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# The Wizard in the Well: The Transmogrification of the Mythical Merlin in C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*

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# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume IX**

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Ninth  
FRANCES WHITE EWBANK COLLOQUIUM  
on  
C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

Taylor University 2014  
Upland, Indiana

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## **The Wizard in the Well: The Transmogrification of the Mythical Merlin in C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength***

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# The Wizard in the Well: The Transmogrification of the Mythical Merlin in C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*

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Since his boyhood, C. S. Lewis had been enamored with mythology and the tales of Arthur and Merlin as reflected in his early diaries and letters. He originally desired to be a great poet,<sup>1</sup> to compose an epic that would be praised alongside such poems as *The Faerie Queene* and *Orlando Furioso*, works that he admired and read (Hannay 241; Ross).<sup>2</sup> At thirteen he crafted a long poem that focused on Nibelung in Wagner's *Ring* cycle (King 4-5);<sup>3</sup> at fifteen he was creating a tragic Norse opera *Loki Bound* with plans to have his friend Arthur Greeves compose the music.<sup>4</sup> Other subjects that interested the young Lewis and influenced his early writing included Medea's childhood (Medea being the enchantress who helped Jason gain the golden fleece),<sup>5</sup> Helen (of Troy),<sup>6</sup> Sigrid,<sup>7</sup> Nimue (the sorceress who seduced Merlin),<sup>8</sup> and the story of Cupid and Psyche,<sup>9</sup> which was the source and inspiration for his last novel *Till We Have Faces* (Hannay 241; *All My Road* 262n2; hereafter abbreviated as *AMR*).

Lewis's familiarity with the Arthurian literary tradition, especially Merlin, is revealed in some of his letters to Arthur Greeves. Lewis writes in a letter dated January 26, 1915 concerning Malory:

Now that my friends have gone, there is nothing to do but sit & read or write when it rains, and consequently I have nearly finished *The Morte D'arthur*. I am more

pleased at having bought it every day, as it has opened up a new world to me. I had no idea that the Arthurian legends were so fine. (The name is against them isn't it??) Malory is really not a great author, but he has two excellent gifts, (1) that of lively narrative and (2) the power of getting you to know characters by gradual association. (*The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* 1:103; hereafter abbreviated as *CL*)

Lewis demonstrates great enthusiasm for Malory in a letter dated February 2 of that same year when he writes, "I am deep in *Morte D'Arthur* by this time, and it is really the greatest thing I've ever read" (*CL* 1:104). Showing his interest in the frontispiece to an edition of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* he obtained, Lewis comments on the style of the picture in a letter to Arthur Greeves dated October 28?, 1917:

I have also got the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 volumes of Malory in the Temple Classics. The frontispieces are from designs by Beardsley. They are v. good in the extremest style of mediaevalism—perhaps rather affected. One is of the finding of Excalibur & the other of someone giving Tristram a shield. In the Excalibur one, Merlin is shewn as a not very old clean-

shaven but beautifully wizened man.  
Not what I'd have imagined him but  
good all the same. (CL 1: 340)

It is clear that Thomas Malory had a formative and lifelong influence on Lewis's writing.

In a letter dated September 18, 1919, Lewis relates how he has abandoned his *Medea* poem while continuing to revise *Nimue*, an Arthurian poem he was constructing. According to Walter Hooper, this excerpt in the letter is the only stanza of the poem that has survived.

On getting back to England I had the pleasure of looking over my 'Medea' of which I told you and finding that it was all hopeless and only fit for the fire! Nothing daunted however I bade it a long farewell—poor still-born—and consoled myself by turning the 'Nimue' from a monologue into a narrative, in which form it may do. It appears in 'stanzas' of my own invention and is rather indebted to 'St Agnes' Eve' with touches of Christabel and some references to contemporary politics—by way of showing how much better I could manage the country if they made me Prime Minister. Sounds promising, DON'T it? It relates the events of a single evening—Merlin coming back & catching Nimue at last. This is the first stanza, do you think it any good?

