C.S. Lewis and King Arthur

A Talk Given at the C.S. Lewis Society, Oxford, 1st March 2016

Thank you for letting me speak to you tonight on the subject of ‘C.S. Lewis and King Arthur’. My topic is titled ‘C.S. Lewis and King Arthur’. I didn’t spend a lot of time thinking that up.

To introduce myself: like many of you, I grew up with the Narnian stories and even once tried to get into Narnia. I remember lying in bed one morning, about eight or nine years old, and feeling that if I opened my cupboard door at this moment I might find myself in Narnia. I crept out of bed and tried it: no luck. Embarrassingly, I later on grew up and gave the illusion of being an adult. But at the back of my mind was a longing to visit that land I
had glimpsed in C.S. Lewis’s stories. I found, to my delight, that reading and thinking about
Arthurian literature was another way to glimpse that land, which wasn’t only Narnia, but the
land of magic and fairytale. Even better, they would let me do a PhD on the topic.

Arthurian literature is, in one sense, of a time. Authors usually set the stories against a
backdrop of knights, castles, magic, and tournaments. We immediately recognise it as an age
of chivalry. And yet that age never existed; it doesn’t correspond to a single historical period,
and is in fact a mismatch of Dark Age paganism, Medieval Christianity, and elements of the
author’s own time. Authors also write *through* the Arthurian legend, to tackle issues they are
personally interested in, such as morality, manliness, and conflict. Because the historicity of
the Arthurian characters is so uncertain, and because there is such a wide array of different
versions of the Arthurian story, authors have been able to bring their own ideas and
perspectives to the stories, unrestricted by the limitations of a specific historical period, or
known historical facts, or even a single authoritative version of the narrative.

C.S. Lewis is an author who wrote *through* things. In his spiritual autobiography
*Surprised by Joy* (1955), Lewis explains that his love of stories and the imagination is not as
important as what they point to, which, for him, is the ultimate reality: God. Lewis’s own
work – both fiction and non-fiction – is image heavy, whether these images are part of his
narratives or metaphors to illustrate points in his argument. But Lewis uses his images to *say
something*; to explore wider issues; to point, in most cases, to the God of Christianity.

Lewis therefore has something in common with many of the writers of Arthurian
literature, having both an appreciation for imagery and narrative, but also a desire to explore
something beyond those images and narrative. I will explore this connection, firstly by giving
an overview of Arthurian literature and Lewis’s encounters with it, and then zooming in to
Arthur himself, to analyse how Lewis regarded the figure.
The earliest mention of Arthur comes from the British monk Gildas. Except it’s not really a reference at all: he doesn’t actually mention Arthur by name. In his work ‘The Ruin of Britain,’ circa 540, Gildas simply mentions a British victory against Saxon invaders at Mount Badon. Gildas does not say who led the British to their victory at that specific battle, but he does name a Romano-British leader, Ambrosius Aurelianus who defeats the Saxons in other battles. The British monk Bede, when he repeats the story in 731, added further details and names to Gildas’s account, but still does not mention anyone called Arthur. However, in the 820s, Nenninus – you guessed it, a British monk – writes about ‘the magnanimous Arthur’, who ‘fought against the Saxons […] with all the kings and military force of Britain’. He fights twelve battles against the Saxons, the last of which takes place at Mount Badon. This either rightly identifies the leader of the battle first described in Gildas and Bede, or else adds
a completely new character to the old story. Whatever the case, Arthur and the Battle of Mount Badon have been inextricably linked ever since. Nennius includes Ambrosius Aurelianus in his narrative, making him the king of British kings, whilst Arthur is merely a war leader. Geoffreys of Monmouth drew on these earlier writers, Welsh oral accounts, and, probably, his own imagination, in his History of the Kings of Britain (circa 1136). The work includes many story elements that became important parts of the legend, such as Guinevere’s adultery and Mordred’s revolt. The work was translated and adapted into French (by Wace, 1155) English (by Layamon, early 1200s), and Welsh. Wace added a particularly important element, the Round Table.

Many of the Arthurian works after the twelfth century move away from anything that could resemble history, into the realms of romance and fairy-story. The stories that would later be grouped together as The Mabinogion, and the works of French writer Chrétien de Troyes, do not claim to be histories, but rather fantastical stories about chivalry and the supernatural, in which Arthur is a background figure. Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight, written in the fourteenth century, is a later example.

