

Research Scholars and Rebel Angels: Faustian Drama and the Modern University in Novels by C.S. Lewis, Simon Raven and Robertson Davies

Rowland Cotterill
Independent scholar

Abstract: In novels by C.S. Lewis, Simon Raven and Robertson Davies, universities are depicted as plausible, and theologically over-determined, settings for battles between cosmic forces, good and evil – battles foreshadowed in earlier “Faustian” dramas and involving “middle spirits”, ambiguously poised between gods and devils, as they relate to humans. Human desires for knowledge, creativity and personal freedom, arguably the consequences of a theologically definable (and perhaps fortunate) “Fall”, are shown to be institutionally entrenched in (Anglophone) universities and caught up in socially recognisable and “modern” contradictions. They are seen also, and to that extent plausibly, as offering opportunities for diabolic agencies whose effects take shape, within the outworkings of apparently human projects, as a set of systematically unintended, and tendentially disastrous, consequences. Representations of such conflicts, and of their violent consequences, vary, between the three novelists under discussion, in terms not only of the writers’ personal creeds and convictions, but also of social plausibility and diverse modes of narration and emplotment.

Keywords: universities, angels, devils, Fall, Faust, projects

In this paper I shall discuss three novels – C.S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*, published in 1945; *Places Where They Sing*, by Simon Raven, published in 1970; and Robertson Davies’s *The Rebel Angels*, published in 1981. At these respective times of publication, Lewis was a Tutor of English at Magdalen College, Oxford, Raven was a successful freelance author of novels and of plays for radio and television, and Davies was Professor of English Literature and Master of Massey College in the University of Toronto.

In the context of a discussion of these novels as “academic fictions”, it is relevant to indicate their authors’ connections with academic life and work. Lewis’s

undergraduate studies had been in classics and philosophy; his widely acclaimed academic publications were largely in the field of medieval literature. He was a conspicuous figure within his college, but would soon be an unsuccessful candidate for an elective university post, the Professorship of Poetry. Raven, a brilliant classics scholar of King's College Cambridge, never wrote a word of his projected doctoral thesis, joined the regular Army but later resigned on account of gambling debts, and was maintained by his publishers on the conditions of his living at a distance from London and producing publishable fictions every couple of years. Davies, mainly educated in Canada, gained his only academic qualification, a B.Litt. in the field of Elizabethan theatre, at Oxford near the end of the interwar years; after two years as an actor at the London Old Vic, he returned to Canada, where he edited and largely wrote a major city newspaper, the "Peterborough Examiner", before being invited to lead a new, small and originally all-male postgraduate college.

Given such varied careers, it is also relevant to consider the novelists in terms of the relations between these specific texts and the writers' overall outputs and beliefs. For Lewis, academic publication had, by 1945, become somewhat overshadowed by the writing of Christian apologetics; *That Hideous Strength* was the third in a series of science-fiction novels sharing such apologetic ambitions. Raven's *Places Where They Sing*, for its part, is the sixth in an ambitious sequence of ten novels, *Alms for Oblivion*, charting changes in English society from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s. Davies's *The Rebel Angels* was the first in a sequence of three, *The Cornish Trilogy*. Lewis was a convinced and militant Christian, orthodox in beliefs and romantic in feeling. Davies saw himself as having moved from his childhood indoctrination into a dour Presbyterianism through an adult fascination with the teachings of Carl Jung. Raven, a rebel against public school Anglicanism, professed to combine respect for the moral teachings of Jesus with a violent dislike of Christian institutions and a positive acceptance of the "pagan" values – the brevity of life, the finality of death, and the supremacy of personal pleasure and honour.

