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Fall 10-15-1988

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### Recommended Citation

Christopher, Joe (1988) "J.R.R. Tolkien, Narnian Exile," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 15: No. 1, Article 7.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol15/iss1/7>

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### J.R.R. Tolkien, Narnian Exile

#### Abstract

Analyzes a number of explanations proposed by biographers and others for Tolkien's antipathy to Lewis's Narnia stories.

#### Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S. Chronicles of Narnia—Attitude of J.R.R. Tolkien towards; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Attitude toward the Chronicles of Narnia



## J.R.R. Tolkien, Narnian Exile

Joe Christopher

On 11 November 1964, J.R.R. Tolkien wrote in a letter: "It is sad that 'Narnia' and all that part of C.S. Lewis work should remain outside the range of my sympathy" (*Letters*, No. 265; 352). Why should this be? Tolkien and Lewis were friends; they both loved fantasies; they were active members – the basic members – of their literary circle, the Inklings, for its ten years or so of existence; they share many beliefs – literary, social, religious. But Lewis' seven children's stories aroused antipathy in Tolkien.

Many readers of Lewis and Tolkien – those who have ventured into the biographies of the two men in particular – believe that they know the reason or reasons for Tolkien's reaction. Certainly, there have been a number of reasons given. But the purpose of this essay is to raise some doubts as to the completeness of the explanations, as well as to call readers' attentions to the number of different explanations. And perhaps the stress should be on different, for not all of the explanations agree. Some comments on the validity and interesting nature of most of these explanations is part of the purpose. Finally, a complicated, obscure letter by Tolkien to Lewis will be considered, which may be related to this whole question.

### I. The Popular Explanations

In 1985 a C.S. Lewis issue of *Christian History* magazine appeared, which may be taken to be a rather popularized view of Lewis. In a section on Lewis' relatives and friends, under the heading of "J.R.R. Tolkien," this explanation of the Narnian disagreement appears:

Tolkien was extremely critical of Lewis' Narnian chronicles, charging that they were hastily written, inconsistent, and that they failed to create a 'real' setting. ("A Gallery" 13)

Where did the editors of the magazine get this statement? Where does Tolkien advance such charges?

Actually, the content here is as mildly faulty as is the editors' failure to perfectly develop the parallelism of their minor clauses. Tolkien never made such charges. But the editors did not make the material up. They are paraphrasing Humphrey Carpenter's discussion in *The Inklings*, where he gives three artistic reasons for Tolkien's dislike – the same as the editors subordinate. In the following quotation, the reasons have been numbered:

[Tolkien] judged stories, especially stories in this vein, by severe standards. He disliked works of the imagination that [1] were written hastily, [2] were inconsistent in their details, and [3] were not always totally convincing in their evocation of a 'secondary world'.... *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* [the first of Narnian stories] offended against all these notions. [1] It had been hastily written, and this haste seemed to suggest that Lewis was not taking the business of 'sub-creation' with what Tolkien regarded as proper seriousness. [2] There were inconsistencies and loose ends in the story, while beyond the immediate demands of the plot the task of making Narnia seem 'real' did not appear to interest Lewis at all. [3] Moreover, the story borrowed so indiscriminately from other mythologies and narratives (fauns, nymphs, Father Christmas, talking animals, anything that seemed useful

for the plot) that for Tolkien the suspense of disbelief, the entering into a secondary world, was simply impossible. (223, 224)

Carpenter's account will be considered in the second section of this essay, but for now it is sufficient to point out that he does not cite any evidence to support Tolkien's position as here stated. If Tolkien ever made these charges against *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to anyone, one could not prove it from Carpenter's book.

The editors of *Christian History* in their reliance on Carpenter do one further thing: they use the word *charging*. Carpenter sounds as if he has evidence, but he has not actually said that Tolkien ever verbalized these objections. This may well be Carpenter's creation of what "must have been" in Tolkien's mind. The editors, no doubt in an attempt to make the material more dramatic, have Tolkien "charging" these complaints against the *Chronicles of Narnia*. (All seven of the *Chronicles*? There is some uncertainty about Tolkien having read any of the books, beyond the two chapters of the first which were read to him; that will be considered later.) In short, this popular account of what occurred is, as might be expected, at least slightly inaccurate and certainly overly condensed for an adequate discussion.

A reader has to turn elsewhere for his information.

If he turns to David Barratt's *C.S. Lewis and His World* (1987), however, he will essentially get a rewrite of the charge of Lewis' hastiness:

Lewis read the first book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, to the Inklings before they dissolved. He had a rather mixed reception, Tolkien not liking it at all.

Possibly, as will become clear later, Lewis did not read the two chapters to an Inklings meeting, but just to Tolkien personally, Barratt continues:

This seems surprising at first, since *The Hobbit* would appear to have obvious affinities. But *The Hobbit* had grown out of years of Tolkien's constructing an imaginary world, for which he had created myths, legends, histories and a geography, as well as several languages. There was none of this for Lewis; Narnia suddenly appeared. Tolkien felt it was somehow cheating, and not the way the secondary world of fantasy ought to work.

Thus far, the repetition of Lewis' haste. But Barratt goes on to add a paraphrase of what Lewis said several times about his books beginning with mental images, perhaps most clearly – certainly most obviously – in "It All Began with a Picture..." (1960).

