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## "No Sex Please, We're Narnians": Turkish Delight, *Twelfth Night*, and the Problem of Susan

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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TO SEX, PLEASE, WE'RE NARNIANS":  
TURKISH DELIGHT, *Twelfth Night*,  
AND THE PROBLEM OF SUSAN

ANDY GORDON

IT WOULD SEEM CHURLISH NOT TO BEGIN WITH TURKISH DELIGHT. This particular sweet is of course the instrument of Edmund's temptation in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (LWW); for an entire generation of British consumers, it is also synonymous with "Eastern promise," as one of the most successful advertising slogans of all time suggested ("100 Greatest TV Ads").<sup>1</sup> And what is advertising but the sacred art of our times?<sup>2</sup> The White Witch sets out to seduce the boy with the promise of fulfilment through unlimited consumption of this particular exotic confectionery. Turkish Delight promises all the pleasures of a part of the world that had long been a byword for the alluring and the seductive; perhaps it is unsurprising that the prospect of endless supplies of the substance (Edmund is promised "whole rooms full of Turkish Delight," and told that he will be able to "eat Turkish Delight all day long" [LWW 4.39]) should persuade him to betray his brothers and sisters to her. Perhaps the temptation may seem even greater when wartime rationing is considered; confectionery rationing in Britain would not end until 1953, three years after the publication of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The Pevensie children are "sent away from London during the war because of the air-raids" (LWW 1.9)—this is how they come to discover Narnia in the first place.

In a detailed analysis of the particular advertising campaign and the slogan referred to above, Merryl Wyn Davies traces its development over three decades. She describes it as "no innocent confection," but rather "an exotic indulgence [which] stimulates an allure that has titillated European curiosity down the centuries"; it evokes "wafts of haunting music that conjure images of

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<sup>1</sup> For those who don't remember or have never seen the advertisement, it can be found at <https://retrovads.com/frys-turkish-delight/>.

<sup>2</sup> The idea that capitalism is a religion was suggested by Marx in *Capital* (1894)—"capital becomes the 'religion of everyday life'" (817), taken up by Walter Benjamin (1921), and developed via Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital by a number of thinkers. McCarragher approaches the idea from a Christian perspective; he states that capitalism has its own "iconography" of advertising (241), and discusses "the sacred office of advertising" (235).

desert dunes, sheikhs and obligatory diaphanously clad maidens,” and Wyn Davies states that “the advertising department most certainly imbibed the entire history of Orientalist phantasmagoria and indelibly imprinted all its jumbled ambiguities into the consciousness of new generations.”

In particular, she notes the association of the sweet with sex: “[t]he Orientalist lexicon begins with the seminal idea of sexual licence and libidinous behaviour as an essential characteristic of Muslim religion and society.” Wyn Davies echoes Edward Said here: “the association between the Orient and sex is remarkably persistent” (Said 309). So Turkish Delight offers the promise of the East and this is a sexual promise.

However, as well as its connotations of Eastern sexuality, Turkish Delight has another cultural association—as two manufacturers of the product inform us, it is “traditionally offered [...] at Christmas in the West,”<sup>3</sup> and “was initially intended as a luxurious treat during Christmas time”<sup>4</sup>— and in Narnia under the White Witch it is “always winter and never Christmas” (*LLW* 2.23, 6.57). In fact, Cara Strickland writes, in asking for Turkish Delight, “Edmund isn’t just asking the witch for candy, he’s essentially asking her for Christmas, too.” This association with Christmas marks a first connection between *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, a connection this discussion will pursue. *Twelfth Night* has frequently been interpreted in connection with Christmas festivities, in particular with the idea of misrule. Misrule may in turn connect the play and the Christian festival with its pagan precursors, such as the Roman Saturnalia. It represents the world turned upside down. And it is readily apparent that the kind of misrule the play evokes is represented by its sexual dimension—to the extent that at least one commentator has compared the energies and impulses released in the course of the play to those of an orgy (Logan 232).

Narnia may be somewhere that Edmund can get Turkish Delight; indeed it is a location to which Christmas, if not misrule, will come in due course, but it is certainly not a place for orgiastic energies. Jennifer Miller suggests that although Lewis wants to present his imagined world as purged and cleansed of sexuality, this endeavour leaves opportunities for sex to emerge (113). Although she concludes that “sexual desire has no place in Narnia” (114), she demonstrates that, in spite of Lewis’s earnest efforts to eradicate it, sex persists in at least two ways—firstly, in the space Lewis leaves for others to (re)inscribe sex where he has attempted to exclude it—both Neil Gaiman and

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<sup>3</sup> Bayco Confectionery, Surrey, BC V3Z 0P6, Canada: “One of our most popular items is the children’s gift box *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*—a 17.6 oz. box of assorted Turkish Delight packaged with the renowned book and blockbuster movie from the *Chronicles of Narnia* series, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*.”

<sup>4</sup> Truede Ltd, Coventry, UK.

Philip Pullman are cited as examples of writers who, in different ways, have done this; and secondly, in the echoes of other stories in which sex and sexuality do have a place (at least implicitly)—Miller’s chosen example is Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Snow Queen” (first published 1884). Andersen’s Queen seduces Kai with kisses rather than Turkish Delight, leaving him craving more, which she refuses on the grounds that she “might kiss [him] to death” (Andersen 239-40; J. Miller 121). I am not sure that the substitution of confectionery for kisses makes much difference; Laura Miller thinks “the scene in which [the White Witch] ensnares [Edmund] swims with sensuality” (*The Magician’s Book* 132).

Lewis did not have to look far for a counter to Narnia. He worked extensively on Edmund Spenser; Spenser’s epic poem *The Faerie Queene* (1590), honouring Elizabeth I, represents the ongoing struggle between (Protestant) Christendom and the forces perceived to threaten it. In Spenser the enemy is basically anyone who can be classed as non- or anti-Christian. The preferred term is “Saracen,” and at the outset the poem promises a final showdown between “the great Faery Queene,” Gloriana, representing Elizabeth herself, and the “Paynim (pagan) king,” whetting its readers’ appetites with the prospect of fields stained “with Sarazin blood.” The poem is “overrun with Paynims, Idolaters and Infidels” (Britton and Coles); while “Saracen” was mostly applied to Muslims (superseded by “Turk”), its meaning extended to denote “generic non-Christian villain.” Benedict Robinson carefully describes the word as a “mobile and resonant term of difference” (33). It retained its Eastern connotations, however—the Ottomans were well-established as the “evil Empire,” *the* great threat to Christendom; by the later sixteenth century, Spenser himself was drawing on a long tradition of Muslim representation. The idea of the “Saracen” persisted; Keats could rely on his audience recognizing his reference to “swart Paynims” in *The Eve of St Agnes* (1820), where it contributes to the medieval atmosphere he is seeking to create. Lewis’s Calormenes are Saracens. Not that this excuses the racism; numerous scholars have pointed out that the term and the idea of the “Saracen” are loaded with opprobrium—“a sweepingly pejorative term” (Quinn 19), “an exceedingly hostile epithet” which carried with it “simple behavioral stereotypes” (Sauer 35) such as “treachery, greed, cowardice” (351).