The most famous and influential Arthurian text is Le Morte d’Arthur by Sir Thomas Malory, published by Caxton in 1485. Malory collated and translated sources from French, Welsh, and English, and put them together in a lengthy and comprehensive account of Arthur and his knights. This became the version of the Arthurian story, at least until Tennyson’s long narrative poem Idylls of the King surpassed it in popular appeal in the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, T.H. White’s The Once and Future King, a prose fiction tetralogy, beginning in Arthur’s childhood and ending at his last battle, is another popular and influential piece of Arthurian literature.

Every time the Arthurian story is told it is told differently, these changes sometimes coming from the author’s personal writing style and ideas, and sometimes influenced by the
times the authors are writing in. Sometimes an author adds a new image or plot detail that is used by the next author, until it becomes an established part of the legend. Sometimes authors simplify a previous aspect of the legend, until that too becomes standard, such as combining the sword in the stone with Excalibur.

This short summary indicates how the Arthurian legend is not stable or monolithic. It is not a single stone slab for others to admire and perhaps carve something on the side; it is more like a dry stone wall, composed of different irregular parts, but contributing to a whole work, leading off into the distance.

So how does C.S. Lewis fit into Arthurian literature? If the Arthurian legend is a ‘dry stone wall’, what is the shape and texture of Lewis’s contribution?

Lewis’s first encounter with the Arthurian legend was through Mark Twain’s *A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur* (1899), which he ‘blissfully read’ as a child, ‘for the sake of the romantic elements that came through and with total disregard of the vulgar ridicule directed against them’. He would not, he tells us in *Surprised by Joy*, ever read it again.¹ This is not that surprising: reading *Yankee* before you’ve read any of the romances it parodies is a bit like reading the punchline of a joke before you’ve read the set-up. But Lewis’s distaste of Twain’s work also tells us something about how he regarded the Arthurian legend, and romance in general: he took it seriously, and did not like it being ridiculed.

At the age of fifteen Lewis gained access to a more serious form of the Arthurian legend. On November 17th, 1914, twelve days before his sixteenth birthday, he ordered a copy of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, and wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves excitedly:

Do you ever wake up in the morning and suddenly wonder why you have not bought such-and-such a book long time ago, and then decided that life without it will be quite unbearable? I do frequently: the last attack was this morning à propos of Malory’s ‘Morte D’Arthur,’ and I have just this moment written to Dent’s for it. [...] I really can’t think why I have not got it before. It is really the

English national epic, for Paradise Lost is a purely literary poem, while it is in the essence of an epic to be genuine folk-lore.²

This is how highly Lewis regarded the Arthurian legend: not only of literary merit, but of national importance. He was not disappointed by Malory, and later declared it was ‘the greatest thing I’ve ever read’.³ He explained why in a letter dated 26 January 1915:

[…] it has opened up a new world to me. I had no idea that the Arthurian legends were so fine (The name is against them isn’s it??) Malory is really not a great author, but he has two excellent gifts, (1) that of a lively narrative and (2) the power of getting to know characters by gradual association. What I mean is, that, although he never sits down – as the moderns do – to describe a man’s character, yet, by the end of the first volume Launcelot & Tristan, Balin & Pellinore, Morgan Le Fay & Isoud are all just as real, live people as Paul Emmanuel or Mme Beck. The very names of the chapters, as they spring to meet the eye, bear with them a fresh, sweet breath from the old-time, faery world, wherein the author moves. Who can read ‘How Launcelot in the Chapel Perilous gat a cloth from a Dead corpse’ or ‘How Pellinore found a damosel by a Fountain, and of the Jousts in the Castle of Four Stones,’ and not hasten to find out what it’s all about?⁴

Lewis’s realisation that the characters were ‘real’ – or at least just as real as other fictional characters – mirrors a similar revelation of T.H. White’s, upon re-reading Malory in 1937: ‘I was thrilled and astonished,’ he wrote, ‘to find that […] the characters were real people with recognisable reactions which could be forecast.’⁵ Both White and Lewis discovered that Malory’s technique may have been different to contemporary writers, but the effects of his narrative was nevertheless powerful; and, furthermore, Arthur and his companions were not dim shadows from the past but characters that readers cold come to know, as if they were ‘real’ living people. Lewis expands the idea in an essay published in 1963, when he writes that Malory makes Launcelot seem ‘not a stained-glass figure, but a real man’ by including