Also, Tolkien took a scholar's interest in his world; Lewis did not – it came from the depths of his imagination, often emerging from it in the form of vivid and haunting images. (28)

This contrast between the two friends is true enough, although it does not explain the source of Tolkien's materials which he then reconsidered in both an artist's and a scholar's ways. But there is no evidence that Tolkien argued this position against the Narnian books, for it really resolves itself into hastiness again: not that Lewis got the stories from his (highly imagistic) imagination, but that he did not revise and polish them as much as he should have.

The reader still has to turn elsewhere for his information.

## II. Humphrey Carpenter's Two Explanations

Carpenter, in *Tolkien* (1977), the authorized biography, and in *The Inklings* (1978), would seem to be the authority on why Tolkien disliked Narnia. But his accounts in the two books do not actually agree (they may be considered supplementary to each other). As was suggested in the previous section, Carpenter's argument in the later book is aesthetic. Actually, as one examines Carpenter's three points, they resolve themselves in his application into one topic: a failure of "sub-creation." Haste, inconsistency, and unconvincingness are all symptoms or results of this failure. "Sub-creation," as a term for a type of thorough artistry, comes from Tolkien's essay, fundamental to understanding his theory of art, "On Fairy-Stories" (1947, rev. 1964). If, as was suggested in the earlier discussion, Carpenter invented the *Inklings* explanation as a probability, then he chose the basis well. According to his theory of aesthetics, Tolkien should have disliked the *Chronicles of Narnia* for these reasons.

In his earlier biography, Carpenter does not argue from aesthetics so much as a personal reaction, perhaps jealousy although Carpenter does not so label it; at least, it involves irritation and annoyance in Carpenter's view. Carpenter does not put citations in Tolkien as he does in *The Inklings* (end notes with citations by pages), so one cannot say that Carpenter fails to give evidence for this personal reading. But it is striking that he does not mention anyone who gave him this information about Tolkien's attitudes, for there are source attributions elsewhere in the book.

At any rate, after quoting Tolkien's comment to Roger Lancelyn Green about *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (which will be considered in Section III of this paper), Carpenter writes these words:

*Undoubtedly* [Tolkien] felt that Lewis had in some way drawn on Tolkien ideas and stories in the books; ...he was *perhaps* irritated [irritation] by the fact that the friend and critic who had listened to the tales of Middle-earth had as it were got up from his armchair, gone to the desk, picked up a pen, and 'had a go' himself. Moreover the sheer number of Lewis' books for children and the almost indecent haste with which they were produced undoubtedly annoyed [annoyance] him. The seven 'Narnia' stories were written and published in a mere seven years, less than half the period in which *The Lord of the Rings* gestated. (201; stress added)

There are two charges here: that Lewis borrowed from Tolkien in his creation, and that Lewis wrote hastily. The second of these appears in an aesthetic form in *The Inklings* and here in a personal form. It can only be a complaint, at the personal level, that Lewis produces Tolkien-like romances quickly and easily, while Tolkien was writing *The Lord of the Rings* slowly and laboriously, for Tolkien had not reacted so negatively against the Ransom Trilogy or against Lewis' other early books – which had come, compared to Tolkien's production, at a speedy rate.

The suggestion of bias because Lewis borrowed from Tolkien's works is interesting. In 1987, J.R. Christopher (if the present writer may so designate himself outside of this essay) spent nine pages in C.S. Lewis arguing that Lewis did borrow from Tolkien's Middle-earth in his creation of Narnia (110-18). A number of earlier essays suggested parallels between the works also. Not all of Christopher's points are necessarily convincing, but some may have some validity – such as Lewis' Golden Tree and silver tree (his capitalization) in *The Magician's Nephew* (Ch. 14; 169) which may be a far-off echo of Tolkien's Laurelin the Golden and Telperion the Silver. Indeed, if Christopher's reasoning is correct and if Tolkien had read the whole Narnian heptology (two different assumptions), then one would expect Tolkien to have complained in some letter or another about Lewis' trivialization of his borrowings, instead of just stating a lack of sympathy with Narnia.

Further, it is striking that Tolkien does not complain in his letters about Lewis' earlier borrowings from him. At least twice, Tolkien mentions that some of the names in the Ransom Trilogy may be derived from his Middle-earth accounts: "eldila, in any case, I suspect to be due to the influence of the *Eldar* in the *Silmarillion*" (*Letters*, No. 26; 33); "Lewis was, I think, impressed by 'the *Silmarillion* and all that', and certainly retained some vague memories of it and of its names in mind. For instance, since he had heard it, before he composed or thought of *Out of the Silent Planet*, I imagine that *Eldil* is an echo of the *Eldar*; in *Perelandra* 'Tor and Tindiril' are certainly an echo, since *Tuor* and *Idril*, parents of Earendil, are major characters in 'The Fall of Gondolin', the earliest written of the legends of the First Age" (No. 276; 361). The point is not just these repetitive statements indicated an indebtedness, but that in neither letter does Tolkien show any irritation with Lewis over his borrowings. Perhaps all this proves is that Tolkien did not mind linguistic borrowings but minded other types. On the other hand, without further specific evidence, they create some doubt that Tolkien would have automatically reacted against Lewis borrowing from him. After all, borrowings produce something of a master-disciple relationship, which is often flattering for the master.