One other influence should be mentioned; the children’s writer E. Nesbit, whom Lewis greatly admired.<sup>5</sup> Of particular relevance is her representation of Babylon in *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), where magical powers enable the child-protagonists to visit a variety of ancient locations,

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis told American writer Chad Walsh in 1948 that he was finishing off a book for children “in the tradition of E. Nesbit” (Green and Hooper 238).

Babylon among them. This is a model for Lewis’s Calormen,<sup>6</sup> but there are some significant differences. One is the ease with which Nesbit allows the children to witness—innocently—a display of what must be relaxed eastern sexual mores; after a Babylonian banquet, the children observe each of the adult women pairing off with a man: “who seemed to be her sweetheart or her husband, for they were very affectionate to each other” (Nesbit 7.120). Though seen through the children’s eyes, they think nothing of it; it is just part of the way Babylonians conduct themselves. Nesbit’s children are similarly unfazed by what can only be a display of belly-dancing—something else consistently associated with the East.<sup>7</sup> In *The Story of the Amulet*, the children witness a Babylonian entertainment: “[T]here was a dancer, who hardly danced at all, only just struck attitudes. She had hardly any clothes, and [...] the children were rather bored by her, but everyone else was delighted, including the King” (7.121).

Another reference that (for various reasons) has no place in Lewis, is to a feature routinely associated with Babylon—the Hanging Gardens. The youngest child does not like the sound of these—“I suppose they have gardens on purpose to hang people in” (Nesbit 6.98). While hanging gardens do not appear in Lewis, hanging (of a sort) does, as I shall show; and hanging is also evoked in *Twelfth Night*, where Feste’s innuendos add a distinctly sexual significance to the idea. “He that is well hanged in this world,” he declares on his first appearance, “need fear no colours” (1.5.4-5), before going on to announce that, “[m]any a good hanging prevents a bad marriage” (18-19). In Feste’s word-play connotations proliferate promiscuously—linking sex and death, Priapic masculinity, capital punishment, and associating both with the institution of marriage. The liberties Feste takes with language are characteristic, and represent the larger liberties suggested by the play’s sustained evocation of misrule. The twelfth night marks very precisely the *end* of the season of misrule; the play must finally discipline and contain the unruly impulses and energies that have been unleashed and allowed an indecent freedom. The festive world of “cakes and ale” (2.3.113), presided over by “Sir Toby and the lighter people” (5.1.333), must give way to the sober world of “manners [...] decency [...] and] respect” (2.3.85, 90) that Malvolio invokes. Lewis must end *The Chronicles of Narnia* with a similar act of discipline and containment—in his case, the discipline and containment of Susan Pevensie, in whom those unruly impulses appear to have come to reside. This reveals another point of connection between *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Twelfth Night*—the endings of both have been found wanting precisely because that final act of containment fails to satisfy: “Susan

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<sup>6</sup> In particular the Calormene formula of “may he live forever,” used whenever the ruler, the Tisroc, is mentioned, comes directly from Nesbit’s Babylon.

<sup>7</sup> See Wyn Davies, for instance.

[...] is no longer a friend of Narnia [...] She's interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations" (*The Last Battle* (LB), 12.127-8).

The ending of *The Chronicles of Narnia* sees Susan singled out; as A.N. Wilson puts it, "Only one of the children from the original quartet is excluded from heaven. This is Susan. She has committed the unforgivable sin of growing up" (Wilson 228). Dissatisfaction with Susan's fate has been widespread. For Alison Lurie, her "banishment" is "deeply unfair" (12), for J.K. Rowling, it is "a big problem," while for Neil Gaiman, who gave currency to the phrase "the problem of Susan" with his 2004 short story, it is both "intensely problematic and deeply irritating" (16); indeed, "problem" is the term most frequently used by readers to express their dissatisfaction. A range of cognate terms is chosen to identify what happens to Susan: for A.N. Wilson, she is "excluded"; for Rowling she is "lost"; for both Pullman and Philip Hensher, she is "sent to hell"; Gaiman simply talks about "the disposal of Susan." Ever since the books were first published, this has been seen as an issue; in 1960 a reader named Pauline Bannister wrote to Lewis to express her unhappiness that Susan did not enter Aslan's country with her sister and brothers. Famously, Lewis replied: "I could not write that story myself. Not that I have no hope of Susan's ever getting to Aslan's country, but because I have a feeling that the story of her journey would be longer and more like a grown-up novel than I wanted to write. But I may be mistaken. Why not try it yourself?" (*Collected Letters* [CL] 3.1135-36). This sounds like an invitation: a similar invitation was extended a year later to another reader: "[W]hy don't *you* try writing some Narnian tales? [...] Do try!" (CL 3.1189).

It is an invitation to write something that Lewis feels he couldn't write and does not want to, something "more like a grown-up novel"; Lewis did of course write novels for adults, such as his "space trilogy," *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Voyage to Venus (Perelandra)* (1943), *That Hideous Strength* (1945). The dates of these show that he wrote them at the same time as he was writing the Narnia books (1939-1954), so it must be Susan's story in particular that he did not want to write. Is that a tacit recognition that her story might have had to include sex? He would not have been alone in thinking that this would make it unsuitable for children, of course. I doubt that Lewis could have foreseen some of the developments that have made it possible for others to take up his invitation (reflecting Susan's own interest in invitations). The postcolonial movement known as "writing back," "a field that is ironic, satirical, subversive and crucially concerned with undercutting, revising, or envisioning alternatives to reductive representations in the colonial mode" (Bartels et al 189), has recently produced an example highly relevant to this discussion: Saladin Ahmed's "Without Faith, Without Law, Without Joy" (2013), which writes the story that Spenser couldn't or didn't want to write, the story of the Saracen brothers

Sansfoy, Sansloy and Sansjoy from Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. Like most of the other dissatisfied readers cited earlier, Gaiman, who inspired the collection in which Ahmed’s story appears, feels like other readers that Susan’s interest in “nylons and lipsticks and invitations” (LB 12.128) is an expression of her sexuality, and that she is punished for this by not being admitted to Aslan’s country in *The Last Battle*. On behalf of those readers who have shared Bannister’s dissatisfaction, Neil Gaiman responds with “The Problem of Susan” (2004). One might nevertheless wonder why Susan’s relatively modest interest might merit punishment, and how it might be considered equivalent to those unruly desires that *Twelfth Night* makes it its business to discipline and control.

At the end of the *Chronicles*, Aslan welcomes the others to heaven by telling them: “[A]ll of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadow-Lands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning” (LB 16.171). On the face of it, exactly the opposite could be said of *Twelfth Night*—the holiday is over, the term is beginning. Christmas misrule must end. Part of that ending is the punishment and eventual departure of Malvolio—for whom, it seems, no other outcome is available. The treatment of Malvolio has been one cause of dissatisfaction; Logan wonders whether or not he “deserves” what happens to him (228); Lindheim refers to “the unfair punishment of Malvolio” (680). Introducing the 2008 Arden edition of the play, Keir Elam moves from talking about “the duping” to “the tormenting of Malvolio” and then to “the maltreatment of the steward” (Elam 7-8). The play’s ending sees Malvolio storming from the stage vowing revenge; despite Orsino’s instruction (to no-one in particular, it seems) that he should be “entreat[ed] to a peace” (5.1.373), he does not return. Are we to consider him, like Susan, “excluded” and “lost,” his fate a “banishment”? As evidenced by his fantasy—surely a libidinous daydream—of “having come from a day-bed, where [he has] left Olivia sleeping” (2.5.45-6), it seems that he himself has harboured unruly desires. So he and Susan may have a little more in common than a shared interest in hosiery.<sup>8</sup>

It is not the case that Susan has never shown an interest in sex in the course of the *Chronicles*. As Kings and Queens, the Pevensies exercise good government over Narnia, and their reign is “long and happy”:

And they themselves grew and changed as the years passed over them  
[...] Susan grew into a tall and gracious woman with black hair that fell  
almost to her feet and the Kings of the countries beyond the sea began to  
send ambassadors asking for her hand in marriage. (LWW 17.167)

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis refers directly to “the cross-gartered Malvolio” in *An Experiment in Criticism* (54). He also discusses Orsino in “Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem” (58-59).



