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## "They Have Quarreled with the Trees": Perverted Perceptions of "Progress" in the Fiction Series of C.S. Lewis

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### "They Have Quarreled with the Trees": Perverted Perceptions of "Progress" in the Fiction Series of C.S. Lewis

#### Abstract

Uses the tools of eco-criticism to read Lewis's attitudes towards nature, hierarchy, and the changes wrought by technological progress in the Narnia books and the Cosmic Trilogy.

#### Additional Keywords

Ecology in C.S. Lewis; Lewis, C.S.—Attitude toward nature; Lewis, C.S. Chronicles of Narnia; Lewis, C.S. Space Trilogy (Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength)



THEY HAVE QUARRELED WITH THE TREES":  
PERVERTED PERCEPTIONS OF  
"PROGRESS" IN THE FICTION SERIES  
OF C.S. LEWIS

DEBORAH KLEIN

ANY READER OF LEWIS'S FICTION, ESPECIALLY OF THE NARNIA CHRONICLES and the Space Trilogy, immediately notices Lewis's love of Nature, though few seem to connect this love with modern ecological issues. His frequent rhapsodic listing of tree, bush, and flower can set many of us thumbing our dictionaries or Peterson guides. For example, in the first published Narnia book, as the hundred-year winter of the White Witch melts, Lewis reveals in the space of nine ecstatic paragraphs firs, oaks, beeches, elms, celandines, snowdrops, crocuses, larches, birches, laburnums, mosses, currants, and hawthorns, not to mention singing waters and chorusing birds (97-99). Throughout the Narnia Chronicles, he goes on to give conscious spirits, in the form of naiads, dryads, and small-gods, to these phenomena. By the end of the Chronicles, we reach the eternal Real Land of Aslan, always an early summer morning, abundant in natural beauty. King Tirian first sees there "a grove of trees" filled with "the gold or faint yellow or purple or glowing red of fruits" (*Last Battle* [LB] 128) of indescribable deliciousness, and Emeth the Calormene meets Aslan after walking "over much grass and many flowers and among all kinds of wholesome and delectable trees" (155). As the characters proceed "further up and further in," they encounter high mountains covered with "forests and green slopes and sweet orchards and flashing waterfalls" (172). Matthew T. Dickerson and David O'Hara observe, "Although ecology is generally not understood as the primary focus of his fantasy novels, Lewis shows a remarkable, consistent, complex, and healthy ecological vision in his numerous fictional worlds" (2). While I limit this essay to the Narnia Chronicles and the Space Trilogy, I think it pertinent here to also note Nancy-Lou Patterson's observation that in *The Great Divorce* Lewis uses "the dichotomy of polluted cities and unspoiled countryside to symbolize Hell and Heaven" (5). Obviously, for Lewis, the divine realm consists not of jeweled buildings and metal streets, but of the best features of the natural world intensified.

Equally obvious in these tales is his Platonic binary. A character either loves Nature or hates it, with no middle position. True, Eustace and Jill, in the

Narnia Chronicles, and Mark and Jane, in *That Hideous Strength*, begin their tales with no allegiance to either side, with perhaps a slight initial hostility against the things of God, including his Creation. But as they move closer to embracing the Divine, they also shift their values and their attitudes. As Patterson remarks, when Lewis considers environmental issues, he focuses on not on politics but on “the spiritual dimension of these contrasts” (5). More specifically, throughout Lewis’s fiction a morally good character loves Nature, while a bad or “bent” character thinks only to exploit or destroy it. In unrighteous people, we see a hell-bent progression from destroying Nature to mistreating animals to abusing other humans to complete separation from God. Those who, in King Tirian’s words, “murder” trees, do not stop at wielding axes or chainsaws against wood. They bind and brutally beat animals. They consider a large portion of humanity dispensable. In other words, their lack of respect for living things does not limit itself to the non-sentient and the non-human. Their callous treatment of other people moves them from merely warped or misguided to truly evil. Ultimately, they reject God himself. Even the dwarves who proclaim themselves neutral (“The dwarves are for the dwarves”) end up self-blinded, slaughtering other creatures indiscriminately and eternally condemned by their own proud indifference to miss out on the bliss of Aslan’s Country.

We see in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* [LWW], when Edmund leaves his siblings with treachery in his heart, that he plans technological “progress,” considering “what sort of palace he would have and how many cars and all about his private cinema and where the principal railways would run and what laws he would make against beavers and dams” (74), a self-deceptive illusion which Dickerson and O’Hara note ultimately leads to the suffering of the animals and Aslan himself in their battle against the Witch (50). Once, however, Edmund recognizes the Witch’s true wickedness, he takes pity on helpless animals (LWW 94) and feels joy at the manifestations of Aslan’s Spring (97-98). Likewise, in *Prince Caspian* [PC], the evil King Miraz and his ilk “have quarreled with the trees” (45) in part because the Telmarines reject Aslan and all things connected with him, while Lucy and other good characters desire to “wake” the trees and to free the Talking Beasts. In similar manner, as noted by environmentalist critics Margarita Carretero-González and Nicole M. DuPlessis, when we first meet Eustace, a despicable character at the time, he only likes animals “if they were dead and pinned on a card” (*The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”* [VDT] 1, qtd. in Carretero-González 103 and DuPlessis 117-18). This enjoyment of killing and cataloging animals, DuPlessis notes, goes along with the fact that, according to Lewis, “deep down inside [Eustace] liked bossing and bullying” (VDT 2; DuPlessis 118).

