Much confusion surrounds the posthumous appearance of the unfinished tale, *The Dark Tower*. The story of *The Dark Tower* does not form part of the Space Trilogy because it exists, as mentioned, only in a fragment and was not published until some years after Lewis's death. According to Lewis's literary executor, Walter Hooper, the untitled sixty-two-page manuscript was salvaged from a fire to which Warren Lewis had consigned his brother's papers soon after his death. Pages 11 and 49 are missing, and it is not known whether Lewis finished the tale or abandoned it about halfway through. Since its publication in *The Dark Tower and Other Stories* (1977), scholars have debated not only the merits of the story but also its date(s) of composition, and in the case of one outspoken critic, the authenticity of the manuscript itself. On the basis of internal and external evidence, Hooper speculates that it was composed in 1938-39 and designed as a sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet*:

[Lewis] had in mind the possibility of a sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet* in which Ransom would play some part and in which time-travel would figure pretty largely—as is evidenced by the obvious tie-up between the last sentence of *Out of the Silent Planet* and the opening sentence of *The Dark Tower*.¹
Out of the Silent Planet ends with a Postscript in the form of an imaginary “letter” from Ransom, of which the last sentence is: “Now that ‘Weston’ has shut the door, the way to the planets lies through the past; if there is to be any more space-travelling, it will have to be time-travelling as well...!” (206). The first words of The Dark Tower pick up exactly where Out of the Silent Planet leaves off: “‘Of course’, said Orfieu, ‘the sort of time-traveling you read about in books—time-travelling in the body— is absolutely impossible’” (17). Lewis was almost certainly referring to The Dark Tower when, in his letter to Sister Penelope of 9 August 1939, he said, “The letter at the end of Out of the Silent Planet is ‘pure fiction and the ‘circumstances wh. put the book out of date’ are merely a way of preparing for a sequel.”

John Rateliff, citing references in J.R.R. Tolkien’s letters and Notion Club Papers, offers a measured argument for redating the manuscript to 1944-45; but he agrees that if the novel had been completed it would have followed Out of the Silent Planet in the final sequence. Jared Lobdell splits the difference by suggesting that Lewis composed the opening chapters in 1938-1939, and then resumed work in 1944-45 and perhaps again around 1956 before putting it aside entirely. In The C.S. Lewis Hoax Kathryn Lindskoog doubts whether
Lewis ever wrote the manuscript. Her argument, which openly casts suspicion on Hooper himself, is based on several factors: the absence of any explicit reference to this work by Lewis or his acquaintances during his lifetime; the inferiority of the writing and the departures in style and content from the rest of the Ransom series; and in her view most tellingly, some striking resemblances to passages in Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), implying that the story must have been composed by someone other than the ailing Lewis, who died in the following year. Lindskoog’s case was compelling enough to have kept the controversy alive, but most scholars who have seen the manuscript regard it as genuine, and after the recent testimony of Lewis’s student, Alistair Fowler, the burden of proof is increasingly on those who question its authenticity. Critical reception of *The Dark Tower* has been mixed: many of its first readers, eagerly awaiting the release of a lost novel by C.S. Lewis, were sadly disappointed. Others have found it an interesting experiment that sheds light on Lewis’s more successful ventures into other-dimensional travel. Some have speculated on the outcome of the story, but few doubt the wisdom of the author’s decision to scuttle it.
The Dark Tower begins with a reference to time-travel. The story, which is told in Lewis’s voice, begins with five men meeting in Dr Orfieu’s rooms in a Cambridge college:

“Of course,” said Orfieu, “the sort of time-traveling you read about in books – time-travelling in the body – is absolutely impossible.”

