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The Experience of Longing as an Argument for God

An Analysis of the Theme of Longing in Two Works by C.S Lewis

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Apologetic Perspective 7

The Theme of Longing in Dymer 10

The Theme of Longing in The Pilgrim’s Regress 14

A Comparison and an Apology for God 18

Conclusion 26

Works Cited 29
**Introduction**

Throughout history, mankind has orally and textually narrated and listened to stories about life, myths and reality. In one way or another, the themes of these stories deal with issues such as life and death, human nature and knowledge, history and the society of humankind, ethics and morality as well as about the metaphysical realm relating to God’s existence or non-existence. Common to all authors of literature and their literary works is that they, consciously or un-consciously, are influenced by one or several worldviews and ideologies within their lifetime and their context, as well as those prior to their time. In this way a reader may be exposed to basically any thought and ideology which exists or which has existed on earth through history and today.

One of the many authors within Irish and British literary history who through his life, literature and teaching experienced and examined different ways of viewing the world is Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963). Lewis, who was professor of English at Magdalen College in Oxford and later the chair of Medieval and Renaissance literature at Cambridge, also wrote fiction and non-fiction which contains and elaborates a multitude of themes as well as explores and examines different worldviews. These explorative themes are in line with how Lewis himself experienced and examined different worldviews, as described in for example *Dymer*, from idealistic positivism and naturalistic/materialistic atheism, to pantheistic romanticism and occultism as well as theism and Christianity in the Anglican Church of England (Lewis, *Dymer* 8). As Sørina Higgins has pointed out, Lewis, both as a scholar and an author had a wide range of dialogues and debates.¹ In addition, he wrote literature, ranging from poems, narrative poems to prose as well as allegorical faeries for children, the latter

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¹ The topics ranged from cultural apologies for Romantic poetry and engagement with poetry-critics; rejection of Freud’s psychoanalytic approach to psychology and religion; a re-interpretation of Jung’s collective unconscious; theological discussions on the problem of evil or the necessity of Free Will and the apology for Christian faith, and also philosophical ideas from Plato on the doctrine of ‘Forms’ as well as his literary adaption of mythology and the view of Christianity as a true myth (1).
being represented by *Narnia*, which has been among his most popular narratives with a general audience. According to scholars, the strength of his appeal lay in the ‘many-sidedness of his work’ (Duriez 403).

Among all his literary works there is one theme which continually recurs, namely the theme of ‘longing’. Corbin Scott Carnell, among others, points out that the concept of human longing is central in the Western history of ideas within literature and philosophy, ranging from Plato’s to Wordsworth’s writings on the theme (Carnell 1974). One of the influences of the concept of human longing comes from the German word *Sehnsucht*. Angelika Corbineau-Hoffman translates *Sehnsucht* as ‘Sehnen’, meaning ‘longing,’ and ‘sucht’, in the near meaning of an almost pathological desire (Corbineau-Hoffman 165). James Helfers translates *Sehnsucht* as ‘unappeasable longing’, hence pointing towards both something missing and something wanting (Helfers 11). In addition, Higgins presents various signifiers which Lewis used to express Sehnsucht over the years, such as: ‘Sweet desire’, ‘heraldry of heaven’, ‘intense longing’, ‘the Blue flower’, ‘dialectic of Desire’, ‘Joy’ (2). As Lewis’s way of defining longing, *Sehnsucht*, varied over the years, in line with the examples above, the term ‘Joy’ came to be commonly and progressively used, both by him and by scholars interpreting him. In his own biography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes the nature of Joy:

I will only underline the quality common to the experiences, it is that of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief, but then it is a kind we want. (20)
Lewis thus defines the human longing as unsatisfied desire. However, these definitions only represent fragments of how the idea has been elaborated through the western philosophical and literary tradition, as well as how Lewis defines and elaborates on the term, for example through the notion of Joy. However, in order not to fall in the pitfall of anachronism, drawing extensively on a definition of the term from other historical periods, it is important to see how Lewis himself defines the term in relation to his works subject for analysis in this essay.

Interestingly, among his fictional works there are two which explicitly center on the theme of longing, namely *Dymer* (1926) and *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933). In the preface of those works the theme of longing is partly described and defined by Lewis. For example, in the preface to the reprinted version of *Dymer* in 1950 Lewis writes that “From at least the age of 6, romantic longing - *Sehnsucht* – has played an unusually central part in my experience. Such longing is in itself the very reverse of wishful thinking: it is more like thoughtful wishing” (6). In other words, Lewis describes his own experience of romantic longing from his early age, or in other words an aspect of thoughtful wishing, to be the definition of *Sehnsucht* as he wrote *Dymer*. Additionally, in the preface to *The Pilgrim’s Regress* Lewis writes that: “The human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given nay, cannot even be imagined as given in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience” (10). In the same preface Lewis confirms that the romantic longing as a child, or the thoughtful wishing, was evoked by “inanimate nature and marvelous literature” (7).

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2 Lewis develops the theme in several of his other fictional works, even though the theme is generally not as explicit there as in *Dymer* and *Regress*. For example, in the allegorical narrative of *Narnia – The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* Lewis reflects on longing as one of the main characters, Lucy, meets Aslan. Aslan is a transcendent Lion and an allegorical character of divinity (God/Jesus), and when Lucy meets him she is reminded of a beautiful dream she had years back, and which she wishes to experience again: “At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in his inside[...][S]usan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her”. Lewis then describes that: “Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer” (64-65). Hence, the character of Aslan evokes in Lucy a specific memory of longing, not to be identified with nostalgia, and relates it to the idea of spiritual transcendence. The notion of longing is featured in other fictions as well as in many of the poems which Lewis wrote over the years, with *Spirits of Bondage* (1919) until later collections of *Poems* (1965) and *Narrative Poems* (1969).
other words, *Sehnsucht* (longing) is by Lewis defined as a lifelong human longing, a thoughtful wishing and unsatisfied desire, that is not, and cannot, be satisfied fully in this life, but in the life after (10). In this way the idea of longing is linked with transcendence, a longing that can only be satisfied by God in heaven, in a life after the earthly life. Further, Lewis’s experience of this longing is described as lifelong, it can also from this biographical perspective be confirmed as an influence and a red thread throughout Lewis’s works, both before (*Dymer*) and after his conversion (*Regress*). However, the theme is intensified in his writings after his conversion to Christianity in 1929 and the publication of his first text as a Christian, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. This is also confirmed by scholars, such as Jason Lepojärvi (2011).