Those who “cut down trees wherever they [can] and [are] at war with all wild things” (PC 53) usually do so in the name of something they call

"Progress," a concept which, according to Patterson, Lewis considers "simply myth, supported by no evidence whatever" ("The World's Last Night" 101, qtd. in 9). Rhonda Herb states that to Lewis, "mankind upsets the balanced whole of nature with his visions of progress and applied science" (9). Ed Chapman clarifies Lewis's objection not to science *per se* but to the technocratic mindset which views "Life" as an abstraction (13) and Nature as something to be manipulated, conquered, and controlled (*passim*). In such dominating actions, even those who acclaim themselves Protectors of Nature actually damage it (16). We see this most blatantly in the final books of each fiction series. Lantern Waste must be felled in *The Last Battle* so that Narnia can take its place among civilized nations (where, among other concerns, men-who-look-like-Apes can more easily obtain bananas and oranges, and no one *really* believes in divine beings—until the Beings actually appear). The self-styled Progressive Element at Bracton College in *That Hideous Strength* [*THS*] forces through the sale—and inevitable deforestation—of Bragdon Wood because the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.) represents development for a nation which, having spent "so many millions a day on a war can surely afford a few millions a month on productive research in peacetime" (23). The sale of the Wood rests solely on quasi-pragmatic marketing ethics: "Any consideration of value of Bragdon Wood other than utilitarian value—any consideration of its beauty, or its historical value, or simply its value as a wood, a place of peace and sanctuary, where birds, sheep, and men are nurtured—is dismissed as mere sentiment" (Dickerson and O'Hara 210-11). In the case of the N.I.C.E., part of the Wood's usefulness is the presence within of Merlin, not dead, though buried. They assume that this great wizard of lore will join them in their diabolical undertakings, merging his magical power with their scientific wisdom. One of Lewis's ironies, of course, is that Merlin is drawn to Ransom and the presence of the Good. Merlin, in his wildness, feels the suffering of the earth and the animals.

Patterson calls attention to the fact that in Narnia, God even incarnates in animal form (13). At the same time, and I will say more on this later, Lewis advocates a hierarchy of creation, with mankind at the apex, and he does not condemn judicious, sometimes necessary use of natural resources. No anti-"interference" environmentalist, Lewis advocates a balanced relationship between the human and the non-human world. The celebration at the end of *Prince Caspian* includes not only cakes and fruits and wines, but also "sides of roasted meat that filled the grove with delicious smell" (177). Tirian's anger "at the felling of trees" becomes incredulity when he hears the reason for the deforestation: "Selling them to Calormenes! Is it possible?" (*LB* 19). All in all, Lewis lays upon humanity a responsibility of stewardship: to nurture and protect. In this respect, he calls us back to the original charge laid upon Adam and Eve in the Garden: to work the ground and take care of it.

The most overtly evil characters in either series appear first in *Out of the Silent Planet* [OSP]. Having drugged and kidnapped philological colleague Ransom, physicist Weston and speculator Devine discuss their plans on the spaceship to Mars/Malacandra. They suspect that Malacandra's *sornis* want to offer up Ransom as a human sacrifice, though they question the *sornis'* ability to recognize anything as human. These two who call *themselves* human find Ransom's probable fate merely amusing. Concluding their conversation, Devine mentions offhandedly that Weston might take custody of one or two *sornis* once the others have been propitiated or, if necessary, eliminated. He suggests that Weston "can keep them as pets or vivisect them or sleep with them or all three" (34), showing his own belief in the equal amorality of all three acts. In part, he does not expect the *sornis* to aid him in his goal of mining precious minerals from Mars; in part, the *sornis* are so Other that he values them no more than pebbles or blades of grass.

When, near the end of *Out of the Silent Planet*, Ransom tries to translate Weston's exploitive ideals to the Oyarsa of Malacandra<sup>1</sup>, he explains that to Weston, Darwinian survival of the fittest precludes concepts like compassion and pity. As Ransom translates, Weston boasts that

the best animal now is the kind of man who makes the big huts and carries the heavy weights [...] and [Weston] is one of these and [...] if the others all knew what he was doing they would be pleased. He says that if he could kill you all and bring our people to live in Malacandra, then they might be able to go on living here after something had gone wrong with our world [...] and so they would never die out. [...]

He says [...] that because of this it would *not* be a bent action [...] for him to kill you all and bring us here. He says he would feel no pity. (136-37)

To the Oyarsa, Weston's Nazi mindset makes him both less intelligent and less wicked than Devine, who cares only about the personal wealth he can seize from Malacandra. Because Weston professes concern for humanity rather than for himself, he who feels no pity receives pity. Oyarsa considers Weston

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<sup>1</sup> In the last chapter of *Silent Planet*, Ransom and Lewis discuss the etymology of the term *Oyarsa* and call the collective *oyarses* or *Oyéresu* (HS 273) "the 'intelligence' or tutelary spirit[s]" of each planet (OSP 152). With the exception of Earth's corrupt Oyarsa, the *Oyéresu* converse and interact with one another, in submission to God's will. At the same time, we see in *Hideous Strength* that each Oyarsa manifests attributes similar to those of the ancient Greek gods whose names we have given them. When Venus/Perelandra descends on Ransom's cottage, her presence fills both humans and animals with the desire to find and share sexual pleasure with their mates. Unlike the mythological Venus, however, she does not stir such arousal in those who have no mates.

