

“ASLAN’S OWN LAND”: PASTORAL, IMPERIALISM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
STEWARDSHIP IN C.S. LEWIS’S *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA*

By

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## Abstract

Recent scholarship on C.S. Lewis's life, work, and personal views of nature has suggested that we should use his enduring children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia* to teach youth environmental appreciation and stewardship. Lewis's fiction is rich with detailed descriptions of environments that function as more than mere background for human drama; his characters, both human and non-human, often express a deep reverence for the world around them. This is particularly clear in *Narnia*, in which the kingdom simultaneously mirrors and transcends our own Earth. However, Lewis presents a very specific environmental vision based on his own interpretation of Christian theology that, at the same time, remains bound to the imperial ideologies that dominated Lewis's time. Together these factors limit Lewis's environmental vision so that it becomes parochial and culturally exclusive. In fact, the series depicts a type of environmental stewardship that consciously and unconsciously works to legitimize Christian dominion and imperial projects. This thesis examines the presence of imperial ideology and colonial attitudes toward nature in the series, which is obscured through pastoral ideals and images of Edenic environments. I argue that using these books to teach environmental appreciation perpetuates parochial, imperially influenced conceptions of nature and environmentalism. The legacies of colonialism demand that we critically examine dominant environmentalisms, moving beyond imperial behaviors to address the environmental problems we face. Merely cultivating an appreciation for pastoral environments is not sufficient, as it will not help our younger generations understand the connections between lingering forms of imperialisms and environmental degradation.

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## Introduction

C.S. Lewis may have meant for children to read his beloved series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, “simply ... as stories” without explicit attention to the Christian overtones and other moral messages (Byfield).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, as Daphne Kutzer reminds us, there is no such thing as a simple story, even if by all immediate appearances the books that make up the legendary *Narnia* series are straightforward and simple children’s stories. Notably, Perry Nodelman, in his seminal discussion of what he terms the “shadow text,” quotes Lewis: “this form [children’s literature] permits, or compels, one to leave out things I wanted to leave out. It compels one to throw all the force of the book into what was done and said” (qtd. in *Hidden Adult* 8). By casting aside what he thinks might complicate, burden, or make the text unfit for child audiences, Lewis focuses his stories almost entirely on surface descriptions of scene, character traits, action, and dialogue. Even so, this simple prose style carries with it a deeper layer of meaning, what Nodelman describes as the “unspoken and much more complex repertoire that amounts to a second, hidden text” or, simply termed, the shadow text (*Hidden Adult* 8).

Kutzer argues that children’s stories grow out of the cultures from which they come and, consequently, mirror the values of that particular culture; “children are the future of any society,” she tells us, “and the literature adults write for them often is more obvious and insistent about appropriate dreams and desires than the texts they write for themselves” (xiii). Whereas the literature written for adults might question dominant cultural norms, “the role of children’s texts ... is to help acculturate children into society and to teach them to behave and believe in

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<sup>1</sup> The series includes seven novels: *The Magician’s Nephew*; *The Lion, the Witch, and The Wardrobe*; *The Horse and His Boy*; *Prince Caspian*; *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; *The Silver Chair*; and *The Last Battle*.

acceptable ways” (xv). Rashna Singh argues similarly: we must stop praising children’s texts for their reputed innocence and instead “acknowledge its [children’s literature’s] role as an encoder of values and transmitter of culture,” for the “political and ideological dimensions of children’s literature are not just an accident or a harmless by-product but an integral part of its purpose” (7).

On one hand, Lewis commends fantasy, or “fairy stories,” for the ways in which the form forces brevity, restrains description, and “its inflexible hostility to all analysis ... reflections and ‘gas’” (“Fairy Stories” 37). On the other, even he notes that children’s stories will inevitably carry with them some moral messages or supposedly universal truths. In the same essay, Lewis also condemns the notion that he intentionally wrote the Narnia books as a means of Christian indoctrination by calling the idea “pure moonshine” (36). Mere lines later, however, he concedes that even if initially “there wasn’t even anything Christian about them”, the Christian message eventually “pushed itself in of its own accord” (36). Even in Lewis’s own thinking on children’s literature, the contradictions and ambiguities surrounding the form and its cultural significance, purposes, and capabilities are apparent. Thus, even if the messages in *The Chronicles* were incidental or even accidental, they are present in the texts and cannot be ignored.

Veldman explains that Lewis saw fantasy as a form of worship for God and his creations and a way to “find relief from [and fight] the sheer ugliness of so much of modern life” (48). Here lies a contradiction: Lewis, on one hand, espouses fantasy’s ability to escape and combat (in itself a contradiction) the “ugliness” of the modern secular world, but also insists that his children’s books should be read just as stories, nothing more—we should not dig for hidden messages or meanings; it is all, so it goes, on the surface. Even so, as Veldman puts it, “he wrote his Narnia books in the form of a children’s story because he regarded this form as the most suited for what he had to say, not because he believed Narnia ‘to be below adult attention’”

(Lewis, qtd. in Veldman 49). More importantly, Lewis also believed that myth and fantasy could expose divine truths while serving as a symbolic protest of the secular world (Veldman 47, 49). In pointing out these contradictions, I wish to illustrate the larger anxiety and uncertainty surrounding children's literature and, in particular, what seems to be a desire for children's texts to carry universal messages while remaining blissfully ideology-free.

