

tolkien influence

on

C.S. Lewis

PILAR SAN JOSÉ

GREGORY STARKEY



he close friendship which Tolkien and Lewis shared throughout their lives was born of their literature and was nourished throughout by it — a tie which brought the two men together in close collaboration, as the following quote from Kilby testifies:

"I don't think Tolkien influenced me [C.S. Lewis], and I am certain I didn't influence what he wrote. My continued encouragement carried to the point of nagging influenced him very much to write at all with that gravity and at that length.

"In other words, I acted as a midwife, not as a father. The similarities between his work and mine are due, I think, (a) to natural temperament, (b) to common sources. We are both soaked in Norse mythology, Geo. MacDonald's fairy tales, Homer, *Beowulf*, and medieval romance. Also, of course, we are both Christian (he as a R.C.)"¹

Lewis clearly asserts here that their friendship and intellectual affinities aided their mutual literary dedication, but he denies that there was any direct interference from one author to the other. He accepts the idea of his having encouraged Tolkien as a kind of literary 'midwife'. We, however, would like to carry our assertions further, and take it from the standpoint of Tolkien rather than Lewis, who, *in the purely chronological order of composition*, was the first, and would therefore have influenced Lewis rather than vice versa.

Our theory goes a good deal further than admitting to a 'common source' as the sum total of their sphere of influence, which is what some critics have suggested:

The name of Tolkien is so linked with Lewis that one wonders whether he exercised a shaping influence. The similarities in their writing are obvious enough; both are creators of other worlds. But what different creators they are! Both men were committed Christians, but Tolkien is as stern in excluding explicit Christianity from his imagined world as Lewis is eager to admit it. Tolkien functions more in an archaic world of sagas; Lewis proclaims a fairy-tale that is also Christian truth. Doubtless the two men stimulated each other, but one sees little evidence of decisive influence in either direction.²

While not denying that the worlds they created are vastly different, as Prof. Walsh points out, there are so many items in Lewis' work that recall Tolkien's, that it would seem to

[1] Kilby, C.: *Tolkien and the Silmarillion*, Aslan Lion Publishing, Bristol, (1976), 1977, p.76.

[2] Walsh, C.: *The Literary Legacy of C.S. Lewis*, Sheldon Press, London, 1979, p.13.



be begging the question not to consider such similarities as an influence—which in the foregoing quotes has been denied of both authors. To support our theory, we shall proceed to investigate the lexical similarities, the thematic structure in both authors, and finally the characters of Ransom and Frodo, which bear a likeness that cannot be lightly dismissed.

1. Tolkien's influence upon Lewis' vocabulary

Kilby gives us the following information about the borrowing of terms from Tolkien, some admitted to by Lewis, others only mentioned by Tolkien:

He [Tolkien] mentioned that Lewis 'borrowed' from him. I pointed out that Lewis had acknowledged the borrowing of the word 'Numenor', but Tolkien insisted that there were unacknowledged 'echoes' in Lewis. In a letter to Jared Lobdell, Tolkien mentioned 'Eldil' as one example, also 'Tinidril' as a composite of his 'Idril' and 'Tinúviel'.

(K, p.76)

In addition to this testimony, the following items of vocabulary from Lewis show obvious similarities in the work of Tolkien:

NIMROD, which appears in *That Hideous Strength*,³ bears a considerable resemblance to Tolkien's **NIMRODEL** in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*.

ELWIN, which means 'the friend of the eldila', according to Lewis in *Perelandra*,⁴ is the name given to Ransom in *Venus*. This shows a parallel with the case of Frodo, who is at times spoken of as the 'Elf friend'.

THE DARK LORD is used both by Tolkien and Lewis, in the latter with reference to the supreme representative of evil in *That Hideous Strength* (HS, pp.244 and 212), and by the former to refer to Sauron throughout *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

THE DARK AGES occurs in Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*, while Tolkien had used it previously, together with other variants, in *QS* and *LotR*.

UNMAN, the compound which means 'the undoing of man', is applied to Weston in *Perelandra* when he is possessed by the power of evil. The same compound type gives rise to **UNLIGHT** and **UNGOLIANT** in Tolkien, referring to the destruction of light in *QS* and to the power which emanates from the evil being.