"bent" but Devine "broken," so broken by greed that he no longer counts as a sensible being. By calling Devine "only a talking animal," the Oyarsa does not mean that Devine possesses the noble sentience of Narnia's Talking Beasts. Rather, Weston still retains some shred of humanity, while Devine has none (139).

By the time Ransom and Weston meet again on Venus/Perelandra, Ransom's point of view describes Weston in harsher terms:

He was a man obsessed with the idea [...] that humanity, having now sufficiently corrupted the planet where it arose, must at all costs contrive to seed itself over a larger area [...] the wild dream that planet after planet, system after system, galaxy after galaxy, in the end, can be forced to sustain, everywhere and for ever, the sort of life which is contained in the loins of our own species [...]. The destruction or enslavement of other species in the universe, if such there are, is to [minds like Weston's] a welcome corollary. (*Perelandra* [P] 81-82)

But Weston claims to have changed. "It was a mere prejudice," he tells Ransom, "that made me prefer our own race to theirs [the Malacandrians]. To spread spirituality, not to spread the human race, is henceforth my mission" (91). He defines this spirituality as "a Force. A great, inscrutable Force, pouring up into us from the dark bases of being. A Force that can choose its instruments" (92). He considers himself, of course, specially Chosen, but gives away his true situation when he argues, "*Your Devil and your God* [...] are both pictures of the same Force" (93). We understand clearly now that Weston has become a man literally possessed, chosen indeed, but as a vessel to corrupt the currently innocent inhabitants of Perelandra. To Ransom, the possession has robbed him of his soul and personhood, making him no longer Weston but a corrupted being—"whether that supreme and original evil [...] The Bent One, or one of his lesser followers" (111-12)—in Weston's body, and finally as "the Un-man" (122ff). I will not discuss the oft-treated theme of the Un-man's role as the serpent to Perelandra's Eve, except to note that his assumption of this role confirms his total absorption by Evil.

One incident on Perelandra particularly illustrates how the Un-man, despite his proclamations to embrace all of Life within spiritual dimensions, acts out his true, diabolical heart. Ransom, wearied by his verbal combat with Weston, wanders the outskirts of their island and finds something "not only fantastic but hideous":

It was a damaged animal. It was, or had been, one of the brightly coloured frogs. But some accident had happened to it. The whole back had been ripped open in a sort of V-shaped gash, the point of the V being a little

behind the head. Something had torn a widening wound backward—as we do in opening an envelope—along the trunk and pulled it out so far behind the animal that the hoppers or hind legs had been almost torn off with it. They were so damaged that the frog could not leap. [...] The thing was an intolerable obscenity which afflicted him with shame. It would have been better, or so he thought at that moment, for the whole universe never to have existed than for this one thing to have happened. (108-09)

And why has the demon committed this abomination? The act of damaging and destroying seems to fill it with a sense of power—though notably, not with any particular feelings of pleasure (110).

Ransom himself reaches a reverse revelation. He comes to appreciate the importance of the as-yet mostly uninhabited Perelandra in its mere beingness. “[A]ll its uncounted miles of laughing water in the lonely present . . . did they exist solely for that? It was strange that he to whom a wood or a morning sky on earth had sometimes been a kind of meal, should have had to come to another planet in order to realize Nature as a thing in her own right” (160). Later, near the end of the novel, Tor the King, the Adam of Perelandra, goes even further in proclaiming the innate worthiness of the natural world. He declares his plans to his Queen: “We will fill this world with our children. We will know this world to the centre. We will make the nobler of the beasts so wise that they will become *hmanu* [sentient beings] and speak: their lives shall awake to a new life in us as we awake in Maleldil [the Creator, the Son]” (211). Here Lewis declares an interconnectedness in which Man cares for the animals and in turn becomes more perfected in godliness. In several places in *The Last Battle*, humans and Talking Beasts address one another as “cousin,” and physically embrace. Lewis does not equate Men and Animals, but he does suggest that mutual care and respect mark those who worship the one true God. For Lewis, “to serve earth is to serve heaven; to exploit the earth is to exploit heaven. Christians should need no clearer understanding than this to motivate a profound and deep concern with caring for the health of the earth” (Dickerson and O’Hara 143).

Ransom destroys Weston’s body on Perelandra, and Devine reappears in the final book of the Space Trilogy. He is now known to most of the characters as Lord Feverstone, aligned with characters significantly named Wither and Frost. Bitter against Ransom, he now craves not merely wealth but raw power. As he tells the naïve Mark Studdock, in order for humanity to progress, “Man has got to take charge of Man” (42). Part of this “taking charge” includes measures advocated by Weston in *Silent Planet*. The “wise” and “enlightened” (those who call themselves “progressive”) must enforce “sterilization of the unfit, liquidation of the backward races (we don’t want any dead weights), selective breeding. Then real education, including pre-natal education” (*THS* 42). One cannot help but suspect that Devine’s idea of “real education” resembles the



torturous process of Narnian schooling under the reign of Miraz, wherein "History" is "duller than the truest history you ever read and less true than the most exciting adventure story," where acknowledgement of real Lions and woodland folk can only happen after "Ivy [comes] curling in at the windows of the classroom," "leafy branches [arch] overhead," the floor becomes "grass in a forest glade," and the teacher's desk turns into a rose-bush (*PC* 167), where the worst sort of students must undergo transformation into "a lot of very fine little pigs" (168-69), in order to free the hearts and souls of those who would follow Aslan.

