ONCE A QUEEN IN NARNIA:

SUSAN AND THE DIVINE IN C.S. LEWIS'S *CHRONICLES OF NARNIA*

by

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ABSTRACT

C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia ends with the absence of one the main characters. Susan Pevensie is not included in the reunion at the end of *The Last Battle*. Other characters attribute her absence to exclusive interest in "nylons and lipstick and invitations." There is a blank space in Susan's story related to her absence from *The Last Battle* and in this space critics have inscribed a variety of meanings. Critics argued that Lewis found beauty and femininity to be suspiciously evil and that in order for a girl to succeed in Narnia she must reject them to become as good as a boy. Others have argued that Susan's difficulty is not her femininity but her failure to mature in an optimal way. In this thesis, I argue that these reversals are intended to emphasize the primacy of the divine in Narnia. I show how Susan's story illustrates Lewis's sense of the necessity of purgatorial redemption, the way he saw that courtly love might lead a person to the divine, and the positive, although subordinate, role in the Chronicles for women and enchantment. The ending of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* ensures that while Susan's story is unresolved in the Chronicles, her return would be more consistent with the internal logic of the series than her absence. While her absence offers weight and sorrow to the otherwise joyful conclusion, Aslan's blessing over the four children as they are crowned "Once a king or queen in Narnia, always a king or queen" (Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia* 131) speaks of their return.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

C.S. Lewis and the 'Problem of Susan'

It has now been sixty-two years since the original publication of C.S. Lewis's enormously popular *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which was quickly followed by six more volumes. Recent years have also seen the first three of those books turned into very successful films. The influence of Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia on the fantasy genre has been profound. Lewis's books have directly influenced such contemporary children's books as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and have given rise to a critical industry that has produced an extensive body of scholarship. The *Chronicles of Narnia*[1] begin with the adventures of four siblings: Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie. Of these, Lucy is the central figure. She initiates their entrance into the magical realm of Narnia, and throughout the series she remains the most emotionally connected to both Narnia and its Christ-like king, Aslan the Lion. Lucy is beloved by both the reader and all of Narnia, because she is the one constant in the

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[1] I will be referencing a continuously paginated, one-volume edition of the Chronicles throughout. This edition orders the books chronologically and not in the original published order; however, I consider the published order canonical. Recognizing that this is a matter of debate among Lewis scholars I have privileged the published order over the chronological primarily because of unresolved narrative discrepancies arising from the chronological reordering.

storyline and the one character most closely associated with the central figure of Aslan. However, it is her older sister Susan who has been the object of critical controversy as her character arc presents some rather challenging reversals. I will argue that these reversals are intended to emphasize the primacy of the divine in Narnia. I will show how Susan's story illustrates Lewis's sense of the necessity of purgatorial redemption, the way he saw that courtly love might lead a person to the divine, and the positive, although subordinate, role in the Chronicles for women and enchantment.

Of all of the Pevensie children, Susan appears least in the series; however, she still participates in its most significant themes. In the first book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, she arrives with her siblings at Professor Kirke's house, ready for adventure. Once there, she and the other three children enter Narnia through the magical wardrobe. While in Narnia, Susan travels with the others and takes an active role in the storyline. Most notably, she witnesses Aslan's passion, death, and resurrection with Lucy, and she joins the others in the liberation of Narnia from the tyranny of the White Witch. In the second novel, *Prince Caspian*, Susan returns to Narnia with her siblings and is less at home there than in the previous adventure. Demonstrating her bravery and skill, she shoots the Telmarine attempting to drown Trumpkin the dwarf, whom she later defeats in an archery contest. Following this, they all journey through the wild forest, making their way to Aslan's How (built upon the ruins of the Stone Table), where Susan is depicted as the most uncomfortable and impatient with the arduous trek. When Aslan appears to them, because of her selfishness, she is the last of the children to be able to see him; however, when they

finally arrive at Aslan's How, she again goes with Lucy and Aslan to begin liberating Narnia, suggesting redemptions. The second adventure, *Prince Caspian*, ends with both Susan and Peter barred from returning to Narnia, as they are nearly grown up and ready to move on to an adult life that includes knowing Aslan by "another name" back in England (Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia*[2] 370).

Although Susan is briefly mentioned as travelling with their parents in America in the third tale, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, her only other appearance in the series is as a minor character in the fifth novel, *The Horse and His Boy*. In this book, all four of the Pevensie children are several years older and share in the reign over Narnia. Two of the four children are abroad in neighboring Calormene, and Susan is being courted by Calormene's cruel Prince Rabadash. As Rabadash's ill intents are exposed, Susan refuses the prince, bringing all of the visiting Narnians in danger. Rabadash's anger leads to a climactic battle between the two countries, wherein the younger Lucy fights briefly, but Susan remains at the Narnian castle of Cair Paravel, acting "more like an ordinary grown up lady" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 197). After the fifth novel, Susan does not appear in Narnia again. Susan's absence and her assumed punishment, as told in the seventh and final book, *The Last Battle*, is known to critics as "The Problem of Susan." The "Problem" proper is best demonstrated in an oft analyzed scene, wherein the other (blessed) humans explain to their fellow Narnians that:

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[2] Hereafter *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia* will be referenced as "*Chronicles*".

> "My sister Susan," answered Peter shortly and gravely, "is no longer a friend of Narnia."
>
> "Yes," said Eustace, "and whenever you've tried to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says 'what wonderful memories you have! Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children.'"
>
> "Oh Susan!" said Jill. "She's interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up."
>
> "Grown up indeed," said the Lady Polly. "I wish she would grow up. She wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now, and she'll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay that age. Her whole idea is to race on to the silliest time of one's life as quick as she can and then stop there as long as she can." (Lewis, *Chronicles* 506)

There is a blank space in Susan's story; more than simply her absence from *The Last Battle*, there is a relative silence about it. Peter, Jill, Polly, and Eustace each speak of her absence in the short passage devoted to it. Three of them speculate as to the cause, and Peter ends the conversations saying "Well, don't let's talk about that now" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 506). Notably, neither Lucy nor Aslan speak of her absence in the final chapters of *The Last Battle*. The silence of Aslan is expected. Throughout the Chronicles, he often tells characters that they cannot know what "would have happened" (e.g., to Lucy in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*) or that "No one is told any story but their own" (203). Because of Lucy's exemplary status,

her silence adds uncertainty to the cause and finality of Susan's absence. In this space, critics have inscribed a variety of meanings.

The Critical Conversation

A variety of critics have addressed the problem of Susan in various forms. In her critical work, *The Magician's Book*, Laura Miller dedicates the chapter "Girl Trouble" to the problem of Susan by entering into an extended conversation with both Lewis's defenders and his critics. For her, the problem of Susan is deeply meshed in Lewis's attitude toward women in general. Miller uses a short story of Lewis's called "The Shoddy Lands," the witches in the Chronicles, and select women in Lewis's personal life—chiefly Joy Gresham and Janie Moore—to contextualize Susan's story. She claims that Lewis ultimately excludes Susan for her femininity and that he simply does not want his women to grow up into either "girly stuff" or a "man-eater, a time waster, a 'hindrance'" (142). This is, in Miller's words, a "trap," one of the fundamental "betrayals" that caused Miller to reassess her relationship to the Chronicles (142).

Miller also includes a private conversation with the *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* author, Susannah Clarke, in "Girl Trouble." While discussing Neil Gaiman's "The Problem of Susan," Clarke objects to the critical tendency "to reduce it all down to a question of sex," instead she attributes the problem to vanity and to not "growing up" (qtd. in Miller 130). Miller disagrees that the problem is a question of vanity and maturity, but argues that it is rather a problem of what Lewis regarded as particularly bad "feminine triviality" (132). Miller concludes that, for Lewis, women must reject

their femininity in order be acceptable and that "The best you can hope to be is 'as good as a boy'" (42).

Like Miller, Karin Fry argues in her essay "No Longer a Friend of Narnia: Gender in Narnia" that Narnia is distinctly "unfriendly" to femininity (166). Because Susan is beautiful, only surpassed in beauty by the "evil witches" (161), and not as interested in masculine pursuits as Jill, Lucy, and Aravis, she is too closely connected to the kind of femininity that Lewis finds "suspicious, deceptive and closer to evil because it seduces and beguiles men" (164). For Fry, femininity in Narnia is something to be overcome, an impediment to full participation in its adventures.

On a different critical front, Mary R. Bowman addresses the problem of Susan in her article "A Darker Ignorance: C.S. Lewis and the Nature of the Fall." She too locates Susan's failure in her inability to grow up in an integrated way.

> The implication is that Susan is not in point of fact grown up, nor is she growing up in what we might call an optimal way. She has fixated at a stage along the way, a stage characterized not only by her interest in adult things, but also by her rejection of, even disbelief in, what she regards as childish things. (71)

Bowman argues that neither curiosity nor a desire to grow up are what keep Susan from Narnia, but rather it is her immature fixation on the idea of *being* grown up that holds her back. Bowman later asserts that Susan's absence is probably meant to be seen as temporary (76). Within her broader discussion of the nature of the fall and goodness of really "growing up," she undermines Miller's argument that Susan would have to reject her femininity to be acceptable in Lewis's world.

In his essay "Pullman, Lewis, MacDonald, and the Anxiety of Influence," William Gray analyzes children's author Philip Pullman's antagonistic relationship to C.S. Lewis and its reflection of Lewis's relationship to George MacDonald. Arguing that Pullman's frequent criticism of Lewis's Chronicles is driven by his uneasy need to distance himself from his clear literary father, Gray concisely and tellingly addresses the problem of Susan, stating:

> [. . .] I feel that Lewis has been rather harshly treated on this issue. The problem with Susan is not so much her adolescent sexuality as such, but the fact that she allows the *construction* of that sexuality to be so all-absorbing that she doesn't *want* anything else. And you don't have to be sexist and/or puritan and/or misogynist to worry about what our culture does to teenage girls. (120 emphasis in original)

This analysis coincides with Susannah Clarke's interpretation of Susan's problem as vanity (noted in Miller 130) and extends it to critique the tendency of modern western culture to cultivate a primarily female preoccupation with personal appearance.

While discussing the problem of Susan as it has been argued, I will show how reading Susan in the context of Dante, Malory, Gower, and the medieval conceptions of courtly love and allegory opens up several new interpretations of her character. Susan highlights the importance of the divine love relationship in Narnia both through her brief resistance/repentance motifs in the first two volumes of the Chronicles and through her absence from *The Last Battle*. She also demonstrates how Lewis imagined courtly love as an alternate religion that could lead human lovers to the

divine. Finally, I will argue that, together with Lucy, Susan is a virtuous counterpoint to the evil witches, offering an alternative role for women and enchantment that is subordinated to Aslan within the hierarchy of Narnia. These offer a potential reading of her absence as temporary. The problem of Susan may lead the reader deeper into Narnia by demonstrating the emphasis Lewis placed on the divine love relationship, even as it may repel the reader sympathetic to Susan.

