread” features “a strange god’s face.”⁷⁹ But these visions do not finally resolve into either a distinct person or a final resolution to the question of longing – that is, its purpose. In “Hymn (For Boys’ Voices)” the sweet call of God “could be man’s peculiar dower, / Even mine, this very hour” if only the speaker “could but understand,” and “if we learned to think aright.”⁸⁰ In other words, with the person in sight – the source and object of longing – Lewis still searches for a natural solution. Instead of submitting to the God who “leave[s] us no will nor choice,”⁸¹ Lewis turns to the power of reason. This is why Angus (in “How He Saw Angus the God”) is changed into a bull “when I followed him beyond the wood.”⁸² The brief vision of the glorious passing of the god is altered because reason cannot sustain the vision.⁸³

Here *Spirits in Bondage* takes a final turn. Lewis returns to a focus on the longing itself in the closing poems of the cycle – from “The Roads” to “Death in Battle.” The conviction that the “utter west,” the “land of the gods,” the place for a homeless wanderer, and the “Country of Dreams” is worth pursuing despite no obvious natural explanation and despite the lack of assurance that he will arrive, completes the end of the cycle.⁸⁴ It is an escape from the problem of bondage to a malicious deity, and it is also an escape from his personal infatuation with the lower orders of pleasure (embodied by the Nereid, sleep, rest, and languor). The escape begins with the rejection that the home country is mere fantasy, or wishful thinking. That it does have a basis in reality. This is seen in “Song of the Pilgrims” with phrases like “We have found nothing

⁷⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁸¹ Ibid., 58.

⁸² Ibid., 61.

⁸³ This transformation of Angus in the eyes of the speaker is also a metaphor for transposition set in Lewis’s early thought. For just as the intensity of the higher order must be simplified in its transition to a lower order, so too the complex vision of the glory of the god settles into the lower order of a bull. The significance of transposition for Lewis’s early thought is that, while he understood the emotional experience of longing referenced something other than the initial experience, he was unable to see the final, glorious personality to which it referred. Instead, he stopped short in following the trail of transposition, and – at this stage – saw only the natural (yet still glorious) desire of the desire. He interpreted this as the final source, though it remained a paradox.

⁸⁴ Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, 74-75.

worth a moment's care / Because the real flowers are blowing there."⁸⁵ "Song of the Pilgrims" does not answer the question of how the Pilgrims know these things, but it foreshadows the final turn.

"The Roads" suggest Lewis's most robust conception of *Sehnsucht* to this point. It is robust because it finally includes the mysterious sense of "seeking for the lands no foot has trod and the seas no sail has known."⁸⁶ In other words, instead of seeing fulfillment in the immediate pleasures, and instead of fearing the presence of some megalomaniacal person at the source of longing, Lewis suggests a final, hearty ambivalence. The gods, or God, may be in that peculiar country, but they are "unseen in their valleys green [and they] are glad."⁸⁷ Nature's function as a guide toward that country (instead of toward oblivion) features heavily in "The Roads," "Hesperus," "The Star Bath," and "World's Desire." "Hesperus" and "The Star Bath" personify the heavens. The former poem elicits the desire to "follow / In thy footsteps bright... / To find my heart's delight."⁸⁸ He is speaking of the trajectory of the sun from the East to the West, and remarking on the power of this image to evoke the language of longing. Moreover, the footsteps point to a spiritual trajectory transposed in the vision of nature. "Star Bath" reveals a vision of the heavens in which the stars come together to take a bath in a freezing pool. The speaker personifies the heavenly bodies "that now remember, knowing not where or when."⁸⁹ Through their ageless eyes (that of the planets and stars), Lewis sees the fundamental principle of the memory of longing. That is, the memories of the place from which joy arises is transposed in our senses, in our nervous systems, and even though these things cannot tell us "where or when," they nevertheless testify to the reality of the source. As such, our sensual and rational responses

⁸⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 67.

to the things of nature are guides. Though they seem mute and deaf, they are not false guides. “World’s Desire” returns the vision of a trajectory of longing first encountered in the picture of the heavens to an earthly subject. A castle is nestled high in the mountains, surrounded by forest, ravine, raging river, and pounded by an unceasing northern wind. The wind is the spirit of longing that “will not rest”⁹⁰ and drives everyone to seek shelter. The faerie maiden, a foil to the Nereid pictured earlier in the cycle, “sing[s] of the world’s regret” and “wanders wild.”⁹¹ She weeps and longs for rest, and “looks with vain endeavour”⁹² toward the castle, but without a soul, all her loveliness is not enough to gain access. It is the admission that Lewis’s earlier focus on natural means of grasping the source of longing (being without a soul), as lovely and robust as they are, will not succeed. The poem concludes with the hope that the speaker has grown beyond the wailing of the maiden, and that there is (he does not know how or when) ultimately a place for him in the castle.

“Tu Ne Quaesieris,” is a summation of the whole journey. At the end of the cycle the poet still struggles to understand himself:

“Yet what were endless lives to me
If still my narrow self I be
And hope and fail and struggle still,
And break my will against God’s will,
To play for stakes of pleasure and pain
And hope and fail and hope again,
Deluded, thwarted, striving elf
That through the window of my self
As through a dark glass scarce can see
A warped and masked reality?”⁹³

The title of the poem, “do not ask,” is the answer to the original question of *Spirits in Bondage*:

Why do the gods keep us from the source of this longing? Why are we chained? This poem

⁹⁰ Ibid., 72.

⁹¹ Ibid., 73.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 68.

acknowledges the narrowness of such questions, and points to the intermingling of “searching thought” with “the large Divine”⁹⁴ as a final resting place for all such questions. Here again is the echo of Orual’s struggle against the gods. You do not know your own question, is their reply to her, because you do not know yourself.⁹⁵ For the speaker, “perfect being”⁹⁶ and true life begins where he ends. The answer to the question of longing does not come in the present life, but in the life to come. In light of the lingering questions of the self, Lewis writes the final poem of the cycle, “Death in Battle.”

Here the speaker calls for the gates of the city (pictured in “World’s Desire”) to be opened, so that he may finally come, through death, to the “Country of Dreams.” The final turn that began with the pursuit of this country in “The Roads” finds its fullest expression here. For in “Death in Battle” the true face of Lewis’s grappling with *Sehnsucht* finally appears. For him, it was ultimately about the desire for a silent wasteland:

alone!
Ah, to be ever alone,
In flowery valleys among the mountains and silent wastes untrod,
In the dewy upland places, in the garden of God,
This would atone!⁹⁷

This is not the loneliness of the Nereid languishing by the pool, or the loneliness of the haunted house that spooks with ghastly visions of the presence of mocking beings. But it is the freedom to explore the vast untouched country in his own way, and in his own will: to finally shake off the shackles of God’s will, and be truly his own. This craving for the utter self transposes all the previous depictions of longing throughout the cycle. But, it leaves out the imminent, personal

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 292-293. Orual’s self revelation comes as she reads her complaint to the Gods’ “and the voice I read it in was strange to my ears. There was given to me a certainty that this at last was my real voice.”

⁹⁶ Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, 69.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 74.

source of that freedom of will. Lewis sleeps in the garden of God with no expectation of meeting the gardener. The following chapter traces this meeting, and the effect it has on Lewis's a conception of Joy.

Chapter 3: Christianity and Joy

If *Spirits in Bondage* presents a cycle of lyrics thoroughly saturated with the question of longing, the poetry that follows Lewis's 1931 conversion to Christianity presents a seemingly casual and certainly less obsessed attitude toward desire. Unlike *Spirits in Bondage*, *Poems* contains a much broader thematic scope. Lewis writes odes to nature, songs for Narnia, and reflections on modernity. He muses over medieval solar systems and philosophizes about meteorites. He considers the lives of Shakespeare, Homer, Firdausi, Young King Cole, Jove, Circe, Adam and Eve, Aristotle, Solomon, Noah, and modern biographers. He engages political commentary, literary criticism, public policy, and art. Finally, *Poems* features a variety of lyric and narrative forms, as well as occasional forms like the Epithalamium.⁹⁸ While *Spirits in Bondage* presents a unified mood (part elegy in its laments, and part ode in its seriousness), *Poems* varies throughout. There are light frothy notes in the song of the dwarves, and scathing lines reminiscent of imprecatory psalms. The differences between the two volumes correspond

⁹⁸ In *Poems*, Lewis writes of man's marriage to the stars. "Prelude to Space: An Epithalamium" discusses the extension of earth's interest into space as if man were populating the universe with his seed. In many ways it is a lament for the destruction which we have wrought on our natural habitat. It anticipates that such destruction will be carried over to our missions in space. The bride in this case is the Universe. In this way Lewis is commenting on the arrogance of humanity as he contrasts the immense womb of the Universe with the miniscule plottings of the human race.

to Lewis's changed attitude toward his poetic vision, as well as a changed attitude toward the problem of longing he struggled with for so long. His poetic vision broadened as did his scope as a writer – he began to write children's literature, science fiction, apologetics, and novels. This chapter considers the significance of Lewis's conversion to Christianity for the change in his perception of longing and joy.

Four movements mark the transition from realism to theism, and Lewis records them in *Surprised by Joy*. The first was his re-reading of *Hippolytus*, which reawakened an awareness and appetite for longing which he had subdued in the years between *Spirits in Bondage* (while prepping for University with Kirkpatrick) and his residence at Magdalen College. The second came through Samuel Alexander's lectures on *Space, Time, and Deity*, in which Lewis adopted Alexander's distinction between enjoyment and contemplation. Third, Lewis connected this new understanding with idealism. Finally, abstract idealism gave way to unavoidable personality when Lewis attempted to define his idealist philosophy for tutoring purposes.

Before considering these four movements, a brief account of Lewis's philosophical outlook is in order. Part of the narrative of longing has been passed over, namely the time between his romantic longings as a boy and young man, and his mature perspective on the experience in later life. During his final years as a student and into his first years as a professor, Lewis experienced few stabs of Joy. He notes that "it came very seldom and when it came it didn't amount to much."⁹⁹ The previous chapter claimed that Lewis settled into a mood of ambivalence toward longing. The period following this (when he seldom experienced Joy) corresponds with his return to Oxford from the war¹⁰⁰; he began a course on "the Greats" at the

⁹⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 165.