Susan is desirable, then—and desired. Jennifer Miller points out that “[t]hese marriages [...] never take place, and [...] the desire for [Susan] is ‘beyond the sea,’ rather than [...] actual romantic love or sexual desire exist[ing] in Narnia”; she takes this as “further reinforcing the idea that sexual desire has no place in Narnia” (114). While there is no doubt that this is the kind of world Lewis wishes to create, it is not quite borne out by the texts. One king who sends ambassadors to Narnia for precisely this reason is the ruler of Calormen, the Tisroc—while Calormen is not “beyond the sea,” it is a different country. And when the foreign prince, Rabadash, is in Narnia, he acquits himself well, as Susan recalls, conducting himself “meekly and courteously” while a guest at the Narnian court (*The Horse and His Boy* (HHB) 4.57). In *The Horse and His Boy*, the Narnians are in Calormen: Susan is sufficiently interested to be returning the state visit—knowing perfectly well that marriage was the reason the ambassadors and the prince himself came to Narnia. The fact that she, along with her royal brother and their entourage, are in Calormen, following up the ambassadors’ initial approaches and the prince’s own later overtures, may surely indicate desire on Susan’s part. If so, then contrary to Miller’s point, this desire has been conceived and nurtured *in Narnia*, where it has been sustained for long enough to motivate this visit to Calormen.

Even Susan’s brother, Edmund, though he may not approve of the possible match, seems to see this; he remarks on the “favour” Susan has shown Rabadash, and refers to him in somewhat Byronic terms, describing the Calormene prince as “dark” and “dangerous” (HHB 4.56, 58); Rabadash is described as “tall [and] young,” like Susan herself, with bright eyes and gleaming teeth (7.88). He is eager and passionate; it is common knowledge in the Calormene capital of Tashbaan that he is “madly in love” with the Queen of Narnia (7.81). Physical and athletic, he has impressed Susan by the display of his masculine prowess—she speaks admiringly of the “marvellous feats” he achieved in the tournaments and fighting games put on for him by his Narnian hosts (4.57).

Rabadash’s own dreams of a future with Susan feature their offspring as rulers of Calormen—a wish to procreate, an indication of sexual desire. Though he is aware of the strategic and political advantages of such a match, confident that High King Peter will recognise “the high honour and advantage of being allied to our House” (HHB 8.94), this appears to be an afterthought compared to the urgency of his desire—“I *want* her [...] I must have her. I shall die if I do not get her [...]!” (8.89). The fact that she seems to be seriously considering this marriage suggests that Rabadash’s desire may be matched by her own—she is, then, not just desirable but desiring in her own right.

So we might conclude that Susan *does* desire her “dark-faced lover” (HNB 56—the term is Edmund’s). But this desire cannot be satisfied—cannot be allowed, in Lewis’s scheme of things.

The reason for this is quite straightforward: race. Rabadash is a Saracen, a *paynim*, an infidel. He is the demon “other,” “Calormene” having been established, like “Saracen,” as Robinson’s “mobile and resonant term of difference.” Lewis’s handling of race has been another major cause of readerly dissatisfaction; writing in 1998, Pullman finds it unnecessary to go into details because others have already done this so thoroughly: “the American critic John Goldthwaite, in his powerful and original study of children’s literature *The Natural History Of Make-Believe* (OUP, 1996), lays bare the misogyny, the racism, the sado-masochistic relish for violence that permeates the whole cycle.”

One does not have to go as far as Pullman, who, in addition to finding the books “nauseating” and “loathsome,” “ugly and poisonous,” describes the ending of *The Last Battle* in particular as “[o]ne of the most vile moments in the whole of children’s literature.” One might admit, like Gaiman, that “there is so much in the books [to] love” (16); Gaiman recalls that he read the *Chronicles* “hundreds of times” as a child himself, and then read them “aloud, as an adult, twice, to [his own] children” (16), but still, when it comes to Calormen, as Kyrie O’Connor puts it, “you don’t have to be a bluestocking of political correctness to find [...] this [...] anti-Arab, or anti-Eastern, or anti-Ottoman.” Greg Easterbrook simply states, “[t]he Calormenes are unmistakable Muslim stand-ins.” O’Connor usefully summarises a number of salient details:

[T]he land of Calormen is not simply a bad place [...]. Worse, the people are bad—or most of them, anyway—and they’re bad in pretty predictable ways. Calormen is ruled by a despotic Tisroc and a band of swarthy lords with pointy beards, turbaned heads, long robes and nasty dispositions. Calormen is dirty, hot, dull, superstitious [...].

Here’s Lewis’s description of ordinary Calormenes: “men with long, dirty robes, and wooden shoes turned up at the toe, and turbans on their heads, and beards [...]” [HNB 1.11]. And here’s the city: “What you would chiefly have noticed if you had been there were the smells, which came from unwashed people, unwashed dogs, scent, garlic, onions, and the piles of refuse which lay everywhere” [HNB 4.50]. (O’Connor)

As suggested earlier, Calormen is deliberately constructed in opposition to Narnia: it is hot where Narnia is cool; the interior is a desert where “the heat shiver[s] on the ground,” and the sun is “blazing” (HNB 2.23), the streets of its capital city are flanked with “burning pavements” (4.50) in contrast to the “cool woods and dewy slopes” of Narnia (5.58). The country’s name derives from the word for “heat,” *calor*:

[T]he sun rose [...]. The double peak of [the mountain] flashed in the sunlight [...]. Then the light became a nuisance. The glare of the sand made [Shasta's] eyes ache [...]. Then came the heat. He noticed it the first time when he had to dismount and walk: as he slipped down to the sand the heat from it struck up into his face as if from the opening of an oven door. Next time it was worse. But the third time, as his bare feet touched the sand he screamed with pain [...]. (*HHB* 9.104)

Courtly and sophisticated where Narnia is rustic and simple, Calormen is (as the reference to opening an oven door could not make clearer) “cooked” where Narnia is “raw.” In contrast with the desert sand and painful heat of Calormen, arrival in the north brings the travellers to a “glade full of the coolest, and most delicious smells,” carpeted with “soft grass”; after they have slept, “the cool morning hours” bring them to a “valley [...] with its brown, cool river, and grass and moss and wild flowers and rhododendrons” (*HHB* 9.107-9). The word “cool” is repeated three times in as many pages. Owing much to the *Arabian Nights* (which we know from his letters that he had read in Edward William Lane’s mid-nineteenth-century translation) and Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (which Lewis liked so much he read it no less than six times),<sup>9</sup> Lewis’s construction of Calormen might be summed up in three words—dark-skinned, dirty, and despotic (in Calormen they practise slavery whereas Narnia is “free” [*HHB* 9.109]; and arranged marriage—in Narnia “no maiden is forced to marry against her will” [3.38]).