The onomatopoeic form "Boom-ba-ba-ba-boom" (P, p.211), representing the noise Ransom hears when he comes out of the cavern in *Perelandra*, is similar to the noise of drums that the Fellowship hears when crossing the Mines of Moria (another enormous underground cavern) in *LotR*: "Doom-doom-doom".⁵

Finally, we must not forget the solution provided by Tolkien to the problem of communication by peoples of different languages — i.e., the 'Common Speech', a kind of Esperanto for all the inhabitants of Middle-earth. We also find a common language in *Perelandra*, 'Sornus', spoken by people of different races as well as their own native language, a device too obvious to neglect as deriving from Tolkien's original.

2. Tolkien's ideas reflected in Lewis

In the field of ideas we find that both authors express their own ideas with identical symbolic techniques. Taking up the idea of language, we find that in Tolkien it is the 'Orcs' that destroy the language, and so are considered incapable of moral integrity. In Lewis it is the followers of evil who turn the language inside out and so corrupt it that it no longer serves as a basis for communication. Tolkien maintains that nothing belongs to the Orcs, not even their language, the 'Black Speech' which Sauron invented when he perverted the language of the Elves (a variety of Quenya); as they were incapable of producing on their own a beautiful dialect, or at least a decent one, they corrupted its original phonetic structure and reduced its polysyllabism to cutting guttural sounds. Its grammar so deteriorated by simplifications that a language of ambiguous phraseology arises where communication itself becomes impossible. Tolkien says concerning Sauron's languages:

Orcs and Trolls spoke as they would, without love of words or things; and their language was actually more degraded and filthy than I have shown it.⁶

Lewis takes the degradation of language to the extreme point where Merlin's magic makes communication in English completely impossible, producing such phrases as

The madrigore of verjuice must be talhibianised. (HS, p.218.)



[3] C.S. Lewis: *That Hideous Strength*, Pan Books, Ltd., London & Sidney, (14th impression) 1976, p.176. (Henceforth abbreviated as HS.)

[4] C.S. Lewis: *Perelandra*, The Bodley Head, London, Sidney, Toronto, (10th impression) 1970, p.224. (Henceforth abbreviated as P.)

[5] J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings*, George Allen & Unwin, London, (one-volume paperback edn., 16th impression) 1976, p.347. (This edition referred to here as 'LotR'.)

[6] J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Return of the King*, George Allen & Unwin, London (1955), (4th impression) 1976, p.383.

We shall not till we can secure the erebation of all prostudinary initemes. (HS, p.219.)

Everyone realizes the lack of communication, increased by the shouting — all reminding us of one of the meetings of the Orcs.

Concerning evil itself, in Tolkien evil is externalised and manifested in the lack of respect and destruction of Nature, seen especially in the turmoil in the countryside. The chapter entitled 'The Scouring of the Shire' in *The Return of the King* illustrates this effect to the full. Evil vents its rage on the trees without reason. This same idea is developed by Lewis in *That Hideous Strength*, when the countryside begins to be attacked:

By that time the big beech had been cut down. At last Cecil did get Mr. Busby, who said there must be some misunderstanding... All the poplars are going down... (HS, pp.48-49.)

Between 'The Scouring of the Shire' and *That Hideous Strength* we can find many parallels. Evil, always cowardly, takes it out on the weak, imprisons without reason, and throws people out of their homes.

Another feature which shows a possible influence by Tolkien on Lewis, is their use of the riddle. Both Lewis and Tolkien gave some importance to it, basing their theories on the popularity of the riddle among the Anglo-Saxons. They both use it to construct plot in their books. In itself it may hold a prophetic function in Tolkien (*LotR*), foretelling the future in cryptic form, as, for example, when Bilbo recites a poem in Rivendell which alludes to the fact that Aragorn will be king.⁷

Besides the prophetic function, there is that of fomenting action to discover the true meaning of the words — as in the case of Boromir, who leaves his country to find out the meaning of the riddle he has dreamed about.⁸

In Lewis the riddle has the same objective: it anticipates the future in code, but it is a prophecy for those who understand it, and it encourages its readers to discover the meaning of the riddle. An example of the first is the riddle which foretells that the Pevensys will be Kings of Narnia:

When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone
Sits at Cair Paravel in throne
The evil time will be over and done.⁹

And an example of the second is,

Make your choice, adventurous Stranger;
Strike the bell and bide the danger,
Or wonder, till it drives you mad,
What would have followed if you had.¹⁰



[7] All that is gold does not glitter
Not all those who wander are lost;

Renewed shall be blade that was broken:
The crownless again shall be king.
(*LotR*, p.265.)

