

Heaven and Hell as Present Realities: The Use and Purpose of Literary Imagery in C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*

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ABSTRACT

Imagery is important to literature across genres because of the many ways that it engages readers and invites them into the words on the page. Imagery is understood by many scholars to be something which appeals to a reader's emotions and reason. Imagery also appeals to a reader's spirituality, and this fact is especially true within the genre of Christian literature. C.S. Lewis, as a Christian author, utilizes imagery in his book, *The Great Divorce* in order to reach the spirituality of his readers. The imagery in this story accomplishes this goal by painting a vivid picture of both Heaven and Hell, which in turn convinces Lewis' readers that these two supernatural locations may, in fact, be realities in the present. The imagery is central to Lewis' goal of transmitting this message to his readers, and it can only be understood fully by considering the impact that it has on the reader's emotions, reason, and spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Writers across genres employ various literary devices in order to engage their readers in a comprehensive way, inviting them into an experience that goes beyond simply consuming the text before them. In the rich literature both of centuries past and the present-day, some of the simplest concepts and devices have proved to be foundational for the use and understanding of language. Among popular literary devices used in literature, imagery stands out as one of the most foundational devices. Writers employ imagery in order to create a scene in the reader's mind and to translate words on a page into a reality in our minds. This is especially true in Christian writing, which finds its basis in the Bible. The Bible uses literary imagery throughout its pages, depicting scenes of a great garden (*The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, Gen. 1.1-2.25), a bush engulfed in flames (*The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, Exod. 3.1-6), and even a man walking on water (*The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, Matt. 14.22-33). These images form a foundation for Christian believers and writers alike, inviting them into the extensive reality which imagery creates in a text. Imagery appeals not only to our sense of sight by creating a visual that we can see in our minds, but it likewise appeals to all of our senses— sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell. In this way, imagery can literally make readers feel transported to an entirely new situation, where they feel as though they themselves are engaging in and experiencing everything that the narrator is. But what is the purpose of this? Why might it be useful or stylistically appropriate for an author to employ this particular literary device in their writing?

IMAGERY IN CHRISTIAN WRITING

Christian writers like Dante Alighieri, John Milton, and J.R.R. Tolkien are well-known within both Christian and secular circles for their uses of imagery. C.S. Lewis was a good friend of J.R.R. Tolkien, and via many conversations with him and other friends, Lewis converted to Christianity (Religions). Lewis himself was a professor of English, so he certainly knew the powerful effects of imagery within literature, especially as a tool to bring writing to life. Through the use of imagery, he "created in his fiction some of the most compelling representations of Heaven of any modern writer" (Hilder 118). And it is this device which "is necessary to make concrete, to visualize, abstractions, which are often, at this point, unintelligible" (Kawano 32). Literary imagery, then, is a device which provides a deeper meaning and goes far beyond the basic implications of the text.

What meaning, then, is extracted from imagery? This literary device has long been associated with a very specific purpose. Traditionally, “the function of [imagery] was to arouse certain states of emotion— very often the same state of emotion as was felt to possess the poet’s mind which had driven him to composition” (92). Ray Brett, in his article titled “The Function of Literary Imagery in Christian Understanding,” argues that this is not the case any longer. He believes that writers of Christian literature make use of imagery in order to appeal not simply to the reader’s emotions but also to their reason. Brett says that “imagery is not a series of mental pictures, with emotional associations, but a device for increasing our understanding” (Brett 93). In this way, imagery is employed by authors in order to make their readers understand the concepts better, as well as to make them more apt to accept the message that they intend to communicate.

While I would agree that the role of imagery goes beyond a simple appeal to the reader’s emotions, the problem with his argument is that he has failed to consider that, within Christian writing, imagery might, in fact, appeal to a reader’s spiritual side. Boston University’s Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation notes that there are eight dimensions of wellness that are central to each person’s life. These eight dimensions are as follows: emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual (“Eight Dimensions”). These wellness dimensions exist because these eight dimensions are the fundamental aspects of who we are and how we function. It is important, then, to consider these in respect to the way that each person navigates life. Thus, reason (which we can equate to the Intellectual dimension) and emotion cannot be considered exclusively from the spiritual. Just as all eight of these dimensions work together to create a healthy person, the dimensions most relevant to the comprehension of literature— emotional, intellectual, and spiritual— must also be considered as being complementary in their effect on a person’s life. An analysis of literature and the elements at work within any given piece must not simply stop at how they affect a person’s emotions or reasoning, but the analysis must also extend to the spiritual dimension of the person. This is especially true within religious writing, where spiritual messages are woven throughout the text.

