Faithful Subjectivities: Narrative Portrayals of a Christian Social Imaginary

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the novel has provided a means of expressing Christian social imaginaries, or models of reality, through attempts to give narrative form to the identity and experience of individual believers that I term faithful subjectivity. Faithful subjectivity refers to the portrayal of individual self-understanding and behaviour that is rooted in the Christian metanarrative and participates simultaneously in the material and spiritual dimensions of its understanding of the world and the cosmos. This thesis thereby highlights the seeming paradox whereby writers turn to fiction to articulate and explore theological verities. It considers three novels from different literary periods, which each conform to different genre norms and are shaped by different theological traditions: John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra* (1943), and Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* (2004). My central contention is that these novelistic expressions of faithful subjectivity are each centred around distinctive organising metaphors: Bunyan famously presents faith as a journey in *Pilgrim's Progress*, whereas Lewis frames it in terms of total war in *Perelandra*, and Robinson expresses faith as a matter of perception in *Gilead*. The analysis of each novel is situated in its historical and cultural contexts, as well as in light of its author's theological dispositions, in order to better grasp the particular metaphor that it employs as a model of faithful subjectivity. I then consider the affordances and limitations of each structuring metaphor. This inquiry provides cultural and historical depth for broader conversations about the articulation of a Christian social imaginary alongside and in tension with the emergence of secular western subjectivity that has long been associated with the rise of the novel.

Contents

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Introduction

Some men by feigning words as dark as mine,
Make truth to spangle, and its rayes to shine.
—John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*

Stories give meaning to human existence, experience, and culture. According to Arthur Frank, "human life depends on the stories we tell: the sense of self that those stories impart, the relationships constructed around shared stories, and the sense of purpose that stories both propose and foreclose" (3). While narratives are not agents in the sense that humans are, they nevertheless can be profoundly influential in shaping identity and behaviour: "[W]e not only continue to be animals who make stories but also animals who are *made by* our stories. We tell and retell narratives that themselves come fundamentally to constitute and direct our lives" (C. Smith 64, emphasis original). In particular, the ability of narrative to give expression to metaphoric understandings plays a crucial role in its cultural work. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue: "[M]etaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (3). Put in these terms, the novel can be seen as a powerful and complex means of giving expression to "conceptual system[s]," and indeed has long been associated with the emergence of secular consciousness within western society.

A somewhat different perspective on the ability of metaphor and narrative to shape thought and action is provided by Charles Taylor's concept of the "social imaginary." Although complex, the social imaginary can be defined as "the way people think about the

world, how they imagine it to be, how they act intuitively in relation to it" (Trueman 37). As Taylor points out, "images, stories, legends" are a key part of the social imaginary (*Secular* 172). Significantly, the social imaginary tends to be assumed and implicit more than it is obvious: "It is in fact that largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have" (*Secular* 173). In addition, the social imaginary is more than simply a materialist conception, for it is accompanied by "some notion of a moral or metaphysical order, in the context of which the norms and ideals make sense" (*Secular* 172). These largely unarticulated and shadowy notions of "moral or metaphysical order" are integral to making sense of one's life or identity. As Charles Taylor points out: "To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary" (*Sources* 28). Inescapably, this understanding of what is good and worthwhile leads to thinking of human life in terms of narrative: "[T]his sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story. But this is to state another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative"* (*Sources* 47, emphasis original). Such a personal narrative for the understanding of the individual self is bound up with, or nestled within, broader narratives about history, culture, and the cosmos itself. Particularly, as Christian Smith argues, humans are shaped by grand narratives or metanarratives that offer encompassing accounts of existence and history: "Our stories fully encompass and define our lives. They situate us in reality itself, by elaborating the contours of fundamental moral order, comprising sacred and profane, in narrative form, and placing us too as actors within the larger drama" (78). This thesis is particularly concerned with novels that attempt to articulate a Christian metanarrative or social imaginary.

However, it may be questioned how the novel can provide a legitimate avenue for exploring theological questions. Theology is concerned with claims of truth about God and humans, whereas the novel is fundamentally fictional and abounding with figures of speech. Thus, historically from within the ranks of Christianity at least, there has been a 'Puritan' objection to fiction as fundamentally deceptive, and incapable of conveying truth: "the mother of lies," as the Elizabethan poet Philip Sidney characterises this charge in his *Defence of Poesy* (1595) (Sidney 129). Thus, John Bunyan, in his Apology for *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), felt the need to address the complaint that "Metaphors make us blind" (*Progress* 3). Additionally, as Malcolm Guite notes, "some philosophers of the Enlightenment thought that image and imagination simply clouded and obscured the pure dry knowledge that they were after" (2). Despite these objections, others have found that fiction can indeed meaningfully "express important theological truths" (Wright 2). The reason for this is bound up with the significance of imagination as, in Trevor Hart's words, "something lying close to the core of what it is to be human, a feature of our humanity that shapes our essentially human responses to others, to the world and (we may reasonably suppose) to God" (5). Imagination is certainly integral to the whole literary project, but it is also essential to the theological enterprise. In Christian thought, God's transcendence of human thinking and language necessarily requires the use of metaphors and analogies. Consequently, as Marilynne Robinson claims, "Great theology is always a kind of giant and intricate poetry, like epic or saga" (*Adam* 117). Accordingly, Guite argues that the "poetic imagination" has the capacity to mediate truth, "to bridge the gap between immanence and transcendence, to mediate meaning between unembodied 'apprehension' and embodied 'comprehension'" (243). In fiction, this mediation particularly occurs through the use of metaphoric language in association with the depiction of characters and events. Although novels are fictitious in terms of character and action, David Jeffrey and Gregory Maillet suggest the possibility of seeing connections between the

narrative world and the actual world through "an engaging cortex of imaginative analogy" (40). The depiction of characters and actions within the world of the fictional narrative can highlight particular theological themes and ideas as significant for the world outside of the text, just as a text might alternatively highlight ideas about determinism or love. As C. S. Lewis puts it: "The story does what no theorem can quite do. It may not be 'like real life' in the superficial sense: but it sets before us an image of what reality may well be like at some more central region" ("On Stories" 101). Leland Ryken similarly claims: "We also look *through* [the literary work] to our experience in the world. The work of art is a veil or window or lens through which we look at reality" (52, emphasis original). The "*feigning words*" of imaginative language, as John Bunyan terms them, make theological ideas and truth-claims more vivid and concrete, bringing them closer to human experience while also preserving a sense of theological mystery.

At the same time, the narrative articulation of a Christian imaginary is also challenged by the principles of novelistic realism. A Christian imaginary or model of reality must encompass both the perceptible material plane and an invisible spiritual realm that surrounds and pervades it. However, the realist novel is strongly associated with conventions of plausibility and likelihood that exclude the supernatural from a "realistic" representation. According to Ian Watt's influential formulation, "[W]hatever the ends of the novelist may be, his means should be rigidly restricted to terrestrial characters and actions: the realm of the spirit should be presented only through the subjective experiences of the characters" (84). Accordingly, while religious experience may be depicted in a novel, its plausibility is to be assessed on materialistic considerations alone. Thus, as Georg Lukács has famously written: "The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88). Although realist conventions create difficulties for a more direct depiction of a spiritual or supernatural realm that touches human experience in the actual world, this has not precluded writers from the

attempt. T. R. Wright highlights the approach taken by Catholic novelists such as Evelyn Waugh and Flannery O'Connor, who "challenge the unexamined assumptions of the 'modern' secular world, the 'rational' view that miracles never happen and that religious experience is an illusion" (111). As Wright asserts, these contrasting "portraits of reality . . . are both ideological and theological, deeply imbued with value-judgements about the nature, purpose and origin of a world either sustained or abandoned by God" (128). The point that it would be helpful to draw is that the representation of religious understanding and experience may require the portrayal of the interpenetration of supernatural and material worlds. This necessitates metaphoric language that both conveys something of such supernatural realities and paradoxically indicates that such reality exceeds the metaphoric description, which equates to a "symbolic expression of realities beyond human comprehension" (Wright 120). One of the ways that a Christian social imaginary may be expressed novelistically is through the portrayal of seemingly realistic characters that persuasively embody faith in the supernatural realm of a Christian imaginary.

Accordingly, fictional expressions of a Christian imaginary can be explored through the idea of faithful subjectivity, as part of a broader conversation in the humanities and social sciences about rethinking dominant models of western subjectivity, either through developing new models or retrieving older ones. The term "subjectivity" refers loosely to "the psychological dimension of human life" and to "the shared inner life of the subject, to the way subjects feel, respond, experience" (Luhrmann 345). Fundamentally, for my purposes, it is strongly connected with the idea of making sense of one's life in connection with a particular understanding of the world and of what matters. Faithful subjectivity is thus intended to serve as shorthand in this thesis for the sort of self-understanding that is rooted in the Christian metanarrative and thus participates in a Christian vision of the world and the

cosmos.[1] Exploring models of subjectivity that differ from a modern secular western subjectivity is of increasing interest to scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Stephen Healy et al., for example, argue urgently for the need of a "decentred [human] subject . . . at home in a larger active collectivity, willing to put itself on the map alongside 'others'" (398). In other words, they emphasise that humans live in the world alongside a host of nonhuman entities, and this recognition contributes to attempts to envision a "postcapitalist" community or imaginary: "[H]olding on to the open, experimental disposition of the decentred subject is crucial at a time when much of what has appeared solid – democracy, so-called global capitalism, and the stability of the earth's life giving ecologies – appears to be faltering" (Healy et al. 389).[2] From the different perspective of Christian sociology, Joseph Scimecca argues that the materialism of contemporary sociology "offers a tragically limited view of what it means to be human," and that there is "need for a transcendental model of the person" (134). He argues for the necessity of seeing humans as being more than what can be encapsulated in strictly material terms. Although Scimecca and Healy et al. argue from within different disciplines and frameworks of belief, they demonstrate the pervasiveness of these concerns about who humans are and how they should think about themselves, and thus of what types of narratives to participate in. The consideration of faithful subjectivity in literature offers a contribution to this broad cross-disciplinary conversation.

In this thesis I will argue that the novel has provided an enduring yet fraught means of articulating Christian subjectivity through the use of organising metaphors, which are embodied through the devices of characterisation and plot even as the norms of realism are simultaneously placed under strain by metaphor's allegorical tendencies. Narrative enables

[1] I owe the term "faithful subjectivity" to Associate Professor Philip Steer.
[2] Jana Norman, in *Posthuman Legal Subjectivity: Reimagining the Human in the Anthropocene* (Routledge, 2022), seems to argue for something similar in her advocacy of "the Cosmic Person" as the "reimagined, posthuman legal subject" (131), a concept that, in her view, "makes human–non-human coexistence normal and renders self-centred individualism abnormal" (139).

the expression of different understandings of subjectivity, "the sense of self" to use Arthur Frank's phrase (3). Consequently, the novel provides a compelling means of exploring deep existential and theological questions through the portrayal of subjectivities other than our own. I will elaborate on this claim through the analysis of three novels from across the last four centuries that each employ metaphor as the basis for a narrative account of faithful subjectivity: John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra* (1943), and Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* (2004). The historical scope of this discussion aims to show that theological ideas about identity have been expressed repeatedly through novelistic form at particular historical moments, while the juxtaposition of these texts also enables reflection on what particular aspects of Christian faith are emphasised by different metaphors or symbols of faithful subjectivity. According to C. S. Lewis, literature enables its readers "to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own" (*Experiment* 137). In other words, literature "admits us to experiences other than our own" (*Experiment* 139). This admission to other experiences and subjectivities is a crucial part of literature's power of defamiliarization: "Great fiction proceeds by making the familiar and the ordinary strange again . . . It offers alternative worlds that put the actual one in a new light" (Bruner 9-10). This capacity of making strange and new enables fiction to convey a sense of what a Christian imaginary is like.

The different metaphors that are employed by these three texts provide different models or pictures of what Christian identity or subjectivity can look like. Although these novels are all deeply rooted in the total history of Christianity, particularly the foundation of Holy Scripture, they arise from diverse contexts of British and American Protestant Christianity. The close reading of faithful subjectivity in each chapter is therefore prefaced by a biographical discussion that situates each novelist in their historical and theological contexts, partly in order to draw out the means by which each author came to create fiction

suitable for the expression of spiritual truth. The historical sweep of this analysis is aimed in the first instance at highlighting the variety of expressions of faithful subjectivity that have been articulated by novelists, but it is not intended to suggest that later portrayals improve on or displace earlier ones. The three novels that I will consider provide narrative expressions of three different metaphors that present certain understandings of what it means to be a Christian. These narrative expressions are, I would argue, complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Each of them provides something that adds to the others. They are not deficient in themselves, but each by themselves does not necessarily convey the entirety of the Christian life.

Chapter One addresses John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, mainly the First Part (1678), with some reference to the Second Part (1684). The focus is on the image of the journey that the allegorical narrative famously uses as a metaphor for the Christian life. The journey that its protagonists take from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City signifies a process of transformation in the life of the Christian from a state of lostness to entering into the presence of God. The image of the journey shapes the subjectivity, or self-understanding, of the pilgrims to focus upon their future meeting with the Lord of the Celestial City, and the hope of this provides the motivation for persevering on the journey. The destination provides encouragement for pilgrims to face the suffering and trouble that befalls them in life. The journey is not largely a solitary one, underscoring the importance of community, although the fullness of community is only reached within the Celestial City. The communal aspect of the journey is even more strongly stressed in the Second Part. The journey provides a model of subjectivity that will likely only make sense if assumptions of eternal realities are granted. Paradoxically, joy and blessing and life is found in leaving behind what was thought to be life and joy and blessing.

In Chapter Two, I consider *Perelandra* (1943) by C. S. Lewis, the second novel of his *Space Trilogy*, and its very different organising metaphor of total war. The central assumption is that there is a cosmic war going on which pervades all dimensions of human life, from the spiritual to the physical. The main character, Ransom, is presented as an ordinary person who is enlisted in this cosmic conflict. Ordinary life becomes of eternal significance as a manifestation or battleground of this war, with daily choices and actions being one of the ways through which the battle is contested. Courage is emphasised as a central virtue. This model looks forward to the great resolution when all evil and darkness will ultimately be overcome, and thus provides encouragement for those whose identity is shaped by the metaphor to keep fighting even when the darkness seems to hang heavy.

Chapter Three discusses *Gilead* (2004) by Marilynne Robinson, which is the most realistic of the three novels considered in this thesis, being, on the surface, a fairly uneventful historical novel. Through the meditative perspective of the narrator, the dying minister John Ames, the novel presents his central insight that faithful subjectivity is a matter of perception: perceiving that the earth and humans are created by God and are thus imbued with a sacredness which must be recognised and treasured. Ames's personal perception in the novel is shown to fall short of the implications of this principle, however, especially through his blindness to racial injustice in the novel's historical milieu of 1950s America. Perception turns out to be a form of courage, for to truly perceive the sacredness of others requires actions that acknowledge and honour this sacredness.

Chapter 1
Faithful Subjectivity as Journey: *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678)

This Book will make a Travailer of thee.
—John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*

Introduction

John Bunyan was born in 1628 and died in 1688, only a few months prior to the November "Glorious Revolution." Bunyan lived in times of political and social upheaval, including the English Revolution and the Restoration of 1660. In this period, as Isabel Rivers notes, Christianity was central to individual and collective English life: "[S]eventeenth- and eighteenth-century English society and culture was essentially religious in its institutions, practices and beliefs" (445). Bunyan converted from nominal Anglicanism sometime in the early 1650s, in the wake of the English Revolution and the disestablishment of the Church of England, and joined the Baptist stream of the Protestant Nonconformist movement that emerged from the wide river of post-Reformation English Christianity.[3] The publication of his treatise *Some Gospel-truths Opened* (1656), directed against certain Quaker doctrines concerning the person and work of Christ, marked the beginning of Bunyan's polemical literary engagements (Keeble "Literary Life" 19). The Commonwealth, or Interregnum, had been a "period of ascendancy . . . in which Presbyterians and Independents secured access to

[3] Some of the dates here are drawn from the "Chronology" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, edited by N. H. Keeble, xxix-xxxii.

the centres of power" (Jones et al. 1). In contrast, the re-establishment of the Church of England following Charles II's restoration in 1660 was an "unmitigated disaster" for many Nonconformists (Coffey 38).[4] In November 1660, Bunyan was arrested for being, as he declares in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), "an upholder and maintainer of unlawful assemblies and conventicles, and for not conforming to the national worship of the Church of England," and he was not released until 1672 (*Works* 1:47, sec. 319). This experience of imprisonment proved formative to his career as a writer. Prior to his arrest Bunyan had published four works, but between 1660 and the end of his life he produced thirty-eight further books, and a further sixteen would be published posthumously (Keeble "Literary Life" 21, 18). Many of the works he wrote during these twelve years of imprisonment included practical theological treatises like *Christian Behaviour* (1663) and spiritual autobiographies like *Grace Abounding* (1666), but he also began work on the narrative that would become the First Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress From This World, To That Which is To Come* (1678).