Apart from Lewis’s own writings on longing there have been numerous monographs and articles by scholars on how Lewis deals with the theme. However, most of the monographs emphasize the non-fictional works in relation to the theme of longing and its link to transcendence (*Surprised by Joy, Mere Christianity, The Weight of Glory, The Letters of C.S Lewis*). Further, scholars who elaborate on the theme of longing in the fictional works either take a very broad perspective – comparing many fictional works – or focus on a single work or genre (poems). For instance scholars such as Don W. King have analyzed Lewis’s pre-conversion narrative poetry like *Dymer*, including the theme of longing from a literary perspective (2007). King, however, does not include Lewis’s post-conversion fiction or non-fiction in these analyses. Mona Dunckel, on the other hand, specifically analyzes *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and its allegorical genre as well as the theme of longing (2007). In addition,

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3 Thereafter, the theme is elaborated thoroughly in his non-fiction books, especially in *Surprised by Joy* (1966), which tells of his ideological and spiritual journey that, at a young age, led him from Christianity to atheism, and various ideologies, and then back to Christianity in his early thirties. Additionally, *The Weight of Glory* (1941), which contains nine sermons delivered by Lewis during the Second World War in BBC radio broadcasts, clearly elaborates on longing. However, there are several other non-fictional books and collections by Lewis which investigate the theme: for example *Christian Reflections* (1940) which consists of fourteen apologetic papers on Christian faith by Lewis; several volumes of *The Collected Letters of C.S Lewis* (2004, 2007), which is a collection of “Family letters”, written between 1905-1931, “Books, Broadcasts, and the War”, 1931-1949, and “Narnia, Cambridge and Joy”, 1950-1963.
there are some articles, by Lewis’s secretary Georg Sayer and the biographer of Lewis Joe R. Christopher, which mainly focus on analyzing Dymer in general. Further, only one article has been written which primarily analyzes Dymer by Christopher, where he analyses the poem from biographical, psychological and literal perspectives and only uses brief comparative comments with The Pilgrim’s Regress and the theme of longing (1996). However, not even this article clearly links the theme of longing, from Dymer and The Pilgrim’s Regress, to the argument for God’s existence. Additionally, the article is not peer-reviewed, why there is a gap of a peer reviewed article in relation to this topic. Subsequently, there are no scholarly analyses which specifically compare and contrast one of the last works of Lewis as an atheist (Dymer) with one of his first literary works as a theistic Christian (The Pilgrim’s Regress) from the perspective of clearly relating them to the theme of longing and establishing the link of this concept to God’s existence. As stated earlier, the scholarly analyses which focus on the theme of longing with the argument for God’s existence predominantly use Lewis’s non-fictional works as their sources, not his fictional works.

There is therefore a need of integrating different scholarly works which analyze the theme of longing in relation to Lewis’s fictional works in general with specific analyses of Dymer or The Pilgrim’s Regress in particular. Additionally, there is a need to link the theme of longing from Lewis’s fictional works with the concept of transcendence and the argument for God. In addition to the secondary sources which have been mentioned above, the works of the following scholars relates to the argument in the essay. From a literary perspective Corbin-Scott Carnell (1974), Mona Dunckel (2007) and David Jasper (2010) all outline common allegorical features of longing in Lewis’s fictional works, without explicitly linking them to the argument for God. Further, from a literary and theological perspective, scholars like James P. Helfers elaborate on the theme of longing in Lewis’s non-fictional and fictional works in general, in relation to Wordsworth’s works. However, he does not develop a clear apology for
God from the concept of *Sehnsucht* (defense of ideology) in his analysis (2007). From a literary and theological perspective, Lepojärvi analyzes on Lewis’s usage of the term spiritual longing as a preparation for presenting a theistic faith, mainly from Lewis’s non-fictional generic works (2011), but not from *Dymer*. Furthermore, from a literary and philosophical perspective, A.N Hunt compares Lewis’s definition, experiences and analysis of longing as a pointer towards transcendence in relation to common naturalistic/atheistic objections from Peter Atkins (2015). Hunt does, however, not focus on Lewis’s fictional work *Dymer* and *Regress* in his analysis. Additionally, Peter Kreeft (1989), Peter Williams (2013) and Joe Puckett (2013), among many other scholars, analyze the theme of longing in relation to the argument for God’s existence. However, they do not primarily base their analyses on Lewis’s fictional works, nor do they focus their analyses on a comparison of *Dymer* and *Regress*, as a foundational link to the argument for God.

Considering the lack of research on the theme of longing, particularly in Lewis’s fictional works and in relation to the argument for God’s existence, the aim of this essay is to compare and contrast *Dymer* and *The Pilgrim’s Regress* in order to see similarities and differences in the way in which the theme of longing is expressed - as a literary apology for God’s existence (using fiction, as opposed the more common way of using non-fiction material as a basis for outlining a philosophical and apologetic argument for God). The main argument is that, even though *Dymer* and *The Pilgrim’s Regress* were written from at least two different sets of worldviews, the theme of longing is expressed in both and progresses intensively in the latter as a way of outlining Lewis’s own ideological journey from atheism to Christianity, as well as to initiate, and in addition support, a literary apologetic argument for God.
The Apologetic Perspective

Theoretical framework of the analysis in this essay has an inter-disciplinary approach; drawing on biographical, philosophical, theological and apologetic aspects through the literary analysis and rhetorical presentation. However, the main emphasis is on the apologetic perspective, where biographical, philosophical and theological aspects will partly be intertwined, in order to clarify the literary analysis of the primary texts. One reason for this is that the primary sources explicitly and implicitly relate to the perspective. One of them is explicitly linked to the perspective through the title and the content: The Pilgrim’s Regress – An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism (Lewis, 1933). The other source, Dymer, relates to this perspective implicitly through the content and the author’s comments on the book, as being written from an ‘idealistic perspective´ where ‘all supernaturalism was considered illusions´ (8). Hence, Dymer may initially be considered to be an implicit apology for atheism. Furthermore, an apologetic perspective is relevant to use since the two different literary works presuppose two different worldviews. Hence, an apologetic perspective, which is used as a discourse to identify the essence of one or several ideologies (worldviews), is suitable to identify the different worldviews which influence Lewis’s works. Additionally, the third reason to use an apologetic perspective is to elaborate a literary apology for God in the twenty first century. In other words, as a contrast to the generic way of defending a specific worldview from a mainly philosophical, theological or even non-fictional literature, this essay uses fiction as a basis of analyzing and supporting the apologetic argument for God, from the perspective of human experience of longing. Hence, prior to giving a contemporary sample of an apologetic perspective a short historical definition and description of the art of apology will be given.