Christian writing, then, must certainly appeal to each of these three dimensions— emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Christian authors like Dante, Milton and Tolkien were certainly skilled in the way they incorporated spiritual truths into their fiction. C.S. Lewis, too, knew the power of using fiction to share his spiritual beliefs. Scholars such as Ray Brett have argued that the role of imagery within C.S. Lewis’ writings is to go beyond emotional appeal to invoke the reader’s reasoning, and therefore effectively convey Lewis’ message. There is, though, as I mentioned above, another dimension that requires addressing. In this paper, I aim to address how C.S. Lewis indeed employs imagery in order to appeal to his reader’s emotions and reason, but its purpose is to go beyond emotion and reason in order to target the spirituality of his reader and communicate the perceived reality of the religious beliefs the story is based off of. In this way, I argue that the intent of Lewis’ imagery, as seen in his book, *The Great Divorce*, is to address and convince his reader of the spiritual reality of his story, which he does through an appeal to their emotions and reason. Through his vivid and distinctive imagery, Lewis engages his reader’s emotions and reason just as imagery is understood to do in the traditional sense. However, Lewis’ purpose is more profound than one might imagine. His purpose in using such imagery within *The Great Divorce* is to appeal to the spirituality of his readers. Whether religious or not, there is a spiritual dimension to every person’s life (Eight Dimensions). Lewis knew that in order to communicate the supernatural truths he was convicted of, he had to appeal

to his reader's spiritual side and make the messages come to life in a compelling and tangible way for them. And he chose literary imagery as his tool to do so.

C.S. LEWIS' VIEWS ON SPIRITUALITY AND IMAGERY

In order to understand Lewis' use of imagery, we must have an understanding of C. S. Lewis' own perspectives about both imagery and the beliefs which he bases his stories off of. There has been quite a bit of scholarship surrounding Lewis' personal beliefs and experiences, perceptions of religious understanding, and his ideas about the role of imagery in literature. Lewis had a great many personal challenges throughout his youth which have formed for him a very clear idea of Hell. This idea has translated into his writings and we can see them exhibited quite plainly in *The Great Divorce*. C.S. Lewis' images of Hell are "intensely personal. [They] are not simply academic, speculative, abstract, or hypothetical terms for him" (Weems 135). From a young age, Lewis experienced great loss and emotional trauma. He lost his mother at the age of ten and afterwards was sent away from home by his father (Weems 126). In a sense, he was banished from the safety of home and sent to a foreign and unfamiliar place. These personal afflictions are "revealed in Lewis's statement 'to enter hell, is to be banished from humanity'" (Weems 130). The lived reality of difficulties and losses in his own life inspired Lewis to write about Hell in such a way that it would become real for his readers. If he could successfully make Hell a reality for them, he might also be able to communicate how awful Hell is and in turn effectively convince his readers to change or live their lives in such a way that they might avoid eternal Hell.

C.S. Lewis may have even incorporated these realities of his own life and perspective into the story of *The Great Divorce*. Joe Christopher, in an analytical article about the Dante-like structure of *The Great Divorce*, suggests that perhaps the narrator of *The Great Divorce* is supposed to be C.S. Lewis, a projection of himself into this fictional world which is so closely tied to his actual life (Christopher 81). If the realities of Hell were so vivid and alive in Lewis' own life, it is not much of a stretch to imagine that he might have placed himself within the center of this story, as it was already something so real for him. This way, too, the reader would be able to step into the realities from Lewis' own perspective, thereby experiencing an almost first-hand perception of both Heaven and Hell. A reader might find themselves surrounded by Lewis' imagined reality, which by extension would increase the message's persuasiveness for the reader.