Indeed, if a critic is searching for a reason for Tolkien to be "irritated" and "annoyed" by the *Chronicles of Narnia*, should he not consider that Tolkien may have felt his adult romance was likely to have its chances for critical acceptance lowered by his friend's children's romances being published at the same time? The present writer does

not advance this interpretation, for there is no support in Tolkien's writings for it. It is mentioned simply to show how easily such reasons can be manufactured. Once one begins writing about things which Tolkien "undoubtedly" felt, emotions he "perhaps" had, there is no end. (*Undoubtedly* should mean something stronger than *perhaps*, but rhetorically in these constructions it does not.)

Thus, the four or five motives which Carpenter attributes to Tolkien probably should be taken more as Carpenter's interpretations than as Tolkien's reasons. It is, of course, dangerous to argue with Carpenter, who has seen many letters by Tolkien which were kept out of the volume of Tolkien's epistles by publishing limits and who notes that the biography is based not only on documents but "upon the reminiscences of his family and friends" (xi). But, as has been said, Carpenter's lack of source notes in the back of *The Inklings* and his failure to mention anyone who gave him the information in *Tolkien* at least make his reasons sound like his own, and not Tolkien's.

However, two or three of his points are worth pausing on for further discussion. The charge of quick writing, whether as provoking Tolkien's irritation or as a sign of Lewis' lack of dedication to sub-creation, is interesting but does not seem to lead anywhere further than that a critic can go. The charge of imitation has already received comment.

The charges of Lewis being inconsistent in his development of the Narnian world and not being interested in presentation of the world for its own sake are true. For the first of these, one may note that Green discusses the most obvious historical inconsistency in his biography, it being due to the fact that the series was not planned when the first volume was written – it has to do with when humans first came to Narnia (Green and Hooper 249-50). However, Lewis was only cut off by death from revising his books, and eliminating their inconsistencies, for the Penguin Book edition (Green and Hooper 307). Tolkien, no doubt, would have written all seven books before publishing one and would have thoroughly revised all of them to, so far as he could manage it, a fine consistency. At any rate, simply considered as a charge, not as Tolkien's charge, that of inconsistency is true but is not basic to Lewis' art.

The second of these points, that of not being interested in the presentation of the world for its own sake, is a variation of the first. In "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best what's to Be Said" (1956), Lewis writes of his enjoyment of the fairy-tale genre: "its brevity, its severe restraints on description,.... its hostility to all... digression" (37). In short, where Tolkien was after the sub-creation of a world, Lewis was after a genre. As Lewis understood the fairy tale, it did not allow for meanderings and elaborations; as Tolkien understood sub-creation, the world of the imagination must be specific and detailed. (This is not just a distinction between works for children and for adults, although there is a relationship between the distinctions, for *The Hobbit* is still more elaborate than *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.) A good discussion of the differences in Lewis'

and Tolkien's artistic approaches is found in Sister Pauline's "Secondary Worlds: Lewis and Tolkien" (1981). Thus, while Carpenter's charge is legitimate from a Tolkienesque perspective, it does not seem to be basic by itself.

The last of these charges is that Lewis was eclectic in his borrowings from traditional materials: "fauns, nymphs, Father Christmas, talking animals," writes Carpenter; one might go on to add Bacchus, dwarves, giants, centaurs, hags, werewolves, unicorns, – and many more. Two points should be made. First, Tolkien, in *The Lord of the Rings*, does create a unity of tone through his mainly Nordic borrowings and his creation of other materials compatible with the Nordic. But in the earliest portion of *The Silmarillion*, the Beren and Luthien episode, Tolkien not only employs werewolves, which are Nordic, but vampires, which are Eastern European. Sauron, for example, takes the shape of a werewolf, "the mightiest that had yet walked the world," when he goes out to attempt to capture Luthien, but takes the form of a vampire, "great as a dark cloud across the moon," after his body has been killed (175). Admittedly, this is not as eclectic as including Father Christmas and Bacchus in the same fictional series; but is not perfectly pure, either. Second, odd as it seems, Lewis is more authentic in his medievalizing than Tolkien is. (Both, of course, are in the general tradition of Romantic neo-medievalism, even though Tolkien technically is writing about a pre-historical setting and Lewis about a non-historical setting reachable only by magic.)

The easy way to see this is through Lewis' *The Discarded Image* (1964). In the chapter "The Longaevi," he includes a catalogue from Reginald Scott in 1584, which claims to be a list of creatures about whom tales were told or warnings made – that is, although Scott is in the sixteenth century, his catalogue sums up earlier tradition: "bull-beggars ['bogies,' says Lewis in a note], spirits, witches, urchins, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylvens [silvans?], tritons, centaurs, dwarfs, giants, nymphs, Incubus, Robin good fellow, the spoom, the man in the oke, the fire-drake, the puckle, Tom Thombe, Tom tumbler boneles, and such other bugs" (125). Obviously, this list is partly classical (satyrs, Pan[s], fauns, Triton[s], centaurs, nymphs), partly Northern (dwarfs and perhaps giants, although the latter are wide spread and Biblical in addition; the fire drake), partly British (elves, fairies, Robin Goodfellow), and partly related to the Christian tradition (witches, an Incubus). Some, such as the urchins, seems difficult to classify. Out of this list, Tolkien has elves, dwarves, giants (referred to in *The Hobbit*), and fire-drakes. (*Drake* comes the Old English *draca*, the source of the Middle English *dragon*.) Tolkien's Wizards are perhaps non-generic, to use a later term; but even the name for his Ents is Old English for *giants*. This has been said many times. On the other hand, Scott's mixture of beliefs is much like Lewis'. In addition to those listed above for Lewis, one may add efreets (the *afreets* of Islamic myth), boggles (Scottish spelling of *bogles*), wooses (the British woodwoses of medieval tradi-