*'There was none stirring in the hall  
that night,  
The dogs slept in the ashes, and the  
guard  
Drowsily nodded in the warm fire-  
light,  
Lulled by the rain and wearied of  
his ward,  
Till, hearing one that knocked  
without full hard,  
Half-dazed he started up in aged  
fear*

*And rubbed his eyes and took his  
tarnished spear  
And hobbled to the doorway and  
unbarred.'* (CL 1: 465-466)

Lewis writes to Arthur Greeves on April 11, 1920 that he was still working on the poem:

Look at me—I am still working at my poem on Merlin and Nimue. It has been in succession—rhymed monologue—rhymed dialogue—blank verse dialogue—long narrative in stanzas—short narrative in couplets—and I am at present at work on a blank verse narrative version. I hope I am not wasting my time: but there must be some good in a subject which drags me back to itself so often." (CL 1: 482-483)

Lewis's diary entry for Thursday, May 4, 1922, records that he submitted the poem to Squire with little hope of it being accepted for publication (AMR 29). Don King notes that this was probably the blank verse version of the poem that had been sent to the *London Mercury* and was rejected (50).

In another letter to Arthur Greeves, written on October 18, 1919, Lewis shares his opinion of Geoffrey of Monmouth's work and refers once again to his Merlin poem *Nimue*:

Since then I have read Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'History of the Kings of Britain'. I don't think you would care much for it, there are a good many dull battles and his Arthur is merely contemptible. Where he really is good is in the early part. Who would not hear about the first coming of Brut, and Bladud (our first aeronaut, the British counterpart of Daedalus), and the birth of Merlin and the building of Stonehenge (its delightful alternative name being The Dance of Giants) and the Vortigern and Lear and Lochrine? One learns a little too. 'Kaer' apparently is British for 'city'. Hence

Leil builds Kaer-Leil (Carlyle) and Kaer-leon is the city of legion. 'Kaerleon of the legions' (as I call it in Nimue) what a name! (CL 1: 468)

From the "History of the Kings of Britain," as this letter indicates, Lewis found his word for Cair Paravel, "the castle of the kings and queens of Narnia in Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*," "cair" actually meaning "city" (CL 1: 468n93).

Lewis's fascination with Merlin and the Arthurian tradition is finally realized almost thirty years later in the third book of his Space Trilogy *That Hideous Strength* (hereafter abbreviated as *THS*) published in 1945. In a letter to I. O. Evans, dated September 26, 1945, Lewis discusses the novel and provides a list of Arthurian works that he knows:

About Merlin: I don't know much more than you do. Apart from Malory (the Everyman edition and the Temple Classics are both complete) you will get something more in Geoffrey of Monmouth (Temple Classics) and LAYAMON (to be found in the Everyman volume entitled 'Arthurian Chronicles from Wace and Layamon'. For Arthur in general see 'Arthur of Britain' by E. K. Chambers, Collinwood in Vol. 1 of 'Oxford History of England', and Vinaver's 'Malory'. But the blessing about Merlin (for you and me) is that 'very little is known'—so we have a free hand! (CL 2: 672-673)

Although some critics such as Professor Chad Walsh have argued that the book would have been much better written had Lewis not included the Arthurian traditions (Sayer 304)—asserting that Merlin functions as a *deus ex machina* (Downing 75)—in reality the return of Merlin seems to contextualize the battle Lewis is depicting and sets up the reader for the ultimate resolution of the conflict of the novel.

The story begins with the narrator entering the restricted Bragdon Wood—an enclosed garden on the property of Bracton College—experiencing a sense of the sacred, journeying to "the centre of the Wood" (*THS* 21). There he encounters Merlin's Well, described by Doris Myers as "a numinous place" (93), "a well with steps going down to it and the remains of an ancient pavement about it. It was very imperfect now. I did not step on it, but I lay down in the grass and touched it with my fingers. For this was the heart of Bracton or Bragdon Wood: out of this all the legends had come and on this, I suspected . . . the very existence of the College had originally depended" (*THS* 21). Lewis continues his detailed description of this ancient location, presenting a historical framework and relating the important events surrounding "Merlin's Well":

The archaeologists were agreed that the masonry was very late British-Roman work, done on the eve of the Anglo-Saxon invasion. [. . .] Certainly, if all that was told were true, or even half of it, the Wood was older than the Bractons. [. . .] A sixteenth-century Warden of the College [had been led] to say that, "We know not by ancientest report of any Britain without Bragdon." (*THS* 21)

According to a song from the Middle Ages, the connection of the Well to Merlin hearkens back to medieval times.