In addition to the importance of a personal immersive experience, Lewis also seems to have believed that the greatest way to communicate spiritual realities is through depicting them as present realities via the use of literary imagery. Even if someone could accurately depict the spiritual world in all of its grandness, how would that person actually go about depicting it? Lewis himself states that "'mere advice would be no good; every sentence would have to smell of Heaven'" (Dickieson 12). Put simply, Lewis believes that it is not effective to simply tell *about* what Heaven is; Heaven must actually come to life for the reader, in the present moment. The basis for this belief can be found within Biblical literature, where St. Paul writes that even now, God "[makes] us alive" with him and we are "raised up with [Christ], and made [to] sit with him in the heavenly places" (*The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, Eph. 2.5-6; Hilder 99). Christian belief, then, sees Heaven as a present reality which "speaks into and indeed defines or re-defines who we are in the here and now" (Hilder 118). Therefore, it is essential that Lewis made these spiritual locations immediate realities; it is their present reality which convicts each individual of their existence and the truth which they hold. Thus imagery, in the way that it

reaches the senses and draws a reader into a new world, is the tool through which Heaven and Hell are able to become more than just statements and explanations.

As Lewis sees it, though, imagery is not simply a means through which to convey emotions or paint a pretty picture. Lewis rejected the idea “that imaginative writing expresses emotion in the sense that its purpose is to discharge the writer's feelings” (Holyer 220). He did believe, though, that imaginative experiences make us more inclined to accept some beliefs (Holyer 217). The imagination, in a sense, is a tool with which we can wrestle with certain concepts and can test their reality. The purpose of imaginative writing, then, “is to convey an understanding of emotions” (Holyer 221). Rather than a reader simply receiving and comprehending the emotions that are expressed by the author, they must be able to put themselves into the described experience if they are to truly understand the emotions that are present. This means going beyond simply transferring emotions from author to reader; the understanding of emotions implies a more complex and profound relation between the two.

This complexity of author and reader relationship was important to C.S. Lewis because he knew well the reality of unbelief within mankind. It was important for Lewis to make the messages of his writing real for his readers. It is interesting to note that he believed that “the burden of unbelief is tied to a failure of the imagination” (Hilder 94). For Lewis, if someone could truly imagine what Heaven or Hell might be like, they would not experience unbelief—rather, they would be convinced of the validity of these places and the weight of the truth that comes with them. Lewis thus provides his readers with an immersive experience in which he employs their imaginations for the purpose of convicting them of the authenticity of these truths. The effectiveness of Lewis’ imagery is found in the fact that art’s ability “to depict lived emotional experience is a stronger [and] more enduring teacher than cool reason” (Hilder 96). In other words, art has the ability to communicate truths on a deeper level than reasoning can, and thus the impact of art is more lasting and more profound.

Clearly, then, C.S. Lewis understood the power of artistic communication when it came to sharing the Gospel. In his article titled “C.S. Lewis on the Epistemic Significance of the Imagination,” Robert Holyer analyzes C.S. Lewis’ arguments for Christianity and says that they are “based accordingly, not on a simple appeal to reason, but on an appeal to the critical imagination in which reason and imagination together make up the organ of truth” (Holyer 215). Knowing this, it is only fair to approach Lewis’ own writings with this perspective in mind. If Lewis sees that reason and imagination work together and go beyond the surface of what they are communicating in order to inform an individual’s mind, then certainly emotion and reason must work together within an individual reader in order to reach their spiritual side.

A SUMMARY OF THE GREAT DIVORCE

The Great Divorce follows a relatively simple plot line. The story opens with the narrator waiting in line to get on a bus bound for Heaven. The bus stop is located in Hell, which is an expansive town comprised of grey buildings, grey skies, and a general lack of friendliness among the inhabitants. In this place, people exist in solitude, physically driven further and further from each other, without end, which is why the city itself seems to never end. Those who have just died find themselves at the bus stop where they are brought to Heaven in order to make their own decision about whether they want Heaven or Hell to be their final destination. When the narrator gets on the bus and it begins to leave, he discovers that the bus actually flies, much like an airplane, high above the rooftops of the town. He observes the grey city expanding as far as he can see.