According to The Oxford Dictionary the word apologetic in this field is defined as: ‘constituting a formal defense or justification of a theory or doctrine´ (Oxford). Similarly, in
The Merriam-Webster Dictionary the term is defined as a `systematic argumentative discourse in defense, as of doctrine´ (Webster). As a decisive classical example, the concept was elaborated by Plato in his work `Apology´, where he defends his ideology in relation to accusers (Jowett 2014). Thereafter, the art of apology was generally implied when a citizen in the Greco-Roman culture was to defend him/herself in court. Furthermore, it was commonly used by Christians when defending their faith, in relation to other worldviews such as Roman stoicism, imperial worship, Jewish faith or Greek mythology. An example of this is when St. Paul, as a Roman citizen and a Jew who converts to Christianity, defends himself before the Jewish and Roman religious and political leaders (English Standard Version Bible, Acts. 22.1-26.32). Additionally, throughout the history there have been numerous examples of apologies for different worldviews. However, as the field of this essay focuses on the apology of atheism, or theism and Christianity through fictional narrative in the twentieth century, a contemporary example of apology will be given as a background to the main analysis.

As a contemporary scholar Kreeft uses a classical form of syllogism as he outlines the apologetic argument of God´s existence from the theme and experience of longing in Lewis´s writings (Surprised by Joy, Mere Christianity, The Pilgrim´s Regress). He states: “The major premise of the argument is that every natural or innate desire in us bespeaks a corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire.” Further, he writes: “The minor premise is that there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature, can satisfy. The conclusion is that there exists something outside of time, earth and creatures which can satisfy this desire” (Kreeft 250).

According to Kreeft this is, next to Anselm´s ontological argument for God´s existence, the “single most intriguing argument in the history of human thought” (Kreeft 249). Even though Kreeft focuses on Lewis´s works as he analyzes the argument for God there are many other authors than himself and Lewis who have elaborated on the theme throughout history. Some
examples are Thomas of Aquinas in the thirteenth century, Bernhard of Clair Vaux in eleventh century, Augustinas in the fifth century, Plato from 428-348 BC as well as in the collection of King Salomon´s philosophical tradition, from 2000-200 BC. For example, Ecclesiastes states: `Also, he has put eternity into man´s heart´ (Ecc. 3.11). Hence, the author argues that longing for transcendence is inherent to human nature. Additionally, Augustine elaborates and says: "for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee” (Augustine 11). Similarly, Aquinas develops the line of argument: “Again, it is impossible for natural desire to be unfulfilled, since `nature does nothing in vain.’ Now, natural desire would be in vain if it could never be fulfilled. Therefore, man´s natural desire is capable of fulfillment, but not in this life, as we have shown. So, it must be fulfilled after this life. Therefore, man´s ultimate felicity comes after this life.” (48)

As the argument was shaped further, by Lewis and after him several philosophers/theologians, Kreeft points out that it not only argues for the existence of God, but also of heaven and of “something of the essential nature of Heaven and of God”. In other words, it brings four conclusions, namely of God, Heaven and the nature of God and of Heaven. Additionally, Kreeft argues, from his experience with students as a professor of philosophy, that it is “far more moving, arresting, and philosophically effective than any other argument for God or for Heaven” (249). He also points out that this argument touches the human experience in a way that may engage thoughts and discussions on God´s existence in a contrasting manner to the classical rational arguments. Kreeft compares this argument with Anselm´s ontological (purely logical) argument and defines the argument from the perspective of human longing to be as a “meditation, an illumination, an experience, an invitation to an experiment with yourself, a pilgrimage” (249). Further, he shows how Lewis is associated with this argument, in three different contexts, namely autobiographical, practical/pastoral and logical and traces four strands of influences, deriving from experiential, historical,
epistemological and practical areas (249-250). In other words, the argument for God’s existence that derives from analyzing and reflecting on the experience of human longing for transcendence is by nature interdisciplinary in its character. Finally, Kreeft’s as well as other philosophers, like Williams’s, way of analyzing the theme of longing apologetically, using syllogism, will be implied in the final chapter as a model of literary apology. The preceding chapters will be, as they outline and analyze the literary features of longing in Dymer and Regress, building literary support for the premises of the apologetic argument.

**The Theme of Longing in Dymer**

The story of the poem Dymer is described by Lewis in the preface as having been “found” or “came to me” when he was seventeen years old (9). Lewis clearly states that he did not invent it consciously or voluntarily. The story is about a man who, after drastically killing his school teacher, escapes from his hometown in search for refuge, adventure, pleasure and purpose in life. All through the story there are different elements, events and characters which evoke his longing and lead to different encounters and experiences. A central element of the plot is that he has sexual intercourse with a mysterious bride and begets a monster with her, a monster whom later kills Dymer (his father). As the monster (his son) kills Dymer, the latter is transformed into a god and the whole earth is also transformed into a new creation. Additionally, the theme of longing is evident both in the narrative plot as well as through several features in the story, which will be elaborated below.