¹⁰⁰ Sayer, *Jack: C.S. Lewis and His Times*, 97. Lewis returned to Oxford in 1919, where he took "Greats" (Latin and Greek literature). Following a first in his 1922 exam on the subject, he was unable to secure a fellowship at the

university and gradually adopted a new philosophical outlook which he calls a “sort of Stoical Monism.”¹⁰¹ He summarizes this philosophical outlook by calling it “The New Look.” The rise of this philosophical position turned his ambivalence toward Joy into distrust. Lewis sums up his transition from a boyhood spent idolizing longing to this “New Look” in which he vilified all the images that used to conjure up the desire:

In reality, of course, as previous chapters have told, my own experience had repeatedly shown that these romantic images had never been more than a sort of flash, or even slag, thrown off by the occurrence of Joy, that those mountains and gardens had never been what I wanted but only symbols which professed themselves to be no more, and that every effort to treat them as the real Desirable soon honestly proved itself to be a failure. But now, busy with my New Look, I managed to forget this. Instead of repenting my idolatry I vilified the unoffending images on which I had lavished it. With the confidence of a boy I decided I had done with all that. No more Avalon, no more Hesperides. I had (this was very precisely the opposite of the truth) “seen through” them. And I was never going to be taken in again.¹⁰²

The flash or slag of Joy moves from desirable to repulsive. *Spirits in Bondage* identified many of these flashes (like sleep, country of dreams) while the vilification of this period is representative of *Dymer*, a narrative poem in which his longing is cast both as a repulsive and destructive force. It is interesting to note that, in Lewis’s recollection, the by-products of Joy are described in opposite images. A flash is brief, bright, often beautiful and virtually weightless, consisting of pure light. Slag is permanent, dull, ugly, and heavy, being made up of fused rock and metal waste in manufacturing. *Spirits in Bondage* leans heavily toward an attitude of chasing such flashes. *Dymer* emphasizes the slag-like nature of longing; it is a burden and source of ill to the protagonist.

University (and was dissuaded from attempting a job as a schoolmaster) and so returned for a year of “English Language and Literature.” It was also during this time that he revised *Dymer*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 164.

Dymer (published 1926) is the natural successor to *Spirits in Bondage* (published 1919). It is the story of one man's discovery of self, and subsequent destruction of that self. After fleeing a city ruled by a Platonic regime of law and reason,¹⁰³ Dymer pursues his desire for truth in the natural world. He finds pleasure in a woman's arms, but only once. In an attempt to re-enter the structure in which his lover lives, he is repelled by a large hag. Leaving the woman, he travels on in the wild, only to find that his departure from the city has caused a revolt in which many have died in his name. Haunted by the effects of his selfishness, Dymer wallows in despair and pessimism.¹⁰⁴ A magician befriends and feeds Dymer, but tricks him into entering a world of illusion, where every desire is made manifest. Disgusted by the lack of reality, Dymer leaves but is shot in the side by the magician before he can escape. In his suffering, he meets the woman of bliss from his previous encounter and learns she is a goddess that came to satisfy Dymer's first desire. The woman tells Dymer that his journey does not end with her, that he is still dreaming.¹⁰⁵ He travels to a graveyard where he finds a man on guard against a terrible beast. The beast, it turns out, is Dymer's son, born of his first meeting with the goddess when his longing was sharpest and full of lust. Dymer realizes he must confront and destroy this offspring of his longing in order to gain his freedom. Yet Dymer is killed in the conflict; however, his death is the means of the transformation of the beast, and the transformation of his bondage to longing.

Roland Kawano, in *C.S. Lewis, Always a Poet*, notes that "Dymer's old longings born forth and incarnated in his son can only be transmuted and transformed through death."¹⁰⁶ He also suggests that "the poet, long haunted by this image [of the northern sky and Baldur's death],

¹⁰³ Kawano. *Always a Poet*, 18.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, 80.

¹⁰⁶ Kawano, *Always a Poet*, 21.

recognized that the rebirth of Odin's prophecy was not simply of the body but of all yearnings and longings that had made up the whole life."¹⁰⁷ Kawano concludes his analysis of *Dymer* with the observation: "He [Dymer] has recognized that his yearnings pointed to something larger than the woman but he, at first, was satisfied only with her."¹⁰⁸ Lewis's own explanation of *Dymer* sheds light on the central theme of the growth and destruction of the self:

The main idea is that of development by self-destruction, both of individuals & species (as man produces man only to conquer her [sic], & man produces a future & higher generation to conquer the ideals of the last, or again as an individual produces a nobler mood to undo all that to-day's has done). The background proceeds on the old assumption of good *outside & opposed to* the cosmic order.¹⁰⁹

The "nobler mood" Lewis describes is Dymer's resolve to take responsibility for fathering the brute. Though Dymer is overcome by his son, he nevertheless transforms the brute from misguided lust into an angelic figure full of life. It is a denial of the self that ultimately transforms his longings. Don W. King suggests that "Dymer's giving of himself, his dying to destroy that monster that his efforts to live autonomously created, transforms that hideous distortion into something beautiful."¹¹⁰

In the opening cantos of the poem, Dymer seeks, but not for a hidden country. His experience is more basic – more natural – and has more in common with lust than longing. Here we see again the inklings of transposition that undergird the entire dialectic of *Sehnsucht* and Joy: the transformation of Dymer's son, the resurrection of longing from a brute to angel, highlights the descending goddess (that first gratifies Dymer's longing) and the ascending son who transforms his selfish longing outward. No longer is Dymer trapped by a self-serving longing; he has found a way to lay down his life. He is not trapped by a bondage to illusions, as

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, ix.

¹¹⁰ King, *Poet: The Legacy*, 135.

is the magician. Roland Kawano captures this sense of bondage to illusions in his interpretation of *Dymer*: “the magician desired to remain as he was; this led him to attempt to change his surroundings. Dymer attempted to be other than he was and so followed the signs of light, music, and of pain.”¹¹¹ That desire for otherness that simultaneously participates in the object of longing brings back the old problem of illusions. Surely it is cruel to keep wafting illusions (as the magician did to Dymer) of fulfillment? The question was not, “how could God allow for such cruelty?” *Spirits in Bondage* gave a clear answer: the cruelty was bondage – the object of longing withheld and denied – and the answer was that the deity must be cruel. As discussed in Chapter 2, the cycle modulates the poet’s response so that it becomes ambivalent to longing. But for Dymer, and Lewis’s subsequent philosophy at this time, the question itself becomes dubious. The cruelty is the illusion that the object of longing actually exists. God was not cruel, but insignificant, in the way Santa Claus becomes insignificant to the child who catches their parents in the act of putting the presents under the tree. In that moment, the spirit of Christmas does not die, but merely vanishes. “It was you all along!” the child says. It becomes clear for children in that moment that the sacredness of the event gives way to the reality that they could ask their parent for an extraordinary gift (like those of Christmastime) any day of the year. Dymer’s experience and appreciation for longing follow the same lines. The romantic mood of longing is mistaken for lust when Dymer feels he has seen behind the curtain.

Lewis gives us a snapshot of the spirit in which it was written – cutting down the illusion of *Sehnsucht*:

“I regarded it [Cristiana Dreams] as the very type of the illusions I was trying to escape from. It must therefore be savagely attacked. Dymer’s temptation to relapse into the world of fantasy therefore comes to him (Canto VII) in that form. All through that canto I am cutting down my

¹¹¹ Kawano, *Always a Poet*, 22.

own former 'groves and high places' and biting the hand
that had fed me."¹¹²

"Christiana Dreams" was an example of the systems of imagery "thrown off" by the experience of romantic longing. Later, Lewis remarks that the hero Dymer was "to be a man escaping from illusion." In Canto VII, Dymer recounts his "wakening to the illusion:"

As when you light a candle, the great gloom
Which was the unbounded night, sinks down, compressed
To four white walls in one familiar room,
So the vague joy shrank wilted in my breast
And narrowed to one point, unmasked, confessed;
Fool's paradise was gone: instead was there
King Lust with his black, sudden, serious stare.¹¹³

Sehnsucht is contrasted with Dymer's rejection of all the illusions of desire by various themes: darkness rather than light; unbounded rather than narrowly compressed; vague rather than familiar; foolish rather than reasonable. The darkness motif is nuanced here, and picked up by Lewis in *Till We Have Faces* with similar emphasis: it is a darkness of gloom (the land and city in which Orual lives is Glome). Additionally, it is unbounded and vague. The lack of clarity of the house of Ungit – or rather the dark holiness that comes through shed blood and ceremony rather than reason – is represented by a dark, featureless stone. Fox – a Greek slave of the King of Glome – is the candle against the darkness of mind, the irrationality of the events of the story. And yet, he too is conflicted, particularly with a longing of the poets, and a longing for his homeland. Orual notes the former longing in the peculiar "lilt" and gravity in the Fox's voice whenever he speaks poetry. But, the Fox always catches himself during these moments of reverie to comment: "lies of poets, child."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, 4.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹¹⁴ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 8.

The “stoical monism”¹¹⁵ of the Fox is also a narrative of Lewis’s thought during this pre-conversion period, in which desire and Joy were “aesthetic experiences.”¹¹⁶ This relates to his “New Look” in which he rejects romantic longing as anything more than aesthetic experience. This viewpoint began to weaken as a result of Lewis’s friendship with Owen Barfield. Barfield (who first met Lewis in 1919) was a “Second Friend” to Lewis:

The first is the alter ego, the man who first reveals to you that you are not alone in the world by turning out (beyond hope) to share all your most secret delights. There is nothing to be overcome in making him your friend; he and you join like rain-drops on a window. But the Second Friend is the man who disagrees with you about everything. He is not so much the alter ego as the anti-self. Of course he shares your interests; otherwise he would not become your friend at all. But he has approached them all at a different angle. He has read all the right books but has got the wrong thing out of every one.¹¹⁷

Barfield and Lewis began a debate in 1925 that lasted for the next five years, which became known as “The Great War.” The debate was chiefly about the nature of truth and whether truth could be discovered best through imagination or reason.¹¹⁸ This showed Lewis the inconsistency of holding to his stoical position while still toying with romantic longing. The result of Barfield’s influence was that Lewis was furnished with intellectual grounding for the pursuit of not only the imagination (which he was repressing) but also Joy. It is on the heels of this intellectual battle that Lewis re-encounters “the land of longing” in the *Hippolytus*, and subsequently the philosophy of longing in Samuel Alexander’s *Space, Time, and Deity*.

The re-reading of *Hippolytus* mirrors Lewis’s childhood reading of Norse mythology. It is not a fresh understanding of the experience of longing, but a fresh experience – like food after

¹¹⁵ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 165.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 161.