When Mark travels with Devine to the N.I.C.E. facility at Belbury, "the insolence of Feverstone's driving" both fascinates and repels him (*THS* 49). Wanting to embrace Devine's attitude toward the world, and thereby enter the circle of Those Who Know, Mark attempts to scorn "the manifestly half-witted pedestrians and men with horses, the hen that they actually ran over and the dogs and hens that Feverstone pronounced 'damned lucky'" (49). He also lets Devine ride roughshod over his own better self, so that although "[a]t one or two moments when his heart came into his mouth he wondered whether the quality of Lord Feverstone's driving quite justified its speed," he eagerly agrees with the driver's declaration that some seeming impediments in the road "need never [be taken] seriously" (49). Sycophancy kills morality.

That the acquisition of Bragdon Wood by the N.I.C.E. means the immediate eviction of the Dimbles, innocent friends of Mark's wife, demonstrates anew the inhumanity of these defilers of Nature: "The first thing we saw [...] this morning was a lorry on the drive with its back wheels in the middle of the rose bed, unloading a small army of what looked like criminals, with picks and spades. Right in our own garden!" (74). Ironically, this action inadvertently sends Jane Studdock into the "enemy" camp, the almost Narnian household that has collected around Ransom at St. Anne's-on-the-Hill, and so we quickly identify the opposing factions. On one side, the ravagers of Nature, who down trees, dig up gardens, drive over small creatures, and disdain most of the human race. On the other side, those who plant flowers, commune with animals, offer food and sanctuary to the needy, and ultimately, submit utterly to the will of God. As Ed Chapman observes,

Ecological sanity is embodied in St. Anne's, in contrast to the sterility images and the worship of technology represented by Belbury. The people at St. Anne's spend much of their time gardening, a metaphor for the proper treatment of nature. All life, including mice, is treated with respect at St. Anne's, and the management of the household is exemplary of a loving ecological relationship between man and nature. But St. Anne's symbolizes more than mere ecological sanity; it represents a movement

back to a sacramental consciousness of nature, and a sacramental relationship with nature. (15)

And although Carretero-González abhors the idea of eating meat (107), she does acknowledge that the reforming Eustace-turned-dragon “was a very humane killer” whose prey “didn’t know (and presumably still doesn’t know) it had been killed” (*VDT* 83; qtd. in 102).

The colleague whom Mark recognizes when he first reaches the N.I.C.E., “Bill the Blizzard” Hingest, “[t]he only real scientist we meet in Belbury” (Dickerson and O’Hara 215), expresses reservations about the Institute’s plans to raze Bragdon Wood: “turning the heart of England into a cross between an abortive American hotel and a glorified gas works” (58). Jane sees in a vision what Mark only learns later, that to accomplish their environmentally destructive goals, the N.I.C.E. contrives the brutal murder of “reactionaries” like Hingest (77). Lewis entitles the chapter containing this assassination “The Liquidation of Anachronisms.” As “anachronisms,” the N.I.C.E. includes “the recalcitrant and backward labourer,” “an old man shuffling across the courtyard of the almshouses,” and “the elderly *rentier*” who converses with the postman (87). Mark attempts to cling to party line and ignore his heart, which goes out to, even embraces, these unviable people. Dickerson and O’Hara point out that “when we treat the earth poorly, all humans may eventually suffer, but it is the poor and less privileged who suffer the most, while the wealthy and most powerful can often avoid (at least temporarily) many of the devastating effects on the soil and water caused by their exploitation” (57).

One of the N.I.C.E. leaders enthuses over the superiority of artificial trees and flowers. “I tell you I have seen the civilized tree in Persia. [...] It was made of metal. [...] Light, made of aluminium. So natural, it would even deceive.” Such a tree has the advantages of easy mobility, durability, and cleanliness: “It never dies. No leaves to fall, no twigs, no birds building nests, no muck and mess.” Ridding the world of natural trees and filling it with such “art” trees will “*clean* the planet” (*THS*172). This same philosopher would also “*cleanse*” the world of organic birds. “On the art tree I would have the art birds all singing when you press a switch [...]. Consider again the improvement. No feathers dropped about, no nests, no eggs, no dirt” (172-73).

For Filostrato and those like him, the ideal world is “hygienic” and “disinfected,” cleansed of organic life forms “[l]ike cleaning tarnished silver” (176). Of course such purging includes ridding the universe of the wrong sorts of people as well, replacing them with “the scientific reconstruction of the human race in the direction of increased efficiency” (258). A “scientific war” is needed “to eliminate retrogressive types, while sparing the technocracy and increasing

its hold upon public affairs” (258). We have seen above how the N.I.C.E. defines “retrogressive.”