After some time, the landscape outside of the bus begins to change, and the narrator, along with the other bus passengers, find themselves in Heaven, which is described as a great, bright, and beautiful garden with flowers, a river, a waterfall, and animals. This place may seem like it is a representation of purgatory, the place between Heaven and Hell where souls go in order to be purified before they can enter Heaven. The things of this garden world seem to be temporary— everything there is solid and heavy to the ghosts who enter and the purpose of being in this garden is to journey to a far mountain. All of this points to the fact that this place might actually be meant to represent purgatory. However, it might certainly be argued that *both* of these settings— the town and the garden— are a kind of ‘in-between’ where a definite choice of Heaven or Hell has not been made by those present. For the purpose of this paper, though, we will call the grey town Hell, while the garden where everything is solid and heavy will be called Heaven.

The passengers get off the bus and are allowed to explore. They each have the choice to stay in Heaven, where they must make a hard journey to a far-off mountain in order to become more alive, or to return to Hell where they will be free to continue in their selfish habits, cut off from the beauty of Heaven. The rest of the story follows the narrator as he explores the new world he finds himself in and makes his own decision about Heaven or Hell. He observes the landscape in great detail, converses with many people he meets there, and overhears many conversations between what he calls ‘ghosts’— those who have arrived on the bus, including himself— and ‘spirits’— those who have completed their journey to Heaven and have returned to help the newcomers on their own journeys.

It is within these conversations that the narrator has— as well as those that he observes— that Lewis is able to communicate the reality of Heaven and Hell to his reader. His characters are average people who share life experiences that many of Lewis readers might even be able to relate to. Within these characters and their words, Lewis’ readers are able to differentiate between good and bad, based on the character’s words and attitude, and the choice they make between Heaven and Hell.

In the end, though, the entire story turns out to simply be a dream— the worlds crafted within the narrator’s mind after he fell asleep at his desk. And yet the tangible experience of the dream and its visual intensity leaves a reader wondering about how far off his imagination might actually be.

MEDIEVAL DREAM VISION

It is important to note that the structure and content of Lewis’ *The Great Divorce* reflects the genre of the medieval dream vision. A medieval dream vision is essentially medieval literature which was written in the form of a dream. The flexibility of the world of dreams meant that this literature “could be used for consolation, advisory literature, religious and philosophical explorations, courtly comedy, social critique, mystical experience or feminist polemic” (Wellesley). These dream visions generally follow this structure: “a first-person narrator falls asleep and meets a guide who reveals some kind of wisdom to him which will either comfort him or give him needed knowledge” (Boenig 32). *The Great Divorce* is, in many ways, a 20th century dream vision. The narrator of Lewis’ story finds himself on a journey where he discovers the realities of Heaven and Hell (or at least the realities of these two places which Lewis has created), and at the very end, he wakes up and we discover that it has all been a dream. This is not the only parallel between *The Great Divorce* and the medieval dream vision, though. Robert Boenig, in his article which addresses the similarities between *The Great Divorce* and the

medieval dream vision, notes that “the brightness of the people inhabiting gardens in medieval dream visions is one of the most repeated details” (33). Here we see very clearly the connection between *The Great Divorce* and the medieval dream vision in the fact that Lewis employs the imagery of bright spirits throughout the garden scenes in this story. Likewise, nature descriptions and frequent detail are also persistent within medieval dream visions (Boenig 32), much as they are within Lewis’ *The Great Divorce*.

A LOOK AT THE IMAGERY IN *THE GREAT DIVORCE*

The Great Divorce tells a great story and communicates great messages, but the story itself would be nothing without the extent of imagery that Lewis uses. The imagery within Lewis’ writing acts as a sign which evokes the sacred (Schwartz 215). Because Lewis’ messages are all rooted in Christian truths, the messages themselves reflect the sacred, the divine. Lewis’ images, then, “inevitably evoke the sacred... by evoking something beyond [themselves]” (Schwartz 215). They go beyond the emotions that they portray, beyond the realities they reflect, into the spiritual dimension wherein they are able to convey even more than they seem to on the surface. Literature, in a general sense, “is marked by this radical understanding of signifying, manifesting a new world, ‘a second life’” (Schwartz 216). Lewis certainly contributed to this idea through his immersive and vivid descriptions of the worlds in which his characters exist.