¹¹⁸ Wolfe, “C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield: The Great War.”

a fast that cures all future attempts at fasting. In particular, Lewis was captivated by the language of the “ends of the world” sung by the Chorus:

O to escape, and lurk high under steep crags,
At the touch of a god to rise,
A wing'd bird among flying flocks
To soar over the swell of the Adrian coast¹¹⁹

Or, lines like: “And then to reach that shore planted with apple-trees,” and “Establishing the solemn frontier of heaven/Which Atlas guards.”¹²⁰ Re-reading these lines coupled with Lewis’s ongoing debate with Barfield reawakened *Sehnsucht*. There was, a second intellectual stimulus running alongside both his reading of *Hippolytus* and conversations with men like Barfield: Samuel Alexander.

Alexander’s technical descriptions of contemplation and enjoyment (in his book *Space, Time and Deity*) lead Lewis to the conclusion that “enjoyment and contemplation of our inner activities are incompatible. You cannot hope and also think about hoping at the same time.”¹²¹

This realization changes Lewis’s perspective on his approach to longing thus far:

“I saw that all my waitings and watchings for Joy,
all my vain hopes to find some mental content on
which I could, so to speak, lay my finger and say,
“This is it,” had been a futile attempt to contemplate
the enjoyed.”¹²²

Lewis found that Joy could not be an object of the senses, but was itself,

“a road right out of the self, a commerce with
something which, by refusing to identify itself with
any object of the senses, or anything whereof we
have biological or social need, or anything
imagined, or any state of our own minds, proclaims
itself sheerly objective.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ Halleran, *Euripides' Hippolytus*, 33.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹²¹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 174.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 175.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 176-177.

The sheer objectivity of the object signaled the necessity of reconsidering his presuppositions about the nature of Joy. If it cannot be identified by the mind or through the senses alone, or even through imagination, how could it be approached? If Joy transcends all of these things, how can it still manifest itself?

The third movement is an answer to these questions, as Lewis acknowledges the import of his philosophical idealism in relation to Joy. Specifically, the idea of an Absolute being in whom we all share, points to the reason Joy is experienced at all. The objectivity of that being, its unapproachable nature, revealed the frailty of the human condition. As Lewis states, “we yearn, rightly, for that unity which we can never reach except by ceasing to be the separate phenomenal beings we call ‘we.’”¹²⁴ He goes on to explain that Joy gives us awareness of our “fragmenting and phantasmal nature,” and an “ache for that impossible reunion which would annihilate us.”¹²⁵ The significance of Lewis’s insistence on the connection between Joy and Being becomes more pronounced when he finally converts to Christianity, because the vague notions of an absolute being becomes specific, and the object of longing (and our union to it via Joy) is finally realized.

Lewis’s marriage of philosophical idealism with Alexander’s objective terminology results in a practical dilemma for him. As a tutor, he feels obligated to have a tenable philosophical position from which he can comment on the work and thought of his students. Vague absolutism gives way to “Berkleyanism,”¹²⁶ with the strict caveat that the God envisioned by this philosophy is by no means personal, but rather a projector of persons, or playwright of some variety. Berkley presented Lewis with a “simple, workable, theistic idealism” that

¹²⁴ Ibid., 177.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 178.

dispelled mystifications which Lewis felt philosophers such as Hegel and Bradley added to the notion of deity.¹²⁷ But, Alexander and *Hippolytus* had paved the road that led, not just to the source of Joy, but (to Lewis's horror) to a person. As an atheist, he was happy to let Joy remain an unknown objective reality. Even as an atheist, he understood it could not be the images or heart palpitations – that these pointed beyond themselves – but Lewis was unwilling to entertain the thought that the unknown object could be a person: “I did not yet ask, who is the desired? Only what is it?”¹²⁸ Lewis confirms this in his discussion of his attitude toward Joy once he converted to theism:

“No slightest hint vouchsafed me that there ever had been or ever would be any connection between God and Joy,”¹²⁹

and,

“For all I knew, the total rejection of what I called Joy might be one of the demands, might be the first demand he would make upon me.”¹³⁰

That Lewis frames his conversion to Christianity in these terms demonstrates the profound impact Joy had on his life. He tried every avenue to achieve it. To have it unmasked and presented as a personal entity he must know and be accountable to was deeply troubling. The trouble was Lewis's old perception of *Sehnsucht*, for he feared that the God he submitted himself to would force him to abandon the longing. He did not yet realize that Joy was pointing him toward God as its rightful object all along.

Lewis's transition from theism to Christianity came about as he attempted to understand a mature iteration of the theistic view. Christianity and Hinduism presented the only full-orbed understanding he could accept:

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 176.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 184.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

The only two systems in which the mysteries and the philosophies come together are Hinduism & Xtianity: there you get both Metaphysics and Cult (continuous with the primeval cults). This is why my first step was to be sure that one or other of these had the answer. For the reality can't be one that appeals *either* only to savages *or* only to high brows.

Lewis goes on to say that the choice lay between materialism (which he could not believe) and the fulfillment of archaic primitive religions. He found that Hinduism does not really join the two strands of savage and highbrow, whereas Christianity does.¹³¹ Moreover, the idea that Christianity presented incarnated myth convinced Lewis. Incarnated myth is an idea introduced to Lewis by J.R.R. Tolkien, fellow professor at Oxford. It means that the Christian story of God descending, dying and rising again, while it shares many similarities with myths of other cultures (particularly Greek and Norse myths) has the added quality of being true.

Given the importance of Joy not only for his life, but for Lewis's interpretation of desire, his conclusion to his auto-biography on Joy is curious. Speaking of Joy as a signpost, Lewis writes:

“He who first sees it cries, “Look.” The whole party gathers around and stares. But when we have found the road and are passing signposts every few miles we shall not stop and stare.”¹³²

Lewis's conversion to Christianity demonstrates a transition in his thinking about longing, from the atheistic “aesthetic experience” to the Christian “signpost;” from utmost importance to friendly reminder and guide. This is true of much of the poetry concerned with longing that Lewis wrote following his conversion. “Sweet Desire” is typical of his new mood. The poem begins,

These faint wavering far-travelle'd gleams
Coming from your country, fill me with care. That scent,
That sweet stabbing, as at the song of thrush,
That leap of the heart – too like they seem

¹³¹ Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, Vol. 3, 71.

¹³² Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 190.

To another air;¹³³

This opening is reminiscent of the “Hidden Country fresh and full of quiet green . / Sailing over seas uncharted to a port that none has seen,”¹³⁴ from “Prologue” in *Spirits in Bondage*; it also alludes to “O country of Dreams! / Beyond the tide of the ocean, hidden and sunk away,”¹³⁵ from “Death in Battle.” Yet, unlike his yearnings in *Spirits in Bondage*, the speaker in “Sweet Desire” settles on a definite person at the centre of this country. The end is more explicit:

So, fearing, I
Taste not but with trembling. I was tricked before.
All the heraldry of heaven, holy monsters...

Slow-paced I come,
Yielding by inches. And yet, oh Lord, and yet,
–Oh Lord, let not likeness fool me again.¹³⁶

The speaker is desperate to avoid the illusions of Joy.. Yet he addresses the object of his desire as “Lord.” The painful experience of submission, full of doubt, nevertheless has a clear object. For once Lewis is aware of the thing toward which Joy has been pointing, and he is terrified lest it too be a sham. “Caught” and “Forbidden Pleasure” conjure up the same spirit:

Oh, for but one cool breath in seven,
One air from northern climes,
The changing and the castle-clouded heaven
Of my old Pagan times!

But you have seized all in your rage
Of Oneness. Round about,
Beating my wings, all ways, within your cage,
I flutter, but not out.¹³⁷

In “Caught,” the poet wrestles with the temptation to return to his old longings (northern climes).

They are forbidden because of the jealous nature of God, who has captured the poet in a cage,

¹³³ Lewis, *Poems*, 114.

¹³⁴ Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, xli.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³⁶ Lewis, *Poems*, 115.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 115-116.

seized all things (pains, pleasure, desires, loves). It is a darker note in Lewis's Christian reflection on the source of Joy, and demonstrates that, even as a believer, Lewis struggled to fully adopt the new paradigm of Joy. Though he acknowledges Joy as a sign post directing him to focus his attention on God, he is not without lapses in which the pursuit of Joy in his sensory experience or imagination looms large. "Forbidden Pleasure" suggests a more amicable mood:

Quick, Lord! Before new scorpions bring
New venom – ere fiends blow the fire
A second time – quick, show me that sweet thing
Which, 'spite of all, more deeply I desire.¹³⁸

The poet's attention is directed to God in a plea that he not fall back into the habit of desiring his previous longings. He recognizes that the fulfillment of his lusts is empty compared with his submission to God, and yet he still feels the "fire" of their temptation. In other poems, like "The Naked Seed," Lewis pleads not for freedom from temptation, but that his desire for God would be rekindled:

My heart is empty. All the fountains that should run
With longing, are in me
Dried up. In all my countryside there is not one
That drips to find the sea....

The poet finds his desire for heaven has shriveled; in fact the only desire is for the moment's need, the ordinary things necessary to life: sleep, food, shelter. He then pleads for God to intervene and stoke the fire, in a manner reminiscent of Augustine's comment in the *Confessions*, "Give what you command, and command what you will."¹³⁹

If thou think for me what I cannot think, if thou
Desire for me what I
Cannot desire, my soul's interior Form, though now
Deep-buried, will not die,
–No more than the insensible dropp'd seed which grows

¹³⁸ Ibid., 116.

¹³⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 233.

Through winter ripe for birth
Because, while it forgets, the heaven remembering throws
Sweet influence still on the earth.¹⁴⁰

The call for God to intervene, to participate in the generation of longing, adds another layer to Lewis's consideration of Joy following his conversion. The desperation for the "real thing," the struggle with temptations to relapse to old longings, and the pleas for God to instill and sustain his longing (or ignite it again) form the mature vision of Joy. It is a frail thing that comes to Lewis in much the same way as before, except he knows that it points not to itself, but beyond. "No Beauty We Could Desire" is a wonderful summation of Lewis's pursuit of God, and in particular how his longing finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ:

The scent was too perplexing for my hounds;
Nowhere sometimes, then again everywhere.
Other scents, too, seemed to them almost the same.