Nature, for the N.I.C.E., requires proper “management.” So Mark discovers at Belbury a quasi-garden, the “Ornamental Pleasure Grounds,” as he perambulates the facilities, but he cannot enjoy the forced orderliness and machine-like arrangement of the place. “The whole effect was like that of a municipal cemetery” (101). On the other hand, when he encounters further on “a loud melancholy howl,” followed by “all manner of trumpeting, bayings, screams, laughter even, [...] mutterings and whines” (102), he only feels proud of the accomplishments of the organization which has opened its arms to him. In his rejection of any potential for nobility in animals, Mark deludes himself in a manner very like that of the amateur magician Andrew Ketterley, who performs cruel experiments on guinea pigs (*Magician’s Nephew* [MN] 19) and utterly misses the moment when Aslan gives speech to Narnian animals because he does not want to hear the voice of Aslan (112).

He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan’s song. Soon he couldn’t have heard anything else even if he had wanted to. And when at last the Lion spoke and said, “Narnia awake,” he didn’t hear any words: he heard only a snarl. And when the Beasts spoke in answer, he heard only barkings, growlings, bayings and howlings. (113)

At least Mark has not digressed as far as the dwarfs in *The Last Battle* of whom Aslan laments, “They have chosen cunning rather than belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out” (140). When Lucy tries to gift one dwarf a bouquet of “fresh, damp flowers” (136), he can only perceive “filthy stable-litter” with “a thistle in it too” (136-37); when Aslan gives them “a glorious feast” (138), they think they are “eating and drinking only the sort of things you might find in a Stable,” things like hay, “a bit of an old turnip,” and “a raw cabbage leaf” (139). To follow the precepts of people like Devine, the beautiful eventually becomes not merely mundane but revolting, as Mark finds when Frost tells him to crush a wooden crucifix underfoot. An assertively non-religious man, Mark feels that to “insult even a carved image of such agony seemed an abominable act,” and he wonders “Why was the crucifix there?” (*THS* 335). He grasps at this point not only the spiritual implications of Belbury and its inner circle, but also the suffering they will inflict on him if he refuses to bend as they desire (336-37).

Lewis graphically describes the desecration of Bragdon Wood:

The river itself which had once been brownish green and amber and smooth-skinned silver, tugging at the reeds and playing with the red roots, now flowed opaque, thick with mud, sailed on by endless fleets of

empty tins, sheets of paper, cigarette ends and fragments of wood, sometimes varied by rainbow patches of oil. (*THS*121)

Bracton College sells out their remaining strip of land, and “[t]wenty-four hours later the N.I.C.E. boarded over the doomed Wynd and converted the terrace into a dump” (122). This matches the discovery made by King Tirian and Jewel the Unicorn when they enter the warped realm of Shift the Ape and the Calormenes in Narnia: “Right through the middle of that ancient forest—that forest where the trees of gold and of silver had once grown [...]— a broad lane had already been opened. It was a hideous lane like a raw gash in the land, full of muddy ruts where felled trees had been dragged to the river” (*LB* 20).

At the same time Mark undergoes his anti-Nature indoctrination, Jane moves in the opposite direction. Initially reluctant, she grows more and more attracted to Ransom’s company, and in spite of herself, as she embraces his life-affirming worldview, she inevitably slides out of her atheism. When they first meet, she finds Ransom’s voice “to be like sunlight and gold [...]: like sunlight not only as it falls gently on English walls in autumn but as it beats down on the jungle or the desert to engender life or destroy it” (143), Nature in both its benevolence and its power. As she travels back home from St. Anne’s, she perceives the world and its inhabitants with changed—enlightened, we might say—vision:

She saw from the windows of the train the outlined beams of sunlight pouring over stubble or burnished woods and felt that they were like the notes of a trumpet. Her eyes rested on the rabbits and cows as they flitted by and she embraced them in heart with merry, holiday love. She delighted in the occasional speech of the one wizened old man who shared her compartment and saw, as never before, the beauty of his shrewd and sunny old mind, sweet as a nut and English as a chalk down. (152)

That immediately following this revelation, she endures captivity and torture at the hands of (unknown to her) Mark’s comrades, only sharpens the dividing line between the two sides, and throws Jane more decisively into Ransom’s camp. And while Devine’s people seek the supernatural only for the power which they hope to gain from it, Ransom’s household both holds and fears the supernatural, the Powers which descend regularly to commune with him.

Jane’s former housekeeper, Ivy Maggs, comments to Ransom, “They’re so eerie, these ones that come to visit you. I wouldn’t go near that part of the house [...]. But I don’t feel that way about God. But He ought to be worse” (262), to which Ransom responds, “He was once. [...] You are quite right about the Powers. Angels in general are not good company for men in general, even when

they are good angels and good men. [...] But as for Maleldil Himself, all that [was] changed [...] by what happened at Bethlehem" (262).

