

Chicago, teaches the course *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, which includes Tolkien. Also, Professor Samantha Zacher teaches the course *Roots of Tolkien* at the College of Arts and Sciences of Cornell University.

The fact that some of the most prestigious Universities in the world offer courses on Tolkien clearly shows that the trend of regarding Tolkien as outside the literary canon is changing. As noted above, this change of mood within the academic world is also demonstrated by recent publications. Tolkien scholarship has had a long history, but there is a sense in academic circles that it has started afresh during the last few years. New publications, books, collections of articles and individual ones, as well as revised editions of older studies undertaken by established and newer Tolkien scholars, have set a different tone on teaching and researching Tolkien's fiction. As a result there is not only more respect bestowed upon the field, but also new analyses and approaches have appeared, enlightening Tolkien's work in fresh and unexpected ways, free from prejudices and concerns that trapped much of previous criticism within strict borders and monotonous and repetitive topics.

A student of mine once remarked that if Tolkien was to become an established canonical author, then his work would be conceived as conventional, 'literary' and – in fact – boring. Though I seriously doubt that Tolkien can ever be considered as any of these things, I understand this concern. However, teaching and researching Tolkien need not mean dissecting and labeling: it should – and it seems it does – mean illuminating, discussing, and understanding. The spread of University courses on Tolkien, or including Tolkien, shows that more and more students have the chance to share their thoughts and ideas about Tolkien's work and to enjoy his fiction.

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Commentary: A Dialogue of Worlds

Frank Wilson

In the *Klavierbüchlein* that Johann Sebastian Bach compiled for his son Wilhelm Friedemann there is a *Menuett* by Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel, for which, as a companion piece, Bach himself composed a short trio movement. Stölzel's dance is charming enough, but Bach's trio is a little gem. The counterpoint is richer, and a mere harmonic pattern in the one is transformed in the other into a simple, but exquisite melody. Because both works are miniatures, a comparison of them enables one to see at a glance something of what happens when a great artist takes inspiration from a lesser one. Bach obviously liked the Stölzel piece, and not just because he could make better use of its material. He liked it for itself.

C.S. Lewis liked David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, which he called "shattering, intolerable, and irresistible." He cited Lindsay's book as a principal inspiration for his own novels of space adventure, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. In a 1947 letter to his friend Ruth Pitter, Lewis said that it was from Lindsay that "I first learned what other planets in fiction are really good for; for spiritual adventures. Only they can satisfy the craving which sends our imaginations off the earth. ... My debt to him is very great." Lewis expanded on this in his essay *On Stories*:

[Lindsay's] Tormance is a region of the spirit. He is the first writer to discover what 'other planets' are really good for in fiction. No merely physical strangeness or merely spatial distance will realize that idea of otherness which is what we are always trying to grasp in a story about voyaging through space: you must go into another dimension. To construct plausible and moving 'other worlds' you must draw on the only real 'other world' we know, that of the spirit.

One does not have to believe in 'spirit' in the sense in which Lewis did to understand what he is talking about, any more than one needs to believe in ghosts in order to order to enjoy a ghost story. The subtle but crucial point he is making is that, in writing of 'other worlds', verisimilitude cannot be achieved merely by inventing an exaggerated version of this world. Nor can the details of that other world simply exist in order to illustrate some ideational framework. Instead, the details of that world and the ideas attached to it must derive from — embody, as it were — the details and ideas inhabiting and animating what one might call the author's own interior landscape and drama.

For the author, Lewis says, “is recording a lived dialectic.” It is that which draws the reader in and holds his attention. So in *Arcturus*, “the physical dangers, which are plentiful ... count for nothing: it is we ourselves and the author who walk through a world of spiritual dangers which makes them seem trivial.”

‘We ourselves and the author’ — the phrase is telling. Lewis is very much aware that the author is as dependent on the imagination of his readers as they are on his. To borrow a notion from the Schoolmen, the reader actualizes the imaginative potency the author provides. This is the reader’s own ‘lived dialectic’, and it explains why Lewis objected to the film version of Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. In the original, “the heroes are awaiting death entombed in a rock chamber and surrounded by the mummified kings of that land.” The film substitutes a volcanic eruption followed by an earthquake. This, Lewis says, took away “the whole sense of the deathly (quite a different thing from simple danger of death) — the cold, the silence, and the surrounding faces of the ancient, the crowned and sceptred, dead.”