These novels have attracted very little academic discussion – in Raven's case, virtually none. Much writing about Lewis and, to a lesser extent, Davies has been biographic or hagiographic. With very few exceptions, which shall be noted, the criticism of specifically academic fiction has passed them over; certainly they have never been drawn together within the sub-category which in this paper I shall outline and develop. This category could appropriately be termed "the-

odrama", insofar as it involves a sequence of relationships between superhuman and human agents. Such relationships were pre-eminently the focus of two major dramatic works, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Goethe's *Faust*, and I shall touch on features of those works which are salient to the arguably "Faustian" novels under consideration here.

First one may set out the premises shared by these three fictional texts. It is no accident that a major pioneering study of academic fiction, Ian Carter's *Ancient Cultures of Conceit* (1990), was written by a professional sociologist; for the terrain of representation, in such fiction, has been taken to be that of a set of institutions defined by human agencies and demands, collective and individual. The novels analysed here proceed upon a rather different basis. Within them, academies and universities are the contexts, plausible and indeed over-determined, for spiritual conflict that is potentially "apocalyptic", in both its violence and its theological significance. Such conflicts involve battles between angelic and diabolic forces, which cannot always be distinguished clearly from one another. To these battles can arguably be traced, in the opinions of the two alternating narrators of Davies's novel, the very origin and continued existence of universities. More generally, for all three novels, contemporary academic developments amount to new episodes in an ancient and protracted spiritual warfare.

For the purposes of Lewis's and Davies's fictions, this warfare began in a double Fall, of humanity and, before that, of "rebel angels". This Fall was, for angels and for Lewis's scenario, only partial, but, for humanity, universal though perhaps not complete. In Davies's novel the Fall is regarded as fortunate, leading to outcomes creative, educative and unpredictably diverse. For Lewis, fallen humanity, though redeemed by the birth and death of Christ, seems still bound in sin. Such sin typically takes the forms of possessive greed, material ambition, and solipsistic pride, all endemic for Lewis even or especially within traditional universities. For Raven's purposes, God may exist but has largely abandoned His human creatures, leaving them a few tokens of His presence, in nature, in culture and in morality.

For Lewis, the medieval Christian foundations of universities seem largely obliterated by modern developments, social and intellectual, in such fields as finance, architecture and disciplinary frontiers. For Davies, more optimistically, a new university college with an ancient name ("The College of St John and the Holy Ghost", nicknamed "Spook") conducts its young research scholars towards new levels of intellectual, emotional and spiritual awareness through the

intermediary workings of figures whom he calls “rebel angels”, some human some superhuman. *Raven*, within an ostensibly less supernatural framework, depicts an ancient Cambridge foundation, Royal and religious, which he names “Lancaster College”, as it attempts a purely secular adjustment to new, revolutionary and potentially violent demands voiced by staff and students. The college is defended by a diverse group, again of students and staff, seeking to uphold precarious human standards of intellect and culture, personal honour and sheer hard labour.

All three novelists organize their narratives around projects which are humanly plausible in the contexts of mid-twentieth-century Anglophone universities. These include projects for new academic subjects, for increases in student intake, and for the rectification of grotesque imbalances of numbers and of perceived power in gender relations. They especially relate to the erection, or the expensive restoration, of buildings which are aesthetically pleasing, architecturally trendy, or scientifically necessary. Such projects, in the course of the novels, acquire spiritual significance and narrative volatility from the presence, within the universities, of angelic and diabolic agencies. Such agencies enact, through the self-delusions of human individual and administrative planning, their own cosmic and perhaps providentially guided warfare and “theodrama”.

Within this framework, it is worthwhile to look more closely at three general issues. I shall consider, first, the terrain of university life, within which this “theodrama” finds a congenial site for enactment; secondly, the nature and the participating agents of this theodrama – and here the parallels with Faustian dramas are relevant; thirdly, issues of narrative representation and emplotment to which the cosmic scope of the novels gives rise.