tion – a figure also used by Tolkien), silvans (classical), salamanders (classical, although better known through their medieval, alchemical description), a phoenix (near-eastern), naiads (classical), marsh-wiggles (a coinage by John Studley, in his Renaissance translation of *Hippolytus*) – and the list is still not complete. But the point is made that Lewis had an eclectic tradition behind his Narnian variety. It is also clear that Lewis pushed its limits even wider.

This indication of an eclectic tradition does not invalidate an objection to it on an artistic basis – a critic may claim that Lewis has imitated an unworthy tradition; Tolkien's Nordic sub-creation is more unified tonally. Perhaps it comes down ultimately to a question of taste: is unity or variety more important in an artistic work? Any good work (of some length) will include both, one agrees – but which is more important when a writer has to choose between them as principles? To that question, there is no certain answer. Is *Paradise Lost* or *Orlando Furioso* the greater as art?

So much then for Carpenter's objections to Narnia, if not for Tolkien's. There are two accounts of Tolkien's objections attributed to Tolkien himself; these are the matter of the next two sections.

### III. Roger Lancelyn Green's Explanation

Roger Lancelyn Green's friendship with Lewis, chronicled in passing in his biography of Lewis (in collaboration with Walter Hooper, 1974), lies behind the next account. In it, Tolkien's charge against the opening, at least, of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* may be called that of sentimentalized mythology. Green writes in the biography, in his authorial third-person style:

On 10 March 1949 Green dined with Lewis in Magdalen [College] and thereafter followed a "wonderful talk until midnight: he read me two chapters of a story for children he is writing – very good indeed, though a trifle self-conscious." Nonetheless it was a memorable occasion which the listener remembers vividly....

Lewis stopped reading with the remark that he had read the story to Tolkien, who had disliked it intensely: was it any good?

A brief interruption at this point for two matters. First, the date of Lewis' reading of the opening of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to Tolkien will have to be considered later, in connection with the letter discussed in the fifth section of this paper. Second, Green elsewhere mentions his use of his diary in this biography (158), so the inner quotation here was presumably written down at the time. To return to Green's account: to Lewis' question of whether it was any good,

Green assured him that it was more than good, and Lewis had the complete story ready to lend him (in the original manuscript) by the end of the month.

And then, in parenthesis, Green adds the basis for Tolkien's dislike:

(Tolkien met Green shortly after and remarked: 'I hear you've been reading Jack's [that is, Lewis'] children's story. It really won't do, you know! I mean to say: "*Nymphs and their Ways, The Love-Life of a Faun*". Doesn't he know what he's talking about?') (240-41)

Tolkien's reference is to the end of the first chapter and all of the second in Lewis' book. Lucy Pevensie goes into the wardrobe which magically transports her to the land of Narnia. There the first character she meets is Mr. Tumnus the Faun. He carries an umbrella, wears a red woollen muffler, and also carries several parcels wrapped in brown paper (Ch. 1; 14-5). He invites Lucy home with him for tea – his home being a red-stone cave with a carpet on the floor, a table and two chairs, a dresser, and a fireplace with a mantle piece (Ch. 2; 19). Indeed, one of the book titles which Tolkien mentioned to Green – *Nymphs and Their Ways* – does appear in the four titles which Lucy notices out of Mr. Tumnus' bookshelf collection (19). Their conversation, which involves the rule of Narnia by the White Witch (23-5), does not seem to be to Tolkien's point; but it should be noted that Mr. Tumnus sees Lucy back to where he met her and encourages her to hurry back to her world (25-6).

What is Tolkien's objection to this? Obviously, it is that Lewis is distorting mythology. J.R. Christopher has summarized Tolkien's position flatly by saying, "if Lucy had really met a faun... the result would have been a rape, not a tea party" (111). Tolkien is thinking in mythological terms – what is a faun? how can one be expected to act? Lewis is reducing Greek mythology to the pleasant level of a child's story, where the faun is just a picturesque exterior of a nice person. In Mr. Tumnus' cave, a door leads from the main room to his bedroom (19) and that door is never, in the story, opened.

There are two answers to this charge by Tolkien, however correct it is at the literal level. The first is a symbolic pattern which seems to be limited to this fiction; the second is what appears to be a more direct fictional answer by Lewis, in the second Narnian book.

Lewis was a rationalist. More specifically, he was a believer in Natural Law, a universal moral code discoverable by reason. The whole matter need not be argued here, for it is mentioned in a number of the books on Lewis; but *The Abolition of Man* (1943) is Lewis' main writing in this tradition and may be taken as the basic support for this assertion. Given Lewis' trust of reason, then it is not surprising that the head, as a symbol for mankind's ability to reason, becomes important in Lewis' writing.