It is a common enough experience to be disappointed in a film version of a favorite novel. Lewis here puts his finger on the source of that disappointment: A film is unlikely to portray the scenes in a novel as the reader of that novel has imagined them on his own. The novel, as adapted for the screen, simply is not the novel one read in private. This intensely personal nature of reading is important to bear in mind when considering how one work can influence another, for if the reader is also a writer, that ‘lived dialectic’ is where such influence is going to play out.

In a conversation with Kingsley Amis and Brian Aldiss recorded the year before Lewis’s death, Aldiss says to Lewis that “I would have thought that you constructed *Perelandra* for the didactic purpose.” “Yes, everyone thinks that,” Lewis replies. “They are quite wrong.” As Lewis had already pointed out, “the starting point of ... *Perelandra* was my mental picture of floating islands.” But isn’t there a contradiction here? Are not floating islands just an exaggeration of a terrestrial phenomenon? Actually, no; they are not. Terrestrial islands do not float, period. They are simply smaller versions of fixed land masses.

To imagine, of course, means to form images, and those who read *A Voyage to Arcturus* must spend a good bit of their imaginative energy forming images of landscape. Therein, in fact, lies much of the book’s appeal, and on this level alone that ‘lived dialectic’ would have engaged Lewis entirely. He was perfectly aware, as any reader must be, of Lindsay’s shortcomings as a writer. But he understood that these are beside the point: “Unaided by any special skill or even any sound taste in language, the author leads us up a stair of unpredictables. In each chapter we think we have found his final position; each time we are utterly mistaken. He builds whole worlds of imagery and passion, any one of which would have served another writer for a whole book, only to pull each of them to pieces and pour scorn on it.”

Published in 1920, Lindsay’s book met with little success and was out of print when Lewis first heard of it. It took him two years to track down a copy. It is a peculiar and peculiarly dark tale, offputting and compelling almost in equal measure. It opens with a séance attended by a large bearded fellow named Maskull and a companion of his called Nightspore. A medium conjures an apparition of a young man with a “mysterious but fascinating smile.” No sooner does the figure stand up than a “thick shortish man” with a “beardless yellow face” bursts in and proceeds to twist the apparition’s neck. It falls to the floor and its expression changes “to a vulgar, sordid bestial grin, which cast a cold shadow of moral nastiness into every heart.”

The shortish man turns about to be named Krag and he tells Maskull that the apparition was from a planet named Tormance, which circles the star Arcturus, the third brightest in the night sky. He invites Maskull and Nightspore to accompany him on a journey there. After a brief interlude in Scotland, the three take off into space in a “torpedo of crystal.” When Maskull awakens on Tormance, however, he is alone.

In Lindsay’s novel, Arcturus is a double star (it is in fact a red giant). This means Tormance has two suns. One is named Branchspell, the other Alppain. Maskull’s point of arrival is at the south of the planet, where Branchspell dominates the sky. During his five days on the planet he will journey northward to where Alppain can be seen.

On this journey, Maskull encounters all manner of strange landscapes and creatures, the latter ranging from the innocent through the predatory, the inquiring, and the aspiring, most of whom prove to be deluded, some of whom Maskull feels driven to kill. Ultimately, Maskull meets up again with Krag and Nightspore, who turns out to be a sort of Maskull-in-waiting, the person Maskull will become after he is killed by Krag.

A Voyage to Arcturus is a fiction, but it is not really a novel. The characters are types, not people. It is one of those philosophical adventure tales, like *Rasselas* or *Candide*. Lindsay’s originality lies in having devised a way to present a metaphysics solely in terms of imagery and action. His aim does not

seem to have been to initiate for the reader a chain of logic leading to a rational conclusion, but rather to bring about at the profoundest level a change in perspective that will in turn prompt a kind of metanoia. Hence, to explicate the book abstractly is to do it a disservice by treating it as something it goes out of its way not to be. Still, some stab at describing that change of heart the book aims to bring about must be made. One key term is ‘Muspel’, which would seem to be the *Urstoff* of being. Lindsay borrowed the term from Norse mythology, where it is a realm of primal fire governed by a god called Surtur. Not surprisingly, one of the names in Arcturus for the creator of worlds is Surtur.

