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## The Bolt of Tash: The Figure of Satan in C.S. Lewis' *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle*

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### The Bolt of Tash: The Figure of Satan in C.S. Lewis' *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle*

#### Abstract

Discusses the figure of Tash in two Narnia books, noting the imagery of Satan that is applied to the god of the Calormenes.

#### Additional Keywords

Devils in the Chronicles of Narnia; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Tash; Lewis, C.S. *The Horse and His Boy*; Lewis, C.S. *The Last Battle*; Satan—Relation to Tash

# The Bolt of Tash

The Figure of Satan in C.S. Lewis' *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle*

Nancy-Lou PATTERSON

Once again the day came when the members of the court of heaven took their place in the presence of the LORD, and Satan was there among them. *Job 2:1 (NEB)*

In *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), the young foundling Shasta discovers that Arsheesh is not his father: Why, I might be anyone! he thought, "I might be the son of a Tarkaan myself — or the son of the Tisroc (may he live forever) — or of a god!"<sup>1</sup> The Catechism of the *Book of Common Prayer* declares that every baptized person has become "A member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." But Shasta is not a Christian. He has been reared in Calormen, a land to the south of the Kingdom of Narnia, whose God is known as Tash.

Shasta decides to run away from his stepfather, and is joined by Aravis; we first hear of Tash from her words: "In the name of Tash and Azaroth and Zardeenah Lady of the Night, I have a great wish to be in that country of Narnia." (HHB, p. 31) Aravis has asked for "three days" in which "to do secret sacrifices to Zardeenah," (HHB, p. 32) the ruse by which to escape an unwanted marriage. We hear no more of Azaroth, but of Tash we are to learn much: "In the name of Tash the irresistible, the inexorable," (HHB, p. 34) suggesting that he is a god of mendacity.

The worship of Tash is centered in the great city of Tashbaan, to which the runaway children go. Tashbaan is described baldly by Edmund, one of the Pevensie children who are, as Narnian royalty, on a state visit to the capital of Calormen. He calls it "this devilish city." (HHB, p. 57) Edmund is the saved traitor of his family, and of Narnia, whose redemption has been bought at the price of Aslan's life. Best of all his siblings, he knows what devilishness is. Even so, it is in Tashbaan that Shasta first hears the name of Aslan. The good little faun Tumnus, who thinks the youth is Prince Corin of Archenland, comforts Shasta with stories of Narnia, "Who knows? — We might see Aslan himself" (HHB, p. 62) Before the book ends, this hope becomes fact for Shasta.

Meanwhile, Aravis, helped by Lasaraleen, creeps into the place of the Tisroc. Almost discovered in this forbidden place, Lasaraleen whispers, "Tash preserve us!" (HHB, p. 88) The two girls overhear the plot of Rabadash, son of the Tisroc, to invade Narnia. The Tisroc agrees to this plan: "These little barbarian countries that call themselves free ... are hateful to the gods," (HHB, p. 94) he says self-righteously, and adds that "The High King of Narnia ... is supported by a demon of hideous aspect and irresistible maleficence who appears in the shape of a Lion, (HHB, p. 95) a Screwtapeian view of Aslan.

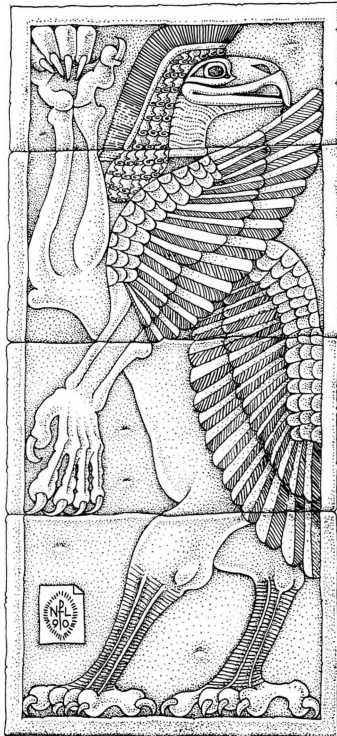
Aravis escapes and joins Shasta, and at last they arrive in Archenland, just ahead of the great army "By Tash!" cries Aravis, ever the Calormene, "It's Rabadash!" (HHB, p. 118) At this point a terrible lion, Aslan in the form of a deity closest to the one Aravis has invoked, intervenes to force the horses into a last desperate gallop, and wounds Aravis with a stroke of his claws. Thus chastened, she reaches the peaceful enclosure of the Hermit of the Southern March, while Shasta's reward is another desperate trek still further North to warn the endangered Archenland.