CHAPTER TWO: READING THE MEDIEVAL SUSAN

The Significance of Susan

Contextualizing Susan within the medieval landscape of the Chronicles offers new critical space for assessing the dissonance of her absence from Narnia's last battle. Focusing on this dissonant element allows the reader to assess how well Lewis accomplished his purpose of opening the medieval world and its imagination. The openendedness of her character's arc through the Chronicles continues to invite interpretation. Lewis wrote Susan out of the reunion at the end of *The Last Battle* to emphasize the possibility that one who had been inside of the divine love relationship could still turn away from it, in Christian terms: that salvation is not guaranteed. No other character turns away in this manner, and the other creatures headed into the eternal night after Narnia were never aligned with Aslan as Susan was. The problem of Susan, by prompting a reexamination of her arc in the Narniad, demonstrates the importance of maturity for a complete and continuing relationship with the divine, which in turn reflects Lewis's reading of Dante, Gower, and Malory.

The atmosphere of a book was paramount to Lewis. He had little interest in those books that lacked a sense of place. Lewis writes extensively about atmospheric appeal in his essay "On Stories," expressing his distaste for *The Three Musketeers* because of its complete lack of "atmosphere" and Dumas's inability to distinguish the atmosphere of London from that of Paris in his prose (*On Stories* 7). The adventures

in Dumas's book mean little to Lewis, because, for him, they are without substance if they are not rooted in a particularized country, culture, or *location*. In this instance, Lewis also defends his love of "Romances" as something *other* than a simple expectation of "excitement" and is clearly distinguishing between the feeling the atmosphere of a story can produce in the reader and the pure feeling of excitement or suspense an adventure can. A comic poem, "X," composed with Owen Barfield, captures this idea in two lines: "Q is for Quality–otherwise 'Whatness' / The gauntness of Ghent and the totnes of Totnes" (quoted in Ward, *Planet Narnia* 16). The correlation of Ghent with "gauntness" and the repetition of "Totness," conjuring its homophone "taughtness" as well as simply repeating the name of the city, implies that the names of these places somehow communicates their essential characters, argues for that elusive "quality or tone of [a] whole story" (Ward 16) that Lewis so valued. Lewis's love of "Northerness," seated in Norse mythology and the music of Wagner, is well known; just as his love of medieval heterogeneity is clear in both his scholarship and fiction. Lewis begins the epilogue of *The Discarded Image*, "I have made no serious effort to hide the fact that the old model delights me as I believe it delighted our ancestors. Few constructions of the imagination seem to me to have combined splendour, sobriety, and coherence in the same degree" (216). There is little doubt that the atmosphere of the Chronicles of Narnia is medieval and that the books evoke this sense of place.

This also reflects Lewis's identification with all things medieval. In his introductory lecture as the new chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University, he famously claimed not to be a modern man at all, but an

"Old Western Man" (Hannay 46): as much as a specimen of the medieval era as he was a guide to its literatures. His published scholarship (such as *The Allegory of Love*, *The Discarded Image*, and *Medieval and Renaissance Literature*), is almost entirely bent on "open[ing] the workings of the medieval mind to us" (Kerby-Fulton 257). Lewis's love of, and identification with, the medieval mind is, in part, responsible for the basic construction of the Chronicles. Moreover, the Chronicles demonstrate his passion for sharing medieval literature and its atmosphere with new readers. The Chronicles' enduring popularity derives, at least partially, from the "atmosphere [which] is so difficult to put into words… its total effect" (Ward 18).

The Narniad draws on medieval imagery throughout all seven books and these themes illuminate many aspects of the books. They also draw on a "wide range of literary traditions" and have even been criticized, most notably by J.R.R. Tolkien, as a "jumble of unrelated mythologies" (Sayer 312). Despite this jumbled-ness, the Narnian books are pervasively and primarily medieval. Lewis critic Michael Ward, in his recently published work *Planet Narnia*, argues that all seven of the Narnia books are symbolically dependent on Lewis's scholarly knowledge of medieval cosmology and upon recognizing the seven medieval planetary bodies. Ward also demonstrates that each book of the Chronicles has an influencing planetary body. Ward's argument is extensive and illuminates many minor, as well as major, images and concepts from medieval cosmology, art, and literature. Ward contends that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is symbolically tied to the planet Saturn, and is constructed around the Jovial principles of joy, festivity, and kingliness, employing Jovial symbols like the oak, the lion, and redness. The other six books are similarly

constructed with the medieval conception of Mars, Sol, Luna, Mercury, Venus, and Saturn acting as the underlying principle for each of them. Ward's work successfully demonstrates the fundamentally medieval structure of the Narniad and offers critic and reader alike a medieval lens through which to view some of the puzzlingly heterogeneous elements of the books.

Ward's overarching compositional theory aside, the atmosphere and many of the details within the books are also mostly medieval. Or, as Ward puts it, "Lewis was attempting to convey numerous aspects of medieval life in the Narniad: language, dress, polity, geography, cosmology, and cartography are all presented so as to communicate a sense of the Middle Ages" (19). A broad medieval worldview is clearly seen in the second Narnian tale, *Prince Caspian*, which describes the young Prince Caspian's education as entailing:

> [. . .] sword-fighting and riding, swimming and diving, how to shoot with the bow and play on the recorder and the theorbo, how to hunt the stag and cut him up when he was dead . . . Cosmography, Rhetoric, Heraldry, Versification . . . History, with a little Law, Physic, Alchemy, and Astronomy and theoretical magic. (Lewis, *Chronicles* 232)

Likewise, in the fifth book, *The Horse and His Boy*, Susan, Lucy, and Edmund speak with beautiful and courtly language right out of Malory.

In both significant and subtler ways, many of the characters in the Narniad reflect individual characters and themes from various medieval stories and poems. Most dramatically, Peter is Narnia's Arthur. Having crowned Peter as "High King" of Narnia, who rules for varying amounts of time, in various books, and who

disappears mysteriously, only to return in Narnia's hour of greatest need, it is evident that Lewis is evoking Malory's "Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross" (Malory, 2: 391). This particular borrowing from Malory is emphasized in the third novel, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, where Lewis describes the Pevensie's return to Narnia (as it occurs in *Prince Caspian*) "as if King Arthur came back to Britain, as some people say he will. And I say the sooner the better" (*Chronicles* 296). If Peter is Arthur then his siblings (and other characters in the Narniad) are likely to be influenced by the many intriguing figures from Arthurian legend. In extending Ward's work with the medieval nature of the Chronicles, I look to several medieval works of literature for a lens through which to examine Susan.

Susan is not the most important character in the Chronicles, and on the surface of the story she is not explicitly related to any striking medieval characters or stories; however, a quick review of the outline of her story will prepare us for an examination of medieval connections to Susan in the coming chapters. Susan's character arc in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and in *Prince Caspian* is a foreshadowing of her absence from *The Last Battle*. In the beginning of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, she is extremely reluctant to believe Lucy's adventures are real and even implies that she is mad. Susan is initially reluctant but does participate in the adventures. She complains of the cold as they enter Narnia (Lewis, *Chronicles* 92) and says "I don't know that I'm going to like this place after all" and "I-I wonder if there is any point in going on" (93). Her sense of responsibility awakens as they

realize Tumnus needs their help; she says: “I’ve a horrid feeling that Lu is right...I don’t want to go a step further and I wish we’d never come. But I think we must try...” (93). Despite her hesitations, only Susan and Lucy are present for the most intimate moments of the story, emphasizing their significance to Aslan. Both she and Lucy cannot sleep and so follow Aslan to his execution, witnessing his self-sacrifice for Edmund. They wait with his dead body overnight, and are the first to see him after his resurrection. This shows how deeply Susan is committed to the divine in Aslan.

Like her reluctance in the first chapters of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Susan is hesitant to participate in the adventures of *Prince Caspian*. She resists Lucy’s visions and is the last to be able to see Aslan as he gradually appears to and leads the children. In fact, she is “even openly spiteful” as she sides against Lucy (Anderson). As the children struggle to find their way to the beleaguered Caspian, she puts her selfish desires before their mission, impatiently refusing to cooperate with Lucy’s directions from Aslan. She eventually admits:

> But I’ve been far worse than you know. I really believed it was him – he, I mean – yesterday. When he warned us not to go down to the fir wood. And I really believed it was him tonight, when you woke us up. I mean, deep down inside. Or I could have, if I’d let myself. But I just wanted to get out of the woods … (Lewis, *Chronicles* 263)

She repents her selfishness and is restored to Aslan as she accepts his mild rebuke against “listening to fears.” This episode in *Prince Caspian* is a repetition of Susan’s arc in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Further, it is worth noting that

in neither *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* nor *Prince Caspian* does Susan's miniature resistance/restoration pattern involve her maturation or sexuality. That Lewis did not resolve her extended story throughout the Narniad in the same way he resolved her situation in both *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and in *Prince Caspian* is dissonant and possibly part of why it has struck readers and critics as problematic. Most of all, if Susan is truly vain, and if her story is a tragic tale of one who turns away from Narnia and the grand adventure it offers, so as to vainly focus on herself and her self-image, we must ask why. Is the end of her story a dissonant note in the Narniad?

In *The Horse and His Boy*, Susan is not only being courted by a foreign prince (Rabadash), she is seriously considering a diplomatically premised marriage. The marriage does not come off because Rabadash is a selfish and brutal fool, but neither the proposed marriage nor Susan's entertainment of the courtship is decried. Rather, the pursuit of it is absolutely normalized, as is Prince Caspian's marriage to the star Ramandu's daughter at the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Caspian's brief courtship of the star's daughter is not a central part of the narrative, but his attraction to her, and his future union with her, is portrayed as a normal part of life and maturity in the stories. Because the stories are for children, and focus on children, and because Lewis described in "On Science Fiction" his "own private *phobia* . . . of anything like a quasi love affair between two children" (*On Stories* 67), there is not much romance in the Chronicles, but what is there is treated as a natural part of mature life as the characters grow up. Lewis's scholarship and his other fiction indicate some broader role for courtly love as a complement to the spiritual life and to ordinary married

love. In Chapter Four, I will explore how Rabadash's soured courtship of Susan confirms the importance of the divine for her and her virtuous response to sensual love and offers a hint of future reconciliation between her and Aslan.

Sensuality is not Susan's only possible failure. She may also be simply vain. Lewis certainly considered vanity a problem. Vanity is a form of pride—a deadly sin for the medieval Church—but, because of its self-reflexive nature, is still mostly a triviality: nothingness. Pride is a far more serious fault for Lewis than vanity; the latter is treated gently in his theological works. On pride, Lewis references St. Augustine " . . . pride does not only go before a fall but is a fall – a fall of the creature's attention from what is better, God, to what is worse, itself" (*Christian Reflections* 7). Of vanity, he says in *Mere Christianity*: "…vanity, though it is the sort of Pride which shows most on the surface, is really the least bad and most pardonable sort" (112). If Susan's fault is vanity, it is not likely that Lewis intended to condemn her utterly for it. Part of the dissonance in the problem of Susan is the sense that Susan didn't do anything so very terrible and so her absence seems unjustifiable. Lewis's argument for viewing this particular flaw as "pardonable" lends credibility to the idea that she ought to be reconciled in the end.