These worlds which Lewis creates are not simply a product of chance within his writing. Lewis considered new and undiscovered places to be great settings for spiritual adventures because “only they can satisfy the craving which sends our imagination off the earth” (Schakel 4). Because both Heaven and Hell are mysterious places, it is important for Lewis that they be places separate from the world we do know. Yet as noted previously, Lewis also believed that Heaven must be depicted as a present reality, as a place more real and more alive than the earth and this life. There is a fine balance here which Lewis walks along within his writing, making sure that Heaven and Hell are not simply places found in our imaginations, but wholly separate and more vivid realities than we know. C.S. Lewis does not seek to invent new worlds for his readers; rather, he makes places we already understand— a different planet, a forest, a town, a garden— and brings them to life in a new way and in a way that makes them seem comfortably familiar and yet still a little bit mysterious. Lewis describes these unexplored worlds “through images, not explanation, thus preserving the sense of divine mystery” (Schakel 5). Herein lies the power of imagery for Lewis— imagery describes these locations “in abundant detail... for the sake of bringing the new planet to life imaginatively” (Schakel 5). C.S. Lewis preserves the mystery and the holiness of these supernatural places by bringing them to life but not over-explaining them and draining them of their allure. Lewis goes beyond simple reason and emotion, thereby maintaining for his reader the conviction that these spiritual designs really do exist.

The story’s setting is certainly an important piece to consider when we look at the imagery in C.S. Lewis’ writings, but it is also necessary to consider the mode through which the reader understands the setting. The narrator within *The Great Divorce* story certainly goes on the journey himself, and his first-hand experiences allow the reader to perceive, as if through a lens, the entirety of the worlds that Lewis has created. The tool that Lewis uses most clearly and most often throughout this book, as with most of his other stories as well, is literary imagery. That does not mean, though, that the story line and the dialogue within the book decrease in significance. The dialogue is actually the most important part of the story, but the imagery that Lewis employs is crucial because it creates the necessary space in which the dialogue may be

understood. From the very beginning of the story, the narrator describes how he finds himself in a dreary sort of town which is caught in perpetual twilight and where it seems to always be raining. He stands in line for the bus and observes how time seems to be suspended in “that dismal moment when only a few shops have lit up and it is not yet dark enough for their windows to look cheering” (Lewis 1). From this description, the reader is immediately drawn into the world in which the narrator stands. As he takes his seat and the bus begins to fly high over the town, the narrator notes that the roofs of the town spread “without a break as far as the eye could reach” (Lewis 5). With these words, Lewis paints the scene of a place that is similar to our world, yet slightly different.

When the bus arrives in Heaven, we enter, alongside the narrator, a scene like a great garden. Below the bus lies “a level, grassy country through which there [runs] a wide river” (Lewis 19). The narrator enters into this land and throughout the remainder of the story, he reminds us of the grandeur that surrounds him. It is interesting to note the numerous vivid descriptions of this imagined world. Consider the following lines:

Near the place where the fall plunged into the lake there grew a tree. Wet with the spray, half-veiled in foam-bows, flashing with the bright, innumerable birds that flew among its branches, it rose in many shapes of billowy foliage, huge as a fen-land cloud. From every point apples of gold gleamed through the leaves. (Lewis 46)

It is in descriptions like this one where we recognize the prominence of nature and the images of nature in Lewis’ writing. Certainly, nature held some kind of importance for Lewis personally, as we see that its importance is reflected in his stories. C.S. Lewis did, in fact, address this idea when he said in one of his sermons that “nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fully reflects” (Edwards 117). Within these words, there is no doubt that Lewis made use of nature imagery very intentionally. He felt that scripture itself, the greatest source of Truth for Christians, urged him to use nature as a tool to engage his readers and communicate certain truths to them. For Lewis, though, imagining nature is not the end result. Nature is simply a part of the process; it invites us into a new world, a vivid and life-like world, in order to draw us even deeper into the mysteries which she contains. What are these mysteries though? Within *The Great Divorce*, the place which we are calling Heaven is described as a garden, whereas the setting of Hell is an entirely man-made town. I would argue that the mysteries intended to be communicated through nature are simply the great mysteries of Heaven. This is why Lewis describes Heaven as a garden— because it is only through nature that the realities of the Divine may be communicated fully and accurately. It is likewise through nature that Lewis’ readers are able to understand this invisible and seemingly abstract existences of Heaven and Hell.