Crystalman would seem to be the name for the being behind being. (The grin on the face of the apparition when Krag strangles it is the “Crystalman grin.” It disfigures everyone’s face at death.) But Crystalman, like Lindsay’s fictional Arcturus, is double: One aspect is called Shaping, and is symbolized by Branchspell; the other is Surtur, symbolized by Alppain. At the very end of the book, Krag reveals that he himself is Surtur and that on earth his name is pain. So the point would seem to be that pain is truer and more powerful, if not better, than pleasure, because pleasure is simply a lure to trick us into thinking that life is good. As Nightspore, in the end, comes to realize:

Muspel was no all-powerful Universe, tolerating from pure indifference the experience side by side with it of another false world, which had no right to be. Muspel was fighting for its life — against all that is most shameful and frightful — against sin masquerading as eternal beauty, against baseness masquerading as Nature, against the Devil masquerading as God ...

Lindsay’s is a grim and deeply pessimistic worldview and it is hard to think that it was his imagined landscapes alone that held Lewis’s attention. Given that Lewis thought that Arcturus bordered on the diabolical, it is altogether likely that what he found most compelling about it was something akin to that “sense of the deathly” that Rider Haggard managed to convey in *King Solomon’s Mines*. *Out of the Silent Planet* can easily be viewed as a merely set of variations on Lindsay’s other-world inventions, but *Perelandra* is surely something else: It seems a direct response to the challenge posed to Lewis’s Christian faith by Lindsay’s bleak “worlds of imagery and passion.”

Though they involve space travel, neither Lindsay’s nor Lewis’s books are, strictly speaking, science fiction, there being very little science in either. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis makes an ever-so-slight gesture on behalf of scientific verisimilitude when he has the scientist Weston explain how the space ship works: “If it makes you happy to repeat words that don’t mean anything — which is, in fact, what unscientific people want when they ask for an explanation — you may say we work by exploiting the less observed properties of solar radiation.”

The hero in *Out of the Silent Planet*, Ransom, is drugged and kidnapped by Weston and his accomplice Devine (a former schoolmate of Ransom’s) and taken with them to Mars, called Malacandra by its inhabitants (Weston and Devine know this because they have been there before). Malacandra turns out to be an old and dying planet, whose inhabitants know and accept that. The inhabitants include three races of intelligent creatures. The Sorns are tall, thin humanoids. The hrossa are like very large otters. And the pfifltriggi are frog-like. But the principal characteristic of Malacandra is that it is an unfallen world. Its inhabitants are free of sin. So the main difference between the creatures Lewis invents for Malacandra and those Lindsay invents for Tormance is that Lewis’s are benign. Lindsay’s are either simply odd, like Leehallfae, who is neither male nor female but something else altogether — Lindsay invents a new pronoun, *ae*, to refer to it — or malevolent, like the shrowks, huge and insect-like, which hunt with their wills. Apart from the imaginary creatures, the most obvious parallel between *Planet* and *Arcturus* is landscape. Shortly after Ransom escapes his captors he notices “a vista overhead” of “greenish white objects.”

They were enormously high, so that he had to throw back his head to see the top of them. They were something like pylons in shape, but solid; irregular in height and grouped in an apparently haphazard and disorderly fashion. Some ended in points that looked from where he stood as sharp as needles, while others, after narrowing towards the summit, expanded again into knobs or platforms that seemed to his terrestrial eyes ready to fall at any moment.

This bears comparison with Lindsay’s “bright, stupendous crags of Discourn” — “a long succession of mountain islands in a sea of clouds” that “loomed up for a thousand feet or more.” In Ifdawn, one of the regions of Tormance he travels through, Maskull remarks, “Those mountains have the most extraordinary shapes. All the lines are straight and perpendicular — no slopes or curves.” The woman Oeaxe tells him, “All over the Marest you’ll find patches of ground plunging down or rushing up.” Similarly, Ransom

suddenly grasps the “perpendicular theme which beast and plant and earth all played on Malacandra — here in this riot of rock, leaping and surging skyward like solid jets from some rock-fountain ...”

