

The Self and Perception of Reality
in
John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and
C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*The heavens ... circle about you,
displaying to you their eternal splendors,
and your eyes gaze only on the earth.*¹

Dante Alighieri

In this thesis I will examine the way the concept of the self and perception of reality are intertwined in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*² (1678) and C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*³ (1945), and what similarities and differences can be found in the authors' approaches to this theme. I will argue that even though this theme is not the most prominent in the literary criticism of these books⁴ it is very central, and my primary aim is to demonstrate that a connection between the self and perception of reality is a major theme in both books. My second aim is to discuss how these two books are similar and to what extent they differ in their presentation of this theme.

Upon reading *The Great Divorce* and realizing that it resonated with *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the similarities between the two books struck me as interesting. This was not so much because of the technical similarities, such as the framework of a dream with the dreamer as narrator (in *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis is both narrator and protagonist), but because the books seemed to share the theme that reality in its highest form is God and everything connected to him, and only the self that sees beyond itself can attain this reality. I will argue that through the use of fantasy both authors try to convey the message that the physical world is in fact not the only reality, but a shadow of the *real* reality, which is the divine, invisible world. This idea is intertwined with an ontology stating that all human beings have a deficient self. Only by focusing on God and allowing him to transfer the deficient, "old

¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio*, Canto 14, translated by Charles Singleton, second edition (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1990), p. 63.

² Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That which is to Come* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), second edition. All further references to this work will appear as in-text citations (PP x).

³ Lewis, C. S., *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002). All further references to this work will appear as in-text citations (GD x).

⁴ I will refer to the two works as *books* because whether or not *The Great Divorce* may be classified as a novel is a source of debate.

self” into a “new self” can an understanding of these two levels of reality be comprehensible, according to the authors. I will argue that at the root of this professed deficiency is a mindset centered on the “old” self and its physical surroundings, and that this subjectivity is the source of an inability to see that which is real. This discussion builds on a Christian anthropology and metaphysics, and both books are clearly didactic; the authors’ prefaces demonstrate how they want to promote a Christian message through their books, as I will demonstrate later. At the same time, I will argue that these themes bear a strong resemblance to Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy, particularly concerning the conception of reality. Along with this I will discuss the authors’ use of allegory as a literary device that functions both as a conveyer of the message and as an illustration of how one level of reality can be symbolic of another.

While these similarities are striking, I find that the authors’ approach to the theme differs in some respects. Partly due to the structure of a journey, I will argue that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* offers an illustration of the progress towards a fuller perception of reality and examples of what happens when the pilgrims retreat into their deficient selves instead of focusing on the divine. In *The Great Divorce*, I find that Lewis to a stronger degree than Bunyan suggests an explanation to and seeks to reveal the nature of these issues. Hence, one can say that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* describes the consequences of a self-centered focus, and examples of how this focus can be changed, while *The Great Divorce* offers an explanation of its source. Further, I will argue that their view of reality and of the afterlife differ to some extent. While Bunyan’s conception of the old self and the physical world as shadows or allegories almost leads to hatred of this world and a strong focus on the constant struggle to reach heaven, Lewis also focuses on the joys a transformed self can bring to life on earth.

The Authors

The personal and professional lives of John Bunyan (1628-1688) and C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) seem very different at first glance. Bunyan was born a tinker in the seventeenth century, seemed very content with his unscholarly background and as a sectarian minister he was imprisoned for almost twelve years for refusing to stop preaching in private gatherings.⁵ C. S. Lewis was not only an academic, studying and working both at Oxford and Cambridge, but he was also a medievalist, an acknowledged literary critic and a Christian apologist, and led a rather calm personal life. Bunyan took pride in his ability to convey his messages in a straight-forward manner that anyone could understand, Lewis wrote critical works about

⁵ Keeble, N. H., “John Bunyan’s literary life” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, edited by Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010), p. 13.

medieval allegories and novels based on ancient mythology. Still, they shared a deep-felt conviction of Christianity as the truth and a desire to spread this message through their works. Colin Duriez sums up their similarities thus:

I see C. S. Lewis as a twentieth-century John Bunyan, even though the roots of the two men are very different. Both were concerned to capture the minds and imaginations of ordinary people and take them into a richer world of thought and experience, indeed, into a world unimaginable in depths and splendour. Both sensed the possibilities of ordinary humanity. Both employed folk traditions of fairy tale and myth as a vehicle for theological meanings, recognizing the natural symmetry between story and theology. Both in their way defended the method of allegory and symbolism, and had deep insight into the psychology of human experience.⁶

This desire to convey their Christian messages has been received in various ways. Robert MacSwain points out that even though Lewis was almost definitely the most influential religious writer of the twentieth century, his works have been negatively criticized and ignored both by critics of literature and theology because of his theological message.⁷ The purely literary quality of most of his works, however, has generally been received more favorably. Similarly, one of the most prominent debates that have evolved around Bunyan's authorship is over the correlation between his theology and his literary talent, well illustrated through the title of the essay collection *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*.⁸ While most critics praise the Bunyan of Parnassus for his imagination and his consistent usage of the allegory genre in writing *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan of the Conventicle has received severe criticism since the first publication of his allegory. Several critics, such as Maurice Hussey, declare that he promotes a belief in predestination,⁹ and even C. S. Lewis criticizes Bunyan for the "narrowness and exclusiveness"¹⁰ of his religious view. It is not my intention to discuss the reasons for and validity of this criticism in this thesis, but it is my opinion that without the Conventicle there would be no authorship, and it is almost impossible to discuss the themes in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (and, incidentally, *The Great Divorce*) without

⁶ Duriez, Colin, *The C. S. Lewis Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), pp. 9-10.

⁷ MacSwain, Robert and Michael Ward, *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 3.

⁸ Keeble, N. H. (ed.), *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus. Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁹ Hussey, Maurice, "Bunyan's 'Mr Ignorance'" in *Bunyan, 'The Pilgrim's Progress': A Casebook*, edited by Roger Sharrock (London: Macmillan, 1976).

¹⁰ Lewis, C. S., "The Vision of John Bunyan" in *Bunyan, 'The Pilgrim's Progress': A Casebook*, edited by Roger Sharrock (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 201.

discussing theology, as the two are impossible to separate without missing the author's message. Unless one focuses solely on the technical literary qualities of the two books, one cannot escape their messages about God and man.¹¹

Methodology

For this reason I will discuss the books with the principle that they are vehicles for the message of the authors, and that it is important to take their views into consideration when interpreting these works. My main reason for choosing this approach is based on the prefaces (Bunyan's preface is called "Apology,"¹² and he has a "Conclusion" as well) that introduce each of the books. These prefaces offer an explanation of the idea behind the stories, and make it clear that the authors want their readers to read the books in a particular way and to not misunderstand the message behind the symbolism. John Bunyan writes, in his

Conclusion:

Put by the Curtains, look within my Vail;
Turn up my Metaphors and do not fail:
There, if thou seekest them, such things to find,
As will be helpful to an honest mind (PP 164).

It is much because of the prefaces that I feel confident that the message expressed in the books corresponds with that of the authors, even though it is a known fact that the authors can never have complete control over the readers' interpretations, particularly when it comes to allegories and fantasy literature.

My interpretation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Great Divorce* will arrive through the method of close reading of the books, and I will draw on many examples from the texts. I have chosen to discuss the themes without considering the role of the historical or cultural context the books were written in, but whereas this approach has much in common with New Criticism, my focus on the authors and their messages differs from that movement.

Because I have chosen to focus on the themes and message in the books it is necessary that I also include material about the ideas and theories that inspired the authors, in order to

¹¹ The noun "man," along with the pronouns he/his, are used in this thesis in reference to a human being in general, both male and female.

¹² Brian Cummings explains the reason for the word "Apology:" After the reformation most Protestants considered allegories both unnecessary, dangerous, and Luther claimed that in relation to Scripture it was something to avoid. Bunyan, however, argues that it is an effective way to present his message, much due to the fact that the Bible is full of images and allegory. Explained in Cummings' "Protestant allegory" in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, edited by Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

gain a fuller understanding of them. Both stories lend themselves to philosophical and theological discussion through close reading due to their symbolism and the ideas expressed explicitly, particularly by Evangelist, the Interpreter and the pilgrims themselves, and by George MacDonald.¹³ I will devote some space to present and discuss these theories in this Introduction, and link them to the message in the books in the following chapters.

Relevant for the authors' theology is Protestantism and its perception of the self, and Pauline eschatology and what Paul writes about world alienation. The authors' ideas about the divine as the center of the universe and this world as a shadow of the "real," spiritual world are much in agreement with Platonist and Neo-Platonist philosophy, and I will draw connections to these ideas in my discussion. Finally, I will discuss the significance of allegory, mainly as an illustration of the two levels of reality, both in the self and in the world in general. For the discussion about allegory I will mainly build on theories presented by Thomas H. Luxon.¹⁴ Because all of these theories are very diverse and a satisfactory account of them is far beyond the scope of this thesis it is my personal understanding of how these theories fit into the theme that serves as the starting point for my discussion of the books. While I will try to avoid over-simplifications in my discussion of them, some elements will have to be simplified so that I can devote more attention to the elements that have a more direct relevance to my discussion of the two works. For my discussion of the books, especially for *The Great Divorce*, I will also draw connections to other works by the authors that share a similar message and can complement my discussion, without saying that what an author writes in one book necessarily corresponds with his message in another.

An important aim in this thesis is to demonstrate that the theme I have presented is indeed central in both books. Still, it does not seem to have caught the full attention of the critics. The reason for this is possibly that the books, though short in length, are remarkably complex, and I am not ignorant of the other main themes that can be detected in both books. Individualism, the importance of making a choice and the implications of a free will, the unmasking of hypocrisy and the limitations of human knowledge are just some of these themes. Even though *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been the source of frequent criticism and

¹³ Fellow author George MacDonald serves as Lewis' guide not only in *The Great Divorce*, but Lewis refers to him as one of his greatest inspirers, both because of MacDonald's literary production and his religious views. Lewis refers to his influence as similar to that of Beatrice to Dante (GD 66). In *The Great Divorce*, however, MacDonald serves more like a spokesperson for Lewis's own message; Catherine Durie agrees with this in "George MacDonald and C. S. Lewis" in *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, edited by William Raeper (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Luxon, Thomas H., *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 159-207.

interpretation since its first publication, I have not yet come across any critics who, like me, build their argument around the connection between the self and perception of reality. Several critics write about the self and about perception of reality separately – Luxon draws the connection between the use of allegory as a symbol of the two levels of reality, and Roland Mushat Frye¹⁵ writes much about the “old self,” to name a few. In C. S. Lewis criticism this theme is more prominent, but it is usually connected to his other works, such as *Till We Have Faces* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, perhaps because *The Great Divorce* is one of his less-studied works. Many critics of *The Great Divorce*, such as Joe R. Christopher¹⁶ and Jerry L. Walls¹⁷ seem more interested in Lewis’ eschatology or in the book’s similarities to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

Before presenting the main theories that I will employ in this thesis, it is necessary to briefly specify my understanding of the terms “self” and “reality.” In making use of these concepts in my thesis I will only associate an everyday use to them. A very straightforward, but illustrative definition of the self is found in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*; here the self is defined as “a person’s inner being, including the mind and spirit.”¹⁸ A definition of reality from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* claims that it is “the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them.”¹⁹

Protestantism and Pauline Theology:

I have already argued that the prominent theme in these books has to do with man’s relationship with God as the source of the transformation to a new self and the ability to see that the divine world is real. Accordingly, the major influence for *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Great Divorce* is connected to Christianity, particularly Protestantism and Pauline theology about the two levels of reality.

At the center of Protestant belief is the idea of grace, salvation as a gift regardless of man’s good deeds or religious practice. Since each individual must accept this by a personal conversion there is a strong focus on individualism and personal choice. No one can accept

¹⁵ Frye, Roland Mushat, *God, Man and Satan: Patterns of Christian Thought and Life in Paradise Lost, Pilgrim's Progress and the Great Theologians* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960).

¹⁶ Christopher, Joe R., *C. S. Lewis* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), pp. 105-109.

¹⁷ Walls, Jerry L., “*The Great Divorce*” in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, edited by Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Definition of “self” from the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, Fifth edition, edited by Jonathan Crowther (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Definition of “reality” from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Tenth edition, edited by Judy Pearsall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

the gift of salvation on behalf of anyone else, and each person is free to accept or refuse God's grace regardless of his or her background, sex or nationality. As John von Rohr explains, it is only when someone "consents to God's gracious giving that its results can be effectively realized in his life."²⁰ This "free will" and freedom of choice also includes every action and thought in a person's life – every day he can choose to do good or bad. This idea infuses the two books I am writing about. Christian embarks on his journey alone, even without his family, and each ghost in Lewis' book is met by a solid person who addresses him or her personally with a question of choosing between heaven and hell.

One of the questions that naturally arises then, one that the authors discuss in their books, is that if everyone is given the choice, why do they not all choose heaven? Von Rohr addresses this issue by pointing out that while both John Calvin and Martin Luther clearly see sin as something man chooses and has to be responsible for, the Fall of man resulted in a deprivation of every man's self. Sin became, in one sense, a part of his fallen nature. Von Rohr writes: "the doctrine of the Fall meant that Man was enslaved to his own ego, bound by a selfish will."²¹ Thus it became more desirable to follow one's own selfish ideas than God's ways. In connection with this, Luther sometimes exchanged the term "free will" with "self-will."²² To choose sin or to refuse God and his heaven is to act according to what is natural for the old, deficient self, but to choose grace, love or selflessness is to submit to the ways of God. In this way, our human condition is contradictory: on the one hand we are created in the image and likeness of God, on the other our fallen nature makes us rebellious against our Creator, according to the Protestant view. This rebellion is both unnecessary and destructive, but it is a product of the free will. Von Rohr describes another representative view on man's condition in a Protestant light, from The Synod of Dort, a Calvinist gathering in 1619:

Man was originally formed after the image of God . . . but revolting from God by the instigation of the devil, and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts, and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment; became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections.²³

²⁰ Rohr, John von: *Profile on Protestantism: An Introduction to Its Faith and Life* (Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), p. 139.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 97.