Here he runs into the very arms of King Lune, but as the company rides North, the boy falls behind, and in a gathering fog Shasta overhears Rabadash's battle plans "In the name of Tash the irresistible, the inexorable — forward!" (HHB, p. 135) It is all up to Shasta now, but in this terrible situation, he is not alone; a "Person" goes with him. Asked for his name, the Lion (for it is He) three times gives it as "Myself," the equivalent of the Name "I Am," given by Yahweh to Moses. Tash has been evoked by Rabadash, but it is Aslan who has come.

The Lion leads Shasta to Narnia, where Rabadash is defeated and provisionally suspended by the back of his chain-mail shirt from a hook on the castle wall. He has cried out "The bolt of Tash falls from above" and jumped down from the wall to this unforeseen end. Shasta, meanwhile, is discovered and recognized as Prince Corin's twin brother and King Lune's son, and Aravis joins him at court, where the unrepentant Rabadash is still raging and declaring that "The bolt of Tash falls from above!" (HHB, p. 184) Careful readers will surely be altered to the imminent arrival of Aslan upon such an invocation, and indeed, Aslan appears, as Rabadash screams curses in the name of Tash. Thus raving, he is turned into a donkey, a proper shape for one who has been making an ass of himself.

In a sense, *The Horse and His Boy* shows us an Old Testament world in which most of the people are polytheists, while the population of Narnia know of the one God incarnated as Aslan. We hear much of Tash and his temple, but we do not see him. He is, perhaps, like Baal, a god known but in abeyance for the Israelites, who follow Yahweh. He is even more like the Adversary as he appears in *Job*. The Satan or Accuser of *Job* is "one of the sons of God whose duty is to test person's faithfulness to God,"<sup>2</sup> rather than the character called Satan in the Medieval "folk presentation of Christianity" (*Ibid.*, p. 36) who is the "counter-principle of Jesus Christ."

In another sense, the situation in *The Horse and His Boy*



is a New Testament one, in which the truth about Aslan and His saving grace has been revealed to Narnia, but not to Calormen. He intervenes whenever he is needed, whether recognized or not. The wish of Aravis to be in narnia, made in the name of Tash and other gods, is granted by Aslan. When Lasaraleen calls upon Tash to preserve herself and Aravis, they are indeed preserved, but Aravis is wounded by Aslan soon afterwards, when she invokes Tash for rescue, even as she is again being saved. When Rabadash identifies with Tash in leaping

down toward his enemies, we do not doubt that his healing in Tash's temple will be Aslan's work as well.

The Christian dialectic of good created, marred, and restored by a new good, operates everywhere in *The Horse and His Boy*, but its operation is implicit rather than explicit. In *The Last Battle* (1956) the lines are drawn with more precision. Certainly, it is in a New Testament world that *The Last Battle* takes place. The precise book of that Testament is *Revelation*. The story begins, dearly, with an Ape — Shift — who is clever in the proper Medieval manner, and a donkey — Puzzle — again in the Medieval manner, who is not. The two discover a lion's skin in a pool at the western border of Narnia, invoking the Medieval symbolism of the West and end-time. Shift, like the Grinch, has a sudden and awful idea. He sets up Puzzle in the lion-skin as a false Aslan, who "has come and is not like the Aslan we have believed in and longed for."<sup>3</sup>

