



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 35
Number 1

Article 7

10-15-2016

Literary Dependence in the Fiction of C.S. Lewis: Two Case Studies

Thomas Schmidt
Independent Scholar

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schmidt, Thomas (2016) "Literary Dependence in the Fiction of C.S. Lewis: Two Case Studies," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 35 : No. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol35/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>

SWOSUTM

Online Winter Seminar

February 4-5, 2022 (Friday evening, Saturday all day)

<https://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/ows-2022.htm>

Online Winter Seminar



Online Winter Seminar

The Inklings and Horror: Fantasy's Dark Corners

February 4-5, 2022 (Friday evening, Saturday all day)

Via Zoom and Discord

Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico; July 29 - August 1, 2022

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>

Abstract

Source-hunters on C.S. Lewis must deal with what James Como called his “alchemical imagination”—his tendency to act like medieval writers who “were in the business not of inventing new material but of transforming existing material.” Schmidt tabulates parallels in Lewis’s writing to two particular sources: David Lindsay’s *A Voyage to Arcturus*, which Lewis acknowledged as a major influence, and V.A. Thisted’s *Letters From Hell*, which he claimed to his friend Arthur Greeves he couldn’t get through and gave away after trying to read only once.

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S. The Great Divorce—Sources; Lewis, C.S. Space Trilogy—Sources; Lindsay, David. *A Voyage to Arcturus*—Sources; Thisted, V.A. *Letters From Hell*—Influence on C.S. Lewis



LITERARY DEPENDENCE IN THE FICTION OF C.S. LEWIS: TWO CASE STUDIES

THOMAS SCHMIDT

NUMEROUS WRITERS QUOTE C.S. LEWIS'S STATEMENTS that David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus* inspired him to make planetary travel a vehicle for spiritual pilgrimage. A handful of writers credit V.A. Thisted's *Letters from Hell*—or at least its title—for inspiring *The Screwtape Letters*. It appears, however, that few writers have read either book, or we would expect to find more comment about Lewis's extensive and specific borrowing from them. While more than a dozen books, medieval to modern, have been cited by various writers—including Lewis himself—as source material for his interplanetary novels, the neglect of these two important sources calls for correction.

This article will show Lewis's substantial use of narrative details from Lindsay and Thisted to help frame his own very different ideas. I will contend that Lewis was in the first case indifferent to, and in the second case unconscious of, his dependence on the two earlier works. Because indifference may imply culpability to some readers, I will end with some observations about originality and attribution in medieval writing and how Lewis applied that understanding in his own fiction.

In order to evaluate the character of Lewis's use of sources, one must first consider in detail Lewis's dependence on Lindsay and Thisted in Lewis's planetary novels, the aborted novel "The Dark Tower," and *The Great Divorce*. It is in the context of this dependence that I comment on the lack of attention paid to these books by other writers and address the issues of originality and attribution on the part of Lewis.

C.S. LEWIS AND SECONDARY LITERATURE

Writers about Lewis's fiction have produced more than a hundred monographs and dissertations that extemporize on Lewis's work—often with profound insight—but few analytical treatments that attempt a comprehensive account of his literary and historical antecedents. In the case of *Voyage to Arcturus* (henceforth VA), despite Lewis's open acknowledgement in both letters and publications of the book's influence, Lindsay's work receives no mention whatsoever in dozens of treatments of Lewis's fiction, mere passing reference in dozens more, and no more than a paragraph or two in the few writers who give

evidence of having read Lindsay at all. In the second case, *Letters from Hell* (LH), I can find only three sources that offer details of its influence on Lewis—one two sentences in length, another one sentence. The scarcity of Thisted's book and its relevance to *The Great Divorce* (GD) rather than *The Screwtape Letters* (SL) may help to explain, but not to excuse, its almost total neglect on the part of Lewis scholars.

LEWIS'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF DEBT TO LINDSAY

The data presented here constitutes only a case study that a Lewis scholar may incorporate in a broader treatment. *A Voyage to Arcturus* is hardly the sole or even primary source for the Ransom books. A thorough treatment would examine H.G. Wells's *First Men on the Moon* and the "scientism" of J.B.S. Haldane's *Possible Worlds* and Olaf Stapledon's *First Men*, all of which Lewis cited in the same letter as influences just after finishing *Out of the Silent Planet* (OSP; *Letters* [L] II 236-237). In past issues of this journal, Robert Boenig discusses correspondences in Wells; Douglas Loney observes that Lewis "systematically raided" (14) E.M. Forster's stories "The Other Side of the Hedge" and "The Celestial Omnibus" for OSP and GD; Charles Huttar finds dependence on Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the opening scenes of GD. These are only a few near-contemporary examples; Lewis also borrowed material from a host of older sources, from medieval writers to Milton.

Although Lindsay's book was published in 1920, Lewis read it much later. He first mentions VA in two letters to Arthur Greeves, the last dated December 1935, when Lewis was seeking a copy (L II 151, 170). In December 1938 he recommends the book to Roger Lancelyn Green (L II 236). He must have read VA during 1936, no more than a few months before he started writing OSP in 1937. Curiously, while Lewis mentions VA in the 1938 letter to Green, he does not describe it as an influence on the just-completed OSP.