There were four of us in Orfieu’s study. Scudamour, the youngest of the party, was there because he was Orfieu’s assistant. Macphee had been asked down from Manchester because he was known to us all as an inveterate sceptic, and Orfieu thought that if once he were convinced, the learned world in general would have no excuse for incredulity. Ransom, the pale man with the green shade over his grey, distressed-looking eyes, was there for the opposite reason – because he had been the hero, or victim, or one of the strangest adventures that had ever befallen a mortal man. I had been mixed up with that affair – the story is told in another book – and it was to Ransom I owed my presence in Orfieu’s party. (17)

In its fragmentary form, The Dark Tower may be divided roughly into two sections. The first four chapters, which take place at
Cambridge, allow us to peer through a newly devised "chronoscope" into a "dark tower"—hence Hooper's title for the work—of a mysterious "Othertime," and they culminate in an equally mystifying "exchange" between the inventor's assistant—Scudamour, from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*—and his Othertime double. In chapter 5, the scene shifts to Scudamour's adventures in the "alien" world, where we remain until the manuscript breaks off abruptly in the midst of chapter 7. As in *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis's point of departure is the trail-blazing fiction of H.G. Wells. Echoing the opening scene of Wells's *The Time Machine*, the story begins with a discussion of time travel that includes the inventor Orfieu, Scudamour, and three guests from the Space Trilogy—Ransom, MacPhee, and the narrator identified as Lewis. Orfieu dismisses the Wellsian premise of a "time flying-machine" (19): it is illogical to assume that the human body can transport itself to a past or future state in which its own matter would be distributed elsewhere. He then shifts to the faculty of recollection and reveals that as a result of his isolation of "the Z substance" (23), he has designed a "chronoscope" that enhances "time-perception" just as the telescope extends the natural apparatus of sight. But the fact that Orfieu's contraption has a material basis in human physiology is less significant than his attempt to reorient time travel from physical to
mental processes - memory, cognition, and imagination - while eschewing any affiliation with the "mystical" (20).

Orfieu's discussion of memory is informed by two early twentieth-century books that had caused quite a stir in intellectual circles. The first, *An Adventure*, by C.A.E. Moberly and E.F. Jourdain, is the documentary account of an excursion to Versailles by a pair of respected Oxford educators, who were walking through the gardens behind the palace when they suddenly beheld "a whole scene from a part of the past long before their birth." The second, J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, demonstrates our capacity to "remember" not only past but also future events. Dunne uses his own dreams as the main source of evidence, but assuming the stance of strictly objective investigator, he lays out an experimental procedure for testing his claims, and as a military officer, engineer, and innovative aeronautical designer, he possessed a level of credibility that tended to put the sceptics on the defensive. Dunne's attempt to couch his hypothesis in a theory that employs the fourth, fifth, and higher dimensions - so that successive moments in a lower dimension appear as simultaneous to an observer in a higher dimension - seemed only to heighten his authority, at least among those who were ready to believe. This remarkably influential book, which provided an ostensibly scientific explanation of
occult phenomena, encouraged various kinds of literary experimentation with narratives that transcended the common-sense image of time. It influenced many writers of the period, including E.R. Eddison, James Hilton, J.B. Priestley, and J.R.R. Tolkien. For Lewis, who was also experimenting with nonlinear notions of time, Dunne’s book offered a means of replacing Wells’s purely mechanical “time flying-machine” with a device more closely related to the operations of the mind and a conception of time travel that strikes a better balance between physical and psychological processes. Or as the reflective Ransom observes, it is “the fact of having minds” that function in a certain way which “puts us into time” (23).

In the next few chapters (2-4), we are introduced to Othertime and follow Orfieu and his colleagues as they try to comprehend the whereabouts – or whenabouts – of this strange new world. The chronoscope lights on an eerie chamber decorated throughout with images composed of swarms of identical sub-images, such as the floral pattern made up of individual flowers “repeated till the mind reeled” (30). The import of these designs is evident in the “idol” consisting of innumerable human bodies and culminating in “a single large head ... the communal head of all those figures”(31). Sitting in this chamber of the “dark tower” is a corpse-like “Stingingman” who transforms what
appear to be ordinary human beings into goose-stepping automatons, reminiscent of the silent drones that populate the totalitarian dystopia of Joseph O’Neill’s *Land under England* (1935). The five observers are appropriately repulsed by this scene; the one exception is the new arrival Knellie, an aging aesthete whose attraction to Othertime speaks to the paradoxical kinship, explored by Thomas Mann and other writers of the time, between the “complete moral freedom” (52) of a detached and decadent aestheticism and the contemptuous violation of time-honoured ethical standards in modern totalitarian regimes. In this sense the alien world seems to represent what our own world is in danger of becoming.