In making a treaty with the invading Calormenes — "our dark-faced," as the racist Ape expresses it — a new theological concept is introduced in response to a very good question asked by a Lamb:

Please ... I can't understand. What have we to do with the Calormenes? We belong to Aslan. They belong to Tash. They have a good called Tash. They say he has four arms and the head of a vulture. They kill Men on his altar. I don't believe there's any such person as Tash. But if there was, how could Aslan be friends with him? (*LB*, p. 31)

These words uttered by this symbol of innocence deserve close attention. The god of the Calormenes is described here for the first time, as a theriomorphic god like the ones the Israelites rejected, a metamorphic divinity which combines the attributes of animal and divinity. We can speculate that his description with "the head of a vulture" associates him with death, or at least with the dead.

The response of Shift to the Lamb's remarks is immediate. "Tash is only another name for Aslan.... Tash is Aslan: Aslan is Tash" (*Ibid.*). Tirian, the last King of Narnia, attempts to protest: "He meant to go on and ask how the terrible god Tash who fed on the blood of his people could possibly be the same as the good Lion by whose blood all Narnia was saved." (*LB*, p. 33) Lewis reminds the reader that there can be no equality between killing one's followers and dying for them.

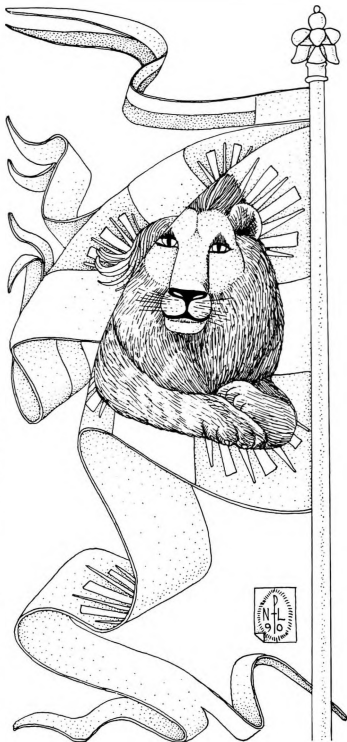
The captive Tirian calls upon the Name of the real Aslan: "Come and help us Now," (*LB*, p. 41) with the result that he sees, in a vision, the "seven friends of Narnia." (*LB*, p. 43) A prayer to Aslan is always answered. First to arrive are Jill and Eustace; after releasing Tirian they return to the benighted Stable of the false Aslan where the unicorn Jewel is imprisoned. The rescue, when completed, includes another prisoner, Puzzle, and Eustace exclaims, "What the devil have you been up to?" (*LB*, p. 62) Lewis never used this word lightly: Jill has rescued "The false Aslan" (*Ibid.*) and Tirian, not pleased, prepares to execute the "accursed Ass" until Jill pleads for his life.

Is the ass a devil? Certainly the devil is an ass, and this Ass has made an ass of himself in following the lead of the Ape instead of thinking of himself. But there is forgiveness for Puzzle. Tirian, now disguised as a Calormene, stops a procession of Dwarfs and says to their captors, "By the great god Tash, they are very obedient." (LB, p. 66) He has invokes their deity, a thing which, we have seen, cannot be done lightly. He questions the Dwarfs about their obedience and learns that these are "Aslan's orders." (LB, p. 67) To free the Dwarfs from this delusion, Tirian displays Puzzle in his disheveled lion-skin and declares that "*The light is dawning, the lie broken.*" (LB, p. 68) But the result is not what he expects. "We've been fooled once and we're not going to be fooled again," (LB, p. 70) the Dwarf leader declares, and off they march, except for "one single dwarf," Poggin, who returns.