Ivy's husband, imprisoned at Belbury near Mr. Bultitude, the semi-tame bear who usually inhabits Ransom's home, shares—albeit unknowingly—many of the desires and feelings of the bear. Both long for the company of a female, though Mr. Bultitude thinks less of companionship than of natural urges, and both mourn, not so much their captivity, as their separation from what their hearts seek. When Mr. Bultitude finds that he cannot get out, "[t]his, combined with an inarticulate want for the human companionship to which he was accustomed, gradually plunged him into depression [...]. In his own fashion, he lifted up his voice and wept" (350). Mr. Maggs, not far away, thinks about how "he had expected by this time to be having his tea at home with Ivy [...] and that it hadn't happened [...]. About once in every two minutes a single tear trickled down his cheek" (350). Lewis reports, almost matter-of-factly, that after having placed "the curse of Babel" upon their enemies, the long-sought Merlin "brought release to both [Maggs and the bear]" (350).

Merlin brings more than liberation. Like the good angelic beings, he also calls down wrath and destruction. Before freeing Maggs and the bear, he has also let loose other N.I.C.E.-ly imprisoned creatures, and the freed animals wreak pitiless destruction on everything in their wake. First, he turns the grand Belbury dining hall into a modern Babel; then he leaves the chaotic situation to follow its natural consequences. Miss Hardcastle, of her own initiative, locks the main door, pockets the key, and murders one of her comrades (347). Despite the sealed door, a tiger appears in the room. As the dinner guests flee in terror, Mark stares at "the hideous head, the cat's snarl of the mouth, the flaming eyes" (348). Miss Hardcastle shoots at the tiger, which seemingly attacks her, then disappears. As Mark registers this action, he "caught out of the corner of his eye a glimpse of something smaller and greyer. He thought it was an Alsatian. If so, the dog was mad. It ran along the table, its tail between its legs, slaving" (348), and then leaps at the throat of a woman. "It was a wolf" (349). More animals race through the room, attacking and slaughtering those who would have tortured and butchered them: "They did not stop to eat what they killed, or not more than to take one lick of the blood. There were dead and dying bodies everywhere by now," and when the humans expect deliverance, they get instead an enraged elephant. It "thrust its way into the room: its eyes enigmatic, its ears standing stiffly out like the devil's wings [...] with [a man] writhing in the curl of its trunk." It dashes the man to the floor and tramples him. "After it raised its head and trunk again and brayed horribly; then plunged straight forward into the room, trumpeting and trampling—continuously trampling like a girl trampling grapes, heavily and soon wetly trampling in a pash of blood and bones, of flesh, wine, fruit, and sodden tablecloth" (349).

I highlight these ghastly descriptions for several reasons. First the situation demonstrates that the refined atheists of the N.I.C.E., just as the Ape and Rishda Tarkaan of *The Last Battle* with their cries for “Tashlan”, in seeking out Merlin and expecting him to follow their godless agenda, have actually “called for Tash” and “Tash has come” (78). Second, neither Tash nor Aslan are, as the unbelievers mockingly reiterate, “tame.” Not only will vengeance fall, it will fall as hard as the crimes which engender it. Yes, Lewis’s God has patience and mercy, as Mark, Emeth, Puzzle the Donkey, and so many others throughout all these books discover. But patience does have an end point, and oppressors eventually eat the fruit of their own actions.

Furthermore we see in these scenes that while Lewis loves flowers and trees and animals, he does not equate them with humans. Animals, however worthy of love and respect, think and behave as animals. Even the Talking Beasts of Narnia, while more capable of human traits like compassion and forgiveness and even penitence, remain bestial. When others praise (or criticize) Trufflehunter the Badger for his loyalty to Prince Caspian, he insists that he only follows his nature. “I’m a Beast, I am,” he says over and over. Talking Squirrels scamper and chatter like ordinary squirrels, and Talking Dogs run about eagerly and chase every stray scent.

Humans in Lewis’s fiction retain primacy over animals, even Talking ones. Aslan insists throughout the Narnia Chronicles that although Narnia is to be a land of and for animals, it must be ruled by Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. When a wild bear attacks Lucy in *Prince Caspian*, the good characters not only slay the bear, but later eat it, with no qualms. The so-called “Gentle Giants” of Harfang do not err by sending out hunting parties or roasting their catches. Lewis condemns them because they eat *Talking Stag* (*Silver Chair* 109). Not surprisingly, we learn a few pages later that they also eat humans and Marsh-wiggles (112). Perhaps the fire in the porter’s lodge which “looked as if four or five whole trees were blazing on it” (89), really did consume that much flora. On the other hand, Eustace endears himself to the whole crew of the *Dawn Treader* when, in dragon form, “he bore back to camp a great tall pine tree which he had torn up by the roots [...] and which could be made into a capital mast” (83). And when Aslan sets the dwarfs to create crowns for Frank and Helen, the first rulers of Narnia (country-folk, by the way, nearly broken by life in the city), the eager smiths “rushed forward to the Golden Tree. They had all its leaves stripped off, and some of its branches torn off too, before you could say Jack Robinson” (*MN* 153), actions Lewis presents as laudable, even though a tree so ravaged may not survive.

Suffering animals Lewis puts down, whether the pithed frog discovered by Ransom on Perelandra or the creatures maimed by the N.I.C.E., who Merlin “killed with an instantaneous motion of the powers that were in him” (351).