As Orfieu and his colleagues behold the spectacle of human degradation, they remain perplexed over the relationship between Othertime and our own time. The narrator wonders whether it is past or future, while Ransom seems convinced that the chronoscope is peering into Hell. But when Scudamour sees his own “double” replacing the Stingingman, the group begins to suspect that they have opened a door to “something going on alongside the ordinary world and all mixed up with it” (48). It now becomes clear that we are not witnessing a form of linear time travel in the manner of Wells’s *The Time Machine*; nor are we peering into the transcendent spiritual or
higher dimensional world that appears in Wells's earlier novel, *The Wonderful Visit* (1895). Instead, we are making contact with what appears to be a parallel or alternative universe that bears an as-yet undermined connection to our own. Wells himself had broached this idea in *The Wonderful Visit*, where the descent of an Angel from the Fourth Dimension prompts his terrestrial host to speculate that "there may be any number of three-dimensional universes packed side by side, and all dimly dreaming of one another. There may be world upon world, universe upon universe" (26). It took several decades, but stories of this sort began to appear in the 1930s, when British authors such as Stapledon were considering the proliferation of simultaneous universes, and various American pulp writers—Murray Leinster, David R. Daniels, C.L. Moore, W. Sell, and Jack Williamson among others—were expanding beyond the linear conception of time travel to tales that involve alternate time-tracks and parallel worlds.

Wells's seminal short story, "The Crystal Egg" (1897), anticipates yet another aspect of *The Dark Tower*. Early in the story, Orfíeu and his associates begin to suspect that crossworld surveillance is running in both directions, and gradually it becomes evident that the Othertimers are not only examining us but constructing replicas of artifacts in our world, including the "dark tower" itself, which is
identified as a copy of the new Cambridge Library. The interaction between the two worlds takes a giant step forward when Scudamour, seeing his Othertime “double” prepare to sting the likeness of his own fiancée, Camilla Bembridge, somehow manages to leap through the chronoscope while his sinister counterpart ends up on the loose in our own world. As contrived as this “exchange” may seem, the existence of Othertime doubles indicates that these parallel worlds are intimately if inexplicably tied to each other. Moreover, the introduction of a love motif explicitly echoing the confusions of identity in Spenser’s epic—Hooper tells us that Camilla’s surname was originally Ammeret, recalling Scudamour’s lover in The Faerie Queene—adds emotional weight to what might otherwise be a merely mechanical exchange between worlds.9

In the second section of the fragment (chapters 5-7), we fast forward to Scudamour’s return and account of his Othertime exploits. As a result of his intervention, Scudamour rescues the Othertime Camilla from his own Stingingman, whom he replaces as Lord of the Dark Tower. In his new role, Scudamour retains his terrestrial mind and character but feels the same impulses, including the urge to sting, as his Othertime “double.” He also receives updates on the movements of an enemy force, the “White Riders,” whom he regards as the
potential salvation of this dreary and oppressive world. But the principal disclosures of this section take place in the Tower library, where Scudamour becomes acquainted with a world that has “specialized in the knowledge of time” to the same degree that ours has been based on the “knowledge of space” (84). There are hints of Bergson in this distinction, but Lewis cuts some new ground as his Othertimers begins to speculate on the possibility of multi-dimensional time. Just as our geometers progress from one spatial dimension to the next by constructing a new axis perpendicular to the existing one, so the Othertime chronometers have extrapolated from a one-dimensional time line to a two-dimensional square in which time may flow not only “backwards-forwards” along a horizontal axis but also “eckwards and andwards” along a vertical axis (86). Proceeding from Lewis’s pet idea that images in myths and dreams may be glimpses of “realities which exist in a time closely adjacent” to one’s own (88), Othertime researchers have begun to construct artifacts designed to replicate and thereby “attract” their other-dimensional counterparts. Reminiscent of Weston and his kind, they have also “sacrificed” children and prisoners in an attempt to produce “exchanges” between their world and ours. We are led to wonder if the Camilla whom Scudamour rescues in Othertime has been the victim of such an exchange, since she is far more appealing and humane than her disagreeable double in our own
world. But the narrative breaks off at this point; the manuscript terminates in mid-sentence.