To begin with, the theme of longing is expressed through the overall narrative plot line of the collected poems. In other words, the `quest´ of the protagonist Dymer in the narrative poem (a poem where the stanzas are linked together with a plot line that runs from the beginning to the end) is a feature of longing. As Dymer, a nineteen-year-old student, kills his lecturer and runs away from his school and his home city he begins his quest: “Down the
white streets and past the gate and forth. Beyond the wall he came to grassy places” (5). However, this initiated quest, or dramatic run away from the “dust heap” (6) of his old city and into adventures of the unexperienced landscape, leads him into an emptiness, or noiselessness:

He shouted. But the solitude received.

His noise into her noiselessness, his fire

Into her calm. Perhaps he half believed

Some answer yet would come to his desire.

The hushed air quivered softly like a wire

Upon his voice. It echoed, it was gone:

The quiet and the quiet dark went on. (7)

Hence, the longing to reach an answer to his desire initiates a quest but leads to emptiness. Dymer then also represents Lewis way of `supposing the universe to be his friend´ (13-14). However the quest, to satisfy the intense longing in Dymer (Lewis) with experiences in nature continues, and will lead to disappointment. The hero is, as Lewis writes in his preface to Dymer, illustrated as “man escaping from an illusion” (13). Additionally, the preface outlines Dymer´s illusion as representing Lewis´s personal “hatred towards the old public school…the army…the platonic view of the state in Plato´s Republic” as well as the “Christiana dream” – or the Christian theology (10-11). In other words, Dymer then represents Lewi´s personal escape from these elements into nature and literature, which evoked the longing (Sehnsucht) in Lewis (Regress, 7). This way of elaborating the theme of longing through the metaphor of a quest in Lewis´s fiction is outlined by scholars like Corbit Scott Carnell. Carnell comments that “quest, distant hills, exotic gardens, the Utter East, music of a special kind” are dominant metaphors of longing in Lewis´s fictional works (91).
A second feature which conveys the theme of longing in *Dymer*, is the `distant hills´. In the story of *Dymer* an old wizard helps men to escape from illusions (a worldview that the natural world is real) into his household of occultism, surrounded by trees which “fringe the garden like a wood” (62). However, the wizard is troubled by the “only flaw in the garden”, namely the sight of the far-off hills, and he tries to stop the men from seeing the view of the hills (which he means is an illusion). The wizard says that he has planted a fir in order to fill the gap, but nothing he plants `will grow there´, and continues: “Let us go in. It draws near time to sup—I hate the garden till the moon is up”. In other words, the wizard tries to stop Dymer from viewing the hills and the light, the natural world, as the view disturbs his attempt to pull Dymer from the illusion of reality (natural world), into the word of dreams (the wizard´s reality of dreams and occultism). The wizard´s fear of the hills is linked to an earlier stanza where he kills a lark, a singing bird, which interrupts his dream (62). Carnell points out that the reason for killing the bird is that the bird´s song “reminds him, as do the hills, of the wonder and the beauty of the everyday real world” (91). Lewis highlights in his preface that the inspiration for the character of the wizard comes from his encounter with his contemporary poet, Yeats (7). Christopher also interprets this Wizard as Yeats, one of Lewis´s poetical influences and a poet whose work he admired (18). However, according to Christopher, Lewis did not admire Yeats´s later “mastery of occult” (18). Thus, the wizard´s attempt to stop people from viewing the `far off hills´, through dreams and occultism is criticized, implicitly by Lewis, through the negative picture of the wizard. In other words, the feature of the far hills and the wizard´s characterization in Dymer may be interpreted as signifying the longing for transcendence, as well as a criticism of occultism as an escape from endeavoring the features of longing.

The third example of a feature which conveys the theme of longing for transcendence in *Dymer* relates to different images of women. As Dymer continues his dialogue with the
wizard he tells him about his longing for a mysterious woman whom he met and had sex with earlier during his quest (64). The wizard then elaborates on how the longing for the lost love of the woman could be exchanged through dreams about women, and gets Dymer to sleep (65-71). However, as Dymer and the woman of his dream were about to make love again he awakens and “that moment snapped the spell”, and the only thing left was “King Lust with his black, sudden, serious stare” (80). In this sense the dream, as well as the woman in it, exposed yet another illusion – the woman that he had encountered was but the source of the ancient lust (81). Hence, the woman was only temporarily satisfying his longing. His deeper, longing for transcendence was still unfulfilled. This is even evident as Dymer later on meets another woman, after being lethally wounded as he escapes from the wizard. As of a miracle Dymer arises to a new life and sees another woman. He sees how “her glance met his” (85) and the woman implicitly tells him that she is a goddess who knows the sorrows of all men (86). Dymer cries out that he wish to know the truth about the world, as opposed to being trapped in an illusion: “Give me the truth! I ask not now for pity, / When gods call, can the following them be sin? / Was it false light that lured me from the City?, / Has heaven no voice to help? Must things of dust / Guess their own way in the dark? She said:„They / must” (88). Dymer finds himself in despair as the nature (‘false light’) he trusted cannot save him. In other words, the protagonist represents a man who is left alone, without any natural force to help him. This view is confirmed in the preface by Lewis as he states that Dymer `egregiously supposes the universe to be his friend´ (13). However, Dymer is abandoned, even by the gods (88). In the dialogue with the goddess Dymer realizes that she is the woman whom he had sexual intercourse with earlier during the quest. The goddess unfortunately disappears from his eyes and he walks away. Again, he is abandoned, this time even physically by a goddess. Lewis

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4 This is yet another example of how the wizard attempts to substitute a real longing with an illusion. At the end of a long dialogue Dymer discovers the lies and curses of the wizard’s mystic teachings as he awakens from a dream. His thoughts become clear as he drinks from a well, which may be interpreted as yet another attempt by Lewis to criticize mysterious occultism. The thought is supported by a later line where Dymer cries out that the wizard’s magic is `accursed´ (75).
here seems to point out an atheistic worldview here, where humankind is left alone in the darkness without any gods to help them. The longing for transcendence seems to end in total disappointment. However, the narrative poem ends with Dymer, or rather his son, encounters the satisfaction searched by his father, as he is transformed into a god in a new form of creation where flowers are coming to life, sweet air fills his nostrils, his heart and his will are changed and, after all the misery he had gone through, he starts to laugh: accompanied by the pleasant music and thriving nature (104). The feature of longing for transcendence thus culminates in a human transformation into a god, and a creational transformation into a heaven.