²² *Ibid*

²³ von Rohr quotes from Schaff, Philip (ed.), *Creeds of Christendom*, Volume III (New York: Harper and Bros., 1977), in von Rohr, p. 94.

According to this idea, man's rebellious nature and actions both make him self-centered and narrow his perception of life and the world around him.

The Apostle Paul, whose Letter to the Romans is a well-known inspiration for Luther, shares many of the same ideas about man's old self. He underlines that to be able to look beyond our old selves we have to remember that we have been created for something infinitely better than what a life of constant self-choice and absence from God entails. We have also been created for eternal life. When Paul warns the Philippians of the problems they will face as Christians, he states: "our citizenship is in heaven,"²⁴ manifesting the belief that the world to come is more important than the temporary, present one, and it is the true home of everyone who follows Christ. Will Love writes that in the Letters of Paul one can find some of the earliest examples of world renunciation.²⁵ He writes about the Pauline world renunciation as a method of seeing into a deeper, other, invisible world. This "other world" stands beyond the physical world we live in; it is "an extra-cosmic dimension that allows the ascetic to break free from more limited and limiting perceptions of the world."²⁶ He claims that the consciousness following a detachment from the physical world will enable a person to see both the physical and the spiritual world more clearly, "making those who engage in such alternate sight the seers of hidden forces."²⁷ Neither *The Pilgrim's Progress* nor *The Great Divorce* seem to suggest that a purely ascetic lifestyle is necessary, nor does the Apostle Paul. But a mental separation from the physical world can, according to Love, as well as Bunyan and Lewis, reveal that one's existence there is temporary and limited.

Platonism and Neo-Platonism:

The conception of our world as less real, a shadow of the genuine reality, bears resemblance to a Platonic and Neo-Platonic view. Philip Cary confirms that Christians have always connected some Platonic philosophies to ideas about Christian life and the Christian God, and writes: "Christianity has been using Platonist language since the New Testament and

²⁴ *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1984), Philippians 3: 2. Future references to the Bible will be taken from *The King James' Version* from 1611, when not otherwise specified. This is taken from the NIV because it better illustrates my point.

²⁵ Love, Will, "Where is "This World" Headed? Irony, World Renunciation, and the Pauline Corpus" in Vaage, Leif E. and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism and The New Testament* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), p. 317.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 325.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

borrowing (or stealing?) Platonist concepts since the Church Fathers.”²⁸ It is a known fact that C. S. Lewis was especially influenced by it, as I will continue to argue in Chapter 3.

I first intend to explore these ideas in light of some of the elements from Plato’s “Allegory of the cave” and the metaphor of the Sun²⁹ that can be mirrored in my argument about the themes of the levels of reality and a person’s ability to see the world for what it really is. Plato’s allegory is an allegory that, in the words of H. D. P. Lee, “intended to express in pictorial and poetic form the general philosophic and religious conviction of the *Republic* that the temporal is only the shadow of the eternal,”³⁰ much like what *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Great Divorce* do. Plato’s Sun has often been interpreted as his idea of a god. Not only does it control “everything in the visible world,”³¹ as Plato expresses, but the Sun is also the source of knowledge and enlightenment, and the eye is dependent upon it in order to see what is real. As Plato explains, “the eye’s power of sight is a kind of effusion dispensed to it by the sun.”³² When the eye turns away from the Sun or fixes its gaze on the material world and the material self it will only perceive shadows. In short, the eye is wholly dependent upon the Sun in order to understand what is real. This outlook is mirrored both in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Great Divorce* by the metaphor of light for something celestial, as in *The Great Divorce* when a solid person explains how the light comes from God and makes everyone enlightened in heaven: “The Glory flows into everyone, and back from everyone: like light and mirrors. But the light’s the thing” (GD 86). By this he means that everything good and all knowledge are achieved when one allows the light (God) to be the center of one’s focus – it is the source of all enlightenment.

Further, Plato’s allegory illustrates how people are used to look at shadows and mistake them for the real existence. But the truth is that there is a *real* reality available to everyone. This reality seems incomprehensible at first because the light from the outside is too bright and because one is used to perceive the world through shadows. But by perseverance, by allowing the eyes to get used to the light of the Sun one will become able to partake in real life. In the same way, the ghosts in Lewis’ book feel that the light in heaven is too bright and the grass so hard that they cannot walk on it, but if they are willing to persist they will grow accustomed to it. The Allegory of the cave also reveals that most people, in

²⁸ Cary, Phillip, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. ix.

²⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, translated by H. D. P. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1955), Books 6 and 7.

³⁰ Lee, H. D. P., “Translator’s Introduction” in Plato, p. 36.

³¹ Plato, p. 280.

³² *Ibid*, p. 272.

spite of this, choose not even to explore the possibilities of this ultimate reality, either because they are content with looking at the shadows or because they have grown so accustomed to that focus that the idea of another level of reality is unfathomable. The irony of this allegory is of course that the man who has experienced the real world knows the truth, regardless of whether anyone believes him or not, but still he is rejected. In the same way the pilgrims in *The Pilgrim's Progress* are ridiculed for believing in the divine, but as the story discloses, they are the ones who are right. The other people carry out their daily lives in voluntary denial of the existence of anything supernatural.

Relevant for this thesis is also the Platonic view on the Fall of man, connected to the problem of men having their deficient selves as the center of attention. Philip Cary discusses Plato's view on the Fall and writes that according to Plato the soul has lost its true home in heaven, and has fallen into bodies. The problem with this is that all souls used to be united, and the fact that they are now divided into bodies has disrupted the perfect unity. Whether this "Fall" should be taken literally or metaphorically is a source of discussion among philosophers. To the Neo-Platonist Plotinus, the idea seems not to be that the soul was once literally disembodied, but that it had its "ontological origin in eternity,"³³ as Cary puts it. As a consequence of the Fall, each soul looks at the material surroundings from its own particular standpoint, from one of the so-called concentric circles, instead of looking towards the unifying, divine center. All of this is unnatural and a defect. To overcome this dispersal one has to turn back "into the inside," the center, where there is unity and not separation.³⁴ The books I am discussing do not so much share Plato's problem of separate bodies as the problem connected to perceiving the world from a personal, narrow-minded point of view. If true knowledge comes from God, the divine center, looking into one's own self for truth and knowledge will be insufficient. Also, to have one's mind set solely on the material world will cause a person to consider it the only reality. Like Plato suggests, everyone's "true home" is in eternity, both physically and spiritually, and to turn the attention towards the divine is the key to finding the way home.

The ideas of Augustine are probably the ones that have the strongest resemblance to the parallel between the self and reality relevant for my thesis. As a Christian Neo-Platonist he devotes much of his writings to attempting to unveil what it is that narrows our mind so that we cannot see the reality of God. Cary refers to his *Soliloquies* where Augustine argues that the challenge for human beings seems to be to have the "mind's eyes" opened to the true

³³ Cary, p. 120.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 121.

light and reality, which is God, and the eyes that are “healthy” are able to see this. Sin and self-centeredness are some of the things that can make the eyes “unhealthy,” and lead to ignorance. He uses the metaphor of the healing of the eyes to explain why the process of seeing the truth in full (that is, as fully as it can be perceived here on earth) is so long. For people with dazzled eyes the Sun is too bright for their gaze, and the approach has to be gradual. This picture also suggests the obstacles that prevent people from seeing God clearly. Augustine claims that these obstacles have to do with a deficient self, but also with our love of temporal, worldly things. Cary elaborates on this: “It is as if our bad habit of staring at dim figures in the darkness has weakened our eyes and made them susceptible to all kinds of disease and corruption.”³⁵ In other words, by focusing only on the material level of reality and by acting and thinking in ways characteristic for our old selves, the eyes will be too dazzled to see clearly. To be able to see everything for what it is takes time, and much will not be understood until one is in heaven. Brian Stock emphasizes that becoming able to see things clearer is not only a matter of improving oneself, but what Augustine describes is a transformation, an entry into a revolutionary new outlook on life and a new world, which comes from a conversion experience.³⁶

Allegory:

My reason for including allegory as one of the relevant theories for this thesis is twofold. First, because it serves as an effective vehicle for the authors in conveying their message. Second, because the phenomenon of allegory as something in which the things seen (the characters and the events in the story) are only representatives for the actual meaning, can illustrate the books’ theme that our existence consists of two levels of reality, according to Bunyan and Lewis.

Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck point out that the definition of allegory is complex, has undergone significant changes through history and is widely debated. It has been treated as a genre, a rhetorical device or trope, a technique related to metaphor and sometimes defined as “extended (or continued) metaphor.”³⁷ I want to point out that while *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is a formal allegory, *The Great Divorce* is not. C. S. Lewis was an expert on the genre, and wrote allegories such as *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, his revision of Bunyan’s novel. He

³⁵ Ibid, p. 73-75.

³⁶ Stock, Brian: “Self, Soliloquy, and Spiritual Exercises in Augustine and Some Later Authors” in *The Journal of Religion*, 91, 1, The Augustinian Moment (January 2011), pp. 5-23.

³⁷ Copeland, Rita and Peter T. Struck, *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-2.

never referred to *The Great Divorce* as a pure allegory, but called it a “fantasy” (GD x). Nevertheless, there are several allegorical elements in it, and for that reason my discussion of allegory is relevant for both books.

By conveying their messages through allegories, Bunyan and Lewis are able to reach a wider readership and can “express imagistically what is otherwise abstract or invisible,”³⁸ as Copeland and Struck claim about allegories in general. The same reader who would discard one of Bunyan’s sermons might be enthralled with his dramatic descriptions of Christian’s battle against an enemy “cloathed with scales like a Fish” with “Wings like a Dragon, feet like a Bear, and out of his belly came Fire and Smoak” (PP 56). The reader is caught up in the story and gains sympathy for the hero. Not only does the reader hope for Christian to succeed and reach his goal, but subconsciously he might also make the pilgrim’s enemies his enemies and take Christian’s words for truth. Whoever wants to understand what the stories are really about, however, have to do what Bunyan urges him to and “look within” his “Vail.” There is obviously no point in investigating if there really is such a thing as giants when discussing *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and it is of no more interest to investigate whether it is physically possible to make a bus fly, as it does in *The Great Divorce*, than to speculate about talking animals when interpreting George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Naturally, this is why my own thesis is centered on the abstract themes that I argue constitute what the authors strive to communicate.

While this is probably a prominent reason for the authors’ choice of method in conveying their message, I propose a reading of the stories where allegory is not only a literary device but also an illustration of what I refer to as the two levels of reality in the stories; this is an idea I owe to Luxon and Brenda Machosky.³⁹ Just like the meaning of an allegory is not the literal story but the abstract ideas it represents, I will argue that the two books depict the divine existence as the “meaning” behind our earthly lives. I will further argue that Bunyan does this most notably by presenting our everyday life on earth as completely insignificant compared to life in heaven. Lewis does it by the metaphor of materiality. By portraying hell and earth as transparent and shadowy and heaven as substantial, the divine is represented as the truly real in *The Great Divorce*. In much the same way the old self can be seen as an incomplete shadow of the new, real self one becomes through divine transformation.

³⁸ Ibid, p 6.

³⁹ Machosky, Brenda, “Trope and Truth in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*” in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 47, 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 179-198.

I have structured my thesis into three chapters, the first being this Introduction. In chapters two and three, which are devoted to the analysis of the two works under investigation, I shall discuss first how the author presents the self in his book and how self-centeredness narrows the perspective of the self, and secondly, I shall analyze the connection between the self and its perception of reality. Finally, I will sum up my findings in a conclusion.

Chapter 2: *The Pilgrim's Progress*

*What good is it for a man
to gain the whole world,
and yet lose or forfeit his very self?*⁴⁰

Luke 9: 25

John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the allegory of a man's journey towards heaven. It is a story of the trials, joys, lessons, dangers and, as I will argue, the broadening of vision one goes through in the process from being hopelessly lost to standing forever safe, perfect and face to face with the divine, and in perfect harmony with oneself and others in paradise. The journey is hard, however, and many are led astray from the narrow path. I will argue that, according to Bunyan, the main reason for this is that they fail to have the spiritual, divine world in sight; they are blinded by a desire to hold on to earthly things, and by a reluctance to change. The problem with this way of life is that it limits man's life to a short-lived and superficial existence in a world that will soon perish, while man was originally created for eternal life together with God. Those who decide not to acknowledge this supernatural cosmology, cling to material things or to their own selfish desire to be the sole ruler of their own lives. They cannot see that the divine world is in fact more real than the material world, and to be part of it is worth fighting for. In order to see this they must turn to God and keep their eyes fixed on Him, because only Christ can open their eyes and make them see beyond the material world into the unending reality.

The conversion experience, where the old self is transformed into a new self, is the most important factor in this realization process. At the same time, Bunyan makes it very clear that at any moment a person can forget about his goal, about the invisible world and his twice-born identity and choose to follow his own way instead of God's. A vital motivation for writing *The Pilgrim's Progress* seems to have been to warn people against this threat. Bunyan feels the need to urge people to always keep their focus on God and on heaven, and he wishes that his allegory will enlighten people, and make them see that God is real. He expresses this near the end of his Apology:

⁴⁰ *The Holy Bible, NIV*, Luke 9: 25.

This Book will make a Traveller of thee,
If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be;
It will direct thee to the Holy Land,
If thou wilt its Directions understand:
Yea, it will make the sloathful, active be;
The Blind also, delightful things to see. (PP 6-7)

His thorough belief in the Christian God as the only way to salvation and to heaven, and as the fountain of truth, cannot be mistaken.