[8] Seek for the sword that was broken:
In Imladris it dwells....
(*LotR*, p.263.)

[9] C.S. Lewis: *The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe*, (1950), Penguin (Puffin), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1975, p.76.

[10] C.S. Lewis: *The Magician's Nephew*, (1955), Penguin (Puffin), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1975, p.50. (Henceforth abbreviated as MN.)

3. Ransom, a new Frodo

We consider Ransom, in Lewis' science fiction novels, to be a new Frodo. Both Frodo and Ransom are involved in an adventure without their initial consent. Frodo finds himself caught in the adventure because he is Bilbo's nephew and heir, and the Ringbearer. Frodo asks himself, "Why was I chosen?";¹¹ and quite by chance Ransom finds himself in the company of two old friends, who get him involved in the adventure by force.¹²

Both Frodo and Ransom understand that they are not exceptionally intelligent, and it is because of that that they have been chosen. Gandalf tells Frodo to listen carefully to the explanation he is given for the reason he has been chosen:

"Such questions cannot be answered... You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess; nor for power or wisdom at any rate." (*LotR*, p.75.);

while Ransom tells Lewis,

"Don't imagine I've been selected to go to Perelandra because I'm anyone in particular. One never can see, or not till long afterwards, why any one was selected for any job."
(*P*, p.25.)

Both Frodo and Ransom suffer injuries in the adventure. Frodo loses a finger which Gollum bites off. Gollum is one of the Hobbits, though his body has turned into something quite ugly because he has succumbed to the seductive power of the enemy Ring. Ransom also gets bitten, by one of his own race. Weston bites his heel when he [Weston] loses his human form and adopts a frightening new shape because he has offered up his body to the spirit of evil which uses him and changes him.

Frodo and Ransom do not recover from the bite of evil, and every now and again the pain in the parts that have been injured returns to plague them.



Neither of them is affected by the passing of time, either. Frodo does not grow old, just as Bilbo before him is not affected by time. The reason for this phenomenon is the possession of the Ring: time stands still for the person who holds it. After his adventures on the other planets, Ransom will not grow older either. Jane, one of the principal characters of *That Hideous Strength*, is astounded by the youthful appearance of Ransom, who, at first sight, does not seem to be more than a twenty-year-old. Mr. MacPhee explains:

"That is what people are like who come from the stars. Or at least from Perelandra. He will never grow a year or a month older again."
(*HS*, p.116)

In the end these two 'heroes' share the same fate: they receive the privilege of everlasting life. Frodo embarks in the Havens on a journey to the West, leaving Middle-earth for ever; and Ransom also leaves the earth en route for Perelandra, like Frodo never to see death:

"He will be taken away, I believe. Back into deep Heaven." (*HS*, p.116.)

[11] *lotR*, p.74.

[12] Ransom himself had been taken to Mars against his will and almost accidentally.
(*P*, p.9.)

4. The Function of Music

Music has the same objective in Tolkien and Lewis, though each treats it in a different way. There is a clear division between harmony (good music) and discord (bad music). Comparing the rôles of music in the creation of *Ea* (*The Silmarillion*) and *Narnia* (*The Magician's Nephew*), we find a similar pattern. Both start with an 'enfolding' music which produces new beings as it develops. It is music inspired by a superior being, it comes from the void and is creative — the creative beings being Eru /Ilúvatar in Tolkien, and Aslan the Lion in Lewis. Tolkien has allowed the suggested images produced by the music to become real beings:

There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur... And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music... and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void.¹³

Lewis, on the same plane, also considers the creation of the world to have been prefigured by musical notes which then turn into real beings:

When you listened to his song [Aslan's] you heard the things he was making up: when you looked round you, you saw them. (*MW*, p.99.)