First it is instructive to compare various diagnoses, within these texts and derivable from other comparable academic novels, of the nature of contemporary university life. One might well wonder whether conditions were such as to offer credibility, not to say warranty, to claims about the operation of supernatural agencies. Two points will at once become clear. First, Lewis and Davies deploy their own pre-existing concerns, theological and narratological, in depicting the university contexts which appear in their novels (the case with *Raven* is more nuanced and complex). Second, the explicit supernaturalism informing Lewis’s text generates a representation of university and college life scarcely, if at all, more pessimistic than that which appears both in *Raven*’s overtly secular novel and in the analysis of academic fiction offered by the

avowedly secular sociologist Ian Carter (to whose book I have already alluded). In this respect it is Davies whose depiction of contemporary collegiate life offers an optimistic alternative.

For Carter, writing in 1990 with awareness of the three novels under discussion here, English universities, old and new, were in a fraught and barely sustainable situation. They were dominated by outdated and inappropriate reverence for Oxbridge institutions and mores. Many of them taught outdated curricula setting supreme value upon ancient languages and early-modern philosophy. In others, ideas of syllabus change were driven by merely fashionable valorisation of “social sciences”, and by inadequately-considered notions of “interdisciplinarity”. The ostensibly practical and vocational fields of law, medicine, and theology were dominated by self-protective professionalism. Elitist and Arnoldian ambitions to educate and lead an otherwise “philistine” national culture rang hollow alongside arbitrary and ineffectual opposition to political and social currents demanding radical change. The governance of universities was ambiguous, as between centripetal and centrifugal institutions – administrative and executive officers on the one hand, colleges and departments and (newly) Faculties and Schools on the other. In consequence there was endemic tension between the forces of national policy and the impacts of local and civic pressure, and between State, local authority, and family as the sources of educational funding and student maintenance. The intake of English universities was, in proportion to the overall population, small, and selected on prejudicial grounds. Arrangements for accommodation were outdated and divisive. Existing gender imbalance in individual institutions and in the student body as a whole was indefensible. Social relations, partly in consequence, were frequently repressive and generally unstable – relations between teaching staff and administrators, staff and students, and (the most common theme of academic fiction) staff and staff. Universities were thus characterized (these are my terms, not Carter’s) at once by fragmentation and petrification. Something, or many things, had gone badly wrong.

Compare with this some remarks by the temporarily-omniscient narrator of Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*, near the centre of the novel;

Despair of objective truth had been increasingly insinuated into the scientists; indifference to it, and a concentration upon mere power, had been the result [...] Dreams of the far future destiny of man

were ragging up from its shallow and unquiet grave the old dream of Man as God. There was now [...] a real chance for fallen man to shake off the limitation of his powers which mercy had imposed upon him as a protection from the full results of his fall. If he succeeded, hell would at last be incarnate. (1945, 3)

Davies's novel, both in continuity with Lewis's terms and in sharp contrast to Lewis's tone, offers this diagnosis;

Adam and Eve had learned how to comprehend the Kingdom of the Father [...] and their descendants have been hard at it ever since. That's what universities are about, when they aren't farting about with trivialities. (1983, 4)

The balance of judgements here, and the supernaturalist framework of the two novelists, are amply in evidence in an earlier text, which also anticipates Lewis and Davies in its conception of the human and supernatural agents predictably operative within a university context – Goethe's *Faust*. In this grandest and most subtle of university fictions the protagonist, already a proto-modern marvel of interdisciplinary virtuosity, exhibits a restlessness with all acquired knowledge, which is characteristic of the Biblical Adam and Eve;

Well, that's philosophy I've read,
 And law and medicine, and I fear
 Theology too, from A to Z,
 Hard studies all, that have cost me dear.
 And so I sit, poor silly man,
 No wiser now than when I began [...]
 And I see all our search for knowledge is vain,
 And this burns my heart with bitter pain.
 (Goethe 1987, 15, ll. 354-60, 364-65)