I believe that very few, if any, literary critics—or even moderately careful readers, for that matter—would buy Lewis's declaration that the *Narnia* series is merely a collection of “simple stories.” Lewis's own well-known identity as a devout Christian apologist and theologian notwithstanding, the Christian influence and allegory, as I have already alluded, is strikingly apparent throughout all seven books. One does not need to be a very careful reader to see it, despite what Stephens suggests (53).<sup>2</sup> Although this particular shadow text is not very carefully hidden in the *Narnia* books, there are also other shadow texts at work in these books that are all the more insidious for their subtlety, specifically the problematic beliefs concerning race, class, gender, and nationality that suffused Lewis's time, which crop up in his own writing and are still perpetuated through these and other classic children's works, film, and other public mediums. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is not a collection of simple stories, no matter what we

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<sup>2</sup> In “Harry and Hierarchy: Book Banning as a Reaction to the Subversion of Authority,”

Stephens argues that, despite reading the series many times during childhood, it was not until a graduate seminar that she came to fully understand the allegorical and metaphorical functions in the texts.



would like to believe.<sup>3</sup> They are, instead, the literary vehicles of insistent cultural and religious desires, beliefs, and values.

In particular, Lewis's frequent and detailed descriptions of the environment function as more than mere setting for the drama to unfold. These descriptions do offer the reader context, setting the stage for the principle action of the plot; however, on a deeper level, these descriptions communicate culturally specific messages about place, nature, and environmental stewardship that masquerade as universally held beliefs. This shadow text works in conjunction with Lewis's representation of religion, culture, race, and gender to naturalize the characters' attitudes toward the so-called natural world.

Recent scholarship on the life and work of Lewis indicates a developing interest in the author's personal views on nature, particularly in relation to Christian theology and his own oft-cited faith. Amongst this scholarship, it is agreed that Lewis's environmental thought is inseparable from his Christianity and several critics argue that Lewis revered nature for its numinous qualities, although he did not worship nature in itself (Brawley; Carretero-González; Dickerson and O'Hara). Lewis believed that humans should venerate, cultivate, and protect nature because it is God's creation and he bestowed us with the responsibility to hold dominion

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<sup>3</sup> Although she does not explicitly address race, class, gender, and nationality, Veldman points to the religious and political (inseparable here) messages of the works in her assertion that "Lewis's fantasies betray an impatience with and even cruelty toward his opponents, who appear as crudely drawn caricatures. These fantasies also reveal the underlying message of both his apologetics and his scholarship. All of Lewis's works call on Britain to reevaluate, question, and retreat from contemporary values and to reclaim a rapidly disappearing cultural tradition" (54).

over it until we are freed from the material world and gain entry into heaven, the ultimate immaterial environment. Clearly, Narnia, the alternative world portrayed in the series, is “built on the same account of human superiority and responsible stewardship model depicted in Genesis” (Carretero-González 97). In fact, Carretero-González argues that Lewis fully adhered to the “dogma that humans had been appointed by God to be the center of the universe” and that, as such, had the right to name and control every other aspect of it, including all nonhuman animals and geographical location, and this implies a patronizing responsibility to and patience with those who are “lesser” than humans (96, 105).

What interests many of these critics is Lewis’s use of mythopoeic fantasy to envision paradisaal and (spiritually and physically) healthy environments and to disseminate a Christian model of reverential stewardship.<sup>4</sup> Matthew Dickerson and David O’Hara argue that Lewis presents an extraordinary and healthy environmental vision throughout his fiction and this “escapism” into another world allows us to see our own world in a different light that could incite increased environmental appreciation and sustainable stewardship efforts. Additionally, they posit that Lewis’s paradisaal depictions of the natural world and humanity’s relationship to it

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that “paradisaal”, in this sense, does not mean Edenic, since Narnia is a fallen land, but it is certainly more sacred and closer to redemption than the industrialized England of Lewis’s time that would have been familiar to his initial readers (Carretero-González 98). As Veldman argues, Lewis believed that “[c]hildren ‘born to .. the atomic bomb’ needed fantasy”; “its ‘brave knights and heroic courage’ would provide much-needed support when its readers met with the inevitable cruelties that abounded in everyday experience. What fantasy offered twentieth-century readers was not only relief from the sheer ugliness of so much of modern life but also a means of combating the ugliness” (Lewis, qtd. in Veldman; 48).

are absolutely universally applicable and healthy: they can and should be instructional to our real environmental situation (3-7). Brawley argues similarly, not only seeing Lewis's environmental vision as profound and beneficial, but also clearly transformative. He states: "By departing from consensus reality, fantasy aids in transforming that reality into a sacramental vision, where the world is seen as new" (78). In this way, Brawley sees mythopoeic literature as a way to subvert "normative modes of thinking" and "allow us to rethink our assumptions about nature" (82).<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, Dickerson and O'Hara and Brawley see the potential of these texts as agents for environmental education and change. What intrigues me is that, within this developing body of environmentally bent scholarship, critics have mainly expounded upon the aesthetic and moral value of Lewis's treatment of the environment. While Lewis's work has been criticized for other reasons,<sup>6</sup> as of yet, the ecocritical readings of his life and work have been largely positive. In fact, he has been lauded as a proto-environmentalist and commended for his representations of paradisaal environments. As Veldman explains, Lewis did not believe nature is a mere stage for human drama to unfold; he believed it has intrinsic value beyond its usefulness to humanity. In her words,

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<sup>5</sup> As Veldman explains, Lewis believes that "[f]antasy takes ordinary things and makes them marvelous, enabling the jaded, blinded, and weary to strip the distorting varnish of the familiar and so encounter life afresh. After immersion in the secondary world of fantasy, the reader can no longer view the familiar as ordinary. He or she must look, and so recover wonder" (47). This is quite the assumption, and largely dependent on the reader; not everyone may immerse themselves in fantasy and emerge seeing reality differently.