In this chapter I first wish to discuss what it is, according to Bunyan, that renders people unable to see this divine reality, and I will mainly focus on this theme in his depiction of the pilgrims. To examine this, I will investigate what Bunyan portrays as threats and temptations that make the pilgrims forget that they are more than citizens of the perishable earth. My argument is that this is caused by what Augustine calls “dazzlement of the mind’s eye,”⁴¹ the result of a self-centered mindset and too strong a focus on the material world and the material self. My claim is that the essence of this perception is an idea similar to the Neo-Platonist ideas I presented in my Introduction – that the world consists of two levels of reality. Hence, to have one’s sight focused on the material self and its material surroundings makes one ignorant of the infinitely more important and *real* reality, that of the invisible divine. I will examine in what ways Bunyan sees the divine, invisible world as the ultimate reality and our earthly existence as a shadow and an allegory of our supernatural existence. With regard to this I will demonstrate how he constantly focuses on the afterlife in heaven as the true goal for our existence on earth, and that he consequently disregards the pleasures and joys available in this world. Finally, I will discuss how this worldview, as presented in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, depicts our very existence on earth as an allegory of the second level of reality – the invisible divine.

The Self in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

While Bunyan’s ideas of cosmology, of the self and of perception are essentially intertwined, it is necessary to discuss them separately before drawing lines between them. I propose to start with his ideas about the self, because man’s insufficiency and subsequent need for transformation are the foundation for his inability to see the world as it really is, according to Bunyan. His view of man’s condition corresponds in most respects with that of Protestantism,

⁴¹ Cary, p. 73.

particularly his focus on man's need for grace and his inability to save himself. An illustration of the author's characteristic urgency and desire to convey this message as straightforwardly as possible is exemplified by the book's opening paragraphs. The dream vision of the narrator begins with a description of man in what Bunyan sees as his most vulnerable, hopeless state: the state one is in as a lost soul who has not yet been redeemed. Here we are faced with a critically negative outlook on the old self. We first meet with Christian while he is clothed in rags; he has a heavy burden of guilt on his back, and while he reads a book he is shaking, weeping, and cries out: "what shall I do?" (PP 8). From reading in his book, which is a symbol of the Bible, he has realized that the city he lives in and the people in it will be burned with fire from heaven. Frye writes about this scene: "Knowing only the misery of man's condition, he finds no way of escape; he sees only part of the vision – man's evil – and from this he seeks release."⁴² In other words, Christian is buried in misery and hopelessness because he looks only at his own self, which is full of shortcomings. As Christian continues to read his book he becomes more and more aware of his own guilt, and the heavy burden he has on his back is a symbol of this. The rags that he is clothed in further demonstrate the way he looks at himself, as a poor, wretched and incomplete man. From this viewpoint, completely blinded by his own shortcomings, Christian is unable to see a solution and is consequently deeply depressed and almost repulsed by his own person.

So far we can establish that Christian realizes that his very self is deficient and that he needs outside help in order to be restored. Frye points out that it is when he has read and prayed more that he adds more words to his question, and asks: "What shall I do to be saved?" (PP 9).⁴³ His first step in the direction of becoming a pilgrim is the realization that he needs to look beyond himself in order to be delivered from his incomplete self. But along with this, he has recognized something essential: his earthly existence, that of a family man and a citizen of The City of Destruction, is not the only reality. The city he lives in will soon perish, but if he chooses to he can experience a much truer, solid, eternal reality. The revelation of this comes not from his own logical reasoning, but from a revelation from the word of God and from his guide Evangelist, who has experienced visions of this reality himself. This insight is what enables him to begin his pilgrimage, his spiritual progress towards becoming a new self, to experience a broadening in vision and eventually receive full enlightenment in heaven.

⁴² Frye, p. 96.

⁴³ Ibid

The divine transformation from a deficient old self to a new self comes, as mentioned, through a conversion experience. Because it seems to be experienced very differently for different people it is by its very nature very difficult to understand. My aim in this thesis is not to partake in a detailed discussion about this phenomenon; therefore I will focus on how it is portrayed in Bunyan's own works and in his own experience, without claiming that this is representative for all believers in Christ. This experience is surely a key element in the pilgrims' movement towards The Celestial City, because it provides them with a certificate to heaven and concretely manifests how they put their old selves behind them.

A prominent message in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is that to become a new self and to put the old behind more often than not takes time and much self-examination, mainly because we are used to thinking only of the material reality. Cary discusses Augustine's explanation of this, which is that the eye of the old self "cannot bear the brightness of the intelligible Sun above it but rather longs for the darkness of sensible things at the ontological level below it."⁴⁴ This idea is in accordance with Plato's metaphor of the Sun. Similarly, the beginning of Christian's journey towards the Cross on the hill, where he loses his burden and is born anew, is difficult; he struggles in the Slough of Despond due to his self-doubt and is almost led astray by Mr. Worldly-Wiseman because of his vanity and desire for worldly pleasures. And this behavior is understandable, for in *The Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan claims that to become a pilgrim means to be willing to give up everything for the sake of heaven, even to give up yourself. C. S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*: "[Repentance] means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years. It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death."⁴⁵ The old self, the human nature that wishes to remain independent of God, must surrender and be born anew, albeit to something much better in Lewis' and Bunyan's view. But even though this transformation is caused by grace, the pilgrim constantly has to make sure that he does not forget the implications of his new status and his new, true home, which is now in heaven.

For John Bunyan himself, as he describes so thoroughly in the autobiographical *Grace Abounding*, conversion came after a long process of self-examination and doubt. Like Christian, Bunyan was filled with negative thoughts about himself, he was afraid of becoming eternally lost and could see no escape. The process of realizing what is a key element in Protestantism, that it is by God's grace alone that a man can be saved, was slow, and he seemed to encounter a new psychodrama at every turn during this progression. This pattern is,

⁴⁴ Cary, p. 73.

⁴⁵ Lewis, C. S., *Mere Christianity* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), p. 57.

as Michael Davies points out, a common trait in seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographies; it has been called a “morphology of conversion.”⁴⁶ At the end, though, Bunyan had a revelation, a full understanding of how his own attempts to be good were insufficient and his shortcomings could be forgiven. He had to remove his focus from his own person and turn his attention to the divine savior.

On the other hand, it is interesting to observe that in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* the protagonist’s conversion happens very early in the novel, and it is not the climactic event. The journey itself is of great significance because it demonstrates how the pilgrims learn to know the invisible world. Their lives are full of struggles to be overcome, lessons to be learned and experiences to be made. The reader may observe that many of the threats and struggles that they go through, such as the aforementioned Slough of Despond and the meeting with Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, follow a cyclical structure. The pilgrims lead themselves into danger due to a retreat into their deficient selves, they see no way of escape until they remember that they have to seek outside help, often through prayer, through the Bible or through remembering the promises God has given them. When this is done, they have gained experience and learn more about the invisible world, and are better prepared for their next trial.

Before discussing the different ways in which the pilgrims retreat into their deficient selves and how their self-focus blinds their perception of reality further, it is necessary to ask ourselves why a self-centered worldview is presented as so dangerous in this allegory? I will argue that this is a key theme in much of C. S. Lewis’s writings, especially in *The Great Divorce*, and will discuss this matter in greater detail in the next chapter. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress* Bunyan does not address this issue as explicitly as Lewis does, but in my opinion it is implied in his description of some of the characters, particularly Ignorance.

As I wrote in my Introduction, the Protestant focus on man’s need for salvation from the outside and his inability to redeem himself is directly linked with his self-centered worldview. He may indeed live a virtuous life and avoid some immoral behavior, but he cannot save himself from his central problem – the wish to live his life entirely on his own terms and, as a consequence, a worldview that is narrowed by his exclusively personal perception of life. Frye discusses these topics in relation to the message in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* that has to do with the reconciliation between God and man, and how man cannot bring atonement for himself. Frye writes: “Sin is primarily – “originally” – self-deification, the

⁴⁶ Davies, Michael, “*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners: John Bunyan and spiritual autobiography*” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, edited by Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 73.

attempt to warp all life, and all that lives, into one's own orbit. It is the reduction of all things to one's own dominion, the exaltation of the self above all else. It is the matter in which man is enslaved to himself, to his own ultimacy. From this slavery there can be rescue, but no escape."⁴⁷ This corresponds with Luther's idea of sin as self-will, as mentioned in my Introduction. I believe this is a key to an understanding of the way Bunyan describes some of the characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In one sense this is what has happened to characters like Atheist and Obstinate. They have become personifications of a distinct deficiency; this has so overtaken them that they are both blind to what Bunyan considers the truth – the pilgrims' message about heaven – and they want to “warp” everyone they meet into their own deficient, narrow-minded worldview and thereby deprive them of a real life with the divine in heaven.

Frye's statement can also shed light on Bunyan's treatment of the character Ignorance. He has been widely debated among critics, and there have been numerous discussions why he is not allowed entrance into the Celestial City. Indeed, Ignorance's destiny, with the sadness and anti-climax felt after witnessing Christian and Hopeful's triumphant entrance into paradise, is heartbreaking. In my view, the reason for Bunyan's treatment of him is that he has chosen not to receive help from the divine, something that is crucial in Bunyan's message. Through constructing his own pathway to heaven he has created his own worldview and is too proud to open his eyes and ears to the pilgrims who try to convince him of the importance of grace. Like in the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee in Luke 18: 10-14 where the Pharisee is not justified because he praises himself and in essence ignores God and other people, Ignorance points to his own virtues and considers himself worthy of heaven. He is blinded by his ego and pride.

Retreat Into Self

Thus far I have established that Bunyan considers man's old self as insufficient and in desperate need of transformation. The old self must surrender and be born anew, but it will still be deficient and will not be made perfect until the person is in heaven. The only way to survive as a pilgrim is to become aware of one's deficient self, and then shift one's focus away from it and towards what Plotinus called the divine center. A vital message for Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is to expose the deficiencies in man as such, so that he becomes aware of them and the consequent need for redemption. This is connected with the ability of

⁴⁷ Frye, p. 72.

seeing the invisible and to learn to recognize the hidden forces that try to prevent the pilgrims from progressing on their journey. As mentioned, this does not come easily for the pilgrims, but through experience and a shift of focus they gradually become able to see what other people cannot see – the different levels of reality and the conflict between their own old and new selves. This is just like the man who learned to look beyond his shadowy circumstances in Plato’s cave and allowed the Sun to enlighten him and let him partake in a better, truer world. In *The Greatness of the Soul*, Bunyan discusses the potential inherent in every human soul, which is “capable of having to do with invisibles; with angels good or bad: yea with the highest and supream being ... The Soul is an intelligent power, it can be made to know, and understand depths, and heights, and lengths, and breadths, in those high sublime, and spiritual mysteries that only God can reveal and teach; yea, it is capable of diving unutterably into them.”⁴⁸ I intend to discuss this message in light of Bunyan’s use of allegory as a device.

First of all, it is important to always keep in mind that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is more than a romantic travel story, that it is symbolic of a person’s spiritual life. While Bunyan stated his purposes for the choice of allegory as a genre in his Apology, along with his intentions for the readers’ interpretation of it, much of this is beyond his control. As Machosky confirms, “Allegory does not allow itself to remain a stable signifier. The writer may want to use allegory as an intentional device, but allegory may have a mind of its own, so to speak.”⁴⁹ Luxon also highlights how the complex nature of allegory can provide different interpretations of the representation of the characters in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. While the characters who do not join the pilgrimage (Luxon refers to them as “outsiders”) can serve as personifications of people or ideas, another level of allegory is to see them as representatives for deficiencies or problems that the pilgrims (the “insiders”) struggle with. They can help us understand the rather incomprehensible transformation of the self. Luxon writes: “The metaphysics of insiders and outsiders constitutes the way [the pilgrimage] as the self-abjection of insiders. An abjection achieved by exteriorizing all one’s own inner vileness as the vileness of the outsider. Thus, the insider is “saved” from himself and is reborn as God, and the outsider becomes the old self one is saved from.”⁵⁰ Luxon highlights that the vital part of the revelation is that a person’s “new birth” is the meaning that always lay behind the “old self;” one’s old self was nothing more than a shadow of the new life acquired through God’s grace. By discussing *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in this way it is possible to also look at

⁴⁸ Bunyan, John, *The Greatness of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 165.

⁴⁹ Machosky, p. 183.

⁵⁰ Luxon, p. 189.

characters like Talkative, Atheist, Giant Despair and Ignorance as character traits or deficiencies in the pilgrims themselves. These they have to expose and get rid of in order to reach their goal. Through experience and a broadening in vision the pilgrims can identify the threats they encounter as characteristics of their old selves. Instead of listening to their ill advice (the ill advice of one's old self), Christian and the others can choose to ignore them and turn their eyes towards the goal.

In this way, one can say that the pilgrims are offered a choice between retreating into their old selves by listening to the advice of the "Ignorant" and "Talkative" parts of themselves, as Luxon would call them, or they can turn their attention to the divine and their goal and realize that these deficiencies can easily be abandoned through an outward-looking focus. Through an awareness of his inward-looking focus Christian is able to expose these characteristics and turn away from them. They become not only examples of outsiders (as in other people), but examples of character traits in himself and in other pilgrims, like Shame to Faithful. What is left of Christian then is the *real* man, his own person and his good qualities.

This realization comes from experience of the divine world. I wrote in my Introduction in relation to Pauline theology that by learning to see into a deeper, invisible world, the pilgrims learn to expose the threats and understand both levels of reality. Luxon presents an illustration of this in relation to the character Talkative, someone Christian knows because he has "been Talkative" himself and can therefore unmask the threat when he tries to tempt the pilgrims again.⁵¹ I will add to this that Faithful is a less experienced pilgrim than Christian, and while Christian is able to see through the threats of characters like Talkative and has previous knowledge of him, Faithful is first deceived by him and finds him an interesting and intelligent person. This is of course symbolic of a character trait that threatens to become a part of Faithful himself – he sees that it is easy to have intellectual, spiritual conversations with people without having to practice what he preaches, and is tempted to embrace this characteristic. Christian has a broader vision and is able to warn him against this danger as he reveals that Talkative "talketh of Prayer, of Repentance, of Faith, and of the New-birth: but he knows but only to talk of them" (PP 78).