As the reader of *The Last Battle* is tersely reminded, Susan is "interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 560). Because her interest in material things precludes her interest in the Narnian world, she will not even acknowledge the other world she once reigned over. Nylons are notoriously fragile, often "running" on the first wearing. Lipstick wears off quickly and needs to be continually reapplied. Invitations are time sensitive and

distinctly fleeting. Susan is absorbed in illusion and consumption and will not remember the paradoxical reality of the fantastical land of Narnia. Polly seems to be something of the authoritative voice at the end of *The Last Battle* as she is the eldest woman present. Her brisk statement, "I wish she *would* grow up" (560), locates Susan's failure in her inability to completely grow up, or mature. It is not that she has matured beyond the games she played as a child, but that she has not matured enough to respect them. Further, that she is interested in the superficial markers of adulthood and not interested in moving beyond the superficial to the paradoxical reality of Narnia remains an issue. Susan's vanity and failure to fully mature in the course of the Chronicles are a demonstration of the things that might keep a person from fully participating in the divine love relationship; however, her repentance elsewhere in the Chronicles signals that her absence might be temporary after some purgatorial working out of her flaws.

CHAPTER THREE: "IN HIS WILL IS OUR PEACE;"

DANTE AND LOVING THE DIVINE

Introduction

Susan Pevensie illuminates some of the most significant medieval themes Lewis draws on throughout the Chronicles. In brief, she is both an archetype and an antitype of a variety of medieval characters. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is hardly the stuff of children's literature; however, the influence of this famous work can be felt throughout the Chronicles. Lewis's debt to Dante is evident in the organizational scheme of the Chronicles, as both works are developed around the Ptolemaic universe (Ward 41). As literary critic Marsha Ann Daigle points out, Lewis's love for Dante is most clearly seen in the structure of both *Prince Caspian* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and in the "biblical typology" that keeps the Chronicles from being either a "literal retelling" or just an "allegorical presentation" of its Christian themes (Daigle 41, 45). Daigle points out that Jill and Eustace's journey in the fourth book, *The Silver Chair*, "bears some similarity to Dante's *Inferno*" in "vivid but brief echoes" of themes and images from Dante including the nature of the giants at the outset of the children's journey, the Green Witch lying about bridges of Malacoda, and their journey into Underland (46). Likewise, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the nine islands variously evoke the Dantean journeys through the *Paradisio* and the *Purgatorio*, as the children face temptations and see new stars. Not only does Lewis invoke the journeys of the *Divine Comedy* in *The Silver Chair* and *The Voyage*

of the Dawn Treader, he also incorporates the "typological approach" (Daigle 42) to representing the Divine nature of Christ in the personification of Aslan. Just as Dante relates to Beatrice as the human exemplification of Christ's love, so the children relate to Aslan.

Michael Ward asserts that "the representation of the divine nature in the Narniad is Lewis's principal achievement" (237). The center of the Chronicles is the children's love relationship with the Divine, as it is personified by the lion Aslan. All of them are powerfully drawn to Aslan, and the spiritual foundation of their adventures in Narnia is clearly associated with their attraction to him. In the first novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* Peter, Susan, and Lucy are all thrilled the first time they hear the name of Aslan invoked. When Mr. Beaver says "Aslan is on the move" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 96), we immediately notice that "Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays . . ." (96). Lucy's attraction seems to be the strongest, and their various expressions of desire are the hallmarks of their future actions. Edmund's first reaction to hearing Aslan's name is a "sensation of mysterious horror" (96), foreshadowing his initial rejection of the Divine in Aslan, before his eventual redemption and reconciliation at the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Eustace's growing desire for Aslan becomes evident in the final chapters, and his full commitment to Aslan is confirmed in *The Silver Chair*, beginning with his desire to return to Narnia. In *The Silver Chair*

Jill Pole (also heroine of *The Last Battle*) has a similar, though milder, experience than Peter, Susan, and Lucy's when she first hears Aslan's name, calling it "curious" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 377). This repetition of the theme of both human and Narnian characters demonstrating a longing for Aslan is a continual re-centering of the story of the Chronicles on the Divine love relationship. Each of the eight Earth children in the Chronicles is a reflection of Dante: they seek Aslan just as Dante's Beatrice is sought, and eventually find in Aslan, a love for the Divine nature.

Susan and the Divine Love Relationship

Susan participates in this pattern, and, although she is a bit more reluctant than Peter and Lucy (especially so in *Prince Caspian*), she does desire communion with Aslan and enjoys his presence. She mourns and suffers with Lucy during Aslan's 'Passion' in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.* She finds his breath strengthening and his company reassuring, just as the other characters do. At the feast of Bacchus, in *Prince Caspian,* Susan says to Lucy "I wouldn't have felt safe with Bacchus and all his wild girls if we'd met them without Aslan," to which Lucy replies "I should think not" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 265). Ford, in his *Companion to Narnia*, sees her discomfort at the revelry as a symptom of the difficulty of growing up. She is not young enough to enjoy the party playfully and childishly as the younger Lucy does, and not old enough to fully understand what the wildness of Bacchus and the Maenads might mean (417). For readers and critics, the presence of Bacchus has been "baffling" (Ryken & Mead 79) because of his wild sensuality. However, Bacchus is clearly subordinated to Aslan in the text as the girls acknowledge that Aslan is what makes Bacchus's presence "safe" (Lewis, *Chronicles*

265). Lewis is not alone in portraying Bacchus as something other than "a drunkard who led frenzied women . . . on wild nighttime processions," other "literary handlings of the myth" show him in something less than "his grossest form" (Ryken & Mead 79). Certainly Lewis's Bacchus does not have "the darker nature of Euripides's Bacchus" (Martin 64), but, given the centrality of the divine relationship, the introduction of Bacchus and Susan's discomfort with him is important as an occasion to highlight Susan's appreciation of Aslan's comforting presence, emphasizing her right, Narnian, relationship to the Divine. Lucy agrees with Susan's assessment of the wildness of Bacchus and the security Aslan offers, her exemplary status confirming that his wildness is legitimately uncomfortable for the girls even though he is also obedient to Aslan. Susan's reaction is a confirmation that, despite her reluctance to acknowledge Aslan in the midst of her physical discomforts during the preceding journey, she finds his presence reassuring and secure and is now reoriented to him as the center of her Narnian experiences.

Susan eventually discontinues her Divine relationship with Aslan and Narnia, and this discontinuation coincides with her vain interest in nylons, invitations, and lipstick. Her denial of the Divine is a trivialization of what, in Narnia, is the most important aspect of living because she does not turn toward a rival religion but merely her own image. Lucy has a parallel experience, turning from the Divine to her own image in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, while she is reading the magician Coriakin's book. Amongst the pages of the book, she encounters a spell that has the power to "make beautiful her that uttereth it beyond the lot of mortals" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 340). Lucy lingers over the fantasy of external beauty, and, despite the

horrible vision of whole kingdoms "laid waste" over her beauty and a jealous and broken relationship with her sister, she is set on saying the spell (340). Daigle equates this temptation on the Island of the Voices to the first ledge of Dante's Mount Purgatory (49). A brief second before Lucy seals her fate, Aslan's face appears in the middle of the page, and it is his angry face in the midst of the words that causes her to turn the page and resist what her vanity desires. Lucy turns away from her beautiful, but false, image (and the increased status it would bring at school as well as in Narnia), and in doing so she embraces the Divine image of Aslan. As Lucy leaves vanity behind, she becomes more beautiful. At the sight of Aslan, "her face lit up till, for a moment, (but of course she didn't know it), she looked almost as beautiful as that other Lucy in the picture" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 342). As Dante leaves the first ledge of Mount Purgatory, beauty greets him in the form of an angel, "That handsome creature" who "seemed like/the trembling star that rises in the morning" (Dante "Purgatorio" XII 88–90).

When Susan becomes absorbed by her adolescent vanity, she becomes impatient with any mention of Narnia and belittles the world and the Divine nature that she once loved. Nor has Susan's adoption of physical vanity at the expense of her spiritual growth escaped the other children. As Eustace laments in *The Last Battle*, "whenever you've tried to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says 'What wonderful memories you have! Fancy you're still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 506). Susan's choices are implicitly contrasted with Lucy's as Lucy aspires to have what Susan has. Lucy wants to be beautiful in *The Voyage of*

the Dawn Treader at least partly because Susan is "the pretty one of the family" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 293) and gets the attention Lucy craves. The efficient cause of Lucy's rejection of the magical spell is the appearance of Aslan to confront her. However, and quite possibly unjustly so, Susan is not challenged by Aslan in the conclusion of the Chronicles and her rejection of Narnia is incomplete. She has not rejected Aslan and the Divine Love in person, but indirectly by not wanting to remember the paradoxical reality of Narnia.

During the journey in *Prince Caspian*, Susan disbelieves Lucy's visions and is the last to be able to see Aslan as he gradually appears to and leads the children. In fact, she is "even openly spiteful" as she sides against Lucy (Anderson). As the children journey to Aslan's How/The Stone Table, she puts herself first and only very reluctantly obeys Peter's decision to follow Lucy. After being forced to follow, she finally acknowledges her failure:

> But I've been far worse than you know. I really believed it was him – he, I mean – yesterday. When he warned us not to go down to the fir wood. And I really believed it was him tonight, when you woke us up. I mean, deep down inside. Or I could have, if I'd let myself. But I just wanted to get out of the woods… (Lewis, *Chronicles* 263)

When she comes face-to-face with Aslan, she weeps but is immediately restored to her relationship with Aslan as she accepts his mild rebuke against "listening to fears" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 263).

Not only do Susan and Lucy each have a moment of confrontation with Aslan who corrects their doubts and selfish desires in the earlier books of the Chronicles, so

does the Calmorene girl, Aravis, of *The Horse and His Boy*. At the start of the novel, when Aravis flees her arranged marriage, she drugs her lady-in-waiting, who is later flogged for failing to prevent Aravis's flight. At the end of Aravis and Shasta's journey, the two children are chased by an angry Aslan, who claws Aravis's back as she flees while riding Hwin. Aslan later explains that his fierce action is justified, for it is "tear for tear, throb for throb, blood for blood . . . equal to the stripes laid on the back of [her] stepmother's slave" and that she "needed to know what it felt like" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 202-203). As with Lucy's correction in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and Susan's in *Prince Caspian*, Aravis's fearful punishment is quickly followed by a change in tone to comfort and celebration. In all three cases, Aslan confronts the girls' selfishness, offers correction, and then swiftly restores their respective relationships to closeness. In all three circumstances, the emotional shift is driven by the Divine.

Purgatorial Episodes

Susan resisted Aslan's presence and orders in *Prince Caspian* and is restored to a relationship with him in the final chapters of the book. This arc suggests that a final reconciliation is possible for her. However, the process of that return—a lengthy journey through dark woods—is distinctly purgatorial. In his attempt to answer the question of Susan's fate, Philip Pullman criticizes Lewis by claiming "He was frightened and appalled at the notion of wanting to grow up." Indeed, Susan is criticized by Jill in *The Last Battle* for being "a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 506). Lady Polly (the implicitly authoritative voice in this situation) reverses that criticism, claiming that Susan is actually *not* grown up but

rather fixated on being a particular age and not a very good one at that (506). This is an issue that Lewis wrote about extensively, including in his essays "On Stories," "On Juvenile Tastes," and "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said" (Lewis, *On Stories*). Simply put, Lewis considered it a part of maturity to appreciate aspects of one's childhood; to have fully matured is to be unembarrassed by what may be perceived as childish tastes, especially the taste for so-called children's books. That Susan describes her adventures in Narnia, which include battles, twice disenchanting an entire country, rule as a queen, an entire alternate life, as "funny games we used to play when we were children" shows her embarrassment with what she perceives as the unreal and unserious (Lewis, *Chronicles* 506). Bowman describes Susan's situation, in "A Darker Ignorance: C.S. Lewis and the Nature of the Fall" as a fixation on an intermediate stage of maturity (71). In this reading, Susan is not being left out of *The Last Battle* because of her maturation but possibly because that maturation is incomplete. Lewis describes Susan as "silly" and "conceited" and says that "there is plenty of time for her to mend" and perhaps get into "Aslan's country in the end - in her own way" (*Letters to Children* 67). This authorial uncertainty about her character offers several interpretive possibilities. One, Lewis could be simply offering a comforting sop to the child who asked about Susan's fate. He was very gentle with his child readers as a rule, and it is hard to imagine him telling a child that he thought Susan went on her merry way to hell after the books ended. Still, Lewis was very much opposed to distorting reality for children, arguing in "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" for the admission of "violence and bloodshed" to children's stories because of the likelihood that they

would actually meet "cruel enemies" in this world (*On Stories* 39). It is also reasonable to read his response "perhaps...get to Aslan's country in the end - in her own way" as allowing either for the possibility that she ends up forever separated from her family or is reconciled to Aslan and reunited with them. There is a third possibility: perhaps, Susan remains in England as a sort of purgatory for her frivolousness, before coming around to a renewed dedication to Divine Love and the promise of Narnia.

