



The Inklings Project

Lessons from Brown University

Just over 12 years ago, Dr. Timothy Flanigan, a physician and professor at Brown's medical school, was inspired to create an undergraduate seminar titled *Beyond Narnia: The Literature of C.S. Lewis*. Students from all backgrounds and academic disciplines found themselves reading and discussing Lewis' books, from philosophical works to fantastical fiction. Today, the course is widely popular, providing an atmosphere for fruitful dialogue and meaningful connection.

This guide is meant to encourage and help educators to provide courses that invite students into the joy of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the other Inklings.

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The Magic of Teaching C. S. Lewis at Brown University

By Dr. Timothy Flanigan, Emily Thurston, and Elizabeth Zenger

Over the last decade, we have held a weekly seminar course on the fiction of C. S. Lewis for Brown undergraduate students. It has gained surprising popularity—and perhaps more importantly, it’s been a lot of fun. What follows is a taste of our course, as well as a few of the lessons we’ve learned.

The key is engagement. As many teachers know, it is often a challenge to get students to actually read a book, let alone respond with their own thoughts. But this is exactly what the works of Lewis invite us to do. Our hope is to extend that invitation to our students. We try to do this in a fun, creative, and welcoming way.

Class begins with Jeopardy on the details of the book, which is entirely student-run. Each student is required to create and lead at least one Jeopardy over the course of the 10 weeks. We provide the template, and they pick it up very easily. The class is divided in half, and then Jeopardy begins. Of no minor importance is that the winning team is typically awarded with cookies or a loaf of bread from one of the best bakeries in town.

We also find it fun to bring tea and coffee for the students, setting the tone for a warm and enjoyable atmosphere. After Jeopardy, the students grab their cup of tea and divide up into small groups for Discussion. Like Jeopardy, this is intentionally student-led. Two students create a one-page, two-sided discussion guide with four to six themes of their choice. Each theme begins with a quote and a couple discussion questions to get the ball rolling. The students first converse in their small groups, focusing on one or two of the themes from the discussion guide. Afterwards, we all come together to hear each group’s thoughts and discuss the themes as a class.

Before class, students who are not leading Jeopardy or Discussion are asked to submit a short thought on some aspect of the book. Between Jeopardy and Discussion, there is a time for the faculty member to read some of these reflections aloud to the class. These are read off anonymously and can be positive or negative reactions to the book, providing a good starting point for genuine dialogue amongst peers.

We also watch the film *Shadowlands* quite early on in the semester. We think this is important for a couple of reasons. First, it allows students to recognize that Lewis is writing as a man of his time—as an English Victorian in the mid-1900s. We hope this helps students put his words into their proper context, rather than being quick to judge them by modern standards. Furthermore, the film invites students to sympathize and even relate to Lewis and his very human experiences: he is a man who falls in love, who undergoes pain and suffering, who becomes incredibly vulnerable. We hope that this film opens students to becoming more receptive to Lewis as they encounter him through his writings (much thanks to Anthony Hopkins!)

Overall, the point of the class is not to "unpack" the writings of C. S. Lewis. Lewis is already such a clear writer, often putting complex ideas into simple and understandable terms. He portrays virtues



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such as forgiveness, courage, and love; as well as both Christian and Jewish imagery and classical themes from mythology. The hope is that the students will be the ones to bring up these themes with each other, rather than for the professor to direct the discussion. That being said, our goal is not that the course is simply a platform for students to state and argue over their personal beliefs; rather, we hope to provide an environment where students can be receptive to what Lewis is actually articulating, and then respond to it in a meaningful and fruitful manner. Ultimately, our goal is to encourage students to read Lewis' works and have fun delving into them—to really allow themselves to enter into, enjoy, and even wrestle with the text—then to come together and hear what their classmates think.

This course has become very well-suited and appealing to students from all backgrounds, especially students from STEM. This class would also be ideal as a freshman seminar focused on writing, presentation skills, engagement in discussion, and reading. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the class was run over Zoom, which also worked out nicely. Moving forward, we are excited about the world of possibilities for this course and for any other Inklings-related courses that it may inspire.



Beyond Narnia: The Literature of C. S. Lewis Course Syllabus

Instructors: Dr. Timothy Flanigan, Dr. Edward Wing, and Dr. Hannah Wei Wu

Course Description

C. S. Lewis was one of the most widely read authors of the 20th Century, yet much of his philosophical, theological and political theories are unfamiliar. His fiction and philosophical writings will be explored to better understand his perspective on modern humanity, the relationship of man to family, the community and the state. C. S. Lewis had a very clear philosophy on the importance of the individual and how he relates to the larger social structures. Morality and the role of individuals as they interface with others around them and their responsibility for working with society both at community level and at the macro-state level will be explored.