Specifically, Mr. Tumnus, as a faun, is human from the waist up (except for his horns) and goat from the waist down. In the episode summarized above, he chooses to do the right action and let Lucy go. But he is tempted to do otherwise:

...the Faun's brown eyes had filled with tears and then the tears began trickling down its cheeks.... Taken service under the White Witch. That's what I am. I'm in the pay of the White Witch. ...I'm a kidnapper for her, that's what I am. Look at me, Daughter of Eve [i.e., Lucy]. Would you believe that I'm the sort of Faun to meet a poor innocent child in the wood, one that had never done me any harm, and pretend to be friendly with it, and invite it home to my cave, all for the sake of lulling it asleep and then handing it over to the White Witch? (Ch. 2; 23-4)

This passage is easy to allegorize into a sexual reading, such as Tolkien saw at the literal level. The faun (or satyr – there does not seem to be much difference in classical literature) is a symbol of sexual lust. The myths of fauns probably were ancient bawdry about goatherds taking out their sexual appetite on ewes in their flocks: the resulting offspring were half-and-half figures. Thus the faun was a symbol of sexual lust (and possibly unnatural lust). In this passage, the faun, under the control of the principle of evil (the White Witch), invites a child to his cave, gives her tea, tells her tales, and plays music on his flute for her (16-21); so men have invited women (and sometimes children) to their apartments, offered them food and drink, talked to them, and played records in the background. But Mr. Tumnus, having met and talked to Lucy (her name means "light" or "clarity"), cannot go through with this "kidnapping" and sends Lucy on her way.

The contrasting figure in Lewis' symbolic pattern can be seen in a list of the White Witch's followers in Chapter 14: "Ogres with monstrous teeth, and wolves, and bull-headed men; spirits of evil trees and poisonous plants" (140; stress added). Earlier, in Chapter 13, when the White Witch gives the order to summon her followers, she asks for, among others, "the Minotaurs" (125); after the description of them as the "bull-headed men" in Chapter 14, in Chapter 15 the ground is shaken "under the galloping feet of the Minotaurs" (144). When these references are contrasted not only to Mr. Tumnus but also to the centaurs who are on the side of Aslan (the Narnian Christ, a lion) in the latter part of the book and especially, in the list of Aslan's followers, to "a bull with the head of a man" (Ch. 12; 177), the pattern is clear. Those mythological figures who have human heads – that is, who have reason – join Aslan's party; those (the Minotaurs) who have animal heads – that is, who lack reason – are on the White Witch's side. Whether or not Lewis consciously planned this symbolic pattern is, of course, impossible to say; but it fits the world view which Lewis himself held.

The second way in which Tolkien's objection can be answered from Lewis' own writing is more explicit. Indeed, it is difficult not to believe that this is a deliberate answer by Lewis to Tolkien. If Tolkien complained of sentimentalized mythology to Lewis when the manuscript was read, or if Green repeated Tolkien's objection to Lewis, it may well be deliberate. At any rate, in the second Narnian book, *Prince Caspian*, Lewis reintroduces some classical mythology. When the trees march on the side of

Aslan, certain other figures join them:

[Lucy] never saw where certain other people came from who were soon capering about among the trees. One was a youth, dressed only in a fawn-skin, with vine-leaves wreathed in his curly hair. His face would have been almost too pretty for a boy's, if it had not looked so extremely wild. You felt, as Edmund [one of the Pevensie siblings] said when he saw him a few days later, "There's a chap who might do anything – absolutely anything." He seemed to have a great many names – Bromios, Bassareus, and the Ram were three of them. There were a lot of girls with him, as wild as he. There was even, unexpectedly, someone on a donkey. And everybody was laughing; and everybody was shouting out, "Euan, euan, eu-oi-oi-oi." (Ch. 11; 139)

After a romp and the growth of vines and grapes, this conversation occurs between two of the Pevensie children:

At that moment the sun was just rising and Lucy remembered and whispered to Susan,  
"I say, Su, I know who they are."  
"Who?"  
The boy with the wild face is Bacchus and the old one on the donkey is Silenus. Don't you remember Mr. Tumnus telling us about them long ago?"  
"Yes, of course. But I say, Lu –"  
"What?"  
"I wouldn't have felt very safe with Bacchus and all his wild girls if we'd met them without Aslan."  
"I should think not," said Lucy. (141)

That is, Lewis seems to reply to Tolkien, under Christ certain basic impulses can be controlled. The grape eating of this episode in Narnia and, for that matter, the wine, beer, and other alcohol drinking of the Inklings themselves do not lead to the extremes of Bacchic revelry; under Aslan, under Christ, such things can be kept in bounds. To return to Mr. Tumnus and Lucy: under Aslan (as his laws are known through reason and acted on through proper emotions), the sexual attraction can be controlled and the bedroom door (although it is there) can be kept shut. As the modern age has been taught to say by the Freudians, the sexual drive can be sublimated. That is, a couple really can meet just for a tea party.