Lewis considered purgatory a necessity for human nature's relationship to the divine. In *Letters to Malcolm*, he posited that "our souls *demand* Purgatory," arguing that the soul would far prefer to be "cleaned" before being welcomed into the presence of the divine, even if that cleaning process was painful (108-109). This concept parallels Eustace's experience in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* where he is "un-dragoned" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 327). He is afraid and embarrassed to be seen by Aslan in his dragon-ish state, but his dragon skin must be painfully ripped off like a "scab," partly by Eustace's efforts but mostly by Aslan, before he can bathe in the refreshing pool (326). Susan's experience in *Prince Caspian* is milder. The four children's midnight journey to Aslan's How can be seen as a purgatorial one. They are all very weary from the previous days' misadventures and must get up and do by night what should have been accomplished during the daytimes. Their walk is "long and tedious" up and down cliffs that echo Dante's Mount Purgatory (Lewis, *Chronicles* 262). While Susan was petulant and willing to force the others to stay rather than go, the journey acts as a corrective to her spirits. She is repentant before seeing Aslan and he exacts no penance from her when he confronts her. The journey

was sufficient. So too, Lucy's confrontation with Aslan over the beauty spell in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* has a purgatorial element. After being stopped by Aslan's growling face, Lucy goes on to say another spell that allows her to eavesdrop on her friends. She hears painful things that leave her with hurt feelings and possibly a broken friendship. When Aslan appears, he does not punish her in any way but confirms that the suffering she felt will be gone one day (Lewis, *Chronicles* 341-342).

In Lewis's science fiction novel *That Hideous Strength*, Jane's experience living at St Anne's also has elements of Purgatory. She arrives wounded and is given the opportunity to rest (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 163). Her sense of class is affronted by Ivy Maggs, her former housekeeper, being treated as her equal, and her annoyance is corrected by Mother Dimble (167-168). She must "labor" in the house both by taking part in the chores and by sharing her visions with the rest of the household, but she is not taken into their fullest confidence. Her entire relationship with Ransom is a long process of thwarted and redirected desire as he accepts her sufferings but does not alleviate her fears (see Chapter Three for a fuller discussion of Jane's experiences). For all these characters, their sufferings are productive, better preparing them to participate in the joyous occasions that follow. Jane is now readied for a joyful reunion with the husband she had stopped loving. Similarly, in the Chronicles, Eustace is readied for the rest of their adventures, Lucy is readied for her reunion with Aslan, and Susan is prepared to participate in the disenchanting of Telmarine Narnia.

In *That Hideous Strength*, Jane's courtly devotion to Ransom brings her into relationship with Maleldil (an analogous figure to God) and restores her to her

husband, and so in the Chronicles, Susan's preoccupation with the frivolous beginnings of "courtships" might bring her back to Aslan. We have already seen that Susan once resisted Aslan in *Prince Caspian* only to be reconciled to him. Might not she also return to him finally, possibly through the agency of some other adoration? She has already been schooled in the art of courtly love in Narnia through Rabadash's failed wooing of her. Her nylons, lipstick, and invitations could lead Susan away from Narnia permanently, but if subordinated, might also be a way back to the divine love relationship she once enjoyed. Together with the purgatorial sufferings she must undergo in England—the loss of both parents and all her siblings—Susan's distractions might be read as a purgatorial test for returning. Whether she eventually returns or not, at least part of Susan's function in the Chronicles is to illustrate the primacy of the divine relationship.

CHAPTER FOUR: A MIDDEL WEI: COURTLY LOVE AS A COMPLEMENT TO THE "REAL RELIGION"

Introduction: Allegory and Courtly Love

Lewis wrote extensively on 'courtly love'[3] and went on to incorporate some aspects of it in his fiction. Both the Chronicles of Narnia and *That Hideous Strength* exhibit interesting reworkings of themes from medieval love poetry. Lewis's scholarship on courtly love in his 1936 *The Allegory of Love* opens a new interpretation of Susan's failure. In the context of Lewis's understanding of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, the problem with Susan is that she has not only turned away from the divine for various distractions but also that she had not progressed from adolescent sexuality to a mature, married love.

One dimension of meaning in the Chronicles is their allegory. Although Lewis specifically denied that the Chronicles were allegorical (Lewis, *Letters to Children* 44-45), it is worth noting that whatever his intentions, and whatever his frustration with readers seeking a simplistic interpretation of the books, the

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[3] "Courtly love" was the accepted scholarly term in the 1930s when Lewis began his scholarship on the subject. Scholars today prefer the more precise term "fin amour" or "fine love" as it is more in line with the language medieval writers themselves used. I will be using "courtly love" as it is the term Lewis used, and I am primarily concerned with his understanding of the phenomena.

Chronicles do function on an allegorical level. Replying to a reader, who assumed that the Chronicles were strictly allegorical, Lewis said:

> The Narnian series is not exactly allegory. I'm not saying 'Let us represent in terms of marchen the *actual* story of this world.' Rather 'Supposing the Narnian world, let us guess what form the activities of the Second Person or Creator, Redeemer, and Judge might take there.' This you see overlaps with allegory but is not quite the same. (*The Collected Letters* 3: 1460)

A precise definition of allegory is important to Lewis. This is evident in how much effort Lewis spends in his critical work, *The Allegory of Love*, defining it over, and against, symbolism. For Lewis, "Symbolism is a mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression" (Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* 48). Similarly, Ward sees the Chronicles as allegorical and as "a complex mix of allegory and symbolism" (32). He claims that "The allegorical elements are fragmentary and allusive, no more than that" (73). Allegorical works and interpretations pervade medieval writing. Indeed, Lewis once commented, "is it possible for any man to write a fantastic story which another man can't read as an allegory? (The history of medieval criticism makes it clear that the answer is No)" (*The Collected Letters* 3: 162).

"Every one has heard of courtly love" (Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* 2). Loosely, it may be defined as an elevated and specialized sentiment from a male lover to his lady. Lewis listed the chief characteristics of courtly love as "Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love" (2). The lover is "always abject," offering service to his lady as a vassal might to his feudal lord (2). The lover's

behavior is stylized into elaborate rituals that mark him as a courtly individual. The normal object of the courtly lover is a married woman and the lover "seldom concerns himself much with her husband: his real enemy is the rival" (3). Finally, it is the "God of Love" who rules over this entire process, making the practice of courtly love into a half-serious religion with its own inviolable rules of conduct and rituals of worship.

Lewis sees an important relationship between religious devotion and romantic attachment:

> The love religion can become more serious without becoming reconciled to the real religion. Where it is not a parody of the Church it may be, in a sense, her rival - a temporary escape, a truancy from the ardours of a religion that was believed into the delights of a religion that was merely imagined. (*The Allegory of Love* 21)

In his scholarship, Lewis argues for courtly love as a personified competitor, boldly disrupting the relationship human beings have with the Divine. However, in both his reading of Gower's "Confessio Amantis" and in his fiction, Lewis demonstrates alternative roles that courtly love might take. Courtly love might be a competitor to the divine and to the Christian religion, but it also might offer the lover a path back to the divine and even to married love.

Susan and all the earthly human characters in Narnia are not meant to stop at a relationship with the divine in Aslan. As Aslan tells Lucy in the concluding paragraphs of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the children are to return to earth in order to know him by "another name" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 370). Aslan not only is the

divine in Narnia but is also a representation of, and a path to, the divine on earth. By finding and loving him, the children are also being led to love another.

Courtly Love and Divine Love

Courtly love makes a formal appearance in the Chronicles. Rabadash's courting of Susan in *The Horse and His Boy* begins as an exemplary medieval romance in the courtly love tradition. Rabadash comes to the Narnian court at Cair Paravel and performs "marvelous feats" at "that great tournament and hastilude which...the High King made for him" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 159). Like Lancelot trying to impress Guinevere, or Tristram or Gawain, Rabadash behaves "meekly and courteously" (159) as he seeks Susan's hand. This romance quickly sours for both Susan and the reader when he is shown to have "another face" "in his own city," but it is not until he shows himself to be "a most proud, bloody, luxurious, cruel, and self-pleasing tyrant" that Susan rejects him (159). Rabadash's erotic devotion to Susan, although most certainly *not* humble or courteous, appeared to be so and is as serious as Cupid could desire. He declares "I shall die if I do not get her" and "I cannot sleep and my food has no savor and my eyes are darkened because of her beauty" (*Chronicles* 173, 174). Rabadash's erotic devotion to Susan's beauty is a parody of proper knightly devotion to a lady. Rabadash will subdue kingdoms (he proposes to destroy both Archenland and Narnia to capture Susan) but, unlike a courtly lover, wishes to rule her rather than to serve her. With the "marvelous feats" at tournament that are the beginning of Rabadash's courtship, Lewis roots this romance in the courtly love tradition, but the vehemence of Rabadash's sensual desire is shown to be

a perversion of the religion of love when he declares “I must have her as my wife, though she shall learn a sharp lesson first” (174).

Rabadash’s “love” for Susan is as vicious and conspiratorial as it is erotic and stands in direct contrast to Aslan’s divine love. As he plots to capture Susan, he and his father speculate about whether or not Aslan “a demon of hideous aspect and irresistible maleficence” is still supporting the kings and queens of Narnia (Lewis, *Chronicles* 175). He is. Aslan later appears in *The Horse and His Boy*, aiding Aravis and Shasta as they bring news of Rabadash’s approach to Archenland and assuring that the warning will be carried to Cair Paravel. Aslan also appears at the end of the story, where he turns Susan’s failed lover into a Donkey who is cursed to remain within ten miles of the temple in his city. Not only does this keep Rabadash from attempting to conquer Narnia again, it also effectively keeps him from ever pursuing Susan’s love again. It would appear that, at this point in Susan’s history, Aslan is her champion. Rabadash fails as a courtly lover and Susan’s love relationship with Aslan acts as a protection against this false and harmful suitor.