Course Guidelines

Over the course of the semester, students will spend 2 to 3 hours per week in class (42 hours total). Required reading for the class meetings is expected to take up to approximately 7 hours per week (98 hours total). In addition, writing and researching weekly response essays and midterm is estimated at approximately 40 hours over the course of the term.

Learning Goals

1. Read Lewis' literature with a critical lens, find the questions he wants to ask, and respond to them with honesty and vulnerability in a community setting.
2. Encourage lively, joyful, and productive thoughts as leaders in Jeopardy reviews and Discussions.
3. Ask and discuss the questions that matter most, both with and beyond an academic lens.
4. Bring honest thoughts and open minds to class and learn how to share our beliefs outside of our class.
5. Respect the diversity of the class, as we all come from a myriad of backgrounds.

Attendance/Participation

Attendance at all classes is mandatory. Weekly attendance will be taken by the TA. If excused, a 3-page paper is due on the day you miss class for that week's assigned book

Weekly Responses

A brief response (5 to 10 lines) about the assigned book will be due by 7 AM the morning of the next class each week. A few of your responses will be read anonymously to the class each week. (*If your response is personal in nature and you would prefer we not read it out loud, please write that at the top of the response, and we will respect your wishes.*)

Class Discussion/Jeopardy

Each week 2 to 3 students will lead the class in Discussion. They will prepare a handout (1-page front and back) with pertinent questions and quotes to aid in organizing discussion. A second group of students (2 to 3) will prepare a round of Jeopardy based on the assigned book. ***It is required that each student lead at least 1 Jeopardy and 1 Discussion per semester.***

Course description continued on next page...



Syllabus continued...

Papers/Essays Assigned

There will be a Midterm (7 to 10 pages) and a Final Paper (5 to 7 pages) due for the course. The midterm topic can be based on any of the books read up to that point. The final paper will be on a topic of your choice that has some relationship to the writings or life of C.S. Lewis. This includes writing about the Inklings, any of C.S. Lewis' mentors, the relevance of C.S. Lewis to Brown or any aspect of modern life, or an approved interactive project. To do a special project, talk to your professor.

Examples of past special projects include a campus-wide Narnia symposium featuring Dr. Michael Ward and artwork interpreting each of the Narnia books with a written artist statement.

Grading

Grades for the course are based on the following: 60% Weekly attendance and participation (which includes weekly thoughts and Jeopardy and particularly Discussion participation). 25% of the grade will depend on your Midterm paper (7-10 pages). The remaining 15% will be your final paper or project.

Schedule of Readings

Week	Material Covered
Week 1	Intro all 3 classes
Week 2	Voyage of the Dawn Treader
Week 3	The Silver Chair
Week 4	The Great Divorce
Week 5	MOVIE NIGHT: <i>Shadowlands</i>
Week 6	The Problem of Pain
Week 7	A Grief Observed
Week 8	<u>MID-TERM DUE</u>
Week 9	Out of the Silent Planet
Week 10	That Hideous Strength
Week 11	The Screwtape Letters
Week 12	The Magician's Nephew
Week 13	The Last Battle
Week 14	<u>FINALS DUE</u>



Beyond Narnia Course Recap Including Real Student Feedback

What Students Did in the Course

- Asked and discussed thought-provoking ideas and challenged each other to grow.
 - We began asking what the idea of “journey” and “sacrifice” meant, questioned whether pain has meaning and addressed human suffering, and examined pride, humility, and egotism.
 - We also asked about loneliness, the fear of the unknown, questioned whether destiny or free will was a fixed idea, and examined definitions of intelligence and rationalism.
- Respected and cared for one another by reading Lewis’ literature for each class, having fun in Jeopardy, and taking Discussion seriously.
- Were honest with each other, admitted when you weren’t sure about some thoughts, and wanted to grow.
- Trusted our community and contributed to it immensely with your incredible insights.

What Students Asked in the Course

- Do the children come to Narnia when the world needs them, or they need it?
- How did Eustace find meaning in the feelings and experiences of loneliness?
- Is all of our suffering directed toward making us more perfect?
- What are some of the ideals that the hrossa possess that are “unattainable” for humans? How do these compare to your idea of a perfect society?
- What’s the difference between wanting to lengthen life (thicken the rind) and wanting to repeat it (to taste the fruit all over again)?
- What are some of the “pressures of the ordinary” we face today? In what ways do they distract us? How can we overcome them?
- Where do you think we can draw the line between being unaware and understanding the need to change but refusing to do so?
- When you start to question God, are your religious beliefs slowly fading?
- Is religious relativism true, or is there a true religion?
- In what cases do you think questioning strengthens or weakens your beliefs?
- Is there wisdom in innocence? What qualities of youth are lost as one grows older?
- Do we spend our lives striving to arrive at something?
- Is Love wanting to care for someone, wanting to save them, wanting to keep them in your life, wanting them to be happy, or something else entirely?
- Do all endings start with new beginnings?