Nevertheless, in *Out of the Silent Planet* Lewis does not seriously engage Lindsay’s metaphysics. In *Perelandra*, he does. A single detail at the start makes that plain. In *Arcturus*, Maskull, Krag and Nightspore travel naked in “a torpedo of crystal.” In *Perelandra*, Ransom travels to Venus — naked — in “a large coffin-shaped casket” made of “some white material, like ice,” so cold it burns the fingers. Moreover, just as Maskull is not invited to visit Tormance by an inhabitant of Earth, but by Krag, so, in *Perelandra*, Ransom travels to Venus because he has been ordered to go there by the Oyarsa (the archangel) who governs Malacandra.

Whatever else it may be, *A Voyage to Arcturus* is an attempt to deal with the origin and nature of evil. Lewis’s first attempt to deal with that subject had been in his 1940 book *The Problem of Pain*. But in 1942, the year before he published *Perelandra*, he had published *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, his classic study of Milton’s epic. This seems to have given him what he needed to take on Lindsay’s dark vision head-on: *Perelandra* is Lewis’s attempt to “justify the ways of God to man.” In doing so, he pulls out all the stops.

There is, for example, a good deal of discourse in both books, but Lewis is far and away the superior dialectician and the discussion of evil in *Perelandra* is always lucid and often persuasive. He is also the superior stylist, but what is interesting is the precise way in which he turns this to his advantage. Lindsay is practically an anti-stylist, his prose often graceless and redundant. But for that very reason it lends a sense of urgency — and conviction — to his tale: It gives the impression of someone lacking skill in speech trying as best he can to get across something of utmost importance. It sounds genuine. To counter it with hi-jinks and dazzle would not work. So Lewis is careful to keep his own prose clear, simple and euphonious. Style there is in abundance, to be sure, but only to draw attention to the story, not itself. And, just as Bach improved Stölzel with counterpoint and melody, so Lewis counters Lindsay’s types with well-rounded characters and his step-by-step narrative with something more suspenseful and dynamic. Malacandra is an old planet that was long ago tempted but did not succumb. *Perelandra* is a new planet about to face temptation. The Green Lady Ransom meets shortly after his arrival is a counterpart to Eve. She is also a counterpart to a woman Maskull also meets shortly after his arrival in Tormance. Her name is Joiwind and she is the only really attractive character on the planet. But Joiwind’s sweetness derives from an almost willful *naïveté*. The Green Lady is genuinely innocent — and in his depiction of her Lewis pulls off one the hardest things a writer can attempt: He makes goodness both believable and interesting.

[H]er purity and peace were not ... things settled and inevitable ... they were alive and therefore breakable, a balance maintained by a mind and therefore, at least in theory, able to be lost.

Looking at her, Ransom “knew ... what the old painters were trying to represent when they invented the halo. Gaiety and gravity together, a splendour as of martyrdom yet with no pain in it at all, seemed to pour from her countenance.”

The tempter in *Perelandra* is the same one who tempted Eve in the Garden, only here he takes on the form, not of a serpent, but of Ransom’s old antagonist, the scientist Weston. Whether or not the Green Lady will give in to temptation is, of course, the problem set in the book, but the problem’s resolution centers almost entirely on the confrontation between Ransom and what is left of Weston. For Weston is no longer himself. His body has been taken possession of by the tempter. His voice is a croak. He doesn’t sit, he squats. His face, “the colour of putty,” wears “a fixed and even slightly twisted grin.” He bears, in fact, a striking resemblance to Lindsay’s Krag.

For the confrontation between Ransom and the Un-man (as Lewis calls the possessed Weston) is also where Lewis directly confronts the challenge posed by *Arcturus*. Lewis understood that Maskull may be the protagonist of *Arcturus*, but the dominant figure is the maleficent Krag. Indeed, in *Arcturus*, Joiwind tells Maskull that Krag is “the author of evil and misery —whom you call Devil.” So Ransom sees

... a man who was certainly Weston, to judge from his height and build and colouring and features. In that sense he was quite recognisable. But the terror was that he was also unrecognisable. He did not look like a sick man; but he looked very like a dead one. The face ... had that terrible power which the face of a corpse sometimes has of simply rebuffing every conceivable human attitude one can adopt towards it. The expressionless mouth, the unwinking stare of the eyes, something heavy and inorganic in the very folds of the cheek, said clearly: ‘I have features as you have, but there is nothing in common between you and me.’