Precedence for Lewis’s contrasting of divine and courtly love in order to emphasize the divine is clearly seen in the concluding volume of his science fiction trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*. In the novel, Jane Studdock is shown having multiple love relationships. She is first shown in a stagnant and possibly loveless marriage. Shortly thereafter, she begins to pursue a relationship that looks very much like courtly love, wherein she takes the active and, for Lewis’s reading of courtly love, masculine role. In the end, she finds herself drawn to divine love, and a renewed submissive and fruitful relationship with her husband. Each of these relationships are

shown to be complementary to one another, in that her experience with courtly love leads her to divine love, and both experiences give rise to a new willingness and capacity to love and obey her husband and potentially to bear children.

That Hideous Strength begins with Jane quoting from the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Matrimony was ordained, thirdly...for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 13). Married for six months, Jane is thoroughly disappointed in the institution. The reader is told, that for Jane, "In reality marriage had proved to be the door out of a world of work and comradeship and laughter and innumerable things to do, into something like solitary confinement" (13). Jane goes on to describe how little she and her husband Mark actually talk anymore, how he is preoccupied with his fellowship at Belbury College, and how they are not planning children right away because she is continuing work on her dissertation. In the next few chapters, the unhappiness of their marriage is further demonstrated by Mark's inability to understand Jane's sensual and emotive desires and by his consuming desire for success and prestige at the college that distracts him from her while she is first bored and lonely and later terrified by incomprehensible visions (42-49). Like Arthur, who throughout the medieval tradition fails in his devotion to Guinevere, not protecting her when she is in danger, Mark is occupied with external concerns at the expense of his wife's comfort and safety. The petty politics of his college as a University Fellow, a drink with colleagues, and a dull administrative meeting are of more importance than being with or thinking of her. He works to attain status within the "inner ring" at his college and wants Jane to be an ornament to his career. Mark's plans for Jane would reduce her to

a “striking looking [. . .] secret hostess [. . .] that only the esoteric few would know” (247). Eventually, Jane is kidnapped and tortured by Mark’s colleagues (153-159) just as Guinevere is kidnapped in a variety of Arthurian legends (e.g., Chretien’s *Knight of the Cart*).

Mark’s objectification and dismissal of his wife are the catalyst of Jane’s troubling visions, which either appear or are remembered when she is left alone in their apartment. These visions send Jane to a clinical house called “St. Anne’s” to see a Dr. Ironwood. While Grace Ironwood is unable to stop Jane’s visions because Jane is a “seer” and not actually mentally ill, she does introduce her to the director of the St. Anne’s group, a very appealing Ransom. In the mythology of the trilogy, Ransom is the heir of King Arthur, holding the title “Pendragon of Logres” and is also the “Fisher-King.” Jane clearly has a strong connection to Ransom from the moment they meet. She is initially repelled by the idea of becoming one of his "female adorers" and warns herself to be "careful" but when she meets him her "world [is] unmade" and adore him she does (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 142). Jane takes on the role of the courtly lover, in that she adores Ransom with an almost religious devotion and Ransom quietly receives her attention. E. Jane Burns, advancing a feminist critique of the tradition, describes courtly love as a tradition where "it is men's feelings that are expressed and men's prowess and social standing that are at stake as men practice and profess the art of love even though the adored ladylove stands nominally at the center of the process" ("Courtly Love: Who Needs It?" 23). The relationship between Jane and Ransom mirrors courtly love by reversing the traditional roles. Moreover, when Jane first meets Ransom she is overwhelmed by

his persona and is almost unable to listen to him. "It was not that her attention wandered; on the contrary, her attention was so fixed on him that it defeated itself." She is prepared to do anything he asks of her. "'And now' thought Jane 'it's coming...' All the most intolerable questions he might ask, all the most extravagant things he might make her do, flashed through her mind in a fatuous medley. For all power of resistance seemed to have been drained away from her and she was left without protection" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 144). After she leaves him, she is in a state of almost complete bliss, rejoicing in everything around her and of herself. "Whatever she tried to think of led back to the Director himself and, in him, to joy[4]" (152). She is wholly surrendered to him.

> Her beauty belonged to the Director. It belonged to him so completely that he could even decide not to keep it for himself but to order that it be given to another, by an act of obedience lower, and therefore higher, more unconditional and therefore more delighting, than if he had demanded it for himself. (*THS* 152)

Jane's willingness to do anything that Ransom might ask of her, including things that keep her from being with him, echoes the devotion of courtly lovers such

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4 It is worth noting in this context the enormous significance Lewis attached to the word "joy." For him it represented the elusive feeling of longing or deep and sorrowful beauty that certain art could evoke in him. Wagner, Beatrix Potter, and the Norse myths all were vehicles of Joy - "Sehnsucht" for Lewis.

as Tristram and Lancelot in a most striking manner. Lancelot endures great disgrace for the sake of Queen Guinevere by riding in a tumbrel at the beginning "The Knight of the Cart" but is chastised by her for his momentary hesitation to endure shame for her sake (De Troyes, Chretien 174, 218, 224-225). When he sneaks into her chamber after their reconciliation, he kneels down and adores her before entering her bed, and, when he leaves, he "behave[s] as a suppliant" (226-227). Finally, when jousting at the tournament he spends an entire day intentionally losing and behaving in a cowardly manner at her express command, refusing to fight honorably until she orders him to (238-241). Indeed, "The irreligion of the religion of love could hardly go further" (Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* 29).

Jane's developing relationship with the divine comes late in the book. Initially, she is only concerned with staying close to the Director. After their first meeting, he sends her away, and, while she does not necessarily want to leave, she is simply glad to have been near him and delights in the memory. She returns late that night after being tortured by "Fairy" Hardcastle (the policewoman acting as enforcer for the evil National Institute of Coordinated Experiments). Her first thought on waking the next morning is "He *must* let me stay here now." Her mind is singing "Be glad thou sleeper and thy sorrow offcast. I am the gate to all good adventure" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 163), a quotation of Chaucer's "This is the wey to al good aventure;/Be glad, thou reder, and thy sorowe of-caste" (*The Parliament of Fowles* 131-2). Jane is indeed accepted into residency at St. Anne's and becomes a part of its common life. She occasionally sees the Director, though only in her "professional" capacity as a seer. At Ransom's request, Jane faces death by going to meet a

supposedly hostile Merlin and contemplates it as obedience to Ransom. While hunting for Merlin, who they all believe may attempt to enchant or kill her, she accepts this potential death. "She had long ceased to feel any resentment at the Director's tendency, as it were, to dispose of her – to give her, at one or in one sense, to Mark, and in another to Maleldil – never, in any sense, to keep her for himself" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 233). At this stage, she avoids thinking of her husband Mark, for, "to think of him increasingly aroused feelings of pity and guilt" (233). However, she is beginning to think of the supreme divine being (Maleldil) that Ransom obeys and finds herself in the early stages of a conversion to a sort of mystical deism while still embarrassed by the Christian thrust of Ransom's esoteric beliefs.

> On the one hand, terror of dreams, rapture of obedience...and the great struggle against an imminent danger; on the other, the smell of pews, horrible lithographs of the Saviour...the embarrassment of confirmation classes, the nervous affability of clergymen. (234)

Jane's resistance is partly aesthetic as she feels herself being drawn into a religious system she dislikes, but her feelings for Ransom drive her to accept the preliminary stages that lead her, inexorably, to conversion. She asks him: "You mean I shall have to become a Christian?" Ransom answers: "It looks like it" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 316). Further complicating the allegorical meanings in this courtly love relationship, just after the discussion that leads up to that question, Lewis places Jane in the garden contemplating her exchange with Ransom when she quite suddenly, and almost involuntarily, converts. This conversion in the garden serves as

a connection between the courtly and the divine love. The "old garden" is such "a picture of love itself, of love at rest" that it is inextricable from the courtly tradition of the *Romance of the Rose* when it appears in *That Hideous Strength* as when it appears in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowles* (Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* 174). By having Jane experience her conversion in this traditional place of love, Lewis affirms the role courtly love has played in the process.

Lewis spends a lengthy paragraph describing Jane's surrender to the divine in Maleldil. The passage not only emphasizes that Jane has passed from being primarily interested in a courtly devotion to Ransom, but, by echoing the themes of surrender, adoration and service, it also shows the continuity between the two relationships and demonstrates that Lewis saw courtly love as a possible avenue to a relationship with divine love. Jane's experience is of a "Person...expectant, patient, inexorable" and that she is in relation to it as a "person...yet also a thing, a made thing, made to please Another" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 318-319). Her acceptance of this is foreshadowed by her willing mental and emotional surrender to Ransom at their first meeting.

It is worth noting how similar this experience is to Lewis's account of his own conversion from atheism, through Theism, to Christianity. He says of his new relationship to the Christian God that "The commands were inexorable" (*Surprised by Joy* 218), echoing Jane's experience. Lewis describes his conversion to Theism as "*compelle intrare*:" God compelling him "a kicking, struggling, resentful" convert (215). Jane's conversion is not one of open struggle, but she is horrified at the idea of an ultimately masculine God, just as Lewis was afraid of an unreasonable and

interfering Divinity (214–215), and longs to be understood and appreciated in a way she fears she never will. In the aftermath of her changed beliefs, "the voices of those who have not joy rose howling and chattering from every corner of her being" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 319), arguing against the finality and the import of this change. But they are ineffectual. The similarity between Lewis's experience and Jane's serves to emphasize the continuity between love relationships in different works in the Lewis canon and to open Lewis's own life to a reading of the courtly love/divine love motif.

Alan Jacobs, writing of the Chronicles, compares Lewis's conversion to Christianity to Eustace Scrubb's introduction to Narnia. Just as Eustace is grumpy and unpleasant as he enters an adventure that he clearly did not, and would not, choose (134), so too was Lewis when it came to admitting to his conversion. Similarly so, it is reasonable to consider Susan's introduction to Narnia analogous to Lewis's conversion. Just as Lewis feared being "interfered with" (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 214), Susan is afraid of committing herself to unquantified demands. While she feels that her sister Lucy is right in the beginning of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and that they ought to help Mr. Tumnus, the thought of doing so gives her a "horrid feeling" and she doesn't "want to go a step further" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 93). This sense of not wanting to be drawn into something beyond her control mirrors Lewis's hesitation to take a leap of Christian faith. At various stages of his own conversion, Lewis describes the steps as "the loss of [his] last remaining bishop" or even "more alarming" and "incalculable" (*Surprised by Joy* 209–211). Susan's fussing and resistance in *Prince Caspian* is not presented as the behavior of a

malicious person, but merely the effect of having "listened to fears" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 263), showing that she is not considered a lost, or even a difficult, case. As Jane slowly converts to a mystical deism and then to Christianity, so does Susan cautiously commit to Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and in *Prince Caspian*.

In *That Hideous Strength*, we see how Jane's conversion ushers in her husband Mark's return. Jane goes to meet him "descending the ladder of humility. First she thought of the Director, then she thought of Maleldil...she was half way to the lodge, and thought of Mark and of all his sufferings" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 382) and this shows the sequence and connectedness of these three love relationships. Jane is first a Lancelot, adoring Ransom with a quasi-religious devotion as Lancelot loved Guinevere. She then becomes like Dante, loving the divine through her love of Ransom. Finally, she becomes exemplary, bearing a sacrificial courtly love *and* a virtuous religious love *and* honorable married love. This reconciliation to the marital relationship, with its implications of chastity and childbearing, draws away from the courtly love tradition. But the connection is there in Lewis's scholarship on courtly love. In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis devotes half a chapter to the poet Gower, author of the "Confessio Amantis". Lewis describes Gower as attempting to find a middle ground and combine "profit with delight": 'delight' meaning courtly love and 'profit' meaning moral instruction (*The Allegory of Love* 198). Considering courtly love's decidedly immoral tradition of adultery, Gower's "middel weie" is both a stylistic choice, and, in Lewis's criticism, a moral

one, as he goes on to elevate fruitful marriage over the barren adultery of the high courtly tradition.