Course Recap continued...

What We Hope Students Keep from the Course

- A fondness and respect for Lewis' literature.
- An insight that even "children's books" have the sharpest ideas; sharp minds such as those at Brown should be open to reading any kind of literature and be excited at finding the most interesting ideas.
- An eagerness to ask and answer the hard questions instead of avoiding them.
- "You know, I once talked about this in a C. S. Lewis class..."

What Students Told Us About the Course

- *Discussion has really made me think deeply about my life, my mortality, and makes me reflect on whether the things I am caring about really are that worthwhile.*
We hope that Lewis' approach to life has shown students just one way to approach life's weird, fascinating, and difficult questions.
- *I feel comfortable to share about things I wouldn't otherwise in any other class.*
We hope that this class has equipped students with the skills and courage to share it beyond our community.
- *I'm not religious and was not raised religious, so I think it's nice to have greater perspective into other people's beliefs.*
We hope that this class has taught students that discussion about things like the human condition cannot exist only in a bubble. We hope that each student is eager to talk about these things with friends and family beyond our course.
- *In my last 3.5 years at Brown I have not really ventured outside of my concentration due to fear of not being able to excel in non-STEM courses.*
We hope that this class has showed students that they are more than capable of succeeding in a humanities course. Each student has had incredible insight, and it has been such an honor to hear what each of them think about some of life's weird, fascinating, and difficult questions.
- *When I am in class, I do not watch the clock and actually enjoy class time.*
Every time we have to end class, a part of us wants to stay - partly because some of these difficult questions can never be answered in an hour, partly because we're a bit selfish: we love hearing from each of the students—they all sharpen our minds to think about ideas about human nature in new and better ways.
- *It makes such a difference to be in a class where the instructors are happy to be there and care about the material.*
This course has been such a joy to teach. It makes such a difference when students are happy to be here and care about the material.



Opening Lecture from Dr. Timothy Flanigan, January 2022

Who is Clive Staples Lewis, also known in the literary world as C.S. Lewis? His friends knew him as Jack and during this course I prefer to call him Jack because we hope he will become our friend, our teacher and our guide to his thoughts and writings.

No need to take any notes during this course. Listen so you can ask questions and enter into conversations with the thoughts and the writings of the man who created Narnia. You are going to be asked to write a mid-term essay and a final essay and there will be no tests.

Right off the bat, let's cover the grading guidelines since everybody wants to know that. 1/3 of your grade will be class participation which means showing up and playing an active role in the discussions. I am asking each student to email us by 8 am the day of your class with your brief response of your thoughts on that week's reading. At the start of each class, we'll read off many of these anonymously. 1/3 of your grade will be based on your leading the discussion during the week where two students will be in charge, and 1/3 of your grade will be based on your mid-term essay which can be anywhere from 5-8 double spaced pages and your final essay which can be anywhere from 7-10 double spaced pages. During the end of class, we can go over questions regarding the course mechanics. I have to warn you though, we are physicians who have lectured on medical topics, but we are not English teachers and we will be exploring how to do this together. We're open to suggestions that you all may have.

Why take this course? This course is about the thoughts and the writings of Jack Lewis. He was an English scholar, a teacher, a tweed coated, pipe smoking gentleman that loved to take walking tours through the Cotswold's in the middle of England and stop at a pub for lunch and dinner. More than any of that, he was a Christian who, like Dante, had a deep abiding conviction that Joy is a higher and deeper word than sorrow, that Joy is the Last Word. He believed in good and evil. He had an affection for humility, fidelity, valor, courtesy, simplicity, the soil, the pub and holiness. He was about going beyond his self..., to the transcendent powers of sorrow, terror, wistfulness, horrible evil and Joy. To him Joy was glorious, hilarious and rhapsodic. These are deep truths that he felt we were beginning to lose touch with. His goal was to bring us back to that realm.

Jack was immersed in our Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions. He loved to paint the canvas of his book with the ideas of majesty, valor, courtesy, grace, nobility, virginity, splendor, ceremony, taboo, magnanimity, and mystery. Jack asked his readers to go beyond themselves. The quest that he offers is to enter into deeper mysteries, deeper truths and deeper adventures, deeper and more wonderful and more unknown than ourselves. As human beings we are limited. The more we focus just inward, the smaller our world becomes.

Our real selfhood and our real liberty are found by entering into the Cosmic Dance where we find that we have a role. We certainly do not know our role at birth, and we are never sure of our role as it progresses. But we are invited to step into the cosmic drama and dance which is bigger than ourselves and more glorious and wonderful and inherently threatening. What is so extraordinary is that we have a role. We are invited onto the stage and asked to be part of it. We may see ourselves as highly insignificant as Jack's friend, J.R.R. Tolkien, portrayed when writing about Frodo and Sam and Merry and Pippin who thought they were only small, little, insignificant hobbits, but yet their role was cataclysmic. We are asked to be part of the great drama, the great dance and the great story. Like all



Opening Lecture continued...

great adventures there is danger, but there is joy. We all matter to an extraordinary degree whether our parts are small or great.