The Pilgrim's Progress is shaped by the particular theological beliefs of English Reformed theology (popularly, and perhaps misleadingly, known as Calvinism). Dewey Wallace notes: "Understanding John Bunyan's theology and relating it to the religious context of England in the second half of the seventeenth century is crucial for the interpretation of his classic writings" (69). Although Bunyan was acquainted with prominent English Puritan theologians, such as John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, he was not academically trained and did not write a systematic exposition of his theological position (Wallace 70-1).[5] However, as

[4] For detailed and nuanced explorations of the Restoration and its effects, see N. H. Keeble, *The Restoration* (Blackwell, 2002) and Ronald Hutton, *The Restoration: A Political and Religious History* (Oxford UP, 1986).
[5] For more examinations of post-Restoration English Protestant Nonconformity, see John Coffey (ed.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume I: The Post-Reformation Era, 1559-1689* (Oxford UP, 2020).
For an older, but detailed, account of Bunyan's theology, see Richard L. Greaves's *John Bunyan* (Eerdmans, 1969), vol.2 of the *Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology.*

Wallace notes, "A consistent, identifiable, and fairly sophisticated Reformed or Calvinist theology focused on soteriology and practical piety undergirds Bunyan's writings, constituting an operative, if not systematic, body of divinity upon which he drew as occasion warranted" (83). Central to Bunyan's theology of salvation (soteriology) is the principle of the two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Of themselves, human beings as sinners cannot fulfil the covenant of works, "which requires complete obedience to the law of God," and so must instead trust in Christ and the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to unworthy sinners, which is the essence of the covenant of grace: "To be under the covenant of works is to be a sinner under the curse and wrath of God; to be under the covenant of grace is to be a forgiven sinner" (Wallace 74). Human works cannot merit acceptance by God; rather, sinners can only be accepted by trusting in Christ, and not their own efforts. Accordingly, Richard Greaves emphasises that divine grace was "a concept which permeated the whole of [Bunyan's] writings and which was the focal point of his preaching and thinking" (159). The pastoral intention of communicating these life-shaping principles underlies Bunyan's decision to express them in fictional form.

The Pilgrim's Progress was first published in 1678, with a Second Part following in 1684, partly in response to some imitative works from other writers. Part One, which is framed as the narrator's dream, depicts the journey of "*a Man*," who is subsequently renamed Christian, and his later companions to the Celestial City (*Progress* 8).[6] The narrative begins with the Man living in the City of Destruction, where he bears a "*great burden*" on his back, as he reads about the impending judgement against the City and realises his wretched plight (*Progress* 8). The Man meets Evangelist who directs him to the Wicket Gate, which is the beginning of the road to the Celestial City, and, now named Christian, he proceeds towards the Gate, leaving behind his wife and family. Along the way he experiences mishaps and

[6] Unless otherwise indicated, all italics are original to the text.

delays, including getting stuck in the Slough of Dispond, before being admitted at the Gate by Good-Will. Christian then begins his journey along the straight road to the Celestial City, first staying at the Interpreter's House, and when he passes the place of the Cross, his burden rolls off his back. He subsequently stays at Palace Beautiful, before entering the Valley of Humiliation, where he has to fight against Apollyon, the evil ruler of the City of Destruction. After escaping the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Christian is subsequently joined by Faithful, and they travel on to Vanity Fair, where "Houses," "Souls," "Adultries," and more are for sale (*Progress* 73). Faithful is killed by the rulers of the Fair, but Christian escapes and is joined by Hopeful. However, they later leave the Path and are captured by Giant Despair and imprisoned in Doubting Castle, only escaping when Christian remembers the key in his pocket. They eventually enter the Country of Beulah, within sight of the Gates of the Celestial City, but have to cross the "deep" River of Death first (*Progress* 128). Part One concludes with their glorious admission into the Celestial City. Part Two, also framed as the narrator's dream, concerns the same journey to the Celestial City, this time with a more communal focus on Christian's wife, Christiana, and their children, as well as a group of other pilgrims with them that increases as the narrative unfolds. The narrative begins with an account of how Christiana, her four sons, and her neighbour, Mercie, set out on the same pilgrimage, and come to be admitted at the Wicket Gate. From the House of the Interpreter onwards, the pilgrims essentially follow Christian's route in Part One, accompanied by the soldier Great-heart who fights the giants they occasionally encounter. As they travel towards the City, the company gradually expands to include a wide range of pilgrims, who exemplify various character types: Mr Honest, Feeble-mind, Ready-to-Hault, Dispondencie and his daughter Much-afraid, as well as Valiant-for-Truth and Mr Stand-fast. The narrative concludes after the company's arrival in the Land of Beulah with the pilgrims awaiting the

individual summons to cross the River to go to the City, Christiana being the first to receive the summons.

The Metaphor of the Journey

The metaphor of the journey provides the narrative shape for the version of faithful subjectivity that is articulated in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. As Roland Frye suggests, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is primarily focused on "the distinctive life of the Christian," and this life is explored through the metaphor of a journey (7). The plot simply describes Christian's journey on foot to the destination of the Celestial City, and his experience is characterised by resting-points, obstacles, and dangers. As Colin Manlove notes, "Many previous [English] writers of pilgrimage homilies and allegories had employed the concept of the one path, but it seems fair to say that none of them gave it quite the centrality, emphasis and powerful realization which it receives in Bunyan's narrative" (16). It would be misleading, however, to characterise Bunyan as particularly innovative since "the metaphor of the pilgrimage through life was already firmly enmeshed in the fibers of medieval spirituality" and maintained its centrality after the Reformation (Caspar 13). Indeed, Bunyan's use of the journey as a metaphor for the Christian life is drawn from Biblical sources, particularly the eleventh and twelfth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Stranahan 280). On a literal level, the geography of Christian's journey also likely draws some inspiration from Bunyan's Bedfordshire surrounds and possibly the Great North Road from London (Russell 239). This doubling of the physical and the metaphysical points to the complexity of Bunyan's narrative model. The journey undertaken by the pilgrims, which is presented as an embodiment of the Christian life, occurs simultaneously at a material level (as a journey through the experiences of life) and at an allegorical level (as a process of forming spiritual attributes).

The interpretation of *Pilgrim's Progress* is complicated by the challenge of articulating the relationship between its allegorical and material dimensions. It is tempting to simply read the entire narrative in allegorical terms. As Jeremy Tambling notes, "at its simplest, allegory is a way of saying one thing and meaning another" (6). In a sense, an allegory is a sustained metaphor, involving the personification of some abstract idea to make it "appear real, forceful" (Tambling 12). However, as C. S. Lewis points out, an allegory is not merely "a cryptogram to be translated," where the particular images used are discarded once deciphered; rather, the images used are essential to understanding the underlying concepts: "[W]e ought to be discovering, as we read, that humility is like that green valley" ("The Vision of John Bunyan" 149). Indeed, rather than dull rigid codification, allegory possesses a richness which Tambling conveys in his summary of the allegorical variety of *Pilgrim's Progress*:

> *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a dream-vision, like the medieval texts discussed earlier, such as *Piers Plowman*. It uses personification allegory, while being also a narrative unfolding of scriptural figuralism, and an exposition of biblical allegories. Further, it makes the hero, Christian, in his journey to the Celestial City, a figure for the reader to follow and imitate. (69)

Significantly, as Tambling suggests, allegory can also have a didactic function, and Bunyan explicitly links his work to such a purpose in his Apology for *Pilgrim's Progress*:

> *This Book will make a Travailer of thee,*
> *If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be;*
> *It will direct thee to the Holy Land,*
> *If thou wilt its Directions understand*[.] (*Progress* 6)

Bunyan intends that the reader will be instructed and shaped by the allegorical aspects of the pilgrimage to understand their own spiritual life and identity as if it was a journey. Thus, he

invites the reader to become a pilgrim and to participate in the rich allegorical significance of the journey that John Knott highlights: “The way is the path of all Christians through the wilderness of the world . . . and simultaneously the inner way of faith of the individual believer” (445). The indispensable image of the journey signifies and points to both the spiritual growth of the individual believer and the shared experiences of the faithful community (past, present, and future) living within the world.

Multiple layers of signification are present as well in the characters from *Pilgrim’s Progress.* As a figure of allegorical significance, Christian is intended to be representative of every Christian, an understanding that is invited by his generic name. As such, the particular model of subjectivity exhibited by Christian is to be a shaping example, a pattern for the reader. This is quite unlike a character’s subjectivity as presented under the principles of realism in the novel, where there is an ostensible “authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals” (Watt 27). At the same time, however, Christian is also particular and individuated in a manner similar to a novelistic character: his struggles and temptations are not the same as Faithful’s, for instance, who is also intended to be representative of Christians in general. As Nancy Rosenfeld argues, Bunyan may be considered a contributor to the novel’s development through his creation of “individuated human characters” rather than flat “allegorical figures” (4). However, subjectivity as represented in *Pilgrim’s Progress* has an explicit exemplarity, or applicability, to it that is absent from the realism of the novel. Such exemplarity is part of the wider function of the allegory in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which manifests both in the image of the journey and in the characters on that journey.

One important consequence of adopting the journey as the central image in *Pilgrim’s Progress* is the sense of orientation or direction that it imparts to the articulation of faithful subjectivity. The entire narrative is structured by the literal journey toward the Celestial City, and thus Christian subjectivity is framed as a life-long pilgrimage which derives its meaning

from its destination. Charles Taylor argues that an integral element of identity is possessing "an orientation to the good," which basically means having a sense of what matters most, and which can be understood in terms of our lives possessing a certain "direction," or alternatively of understanding our lives as a story: "In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going" (*Sources* 47). As Alasdair MacIntyre argues, "all lived narratives" occur in light of "an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a *telos*" (215). At the beginning of Part One of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the importance of such a telos is made apparent by its absence. When the Man is full of distress because of the conviction of judgement against the City of Destruction, he can find no way of escape because he does not know where to go. The narrator relates: "I saw also that he looked this way, and that way, as if he would run; yet he stood still, because, as I perceived, he could not tell which way to go" (*Progress* 9). When Evangelist meets the Man in this state and asks why he stands still, his reply highlights his uncertainty of direction: "Because I know not whither to go" (*Progress* 9). It is only after Evangelist directs him towards the Wicket Gate, and ultimately towards the Celestial City, that the Man is able to go anywhere. On the allegorical level, this signifies the lostness of every individual apart from Christ, and the need for Scriptural instruction from ministers of the gospel. On the literal level though, this conveys the idea that life ought to involve a sense of direction toward a specific destination. In a sense, the Man, before receiving directions from Evangelist, does not really know who he is, which is perhaps reflected in his lack of specific name. Although Christian subsequently indicates at Palace Beautiful that his name was formerly "*Graceless*," he is not so identified at the beginning of the narrative, and is only called Christian after commencing his journey (*Progress* 38). The journey toward the City, which gives the Man a new name, also gives him a teleological sense of identity, of going somewhere, from somewhere, as reflected in Christian's declaration to Good-Will at the Wicket Gate, which is

repeated several times throughout the narrative: “Here is a poor burdened sinner, I come from the City of *Destruction,* but am going to Mount *Zion*” (*Progress* 21). The sense of a destination gives a narrative shape to the pilgrim’s identity.

Ultimately, the narrative shows that this sense of subjective orientation toward the Celestial City is a profoundly relational orientation toward the Lord of the Celestial City. Throughout Part One, the pilgrims’ vision of destination, what they look forward to and are sustained by, is characterised by several images, including inheritance, an “endless Kingdom,” and community with fellow pilgrims (*Progress* 12). However, these various images cluster around the more personal prospect of meeting the Lord of the Celestial City. In Part One, while at Palace Beautiful, Christian is asked why he desires to go to the Celestial City, and he replies by expressing his love for the Lord of the City: “Why, there I hope to see him *alive*, that did hang *dead* on the Cross . . . For to tell you truth, I love him, because I was by him eased of my burden, and I am weary of my inward sickness” (*Progress* 42). Christian’s longing is one of the instances where the literal and allegorical levels of the text are almost blended together. Indeed, the figure of the Lord of the Celestial City transcends the literal level of the narrative. As Jason Crawford notes, there are numerous references throughout the narrative to “this invisible governor [who] belongs to some order beyond the domestic countryside over which he presides” (198). Mentioned in such phrases as the “Governour of that Countrey” (*Progress* 12), the “Law-giver” (14), the “Lord of the Hill” (35), and the “Prince of Princes” (73), this figure embodies a blending and transcending of the literal and allegorical levels of the text, signifying, often very plainly, the divine figure of Christ, traces of whose presence and activity are suggested throughout the literal journey of the pilgrims, particularly in the Wicket Gate which all the pilgrims must pass through. The seeping of allegorical signification into the literal journey manifests in the shared desire of all the pilgrims, in both parts of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, to see Christ, which highlights one of the

ways in which their subjectivity is to be exemplary for the reader, who is invited by the allegory to share and be shaped by this desire to see and love Christ. At the end of Part Two, and thus serving as a conclusion for the whole of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Stand-fast powerfully expresses this longing as he crosses the River of Death: "I see my self now at the *end* of my Journey, my *toilsom* Days are ended. I am going to see *that* Head that was Crowned with Thorns, and *that* Face that was spit upon, for me" (*Progress* 261). The journey-structure of *Pilgrim's Progress* means that faithful subjectivity as depicted on the literal level of the narrative is oriented toward the joyful prospect of meeting the King of the Celestial City, which allegorically signifies the believer's anticipation of ultimately seeing God and of being in union with Christ.

Paradoxes and Implications

The image of the journey also establishes a number of paradoxes and tensions at the centre of faithful subjectivity. While the pilgrims are portrayed in terms of following their authentic or innate desires, the road to the Celestial City is not determined by their whims or self-determination. As Jason Crawford notes, much of the narrative can be understood as concerned with the "ideal of authenticity," particularly in relation to the state of the pilgrims (176). On the literal level, there are genuine and false pilgrims on the road to the Celestial City. For instance, Ignorance, whom Christian and Hopeful meet toward the end of their journey, reaches the Gate of the City but is thrown through a door to Hell since he does not possess a certificate (*Progress* 133). The crucial difference between the genuine and false pilgrims is that the former have entered through the Wicket Gate while the latter have not. Ignorance walks onto the road to the City from "a little crooked Lane" without passing through the Wicket Gate, or indeed without seeing any need for passing through the Wicket Gate (*Progress* 101). When pressed by Christian, he responds: "And as for the Gate that you

talk of, all the world knows that that is a great way off of our Countrey. I cannot think that any man in all our parts doth so much as know the way to it; nor need they matter whether they do or no. . .” (*Progress* 101). Ignorance’s indifference to the Wicket Gate marks him out as a rebel and trespasser, although he may not realise it, against the Lord of the Celestial City, since Ignorance has improperly entered onto the King’s Highway. Roland Frye considers Ignorance, and the other “pseudo-pilgrims,” as allegorically exhibiting a “secular relativism” in which “the way is seen as relative to man, determined by man” (106). In contrast, the rightly ordered journey to the Celestial City must begin at the Wicket Gate, which allegorically signifies the person of Jesus Christ and the grace that is offered to the sinner. As Philip Edwards notes, the necessity of entering at the Wicket Gate highlights the holistic nature of the journey: “Christian path-keeping . . . means not only keeping to the path but keeping the whole path. You can only get to the end of the road by travelling the whole of the road” (116). On the literal level, the Wicket Gate is also where pilgrims seemingly receive the certificates (passports in a sense) that entitle them to entry at the Celestial City. Martha Russell notes that this essential documentation is reflective of the existing legislation in Bunyan’s time concerning how non-native English persons received citizenship within England (242). The events that occur at the Wicket Gate thus demonstrate that in order to arrive at the Celestial City, one must travel by the path already laid down.

Furthermore, articulating faithful subjectivity in terms of following this singular, preexisting road to the Celestial City also means that the individual is oriented away from the present world. In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, there is a clear element of movement away from “this world,” as indicated in part of the longer title for the book: *From This World to That Which is to Come.* Thus, at Palace Beautiful, Christian confesses to the damsels there that he sometimes thinks of his original country, “but with much shame and detestation; *Truly, if I had been mindful of that Countrey from whence I came out, I might have had opportunity to*

have returned; but now I desire a better Countrey; that is, an Heavenly" (*Progress* 41). However, Christian's renunciation does not signify a total repudiation of the material world but of a certain way of valuing the world. This is exemplified in Christian and Faithful's conduct in Vanity Fair, where Faithful meets his death. The Fair was built by demonic rulers to entrap pilgrims through the sale of "*all sorts of Vanity*," and, thus, almost any conceivable thing is on sale at the Fair, including "Houses, Lands . . . Countreys . . . Lusts, Pleasures, and Delights of all sorts, as Whores, Bauds, Wives, Husbands, Children, Masters, Servants, Lives, Blood, Bodies, Souls, Silver, Gold, Pearls, Precious Stones, and what not" (*Progress* 73). As the pilgrims pass through this Fair, they are marked as distinct by their clothing, their language, and their refusal to buy the commodities being sold at the Fair (*Progress* 74). In response to interrogations by the men of the Fair, the pilgrims assert that they are merely passing through: "[Christian and Faithful] told them, that they were Pilgrims and Strangers in the world, and that they were going to their own Countrey, which was the Heavenly *Jerusalem*" (*Progress* 74). However, being a pilgrim in the world does not equate to a denial of the worth of the physical world. As Neil Keeble notes: "[T]he Puritan did not conceive the way to salvation to consist in abstinence or asceticism but in a right use of our physical natures. Eating, drinking, singing, music and dancing are celebrated throughout *The Pilgrim's Progress* as divine gifts" ("Introduction" xiii). To be a pilgrim though does mean to reject the spiritual attitudes and values embodied in Vanity Fair, a place that is dominated by acquisition and consumption, and where everything, whether objects or people, is reduced to a catalogue. The sale of such abstract and metaphysical items as "Lives" and "Souls" shows a destructive commodification that extends beyond the material dimension. Vanity Fair is a place where people's very souls and lives have no more value or dignity than if they were pieces of jewellery. It is this spiritual attitude of endless consumerism, without any reference to the King of the Celestial City, that the pilgrims are to renounce. To be oriented rightly

towards the Celestial City is therefore to regard “this” world as a place through which the pilgrim is passing on the way to the Celestial City.