Leaving the forests where you are pursued in vain
– Often a mere white gleam – I turn instead
To the appointed place where you pursue.
Not in Nature, not even in Man, but in one
Particular Man, with a date, so tall, weighing
So much, talking Aramaic, having learned a trade

Not in all food, not in all bread and wine
(Not, I mean, as my littleness requires)
But this wine, this bread... no beauty we could desire.¹⁴¹

Kawano comments on this:

Lewis's "No Beauty We Could Desire" is about how one who seeks joy eventually finds it in Christ. . . . When he tried to track what he longed for, he was thwarted by confusing scents As a result, he stopped the search for joy through things (including poetry) and made himself available instead to be found by the source of the joy. . . . In the person of Christ there was no greater beauty for him to desire the joy he found in Christ surpassed all earthly joys, and this poem becomes a measure of Lewis's personal devotion.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Lewis, *Poems*, 117.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁴² Kawano, *Always a Poet*, 213.

Lewis recognizes a direct pursuit of Joy is a vain pursuit. To follow the glimmers and trace the feeling in the senses and imagination was a distraction from the real purpose of the longings: to direct attention to God. Moreover, Lewis suggests that Joy directs attention to Christ, just as the wine and bread of communion emphasizes not eating and drinking in general, but the body and blood of Christ sacrificed for humanity. It may be overreaching to suggest that the poem is a “measure of Lewis’s personal devotion.” That is a difficult category to assess. Rather, the poem is a condensed articulation of Lewis’s growth in understanding Joy. It gives the scope of his movement from an atheist pursuing the white gleams and scents of longing to his realization that he must submit and follow Christ. It suggests a final movement from attention focused on Joy to attention directed away from Joy to the fountain of Joy. Alongside this one might consider a fragment Lewis wrote in a letter to Owen Barfield:

I will write down the portion that I understand
Of twenty years wherein I went from land to land.
At many bays and harbours I put in with joy
Hoping that there I should have built my second Troy
And stayed. But either stealing harpies drove me thence,
Or the trees bled, or oracles, whose airy sense
I could not understand, yet must obey, once more
Sent me to sea to follow the retreating shore
Of this land which I call at last my home, where most
I feared to come; attempting not to find whose coast
I ranged half around the world, with vain design to shun
The last fear whence the last security is won.
Oh perfect life, unquivering, self-enkindled flame
From which my fading candle first was lit, oh name
Too lightly spoken, therefore left unspoken here,
Terror of burning, nobleness of light, most dear
And comfortable warmth of the world’s beating side,
Feed from thy unconsumed what wastes in me, and guide
My soul into the silent places till I make
A good end of this book for after-travellers’ sake.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol 2*, 77-78. This poem has also been reprinted in the appendix to Don W. King’s work, *C.S. Lewis, The Legacy of His Poetic Impulse*.

This section of the poem reflects the two great impulses in Lewis's life. The first, as discussed in chapter 2, was Lewis travelling from land to land, harbour to harbour, searching for rest. He could not understand but must heed the unknown call toward a "retreating sea." The fulcrum of his wrestling with longing is the fear to arrive at his home, a fear that has been considered a core part of his conversion experience. It is the fear that longing itself will be taken away once he submits to God. The second half is like the pleading poems quoted above in which Lewis asks for a pure vision of God. He also asks for nourishment from the life of God. The line "feed from thy unconsumed what wastes in me," is an ontological observation about the nature of God and God's relation to man. God is unconsumed, man is utter waste. Yet God can descend and fill man, guiding the soul with his self-enkindled flame to its ultimate rest. The following chapter considers the nature of this ontology of Joy by reflecting on Lewis's understanding of transposition. Joy's fullest expression is found in a close examination of the relationship between the spirit and body, which Lewis suggests is at the heart of the mode of transposition.

Chapter 4: Transposition and Joy

While the young Lewis was fragmented by the haunting experience of longing, the older man lost the intensity of obsession. As a Christian, he found Joy indicated God's presence, a sign post that directed his attention to God. Beyond this, some of the verse in *Poems*, and a number of non-fiction stories and essays reflect a more comprehensive interpretation of Joy. The main focus of this chapter is on a sermon entitled "Transposition," which was first preached in Mansfield College, Oxford on the Feast of Pentecost in May of 1944 and was subsequently published in the volume *The Weight of Glory* in 1941.¹⁴⁴ The essay reflects on the use of the body by the spirit, or the relation between mind and body. The connection point between the two ideas – Joy and transposition – provides a foundation for considering the modality of Joy. The previous chapters have considered the thematic development in Lewis's poetry, from a passionate pursuit of the by-products of Joy, which roughly corresponds with his efforts in *Spirits in Bondage*, to the rejection of Joy as illusion (or at best self-destructive), indicative of much of *Dymer*, to his expression of Joy as a sign-post in his later poetry and fiction. Alongside the thematic development, the question of the mode of Joy is set. Specifically, how is Joy functioning in Lewis's thought? What is the nature of these indescribable experiences? Why are the senses involved in the portrayal of mysterious longings?

The goal of this chapter is to show the significance of transposition in enabling the experience of Joy, and also to reflect on the ontological significance of Lewis's shift in emphasis on the purpose of Joy. "Ontological significance" refers to Lewis's articulation of the interaction between the body and the senses, as well as his articulation of the interaction between man and God in the context of the experience of Joy. While an atheist, Lewis adhered to a developmental ontology. That is, he argued that the relationship between the body and the mind is one of

¹⁴⁴ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 18-19.

gradual ascent or descent. The chemicals that form the nervous system and the chemicals that form thought exhibit varying degrees of complexity, but they are nevertheless the same kind of thing. Joy is a phenomenon that consistently overturned this approach to the body-mind relationship. It is detected by the senses, and yet cannot be held by the mind or reproduced at will. It proclaimed itself emphatically “different” and thus required a reworking of Lewis’s conception of how the mind and body interact. Instead of development, Lewis posited transposition. Transposition is the movement between richer, higher mediums and more limited, lower mediums. The representation of a higher medium in a lower medium requires duplication. Fear and affection may be represented by the same chest palpitation. The context reveals whether the chest palpitation refers to fear or affection. A language of thirty vowel sounds, if translated into a language with seven, must re-use the seven when representing the more complex language. Joy is a reproduction of a higher desire in all lower desires. To perceive Joy is fundamentally to experience it through another desire. Lewis made the conjecture that the “real relation between mind and body is one of transposition.”¹⁴⁵ While this comment invokes a dialectic between materialism and supernaturalism – the primary subtext for Lewis’s essay “Transposition” – we will discuss this specific significance in due course. Broadly speaking, Lewis has touched on a classification or paradigm of relation between mind and body. Transposition gives a thoughtful explanation not only for the representation of mental processes and emotions in bodily sensations, but also for the representation of one emotion in another. Joy is a focal point for uncovering this dynamic. For what Joy suggests (and continually suggested to Lewis throughout his life) is that some experiences exist only as a byproduct of another experience.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 103.

The Chronicles of Narnia bear witness to transposition in both its simplest definition and also in its ontological implications. First, in its simplest definition (a movement across), transposition is apparent in the inclusion of talking animals. Anthropomorphism is a simple transposition of the sensibilities and faculties of humans into other creatures. Lewis is no pioneer in this regard, but he adds to this first layer in his special characterization of some of these creatures. Reepicheep, for instance, is an anthropomorphized mouse. But he also transposes the entire medieval system of chivalry and knighthood. Above any other character in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the mouse is the vehicle for expressing this precise gallantry. Reepicheep's mannerisms and linguistic range are unique in this regard. Though other characters, such as Caspian and Rilian, as well as some of the dwarves and centaurs, show a semblance of courtly manners, it is Reepicheep who is given distinctive lines, such as: "My friendship you shall have, learned Man," piped Reepicheep. "And any Dwarf--or Giant---in the army who does not give you good language shall have my sword to reckon with."¹⁴⁶ In *The Dawn Treader*, Reepicheep is also the embodiment of desire. It is he who constantly presses the company to continue on to Aslan's country (the utter east) despite many dangers. He is unwavering in his commitment to come at last to those shores, even were it to cost him his life. As part of the embodiment of desire, Reepicheep alerts the reader to other transpositions. Nearing the end of the journey, the mouse dips his hand into the water: "That is what it is, drinkable light!"¹⁴⁷ The transposition of one sense organ to another (sight to taste) is more than poetic flourish. It is the heart of the narrative in which the characters progress toward a realm in which transposition is transparent. At one stage in their journey, the explorers in *The Dawn Treader* come to an island with an old man, his daughter, and a feast replenished by birds every

¹⁴⁶ Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 90.

¹⁴⁷ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 251.

night. The old man identifies himself as Ramandu, a retired star.¹⁴⁸ Here, as in *The Space Trilogy*, Lewis mixes religious and stellar symbols together. Ramandu is described as an angelic figure rather than an inanimate object; he possesses a personal dimension, just as the eldila from the Ransom trilogy. In both cases Lewis captures a sense of ontological perspective: the beings from a richer environment condescend and appear in the poorer environment. The eldil exist as beings of pure spirit, but they appear to Ransom and the creatures that inhabit Mars as a faint glow. At the end of *Perelandra* they are transfigured into a glorified state, but the two angels tell Ransom that the vision is addressed to the condition of the lesser animals. The higher is represented in the lower by borrowing and sometimes duplicating the resources in the lower medium. This is why Ramandu appears as an old man, and the two eldila appear in an exalted, super-human form. To appear otherwise would be to remain unintelligible to those from below.

Lewis also presents transposition in *The Great Divorce*. The story depicts ghosts journeying by bus to the outskirts of heaven on a kind of spiritual “tour.” The narrator, a ghost himself, observes many conversations between these ghosts and their counterparts, the glorified humans who have come from the innermost parts of heaven. The goal of the glorified humans is to convince the ghosts to make the journey toward heaven instead of returning by bus to their existence in Hell. Through this novel, Lewis explores what human emotions and human relationships might be like were human souls lost in Hell actually to have a small reprieve or journey into the heavenly realms. In one scene an Episcopal ghost meets one of the glorified saints who has come to visit him. The saint was a colleague when the two men were alive. In the exchange, the saint tries to persuade the intellectual ghost to drop his arguments for a life of “free inquiry” and come with him to meet God face to face:

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 226.

Ghost: 'But you must feel yourself that there is something stifling about the idea of finality? Stagnation, my dear boy, what is more soul-destroying than stagnation?'

Saint: 'You think that, because hitherto you have experienced truth only with the abstract intellect. I will bring you where you can taste it like honey and be embraced by it as by a bridegroom. Your thirst shall be quenched.'¹⁴⁹

The ghost rejects the offer on the grounds that there is no space for questions in heaven. The finality is not, for him, a sign of progress, but a sign of destruction. The saint in the scene, who has already spent a good deal of time arguing with the Episcopal ghost, takes another tactic. He argues that what the intellectual ghost has been craving all along is not more questions, but an answer. The answer, however, is not merely intellectual content perceived by the mind, but the embracing of a person, using all of the faculties. Here transposition means tasting truth.