Even though the pilgrims have experiences that demonstrate how much better life is when they look beyond their deficient selves and focus on God and other people, experiences such as Christian's and Hopeful's redemption, the freedom the pilgrims feel in Vanity Fair and the encouragement Christian receives in the Interpreter's House, they often forget about

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 176.

this. They are tempted to return to their former way of living or they ignore God's ability to intervene in their lives and put their trust in their own abilities. While Plato's Allegory of the cave can shed light on the idea of the two levels of reality, his image of the divine unity as the center of our existence can explain the dangers of an exaggerated self-focus. To consider oneself and one's material surroundings the center of the universe is to misunderstand the real context. Even though the pilgrims are, at least partly, aware of this danger it is difficult for them to keep their eyes on the target and on God, and not on themselves. When Christian struggles in the Slough of Despond it is because, as Help explains: "as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions," (PP 15) and this causes Christian to retreat into his deficient self and forget the bigger picture and the outside help that was offered. On several occasions we see that Christian's arrogance is what leads him into trouble. He considers himself the superior of his fellow pilgrim, Hopeful, because he is younger and less experienced in the spiritual life. Christian leads them both away from the path, to the grounds of Giant Despair, because he ignores Hopeful's advice and trusts in his own judgment.

It is interesting to observe that two of the most central episodes in *The Pilgrim's Progress* are marked by someone's arrogance and pride: the aforementioned fate of Ignorance because it is the final incident in the novel, and Christian's battle against Apollyon because it is the most intense of all his trials. I propose that the reason for this is that Bunyan considers pride one of man's most serious threats; it can make a person feel self-sufficient and in no need for transformation from the outside. I believe the intensity of Christian's battle against this fiend is symbolic for something that has been building up inside him: on the one hand he considers himself superior to the life of a pilgrim, a life marked by hazards and persecution, and on the other hand he believes himself inferior to the standards of heaven, and more fit for his old life in The City of Destruction. The attacks Christian meets in The Valley of Humiliation aim at making him turn back to his former life and ignore the temporary nature of the physical world. When Apollyon tries to tempt Christian he focuses on his character flaws – fears and vanity - instead of focusing on God or the new being he has become. Apollyon says to Christian: "when thou talkest of thy Journey, and of what thou hast heard, and seen, thou art inwardly desirous of vainglory in all that thou sayest or doest." (PP 58). Frye writes that the fiend's insults attempt to move Christian into a deep sense of pride and

self-defense, self-justification and self-exaltation.⁵² The strength of the enemy and the force of the battle signifies that Christian's struggle against his own arrogance and self-will is hard.

It is also serious because the pilgrim's pride and arrogance is a way of distinguishing himself at the expense of others. In the extreme it can lead to hubris, like it did for Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, who rebelled against God because he wanted to be ruled by no one. Apollyon is first and foremost an incarnation of evil and the master of The City of Destruction. Yet, if we see the fiend as a symbol of a character trait in Christian himself we can say that this battle enables him to see this destructive deficiency in his old self face to face, and fight against it by pointing towards something outside of himself. Christian's answer and defense against the fiend is to acknowledge his deficiencies and agree with Apollyon's criticism of him, but to also point to something outside his "old self" - Christ the forgiver and his own forgiven nature and new self. This scares and aggravates the beast, and this is the reason why he can stand up to him and eventually defeat him. By killing the enemy he is in one way killing a part of his old self, something that will make room for his new self. This does not mean that he is forever free of pride or arrogance, as the book reveals through his future struggles, but it means that the chance of retreating completely into his old self is diminished. Bunyan keeps focusing on the need to fight evil (both in the self and the world) and never give up, even though it will be hard. Letting go of the old self, indeed letting it die, is not easy.

Still, this victory comes after a long and dangerous battle, which could have been avoided had it not been for Christian's self-centered mindset. This can be illustrated by comparing the experiences other pilgrims had in the same place. Contrary to Christian, Faithful's struggle is not with his own arrogance, and therefore he never meets Apollyon even though he walks through the same valley as Christian did. In fact, he "had Sun-shine" (PP 74) through most of the valley. Machosky points out that the same is the case for the pilgrims in the Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian's family also see Apollyon, but because their self-centeredness takes on a different form and, as Machosky points out, because they are more experienced and have greater knowledge of the invisible reality, they "see through this imagined danger" and "know that they can overcome the dangers."⁵³ As soon as they realize this, the fiend disappears without a struggle.

It is important to emphasize that the pilgrims in Bunyan's allegory experience a *progress* as they travel through life, and this progress is marked by a continuously deeper

⁵² Frye, p. 125.

⁵³ Machosky, p. 185.

insight into and discernment of the spiritual world. John R. Knott Jr. draws attention to how Bunyan critic Stanley Fish claims that the novel offers no real progress, partly because the pilgrims have only to follow an external path that can be discerned with the physical eye.⁵⁴ Naturally, I disagree with this statement, as much of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of how the opposite is the case. In my opinion the pilgrims' journey is clearly marked by a development in their ability to see the "things unseen" and to choose to wait for their heavenly reward. We detect a significant contrast between Christian in the beginning of the book, when he follows Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's advice to settle in the Village of Morality, and his character closer to the end, when he is willing to risk his life in Vanity Fair.

At the same time, the pilgrims are always far away from a full understanding of the divine, even at the very end of the pilgrimage. It seems clear that in *The Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan wishes to convey the message that life on earth, when bound for heaven, is challenging for two main reasons. First, it takes time and self-awareness to turn one's vision away from oneself and one's surroundings, towards God. This I have already discussed. Second, because we are so used to consider this world the only reality, the implications of a second level of reality are easily disregarded. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Farinata explains the limitations in man's ability to understand that which is beyond our physical surroundings: "'We see like those with poor vision,' he said, / 'the things that are far away from us.'"⁵⁵ Sight is a metaphor for man's understanding of the spiritual world, also in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. E. Beatrice Batson points out that at a very early stage in the book, Bunyan establishes two levels of seeing: the visible and the invisible. Those who see only the visible aspects of the journey, like many of the people Christian encounters, will not understand the reason for his pilgrimage. Unlike Christian, they have not met characters like Apollyon face to face, and are unaware of the hold he has on The City of Destruction, and on their lives. Batson refers to the episode where Evangelist points towards the Wicket Gate, and asks if Christian can see it, as symbolic for different ways of seeing. Since Christian is not yet able to see it, he is advised to follow a light that will eventually lead him to it at the point when he is ready and able to see it. Batson points out that as Christian runs towards the light we can distinguish between four types of seeing. The narrator describes a man fleeing "towards the

⁵⁴ Knott Jr., John R.. "Bunyan's Gospel Day: A Reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress*" in *Bunyan, 'The Pilgrim's Progress': A Casebook*, edited by Roger Sharrock (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 221. Knott Jr. makes this claim about Stanley Fish's "Progress in *The Pilgrim's Progress*" in Fish's *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-century Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), chap. iv.

⁵⁵ Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 10, ref. in Stock, p. 21.

middle of the Plain,” (PP 10) Christian’s family see a father and husband running away from them, Christian himself sees a light that will lead him to “Life, Life, Eternal life” (PP 10) and Evangelist is the only one who can see the Wicket Gate.⁵⁶ Depending on former experiences and the willingness to believe in the invisible, the different characters can have different experiences of the exact same episode, and their focus determines what they can and cannot perceive.

Worldly Self and Focus

Along with the ability to see beyond one’s physical circumstances and into the invisible reality comes the knowledge that what one thought of as reality is only a shadow. Our material existence is not only less important than our spiritual existence, but less real; consequently it is in danger of becoming the antagonist. The constant reference to this world as temporary and the afterlife as eternal in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* confirms the idea of heaven’s superior reality. This is why it is so important to become a new self and to do everything one can to not fall back to the ways of the old self. For it matters not if one has to endure hardships and misses out on some of the temporary pleasures here when this world is only a shadow of the ultimate reality. This world can give the pilgrims a little taste of heaven, and Christian’s vision of the real reality does become clearer on earth, but it is only in the afterlife that they can understand everything to the full and live a complete life. But since the pilgrims have to live their lives in this shadow land they always stand at risk of forgetting this. Bunyan addresses this challenge by proposing to regard our earthly existence as distinctly inferior to the one in heaven.

This becomes clear in the story of Passion and Patience from the House of The Interpreter. Passion mistakes his life on earth for the only reality because he does not listen to his master (who is most likely a symbol of God). He is only interested in enjoying the fleeting, mundane pleasures of the temporary world. The Interpreter explains Passion’s way of thinking thus:

For the things that are seen, are Temporal; but the things that are not seen, are Eternal: But though this be so, yet since things present, and our fleshly appetite, are such near Neighbours one to another; and again, because things to come, and carnal sense, are such strangers one to another: therefore it is, that the first of these so suddenly fall into amity, and that distance is so continued between the second. (PP 32)

⁵⁶ Batson, E. Beatrice, *John Bunyan: Allegory and Imagination* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 36.

Patience, on the other hand, listens to the master and is willing to be belittled and to abstain from temporary pleasures because he has his mind set on heaven. He knows that by doing so he will be made perfect at the end of his life, when Passion will have “nothing but Rags” (PP 31). Patience’s world renunciation enables him to understand both this and the future world, equally to what Love declared in relation to the Pauline worldview. When the Interpreter explains that the treasures of the physical world will soon wear out, he is implying that they are like shadows in their nature, like imitations of the *real* world. And who wants an imitation when the real thing is available? By being unwilling to wait for the real world and the real treasures, Passion resembles Plato’s cave people who perceived and enjoyed only the imitation of life. Patience is like the man who ventured out to reality, despite the cost, and was by this means able to lead a full life and be a real self.

The perception of worldly life as the most important of the two levels of reality seems nothing less than a misunderstanding of the human existence to Bunyan. This view has a strong resemblance to what Machosky writes about Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*; here he states that this world must be used as a means, but people should not enjoy it as if it was the end of their existence.⁵⁷ But, as The Interpreter points out, the things of the future are still strangers to us, and the ability to comprehend the importance of spiritual persistence and patience does not come easily to the people in Bunyan’s allegory. Frye makes a very interesting observation when he writes about the apostates in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* who, unlike the pilgrims who only wander astray from the path for a short time, always to return, have lost their lives in the attempt to save them. Characters like Mistrust and Timorous choose some lesser good, like safety in the temporary world, over the real safety, which is eternal life in the Celestial City. Frye refers to the apostates’ interest in saving their lives in this way as a recurrent source of irony in Bunyan’s novel.⁵⁸ Pliable’s comment to Christian as they are stuck in the Slough of Despond is a good example of just that, as he says: “May I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave Country alone for me” (PP 14). Pliable, and others with him, attempt to preserve their lives here and now, but by doing so they will lose life eventually. Good-will, one of Christian’s helpers, pities Pliable and says: “Alas poor man, is the Caelestial Glory of so small esteem with him, that he counteth it not worth running the hazards of a few difficulties to obtain it?” (PP 26).

A desire for worldly things is not reserved for the apostates in the allegory. The pilgrims are constantly tempted to forget or ignore their new status and the implications of the

⁵⁷ Machosky, p. 194.

⁵⁸ Frye, pp. 134-135.

real reality. Mr. Worldly-Wiseman appeals to Christian's desire for a worldly life where he is respected and can live a life of comfort "in credit and good fashion" (PP 19). But by choosing this life Christian would, like Passion, be content only for a short period of time. In the Letters of Paul we find many examples of a worldview which states clearly that the world to come is infinitely better than the one we live in here and now, and that one has to be reminded of this constantly and focus on divine matters in order to stay on the right path. In Col. 3: 2 he states: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." By realizing the value of the "things above," the problems and sacrifices made on earth become immaterial.

In the middle of his journey through life Christian has an experience of the freedom and sincere joy that comes from a position of surrender of his selfish ways and his love of worldly things. His experience in Vanity Fair is as close to a revelation of the truth of the superior reality as he comes on earth. While most of the threats that the pilgrims have to go through are symbols that represent the struggles of spiritual life, the events in Vanity Fair stand out as physical threats. Hard-felt and fatal as they turn out to be, they are in the deepest sense much less threatening than the trials they meet in the Valley of Humiliation or in Doubting Castle, because these are threats to the soul. Imprisoned in Vanity Fair, Christian and Faithful paradoxically feel free and happy because they focus on their goal and reward in the Celestial City, and on someone outside themselves - their savior and the people they meet with and try to preach to. Faithful and Christian feel freedom and happiness because the fact that the world is against them confirms that their true home is not on earth. By having their mind set on divine things their physical circumstances are irrelevant. The fact that heaven, their "real" existence, is so close to them rids them from self-centeredness and fear, and they can envision their true identity, which is that of God-like, perfect beings; this is what they will become and what they will remain for an eternity in heaven. What separates the pilgrims from the other people is that they see the world through the light of faith, and not just the material things that can be distinguished with their physical eyes.