Consequently, the narrative further asserts a fundamental contrast of identities between the pilgrims to the Celestial City and the characters who oppose and criticise them on their journey. The lives and identities of the genuine pilgrims are structured and transformed by the journey to the Celestial City through the Wicket Gate, while the identities of the non-faithful, who include the various false pilgrims as well as the hostile residents of the City of Destruction and Vanity Fair, are structured by attitudes and desires that point away from the Celestial City. This juxtaposition is seen from the beginning of Part One with Christian’s declaration, responding to Obstinate’s overtures to return to the City of Destruction, that he is looking for “an *Inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*; and it is laid up in Heaven,” and this inheritance is worth incomparably more than anything that might be left behind (*Progress* 10). Obstinate, however, considers Christian and others like him to be “mis-led fantastical Fellows,” and this sort of opposition culminates in Faithful’s execution at Vanity Fair, which marks a crucial difference between the pilgrims and their opponents (11). The pilgrims are persecuted and even killed by their enemies, while the pilgrims themselves are presented as only seeking to change the minds and attitudes of their opponents. This contrasting and antagonistic relationship, along with the possibility of transformation, continues throughout the narrative and articulates a contrast in teleologies possessed by Christians and non-Christians: the former’s telos is concerned with the claims of eternity upon the present earthly life while the latter’s either disregards those claims or the necessity of faith in Christ. In the narrative, the teleology of the pilgrims is vindicated by their successful arrival at the Celestial City, in contrast to those who rejected the very idea of pilgrimage or who refused to enter through the Wicket Gate.

The literal journey of the pilgrims to the Celestial City further construes faithful subjectivity as involving the facing and overcoming of various obstacles. These obstacles frequently take the form of physical locations, such as the Valley of Humiliation or Valley of the Shadow of Death, or of entities, such as the figure of Apollyon. In some cases, these obstacles are intrinsically threatening to the pilgrims; however, as Colin Manlove points out, "different pilgrims find different aspects of the route daunting" (20). This is readily apparent in Part Two where the company of pilgrims has a smooth passage through the Valley of Humiliation, since, according to Great-heart, there is nothing in the valley to "hurt" the pilgrims "unless [they] procure it to [their] selves" (*Progress* 196). Even in Part One though, Faithful has "Sun-shine" and uneventful travel all the way through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, unlike Christian's fearful experiences there (*Progress* 61). Although the pilgrims may have differing experiences at particular places, and sometimes encounter entities that other pilgrims do not, these encounters highlight the importance of perseverance in the face of danger. As Neil Keeble notes, the pilgrims are not marked "by any exceptional abilities or virtue but by their faith: they keep on going" ("Introduction" xvii). Consequently, when Evangelist meets Christian and Faithful prior to their arrival in Vanity Fair, he encourages them to persevere irrespective of obstacles or opposition: "[L]et the Kingdom be always before you, and believe stedfastly [sic] concerning things that are invisible . . . [S]et your faces like a flint, you have all power in Heaven and Earth on your side" (*Progress* 71). The pilgrims' experiences of these obstacles thus derive their significance from being part of the journey to the Celestial City. That is, the journey metaphor places real struggles into a wider pattern that makes some sense of them. While crossing the River of Death, for example, Christian is engulfed by "great darkness and horror": "[H]e could neither remember nor orderly talk of any of those sweet refreshments that he had met with in the way of his Pilgrimage" (*Progress* 128). This despairing and blind struggle in the River only ends after

Hopeful's repeated exhortations elicit a change in Christian's sight: "*Hopeful* added this word, *Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole:* And with that, *Christian* brake out with a loud voice, Oh I see him again!" (*Progress* 129). After Christian's revival, they safely cross the remainder of the River to reach the Celestial City. Christian's struggle highlights that overcoming the obstacles on the pilgrim's journey requires an endurance that is largely a matter of keeping one's vision fixed upon the destination and trusting in the sustaining help of the Lord of the City. Allegorically, this signifies the need for believers to situate their lives in relation to "the greater soteriological narratives of mercy and justice, the focal point of which for the sinner is Christ's fulfilment of the covenant of grace on the Cross" (Davies 78). This trustful endurance in the face of the struggles and obstacles that occur during the unfolding journey is a key aspect of the model of faithful subjectivity that is presented in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Imagining Subjectivity

The portrayal of the pilgrims as both character types and individual moral agents raises the question of how *Pilgrim's Progress* understands subjectivity at a key moment in the emergence of modernity. In his account of the development of secularism in the West, Charles Taylor distinguishes between the modern "buffered" self and the premodern "porous" self (*Secular* 37-8). The porous self lacks a clear boundary between itself and external forces, being "vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces" (*Secular* 38). The buffered self, on the other hand, can disengage from anything "outside of the mind" (*Secular* 38). One aspect of this buffered self is that "moral sources," the sources from which moral meaning and energy are derived, are internalised and placed within the human, rather than being located in something external, such as God or the Good (Taylor *Sources* 143). Perhaps surprisingly,

critics have considered Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, primarily Part One, as participating in the promotion of such a modern buffered subjectivity, undertaking what Jason Crawford calls an "experiment in disenchanted modernity" (182) and Roger Sharrock terms "the lonely drama of the individual soul" (74). Similarly, Vincent Newey argues for the presence of a "certain *anti*-religious tendency" in *Pilgrim's Progress* which foreshadows a modernity "without the Divine" (22). As an example, Newey focuses on the Doubting Castle episode in Part One, where Christian and Hopeful are imprisoned by Giant Despair after leaving the road at By-path Meadow, and then escape when Christian remembers the key, called Promise, in his pocket. Newey considers this episode as "from beginning to end a psycho-drama in which emphasis is increasingly placed on the individual's ability to live by his own devices, which means overcoming his own weaknesses and the formidable challenge of the shadow side of his psyche" (24). However, Newey's assumption of individualistic autonomy in the pilgrims' imprisonment and escape from Doubting Castle, specifically a self-sufficiency within the figure of Christian, seems to overlook various elements within the narrative depiction of the episode. For instance, the prayer of the pilgrims, which lasts from midnight till almost dawn, on the eve of their escape suggests their reliance upon the "*King of the Cœlestial Countrey*" (*Progress* 97), rather than upon their "own devices" (Newey 24). Additionally, the key of Promise presumably refers back to Good-Will's gracious promise given to Christian at the Wicket Gate: "We make no objections against any, notwithstanding all that they have done before they come hither" (*Progress* 23). As Michael Davies argues, "[T]he 'Key' is nothing less than scriptural 'Promise' constantly present for the backsliding pilgrim and always available throughout his journey despite any trespass committed" (282). Allegorically, the key likely recalls the hope of forgiveness made possible by Christ's resurrection which occurred on a Sunday according to the Gospels, which is also the day that the pilgrims escape from the Castle. All of this would suggest that the Doubting Castle

episode is consistent with a subjectivity that expresses reliance upon something outside of the pilgrim, upon the Lord of the Celestial City, rather than self-reliance upon individual inner strength, and thus may be understood as akin to Taylor's concept of the "porous" self.

This is not to suggest that Part One of *Pilgrim's Progress* contains no individualist, or, rather, personal elements. Passage through the Wicket Gate, for instance, seems to occur as a largely individual affair. More graphically, Part One begins with a striking example of the individual spiritual renunciation that each pilgrim is to undergo at the start of their journey. The narrator relates that after receiving directions from Evangelist, the Man starts running in the direction of the Wicket Gate: "Now he had not run far from his own door, but his Wife and Children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return: but the Man put his fingers in his Ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life: so he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the Plain" (*Progress* 9-10). Echoing Lot's flight from doomed Sodom, Christian's forsaking of his family is a startling enactment of Jesus's words in Luke 14:26: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (*KJV*). Kathleen Swaim refers to this episode as "one of the especially difficult junctures of *Pilgrim's Progress*" (1). It is important at this stage to remember the allegorical nature of *Pilgrim's Progress*. As Michael Davies notes, "Christian is embarking upon an allegorical journey in faith, his literal abandonment of his family merely being emblematic of the beginning of a spiritual quest not within the physical world but within his soul" (277). The image of Christian fleeing the City of Destruction is not intended to condone the abandonment of family in the reality external to the narrative. Bunyan himself, in *Christian Behaviour* (1663), precludes such negligence when he instructs a man in his duties to family, even an unbelieving family: "[I]t lieth upon thee to care for them that they have a convenient livelihood" (*Works* 2:557). On the allegorical level that the narrative points to, a Christian does

not leave their family behind. However, the image of Christian fleeing the City of Destruction does highlight the extreme change of orientation and consequent renunciation that the journey to the Celestial City, and allegorically the Christian life, involves for each individual pilgrim.

Moreover, the sense of individualism that may characterise the beginning of Christian's journey does not dominate the entirety of the journey; rather, the journey combines both individual and collective aspects. Most obviously, the journey culminates with Christian and Hopeful's entry into the Celestial City and its community. After the pilgrims cross the River, the Shining Ones explain some of the blessings and wonders of the City: "There you shall enjoy your friends again, that are got hither before you; and there you shall with joy receive, even every one that follows into the Holy place after you" (*Progress* 130). This future community is prefigured and anticipated in various ways throughout the journey to the City, not least in the fact that Christian is not a solitary wayfarer on a solitary journey. As David Seed notes: "Critics have commented frequently on Christian's isolation in Part I, but this has been rather over-stated" (75). Before halfway through Part One, Christian has been joined by Faithful, and is never alone from that point onward, having previously longed "to have company" during his solitary and "disconsolate" passage through the Valley of the Shadow of Death (*Progress* 53). Additionally, various places along the journey provide experiences of community that foreshadow the Celestial City, such as the Interpreter's House, the Shepherds at the Delectable Mountains (where Christian and Hopeful briefly stay after escaping Doubting Castle), and particularly Palace Beautiful. Indeed, Andy Draycott suggests that there is a "churchly orientation" in the narrative, exemplified by characters like Evangelist and places like Palace Beautiful, which allegorically indicates that "church belonging is . . . vital for the Christian walk" (340). Furthermore, there is a sense in Part One that Christian is part of a broader and invisible community that is heading toward, and has already arrived at, the Celestial City. When Good-Will instructs Christian in the route to take, he draws attention

to the illustrious predecessors who made the road: “It was cast up by the Patriarchs, Prophets, Christ, and his Apostles” (*Progress* 23). Christian’s journey is saturated by a sense of Biblical history and his journey in some sense is not unique and individual but rooted in a “spiritual paradigm” that he did not establish (Manlove 20). Even when Christian is alone, there are structures and places in the landscape that suggest the presence of other pilgrims who are also heading to the Celestial City, such as the “*Arbour*” on Hill Difficulty, near the place of the Cross, which has been “made by the Lord of the Hill, for the refreshing of weary Travailers” (*Progress* 35). Quite apart from the presence of Faithful or Hopeful, there is a sense in the narrative that Christian is part of a community that is heading towards the Celestial City. Consequently, faithful subjectivity, even in Part One, incorporates both individual and collective aspects on the journey that is ultimately oriented towards communal participation in the Celestial City.

The configuration of faithful subjectivity toward community is extended and made more evident in the depiction of the pilgrims’ journey in Part Two of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. As already suggested, the subjectivity articulated in Part One is not an autonomous individualism, but in Part Two the journey on a narrative level is a communal affair from start to finish. Michael Austin notes that the typical critical approach to the relationship between Part One and Two is to see them as “complementary allegories of two different facets of Christian salvation: the individual and the communal” (491). Accordingly, Roland Frye suggests that Part Two functions to portray the more communal aspects of the Christian life whereas the first part is more focused on the life of the individual Christian: “The second part of the allegory supplies the perspective of the church, the body of Christians moving over the same ground that Christian had earlier covered” (97). Austin argues that this demarcation, while mainly accurate, neglects the “figural relationship” between the two parts, which is like the typological relationship between the Old and New Testament asserted by Puritans (491).

Indeed, the more subtle and implicit hints concerning community on the journey of Part One are made more overt and explicit within the journey of Part Two. For instance, in Part Two during the journey of Christiana and her fellow pilgrims through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, guided by Great-heart, Christiana suggests the value of community when she realises how dreadful the Valley would have been for Christian by himself: "[P]oor man, he went here all alone in the night" (*Progress* 201). This more overt communal focus in Part Two is reflected in the sheer quantity of pilgrims: The initial group of Christiana, her sons, and neighbour Mercie expands over the course of the narrative to include such characters as Honest, Feeble-Mind, Ready-to-Halt, Dispondencie and his daughter Much-Afraid, Standfast, and Valiant-for-Truth. As Galen Johnson suggests, these pilgrims on their journey "find the full community of saints for which Christian so desperately yearns" (ch.5). In Part Two of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the pilgrim community is made central to the journey toward the Celestial City.

The representation of this pilgrim community not only highlights the inclusivity of the ultimate community of the Celestial City but also revises the model of faithful subjectivity presented in Part One. The company of pilgrims does not exclude those who feel weakness within themselves or feel that they lack in faith, as attested by the diversity of characters who join the company at various stages, such as Feeble-mind, Mercie, and Dispondencie. When the company is at Gaius's Inn and Feeble-mind protests that his "*weak and feeble Mind*" prevents him from joining the company, Great-heart declares: "Brother . . . I have it in Commission, to comfort the *feeble minded*, and to support the weak. You must needs go along with us; we will wait for you, we will lend you our help" (*Progress* 225-6). This communal focus that is open to individual weakness is an extension and elaboration of elements already present in the narrative of Part One, such as Good-Will's promise at the Wicket Gate to Christian, and Christian's own frailty. At points, Christian shows the same

frailty that Feeble-mind does, such as at the crossing of the River where Christian is assailed with “troublesome thoughts” of his past failures and with despair that he will never enter the City (*Progress* 128). At such juncture, Christian progresses through the support from his fellow pilgrim Hopeful and through the aid of the Lord of the Celestial City. Nevertheless, Part Two places greater emphasis on the idea that individual weakness is not a barrier from the company of the pilgrims, nor from the places of the Prince of the City. As Betty Schellenberg suggests, “Presented as foibles, like the qualms of Mr. Feeble-mind and the crutch of Mr. Ready-to-halt, rather than as the kinds of moral faults which cause Christian to stumble or go astray, such weaknesses [of character] not only are not condemned, but are shown to contribute to the spiritual growth of the community” (318). This means that no one is excluded from the fellowship of pilgrims merely because of personal weakness or failure. Part Two of *Pilgrim’s Progress* expands on Part One by providing a picture of faithful subjectivity that focuses on the value of community and thus recognises the need for help from fellow pilgrims and, above all, from the Lord of the Celestial City, as the pilgrim community journeys together to the Celestial City, where the weakness of the individual is no barrier to entry.

Conclusion

Through the metaphoric device of the journey, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* appeals to the imagination of readers, so that they may be shaped by its narrative and become part of the greater Story that Bunyan presupposes. David Parry argues that Bunyan can be considered as an imaginative apologist “engaging in a kind of imaginative preparationism” which “seeks to habituate the imagination of the hearer or reader to incline the recipient’s mind to be a passive recipient of the divine grace that brings salvation” and to “make a believing social imaginary

plausible" (para.57). Bunyan's pastoral intention in writing *Pilgrim's Progress* is to shape and form the subjectivity and character of those who read it: the logic imparted by the journey narrative seeks to remind people of eternal realities that transcend and touch this short span of earthly life so that they may live in light of those realities. The point is not to make people hate sunsets or beauty in the material world. Rather, it is to remind them of the reality of death. If death is not the end of existence, then it should matter immensely what lies beyond. Bunyan's intention is to underscore the urgency of the matter. If one is not a true pilgrim to the Celestial City, if one is not yet reconciled to the Holy God through Jesus Christ, then one is still in the City of Destruction and ignoring the God in whom alone true life is found. But the story is also to be comforting: despite their weaknesses and mistakes, Christian and his fellow pilgrims do eventually arrive at the Celestial City. Bunyan thus contributes to a Christian social imaginary which recognises the reality of death and provides reminders and glimpses of a reality beyond this life.

Although this is not the place for a comprehensive history of the reception or influence of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the work certainly has proven to be popular and pervasive; according to Bunyan's preface to the Second Part (1684), by this time the narrative had already made its way to Europe, Scotland, and New England (*Progress* 137). Bunyan's works were particularly influential on the Evangelical movement that emerged out of Britain in the eighteenth century, and his "cumulative influence in shaping the evangelical imaginary is likely unmatched" (Prior 89). This influence expanded further during the nineteenth century, as *The Pilgrim's Progress* exerted a significant influence on Victorian literature: "Bunyan . . . is not only endlessly quoted by the Victorians, he also haunts the plot-lines, pedagogies and affective subtexts of their literature" (Mason 159). In general, "pilgrimage narratives" were exceedingly popular for the Victorians and *Pilgrim's Progress* was a "particular favourite . . . primarily because of the way the narrative lent itself to a Victorian obsession with exploring

the personal truths of individual subjectivity" (Mason 151). However, this broader cultural adoption came at the cost of much of the story's distinctive character. These texts of the nineteenth century often "re-inscribe *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a universally religious and moralistic as opposed to a strictly Reformed (if not Calvinist) theological work" (Davies 347). And this is to misread how the narrative seeks to direct readers toward the grace of God in Christ, and to shape their hearts and lives –who they are—in relation to that transforming grace.

The image of life as a journey certainly persists from Bunyan's day to the contemporary moment, although it has had multiple reinterpretations and applications in that time, with correspondingly different understandings of subjectivity and of life. The focus of the journey metaphor in *Pilgrim's Progress* is on the destination. Today, the idea of a destination and whether there is one at all is likely contentious, and perhaps the emphasis today may be on the journey itself, irrespective of destination. Soon after the end of the Victorian era, William Hale White wrote, "Bunyan takes it for granted that the life of a man who is redeemed by the grace of God is a pilgrimage to a better world. . . . but we are not sure, as he was sure, that the wayfarer will reach a celestial home at last" (169-70). Bunyan, however, was not unfamiliar with this attitude, given that it is only a slightly softer version of the scoffing of Atheist, a minor character encountered by Christian and Hopeful (*Progress* 110). For Christians today, the journey metaphor still offers a helpful and Scriptural understanding of the Christian life as they seek to live in this world in the light of eternity.