What of Narnia? The fabric of the stories is shot through with glory. Narnia is a story full of cups of tea and tankards of beer, cakes and sandwiches piled high, firesides and pipes and hot baths and so forth. A theme right at the center of all of Jack's vision was goodness and simplicity, fellowship, creation, and the sheer pleasure of good tastes and smells such as fresh bread, raspberries and nuts. Narnia is a place of festivity and merrymaking. Evil, on the other hand, is real and we all have a choice to participate with good or with evil and very often our choices land us on both sides of the fence at different times. Evil though is often a parody of good and thus is very tempting. There are beauties that can burst your heart if you were to encounter them and terrors that would wither you utterly.

Through it all, humans have a unique role in Narnia. Humans have a choice to participate in the Great Dance and to work with it or against it. Humans can see beyond their own experience. Professor Kirke has been to school in Aslan's country as we learned in the *Magician's Nephew*. There he learned the hard lesson of playing and obedience and of trusting against all odds that Aslan knows what he is doing and of not being too sure what can't happen. When Peter and Susan and Lucy and Edmund bring their quarrel about Lucy's report on the wardrobe to Professor Kirke his question is "how do you know that your sister's story is not true?" Great happenings hang upon apparently insignificant decisions, and the whole weight of responsibility for the great things are tasks of very small choices. On the other hand, sometimes those small choices are chosen wrongly, and one finds there is forgiveness and there is reconciliation. Diggory's assumption, (as you will learn when you read *The Magician's Nephew*) that he has the right to try out anything like ringing a little bell leads him to great peril. The scuffle on the edge of a cliff between Eustace and Jill ends up setting in motion a whole host of adventures.

In this course, you will really come to know the fiction and vision of C.S. Lewis. It will be great fun. You will need to jump in and share your thoughts. You have to lead Jeopardy and Discussion at least once during the semester. It is about getting to know "Jack" and hopefully becoming a friend of his fiction and share your ideas.

Jack was a Christian, but he wasn't always. He had a journey to what he believed, like all of us do. Many Christians take this course which is great—we want to hear about your beliefs and how C.S. Lewis resonates with you (or doesn't). But students of all faiths and no faith and who just are unsure are all welcome and have taken this course and have gotten something out of it. The point is to engage and enter into these deep questions we all come across in life.



Discussion Guide Example 1: *The Great Divorce*

The Great Divorce

CAST LIST

Big Ghost.....(Scene 4)

“I haven’t got my rights. I always done my best and I never done nothing wrong. And what I don’t see is why I should be put below a bloody murderer like you.” (28)

Question: Is BG’s anger justified? Is he being deprived of his “rights”?

Fat & Cultured Ghost/Apostate.....(Scene 5)

“But honest opinions fearlessly followed--they are not sins.”

Question: Is the Apostate’s claim right? Or can honest opinions be harmful? What is the difference between sincere and innocent opinions?

Hard-bitten Ghost.....(Scene 7)

“All that idea of staying is only an advertisement stunt....They’re all advertisement stunts” (52)

Question: Is the Hard-bitten Ghost right when he says that they are all “advertisement stunts?” Is there anything wrong with his distrustful and skeptical world view?

Well-dressed Woman.....(Scene 8)

“But, I tell you, they’ll see me.”

Question: Is it fair that the woman received no warning? Does the Spirit have a right to ask the woman to do something that makes her so uncomfortable?

Garrulous Old Woman.....(Scene 9)

“I ought to be alive today and they simply starved me in that dreadful nursing home and no one ever came near me and...” (76)

•Does this woman have a reason to “grumble”? Can one blame her for complaining?

Artist.....(Scene 9)

“How soon do you think I could begin painting?”

Question: Can one blame the artist for his desire to paint? Isn’t it a good thing to worry about the reputation one leaves when he dies?

Continued on Next Page...



Discussion Guide Example 1 continued...

Robert-Obsessed Woman..... (Scene 10)

“But if I’m given a free hand I will take charge of him again. I will take up my burden once more.”

Question: Is the woman wrong for worrying about Robert so much? Could we consider her actions selfless? Did she have good intentions? What do you think happens to her once she disappears?

Pam - Michael’s Mother.....(Scene 11)

“If He loved me He’d let me see my boy. If He loved me why did He take Michael away from me?”
(99)

Question: Do you sympathize for or empathize with Michael’s Mother? Is her anger with God justified?

Lizard Man.....(Scene 11)

“Honestly, I don’t think there’s the slightest necessity for that. I’m sure I shall be able to keep it in order now. The gradual process would be far better than killing it.”