But Calormen is sexy. The river-sides of Tashbaan are lined for miles with “gardens and pleasure houses,” for instance (*HHB* 3.43), and on the river itself there are “pleasure boats” (9.100); Rabadash himself, in the passion, ardency and heat of his desire, sounds sexy. Since Lewis was a consumer of those materials identified by Said as constituting the discourse of Orientalism, it seems worth reiterating the point made by both Said and Wyn Davies, cited above, on the association between the Orient and sex (Said 309). Both writers also pick out one particular cultural icon that Lewis may well have been familiar with—Rudolph Valentino and his 1921 film *The Sheik*. Actually Italian by birth, Valentino was the original “Latin lover”; indeed, the term was coined for him. A later example is the Egyptian-born Omar Sharif, who featured in David Lean’s epic *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962); more contemporary “Latin lovers” include the Spanish-born Enrique Iglesias. Perhaps if Rabadash were regarded as a kind of composite of these we might better appreciate why Susan might desire him—his very otherness (dark-skinned, culturally different) might well make him all the more exotic and attractive to the twenty-six-year-old Susan, surrounded as she is by pale sexless Narnians in a country that can’t even muster a lustful faun.

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<sup>9</sup> 11 December, 1916. Joel Heck gives a reference to *The Lewis Papers* V.173.

Calormen is sexy, Narnia is not. In Narnia, not only the sexual licentiousness associated with the East, but sexuality itself, are systematically denied. Narnia is Arcadian in conception—Laura Miller remarks in interview, “A lot of what we [are] responding to when we’re responding to Narnia is the idea of Arcadia, from classical mythology” (“A Spy in the House of Narnia”). Rustic, peaceful, simple and bucolic—but in classical mythology, Arcadia is the home of Pan, who is also its patron. Pan is a fertility god, described by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as “vigorous and lustful”—a Priapic image of sexual licentiousness. What Lewis gives us in Narnia is Arcadia without Pan, a systematically *deseexualized* version of Arcadia. With the hindquarters, legs, and horns of a goat, Pan is like a satyr or a faun. But in Narnia, fauns are deseexualized—Tumnus, the first Narnian Lucy Pevensie and the reader ever encounter, may be a little like his classical forebears in meeting and befriending a little girl who is lost in the woods, and “us[ing] music and a magical fire to seduce Lucy into falling asleep” (J. Miller 126), but sex is the last thing on his mind. Instead, he is thoroughly domesticated, serving Lucy “a wonderful tea” of toast, sardines, and cake (*LWW* 2.19-20). When we meet Tumnus again in *The Horse and His Boy* he is once more engaged in serving food (*HHB* 5.64), as if to confirm his domesticated, safe, and non-sexual nature. In general, Jennifer Miller finds “a marked lack of sexuality and treatment of sexual desire in all the [Narnia] stories”, entirely “consistent with Lewis’s desire to create a world of innocence for children,” but nevertheless “problematic” (113), in the ways described.

But it is possible that Lewis’s own attempt to exclude sex and sexuality from Narnia is not entirely successful, as Jennifer Miller suggests. This attempt may be seen as a repression that is subverted because, as Freud has taught us, the repressed will always find a way of returning. The unruly desires which *Twelfth Night* and *The Chronicles* both work so hard to contain, so strenuously to control, may not be easily dealt with. So, sex has a way not only of persisting, but of insisting on making its presence felt (sometimes at altogether unexpected moments). So, on Tumnus’ bookshelf, Lucy notices a book called *Nymphs and Their Ways* (*LWW* 2.19), a very minor detail but nevertheless a reminder that Tumnus’s sexual origins have not been entirely expunged. We might recall that the Greek Pan, who presides over Arcadia, and became the Roman Faunus, had a particular penchant for nymphs.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Joe R. Christopher draws attention to the first line of one of Horace’s odes, which describes Faunus as “lover of the flying nymphs,” “*Nympharum figientum amator*” (*Carminum* Book 3, No, 18) (86).

However, Susan's possible desire for "Eastern promise" in the form of her "dark-faced lover" has larger ramifications; the fact that she may be attracted to this alluring embodiment of otherness is itself transgressive due to all that Calormen is made to stand for, and so represents an unruly desire which must be governed and disciplined out of existence.

It is not enough for Susan to find that she cannot have the object of her desire. In *Twelfth Night* not only must Orsino learn that he cannot have Olivia, he must settle for Viola; Olivia herself must not only learn that she cannot have Cesario, she must settle for Sebastian. It is (merely) a question of transferring desire from an unavailable (and impossible, disallowed, forbidden and/or transgressive) object to an object that is available. Normality is reasserted, order restored; misrule, with its indulgent and questionable pleasures and riotous inversions, is banished; feverish, cruel Calormen with its dark skins, turbans, and scimitars gives way to temperate, cool Narnia with its northern faces, fair hair, and swords which are "long and straight, not curved like Calormene scimitars" (HHB 4.52).

But in the end there remain those whose desire is supplied with no object to which it can be transferred, those who are not included in what Orsino calls the "golden time" (5.1.375): Malvolio, Antonio—and Susan.

If the idea of the disciplining of unruly desire makes sense, as a means to control and curtail misrule in favour of the restoration of order, and to discredit sexy Calormen in favour of wholesome Narnia, then Malvolio must learn that he can't have Olivia, Antonio that he can't have Sebastian, Susan that she can't have Rabadash, and all of these must content themselves with nothing. So perhaps it is not only readers who are left unsatisfied—perhaps the dissatisfaction actually originates with the characters.

Susan must learn *not* to desire Rabadash; and "the unfortunate Rabadash" (HHB 15.152) must prove his undesirability. She is perhaps remarkably easily persuaded to agree with her brother Edmund that her "dark-faced lover" is not as desirable as she had thought—"in his own city, he has shown another face." Edmund, somewhat gleefully, elaborates, "We have now seen him for what he is: [...] a most proud, bloody, luxurious, cruel and self-pleasing tyrant" (HHB 4.57). A true Calormene/Saracen, in other words. As Said says, the discourse of Orientalism is at times opaque, but "On rare occasions—as in the work of Léon Mugniéry—do we find the implicit made clear: that there is a 'powerful sexual appetite [...] characteristic of those hot-blooded southerners'" (Said 311). "Luxurious" is as close as Edmund gets. But for Susan and the other Narnians, the immediate problem is how to get out of the clutches of this bloody tyrant. And the plan they come up with bears a striking resemblance to the deception practised on Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*.

Both plans involve invitations, one of Susan’s favorite things. Malvolio is to be duped into believing that Olivia loves him; Rabadash is to be duped into believing that Susan loves him, that there is still a chance of her accepting him in marriage. Malvolio will receive a duplicitous letter—“some obscure epistles of love” (2.3.150-10)—and Rabadash will receive a duplicitous invitation, “worded as graciously as the Queen can contrive [...] so as to give the Prince a hope that she is weakening” (*HHB* 5.61). Malvolio will be invited to appear in yellow stockings and cross garters; Rabadash will be invited to appear at a great banquet aboard the Narnian ship berthed in the harbour. In *Twelfth Night* this “device” (2.3.157) is proposed by the servant, Maria; in *The Horse and His Boy* it is proposed by the faun, Tumnus, proving that what he lacks in goatish sexuality he makes up for in cerebral ingenuity. In both cases, the proposal is met with great enthusiasm by the collaborators—“Excellent,” cries Sir Toby Belch (2.3.157); “very good,” applauds the Narnian raven, Sallowpad. “You shall hear no better plot” (*HHB* 5.62).