Chapter 2
Faithful Subjectivity as Total War: *Perelandra* (1943)

Suddenly and irresistibly, like an attack by tanks, that whole view of the universe which Weston (if it were Weston) had so lately preached to him, took all but complete possession of his mind.
—C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*

Introduction

Clive Staples (C. S.) Lewis was born toward the end of 1898, in Belfast, Ireland, and died on November 22, 1963, in Oxford. Although he was raised within the Anglican Church of Ireland, his own early experiences of Protestant Christianity were nominal, according to his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy* (1955): "I was taught the usual things and made to say my prayers and in due time taken to church. I naturally accepted what I was told but I cannot remember feeling much interest in it" (*Joy* 12). After Lewis's mother died in 1908, he was sent to a succession of English boarding schools, which he disliked, and during this time he "ceased to be a Christian" (*Joy* 52). At the end of April 1917, Lewis went up to Oxford, joining the University Officers' Training Corps, and was soon deployed to France as part of the Somerset Light Infantry (McGrath *Lewis* 53, 68). In April 1918, he was wounded in an explosion and hospitalised, subsequently being sent to military hospital in London (McGrath *Lewis* 71-3). Following the end of the War, Lewis began his studies at Oxford in 1919, which was also the year of publication for his first creative work, *Spirits in Bondage*, a collection of poetry mainly written during his military training before his deployment (McGrath *Lewis* 76).

In 1925 he was elected to an English fellowship at Magdalen College, and he remained in this position as an English lecturer and tutor for almost thirty years (MacSwain 5-6). Early in his tenure at Oxford, Lewis underwent a conversion to Theism, as he famously recounted in his autobiography: "In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England" (*Joy* 182).[7] Lewis stressed that this conversion was to Theism, rather than Christianity: "I knew nothing yet about the Incarnation. The God to whom I surrendered was sheerly non-human" (*Joy* 184). His later conversion to Christianity probably occurred in September 1931, and was the product of an "extended process of reflection and commitment," aided by conversations with fellow academics, Hugo Dyson and J. R. R. Tolkien (McGrath *Lewis* 156). Following this gradual process, he returned to the fold of the Anglican church. In his preface to *Mere Christianity* (1952), Lewis described himself as "a very ordinary layman of the Church of England, not especially 'high,' nor especially 'low,' nor especially anything else," and in his apologetics accordingly focused on the idea of a "mere Christianity," or the "belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times" (*Mere Christianity* 6). Robert MacSwain describes Lewis as "theologically traditional, doctrinally orthodox and generally conservative in his interpretation of the Bible," although he also "accepted some form of cosmic and biological evolution, did not hold to the inerrancy of Scripture, and was not committed to a specific theory of the atonement" (7). Around the beginning of the Second World War, Lewis began a second career as a public apologist – a defender of the claims of Christianity.

The interwar period was a time of declining public engagement with Christianity that was paradoxically also a period of increased Christian intellectual vitality. By 1940,

[7] This conversion experience probably occurred in the Trinity Term of 1930 rather than 1929, as persuasively argued by Alister McGrath (*Lewis* 140-6).

organisers of religious broadcasts at the British Broadcasting Corporation felt that for many radio listeners "the dimension we call 'God' had largely vanished from their lives," religious language had lost its significance, and "everywhere there was great ignorance of the Christian Faith" (Welch 11). Lewis himself noted in an article, "The Decline of Religion" (1946), that "In every class and every part of the country the visible practice of Christianity has grown very much less in the last fifty years" (*First* 71). Within this broader social trend, Adrian Hastings observes, agnosticism – if not outright atheism – was "the common ground of almost all first rank intellectuals . . . the message of all the foundational texts of modern culture" (225). This sceptical climate is encapsulated in a letter by Virginia Woolf commenting on T. S. Eliot's conversion, which occurred in 1927: "[Eliot] has become an Anglo-Catholic, believes in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was really shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is. I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God" (457-8). For Woolf, and many others who lived in this climate of agnosticism and atheism, belief in the existence of God seemed unthinkable, if not morally questionable. However, according to Hastings, Eliot's conversion and Lewis's slightly later one marked a shift towards a more openly Christian culture among the social elite and intellectuals of England: "In Oxford and Cambridge, in the political establishment, in intellectual circles, in the public schools, there was a noticeable revival of Christianity, Anglican Christianity above all, by the later 1930s" (253). Within this broader context, Lewis's work provides a key example of the way that literature allows an imaginative expression of Christian belief.

Indeed, imagination and literature were central to Lewis's understanding of Christian faith. Alister McGrath points out that "Lewis's love of literature is not a backdrop to his conversion; it is integral to his discovery of the rational and imaginative appeal of Christianity" (*Lewis* 133). According to Lewis's own retrospective account, his materialistic

understanding of reality as an atheist had existed in tension with his imaginative longings, and especially the appeal of literature and stories: "The two hemispheres of my mind were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow 'rationalism.' Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless" (*Joy* 138). The problem he found was that his materialism could provide nothing to ground the beauty and desires conveyed in works of imagination. McGrath notes that in the midst of this internal tension between imagination and reason, Lewis frequently "experienced deep feelings of desire, to which he had attached the name 'Joy'" (*Lewis* 42). Lewis's reading, in 1916, of George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858), a Christian-themed work of fantasy, played a significant part in this search for "Joy" – he later described it as having "baptised" his imagination (*Joy* 146). For Lewis, Christianity resolved the opposition between poetry and reason in explicitly narrative terms: "Christianity, rather than being one myth alongside many others, is . . . the fulfilment of all previous mythological religions. Christianity tells a true story about humanity, which makes sense of all the stories that humanity tells about itself" (McGrath *Lewis* 150). Lewis found that his longings for something transcendent, evoked in his reading of literature and stories, were fulfilled in Christianity. As McGrath summarises: "[T]here was a deeper order, grounded in the nature of God, which could be discerned—and which, once grasped, made sense of culture, history, science, and above all the acts of literary creation that [Lewis] valued so highly" (*Lewis* 158). In a real sense, literature paved the way for Lewis's conversion.

Unsurprisingly then, Lewis's career as a Christian writer was shaped by a commitment to the importance of the powers of imagination and stories, and especially those afforded by science fiction and fantasy, as a means of exploring the idea of "Myth" that he felt gave explanation to the meaning of human existence. As Alister McGrath notes: "For Lewis, a

myth is a story which evokes awe, enchantment, and inspiration, and which conveys or embodies an imaginative expression of the deepest meanings of life – meanings that prove totally elusive in the face of any attempt to express them abstractly or conceptually" (*Intellectual* 63). More concretely, the beginning of Lewis's mature career as a writer of fiction originated in an agreement with Tolkien for them to each write a science fiction story undergirded by a Christian sense of reality – "Christian novel[s] like the spiritual thrillers of Chesterton and Charles Williams" – which Lewis considered to be scarce in the modern era (Sayer 153). Only Lewis managed to successfully complete his story, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), whereas Tolkien's remained (as he later wrote in a letter) "owing to my slowness and uncertainty only a fragment" and only emerged posthumously (29). The imaginative attempt to access the power of myth is fundamental to all of Lewis's fictional endeavours. The work of fiction begun alongside Tolkien eventually became the first novel in Lewis's *Space Trilogy* – followed by *Perelandra* (1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (1945) – and was a predecessor to his more well-known *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which were published throughout the 1950s.[8]

Affordances of Science Fiction

For Lewis, science fiction enabled the exploration of questions and issues of importance to the spiritual condition and imagination of humanity. In his essay, "On Science Fiction" (1955), Lewis provides a taxonomy of science fiction stories, introducing five "sub-species" of science fiction narrative. He considers the worst form to be what he calls "fiction of the

[8] *The Space Trilogy* has also been variously referred to as *The Ransom Trilogy*, after the character of Elwin Ransom, or as the *Cosmic Trilogy*. Lewis himself seems to have referred to it as "the Ransom trilogy" in letters to Sister Penelope (*Collected Letters* 624). In this chapter, however, the trilogy will be referred to as *The Space Trilogy.*

Displaced Persons," in which an "ordinary love-story, spy-story, wreck-story, or crime-story" takes place in a futuristic science fiction setting that is largely irrelevant to the story (*On Stories* 57-8). In contrast, there is the "fiction of Engineers," roughly equivalent to hard science fiction, which is mainly focused on space-travel, for instance, as "real possibilities in the actual universe" (58). Lewis's favourite, however, is writing that is interested in "beauty, awe, or terror," and includes stories that would typically be regarded as fantasy (63). Lewis describes multiple sub-species of this sort, but most relevant is the type where "the marvellous is in the grain of the whole work. We are, throughout, in another world" (65). The key aspect of such a narrative world is "its quality, its flavour," which enables it to "enlarge our conception of the range of possible experience" (66). One key example for Lewis was David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), a philosophical work of science fiction which depicts the strange travels of Maskull, from Earth, on the planet Tormance that orbits the star Arcturus, and which engages with questions around the existence and goodness of God and the nature of reality. Although Lewis detested the underlying philosophy of *Voyage* as "so Manichaean as to be almost Satanic," he later noted its creative importance for the development of *The Space Trilogy*: "From Lyndsay [sic] I first learned what other planets in fiction are really good for: for *spiritual* adventures. Only they can satisfy the craving which sends our imaginations off the earth" (*Collected Letters* 753, emphasis original). In Lewis's consideration, it seemed that the other worlds of science fiction were best suited for exploration that engaged with the spiritual capacities and longings of humanity.

The "spiritual adventure" of *The Space Trilogy* was motivated by several philosophical commitments, particularly a reaction against certain contemporary ideas and the imaginative adaptation of a medieval understanding of the universe. Firstly, the trilogy provides a critique of the claims of scientism and evolutionism. In "A Reply to Professor Haldane," Lewis notes that *Out of the Silent Planet* reacted against "the belief that the supreme moral end is the

perpetuation of our own species, and that this is to be pursued even if, in the process of being fitted for survival, our species has to be stripped of all those things for which we value it—of pity, of happiness, and of freedom" (*On Stories* 71-2). Related to this concern was Lewis's opposition to modernist faith in progress, or what he termed "universal evolutionism." As he articulated in "Is Theology Poetry?" (1944): "By universal evolutionism I mean the belief that the very formula of universal process is from imperfect to perfect, from small beginnings to great endings, from the rudimentary to the elaborate" (*Screwtape Proposes* 56).[9] Scepticism towards teleological progress narratives thus comprises an important part of the intellectual background to *The Space Trilogy*. Alongside this motivation of reaction or critique, however, Lewis also had "another and more positive goal in writing, and that was to challenge modern cosmology and offer an alternative view of the universe" (Shippey 239). As Lewis makes clear in *The Discarded Image* (1964), he had great affection for the "old Model" of the universe – that is, a medieval or pre-Copernican understanding of cosmology (*Discarded* 216). One of the aspects of modern cosmology that Lewis objected to most strongly was "the idea of Earth as the only warm and habitable spot in an abyss of cold, dark vacuum" (Shippey 240). In contrast, under the medieval model of the universe, a poet such as Dante in his *Divine Comedy* "is like a man being conducted through an immense cathedral, not like one lost in a shoreless sea" (*Discarded* 100). Or, to use a different metaphor, the Earth is situated as a spectator "looking *in*" at the "revelry of insatiable love" in the heavens animated by love for God (*Discarded* 119, emphasis original). *The Space Trilogy* is infused with this medieval understanding even as it also conforms to precepts of modern astronomy.

The Space Trilogy is thus marked by the borrowing and adaptation of key aspects of medieval or Ptolemaic cosmology.[10] A key Ptolemaic idea that features in the Trilogy is that

[9] Lewis also discusses this myth in "The Funeral of a Great Myth" in *Christian Reflections* (1967).
[10] More extensive discussions of the medieval Model may be found in Lewis's *Discarded Image* and Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia* (Oxford UP, 2008).

Luna (the Moon) marks "the great frontier" between the Earth and the heavens: everything below the Moon is subject to change and corruption whereas the "translunary world" is permanent and "incorruptible" (*Discarded* 106). Additionally, each sphere—each sun and planet—is governed by or associated with a "conscious and intellectual being" known as an "Intelligence" (*Discarded* 115). In the universe of the *Space Trilogy*, these Intelligences are frequently referred to as "Oyarsa," and are part of a species of angelic beings known as *eldila*.[11] The *eldila* refer to Space as Deep Heaven, and to the Solar System as the Field of Arbol (Arbol being the *eldila*'s name for the Sun), and they are ruled by Maleldil, another name for God the Son. In medieval cosmology, Earth typically lacked a planetary intelligence, yet the *eldila* know Earth as Thulcandra, the Silent Planet, ever since the Oyarsa of Earth, Satan, rebelled against Maleldil eons ago. As Tom Shippey notes, making Satan "the presiding Intelligence of Earth" was Lewis's "most original speculation" (241). Lewis's use of medieval cosmology in *The Space Trilogy* can be seen as an attempt to "re-enchant" the modern and naturalistic understanding of the universe, allowing a "re-education toward supernaturalism" as Monika Hilder describes it ("Packed Reality" 96). Rather than offering a solely naturalistic picture of the universe, Lewis presents a cosmos that is imbued with the supernatural and with life in abundance: "By employing the Medieval model of the Ptolemaic cosmos . . . Lewis . . . depicts a universe that is neither empty nor dark nor cold but one full of life and light and warmth. The universe is not silent but singing" ("Packed Reality" 99). *The Space Trilogy* provides an animated and supernatural depiction of the universe beyond the clouded atmosphere of Earth.

The Trilogy begins with *Out of the Silent Planet*, which describes how the philologist Elwin Ransom is abducted by the physicist Weston and his crony, Devine, and taken on a ship

[11] In the edition of *Perelandra* that I use, words such as "*eldil*" and "*eldila*" are consistently italicised, reflecting that they belong to the fictional Old Solar language, and this is preserved in quotations.

to Malacandra (Mars) as a sacrifice for the seemingly hostile Malacandrians. Weston's main plan is one of interplanetary imperialism whereby the human race will be propagated far beyond the Earth irrespective of any moral costs or concern for other species. As Weston declares to Oyarsa, the angelic ruler of Malacandra: "Our right to supersede you is the right of the higher over the lower" (*Space* 123). Oyarsa, however, frustrates Weston's designs by sending the humans back to Earth, or Thulcandra, the Silent Planet. Tom Shippey suggests that *Out of the Silent Planet* offers an exploration of the myth of "the Fall of the Angels," and there is indeed an account offered in the novel of the rebellion of the Bent One (or Satan) (240). The narrative also subverts the existing tradition of hostile Martians – exemplified by H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) – by presenting the Malacandrians as benevolent in their relations with Ransom.[12] Furthermore, the novel emphasises the medieval sense of the animated liveliness of the "heavens," with Ransom becoming "convinced that the abyss was full of life in the most literal sense, full of living creatures" (*Space* 133). *Perelandra* continues and elaborates on some of these significant themes.

Perelandra is divided into an opening frame narrative and a longer embedded narrative. In the frame narrative, the first-person narrator, Lewis, travels to Ransom's cottage, where he learns that Ransom has been "ordered" to go to Perelandra (Venus) because the demonic "black archon" of Earth is planning "some sort of attack" on Perelandra (*Space* 164). Lewis packs Ransom into the coffin-like ship that will transport him to Perelandra. The remainder of the narrative is Lewis's third-person account of Ransom's experiences, following his return well over a year later. Once Ransom arrived on Perelandra, he discovered that the world was one vast ocean, containing "floating islands" which altered according to the shape of the waves (179). Ransom's early explorations and his discovery of various foods and creatures

[12] Some discussion of *Out of the Silent Planet* in relation to fictional portrayals of Mars is offered in Robert Crossley's *Imagining Mars: A Literary History* (Wesleyan UP, 2011).

display an Edenic quality of guiltless "excessive pleasure," and he eventually meets the Green Lady (identified as Tinidril at the end of the narrative), an Eve-like figure who is the Queen and "Mother" of Perelandra (202). They venture to the Fixed Land, a mountainous island that the Green Lady is forbidden from living on, so that she can find the King (Tor), her missing husband, but they are unable to see him. While there, Ransom encounters Weston, his kidnapper in *Out of the Silent Planet*, who now expresses a commitment to the spiritual "Force" of emergent, or creative, evolution, a Force of which God and the Devil are "both pictures" (228). Weston is rendered unconscious when he "call[s]" this "Force" into himself "completely" (230), and from this point onward in the narrative, his body is possessed by a demonic intelligence, and he is generally referred to as the "Un-man." Subsequently, on a floating island the Un-man offers a prolonged series of temptations to the Green Lady, and Ransom, after an agonising spiritual crisis, comes to the realisation that he must "try to kill the Un-man" (277). Their lengthy conflict ultimately ends in an underground cave with the Un-man's death. The weakened Ransom finds his way out of the underground to a valley on the highest mountain that feels like the Garden of Eden, where he meets the angelic intelligences of Malacandra and Perelandra, and is reunited with Tinidril the Green Lady, and meets her husband, Tor the King. Finally, after experiencing the "Great Dance" of the cosmos in a year that passes in a moment, Ransom is packed into another coffin ship for his return to Earth (341).

The Metaphor of Total War

Although *Perelandra* rehabilitates and incorporates aspects of medieval cosmology, the model of faithful subjectivity articulated in the novel draws instead on contemporary concerns regarding the notion or logic of total war – war which makes little or no distinction

between soldiers and civilians, and which involves the entirety of society. As Sanford Schwartz notes: “Lewis’s fighting philologist [Ransom] was conceived in an atmosphere of looming international crisis, and however far he travels from his own planet, the issues surrounding the causes, conduct, and consequences of the Second World War are never far from the surface” (4). In the opening frame narrative, the ongoing war in Europe is present as a background taken-for-granted reality, as in the casual reference to “blackout time” in Lewis’s account of his journey toward Ransom’s cottage, and in Ransom’s later mention of “our own little war here on earth” (*Space* 156, 165). Lewis’s recollection of the interval between Ransom’s departure to and return from Perelandra is similarly dominated by the bleakness of the historical moment: “Then the months went past and grew to a year and a little more than a year, and we had raids and bad news and hopes deferred and all the earth became full of darkness and cruel habitations” (*Space* 170). Such allusions occur throughout the remainder of the novel. Martial imagery is also present in the novel in ways that extend far beyond references to the Second World War to encompass a deeper spiritual meaning of total war, which reflects Lewis the author’s understanding of Christian doctrine on the current state of reality: “Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war. But it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel” (*Mere Christianity* 47). *Perelandra* thus not only reflects the context of the Second World War in its setting but also presents total war as a narrative model of faithful subjectivity shaped by participation in an epic of ongoing supernatural conflict.