To summarize, the overall quest, the view of the far hills accompanied by the bird’s song and the encounter with women, specifically the goddess appearing as a woman, seems to embody some of the images which convey the theme of longing for transcendence, of another creation. The story ends with Dymer’s son being transformed into a god, in a new creation. In this way his son finally reaches the goal of his father’s longing. The divine longing which initially lead Dymer on the quest at the end leads his son to a cosmic and personal transcendence. The theme of longing as a signifier of transcendence can, as outlined in the thesis, be traced in Dymer in several respects, even before Lewis’s conversion to Christianity.

**The Theme of Longing in The Pilgrim’s Regress**

*The Pilgrim’s Regress* was written during a two-week holiday in Ireland during 1932, and was, as stated earlier, the first book which Lewis wrote after his conversion to Christianity. The story deals with a man who leaves his childhood home on a pilgrimage in search of an island, which he has glimpsed in a vision and which represents longing, *Sehnsucht* (Jasper 225). As David Jasper summarizes it: “In this search he encounters many other characters and obstacles, learns many lessons, and finally returns to his homeland – yet changed” (225).
One of the dominant images of longing in the *Pilgrim’s Regress* is the metaphor of a pilgrim, longing and searching for ‘truth’. The image of pilgrimage, and an inspiration for the pilgrimage plot, derives from the seventeenth century novel *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan, a story about a man’s progress through life in search of salvation (Sayer 196). The metaphor of the Pilgrim in Lewis’s novel is similarly a man, also called ‘John’, in search of truth about reality and God. In *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, however, the concept of the pilgrim is linked with John’s longing for transcendence. As John follows the longing in his heart, he encounters different features, attributes and ideologies, such as Hedonism, Reason, Virtue, Mammon, Senses, Sigismund (Freud), Romanticism, Atheism and Christianity in various traditions, all of which are characterized as different people and/or places in the story. Jasper describes it as: “tightly drawn allegories of historical figures such as Spinoza, Hegel, Kant, Marx and Freud” (226). It is also, as Lewis states in some respect, a biographical ‘pilgrimage story’ of how he came to believe in God through emotionally and logically reflecting back on his various experiences in life. He writes in his preface that: “The sole merit I claim for this book is that it is written by one who has proved them all to be wrong” (Lewis 8). Subsequently, Jasper describes the main character John as ‘partly Jack (Lewis) and partly Everyman’ (223). Hence, the biographical perspective, and Lewis own identification with the protagonist, is evident.

A second major image of longing in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* is the island. Dunckel, among other scholars, also notices how the island is a common image for longing in *Regress* (42). The image of an island is a recurring one throughout the novel as a vivid picture of something that John sees in a dream, before he starts his pilgrimage. The episode when the image of the island is first presented is initiated by a sound of a musical instrument and, in the dream, he hears a voice which says “come” (24). When John then goes to the window he sees a window in a garden wall which he has never seen before, a window without glass or bars. As he sees
this, John remembers when as a child he went into a wood to pick primroses. He recalls images from this event and he senses a “sweetness and a pang so piercing that instantly he forgot his father’s house, and his mother, and the fear of the Landlord, and the burden of the rules” (24). This experience has connotations to Lewis’s life as a child, as he, in *Surprised by Joy* explains how, in the distance from the window of his home, he could see the remote Castlereagh Hills. As he saw the hills he experienced a sense of longing (Lewis 14). In *Regress*, however, the hills have been exchanged with the view of an island: “It seems to him that a mist which hung at the far end of the wood had parted for a moment, and through the rift he had seen a calm sea, and in the sea an island, where the smooth turf sloped down unbroken to the bays” (24). At this sight John discovers that this is something unique and says: “‘I know now what I want’. The first time that he said it, he was aware that it was not entirely true: but before he went to bed he was believing it”. Hence, the sight of the island awakens, as Cornell comments, a “feeling of mingled awe and desire” (90). Additionally, in one of Lewis’s non-fictional essays he outlines this notion of longing for a distant country – like an island – similar to those that brought up memories of longing in John’s life. Lewis calls these beautiful memories of one’s past “good images of what we really desire” (6-7). However, he warns the reader that the images we long for are not the source of the longing itself. They are only “the scent of the flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country never visited” (6-7). In this way, again, the longing is a signifier towards transcendence, and a life after or beyond the earthly life.

A third feature of longing in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* is music. As partly outlined previously music is the ‘instrument´ that draws John, the pilgrim, in the first place to go and discover the place of the island: “Then came the sound of a musical instrument, from behind it seemed, very sweet and very short, as if it were one plucking of a string or one note of a bell, and after it a full, clear voice” (24). He continues: “and it sounded so high and strange that he thought it
was very far away, further than a star. The voice said Come” (24). In other words, the sound of music evokes the intense longing in John. As John then regularly hears the sound of a particular music he also gets a glimpse of an island through a window. In this way the second feature of longing as an `island´ is mixed with the notion of music.5

The sound of music which evokes John´s longing to search for the island, reoccurs in different episodes until the last page of the novel. As John finally reaches the goal of his pilgrimage, the source of the island (Transcendence/God), John again regresses back to the home of his youth (172). While there he hears again the voice of music, through the voice of the birds, which is blended with the voice of the `Guide´ - who had been appointed as a spiritual guide on the `regress´.6 Carnell connects Lewis´s significant experiences of longing through music to the kind of music which “conveys Sehnsucht - sounds which awake sweet desire at once so fleeting and so overwhelming that one reacts to some degree in this way” (90). The experience of inner longing, initiated by this particular music, guides John towards transcendence, as well as an existential and personal transformation. This transformation is described where he has to “take off your rags” and “dive into the water” (resembling a form of baptism), which symbolizes the pilgrim´s return to “Mother Kirk” (representing Christianity) (168, 14). After the experience of transcendence and transformation John regresses back to the home of his youth (172). John´s whole pilgrimage, from his hometown to his experience of ‘Mother Kirk´ as the source which evokes his longing, could, as outlined, be described as an allegorical apology for God and Christianity.