In both cases, the plot succeeds; the victims believe what they want to believe—Malvolio, “sick with self-love,” “so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him” (1.5.86, 2.3.145-7), Rabadash “self-pleasing,” as Edmund describes him, are both taken in. Malvolio dresses up and smiles, exactly as instructed; the Narnians make their escape while Rabadash (presumably) is dressing appropriately for a royal feast.

Just as Malvolio swears, “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you” (5.1.371), Rabadash too swears revenge: “Every insult you have heaped on me shall be paid with oceans of Narnian [...] blood. Terrible shall the vengeance of the Tisroc be” (*HHB* 15. 169).

There are a number of levels on which he must be punished. Not only the Narnians, but the Calormenes too must witness this; and most importantly, it must be endorsed by the reader.

First, the military threat must be defused. Rabadash must be defeated in battle, to demonstrate Narnia’s *moral* superiority as well as to prove its strength. In Spenser’s terms, Christendom must defeat Heathendom; “Briton” must conquer “Paynim”; the swarthy infidel Calormenes/Saracens must be vanquished. So Rabadash is beaten in the fighting and he is humiliated into the bargain. He leaps upon his enemies, intending to cut a “very grand and very dreadful figure” as he descends with a cry of, “The bolt of Tash falls from above!”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, due to an earlier skirmish, there is a hole in his mail-shirt; this catches on a hook in the wall, and he ends up hanging there; a good

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<sup>11</sup> Presumably intended as a version of the *takbir*—“*Allahu Akbar!*” (“God is great!”)—the traditional Arabic formula, used as a battle-cry.

hanging, no doubt, that prevents a bad marriage. Looking like “a piece of washing hung up to dry,” this is far from the spectacle he planned to create. Instead of inflecting the idea and the image of hanging in terms of enhanced and prodigious masculinity, Lewis takes it in the opposite direction: the simile deliberately domesticates him, just as Tumnus has been domesticated, completely deflating the warlike image intended. While hardly the bloodbath that Spenser promises (and never actually delivers), the battle is a decisive victory for the Narnians; furthermore, Rabadash ends up “with everyone laughing at him.” We are told that “though he could have faced torture, he couldn’t bear being made ridiculous” (HHB 13. 152-3). In *Twelfth Night* it is part of Maria’s plan from the start that Malvolio should be humiliated: she swears to make his name into a byword for stupidity and make him a laughing-stock (2.3. 131-132); now Rabadash too has been made a laughing-stock. This then is a *public* punishment.

But further ridicule is to come. The second level of punishment to which he must be subjected is a *personal* one: he must demonstrate his unsuitability as either a mate or an appropriate object of desire for Susan. So he is reduced to childishness—after the Narnian plot is put into practice he protests “sulkily” to his father the Tisroc, before growing exasperated and furious, kicking the Gran Vizier and demanding that Calormen’s armies should immediately be mobilized to invade and lay waste to Narnia, “killing their High King and all of his blood except the queen Susan. For I must have her [...] though she shall learn a sharp lesson first” (HHB 8. 90). What looked like urgent desire now looks more like the petulant wilfulness of a spoiled child. This is the Rabadash of whom Edmund remarks, “He is little used [...] to having his will crossed” (HHB 5.58). When his father’s agreement is not instantly forthcoming (he does, after all, have eighteen other sons, clear evidence of Calormene potency (HHB 8.98)), Rabadash says he will take matters into his own hands, seize the royal castle of Cair Paravel, and take Susan by force. He continues to act like a child, “sulking [...] furiously,” “stamping and roaring and cursing” (HHB 15.168), making this seem a mere temper tantrum.

But there is a third level on which he is to be dealt with: the *providential* level. Aslan appears on the scene, predicting “doom” for Rabadash; furious, Rabadash pulls what he thinks is a terrifying face, shrieking insults, calling Aslan a “demon,” “the foul fiend of Narnia,” “the enemy of the gods,” a “horrible phantasm.” His final threat, however, proves the last straw—“I will never desist until I have dragged to my palace by her hair the barbarian queen, the daughter of dogs [...]” (HHB 15.170). Aslan proceeds to transform him into a donkey.

This may be a further parallel to *Twelfth Night*. Maria refers to Malvolio as an ass, telling him to “go shake [his] ears,” and the conspirators vow to “make him an ass” (2.3.122, 143, 163-4); Lewis literalizes Shakespeare’s metaphor.

For the moment, the metamorphosis is only temporary. Rabadash will remain in his ass’s shape until the Autumn Feast, after which he will resume human form. But for the rest of his life, should he ever venture more than ten miles from Tashbaan, he will be turned back into a donkey. “And from that second change,” warns the lion, “there will be no return” (*HHB* 15.172). This means that he can never again pose a military threat to Narnia or any other country, and as a result he becomes “the most peaceful Tisroc Calormen ha[s] ever known” (*HHB*, 15.73).

Nor is that quite all. There is one Saracen whose name became a byword for chivalry and generosity, and who has been described as “a handsome young Turk,”<sup>12</sup> “a glamorous and charming infidel” (Phillips), much as I have been suggesting Susan might have regarded Rabadash: this is Saladin, over the years a hero for both Europeans and (latterly) for Arabs. Described as “a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*,”<sup>13</sup> the absolute epitome of chivalry, Saladin was immortalized by Dante as one of the “virtuous pagans” (Canto II, IV). C.S. Lewis’s love for Dante is well known; he first read the *Inferno* in Italian in his teens. Petrarch too hails Saladin;<sup>14</sup> and in one way or another so do writers including Walter Scott, for whom Saladin is “grave, graceful and decorous” (*The Talisman* 36). We know how highly Lewis thought of Scott.<sup>15</sup> A different model, then, was available to Lewis had he wanted Rabadash to be a suitable partner for Susan. The Rabadash we have is of Lewis’s choosing. And *that* Rabadash is not remembered as “a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*”; instead, he is memorialized in Calormene history books as “Rabadash the Ridiculous” — “and to this day in Calormene schools, if you do anything unusually stupid, you are very likely to be called ‘a second Rabadash’” (*HHB* 15. 173). The process of humiliation is complete.

The demonstration of Rabadash’s unworthiness, his defeat, debasement, and degradation, are all part of the systematic disciplining of desire which directly parallels the process Logan describes in *Twelfth Night*; in fact, the behaviour Rabadash is made to display may incline us to be less sympathetic to his situation than commentators have been to Malvolio’s. Yet we may still feel

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<sup>12</sup> By Voltaire, in the *Essay on Morals* (see David 80).

<sup>13</sup> By Kaiser Wilhelm II, on a visit to Damascus seeking a military alliance with the Ottomans in 1898 (see Klausmann 320-321).