The imagery which Lewis employs in this story is not only limited to imagery of the natural world. Lewis also depicts this alternate reality through descriptions of the people that are there. An important purpose of the narrator’s descriptions of the people he finds there— including himself— is to display the differences between the two types of people, the ghosts and the spirits. The spirits, as the narrator notes, are “almost blindingly white” (Lewis 34) and have such a youthful presence about them that it makes the narrator want to dance (26). The ghosts, on the other hand are “transparent— fully transparent... smudgy and imperfectly opaque” (Lewis 20) and the “grass [does] not bend underneath their feet: even the dew drops [are not disturbed]”

(21). Here, there is a great contrast between the ghosts and the spirits. The ghosts, who have yet to make a decision between Heaven and Hell, are transparent and do not seem to hold any real weight in this new world they are in, while the spirits are solid, heavy and very clearly a real part of the garden. This, along with the radiating light and joy they so clearly have, suggests that they have a level of permanence in this garden which the ghosts do not have. The ghosts exist in the garden as foreigners— they are not yet fully accepted into Heaven and therefore they appear transparent and cannot interact with this new world (hence the fact that the ground beneath their feet is not disturbed by their steps). It is only those who have made the journey to the far mountain and fully chosen to enter Heaven who exist in this garden in a permanent way and find themselves to be fully present and fully alive. This implies that Heaven— the Christian reality accepted by so many believers beyond the pages of Lewis’ book— is where Man is fully realized. The ghosts that do not choose Heaven end up getting further and further from the goodness which exists in the garden, and remain simply as ghosts, in the dreary grey town which is Hell. Those who do choose Heaven, on the other hand, become more and more real in the garden. For Lewis’ readers, the suggestion of a human person becoming fully alive in this garden of Heaven is made tangible through the vivid imagery. The way that Lewis draws his readers into the reality of his imagined worlds means that this choice is made to seem like it is real for them, too.

VISUAL IMAGERY AS A MEANS OF ENHANCING DIALOGUE

This visual imagery which Lewis uses provides a space in which the dialogue between the various characters may resound and elicit its full meaning. The dialogue, outside of the context of the garden, may certainly be effective to a reader well-versed in Christian beliefs. However, without this vivid depiction of the setting, the messages within the dialogue might fall short of the understanding of the reader. The role of Lewis’ imagery, then, is to create a reality which subtly communicates certain truths to the reader. For example, the images of Hell and Heaven in *The Great Divorce* communicate to the reader, without explicitly saying so, that Heaven is good and beautiful, while Hell is dreary and lonely. Through Lewis’ employment of imagery, this reality is both understood and accepted by the reader before the messages of the dialogue are even presented. In this way, the images created in the reader’s mind prepare the reader for the truths revealed within the dialogue— in a way, the imagery is simply a tool in the process of communicating a spiritual reality.

Lewis, therefore, considers it important that this new world in the story be not some foreign and unfamiliar place, but rather a reflection of the reality we already know. In fact, his first concern “is to imagine heaven by re-imagining the world 'as it is'; to discover the invisible not behind but within the visible” (Edwards 108). Lewis certainly discovered within his own life the reality of Hell as something that can exist in the here and now. Why, then, might Heaven not also exist in the present, in the visible world we are so familiar with? C. S. Lewis more than likely recognized these two spiritual worlds as realities which exist in the every-day, and he used his own experiences to create a world in which he could convey the truths he had come to believe in so deeply. Lewis certainly must have desired not simply to communicate what he believed or felt about the spiritual world, but to create an experience for his readers in which they might even have a personal encounter with these same truths. In order for the writing on the page to become a true personal experience for his reader, Lewis had to intentionally draw them into a world that they could relate to and truly imagine themselves within. A Michael Edwards puts it in his article, “C. S. Lewis: Imagining Heaven”, C. S. Lewis believed that “the other world is most vivid when we are fully alive in the here and now” (113).