In what sense, and to what extent, did Lewis acknowledge his debt to Lindsay? The few references are all quite general. The first attribution occurs in 1944, when Lewis acknowledges that

The real father of my planet books is David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus* [...]. [Lindsay] first gave me the idea that the 'scientifiction' appeal could be combined with the 'supernatural' appeal [...]. [H]e showed me what a bang you cd. get from mixing these two elements. (L II 630)

In the 1947 essay "On Stories," Lewis praises Lindsay:

His Tormance is a region of the spirit. He is the first writer to discover what 'other planets' are really good for in fiction. [...] To construct

plausible and moving 'other worlds' you must draw on the only real 'other world' we know, that of the spirit. (98)

A 1947 letter asserts that "from Lyndsay (sic) I first learned what other planets in fiction are really good for: for *spiritual* adventures [...] My debt to him is very great" (L II 753). In 1953, Lewis writes that Lindsay "first suggested to me that the form of 'science fiction' cd. be filled by spiritual experiences" (L III 314). The 1955 essay "On Science Fiction" refers to Lindsay's book as "shattering, intolerable, and irresistible" (66). Finally, in 1963, Lewis writes regarding the books that "influenced" his stories, "The first impulse came, I believe, from H.G. Wells. More important was David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*" (L III 1433).

Attention to the sequence of events requires reference here to Lewis's unfinished novel known as "The Dark Tower" (DT), which was significantly influenced by VA. Internal evidence indicates that this undated manuscript was begun in 1938 as a sequel to OSP. *Perelandra* (P) was not published until 1943, and we do not know precisely when it was begun. It may be that DT was set aside because P emerged as a better story. It is also possible that the darkness of the war, together with the spiritual battle involved in the writing of *The Screwtape Letters* (SL), contributed to DT's abandonment. In any case, DT is clearly among the Lewis works that exhibit dependence on VA.

ELEMENTS OF *VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS* IN LEWIS'S FICTION

In order to facilitate ease of reference (including later attribution to previous writers who have noted specific parallels), I will number the distinct elements of correspondence between VA and OSP, P, and DT, respectively. In most cases I offer only page references or brief descriptions of the parallels; where the extent of the correspondence is noteworthy, I quote both authors.

Parallels to *Out of the Silent Planet*:

1. In *Voyage to Arcturus*, the journey to the planet Tormance is taken by three characters, one of whom is the protagonist Maskull (11-30). In *Out of the Silent Planet*, the journey to Mars is taken by three characters, one of whom is the protagonist Ransom.

2. The organizer of the VA trip, Krag, is immediately characterized as evil and violent (9-10), and he becomes an evil force on the new planet. Weston, who leads the expedition in OSP, is immediately characterized as evil and violent (6-7).

3. Maskull can travel freely to Tormance "with no encumbrances" because he has "neither wife, land, nor profession" (13). Ransom "has no wife

[...] or anything of that sort" (12); he "came alone [...] left no address [...] has no family [...] will not be missed" (15).

4. The three travelers in VA begin with a seven-mile hike through "wild and lonely" country (16); Ransom in OSP begins with a six-mile hike through "uninhabited [...] desolate" country (2).

5. The rural location for the travelers to Tormance is the Starkness Observatory (13). In OSP, Ransom hikes to the village of Sterk (1).

6. When the VA travelers arrive at Starkness, they find the buildings "shut up and deserted," and no one responds to their knock (17). Ransom arrives at the Rise, which appears "shuttered [...] lifeless and inhospitable," and no one responds to his ring (5).

7. Behind the Starkness house is a dark tower seen against "the black sky [...] glorious with liquid stars" (23). Behind the Rise is "a huge round shape that rose black against the stars, which he took for the dome of a small observatory" (6).

8. The towers in both stories turn out to be the means of transport to the new planet.

9. At Starkness, "the house and the shop were separated by an open yard, littered with waste" (17). At the Rise, the house was approached over "a width of untidy neglected lawn" (5).

10. Inside, the Starkness house is "indescribably filthy and neglected [...] broken utensils and rubbish lay on the floor instead of on the dust heap, everything was covered with a deep deposit of dust" (17-18). The interior of the Rise is "uncarpeted and strewn with packing-cases, shavings, newspapers and boots [...] litter [...] covered the tables" (10).

11. Amid this squalor, the three men in each story discuss their impending journey while sipping whiskey (VA 20, OSP 11).

12. The men in both stories travel naked aboard the spacecraft (VA 28, OSP 20).

13. The protagonist Maskull is rendered unconscious for the space journey (30), then awakes to commence his journey alone on a new planet (31). Ransom is drugged and regains consciousness during the space journey (17); after he escapes his captors, he commences his journey alone on a new planet (45).

14. To Maskull, the scenery of Tormance is at first difficult to understand except as "dim shadows" (31) which emerge into "rosy" tints of "scarlet" sand and "purple" vegetation (31-32). Ransom, upon arrival on Malacandra, looks out the hatch at "colours that refused to form themselves into things" until he discerns "pale pink" ground, and "rose-colour" or "purple" vegetation (40-42).

15. When Maskull begins to note terrain details, he sees slopes “clothed [...] with little purple trees from base to summit” (34). When Ransom begins to note terrain details, he sees trees as “a purple mass” (42).

16. The Tormance landscape includes a river below a line of cliffs “from five to six thousand feet high. The lofty, irregular, castellated line seemed like the walls of a magic city” (65). The Malacandrian landscape consists of a river valley flanked by “the serrated bastion of immeasurable tablelands” and “jagged walls [...] which he could still hardly call mountains, so tall they were, so gaunt, sharp, narrow, and seemingly unbalanced” (63).

17. Twice in Maskull’s journey through Tormance, he must clamber up perilous cliffs and enter a cave in order to find characters who can enlighten him (48-55, 172-178). Ransom must make the dangerous ascent toward the Malacandrian surface to learn from the sorn Augray (93-96).