But the medieval song takes us back to the fourteenth century.

*In Bragdon bricht this ende dai  
Herde ich Merlin ther he lai  
Singende woo and welawai.*

It is good enough evidence that the well with the British-Roman pavement was already "Merlin's Well," though the name is not found till Queen Elizabeth's reign [. . .] when [. . .] the fountain [is] called in vanity Merlin's Well. (*THS* 21-22)

The Well itself had been controversial, especially during the time of Cromwell

when one of Cromwell's Major Generals, conceiving it his business to destroy "the groves and the high places," sent a few troopers with power to impress the country people for this pious work. The scheme came to nothing in the end; but there had been a bicker between the College and the troopers in the heart of Bragdon, and the fabulously learned and saintly Richard Crowe had been killed by a musket-ball on the very steps of the Well. (*THS* 22)

The Well was the focus of tradition and ritual: "And always, through all changes, every Warden of Bracton, on the day of his election, had drunk a ceremonial draught of water from Merlin's Well in the great cup which, both for its antiquity and beauty, was the greatest of the Bracton treasures" (*THS* 22). It is also surrounded by history and intrigue as the narrator relates:

All of this I thought of, lying beside Merlin's Well, beside the well which must certainly date from Merlin's time if there had ever been a real Merlin: lying where Sir Kenelm Digby had lain all one summer night and seen a certain strange appearance: where Collins the poet had lain, and where George the Third had cried: where the brilliant and much-loved Nathaniel Fox had composed the famous poem three weeks before he was killed in France.<sup>10</sup> (*THS* 22)

A place of serenity and mystery—"The air was so still and the billows of foliage so heavy above me, that I fell asleep" (*THS* 22)—Merlin's Well had become a symbol of "the sanity, the balance of religion, science and law that makes up the Bracton College tradition" (Myers 93). The historical

figures associated with the Well represent the Tao (which Lewis describes in *The Abolition of Man*, the non-fiction work on which the fictional *That Hideous Strength* is based), for their actions functioned as a beacon of moral authority, as they successfully defended the Well from the Progressive forces of the College—those who wanted to destroy it in order to purify the place (Myers 93).

The reader learns that Merlin, the most famous wizard in the ancient tales of King Arthur, was buried here. In a conversation with Jane Studdock—one of the protagonists in *That Hideous Strength* along with her husband Mark—"a pair of anchorless modern intellectuals in an unfulfilling marriage" (Downing 53), Dr. Dimble (Jane's former tutor) and Mrs. Dimble (also known as Mother Dimble, her "unofficial aunt") discuss the myth of the ancient Merlin during a lunch engagement (*THS* 29). Jane asks, "And where would Merlin be?" To which Dr. Dimble replies, "Yes. . . . He's the really interesting figure. Did the whole thing fail because he died so soon? Has it ever struck you what an odd creation Merlin is? He's not evil; yet he's a magician. He is obviously a druid; yet he knows all about the Grail. He's 'the devil's son'; but then Layamon goes out of his way to tell you that the kind of being who fathered Merlin needn't have been bad after all." Dr. Dimble continues, "I often wonder [. . .] whether Merlin doesn't represent the last trace of something the later tradition has quite forgotten about—something that became impossible when the only people in touch with the supernatural were either white or black, either priests or sorcerers." Mrs. Dimble interjects, "Anyway, Merlin happened a long time ago if he happened at all and he's safely dead and buried under Bragdon Wood as every one of us knows." "Buried but *not* dead, according to the story," corrected Dr. Dimble" (*THS* 31-32). Various traditions place Merlin's burial sites in different locations: "His prison and/or burial place is said to be beneath Merlin's Mound at Marlborough College in Marlborough (Wiltshire), at Drumelzier in

Tweeddale (Scotland), Bryn Myrddin (Merlin's Hill) near Carmarthen (Wales), Le Tombeau de Merlin (Merlin's Tomb) near Paimpont (Brittany) and Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island) off the Lleyn Peninsula (Wales)" ("Merlin"). For Lewis, it is his mythical Bragdon Wood.

The most famous depiction of Merlin's demise comes from *Le Morte d'Arthur* (a very familiar story to Lewis as noted previously), where Malory relates the tragic tale of the wizard and Nimue (Nimwu), the Lady of the Lake:

[I]t fell so that Merlin fell in a dotage on the damosel that King Pellinore brought to court, and she was one of the damosels of the lake, that hight Nimue. But Merlin would let her have no rest, but always he would be with her. And ever she made Merlin good cheer till she had learned of him all manner thing that she desired; and he was assotted upon her that he might not be from her. [. . .] And so, soon after, the lady and Merlin departed, and by the way Merlin showed her many wonders, and came into Cornwall. And always Merlin lay about the lady to have her maidenhood, and she was ever passing weary of him, and fain would have been delivered of him, for she was afeard of him because he was a devil's son, and she could not beskift him by no mean. And so on a time it happed that Merlin showed to her in a rock whereas was a great wonder, and wrought by enchantment, that went under a great stone. So by her subtle working she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there; but she wrought so there for him that he came never out for all the craft he could do. And so she departed and left Merlin. (bk. 4, ch. 1)

Malory relates how Merlin is beguiled by a woman who desires to discover his esoteric knowledge. He, a willing victim with ulterior motives of his own, is outmaneuvered and trapped helplessly under a rock (probably in a cave), and according to this tradition, he never came out—a victim of his own desires—deceived and alone. Another interpretation of the Merlin tradition cited by Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper asserts that "Merlin did not die, but was imprisoned in a tomb, in a magic sleep, by an enchantress: and from that sleep he would awake at some future date no older than when he fell into it" (176). Lewis emphasizes this aspect of the Merlin tale in *That Hideous Strength*.

There is little debate that Lewis was an eclectic writer, assimilating and transforming the texts that he read, shaping them into his own fiction. Alan Jacobs observes, "If there is anything truly unique about Lewis, it is the facility with which he assimilated influences" (121). For example, Lewis adopts close friend and fellow Inkling Charles Williams' interpretation of Logres in *That Hideous Strength*. Downing explains, "In his Arthurian books, Williams used Logres to represent the spiritual side of England, the combination of Christian and Celtic ideals, a force that stands against the tides of worldliness and corruption" (76). According to Lewis' novel, Merlin's body lay beneath Bragdon Wood "uncorrupted for fifteen hundred years," a discovery that "did not seem strange to them [the eldils]; they knew worlds where there was no corruption at all. [. . .] Merlin had not died. His life had been hidden, sidetracked, moved out of our one-dimensional time, for fifteen centuries. But under certain conditions it would return to his body" (*THS* 201-202). Green and Hooper note that this sleeping Merlin is an

ancient legend still believed in the case of Epimenides of Crete<sup>11</sup> and the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus,<sup>12</sup> used most memorably as conscious literary background in *Rip Van Winkle*<sup>13</sup> and Edwin Lester Arnold's

*Lepidus the Centurion*,<sup>14</sup> and in the imaginative science fiction of Rider Haggard's *When the World Shook*.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Lewis may have had all these at the back of his mind—Jane's dream of the vault and the sleeper under Bragdon Wood seems too close to Louis Allenby's discovery of Lepidus to be mere coincidence. (Green and Hooper 176)<sup>16</sup>

In "the lecture with which Jack Bennett [a member of the Inklings, medieval scholar, and Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Magdalene College, Cambridge] inaugurated his Cambridge chair after the death of C. S. Lewis" (Boitani 10), he declares, "In our own time it was Lewis who turned men's minds to the Middle Ages and so stimulated our mental thirst" ("Humane Medievalist" 364).<sup>17</sup> Bennett points out in his essay "Grete Clerk" Lewis' s fascination with Merlin: "The Merlin who in a very literal sense underlies the action of *That Hideous Strength* is the Merlin who was the figure in his selections from Layamon's Brut" (49). In fact, Lewis wrote a chapter entitled "The Genesis of a Medieval Book" devoted to "Brut" (*Studies* 18-40). Downing observes, "Indeed, the Merlin of the Brut, like the Merlin in *That Hideous Strength*, is a shaggy, half-savage man who gives fealty only to the pendragon, who challenges his rivals by asking them riddling questions, and who demands that his enemies be beheaded" (137). In Lewis' introduction to medieval and Renaissance literature entitled *The Discarded Image*, Merlin is classified as one of the Longaevi, the Longlivers, who "are usually of at least fully human stature": he is "only half human by blood and never shown practicing magic *as an art*" (130). A. N. Wilson even asserts that "Lewis drew on Yeats when he was describing the bulky mysterious figure of Merlin, the morally ambivalent wizard-ruffian of *That Hideous Strength*" (71).