<sup>6</sup> DuPlessis, for example, remarks that Lewis's critics have mainly disparaged his works for their Christian agenda, who view them as tools of indoctrination (115).

Lewis sought to highlight not only God's intended harmony between humanity and nature but also the sanctity of nature itself, apart from any relationship with humanity. Nature, in Lewis's view, is not simply a script in which the Christian reads the drama of God's actions. Nature reveals God's humanity, but this natural revelation is not nature's reason for being. Like many ecologists two decades later, Lewis asserted nature's right to exist, its holiness as a living entity, apart from its utility to humanity. Man's appropriation of nature as a thing, rather than respect for it as fellow creation, violates the divine plan. (65)

This belief might help explain many critics willingness to reclaim Lewis as an environmental champion because of its similarity to the arguments of early Western environmentalists and even many contemporary deep ecologists, ecofeminists, and other environmental thinkers who insist that nature should be valued in its self and not just for its usefulness to humanity. I am not arguing that nature should not be valued for its autonomy—it should—but we must also be careful not to overlook the systemic social inequalities and homogenizing forces that are all-too-often pushed aside when we proclaim that “we must value nature for nature.” To do so only perpetuates the false separation between humanity and nature.

We should not hastily claim *The Chronicles* for the environmental cause, as these arguments tend not to fully consider the illiberal social implications of the worldview presented within *Narnia*—mostly through the shadow text that comes to life through careful reading. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley warn us of the dangers of “adopting one genealogy of ecocriticism as the normative one that is blind to race, class, gender and colonial inequities” lest we marginalize the work done by those “who have actively theorized the relations of power, subjectivity, and place for many decades” (14). Accordingly, we must not ignore the social

implications of Lewis's treatment of environment, especially if we are to see these texts as tools of education or reform.

Although critics agree that Lewis cannot be deemed an environmentalist, since such a term was not used during his time, his work can be instructive in our contemporary understandings of proto-environmentalism, literary environmental imagination, and our current environmental thought, particularly when put into conversation with other environmentally conscious texts. Lewis's fiction is undeniably rife with detailed descriptions of fantastic landscapes and environments that function as more than mere background for human drama; his characters, both human and non-human, often express a deep reverence for the world around them. This is particularly clear in *Narnia*, in which the kingdom simultaneously mirrors and transcends our own Earth. Carretero-González notes this as well, remarking that, "passages of great beauty abound whenever the Narnian landscape is described" (98). Furthermore, she recognizes the significance that Narnia, like our world, is "a fallen world" (98), which highlights its ability to mirror our lived reality. Despite these qualities, Lewis presents a very specific environmental vision based on his own interpretation of Christian theology. At the same time, this vision remains bound to the imperial ideologies that dominated Lewis's time. Taken together, these two pressing factors limit the scope of Lewis's environmental vision so that it becomes parochial and culturally exclusive; because of this, his treatment of environment cannot be so emphatically lauded.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Of those who I reference here, Carretero-González is the only author to question the value of Lewis's treatment of environment. She argues that because the Christian component always takes precedence over environmental concern, Lewis's tenets "are not very palatable to

The series depicts a type of environmental stewardship that consciously and unconsciously works to legitimize Christian dominion and imperial projects in the name of religious right. This works, in part, due to the complex and often contradictory ways in which Lewis represents the natural world throughout the novels. Nature must be simultaneously revered for its numinous qualities, feared and distrusted for its mysteriousness and ability to shelter evil, and most importantly, brought fully under human control through exploration, mapping, and naming—an explicit tie to Adam in Genesis. Those environs that are deemed closer to God should be treated as places of worship, while those further away from God must be literally and figuratively “brought into the light” through a combination of exploratory study and faith. Most importantly, however, is that every experience that a human has with the environment should serve to bring him or her closer to the true God. Additionally, those who seek closeness to God and heaven are encouraged to seek experiences with environments that further their spiritual quest.

Nonetheless, this ideology disregards and diminishes differing environmental perspectives and attitudes by masquerading as absolutely ubiquitous and infallible. At the same time, it creates an environmental hierarchy between differing landscapes, animals, and people.<sup>8</sup>

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ecologists in general and ecotheologians in particular” (94). Even so, she does not consider the connections of Lewis’s work to colonialism in her discussion of these issues.

<sup>8</sup> Although I do not have the space to address this issue in this paper, the talking animals of Narnia are valued infinitely more than non-speaking animals. For an insightful reading of Lewis’s treatment of these characters in his fiction, see Margaret Blount’s “Fallen and Redeemed: Animals in the Novels of C.S. Lewis” in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views: C.S. Lewis*.