Parallels to *Perelandra*:

18. When Maskull first ascends the tower toward the spacecraft, he is “compelled to pause, to gain breath. [...] As he proceeded, the sensation of crushing weight [...] grew worse and worse. It was nearly physically impossible to go on” (23). As the narrator at the beginning of P approaches Ransom’s rural cottage, he encounters a mysterious “sort of invisible wall of resistance that met me in the face, fighting for each step” (15).

19. Maskull does not understand his desire to visit Tormance (16) but comes to believe it must be for an end “beyond his own purposes” (61); later, a disembodied voice whispers, “Don’t you understand, Maskull, that you are only an instrument, to be used and then broken?” (24). Ransom admits not knowing why he is going to Perelandra (23), struggles with his purpose through most of the narrative, concludes that it has something to do with opposing Weston (82), and finally finds clarity when a disembodied voice says, “It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom. [...] My name also is Ransom” (147-148).

20. Before the journey to Tormance, the evil Krag slashes the arm of Maskull, who feels it as “an awful agony, emanating through the wound [...] through Maskull’s body”; later, he “felt nothing but a gnawing ache [...] just strong enough to make life one long discomfort” (27). Ransom is bitten in the heel by Weston (187, 30-31, cf. Gen. 3:15); the debilitating nature of this injury is developed later, in *That Hideous Strength* (141-142, 367).

21. Soon after his arrival on Tormance, Maskull meets a young lady “clothed in a single flowing, pale green garment” (32). Soon after his arrival on Perelandra, Ransom sees and then meets the Green Lady (53-55).

22. Joiwind, VA’s lady in green, is an “angelic” beauty: “tall and slight. All her movements were graceful as music. Her skin was not [...] like that of an earth beauty, but was opalescent” (32). The Green Lady is “a goddess” (54, 64);

“grace was in all her movements” (76) and she is “[b]eautiful, naked, shameless, young” (64); before her Ransom is “overwhelmed” and “unnerved” (59-60).

23. The “clean soul” (41) of Joiwind is revealed in her face: Maskull “seemed to see right into a soul that was the home of love, warmth, kindness, tenderness, and intimacy. Such was the noble familiarity of that gaze, that he thought he knew her” (32). The face of Perelandra’s Green Lady reveals a glance “full of love and welcome” (54); “Never had Ransom seen a face so calm [...] a calm which no storm had ever preceded” (56).

24. As Maskull speaks with Joiwind, “Her gaze was so friendly and unembarrassed that Maskull felt scarcely any humiliation at sitting at her feet, naked and helpless” (32). The Green Lady is so unselfconsciously pure and good that Ransom feels “ugly” in his own nakedness, and “All through this part of the conversation he found it difficult to look higher than her feet” (62).

25. During their conversation, Joiwind reveals to Maskull that she has a husband, Panawe, who is far away, and no children (33). The Green Lady reveals to Ransom that she is the original but as-yet childless Mother of Perelandra and separated from her King, who is on another island (66).

26. Maskull expresses amazement that Joiwind knows something of “Surtur—or Shaping” [God of Tomrance]; she

remained silent for a time, studying his face. [...] “I see . . . and yet I don’t see,” she said at last. “It is very difficult Your God is a dreadful Being—bodyless, unfriendly, invisible. Here we don’t worship a God like that. Tell me, has any man set eyes on your God?” [...]

[Maskull observes:] “In ancient times, when the earth was young and grand, a few holy men are reputed to have walked and spoken with God, but those days are past.”

“Our world is still young,” said Joiwind. “Shaping goes among us and converses with us. He is real and active—a friend and lover. Shaping made us, and he loves his work.” (40)

Later, Joiwind speaks directly with Shaping (40). Ransom is awed to learn that the Green Lady receives communications directly from Maleldil (61): “At this point she clapped her hands and a smile such as Ransom had never seen changed her. [...] ‘Maleldil is telling me’”(61); the Lady knows that her world is young (67) and that she is gradually learning Maleldil’s purposes, knowledge of which makes her “older” (60-67).

27. Maskull’s conversation with Joiwind is interrupted by their encounter with a “remarkable plant [...] a large, feathery ball [...] which they encountered sailing through the air” (38). Joiwind instructs Maskull not to eat it, but shortly after she introduces him to a fountain of “gnawl water” which “affected his palate in a new way—with the purity and cleanness of water was

combined the exhilaration of sparkling wine, raising his spirits" (43). Later in his travels, Maskull encounters a flock of pale blue jellies floating in the air, which he ate "just as one eats a luscious pear plucked from a tree. [...] A sort of electric vigor at once entered his limbs and body, his muscles regained their elasticity, his heart began to beat with hard, slow, strong throbs" (105).

Ransom encounters "bubble trees" on Perelandra that burst, drenching him with a "shrill, exquisite scent" and "such [...] refreshment that he seemed to himself to have been, till now, but half awake" (47).

28. Maskull affirms Joiwind for praying and says, "God and Devil must exist. And we should pray to the one, and fight the other." To his shock, she responds, "Yes, we must fight Krag [...] the author of evil and misery – whom you call Devil" (41). Ransom gradually becomes aware that Weston is possessed or identified with the Devil, and that he must physically fight him (143).

29. Joiwind's husband Panawe explains why beings on Tormance look like those on earth: "All creatures that resemble Shaping must of necessity resemble one another" (48). The Green Lady tells Ransom that "in your world Maleldil first took Himself this form, the form of your race and mine. [...] Since our Beloved became a man, how should reason in any world take on another form?" (62).