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³ To Arthur Greeves, February 2nd, 1915, 64.
⁴ To Arthur Greeves, 26 January 1915, 103.
practical, homely details – such as how Launcelot wanted to stretch his legs after being on a ship for a month – even in the context of high religious devotion.\(^6\)

Lewis’s thrill at the names of the chapters is part of his life-long appreciation of language and imagery. In his essay ‘On Stories’ (1947), Lewis writes that he ‘has spent more hours than he cares to remember in reading romances, and received from them more pleasure than he should.’\(^7\) This pleasure, he goes on to explain, is not primarily derived from plot or conflicts and dangers in the narrative, but from settings; images; the whole world of the story. The chapter titles he quotes evoke ‘the old-time, faery world’, and describe it in plain, straightforward terms. Lewis adopts this style in many of his Narnia chapter titles: ‘What happened at the front door’; ‘How Bree became a wiser horse’; ‘How they discovered something worth knowing’.\(^8\) Both Malory and Lewis tell you just enough to make you want to know more.

By 1919 Lewis had read Layamon and Wace as well as Malory, and was inspired to write an Arthurian work of his own. He mentions a poem to Arthur Greeves in March 1919 on the afterlife of Arthur, based on Wace, who speculated that Arthur lives with the elves after his defeat at Badon. The poem was rejected by Heinemann, possibly for not being original enough. We don’t know anything else about it. In the same year Lewis attempted another Arthurian poem, on Merlin and Nimue. He worked on this over the course of three years, but it too was rejected, abandoned, and is now lost.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Published in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

\(^8\) *The Magician’s Nephew, The Horse and His Boy*, and *The Silver Chair*, respectively.

Two years later – in August 1921 – Lewis visited King Arthur's Castle Hotel in Tintagel, Cornwall. The hotel, built in 1899, is only one example of something Arthurian aimed at the mass market, which, thanks to the huge commercial success of Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, had emerged by the end of the nineteenth century. As well as staying in King Arthur’s hotel, people could eat in an Arthurian restaurant, decorate their house with Arthurian tiles, and even bake bread using King Arthur’s flour. Lewis described his visit to his brother Warnie:

> We lay this night at Tintagel, storied name. There is a generally diffused belief that this place is connected with King Arthur; so far as I know from Malory, Layamon and Geoffrey of Monmouth, it is not: it is really the seat of King Mark and the Tristram story. This has not however deterred some wretch, hated by the muse, from erecting an enormous hotel on the very edge of the cliff, built in toy Gothic, and calling it King Arthur’s Hotel. The interior walls are made of cement with lines on them to represent stone. They are profusely illustrated with toy armour from Birmingham: a Highland target, suitable for Macbeth, jostles a reproduction of late Tudor steel plate and is lucky to escape a Cromwellian
helmet for its next door neighbour. In the centre of the lounge, with the Sketch and Tatler lying on it, is - of course - THE Round Table. Ye Gods!! Even the names of the Knights are written on it. Then there are antique chairs - on which very naturally we find the monogram K.A. stamped.

Here again we see Lewis’s high regard for Arthur’s story: his outrage is partly caused by the lack of understanding of the legend by the tourist industry, leading to the wrong armour, the wrong architecture, even the wrong location. It doesn’t matter that the legend is fictional, and that there is no set time period that one could use in designing a hotel; Malory, Layamon, and Geoffrey of Monmouth are still the authorities on the matter, as far as Lewis is concerned. Romance is not history, but it can be just as important. The letter continues:

I have not yet exhausted the horrors of the place: I was glad to see a book case in the lounge. All the books were uniformly bound, and I was surprised to see such unlikely titbits as the Ethics of Aristotle and the works of the Persian epic poet
Firdausi. I solved the mystery by finding out they were a uniform series of Lubbock’s HUNDRED BEST BOOKS!!! How I abominate such culture for the many, such tastes ready made, such standardization of the brain. To substitute for the infinite wandering of the true reader thro’ the byways of the country he discovers, a char-a-banc tour. The whole place infuriated me.¹⁰