Environments that are overtly sacred or paradisaical, such as mountains and gardens, are valued more than those that are darkly mysterious, untended, dangerous, or even merely unpleasant. In this context, caves can obviously be classified as malevolent, but less obviously, so can any environment inflicted by a storm and one under the possession of an unchristian ruler. People and, to a lesser extent, Talking Beasts who follow Aslan and his Christian ideals are given inherent authority within the text; along with this, the texts suggest that those who do not adhere to Christianity must be redeemed (although, tellingly, the dark-skinned Calormenes from Narnia's neighboring country are never redeemed, nor do Aslan's followers attempt to redeem them). Ania Loomba emphasizes the connection between colonialism, Christianity, and the moral imperative to bring all "savages" and "monsters" "back into the fold and converted to Christian ways" (92): quoting Miles, she reminds her reader that in Europe, since the medieval and early modern periods, Christianity has been 'the prism through which all knowledge of the world was refracted' (qtd. in Loomba 92). Additionally, Judith Wolfe argues that Lewis believes that "the correct exercise of power requires a common submission and directedness toward a shared good (and ultimately, God)" (177). As such, this is not an untroubled environmental text, as some critics seem to suggest, but a form of pastoral literature that promotes supposedly universal attitudes to the environment—attitudes that are, in actuality, culturally specific and closely bound to both paternalistic and adventuresome imperial behaviors.

The height of the British Empire during the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw dramatic changes in environmental thought. Increasing urban development and manufacturing demands brought about anxiety about the loss of natural resources and, in part, helped prompt the widespread development of national parks and an increased desire to conserve "wild" nature (Adams, *Future Nature* 12; Adams and Mulligan 1). With this came a changing definition of nature as wildly

distinct from culture: “As the precursors of modern environmentalism took hold in the industrializing North towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ‘nature’ came to be understood not purely as something distinct from society, but somehow in opposition to culture, the city and industry, to technology and human work. Nature was wild, unrestricted, magnificently unknown (Adams, “Nature and the Colonial Mind” 33). These burgeoning conservationist ideas were also explicitly linked to colonialism, and “were an important element in colonial ideology at home and abroad” (Adams and Mulligan 1). On one hand, “the colonial mind”, as Adams terms it, cherished the exotic and wild environments of the periphery, but, under the guise of development, it also sought to bring these environments, and their inhabitants, under control and transform them into “productive” environments.

Environmental historians such as Richard Grove point out that colonial attitudes and behavior toward the environment were not homogenous nor were they always “purely destructive;” in fact, conservationist consciousness developed in direct response to the destruction of colonial environments (39). Even so, by and large, colonial treatment of environments and their inhabitants were widely detrimental and it is important to understand the link between colonial ideology and conservation practices still carried out today. Adams and Mulligan put it eloquently:

It is important to recognize that both the exploitation of nature in the colonies and the impetus to conserve nature for longer-term human use were a product of the colonial mindset, which was shaped by the interaction between colonial experiences in the centre and periphery. The colonial mindset can only be understood by looking at this interaction; but it was fundamentally rooted in



European values, which constructed nature as nothing more than a resource for human use and wildness as a challenge for the rational mind to conquer. (5)

More specifically, colonialism and its imperial legacies have transformed relationships between people and their environments, namely in that locally developed relationships between inhabitants and their environment have been, by and large, pushed aside in favor of private property, governmental control, and development, all of which serve to displace marginalized peoples from their lands (Grove 179).

After World War II, when Lewis was writing *The Chronicles*, the environmental ideals developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not go away; instead, they became entrenched in Western culture and remain with us today. Their ideological power is clear: “[t]he language of nature ... the very systems of logic that we draw from today to speak of conservation and sustainability”, DeLoughrey and Handley point out, “are derived from a long history of the colonial exploitation of nature” (13). Because these environmental beliefs have become sublimated into mainstream environmental thought, they often go unquestioned—they are seen as “natural.” As Amitov Ghosh’s novel *The Hungry Tide* so poignantly illustrates, mainstream conservation and other environmental practices often further imperial behaviors, privileging sublime ideas of wildness while disregarding the all-too-real impacts of uneven global development, imperialism, and uncritical environmental practices on human inhabitants.

*The Chronicles* arose out of the very same cultural and historical context that has given us these persistent and problematic ways of seeing the “natural world.” In blithely choosing to ignore certain ideological messages carried in the shadow text of these books while also using

them as tools of environmental literacy, we risk perpetuating parochial environmental views and practices that appear as facets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's version of Kipling's "white man's burden."

### **Just Environmental Stewards, Children, and the White Man's Burden**

Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism*, "at some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others" (7). He continues, some pages later, by iterating the residual effects of colonialism and imperialist thought: "in our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see, lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices" (9). As such, imperial ideology has been sublimated into our everyday practices and thus has the potential to become invisible and perhaps all the more dangerous for its subtlety. It is the shadow text lying beneath the guise of simplicity within this series. Imperial ideology is disguised through the trope of religious quest, empty or unjustly ruled pastoral landscapes, and, significantly, the use of children in the hero roles. Nicole DuPlessis, however, goes so far to argue that the series not only presents a stellar environmental vision, but is also inherently anticolonial. She writes:

Throughout *The Chronicles*, the negative effects of colonial exploitation and the themes of animal rights and responsibility to the environment are emphasized in Lewis's construction of a community of living things. Through the negative examples of illegitimate rulers, Lewis constructs the "correct" relationship between humans and nature, providing examples of rulers like Caspian who fulfill their responsibilities to the environment. (125)