Lewis reflects Gower's sentiments in *That Hideous Strength* by showing multiple chaste marriages. Jane and Mark Studdock's renewed dedication to their marriage is set against a backdrop of faithful marriages. Dr. and Mrs. Dimble are the older long-married and peaceful couple. Arthur and Camilla Denniston are young and passionately in love, Camilla newly pregnant. Ivy and Tom Maggs are simple, earthy, and loyal. Each of these relationships illustrates aspects of the goodness of married love in the conclusion of the trilogy. This emphasis on married love is not a departure from the themes of courtly love Lewis organized Ransom and Jane's relationship around. Rather it is a development of Gower's middle way, allowing for courtly love *and* married love. One of Gower's innovations is in having both the lover Amans and his mistress be unmarried and chaste. Further, Gower's confessor "Genius" emphasizes the goodness of seeking one's "oghne wif" (vii 4219) and that "To borwe an other mannes plouh,/Whan he hath geere good ynouh" (vii 4221–4222) is the height of foolishness. Genius directs Amans to "honeste" love in marriage and away from unmanly "falshode" in adultery (vii 4224–4229).

Bennett argues that Gower presents "consummation in marriage," love that results in an actual wedding, as the proper end of mature love by implying that "mi ladi Venus" should not be the final arbiter of love affairs (115). Lewis clearly reflects Gower here, presenting all the marriages (and animal matings) as increased and fired by the presence of Venus but *only* within the context of married relationships. The married couples of *That Hideous Strength* are all shown with intensified passion and

affection for one another and no unmarried pairings are allowed within the story. Even the animals that pair off are referred to as married; the bear Mr. Bultitude finds a mate, and Ransom and the others refer to her as "Mrs. Bultitude" (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 375). In this elevation of married love Lewis demonstrates another subordination of the courtly tradition.

Susan Rejects Her Lover

In *The Last Battle* Susan turns away from Narnia in a very specific way. She rejects a love relationship with Aslan for a fixation on adolescence. Her "nylons and lipstick and invitations" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 506) are opposed to the divine because they have become a barrier. Her self image is being constructed via clothing and makeup, and she is interested in her social desirability. She is not engaged in the ardors of either a courtly or a divine love, but is instead fixated on herself. When Susan entertains a marriage proposal in *The Horse and His Boy* (although that courtship is eventually broken off), her romantic attachment is not regarded as an impediment to participation in the life of Narnia. However, in *The Last Battle* she is engaged with pursuits that are in direct competition with her ability to return to Narnia and, by extension, to the Divine. Lewis clearly acknowledges that courtly love can become more than a simple competitor of religious devotion; it can grow to become an enemy when its adherents would rather follow courtly demands "to hell" rather than "go without them to heaven" (Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* 22). Susan is never shown following her vain image all the way to hell, but just as it remains possible that she might return to the divine, it is more than probable that she might condemn herself by turning her back on Aslan and Narnia. Susan's nylons, lipstick,

and invitations are qualitatively different from a Narnian marriage offer and sanctioned journey to visit her potential husband; her preoccupations have become an end in themselves instead of a living relationship with a person or with the divine. "She wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now and she'll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay that age" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 506).

Lewis regarded gender—and indeed the universe—as hierarchical. Moreover, Lewis's hierarchical worldview is much more dramatic than a modern reader might first imagine. There is a telling passage in *That Hideous Strength*, the third volume of Lewis's science fiction space trilogy, wherein Lewis describes the Roman gods descending to Earth. In this passage, Lewis is clearly referencing the Great Chain of Being:

> For this was great Glund-Oyarsa . . . through whom the joy of creation principally blows across these fields of [the Sun], known to men in old times as Jove and under that name, by fatal but not inexplicable misprision, confused with his Maker – so little did they dream by how many degrees the stair even of created being rises above him. (*That Hideous Strength* 327)

Lewis directs the reader to look up from man to Jove. Man almost cannot help but see Jove and think of him as the Most High God because of his unimaginable greatness. Then, in a deft moment, Lewis increases the contrast claiming that not only is this great and worshipful god actually a *created* being, but Jove is far from the greatest among the created beings. In light of this, the authority Lewis believed a man had over his wife would be a real, but relatively minor thing in the scale of

universal hierarchy. The scale of the hierarchy may be read as shifting the emphasis from rank among people to the subordinate relationship of individuals to the Divine.

The hierarchical nature of the spiritual world is further described in *That Hideous Strength*, where Jane, in conversation with Mother Dimble, is trying to figure out what Ransom thinks of a lower-class woman making herself "at home" with her social betters. She asks:

> "I think what's puzzling me is that when I saw him he said something about equality not being the important thing. But his own house seems to be run on - well, on very democratic lines indeed."
>
> "I never attempt to understand what he says on that subject," said Mother Dimble. "He's usually talking either about spiritual ranks - and you were never goose enough to think yourself *spiritually* superior to Ivy... (Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* 168)

Jane is socially uncomfortable with her former housekeeper being a full member of the household where she is hiding out; her sense of propriety is offended. She discusses the subject with Mother Dimble, and her response shows how Ransom, and by extension Lewis, viewed spiritual rank—a view that pervades Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

In the *Paradiso*, there are nine circles of Heaven. In each of these circles, there are different types, and intensities, of blessing. All in heaven are blessed, but some are more capable of receiving and participating in that blessing than others. While still in the First Heaven—the Sphere of the Moon—Beatrice replies to Dante's

confused and questioning look as he struggles to comprehend the true peace of these less exalted souls:

> Neither the Seraph closest unto God,
> nor Moses, Samuel, nor either John-
> whichever one you - nor Mary has,
> I say, their place in any other heaven
> than that which houses those souls you just saw,
> nor will their blessedness last any longer.
> But all those souls grace the Empyrean;
> and each of them has gentle life - though some
> sense the Eternal Spirit more, some less. (Dante "Paradiso" IV 28–36)

Those who are closest to God are there because their virtues give them the ability to bear the weight of His glory. Thus, Lucy is closer to Aslan than Susan is. Moreover, Lucy has a more intimate and intense relationship with Aslan, because she can bear the sacrifice and loss of self that this commitment entails. Of course, this sense of inequality is not, for Dante or Lewis, a source of discord. Unlike Lucy's desire for greater beauty (as described in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*), which would incite wars and destroy her relationship with Susan, a greater capacity to receive God's blessing does not provoke jealousy. Just as Beatrice declares, "And in His will there is our peace" (Dante, "Paradiso" III 85), so do the Pevensie children accept their differing ranks and relationships with Aslan.

In *Prince Caspian*, as the children are journeying through the wood, it is Lucy who first sees Aslan. Not only must she follow him, she must also lead the others to

do the same, despite their over-rationalized skepticism. Lucy's insistence on following Aslan is understandable given that her affection for Aslan is more intense than the others' in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and it is only fitting that she is more sensitive to his presence than her siblings. Returning to the storyline in *Prince Caspian*, when the two older children begin to squabble over whether or not to accept Lucy's claim that she has seen Aslan, Edmund confirms Lucy's special relationship to Aslan by saying:

> "Well, there's just this," said Edmund, speaking quickly and turning a little red. "When we first discovered Narnia a year ago—or a thousand years ago, whichever it is—it was Lucy who discovered it first and none of us would believe her. I was the worst of the lot, I know. Yet she was right after all." (Lewis, *Chronicles* 255)

Further on in the same novel, there is a clear delineation of the four children (and Trumpkin's relative standing) as Aslan gradually becomes visible to them in sequential turn. First to see him is Lucy, who initiates their journey in Aslan's path; second is Edmund whose closeness to Aslan was intensified by Aslan's direct sacrifice for Edmund's life, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; then Peter sees him shortly before Susan does. Last of all is Trumpkin, whose gruff agnosticism is roundly answered by a humorous and physical encounter with the Narnian King of Beasts. This hierarchy of intimacy in the Divine relationship is not gender, age, or authority related but is based on spiritual affinity. This episode does more than just show the reality of spiritual rank in Narnia, it also foreshadows Susan's eventual rejection of the Divine by showing her great reluctance to acknowledge Lucy's

wisdom and her inability to see Aslan. Further, her reconciliation to Aslan hints at the eventual tension that arises because of her obvious absence in *The Last Battle*—and, most of all, what Lewis will later confirm in a letter, that Susan may eventually stop fixating on her own comfort and pleasures, and return to a relationship with the Divine in either England, or Narnia. Despite the differing responses of each of these characters to Aslan, *all* are reconciled to him at the end of the journey. Lewis was no Universalist, believing that all would be saved, but in *Prince Caspian* it seems clear that even the reluctant, having once known the divine, will return.

The, at least temporary, lack of redemption for Susan is readily seen when contrasting her fate to her sister's. When Lucy is tempted to increase her own beauty and become primarily an object of sexual desire in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, she is confronted by Aslan's image. However, in the conclusion to *The Last Battle*, Susan is not confronted by Aslan himself, she only encounters the other children talking of Narnia generally. This leaves the ending of Susan's story open. Had she been confronted by Aslan, as she and Lucy had been before, and then rejected him, it would then be reasonable for the reader to conclude that she had been condemned. Instead, with her fate left open to interpretation, she is potentially reconcilable to the divine love that she once enjoyed. She resisted her faith in Aslan in *Prince Caspian*, but repented for having "listen[ed] to fears" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 263), and thus is reconciled to him. Susan's character arc may be incomplete, in that Lewis does not create an opportunity for her to make a full commitment to her faith.

At the conclusion of the Chronicles, Susan is separated from her immediate family and from Narnia. A traditional reading of Susan's fate suggests that her

secular desires are overwhelming her spiritual welfare, but there is also the potential that her conflicted nature is another means by which Lewis challenges his reader to consider the path one must endure if he is to approach the Divine. Just as Lewis contends that the "secular religion" of courtly love can be seen as a competitor to the "real religion" of Christian devotion, so too does he recognize that Dante found "a *modus vivendi* with Christianity and produce[d] a noble fusion of sexual and religious experience" and that one should be prepared for "a certain ambiguity" in texts that attempt such a reconciliation (*The Allegory of Love* 21). Moreover, not only did Lewis see this rapprochement in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but he also develops a similar theme in his science fiction. By extension, this syncretism between the courtly love tradition and divine love opens up a reading of Susan's character that suggests for her an unrealized Narnian salvation.

As Lewis emphasizes the primacy of the divine love relationship throughout the Chronicles, his borrowings and reflections from the courtly love tradition reinforce that theme. The earthly humans are meant to be in relationship with Aslan and through him to find the divine (Christ) in their own world. Other relationships are permissible but an all-consuming and stagnant preoccupation keeps Susan from returning. While this is a failure for Susan, there is still tentative hope of redemption for her within the Narniad. The distractions that draw her away might also be imagined to lead her back should she become disillusioned with them or if they led to the kind of courtly love that would reveal the divine to her again. The lack of finality in her character arc demands some imaginative extension of her story, as the critical

traditions shows, and the pairing of the courtly love tradition with the divine love relationship offers one potential path.