In another scene, the narrator observes a great lady meeting one of the ghosts, who was her husband while on Earth. The ghost appears as two phantoms, one a tragic actor and another a dwarf-like man. In the conversation it becomes clear that the tragedian is a puppet the dwarf uses to express himself; the longer they talk, the smaller the dwarf becomes until he all but disappears and only the tragedian is left speaking with the lady. All that remains of the ghost is the act itself, the lie of self-pity which it used to control and torment the woman while on Earth. In reflecting on the exchange, the narrator asks his guide (an image of George MacDonald) why the lady did not descend into Hell to save the man from his self-pity, to draw him into the joy she experienced. The guide responds that she would not "fit" in Hell, that compared with Heaven, Hell is but a tiny speck:

'Then no one can ever reach them?'

'Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell.

For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend – a man can sympathise

¹⁴⁹ Lewis, *The Complete Signature Classics*, 487.

with a horse but a horse cannot sympathise with a rat. Only one has descended into Hell.’¹⁵⁰

This discussion is important for the emphasis of ontology suggested at the end of this chapter. It is the “highest” things that can descend lowest. For now, it is enough to show that the *Great Divorce* bears witness to the significance of transposition in connection with Joy. The lady, who dwells “in joy,”¹⁵¹ is not capable of descending to the depths of Hell. That task is left for Christ, who is the fullness of Joy.

The great lady’s claim to be “in joy” and “in love” is itself a comment on the nature of Joy. To have Joy assumes unity with another person. Joy cannot be had on its own, and therefore, suggests that her experience is either one of illusion, or transposition. The purpose of the scene with the tragedian is to emphasize that her joy is not phantasmal; rather the self-pity of the ghost is truly un-real, lacking any substance. In terms of the broader discussion of *Sehnsucht* and Joy, the experience is either too poor, and must be rejected as a byproduct of no significance, or, the experience is too rich to be adequately represented on its own, and can only exist symbiotically within the available symbol systems. Another way of framing this dichotomy between illusion and transposition is to say that the illusory element is Joy’s place in the experience. Paradoxically, it is primary yet dependent, or auxiliary. The longing is the desired emotion, yet it cannot exist apart from some other, transposed emotion. The “host” emotion is not superseded but fulfilled; the experience gives way to “something more deeply interfused.”¹⁵² In this way, transposition evokes a sense of metaphor, where the initial experience, while remaining wholly itself, carries another experience. However, transposition conflates the distinction between carrier and carried. The following comparisons demonstrate this distinction:

¹⁵⁰ Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 538.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 534-535.

¹⁵² Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, 134.

Love is a rose that will not grow beside the ocean.
A rose will not grow beside the ocean.
Love will not grow beside the ocean.

In the first sentence, the question, “why will a rose not grow beside the ocean?” also sheds light on the experience of love. If we answer, for instance, that the rose is too delicate to survive in the turbulent conditions of the ocean-side, we also demonstrate that the speaker’s experience of love is delicate, and susceptible to its emotional environment. Thus the rose carries the significance of both itself and love. The second sentence loosens the connection between carrier and carried, reducing it to a statement of fact or a symbol (in which the significance of the rose disappears in the analysis). The third sentence is an example of the heightened conflation of carrier and carried. This is accomplished by making the word “love” stand in for multiple expressions. It is given as a range of ideas rather than a specific example. One could substitute examples that prove contradictory, such as crabs, civilizations, or palm trees. The substitution forces the reader to ask a contextualizing question: “What is the element of growth in the experience of love?” These questions exemplify Lewis’s search for the common element in all of his experiences of longing. As a child one of Lewis’s first glimpses of *Sehnsucht* came through his reading of the *Saga of King Olaf*. While he enjoyed the rhythms of the saga in (what he describes as) a casual way, he was suddenly struck by *Sehnsucht* when he read, “I heard a voice that cried, / Balder the beautiful / Is dead, is dead—¹⁵³ Lewis comments in *Surprised by Joy* that he knew nothing of Balder,¹⁵⁴ but in this moment desired “with almost sickening intensity something never to be described.”¹⁵⁵ While the vision of Balder carried him into the open spaces of the northern sky Lewis felt something else (*Sehnsucht*) was the vehicle all along.

¹⁵³ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 19-20.

¹⁵⁴ Longfellow, *Evangeline*, 115. Balder is a Norse god of the summer whom the speaker of “Tegner’s Drapa” suggests ought to be forgotten in favour of Christ: “Sing no more, / O ye bards of the North, / Of Vikings and of Jarls! / Of the days of Eld / Preserve the freedom only, / Not the deeds of blood!”

¹⁵⁵ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 20.

When he looked for *Sehnsucht* he found Balder, just as, if the reader looked for the element of growth in the second example, they would find a rose.

I said earlier that the dialectic between materialism and supernaturalism was a primary subtext for Lewis's essay "Transposition." He begins the essay discussing the topic of tongues as presented in the account of Pentecost in the book of Acts. Pentecost refers to an experience in which the apostles, gathered in a room together, received the gift of the Holy Spirit. As a visual sign that they had received this gift, tongues of fire descended on each man's head.¹⁵⁶ Tongues was the ability to understand and speak in foreign languages. Lewis's key question is, how does one discern which "tongues" experience should be taken as from the Holy Spirit, and which should be dismissed as merely "nervous excitement?" He then generalizes it to, "is the continuity between the physical and the spiritual not a serious problem for the supernaturalist?" Is it not odd that "the rite whereby Christians enact a mystical union should turn out to be only the old, familiar act of eating and drinking?"¹⁵⁷ If love and lust share the same physical act, is it not plausible that they are the same?¹⁵⁸ From these questions, Lewis begins to build a case *prima facie* for Transposition (through an analysis of Pepys and his own experience of sensation) until he comes to his main argument: the emotional life is "higher" than the life of the senses. Here is where the subtext of materialism and supernaturalism comes in, for materialism essentially says, there is only matter and energy, and those two things are interchangeable to the extent that there is truly only one kind of thing. All emotional experiences are produced by reactions in the brain, and their significance (in an ultimate sense) is nothing. Matter has no purpose outside of itself. Supernaturalism claims that there is, in addition to the physical world of matter and energy, immaterial realities that affect humanity. And while the body contributes to the state of the

¹⁵⁶ Acts 2:3 ESV.

¹⁵⁷ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 94.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

emotions and thought, these faculties are also influenced, directed by, and designed in the likeness of a nature above the physical.

Having laid out his evidence for Transposition, Lewis makes the following comment: “It is clear that in each case what is happening in the lower medium can be understood only if we know the higher medium.”¹⁵⁹ Lewis is careful to acknowledge that those who only consider a relationship from the perspective of the lower medium do so “on the evidence available to them.” Nevertheless, he argues that everyone must approach issues like emotions, sensations, or the three-dimensional world from above.

“The theory that thought therefore is merely a movement in the brain is, in my opinion, nonsense, for if so, that theory itself would be merely a movement, an event among atoms, which may have speed and direction, but of which it would be meaningless to use the words “true” or “false.”¹⁶⁰

This is a common apologetic axiom in discussions of materialism. Truth claims, from the perspective of the materialist, are nonsensical. This is not because the materialist is lying about observations, but because, to such a person, truth is not a category with any meaning. To illustrate this, Lewis gives a lengthy example of a mother and child confined to prison. The child only knows of the outside world from his mother’s drawings. The result of this deprivation is that, “the child will get the idea that the real world is somehow less visible than his mother’s pictures. In reality it lacks lines because it is incomparably more visible.”¹⁶¹ Lewis’s point is that the child mistakes the lines for reality, when in fact they are the transposed state of a more complex truth into a simpler medium. To say thinking is only chemical movement is to see lines like the child. The lines do their best to represent a truth which cannot fully exist in a drawing.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 100.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 110.

To focus on the collision of atoms is to have nothing significant to say regarding our emotional life. The human body is the vehicle for expressions which it cannot fully articulate; it plays host to our emotional life and in doing so provides us with a qualitative perspective of what humanity itself means. Lewis describes as “incomparably more visible,”¹⁶² the full reality to which Joy points. However, like the child, we remain in the cell with our mother and teacher. And despite our best efforts of translation, until we step into the “reality,” we are stuck with lines or signposts. The struggle remains to see the transposition at all, for the vivacity of Joy belies its status as by-product. It is like saying that the Mona Lisa or Sistine Chapel paintings were accidental off-shoots, trifles resulting from a far deeper endeavour – hardly worth noticing compared with the artistry present in the living being. Lewis saw that the hope and purpose of all art was a participation in this great conversation; art is a vessel for transposition of the great truths. To see the thing in itself – concerned entirely with a perspective from below – was the essence of the disastrous shift modernism had taken.

The articulation of transposition is thus part of a broader conversation of ontology. In light of the discussion of modernism and the representation of higher-in-lower, transposition becomes a tool for understanding human perspective. Just as the earlier analogy of the mother and son demonstrates a peculiar methodology, so too transposition suggests a methodological approach to ontology. The mother “draws pictures” for her son, and in doing so, chooses to draw in perspective. What is this perspective? It is merely the illusory manipulation of lines, shading, and particular strokes so that the eye imagines a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional plane. We are familiar with this strategy because of long years of use in Western art, but it is not the only means of representation. Ancient Egypt (among many other cultures in that period) chose a symbolic representation system. Hieroglyphs do not represent perspective to the viewer,

¹⁶² Ibid.

and upon comparing the two styles, it becomes clear that the lines and shades used to create the three-dimensional sense require a sense of the whole; that is, they presuppose an interpretive scheme that includes the very idea of perspective. They presuppose a relation not inherent to the system of representation. However, Lewis is not asking us to consider a Platonic straw-man: eternal form printed in matter. The situation is more complicated, and yet retains the hierarchical economy. The more complex medium is not wholly absent or other; it transcends and inhabits as it transforms. Moreover it functions as a diminution in the lower medium, not merely a template. In one sense, the crude perspective of the mother's drawing is a truthful account of a world in which many perspectives can be adopted and interchanged. The paper is static, the sun frozen, and yet, it is not merely symbolic. The nature of the arrangement into a picture itself tells of the influence of the higher medium. Lewis notes that the sun in the picture participates in the function of the sun in reality – that it provides a diminished “source” of light for the little scene. The boy sees the page by the light of his own reality, and thus the little sun is only visible by means of the actual sun. Yet, for the boy who has never seen the true sun, the paper one is the only means of him understanding its function. The fiction has an illuminating effect because it participates in the narrative of the scene. This is the ontological significance of transposition. It provides a means of understanding our own experiences by showcasing Joy throughout our emotional life. Like the sun in the drawing, Joy has a purpose: it illumines by generating longing.