What DuPlessis does not address are the highly racialized elements of Lewis's texts: those "illegitimate" rulers are more often than not described as dark-skinned.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, those who do not abide by a reverential stewardship model with an eye to Aslan's wishes are treated as illegitimate. Clearly, then, the only legitimate rulers are those sons and daughters of Adam and Eve who adhere to Christian conceptions of morality and stewardship, who, notably, are white English children (such as Peter) or, if not English, those who possess characteristics valued and cultivated by the British colonial project (such as Caspian). Although Lewis's novels may not be overtly supportive of colonialist practices, they are also, as I have already argued, not free from the dominant colonial discourses of Lewis's day as DuPlessis suggests. She does acknowledge that Lewis's treatment of environment is "necessarily limited by the time period in which Lewis was writing and the sociopolitical factors that influenced the production of these texts" (126), but, considering the lasting popularity and use of these texts to educate children, it is crucial to theorize more deeply the environmental vision he presents lest we continue to perpetuate these extremely problematic ideologies, especially if we consider the stubborn endurance of imperial ideology and its continuing impacts (Loomba 214-228; Adams 19, Said 9).

As DuPlessis argues, Lewis does construct "the 'correct' relationship between humans and nature" (125), but his definition of a proper environmental steward is a limited one. As I mentioned earlier, in this series, proper environmental stewards are *only* those white sons of

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<sup>9</sup> While these illegitimate rulers are often white women as well, that issue is not as pressing to the argument presented here and, much like the issue of talking animals, I do not have the space here to discuss this at any length. For reference, see Elizabeth Baird Hardy's lengthy discussion of Lewis's use of female antagonists in her monograph *Milton, Spenser, and the Chronicles of Narnia*.

Adam and daughters of Eve who abide by the rule of Aslan.<sup>10</sup> This becomes naturalized, however, through the series' frequent deployment of ideology-steeped images and tropes, including those of righteous authority figures and Aslan-ordained hierarchies. As Kutzer asserts, defenses of democracy and hierarchy figure importantly "in children's novels that employ the imagery of empire" (4); *Narnia* is no exception. The novels carry with them a strong emphasis—even fixation—on the idea of hierarchy and particularly "fair" hierarchical systems within democracy, but this is just another way in which the imperial ideology lurks within the texts.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to point out, however, that this construction abides by traditional Christian gender hierarchies—although the female characters are framed as environmental stewards in certain ways, their roles are limited and always in support to the *true* authority—one of the male characters, each of whom Lewis bestows with the most agency and authority throughout the series.

<sup>11</sup> In her discussion of Lewis's bias toward medievalism and distrust of modernity, Veldman suggests that it is not surprising that *Narnia* is a medieval world. More importantly, however, she also posits that, "because the *Chronicles* constitute a fairy story or fantasy, awkward questions, such as who produces wealth and by what means, can simply be ignored ... because of the choice of genre, Lewis could embrace an unpalatable and problematic doctrine without arousing too much opposition. In *Narnia*'s hierarchy, as in the Great Chain of Being of the medieval world view, human beings stand near the top of the ladder ... humanity must rule" (70-71). Perhaps, but if fantasy is meant to convey divine truths, then what do the racial, androcentric, and anthropocentric hierarchies tell us about these "natural" or "divine" truths? This is similar to a person qualifying a racist joke by declaring, "It's okay. I'm not racist." It simply does not excuse the meaning behind the message.

The potency of ideology is in its ability to remain invisible or, if not exactly invisible, to masquerade as the natural order. By placing a strong emphasis on fairness, kindness, and the naturalness of a hierarchy which places Aslan (who, as our metaphorical God, is not a “tame lion,” does not take orders, and is certainly in no danger of becoming a colonized subject) in the position of greatest authority and those who do his bidding in the positions directly beneath him, Lewis creates a narrative world that does not question that system. Those who do are antagonists (such as the dwarves in *The Last Battle*).

In the series, King Caspian, the High King Peter, King Tirian, and to a lesser extent, King Edmund appear as idealized patriarchal figures—all just and natural monarchs, whose subjects adore them and do not question their positions of power, and all rule in the name of Aslan. They are all also ideal men of the Empire, although crucially most of the readers’ encounters with them are when they are still children or teenagers. This is a key point, for I cannot overemphasize enough how the characters’ status as children disguises the imperial overtones of their values and actions. Kutzer argues that

By the [nineteen] twenties empire is so interwoven into British life, social and private as well as political and public, that it makes an almost unavoidable appearance in children’s nurseries and in children’s stories. Empire, by the twenties, no longer presents the possibility for high adventure and heroic deeds: empire has been literally domesticated into nursery toys, stuffed tigers ... The real world might be increasingly anxious about the state of empire, but in children’s books we get the comforting image of an empire totally tamed, so tamed it can be handled even by a British boy. (99)

Although Kutzer writes specifically about the 1920s in this passage, she raises an important point: even if the real world, as she terms it, might think anxiously of the Empire and the imperial question, it is presented to children as something they—and especially male children—can control. In Narnia, all of the human children carry, to varying degrees, the proverbial “white man’s burden,” but none more so than Peter and Caspian. As previously mentioned, Peter and Caspian in particular epitomize the idealized patriarchal Christian monarch, but they also embody decidedly English characteristics, especially those useful to the imperial enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