30. When Maskull is mystified that "men here are ignorant of tools and arts, and have no civilization, and yet contrive to be social in their habits and wise in their thoughts," Panawe responds that "love and wisdom [do not] spring from tools [nor are we] obliged to call in the assistance of stones and metals. That is by no means a sign of superiority" (56). In OSP, Ransom observes the same superiority in simplicity on Malacandra, whose Oyarsa comments on technology: "It is the Bent One, the lord of your world, who wastes your lives and befouls them with flying from what you know will overtake you in the end. If you were subjects of Maleldil you would have peace" (OSP 152).

31. Another of Maskull's guides, Oxeaxe, summons a dragon-like "shrowk" upon which the characters fly to the top of the tableland (72-74). The Green Lady summons giant tadpole-shaped fish to transport her and Ransom to the Fixed Island (77-78); later the same species of fish carry Weston and Ransom (158-171).

32. Maskull kills a man and carries the corpse over rough terrain, across peaks and chasms where "underneath were the black, impenetrable abysses" (90). Ransom embarks on a perilous subterranean journey on Perelandra during which he dispenses with the Unman in the abyss (172-184).

33. Maskull's evil guide Tydomin offers him a kind of possession to tie their bodies together and explains: "There are many such beings, even in your world. [...] They are in reality living wills, deprived of material bodies. [...] Are you noble-minded enough to accept such a state?" (92). Ransom gradually

comes to understand that Weston's body has been taken over by Satan, subjugating the scientist's spirit until it becomes a nonentity, or perhaps only Weston's body survives. At one point he declares, "I, Weston, am your God and your Devil. I call that Force into me completely . . ." (96).

34. During Maskull's corpse-carrying trek, he encounters "countless reptiles and insects [...] some of them were of enormous size. One monstrous insect, as large as a horse, stood right in the center of their path without budging. It was armor-plated, had jaws like scimitars, and underneath its body was a forest of legs" (90). When Ransom is crawling through Perelandra's caves, a giant insect follows him with "a shell-helmeted head [...] a huge, many legged, quivering deformity, standing just behind the Unman" (181).

35. Late in his journey, Maskull encounters his evil nemesis Krag, who snatched an egg from him and "flung it against a tree trunk, where it broke and stuck, a splash of slime." Krag comments, "Say, is there a filthier sight than a smashed pleasure?" (229). Ransom comes upon the Unman Weston methodically eviscerating frogs and wearing "a devilish smile" which "seemed to summon Ransom [...] into the world of its own pleasures," of "whole-hearted evil" (108-111).

36. In a three-way debate between Maskull, Gangnet, and Krag, Maskull becomes enraged and Gangnet advises, "Keep your temper [...] [T]here's only one way of making him lose his hold, by ignoring him. Despise him—say nothing to him, don't answer his questions. If you refuse to recognize his existence, he is as good as not here" (230). In a three-way debate between Ransom, the Green Lady, and the Unman, Ransom is enraged by the Unman's rhetorical powers and breaks in: "Don't listen to him [...] send him away. Do not hear what he says, do not think of it" (113).

37. Floating islands are introduced late in VA. Each is "lozenge-shaped, and about fifteen feet from end to end. It was composed of a sort of light brown peat" (231); one of these transports the characters over a lake or river for the book's closing scenes (230-243). Large floating islands are the major feature of terrain in P. An island "behaved like a mat of reeds on a river [...] but [...] thirty acres or more in area" (37). The surface was "very like soft wood" (39) and "something very like heather, except for the colour which was coppery" (40).

38. The dialogue continues on the floating island until Gangnet leaves the scene and Krag kills Maskull (230-235). The dialogue on the floating island continues in P, but eventually the Green Lady leaves the scene and Ransom physically battles the Unman, finally killing him (140-182).

Parallels to “The Dark Tower”:

39. *Voyage to Arcturus* opens with a scene viewed by the characters on a stage (5). In DT, the view through Orfieu’s chronoscope is described as a stage (30-31, 36).

40. The stage scene in VA is described as a temple, including a “gigantic seated statue of the Pharaoh,” “a fantastically carved wooden couch [...] before the pedestal of the statue,” and “a plain oak armchair obliquely placed to the auditorium” (5). The chronoscope in DT reveals a temple scene, including “a squat pillar surmounted by a curious idol,” “a high step [...] across the room [...] formed a kind of dais” placed at an angle to make its visible to viewers “the chair in which the Man was seated” (30).

41. In order to establish proof from this world, Maskull is shown a small instrument—“the diameter of the glass did not exceed two inches”—by means of which he views Arcturus and Tormance (14-15). In order to establish proof from this world, the characters in DT are shown a small instrument—“only about the size of a man’s fist”—by means of which they view Othertime.

42. A figure appears to the viewers in VA at which “the company stared in sick horror” because “the seeming man was *dead*, but somehow [...] like a death preliminary to life. All felt that he might sit up at any moment” (8). The Stingingman first appears in DT “perfectly still [...] not like [...] a man asleep [...] it was the stillness of a corpse” (32).

43. When the figure in VA is animated, it opens its eyes but exhibits only “a cryptic smile”; after the character Krag strangles it, “its expression had changed from the mysterious but fascinating smile to a vulgar, sordid, bestial grin, which cast a cold shadow of moral nastiness into every heart” (10). This idiotic, fixed grin is repeated on characters throughout the novel to reveal them as spiritual deceptions (e.g. 81, 120, 220). In DT, after a young man is poisoned by the Stingingman, “His eyes were staringly open and his face wore a fixed grin” (35). Characters similarly affected appear later in the story as the Stingingman’s automaton victims.