Lewis felt that fantasy, science-fiction, and (in particular) myth, provided a means of communicating this “longing” aspect of transposition. In *Till We Have Faces*, Orual travels to a small shrine near the end of her reign as Queen of Glome. Glome is at peace with surrounding nations, and Orual and her entourage travel to visit with her sister, and meet with many other

nations. On the way home the company stops at the shrine, and Orual learns that it is dedicated to a new goddess named Istra. Paying the “silly” priest, Orual listens to an account of her own story, the history of her encounter with the gods and Psyche’s exile.¹⁶³ Yet, to Orual’s dismay, the priest “tells the story wrong,” by suggesting that Orual could see the palace and openly, consciously rejects the decrees of the gods. As a result Psyche had been punished. This scene shows the quality of Lewis’s writing because of the layers of irony presented. Three levels appear, and it is the interplay that suggests the literary value of transposition. The first level is that of the priest. Orual finds that he is “silly” rather than clever, meaning that he is simply a parrot repeating the story in order to raise money for the shrine. He has no thoughts about the story he is telling whatsoever, either in favour of it for its literary merits, or in defense of its validity and truthfulness. His concern is purely economic. He thus speaks better than he knows when he tells a story that has both aesthetic value (in that it is a picture of sacrifice, love, suffering, and ultimate glorification) and is historical. The second level is the irony produced by Orual’s reaction. It is precisely this encounter which causes her to renew her complaint against the gods, to put it in writing. She perceives that the gods are responsible for disseminating the lie about the palace, and in doing so, are mocking her version of the events. The long buried wound of Orual, buried beneath the business of her kingdom, suddenly flashes out. Instead of using the reason by which she has maintained a glorious reign, she rises to the perceived taunts of the gods. In doing so, she is ultimately saved, for it is the writing out of her complaint that causes her to recognize the true events regarding Psyche and the god of the mountain. Her own account is no less a lie than the priest’s at the shrine of Istra. Yet, in her passion to get the correct story into the hands of a reasonable Greek (who might judge between her and the gods), she finds her true self:

¹⁶³ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 241-246.

The change which the writing wrought in me (and of which I did not write) was only a beginning; only to prepare me for the gods' surgery. They used my own pen to probe my wound.¹⁶⁴

Finally, it is ironic on a third level. The subtitle for *Till We Have Faces* is *A Myth Retold*. Lewis himself is involved in the retelling of a story, twisting the events to suit his goal. The main difference (which he discusses in the epilogue to the novel) is that the real myth runs like the story of the priest to Istra. The older sister could, in fact, see the palace in which Psyche lay with the god of the mountain. Here is Lewis, rewriting a story of a woman who rewrites the story of her complaint against the gods. And yet, these ironies provide a picture of transposition as in the example of the boy with his paper sun. Psyche's longing for relief and the burden of her tasks are borne by Orual, just as the myth of Psyche and Cupid is borne by Lewis. His transposition of it produces thousands of plots, characters, speeches, and descriptions that do not occur in the core myth of Psyche. It is nuanced in its depiction of political arrangements, religious festivals, and court life. Yet all of these things are as the lines on the boy's page. The sun shining through is the myth itself. The discord and irony produced by so many retellings helps alert the reader to the connection. Lewis might contend that even Apuleius' version is itself a kind of transposition of an even further-off myth, the details of which are irrelevant next to the central story.

I said earlier that transposition suggests a method by which man can understand his ontology. The recognition of a higher medium gives meaning to daily experience. The key method, for Lewis, is a continual assessment of our participation in the whole. He considers this theme in much of his fiction. *The Chronicles of Narnia*, for example, reinforces the idea of one's place in the whole as each of the children are allotted a certain number of journeys to Narnia and while there, they have a special role to play in restoring Narnia. It is not democratically decided, but Aslan gives to each child a specific task. To Lucy is given the vial that heals, but to Susan

¹⁶⁴ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 253.

the bow that kills.¹⁶⁵ Jill is entrusted with the signs to help on the journey while Eustace is not.¹⁶⁶ Likewise in *Till We Have Faces*, Orual comes to realize that she and Psyche have shared a burden, but each of them has been given a different task. They participate together and their fate is connected, yet they have had no knowledge that their actions were affecting the life of the other or even a part of the other's salvation.¹⁶⁷ Such participation in the whole is encapsulated best in the Space Trilogy. The main protagonist, Ransom, journeys to two planets on a mission to save them from corruption. What is clear to Ransom throughout is the strange intermediary position he inhabits. He is both transported to these planets in a vessel and he is also a vessel, a transposition of the will of Maeldil (God) into each of the environments he inhabits. In the trilogy, Ransom wrestles with this position. How can God expect him to defeat Satan (in *Perelandra*)? What if he refuses or fails? Lewis ties the fate of the world to Ransom's existential wrestling.¹⁶⁸ His concerns about who he is as an individual cannot be resolved by only factoring in his own hopes and desires. It is now complicated by a duty which he must bear willingly or not at all; this decision to save someone else – possibly at the expense of his own life – is the means by which he finds himself. At the end of the novel, this participation ontology (what Hans Boersma has called “sacramental ontology”)¹⁶⁹ is pictured by Ransom's inclusion (but not absorption) into a kind of mystical dance or celebratory worship in which all the lesser beings participate: animal life, human life, angelic life all bring their collective worship to God, through one another.

¹⁶⁵ Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, 109.

¹⁶⁶ Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 25-26.

¹⁶⁷ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 304-305.

¹⁶⁸ Ransom realizes he must literally wrestle, or physically confront, Satan-in-Weston. This realization comes to him very slowly after he has exhausted his attempts to reason with the woman.

¹⁶⁹ Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*, 21.

Boersma's call to return to a sacramental ontology is driven by ecclesial concerns – the hope of reuniting Catholics and Protestants. His point is that both Catholic and Protestant (particularly evangelical) doctrine shares more in common with modern hermeneutics than with the tradition of the church and the biblical account. By tracing a movement known as *nouvelle theologie*, he draws out the implications for our understanding of being. This, says Boersma, is in accord with Saint Paul's emphasis:

Saint Paul's theology is an otherworldly theology. He is much more concerned about heavenly participation than about earthly enjoyment. For the apostle, heaven is the place we come from, the place we currently inhabit, and the place we aim for. In short, according to Paul, our past, present, and future lie anchored in heaven. In contemporary Western theology, however, discourse on "heaven" has lost its central place... To speak of creaturely participation in heavenly realities ("heavenly participation") cannot but come across as outlandish to an age whose horizons have narrowed to such an extent that bodily goods, cultural endeavors, and political achievements have become matters of ultimate concern.¹⁷⁰

Lewis's purpose in *Transposition* is parallel to Boersma's. Beginning with the question of the nature of the Holy Spirit, Lewis drives home the point that we have forgotten – as a society – to include the heavenly perspective in our calculations. The shift in perspective (denying the "view from above") has altered not only the direction of artistic expression, but also our theological concerns. Lewis sketched this heavenly-mindedness into the character of Reepicheep. When the members of the Dawn Treader were deciding how far east to sail in search for the lost lords, Reepicheep made clear his otherworldly perspective:

My own plans are made. While I can, I sail east in the *Dawn Treader*. When she fails me, I paddle east in my coracle. When she sinks, I shall swim east with my four paws. And when I can swim no longer, if I have not reached Aslan's country, or shot over the edge of the world in some

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 3.

vast cataract, I shall sink with my nose to the sunrise and Peepiceek will be head of the talking mice in Narnia.¹⁷¹

Reepicheep makes this speech in the midst of disagreement. His resolve is unwavering throughout the book, such that the requirement that one person be left in the utter east to break an enchantment does not phase him. Rather, he delightfully claims the position.

Lewis makes a similar case in his landmark work, *The Discarded Image*, which introduces students to Medieval and Renaissance literature. He traces a model of the universe that was at the core of Medieval thought, and informed Western ideology down to the present day. For Lewis, “the Medieval Model is, if we may use the word, anthropoperipheral. We are creatures of the Margin.”¹⁷² From this basis, Lewis makes the claim that the modern Romantic movement carried an ontological shift away from the centrality of the model. The quest for originality is entirely at odds with the Medieval sentiment:

“The originality which we regard as a sign of wealth might have seemed to them [Medievals] a confession of poverty. Why make things for oneself like the lonely Robinson Crusoe when there is riches all about you to be had for the taking? The modern artist often does not think the riches are there. He is the alchemist who must turn base metal into gold. It makes a radical difference.”¹⁷³

Lewis goes on to argue that the “originality” of these early authors is a by-product of attention to the subject matter, and an attempt to faithfully portray their sources. One can only self-identify as a “creature of the margin” if the fundamental participation within a greater whole is also recognized.

This sense of participation in transposition is first hinted at by Joy. The next chapter explores the second sense in which transposition works. Here we have shown the downward

¹⁷¹ Lewis, *The Dawn Treader*, 232-233.

¹⁷² C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 58.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 211.

movement – that of higher medium represented in lower. Chapter 5 considers the subsequent upward movement hinted at by the worship scene – the drawing up (and in) of the lower mediums into the higher. It is the old doctrine of glorification.