It is easy to see how Lewis's response to Lindsay began with a "mental picture of floating islands." The vast ocean of Perelandra is filled with an archipelago of floating islands. It is on these that the Green Lady lives. But there also a fixed land, which Maleldil (God) permits her to visit, but has forbidden her to remain on after nightfall.

For *Perelandra*, exactly like *A Voyage to Arcturus*, presents its metaphysics in terms of imagery and action. That is why — and how — it leads its readers, not to an intellectual conclusion, but to a mode of sensibility, one quite contrary to the kind Arcturus is likely to inspire. To read Lewis's book shortly after finishing Lindsay's is like walking out of a theater into cheery sunlight after seeing a very scary movie. The movie was fun, and you're glad you saw it, you enjoyed the terror of it, but the sunlight reminds you that even in this fallen world of ours there is a good deal more to life than unrelenting gloom.

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Commentary: **Strange Visions of Mountains – the Montane Motif in Tolkien's Fiction**

Maria Rafaella Benvenuto

Even a cursory glance at a map of Middle-earth will show how Tolkien's fictional world looks all but studded with mountains of every description: massive ranges and isolated peaks, gently sloping hills and fiery volcanoes. However, their role in the narrative is not merely geographical: they are the abode of monsters and the repository of fabulous treasures; they function as beacons, walls, places of observation, and many other things. Indeed, Tolkien's mountains often act as impenetrable walls, preventing intruders from trespassing into places where, for one reason or another, strangers are not allowed. The Echoriath, the Encircling Mountains, hide the Elven realm of Gondolin from the outside world; while the forbidding Ephel Dúath and the dreary Ered Lithui effectively fence Mordor off the rest of the world.

However, in spite of their clearly paramount importance in Tolkien's narrative, it is quite difficult to find actual references to this motif in the vast body of secondary literature currently available on his work. Whereas Karen Wynn Fonstadt's *The Atlas of Middle-earth* and articles of similar content describe the various mountains and ranges from a geological point of view and sometimes compare them to real features of our primary world, they do not deal with the topic in its many implications as a narrative motif.

If one thinks that Britain's highest mountain would be considered little more than a hill elsewhere, Tolkien's fascination with mountains is rather intriguing. Even though he was born in South Africa, home of massive mountain ranges, it is quite unlikely that he saw any of them before he left the country at three years of age. Moreover, as an adult Tolkien did not travel extensively: his only real experience with mountains at close quarters was in 1911, on the occasion of a trip to the Swiss Alps with a group of 12 people which included his aunt, Jane Neave. The sight of those magnificent peaks in all their glory (not to mention the physical effort and the dangers inherent to the trip) was to leave a deep impression on the 19-year-old Tolkien: in fact, in his first published work of fiction, *The Hobbit*, a huge, imposing range, to whom he had given the Old Norse name of Misty Mountains¹, played a very important narrative role.

As Anderson remarks in *The Annotated Hobbit*, Tolkien's drawings of both the Misty Mountains and the Lonely Mountain are alpine in both shape and form, bringing to mind the profile of such well-known peaks as the Matterhorn². The author's trip to the Swiss Alps left him with such a strong impression that he recalled it over 50 years afterwards, when writing to his son Michael in 1967 (*Letters* #306), giving a very detailed account of the excursion. In another letter (#109), written in 1947 to his publisher, Stanley Unwin, Tolkien declared that he longed "to see the snows and the great heights again!" As Hammond and Scull point out, these words are echoed by Bilbo in the first chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*, when he is preparing to leave the Shire forever³.

Indeed, the Misty Mountains are possibly the single most important element in Tolkien's fictional landscape. For sheer size alone, this mighty range is doubtlessly one of the most striking features in Middle-earth, therefore its crucial role in Tolkien's geography should not come as a surprise. In the third chapter of *The Silmarillion*, the Misty Mountains look so forbidding that their very sight frightens the Teleri and prevents them from pursuing their journey towards Beleriand: