

Reconstructing the Fictional Worlds of Heaven and Hell as Depicted in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*

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Abstract

Within each story there lies in the background the fictional world which in turn contains the characters, their stories and everything. The Great Divorce has embedded within its stories the fictional worlds of Heaven and Hell. The narrator has beautifully embroidered the worlds within the thread-work of narrative elements constructing the narrative itself. This research paper attempts to revive or reconstruct the fictional worlds of Heaven and Hell through the fragmented hints left over by the narrator.

The Great Divorce is a novella written by C. S. Lewis. It was published in 1944. This great philosophical novella is a theological vision. Like *Pilgrim's Regress*, it comes under the frame work of dream. Here the narrator doesn't stay outside the dream watching other people act, but he is inside the dream and is a part of it. At the end he wakes up to find that it is a dream. The novel becomes a record of whatever he heard and saw, and also of whomever he met, talked with, and things he understood.

The novella draws the fictional worlds of Heaven and Hell. The life on earth becomes a pilgrim way to reach either heaven or hell. In reconstructing the fictional realities of Heaven and Hell, it is very essential to note that the fictional worlds are carved within the structure of the stories told or re-told. A story is a pack of events arranged in chronological or anachronological order. Events make up the story. Rimmon-Kenan classifies events into kernals and catalyst. As explained in the previous chapter, kernal opens alternatives while catalyst moves it further or delays it.

In the *Great Divorce*, there is a Grey town. There is a bus stand and a short queue to get in the bus. Everyone is given an alternative whether to get in the bus or not. This is kernal where everyone is left with an alternative. There are some who go away from the queue and some choose to stay. The narrator gets in the bus because he doesn't want to stay in the dull grey town. Those who choose to ride the bus, come to the outskirts of Heaven. Each ghost is met by a spirit from heaven. They are again given a choice whether to stay in Heaven or to go back to the Grey Town, i.e., Hell. Making the decision is not easy. It takes agreements, understanding, and acceptance that get into the process of decision making. That becomes the catalyst that kindles the story up.

The kernals and catalysts are essential parts of the all the events. The isolated events cannot make up a complete story. Events need to be threaded together in the process. The events are combined with two basic principles: temporal succession and causality. Temporal succession deals with the arrangement of events in the timeline. Stories are more often multilinear.

Temporal sequence gets complicated in *Great Divorce*. Every Ghost and Spirit has a story of past which has influenced his/her present. The temporal sequence shifts to and fro between past and the present. The narrator after he gets down from the bus, he sees a Big Ghost. A spirit called Len meets him. Their conversation goes back to their life on earth when Len murdered Jack but Len later repented and is now in heaven. The Big Ghost cannot accept the fact that a murderer is in heaven while he is in hell. The reader can clearly notice the constant swirl between past and the present. The past becomes so significant that it has its effect in the present and the ghost's present decisions affecting their future. With the amalgam of past and future with the present, the story becomes multilinear and more interesting. The narrator puts them in an order of temporal sequence which is anachronological. Let us deal with anachronies in detail a bit later. The next principle in combining events is causality.

Causality explains why something happens. Without it will be just pieces of events arranged. Causality can be explicit or implied by chronology. The temporal sequence is gilded with causality making the re-telling of the stories more feasible. The narrator in *Great Divorce* one day finds himself in a Grey Town. He doesn't like the place so he chooses to travel in the bus. He goes to heaven with the few other passengers. There he hears conversations of several Ghosts when they met their Spirits. The encounters are purely guided by explicit reason. Each Ghost has their free will. They can either choose to stay in heaven or return to their Grey Town, Hell. The Big Ghost couldn't understand the forgiveness of God who chose to forgive a murderer and returns to the bus. The Ghost Ikey goes to make profit by stealing golden apples from heaven. The Ghost Pam refuses to give up the sorrow of her dead child for the love of God. There is a Ghost with a lizard on his shoulder who allows the Spirit to kill the lizard and chooses to stay in heaven. The causality lies in the personal choice of each Ghost.

It is seen how the plots is constructed through temporal sequence and causality. The constructed plot can have single plot or multiple plotlines. It is obvious that this novel has multiple plot lines. A novel with multiple plotlines can be divided into main plot and subplotlines. The novella has vast range of sub-plotlines that aid the main plot which focuses on the narrator's visit to the Grey Town and the Heaven. As the narrator overhears the conversation between each Ghost and Spirit, their stories become fragmented sub-plotlines. These subplots are significant for the narrator's profound understanding of issues on earth, as this is a vision to warn him and others.