The oscillations of Faust's restless moods incur, or invite, the intervention of a devil, Mephistopheles. He leads Faust from his gloomy Gothic study into an adventurous quest for the knowledge and experience, intellectual and erotic, cultural and social, with which Faust might construct, from and amidst a fallen

world, a new self-conscious and aspiring human community. For such a community, Davies's maxim might be appropriate;

The striving for wisdom is the second paradise of the world. (1983, 6)

Faust's career, across the two parts of Goethe's vast drama, never quite abandons the context and the trappings of an intellectual prestige and charisma rooted in the institution of a university. Nor does Faust ever quite put off the naivety of a career intellectual in face of the ways of a world where Mephistopheles is inextricably at work. Faust charms and consoles Gretchen with the rationalisations of "modern theology". He impresses the Emperor with classical learning, with a parade of alchemy and with the skills of Renaissance stagecraft. To a Euripidean Helen of Troy he teaches the prosodic skills of medieval and Romantic verse-construction. Once rewarded, by the Emperor, with new terrain for building works, he projects an ecologically invasive intervention upon hitherto-unplanned natural sites. Such a career, however far it is inflected by Mephistophelean malignity, is also recognisable in terms of what has subsequently been perceived as academic modernity.

A linkage between these notions, pertinent to an understanding of the agencies at work in the novels of Lewis and Davies, was articulated by William Empson in his posthumously-published study of another Faust-drama, that of Marlowe; he wrote of

[...] a strong intellectual belief in Middle Spirits, neither from Heaven nor Hell [...] [this belief] gave a tolerable picture of the pagan gods [...] for any study of Nature, at the start of the sciences, it was essential to be allowed a belief in spirits who were neutral. (1987, 99-100, 104)

Empson, passionately anti-Christian and seeking to associate Marlowe to this persuasion, regarded Mephistophilis, in *Doctor Faustus*, as a stage embodiment of just such a Middle Spirit. Marlowe's Faust, accordingly, would be, despite his fears of Christian damnation, neither damned nor saved but dissolved, rather like Shakespeare's Ariel, into the elements. By contrast but perhaps no less obscurely, Goethe's Faust is saved, by a very non-interventionist God and by the pleading of repentant women, into an unexpectedly Catholic (and catholic) Heaven.

The situation for Lewis's characters is less ambiguous and highly polarised. His scientific technicians, together with a radically modern post-Christian priest, and led by administrators both vapid and inhuman, are overwhelmed by the supernatural forces which their own tamperings with diabolism have let loose. These forces are also provisionally entrusted to the more benign hands of a magician, the resurrected Merlin, equipped with his own resources of "pre-Atlantean magic". Such magic is potentially indifferent in its nature, like Empsonian Middle Spirits, but capable of damaging even its own well-intentioned users. The positive protagonist of Lewis's thriller, the academic linguist Ransom, must, accordingly, be extracted from the worlds of human and of academic "nature" by which he can no longer be appropriately, or safely, contained. His followers, some of them fellow-linguists, mourn his departure; but the collegiate institution, initially hospitable to the devil-worshipping intellectuals, and effectively destroyed by Merlin's powers, can and will be put back together again, in all its dubious potentialities.

Ransom remarks that such agents as Merlin

weren't ministering spirits sent to help fallen humanity, but neither were they enemies preying upon us [...] Merlin is [...] the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our point of view, confused. (Lewis 1945, 351)

In Raven's novel, the nearest equivalent of such spiritual forces is a character named Mayerston, described as a "revolutionary". He is unattached to the focal intellectual institution of "Lancaster College, Cambridge" (aka King's College), but wields hypnotic and destructive power over the brilliant Lancaster English student, Hugh Balliston, who is Raven's anti-heroic protagonist;

Hugh [...] was drawn on and upwards into a blue empyrean that had no end, until he was hanging there in space [...] supported only by the [...] infinitely reassuring clasp of Mayerston's soft hands. The hands released his [...] he started to fall, very fast, from what must surely be an immense height. (Raven 1970, 150)

For the quasi-Faustian Hugh, Mayerston represents a quasi-Mephistophelean figure – a plausible notion in view of the aerial travels assigned to the Fausts

of both Marlowe and Goethe. The “middle spirit” of Davies’s novel is more explicitly named; he is John Parlabane – a speaker of harm, a persuasive orator, an apostolic witness to both good and evil,

as slippery-tongued, as entertaining, and sometimes as frightening
as the Devil himself [...] (Davies 1983, 205)

and thus, like Goethe’s figure, one who partly seeks evil and always generates good.

The deliberate ambiguities, which I have discussed, within the representation of the possibly supernatural agents of these three novels are carried through in the domain, to which I now turn, of narrative emplotment. Prominent here, above all, is the motif of “unintended consequences”. This motif is, of course, already in play within the theological scenarios of the Fall (considered as an outcome of defensible intellectual curiosity) and of Redemption (considered as a self-defeat for forces of evil, human and supernatural). Thus Lewis’s protagonist Ransom explains to his followers that the scientists pitted against them had, to some extent knowingly and purposefully, invoked the devilish forces who secretly governed our fallen planet Earth; they had thereby provoked intervention and rescue by angelic Powers.

If of their own evil will they had not [...] let in the celestial Powers, this would be their moment of victory. Their own strength has betrayed them. They have gone to the gods who would not have come to them, and pulled down Deep Heaven on their heads.
(Lewis 1945, 363)

In Raven’s story, of a malign but humanly intelligible challenge to collegiate institutions and property, more recognisable motivations, and more numerous agents, play determining roles. The heroine Hetta loses her boy-friend Hugh to Mayerston’s hypnotic skills, and to Hugh’s self-imposed demands and desires for recognition and leadership. The college Council debates, with deliberate delaying tactics, proposals both revolutionary and conservative for expenditure upon building projects. Hetta is led into a new love-affair – with a biology professor, Balbo Blakeney, foul-mouthed and irreligious but a passionate champion of medieval architecture and Renaissance music.

At the novel's violent climax, it is their affair, and alliance, which defends from destructive assault the East Window of the college's Chapel, in effect the world-famous chapel and musical establishment of King's College Cambridge. Raven presents this chapel as the symbolic embodiment of a sustainable and hard-won worldly spirituality. A crucial defensive role is also played by a History don, Tom Llewellyn. His untypical background in popular journalism empowers him with a charisma and a communicative style which are capable of redirecting, for good, the amorphous energies of popular protest. Meanwhile Fielding Gray, successful novelist and spoiled college Scholar, allows himself to be dragged away to ignominious safety by his lover – Raven, here as throughout the *Alms for Oblivion* sequence, presents an unheroic version of himself. Thus a large number and a wide range of projects, encountering one another, lead to a contained explosion of violence, accompanied by a sense of much remaining business still unresolved.

In Davies's novel, complex relationships are set up between five major characters; and the projects of these characters are variously focussed around the disposition of a large property, the "Cornish Bequest", left at his death by a former collector of paintings, curios and rare manuscripts, Francis Cornish. (The two subsequent novels in Davies's trilogy fill out the narrative of Cornish's own life and of the eventual effects of the bequest.) Three characters are tenured academics – Hollier the "historical anthropologist", McVarish the Renaissance historian and "virtuoso" in objets d'art, and Darcourt, who is a theology professor, a priest, and one of the two internal narrators of the story. The other two characters are or have been research scholars. One is Maria Theotoky, the other narrator (her surname is taken to mean "God-bearer"), an ambitious student of Rabelais and of his putative links with Paracelsus and practitioners of alchemy. The other, already mentioned, is John Parlabane, formerly an unproductive though brilliant research student, more recently a spoiled monk. Maria loves and/or wants sex with her supervisor Hollier. Parlabane tempts her towards his own besetting scepticism and intellectual despair. Darcourt turns his own desire for her into Platonic love. From the materials of the Bequest, McVarish, under cover of an unchallenged lie, steals an alchemical manuscript coveted, by Maria for her work, and by Hollier as a tool of purely professorial dominance over her. In due course, Parlabane is found to have killed McVarish, secured the stolen manuscript as a quixotic offering for Hollier and for Maria, and killed himself. Hollier is led to see, in the double death, an outworking of his own proprietorial

