

**Eva Oppermann**

## **Splitting the Atom and Returning: Death and Beyond in C.S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet* and Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass***

As I have shown before (Oppermann, 2008), Lewis' and Pullman's fantasies are comparable despite the latter's antipathy against the former. In both *Out of the Silent Planet* and *The Amber Spyglass* the death of both worlds and species is discussed, and in both scientists attempt to overcome his threat. In *Silent Planet*, it is Weston who travels to Space in order to find inhabitable planet for the time Earth falls victim to planetary death. In *Amber Spyglass*, Mary Malone recognizes the threat of Dust streaming out of the universe and attempts to find a way to stop it. In contrast to Weston, she is not driven by a lust for power but rather by compassion for her mulefan friends. Neither does she regard herself as representative of mankind or any other species in Pullman's richly peopled multiple universes. Weston, who does, stands in the tradition of the Overreacher (Levine, 9), of which Frankenstein is the first and most prominent example.

Both novelists present death similarly. In Lewis' portrayal, the bodies of the dead Hrossa are 'unbodied'; by unexplained means returned to apparent nothingness. Oyarsa speaks of "returning them to Maledil", and the songs sung in Meldilorn mention a journey to some other realm. Devine compares this process to 'splitting the atom'. Similarly, once the World of the Dead is opened and the ghosts can dissolve, they return to "everything living". In both cases, they are apparently reduced to atoms which can serve as material for new creation.

In my contribution, I will look at the following issues:

- ▶ the diverse theories and origins behind the ways of death and the implied afterlives in both novels,
- ▶ the parts played by the scientists who either try to overcome death or to maintain the possibility of living, and
- ▶ the implication as to a superior power (God or otherwise) as assumed behind the laws and mechanisms in the Universe(s).

**Eva Oppermann** studied English and Theology for teaching at grammar schools at the University of Kassel (Germany) and the University of Central Lancashire, Preston (England) from 1992 till 1998. She has worked as a doctoral researcher and junior university teacher at the University of Kassel between 2004 and 2006, and as a research assistant (postdoc) and junior lecturer at the University of Rostock between 2008 and 2009. She has written her doctoral dissertation on the first Golden Age of English children's literature, covering works of Lewis Carroll, Edith Nesbit, Kenneth Grahame and Frances Hodgson Burnett, and she has recently finished her Second Book on the Fall of Satan Motif in English Literature from the *Caedmon-Genesis* to the Present, in the context of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (2018). Furthermore, she has published on Aldous Huxley's *The Crows of Pearblossom*, *Brave New World* and *Island*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and contemporary Fantasy, spatial concepts in literature (esp. George Eliot's *Middlemarch*), intertextuality, and the teaching of *Paradise Lost* at high school level. Eva Oppermann is currently an Independent Scholar.