No one, to the present writer's knowledge, has questioned Green's account of what Tolkien charged against the opening of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Sentimentalized mythology – however a critic wishes to phrase the actual charge – was the reason for Tolkien's immediate negative reaction (or fairly immediate – as will become clear in the fifth section, Tolkien's comment may have been given a little over a year after he heard the chapters). Green, as a well-known writer on children's literature and areas of popular literature, showed himself to be accurate and honorable with his materials. Thus, this account is acceptable. It may not be everything Tolkien had against Narnia, but it certainly is what Tolkien told Green. However, seventeen years later, he told another person a different reason.

#### IV. Nan C.L. Scott's Explanation

Roger Lancelyn Green's account of Tolkien's objection is well known. It appeared not only in his biography of Lewis, but Carpenter quotes it in his biography of Lewis, but Carpenter quotes it in his biography of Tolkien. Thus, anyone interested in the topic should be aware of it. But the other first-person account of an objection by Tolkien to Narnia is far less well known, appearing in a religious magazine in the United States and in a small book the same year.

Nan C.L. Scott was involved in publicizing the fact that the first U.S. paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings* – from Ace Books – was done, while quite legally produced, without Tolkien's permission. A 21 July 1965 letter from Tolkien to her appears in his *Letters* (No. 273; 358), thanking for her aid in this matter.

The spring and summer after Tolkien's letter to Scott, she and her husband visited Tolkien twice. According to a 30 September 1987 letter to the present writer, Scott was in England because her husband was on sabbatical (probably from the University of Kansas); Scott herself was taking acting classes in London that spring. In her essay mentioning her and her husband's visits, she describes this exchange:

Tolkien expressed distaste for C.S. Lewis' "Narnia" books because of their allegorical nature. Even more limiting than religious allegory, a narrow, political interpretation of literature was his special detestation; and he spoke with scorn of critics who tried to reduce the War of the Rings to an analog of World War II with Hitler as Sauron, the Dark Lord. (80)

The political matter is not significant here, but the opening phrase of the second sentence suggests that type of allegory which Tolkien found – and objected to – in Lewis' books was religious. This statement will have to be qualified below.

Several questions are raised by this brief account by Scott. First, since Scott published her essay in 1978, twelve years after her visit with Tolkien, how accurate is her report? According to her letter, she "took no notes" and "kept no records."

Tolkien talked rather quickly at all times, usually with his pipe clenched in his teeth. Consequently, it was far from easy to catch every word.... The quotes [and paraphrases, in the passage above] are quite accurate, I feel, but I have not written record – just an unusually good memory and perhaps especially an actress's acute recollection of the spoken word.

Scott adds on this point that her essay, intended primarily as a review of *The Silmarillion*, is "a slight piece of writing that was never really intended to bear serious scholarly scrutiny (though I'd still stand by the accuracy of anything in it)."

Scott also enlarges on her exchange with Tolkien over



the Narnian books on her second visit.

As for the *Narnia* books, I had earlier (on the first visit, according to the essay (80)) mentioned reading some of Charles Williams' books (specifically *Descent into Hell* & *All-Hallows Eve*), & Tolkien had almost cut me off with, "Ah, yes, dreadful books! Dreadful!" So it was with some hesitancy that I mentioned having just read the *Narnia* books. He asked me if I liked them. "Not very much," I said, but before I had a chance to explain that I was bothered by a strain of didactic priggishness in them, he indicated his objections of a different nature – a dislike of allegory. I don't recall his exact words, whether he indicated a particular dislike of religious allegory or just a dislike for allegory in general (which I'd already been aware of, of course, from his remarks in the preface to the revised *L of the R* in the first Ballantine p'back edition).

Thus, the phrase about "Even more limiting than religious allegory" in Scott's essay is a transition and *religious* need not be taken seriously, unlike the basic statement of Tolkien's dislike of the Narnian fiction for its allegory. Is this distinction significant? Yes, for if it could be proved that Tolkien thought of the Narniad as *religious* allegory, then that would prove Tolkien had read more of Lewis' series than just the first two chapters of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* that Lewis read to him. There is nothing explicitly religious about the meeting of Lucy and Mr. Tumnus. As was indicated in the previous section of this essay, a moral (but not specifically Christian) allegory can be read into the opening chapters. (As will become clear below, if Tolkien read more of the book subsequently, other passages are more obviously "allegorical"; but it is possible to defend Tolkien's reaction on the basis of what he is known to have heard of the manuscript.)

However, a defender of Lewis may argue, Lewis has said in his letters that his Narnian tales are not allegorical. He writes, on 29 December 1958:

If Aslan represented the immaterial Deity in the same way in which Giant Despair represents Despair (in *The Pilgrim's Progress*), he would be an allegorical figure. In reality however he is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, 'What might Christ become like, if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as He actually has done in ours?' This is not allegory at all. (*Letters of C.S. Lewis* 283)

Lewis discusses the difference between allegories and supposals further in his letter, but his is enough to give the general attitude

However, this letter shows Lewis being limited in his categories. Is the only type of allegory that in which a personified abstraction stands for a psychological quality? For example, what about John Dryden's "Absolom and Achitophel" (1681), in which an Old Testament story is handled so that it precisely parallels a political situation in seventeenth-century Britain? For that matter, what about Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which the various individuals are intended to show, first, the types of sinfulness and

beatitude there are and, second, the results of choices in this world? Despite all its differences from Bunyan, Dante's poem is also called an allegory. If the opening chapters of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* were a personification allegory, of course, they would tell of how Lust attracted Innocence to his cave, where he lulled her with food and music, in preparation of handing her over to his sovereign, Vice, but Conscience, at the last minute, rescued her from Lust's intentions (thus splitting Mr. Tumnus' two sides into two figures). Lewis did not write this, but it does not mean he did not write something very like an allegory, however he approached it ("supposals").