It emerges that Ginger the Cat has explained Tirian's escape by saying that Aslan has swallowed him up "at one mouthful," (LB, p. 74-75) "What devilish policy" said Tirian." (LB, p. 75) "Devilish" is indeed. The Cat and the Tarkaan in charge of the Calormene detachment "care neither for Tash nor Aslan." Lewis does not agree with these conspirators. Not only is there a real Aslan — there is a real Tash. Invoked, perhaps by this ultimate blasphemy, Tash now appears: "At First glance you might have mistaken it for smoke, for it was grey and you could see things through it. But the deathly smell was not the smell of smoke." (LB, p. 71) Lewis has piled image upon image in creating this vision: it is seen in the "shadow" it resembles "smoke"; it is in "the shape of a man" but is also in the form of a "bird of prey"; it leaves a "deathly smell" and withered grass in its wake. This Tash is real, but not corporeal. Unlike Aslan, a living, natural animal at whose presence winter gives way to spring, this being is a spirit, made manifest only as a "cloudy shape." Having learned something, perhaps, from the vision, Tirian decides to put aside his Calormene disguise.

Now he learns that the banner of the Tisroc flies over Cair Paravel, and recognizes that "Narnia is no more." (LB, p. 86) Death has been called by his name and has answered by coming to those who called, and he must and always will come. there are not many children's books which culminate in the deaths of the most attractive protagonists — *Charlotte's Web*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, and *The Water Babies* come to mind — and readers of *The Last Battle* do not yet realize that their favorites are in fact going to die.

After a vigil, Tirian and his friends look with undeluded eyes as the Ape announces that a "wicked beast" has "dressed itself up in a lion-skin and is wandering about in these very woods pretending to be Aslan." (LB, p. 96) Jill, in horror, understands "the devilish cunning of the enemies' plan." The devil, after all, is the Father of Lies. Jill asks Tirian, "What do you think is really inside the Stable?" and dares to ask, "Tash himself" In answer to this, Tirian utters the second most beautiful phrase in the book: "Courage, child: we are all between the paws of the true Aslan."



At this moment Ginger announces that he will go in, and he is followed by Emeth, the good Calormene. "Thou has said that their Aslan and our Tash are all one," Emeth declares, and enters to look upon the face of his god. An armed Calormene stumbles out again and falls to the ground, but it is not Emeth. Tirian now reveals himself to the gathered Narnians, declaring that "Tash is a foul fiend," and the Tarkaan calls upon his warriors invoking "the wrath of Tashlan" which we know by now is a very dangerous thing to do. Almost immediately there is heard

"a clucking and screaming as if it was the hoarse voice of some monstrous bird" and Tash himself appears in person.

The first skirmish of the Last Battle has now begun, and the Calormenes steadily drive the friends of Narnia toward the Stable door, calling out "Tash! Tash! The great god Tash! Inexorable Tash!" At the Battles' height, Tirian flings the Tarkaan into the Stable:

A terrible figure was coming towards them.... It had a vulture's head and four arms.

Thou has called me into Narnia, Rishda Tarkaan. Here I am.... What has thou to say? (LB, p. 124)

This at last is no wraith, but the Lord of Death himself, who pounces upon the Tarkaan like the bird of prey he is. Now, a voice is heard: "Begone, Monster, and take your lawful prey to your own place: in the name of Aslan," and with that, "The hideous creature vanished with the Tarkaan still under his arm." (Ibid.) It is the voice of the High King Peter. Servants of Aslan are able to drive out demons in His Name.

This is the last ever seen of Tash in Narnia. Tirian is now inside the Stable and meets the seven friends of Narnia in their eternal form, and they report that Tash has Already made away with Shift the Ape. Now Aslan appears, and Tirian flings himself at the Lion's feet to receive the "well done" (LB, p. 138) of the good and faithful servant.