The structure of the stories comprises within it the levels of narration that happens in the fictional and the non-fictional level. The first level of communication is extratextual since the author and the reader do not communicate inside the text. It is a non-fictional level. There are two fictional levels of communication. The first level of fictional communication happens between the narrator and the narratee. The next level of fictional communication happens among the characters. It is a level of action. Within the fictional level, sometimes the characters may narrate other stories. "Such narratives within narratives create a stratification of levels whereby each inner narrative is subordinate to the narrative within which it is embedded" (Rimmon-Kenan 92). The stories told by the fictional characters constitute the second degree narrative. Rimmon-Kenan calls it is as a hyponarrative level since it is "a level below another level of diegesis" (93). There can be a third degree narrative when there is another narrative embedded within a second degree narrative.

In the context of metalanguage the prefix 'meta' means the transition to the second degree. A character in a story can tell a story of his or her own, creating a narrative within a narrative, or a tale within a tale. The original narrative becomes a frame or matrix narrative, and the story told by the narrating character becomes n embedded or "hyponarrative" (Bal 48). A matrix narrative is a narrative that contains an embedded or hyponarrative. Normally both the shift to a hyponarrative, its end and the return to the matrix are explicitly signalled in a text. The entire novella has its first fictional frame of dream. The second fictional frame is that of what happens inside the dream or vision. Within the events of the vision, the stories of several Ghosts and Spirits are recalled, creating metalepses.

Now let's move on to the order of events in detail. As said earlier, the narratives don't follow the natural chronological order, since it is impossible to copy life as such and retell them just like they happened. Each human being experience or do something simultaneously but when someone narrates he cannot retell at once everything that happened at a point of time. This is the limitation of language. So the narrator orders them in such a way that he manipulates this limitation to language through analepsis and prolepses to create the desired effect of suspense or delay. Analepsis denotes flashback and prolepsis refers to flash-forwards. This is anachrony which is a general term "to designate all forms of discordance between the two temporal orders of story and narrative" (Genette 40).

First, how does the narrative begin? A narrative can begin ad ovo, in medias res or in ultimus res. The *Great Divorce* begins without ad ovo. "I seemed to be standing in a bus queue by the side of a long, mean street" (GD 11). And then the narrator tells us what he did before he stands in the queue. "I had been wandering for hours in similar mean streets, always in the rain and always in evening twilight" (11). But the story doesn't continue as flash back. The wandering happens before the incipit of the novel. There can be things that happened before this event of wandering, but it should be noted that it might the onset of his dream. It is possible that something could have happened even before this dream or vision started. So the incipit is in medias res.

The Great Divorce is crowded with anachrony. There is frequent oscillation in time. With almost every Ghost that the narrator meets or overhears, there is a past that connects the present and the present that affects the future. The narrator stands in the queue in the bus stand. He talks with the neighbour standing in the queue. The neighbour tells why the streets are empty. The people in the Grey Town are

quarrelsome. Once a person comes and settles in, he quarrels with his neighbours and moves away. Wherever he/she settles, he/she fights with the neighbours and moves further and further away. This made the streets near the bus stop always empty except for a few. This analepsis is external and it explains the present status of the place.

When they reach the outskirts of heaven, the Ghosts are met with Spirits from Heaven. The narrator overhears the conversations. Every conversation that occurs between the Ghost and the Spirit has references to the past. The Big Ghost when he meets with the Spirit, the past of the Spirit is brought up. He was a murderer on earth, he asked for forgiveness at the last moment and he is in heaven now. The time swings towards the past and returns to the present. This is mixed analepsis which extends before the incipit of the first narration and has its reach within the first narrative. The Big Ghost who couldn't accept the murderer being in heaven, returns to the bus. The choice gives a hint to the future the Ghost has chosen. The choice of returning to the bus becomes a proleptic indication that his future is in Hell.

The second Ghost is concerned with his honest opinion. The Episcopal Ghost meets Dick, the Spirit who was a friend of the Ghost. The time moves backwards to their life on earth. They never believed on one truth but on the free play of inquiry. The analepsis is again external. Then the Ghost leaves to the bus, since he has a little Theological Society to meet in Hell. The act of returning to bus is prolepsis which indicates that he will be Hell. If he has chosen to stay in Heaven, the Grey Town would be Purgatory.