Lewis wasn’t only outraged by the hotel owners getting the legend wrong; he was also outraged by the idea that myth and romantic literature should be purposefully aimed at the masses, which he thought was to the detriment of the much better individual discovery and appreciation. His attitude is not without precedent. In 1895, Sir Henry Irving employed the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones to design sets and armour for his play King Arthur at the Lyceum Theatre. Burne-Jones, who’s magnum opus is a painting of King Arthur,

¹⁰ To Warnie Lewis, 7 August 1921, Collected Letters, vol 1., 580-1. Charabanc refers to a mode of transport primarily used for worker’s trips in the early twentieth century.
thought that it was a bad thing to aim the Arthurian legend at a mass audience: ‘I can't expect people to feel about the subject as I do’, he wrote. ‘It is such a sacred land to me […]’ [Irving] thinks it is better for people to see an Arthurian play than not — that there are enough people who like romance and they might be fed — and perhaps he is right […] In the main I should like to keep all the highest things secret and remote from people; if they wanted to look they should go a hard journey to see.’

Lewis isn’t advocating a ‘hard journey’ in his description of the King Arthur Hotel, but he does object at least to a pre-packaged, standardised ‘char-a-banc’ journey; if people are to read great literature, they should discover its greatness for themselves, not told beforehand that it is great and they should therefore read it. The entire hotel seems to advocate mass-producing elements of great literature for a broad market. The cemented walls, the toy armour, the magazines on the Round Table were all products of mass production, keeping the cost cheap to make the hotel available to the aspiring middle class, whether they really understood the Arthurian legend or not. The hotel represented a watering-down of the Arthurian legend that Lewis could not abide.

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The above gives a sense of how Lewis regarded the Arthurian legend. But what did he think of the character of Arthur, and what was his own portrayal of that character?

In the letter from 1915, Lewis wrote of his surprise at how ‘fine’ the ‘Arthurian legends’ were, explaining that ‘[t]he name is against them’.  

He presumably meant that the name Arthur somehow worked against their quality. In his introduction to G.L. Brook’s Selections from Lāzamon’s Brut, Lewis writes of ‘the tasteless fiction of Arthur’s foreign conquests’, a detail he assumes is a ‘vulgar invention’ of Geoffrey of Monmouth. In his article on ‘The English Prose Morte,’ Lewis repeats the words ‘fine’ and ‘vulgar’ in relation to the Arthurian legend, when talking about the actions of Malory’s heroes: they promote ‘the civilisation of the heart […] a fineness and sensitivity, a voluntary rejection of all the uglier and more vulgar impulses’. Lewis gives examples of Gawaine, Launcelot, and Pelleas acting charitably and courteously. He does not give an example of Arthur.

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C.S. Lewis, ‘Launcelot’, autograph MS, Bodleian Dep. d. 808, a, fol. 2-8, fol. 2. Photographed with permission from Walter Hooper. Not to be reproduced.

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12 C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, Collected Letters, vol. 1, 103.
15 Ibid.
Arthur is also notable for his absence in Lewis’s posthumously published poem ‘Launcelot’. The poem describes the grail quest from Launcelot’s perspective and begins in Arthur’s hall. However the first speech is given by Lucan, one of Arthur’s stewards, and Arthur himself only says one short utterance, being ‘daily less / Of speech’, presumably out of worry for his knights who have gone on a quest from which they may never return. The main focus of the poem is on Launcelot, who Lewis also focuses on more in his essays. He seems particularly taken by the scene in Malory when Launcelot ‘weeps like a beaten child’ after healing Sir Urry, quoting it in two separate essays, as well as talking about it personally to Tony Cockshut, as we heard last term. The reason why Launcelot weeps is not explicitly given, but it may be that he weeps in relief and gratitude that he could still perform a healing miracle despite his adultery. Lewis writes that ‘Hector, Pallas, Othello, or Tom Jones’ would not have understood why Launcelot would behave like that. Perhaps he could have added Arthur to that list.