The central premise of the novel, and indeed of the entire trilogy, is an ongoing conflict of cosmic and supernatural proportions. As Chad Walsh notes, “The overall plot is the struggle between divine and demonic powers, not just on this fallen planet, but in the cosmos” (65). In the opening chapter of *Perelandra*, Lewis the narrator reflects that Ransom

has previously told him that Earth is "in a state of siege, as being, in fact, an enemy-occupied territory, held down by *eldila* who were at war both with us and with the *eldila* of 'Deep Heaven,' or 'space'" (*Space* 154). The novel depicts the intrusion of this cosmic war into the lives of ordinary individuals. In the opening chapter, Lewis begins to have doubts about the goodness of the *eldila* in Ransom's story, worrying that Ransom has been duped by "something from outer space": "How if my friend were the unwitting bridge, the Trojan Horse, whereby some possible invader were effecting its landing on Tellus [Earth]?" (*Space* 154). Lewis struggles with such worries, and impulses to turn back, all the way to Ransom's cottage, and Ransom later explains this as part of "the barrage" from the hostile *eldila* (*Space* 162). The cosmic war continues its spillover into the lives of ordinary people with Ransom's revelation that he's been "ordered" to go to Perelandra (Venus), and the news that "the black archon [of Earth] . . . is meditating some sort of attack on Perelandra" (*Space* 164). In contrast to the metaphor of the journey that structures the pilgrims' experience in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Ransom is portrayed as a soldier being sent on a mission. This provides a certain understanding of identity or faithful subjectivity that is rooted in the idea that life is like a war.

Perelandra is certainly not the first text to make a significant use of the metaphor that life is a war. The metaphor that the Christian life is a war has a long tradition, ultimately stemming from New Testament language, such as in Ephesians 6:12, which Ransom alludes to in the frame narrative: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (*KJV*). As Harriet Crabtree notes: "The image of the Christian as a faithful soldier, fighting with principalities and powers which assault the soul and, more mundanely, with the obstacles presented to faith by the world of daily life, has been a persistent and popular one throughout the centuries" (87). Both Prudentius in the poem

Psychomachia (c.400) and John Bunyan in *The Holy War* (1682) explore aspects of the metaphor, and in the Anglican baptismal service from 1662, the baptised Christian is received into the Church with the Priest's prayer that "hereafter *he* shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto *his* life's end" (*Common Prayer* 347). This sense that every Christian is to be a soldier in Christ's army is amplified in *Perelandra*, but the consequences of the framing of faithful subjectivity in a context of total war are most evident in its characterisation.

Most immediately, the narrative appeal to ideas of total war involves a turn away from the exceptional heroes of romance to the enlistment of ordinary people in the struggle. Paul Rovang, who discusses parallels between *Perelandra* and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), suggests that Ransom resembles the Red Cross Knight from Book I of the poem in being an "Everyman Christian warrior and a flawed potential Christ figure," and that their "quests . . . reflect the extraordinariness of the ordinary in our everyday moral and spiritual struggle through a representative of elect humanity who attenuates us to the realization that we exist simultaneously on two levels" (40). Yet unlike the central characters of the *Faerie Queene*, Ransom is not an aristocratic or chivalrous figure, as he assures Lewis in the frame narrative: "Don't imagine I've been selected to go to Perelandra because I'm anyone in particular. One never can see, or not till long afterwards, why *any* one was selected for *any* job" (*Space* 165, emphasis original). Indeed, Ransom muses that his mission, of being sent to another planet to combat an unknown evil, is not particularly "odder" than the fact that "quite ordinary people" are expected to fight against evil spiritual forces on a daily basis (*Space* 164). In this sense, Ransom signifies a democratisation or extension of what Lewis elsewhere calls "one of the great Christian ideas," namely, the "idea of the knight – the Christian in arms for the defence of a good cause" (*Mere Christianity* 104). Rather than knighthood being

the preserve of an exclusive warrior and elitist class, ordinary people are called upon to be soldiers and knights. Although he asserts it in the frame narrative, Ransom comes to a practical understanding of this during his spiritual crisis on Perelandra when he realises that everyone is Maleldil's representative: "It was true that if he left it [trying to kill the Un-man] undone, Maleldil Himself would do some greater thing instead. In that sense, he stood for Maleldil: but no more than Eve would have stood for Him by simply not eating the apple, or than any man stands for Him in doing any good action" (*Space* 277). Ransom is an ordinary citizen in an extraordinary situation, but his special mission does not set him apart from ordinary people in the way that a figure like the Red Cross Knight might be distinguished. Thus, the metaphor of war in *Perelandra* frames the Christian life, and perhaps every life, in terms of a battle in which everyone is involved.

Consequently, the idea of total war frames faithful subjectivity as being part of God's, or Maleldil's, army and thus in active opposition to the forces of evil. At a basic level, this is reflected in *Perelandra* in the fact that no main character maintains a position of neutrality or half-heartedness. On the floating island, when Ransom encounters the Un-man for the first time after Weston had called the Force into himself, he realises that "he had never before seen anything but half-hearted and uneasy attempts at evil. This creature was whole-hearted" (*Space* 242). At the sight of "the thing," Ransom experiences a terrifying moment of darkness and faintness, and remembers that "certain old philosophers and poets" believed that seeing devils would be a central torment in Hell (*Space* 242-43). This realisation leads to a more profound reflection on reality: "And though there seemed to be, and indeed were, a thousand roads by which a man could walk through the world, there was not a single one which did not lead sooner or later either to the Beatific or the Miserific Vision" (*Space* 243). Although this reflection employs journey imagery, it ultimately frames the entirety of every human life in terms of a conflict between two oppositional destinies as part of the broader cosmic war

between Maleldil and the Bent One. This is consistent with Lewis's views on the importance of earthly life for each human's eternal destiny: "[W]hat really matters is those little marks or twists on the central, inside part of the soul which are going to turn it, in the long run, into a heavenly or a hellish creature" (*Mere Christianity* 105). Consequently, everyone is on a side in this cosmic war by virtue of the choices they make and the paths they take through all of life. Faithful subjectivity, then, involves a personal commitment and choice to serve in the army of Maleldil. The binary opposition of the total war thus underscores the importance of human choice and belief, and the impact of these on the trajectory and direction of human lives.

Imagining Subjectivity

While a total war might emphasise the collectives of armies, the emphasis on everyday life and ordinary people underscores the significance that is placed on the individual in *Perelandra*. The shaping concept of war implies the idea of an army, but the focus in *Perelandra* is on a particular "soldier," Ransom. During Ransom's spiritual crisis, this emphasis on the individual is highlighted through his realisation of the parallels between himself and soldiers back on Earth: "[W]hitefaced subalterns and freckled corporals . . . stood in horrible gaps or crawled forward in deadly darkness, awaking, like him, to the preposterous truth that all really depended on their actions" (Lewis *Space* 270). In "A Reply to Professor Haldane," C. S. Lewis comments that *That Hideous Strength*, the final novel of the *Space Trilogy*, reacts to a couple of developments in modern thought: "the growing exaltation of the collective and the growing indifference to persons," and the springing up of movements like Nazism or Communism that saw themselves as serving "an impersonal force" like "Nature, or Evolution, or the Dialectic, or the Race" (*On Stories* 78). Similarly,

according to Jeffrey Folks, the hymn of the Great Dance that concludes the novel provides a rejection of "modern ethical philosophy's collective diminishment of the individual and its devaluing of human life" (116). *Perelandra*, then, reiterates the Protestant understanding of individual human worth and agency. Individual choice and freedom are given considerable significance: "Thus, and not otherwise, the world was made. Either something or nothing must depend on individual choices" (*Space* 270). It does matter that an individual named Ransom ends up fighting and defeating the Un-man. The individual choice to perform or not to perform "any good action," and thereby to represent Maleldil or not, is thus imbued with profound meaning (*Space* 277). Ransom's rejection of uniqueness and his placing himself on the same level as other people means that anyone could be called upon to do extraordinary things. The depiction of Ransom as a representative soldier shows the value that the war metaphor in *Perelandra* places on every individual.

In positing that a cosmic war pervades and encompasses all of human life and all of reality, *Perelandra* further presents disparate dimensions or aspects of life as different "fields" of battle. In the world of Perelandra, three main "battlefields" can be identified: an intellectual battle, an emotional conflict, and a physical struggle between Ransom and the Un-man. This intellectual battleground, which includes imaginative elements like stories, is presented in the various interactions between Ransom and Weston/Un-man, and particularly in the temptation of the Green Lady by the Un-man. Sanford Schwartz asserts that "ideological warfare," between Christian thought and the "conceptual paradigm" of evolutionary philosophy, is central to the *Space Trilogy* (6). The opening conflict between Ransom and Weston is a conversation in which Weston outlines his commitment to Creative Evolution, and Ransom reflects that, despite the surroundings of an "alien world," it feels like "a philosophical argument which might just as well have occurred in a Cambridge combination room" (*Space* 223-24). The emotional conflict is seen primarily in Ransom's

recurring doubts and inner crises, which are often explicitly linked to military imagery. For instance, Ransom's final confrontation with the Un-man is preceded by an abrupt psychological attack: "Suddenly and irresistibly, like an attack by tanks, that whole view of the universe which Weston (if it were Weston) had so lately preached to him, took all but complete possession of his mind" (*Space* 304). Ransom faces a battle within himself. Finally, physical struggle is also brought to the fore through the confrontation between Ransom and the Un-man, in which the Un-man is killed. This fight to the death is both rather ordinary – "On the physical plane it was one middle-aged scholar against another" (*Space* 281) – and "mythological" in importance: a servant of Maleldil wrestling with the embodiment of darkness and evil (*Space* 271). These different battlefields are all part of the wider war, and show how the war is fought throughout every dimension of life. By expressing faithful subjectivity in relation to a total war, the novel suggests that the whole of the person is involved in spiritual struggle. Just as Ransom, a representative of ordinary people, cannot dissociate the intellectual from the psychological, or, indeed, from the physical, so neither can ordinary people compartmentalise or distance themselves from the war in all of its dimensions because the "spiritual" touches every other part of life.

Ransom's experiences as the soldier of Maleldil in the conflict on Perelandra emphasise certain virtues as involved in faithful subjectivity, particularly the virtue or character quality of courage. David Downing suggests that a major theme of *Out of the Silent Planet* is Ransom overcoming his fears, and in *Perelandra* the "great challenge" is for Ransom to "overcome his doubts" (111). The novel's conception of courage extends beyond facing dangers to include the idea of endurance. C. S. Lewis notes that the cardinal virtue of "Fortitude" includes two "kinds of courage – the kind that faces danger as well as the kind that 'sticks it' under pain. 'Guts' is perhaps the nearest modern English" (*Mere Christianity* 73). In Lewis's view, probably echoing a comment by the eighteenth-century writer Samuel

Johnson, courage is essential to the practice of virtue: "[C]ourage is not simply *one* of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point" (*Screwtape Letters* 115, emphasis original). Thus, Ransom displays a type of courage through attempting to endure the seemingly endless temptation of the Green Lady by the Un-man, which is frequently characterised as a battleground with "counter-attacks and stands and withdrawals," like a soldier involved in a hopeless-looking conflict in which he must continue to fight despite the apparent lack of help (*Space* 262). Ultimately, however, Ransom must embody courage when he physically fights the Un-man, which terrifies Ransom with its lack of humanity and corpse-like physicality – its "deadly cold" hands and its "long metallic nails" – to such an extent that he is profoundly afraid of "bodily strife" with the Un-man, as he realises during his spiritual crisis: "One would die slowly. Up to the very end that cruel idiocy would smile into one's face. One would give way long before one died – beg for mercy, promise it help, worship, anything" (*Space* 271). Ransom must battle against his fear and against the thing itself which fills him with horror. When he encounters the Un-man after resolving, or resigning himself, to fight, the Un-man attempts to paralyse Ransom with a nightmarish picture of reality: "'And you think, little one . . . that you can fight with me? You think He will help you, perhaps? . . . . They all think He's going to help them – till they come to their senses screaming recantations too late in the middle of the fire, mouldering in concentration camps, writhing under saws, jibbering in mad-houses, or nailed on to crosses" (*Space* 280). The Un-man seeks to make Ransom afraid, to think himself utterly alone and beyond aid, particularly by reminding him of terrible things that have happened historically and are happening in the war back on Earth, and to make Ransom doubt that there is any meaning in his mission or in the suffering of war, only a meaningless silence. In the face of such horror, Ransom must both stand his ground and not flee from the danger. The conceptual framing of

war means that faithful subjectivity involves endurance to continue fighting as well as courage to face danger.

This courage cannot be disconnected from qualities of trust in and obedience to Maleldil. The Un-man seeks to cultivate a particular understanding of courage within the Green Lady's heart during the temptation scenes through the stories it tells her. From these stories, as Ransom realises, a particular "image" emerges: "the picture of the tall, slender form, unbowed though the world's weight rested upon its shoulders, stepping forth fearless and friendless into the dark to do for others what those others forbade it to do yet needed to have done" (*Space* 255-6). The Un-man's goal is to suggest that disobedience to Maleldil is the truly courageous and heroic thing to do, thus unhinging courage from obedience to Maleldil's revealed will, and inculcating in the Green Lady the "'masculine' values of classical heroism: autonomy, aggression, and pride" (Hilder "Feminine" n.p.). In contrast, Ransom must exercise his courage in the service of Maleldil, and such obedience is genuinely courageous. As Monika Hilder argues, Ransom "embodies the traditionally viewed 'feminine' values of spiritual heroism: interdependence, passivity, and humility" ("Feminine" n.p.). During his spiritual crisis, Ransom continually tries to evade the idea of physical combat with the Un-man, to "resist the conviction of what he must do" (*Space* 274). Even after he accepts that such an action is what he is being called to do, Ransom is still horrified by the idea of wrestling "naked chest to naked chest" with the Un-man: "Terrible follies came into his mind. He would fail to obey the Voice, but it would be all right because he would repent later on, when he was back on Earth. He would lose his nerve as St Peter had done, and be, like St Peter, forgiven" (*Space* 274). The struggle to submit and obey is itself a battle, to do the thing that seems "impossible" (276). Ransom is dependent upon Maleldil and must submit to the fate of battling the Un-man and, in so doing, acquires courage, even though his fears still remain.

Ransom's courageous submission to the task of fighting the Un-man raises the question of the novel's embrace of individual violence and aggressiveness given the notion of war as a framing metaphor for faithful subjectivity. The physical combat between Ransom and the Un-man ends with the death of the Un-man and completes Ransom's mission. Some critics have seen this plot development as ethically problematic, and even as a justification for fighting in the Second World War: "The author's decision to resolve the conflict in this manner—an open attempt to justify, if not sanctify, the recourse to arms—remains a disturbing aspect of the novel even to sympathetic readers who assent to the position it supports" (Schwartz 5). David Downing, while addressing what he considers the novel's unconvincing "transition from 'novel of ideas' . . . to mythic fantasy," notes the potential objection: "Is Lewis implying that Christians abandon the battle of ideas and go knock a few infidels over the head?" (50). Indeed, there have been concerns over the imaginative dangers of using a war metaphor to structure identity. According to Harriet Crabtree, "many have rejected the concept of warfare as a metaphor for the Christian endeavour because of a conviction that it fosters violent attitudes and triumphalism in those for whom it becomes compelling" (89). The concern is that framing subjectivity with the metaphor of war will encourage violence and hostile attitudes against those who are seen as enemies. It must be conceded that this is a possibility, and the physical combat in *Perelandra* could be construed as justifying violence against enemies. During the long and "grotesque duel" with the Un-man on the floating island, Ransom realises "at last what hatred was made for" and he experiences "a torrent of perfectly unmixed and lawful hatred" against the Un-man (*Space* 282). Additionally, in the frame narrative Ransom tells Lewis that "the two sides [the evil *eldila* and those from Deep Heaven], as you call them, have begun to appear much more clearly, much less mixed, here on Earth, in our own human affairs – to show in something a little more like their true colours" (*Space* 163-4). This remark could be regarded as evidence that aligns the Second

World War quite straightforwardly with the opposition between the forces of Maleldil and the forces of evil.

However, *Perelandra* distinguishes between the humanity of Weston and the spiritual reality of the Un-man that has invaded and consumed Weston's being. It is essential to recognise, as Evan Gibson asserts, that Ransom is not fighting against a human foe: "Some writers persist in talking about Ransom's fight with Weston. But the Un-man is literally a demon incarnate. Weston's body is simply the machine through which he operates" (55). Ransom fights against the Un-man, an evil entity that has completely taken over the body of Weston the physicist, rather than against Weston himself: "What was before [Ransom] appeared no longer a creature of corrupted will. It was corruption itself to which will was attached only as an instrument" (*Space* 282). During the physical fight, when the Un-man begins to flee with a severely sprained ankle, Ransom wonders with horror if the Un-man can transfer the feeling of pain to be borne by the "remnants of Weston's consciousness": "The idea that something which had once been of his own kind and fed at a human breast might even now be imprisoned in the thing he was pursuing redoubled his hatred" (*Space* 284). Ransom hates the Un-man precisely because it represents the destruction of humanity, including Weston's humanity. This distinction between Weston and the Un-man is apparent after the weakened Ransom emerges, following the Un-man's death, from the subterranean world into a mountainous region and proceeds to inscribe a memorial to Weston on a cliff face, to the memory of the physicist who "GAVE UP LEARNED WILL AND REASON TO THE BENT ELDIL" (*Space* 311). Ransom still honours Weston as a fellow human, while also recognising the terrible cost of surrendering to the dark powers of the universe. The conflict between Ransom and the Un-man therefore cannot be simply mapped onto the earthly war between the Allies and the Axis, nor can it be seen as a justification of violence against one's human enemies.

