
“PUTTING ETERNITY IN READER’S HEARTS: C.S. LEWIS AND THE ART OF SEHNSUCHT”

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WHAT IS SEHNSUCHT?

- Scholar D.G. Kehl defines Sehnsucht as a deeper emotion than simply a strong wish for something: “More than simple longing or nostalgia however, and lacking a sufficiently expressive English term, this quality can be characterized by the German term Sehnsucht (a. compound of the verb sehnen, "to long," and the noun sucht, "addiction"), an intense addiction of and to longing” (Kehl).

SEHNSUCHT APPLIED TO C.S. LEWIS

- Throughout his various works of fiction, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956), *Till We Have Faces* (1956), and *The Great Divorce* (1945), C.S Lewis demonstrates the philosophical approach which he devises in *Mere Christianity* (1952) concerning the sehnsucht for a God who is "farther back and higher up" (43).

Mere Christianity

- “Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world... The Christian says, ‘Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists’” (*Mere Christianity* 135).

Mere Christianity

- “...you are putting into the universe a third thing in addition to the two Powers...But since the two powers are judged by this standard...the Being who made this standard, is farther back and higher up than either of them, and He will be the real God” (*Mere Christianity* 43)

SYNOPSIS OF THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

- These books are set in the fictional realm of Narnia, a fantasy world of magic, mythical beasts, and talking animals. The series narrates the adventures of various children who play central roles in the unfolding history of that world.

SYNOPSIS OF TILL WE HAVE FACES

- C.S. Lewis's final novel, *Till We Have Faces*, is a retelling of the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche. The novel is narrated by Orual, the Queen of Glome, and is framed as a complaint against the gods. As a result of Psyche's extraordinary beauty, people begin to call her a goddess, which incites the wrath of Ungit, the principal goddess of Glome, resulting in famine, drought, and plague. To appease the goddess, the Priest of Ungit tells the King that Psyche must be sacrificed. Rather than being sacrificed, she weds the son of Ungit and becomes a goddess.

SYNOPSIS OF THE GREAT DIVORCE

- The inspiration for this theological fantasy is the medieval idea of the *refrigerium*, the refreshment or vacation from Hell granted to some of the souls abiding there. So Lewis' narrator leaves the dreary streets of the underworld and, with a group of other ghosts, journeys by flying bus to a lovely land that he comes to realize is the forecourt of Heaven. In that enchanted place, the ghosts meet a number of spirits from the heavenly world, who attempt to lure the poor souls out of their misery.

THE GOD-LIKE FUNCTIONS LEWIS PRESENTS

- 1. The Chronicles of Narnia: Aslan*
- 2. Till We Have Faces: The gods*
- 3. The Great Divorce: The mountains*

THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE

- Lucy discovers Narnia and the God-like function of Aslan. As a result, they experience fulfillment in their longing for some higher power throughout The Chronicles of Narnia by going “further in...a step further in...still further in...on a step or two further” (7-8). Lucy’s innate curiosity for something that was beyond her spurred her towards this new world, and it is in Narnia that she discovers Aslan.

THE LAST BATTLE

- When Emeth is recalling his story he says that Aslan “breathed upon me and took away the trembling from my limbs and caused me to stand upon my feet. After that, he said...I must go further up and further in” (*The Last Battle* 102).

THE LAST BATTLE AND ASLAN

- Aslan calls out to His companions: “Come further in! Come further up!” (98) in order to establish a deeper relationship in a more intimate place with Himself.
- Not only does this align with Lewis’s theology, but it is biblically supported by
- James 4:8: “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”

KARL POPPER ON SEHNSUCHT

- We can invent myths, stories, theories; because we have a thirst for explanations, an insatiable curiosity, a wish to know. Because we not only invent stories and theories, but try them out and see whether they work and how they work... [for example] by making up a myth about 'invisibles' such as atoms or gravitational forces which explain the visible. (Popper)

COLEY ON THE LAST BATTLE

- Toby F. Coley refers to *sehnsucht* in relation to *The Last Battle*: “He [Lewis] calls the object of this desire...so familiar to the contemporary readers of *The Last Battle*. By feigning—or at least explicitly bringing attention to—his ‘shyness’ of discussion of this desire, Lewis gives the audience the impression of being let in on a secret, and thus revelation works well to draw the audience ‘further in’” (Coley).

TILL WE HAVE FACES

- The gods grant Orual's wish, and bring her "into the dark inwards of the mountain, and then further and further in" (*Till We Have Faces* 136).

TILL WE HAVE FACES


- Lewis dictates this by saying that “Psyche went on and on, deeper into the earth, colder, deeper, darker...Psyche, her eyes fixed straight ahead, went further and further on down” (*Till We Have Faces* 141-142).

ARTHURIAN TORSO

- “Every created thing is, in its degree, an image of God, and the ordinate and faithful appreciation of that thing is a clue which, truly followed, will lead back to Him” (151).

THE GREAT DIVORCE

- ‘Ye will understand that better, perhaps, before ye go...In the meantime, I must tell ye they have come further for the sake of the Ghosts than ye can understand. Every one of us lives only to journey further and further into the mountains. Every one of us has interrupted that journey and retraced immeasurable distances to come down today on the mere chance of saving some Ghosts.’ (*The Great Divorce* 74)

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- But why does this matter? How does it apply to me?

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- Ecclesiastes 3:11: God has put eternity into the heart of man.