greed and of his hatred for McVarish. Darcourt withholds the manuscript from Hollier, reserving it instead as a gift for Maria on the occasion of her marriage to a mercifully non-academic character, the young financier Arthur Cornish, nephew of the dead Francis.

In the subsequent novels, alchemy yields place, as a privileged site of quasi-supernatural forces, to painting and to music-drama. Insofar as the “rebel angels” of the first novel – the forces empowering characters defined as scholars and intellectuals – continue their operations, these are shown to generate artistic rather than scholarly activities. Such activities are morally somewhat dubious; they include the creation, in 1939, of a quasi-Renaissance painting, and an unfinished German romantic opera provided with a pastiche-like completion, at once innovative and ironic. The implication is that such ambiguous but creative work befits the energies, at once critical and positive, of a contemporary university. Davies’s *Rebel Angels*, in keeping with the rest of the trilogy, develops an open-ended moral perspective upon the narrative outcomes traced within it. Its alternating narrators, Maria and Darcourt, both face their own limitations, in clarity and honesty, and are each shown indirectly to be the fields of spiritual conflict, rebellious and/or angelic – conflicts which continue, through different narrative agents and subjects, in the two subsequent novels.

By contrast, Lewis’s novel closes a trilogy in whose earlier volumes the nature and powers of angels and devils are very sharply distinguished. The first and second volumes of the trilogy display those powers as they affect both Earthly humans and the rational inhabitants of other planets (Mars and Venus – “Malacandra” and “Perelandra”). The battle between good and evil forces in *That Hideous Strength* amounts, in turn, to a concentration, within an earthly setting, of a set of narrative agencies and projects which in their essence are not earthly but, so to speak, interplanetary. By contrast, the novel’s main human centres of consciousness are a relatively innocent and even passive young couple – Mark, an ambitious and over-pliable sociologist, and Jane, an English Ph D student trying to resume work on her thesis on John Donne. Their marriage is nearly destroyed. Mark’s career plans lead him, without much more than naive acquiescence on his part, into the heart of scientific and technocratic darkness. Jane’s unusual power of veridical dreaming, meanwhile, is seized upon, at first against her will, by the Christian academics and intellectuals grouped around Ransom. Through her, and by Ransom’s own angelic powers, the magician Merlin, already resurrected, is recruited for goodness and equipped with “Middle-

-Spirit"-like energies for the undoing of evil. But since neither Jane nor Mark is equipped with any project whose fulfilment, or reversal, might be central to the novel's structure, neither of them is positioned so as fully to grasp what, in their adventures, is truly at stake. Hence their awarenesses need to be amplified by much authorial comment, largely devoted to a clarification of the nature of the superhuman agencies at work.

This authorial comment guarantees, for the novel's moral compass, an extreme lack of ambiguity, certainly by comparison with the nuanced stagings of events arranged by Raven and Davies. Yet what is lost in ambiguity is perhaps gained in force, particularly in Lewis's portrayals of the ambitious and short-sighted dons of "Bracton College". It is their projects to raise the profile of their academic institution which give leverage to the more consciously diabolical administrators of the "National Institution of Co-ordinated Experiments" and to their plans for a dehumanised world. In turn Lewis achieves great brilliance in the representation of the two leaders of the "NICE". One is John With-er, whose endless circumlocutions deliberately aim at meaninglessness and are eventually turned, by Merlin's powers, into gibberish. The other is Augustus Frost, whose "Augustan" insistence upon extreme verbal clarity conceals from himself his drive towards suicide. The endless velleities, the would-be clarifications and the mutual back-biting of university professors and administrators have rarely been so devastatingly depicted. Yet, for this triumph of satiric style, Lewis's novel pays a price in terms of social plausibility. While the scientists and administrators become mutually unintelligible, the allies of the good angels are allocated no institutional embodiment, little discernible agency (as they themselves complain) and no powers of self-maintenance. They are left merely to remember their leader Ransom as he, literally, ascends into the heavens. It is strange that Lewis's "Bracton College", for all its antiquity, lacks any chapel, any priests, and any defenders of Christian faith. It offers no redemptive site for any of its present employees - still less for their totally invisible students.