Yet, their feelings of joyfulness in Vanity Fair stand as exceptions to the emotions they usually experience during their journey. For the most part their progress is marked by a struggle against their self-will and the desire for worldly pleasures. Hopeful is "haunted" by Shame who brings up the weaknesses of religion as something that emasculates and degrades him in the eyes of the world, and he goes through a difficult time fighting against his desire for Wanton who offers him "all carnal and fleshly content" (PP 68). Christian is depressed when he thinks of the family that he had to leave behind, and he and Hopeful are tempted to commit suicide because of the torture they experience in Doubting Castle. It seems that John

Bunyan simply cannot emphasize strongly enough the message that a pilgrimage will be costly. It is a solitary journey, and they cannot escape the struggle against their own self-will and carnal desire, what Knott Jr. refers to as the “rival cities of God and man” in Augustinian philosophy, connected with Paul’s opposition between flesh and spirit.⁵⁹ In the Apology the author explains how the protagonist “runs, and runs” (PP 6) through his life because he is terrified of being led astray and missing out on the heavenly reward. When fleeing from his hometown he puts his fingers in his ears while he focuses on the light that he follows. The struggles that the pilgrims go through on their journey seem never-ending, and as soon as they have overcome one a new challenge faces them. At no point, almost, are they allowed to rest and enjoy the world they live in, because their citizenship there is only temporary, hence unimportant. In most of Bunyan’s literature and sermons, this seems to be his outlook on life and a message he considers necessary to communicate. Luxon writes: “For Bunyan, the purity of Puritanism is the Calvinist theme of despising the world,”⁶⁰ and as Bunyan writes in his *Institutes*: “despising this present life and aspiring to celestial immortality”⁶¹ is a sure way for the truly pious. This world will soon be annihilated, so a spiritual separation from it is necessary.

In this thesis I have chosen not to discuss *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in light of its time and setting, but I have focused on the theme and message as separate from the context the book was written in. Instead of discussing how Bunyan’s worldview, as represented in the allegory, is a reflection of a historical setting and situation very different from the contemporary, I wish to address the question whether this outlook on life is consistent with what Bunyan himself professes as his inspiration for the novel. Bunyan claims the Bible for his one true source of inspiration for *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and claims that in it the reader will find “Nothing but sound and honest Gospel-strains” (PP 7). Samuel Taylor Coleridge refers to the allegory as “incomparably the best *Summa theologiae evangelicae* ever produced by a writer not miraculously inspired.”⁶² And even though almost all of Bunyan’s ideas can be traced back to the Bible, I find it necessary to question whether this distinct separation between spirituality and materiality does not bear just as much resemblance to a Neo-Platonic worldview as to that of the Bible as a whole? Bunyan’s emphasis on detachment between the material world, including our physical bodies, and our spiritual existence and connection with

⁵⁹ Knott Jr., p. 229.

⁶⁰ Luxon, p. 199.

⁶¹ Ibid, Luxon quotes Bunyan’s “Institutes 3.10.4.”

⁶² Batson quotes Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Literary Remains* (London, 1838), III. p. 398 in Batson, p.40.

the divine center, has more in common with a Platonic view on the Fall than with a Biblical view. For is it not true that, according to the Bible, God himself approved of his creation, he “saw every thing that hee had made: and behold, it was very good”? (Genesis 1: 31) Is not the book of the Psalms full of wonderful descriptions and praise for the beauty of God’s creation, which is this universe? Does not Paul’s letter to the Corinthians say that our “body is the Temple of the holy Ghost”? (1 Cor. 6: 19) And when the Song of Songs describes two lovers finding pleasure and delighting in each other’s physical bodies,⁶³ is it not wrong of Bunyan to focus on the body as unequivocally evil and “carnal,” full of potential for sinful behavior? And if Bunyan’s aim is to inspire the readers to reach for heaven, would it not be advisable to include more descriptions of real beauty on earth and link this to the even more beautiful, even “more real” beauty and joy they will experience in heaven?

The Significance of Allegory

I deem it necessary to include one bibliographical element in relation to this. Six years after the publication of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the Second Part was published, a sequel in which the new pilgrims are able to rest, enjoy their journey, get married and start families. For the second generation of pilgrims life is not only centered on their heavenly goal, but on charity and enjoyment of earthly life as well. The first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, however, was written while Bunyan was in prison, and his own experiences of persecution in the world are likely to be one of the reasons for his desire to regard it as alien in the novel. Being forbidden to convey the message that he thought was not only good and right, but crucial for people’s chance of having an eternal life makes this worldview more understandable. If the rulers of this world (in the shape of the English government) would forbid him this, and if he believed that the rules of the divine world would do the opposite, this would confirm the superiority of the latter. And it would completely discredit the humiliation and guilt one usually connects with a prison sentence. If we assume that Bunyan continued to preach because he believed that it was the will of the divine, his actions on earth become manifestations of his commitment to the second and most important level of reality – that with his spiritual relationship with God.

Several Bunyan critics, Luxon and Machosky in particular, have founded much of their interpretations of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* on the significance of the allegory genre and how this can be transferred to the perception of our entire worldly existence as an allegory of

⁶³ I am aware of the debate whether the Song of Songs is actually an allegory of God’s relationship to his Church, a description of romantic lovers or both.

the “invisible” divine world. The cosmology of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* consists of a temporary earthly existence and an eternal spiritual existence. Because it is believed that the spiritual is the true reality, allegory is a suitable genre to present the message in. Machosky points out that in his Apology for his book, Bunyan states that he “fell” into an allegory while writing something else, and she claims that “The fall into allegory is analogous to the fall from the realm of heaven and true light into the dark and profane world in which we live, implying that the fallen world is already allegorical.”⁶⁴ To a believer in Christ this world is not the “true” world; hence writing about it in an allegorical mode is in a way more truthful and suitable. She continues: “We take this world to be real and true, but it is, in fact, shadowy and deceptive according to a Protestant theology that insists on absolute distinction between the human and the divine.”⁶⁵ By seeing the world allegorically, one sees it more clearly, and it is in fact a truer representation of the historical world, according to this view.

Through experience and expansion of vision, the pilgrims learn to perceive their circumstances as symbolic for spiritual attacks or assistance. At the beginning of his journey Christian’s lack of experience makes him an easy prey for Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, but near the end he sees through Demas’ and Atheist’s attempts to deceive him because he has gotten a deeper understanding of the invisible world. Bunyan’s desire is that the same will happen for his readers. He claims: “My dark and cloudy words they do but hold / The Truth, as Cabinets inclose the Gold” (PP 4). The reader has to search for meaning beyond the words, beyond the events and beyond the character traits portrayed, just like every man must search for meaning above his material circumstances. Those who are willing to look beyond the physical words and the physical surroundings will find the true, intended meaning. As readers we do not read *The Pilgrim’s Progress* simply as an entertaining and dramatic travel story (although it is that as well), but we look for the symbolic meaning behind the incidents and the ideas personified in the characters. One of John Bunyan’s aims in writing the story must have been to materialize different ideas and temptations in order to unmask and expose them as such. This is done so that when a person is faced with them he can fight against them as something specific instead of as a vague idea of something that is evil or wrong. The readers who fail to perceive this symbolic meaning, however, will not only have a less interesting reading experience, but they will miss the entire message that the author wishes to convey. Similarly, the people who fail to understand that their earthly lives are temporary and mere shadows of the invisible reality will not be able to partake in it.

⁶⁴ Machosky, p 179.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p 180.

Luxon is one of the critics who comments on a connection between the self and perception of reality in relation to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. While writing about the significance of Bunyan's use of allegory as a genre, he claims that a key to the spiritual survival of the pilgrims is the ability to see their whole existence on earth as an allegory of the reality that is to come. Characters such as Atheist and By-Ends lack vision and consequently mistake the things of the earth for the deepest reality. Luxon writes: "Those not blessed with the experience of new birth are doomed forever to mistake types and shadows, figures and similitudes, all the things of "this World," including themselves, for what is real."⁶⁶ Accordingly, the threat for the pilgrims is to forget their "allegorical status" in this world and mistake it for the real thing. The spiritual empiricism, their experiences with and knowledge of the divine, is exchanged for empiricism of worldly things that they can see with their physical eyes. Recognizing, not only their own insufficiency, but also that they need a divine revelation of the true meaning of their existence is what leads to a conversion experience for the pilgrims, according to Luxon.⁶⁷ He explains the pilgrims' journey thus: "Christian and Hopeful, like all true pilgrims, are on a quest for reality, or more precisely, they are 'travelers' on the road to becoming truly real. Since the truly real is everything on the other side of the 'things of this world,' what this world understands as realism is, strictly speaking, allegory."⁶⁸ This is very much in agreement with C. S. Lewis's ideas about the transformation of the self in *The Great Divorce*, as I will discuss in the next chapter. The new, reborn self is more real than the old self, just like the afterlife in heaven is more real than life on this earth. A prominent Protestant view is that man was never meant to live in a graceless state, cut away from a connection with the Creator and constantly struggling to understand the "things unseen." Had it not been for the Fall of man, he would not have had to live in a temporary world which is, as Bunyan and Lewis see it, merely a shadow.

Finally, the challenges we face as readers when attempting to understand the meanings and implications of the allegory are in many ways similar to the pilgrims' search for truth and meaning in the world they are travelling through. The critics and readers of a literary work will most likely never arrive at a consensus; they will never come to an absolute agreement about the main message, theme and meaning. For Christian and Hopeful it is different. When in heaven, they can see and understand everything without a shadow of doubt. Their arrival in the Celestial City is the ultimate climax in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This is because the

⁶⁶ Luxon, p. 159.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 160.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 190.

sufferings of the pilgrims have been so extensive. They have experienced the utter depths of despair and been imprisoned, tortured and ridiculed wherever they went. Because of everything Christian has lost - his home, reputation, possessions, family and his Faithful companion - and because they have never seen the world, themselves or God for who they really are, the moment when “all the Bells in the City Rang again for joy; and that it was said unto them, ‘Enter ye into the joy of your Lord’” (PP 162) makes the reader want to rejoice with them, whether he believes in an afterlife or not. It is the same experience one has after having read through the 600 pages of guilt, remorse and emotional agony in Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, and Raskolnikov finally experiences redemption and moral renewal in the final pages. The final scene of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is a step out of the allegory. The signs require no interpretation, the words do not need to be explained, the people the pilgrims meet and the light they see are not symbolic for anything else. Unlike their worldly existence where they were constantly trying to look “within the Vail” and struggling to understand what it meant, the pilgrims are no longer in the allegorical world of shadows and uncertainty, but in the afterlife of eternal reality.

Chapter 3: *The Great Divorce*

*The mind is its own place,
and in itself Can make a heav'n of hell,
a hell of heav'n.*⁶⁹

John Milton

In the previous chapter I reflected upon the destiny of people on their journey of life, and argued that the destination for the pilgrims was true reality and that their desire for earthly things blinded them. By fixing their eyes on the divine, however, they were able to walk into reality materialized in the Celestial City, and the pilgrims were portrayed in shining clothes as a verification of the true selves that they would forever be. In this chapter I will focus on the self and perception of reality in the ghosts, or damned souls in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*. I will argue that these people are offered the same prospects as those in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but due to a mindset revolving around their old, deficient selves they all, with one notable exception, choose not to partake in that reality.

The difference in structure is one of the decisive factors for the different thematic approaches to the two books. Both authors center their stories on a protagonist who is on a journey, and his encounters with and observations of many different characters who are to a larger or lesser extent personifications of characteristics or ideas. But while the protagonist in Bunyan's novel is the focal character, the protagonist in *The Great Divorce* serves more as an observer and commentator upon the encounters and emotions of the ghosts. In making use of this position, Lewis' book to a greater extent offers reflections on and explanations of the ideas presented than *The Pilgrim's Progress* does, this is conveyed through the conversations between George MacDonald and C. S. Lewis.

In Chapter 2 I criticized Bunyan for his presentation of this world as so unimportant that it almost comes across as a loathing for everyday life on earth and that to reach heaven is the only goal in life. Although Lewis shares the same idea of the shadowy and temporary nature of the earth, and agrees that a full revelation of reality is only attainable in heaven, I will argue that he values the transformation of the self also because it brings joy, freedom and personality to a person's earthly life. Further, the Angel's much quoted "This moment

⁶⁹ Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 254-255, Second edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993). This statement will be discussed later in this chapter.

contains all moments” (GD 109) describes how a transformation is necessary because it was how the self was created to be, both at the present moment and in all future moments.

Like *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *The Great Divorce* is also introduced by an author’s preface where the intentions and origins of the book are explained. In his preface C. S. Lewis briefly summarizes some parts of his message, particularly about the importance of making an individual choice in life. As mentioned in my Introduction, many critics have later written much about Lewis’ speculations about the afterworld, what he writes about hell, earth and heaven. But in his preface, Lewis shows a very humble attitude in acknowledging that he, like every human being on earth, knows very little about the afterlife. He writes in conclusion: “I beg readers to remember that this is a fantasy. It has of course – or I intended it to have – a moral. But the trans-moral conditions are solely an imaginative supposal: they are not even a guess or a speculation at what may actually await us. The last thing I wish is to arouse factual curiosity about the details of the after-world” (GD x). For this reason, my discussion of Lewis’ depiction of the afterlife will be centered on the direct connection it has to the self and its perception of reality. In this way, the ghosts’ meetings with the solid people in heaven resemble the journey of the people in Bunyan’s allegory of life, and how some choose to reject the message, some accept it but then turn back to their old way of living and some remain pilgrims until they reach heaven.

The Self in *The Great Divorce*

A discussion of C. S. Lewis’ ideas about the self and the self’s perception of reality (indeed, any discussion about his ideas in relation to *The Great Divorce*) will naturally be imbued with his Christian worldview. Characteristic for his ideas about the self is a belief in the necessity of being interfered with by God so that a person’s life becomes more like God’s own. This has nothing to do with being a decent citizen or a doer of good deeds while living life on one’s own terms, but it is a transformation where one goes back to being the real, splendid, original self that God created each man to be, according to Clyde S. Kilby. He refers to Lewis’ perception of God’s role in this process from his book *Mere Christianity*: “He is not like a trainer who teaches a horse to jump better; He is in the business of turning horses into winged creatures.”⁷⁰ As a human learns and experiences more and more of the divine the

⁷⁰ Kilby, Clyde S., *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (Appelford: Marcham Manor Press, 1965), p. 182. Here Kilby rephrases a sentence from C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), p. 216.

more human he or she will become, and this is a process that continues until one reaches heaven, which is the ultimate reality.