CHAPTER FIVE: DEEPER MAGIC FROM BEFORE THE DAWN OF TIME: NARNIA, MALORY, AND ENCHANTRESSES

Introduction

In her essay "No Longer a Friend of Narnia: Gender in Narnia," Karin Fry argues that one of the characteristics that foreshadows Susan's "exclusion" from the "Narnian equivalent to heaven" is her beauty (160). Not only is Susan unique among the Earthly humans for her absence in *The Last Battle*, she is also unique for her beauty; "the only characters who surpass Susan's beauty are the evil Witches" (Fry 161). Laura Miller also correlates the beauty of the witches to Susan's beauty and argues that their beauty "isn't ancillary to their evil, but integral to it" (139). The Chronicles leave Susan in suspended animation in the middle of trying on a temptation to vanity. She is in a sort of limbo, neither confirmed to be evil like the witches, nor repentant as she has been before and as Lucy is in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Susan's relationship to her beauty shifts in the text from unselfconsciousness to vanity. This shift (appearing in *The Last Battle*) is not signaled in her character arc through *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian*, or *The Horse and His Boy*. It is foreshadowed by Lucy's temptation, which demonstrates that it is not a character's possession of beauty that counts but her relationship to that beauty: she may not regard it with vanity or use it as a weapon though it may be admired or pursued by others.

Both Philip Pullman and J.K. Rowling have asserted that Susan's developing sexuality is a key component of her exclusion (Anderson; Pullman). Jennifer L. Miller argues that Lewis's deliberate omission of sexuality from Narnia opens interpretive space for importing it from some of the "characters and imagery" he borrows from other authors and from mythology (113). Robert Boenig finds Lewis's exclusion of sexuality from Caspian's story particularly interesting given that Lewis was clearly influenced by the super-sensual William Morris's *Child Christopher* (113). Jennifer L. Miller's discussion of the witches' sexuality together with Gaiman, Pullman, Rowling, and Laura Miller's connection of the Problem of Susan to sexuality links Susan's character to that of the various witches evilly enchanting Narnia. What is Susan's relationship to her own beauty and what is the relationship between beauty and enchantment? Further, how does sexuality fit into the beauty/enchantment relationship? In "No Longer a Friend of Narnia: Gender in Narnia." Fry connects Lewis's "White Witch" to Hans Christian Andersen's "Snow Queen" but Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* may be a more overt influence. Lewis's handling of Malory's enchantresses shows that Susan and Lucy can work with magic and exhibit beauty and sexuality so long as all are subordinated to the divine love relationship.

Morgan le Fay and Narnia's Witches

Lewis's reading of *Le Morte D'Arthur* began early. He first began writing of his affection for Malory's "lively narrative" to Arthur Greeves in 1915 (*Collected Letters* 1: 103) and Malory's name continuously appears throughout both his personal letters and his academic works. Lewis freely criticized Malory's failures as a

narrator, writing that "he is so generally confused" (*The Allegory of Love* 300); however, he was deeply a part of Lewis's literary imagination.

Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* is full of enchantresses including Nimue and Morgan le Fay. Morgan le Fay is the most well known and most powerful sorceress in Arthurian legends. In Malory's text, as in many others, she is Arthur's older half-sister. She is often opposed to Arthur, plotting against him and against Guinevere, but eventually reconciled to him in some way as she carries him off to Avalon with several other women including the enchantress Nimue. Malory's Nimue is a gifted enchantress, though not as powerful as Morgan le Fay. She "has a secure identity as the bold and helpful female who ever 'dyd grete goodenes vnto kynge Arthur and to alle his knyhtes'" (Holbrook 762). She is most famous for a long and loving relationship to the knight Pelleas and for enchanting Merlin, who was obsessed with her, by locking him under a stone.

In *That Hideous Strength* (page 31) Lewis quotes Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* "Than [King Mark] wood wroth out of measure. Then he sent unto Queen Morgan le Fay, and to the queen of Northgalis, praying them in his letters that they two sorceresses would set all the country in fire with ladies that were enchantresses" (Malory, 2: 30), who are to seduce and destroy knights. Much like Malory's England, Narnia is "in fire" with enchantresses. First (chronologically speaking) is Jadis[5] who brings evil into Narnia at its creation. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Digory and Polly

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5 I will be treating each of the witches as distinct characters although some critics read Jadis and the White Witch as one person; this connection was not fully resolved by Lewis as the series grew (Ford 453).

unwittingly bring her to Narnia in an effort to get her out of England (Lewis, *Chronicles* 41). Seduced by her beauty, Digory is responsible for Jadis's awakening (26) and, therefore, for the subsequent problems in England and Narnia; Aslan both confronts him and forgives him for this (57). Jadis already had a terrible career of murder in her own land of Charn before she is brought to Narnia. Like Morgan le Fay striving with Arthur for control of England, Jadis competes with a sibling (her sister) for dominance of Charn. Jadis also learns her magic, though "at great cost to herself" (Ford 454). Similarly, "Morgan le Fay was put to school in a nunnery, and there she learned so much that she was a great clerk of necromancy" (Malory 1: 8). Each of these enchantresses competes with a sibling to dominate a realm. Jadis wins against her sister, destroying all life in Charn, whereas Morgan's efforts are not so clearly effective; Arthur and the Round Table fall but not by her hand alone.

The White Witch is the eponymous witch of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Her 'whiteness' is not that of good or neutral magic but rather "the color of death, the time of winter" (Ford 455n). She holds Narnia in the thrall of a spell, making it "always winter and never Christmas" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 81). She, like Jadis, aligns with Morgan le Fay. Most explicitly, they both have the power of turning themselves and others to stone. The White Witch turns the faun Tumnus into a stone as punishment for his defiance, and her castle is filled with stone images of creatures she has enchanted (104). She also has the ability to make herself appear as a stone, turning herself into a boulder when she is hunted by Aslan's messengers (114). When Morgan is pursued by Arthur after attempting to have him killed in single combat with Accolon:

> . . . she rode into a valley where many great stones were, and when she saw she must be overtaken, she shaped herself, horse and man, by enchantment unto a great marble stone . . . So when Arthur was gone she turned all into the likeliness as she and they were before. (Malory, 1: 109)

The White Witch is also identified as one of "those Northern Witches" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 447), the north being both the region of giants (Ford 319) and general wildness in Narnia. Morgan le Fay, too, is associated with the wild regions of England, especially the west and North where her husband Uriens rules.

The last of Narnia's witches is the so called "Lady of the Green Kirtle" or "Queen of Underland" (Ford 360). After killing his mother, she enchants Caspian's son, Prince Rilian, and plans to rule Narnia through him. Her beauty is maddening, and she practices seduction far more blatantly than the White Witch who enchants Edmund mostly with food and drink. Rilian claims that she is "of divine race, and knows neither age nor death" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 424). Her plot to conquer and rule Narnia is reminiscent of Morgan's conspiracy with Accolon, one of Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. Morgan plots to kill her husband Uriens, have Accolon defeat Arthur in single combat, and then rule through him (Malory, 1: 81–93). The Lady of the Green Kirtle enchants Rilian in the same way that Accolon and Arthur are separated and set against each other by "these false damosels that use enhantments" (1: 84). Rilian encounters the Lady of the Green Kirtle at a spring while he is hunting a serpent and there is put under her spell. She then carries him away to Underland where he is kept prisoner (429). Just so, Arthur is out hunting a hart with Sir Accolon

and King Uriens when they rest themselves in an enchanted ship. Arthur awakens in a "dark prison" (Malory, 1: 98). As Rilian is delighted by the "honor," "truth, mercy, constancy, gentleness, courage, and the rest" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 424) he believes the Queen of Underland to possess, so Arthur declares that he "honoured [Morgan le Fay] and worshipped her more than all . . . and more have I trusted her than my wife and all my kin after" (Malory, 1: 105).

Lewis describes each of the three witches as beautiful. The White Witch is "beautiful . . . but proud and cold and stern" (*Chronicles* 84). Jadis has "a look of such fierceness and pride that it took your breath away. Yet she was beautiful too" (25). The Lady of the Green Kirtle is "The most beautiful thing that was ever made" and "she was tall and great, shining, and wrapped in a thin garment as green as poison" (394). The beauty of Jadis and the White Witch is correlated with their pride and the Lady of the Green Kirtle's with her poisonous seduction. All three witches attract or tempt a male character, leading to destruction. They are conscious of their beauty and its power.

The adult Susan in Narnia is described as "a tall and gracious woman with black hair that fell almost to her feet," and she is pursued by "the kings of the countries beyond the sea [who] send ambassadors asking for her hand" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 132). In *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta calls her "the most beautiful lady he had ever seen" (158). In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, she is described as "the pretty one of the family" (*Chronicles* 293). While the Witches' beauty "link[s] feminine beauty to evil" (Fry, "No Longer a Friend of Narnia" 164), Susan's beauty is not connected to evil in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Horse and His*

Boy, or *Prince Caspian*. However, Lucy very nearly bridges the gap between the beauty of the witches and the beauty of the girls.

In the "Magician's Book" chapter of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, before Lucy disenchants the Dufflepuds, she is tempted to say "*An infallible spell to make beautiful her that uttereth it beyond the lot of mortals*" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 340). The vision the magician's book gives her of herself is horrifying. Lucy sees herself saying the spell with "a rather terrible expression on her face" and is then "dazzled" by the beauty of the other Lucy. Her beauty would be the cause of tournaments followed by "real wars" and countries would be "laid waste with the fury of the kings and dukes and great lords who fought for her favor." Finally, Susan would become "jealous," "plainer," and "with a nasty expression" (340) should the spell be spoken. This magical, otherworldly beauty is considered destructively evil. It would permanently alter Lucy, Narnia, and England by evoking jealousy, uncontrollable desire, and rage. Lucy is prevented from saying the spell by the sudden appearance of Aslan's face in the middle of the images. She might have aligned herself with the witches by pridefully grasping beauty "beyond the lot of mortals," but she does not (340). Not only does Lucy turn away from a clear temptation to pride and personal vanity in this passage, her disenchantment of the Dufflepuds also acts as a reorientation to the right side of magic and magical creatures. Speaking the spell to make hidden things visible, she fulfills her quest for the Dufflepuds and causes Aslan to appear. The importance of the disenchantment is confirmed by Lewis's description of Lucy's face when Aslan appears. "Then her face lit up till, for a moment, (but of course she didn't know it), she looked almost as beautiful as that other Lucy in the

picture, and she ran forward with a little cry of delight and with her arms stretched out (342). She unconsciously, and righteously, achieves what she had selfishly desired only after she renounces it and realigns herself with the proper use of magic.

Susan's "nylons and lipstick" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 560) are a reflection of Lucy's spell. Both are moments where the girls' beauty becomes an object of their own contemplation. Susan's appearance is remarked upon by other characters, but she is not necessarily conscious of it until *The Last Battle* where it suddenly becomes her downfall. Lewis correlates the beauty of the witches with power and evil but for Susan and Lucy it is a neutral characteristic unless they are consciously try to use or augment it.