6 Further, on the regress John has repeated encounters with the various ideological characters and places which he faced on the way to the island. The “voice of the birds at my window began to reach my ear (for it was a summer morning), I heard the voice of the Guide, mixed with theirs and not unlike them, singing this song” (198). The song of the birds (representing beauty in nature) is then blended with the voice of the ‘Guide´ (representing a messenger, plausibly even the Son, of the kingdom of the island that is, heaven), which both arouse the romantic longing of life. This ‘Guide´ for John and Vertue (a person characterizing Virtue whom accompanies John on parts of the pilgrimage to the quest for the island, and on the regress to John´s youthful home.
To summarize, the theme of longing in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* is expressed through a number of features. Firstly, the metaphor of the Pilgrim, picturing a man in search of truth and meaning in life. Secondly, the imagery of an island, as an image of a distant and transcendent place which arouses his determination to seek the truth. Thirdly, the voice of music – which is blended with the ‘sweet desire´ and the `calling´ to go on the quest which finally leads to the primary source of longing. The primary source that provokes the notion of longing turns out to be found by John in `Mother Kirk´, and is symbolized by the pilgrim `diving´ into the water where he encounters a transformation and a renewed vision of the world (168, 170). Hence, the theme of longing, as outlined in the thesis, can be traced in Regress, as a post-conversion fiction, in several respects. Furthermore, the pilgrimage, initiated by longing, and leading to the peak of the plot line where John converts to Christianity features the perspective of a literary allegorical apology for God’s existence and Christian faith. The following chapter will compare and contrast the features of longing in the two narratives and initiate a discussion on the apologetic argument for God’s existence, from the perspective of longing.

**A Comparison and an Apology for God**

Considering the two analyses above it can be stated that *Dymer* and *Regress* elaborate on the theme of longing. It may also be noted that there are both similarities and differences in the way in which this theme is expressed. This section will analyze those aspects as well as analyze how the theme of longing may be outlined as a contemporary argument for God’s existence.

Firstly, there is a similarity in the way Lewis, in *Dymer* and *Regress*, uses the metaphor of an adventurer on a quest in the former, a pilgrim on a pilgrimage in the latter. Both Dymer and John are drawn into a quest which leads them toward unexplored territory of ideologies. In the case of Dymer he is escaping from a totalitarian school, state and society which he resists in
many ways (Lewis, *Dymer* 4). Similarly, John `escapes´ his world of `Puritania´ - representing a very strict form of his family and his upbringing in the Anglican Church – with its many rules (Lewis, *Regress* 20). In other words, both of the adventurers escape from contexts where they experience regulations and rules to which they do not wish to conform. As noted earlier, in *Dymer* the end of the quest is when Dymer´s son, the giant who defeats his father, is transformed into a god. Simultaneously the nature around him is transformed as well and he views his dead father from `above´ (103). However, in *Regress*, the quest ends, not primarily with the transformation of the nature around the adventurer John, but with the transformation of his heart, when `conscience and Sweet desire (longing) come together to make a Whole man´ (155). Hence, there is a difference in the view of the human being in relation to transcendence in the two works. Whereas Dymer becomes a god and reaches fulfillment of his longing John encounters god and reaches fulfillment of his longing. In this way two contrasting worldviews are outlined; In *Dymer* the view of a platonic, or pantheistic, view where the human becomes a god and in *Regress* a theistic and Christian view where God transforms, not the essence but the character of the human.

Secondly, the image of the `far off hills´ in *Dymer* and the image of the `island´ in *Regress* are featured as two different objects in relation to the sense of longing. However, even if they are two different images, they are linked together as both are objects of a romantic and existential longing within the adventurer. Interestingly, the image of an island `in the far west´ in *Regress* is also complemented by an image of `The Eastern Mountains´ in the same novel. At the end of the pilgrim´s quest to the far West, where John and Virtue in `Mother Kirk´ go through the transformational conversion into Christian faith through a dive in the water, symbol of baptism, John has a vision of the `island´, which seems to merge the vision of a castle (168-170). John then views the “summit of the Eastern Mountain which we called the Landlord´s castle as we saw it from Puritania” and the `Guide´ says: “They are not only the
same shape. They are the same” (172). The `island´, the `castle´ and the `mountains´ are then all described as being of the same essence, but with different appearances - which allegorically could be translated as an analogy for God appearing in triune ways as a Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Additionally, it can be viewed as if the ultimate source of the object desired (far hills/island/mountains) is God – even though mankind may have experienced and viewed him in different ways.

The third feature of longing in Regress, which also appears in Dymer, outlines both similarities and differences. In Dymer the sound of music is described as `bitter sound´ which “could have crumbled proud belief / With doubt, or in the bosom of the sage / Madden the heart that had out mastered grief, / And turn the young man´s feet to pilgrimage” (9). Thus, on the one hand the sound of music in Dymer is `bitter´, in contrast to Regress where it is primarily accompanied with a wave of `sweet´ feelings (32). In this way the contrasting aspects of the human longing, as something simultaneously missing (bitter) or wanting (sweet) is outlined. Additionally, Lewis seems to imply that the sound may lead a man on a right or wrong view of the world, depending on the character of the sound. As outlined earlier it was the `sound of music´ which urged John to look through the window where he saw the island, and which trigged him on to a pilgrimage that finally led him to the ultimate reality, namely God (Lewis, Regress 24). Further, in Regress, the sound of the music finally leads him to a deeper satisfaction, even though he is tempted and led astray on the way. Contrastingly, in Dymer the sound of the music leads the protagonist into a disaster as he is led to a dark room in a castle where he has sexual intercourse with a woman (goddess) whose son later kills him (8). In other words, in the case of Dymer the sound, even if it also called the protagonist on to a quest, led him to despair, and tragedy; realizing that he had no friend in neither nature nor in the goddess. Thus, even if the musical sound evokes both John and Dymer to a quest the outcomes are different; in Dymer the music leads to an illusion and abandonment in relation to
transcendence whereas in *Regress* it leads him to friendship and fellowship with the transcendent source that evokes his longing and desire for God.