Lewis discussed the character of Arthur with the writer Dorothy L. Sayers in 1948. Sayers wrote that ‘[w]hoever handles the Arthurian matter, Arthur never succeeds in being the hero futurus… The unfortunate fact seems to be that you cannot make a heroic figure out of a cuckold.’ Lewis responds:

It wd. be interesting if you’re right in saying that a cuckold can’t be a hero [...] Arthur is a hero alright in Layamon, but only a war hero. It looks as if you were right. But A. has other disqualifications besides his horns. Once his court was made the nucleus of ‘adventures’ he was bound to fade: sinks into the Headmaster.

It is true that many authors have struggled with how to present Arthur as a hero. Tennyson’s Arthur is criticised – both by characters within Idylls of the King and by critics outside it – as weak and effeminate. According to Tennyson’s Vivien, Arthur is ‘pure as any maid,’ and for

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16 ‘Lewis in Post-War Oxford’, Michaelmas Term 2015
the author Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Tennyson lacked a ‘masculine quality,’ wondering how ‘any man could reconcile himself to dwarf such mythical characters as Arthur [...] into a whimpering old gentleman.’ Tennyson tried to make Arthur seem heroic whilst also being pure and gentle – two qualities that might make someone call him a ‘cuckold’ – by emphasising how morally perfect he is. However, this too is criticised both inside and outside the text; Guinevere complains that Arthur is ‘all fault who hath no fault at all,’ and for A.C. Swinburne, ‘this king is hardly “man at all” [...] by the very exaltation of his hero as something more than man he has left him in the end something less.’ Tennyson was aware of this problem, as one of his last edits to the poem was to insert the description of Arthur as ‘[i]deal manhood closed in real man’. He was also aware of the problem Lewis mentioned, that Arthur doesn’t do much in the story after he has established his kingdom. He tried to counteract this by mentioning Arthur’s success in jousting tournaments and how busy he was ‘Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,’ but he cannot make Arthur an errant adventurer without changing the story; Arthur’s role in the narrative and as a king is to sit in court and listen to others tell stories of their adventurers. As Lewis wrote, ‘all through Tennyson’s Idylls the Arthurian story is pulling against nearly everything that Tennyson wants to say.’ That assertion certainly applies to Arthur’s character.

Other authors, such as Edward Bulwer Lytton, avoided the problem by changing the story, and making Arthur a king who goes on adventures. T.H. White’s solution was to set his first book in Arthur’s childhood, before he becomes king, exploring a passage of time

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18 Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Mrs Halliday, 1871, qtd in [Victory Bulwer-Lytton], Life, i, 431. Original emphasis.
previous writers had left untouched. Other Inklings were also interested in the Arthurian Legend. Williams wrote a series of Arthurian poems highly valued by Lewis. His Arthur is militaristically successful but Williams is critical of his kingship (he serves himself rather than his people) and personal character (he is self-obsessed and committed incest). Tolkien’s Arthur gets away with being both a warrior and a hero because of the setting of the poem (the last battle) and because it is a tragedy – it is the fall of Arthur – which makes it easier to forgive any of the character’s excesses. Owen Barfield keeps Arthur as a mere background figure in his poem *The Quest of Sangreal* and elsewhere is more interested in the dispute between King Mark and Sir Tristram, which he explored in a series of letters with Lewis.²³

Lewis had his own approach to Arthur, making him heroic whilst still respecting the role he plays in the legend as formed by the majority of previous writers.

He ignores Arthur as a character and instead explores Arthur as a title and an idea in *That Hideous Strength* (1945), the last part of his science-fiction trilogy. In that text, Arthur has long since left the earth, to live on Perelandra (Venus) with ‘with Enoch and Elias and Moses and Melchisedec the King’ – a Judeo-Christian version of the afterlife Wace gives Arthur with the elves, which Lewis once wrote a poem about. But Lewis is not interested in this version of Arthur, besides a passing reference in which he speculates about the historicity of the legend. Instead he focuses on Arthur’s title, Pendragon, making it a name that can be passed down generations. Elwin Ransom, the hero of the previous two books in the trilogy, is the 79th successor of the Pendragon title. The role of a Pendragon is to keep the moral, Godly spirit of ‘Logres’ alive against the encroaching evil, individual-crushing ‘Britain’. One of the characters in *Strength* who helps Ransom do this is Merlin, who has reawakened from a long secret sleep, and his subservience to Ransom as the Pendragon establishes Ransom as Arthur’s true successor.