44. The victims in the opening scenes of both stories are attractive young men.

45. The victims are silent.

46. The victims are killed by horrifying, bestial characters.

47. In the next part of VA, the launching point to Arcturus is made from “a square tower of granite masonry, seventy feet in height” (17) which the characters enter at night (23). The first view through DT’s chronoscope is a night view of “the mass of some large building. There was a square tower in the building” (26) later called “the Dark Tower” (27); this turns out to be a replica of the Cambridge University Library (46), which is square and about seventy feet high.

48. After arriving on the new planet, the character Maskull “felt something hard on his forehead. Putting his hand up, he discovered there a fleshy protuberance the size of a small plum, having a cavity in the middle, of which he could not feel the bottom” (31). In DT, when the character Scudamour is transported through the chronoscope, he discovers that he has a “sting” (63): “It was in his forehead, like a unicorn’s horn. The flesh of the forehead was humped and puckered in the middle, just below the hair, and out of it stuck the sting. It was not very big. It was broad at the base and narrowed quickly to its point” (33).

Attribution of Prior Research

A few of these 48 distinct items of literary dependence have been noted by others. Significantly, however, no writer to my knowledge actually quotes them—much less shows them in parallel to highlight the extent of dependence. Here is a catalogue of attribution for the numbered items above, listed alphabetical by author: Adey (116) devotes a clause each to 4, 12, 16, 32, and 43; Como (69) refers generally to Lewis borrowing “the very landscape” of VA for DT but specifies only “the very tower”; Downing (85) notes 5; Glover (90) mentions 41 and 48; Law describes 39, 40, 44, 45, 47, and 48; the blog author “literaryfruit” notes 1 and 27; Lobdell (56) refers to “the Rise, Ransom’s dream, and the Dark Tower” as “echoes” of VA; by far the most thorough, Sellin (104–112) devotes up to a sentence each to 12, 16, 21, 26, 27, 31, 37, 38, and 48. After eliminating repetitions, the total is 20 of the 48 parallels listed mentioned even briefly in all of the secondary literature on Lewis. Among the more remarkable omissions, not a single writer acknowledges that the opening settings of OSP and DT echo those of VA; that Joiwind is dressed in *green*; that her description, character, and conversation are so like that of the Green Lady; that Maskull’s mountain journey involves a corpse; and that Maskull receives a permanent wound. What is more surprising is that the few parallels acknowledged by the few writers are so cursorily treated.

THISTED’S *LETTERS FROM HELL* AS A SOURCE FOR *THE GREAT DIVORCE*

However scant among Lewis scholars is the treatment of VA, it is thorough next to that of Thisted’s *Letters from Hell*. The book itself is certainly obscure and was very difficult to attain until recent electronic or print-on-demand copies became available. Lewis first made reference to LH in a July 1916 letter to Arthur Greeves when he was looking for the book on Greeves’ recommendation. After much anticipation, Lewis finally acquired a copy and in October 1916 sent this assessment to his friend:

And now I must turn to 'Letters of Hell.' [sic] I suppose I must have looked forward to it too much: at any rate—I will tell you the truth—I have failed to read it, have not enjoyed it a bit and have put it away in my drawer unfinished. There! Am I fallen in your eyes forever? I don't really know why I disliked it so much, because I could see all the time that there was good in it if only I could appreciate it—which makes it all the more annoying. For one thing I expected beauties of the phantastic type, and in reality it turns out only a novel. For the parts about Hell are after all only a setting for the story of his previous life—a story which seemed to me so far as I read it supremely commonplace. The characters are all absolutely crude—wicked rich men of the melodramatic type and miraculously innocent angels of heroines. The only part I liked was the vision of paradise, which struck me as good. Still, when both you and Macdonald praise the book, I am ready to believe that the fault must be in me and not in it. (L I 236)

A month later Lewis wrote again to Greeves, "Which reminds me I am no longer in a position to take your advice about 'Letters from Hell' as we had a jumble sale for the red cross or something in 'our village' last week and I contributed this" (L I 256). What this establishes is that Lewis acquired LH during his post-*Phantastes* but pre-Christian period, gave it a cursory reading, was impressed by parts but unimpressed overall, then discarded the book a month later. There is no further reference to Thisted in his writings or published correspondence.

The Screwtape Letters was published in 1942 and GD in 1945. If there was a strong influence on either book, then, LH had to swim against the tides of memory and inattention for three decades—which included two world wars. By contrast, Lewis read VA within one or at most two years of his writing OSP, and he was openly impressed by the approach if not the themes of Lindsay's work.

Only three writers to my knowledge have commented on the dependence of *The Great Divorce* on Thisted's *Letters from Hell*. Thom Satterlee was the first to offer details, in a symposium paper which in turn credits a two-sentence reference in a previous symposium paper (Hill 20). My work extends considerably Satterlee's list of parallels, offers one important correction, and engages Satterlee's comments about plagiarism.

It should be noted that nothing in LH apart from the title suggests any affinity with *The Screwtape Letters*, nor would any reader imagine from Thisted's work a correspondence between a demonic tempter and his underling. There are in fact no descriptions of demons in LH and only brief reference to Satan near the end. Thisted regards temptation and sin as products of the human will and offers no hint of the soul as a battleground between supernatural forces. The book, in brief, is the extended lament of a damned soul who alternately intrigues

the reader with descriptions of hell and bores the reader with interminable recollections of his mundane earthly life. What interests us here are the points of contact with Lewis's work.

Elements of *Letters from Hell in The Great Divorce*

1. After introducing himself to the reader as a soul in hell, the narrator Philip finds himself walking "through mist, or darkness" toward a faint light "in the far distance, it might be some thousands of miles away," moving past "shadowy outlines of castles, palaces, and houses appearing through the mist" (5-6). In GD, Lewis initially finds himself "wandering for hours in similar mean streets, always in the rain and always in evening twilight" (1).