All nations and cultures promote certain character traits, but few were “as mindful, deliberate, or purposeful about it as the British in the period of the Empire” (Singh 41). This careful construction of the British character arose, in part, to help bolster the imperial project and pass imperial ideology on to future generations: “The emphasis on character in the literature for children at the time of the British Empire was meant to serve the colonial agenda ... Character formation was considered one of the most important tools of the civilizing mission of colonialism and one of the main building blocks of a successful empire” (42). Peter and Caspian fit Singh’s description of the proper British character perfectly:

The British posited courage against cowardice, strength against weakness, virility against effeminacy, exertion against languour, principles against corruption, morality against degeneracy, hard work against sloth, adventure against caution, endurance against capitulation, duty against disaffiliation, loyalty against

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<sup>12</sup> For the sake of brevity, this analysis will focus solely on Caspian, although both characters exemplify the same ideals; in fact, except for their different origins (Narnia and Earth, respectively), Caspian and Peter are very similar characters.

infidelity, and the outdoors against the indoors. They saw themselves as doers, not talkers. (33)

Consider Caspian's first appearance in the fifth book of the series, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*: when Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace are initially pulled into Narnia, they are thrown into the Great Eastern Sea. Caspian, unknowing of their identities as of that moment, leaps from the ship in aid, with apparently little thought to his own safety. Significantly, Lewis describes him as a "white figure diving off the ship's side" (10). The contrast between whiteness and darkness is especially instrumental to our understanding of Caspian, as it alludes to both his Christian and racial purity and knightly behaviors, which help naturalize his position as monarch. At the same time, this single action paints Caspian as the epitome of ideal British character, even though he is a Narnia-born human.

I will return to my discussion of Caspian in a moment, but now I must turn to the ways in which the narrative overtly and subtly naturalizes the dominion human children hold over all of Narnia's inhabitants and environments. In part, the children's respective sojourns in Narnia serve to improve their characters, making them more moral and most importantly, better Christians. However, the series also insinuates that the citizens of Narnia require human guidance and that Aslan honors ideal humans by placing them in positions of power where they might not only save the Narnians' lives and lands, but bring them closer to Aslan. In her discussion of the British imperial compulsion to "improve" their colonial states and subjects, Singh argues, "the reward for such character is respect and awareness of being engaged in a noble endeavor. It is to shoulder one's share of the white man's burden, to discharge one's duty in bringing hope to the benighted, succour to the weak, and government to the lawless" (5). Singh's choice of the word "shoulder" is astute, for the imperial project and the concept of Christian dominion over the so-

called natural world carry with them a sense of burden—they are both presented as noble missions, yes, but they are not depicted as easy or for the faint of heart. These twinned burdens are simultaneously an honor and a punishment from God. This can be seen throughout the series, but especially clearly in the first book, *The Magician's Nephew*, when Aslan creates Narnia. During the scene—which closely reflects the world-making scene in Genesis—Aslan punishes humans for their part in destroying Charn (the world that preceded Narnia): “as Adam’s race has done the harm, Adam’s race shall help to heal it . . . you shall rule and name all these creatures, and do justice among them, and protect them from their enemies when enemies arise” (164-165). The words are significant, for they justify human superiority and dominion throughout the entire series, but they are also familiar to readers raised in or around the Christian tradition.

The narratives’ discourse about these issues works to naturalize both imperial and Christian ideologies (which are clearly bound together and cannot be separated); consequently, the shadow text suggests to the reader that Christian patriarchal human dominion is natural, justified, and ultimately the only option that will not lead to war and unhappiness. The nonhuman residents of Narnia themselves even endorse this hierarchical system; in *Prince Caspian*, for example, the country is in shambles during the usurper King Miraz’s rule; he does not abide by, let alone believe in, Aslan’s law. Consequently, the entire novel revolves around restoring a proper steward (Caspian) back into power, and all of the “true” Narnians work to raise Caspian to that position. Consider this early scene, wherein Trufflehunter, a talking Badger, introduces Prince Caspian to a group of Talking Beasts: “This is the true King of Narnia we’ve got here: a true King, coming back to true Narnia. And we beasts remember, even if Dwarfs forget, that Narnia was never right except when a son of Adam was King” (71). The passage depicts a distinctly Christian imperial fantasy: it suggests that a proper ruler can only be a white



Christian male. In this particular moment, the shadow text reveals itself, communicating to the reader that the indigenous *need* the guidance of a proper colonialist. Yet it does so innocently; nowhere in this series does Lewis condone the type of imperialism that simply seeks to benefit the colonizer economically at the expense of the colonized. This version of imperialism disguises itself as a mission to save the indigenous from their own actions and beliefs, much as Christian missionaries did during the age of Empire, decolonization, and today. On one hand, then, the text remains simple; on the surface it carries a benevolent moral message, but lying underneath that, it insinuates that Christianity and Christian value systems are the only correct ontological frameworks and that those who do not abide by these beliefs are incapable of taking care of themselves or their environment.

This sort of message appears repeatedly in the series. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, shortly after Caspian rescues the children from the sea, he, Edmund, and Lucy begin discussing what has happened in Narnia since they helped place Caspian into his position of power. As the children begin talking with Caspian, Edmund asks curiously: ““All going well?”” (20). Caspian, clearly exerting his aptitude as the rightful monarch, responds boastfully: ““you don’t suppose I’d have left my kingdom and put to sea unless all was well ... it couldn’t be better. There’s no trouble at all now between Telmarines, Dwarfs, Talking Beasts, Fauns and the rest. And we gave those troublesome giants on the frontier such a good beating last summer that they pay us tribute now”” (20). This clearly insinuates that Caspian’s nonhuman subjects require his careful supervision so that they can overcome beastly—or, in a word, unchristian—tendencies and remain productive citizens of Narnia. Both Carretero-González and Wolfe discuss Lewis’s promotion of responsible monarchy in his fiction; as I have been arguing, those who work to maintain the status quo that Aslan established are clearly given dominion over everyone

and everything else. And, as Carretero-González rightfully points out, this is an order that is clearly hierarchal and patriarchal (105).