<sup>14</sup> In *The Triumph of Fame* (1351-74) Petrarch lists Saladin alongside Alexander the Great and King Arthur.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis was president of the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club in 1955, and discusses Scott in his inaugural lecture as Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Poetry at Cambridge (1954).



disquiet, even dissatisfaction, at the ease and speed with which he degenerates into another cliché of Orientalism—hot-blooded with a powerful sexual appetite, but not capable of satisfying it. Said suggests that “the absolutely inviolable taboo in Orientalist discourse is that that very sexuality must never be taken seriously” (311).<sup>16</sup> It is not only that Rabadash degenerates into a joke, but that his creator ensures that he does so. Just as his final humiliation is at the paws of Aslan, so his debasement is at the hands of Lewis. And might we not conclude that, like Malvolio, “he hath been most notoriously abused” (*Twelfth Night*, 5.1.372), a “poor fool, [...] baffled” by the machinations of his enemies?

It is Lewis, too, who determines that Susan’s desire is frustrated. This is part of the disciplinary process; as is her return to sexless Narnia and a sexless existence, as is her treatment in *The Last Battle*. As noted above, readers immediately expressed their dissatisfaction: the final instalment of the *Chronicles* was published in 1956; the following January, Lewis is writing to Martin Kilmer:

Susan [...] is left alive in this world at the end, having by then turned into a rather silly, conceited young woman. But there is plenty of time for her to mend, and perhaps she will get to Aslan’s country in the end—in her own way. I think that whatever she had seen in Narnia she *could* (if she wanted to) persuade herself, as she grew up, that it was “all nonsense”.  
(*CL* 3.826)

This sounds as if Lewis recognises that he has a case to answer. But why might Susan *want* to believe that it is nonsense? Why might she *want* to forget?

Unlike Olivia, Susan takes an active part in the duping of Rabadash, thus in the frustration and denial of any desire she herself might ever have had for him. She is no less gleeful than the others when they hear Tumnus’s plan—perhaps more, “catching his hands and swinging with him as he dance[s],” and crying out, “Oh Master Tumnus, dear Master Tumnus [...] You have saved us all” (*HHB* 5.62). None of the others expresses their approval quite as enthusiastically, though Edmund is described as “rubbing his hands” (*HHB* 5.62) with satisfaction at the faun’s scheme. I have suggested that for Susan, Narnia might come to stand for the frustration, and her own collusive repression, of her desire. Freud has taught us that “forgetting is very often determined by an unconscious purpose, and [...] it always enables one to deduce the secret intentions of the person who forgets” (254); as remarked, he also teaches us that what is repressed will return—if Susan were a real person, rather than a product of Lewis’s imagination, one might conclude that her

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<sup>16</sup> So in *The Sheik*, for instance, Valentino’s character turns out to be the child of a British father and a Spanish mother, adopted and brought up by the old Sheik, whose position he has taken over on the old man’s death.

interest in nylons, lipsticks, and invitations signals the return of that long-repressed sexuality when she once again reaches her early twenties, the age she was in Narnia when she at least entertained the thought of a mature sexual relationship with Rabadash.

It is clear in *The Last Battle* that the heaven which Susan is not admitted is Narnia writ large, “the real Narnia,” in Lewis’s Platonic terms. Digory explains:

When Aslan said you [the Pevensies] could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia, which has always been here and always will be here: just as our world, England and all, is only a shadow or a copy of something in Aslan’s real world. [...] And of course [this] is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream. (*LB* 15.160)

Although Peter tells the others, “I’ve a feeling we’ve got to the country where everything is allowed” (*LB* 13.129), one might ask whether this is in fact true, whether the new Narnia (the “real” Narnia) is any less inimical to those unruly desires, like Susan’s, than the old Narnia proved to be? If for Susan Narnia is a place of desire denied, frustrated, stifled and repressed, why would she want to be in a heaven like that? Why would she want to be a friend of Narnia? Forever? Condemned to a sexless eternity, not allowed to desire (let us say) Rabadash? Lewis no doubt means it as a comfort when he assures Martin Kilmer that Susan may yet get to Aslan’s country, but we might see Susan’s absence from the heaven that is (just) another Narnia not as a banishment, an exclusion or a disposal, but instead as something to be celebrated—a positive thing, rather than a negative thing? A triumph, rather than a defeat? Turning away rather than being turned away? “[L]eft alive,” as Lewis puts it in that letter to Martin Kilmer, Susan has access to experience and possible fulfilment that were not available to her in Narnia; she is free to explore her impulses and desires, however unruly. Gaiman does not quite give her this in his intervention into “the problem of Susan,” but at least he gives her the opportunity to have sex and perhaps marriage, if that is what is signified by the change of name of his central character—not Pevensie, but Hastings. And he gives her intellectual success and academic achievement—she is a professor—and a degree of fame—she is being interviewed by a journalist, and people are clearly interested in her views.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Perhaps making her a professor is an act of revenge for Lewis having described her as “no good at school work.” At any rate, Gaiman has her looking back and reflecting that “[i]t has been a good life” (248).

Lewis's aim is the construction of an imaginary world for children which has been purged of sex. Jennifer Miller suggests that this is why he chose the form of the fairy-tale: it "seemed to demand no love interest" ("Sometimes Fairy Stories may Say Best What's to Be Said" 46) he wrote, also stating that "[w]riting 'juveniles' [...] excluded erotic love" (Higgins 534). Whether this is in fact true is debatable; one way or another, sex keeps cropping up, despite Lewis's sustained efforts.

In part this is due to the unruly and resistant nature of the subject matter: in the example that has been the focus of this discussion, Susan's possible desire for Rabadash, all manner of contradictions may be discerned—as Wyn Davies observes, the discourse of Orientalism is riddled with inconsistencies. With "all its jumbled ambiguities," she remarks, "[t]here is no single consensual narrative of Orientalism. A welter of ideas twist, turn and morph into contradictory formulations. [...] What best defines Orientalism is not so much its monolithic consensus but the confusion of its tropes." So Rabadash must be both desirable (enough for Susan to come to Calormen) and undesirable (enough to justify rejection); Calormen must be dirty and smelly and at the same time luxurious and alluring; cruel and courtly; debased and refined. Tashbaan is "one of the wonders of the world"—"terrace above terrace, street above street, zigzag roads or huge flights of steps bordered with orange trees and lemon trees, roof-gardens, balconies, deep archways, pillared colonnades, spires, battlements, minarets, pinnacles" (*HHB* 4.47). Shasta is awed, saying, "This is a wonderful place" before they discover the piles of refuse in the lower streets<sup>18</sup> and the smell of "garlic [and] onions" (*HHB* 4.50). Yet Calormene cuisine is impressive—it is a Calormene feast that the sexless faun Tumnus serves up in *HHB*:

lobsters, and salad, and snipe stuffed with almonds, and a complicated dish made of chicken-livers and rice and raisins and nuts, and there were cool melons and gooseberry fools and mulberry fools, and every kind of nice thing that can be made with ice. (*HHB* 5.64)

"I don't know whether you would have liked it or not," the narrator says, "but Shasta did." Even so, he is required to prefer the homely fare served up by the dwarves when he gets out of Calormen: bacon, eggs, mushrooms and toast—

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<sup>18</sup> It is appropriate that the dirt and smells are located on the lower levels, the splendor and elegance on the top levels, as if a glittering surface masked a filthy underlying reality; precisely what Lewis wants to suggest about his Saracens: corruption is concealed by jewels, and odors are masked by heavy scent.