Chapter 5: Transposition of Being: Incarnation and Glorification

Chapter 4 provides a broad look at the relationship between Transposition and Joy. It is a “top down” perspective which considers the ramifications of Joy descending into the body. This final chapter takes the other view, drawn from Lewis’s discussion of the implications of the idea of Transposition for an understanding of Incarnation. He writes,

“I have found it impossible, in thinking of what I call Transposition, not to ask myself whether it may help us to conceive the Incarnation...In varying degrees the lower reality can actually be drawn into the higher and become part of it. The sensation which accompanies joy becomes itself joy; we can hardly choose but say “incarnates joy.” If this is so, then I venture to suggest, though with great doubt and in a provisional way, that the concept of Transposition may have some contribution to make to theology – or at least to the philosophy – of the Incarnation.”¹⁷⁴

Lewis postulates a unique perspective of the nature of God’s presence in the Incarnation. It does not deny Christ’s full deity and full manhood. It emphasizes the special translation of deity into human form. That is, just as transposition reminds us that there is a complex emotional experience represented in the tingling of the spine, the Incarnation reminds us that there is a complex emotional being represented to us in the person of Christ. Human nature itself is changed precisely because of this representation. As Christ descends and takes on human form, he connects the natural with the supernatural. In the Incarnation, man sees his hope of an ultimate “drawing,” where not only individual people, but the entire race, are forever connected to deity. And yet, just as the emotions that carry Joy remain themselves, humanity remains itself in this arrangement. When discussing a broader perspective that includes animal life and vegetative life, Lewis suggests that these things will be drawn up into humanity just as humanity is drawn into deity. It is this act of drawing that causes us to treat dogs and cats as if they

¹⁷⁴ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 112-113.

possessed personality. Lewis suggests that our tendency to treat animals in this way is a natural feature of transposition:

Now it will be seen that in so far as the tame animal has a real self or personality, it owes this almost entirely to its master. If a good sheep dog seems ‘almost human’ that is because a good shepherd has made it so that is to say you must not think of a beast by itself, and call that a personality and then inquire whether God will raise and bless *that*. You must take the whole context *in* which the beast acquires its selfhood – namely ‘The-good-man-and-the-goodwife-ruling-their-children-and-their-beasts-in-the-good-homestead’.¹⁷⁵

The dog truly is a member of the family, despite being a different race of being, and on a wholly different level intellectually. Its membership is a result of the owner drawing the beast up into his humanity, and allowing the dog to share in it.

Joy allows humanity to participate in the Incarnation in much the same way. The desire for God’s presence is one indicator that his presence is already experienced. The apprehension of Joy is itself the best reminder that the human soul is being drawn into something else greater than itself. In his earliest days, the stabs of longing were perceived by Lewis as ends in themselves. Later he treated them as distracting illusions. At his conversion he recognized the power of Joy to invoke the presence of God. Yet after his conversion, the experience becomes relatively unimportant. It is treated as a sign post, pointing to the source of Joy. When lost, a signpost is invaluable, but when on the main road, almost unnoticeable. Just as we are assured by a long line of sign posts that we will arrive at our destination soon, so too the consistent longing for God’s presence assures us of our ultimate arrival.

Christ’s own incarnation demonstrates the reality of transposition. The Hebrew idea of Messiah¹⁷⁶ evoked transposition in a culture that continually cried out to be delivered.

¹⁷⁵ Lewis, “Animal Pain,” *The Complete Signature Classics*, 634-645.

¹⁷⁶ Many Old Testament passages indicated an anointed one or Messiah. Of all, the prophet Isaiah wrote at most length about the coming Messiah, what he would be called, what he would look like, how he would suffer, and his

Throughout the Old Testament, God delivered Israel through indirect means using individuals within the nation. The history of Judges demonstrates this best. Judges depicts a cycle of events in the nation of Israel in which a number of different people rise to rule the nation. These rulers differ from the kings of Israel in that they only serve for a short time, they were called by God to deal with a particular set of circumstances, and they have no hereditary right to rule. In addition to this, many judges deliver Israel through peculiar circumstances. What is significant is the difference between how God dealt with people in Moses's time and how God dealt with people in the time of the judges in that God saw fit to use the particular skills and gifts of the judges themselves rather than displaying supernatural wonders. For example, Gideon is called to deliver the people of Israel from the Midianites. Gideon accomplishes this by surprising the Midianite army in the middle of the night with torches and loud trumpet blasts.¹⁷⁷ His success is just as unlikely, from a natural perspective, as Moses's because the size of Gideon's army is a fraction of the Midianite army.¹⁷⁸ But God's means, in Gideon's case, according to the Bible was indirect. Another judge that demonstrates this indirectness is Ehud. Ehud was responsible for delivering Israel's tribute to the nation of Moab. On one such journey, Ehud was able to sneak a sword into the king's chamber where he slew Eglon. Ehud's resourcefulness allowed him to escape without notice. The Bible credits Ehud's success to his left-handedness.¹⁷⁹ That is, he was able to hide the weapon because the guards did not check the right side. God delivers Israel through Samson by imbuing the man with supernatural strength.¹⁸⁰ Christ's coming draws

heritage. Some examples include: Isaiah 55:3-4; 59:16; 61:1-3, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Daniel 9:25-26, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 9:9; 11:12,13.

¹⁷⁷ Judg. 7:15-25 ESV.

¹⁷⁸ In the story, God tells Gideon to reduce the number of men sent to raise the trumpets and torches at the battlefield on two occasions. The first time, 22,000 depart, leaving 10,000 to fight. The second time, only 300 men are left. This is roughly 10% of the original army Gideon had recruited. Gideon's army destroy 120,000 Midianites in the rout. Judg. 7:1-8; 8:10 ESV.

¹⁷⁹ Judg. 3 ESV.

¹⁸⁰ Judg. 16 ESV.

all of those “salvations” up into the Godhead and transforms them. They were merely the introduction to the whole book. They were a foreshadowing of a much greater salvation. While the people had an understanding that Messiah would perform this transpositional kind of function, many of them assumed it would be through similar means. In other words, Messiah was understood as a political savior (who can blame the Israelites of the day for this view given the oppression from Rome at the time), who would free the people from bondage to other nations. Messiah was foremost a temporal savior who would oust the Romans. Christ’s work of salvation gave significance (he called it fulfilling the law).¹⁸¹ to all other acts of salvation throughout Israel’s history. He is called “the last Adam”¹⁸² because he fulfills the role Adam failed to fulfill.¹⁸³ He is considered the ultimate high priest, because he fulfills the role that all other high priests could only depict in ceremony (that of removing sin). Their acts – the sacrifices of bulls and goats every year in a great ceremony – are transposed in the Incarnation. They are merely gestures: Christ’s sacrifice was the real thing. What they pictured actually became reality in Christ’s life and death.

Christ’s Incarnation also grants a unique perspective on Transposition. We have considered it largely as a discussion of the manifestation of metaphysical realities in a physical medium. In Christ’s Incarnation, the thing transposed is a person. Paul wrote these often debated lines to the Philippian church:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And

¹⁸¹ Matt. 5:17 ESV.

¹⁸² 1 Cor. 15:45 ESV.

¹⁸³ Adam’s role was to obey God perfectly and rule as his appointed regent over the whole Earth alongside his wife Eve. Adam and Eve were the representatives of the rest of the world to God, and failed in this role.

being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”¹⁸⁴

The phrase “made himself nothing,” (Greek *Κενοω*¹⁸⁵) is a picture of emptying a vessel (perhaps a bucket of water). Theologians have wide-ranging perspectives on this phrase, with some suggesting that Christ was not God while in human form, while others focus on Christ relinquishing the privileges due him as the Son of God, but not the quality of Godhood. For our purposes, the interesting idea is actually rooted in the action this word depicts: pouring out. To carry the analogy further, in transposition one medium is poured into another. The abundance of the richer quickly fills up the scarcity of the poorer. The implication is that no higher medium can be fully itself in a poorer (we have seen this before). The deeper implication is that no poorer medium can be fully itself without transposition. “Made himself nothing” reminds us that the humanity into which Christ stepped was not a step up, nor a step across, nor even a step down, but a step into an abyss. What Paul is telling the Philippians is, relatively speaking, humanity is nothing next to God; if Christ had been incarnated as a block of stone rather than a man, the difference in the descent would be miniscule. The hope (for humanity) is that such a descent has the immediate effect of giving worth to all other human beings; the notoriety of the cornerstone gives the rest of the stones significance.

This is reminiscent of Paul’s speech to the Areopagus (recorded in Acts 17:22-35), when he quotes Epimenides: “in him we live and move and have our being.” The reference is to Zeus, and the language reminds us of the transposition of being in the incarnation. “Being” is not a quality inherent to humanity. It, along with consciousness, emotion and personality, is

¹⁸⁴ Phil. 2:5-8 ESV.

¹⁸⁵ "Greek Lexicon :: G2758 (KJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 3 Dec, 2014.
<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2758&t=KJV>.

transposed. For the Greeks, for the apostle Paul, and for Lewis, our very existence is a kind of transposition. The incarnation reveals that transposition extends to being.

This final turn, transposition and being, reveals Joy's function as a signpost for Lewis. It is here "that humanity, still remaining itself, is not merely counted as, but veritably drawn into, Deity."¹⁸⁶ The development from chapter 4, which outlined the movement of a greater medium into a lesser one, is now reversed. In its place, the movement is the lesser drawn into the greater. For Lewis, this included the whole of the created order being drawn up into the maker. Humanity stands as a unique vessel in this regard since all of creation finds its fulfillment in being under mankind's dominion. It rises and falls with man's decision. This is why, in *Perelandra*, Lewis depicts the final scenes as an inauguration of the new planet. It cannot be said to have truly begun until the first man and first woman of that world are united and one. The imagery also suggests a gathering of all types of life (including the overseeing angel figures) around the pair. They are the centre and their rise and fall would constitute the rise and fall of *Perelandra*. It is in this context that the idea of the pursuit of Joy is swallowed up in the pursuit of a being toward whom all history and all creation move. Joy is an indication that this second process of transposition is underway.

The distinction made between "counted as" and "drawn into" is significant for Lewis. He is suggesting that this kind of participation is different from normal human relationships. The "counted as" is merely an acknowledgment of one's position. To be counted among the number of the gods of the Greek pantheon was extraordinary, but not particularly personal. The hope of being included in the counsels of Zeus or the plots of Pallas bears little resemblance to the idea imagined by Lewis here. Instead, while retaining personality (not being absorbed), the subject nevertheless joins in with and becomes a central part of the operation of the Godhead. In

¹⁸⁶ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 113.

Perelandra, Lewis imagines what this kind of relationship entails as the whole of creation participates in an unbroken relationship with God. We have already considered briefly the “worship scene” in chapter 4. There the creatures are in harmony, from the highest to the lowest, and they share their exultation with one another in a ceremony of words that praise the maker. The harmony is represented by a trance-like state that causes Ransom to forget the passage of time and even to lose track of who is speaking. This type of harmony is also present in the closing pages of *The Last Battle*, in which the whole host of Narnians cross the wide field of Aslan’s country toward the mountains. There is a unity, and yet they are not crowded. The sense of participation in the whole does not impinge the individual. This type of participation is also considered in *The Great Divorce* and *Till We Have Faces*.