Constant self-choice, on the other hand, seems to be what Lewis regards as a safe way to hell, according to Kilby. A person who daily and consistently focuses every aspect of life upon himself and neither on God nor others, will ultimately become unable to discern anything other than his own selfish self, and his vision will become so narrow and shadowy that true reality is beyond reach.⁷¹ This description corresponds with what I have discerned in much of Lewis' writings, like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Screwtape Letters*, *Till We Have Faces* and *Mere Christianity*, to name some. And this view of the self seems to be exactly the one Lewis presents in *The Great Divorce* through the encounters between the damned and the redeemed. These ideas, as presented in the novel, are much influenced by Neo-Platonism and the Protestant view of individual choice, as I stated in the Introduction. In this chapter I wish to examine this outlook on the self critically as I investigate different theories around it and my own ideas about the book. What does Lewis mean when he writes that one becomes more like oneself by becoming more like God? How does he account for the fact that many people are unable to see what is "real" – heaven and the divine? How is heaven seen as the ultimate reality, and how do these ideas differ from and resemble those in *The Pilgrim's Progress*?

From the very beginning of the book, indeed from Lewis' first observations of the ghosts on the grey, dismal bus stop, the ghosts, visitants, or damned souls, are presented in a distinct way. They are generally unsympathetic, unenlightened (in the sense that they do not see what is real, but only what they wish to see), often parochial and self-centered. Their arrival in heaven is marked by an obvious sense of misplacement. This is physical in the way that the heavenly light feels too bright for them and the grass is so hard that their transparent feet can barely walk on it. The misplacement is psychological in the sense that most of them feel overwhelmed by the strong impressions the light, the river and the colors give, as well as the invitations from their friends and family members to give up something and follow them to the mountains.⁷² Along with this is their inability to appreciate what the narrator and reader understand – that the place they have come to is infinitely better than the grey city that they came from. The fact that the ghosts do not understand this, nor the gravity of their situation, demonstrates a sense of narrow-mindedness. The "Intelligent Man" who talks to Lewis on the bus says that the "revolution of opinion ... in educated circles" (GD 16) has proved that ideas

⁷¹ Kilby, p. 182.

⁷² The "heaven" that Lewis and the other ghosts visit is also called "The Valley of the Shadow of Life," and the ghosts are invited to walk with their celestial guides towards the mountains, which indicates that it is possible to go "deeper" into heaven.

about the end of the world are mere superstitions, even though the man has lived in and experienced hell himself. The same is the case for the apostate bishop; though intelligent and well read, he talks about the different theories about heaven and hell among scholars, but fails to see that he has physically lived in one and is now visiting the other. Because the ghosts do not feel at ease in heaven, do not understand the reality of it and even have no desire to stay there and would rather go back to the lonely, miserable city, it is obvious for the reader that something is wrong with their perception of reality and their outlook on life. The essence and source of this deficiency is what Lewis attempts to reveal in *The Great Divorce*, and what I will investigate further in this chapter. For how, indeed, could someone who has lived in and experienced hell not be delighted by the prospect of deliverance from it and the promise of an eternity in heaven?

When writing about the book's publication process, Lionel Adey makes an interesting remark. He points out that when the work was first published it came under the title "Who Goes Home?," and this title, Adey writes, "better conveys the preoccupation of almost every visitant in *The Great Divorce* with finding or clinging to a home on Earth."⁷³ In other words, one reason why the ghosts will not stay in heaven is that they refuse to give up their family members, their talents or certain character traits (pride, self-pity, vanity, avarice), or their desire to rule over their own lives in every way, similar to the people in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Adey further argues that while the Christian paradox of losing one's self by clinging to it is relevant for most of the ghosts, the novel is first and foremost the work of Lewis the moralist. He states that the faults and problems found in the visitants can be found and agreed upon without regard to Christianity, and in his interpretation he focuses on the psychology in the episodes witnessed.⁷⁴ On this point I disagree with him. As he affirms, everyone can agree that the ambitious wife treated her husband ill by constantly wanting to improve him and that Pam, the mother of the deceased Michael, loved her son too little. I will, however, continue to argue that the source of their problem is not just a few common character flaws, but a deficiency in their very selves. They have not allowed themselves to be transformed by the grace of God and to be made whole again, as I argued above in relation to Lewis' idea of the self.

⁷³ Adey, Lionel, *C.S. Lewis: Writer, Dreamer, and Mentor* (Grand Rapids, Michigan.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 148.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 149.

I will investigate this claim, first by examining the case of the obsessive mother, Pam. She states that her love for her son, and mother-love in general, “is the highest and holiest feeling in human nature” (GD 100). But through the dialogue between her and the solid person who meets her, and George MacDonald’s comments, we understand that it is a selfish love and a selfish grief she has after the death of her son because her love is based on her desire to own him. As MacDonald explains,

There was no excess [of love], there was defect. She loved her son too little, not too much. If she had loved him more there’d be no difficulty. I do not know how her affair will end. But it may well be that at this moment she’s demanding to take him down with her in Hell. That kind is sometimes perfectly ready to plunge the soul they say they love in endless misery if only they can still in some fashion possess it. (GD 114-115)

A characteristic of a deficient self in *The Great Divorce* seems to be, as in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a desire to draw everything and everyone into one’s own narrow sphere. In that way, one can look at and use the world and other people only in ways that serve one’s own purposes. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this is what Frye referred to as self-deification; by being the god and ultimate sovereign of one’s own life a person needs other people only insofar as they serve his or her own needs. It is the same with ideas and beliefs; one can choose and form one’s own outlook on life and reality.

Much the same can be said of most of the visitants in the book. The poet who talks to Lewis on the bus reveals his self-obsession as he rants about the people who have used him ill by not understanding or appreciating his talent. He blames society and other people in a comically general way, and seems to be convinced that he is the genius and that the rest of the world should adapt to his own personal worldview. At no level is the man open to the idea that he is in the wrong. The hard-bitten ghost shares this man’s negative outlook on society. He blames “Them,” the non-specific “World Combine” (GD 53), for deceiving everyone in the world, every time, and the pride he takes in his own intelligence and imagined insight makes him unable to see anything in a different light than that which he has subconsciously chosen. We are reminded of Ignorant’s case in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The well-dressed woman is ashamed of her appearance next to the shining people, just like Christian was wretched over his guilt, and because of this she wants to hide. She shuts herself into her own bubble, and will not relate to anyone or come out and look around her. Nothing is as important to her as her own appearance, and her shame of herself controls her every thought

and action. The Spirit who talks to her asks: “Could you, only for a moment, fix your mind on something not yourself?” (GD 62), but the ghost refuses.

The parallel between C. S. Lewis’ perception of the self and some Neo-Platonist ideas can be seen in the conception of the deficient self as the center of man’s attention. Plotinus’ aforementioned theory about the divided souls’ ontological origin in eternity and the divine center is applicable here. Further, Plotinus builds on this argument by claiming that the “higher parts” of the soul still long for the divine that it originated from, and the “lower parts” reach for the temporal and earthly. Cary writes, interestingly: “Hence for Plotinus much of what we think of as essential to our individuality is a result of the Fall.”⁷⁵ If we examine the individualism of some of the ghosts in *The Great Divorce* in light of this, we may ask ourselves whether it is this exaggerated self-focus and their occupation with earthly things at the expense of the divine which make them narrow-minded and incomplete selves. If the origin of the universe was in fact a perfect unity of divine and human souls, and if the division into bodies provided the individual with a choice between reaching for the higher and the lower parts of the soul, to choose the latter would necessarily take his focus away from the divine and perfect, to settle upon his imperfect self. That each ghost has the potential to choose to go back to this divine origin is evident in the episode with the ghost with the red lizard. The man’s inner struggle between his longing for a better life in harmony with God versus his desire to cling to his familiar, worldly, incomplete self illustrates the battle in his soul between reaching for the “higher” or “lower” parts. This episode, however, will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

I still want to make it clear that C. S. Lewis in no way embraced every aspect of this philosophy. Though a significant influence, I very much doubt that Lewis believed that reaching for the “higher” parts of one’s own soul would be enough; like Bunyan he was too much a follower of the Protestant ideas about man’s insufficiency and a need for a complete transformation by God’s grace alone, as I will argue later. It would be more correct to say that he deepened this idea, and believed that the importance is for the soul to keep its eyes on something outside its own sphere, indeed on God and other people. This becomes clear in connection with the way Cary continues to present Plotinus’ picture of the universe. In a simplified way, one can say that in his perception there is a divine One at the center, and “the divine Mind” revolves around it while the Soul has its focus on this center. Furthest out from this unity is the material cosmos. The result of the Fall is a turn outward for the soul, away

⁷⁵ Cary, pp. 120-121.

from this divine center. Because the souls, which were once one, are now divided, each soul is deeply attached to its own separate body as an individual. Since they are now separated and in conflict with each other, they become too attached to their material selves. The solution is to turn one's focus to the center again, as Cary points out.⁷⁶ Although they do not correspond in every way, these ideas are relevant both to *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Great Divorce* because they illustrate that the self is defective, that men (or the soul) were created to be in unity and harmony with each other and the divine, and the solution is to look towards the divine center of the world instead of one's material self. If John Bunyan and C. S. Lewis were to draw a similar construction of how they perceived the universe, they would surely place the Trinity in the center. In this way a crucial problem for the three aforementioned ghosts, as well as characters like Pliable, Mistrust, Timorous and Ignorance from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is that they are unwilling and unable to reach for the "higher parts" of the soul, the parts that long for the divine. Instead they are blinded by their own perceptions. This can be summed up by what MacDonald says about the different kinds of love, and the incomplete love human beings can give and feel: "There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him" (GD 106).

To appreciate how C. S. Lewis seems to understand this self-centered self is vital for our understanding of how human beings perceive the world, according to his book. To elaborate on Lewis' conception of the deficient self as something that lacks substance, I wish to turn to another book of his, where he more explicitly addresses the intentions of God, and those of the devil. In his fantasy *Screwtape Letters*, Lewis tries to expose and reveal the forces of evil. Through the voice of a "Senior Devil," Lewis writes about the differences between the intentions of God and those of the devils: "We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself: the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct."⁷⁷ In Lewis' opinion, it seems that hell, whether the physical hell or that which is in a person's mind, is full of nothingness, and the more a person embraces it the less he or she will be able to partake in real life. At the end there will be very little, or nothing, left of who one really is. This is the case for the ghost with a split personality in *The Great Divorce*. He allows a dummy, a pretentious, comically self-pitying tragedian who is not really himself, to take control over him completely. His real self, which is who the solid person addresses, continues to shrink while the dummy talks, and at the end

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 121.

⁷⁷ Lewis, C. S., *The Screwtape Letters* (Frome and London: Butler & Tanner LTD, 1954), p. 46.

the man disappears completely, and what is left is the dummy, an empty, soulless actor with no real personality. In key respects, the same problem can be found in the grumbling woman ghost. Delivering a monologue filled with endless whining and self-pity the woman feels slighted by everyone and will not allow the solid person who meets her to speak at all. When Lewis asks MacDonald if there is any hope for her, MacDonald claims that it depends upon whether there is anything left of the woman herself, or if the grumbling mood has turned her into a *grumbler*. He explains this by saying:

The whole difficulty of understanding Hell is that the thing to be understood is so nearly Nothing. But ye'll have had experiences . . . it begins with a grumbling mood, and yourself still distinct from it: perhaps criticising it. And yourself, in a dark hour, may will that mood, embrace it. Ye can repent and come out of it again. But there may come a day when you can do that no longer. Then there will be no *you* left to criticise the mood, nor even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine. (GD 77-78)

This statement is very much in agreement with the idea of turning away from the divine center and into the selfish center, which is in reality full of emptiness because it was not created to be so. The only hope is to allow the old self to die and be completely transformed by the grace of God into the self he always intended it to be.

To Lose and Find Oneself

The question that naturally follows this is, how can redemption by Christ, in Lewis' opinion, cause a human being to see the world in a clearer way, and how can one allow the old self to die and become more like God without losing one's very personality? How can one "lose" oneself without becoming less of an individual and more a copy of someone else? What answers or speculations does Lewis offer in relation to this in *The Great Divorce*?

I believe a key to this answer lies in the perception of what evil, as the opponent of the divine, is in Lewis' writings. After all, he makes it perfectly clear in *The Great Divorce* that every human being must make a choice between giving his life to God, the embodiment of goodness, or ignore him or consciously choose something else, which is inevitably evil. Walls claims, and I agree with him, that many Christian writers, perhaps unconsciously and against their intentions, tend to portray evil as more fascinating and attractive than goodness.⁷⁸ Many have declared this about Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to which C. S. Lewis wrote his famous

⁷⁸ Walls, p. 257.

Preface. John V. Fleming explains how writers and critics find that the devils' conversations are colorful and exciting while the divine become tedious and dreary in comparison.⁷⁹ The same can be said, though in a lesser degree, about Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which was obviously an inspiration for Lewis' book. Although the suffering of the people in Dante's *Inferno* is horrifying and causes the reader's pity, the hierarchical structure with the notorious, powerful and influential sinners like Brutus and Cassius at the bottom rather fascinates the reader. The same tendency can be found in Bunyan's portrayal of Apollyon, the frightening yet powerful fiend who combats with Christian. And in *The Pilgrim's Progress* there is a general focus on everything the pilgrims have to give up in order to reach their goal, while the other people are free to enjoy life.