The location of Merlin's Well in Bragdon Wood is connected to King Arthur, to Logres, as explained by Dr. Dimble: "It all began [. . .] when we discovered that the

Arthurian story is mostly true history. There was a moment in the Sixth Century when something that is always trying to break through into this country nearly succeeded. Logres was our name for it—it will do as well as another. And then . . . gradually we began to see all English history in a new way." Dr. Dimble calls this discovery "the haunting": "We discovered the haunting [. . .] [h]ow something we may call Britain is always haunted by something we may call Logres. Haven't you noticed that we are two countries? After every Arthur, a Mordred. [. . .] Is it any wonder they call us hypocrites? But what they mistake for hypocrisy is really the struggle between Logres and Britain" (*THS* 368-369). Merlin's connection to Logres is essential to the action that follows, to what Merlin will do to help save Thulcandra by destroying N.I.C.E. (National Institute of Coordinated Experiments), an organization that is anything but nice.

Indeed in *That Hideous Strength*, Merlin the Longliver arises from the ancient well of Bragdon Wood after centuries of sleep, his purpose to overcome the sinister forces of evil (N.I.C.E.) that seek to destroy Thulcandra. By taking the elements of the Arthurian tradition and transmogrifying them into this "modern fairy-tale for grown-ups"—depicting the age-old battle between Logres (the sacred, the spiritual reality) and Britain (the secular, the earthly reality)—Lewis is able to demonstrate that even though human beings may be hunted by evil forces, a future Merlin will arise to once again deliver them—to haunt them from the past in order to deliver them in the future. By discovering more about the haunting, Logres would be saved. Dr. Dimble explains:

It was long afterwards [. . .] after the Director had returned from the Third Heaven, that we were told a little more. This haunting turned out to be not only from the other side of the invisible wall. Ransom was summoned to the bedside of an old

man then dying in Cumberland. His name would mean nothing to you if I told it. That man was the Pendragon, the successor of Arthur and Uther and Cassibelaun. Then we learned the truth. There has been a secret Logres in the very heart of Britain all these years: an unbroken succession of Pendragons. That old man was the seventy-eighth from Arthur: our Director received from him the office and the blessings; tomorrow we shall know, or tonight, who is to be the eightieth. Some of the Pendragons are well known to history, though not under that name. Others you have never heard of. But in every age they and the little Logres which gathered round them have been the fingers which gave the tiny shove or the almost imperceptible pull, to prod England out of the drunken sleep or to draw her back from the final outrage into which Britain tempted her. (*THS* 369)

When MacPhee questions Dr. Dimble's version of history, claiming it "is a wee bit lacking in documents," Dr. Dimble answers "with a smile": "It has plenty. [. . .] But you do not know the language they're written in. When the history of these last few months comes to be written in *your* language, and printed, and taught in schools, there will be no mention in it of you and me, nor of Merlin and the Pendragon and the Planets. And yet in these months Britain rebelled most dangerously against Logres and was defeated only just in time" (*THS* 369). Ultimately, Lewis' wizard in the well arises from his sleep and delivers Logres from the clutches of evil, preserving the spiritual reality of England.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>In a diary entry written on Saturday, March 6, 1926, Lewis expresses his desire to be a famous poet: My desire then contains two elements: (a) The desire for some proof to myself that I am a poet. (b) The desire that my poet-hood should be acknowledged even if no one knows that it is mine" (*CL* 1: 929-930). He continues, "I have flattered myself with the idea of being among my own people when I was reading the poets and it is unpleasing to have to stand down and take my place in the crowd" (*CL* 1: 930). When Owen Barfield spoke at Wheaton College on October 16, 1964, he reminisced about his early acquaintance with Lewis, noting that his "ruling ambition was to become a great poet. At that time if you thought of Lewis you automatically thought of poetry" (qtd. in King 2).