Loombia explains that “contact with racial others was structured by the imperatives of different colonial practices, and the nature of pre-colonial societies. Early colonial discourses distinguished between people regarded as barbarous infidels ... and those who were constructed as savage” (94). Lewis distinguishes here between those who have some semblance of a culture (barbarous infidels) and those who purportedly lack any culture whatsoever (savages). For Caspian, his subjects (particularly “those troublesome giants”) seem to have some implied culture; thus, they need to be reeducated to appreciate the ostensibly superior policies and customs of Narnia. Through proper education—in the form of a “good beating”—they can and, in this case, have come to see the virtues of Caspian’s Aslan-ordained rule. Beneath this lies the assumption that certain groups require the guidance and rule of a monarch like Caspian or the human children, who are unquestionably white, English, youthful, and intent on fulfilling Aslan’s wishes. At the same time, turning back to questions of geography and environment, this assumption underscores Caspian’s behavior toward conquest and geographical exploration. Because he is named the rightful ruler of Narnia and acts in the name of Aslan, his quest of the Great Eastern Sea and the islands scattered among it is vindicated.

In the next section, I will argue that the series’ fixation with geographical exploration and adventure promotes the imperial project through the use of imperial fantasy; the novels present the Empire to children as a vast space rife with possibilities for adventure; a space comprised of places that they have an unquestionable right to explore, name, and own; and a series of places wherein they can more fully form their own identities as not only proper children of Western culture and, more specifically, Britain, but as proper followers of Christ/Aslan. The empire, as

presented in this series, is the backyard garden writ large. And this, I will argue, is a pastoral fantasy, which erases racial, geographical, and class power structures in order to present Christian Western ideology, with all of its implications, as ubiquitous, natural, and omnipotent.

### **Good, Evil, and Redeemable Environments: Naming and Claiming**

In the second chapter of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Caspian relates his main purpose for the voyage to the Pevensie siblings and Eustace:

“Well,” said Caspian, “that’s rather a long story. Perhaps you remember that when I was a child my usurping uncle Miraz got rid of seven friends of my father’s ... by sending them off to explore the unknown Eastern seas beyond the Lone Islands.”

“Yes,” said Lucy, “and none of them ever came back.”

“Right. Well, on my coronation day, with Aslan’s approval, I swore an oath that, if once I established peace in Narnia, I would sail east myself for a year and a day to find my father’s friends or to learn of their deaths and avenge them if I could.” (20-21)

This relatively unassuming passage indicates much about Caspian’s role and the worldview promoted within the novel and the entire series more generally. In part, the section reemphasizes Caspian’s position as the rightful monarch of Narnia. Lewis accomplishes this by reminding his reader that Miraz was a “usurper,” which juxtaposes him to Caspian. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of justice in the worldview promoted throughout the series. As Marek Oziewicz argues, Lewis placed an emphasis on a myth-derived conception of justice, which absolutely privileges those who seek to avenge those who have been wronged (44). For Caspian, saving and

avenging his father's friends would simultaneously honor his father (a common Christian ideal) and right those wrongs committed by Miraz; ultimately, both these actions carry the ultimate aim of pleasing Aslan. Finally, this passage hints at the contradictory and complex relationship between the environment and humanity that Lewis presents in *The Chronicles*. That Miraz ordered an exploration of uncharted waters indicates the importance of mapping, exploration, and the expansion of empire within the Narnian world (an attitude that Caspian holds as well, as evinced by his desire to explore and name unclaimed geographies along their journey), but perhaps more importantly, the fact that those seven lords never returned points to the threat of unexplored and untamed environments (whether oceanic or land). This attitude underpins Caspian's desire to explore, chart, name, and ultimately, possess these mysterious geographies, but unlike Miraz, he sets out on this mission with pure intentions and as a result, within the constraints of the novel's world, is destined to succeed.

Nevertheless, even if these actions are untainted within the fictive world, this behavior remains clearly linked with colonialism and imperialism. Adams discusses the ways in which colonialism strove to exert control through the process of claiming, studying, and renaming environments:

Colonialism promoted the naming and classification of both people and places, as well as nature, in each case with the aim of control. Landscapes were renamed, and these names were entrenched through mapping and the formal education system ... Colonial states occupied human landscapes whose nature, names, and boundaries were to them indistinct; but they conceptualized them as specific entities ... (24)

To put it roughly, the series features three basic types of environments: sacred, malevolent, and those which are chthonic, but, through proper treatment, can be redeemed. All of these environments are mapped and named with the intention of gaining understanding, control, and specific use, which, in this novel, is always spiritual. The imperial imperative to explore and claim unused and unknown landscapes is never clearer than in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, as the entire plot centers on this very fantasy of high imperial adventure, but it certainly appears in all of the novels.