2. "After a while" Philip "began to distinguish human phantoms flitting along, singly at first, but soon in greater number" (5). Lewis in GD wanders for a while and then encounters a "little crowd at the bus stop" (1).

3. Philip immediately begins to engage in conversations with individuals in hell, a technique that Thisted uses to reveal the character of the lost souls (7). Lewis uses the same technique, first observing the self-absorbed remarks of those in the bus queue and then engaging in a brief exchange with one of them (2-5).

4. Philip stops in a tavern whose owner asserts, "I thought of it, and then it was. [...] We need but imagine a thing, and then we have it" (10-11); similar statements occur throughout LH (e.g. 28). In GD, a character explains to Lewis why hell continues to expand through construction: "You've only got to *think* a house and there it is. [...] You get everything you want (not very good quality, of course) by just imagining it" (12).

5. Characters in LH "appear to be doing now in the spirit the very things they did in the body upon earth. [...] [They] gamble, drink, and swear, pretending wanton merriment, despair gnawing their hearts the while" (11); in another place, "we are driven, helplessly driven, to be for ever trying to be what we were on earth" (27). This of course is the dominant theme in GD, with one character after another compelled to reject heaven due to ingrained selfish habits.

6. A ghost in LH mentions the decreasing light and impending night in hell; when Philip asks if daylight will reappear, the ghost responds, "If you call that daylight which we used to call dusk upon earth, we never get more. I strongly suspect that it is not daylight at all" (13). This theme continues later: "Light increases slowly, but we never reach further than a kind of luminous twilight" (75, cf. 340). Lewis, who repeatedly refers to hell as "the grey town" (7), encounters a ghost who worries that "It will be dark presently" and that "They" will come (13-14). Thus both books imply that the growing dark is a metaphor for final judgment, with greater suffering. Nancy-Lou Patterson notes

the fading light in LH as a possible source for GD (49); her only other reference to Thisted is a reference to the epistolary format of LH as a possible inspiration for *Screwtape*.

7. Commenting on the physical dimensions of hell, a ghost explains to Philip: "Hell has its own geography, but no one can tell how far its realm extends; it is infinite—that maybe is the most correct estimate to be given. [...] And as for boundaries?—on one side only, far, far, away, hell has its boundary; whether any one ever reached it I cannot tell" (28-29). A ghost explains to Lewis that "earlier arrivals" have "been moving on and on. Getting further apart. [...] Astronomical distances. [...] You can see the lights of the inhabited houses [...] millions of miles away" (9-10); one might reach the limit only "theoretically" (10).

8. The denizens of Philip's hell experience "a greed of desire that can never be satisfied; an unquenchable longing for things left behind" (33). For example, the ghost of a young woman "was afire with a ceaseless longing for [...] her lover [...] whom she awaited with ardent desire." When he arrives a decrepit old man, "she loathes him, but she is driven to pursue him" (116). Another woman is in hell for

her unchastened love for her husband. [...] She idolised him, forgetting everything for him, even her God. [...] [H]er love, touching as at first sight it would appear, was after all nothing but a peculiar development of selfishness, and that is why it dragged her to hell.

And in hell she continues sick of love for her husband; it was the one longing of her life, so it needs must be the all-absorbing torment of hell. (117)

Lewis encounters a similar ghost who wants to control her husband even in the afterlife: "I sacrificed my whole life for him! [...] Put me in charge of him. [...] Give him back to me. [...] What right have you to keep him from me?" (83-89). In the next chapter, a similar "loving" mother is described who craves to possess her son (90-96).

9. LH describes a number of characters who attempt to promote the arts, literature, or even theology, but really only promote themselves (57-59, 94-99, 176-178, 215-219). Lewis in GD satirizes an aspiring author (5), a theologian who commands a "little Theological Society" in hell (30-41), and a trendy artist (76-81).

10. LH includes an extended diatribe against prevailing earthly fashion in dress (87-92), and one character remarks, "And the worst is, our clothes do not even clothe us [...] we all see through each other's attire, no matter how stylish it is" (87). Lewis encounters a "well-dressed woman" whose "shadows

of finery looked ghastly" and who refuses heaven because she is horrified by her own transparency: "they'll see me" (55-58).

11. Traveling through "some outlying districts," Philip encounters Pontius Pilate, whom he finds continually washing his hands and repeating "What is truth?" (131). A ghost informs Lewis that an excursion to the outskirts of hell found Napoleon "Walking up and down—up and down all the time [...] muttering to himself all the time. 'It was Soult's fault. It was Ney's fault. It was Josephine's fault. [...]" (11).

12. Near the end of the narrative, Philip is granted a vision of the coming dawn and a glimpse into Paradise, which for him comes too late: "I felt the balmy breezes, I heard the rustle of trees, the gentle cadence of waters. It was given to me to see every perfect fruit, every lovely flower, every drop of dew reflecting the light" (246). When the bus carrying Lewis first lands in heaven, he describes the super-reality of the grass, flowers, leaves, and water (18-19).

13. Commenting on the relative size of hell in relation to heaven, Philip comments that "There are no accurate means of estimating either distance in hell, or the speed of our travels [...]. Time and space here can only be spoken of in an abstract sort of way, as existing in thought merely" (251). Lewis's guide MacDonald shows him "a crack in the soil" where "all that infinite empty town" is contained, all its evil rendered insignificant "against the least moment of joy that is felt by the least in heaven" (126).

14. Philip speculates that his wife Lily could not be happy in heaven without him, and this gives him hope that he may yet be led to salvation (341). In GD, MacDonald addresses the same issue in relation to a married couple (123-124).