<sup>2</sup>In an article by Charles Ross, "Arthuriana and the Limits of C. S. Lewis' *Ariosto Marginalia*," the author discusses some of the marginalia of Lewis as he is annotating the Arthurian text *Orlando Furioso*. He includes in it facsimile pages that demonstrate Lewis' focus on the various Arthurian elements that intrigued him. Ross describes Lewis' process:

Lewis rigorously summarized the plot of Ariosto's long poem. He did so generally without comment, in neat captions copied out in a fair hand across the top of the distressingly cheap editions, often second hand, that it was his practice to purchase. His annotations also included underlinings as well as single vertical lines. These marginalia indicate a habit of mind that is extremely focused, limited to a fixed number of topics, and at times almost mundane and personal. Lewis always marked the Arthurian moments, and the related themes of Ireland (he was born in Belfast), women, significant parallels

to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and virtue. He also had a strange fascination for noses. (47)

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis began reading "a magazine called *The Soundbox* [that] was doing synopses of great operas week by week, and it now did the whole *Ring*." He writes,

I read in a rapture and discovered who Siegfried was and what was the 'twilight' of the gods. I could contain myself no longer—I began a poem, a heroic poem on the Wagnerian version of the Niblung story. My only source was the abstracts in *The Soundbox*, and I was so ignorant that I made Alberich rhyme with *ditch* and Mime with *time*. My model was Pope's *Odyssey* and the poem began (with some mixture of mythologies) *Descend to earth, descend, celestial Nine*  
*And change the ancient legends of the Rhine. . . .*

Since the fourth book has carried me only as far as the last scene of *The Rheingold*, the reader will not be surprised to hear that the poem was never finished. But it was not a waster of time, and I can still see just what it did for me and where it began to do it. The first three books (I may, perhaps, at this distance of time, say it without vanity) are really not at all bad for a boy. At the beginning of the unfinished fourth it goes all to pieces; and that is exactly the point at which I really began to try to make poetry. Up to then, if my lines rhymed and scanned and got on with the story I asked no more. Now, at the beginning of the fourth, I began to try to convey some of the intense excitement I was feeling, to look for expressions which would not merely state, but suggest. Of course I failed, lost my prosaic clarity, spluttered, gasped, and

presently fell silent; but I had learned what writing means.  
(*Surprised by Joy* 74)

<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Arthur Greeves dated June 5, 1914, Lewis writes, "Of course, take the 'Loki Bound' MS. over to Bernaugh, anytime you feel inclined to compose a little operatic music" (*CL* 1: 59). In a subsequent one written on October 6 of that same year to Greeves, he sets forth "the plot of my would-be tragedy," "divided into the technical parts of a Greek tragedy" (*CL* 1:75-78), and in an epistle penned on October 14, he acknowledges, "I am afraid this is rather a 'Loki' letter, and I know that I must not expect others to doat [*sic*] on the subject as foolishly as do I" (*CL* 1: 81).

Lewis remarks to Greeves:

I was very glad to hear your favourable criticism of 'Loki' (and I hope it is genuine) and to see that you are taking an interest in it. Of course your supposed difficulty about scoring is a 'phantasm.' For, in the first place, if we do compose this opera, it will in all probability never have the chance of being played by an orchestra: and, in the second place, if by any chance it were ever to be produced, the job of scoring it would be given—as is customary—to a hireling. (*CL* 1: 80)

<sup>5</sup> In letters to Arthur Greeves and an entry in his diary, Lewis discusses his interest in the childhood of Medea and the poem he is writing about the subject.

July 11, 1916: "I am very glad to hear that you are getting to like Jason: I agree with you that the whole description of Medea—glorious character—going out by night, and of her sorceries in the wood is absolutely wonderful, and there are other bits later on such as the description of the 'Winter by the Northern River' and the garden of the Hesperides, which I think quite as good" (*CL* 1: 209).

February 17, 1917: "The subject is 'The childhood of Medea,' & it will leave off

where the most poems about her begin— shortly after her meeting with Jason. It will describe her lonely, frightened childhood away in a castle with the terrible old king her father & how she is gradually made to learn magic against her will” (CL 1: 277-278).

February 20, 1917: “The childhood of Medea has progressed to some two hundred and twenty lines, in the metre of ‘Jason’—tho’ I am trying not to imitate [William] Morris too much” (CL 1: 282)

February 28, 1917: “‘Medea’s Childhood’ after struggling on for 300 turgid lines has been quietly made into spills for my ‘tobacco pipe’—all those fine landscapes and vigorous speeches, devoted to real use at last!” (CL 1: 286).