It was all new and wonderful to Shasta for Calormene food is quite different. He didn’t know what the slices of brown stuff were, for he had never seen toast before. He didn’t know what the yellow soft thing they smeared on the toast was, because in Calormen you nearly always get oil instead of butter. (*HHB* 12.136-7)

Calormen is allowed its excellence in the art of story-telling (*HHB* 2.35), and its baths are said to be justly “famous” (*HHB* 7.82), but these details merely punctuate a story whose overall trajectory, both at the main plot level—Aravis and Shasta—and at the level of the Susan sub-plot, is away from Calormen and towards Narnia. Aravis, a Calormene, is allowed what Susan is not: a cross-cultural marriage. Jennifer Miller suggests that as “their marriage focus[es] around quarrelling and arguing, rather than love, desire, and sex” (115), sexuality is still excluded. More to the point, however, is that Aravis is a willing convert, a Calormene who rejects Calormen, a would-be Narnian, whereas Susan perhaps rejects Narnia. William Chad Newsom, who sets out to defend Lewis against racism, argues that Aravis is one of the only “noble Calormenes depicted in the books.”<sup>19</sup> Laura Miller says that this “sounds suspiciously like ‘some of my best friends are . . .’” (125); and Newsom is forced to admit that Aravis’s “nobility consists, in part, in [her] rejection of certain aspects of Calormene culture ([she] leaves an oppressive life in Calormen for freedom in Archenland).” Both characters are, I would say, Narnians at heart—so Aravis can go on to become Queen of Archenland and the mother of Ram the Great (*HB* 175) because in the end, allegiance counts for more than skin color. She has moved away from Calormen and all that it stands for. Susan must move in the same direction, though perhaps it is significant that she is absent from the story after the Narnians leave Calormen—in the final chapter we are told that this is because “She’s not like Lucy [...] who’s as good as a man, or at any rate as good as a boy. Queen Susan is more like an ordinary grown-up lady” (*HHB* 13.144). This sounds a lot like the charge that is levelled at Susan in *LB*: “She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up,” Jill says impatiently (*LB* 12.128). “She has committed the unforgivable sin of growing up,” Wilson says (228), expressing his own dissatisfaction with Susan’s fate. Susan’s absence from the last chapters of *HHB* prefigures her absence from the final book, her absence from heaven.

These are not the only occasions in which she is absent from the *Chronicles*. Susan may not get to go to heaven. But she does get to go to America. Could there be a connection? This is one of the reasons for her absence from *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader” (VDT)*. Lewis either doesn’t want to, or can’t, tell

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<sup>19</sup> There is only one other—Emeth, in *LB* (10. 106-7; 14-15. 150-55). And, like Aravis, he turns out to be a Narnian under the skin.

us about her experience in America, so there is a four-month gap in Susan's story that we know of only as an absence. Lewis's lack of interest is signaled by the fact that it is only once Susan has been dispatched to the USA that we are told, "[t]he story begins [...]" (VDT 1.8). But we know that that is where she has gone, and we are told why. Her father has a job lecturing there for four months; the children's mother is going with him, and Susan is selected because "she [is] no good at schoolwork" (Peter is studying hard for an exam) and because she "would get far more out of the trip to America than the youngsters" (VDT 1.8). Are the two things—being no good at school and going to America—related? Is Susan to learn a lesson from this trip? If the experience of America sets her apart, what might she learn from it that the others don't learn?

Lewis sends her to America at a particular moment in history. It is often as if he forgets that the war is on—as if it is no more than a convenient plot device to enable the children to make their first trip to Narnia. The ending of *Prince Caspian* (PC), where we are of course given the other reason for Susan's absence from the *Dawn Treader*, that is, Aslan's decree that she and Peter are now too old (PC 15.188), is a case in point: transported back to England, the children find themselves back on the railway platform where this particular story began: it is "unexpectedly, nice in its own way what with the familiar railway smell and the English sky and the summer term before them" (PC 15.190). This is 1941: that sky is full of bombs; and the railways are a particular target. And whatever the Pevensies might like to think, whatever Lewis might like to think, those bombs are proof that it is not just an *English* sky. There is war in heaven.

In the same year that Susan and her brothers and sister are contemplating their ownership of the sky, that same sky above Honolulu is filled with Japanese bombers. It is 1942 when Susan goes to America. She is visiting a country newly—and more than a little reluctantly—drawn into that war. Unlike Peter and Edmund and Lucy, Susan is to gain first-hand experience of the war as a world-wide phenomenon in which nothing and nobody is safe, and *everything* is to be fought for. America too is under threat. If America is the New Jerusalem then the Saracens are at the gates.

As Susan is preparing to cross the Atlantic, some young Americans are preparing to make the same journey in the opposite direction. She may have been aware of the arrival of the first US servicemen in Britain, in January 1942. These young men, some of them only a few years older than Susan (she is fourteen), come armed with a book called *Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain* (IAS), a pamphlet distributed by the United States War Department.

The IAS is a strange hybrid. On the one hand, it is a guidebook, designed to promote cultural understanding. On the other, it is a kind of secular bible. Or at least, a secular *Paradise Lost*—it sets out to justify the ways of war to man. In the interests of fulfilling such ambitious aims in a scant 31 pages, it

reveals a lot about how America sees itself: as “a country where your house is still safe, food is still plentiful and lights are still burning” (23). Quite explicitly, as the land of plenty, the terrestrial Paradise.

Had Lewis wanted to represent America, he could have found ample characterizations of the New World as a place of plenty in the literature which afforded him precedents for his representation of Calormen; in *The Faerie Queene*, for example, Spenser writes of “fruitfulle Virginia”<sup>20</sup>; or he might have considered the way that ancient myths and legends locating the blessed realm in the west were transmuted into the notion of a “Terrestrial Paradise,” and then into ideas of Utopia, something that could be *built*,<sup>21</sup> but as suggested, he is not interested; America serves merely as a narrative device to get Susan off the scene. We are left to fill in the gaps ourselves—but we should remember that we have been invited to do so.

In passing, the *IAS* reminds its readers that New York is founded upon a rock—this is the reason that city can have skyscrapers (and London can’t). But the document makes almost no reference to religion as such: God is mentioned just once, in the title of the British national anthem; churches are mentioned as potential tourist attractions, “if you feel like it, do not hesitate to walk in” (17-18). Otherwise, Sundays are an inconvenience: “The British make much of Sunday. All the shops are closed, most of the restaurants, and [...] there is not much to do” (17).

The *IAS* details “the things which Americans take for granted” (23): it even refers to a home-grown trinity—“baseball, jazz, and Coca-cola” (14), as if the Declaration of Independence had been sponsored by Joe DiMaggio. These are what is at stake, these are what is under threat. A litany of these “things” is given: skyscrapers, automobiles, trains, radios; achievements of modern building. But now even mundane substances like soap are threatened—the shortages which Britain is now enduring are the signs of what America might have in store. The land of plenty may be transformed into a land of scarcity: like Britain, it could become a place of “shortages, discomforts, blackouts and bombings” (23). In 1942, these deprivations are beginning: the first ration cards are introduced in the USA in May; gasoline is one of the first “things” to be rationed, along with car tires and automobiles; by the end of the year the list would include nylons.

Susan may be debarred from the land of Narnia, but she does go to the land of nylon. Invented in America in 1935, nylon was used for women’s

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<sup>20</sup> Book 2, Prologue 2.3. See Whitney, 143-162.