There is a female Ghost who is grumbler. She complains of how she died because of the surgery and how she was starved in the nursing home. The temporal order changes as she tells about her death on earth (past). Her conversation with the Spirit is left open as the narrator moves away with the Teacher Spirit.

There is an Artist Ghost who wants to paint Heaven's landscapes. He was a great artist once upon a time on earth, but now he has been forgotten. There is Ghost called Pam who lost her son, Michael on earth. She kept grieving that she didn't look after her husband, Dick and her daughter, Muriel. She keeps grieving even now that she wants her son in hell. With all the Ghosts, time like a pendulum oscillates between present and past. When they choose to return to the bus, it becomes prolepsis that hints their future. The Ghost with the Lizard lets the angel kill the lizard and with death he is made a new man. Death here becomes indication of eternal life.

The prolepses and analepses propel the present, and thus, create the story. Without these temporal fluctuations, the present becomes meaningless. Moreover, these structural and temporal elements help the reader understand how the narrator has structured the stories which erupt from the fictional realities of Heaven and Hell. In reconstructing these fictional worlds, the voices in these stories, the characters and perspectives from which the stories are told are essential.

The short novel, *The Great Divorce*, (as mentioned earlier) comes under dream framework, like *Pilgrim's Regress*. Unlike the latter, *The Great Divorce* makes the narrator a part of the narration. The narrator is inside the story, as a character. Since he is a character in the narration he narrates, he is overt. He is "a narrator who is part of diegesis s/he presents; a narrator who is a character in the situations and events s/he recounts" (Prince 40,41). The narration happens in first person, so the reader knows what he sees, hears and learns. The narrator overhears the conversations when each ghost from the Grey town meets each bright Spirit from Heaven. The narrator doesn't make any judgemental statements but simply shows whatever he could hear and see on the spot. So, it is obvious that the narrator takes the role of an eye witness and propagator of his vision. Though he is a character inside the narration, he doesn't play the role of a protagonist. He doesn't influence any action in the narration, though he participates in the course of the action. As the events happen he simply watches over.

The work of interpreting and commenting is done by the narrator's teacher, George Macdonald. His voice often interrupts the narration, unlike the narrator's. He is a heavenly Spirit sent to meet the narrator. The narrator was a fan of George Macdonald on earth. He has read all his books and admires him as his teacher. Before the teacher arrives, the narrator has met several ghosts and through some ghosts, he has gained knowledge of what's happening to some extent. All his doubts are clarified and that too with the words of someone (teacher) he totally respects. The teacher reveals to him the purpose of his visit. "...And ye were not brought here to study such curiosities. What concerns you is the nature of the choice itself: and that ye can watch them making" (69). The teacher's role gains importance with the fact that without him, the narrator wouldn't have any clue about his vision. It would have been harder for the reader to interpret everything. The symbols are deciphered and questions answered with the intervention of the teacher's voice.

There are several other minor characters whose presence is shorter, yet their voices are significant. The significance of the voices arises from their role in depicting the different choices they make. So these voices cannot be neglected in the fictional narration. The voices of the Ghosts and of the Spirits clash bringing in the end result. It should be noted that most of the narration falls under mimesis. Diegetic narration is comparatively less. In other words, the narration is more of showing than telling.

Now let's move on to some of the minor characters in detail. The Ghosts are transparent when viewed in the abundance of light in the outskirts of Heaven. They are "smudgy and imperfectly opaque when they stood in the shadow of some tree" (27). Against the bright air, they look like "man-shaped stains" (27). They cannot affect anything in Heaven. Even the dew drops on the grass aren't disturbed by their walk over them. It becomes very painful for the Ghosts to walk on the solid grass since the grass leaves are so solid (unlike earth's solidarity, every substance here is more solid and real). On the other hand, the Spirits from Heaven are radiant and solid. Some are naked and some wear robes. "But the naked ones did not seem less adorned, and the robed ones did not disguise in those who wore them the massive grandeur of muscle and the radiant smoothness of flesh" (30). They all look ageless. A sweet smell came out as the grass gets crushed under their feet and the dew scattered.