The action of Raven's *Places Where They Sing* offers a strong contrast to the novels of Lewis and Davies, in its complex narrative mode and in the plausibility of its social representations. It is propelled by the actions and the inertias, the desires and the formulated plans of a very large number of characters, each marked out convincingly by styles of diction and rhythms of conversation. It concerns a potential redistribution of college funds and assets, into architectural and educational projects both traditional and aggressively modernising. These pro-

jects recognisably embody debates about planning and regulation taking place, within and beyond universities, during and after its time of writing. The novel stands, within Raven's sequence of ten, as a central and exemplary case. It embodies an encounter, between an undeserving but tenacious and over-privileged older generation and their younger and impatient heirs and prodigal children, emblematic of Raven's sense of the England in which he wrote. Raven's sense of himself as an exemplary "case" is relevant here. He saw himself as exhibiting the reverse pattern, a glamorous traditional scholarly career frustrated, or creatively corrupted, into the life-style of a successful, up-to-date, and scandalous popular novelist. This conception can be felt to determine many local emphases and lasting images within the text. And it is this sense of centrality, of a particular college to a general national condition, which comes to determine, within the narrative, another mode of centrality; that which pertains, vis-a-vis the college, to its natural physical setting, and to the architecture and institutions of its chapel.

In an early set-piece of ephrastic narrative, the heroine Hetta walks, from her lover's modern student accommodation, through the full extent of the college grounds, transparently recognisable as those of King's College. She passes initially alongside "Scholars' Meadow" – a small but beautiful mini-landscape, partly uncultivated but also, it is believed, carefully tended by an "unknown gardener". The unknown gardener is, in fact, a perhaps-absent God; arguments centred on the notion of the Christian God as an unseen but inferable agent in affairs natural and human frequently centred, during debates in the 1950s and 1960s, around a parable of an "unseen gardener". Hetta strolls on, passing college buildings more and less ancient, until she reaches the college's front court – where her lover's revolutionary and socialist principles encourage her to avert her eyes from what, ultimately, she finds herself drawn to admire and even adore; the college's chapel. It is the chapel which rather unexpectedly becomes the chosen target of the unwashed and untaught revolutionaries, of town and gown, in the novel's concluding scene. This scene is set up by Raven's bold appropriation and metamorphosis of a major and still continuing institution of Anglophone cultural and spiritual life, the King's College Christmas Eve carol Service. Shifted in the novel by six months, this becomes Lancaster College's midsummer Madrigal Sunday.

At the cost of her life, Hetta defends and preserves the honour of the chapel and of its royal and Christian founder (Henry VI). Her worldliness, not to say her sexual enthusiasms, are found to be compatible with, rather than opposed

to, such spiritual loyalty. In an earlier radio play, entitled *Sir Jocelyn, the Minister Would Like a Word*, Raven had voiced, through another college professor, a nuanced acceptance of the charismatic power of something hidden, precluded from direct representation or explicit narrative agency; and such power is, already in this play, located in a college chapel.