Even though *The Dark Tower* is only about seventy-five printed pages, it does reveal the mind, and narrative skill, of Lewis. The depiction of the idol room and the Stingingman vividly evokes an atmosphere of nightmare; one suspects it is based on one of Lewis’s own nightmares. According to Hooper, some of the Inklings thought that the stinging episodes had disquieting sexual overtones, and this may be one reason Lewis abandoned the project. But he does manage to present some deft satire in the pages he completed. First, there is Knellie, an addle-brained "progressive" who calls Lewis "Lu-Lu" and who watches the chronoscope thinking it is some sort of performance art. Then there is Camilla, Scudamour's outspoken fiancée: "She was so free to talk about things her grandmother could not mention that Ransom once said he wondered if she were free to talk about anything else" (76).

*The Dark Tower* hints at some of the themes that are developed in the other Ransom fantasies. The idol with its many bodies and one head probably represents Lewis's distaste for collectivism. The sting that turns people into automatons similarly suggest dehumanization. Othertime is also a spiritually barren realm where Scudamour cannot
thing or say the word God because the word does not exist in the language of that dimension. The idea that most strikingly recalls the Ransom trilogy comes when Scudamour browses through a library in the other world and reads of “the theory that certain fabulous creatures, and other images which constantly appeared in the myths of widely separated peoples and in dramas, might be glimpses of realities which exist in a time closely adjacent to our own” (88).

The Dark Tower most directly adumbrates That Hideous Strength. The Stingingman closely resembles Alcasan, the prisoner whose decapitation provides the head at N.I.C.E. Both have foreign-looking faces, with beards and yellowish skin. The Stingingman is also described as having an expressionless face, as if he were the sudden victim of guillotine (32), a fate like Alcasan’s. MacPhee, whose obstinate scepticism in The Dark Tower comes near to stupidity, reappears as a more credible character, a member of Ransom’s company at St. Anne’s. Of course, the name Camilla reappears in That Hideous Strength, though the Camilla of The Dark Tower seems more like Jane Studdock early in the novel than like Camilla Denniston. The idea of parallel time frames is put to good use in That Hideous Strength, where Merlin lies in a “parachronic state” (226). Lastly, the idol room with its hideous decorations, including a picture of beetles
marching in battalions, resembles the wall hangings in the Objective Room at N.I.C.E., which also features a picture crowded with beetles.

Ransom does not have the richness of character in *The Dark Tower* that we find in *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. Orfieu and Scudamour, however, both scientists and non-Christians, are portrayed with more sympathy and complexity than their counterparts in the Trilogy.

One can only guess why Lewis never completed *The Dark Tower*. He may have felt that the story was overloaded with exposition. The beginning and the end of the fragment make rather dry reading, as Lewis takes pains to try to convince the reader of the scientific plausibility of his story. Perhaps he learned a lesson here: when he did successfully create a sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet*, he dispensed with scientific explanations altogether and just had the Oyarsa deliver Ransom to Perelandra in a casket.

Another possible reason Lewis might have abandoned *The Dark Tower* is that his vision of horror was not counterpoised by any vision of goodness. In the completed stories of the trilogy, there is a balance: the repugnance of the Un-man is offset by the glory of the Green Lady and her world; the odious characters at N.I.C.E. are juxtaposed to the wholesome and winsome world of St. Anne's. But in *The Dark*
*Tower* the Stingingman is by far the most powerful image, and there is nothing beatific about Ransom or his colleagues to counterbalance this miserific vision.

Despite its incompleteness and evident flaws, the *The Dark Tower* remains an intriguing piece of work. It perhaps was a means for Lewis to discover more clearly what he was trying to accomplish in the succeeding books of the Trilogy.
References