²³ *C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield, Mark vs. Tristram: Correspondence between C. S. Lewis and Owen Barfield* (Cambridge, Mass: Lowell House, 1967).
In Ransom Lewis preserves some of the qualities he admired in King Arthur. When Jane Studock meets Ransom for the first time:

She had (or so she had believed) disliked bearded faces except for old men with white hair. But that was because she had long since forgotten the imagined Arthur of her childhood – and the imagined Solomon too. Solomon – for the first time in many years the bright solar blend of king and lover and magician which hangs about that name stole back upon her mind. For the first time in all those years she tasted the word king itself with all linked associations of battle, marriage, priesthood, mercy and power.

Ransom’s appearance recalls the idea of Arthur to Jane, and from that the essential nature of kings… similar to how the lines ‘Balder the beautiful / is dead, is dead’ evoked the idea of ‘northerness’ to a young Lewis, as he recalls in Surprised by Joy.\(^{24}\) Lewis may not have liked Arthur’s character – bloodthirsty at worst, boring at best – but he can appreciate the idea of kingship promoted figure. However, he is also uncomfortable about relying too heavily on Arthur as the representative of this idea of kingship. Arthur is soon pushed out of the description by Solomon. This is also true of Ransom’s title; even though he is the Pendragon, this Pendragon title didn’t originate from Arthur, but was inherited by him from Uther and Cassibelaun.\(^{25}\) In addition, Ransom is not only titled the Pendragon, but also called Mr Fisherking. The Fisher King is another Arthurian character, who is wounded, as Ransom is, and reigns over the Wasteland in the Grail story. But Ransom is not entirely the Fisherking either; the Fisherking is usually wounded in the legs or groin, whereas Ransom is wounded in the heel, following God’s command in Genesis 3:15 that the serpent shall strike Eve’s offspring on the heel. So Ransom is Arthur. But he is also the Fisher King. And in another sense he is just a man, bitten on the heel like any other son of Eve.

We can observe something similar in the Narnia series. In some ways they owe a great debt to the Arthurian legend. Fiona Tulhurst argues that Prince Caspian is Arthurian


because the relationship between Caspian and Repicheep embodies Arthurian chivalry; Cor from *The Horse and his Boy* resembles Tor from the Arthurian legend, who is also raised as a poor boy, unaware of his royal heritage; and the Dolorous word in *The Magician’s Nephew* resembles ‘The Dolorous Stroke’ of the Arthurian Wasteland.\(^{26}\) *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* has been singled out as particularly Arthurian – Margaret Blount said it had ‘a strong Arthurian odour’ (she must have a good sense of smell) – because it is said to be a version of the Grail Quest. In my opinion, the most important Arthurian element of the *Narnia* series is also the most obvious:

> […] when the Pevensie children had returned to Narnia last time for their second visit, it was (for the Narnians) as if King Arthur came back to Britain, as some people say he will. And I say the sooner the better.\(^{27}\)

Why ‘the sooner the better’ if Lewis had problems with Arthur as a character, and seemed reluctant to use him in his texts? I began this talk by saying that most Arthurian writers aren’t just writing *about* Arthur; they’re writing *through* Arthur as well. If we believe the same is true for Lewis, his attitude to Arthur makes more sense. The Pevensie’s visit to Narnia in *Prince Caspian*, described in this quotation, brings the inhabitants of Narnia back to the open worship of Aslan. The comparison to Arthur therefore suggests that Arthur’s return would bring people in our own country back to Christianity. Ransom performs this role in *That Hideous Strength*, both by being on a higher spiritual level than the other characters – he corresponds to what Lewis calls ‘the new men’, who show us what we can become if we follow Christ – and by helping defeat the work of Satan in the novel.\(^{28}\)

As for the confusion about who represents what in Lewis’s writing, and to what extent his characters are versions of Arthurian characters, the best explanation might be found from

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\(^{28}\) See C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, ch. 11.
Tennyson, who was asked whether the three queens at the end of *Idylls of the King* represented ‘faith, hope, and charity’. He said:

They are right, and they are not right. They mean that and they do not. They are three of the noblest of women. They are also those three Graces, but they are much more. I hate to be tied down to say, ’This means that’ because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation.29

Lewis loved images. But he also thought *with* them. And his thoughts within his images are always more than any one interpretation.

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