LITERARY DEPENDENCE OR PLAGIARISM?

Satterlee offers details of 4, 6, 9 following Hill's one-sentence list of "ideas [from LH] that Lewis developed" (Hill 20). Patterson also notes 6 in a single sentence. Both Hill and Satterlee make reference to 12, the vision of Paradise, but Satterlee cites an earlier reference in LH (29) about a vision of souls in heaven and does not comment on its natural "ultra-realities," which I consider the more significant parallel. From these and his general observations of dependence, plus Lewis's failure anywhere to credit Thisted, Satterlee is "inclined to use the word plagiarism" [4]. Satterlee's conclusion, however, relies on Hill's mistaken assertion that Lewis owned a copy of LH. In fact, as we have seen from his letters, Lewis owned that copy for less than a month, disapproved and discarded the book, and wrote GD nearly thirty years later. How remarkable, not that Lewis failed to acknowledge his debt to Thisted—how many of us remember details of novels we didn't like after three decades?—but

that enough of its imagery remained in his mind so to infuse his own story. Even the harshest critic will release Lewis from culpability in this case.

Voyage to Arcturus is another matter, and more serious. Knowing that VA was a recent read for Lewis, and then observing dozens of similarities, the reader is struck by the quantity and detail of correspondence. Of course, one might argue that the points of contact listed here could be countered by ten times the number of divergences. Perhaps more importantly, the borrowed details are incidental compared to the themes, which are entirely different for Lewis than for Lindsay (Fisher; Kegler). Surely it matters little that there were three space travelers, a long walk to the launch site, and a dirty house. More noteworthy borrowed details, like bubble trees, the Lady's greenness, rides on summoned fish, or forehead protuberances, may diminish Lewis's inventiveness but not his insightfulness as he transforms these features to serve his thematic purposes. We must allow, further, that Lewis openly acknowledges his dependence on Lindsay and must have assumed that readers of his fiction would have read Lindsay; he clearly delved VA with no qualms.

Nevertheless, the quantity and specificity of Lewis's borrowing from a single source is problematic by today's standards for originality and attribution. The early settings of OSP and DT are blatantly derivative, and Maskull's encounter with Joiwind is strikingly similar to Ransom's with the Green Lady. We might wish for Lewis to have gone beyond general references to acknowledge his adaptation of these features of Lindsay's work. The fact that he did not do so may be explained in part by his particular field of expertise.

DINOSAUR TRACKS

As a medievalist and student of Shakespeare and Milton, Lewis was steeped in the art of literary theft. That is in fact the terminology used by his friend T.S. Eliot in an essay that Lewis undoubtedly knew well:

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better [...]. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest. (Eliot 114)

Lewis clearly applied this principle to the literature he studied. Medieval writers, he explained, "are so unoriginal that they hardly ever attempt to write anything unless someone has written it before" (Genesis 37). Their treatment of sources is "cavalier" as they transform familiar texts into conveyances for their own ideas (Genesis 36). In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis observes that medieval writers had no inkling of sources and literary property as we know them. They were in the business not of inventing new material but of transforming existing

material: "And the paradox is that it is just this abdication of originality which brings out the originality they really possess" (*Discarded* 211-12).

If the shift from object to subject is not already obvious, Lewis himself makes the connection himself in his manifesto lecture, "*De Descriptione Temporum*." In his summary, Lewis asserts that "in order to read Old Western literature aright you must suspend most of the responses and unlearn most of the habits you have acquired in reading modern literature" (24). He concludes, "Speaking not only for myself but for all other Old Western men whom you may meet, I would say, use your specimens while you can. There are not going to be many more dinosaurs" (25).

A number of Lewis scholars have noted the influence of Lewis's academic study on his own writing. Jason Fisher, for example, explains Tolkien's borrowing in terms of Lewis's articulation of medieval technique; what he writes of Tolkien is applicable to both authors: "[his] working methods and attitude toward literary construction resemble those of authors writing many centuries earlier" (33). Chad Wriglesworth, similarly, observes that Lewis writes "[l]ike a medieval compiler [who] gathers and grafts [...] images into a new state of being, reshaping pagan signs and medieval lore into an imaginative and highly accessible Christian context" (29). James Como, addressing the issue of Lewis's originality in relation to VA, puts it best:

[H]is alchemical imagination would transmute anything it and his intellect had retained if the transmutation would serve his end. [...] He was simply as unoriginal as he claimed all along—unoriginal here and there, sometimes in manner, other times in matter. But his syntheses are freshness itself, and he could write vastly better than almost any of his sources and influences. (70)

CONCLUSION

It is extraordinary that so many details of *Letters from Hell* resurfaced in Lewis's *The Great Divorce* thirty years after he discarded Thisted's forgettable book. The borrowing can only have been unconscious, but one marvels at a mind that stored photographs where most of us retain only vague impressions.

It is intriguing that so many details of *Voyage to Arcturus* appeared in Lewis's Ransom books and *The Dark Tower* soon after he read Lindsay's work. The borrowing could only have been conscious, but one wonders why Lewis publicly acknowledged only Lindsay's exemplary use of space travel as a vehicle for the spiritual journey.