Additionally, there is also a difference between the two works in how transcendence and divinity are pictured. In *Dymer* the goddess represents transcendence. This initially is understood as a mere illusion, not to be treated as reality. As Lewis outlines in the preface edition: “I was an idealist, and for an idealist all supernaturalism were equally illusions, all `spirits´ merely symbols of `Spirit´ in the metaphysical sense, futile and dangerous if mistaken for facts (Lewis, *Dymer* 8). However, in *Regress*, transcendence of Heaven and God are described as a `real´ place and a person, even though the divinity and the divine place are allegorically described by Lewis through fiction. Transcendence is described as a place, “in some sort, lying rather at the world´s beginning, as though men were born travelling away from it” (Lewis, *Regress* 171), a place where:

the pain and the longing were changed all unlike what they had been of old: for humility was mixed with their wildness, and the sweetness came not with pride and with the lonely dreams of poets nor with the glamour of a secret, but with the homespun truth of folk-tales, and with the sadness of graces and freshness as of earth in the morning. There was fear in it also, and hope: and it began to seem well to him that the Island should be different from his desires (longing), and so different that, if he had known it, he would not have sought it (Lewis, *Regress* 172).

In this sequence, Lewis is describing a place which John views in his dream, a place at the beginning of the world, a creational place: “as though men were born travelling from it” (171). It is described as a place where pain and longing are transformed and humility is blended with wildness. Further, `sweetness´ is linked with the truth of the tales that told of the first
morning, the creation. In this way longing is implicitly linked with the stories of the Bible, which conveys ‘sweet’ truth (172). Additionally, the place of transcendence can be described as ‘Mother Kirk’, representing Christianity, which John visits and where he gets the ‘true’ vision of the island (172). The apology for Christianity is in other words explicit even here.

Considering the link between the theme of longing and the aspect of transcendence, it may also be said that the eclectic features of longing in the two works partly serve as pointers towards different, yet also in some perspectives similar, conclusions. Firstly, if one reads Dymer from a strictly biographical and apologetic perspective, considering Lewis’s personal worldview at the time of writing, it may seem as if it represents an apology for atheism. The reason for this is that Lewis as an author of Dymer disregarded ‘all supernatural’ beliefs (Lewis 8). Consequently, the features of longing in Dymer (quest, far hills, music and female goddess), from a biographical perspective, may be interpreted as mere symbols for desire towards a “‘Spirit’ in the metaphysical sense, futile and dangerous if mistaken for facts” (8). Additionally, King confirms that Dymer, in some aspects, illustrates Lewis’s attempt to ‘deny God’ (King 228). This is, for example, evident as Dymer realizes that he cannot trust the goddess but is abandoned to himself (88). Subsequently, the literary an apology of Dymer could be interpreted as an argument against the existence of God, since the human being is left alone. From a biographical perspective it may additionally be viewed as apology for atheism, naturalism or even Marxism since Lewis, at the time when writing Dymer, regarded all supernatural aspects as illusions.

However, if one reads Dymer from a literary, philosophical and apologetic perspective it is possible to find an apology for theism (a belief in god/gods/God). The reason for this is that the plot of Dymer supports platonic idealism. Plato regarded this physical world as a mere illusion, pointing towards a greater reality beyond the visible world (Hottenga 547). In many ways the story of Dymer suits this platonic idealism, where the resolution of the plot ends in
Dymer’s son being transformed into a god. This is similar to Plato’s argument that ‘an adequate explanation of the actual world required both a realm of supernatural Forms, highest of which is the Good (Republic VI), and a divine ‘craftsman´ to order this world after the pattern of these Forms (547). In this sense the ‘Form´ of Dymer (the protagonist) is transformed into its ‘real´ Form (His son) as his son experiences a metamorphosis and becomes a god in a ‘new world’, beyond the world which his father (Dymer) had experienced (103-104). Hence, from a literal and philosophical perspective the narrative of Dymer illustrates a worldview of philosophical platonic idealism, which Lewis also was influenced by (Lewis, Dymer 10). Further, as platonic idealism does not exclude transcendence Dymer may, explicitly or implicitly, be described as an apology for theism. This is also in line with how many scholars would argue in relation to Plato, namely that he could be counted as the ‘father of philosophical theism´ (Hottenga 547). Additionally, King adds that there is also a ‘pre-Christian voice´ in Dymer where Lewis reveals his anger towards a God who allows suffering (King 228). Subsequently, from a philosophical and apologetic perspective Lewis´s Dymer may be described as a literary apology for a platonic or theistic view of a divine existence – even though it may be far from the description of God in Regress.

This aspect is also plausible if one compares and considers the two protagonists’ experiences through the narrative. Both Dymer and John are drawn to explore the source of their longing through the cluster of features which have been analyzed in this essay: quest/pilgrimage, far hills/island, bitter or sweet music and an encounter with female divinity: goddess/Mother Kirk. Common to both of the protagonists, through most of the plot, is that they cannot find the source of their longing through various experiences, encounters or ideologies. As King states, Dymer realizes that his longing for beauty is dying, as he has a final dialogue with the goddess (225). In other words, Dymer finds himself in despair as he realizes that he cannot find fulfillment through seeking aesthetic beauty. As for John he finally
realizes that all the different ideologies, from enlightenment to hedonism, cannot fully satisfy his desires (Lewis, *Regress* 170). All of these experiences could then be viewed as supporting the second premise of the argument from human longing (desire) which Kreeft outlines: “there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature, can satisfy” (250). In other words, both Dymer and John are literary examples of characters whose search to satisfy their inner, romantic longing supports the second premise: that there is a longing within us that nothing in this world can satisfy. Subsequently, if one also accepts the first premise (250): “Every natural or innate desire in us bespeaks a corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire” the logical conclusion follows: “There exists something outside of time, earth and creatures which can satisfy this desire (250). Hence, Dymer and John could be described as literary characters who support and point towards an initial literary apology for a theistic worldview.