We see this reality reflected in the depictions of Heaven as a place we might even be able to find here on Earth. Lewis uses our present reality as an image for Heaven so that it might become truly real for his readers. In *The Great Divorce*, Heaven is described as a beautiful garden teeming with life. In this way, Lewis makes Heaven a re-imagined earth, which is both comfortable and familiar for readers. Likewise, Lewis' idea of entering into (or deeper into) the reality of Heaven is reflected perfectly in the bus ride in which entering heaven requires an ascent and the result of the reality of heaven is not a new place altogether, but rather a 'more real' reality of earth. With the familiarity that this view of Heaven brings, the reader's focus is able to stay rooted in the dialogue of the story's characters, rather than on trying to comprehend an entirely new and different world.

Lewis' Heaven provides the ideal location where he might communicate his truths via the conversations between his characters. Once the scene has been set via the imagery, Lewis is then able to share concrete truths through the dialogue of his characters. This is especially clear within on particular scene in *The Great Divorce* where our narrator asks questions about the difference between the Lost (those that end up in Hell) and the Saved (those that end up in Heaven). The response to his questions is that "every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of his own mind— is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself" (Lewis 70). Herein lies the tangible claims that Lewis is making, which we have already seen reflected in the imagery of both Heaven and Hell. While the image of Hell throughout the story consists of solitude, the images of Heaven emphasize that Heaven is a tangible reality. It is clear that Lewis' imagery does not necessarily stand on its own, but it serves to support the dialogue of the story, and therefore the imagery and the dialogue work together to engage reader's and communicate Lewis' messages. Without the imagery, though, the dialogue might fall short of convicting Lewis' readers. The imagery throughout the book is therefore indispensable for the purposes of the story.

THE EFFECT OF IMAGERY AS AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

The imagery which Lewis uses in *The Great Divorce* actually increases in frequency as the narrator spends more time in Heaven and comes to understand it better. This parallels the reality of Heaven in the story itself: the more time one spends in Heaven travelling towards the mountain, the more real they seem to become (Lewis 60). In the same way, the reality of Heaven becomes more and more real as the imagery increases further into the book. This allows for the reader to grasp at this new world gradually, to pick up on the central truths at the same time as the narrator does— and thus, they can feel like it is they themselves at the center of this story, experiencing the realities of Heaven and Hell. If they themselves have these experiences, then it is conceivable that they might grasp and even adopt the central beliefs as their own. This reiterates the idea that "it is we who shall know heaven, not some ghostlier version of ourselves, not some ethereal and disembodied soul" (Edwards 115). Even though the narrator of this story is a ghost, Lewis' readers feel that they themselves are experiencing a reality because of the familiarity of the imagined world they find themselves in. In turn, Lewis' reader is exposed to the notion that they might have a real and personal choice of what world they will end up in, just as the story's narrator does. Imagery indeed makes Heaven and Hell real— not simply in order to persuade the reader that Heaven and Hell *exist*, but in order to convince the reader of their present and enduring reality and the reality that he or she has a legitimate choice in all of it.

Lewis skillfully employs fear within *The Great Divorce* to awaken a deeper reality in his readers. While the narrator is exploring Heaven, he notices another ghost, like himself,

“crouching as if to conceal itself from something beyond the bush, and... it kept on signaling me to duck down” (Lewis 46-47). This scene is repeated frequently throughout the story as the ghosts, who are not yet accustomed to Heaven, fear every noise and movement around them. The narrator notes, too, that there was a “sense of danger, which had never been entirely absent since [he] left the bus” and that “Terror whispered, ‘This is no place for you’” (Lewis 58). The presence of fear in these ghost characters reflects the uncertainty that seems so natural for humans to have in regard to anything unknown. The reality is that Heaven is an unknown place, an unknown existence for anyone who is alive, and therefore it is natural that Lewis’ characters would embody that fear. It is this fear itself which seems to make the ghost characters all the more relatable, and which in turn draws Lewis’ readers even deeper into the reality of the story he creates. Indeed, it is “the gap between Eternal Goodness and fallen humanity [which] is the reason why [Lewis] takes such pains to portray Heaven. Lewis hopes to awaken us to ethical consciousness and thereby to woo us to our eternal destiny” (Hilder 105). Lewis recognizes and believes in the great gap between Man and God and he desires to discover— or create— a bridge which can span that gap. It is for this very reason that he endeavors to present the verity of Heaven through the images in his stories.