<sup>21</sup> See for example, Adams, 100-115. In departing from the tradition that locates the Terrestrial Paradise in the West (Aslan’s country is in the East), Lewis shows his readiness to transform his source materials to suit his purpose.

stockings not long after that—“The modern miracle of that first pair of stockings represented the epitome of human superiority over nature,” Kimbra Cutlip says, enthusiastically if hyperbolically. What it has in common with the *IAS*’s list is that it is human-made: the first useful synthetic fiber to be synthesized in the laboratory, out of “coal, air and water” as Cutlip reminds us. If not a miracle, then evidence of the human ability to make things. But nylon can also be made into other things: and in 1942 it is needed for a number of those other things: especially parachutes, but also for glider tow ropes, aircraft fuel tanks, flak jackets, shoelaces, mosquito netting, and hammocks. Eventually the only stockings available were those sold before the war or bought on the black market.

Before he disposes of her, Lewis points out that despite Susan’s deficiencies at school work, she is “otherwise very old for her age” (*VDT*, 1.8), an indication of those aspirations to adulthood that she would be so disparaged for in *The Last Battle*. He has also stressed another quality: “[g]rown ups thought her the pretty one of the family” (*VDT* 1.8), something which will be stressed when Susan makes another brief appearance in the book from which she is meant to be absent, in Lucy’s jealous vision in the magician’s house: “Susan [...] had always been the beauty of the family” (*VDT* 10.119).

A pretty, precocious fourteen-year-old girl in America for the first time with her mother—what do they do while Mr. Pevensie is lecturing? If they meet American women and girls of around their ages, such as the wives and daughters of Susan’s father’s colleagues, what kind of conversations might they have? Lewis seems to think he knows: when the adult Lucy meets Aravis for the first time, “[t]hey [...] soon [go] away to talk about [...] getting clothes for [Aravis], and all the sorts of things girls do talk about on such an occasion” (*HHB* 15.167).

But Susan would not be alone in taking an interest in nylons. Those young GIs, whose journey across the Atlantic in 1942 mirrors Susan’s, are to become popularly known in Britain as “oversexed, overpaid and over here,”<sup>22</sup> a label dripping with equal measures of envy and resentment. Not all of them had observed the advice of the *Instructions*, warning them of the two actions guaranteed to alienate their British counterpart: “swiping his girl [...] and rubbing it in that you are better paid than he is” (*IAS* 18). An Englishwoman only a few years older than Susan recalls that the American servicemen “used to arrive with their packs full of nylons and they undoubtedly thought that British girls were a pushover for a pair of these and a bright red lipstick. And truth to tell some of them were.” She immediately adds that “a wise girl got her eagerly and hoped for gift first and then disappeared before she was further

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<sup>22</sup> Attributed to British comedian Tommy Trinder (1909-1989), but disputed.

committed, or the guy thought he was on to a promise" (MacDermott). Knowledge of what human beings do can be strategically useful if what they want to do is not what you want to do. And the duplicity for which Spenser's Duessa is ultimately rewarded with execution might come in handy on occasions like this.

A Fats Waller song that was released just after Susan's return to England, in 1943, looks forward to the day when nylon stockings are freely available again; because "cotton is monotonous to men," women are advised to "get some mesh for your flesh." This song—"When the Nylons Bloom Again"<sup>23</sup>—was explicitly addressed to "women of the USA and Britain," so it is possible that Susan might have heard it played on the radio. Not until the war ended, however, did production of nylon stockings resume—and demand so far outstripped demand that in the USA the result was "The Nylon Riots" of 1945-46 (Spivack). But the lesson for Susan is surely that human beings can make nylon into stockings or parachutes; they can make it into objects of value and objects of sexual exchange: none of these is an intrinsic quality of nylon. In and of itself it is neither good nor bad.

Perhaps, then, Susan might get something from her experience of America that is not available to the others: an enhanced sense of the human ability to *make*; not only nylons but wars. Such an awareness might lead to an increased sense of the value of such things; an enlarged appreciation of both their precariousness and their preciousness. If this leads to a privileging of the things of this world over those of the next world then Lewis could not endorse it; for him an awareness of the precariousness of things leads to contempt of the world, via that favorite topic of those he read, mutability.

If Lewis senses that this is where Susan might be led, that could be why he doesn't want to write it; indeed, why America, like sex, must be kept at bay; it also corresponds with the idea of Susan as disobedient, which is precisely what emerges from her dalliance with Rabadash. Perhaps this is what has to be disciplined, in the interests of correcting—"mend[ing]"—it.

She is finally left behind to "mend," to repent, and to gain access to heaven "in her own way," though Lewis has to qualify that—"perhaps." It is as if his efforts have grown increasingly desperate—but what if Susan has no desire to enter Aslan's country? The attempt throughout this discussion has been to focus on Susan's possible desire—perhaps this focus could be sustained by a reading of the ending which sees her absence as a *rejection* of what Aslan's country—heaven—stands for. Turning away from Narnia, exclusion, and banishment, might then be seen as an attainment of freedom, a refusal of the discipline that she has been subjected to. The "problem of Susan" might not be

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<sup>23</sup> The title both evokes and secularizes (and sexualizes) the idea of resurrection.



Susan's problem so much as C.S. Lewis's problem—the ending of the *Chronicles* might serve as an acknowledgement that Susan's desires may run counter to those of her creator. Perhaps a susceptibility to the allure of Eastern promise is not confined to just one member of the Pevensie family.

In her conversation with Naomi Rousseau, Tessa Laird draws attention to Lewis's role: "One of the things that has struck me the most on re-reading these books is that C.S. Lewis himself comes off as a kind of God, creating his own world and predestining some of the characters to heaven and some to hell." Gaiman has his Susan reflecting in a similar vein:

A god who would punish me for liking nylons and parties by making me walk through that school dining-room, with the flies, to identify Ed [after the train crash that has killed the rest of her family], well . . . he's enjoying himself a bit too much, isn't he? Like a cat, getting the last ounce of enjoyment out of a mouse. (246)

Could Susan's absence from heaven be seen as a protest as well as a rejection—as a positive declaration of the resilience and resistance of desire to the forces that seek to discipline and deny it?

I want to conclude by invoking one critic's response, not to Susan Pevensie and the Narnia story, but to another children's story with an ending that has provoked dissatisfaction—Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911). Readers familiar with that text will know that it too ends with the exclusion of a female character, Mary Lennox, from its triumphal ending: Linda Parsons writes, "Some readers are disappointed by the fact that Mary is excluded from Colin's triumphant return to the manor. I rejoice that Mary remains forever in the garden" (Parsons 267). If the outcome for Susan in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is seen not as an exclusion or a banishment, but as a rejection of, even a protest against, the Narnia-that-is-Heaven/the Heaven-that-is-Narnia, perhaps this too may be regarded as a cause for celebration. *The Chronicles* begin with the reinstatement of Christmas (LWW 10.97-101); perhaps it is fitting that they should end with *Twelfth Night*, "the whirligig of time brings in his revenges" (5.1.370). Perhaps Malvolio and Susan, perhaps even Rabadash and Calormen, can in some measure be avenged by the expression of dissatisfaction at their fates—whether by writing their stories differently, like Gaiman and Pullman, or just by exposing and interrogating some of the methods that have been used to bring about those fates?

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