Evil and the profane as represented by Lewis, however, is something else entirely. Walls agrees with this, and writes that in C. S. Lewis' writings, evil "is exposed as impotent and shadowy, a pretender that must inevitably and decisively lose in its bid to unseat reality. The ultimate philosophical reason for this lies in the traditional Augustinian view that evil is at best a parasite, a perversion of the good that has no independent claim to reality."⁸⁰ In my opinion, the heart of Lewis' message in *The Great Divorce* is an attempt to reveal and unmask evil as just this. Thus, instead of being something tempting and fascinating it is marked by severe emptiness and passivity. The grey city of hell, which can also be an allegory for the damned souls, is like a modern nightmare. It resembles Prufrock's "half-deserted streets"⁸¹ more than Dante's *Inferno* of fire and inventive demons who look for more and more original ideas about how to torment people. And like Prufrock, the ghosts in hell walk around in solitude - detached, dreary and utterly mundane, detesting both themselves and others. At no level will the reader envy the ghosts in the story their choice of a life away from the divine. On the contrary, one is attracted by the solid people, whose selfless love, joy, wisdom and beauty stand as striking contrasts to their visitants. Not only are their character traits different, but also their entire selves have been transformed, as I will point out and argue in the following pages. Their lives are fuller, their happiness obvious and they are able to see and understand what is real, something the ghosts are unable to do. Instead of being blind followers and marionettes in the hands of a manipulative God, they have more freedom, more

⁷⁹ Fleming, John V., "Literary Critic" in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, edited by Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 20.

⁸⁰ Walls, p. 257-258.

⁸¹ Eliot, T. S.. "The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock," line 4 in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Volume 2*. Eighth edition, edited by Stephen Greenblatt and M. H. Abrams (New York: W. W. Norton & Company) 2006, p. 2289.

joy and are more enlightened than their narrow-minded, petty visitants. Their lives can be seen as illustrations of what Luxon wrote about the new self as the “meaning” that was always behind the old self. This view receives confirmation in much of Lewis’ writings. In *Mere Christianity* he writes: “At the beginning I said there were no Personalities in God. I will go further now. There are no real personalities anywhere else. Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self.”⁸² An empty soul has no personality.

In order to elaborate on this contrast I would like to examine the transformation, the conversion experience, of the only ghost who, as far as Lewis observes, decides to stay in heaven. I propose to explore this case in light of another illustrative quote from *Screwtape Letters*. In this passage Screwtape ponders on something that he cannot understand, namely God’s interest in man as an individual: “When He talks of their losing their selves, He only means abandoning the clamour of self-will; once they have done that, He really gives them back all their personality, and boasts (I am afraid, sincerely) that when they are wholly His they will be more themselves than ever.”⁸³ According to Kilby this seems to imply that God loves distinctiveness and that in heaven, as opposed to hell, the self is valued and has become what it was meant to be.⁸⁴ Along with the following example, it affirms that Lewis’ idea is that by allowing your old self to die you will always gain much more than you lose.

The visitant in question is a “dark and oily” man with a little red lizard on his shoulder (GD 106). The lizard, representing the man’s Lust, keeps whispering into his ears, urging him to go back to the bus. The man has become detached and pacified and lets it control his life and mind. The lizard’s whispers are obviously lies; he claims that the man cannot live without it, and admits that instead of real pleasures it gives him dreams, but “nice dreams” that are “almost innocent” (GD 110). When the angel appears and offers to kill the lizard, the man’s passivity and doziness is demonstrated as he hesitates, unwilling to cause any trouble. He also suggests that a “gradual process would be far better than killing it” (GD 108), fearing that the action will be too painful and drastic. Just like Pliable in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the man fails to see that the temporal struggle and possible pain is of little matter in the bigger picture, and will rather live a passive half-life filled with fleeting pleasures. Still, the angel maintains that a gradual process is of no use. Just as Christ claimed that the old self has to die and be born again, the man’s lizard must be killed. When he finally, after a long struggle with himself, gives the angel permission to do so (note that the angel needs the man’s

⁸² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 226.

⁸³ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p 68.

⁸⁴ Kilby, p. 40.

permission, a sign of his free will), however, the man is transformed. He becomes materialized, bright and beautiful, as Lewis observes: “I thought his face shone with tears, but it may have been only the liquid love and brightness (one cannot distinguish them in that country) which flowed from him” (GD 112).

I want to underline two aspects of this incident. First, it seems that C. S. Lewis wishes to make the point that the change the man goes through is more than a mere improvement; he has to allow for something to die in order to let his new person be born. The transformation is caused by forces from the outside and not from the man himself, as a symbol of God’s grace as a gift of unconditional love. This focus on grace and the choice each individual has to make on his own clearly reveals Lewis’ Protestant views. After all, as one of the solid people says to the Big Ghost who was his employer on earth, it is not enough that a man tries to do his best and be a “decent man,” as he claims to have been. He replies to the ghost: “You weren’t a decent man and you didn’t do your best. We none of us were and we none of us did” (GD 29). In other words, it is not enough for a man to attempt to be better; his whole self must surrender, die, and then allow God to restore it.

Second, the example demonstrates how the man’s new self is incomparably better than the old. He is not a submissive, degraded slave to his master. On the contrary, he is now finally free from the corruption and manipulation of his own Lust. The transformation that man goes through and the joy and redemption he experiences is much the same as what Christian goes through when he is delivered from his burden, and is clothed in shining clothes. So when the self is transformed, one’s eyes are opened and it is revealed that everything one used to be and every little pleasure is as petty and, basically, as unsatisfying, as the man’s lustful dreams were in contrast with his heavenly splendor.

Nearing the end of his visit Lewis witnesses another shining being, one whose transformed self is also revealed physically in heaven. Along with MacDonald, Lewis beholds a magnificent sight of musicians, Spirits who dance and scatter flowers, boys and girls singing and countless animals, a procession solely in honor of a lady with a face of “unbearable beauty” (GD 118), and as she speaks to a ghost with a split personality Lewis writes that “her smile made me wonder how both the phantoms could refrain from crying out with joy” (GD 126). The lady’s name is Sarah Smith, as ordinary a name as could be found in England, and she was in no way famous on earth, according to MacDonald. Still, MacDonald talks of her as “one of the great ones” (GD 118). In heaven she is presented physically as who she really was in her true self. On earth, no one could see the character of her heart, she was only an “ordinary” woman, leading an “ordinary” life. Yet, in heaven, where everything is

real and where Lewis sees things the way they are (some men as ghosts, some as shining beings), her true self is made visible to the eye.

Reality and Shadow

So far I have established that in *The Great Divorce* Lewis claims that it is in many ways the defective self that makes a person unable to see the reality; a person who retreats into his old self will have a limited vision since everything is centered around his or her personal sphere. In order to see the reality a person needs to allow God to transform them, and receive a new self. What we have yet to investigate is what Lewis means when he writes about *reality*. What is the basis of his outlook on it and how does he defend the idea that heaven is more real than hell, or earth?

By way of introduction I would first like to draw attention to Lewis' use of materiality as a device. I propose that this symbol serves the same purpose as Bunyan's use of allegory as a genre, in that it illustrates the two levels of reality. In *The Great Divorce* Lewis makes his first observations in hell. It is a colorless city where all the buildings are unreal in the sense that they do not have to be built physically of bricks or wood. One only has to *think* a house and it is there, the same is the case with other material things. That is why the quality is bad, and the roofs of the houses do not keep the rain out. The motivation for one of the ghosts Lewis encounters is to go to heaven and bring back some "*real* commodities," as he puts it, "anything at all that you could really bite or drink or sit on" (GD 13). Upon their arrival in heaven the ghosts are shadowy, transparent, because in heaven one sees everything through a clearer lens, and the nature of everything is truthfully portrayed. The ghosts are nothing but shadows compared to the reality and substance of heaven. This is why they can barely walk on the grass, and why they cannot even lift the flowers or the fruit. At this point, Lewis writes:

Then some re-adjustment of the mind or some focussing of my eyes took place, and I saw the whole phenomenon the other way round. The men were as they had always been; as all the men I had known had been perhaps. It was the light, the grass, the trees that were different; made of some different substance, so much solidier than things in our country that men were ghosts by comparison. (GD 21)

He is now thinking back to his existence on earth, and seems to claim that it was like a shadow, and the men like transparent ghosts, compared to the solidity and the colors of heaven. This corresponds with what Luxon claimed in relation to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The

world and the worldly self are allegories of the real divine world and the new self, just like a shadow is a dazzled representative for the real thing.

Once again the Platonic influence is transformed and deepened by C. S. Lewis. This world is like a shadow compared to the divine. His epiphany reveals that the greatest surprise for him is the notion that everything and everyone on earth are shadows of that which is to come, and the damned souls will remain shadows while the redeemed will become materialized. Pauline theology, as demonstrated in his much quoted 1 Corinthians 13: 12: “For now we see through a glasse, darkly: but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know euen as also I am knowen” is likely to be another source of influence for this perception. The source of evil is the absence of good, so the evil hell and, to a lesser degree, earth, lack substance and color while heaven has light, flowers, water and beauty in abundance.

Still, even though Lewis and MacDonald see and appreciate the truth of this, the other visitants do not. They have *chosen* (as Lewis emphasizes on several occasions) to hold on to their own perceptions and worldviews, and will not give up their own self-will in exchange for reality. As MacDonald explains: “Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouth for food, or their eyes to see” (GD 139). The solid people’s attempts to persuade them bear resemblance to the pilgrims’ conversation with Talkative. They endeavor to point at the deficiencies in his self and the need for transformation, but he brushes them off, refuses to admit that what they say is true and thereby misses out on heaven and joy. As a Spirit says to the bishop ghost, “reality is harsh to the feet of shadows” (GD 39). Getting accustomed to a new reality and letting the old self die demands a reversed way of thought.

Peter J. Schakel points out that to Lewis perception seems to be dependent not only upon the percipient, but *in* him. He draws the parallel to other novels by C. S. Lewis. In *Prince Caspian* Lucy is the only one who can see the lion, Aslan. Her sister Susan asks: “Why should Aslan be invisible to us? He never used to be.”⁸⁵ She does not realize that it is a change in themselves that makes them unable to see him. The same can be said for the dwarfs in *The Last Battle*. Schakel writes that they are determined not to believe in the supernatural, and instead of seeing the beautiful flowers and taste the food in the New Narnia, they see stable-litter and the food tastes like hay and raw cabbage leaves. Aslan explains: “They have

⁸⁵ Lewis, C. S., *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia* (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1981), p. 130, ref. in Schakel, Peter J., *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), p. 43.

chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison.”⁸⁶ Like the ghosts, they are in heaven, but the retreat into their own narrow mindset makes them unable to appreciate and see it. In *The Great Divorce* George MacDonald refers to Milton and Satan’s renowned “Better to reign in hell, than serve in heav’n,”⁸⁷ and he expresses this as the choice of every lost soul: “There is always something they insist on keeping even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy - that is, to reality” (GD 71). By willfully and obstinately clinging to one’s self-respect, pride or determination to be right about one’s convictions, one will miss out on not only reality, but also joy. This was the choice made by Sarah Smith’s husband, who refused to give up his pretences and missed out on all the joyfulness and beauty that surrounded her. It is the same, fatal choice that was made by Ignorance in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. This headstrong choice does not make a man happy, let alone right. The psychology of this is of course well known, like that of a child who refuses to apologize to his parents, and would sit alone and sulk in his own room for hours rather than humble himself and ask for forgiveness.

In her article, Machosky problematizes the concept of the dream in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and suggests that what the narrator is dreaming (which is the allegory) is in fact more true than the narrator’s own life experiences because in the dream the abstract concepts of our world are materialized and personified.⁸⁸ The same is the case for *The Great Divorce*. Like in a prose version of a medieval dream vision, Lewis the protagonist is presented with suggestions and answers by his guide that will help him to understand the questions that he cannot understand in waking life. Schakel writes much about the idea of the physical world as a dream and the divine world as reality in Lewis’ fiction. He refers to Lewis’ novel *Till We Have Faces*, where Psyche tries to convince Orual that it is the mortal world, not the world of the gods, which is in fact a dream.⁸⁹ But because Orual is determined to believe only in what she has chosen to believe, she refuses to acknowledge this even though she has seen the world of the gods with her own eyes, according to Schakel.

In *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis is able to see more than what the damned ghosts do,⁹⁰ just like the pilgrims experienced a broadening in vision as they progressed on their pilgrimage. At the same time Lewis is unable to understand everything and is in a constant

⁸⁶ Lewis, C. S., *The Last Battle* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1980), p. 150, ref. found in Schakel, p. 43.

⁸⁷ Milton, Book 1, line 263.

⁸⁸ Machosky, p. 188.

⁸⁹ Schakel, p. 45.

⁹⁰ Although a ghost himself, he is redeemed; like Dante he is only a visitor both in hell and heaven.

state of questioning. The solid people he observes, on the other hand, seem to be reassured and at peace – no evil can harm or affect them and there is no doubt in their perception of God as decidedly good and real. This is like Christian and Hopeful’s experience in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*; when in The Celestial City they can finally understand everything.

At the End - the Chess Game of Time

An illustration of what Lewis is still unsure about in his earthly state, is found in his discussion with MacDonald at the very end of the novel. My argument about how the main theme and message in the book is not Lewis’ eschatology and his speculations about the afterlife, is partly based on what he says in his preface, and partly based on this scene, to which I will now devote some space. I believe that Lewis’ aim is for the reader to focus less on a potential life in heaven or hell than on the choice he or she makes here on earth, the choice between accepting or rejecting Jesus’ salvation. One of the last scenes, centered around the chess game, is of great significance. The movements of the small figures (the chess pieces) in this game of time, representing the souls around the table, cause Lewis to wonder whether everything he has witnessed in his excursion to heaven is just imitations of choices that people made on earth. To this his mentor cannot give a certain answer, but he acknowledges that these choices were portrayed more clearly in Lewis’ vision of heaven than how they are seen on earth. In this way they are allegories of the choices made and the encounters that occurred in the ghosts’ earthly lives. At the same time, MacDonald urges Lewis intently not to come up with any speculations in relation to this, and says: “Do not ask of a vision in a dream more than a vision in a dream can give” (GD 144). Again Lewis brings out the issue of vision and of not being able to see clearly in the state one is in as a human being on earth. By becoming a new self one can learn to discern, but no one will understand fully until they are made perfect in the real heaven and can see God face to face.