The best explanation for Lewis's blithe neglect of modern notions regarding originality and attribution is his medievalist approach to writing. He understood that adaptation transforms narrative details into the inconsequential

servants of ideas, that familiarity breeds a kind of benign contempt for sources. Perhaps it is best to give Lewis himself the last word. As he put it to a juvenile reader,

[Y]ou must not believe all that authors tell you about how they wrote their books. This is not because they mean to tell lies. It is because a man writing a story is too excited about the story itself to sit back and notice how he is doing it. [...] And I don't believe anyone knows exactly how he 'makes things up.' Making up is a very mysterious thing. ("It All Began with a Picture . . ." 78-79)

WORKS CITED

- Boenig, Robert. "Lewis' Time Machine and His Trip to the Moon." *Mythlore*, vol. 7, no. 2 (#24), Summer 1980, pp. 6-9.
- Como, James. *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C.S. Lewis*. Spence Publishing Company, 1998.
- Downing, David C. *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C.S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy*. U of Massachusetts P, 1995.
- Eliot, T.S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. Methuen, 1920.
- Fisher, Jason. "Tolkien and Source Criticism: Remarking and Remaking." *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources: Critical Essays*, edited by Jason Fisher, McFarland, 2011, pp. 29-44.
- Fisher, Matt. "Maskull and Ransom: The Dark Night of the Soul." *Mythlore* vol. 14, no. 2 (#52), Winter 1987, pp. 30-31.
- Glover, Donald E. *C.S. Lewis: The Art of Enchantment*. Ohio UP, 1981.
- Hill, Richard. "The Gently Sloping, Chosen Path: C.S. Lewis's View of Hell in *Screwtape* and *The Great Divorce*." *Inklings Forever, Vol. III: A Collection of Essays Presented at The Third Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis & Friends*. Taylor University: Upland, Indiana, 2001. http://library.taylor.edu/cslewis/inklings_forever/inklings-forever-vol.-iii.shtml
- Huttar, Charles A. "C.S. Lewis's Prufrockian Vision in *The Great Divorce*." *Mythlore* vol. 22, no. 4 (#86), Spring 2000, pp. 4-11.
- Kegler, Adelheid. "Encounter Darkness: The Black Platonism of David Lindsay." *Mythlore* vol. 19, no. 2 (#72), Spring 1993, pp. 24-33.
- Law, Casey R. "A Voyage to Arcturus, C. S. Lewis, and The Dark Tower." *C.S. Lewis Web*. The Discovery Institute. 1 Sept. 1998. <http://www.discovery.org/a/882>
- Lewis, C.S. *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis. Volume I: Family Letters, 1905-1931*, edited by Walter Hooper, Harper San Francisco, 2004.
- . *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis. Volume II: Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931-1949*, edited by Walter Hooper, Harper San Francisco, 2004.
- . *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis. Volume III: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy, 1950-1963*, edited by Walter Hooper, Harper San Francisco, 2007.

- . *The Dark Tower and Other Stories*, edited by Walter Hooper, Collins, 1977.
- . "De Descriptione Temporum." *They Asked for a Paper*. Bles, 1962, pp. 9-25.
- . *The Discarded Image; an Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 1964.
- . "The Genesis of a Medieval Book." *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge UP, 1966, pp. 18-40.
- . *The Great Divorce*. Macmillan, 1946.
- . "It All Began with a Picture." *Of This and Other Worlds*, edited by Walter Hooper, Collins, 1982, pp. 78-79.
- . "On Science Fiction." *On Stories, and Other Essays on Literature*, by C.S. Lewis, edited by Walter Hooper, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982, pp. 55-68.
- . "On Stories." *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. Oxford UP, 1947, pp. 90-118.
- . *Out of the Silent Planet*. Macmillan, 1938.
- . *Perelandra*. Macmillan, 1943.
- . *That Hideous Strength*. Macmillan, 1945.
- Lindsay, David. *Voyage to Arcturus*. Macmillan, 1963. (Original London: Victor Gollancz, 1920).
- literaryfruit. "The Science Fiction of Lewis and Wells." Literary Fruit. 1 Jan. 2013. <http://literaryfruit.wordpress.com/tag/c-s-lewis/>
- Lobdell, Jared. *The Scientifiction Novels of C.S. Lewis: Space and Time in the Ransom Stories*. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004.
- Loney, Douglas, "C.S. Lewis' Debt to E.M. Forster's 'The Celestial Omnibus' and Other Stories." *Mythlore* vol. 21, no. 1 (#79), Summer 1995, pp. 14-22.
- Patterson, Nancy-Lou. "Letters from Hell: The Symbolism of Evil in *The Screwtape Letters*." *Mythlore* vol. 12, no. 1 (#79), Summer 1985, pp. 47-57.
- Satterlee, Thom. "C.S. Lewis as Plagiarist: Some Grey Areas in the Grey Town." *Inklings Forever, Vol. IV: A Collection of Essays Presented at The Fourth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis & Friends*. Taylor University: Upland, Indiana, 2004. <https://library.taylor.edu/dotAsset/05d44404-cecc-4cce-ab95-fd92604d1034.pdf>
- Sellin, Bernard. "Journeys Into Fantasy: The Fiction of David Lindsay and C.S. Lewis." *A Christian for All Christians: Essays in Honor of C.S. Lewis*, edited by Andrew Walker & James Patrick, Hodder & Stoughton, 1990, pp. 98-115.
- Thisted, Valdemar Adolph. *Letters from Hell. Given in English by L.W.J.S. With a Preface by George MacDonald, LL.D.* Richard Bentley & Son, 1888.
- Wriglesworth, Chad. "Myth Maker, Unicorn Maker: C.S. Lewis and the Reshaping of Medieval Thought." *Mythlore* vol. 25, no. 1 (#95/96), Fall/Winter 2006, pp. 29-40.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

THOMAS E. SCHMIDT (PhD Cambridge University) recently retired after thirty years of teaching humanities. His latest publication is *Approaching the Bible as Literature* (Cascade Books, 2016), and his web site is nottuimpress.com.