Another anti-allegorical statement from Lewis may make this clearer – this time from his essay "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say What's to Be Said":

Some people seem to think that I began by asking myself how I could say something about Christianity to children; then fixed on the fairy tale as an instrument; then collected information about child psychology and decided what age group I'd write for; then drew up a list of basic Christian truths and hammered out 'allegories' to embody them. This is pure moonshine. I couldn't write that way at all. Everything began with images; a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion. (36)

As Lewis describes it in his essay, first the images, then the form (the genre of the fairy-story) to embody the images, then some concern with the meaning (Christian, in Lewis' case).

What Lewis denies in this passage is not some thematic passages which a critic may label allegorical or symbolic; rather, he denies pre-planned allegories which set up Christian didacticism. But one may do many things with an image – even an image of a faun carrying an umbrella – and the overtones when one finishes may be conscious or unconscious. In Lewis' case, it is best to assume he is conscious of what he is doing. Tolkien writes to him in a footnote to a letter which will be discussed more fully in the next section of this paper, "[criticism] gets in your way, as a writer. You read too much, and too much of that analytically" (No. 113; 126n). Whatever other suggestions are carried by being too analytical about one's fiction, surely that of being conscious of the material and its meaning (at least, most of the time) is one of them. The images, for Lewis, may come from the unconscious; but what he does with them is controlled. That is enough for a beginning. Perhaps Lewis was just "supposing" what Christ would be like in another world, certainly he was not attempting the type of allegory which has symbolic personages with names announcing their meanings, but neither of these denies a different sort of symbolic parallelism.

Therefore, a critic may disregard Lewis' objections to the Narnian tales – or, at least, the first of them – being called allegorical; and for the present purposes of understanding what Tolkien may have meant, the first book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, will do. What follows begs the question of how much of the book Tolkien knew. The

only evidence is that he knew the first two chapters of this book. On the other hand, Tolkien's generalizations – the one that opened this paper and the one to Scott – imply he knew generally of the books, even if he had not read them (any of them or all of them). The two chapters have been discussed in allegorical terms above; the rest of the book will now be considered. But a reader needs to keep in mind the limits of published information about how much Tolkien had read.

The place to begin is with an objection to the interpretative comments about the first two chapters. An allegorical reading (Mr. Tumnus = Lust [allegory] or sums up, in his nature as a faun, all seducers [symbolism]) does not prove that the work being read is an allegory. After all, Tolkien, who disliked allegory, comments in a letter, "any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language" (No. 131; 145) – and no one denies that the Narnian stories are fairy-tales or that Mr. Tumnus, as a faun, comes out of myth. (The distinction between allegory and symbolism, which seems to be introduced above, is not going to be maintained here as a real distinction; it would make *La Divina Comedia* into a mainly symbolic work – which is not the critical tradition.)

However, a larger reading of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* can also support the allegorical understanding of the book. This will involve the death and resurrection of Aslan, in Chapters 14 and 15, which, as a number of writers have pointed out, is closely parallel to the death and resurrection of Jesus (primarily as reported in the Gospel according to Matthew). In Dryden's poem, the tenor is seventeenth-century politics, the vehicle is a Biblical story. In this book, so some critics have assumed, the tenor is the life of Christ, the vehicle is a fairy-tale about a lion. But the place to begin is not there but with Father Christmas (the figure known as Santa Claus in America). Logical critics have wondered why a Christian figure – one tied to the celebration of Christmas – is introduced into the secondary world of Narnia (Green and Hooper 241; Schakel 140, n. 24). Another critic, D.E. Myers, sees a pattern in the book, involving Father Christmas, which can only be called allegorical if one chooses to label it:

For children born into an Anglican-style religious home, the first awareness of Christianity comes through its two great festivals, Christmas and Easter. The young child does not know why these holidays are so important; he simply accepts the joyous celebration, feeling it more as a physical than a mental or spiritual event. This is exactly what we find in [*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.... The arrival of Father Christmas in Narnia is a lovely surprise for the children, a physical experience of receiving presents and having a good dinner. Mr. Beaver understands the *evangelium* of Aslan on the move, of an end to the always-winter-but-never-Christmas stagnation, but the children are less aware of it. The Narnian analog of Easter also focuses on physical sensations: the delicious languor of the spring thaw; the cold, horror, and weeping of the girls' vigil; the joyous resurrection-morning romp and lion-back ride. These, rather than a cognitive grasp of

the theology of incarnation and sacrificial redemption, are the focus of [the book]. It is Christianity on the very simplest level. (149-50)

Myers' reading of the book is brilliant, but what she suggests artistically is that Lewis structured at least this first Narnian volume around allegorical cores, depicting a simplified life-of-Christ pattern (based on the Church Year), rather as Edmund Spenser – on the evidence of the "Mutabilitie Cantos" – is thought to have structured the books of *The Faerie Queene*, not that Lewis need have written the cores out first. His quick composition of the Narnian books, once he got started, suggests he could hold his whole conception of a book in his mind as he worked on it. Thus, Lewis is not so much concerned with the creation as a separate Secondary World as with the creation of a thematic fiction (in a particular genre, to be sure). More generally, it may be said that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is at least as allegorical as Books Three through Six of *The Faerie Queene*, although with fewer thematic names. Tolkien's objection voiced to Scott is valid, however he came to his knowledge of however much of the Narnian works.

