



That Hideous Strength with Dr. Junius Johnson

Lesson 3: That Hideous Strength

Outline:

In this last story in Lewis's trilogy, Dr. Johnson offers nuanced insight for drawing students into this admittedly challenging modern fairytale for grownups.

- Unlike the other books in the trilogy, this setting takes place on our planet in very common surroundings.
- Of all Lewis's work, this book is the most abandoned by readers.
- From the start, the married couple is portrayed as distant from one another.
 - Mark is caught up in rising through the hierarchy of academia which makes him a target for continual suspicion.
 - Jane struggles to complete her dissertation having given up on a domesticated life and is lonely with her husband away.
- The NICE organization Mark gains influence in is a modern representation of the Tower of Babel and the outpost of evil in the story.
- Meanwhile, Jane begins to have visions and she is led to a community headed up by Ransom, the headquarters of the forces of good.
- While the distance between them continues to grow, their stories are adjacent to the central battle in the story between good and evil.
- The NICE is concerned with "rehabilitating" people as they see fit while making others indebted to them.
 - They make no promises, yet they make it hard to leave them.
- Mark is eventually taken on assignment where his senses begin to stir.
- Meanwhile, Jane is taken to see Ransom who is referred to as The Fisher King and the Pendragon.
 - Both are titles from Arthurian legend and important to Merlin's decisive role in resolving the plot.
- Mark finally comes to a real point of decision.
 - He recognizes the criminal nature of it, but hardly notices giving his consent.
 - The feeling of belonging "makes men do very bad things before they are yet individually very bad men."
- Jane is finally taken to meet Ransom and is firm in her feminist convictions.
 - One look at Ransom and "her world was unmade."
 - He is gripped with pain, yet shot through with tranquility.
 - He is youthful in appearance, yet strong in presence.
 - She is unable in herself to make sense of what sees or once held for truth.
- Even still Jane desires to stay but must seek her husband's approval first.



- Lewis is addressing a view of marriage not beholden to modern conventions.
 - The principle is not whether students agree but that they understand the proper role of submission and authority as a picture of the relationship of the soul to God.
- By the time Merlin appears in the story, he's distraught at how the world has changed and lost all its proper authorities.
- Just as Merlin despairs of hope, Ransom describes the mistake of the NICE in that their hideous strength has broken the one frontier and let in the celestial powers.
 - Their own strength has betrayed them.
 - They pulled down deep heaven upon their own heads.
 - They overreached and forfeited their claim upon earth.
- There is a transformation that results for Jane and a moment of conversion for Mark and the book ends with their emotional and physical reunion.