Question: Is the Angel’s sudden demand of killing the lizard unfair or too rushed? It is really necessary for the Ghost to feel pain in the process?

Frank - Dwarf/Tragedian.....(Scenes 12 & 13)

“I believe I’m fairly quick at recognising where I’m not wanted. ‘Not needed’ was the exact expression, if I remember rightly.” (130)

Question: Is Sarah’s response toward Frank heartless or loving? Does she really care about him? Does he really care about her?



Discussion Guide Example 2: *The Magician's Nephew*



EXAMPLE OF A 2 PAGE
DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Magician's Nephew

Theme: Vanity & Entitlement

"But of course you must understand that rules of that sort, however excellent they may be for little boys--and servants--and women--and even people in general, can't possibly be expected to apply to profound students and great thinkers and sages. No, Digory. Men like me, who possess hidden wisdom, are freed from common rules just as we are cut off from common pleasures. Ours, my boy, is a high and lonely destiny."

"I had forgotten that you are only a common boy. How should you understand reasons of State? You must learn, child, that what would be wrong for you or for any of the common people is not wrong in a great Queen such as I. The weight of the world is on our shoulders. We must be freed from all rules. Ours is a high and lonely destiny."

Discussion Question: Should some people with greater destinies or roles in society (i.e. rulers, leaders) be exempt from rules for the common people? Can you think of any examples where this is appropriate?



Theme: Scientific experimentation

"No great wisdom can be reached without sacrifice."

Discussion Question: Is sacrifice necessary to achieve knowledge? To what extent is sacrifice justified? Does the sacrifice of a few justify benefitting the greater good of society?

Theme: Danger of Curiosity

"Make your choice, adventurous Stranger;
Strike the bell and bide the danger,
Or wonder, till it drives you mad,
What would have followed if you had."

Discussion Question: Is curiosity useful or dangerous? When does curiosity become more dangerous than enterprising?

Theme: Self-fulfilled prophecy

"And the longer and more beautiful the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did."
"I know I shouldn't have. I think I was a bit enchanted by the writing under the bell.' 'Do you?' asked Aslan, still speaking very low and deep. 'No,' said Digory. 'I see now I wasn't. I was only pretending.'"

Question: How much of what we can or cannot achieve is affected by how much we *think* we can or cannot achieve?

Theme: Gift of Reason

"Creatures, I give you yourselves," said the strong, happy voice of Aslan. "I give to you forever this land of Narnia. I give you the woods, the fruits, the rivers. I give you the stars and I give you myself. The Dumb Beasts whom I have not chosen are yours also. Treat them gently and cherish them but do not go back to their ways lest you cease to be Talking Beasts. For out of them you were taken and into them you can return. Do not so."

Discussion Question: What are the pros and cons of the gift of reason? Why do you think God gave humans the gift of reason but did not give it to animals? Why does Aslan give the gift of reason to animals in Narnia?



Discussion Guide Example 2 continued...

Theme: Good always prevails over evil

"I'll go. But there's one thing I jolly well mean to say first. I didn't believe in Magic till today. I see now it's real. Well if it is, I suppose all the old fairy tales are more or less true. And you're simply a wicked, cruel magician like the ones in the stories. Well, I've never read a story in which people of that sort weren't paid out in the end, and I bet you will be. And serve you right."

Discussion Question: Why does good generally prevail over evil? Are there any cases in which evil may prevail?

Theme: Afterlife

"And if we're dead--which I don't deny it might be-- well, you got to remember that worse things happen at sea and a chap's got to die sometime. And there ain't nothing to be afraid of if a chap's led a decent life. And if you ask me, I think the best thing we could do to pass the time would be sing a hymn."

Question: Is the idea of death less frightening if you think you have been "good" throughout life? Why or why not?



Theme: Role of Perspective

"For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on what sort of person you are."

"But I cannot tell that to this old sinner, and I cannot comfort him either; he has made himself unable to hear my voice...Oh Adam's sons, how cleverly you defend yourselves against all that might do you good!"

Question: What do you think about the role of perspective and how it guides us in becoming the sort of person we are?

Question: To what extent do we only see what we want to see, and hear what we want to hear? Are there instances when that is beneficial?

Theme: God's love

"They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself."

Question: Throughout our discussions, we have talked a lot about human suffering but we haven't touched upon God's suffering. When we suffer, does God suffer with us? Does he perhaps suffer more than we do?

Theme: Taking responsibility for actions

"Evil will come of that evil, but it is still a long way off, and I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself. In the meantime, let us take such order that for many hundred years yet this shall be a merry land in a merry world. And as Adam's race has done the harm, Adam's race shall help to heal it."

Question: Is it often clear where the blame falls after the introduction of an "evil"? Is it clear in the novel?

Theme: Greed, temptation

"All get what they want; they do not always like it."