However, in the novel's portrayal of bodily conflict there are manifestations of real good and real evil, which are tied to the deeper spiritual reality of the cosmic war. The concern in *Perelandra* is not to particularly articulate a theology of just war, although Lewis did believe in the possibility of just war. Rather the novel engages with the fundamental conflicts between Maleldil and the Bent One, good and evil, light and darkness that play out in complex ways in every aspect of human life, including within a person's own soul. There is a sense in *Perelandra* in which the Second World War is a part of the wider cosmic war, as suggested by Ransom's comment that the "two sides" in the cosmic war were beginning to "appear much more clearly" in "human affairs" on Earth (*Space* 163-4). The point is not that the Axis are pure embodiments of evil, but rather that they are involved in terrible evil which, at some level, is the result of the activity of the fallen *eldila*. And, of course, the Allies, or some other nation or movement, are not exempt from falling prey to such demonic machinations. In other words, there is real evil in the world, and it is right to hate evil – which is rebellion against Maleldil and the rejection and twisting of what is good, ultimately leading to some state of almost nothingness, as represented by the Un-man. As Lewis comments, "Christianity does not want us to reduce by one atom the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery. We ought to hate them" (*Mere Christianity* 103). Robert Smith notes the ethical implication of Lewis's thought: "Irrational or self-serving hatred, or the hatred of persons, must routinely be excluded, but it is quite appropriate for one to hate what is inimical to God or to the Good. Thus the Christian can and should hate Satan and all that is evil" (183). Accordingly, Lewis recognised the danger of "identifying the enemy with the forces of evil," asking the rhetorical question, "Surely one of the things we learn from history is that God never allows a human conflict to become unambiguously one between simple good and simple evil?" (*Collected Letters* 391). Consequently, Monika Hilder suggests that Ransom's physical conflict with the Un-man is "best regarded as a symbolic manifestation of what is

acted out in the spiritual realm; it is not to be confused with the practice of jihad on the sociopolitical level" ("Feminine" n.p.). The conflict on Perelandra delves into the underlying moral and spiritual conflict between Maleldil's army and the fallen *eldila*, which manifests more complicatedly in the sphere of human activity. The "ordinary people" on Earth who are involved in the cosmic war are not going to be fighting demonically possessed corpses, although it may be right to fight such entities if one were to encounter them. Rather, Ransom's fighting, as a representative of "ordinary" people, can be regarded as a symbol of the moral and spiritual conflict that ordinary people are daily engaged in. The various conflicts on Perelandra highlight the seriousness of the daily spiritual conflict – which includes the intellectual, emotional and psychological, and the physical domains of reality – and thus the need to fight. If Ransom is representative of faithful subjectivity framed by the metaphor of war, then aggressiveness or hostility is necessary against the things, including demonic powers, which ruin humanity and human lives and souls.

Conclusion

The metaphor of war orients or structures faithful subjectivity towards some sort of future victory, or of cessation of conflict at the very least. Ransom's defeat of the Un-man in the subterranean regions "resolves the major external conflict of the story," and provides a type of victory (Downing 51). However, this moment in the narrative feels curiously anti-climactic. In the midst of a psychological attack that fills Ransom's mind with visions of nihilism, Ransom hurls a large stone into the Un-man's face, killing it and dispelling the nihilistic thoughts, and then pushes the broken corpse over a cliff into a pool of lava: "He saw its shape black, for a second, against the sea of fire: and then that was the end of it" (Lewis *Space* 306). Exhaustion overcomes Ransom, severely weakened from his prolonged wrestling

with the Un-man, and he falls asleep after reflecting for a moment: “Glory be to God. I’m tired” (*Space* 306). Ransom here does not much resemble a great triumphant hero. Indeed, the great climactic moment of triumph comes rather with the arrival of Tor and Tinidril at the mountaintop and their subsequent investiture as the rulers of Perelandra, when “the gods kneeled and bowed their huge bodies before the small forms of that young King and Queen” (325). Prior to their arrival, Malacandra further diminishes any sense of Ransom’s importance: “It is no doing of yours. You are not great, though you could have prevented a thing so great that Deep Heaven sees it with amazement. Be comforted, small one, in your smallness. He lays no merit on you. Receive and be glad. Have no fear, lest your shoulders be bearing this world. Look! it is beneath your head and carries you” (319). Although Ransom might be seen as a saviour figure by virtue of stopping the Un-man, he remains “small” and without “merit,” merely a servant of Maleldil. The implication or effect of this for faithful subjectivity is that the resources and capabilities of identity are derived ultimately, in a mysterious sense, from something outside of the human soul. Ultimately, victory does not come from the achievements of individuals, but from the mysterious working of Maleldil.

Furthermore, *Perelandra* presents the hope of a final end to the cosmic war and of the subsequent endless time of joy and peace. Faithful subjectivity is ultimately framed as anticipating the final victory and the cessation of the cosmic war when the Dark Lord of Thulcandra is comprehensively defeated, and thus as anticipating the future paradisical times of peace. Following the investiture of Tor and Tinidril as King and Queen of the Paradise of Perelandra, Tor speaks of the future of the world of Perelandra, and how after “ten thousand circlings” they will behold “Deep Heaven,” and will undergo a great transformation: “Our bodies will be changed, but not all changed. We shall be as the *eldila*, but not all as the *eldila*. And so will all our sons and daughters be changed in the time of their ripeness, until the number is made up which Maleldil read in His Father’s mind before times flowed” (*Space*

332). Ransom thinks Tor is speaking of an "end" to the world of Perelandra, but Tor corrects him by rather describing it as a prelude to "the beginning of all things," which will be preceded by the true ending of the cosmic war with the settling of "one matter": "The siege of your world shall be raised, the black spot cleared away, before the real beginning. In those days Maleldil will go to war – in us . . . and, last of all, in Himself unveiled, He will go down to Thulcandra" (332). Tor uses eschatological language that echoes the Book of Revelation to describe the end that will come on Thulcandra (Earth) before the true beginning: "[I]n the end all shall be cleansed, and even the memory of your Black Oyarsa blotted out, and your world shall be fair and sweet and reunited to the field of Arbol and its true name shall be heard again" (332). The ending of the war will result in the cleansing and renewal of the Earth – new creation, as it is sometimes termed in Christian thought. Ransom's defeat of the Un-man is then only a faint foreshadowing of the ultimate end of the cosmic war—the victory when evil is removed from Thulcandra, and the "Black Oyarsa" completely overthrown.

The anticipation or hope presented at the end of *Perelandra* has some parallels with *Pilgrim's Progress* and the pilgrims' looking forward to their eventual arrival at the Celestial City. Manifestly, however, there are differences between winning a war and reaching the end of a journey. Additionally, *Progress* is more focused on the personal and individual dimension of each pilgrim entering, after earthly death, into the Celestial City, while *Perelandra* has a more eschatological and comprehensive perspective of hope, looking forward, in traditional Christian terms, to the new heavens and the new earth. Nonetheless, both narratives share the idea of hope, of looking toward something that is still future, whether entering into a city or winning a war. In fact, the focus in *Perelandra* extends beyond winning the war to what reality will look like after the war is won, which may correspond more closely to the longed-for state of the Celestial City.

It is therefore significant that the novel concludes with the image of the Great Dance, rather than with an image of war. The ending of the cosmic war and the overthrow of the Dark Lord will mark the beginning of, or at least the beginning of Earth's true participation in, the "Great Game, of the Great Dance" which, according to the *eldila*, has been going on from eternity (334). The introduction of the idea of the Great Dance marks a shift in the narrative towards, firstly, what may be called a "hymn of praise" to Maleldil which itself seems part of the Great Dance, and, later, Ransom's transcendent vision of the Great Dance itself (Fiddes n.p.). As David Downing notes, the complex Great Dance "serves as a kind of liturgical answer to the angst produced by positivism, the sense that humans inhabit a vast, dead universe that mocks all philosophy, all desire for justice, all yearning for some larger meaning" (73). Moreover, the Dance can be understood as an "attempt to let the reader encounter a mystical experience" (B. R. Johnson n. p.). Ransom's experience of the Great Dance lasts for an entire year and probably functions as a counterpoint to narrating Lewis's account of the interval between Ransom's departure and return with all the "raids and bad news and hopes deferred" (*Space* 170). The Great Dance is centred around the figure of Maleldil and the participation of all things with Him: "Each thing was made for Him. He is the centre. Because we are with Him, each of us is at the centre" (336). The song and vision of the Great Dance provide a sense of the jubilation that will come at the end of the war but also of the purpose that already pervades all of reality. The Dance also indicates that reality is altogether greater and more wonderful than the human mind can understand: "[T]he universe is stranger and more beautiful than we suppose, beyond our understanding; time is swallowed up in eternity; and there is no disorder, no randomness, because everything that exists is, by the grace of God, the center of the universe" (Myers 71). Faithful subjectivity is consequently framed as looking forward to the days when the spiritual siege of Earth is ended and the demonic rebels against Maleldil who lurk within the terrestrial sphere are finally defeated.

Even more though, faithful subjectivity anticipates the subsequent eschatological time of peace that will prevail throughout Earth and the entire cosmos. The structuring metaphor of war is then a temporary framing, just as a journey is. Ransom will not always be a fighting soldier, nor will Christian always be on the journey towards the Celestial City. In both metaphors, there is an anticipation of a future reality of peace and joy that is centred around the Divine.

Chapter 3
Faithful Subjectivity as Perception: *Gilead* (2004)

I feel sometimes as if I were a child who opens its eyes on the world once and sees amazing things it will never know any names for and then has to close its eyes again.
—Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*

Introduction

Marilynne Robinson (née Summers) was born on November 26, 1943, in Sandpoint, Idaho. As she noted in an interview, she grew up in a family that was "pious and Presbyterian," although that affiliation was more an "inherited intuition than an actual fact" and "very Republican politics" were talked about more frequently than religion (Fay 43). Robinson studied a Bachelor of Arts at Pembroke College in Rhode Island, graduating in 1966, having majored in English Literature, with "an emphasis on nineteenth-century American literature," notably Walt Whitman, Thoreau, Melville, Emerson, and Emily Dickinson (Engebretson 3). In the course of researching and writing her doctoral dissertation, on Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part II*, Robinson "began an experiment with metaphors" which became part of her first novel *Housekeeping* (1980) (Zelazko n.p.). *Housekeeping* received a Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award in 1982, and was also nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Subsequently, Robinson worked at a succession of American universities, plus a stint at the University of Kent, England. Her British experience, coupled with concern about environmental issues, led to the writing of *Mother Country: Britain, the Welfare State, and Nuclear Pollution* (1989). Having divorced her husband in 1989, Robinson ended her "professional wandering" in 1990

when she accepted a position at University of Iowa's Writer's Workshop (Engebretson 4). Around this time she also crossed the "doctrinal and demographic inch" and started attending the Congregational United Church of Christ (Robinson *Adam* 231). This change was part of a broader "effort to reeducate [herself]" (Fay 62). During this time of reeducation, Robinson read John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), which increased her understanding of "the religious culture [she] had very passively received" (Hoezee). This period of personal reassessment resulted in her next major work of nonfiction, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (1998), which offered "reevaluations of major figures in intellectual history, including Charles Darwin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and John Calvin, as well as incisive inquiries into subjects such as the environment, political correctness, nineteenth-century American abolitionists, and the Puritans" (Engebretson 4). These concerns also informed her second novel, *Gilead* (2004), which was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

Robinson places herself very precisely within a particular tradition of liberal Christianity. As Alexander Engebretson notes, "Liberal theology is a large, complex tradition" but some of the "widely shared attitudes" within the tradition include "an ethical focus, a positive attitude toward human nature, the privileging of the individual's experience, and the acknowledgment of history as a condition for truth" (10). In Robinson's understanding, her tradition of "American liberal Protestantism" was one of the branches of Christianity in America that grew out of Calvinistic Protestantism following the First Great Awakening in the eighteenth century. This tradition has been marked, as she puts it, by an emphasis on social action: "What has personal holiness to do with politics and economics? Everything, from the liberal Protestant point of view. They are the means by which our poor and orphaned and our strangers can be sustained in real freedom, and graciously, as God requires" ("Onward, Christian Liberals" 51). She contrasts such liberalism with "fundamentalism," a movement which "subscribes fervently to the principles of laissez-faire

capitalism" and has shifted American society towards social Darwinism, or "survival of the fittest" ("Onward, Christian Liberals" 46).[13] There is thus a significant political and ethical dimension to Robinson's spiritual framework that informs her approach to fiction.

In addition to her liberal American Christian heritage, Robinson also draws on a rich tradition of Christian humanism, which immensely shapes her writing and approach to literature. As Robinson points out, John Calvin, whose thought has profoundly shaped her, was "very much a Renaissance humanist in his appreciation of everything wonderful in the human creature. We are, he says, the highest proof of the divine wisdom" (Sitman).[14] This Christian and theistic humanism allows an exalted view of humanity, rooted in the idea that humanity is made in the image of God, which is essential to Robinson's understanding of both literature and theology, and which she articulates using the term "soul": "I find the soul a valuable concept, a statement of the dignity of a human life and of the unutterable gravity of human action and experience" (*Givenness* 9). Accordingly, as Robinson remarks, this conception of a soul depends upon "a metaphysics, an unconfirmable parallel reality," which is able to "sustain the civilization culture and history created for us" (*What Are We Doing Here?* 204) The idea of the soul is integral to Robinson's conception of literature: "Reading . . . is an act of great inwardness and subjectivity, and this is why and how it had such a profound meaning while it did—the soul encountered itself in its response to a text, first Genesis or Matthew and then *Paradise Lost* or *Leaves of Grass*" (*Adam* 9). In this account, literature allows the possibility of the soul's growth, and leaves space for the sense of profound human dignity, inwardness, and experience, as well as enabling the soul to

[13] "Fundamentalism" is a notoriously slippery term which Robinson seems to apply to some branches of American Christianity which often involve support for conservative politics and policies. Many in those movements would likely distance themselves from the fundamentalist label, and would disagree strongly with many of the criticisms that Robinson levels against them.

[14] *Re-Envisioning Christian Humanism: Education and the Restoration of Humanity*, edited by Jens Zimmermann (Oxford UP, 2017), provides some historical background for Christian humanism, including roots in the Church Fathers. In that collection, Nicholas Wolterstorff has written an essay entitled "The Christian Humanism of John Calvin" (pp.77-94).

encounter other souls. However, Robinson argues, modern thought, under the influence of "variously determinist and reductionist models of human nature and motivation," tends to reduce everything to the material, leaving no space for anything that transcends the physical (Robinson *Absence* xiii).[15] At its best, by contrast, she argues that literature displays a "testimony to the mysterious beauty of life," one that is greatly reduced when the worth of souls is excluded from our picture of reality, when human dignity is neglected or explained away (*When I Was a Child* 32). The ideas of the immaterial soul and that humans are made and exist in the image of God provide formative elements in Robinson's approach to writing.

Just as Robinson's approach to literature is shaped by her liberal Protestantism and humanism, so literature also reciprocally informs her theological understanding. There is a sense of mystery in Robinson's confession that she doesn't know "where [fiction] comes from" or "why we need it," while acknowledging as indisputable the fact "that we do create it and also crave it" (*When I Was a Child* 7). In her account, "writing consists very largely of exploring intuition," and thus creating or capturing "the sense of a character" is more fundamental than plot for this task of exploration: "When [a writer] *knows* his character he is writing to explore, to feel reality on a set of nerves somehow not quite his own" (*When I Was a Child* 6). Robinson similarly considers religion in terms of experience that cannot be entirely articulated: "This primary intuition of the strangeness of it all, of our single selves as unspeakably fragile and brilliant observers of a grandeur for which we have tried through all our generations to find words, this is the experience that seems to me to underlie religion" ("Credo" 29). Literature can offer a depiction of this encounter with strange reality that cannot be fully articulated. As Robinson writes: "The frontiers of the unsayable, and the avenues of approach to those frontiers, have been opened for me by every book I have read

[15] Robinson lists several thinkers in connection with these "reductionist models": Darwin, Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, and B. F. Skinner.

that was in any degree ambitious, earnest, or imaginative" (*When I Was a Child* 20). In addition to wrestling with the inarticulable, literature, or narrative at least, "creates paradigmatic structures around which experience can be ordered, and this certainly would account for the craving for it, which might as well be called a need" (*When I Was a Child* 126). Robinson's appreciation of literature informs her theological sensibility, or way of approach to theology, through its ability to depict transcendent human experience and to "order" or comprehend it.