When Mr. Bultitude and other freed animals appear at Ransom's house, many human residents are shocked—though Ransom seems more amused—at the noisy mating of all these creatures. He orders the he-bear to "take" the new she-bear, but "not in the house" (377). One of Ransom's company asks what insanity has all the birds making noises at midnight, and Ransom responds, "They are sane" (377). A stunned Jane reports the presence of "Elephants! Two of them!" in the garden, and adds a lament: "Oh, the celery! And the rose beds!" (378), but Grace Ironwood admires the courtship dance of the pachyderms, and Ransom assures everyone that the elephants "will be as private as human lovers" (379).

Not only do and should the animals act as animals, but Lewis also suggests that humans have much to learn from humbler creatures. In fact, "Lewis also saw in Christianity—and he illustrated in his writings—that rather than nature existing to serve humanity, humanity may be said to have been created to care for nature as a way of serving God" (Dickerson and O'Hara 14). "In short, Narnia is not just a place for Narnians to live; it is medicine for our world, stooped as it is under the burden of injustice, toil, and the degradations of civilization" (88). Trufflehunter, as I have noted earlier, sets an example of faithfulness and constancy. Likewise, the Talking Dogs and Horses of *The Last Battle* put many humans to shame. In her first discussion with Ransom, Jane complains, "You don't think a woman is to have no life of her own just because she's married?" (*THS* 146), and insists, "I thought love meant equality [...] and free companionship," but Ransom argues, "Equality is not the deepest thing, you know. [...] Equality guards life; it doesn't make it. It is medicine, not food" (148). Jane must learn that equality before God does not mean equality of roles and responsibilities. To fully join the St. Anne's community, she must also submit to its hierarchy. (She does not realize—and no one tells her—that Mark will also have to change in order to become the kind of husband he ought to be, as we see in his journey on 380-82.)

By the end of *Hideous Strength*, with the N.I.C.E. destroyed and both Mark and Maggs on their way to St. Anne's, Ransom encourages Jane and Ivy to welcome their husbands fully, in their hearts and in their bedrooms. With the presence of Venus/Perelandra upon his house, he reaffirms the medieval Chain of Being, "Man is no longer isolated. We are now as we ought to be—between the angels who are our elder brothers and the beasts who are our jesters, servants and playfellows" (378). Lewis, according to Dickerson and O'Hara,

held that the world is orderly, and that the aim of thought is to discover this order and to live according to it, rather than to attempt to impose an arbitrary order upon the world. To ignore the inherent order of nature, and instead to attempt to impose one's own order on the world, leads necessarily to bad mental, spiritual, and ecological consequences. (20)

Here, in his advocacy of hierarchy, Lewis parts company with many modern-day Nature-lovers. DuPlessis rejects Lewis as “an environmentalist by today’s standards [...] because his worldview is hierarchical” (125). She dislikes his setting humans above animals and men above women—though she does support the anti-colonial sentiments she finds in his writing. Carretero-González actually condemns Lewis’s morality, claiming that “some of Lewis’s tenets—such as human superiority over the rest of the nonhuman world—are not very palatable to ecologists in general and of [sic] modern ecotheologians in particular” (94). She acknowledges that “the superior position given to humans entails a high degree of responsibility,” but she finds Lewis’s overall view “extremely condescending and difficult to make [...] coexist with ecological ethics” (95). More than once, she repeats the sentiment that “Lewis had complete faith in the dogma that humans had been appointed by God to be the center of the universe and this assertion can hardly be reconciled with deep ecological ethics” (96). Both writers ignore what Lewis expects of such a hierarchy, “that *authority* is not the same thing as *ownership*. Humans are meant to *rule* over nature (the creatures of Narnia including animals, trees, and rivers), but Narnia does not *belong* to humans” (Dickerson and O’Hara 62). Like the underwater creatures on Perelandra who live apart from even its human King and Queen, natural beings whose existence concerns apparently only themselves and God, Creation has value in and of itself, regardless of the values assigned to it by humans (161-62)<sup>2</sup>. To Lewis, “Nature can be sinned against. And the humans who do these things are morally culpable for their evil” (Dickerson and O’Hara 129). In short,

there is moral obligation in our dominion. To exploit other creatures is to do evil. Human dominion is a fact of our existence. We don’t need a biblical creation account to tell us that humans have the power to eradicate species, or often to preserve species; to pollute rivers or clean them; to heal or to hurt; to exploit or to sustain. (Dickerson and O’Hara 65-66)

A good ruler, Dickerson and O’Hara point out, exhibits not arrogant dominance, but humility, as we see with King Frank in *Magician’s Nephew*, Caspian, Shasta/Cor (from *The Horse and His Boy*), the reformed Eustace, and others (73). With his kingdom and his own life in peril, King Tirian prays desperately, “I ask nothing for myself. But come and save all Narnia” (*LB* 41). The Green Lady of

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<sup>2</sup> While nowhere directly quoted in this paper, beta readers Carmen R. McCain and Patricia A. Belanoff deserve acknowledgement for their contributions to its development. Special thanks to Carmen for reminding me of both this scene in *Perelandra* and the tearful farewell to Narnia in *The Last Battle*.



*Perelandra* "loves the animals for their own sake. She does not caress them simply to enjoy them, though she obviously does delight in them. She caresses them and cares for them because it is both her right and her responsibility to do so" (Dickerson and O'Hara 198). In contrast, an evil ruler, like Jadis or Miraz, considers both the natural world and their human subjects present only to serve the rulers' will (*MN* 55). Far from espousing domination via hierarchy, "Lewis's ecology is characterized by integrity, plenitude, humility, reverence, and a grateful embracing of life" (Dickerson and O'Hara 244).