July 4, 1923: “[. . .] I wrote and destroyed over seven hundred lines of a poem on Medea” (AMR 252).

<sup>6</sup> Lewis reflected on his Helen poem in letters to Arthur Greeves.

May 5, 1919: “I have nearly finished the Venus poem and am full of ideas for another, which Gilbert Murray gave me the hint of in a lecture—a very curious legend about Helen, whom Simon Magus, a gnostic magician mentioned in the Acts, found living as a very earthly person in Antioch and gradually recalled to her who she was and took her up to Zeus again, reborn: on their way they had to fight ‘the Dynasties’ or planets—the evil powers that hold the heaven, between us and something really friendly beyond—I have written some of it, but of course I get hardly any time either for reading or writing” (CL 1: 447).

June 2, 1919: “Hardly writing anything at all except a few lines yesterday for the Helen poem, and bits for a short one I thought of doing on ‘Nimue’. What are the possibilities of the subject?” (CL 1: 454).

<sup>7</sup> In his diary entry of July 11, 1923, Lewis mentions his “Sigfrid” poem: “[. . .] [C]oming across my old poem on ‘Sigrid’, I began to turn it into a new version in couplets with great and totally unexpected success” (AMR 259).

<sup>8</sup> In an April 20, 1922 entry in his diary, Lewis comments on his “Nimue” poem: “After supper I began to copy out ‘Nimue’ with many corrections: I am pleasantly satisfied with it. Whether I succeed or fail, how ridiculous that will read some day! . . .” (AMR 23).

<sup>9</sup> In a diary entry dated September 9, 1923, Lewis discusses his Cupid and Psyche poem: “. . . My head was very full of my old idea of a poem on my own version of the Cupid and Psyche story in which Psyche’s sister would not be jealous, but unable to see anything but moors when Psyche showed her the Palace. I have tried it twice before, once in couplet and once in ballad form (AMR 266).

<sup>10</sup> Doris Myers describes the figures Lewis mentions in this passage: “Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-1665), an amateur scientist, poet, and collector of manuscripts; William Collins (1721-59), a pre-romantic poet; George III (1738-1820), the mad king; and Nathaniel Fox, a fictional World War I poet” (93).

<sup>11</sup> Diogenes Laërtius, who probably wrote around 250 A.D., records the tale of Epimenides in his *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*:

Epimenides, according to Theopompus and many other writers, was the son of Phaestius; some, however, make him the son of Dosiadas, others of Agesarchus. He was a native of Cnossos in Crete, though from wearing his hair long he did not look like a Cretan. One day he was sent into the country by his father to look for a stray sheep, and at noon he turned aside out of the way, and went to sleep in a cave, where he slept for fifty-seven years. After this he got up and went in search of the sheep, thinking he had been asleep only a short time. And when he could not find it, he came to the farm, and found everything changed and another owner in possession. Then he went back to

the town in utter perplexity; and there, on entering his own house, he fell in with people who wanted to know who he was. At length he found his younger brother, now an old man, and learnt the truth from him. So he became famous throughout Greece, and was believed to be a special favourite of heaven. (1.109-110)

<sup>12</sup> Around 1250 A.D. the tale of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus was recorded in chapter 24 of the work by James de Voragine entitled *Legenda aurea* (the “Golden Legend”), which relates information on the lives of the saints and Christian feasts. Pieter W. van der Horst in his article, “Pious Long-Sleepers in Greek, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity,” summarizes the story:

During the persecution of Christians by the emperor Decius (ca. 250 CE), seven pious young men took refuge in a cave near Ephesus where they fell asleep and were walled up by Decius. When they woke up, initially they thought they had slept only for a short time and sent one of their number, Iamblichus, to the market to get some food. But as he came into the city, everything appeared strange to him: the buildings were changed, Jesus Christ was being talked about freely by the people, and crosses were inscribed on all the city gates. He couldn't believe that this was his Ephesus. Finally he realized that it was no less than 372 years later: Theodosius was the Emperor. (Curiously enough, this is said to have happened not about 622 CE but in the reign of the Emperor Theodosius, either I or II [379-395 and 408-450 CE respectively]). The appearance of the seven young men became the occasion for great ecclesiastical festivity in which also the Emperor participated. All who saw the young

men thanked God for the miracle. The cave became a much visited pilgrim site for many centuries. (1)

<sup>13</sup> “Rip Van Winkle” is a short story published in 1819 by Washington Irving. The protagonist of the tale, after which the story is titled, lives before the advent of the American Revolutionary War. Although popular with townsfolk and children, he is an idler and his farm has suffered as a result. He finally escapes to his beloved wilderness with Wolf his dog to avoid his wife's constant nagging. On his way, he sees a fellow Dutchman who needs assistance carrying a keg of moonshine. As they proceed, Van Winkle hears deafening noises. Finally, they arrive at a place where he discovers that the source of the noise is a company of men who are bowling. Helping himself to their liquor, Van Winkle quickly falls asleep. When he awakens, he sees a rusty gun, no dog, and he is sporting a foot-long beard. He is a stranger to the town and sees no people he recognizes. Hanging in the village's inn is a portrait of George Washington instead of King George III. His wife is dead and his friends gone. He sees his son who is now an adult. Van Winkle finds out that he was asleep twenty years, and his adult daughter finally takes him in.

<sup>14</sup> *Lepidus the Centurion: A Roman of Today* is a British fantasy novel written by Edwin Lester Arnold, published in 1901. Louis Allanby, the young squire who is the narrator of the story, lives in modern-day Rome. He discovers on his estate the underground tomb of a Roman centurion named Marcus Lepidus. For some unexplained reason, Lepidus comes back to life with the help of Allanby. The squire invites him to be a guest at his house introducing him as his cousin to his other visitors. The reader learns of the past life of Lepidus in ancient Rome where he became a centurion in order to be close to the woman he loved.

<sup>15</sup> *When the World Shook: Being an Account of the Great Adventure of Bastin, Bickley, and Arbuthnot* is a science fiction

novel by H. Rider Haggard published in 1919, shortly after WW I. It relates the travels of Basil Bastin, a preacher; Bickley, a physician; and Humphrey Arbuthnot, an author who writes adventure stories, to the mysterious south sea island of Orofena where they are marooned. They learn from the natives of their powerful god Oro who has been asleep for 250,000 years. The shipwrecked men search a volcanic cave and discover two coffins made of crystal in which two beings have been laid. They revive Oro and his daughter Yva, who looks just like Arbuthnot's dead wife Natalie. The two plan to marry. After Oro forces Arbuthnot to show him the negative state of the world through some kind of remote projection, the god decides to destroy the world through an earthquake in order to create a golden age with the survivors. Yva thwarts the attempt but in the process is killed. The grieving father allows the three travellers to return to England where Arbuthnot dies and is buried next to Natalie.

<sup>16</sup> Although not mentioned by Green and Hooper, there can be little doubt that Lewis would have also been familiar with the medieval work "St. Erkenwald," a miracle story that relates the resuscitation of an ancient corpse that was discovered in a pagan tomb during construction of a cathedral. The tomb is opened and inside is a perfectly preserved body dressed in kingly garments. Unsure about what all of this means, the mayor sends for St. Erkenwald who prays to learn the identity of the individual. After Erkenwald prays, a light appears, and the corpse is revived. Asking questions of the corpse, Erkenwald discovers that the animated man is a just judge who lived in Britain before the time of Christ. One teardrop from St. Erkenwald, symbolizing baptism, falls on the former judge. With his soul now ready to enter bliss, his body turns to dust.

<sup>17</sup> In that same lecture, Bennett expressed his sincere sorrow at the loss of his colleague, "C. S. Lewis died a year ago today,

and the year has deepened not diminished our sense of loss," and describes the affection his students and friends had for him:

The regard he inspired in his pupils happily illustrated on the night he inaugurated this professorship; when a platoon of them who had made the journey from Oxford could find no place to sit save on the dais, on which they ranged themselves like a *sceldtruma* or shield-wall resolved to defend their liege-lord. In fact, of course, he found here friends rather than adversaries, and friends who added happiness and solace to his last years. No man was ever more indifferent to 'status'. But no man could have relished more the friendliness and the freedom that Cambridge accorded him. And assuredly he was not distressed to find here that the dinosaurian culture which he described so memorably in his opening lecture was not quite so moribund as he had suggested. ("Humane Medievalist" 359)

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**The Wizard in the Well · Mark R. Hall**

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