"Come in by the gold gates or not at all. Take of my fruit for others or forbear. For those who steal or those who climb my wall shall find their heart's desire and find despair."

Question: How is the greed in the witch's actions in stealing an apple different from the greed in Digory asking for one?



Discussion Guide Example 2 Continued...

Theme: Selfishness in relationship formation

"I think (and Digory thinks too) that her mind was of a sort which cannot remember that quiet place at all, and however often you took her there and however long you left her there, she would still know nothing about it. Now that she was left alone with the children, she took no notice of either of them. And that was like her too. In Charn she had taken no notice of Polly (till the very end) because Digory was the one she wanted to make use of. Now that she had Uncle Andrew, she took no notice of Digory. I expect most witches are like that. They are not interested in things or people unless they can use them; they are terribly practical."

Question: Do we as a society tend to notice people more when they can be useful to us? Is this beneficial, and do the benefits outweigh the inherent selfishness?

Theme: Qualifications to rule over others

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, "and thanking you very much I'm sure (which my Missus does the same) but I ain't no sort of a chap for a job like that. I never 'ad much eddycation, you see."

"Well," said Aslan, "can you use a spade and a plough and raise food out of the earth?" ...

"Can you rule these creatures kindly and fairly, remembering that they are not slaves like the dumb beasts of the world you were born in, but Talking Beasts and free subjects?" ...

"And would you bring up your children and grandchildren to do the same?" ...

"And you wouldn't have favourites either among your own children or among the other creatures or let any hold another under or use it hardly?" ...

"And if enemies came against the land (for enemies will arise) and there was war, would you be the first in the charge and the last in the retreat?" ...

"Then," said Aslan, "You will have done all that a King should do."

Question: Is it enough that the Cabby's only qualification for being a king is that he will try his hardest? Are there times when having royal lineage would be a stronger qualification? In modern society, do connections typically win over individual effort?



Example Student Paper

Death and Joy in the Writings of C. S. Lewis

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.
-John Donne, Holy sonnet 10

At Brown, I rarely think of death. Surrounded by so many young, bright, healthy people, it often seems surreal and irrelevant. This is, of course, an illusion. Life and death are inseparable. Analyzing life without death would make no more sense than analyzing a shape without an outline. Death lays at the boundary of life and through its position begs the question of what life means and what comes next. C. S. Lewis did not avoid death in his writings. He wrote of what might come after death, and he wrote of death itself. The depictions of death in Lewis's writing range from subtle to achingly raw but in each case the pain is paired with an awareness that simple pleasures continue to exist, even in the face of death. Death brings many kinds of pain. It brings the fear and confusion of anticipated loss, the aches which permeate a body as it slowly shuts down, and the exquisite agony of losing a loved one in the most permanent way. There is so much pain in death, in fact, that it might be tempting to posit that death is only pain. Lewis's writings challenge this conclusion. In *The Last Battle*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, and *A Grief Observed*, there is a constant alongside pain in each death: joy. Even in the darkest moments, beauty still exists for anyone who is willing to see it.

The Last Battle recounts the death of Narnia, an entire world, and deaths of most of the brave souls who fought to defend its virtue. Yet it is not a sad story, quite to the contrary, it effuses hope and joy because none of the deaths is truly an ending. When the Kings and Queens of Narnia die, they are transported immediately to Aslan's kingdom, where they can reflect upon what has happened to them. "It wasn't at all like that other time when we were pulled out of our own world by Magic. There was a frightful roar and something hit me with a bang, but it didn't hurt. And I felt not so much scared as - well, excited...I'd had a rather sore knee... I noticed it had suddenly gone. And then - here we were." (*The Last Battle*, Ch. 13) This narrative of Peter's death describes death not as a source of pain, but as a release from it. There is a slight dissonance in his description; the terms "frightful roar" and a "bang" don't quite match his feeling of "excitement." This juxtaposition of violent and joyful language suggests a subtle nature in death, more complex than pain alone could explain. When Peter makes this



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comment, it is unclear whether he recognizes that what has happened to him is, in fact, death. It is only much later that Aslan explains to Lucy: “you are - as you used to call it in the Shadowlands - dead” (The Last Battle, Ch. 16). Aslan’s qualification of the term, ‘death’, suggests that the earthly definition might not be sufficient. The fact that Lucy was unable to identify what had happened to her for such a large portion of the novel further supports this point and suggests that death, through the eyes of those who die, might not be so terrible.