On the other hand it is interesting to notice the relation music has to the representatives of evil. The servants of Melkor in Tolkien's works are incapable of creating anything beautiful in any way whatsoever. With their deteriorated language it is difficult to imagine their producing ballads of beauty. The first time music appears in relation to Melkor, when he interweaves themes of his own imagining into the music of the Ainur, the only thing he manages to achieve is discord in the Choir of the Ainur. In *The Hobbit*, the goblins are absolutely incapable of bringing music and words together to produce a beautiful effect. They only manage to produce onomatopoeia and abundant monosyllables:

The goblins began to sing, or croak, keeping time with the flaps of their flat feet on the stone, and shaking their prisoners as well.

Clap! Snap! the black crack!
Grip, grab! Pinch, nab!
And down down to Goblin-town
You go, my lad!¹⁴

This same effect occurs in *The Lord of the Rings*. The servants of Sauron are ignorant of their history and tradition, and are not interested in creating or maintaining a poetic heritage to hand down from one generation to the next by means of music. Sauron's servants are only capable of a simple and more primitive music: they only know how to produce rhythm. The enemies, for both authors, are completely incapable of producing harmony; so, when Ransom's enemies sing, the result is similar to that of the Orcs in Middle-earth. When this happens, music and words produce a horrifying effect — as in Whither, Straik and Filostrato's song when they are about to kill the latter:

Ouroborindra!
Ouroborindra!
Ouroborindra ba - ba - hee!
(*HS*, pp.228-229)

The relationship of harmony and goodness is given from different angles in each author. Tolkien speaks about the characteristics of each song before he introduces the words. He gives his readers a hint as to whether it is happy or sad, if it inspires reflection or not, and then sets forth the song itself. For example,



There he wandered long
in a dream of music that
turned into running water, and then suddenly
into a voice...

Eärendil was a mariner.... (*LotR*, p.250)

He rose and standing in the dark he began to
chant in a deep voice, while the echoes ran
away into the roof.

The world was young.... (*LotR*, p.333)

...someone was singing a song; a deep glad
voice was singing carelessly and happily,
but it was singing nonsense:

Hey doll merry doll.... (*LotR*, p.134)

In this way Tolkien builds up quite a large corpus of songs.

Lewis, however, never sets down the song itself, except on a few occasions, because he is not interested in providing a corpus of songs to supply some kind of historical proof or tradition for his works as in Tolkien. He does take care to tell us the result and effect of the music on its hearers. As a general rule when he employs music, Lewis does so to indicate that something important is about to occur. Thus not only is music used to denote the creation of *Narnia*, but music also dramatically announces its end:

Then the great giant raised a horn to his mouth... After that — quite a bit later, because sound travels so slowly — they heard the sound of the horn: high and terrible, yet of a strange, deadly beauty.

Immediately the sky became full of shooting stars...¹⁵

Similarly, in *The Silver Chair* music heralds the change to a magical world, the world of *Narnia*:

Instantly there was a quite different sound about them. It came from those bright things overhead, which now turned out to be "birds. They were making a riotous noise, but it was much more like music — rather advanced music which you don't quite take in at the first hearing — than birds' songs ever are in our world."¹⁶



Lewis is eager to point out that the music of *Narnia* has little or nothing to do with the music we understand in our world. He describes the music by its effects, but its constituents are difficult to convey, and so he finds himself obliged to describe it by its synesthetic effects in order to communicate the content in an intuitive way:

A cold kind of song, an early morning kind of

[13] J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Silmarillion*, George Allen & Unwin, London, Boston, Sidney (ed. Christopher Tolkien), 1977, p.15.

[14] J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Hobbit*, George Allen & Unwin, London (1937), (10th impression) 1975, p.71.

[15] C.S. Lewis: *The Last Battle*, (1956), Penguin (Puffin), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1975, p.136.

[16] C.S. Lewis: *The Silver Chair* (1953), Penguin (Puffin), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1975, p.19.

song.¹⁷

...the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. They were in harmony with it, but far higher up the scale: cold, tingly, silvery voices.

(*MN*, p.93.)