Each Ghost from the Grey Town has great affinity to their lives on earth. They are so attached to their anger, their bitterness, their ideologies, their lifestyles and their sins on earth that they don't want to shed them to get adorned with the real joy of Heaven. The Big Ghost was straight person who has done his best in everything on earth. He doesn't believe in religion. He meets the Spirit of Jack who was a murderer on earth. He murdered Len who is now a Spirit. Jack has repented on his last minute and has come to heaven. But the Big Ghost is not ready to take advice from a murderer and charity from God.

The Episcopal Ghost is so concerned with intellectually analysing the details of the Bible and the stature of Christ that he disregards to stay with Christ in Heaven. It is better for him to read religious papers in Hell and feel useful rather than to leave his ideologies and freedom of inquiry to be in Heaven. Dick, the Spirit, who meets him was an intellectual friend on earth but the Ghost complains of him turning narrow minded.

Ikey, the Ghost is materialistic. He tries to steal a golden apple from Heaven so that he can sell real commodity in Hell. But Hell cannot contain the tiniest grain of sand from Heaven. The Hard-bitten Ghost is negative about everything. He has a gruffy, uneducated voice. He complains everything to be deceptive and doubts the intentions of the solid people.

There is a Female Ghost who is conscious of her nakedness and transparency. She doesn't want other Spirits to stare through her. So she refuses to go with the Spirit who urges her come to the mountain and also calls for Unicorns for help. There is another Grumbler Female Ghost who grumbles about everything. Yet another Female Ghost unaware of her ghostly appearance tries to attract others with her physique. An artist Ghost wants to paint the landscape of Heaven and refuses to understand the Spirit to tries to tell him that there no need for copies in Heaven.

There is another Female Ghost who nagged her husband Robert to overwork and earn for her luxury on earth, and has come to Heaven to take him back, since he is not fit to be on his own. The bossy Ghost finds it hard to live without bossing someone. A mother Ghost who lost her son refuses let go of the pain and let God's love in. Her selfish love wants her to be with her son, Micheal, even if it is Hell.

A Ghost with a lizard on his shoulder chooses to let the bright Angel to kill the lizard which represents lust. The lizard dies and a huge bright stallion comes out. Moreover the Ghost also gets transformed.

Finally, there is a dwarf ghost called Frank, who is tied by chain to a tall tragedian Ghost. The Lady Spirit who was her wife on earth tries to pull him into Joy. But the dwarf ghost is occupied with the words of the Tragedian who talks about misery. He wants her to miss him be miserable. But she is in Love (God) Himself and so she cannot afford to be miserable. The Dwarf struggles against joy and vanishes. They couldn't bring hell into her (the Lady Spirit).

Each voice of these minor characters is important since their clash of thoughts and ideas becomes the core of the novella. The purpose of the narrator's visit is to listen to these voices and understand the choices they make. Without them, there is nothing to witness. Without these characters and their voices, the spaces such as Hell and Heaven would be empty and insignificant. So these voices and characters have painted the fictional realities to some extent. The author also has painted with words these landscapes (Heaven and Hell) and the time in which he located these stories.

The Spaces - Heaven and Hell are depicted through conversations the narrator has with others and his observation. The spaces here are well defined in comparison with the other two novels. The narration begins in the Grey Town. The Grey Town is dull with its “long, mean” (11) streets. It’s “always in the rain and always in evening twilight” (11). It never becomes night and eventually it never dawns. It is a town with its continual hope of morning.

In the beginning the narrator wanders around and describes the place: “dingy lodging houses, small tobacconists, hoardings from posters hung in rags, windowless warehouses, good stations without trains, and bookshops of the sort that sell *The Works of Aristotle*” (11). Apart from these places, the whole town looked empty. Later, the narrator learns from another ghost how the people in Grey Town are quarrelsome. Once they come to the Grey Town and settle in a street, they quarrel with someone and move away. When they settle in some other place, they fight again and move away. So the people move far and far away from the bus stop, and the streets are empty.

Building a house isn’t a big deal in the Grey Town. Once they imagine, the house appears. Everything in the Grey Town comes out of imagination. Nothing is really real, while Heaven is made up of solid substance. For those who always lived in the Grey Town with the dull light, the bright light of Heaven appears “cruel” () and unbearable. For the ghost-like people (immaterial) from the Grey Town, the solid things of Heaven are too heavy and too solid. Even the raindrops are like shower of hailstones; the leaves of grass are too sharp and hard for the Ghosts to walk on; and the golden apples are too solid to be carried off to Hell.

The narrator observations about Heaven and Hell are even more clarified and explained by the Spirit of Macdonald. He explains that the Grey Town is called the ‘Valley of Shadow of Death’. If the Ghosts leave the Grey Town and choose to stay in Heaven, “it will not have been Hell...it is purgatory... but to those who remain there they will have been Hell even from the beginning” (67).

On the other hand, the outskirts of Heaven where the bus has stopped in is the ‘Valley of Shadow of Life’. The deep Heaven lies deeper in the mountain as the Spirits journey further and further. But it will be Heaven from the first, for those who stay there. Hell can be considered as a state of mind, but Heaven never be. “Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly” (69).

Most of the Ghosts refuse to stay in Heaven and return to the bus. Teacher comments quoting Milton, “Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven” (69). They reject the joy and the reality. Even a simple leaf from Heaven cannot fit into Hell. Even a humble butterfly of Heaven can swallow up Hell, but Hell cannot open its mouth wide enough to swallow even a single grain of Heaven. “Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell... Only One has descended into Hell” (124).

The narrator not just gives philosophical ideas of the space but also detailed descriptions of the landscape. The grass, the trees, the water falls, unicorns, the yellow lions, the mountain, the sounds and smells of the place are drawn in details. The space with all its uniqueness is not abstract. The alien space is pretty detailed and the reader can possibly form a mental picture of the landscapes from these descriptions. “...the author’s own real homeland... serves as organizing center for the point of view, the scales of comparison, the approaches and evaluations determining how alien countries and cultures are seen and understood” (Bakhtin 102). The descriptions are proof of it. But the temporal segment is abstract since it is a dream or a vision. There is no logically coherent time of the events which is typical of a vision narrative. But narration cannot happen without the dimensions of time and space. It is “an alien world in adventure-time” (Bakhtin 89). It is a completely new chronotope that the narrator has created with abstract time in such alien worlds – Hell and Heaven. In Hell, it doesn’t get dark or it dawns. It is always twilight. The time becomes empty without any day or night. Rightly the narrator comments: “Time seems to have paused on that dismal moment” (Lewis 11).

In Heaven it is always pure bright light. No twilight or night can be found in Heaven. Again it is empty time. The ‘forever’ time in both the fictional worlds is abstract. The time flows without any obstruction of day and night classification as we have on earth. Time becomes ‘length-less’ and immeasurable.

Events happen within the constraints of time and space, but time doesn't affect anyone. Time seems to have paused in Hell. It seems long. In Heaven, 'now' is the time. The character who live in Heaven (Spirits) or the Ghosts who choose to stay there have to shake away their past as well their worries of the future. They live in the 'now' (present). Each Ghost has to take decision 'now' - right at that moment. There is nothing called later in Heaven. A Ghost from Hell who has a lizard (Lust) on his shoulders hesitates to let the angel kill it. He wants to do it later. But the angel insists on 'now'. "This moment contains all moments" (100). In the final chapter, Time takes the physical representation with a capital T. It becomes the silver table which watches over the chessmen.

At the end the whole temporal vastness collapses with the realisation that it's all been a dream. The narrator wakes up from his sleep. The chronotope becomes unreal and dreamy when we realise it is a dream, but in the lines of the narration, the fictional space and time remains.

In conclusion, the fictional realities of Heaven and Hell are constructed by the narrator. In attempt to re-construct these worlds, the researcher has re-traced the structure of the narrative, the characters and the voices, and the chronotope. These narrative features create the worlds. In other words, the worlds contain the story. The characters, the voices, the space and the time stretch beyond the boundary of the story and are a part of the re-presented worlds. "It is a part of a larger construct referred to by some as the 'reconstructed' (or 'represented') world (or level) (e.g. Hrushovski 1976, p.7), i.e., the fictional 'reality' in which the characters of the story are supposed to be living and in which events are supposed to take place" (Rimmon-Kenan 6). The story is limited and the words are too. It is definitely impossible to revive the entire fictional worlds through the limited resource of narrative available. Yet the essence of the 'reconstructed' worlds is revived and re-presented manipulating the available narrative features.

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