The death of the Kings and Queens of Narnia in *The Last Battle* is not painless, even though they were killed instantly and brought immediately to Aslan’s kingdom. They experience the loss of a loved one: the only one of them who is absent, Susan. When Tirian enquires after Susan, Peter replies “‘My sister Susan,’ answered Peter shortly and gravely, ‘is no longer a friend of Narnia.’” (The Last Battle, Ch. 13) Here, Peter actually uses language associated with death. The word ‘gravely,’ ironically, is used in reference to a one of the few people they know who is still alive, and refers to Peter’s emotions about the fact that Susan no longer believes in Narnia. This inversion suggests that perhaps grief, which is currently directed at death, actually ought to be directed towards a loss of faith. Even so, Peter’s sadness is fleeting. Almost as soon as they begin to talk about Susan, he calls attention to fruit trees, and their dismay melts away in the sensory pleasures of Aslan’s kingdom. “‘What was the fruit like? Unfortunately no one can describe a taste. All I can say is that, compared with those fruits, the freshest grapefruit you’ve ever eaten was dull, and the juiciest orange was dry, and the most melting pear was hard and woody...” (The Last Battle, Ch. 13). Their dismay is not assuaged by a solution to the problem of Susan, but rather by the delicious flavor of a fruit. Peter lists the fruits’ virtues in exclusively sensory terms: ‘melting’ and ‘juicy,’ and these sensory pleasures are sufficient to carry the Kings and Queens past their unhappiness. They do not address the problem; questions of love, loss, and faith are not so easily answered, but they refer the friends of Narnia back to the simple joys which are inherently and always available to them. Even alongside the hugeness of permanent loss, sensory pleasures can coexist with pain.

Not all of the characters in Aslan’s kingdom are able to access these pleasures. The dwarves sit in a tiny circle amidst all of Aslan’s splendor, but they are unable to detect it and stubbornly persist in the belief that they are in a dingy stable. Lucy attempts to open their eyes, but they react with hostility and disbelief: “‘But it isn’t dark, you poor stupid Dwarfs,’ said Lucy. ‘Can’t you see? Look up! Look round! Can’t you see the sky and the trees and the flowers? Can’t you see me?’ ‘How in the name of all Humbug can I see what ain’t there?’” The root of the dwarves’ problem is not a shortage of splendor to be had; the children can clearly see an abundance, but rather lies in their perception. They have been offered something far greater than the stable they insist upon as reality, but in their stubbornness they are unwilling to open up and accept it.

The deaths in *The Last Battle* are remarkable because they coincide with the end of a world; so the narrative is centered on the experience of those who die almost to the exclusion of the loved ones left behind. This is essentially the inverse of how death is actually experienced. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, the death of Hyoui and his two comrades follows a much more earthly storyline. Hyoui is shot from afar by Devine and Weston immediately after his triumph over the fearsome Hnakra, one of the greatest achievements possible in Hnoi society. He is injured, becomes aware that he is going to die, and passes away. The narrative with which Hyoui conceptualizes his own death, though, is distinctly alien. Well before his death, when Ransom wonders why Hyoui treasures the dangerous, predatory Hnakra, Hyoui



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explains, "I do not think the forest would be so bright, nor the water so warm, nor love so sweet, if there were no danger in the lakes..." (Out of the Silent Planet, ch. 13). In this sentence, Hyoui redefines the connotation of the word 'danger.' It is associated with beauty alongside fear and dismay, combining the visceral with sensory pleasures to create a much more nuanced sensation. It is not solely the glory and exhilaration which gives Danger its value, but also the increased richness of sensation when nothing is guaranteed.

Hyoui extends his perspective on danger even when the danger carries a genuine risk of death. "[Because] I stood on the shore of the Balki pool... my heart has been higher, my song deeper, all my days. But do you think it would have been so unless I had known that in Balki hneraki dwelled? There I drank life because death was in the pool." (Out of the Silent Planet, Ch. 13). In this passage, it is death, not danger, which allows Hyoui to 'drink' life. This word, 'drink,' carries powerful associations. It calls forth the many Bible verses about thirst, including John 4:14, "But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." (English Standard Version, John 4:14). Thirst is among the most basic, powerful human urges, and the equally powerful act of relieving it, drinking, is only enabled by the knowledge of death. Here, death is still framed as the end of life, but in a way which focuses on the richness of life illuminated by death, the punctuation point which turns the words of life into poetry.