The chess game scene is, however, ambiguous and very difficult to understand, perhaps so because Lewis himself was not sure about what he was saying, and because the outcome of our human life is still unfamiliar, as Lewis and MacDonald both admit in this incident. As readers we can only ask questions, like Lewis himself. Were the scenes witnessed on this day, on this excursion from hell to heaven, only the product of endless choices made by the people on earth, a product of constant self-choice as opposed to self-denial, which over the scope of time formed the person’s self? Were they the sum of the self-centered worldview of each damned soul? Perhaps he is saying that when the ghosts were alive they were presented with numerous opportunities to accept a future in heaven, and an

earthly existence close to God, but chose to make themselves the gods of their own lives. No matter how convincing other people were and how much truth they preached, the ghosts remained blinded by a desire to hold on to something worldly, in essence their old, worldly selves. Michael Raiger explains this thus: “Lewis presents a view of the self that is open to reality, but has choice in determining its own relation to the world. What the subjective relativist would call one’s worldview, Lewis would call the hell of one’s own self, chosen above the reality given to it.”⁹¹ To live life according to a personal worldview is a way of deceiving oneself if a truth exists, one that is different from one’s own perception.

Undoubtedly, it was important for Lewis to illustrate the choice everyone makes, consciously or subconsciously. The choice is initially between recognizing and ignoring the fleetingness of earthly life and the need to wake up and embrace the reality of one’s existence.

On the one hand, the ambiguity of the chess scene and the following discussion is appealing for the reader because it reveals how human existence is incomprehensible in so many ways. To a much larger degree than Bunyan does, Lewis asks questions and comes up with suggestions (in his preface he refers to *The Great Divorce* as a “supposal”⁹²) that urge the reader to come up with his own reflections. At the same time this ambiguity makes it possible for the reader to misunderstand his message. I have argued all along that Lewis depicts both earth and the earthly self as shadows of heaven and the heavenly, new self. Still, some of his ideas seem to imply something else. In his preface to *The Great Divorce* Lewis writes: “Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to be in the end a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself” (GD p. ix). The question I have to ask in this case is if this view corresponds with Lewis’ message in the rest of the book? Does he mean by this that heaven is just like earth, only a little better? Or that heaven, earth and hell are in fact all the same place, but a person’s attitude towards it decides if it will *feel* like a perfect or a horrible existence? I very much doubt that this is the case, but despite the warnings in his preface about the character of his “supposal” and his limited insight the reader might misunderstand passages like this. I believe what Lewis is really trying to say here is that when in the perfect heaven, where every deficiency in the self is cast away and one is finally, eternally, who one was meant to be, the earthly things with their shadowy, transparent quality will be too small to even remember.

⁹¹Raiger, Michael, “The Place of the Self in C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*” in *Logos*, 13, 2 (May 1st 2010): 109-131, p.130.

⁹²GD, p. x.

The little experiences and tastes of the divine, however, will be remembered because their characteristics are heavenly and real. In that reality, perception will no longer be dependent upon the percipient because everything is revealed in full.

It is still the earthly existence that determines a person's afterlife, an idea that infuses both C. S. Lewis and John Bunyan's books. As Raiger points out, "The self itself is an enormous reality, terrible and wonderful in its possibilities, revealing the deep significance and shuddering power of the Spirit of George Macdonald's"⁹³ words: "This moment contains all moments."⁹⁴ The "enormous reality" of the self that Raiger refers to, as well as the words that he quotes from the book, elaborate on Lewis' idea that perception is in the percipient, along with the quote from *Paradise Lost*: "The mind is its own place, and in itself Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n."⁹⁵ At the same time, as Lewis so intently urges his readers to comprehend through his preface, the choice is, from his viewpoint, very real. In one sense one can make a hell out of heaven, like many of the ghosts did by being self-centered, by not appreciating the beauty and love that surrounded them and by refusing to follow their solid friends and family members to the "deeper" heaven beyond the mountains. Heaven was available to them, but they chose not to see that it was real. And in one way one can make a heaven out of hell, like Sarah Smith did by being loving and attentive to her husband and everyone around her while her husband all the time treated her ill. Yet, it seems that Lewis agrees with Bunyan and disagrees with Milton's Devil in a key respect; through MacDonald's voice he states that hell can indeed be seen as a state of mind just like "every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind – is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakable remains" (GD 70-71).

⁹³ It is a common mistake to attribute this quote to George MacDonald, seeing that he delivers most of the memorable quotes in this book, but it is in fact spoken by the Angel (GD 109).

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 130.

⁹⁵ Milton, Book 1, lines 254-255.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined the way the concept of the self and our perception of reality are intertwined in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*. Through close reading I hope I have managed to demonstrate that this is a central theme in both books, even though it is not the most prominent in previous criticism. Along with pointing out how these two books convey the same message about the world and about man, I have discussed and demonstrated some of the differences in their approaches to this theme.

Although it was written almost 300 years after *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Lewis' message in *The Great Divorce* resembles the former in many respects, which suggests that this is a central theme for writers eager to convey a Christian message, regardless of their historical or cultural context. In their prefaces both authors make it clear that they have a message and that they wish for their readers to interpret the allegories in a specific way. In this thesis I have pointed out how both writers share a Protestant view of man in the belief that his self needs to be transformed into a "new self," and that only God can implement this. The belief is that God has to release a person from clinging to his old self through a misunderstood self-will, just like he has to be released from a belief in this physical world as the only reality. According to a Protestant view, one that is reflected in both books, it is natural for a person's old self to have an inward-looking focus. Christian has it at the beginning of his journey, and is depressed and discouraged when he looks at himself instead of on God, and the ghosts are so blinded by their self-centeredness that they cannot perceive or recognize the beauty that surrounds them in heaven. This self-centeredness leads to what Augustine calls "dazzlement of the mind's eye" and makes them unable to see what is real in the world.

I have argued that Bunyan's allegory is full of examples of what happens when people retreat into their deficient, old selves instead of focusing on the divine. By doing so they lead themselves into problems that are easily overcome as soon as they start to look beyond themselves. I have demonstrated how the trials the pilgrims experience often follow a cyclical structure. Through a self-centered focus the pilgrims lead themselves into trouble, to overcome this they have to seek help from God or other people, often through prayer or by remembering promises given to them. As the problems are overcome they have gained new experience and a broader vision that can help them in their next trial. Examples of this are Christian's struggle in the Slough of Despond, his meeting with Mr. Worldly-Wiseman and

his battle against Apollyon. The irony, however, is that even though the pilgrims experience that an inward-looking focus is the source for almost all the trials they meet, they continue to make the same mistakes all their lives, and they continue to focus on their life in the material world and the deficiencies in themselves.

The same lack of vision is found in the ghosts in *The Great Divorce*. They are unable to perceive the invisible world because their mind is set on their distinctly earthly selves. The poet is blinded by his self-obsession and the well-dressed woman by her vanity and shame, to name a few. The message in both stories seems to be that man was created to be so much more than what he is on earth. Through the use of fantasy this is demonstrated at the end of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as the pilgrims become more than dirty, insecure and occasionally weak men clothed in rags. When they enter heaven, and can see God face to face as reality personified, they become shining people with crowns on their heads and are met with triumph like kings. In the same way a ghost from *The Great Divorce* is transformed from a weak, dark and "oily"-looking man into a golden, "immense" man riding on a white stallion. Through the use of allegory the character of their new inner selves is made visual.

I have argued that while the authors share this theme they approach it differently. Bunyan's novel is characterized by a disregard for the pleasures available to people on earth, and it seems that the only goal for the pilgrims is to reach the Celestial City, heaven, as fast as possible. In Bunyan's account, they "run and run" to reach it, and their journey is full of hazards and threats and very little relaxation and enjoyment. It can almost seem as if Bunyan feels that the only reason for why you need a transformation into a new self and a broadening of your vision, is that it enables you to reach heaven. While C. S. Lewis clearly considers this a vital goal in life, he seems to value the implications of a conversion because it can bring joy and freedom to this life as well. In his book, Lewis takes time to explain the ideas that he presents through the conversations between the ghosts and the solid people, and he reflects upon the source and nature of the ontology presented. While I have argued that Bunyan's focus is constantly on everything a person has to sacrifice in order to be a pilgrim, Lewis seems to suggest that earthly things are not *worth* focusing on, because compared to heavenly things, such as love, joy and goodness, they are little more than shadows and imitations of the real thing. The reason why Lewis takes more time to explain his ideas is partly because he serves more as an observer than a focal character, unlike Bunyan's protagonist, and partly because *The Great Divorce* is not a formal allegory; the protagonist often steps out of the symbolism and explains what has been suggested.

My primary aim in this thesis has been to demonstrate how this view on the self is intertwined with a perception of reality. As mentioned, both authors suggest that an inward-looking focus narrows the perception because it gradually hinders a person from seeing anything beyond his own person and surroundings. What he can see is a shadow of reality, the physical level of it, but the invisible, divine level is essentially more real. I have argued that this idea resembles Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophies of this earthly life as a shadow, as in Plato's cave allegory. The Platonic and Neo-Platonic idea of the Fall of man and the consequence of a division and distance from the divine center, which is the source of enlightenment and reality, can also shed light on the conception of perception. The deficient, old self is attached to the material world because it has been set apart from the divine unity in the center. Just like one has to see beyond the material world in order to be reunited with this unity one has to look beyond the material self to see or become the real self. This is a struggle for almost all of the people in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and for the ghosts in *The Great Divorce*. Everyone feels an attachment to the material world and even to the deficiencies in their own selves, and they are reluctant to give them up. Pliable in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is unwilling to face the dangers of a pilgrimage, and the apostate bishop in *The Great Divorce* is unwilling to reconsider his personal theories, to name some.

The idea that the physical world and the physical self are less real is portrayed through different devices in the two books. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* it is done through the device of allegory as a representation of the two levels of reality, and in *The Great Divorce* it is done through the symbol of materiality. I have built on Luxon and Machosky's ideas about allegory as a proper genre because it demonstrates how the "meaning" is not the things seen (the words) but what they represent or point to (the message). To Bunyan, the meaning of a life on earth is not to enjoy it "as a means," as Augustine would say, but to understand the invisible existence and the implications of it. To Bunyan, heaven is the real meaning for a person's life, what he was created for. The more the pilgrims understand that life on earth is temporary, the more they can understand their status as pilgrims, as new selves, and lead their lives accordingly. At the same time there are two levels of the self – the old self is a shell of a human being – and the new self is the real self, what one was meant to be, the "meaning" behind the old self. In order to keep a focus on heaven and the divine, the pilgrims have to get rid of their old selves. This is done first and foremost through conversion and by outside help. But I have also suggested that the characters the pilgrims meet in *The Pilgrim's Progress* can be personifications of deficiencies in themselves. The fact that the pilgrims eventually leave

or defeat these characters, such as Talkative, Ignorant or Apollyon, can be symbolic for how they leave parts of their old selves behind on their progress towards reality.

In *The Great Divorce* the superior reality and substance of heaven as opposed to that of the earth or hell is depicted through the device of materiality. Heaven is more solid than hell and the new selves in heaven are called “the solid people” while the others are ghosts. Just as the physical world is a shadow of the real world – darker, dimmer, less full and less of everything – the old self is a shadow of the new self. That is why Lewis can say that there are no real personalities outside of God (God must intervene to create this new self), because that self is only a shadow or an allegory, like a vague image or symbol of who one really is. By searching for the real world one is at the same time searching for the real self. I have argued that this idea of Lewis’ is clearly inspired by Augustine’s conception of evil as a deprivation of good; it is a parasite that seeks to remove life, joy and personality from a person and from the world. While Bunyan is preoccupied with warning his readers against everything that can go wrong in life and everything one must stay away from, Lewis aims at explaining the essence of our “natural” desire for the things that are not from God. He describes how sin and evil are not forces we have to absent ourselves from but rather forces that we no longer have to be a part of because they are not good. They are not beneficial and in their essence they decrease the quality of our life and make it empty. Hell and evil are full of nothingness, as illustrated by a portrayal of hell as a colorless, transparent city where everyone is dissatisfied with life, with themselves and with other people.

Finally, I will briefly comment on the ending of the two books. Both endings follow the classical device of a medieval dream vision. The narrator has fallen asleep; his dream is the allegorical story that explains abstract ideas through symbolism, ideas that are obscure to him in real life. When he wakes up he is eager to share his dream, his experience of enlightenment, with others, and does this through writing. Also, in the final paragraphs the narrators of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Great Divorce* both have a vision of people who have become celestial as they are about to enter the real reality in heaven. The narrator of Bunyan’s allegory sees Christian and Hopeful in shining clothes and C. S. Lewis has a vision of his guide’s face “flushed with a new light” (GD 145) from the rising Sun. Both books are infused with the idea that everyone must make a choice and that every man’s self has an unimaginable potential – it is possible for everyone to experience what Christian and Hopeful did at the gate of the Celestial City, according to Bunyan and Lewis. I believe that in the eyes of the authors it would be to trivialize their stories if this symbolism was treated only as original and imaginative escapism. Through their prefaces they both make it clear that the

stories, despite being fictional fantasies, are attempts at expressing what the authors believe to be real and true ideas about our human existence, abstract ideas made concrete through the allegorical dreams. They both attempt to reveal and expose the “things unseen,” in Bunyan’s words, to the readers as well as to their characters in the stories. The allegories are charged with meaning, as is this our universe, and by attempting to interpret them it is possible to realize that behind what we can sense physically there is a truer “meaning,” a truer reality.

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