Lewis knows, too, that the power of metaphorical language and vivid detail are the keys for communicating these great mysteries and personal convictions. When Lewis speaks of the supernatural and the great mysteries of the divine, “he almost never speaks in abstractions, which have a brittle and inflexible quality” (Kawano 22), but rather in specific and arresting images, which alone are suitable to describe the highest things. Abstractions do not convict readers, and Lewis knew this. He knew that “his reader and listener need metaphors taken from the common experience of all men even to understand his private experiences” (20). Lewis, as we looked at before, experienced Hell as an absolute truth within his own life; we can guess that he likewise experienced Heaven with similar conviction. It is these personal experiences which Lewis ventures to impart on his readers— not just as a story about some dream or an emotional pull he feels, but as a certainty beyond all doubts, which adjures his readers to consider and believe in their reality, as well.

CONCLUSION– THE PRESENT REALITY OF HEAVEN AND HELL

C.S. Lewis undoubtedly used literature as a device through which he shared the reality of the spiritual truths he himself was so convicted of. As we looked at previously, imagery is the medium through which these truths are communicated to Lewis’ readers. Imagery is so effective because of its ability to draw a reader into a new world and immerse them in the reality of this other place. It is a more effective and lasting teacher than mere explanation, and because of this, it is an exceptional tool for Christian writers who desire to emphasize and promulgate the key components of their faith. Through the traditional use of imagery, C.S. Lewis appeals to the reason and emotion of his readers. And yet this is not the fully accomplished outcome which this device is capable of producing. The way that imagery is used within C.S. Lewis’ works is that it creates a space that feels both tangible and substantial. Because these spiritual things and locations seem so distant and fictional, Lewis’ immersive imagery prompts his readers to consider the possibility that these things might actually be true. This allows Lewis to reach the spiritual side of his readers, which convinces them of the similarly present reality of their personal role within these supernatural situations.

At the beginning of this paper, we looked at the genre of a medieval dream vision and compared the structure of this to C.S. Lewis’ *The Great Divorce*. The structure of the medieval

dream vision, however, is tied tightly to its purpose. Dreams had important meaning in the lives of medieval people. For them, “a dream could be an encounter with the divine, it could advise you on what course of action to take, or it could be a prophecy. The dream world was a place where truth was revealed” (Wellesley). This meant that writing which followed the structure of a dream (a medieval dream vision) did so in order to communicate some truth to the reader. If the purpose of the dream vision is inseparable from its form, so too must *The Great Divorce* mirror both the structure and the purpose of this genre. C.S. Lewis’ apparent mirroring of this genre seems to have been an intentional decision. Lewis worked through his imagery within *The Great Divorce* to engross his readers, to make an abstract reality come to life, and to convict his readers of the reality of the spiritual world and their individual and ongoing role within its entirety. And Lewis wrapped all of this together as if it were a dream, with the purpose of suggesting that these worlds, these distant and unknown lands, might hold the whole truth of life within them.

C.S. Lewis believed in the reality of both Heaven and Hell and used his writing to share these truths which he himself was so convicted of. Lewis, in his stories in general and notably within *The Great Divorce*, “depicts a universe that is neither empty nor dark nor cold but one full of life and light and warmth. The universe is not silent but singing. The universe is not a void but teeming with celestial beings” (Hilder 99). Lewis draws a picture of a world that is both new and yet comfortable and safe; unknown and yet a present reality; made for every person that has ever existed and yet deeply personal. Thanks to his expert employment of imagery, Lewis aims to engage the spirituality of his readers and invites them to participate in the divine mystery and glory of Heaven. They are drawn into a new world and invited to consider for themselves the verity of the celestial dream world they discover before them.

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