[...] essential knowledge [...] is never readily available [...] [it] is the knowledge of first and last things [...] the mystery from which came the immensity of the galaxies and the tiny seed of man. Such things are to be found in no lecture room [...] and in no chapel. But at least a chapel invites attention to the existence of the mystery [...] The priest in your chapel will tell a lot of foolish lies; but he will remind you that there is something which you do not understand. (Raven 1966, 442)

Raven's allusions to, and invocations of, the structures of "theodrama" as embodied in the novels of Lewis and Davies, are covert. But they acquire, one may feel, greater plausibility through the emphatically worldly concerns and discourse of the characters in *Places where they sing*. By comparison, again, with those novels, Raven's writing also stands out in its refusal totally to marginalise, as they do, the concerns and agencies of undergraduate students. As J.P. Kenyon noted long ago (the observation remains valid at least for English academic fiction), "Hugh Balliston is one of the few credible students or undergraduates in the whole genre [...] He is even seen doing some work, something surely unique" (2007, 90).

Now in the tenth and final novel of Raven's sequence, entitled *The Survivors*, Lancaster College chapel still stands; the college is still threatened by unregenerate students and by its own corrupt or self-serving Fellows; but Hugh Balliston also makes a surprising guest appearance. He has seen the error of his former ways. He has become a monk. One could ask whether his assignment by Raven to such a vocation, or fate, amounts to an unexpected vote in favour of Christianity or of explicit supernaturalism. Some hesitation, and some critical comparison, would be appropriate here. Lewis offers strenuous authorial comment on the moral neutrality or otherwise of "Atlantean magic". Davies's learned academics pontificate about orthodox and unorthodox theology concerning "rebel angels". Raven remains content, at the climax of *Places Where They Sing*, to note a certain

similarity, of style and content. This is the similarity between the religious slogans directed, by a revolutionary crowd, against endemic academic corruption, and the secular sermonising, by which Tom Llewellyn holds that crowd at bay, targeted against lazy critiques of academia. On the one hand, Mayerston leads

[...] a series of violent denunciations of the church, the clergy and the entire academic establishment, which was still associated with them. Every denunciation was framed like the verse of a psalm [...]

On the other hand, with reference to Llewellyn's heroically improvised sermon,

[...] the hell which he spoke of was of this world, the hell of envy and sloth, and the salvation which he offered was also of this world, by grace of intelligence, truth and hard work. (Raven 1970, 213)

Simon Raven could appropriately have staged himself in his novel as a John Parlabane, exiled from the pleasures of academic life and working enviously to dismantle the false aura and charisma associated with them. Equally he could have inserted himself as a "rebel angel", operating to redeem, despite itself and its failings, the status and the functioning of a traditional and still-beloved college and university. Shrewdly avoiding these paths of representation and of critique – paths less cautiously embraced by Lewis and Davies – he notes, as in their measure Lewis and Davies also do, the difficulty of drawing distinctions, in issues of academic life and in academic fictions, between good and evil agencies. To this extent Raven, in his novel, demonstrates his adherence to the lineage of "Faustian" academic fiction, and offers an example of such fiction which merits more analysis, and more commendation, than it has received.

The critical significance of the three novels under discussion here lies in their depiction of academic life as pervaded, in its origin and of its very nature, by supernatural powers and agencies. It would not follow that the professional academic characters in these novels, or in others resembling them, should be seen as definitively or consciously either diabolic or angelic. Rather, as has been suggested, their academic projects, whether intellectual or more obviously careerist, expose them to failures of self-recognition which, imbued as they are by professional prestige and hybristic rationality, they may be unusually slow to identify. In this respect, also, the figure of Faust stands as an important and recognisable

precedent. The general point here, upon which it is appropriate to conclude, is enunciated memorably in two utterances by Shakespearean characters, each of them morally ambiguous – Angelo and Malcolm;

Let's write "good angel" on the devil's horn.

'Tis not the devil's crest. (*Measure for Measure* 2.4.16-17; Shakespeare 1997, 88)

Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell. (*Macbeth* 4.3.22; Shakespeare 1997, 934)

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