Accordingly, Robinson employs fiction as a significant avenue for theological expression. Andrew Latz writes of Robinson's fiction as "literary or novelistic theology" which shows what doctrine "looks like in practice" as it affects people's lives (284). From this perspective, the advantage of fiction is that it enables a sense of the experiential, rather than mere abstract theological propositions. Robinson's fiction, then, shows how doctrine and belief and religious experience can feel as they touch the life of the individual, particularly through the portrayal in narrative form of characters' mental and emotional inwardness. This serves to express a sense of the soul's reality and thus enables the reader to encounter another soul and another's experience, which is one of the emphases of humanism in Robinson's understanding. As Engebretson notes, "Her fiction is a vehicle for this Calvinist-humanist vision of selfhood, the self in possession of dignity, inwardness, and holiness" (11). Crucially, the use of narrative enables such encounters to be expansive, rather than constrictive, reflecting the "intellectual openness" that Robinson considers essential to faith: "I believe that faith in God is a liberation of thought, because thought is an ongoing instruction in things that pertain to God. To test this belief is my fictional practice, the basis for the style and substance of my two novels and the motive behind my nonfiction" ("Credo" 27). All fictional experience is thus potentially theological because it offers opportunity for such instruction. Another significant aspect of Robinson's literary theology, again centred on experience, is an

emphasis on the value and meaning of beauty. According to Robinson, “The beauty we see in this world is a sign and portent of an ultimate beauty, and we are rightly enthralled by it” (*What Are We Doing Here?* 268). In experiences of sunlight, the stars, the human body, and so on, “the sacredness of creation is manifest, there for us to see because our senses and minds are formed to apprehend it and glory in it” (*What Are We Doing Here?* 214). Fiction provides a way of conveying and acknowledging this sense of beauty in the world. Consequently, fiction provides a means of expressing that “[w]e inhabit, we are part of, a reality for which explanation is much too poor and small” (*When I Was a Child* 7). Fiction, as theological expression, leaves room for mystery and (paradoxically) for the sense that reality is far too wonderful to ever be perfectly encapsulated in words. Robinson’s fiction enables the presentation of characters’ perception of reality’s wonder and mystery, and in turn enables the reader to perceive.

The Metaphor of Perception

The challenge of perceiving the sacred within everyday reality occupies a central position in Robinson’s thought and fiction. In one of her essays, Robinson declares, “The locus of the human mystery is perception of this world. From it proceeds every thought, every art” (*When I Was a Child* 9). Robinson traces this conviction that perception is integral to the soul and its expressions in art and language to a discovery she made as an undergraduate while reading a “long footnote” in Jonathan Edwards’s *Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758): “I realized that I could think of God as present and intentional, and of reality as essentially addressed to human perception—perception being then as now my greatest interest and pleasure in life”

("Credo" 27).[16] Robinson also acknowledges the influence of nineteenth-century American transcendentalist writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, who, as she understands them, "see through all convenient or dismissive categories to the actual, the vital and essential. In every case their protagonist is the perceiver" (*What Are We Doing Here?* 295). Robinson considers these writers to be intellectual descendants of the American and English Puritans, who highly valued the idea of the "exalted mind" as central to seeing "the ordinary as visionary," and who provided language that "acknowledge[s] the great mystery and dignity of humankind" (*What Are We Doing Here?* 295). Further back in this lineage lies the Reformation, and particularly John Calvin, for whom perception is fundamental: "I am proposing that Calvin's metaphysics reduces reality to two terms: humankind and God. Every other aspect of being is a revelation of God suited to human perception, or a form of comfort or sustenance provided to address human needs, or a test by which our understanding of God can be enlarged and deepened" ("Calvinism as Metaphysics" 184). If reality is regarded as a communication from God with the intent that humanity may know him, a wonderful sacredness is imparted to everything that shapes how lives are to be lived: "What I might call personal holiness is, in fact, openness to the perception of the holy in existence itself and, above all, in one another" ("Onward, Christian Liberals" 43). Robinson's *Gilead* can be approached as an attempt to articulate this understanding of perception through the personal narration of its protagonist, John Ames.

The importance of perception in *Gilead* is immediately apparent in its structure, which is not strongly plot-driven like *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Perelandra*, but rather emphasises meditation and memory. As one reviewer remarked, "I pity the blurb writer who first had to try to encapsulate this story of a 76-year-old cleric from Gilead, a small (very small) town in

[16] Robinson frequently refers to this formative moment, most fully in "Jonathan Edwards in a New Light," *HUMANITIES*, November/December 2014, vol. 35, no. 6, www.neh.gov/humanities/2014/novemberdecember/feature/jonathan-edwards-in-new-light-remembered-preaching-fire-and

rural Iowa, writing to his young son and looking back over a long life lived mainly alone and in prayer. It is a novel that defies summation" (Jordison). *Gilead* takes the form of a long letter written in 1956 by John Ames, a Congregationalist minister in his late seventies who lives in the small town of Gilead, Iowa. Ames has been diagnosed with a heart problem (angina pectoris) and so is writing the letter for his almost-seven-year old son (unnamed in *Gilead*, but identified as Robbie in subsequent novels) to read when he's older, since Ames does not expect to live long enough to see him grow up into adulthood. In the letter, which is overshadowed by his awareness of his mortality and impending death, Ames reflects on his own life and his memories of his father and grandfather (both also named John Ames), as well as events happening in the present of the novel, in addition to trying to give advice to his son.[17] Accordingly, the novel often gives the impression of a looseness, or even lack, of structure, particularly with Ames's frequent switching between the present and the past. Lance Larsen, for instance, describes the novel as a "series of linked meditations that have eventually coalesced into a narrative" (Handley and Larsen 27). These overlapping narrative strands reflect a number of formal influences. As an epistolary novel, *Gilead* resembles some relatively modern works such as Georges Bernanos's *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1936; first English translation:1937), which Ames alludes to at one point (Robinson *Gilead* 52). Justin Evans, along with other critics, points to older sources of influence in suggesting that "*Gilead* is based on the tradition of American spiritual autobiography" (132). Alexander Engebretson adds to the complexity by pointing out that the categories of "the sermon, the jeremiad, the prayer, the journal, and the deathbed epistle," along with that of "confession," can be usefully applied to *Gilead* (35). Following a singular unfolding story seems secondary to the "crucial experience" of "engaging with the voice of the Reverend John Ames; entering

[17] To distinguish between the various John Ameses in the novel, Ames the narrator will typically be referred to as Ames or John Ames, while his father will generally be referred to as Ames Senior, and Ames's grandfather will generally be referred to as Grandfather Ames. Ames's son will be called Ames Junior.

his world and his heart" (Jordison). Consequently, *Gilead* may come across as fragmentary rather than a straightforward and coherent narrative.

Despite its apparent temporal fluidity, however, *Gilead* in fact consists of a frame narrative set in the present day (the 1950s) and several embedded narratives concerning Ames's family history. The frame narrative is occupied by Ames's reflections on everyday events such as preaching sermons, going for walks, watching his son play outside, and visiting his old friend Robert Boughton, a retired Presbyterian minister. The most unsettling development in the frame narrative concerns the return to Gilead of Jack (John Ames) Boughton, one of Robert Boughton's sons and Ames's namesake. Jack has had a troubled past, which haunts Ames's perception of him for much of the narrative, and only near the end of the novel is it revealed that Jack has a "colored" wife and child and that he has come to Gilead to see if he and his family could live there together safely. One embedded narrative concerns Ames's grandfather (Grandfather Ames) who died in 1892 when Ames was twelve. Grandfather Ames strongly espoused the cause of abolitionism and, as Ames came to learn, he "was involved pretty deeply in the violence in Kansas" prior to the American Civil War (Robinson *Gilead* 97). Another embedded narrative concerns the lonely period of Ames's life between the death of his first wife and child and marrying his second wife, Lila, which he refers to as his "own dark time" when it felt as if "every winter were the same winter" and during which he "listened to thousands of baseball games" (*Gilead* 50). Across these narrative strands, the novel both presents Ames's perceptions of the sacred in everyday experience and raises the question of whether his perceptions extend as far as necessary.

Perception may not present such a clearcut example of a metaphor that structures faithful subjectivity as is the case in *Pilgrim's Progress* –a journey – or *Perelandra* –total war – but it nevertheless figures prominently as a concept that structures and gives meaning to Ames's experience and identity. One of the most telling examples of perception and

recognition occurs near the beginning of the novel, in Ames's first account of his and his father's expedition to find the grave of Grandfather Ames in the wilds of Kansas. After they had tidied up the grave site, and while his father was in the middle of a long prayer, Ames was entranced by the sight of the sky: "I realized that what I saw was a full moon rising just as the sun was going down. Each of them was standing on its edge, with the most wonderful light between them. It seemed as if you could touch it, as if there were palpable currents of light passing back and forth, or as if there were great taut skeins of light suspended between them" (*Gilead* 16). This wondrous display infuses the "parched and sun-stricken" grave site with a sense of beauty and meaning (*Gilead* 15). Similarly, in one of his final entries for the letter, Ames effuses over the virtue that can be perceived in the beauty of the local landscape: "I love the prairie! So often I have seen the dawn come and the light flood over the land and everything turn radiant at once, that word 'good' so profoundly affirmed in my soul that I am amazed I should be allowed to witness such a thing" (*Gilead* 281). Echoing the proclamation from Genesis that God made the creation good in the beginning, Ames seems to find each morning to almost be a moment of re-creation. This highlights that Ames's perception bridges theological concepts and everyday realities.

The model of faithful subjectivity presented in *Gilead* – perception – has a long history prior to Robinson's usage of it. As mentioned above, John Calvin uses metaphors of perception throughout his writings. According to Belden Lane, "Calvin's favorite metaphor in conveying the beauty of the natural world was to speak of it as a theater of God's glory" (58). As Calvin himself writes in his commentary on Psalm 135: "The whole world is a theatre for the display of the divine goodness, wisdom, justice, and power" (*Psalms* 178). The metaphor of a theatre emphasises the idea of looking and perceiving and realising the importance of what is seen: "[B]eing placed in this most beautiful theater, let us not decline to take a pious delight in the clear and manifest works of God" (Calvin *Institutes* 1.14.20). Ultimately, this

idea of perceiving God through his creation stems from the language of Scripture, as shown by the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20, *KJV*). Paul highlights the wilful blindness of mankind to the revelation of God in his creation, and counters that seeing what God has made ought to lead to the praising and honouring of God. Perception is not merely seeing, but it is also understanding, to some degree, the meaning and significance of what is seen. Perception, as understood in this sense, provides a model or expression of faithful subjectivity that involves recognising the sacred beauty of the world and the people within it and thus being led to the God who created it.

Crucially, Robinson's emphasis on perception not only focuses attention on the ordinary aspects of life but also affirms the value of the material world. According to Ray Horton, one of the central patterns of Robinson's fiction is "an aesthetics of the quotidian that reveres the overlooked minutiae of daily life," and which is "deeply interwoven" with Robinson's "committed engagement with religious forms of life" (120). To put it more plainly, Robinson finds cause for wonder in the seemingly ordinary aspects of life, including washing dishes or other domestic activities. As Robinson writes, "So I have spent my life watching, not to see beyond the world, merely to see, great mystery, what is plainly before my eyes. I think the concept of transcendence is based on a misreading of creation. With all respect to heaven, the scene of miracle is here, among us" (*Adam* 243). Andrew Cunning accordingly asserts that "[Robinson's] Christianity is, above all, a way of seeing that seeks to maintain and gesture towards the wholeness and infinite plurality of reality and human experience, a way of seeing that refuses not to see anything" (3). Thus, as Ryan Kemp and Jordan Rodgers discuss, Robinson's fiction draws attention to the joy and wonder that can be found in this present world and life: "[W]hat is most striking and enthralling about Ames is

his remarkable affection for the world he is about to leave, and a virtuosic attentiveness to the moments in which it can reveal its value. Somehow, Ames's Christian beliefs seem to intensify rather than diminish his love for this life" (1). Robinson's fiction, and particularly *Gilead*, provides a positive "sacramental vision" which "finds the most ordinary elements of life to be revelatory" (Stout 585). In *Gilead*, the world, including very ordinary aspects of the world, is imbued with wonder for those who have eyes to see.

Accordingly, Ames frequently meditates on the wonder and beauty to be found in rather normal sights within the created world. At one point, Ames recalls "another morning, fall a year or two ago" when the large oaks by the Gilead war memorial were "dropping their acorns thick as hail almost": "[T]here was such energy in the things transpiring among those trees, like a storm, like travail. I stood there a little out of range, and I thought, It is all still new to me. I have lived my life on the prairie and a line of oak trees can still astonish me" (Robinson *Gilead* 64). This is typical of the wonder that Ames expresses as he looks out at the everyday world. Earlier in the frame narrative, Ames seems similarly astounded as he observes his son and wife blowing bubbles at the cat outside his window: "[Y]ou were kneeling on the ground together with Soapy [the cat] between and that effulgence of bubbles rising, and so much laughter. Ah, this life, this world" (*Gilead* 10). Ames further exhibits this attention to the ordinary in the way he has "paid a good deal of attention to light," so that he is "struck by the way the light felt" one afternoon: "There was the feeling of a weight of light . . . It was the kind of light that rests on your shoulders the way a cat lies on your lap. So familiar" (*Gilead* 59). Throughout these rather mundane moments, Ames illustrates Robinson's conviction that "all experience is profound, and worthy of all the attention it can be given," regardless of any apparent insignificance ("Credo" 28). Instead of the mundane being boring, Ames finds cause for continual wonder. As he writes later on, he has lived almost his entire life in a small American town but now feels he could never understand "this

world" even if he had "a dozen lives" (*Gilead* 76). In fact, Ames claims: "Each morning I'm like Adam waking up in Eden, amazed at the cleverness of my hands and at the brilliance pouring into my mind through my eyes" (*Gilead* 76). The world has a "brilliance" about it that cannot be fully explained or exhausted.

Even more so than the world, however, people are presented as possessing a sacred wonder to be perceived that Ames feels requires recognition or affirmation with acts of blessing. While remembering a seemingly absurd attempt to baptise a litter of cats when he was a child, Ames reflects: "There is a reality in blessing, which I take baptism to be, primarily. It doesn't enhance sacredness, but it acknowledges it, and there is a power in that" (26). Ames has come to believe that blessings, such as sacraments, are acknowledgements of a pre-existing sacredness within the individual human being (or cat), as is apparent in his frequent musings on his experiences of baptising children: "[W]henever I take a child into my arms to be baptized, I am, so to speak, comprehended in the experience more fully, having seen more of life, knowing better what it means to affirm the sacredness of the human creature" (*Gilead* 104). Ames's understanding of blessing as an affirmation of sacredness reflects his wider perception of human sacredness in the novel, which he describes using imagery of light:

> When people come to speak to me, whatever they say, I am struck by a kind of incandescence in them, the 'I' whose predicate can be 'love' or 'fear' or 'want,' and whose object can be 'someone' or 'nothing' and it won't really matter, because the loveliness is just in that presence, shaped around 'I' like a flame on a wick, emanating itself in grief and guilt and joy and whatever else. (*Gilead* 51)

As Chad Wriglesworth notes, this "flame of consciousness" that Ames perceives is a manifestation of the "animating vitality disclosed in the breath of God," and which is "stoked in all of humanity" (108). Its universality is conveyed early in the novel when Ames sees

some “not churchgoing . . . decent rascally young” mechanics, who were “passing remarks back and forth the way they do and laughing that wicked way they have,” but nevertheless “seemed beautiful to me” (*Gilead* 5-6). The novel suggests that perception involves the recognition that each human is a sacred reality, irrespective of religious affiliation, by virtue of their being made in the image of God.

Vision and its Limitations

In *Gilead*, Ames’s perception of the sacred in creation and humanity can be tied to the contrasting ideas of “vision” that are raised within the novel. Several times throughout his narration, Ames alludes to a vision that Grandfather Ames had back in Maine when he was “not yet sixteen”: The Lord Jesus appeared, “holding out His arms to him, which were bound in chains” (*Gilead* 56). Ames recounts the meaning his grandfather ascribed to this experience: “He said he knew then that he had to come to Kansas and make himself useful to the cause of abolition. To be useful was the best thing the old men ever hoped for themselves, and to be aimless was their worst fear” (*Gilead* 56). This vision gave Grandfather Ames’s life a singular and fiery focus, which is physically embodied in the fact that he had only one eye after the Civil War. In contrast to his grandfather’s all-consuming vision, Ames thinks that all of life possesses a “visionary aspect”: “I believe that the old man did indeed have far too narrow an idea of what a vision might be. He may, so to speak, have been too dazzled by the great light of his experience to realize that an impressive sun shines on us all” (*Gilead* 103). According to Ames, sometimes visions are apparent only “in memory, in retrospect” (*Gilead* 104). Ames goes on to tell a story about when he was young and he joined his father, Ames Senior, in helping to demolish the ruins of a Baptist church that had burnt down after being

struck by lightning. Ames particularly remembers his father giving him a biscuit covered in ash, which he always remembers "as communion":

> I remember my father down on his heels in the rain, water dripping from his hat, feeding me biscuit from his scorched hand, with that old blackened wreck of a church behind him and steam rising where the rain fell on embers, the rain falling in gusts and the women singing 'The Old Rugged Cross' while they saw to things, moving so gently, as if they were dancing to the hymn, almost. (*Gilead* 109)

Ames remembers this moment, in which "much of [his] life was comprehended," as "so joyful and sad," and altogether beyond his capacity to articulate: "I can't tell myself what it has meant to me" (*Gilead* 109). If Grandfather Ames's understanding of visions is particular and focused—and supernatural—Ames has a more expansive understanding of vision as being rooted in experience and memory, which embodies Robinson's conviction, derived from Calvin, that "experience itself is visionary" (Holberg). Ames's visions are not necessarily fully describable, or even able to be grasped fully by others, but despite him finding it difficult to explain the precise meaning of these visions he affirms their basic import that all experience is visionary (that is, worthy of attention) because it carries with it a message or communication from God.