When Ransom hears a gunshot and realizes what has occurred, he is flooded with frenzied guilt and fear, which he struggles to communicate to Hyoui: "[Ransom] did not know the words for 'forgive,' or 'shame,' or 'fault,' ... He could only stare into Hyoui's distorted face in speechless guilt... it muttered and then, at last, 'Hman hnakrapunt.'" (Out of the Silent Planet, ch. 16). Against Ransom's expectations, Hyoui uses his last words to remind Ransom of his new title as Hnakra- slayer. The act of slaying a Hnakra is a symbol for the immense potential for life which lives on the edge of death and Hyoui's very last action is to affirm this. The emotions which Ransom expects from Hyoui: forgiveness and blame, are intrinsically tied to the actual death. What he actually says affirms life as it can be lived, with each sensation more sweet and satisfying for the knowledge that one day it will end. Hyoui's death is painful for the surviving Hnoi. They march Weston and Devine to Oyarsa seeking answers, "Hyoui they hit from afar with a coward's weapon when he had done nothing to frighten them. And now he lies there (and I do not say it because he was my brother, but all the handramit knows it) and he was a hnakrapunt and a great poet and the loss of him is heavy" (Out of the Silent Planet, Ch. 16). The speaker is Hyoui's brother, and his use of the words "coward" and "heavy" intimate the depth of his anger, fear, and confusion. The Hnoi philosophy of death cannot miraculously eliminate the pain of grief, but, within its framework, the pain of grief is not sufficient to eliminate the joys of life. When Weston prances about, dangling glass beads before the Malacandrans in an attempt to bribe them, they respond with what Weston believes is a collective roar. The Oyarsa explains "'You must forgive my people,' said the voice of Oyarsa - and even it was subtly changed -' but they are not roaring at you. They are only laughing'" (Out of the Silent Planet, Ch. 16). This laughter is a profound example of joy in the face of death. Laughter is a form of joy which is particularly candid and light, and if laughter can exist in the face of death, it suggests that all joy can. The disconnect between Weston's initial interpretation of the Malacandrans' vocalizations and their actual emotional subtext highlights the alienness of their philosophy. Weston assumes that any emotion experienced around the time of a death must be deeply seeded in pain, but the Malacandrans dispel this. They feel the pain, but not to the exclusion of joy.



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When C.S. Lewis faced the death of a loved one in his own life, he found that following the principles from his fiction was not so easy. The thought that he might keep hold of simple pleasures, be it a cup of tea, a long walk, or a friendly conversation seemed impossible in light of the gaping hole left by his wife, Joy Gresham, in his life. “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear...At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me” (A Grief Observed, 3). Lewis expresses surprise at the intensity of his emotion. More than just emotion, he describes it as an illness, an intoxication. This suggests an additional level of grief not addressed in any of Lewis’s earlier stories. Reality is, unsurprisingly, more brutal and visceral than fiction. As time passes, though, Lewis slowly rises out of his depression, and this correlates his re-emerging ability to experience joy, “Today I have been revisiting old haunts... And this time the face of nature was not emptied of its beauty ...On the contrary, every horizon, every stile or clump of trees, summoned me into a past kind of happiness, my pre-H. happiness” (A Grief Observed, 60). The first bits of happiness which Lewis reports returning to him are moments of sensory bliss. As in *Out of the Silent Planet*, his comfort is not complete. The pain he feels is still present, and he even seems to deal with a new pain: guilt at feeling happy without Joy; but it begins to coexist with the simple pleasures which he had denied himself.

Immediately after Joy’s death, Lewis became like the dwarves in *The Last Battle*, unwilling to see and be comforted by the feast that lay before him. Later, he understood this. “The time when there is nothing at all in your soul except a cry for help may be just that time when God can't give it: you are like the drowning man who can't be helped because he clutches and grabs. Perhaps your own reiterated cries deafen you to the voice you hoped to hear” (A Grief Observed, 46). In times of happiness and peace, while he was writing Narnia, Lewis was able to recognize the importance of remembering pleasure through times of pain. When actually faced with it, he was unable to do so. The words, “drowning,” “clutches,” and “grabs” all connote extreme desperation, and suggest that Lewis had no volitional control over those actions. How can a drowning man stop to enjoy the aroma of the salty breeze while the ocean slowly envelops him? Eventually, though, Lewis was no longer drowning, and he dared to feel joy once more. As he predicted, it began to heal him. First, joy coexisted with pain and slowly the ratio gradually tipped more and more towards pleasure. Lewis tested his hypothesis about simple pleasures and grief unwillingly in the laboratory of his own heart. In the days following the loss of his love, the hypothesis ceased to have any relevance, as did everything else. However, eventually, as his life began to return towards sanity, the hypothesis began to apply. As Lucy’s attempts to rouse the dwarves demonstrated, the grieving cannot be forced to notice the joy which surrounds him. Yet it is still comforting to imagine that in the depths of grief, joy and beauty are everywhere, awaiting the moment when they can be appreciated.

As a healthy 20-year old, I need not have to face death on a daily basis. But I do face loss, uncertainty, and fear of the unknown. I face graduation. Surely, I am surrounded by an endless source of simple pleasures: the warm smile of a close friend, the thrill of a newly comprehended scientific topic, the first sip of a hot coffee in the morning. In the face of pain, or even the possibility of it in the near future, it is not always easy to remember these things. At times, I am even tempted to avoid pleasures for fear of the possible pain of one day losing them. In the end, though, all things must die. The deaths in Lewis’s writings were often fantastic and magical; they were a blueprint for how death might not defeat us. Death is unforgiving, powerful, and cold, but it can never defeat joy.