Additionally, *Dymer* and *Regress* have in common that they appeal to existential and metaphysical questions as outlined in the introduction. In other words, the two literary works point towards the ‘general’ human experience of longing and searching which people may identify with. In addition, one aspect of the examined claim in this thesis, that the theme of longing for transcendence is evident in both of Lewis’s works and life despite his different worldviews at the times of writing, could be used as support of the second premise as well. Subsequently, if a reader identifies with Dymer’s, John’s or implicitly Lewis’s experiences and accepts the first and the second premises of the argument from human longing, the logical conclusion follows:

**Premises 1:** Every innate desire [in John, Dymer, Lewis and Everyman] corresponds to an object of satisfaction.
**Premises 2:** We [John, Dymer, Lewis and Everyman] have a desire which only God can satisfy.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, God exists (Williams 63).

Regarding this argument, Williams quotes Phil Fernandes: “This argument is not meant to be an air-tight proof, but it does seem to have a high degree of probability since everything else man needs does in fact exist” (63). The foundational question boils down to which worldview one presupposes: Does the view imply transcendence or not? In line with this Hunt writes: “Either Lewis or Atkins is telling the truth about the nature of the world. They cannot both be right. In the case we are examining, the phenomenon that causes Sehnsucht is either an evocative experience from the Kingdom of the Spirit, or a random, objectively meaningless epiphenomenon. It cannot be both” (60). In other words, there are only two options. Either the deep longing for satisfaction derives from an objectively meaningless and subjective human experience or from an objective transcendence that has initiated the potentiality in the human being of having this experience as a pointer to God. Hunt then continues his argumentation, with the help of the psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers, to show that this “awareness causing Sehnsucht is not a meaningless, entirely subjective phenomenon” (60). It may very well be, according to what Carnell states, a “cosmic pointer to underlying spiritual meaning” (Carnell 60). Hunt continues his argumentation to link human experience of longing, from metaphoric images like landscapes (as elaborated in chapter 3-5) or the sea, to transcendence as he analyzes and links Lewis´s and Jasper´s fields of studies. As Carnell points out, on the one hand Lewis contributes with the articulation of the human experience of longing, or `feeling intellect´ (161). On the other hand Jaspers and his students, as Hunt points out, “explore the intuitions which escape objective analysis, but through which we `detect feelings of an identity´ (62). In other words, we may not be able to know this transcendence according
to a scientific way but we may use our reason in order to apprehend the transcendence in a subjective way, through reading and analyzing fiction and linking them to our human experience of longing in relation to the apologetic argument of longing. Hence, literary reading may evoke, as in the life of Lewis, the deep sense of longing, a desire for a deeper satisfaction in life which may have the role of an initial `guide´ towards further exploration, or confirmation, of God´s existence.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, this essay has argued that the theme of longing, as a pointer towards a transcendence and God, is expressed in both the pre-conversion narrative poems of *Dymer* as well as in the post-conversion narrative of *The Pilgrim´s Regress* - in spite the fact that the author represented at least two opposing worldviews as he authored the two works. Additionally, the essay has argued that there are both differences as well as similarities in the way in which the two literary works feature the theme of longing. Firstly, there are similarities in the way in which the theme of longing is expressed through the image of a `quest´ or a `pilgrimage´ - where both of the adventurers are `escaping´ from a totalitarian or regulation based context in search of an object which may fulfill their inner longing. Secondly, there are similarities in the way in which the theme of longing is featured in the image of the `far hills´, the `island´ and the `Eastern-Mountains´. However, there is a difference in the way in which the sources of, and the reality behind, these images are perceived or implied (illusion/atheism, platonic idealism/Theism or Theism/Christianity). Thirdly, there are both similarities and differences in the way in which the image of `music´ is used as a source which awakens the longing for pilgrimage, and to an unknown goal in the landscape. Contrastingly, even here the character of the music, as well as the purpose of the music differs. Whereas the music in *Dymer* is primarily `bitter´, and leads him to an act of sexual abuse and finally death, the
music in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* is predominantly ‘sweet’ and leads to ‘new life’ for the pilgrim. In this way the different color of the music points towards either an atheistic life (with a bitter loneliness as Dymer experiences as he is abandoned by the goddess), a platonic and theistic life (as Dymer’s son experiences the transformation of body and creation into a new Platonic world or a theistic and Christian life, as John reaches the source of his longing, in ‘Mother Kirk’ (Christianity).

Additionally, the way in which *Dymer* and *Regress* perceive the notion of transcendence differs, but also have some common ground. In *Dymer*, transcendence is an illusion which humans should escape from, if one considers the author’s own comment and historical context. Hence, *Dymer* could, from a biographical and apologetic perspective, be described as an apology for atheism, naturalism or even Marxism. However, from a literal and philosophical perspective, *Dymer* could be interpreted as an apology for platonic idealism, or even theism. In these ways both *Dymer* and *Regress* literally represent, and in some sense, argue for the existence of a transcendence. In other words, both works may be interpreted as expressing a theistic worldview; primarily through supporting the second premise of the argument from desire which Kreeft, Williams, Hunt and Puckett among others outline. Subsequently, the experiences of unsatisfied longing for transcendence (truth and meaning), which are mirrored through the protagonists (John and Dymer) and the plot, may be viewed as literary ‘support’ of the second premise; “there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature, can satisfy”. Similarly, the fact that Lewis elaborates on the theme of longing in both works, regardless of his personal worldview, may point as a reference of support to the second premise. In other words, as the story of *Dymer* outlines the metaphors of longing for transcendence, even if he is an atheist at period of writing, it supports the second premise that there exists a desire in the human being which nothing but a transcendent God can satisfy. Additionally, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* differs from *Dymer* in that
it goes several steps further and argues, not only for a transcendence in general, but for God´s existence as presented through Christianity in particular. Hence, the Regress may be described as an explicit literary allegorical apology for theism and Christianity, whereas Dymer can be interpreted as an implicit literary apology for theism and platonic idealism.

Finally, this way of analyzing fiction and the concept of human longing for transcendence in Lewis´s work in relation to the argument for God may be a pointer, or a starting point, in a further investigation of God´s existence. In other words, Lewis´s personal experience of longing evoked through nature and literature, where metaphors like the far hills, music, urge for pilgrimage and longing for love (represented by women, female goddess or Mother Kirk) may echo generic human experiences of longing, which in this life is never fully satisfied. Hence, Lewis´s life and literature, through Dymer and Regress, may be `guides´ towards God.
Works Cited


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