Nimue: The Good Enchantress

Magic and enchantments are virtuous in Malory in two significant instances. Merlin's skill, while not always clearly good, often supports Arthur and his court. Despite the significantly negative episode where Merlin arranges for the exposure of the infant Mordred, Malory shows Merlin as Arthur's support and defender throughout his early reign. Nimue,[6] an enchantress who learns her art from Merlin, is the second instance. While Merlin illustrates the point that, for Malory, magic can be used for good or ill, Nimue is not only a beautiful and helpful enchantress who supports Arthur, her story also demonstrates the virtuous path open to Susan.

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6 Also Ninive, Nyneve, Niniane, Viviane, Nynue, etc. Nimue is the spelling in the Everyman's translation of Malory that Lewis read. She is associated with the Lady of the Lake but is *not* the same Lady of the Lake who gave Arthur Excalibur.

Nimue, in Malory, is "a single, unambiguously benign character," a "kind woman capable of foreknowledge and enchantment" (Holbrook 767). Malory uses her as a replacement for Merlin whose "skills, knowledge, and loyalty are dedicated to Arthur and his court" (Holbrook 771). Like Susan who flees Rabadash's attentions, Nimue is persecuted by Merlin's lustful attention as he pursues her relentlessly (Malory, 1: 91). Merlin is not an honorable lover and Malory shows him consumed by "an incessant desire to have the damosel's 'maydenhede'" (Holbrook 770). As we sympathize with Susan's rejection of Rabadash once "he has shown another face," so, despite Merlin's status as Arthur's ally, his "patent lechery" in pursuing Nimue turns our sympathies away from him to her (Holbrook 770).

Nimue also acts against Morgan le Fay, breaking her plot to have Accolon defeat Arthur in single combat. Morgan le Fay enchants Accolon, Arthur, and her husband Uriens, separating them in order to pit Accolon against Arthur. She also steals Arthur's sword Excalibur and his enchanted scabbard that protects him from blood-loss. When Accolon is winning the fight and Arthur is near death, Nimue sees his "prowess" and "the false treason that was wrought for him" and enchants Excalibur to fall out of Accolon's hand that Arthur may recover it (Malory, 1: 103). In this way, she not only works against Morgan le Fay for Arthur but does so by using an enchantment to break the effect of another enchantment.

Susan and Lucy also break evil enchantment in Narnia, and this aligns them with Nimue. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Susan and Lucy not only attend Aslan during his 'Passion' but also travel with him to disenchant the White Witch's castle. Aslan is the one breaking the spells as he breathes on each stone

image, bringing it to life but Susan and Lucy participate by hunting up statues in dusty old rooms and rejoicing with the newly liberated creatures (Lewis, *Chronicles* 127–8). This liberated crowd then goes on to join the battle against the White Witch and partly because of their reinforcement, Peter's army is victorious (130). Susan and Lucy support Aslan and Peter as they work to break the White Witch's hold over Narnia.

Susan and Lucy also participate in the second disenchanting of Narnia in *Prince Caspian*. While Narnia is not under an explicit spell, as with the White Witch, it is still under the power of an unjust ruler who fundamentally alters the nature of Narnia. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, it is "always winter and never Christmas" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 81). In *Prince Caspian*, the usurper king has forcefully eradicated all vestiges of the native Narnians, repressing even the memory of them. The tree and water spirits are in a sort of drugged or enchanted sleep, unable to awaken and aid the old Narnians in their attempts to free themselves. Narnia "was never right except when a Son of Adam was King" (236), and while King Miraz (Prince Caspian's uncle) is human, he was not the rightful ruler. Not only did he murder his brother the king, he also hated and feared the talking beasts and mythical creatures to which Narnia properly belongs. Miraz's unjust rule and fierce suppression of the native Narnians acts as an evil spell on the country, leaving its human inhabitants fearful of the rumored talking beasts, the trees, the rivers, and the sea (232). Lucy tries to disenchant the trees alone during the first night of their journey to the Stone Table. "'Oh, Trees, Trees, Trees . . . Oh, Trees, wake, wake, wake. Don't you remember it? Don't you remember *me*? Dryads and hamadryads,

come out, come to me'" (252). She is incompletely successful; while the trees do respond, they do not fully awaken at her entreaty.

Lucy and Susan travel with Aslan after the 'Romp' with Bacchus and the Maenads through the Telmarine settlement at Beruna. Bacchus, at Aslan's command, destroys the bridge that binds the river, and his Maenads help release a schoolgirl from her uncomfortable school clothes. Once again, Aslan is the active agent of disenchantment but the girls attend him as he corrects wrongs and frees the enchanted, first riding on his back (as they did in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) and then running along with celebratory people and creatures. Aslan fully awakens the trees (274), who are instrumental in the overwhelming victory Caspian's forces have over the Telmarines. While neither girl is the cause of these disenchantments, their attendance on *both* journeys connects their presence to the releasing of spells, the process of disenchantment.

That connection is strengthened by Lucy's role in the "Magician's Book" chapter of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. After the travelers (Edmund, Eustace, Caspian, and Lucy) arrive on "The Island of the Voices," Lucy is asked to brave the room of the magician Coriakin to say "*A Spell to make hidden things visible*" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 341) to reveal the Dufflepuds who are tired of their invisibility. It must be Lucy because "it's got to be a little girl or else the magician himself" (336). Lucy completes her task and succeeds not only in making the Dufflepuds appear, but also Aslan himself (342). Her performance of the spell is another disenchanting moment as she is reversing the effects of the invisibility spell the Dufflepuds put on themselves.

The disenchanting role Susan and Lucy play is subordinated to Aslan. They attend him as he works his magic, and Lucy acknowledges in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* that while she can say spells, she cannot exercise power over Aslan (Lewis, *Chronicles* 342). In the same way, Nimue's enchantment is subordinated to the divine. Accolon tells Arthur to slay him because he sees "well that God is with [him]" (Malory, 1: 103). Nimue's work is read by Arthur and Accolon as the hand of God. The working of magic in both Narnia and Malory is good so long as it is subordinated within the proper hierarchy: oriented to the divine and to the lawful king.

Enchantment/disenchantment connects Susan and Lucy to Nimue's role as a supporter of the king and a subordinate to the divine, and opposes them to Morgan le Fay[7], but Fry's comparison in "Gender in Narnia" is based on Susan's appearance. Morgan le Fay is not explicitly described as beautiful in Malory's text. Paton observes that "In general she is favored with the traditional beauty of a fay" but that she is also sometimes a "loathly lady" (though not in Malory) and her appearance is often uncertain (151). In Malory, enchantment and beauty go hand in hand but, at least Morgan's enchantments, associate beauty, seductive beauty, primarily with

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7 Lucy is slightly connected to Morgan le Fay by her role as a healer. Lucy is given a healing cordial by Father Christmas in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, *Chronicles* 108) and she goes on to use it several times in the first three books. Morgan le Fay is associated with healing in a variety of Arthurian tales (Paton) including the "Alexander the Orphan" episode of Malory where she first increases his wounds and then heals them (Malory, 1: 394). Further, Morgan is associate with an analogous figure in the Welsh *Geraint* called "Morgan Tud" who is the "chief physician" (Paton 259).

places of rest, like the magical ship Arthur, Uriens, and Accolon fall asleep in, rather than with her person. Nimue is also not described as beautiful although she is seductively attractive and Merlin is "assotted" with her (Malory, 1: 90). Morgan uses beauty and enchantments to entrap knights and to undermine Arthur's authority while Nimue works against Morgan to support Arthur.

The choice for Susan and Lucy is clear. They can align with the seductively beautiful but destructive witches or they can be unconsciously beautiful and work enchantment within the hierarchy of subordination to Aslan. While the Witches' beauty is a physical characteristic connecting their evil to Susan's exclusion from Narnia for some critics, Susan and Lucy's role as 'dis-enchantresses' is a more explicit alignment of the girls *against* the Witches and the Witches' modes of evil. They align with the good enchantress Nimue, from Malory, as they act with Aslan to bring Narnia out from under its oppressors. They are the opposite of the Witches, breaking evil enchantment and working with Aslan's "deeper magic from before the dawn of time" to restore Narnia. Susan's rejection of Narnia in *The Last Battle* demonstrates one aspect of the witches' evil, her vain attention to her own beauty, but she is not explicitly seductive and certainly does not destroy anything. Because Susan has not progressed beyond a very minor sin of vanity, it is difficult to imagine that she is intended to be eternally condemned.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

On closer examination, the problem of Susan becomes a stepping stone to a deeper reading of both Susan and the Chronicles. Susan's turning away from Narnia, while a significant moment in the text, is not the only defining moment for her. The off-putting dissonance in the ending of her story, just before the conclusion of the Chronicles, offers an opportunity to reexamine the importance of the divine love relationship in Narnia and to see the significance of Susan's character in light of Lucy's. Through this examination, the reader finds not only the resonance of some of Lewis's favorite medieval works and themes, but a new understanding of the limits for female characters in his fiction.

Susan demonstrates the significance of the divine love relationship in Narnia through her repeated process of resistance and repentance in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*. The importance of this ability to both turn away and return is emphasized by the conclusion to the Chronicles where she does *not* return, contrary to the brief pattern repeated in the earlier books. This upending of expectations draws attention to the risk of a real falling away for characters in the Narniad. Narnian salvation is simply not guaranteed. The perilous possibility is both a somber note in the Chronicles and recognition of the primacy of the divine and the purgatorial route back. Only Susan falls away permanently and, while this has opened the Chronicles to suspicion of a misogynistic fear of female sexuality,

Lewis's views were somewhat more complex. In his fiction, female sexuality was not to be feared but *was* to be directed in a particular way.

The open-ended nature of Susan's exclusion from the Narnian afterlife demands an imaginative extension of her story. By reading the pattern of courtly love in the Chronicles, Susan is offered a path back into the Divine Love relationship. Her virtuous response to sensual love in *The Horse and His Boy* limits the reading of her failure from just sexuality *per se* to how her sexuality fails to mature and prevents a return to the divine. Lewis's imagining of courtly love as not only a potential competitor to religion but also as a precursor to divine love in *That Hideous Strength* further extends the potential reading of Susan as able to return if she will mature into controlled and submitted sexuality via married love.

The enchantment/disenchantment motif in Susan's and Lucy's stories operates in conjunction with the courtly love/divine love pattern. As Susan and Lucy break the spells that bind Narnia (and, for Lucy, the spell that conceals the Dufflepuds), they help put Narnia back into a right relationship with Aslan. On an allegorical level, the divine love relationship can be seen as a disenchanter that puts courtly love and sensuality in their proper, Narnian, place, subordinate to both the divine and to "honeste" married love (Gower, 3: 4224). All relationships function within the hierarchy established and headed by Aslan so that even Bacchus himself is obedient to Aslan, and thus any love relationship for any character must also be so subordinated to the divine love relationship. Aslan banishes the false lover Rabadash to protect Susan, showing himself supreme over courtship as well as Bacchus's baser characteristics. Susan and Lucy can operate within the magical powers of Narnia so

long as their actions are obedient to Aslan and so their sexuality must be subordinated to him also. The hierarchy is so thoroughgoing that the lion swears to "obey my own rules" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 342); even Aslan is obedient to Aslan.

The ending of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* ensures that while Susan's story is unresolved in the Chronicles, her return would be more consistent with the internal logic of the series than her absence. While her absence offers weight and sorrow to the otherwise joyful conclusion, Aslan's blessing over the four children as they are crowned "Once a king or queen in Narnia, always a king or queen" (Lewis, *Chronicles* 131) speaks of her return.

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