We should point out, however, that the allusions to music in Lewis' science fiction trilogy are not abundant, but when they occur he emphasises that the music of other planets is different from what we know as music — as at the funeral of a 'Hrossa' in Malacandra (Mars), when Ransom and those present sing in honour of Ransom's dead friend:

Lifting their heads, and with no signal given as far as Ransom could see, they began to sing... For Ransom this moment had now come in his understanding of Malacandrian song. Now first he saw that its rhythms were based on a different blood from ours, on a heart that beat more quickly, and fiercer internal heat.¹⁸

Or again, in *Pereleandra*:

Had there been any actual sound? Listening hard, he could hear nothing but the low murmurous noise of warm wind and a gentle swell. The suggestion of music must have been from within. But as soon as he lay down again, he felt assured that it was not. From without, most certainly from without, but not by the sense of hearing, festal revelry and dance and splendour poured into him — no sound, yet in such a fashion that it could not be remembered or thought of except as music. (*P*, p.121.)

In short, both Tolkien and Lewis identify the 'right side' with harmony, and the evil one with discord; they both describe the effect of songs; and both use music for similar purposes, though in completely different ways.



In conclusion, we would like to state that these few examples of parallels in the two authors seem to indicate to us a similarity in both authors' work that cannot be explained merely by suggesting a common source. When these 'borrowings' (if one may hint at this term) appear in Lewis, they do so in such a way as to prove impossible the tracing of direct parentage to the work of Tolkien, as they contain an originality and identity that is none other than that of Lewis. We consider that though there may be influences from one author to the other, the overall result is one of originality, rendering comparisons odious; though not only was there a common purpose, but also, from the evidence we have briefly set out here, a good deal more.



[MITHRIL,
continued from p.22]

have found it fit to swing two-handed — yes, and the elves had given them many fine gifts, had they not? True, the lands above the Dwarrowdelf had never been much dwelt in by men, but treasures could be hidden anywhere, could they not? This unpleasant sword, that he liked less and less as he saw more and more of it, might be but one small part of some ancient hoard that had long ago dropped down from a secret cave or delving far above.



Strength redoubled, he set to work so that he might fully expose the thing and clear his way to what might lie beyond. In his haste he blocked his passage back; no matter, a few minutes' work would clear it once more. Cryptic runes he saw, written on the broad blade, but he heeded them not. At last he lifted one last rock and revealed the thick and bulbous hilt. Disappointingly, it seemed to be of black iron, plain and unadorned apart from some markings that might be yet more of those curious runes. But he could not see it fully; somehow the further part of the hilt had wedged itself within a strangely shaped irregular and discoloured stone. Eager to have done with it, he knelt down and set his chisel against the stone; meaning to carefully cleave it away.

Thud! It was no honest rock he had struck; the least skilful delver would need no second blow to know that it was no rock. More like some damp but resistant fungus, or a blob of half-solidified pitch, or....

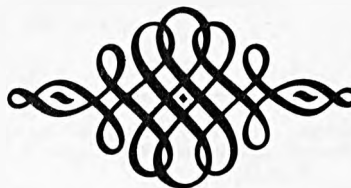
More carefully now he studied the strange 'stone'. He could make out three little furrows that ran parallel and then petered out altogether. Beyond these was another half-revealed projection and beyond this again it diminished a little; running under a stone he had not yet shifted — a thick cylindrical mass that seemed to grow thicker once more as it went. From the notch that his chisel had made some sort of dark fluid was beginning to flow; the common rock beneath it hissing and dissolving as the droplets splashed upon it. He looked back in growing alarm at the three parallel furrows; the four rounded ridges that they made could almost be.... looked almost like....

Almost like fingers.

Almost like fingers, beginning to move.

With a scream, he ran back and grabbed for his pick. Hopelessly he wished for his battle-axe — but it hung uselessly beside his bed, for who carried weapons in the heart of the Dwarrowdelf? There was no running away; in his haste to reveal the sword he had blocked the passage out. Thus he could do no more than watch in utmost terror as the thing erupted into view, scattering boulders like straw bolsters as it stood up to its full terrifying height; its mighty sword now ablaze with living fire!

Brave to the end, he made his final hopeless stand against that which was to be known as Durin's Bane — Balrog of Moria.



[17] C.S. Lewis: *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, (1952), Penguin (Puffin), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1975, p.137.

[18] C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, (1938), Pan Books Ltd., London & Sidney, (17th printing) 1975, p.152.