John Ames's understanding of vision as encompassing all of experience poses the challenge of perceiving sacredness even within moments and experiences of suffering, sorrow, and loss. It might initially seem that the idea of perception would be rather rosy-eyed and focused on the clearly beautiful, but Ames is not blind to the realities of sorrow in life. He has experienced the turmoil of the Spanish Flu, two world wars, and the Great Depression, along with the death of his first wife and daughter and subsequent decades of loneliness. Indeed, Ames reflects: "Sorrow seems to me to be a great part of the substance of human life" (*Gilead* 118). In all these sorrowful times Ames seems to find a kind of spiritual

value, particularly in his own experiences of darkness and sorrow before meeting the woman who would become his second wife, Lila. Reflecting on the long, lonely years of writing many sermons, of "[t]rying to say what was true," Ames finds something to appreciate: "I'm grateful for all those dark years, even though in retrospect they seem like a long, bitter prayer that was answered finally" (22). Retrospectively, Ames "remember[s] it as a blessed time": "Now that I look back, it seems to me that in all that deep darkness a miracle was preparing" (63). The blessing firstly comes from the "peace and comfort" that Ames remembers alongside his grief and loneliness, peace and comfort that likely came from prayer, the friendship of Robert Boughton, many books, and late-night wanderings in Gilead (81). Secondly, and more importantly, the blessing comes through the miracle of Lila's unexpected arrival into Ames's life on a "blessed, rainy Pentecost" while he was preaching a sermon (231). The experience of their friendship and marriage, Ames reflects, "enlarged my understanding of hope, just to know that such a transformation can occur" (231). Ames's marriage to Lila highlights the possibility of unexpected transformation and change, a transformation that is all the more striking because of the contrast with the suffering that preceded. As Mark Scott notes, "Even in the darkest times of [Ames's] life, beauty enters in unexpected ways, which raises the possibility of the aesthetic transformation of suffering" (16). Thus Ames's "meditations . . . invite reflection on how God might ultimately transform suffering" (Scott 16). Ames sees beauty and sacredness even in the midst of suffering and sorrow. Suffering is not perceived as existentially ultimate, rather Ames's perception emphasises the possibility of hope, or at least of the meaning and value of that experience. While remembering the moment of ashen communion, Ames reflects on the fact that sometimes he forgets where he is and finds himself "back in hard times for a minute or two": "[T]here's a sweetness in the experience which I don't understand. But that only enhances the value of it. My point here is that you never do know the actual nature even of your own

experience. Or perhaps it has no fixed and certain nature" (*Gilead* 109). The implication that Ames makes is that even experiences of suffering may have "sweetness," but not necessarily in such a way that can be perceived at the time or even rationalised subsequently.

Although Ames understands all experience and all humanity and all creation to be visionary and imbued with sacredness, his failures of perception are also apparent, most evidently in the case of his unawareness of racism. *Gilead* makes several connections to the history of racism in America, from Grandfather Ames's fight for abolition during the era of the Civil War through to the anti-miscegenation laws in 1950s America as experienced by Jack and his African American wife, Della. Additionally, Ames occasionally alludes to the historic incident of a "fire at the Negro church" in Gilead when Grandfather Ames was still alive, and to the church's much later dissolution with the departure of its dwindling congregation to Chicago (*Gilead* 41). Although Ames is aware of the fire that happened when he was young and of the departure of the African American congregation to Chicago, he seems to be blind to the significance of these events for most of the novel. In a sense, Ames' lack of perception embodies Robinson's perplexity, as expressed in an interview, that "one generation was passionate on the subject of abolition and the next generation forgot it, forgot all of the history that surrounded it" (Mariotti and Lane Jr. 295). This is despite Ames's awareness of the tendency to forget the trials and difficulties of previous generations. The Depression of the 1930s, he writes, "might as well be Ur of the Chaldees for all people know about it now" (*Gilead* 226). More pertinently, "people have forgotten" about the clashes during the formation of Kansas, prior to the Civil War, over whether or not to permit slavery within the state: "Remarkable things went on, certainly, but there has been so much trouble in the world since then it's hard to find time to think about Kansas" (*Gilead* 86). However, Ames does not perceive the personal significance that such historical forgetting might point to.

Numerous critics have considered the novel in relation to its engagement with racism, and especially the religious and political implications of its highlighting of Ames's failures in that area. Some of the most forthright responses have concluded that his blindness to racism reveal a fatal weakness in his spiritual perception. As Emily Hammerton-Barry puts it, "Ames's personal myopia has political implications in Gilead" (209). She argues that the "sublime beauty" that Ames claims to discern is "revealed to be the mythic vision of a white man who made the decision to look away from the oppression he is implicated in" (209). Indeed, it may well be the case that the "Gilead novels chart the strange transformation of the 'heartland' of America from a nineteenth-century radical, utopian project for racial justice to a twentieth-century byword for reflexive conservatism, quiescent racism, and casuistically justified greed" (Churchwell et al. 10). The problem with Ames, however, is not his "mythic vision," but rather that he does not realise the fullest implications of his vision. Throughout the novel Ames does perceive something of the sacredness of all human beings, because they are made in the image of God, but as he realises after finding out about Jack's interracial marriage, he has failed to live up to the implications of what he has perceived: "I woke up this morning thinking this town might as well be standing on the absolute floor of hell for all the truth there is in it, and the fault is mine as much as anyone's" (*Gilead* 266). Despite understanding his role as preacher to encompass that of prophet, Ames reflects that he never "looked up from the trouble we had just getting by to put the obvious question . . . to ask what it was the Lord was trying to make us understand" through all the troubles of plague, drought, war, and depression (266). Gilead was established by abolitionists in "the heat of an old urgency that is all forgotten now" as "a dogged little outpost in the sand hills, within striking distance of Kansas" (267). It was to be a place that would encourage the hope "that a harmless life could be lived here unmolested" (276). The realisation of such hope ought to be

what flows from a consistent perception of the sacredness of each human being regardless of ethnicity or skin colour.

Conclusion

Ames's blindness around race extends Robinson's model of faithful subjectivity by revealing that perception carries ethical implications – that what is perceived must affect conduct. At the end of the novel, Ames reaffirms the idea that all of existence is a vision: "Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see. Only, who could have the courage to see it?" (*Gilead* 280). If faithful subjectivity is understood in terms of perception, then the novel further suggests that key qualities that such a model requires are the "courage" and the "willingness" to see. Faithful subjectivity involves the courage to perceive the sacredness of creation, and courage is necessary because perception creates obligations upon the perceiver. Ames notes earlier in the novel when realising the wonder of a human face: "Any human face is a claim on you, because you can't help but understand the singularity of it, the courage and loneliness of it. But this is truest of the face of an infant. I consider that to be one kind of vision, as mystical as any" (*Gilead* 75). Perception involves realising and recognising the intrinsic sacredness of creation and of every human being, and then acting in accordance with such recognition. Perceiving, truly seeing, becomes a brave act, as Ames acknowledges, one that requires God's grace and help: "I think there must also be a prevenient courage that allows us to be brave – that is, to acknowledge that there is more beauty than our eyes can bear, that precious things have been put into our hands and to do nothing to honor them is to do great harm. And therefore, this courage allows us, as the old men said, to make ourselves useful" (*Gilead* 280-81). Thus, at the end of his letter, Ames's promise to pray for his young son carries a more

profound ethical charge than is apparent from its literal meaning: “I’ll pray that you grow up a brave man in a brave country. I will pray you will find a way to be useful” (*Gilead* 282). Ames’s closing statement provides a vision of life for Ames Junior, to be brave and to be part of a world that is brave enough to see, brave enough to seek the peace for everyone that the town of Gilead was meant to represent: “To play catch of an evening, to smell the river, to hear the train pass. These little towns were once the bold ramparts meant to shelter just such peace” (*Gilead* 277). It is significant in this regard that Robinson has described the Civil Rights Movement as “the third great awakening,” a successor to the First and Second Great Awakenings of renewed spiritual fervour in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*Givenness* 95). In this social justice movement, from Robinson’s perspective, there are glimmers of the “brave” recognition and perception that Ames prays for his son to have. To truly perceive means to act in a way that acknowledges what is seen, which means that perception has ethical and communal implications. If every human being has a sacred dignity, then the perception of that sacred reality ought to lead, as much as possible, to the formation of the sort of community in which that dignity is recognised and honoured.

The novel thus concludes with the hope of a community that perceives and enshrines a fundamental truth of Christian anthropology: that every human is made in God’s image, and therefore precious and valuable. The portrayal of faithful subjectivity in *Gilead* therefore provides a different perspective from those offered in *Perelandra* and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. John Ames’s closing encouragement to his son may particularly imply a greater focus on social and political action, or “personal holiness,” that Robinson has elsewhere described as flowing out of the “perception of the holy . . . in one another” (“Onward, Christian Liberals” 43). In this, it circles back to the abolitionist zeal of Grandfather Ames. However, the future community that fully embodies these ideals may ultimately bear some resemblance to the Celestial City of *Pilgrim’s Progress* and the reign of peace that *Perelandra* anticipates. At the

end of Ames's letter, along with expressing his prayer for his son, he writes of his death: "I too will smolder away the time until the great and general incandescence" (*Gilead* 282). This refers to the Christian hope of the resurrection, when the Lord will breathe "on this poor gray ember of Creation," and the fire will never burn out again, and hope will be fulfilled, and everyone will be truly seen (*Gilead* 279). Given the fallibility of humanity, as shown by John Ames, the ethical implications of spiritual perception may only be imperfectly realised within any earthly community. The full embodiment of the implications of perception awaits the final Divine intervention when "He will wipe the tears from all faces" (*Gilead* 280). This provides some eschatological connections to *Perelandra* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* without abolishing the distinctive character of *Gilead*. As this future hope of restoration is awaited, the burden of perception remains: to see and cherish the "precious things that have been put into our hands" and before our eyes (*Gilead* 281). The novel thus concludes with a kind of double-vision, looking towards a final renewal of Creation while also hoping that fallible people will have the courage, by God's grace, to see what is right before their eyes.

Conclusion

[W]e seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves.

—C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*

This thesis has argued that the novel provides a powerful means of articulating a Christian social imaginary through the portrayal of faithful subjectivity. Faithful subjectivity is proposed as a key concept for encapsulating the sort of individual identity and self-understanding that is rooted within the Christian metanarrative. It has been a central contention of this thesis that fiction can articulate and explore theological insights, especially those regarding particular understandings of the Christian life, despite the longstanding antithesis between novelistic realism and ideas of the transcendent and supernatural. Fiction does not replace or supplant the systematic form of Christian doctrine, which remains vital as the "attempt to clarify and offer a cogent statement of what the Church believes" (Hart 142). However, with the preeminent precedent of Jesus's use of parables in the Gospels, Christians over the centuries have sought to use fiction, both poetic and prose, to explore theological claims and ideas. The three novelists considered in this thesis, John Bunyan, C. S. Lewis, and Marilynne Robinson, wrote out of the conviction that fiction at some deep level has the capacity to engage with or express claims of truth about God, man, and existence. One key advantage of fiction is that it can show the application of theological concepts—what they "feel like"—as they are embodied through the representation of characters and events. In other words, fiction can provide a way of seeing and a way of getting inside an idea. It also allows the consideration of "different possibilities" and "alien standpoints" (Hart 142). As C. S. Lewis writes, "[I]n reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain

myself" (*Experiment* 141). Consequently, in reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* we are taken on a journey with the pilgrims whose homeland is rendered strange by faith. *Perelandra* confronts us with a universal war that transpires simultaneously in the battles of nations and in the mundane activities of human life. In *Gilead* we see the wonder that resides in mundane life, even as the consequences of limited perception are also revealed. The three novels reveal the role of structuring metaphors in shaping narrative explorations of theological questions, from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries, and the different windows that they provide onto Christian visions of the world, how life is to be lived, and why.

The image of the faithful life as a journey through toil and danger may have particularly resonated with John Bunyan, a Nonconformist who lived through the pressures of the Restoration regime of Charles II. *The Pilgrim's Progress* provides a famous and influential articulation of a symbol of the Christian life that has been valued since the birth of Christianity. His allegorical proto-novel, in common with all his other works (fiction and nonfiction), is imbued with the purpose of "seek[ing] to transform lives" (Keeble "Literary Life" 19). Particularly, Bunyan seeks through metaphor and allegory to direct lost sinners to find salvation in the grace of Jesus Christ, reflecting the convictions of his English Reformed tradition. This is powerfully embodied in the narrative through the portrayal of the pilgrimage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. The journey structures the pilgrims' understanding of themselves by grounding their identity in the future prospect of entering the Celestial City and meeting the Lord of the City, who mysteriously sustains them every step of the way. Though the pilgrims have different experiences along the way, the narrative continually stresses that there is only one road to the Celestial City, which begins at the Wicket Gate. This model of faithful subjectivity consequently asserts a contrast with the subjectivity presented by those who refuse pilgrimage or who do not enter through the Wicket Gate. The pilgrims' varied experiences, especially those of suffering and difficulty, are placed

within a broader pattern that emphasises both perseverance, which almost equates to reliance upon the Lord of the City, and the hope of entry into the community of the City. This community is foreshadowed throughout the journey, especially in the pilgrim community of Part Two which stresses the value of community and the fact that individual weakness is not a barrier from the Celestial City. Through the emphasis on the pilgrims' relationship with the Lord of the City and with each other, the narrative counters the modern impulse to locate the sources of identity within the human self. The model of faithful subjectivity as journey in *The Pilgrim's Progress* brings the claims of eternal, spiritual realities to bear upon the present life. It serves to encourage those who are not spiritually pilgrims to become pilgrims and seek the Celestial City via the Wicket Gate, for that is the way to true life.

In *Perelandra*, C. S. Lewis similarly presents the bearing of spiritual realities upon human experience, but through the metaphor of total war, rather than the journey. The use of total war as a structuring metaphor for faithful subjectivity particularly marks the novel's production during the historical moment of the Second World War. As with Bunyan's use of the journey, Lewis is also drawing on a preexisting symbol for the Christian life, reflecting his understanding of the teachings of "mere" Christianity. The novel embodies Lewis's conviction that science fiction was ideal for exploring the spiritual aspects of the human condition and for offering insight into deeper realities beyond the material dimensions of existence. Thus, *Perelandra* presents a war between the army of Maleldil and the Bent One's forces that pervades all of the cosmos and reaches down into every aspect of the lives of ordinary people. This conflict is embodied through the confrontation between Ransom and the Un-man. Ransom's appearance as a representative soldier of Maleldil emphasises that ordinary people are to fight in the battle. Perhaps surprisingly, given the collective implications of total war, the focus in the novel on Ransom particularly emphasises the significance of individual action and agency. Through Ransom's example, the model of

faithful subjectivity as total war highlights the need for courage and trust in Maleldil as ordinary people contend in the conflict that manifests more complicatedly in the earthly world than in the plain binary opposition between Ransom and the Un-man. Faithful subjectivity involves participation in Maleldil's army and opposition to evil throughout the different dimensions of life. Ultimately, this model looks forward to the day of victory in the cosmic war, faintly foreshadowed by Ransom's defeat of the Un-man, when Maleldil will usher in lasting peace and the Earth will join the Great Dance.

Though *Gilead* may seem to be an uneventful realistic novel, it also presents the material world as interpenetrated with the transcendent and spiritual, though in rather different ways from *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Perelandra*. The novel's theological insights centre on John Ames's reflections on the idea that the Christian life is about perceiving that everything is made by God and therefore is sacred, particularly humans, who are made in God's image. The model of perception highlights that all of material reality is a communication from God, and even experiences of sorrow may possess a sacred and almost revelatory aspect. While the novel shows that Ames's perception is limited, particularly in his blindness to racial injustice in 1950s America, the value of perception is continually affirmed. Through Ames's realisations, the novel emphasises the need for courage, the courage to perceive, to value, and to honour and cherish. The novel concludes with the hope of a community that will truly honour human sacredness, a hope that will be fully realised in the resurrection of the dead even as it is imperfectly realised through the efforts of fallible humanity.

These literary models offer surprisingly divergent ways of thinking about the Christian life. Travelling to a city, fighting in a war, or opening one's eyes are very different experiences, and they each highlight different aspects of how Christians are to live and think of themselves, as well as drawing attention to different things that are to be valued. The

journey emphasises the destination of the Celestial City, while total war anticipates the conflict's end and Maleldil's cosmic reign of peace, and perception looks forward to a community that is bold enough to realise the sacred dignity of all humanity. The images that these metaphors look towards can all be characterised as eschatological to some extent, reflecting the rich symbols that have variously marked the Christian hope of the End. These linkages, however, do not diminish the distinctive character of each novel and their respective metaphors. Their difference is what gives them their distinctive power of expression. On the one hand, the metaphor of total war in C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra*, written amidst the turmoil of the Second World War, provides the clearest example of a productive tension between theological understanding that purports to be universal and the pressing concerns of a particular time and place. On the other hand, Marilynne Robinson's derivation of the metaphor of perception in *Gilead* from the archive of American Protestantism, and the enduring pervasiveness of the journey metaphor laid out by John Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress*, point in different ways to the potential for models of faithful subjectivity to transcend their immediate historical moment. Considering models of subjectivity from within the rich Christian tradition show some of the ideas that have powerfully shaped Christians throughout history. These models may also persist in more secular circles, often sundered from their religious moorings, arguably to the impoverishment of these metaphors. They show some of the things that Christians have lived for – their vision of the world and of what matters.

This thesis therefore provides historical and cultural depth for modern questions about subjectivity and religion in an ongoing conversation about the need of rethinking western subjectivity. It remains a pressing question as to how subjectivity is to be conceptualised, how people are to think of themselves in ways that are not merely circumscribed by the soulless cycles of economics and consumerism. Some argue for new models, and others for historical

retrieval. The Hebrew writer of Ecclesiastes, for whom there is “no new thing under the sun,” would likely be sceptical of attempts to find answers in the innovative refashioning of the self (Eccles. 1:9). However, the Scriptures also point to the possibility of changing understandings. In the Gospels, the good tidings of Jesus are likened to “new wine” at a wedding feast that would burst the “old wineskins” of the Pharisees’ teaching (Matt. 9:17). And at the very end of the Scriptures, God proclaims: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5). Christianity ultimately highlights the themes of redemption and new creation, centred around the person of Jesus Christ. The Christian would argue that this provides an ever-new source of replenishment for the Christian tradition as it seeks to engage with a world that is continually changing, and yet also does not change much at all. The portraits of faithful subjectivity in these texts attest to the vibrant variety that grows out of the rich and new tidings of the Man from Heaven. Ultimately this thesis shows the enduring capacity of the novel to powerfully express questions and ideas about religion, existence, and meaning, ideas which persist and refuse to go away.

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