Despite her concern for the well-being and preservation of plants and animals, Carretero-González too often uses the term "ethics" in ways that echo the sentiments of the N.I.C.E. "Ethics" has no external basis; rather, "ethical" means "whatever agrees with *my* moral position." For Lewis, on the other hand, "what makes good literature is inseparable from his notion of moral goodness; and his environmental vision is both the fruit of that notion of moral goodness and an example of it in literature" (Dickerson and O'Hara 42-3). Furthermore, Lewis sees "our relationship to the land [as] at once a *sign* of our ethics and a significant force in *shaping* our ethics" (43). In fact, many modern environmentalists exhibit far too much "arrogance—a lack of humility—[which] is at the root of many of our environmental woes, [and] also is a hindrance to the solution, even among many well-intentioned individuals with a commitment to environmental causes" (74).

Not only does Lewis offend many anti-Christian ecologists, but Herb sees Lewis at odds with self-identified believers who consider Nature "part of this planet" and therefore, since destined for destruction, "not to be valued" (6). She argues, "One of the great myths that Lewis worked to dispel is the notion that the earth is ours to destroy" (10). Dickerson and O'Hara likewise see Lewis as fighting not only the technocrats and the God-rejecting pragmatists, but also those religious imperialists who claim that by putting Man in authority over Nature, God gives humans the right to ravage and destroy at will, that a "healthy environmentalism" is somehow "at odds" with Christianity (10-12). They identify this theology with Gnosticism and argue that in this respect Lewis parts company from Plato (34-35). Lewis repeatedly acknowledges the impermanence of "the flesh," the physical world, throughout both his fiction and his non-fiction—after all, the end of the *Narnia Chronicles* depicts the end of Narnia. As Patterson quotes from "The Weight of Glory": "Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive" (209, qtd. in 10). And the Oyarsa of Malacandra tells Ransom that he foresees the end of all life on that already damaged planet.

Life on Mars is limited to deep valleys that, we learn, have been artificially created to contain the last bits of water and air that sustain life on Mars. The highlands are littered with the bones and stems of extinct species.

From this it is evident that Lewis would not argue for a strict hands-off policy of preservationism. When Mars went through its ecological crisis, some species could not be saved, and Mars was refashioned to save what could be saved. While this is sad to the Malacandrians, it is not devastatingly so. All living things pass away, and the Malacandrians accept this as part of the gift of life. (Dickerson and O'Hara 178)

The impermanence of Nature, which includes Man himself, makes "trying to use Christianity to justify exploitation (of nature or of other humans) [a misinterpretation] in the same light as putting a lionskin on a donkey to impersonate Aslan. The sad thing is that many people have been fooled, just as many Narnians were fooled by Shift's schemes" (Dickerson and O'Hara 140). According to Lewis, death and decay are part of temporality, an attribute humans share with the rest of Creation: "God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature [...]. He likes matter. He invented it" (*Mere Christianity* 60). For Lewis, "the end of humankind lies beyond the fate of the earth, whatever responsibilities we undoubtedly share in its conservation in the meantime" (Patterson 6). Even as they stand in Aslan's Country, Lucy, Jill, and Tirian mourn the passing of Narnia, their love of the temporal a part of their embrace of the eternal (*LB* 149-50).

I agree with Dickerson and O'Hara that "Readers who take Lewis's ideas seriously are called to live lives in harmony with the earth; they are called to a healthy ecology and a respect of all of creation" (15). These and other writers give much attention to the influence of the Irish countryside and Celtic mythology on Lewis's youth and his love of the English Romantic writers in his adulthood, but I find more important than any of these traditions the teachings of the Bible, beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden and progressing to John's declaration that "anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20b). Lewis realizes at a deeper level than most that God has gifted Man with this world, and even in our fallen state, we still bear a responsibility toward the earth and the creatures on it. "C.S. Lewis's stories offer us a vision of the world brimming with life and goodness, full of purpose, rich with value, every part enmeshed in deep and ethical relations with every other part. His is a world of spirit—spirit dwelling in the trees, rivers, and stones, hovering over the deep and upon the mountains" (Dickerson and O'Hara 260). To both the ecologists who lessen the value of Man, making humans equal to animals and to the Christians who lessen the value of Nature, making humans *owners* rather than *stewards*, Lewis continues to speak. We who have ears to hear, let us hear.

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**DEBORAH KLEIN** grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, but has lived and taught in Memphis; greater Los Angeles; Valdosta, GA; Long Island, NY; Edmond, OK; Lubbock, TX; and Moberly, MO; before joining the faculty of Faulkner in 2011. She and her husband also lived and taught in for five years in Awka Ibom State, Nigeria, and for eight years in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. While in Jos, Klein became very active in the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) and PEN-Nigeria, and she still moderates the JosANA listserv and is one of the moderators of the ANA group on Facebook. Together with Andrew Jacobs, she guides the student staff of Faulkner's *Images in Ink* literary magazine. Her favorite writers include Jane Austen, Dickens, Ray Bradbury, Stephen King, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, and Wole Soyinka.

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