In *The Great Divorce*, a mother vainly attempts to get her son back, and in that scene the corrosive nature of selfish love is revealed.¹⁸⁷ In another, a ghost attempts to seduce one of the heavenly host, but the ridiculousness of her horrific figure becomes the source of another reflection on the ontology of hell and heaven.¹⁸⁸ Hell and its denizens are of no weight, no substance, no reality when compared with that of Heaven. They cannot pick up the fruit, are horribly stabbed by blades of grass, and have no power to alter their surroundings. Despite this gulf between the two realms, we witness the transposition of one ghost from a transparent, sickly and ephemeral nature into a robust, full-fledged man. The new man is helped “further up and ... further in”¹⁸⁹ to the realm of Heaven by an angel – a process that will continue to alter him, as a muscle is built up through exercise.

Likewise, Orual experiences a drawing up and into participation with God, though it is a prolonged and agonizing journey. Like the mother from *The Great Divorce*, Orual’s selfish love

¹⁸⁷ Lewis, *The Complete Signature Classics*, 517-521.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 508.

¹⁸⁹ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 207.

for Psyche sets in motion a horrible separation. Banished from her husband (the God of the mountain that the people of Glome consider a beast requiring human sacrifice to appease) by Orual's demands, Psyche undergoes a series of trials – the most grievous of which is enduring the pleas of her closest friends and family in her journey to the Underworld. The Fox, in the last scenes of the novel, shows Orual a series of paintings that depict Psyche's journey. Through this series, Orual learns that her life was bound to Psyche's in a profound way. While Psyche was banished to perform numerous tasks, Orual "bore the anguish."¹⁹⁰ Orual was given no reason, no communication; she suffered the injustice so that Psyche could complete the work. This is Lewis's most subtle consideration of the Incarnation as it suggests the kind of emotional suffering Christ endured on the cross. It was not merely the physical hardship or pain, but the lack of God's presence through the trial that caused the most suffering. Orual, like Christ, cried out for an answer ("my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹⁹¹) and received none. Yet out of this suffering, Orual gets a picture of the resurrection and its transformative power over human nature, when she meets Psyche in the dead lands:

"And yet (this is hard to say) with all this, even because of all this, she was the old Psyche still; a thousand times more her very self than she had been before the Offering. For all that had then but flashed out in a glance or a gesture, all that one meant most when one spoke her name, was now wholly present, not to be gathered up from hints nor in shred, not some of it in one moment and some in another. Goddess? I had never seen a real woman before."¹⁹²

This is the doctrine of glorification, that a being might be "a thousand times more her self." It is not the obliteration of personality, nor is it some kind of illusion or mechanical trick. It is the growth of a soul in its own nature to perfection. Crucially, this process only takes place as the

¹⁹⁰ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 301.

¹⁹¹ Matt. 27:46 ESV.

¹⁹² Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 306.

soul participates in the divine nature. *Till We Have Faces* closes with Orual being transformed into the same likeness as her sister Psyche in the presence of God. Orual writes,

“I ended my first book with the words *no answer*. I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice?”¹⁹³

Orual’s long journey toward understanding ends with this simple confession. Lewis formulates his approach to Joy much the same way. Having received no answer to his queries about *Sehnsucht* and Joy for much of his life, having been thwarted in his pursuit through many avenues, Lewis finds the questions die away. All along it has been a sign-post, not the source of his satisfaction.

It seems fitting to conclude the discussion of glorification and transposition by considering one of Lewis’s last written articulations of it, in *Letters to Malcolm*. The Letters are an exploration of prayer life, in all its difficulties and joys, with a rhetorical flourish that invites all to come and listen in. One of the most profound passages is his consideration of sensation and memory in its relation to resurrection:

“We are not, in this doctrine, concerned with matter as such at all: with waves and atoms and all that. What the soul cries out for is the resurrection of the senses. Even in this life matter would be nothing to us if it were not the source of sensations. Now we already have some feeble and intermittent power of raising dead sensations from their graves. I mean, of course, memory....At present we tend to think of the soul as somehow ‘inside’ the body. But the glorified body of the resurrection as I conceive it – the sensuous life raised from its death – will be inside the soul.”¹⁹⁴

For Lewis, glorification does not put us in the same category as angels, who are beings of pure spirit and have no use for the bodily senses. Rather, the resurrection of sensation itself, the

¹⁹³ Ibid., 308.

¹⁹⁴ Lewis, *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, 121.

transposition of it from its meager beginnings on earth to its fullest expression in eternity, is the central cry of the person: to reunite with the body, because it is the seat of the senses – the vehicle through which we grow and learn and transmute our environment into soul. The other fascinating feature here is his emphasis on the reversal produced through resurrection of the senses. It corresponds with the discussion of transposition – the soul is not inside the body, rather, the body is inside the soul. Lewis recognizes that the final position of the senses is a state of perfection within which stimulæ are fully realized. At the moment, Lewis says, we have memory, which does a poor job of resurrecting the sensations. Memory has been one of Lewis (Wordsworth affirms the place of memory in “Tintern Abbey” with, “And passing even into my purer mind / With tranquil restoration”¹⁹⁵) chief portals for exploring *Sehnsucht* and Joy. In the resurrected body, the fullness of memory overtakes our limited earthly sensations:

“The fact that [the hills] are blue five miles away, and the fact that they are green when you are on them, are equally good facts... Wordsworth’s ‘landscape appared in celestial light’ may not have been so radiant in the past when it was present as in the remembered past. That is the beginning of glorification. Thus in the sense-bodies of the redeemed the whole New Earth will arise.”¹⁹⁶

Here Lewis reiterates his perception of man’s place in the model of transposition. He is a vehicle through which the whole earth rises. Thus, if man does not rise, Earth too will fail to rise. Additionally, his positioning of “fact” as three-dimensional, that is, having ontological significance relative to the viewer, is also present. The dialectic of reality and illusion – something Lewis struggled to rightly divine throughout his life – is here ameliorated. The “equal good” of the distant perspective (memory) and the present circumstance brings to mind the great participatory chain in which human ontology is embedded. In addition, the “New Earth” arises *in* the sense-bodies. It is not external to them, but (thinking of the body in the soul) part of their

¹⁹⁵ Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” *The Major Works*, 132.

¹⁹⁶ Lewis, *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, 122.

new nature. Just as the redeemed person's life is "in Christ"¹⁹⁷ so too the life of the new Earth exists in humanity.

Lewis follows this with a statement that is perhaps his most pithy and profound on the ontology of transposition: "what was sown as a becoming rises as being."¹⁹⁸ Here is Joy, sown in the senses through our desires, accomplishing an ontological task undreamed of by the subject. It is participating in a transformation of the senses themselves into adequate vessels for the full expression of human desire, and its object. Here is where incarnation and glorification meet. They both travel in the same mode of our experience, a longing and desire for "we know not what." Yet, it is the discovery of the object of this longing that triggers the ascent, the glorification of the soul as it is transformed into the likeness of Christ. Notice that Lewis places becoming and being in order. Becoming is the lesser, the diminution, the image of longing. It is the flash or slag of Joy. Being is greater, the end, the glory of longing. Such ordering calls to mind the conversation from *The Great Divorce* already discussed in chapter 4, in which an intellectual ghost clings to the idea of development and growth over the greater glory of true answers. Lewis's vision of Hell is one in which everyone is becoming and never being; there is no final ontological shift, prophesied by the gleams of Joy and ushered in by the transposition of God's presence.

In his most famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory," Lewis describes his final assessment of Joy and transposition. It takes the phrase "sown as becoming rises as being" to its ultimate end. The following passages illustrate the final movement from Joy as sign-post in our experience to reunion with a person.

¹⁹⁷Eph. 1:1-13, ESV

¹⁹⁸ Lewis, *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, 123.

Now, if we are made for heaven, the desire for our proper place will be already in us, but not yet attached to the true object, and will even appear as the rival of that object.¹⁹⁹

Lewis begins by sketching the transition from alien to countryman. As an exile, the human creature already possesses the desire for its proper place. However, as Lewis found in the intense intellectual battle leading up to his conversion, this desire is often perceived as antagonistic to heaven. This is why Lewis could say that he was a reluctant convert, since he was certain that his submission to God would entail the abandonment of Joy. Lewis continues:

We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it...²⁰⁰

These two, intertwined truths provide the next step. The images are not enough to capture the experience, but only provide a partial answer to the presence of this mysterious longing.

However, they appear with such variety and frequency that it cannot be denied. In essence, Joy cannot be explained and cannot be explained away.

These things – the beauty, the memory of our own past – are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers.²⁰¹

This is reminiscent of Lewis's comments regarding "flash and slag" from *Surprised by Joy*.

There he was showing how his attitude toward the images changed from adoration to hatred.

Here, he takes it one step further by suggesting the moral implications of longing by invoking the language of idols. An idol is an image (often carved from wood, stone, or precious metal) that stands in for a god or goddess. "Dumb idols" is a reference to the impotence of the statues to accomplish anything on behalf of the worshipper. The idol cannot speak and cannot hear. In worshipping beauty or some distant memory, the once useful image (since it pointed to Joy) is

¹⁹⁹ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 29.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

now wasted. The images cannot bear the weight of worship placed upon them, since they are only a guide. This sense of misplaced worship leads Lewis to consider the final development of the transposition of being. Lewis writes,

And now notice what is happening. If I had rejected the authoritative and scriptural image of glory and stuck obstinately to the vague desire which was, at the outset, my only pointer to heaven, I could have seen no connection at all between that desire and the Christian promise. But now, having followed up what seemed puzzling and repellent in the sacred books, I find, to my great surprise, looking back, that the connection is perfectly clear. Glory, as Christianity teaches me to hope for it, turns out to satisfy my original desire and indeed to reveal an element in that desire which I had not noticed.²⁰²

Glory becomes the answer to longing because it both satisfies the desire and demonstrates the element of belonging.²⁰³ The promise of glory is acceptance by God, and “welcome into the heart of things.”²⁰⁴ The transposition of being, established by the incarnation of God in the world, comes full circle as the human soul is united with God through glorification. Just as Christ’s incarnation paves the way for mankind’s ascension into the godhead, glorification establishes the paradigm of man’s new relation to God. As Lewis puts it, “the whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy.”²⁰⁵ The image of the fountain suggests a finality to Lewis’s lifelong search. His thirst has been slaked. In the process he discovered that the thirst was not merely a desire for some vague, unobtainable object, but for permanent residence in the presence of God.

²⁰² Ibid., 39.

²⁰³ Ibid., 40.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 41.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 44.

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