At least, the objection is valid from Tolkien's perspective. (Others may not object to allegory.) Tolkien indicated his dislike of allegory both, as Scott said, in his introduction to the American paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings* – "... I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence" (*The Fellowship of the Ring* xi) – and, as she did not say, in his letters – "I dislike Allegory – the conscious and intentional allegory" (No. 131; 145), "my mind does not work allegorically" (No. 144; 174), "[the] fairy story has its own mode of reflecting 'truth', different from allegory" (No. 181; 233), "There is no 'symbolism' or conscious allegory in [*The Lord of the Rings*]. Allegory of the sort 'five wizards = five senses' is wholly foreign to my way of thinking" (No. 203; 262), "I have deliberately written a tale, which is built on or out of certain 'religious' ideas, but is not an allegory of them (or of anything else), and does not mention them overtly, still less preach them" (No. 211; 283-4), "[political] allegory is entirely foreign to my thought" (No. 249; 307), "I am not naturally attracted (in fact much the reverse) by allegory, mystical or moral" (No. 262; 351). Tolkien knew himself fairly well, and his comment, quoted at the first of this paper, that the Narnian books were "outside the range of [his] sympathy," is a valid way of stating the difference.

Lewis was quite aware of Tolkien's and his differences on these matters, of course. He makes the distinction in a letter of 22 September 1956, saying that Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*

is not an allegory – a form he dislikes....His root idea of narrative art is 'sub-creation' – the making of a secondary world. What you wd. call 'a pleasant story for the children' wd. be to him *more serious* than allegory. (271)

Lewis sends his correspondent to Tolkien's "On Fairy-

Stories" for a fuller discussion of Tolkien's position. In this letter, Lewis also makes a distinction of his own between an allegory and a mythic work, but that is not significant point in this discussion of Tolkien's reaction to the Narnian tales. Lewis, with his first critical book being *The Allegory of Love*, with his continuing love of *The Faerie Queene*, with his first Christian book being *The Pilgrim's Regress*, obviously is different by temperament from Tolkien. Tolkien's closest approach to an allegory is "Leaf by Niggle," in which, for example, he uses the traditional argument between Mercy and Justice from the medieval Morality Plays, although, typically, Tolkien does not name the speakers. Lewis' greatest romance is *Till We Have Faces*. But, despite the overlap, with Tolkien writing an allegory and with Lewis writing a number of romances, there was a temperamental difference between the two men here. Tolkien would not have introduced Father Christmas into a Secondary World and he would not have made Aslan's death at the hands of the White Witch quite as close to the Passion story as Lewis makes it. Tolkien's aesthetics of the secondary world discouraged him from allegory, while Lewis, as is clear from his essay on "Christianity and Literature" (1939) as well as his variety of critical writings, thought of there as being a spectrum of genres to which he might turn his hand. Lewis' range of sympathies was larger than Tolkien's. It is the traditional distinction between the hedgehog who knows one thing with all his being and the fox who knows many things.

Therefore, Tolkien's shift from disliking the handling of mythology in the first two chapters of *The Lion, the Witch*

and the *Wardrobe* to disliking the Narnian books generally on the basis of their being allegorical implies two things: first, that he probably, but not absolutely certainly, knew more than those first two chapters; second, that he shifted from an aesthetic objection to a temperamental one. But there is an obscure letter from Tolkien to Lewis which will modify this conclusion, if it is accepted as being a reaction to, again, those first two chapters. If it is accepted, Tolkien's first objection will be more than a handling of myth; that is a matter for the next section.

*To be concluded in the next issue.*

#### In This Issue, continued from Page 4

The article on Lord Dunsany comes from Angellee S. Anderson. Her fiction has graced several issues of the Society's fiction journal, *Mythic Circle*. She lives in Westminster, California with her husband Stanley and their chocolate Labrador Retriever, Strider. She has recently finished her second adult fantasy novel, and has also written short stories, poems, songs and instrumental music. She writes, "I wish that I could boast impressive college credential as [many others seem] to, but I am in fact self-educated. Such love of learning for its own sake is commendable. The article was originally prepared for an informal literary discussion group to which the author belongs.

The front cover by Nancy-Lou Patterson is taken from the poem "The Son of Lancelot" from Charles Williams' *Talisman through Logres*: "warm on a wolf's back, the High Prince rode into Logres." The falling wolf is Lancelot, deflected by Merlin (who carried Galahad on his back); the nun is Blanchefleur, who sees it all mystically; "a line of lauded glory" is Merlin's path by which the High Prince comes to her for safe-keeping.

The back cover, an incident from Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, is by Paula DiSante. She is working ("madly working," she would say) her way through the Masters degree program at the University of Southern California's Film School.

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