Aslan has come to bring about the end of Narnia, and to take from it into his own Land all who will. When all is at an end, there is found "a young Calormene sitting under a chestnut tree beside a cold stream of water. It was Emeth." (LB, p. 151) When he entered the Stable so boldly, the Calormene had met not Tash but Aslan, who greeted him with these sweetest of words: "Child, all the service thou has done to Tash, I account as service done to me." (LB, p. 156) This is so,

Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him.

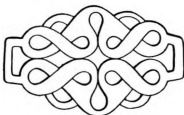
Perhaps Lewis never wrote more important words. They are also the very last words in *The Last Battle* about Tash. At the conclusion of this passage, As Aslan says, "all find what they truly seek," the story of Tash is at an end. He has no place in Aslan's Country. And there, we, who know more that Lewis at the time he wrote *The Last Battle*, must leave the god of the Calormenes, whether he represents death, or Satan, or the local divinity of an archaic kingdom, or any of the false gods worshipped in our world. Not all mysteries are capable of resolution this side of the Stable door.

#### Endnotes

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), p. 76. (Hereinafter cited as *H&B*.)
2. Donald Taylor, "Theological thoughts about evil," in David Parkin, *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 34.
3. C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 25 (Hereinafter cited as *LB*.)

#### Endnotes to *A Grief Observed*, (continued from page 9)

27. Perhaps this seems to me to be a natural supposition because many times in the years since I first read Lewis' *Till We Have Faces*, as I have lived my own life, I have seen the reflection of many of Orual's experiences in my life, and I too have said, "That's it!" I have also marveled that Lewis could so accurately depict the psychological processes of a woman, and realized that an idea he had had many years previously did not come to fruition until after he had known Joy.
28. *Grief*, pp. 43-49 in particular. Lewis used the phrase at other places in the book as well.
29. Sheldon Vanuaken, *A Severe Mercy*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1977), p. 231.
30. Wilson, C. S. Lewis, pp. xi-xii. Not only did Lewis lose his mother in 1908, but his grandfather and uncle as well, piling grief on grief. See Kathryn Lindscoog, C. S. Lewis: *Mere Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1987), p. 75.
31. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964), pp. 42-43.
32. *Leinen Lands*, p. 131.
33. *Letters to Malcolm*, p. 41.



#### Endnotes to *Hosts, Armies....* (continued from page 16)

16. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Book of Lost Tales Vol. II* edited by Christopher Tolkien, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1984, p. 213, note; *Lays of Beleriand*, p. 281, line 3517. One wonders as to what Tolkien meant to do with the thousands of Balrogs in these earlier tales. This author suggests that they would have become the Trolls.
17. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Silmarillion*, p. 191.
18. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Shaping Of Middle-earth* edited by Christopher Tolkien, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986, p. 302.
19. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Silmarillion*, p. 193; see also *The Encyclopedia Of Military History*, p. 101, for a good rule of thumb when estimating battle casualties in drawn fights or routs; *Lost Tales Vol. I*, p. 241, states that "nearly half of all the Gnomes and Men who fought there were slain," as the final casualty toll.
20. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Lord of the Rings, Return of the King*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966, p. 167.
21. Tolkien, J.R.R., *Unfinished Tales* edited by Christopher Tolkien, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1980, p. 239.
22. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Lord of the Rings, Appendix A*, p. 320.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
24. Tolkien, J.R.R., *Unfinished Tales*, p. 352.
25. Fonstad, K.W., *The Atlas Of Middle-earth*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981, p. 151.
26. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Lord Of The Rings, The Two Towers*, p. 171.
27. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Hobbit*, p. 303.

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 Karen Wynn Fonstad: *The Atlas Of Middle-earth*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981, p. 151.  
 Lisa Anne Mende: "...And Yet Not So Many Nor So Fair...Diminution and Substitution in *The Silmarillion and The Lord Of The Rings*".  
 Tom Loback: "Kindreds, Houses and Population of the Elves during the First Age," "Hoth, Hothri, Hothron," *Halls Of The Elven-king*.  
 Dupuy and Dupuy: *The Encyclopedia Of Military History*.