A blatant instance of colonial action occurs early in the narrative when the ship and its crew reach the Lone Islands, a distant territory of Narnia that also serves as the link between the civilized and cultivated landscapes of Narnia and the wild unknown of the Eastern Sea and its islands. As they approach the Lone Islands, Caspian, Edmund, and Lucy openly question why Narnia possesses them, since they are so far removed from the rest of Narnia. Although this dialogue begins to question the colonial project, Edmund iterates that the islands were Narnian even before his reign as king. In doing so, he implies that the circumstances of Narnia's acquisition of the island are irrelevant and erases any possibility of unjust colonial conquest—they have always been Narnian. In contrast, Lucy reminisces on the pastorally Edenic and atemporal qualities of the islands: “‘I’m sorry we’re not landing on Felimath,’ said Lucy. ‘I’d like to walk there again. It was so lonely — a nice kind of loneliness, and all grass and clover and soft sea air’” (39). Lucy’s abrupt shift in focus from how Narnia acquired the islands to their pastoral virtues obscures colonial violence by invoking a pure Edenic landscape. This type of pastoral invocation, DeLoughrey and Handley argue, is a common way in which imperial

ideology hid its violence.<sup>13</sup> As such, Lucy's desire and nostalgia for "a lost Eden, an idealized space outside of human time, is closely connected to the violence of colonial rearrangements of human ecologies" (DeLoughrey and Handley 20).

But the Lone Islands are not, in fictive reality, "an idealized space outside of human time" (20). In the absence of the Narnian government's watchful eye, they have been taken over by an amoral expropriating governor who does not recognize Narnia's sovereignty and allows rampant slave trading to occur.<sup>14</sup> The characters and events of these chapters are extreme caricatures of improper stewardship, leaving the reader little to no room to question Caspian's imperative to restore proper Narnian order on the Lone Islands. In the name of religious right, Caspian is willing to do battle with the unscrupulous men who currently hold reign and reconquer the islands so that virtuous order can be restored and Lucy's nostalgic vision of the formerly Edenic islands can become a lived reality once again. In this instance, there is no moral quandary concerning the rightful stewards of the islands; good and evil are laid out in distinct terms. So, while the reader may have no reason to question Caspian's actions (and why should she? He is ridding the islands of slavery and other forms of human exploitation!), his actions also work to return the islands to an extremely pastoral and agrarian state where its inhabitants can seek communion with Aslan through diligent environmental stewardship. Adams argues that "agriculture was the most favored means of organizing 'nature's government' ... under the

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<sup>13</sup> Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin also suggest that this type of pastoral "is about the legitimization of highly codified relations between socially differentiated people" and these relations are mediated and mystified by "supposedly universal cultural attitudes to land" (84).

<sup>14</sup> Lewis emphatically condemns slavery several times in this novel while extolling the Christian virtues of diligent work under a just monarch.

doctrine of improvement, [it] could reclaim wastelands and make barbarous people civilized” (27). Here, by reinstating proper Christian stewardship, which values pastoral and agrarian landscapes, Caspian can rid the islands of barbarism. Read in this manner, the connection between Caspian’s actions and colonial ideas of conservation are clear and, as Adams and DeLoughrey and Handley argue, colonialist discourse often compulsively pressed discourses of purity and conservation practices upon the colonized people and geographies (Adams 29-33; DeLoughrey and Handley 19-20).

The value placed on pure or pastoral environments stems partially from the emphasis Lewis places on baptism and spiritual renewal. The baptismal theme runs clearly throughout the entire series, but the connection between physical environment and spiritual renewal is particularly evident in the chapters of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* that concern Eustace’s transformation into a dragon and subsequent rebirth.<sup>15</sup> It seems that Eustace is in Narnia for the sole purpose of being saved; in this book, at least, he has nothing to offer Narnia but has much to gain.

In the middle of the book, Eustace’s nasty behavior reaches its peak when, after the crew docks at a seemingly uninhabited island, he wanders off into the unknown land. Although the island is described as awe-inspiring, Lewis is quick to remind his reader of its ominous nature: “The scene would have been pretty in a picture but was rather oppressive in real life. It was not a country that welcomed visitors” (79). As Eustace moves deeper into the forest, the landscape

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<sup>15</sup> Lewis clearly identifies Eustace as a spoiled, cruel, and decidedly unchristian child in need of a profound moral transformation; the novel opens with a description of him as a “puny little person” who liked “bossing and bullying” (2). In other words, he is not the ideal English subject.

engulfs him until he no longer knows where he is. The absence of people and the utter wilderness suggests to Eustace that this island is evil and the loneliness he begins to feel there marks the beginning of his redemption (82-85). In the subsequent chapter, the magic of the island transforms Eustace into a dragon. Although the narrative suggests that this environment is malevolent, Eustace's suffering there leads him to his ultimate redemption. Eventually, Aslan shows himself to Eustace, strips him of his dragon flesh, and unearths a purer version of the boy, who can then begin developing a new moral character. Since Lewis saw nature's value not in economic terms, but in its spiritual usefulness (Dickerson and O'Hara 40), the once chthonic island, as the site of Eustace's baptismal redemption, undergoes its own baptism, becomes God-filled, and thus is spiritually valuable to the Narnians. After Eustace regains his human form, he relates his tale; the others rejoice in Aslan's grace and, comforted by his godly corporeal presence on the dreaded island, proceed to claim the land for Narnia on the basis of its spiritual worth.

In the context of this argument, the island's redemption is based entirely on Eustace's experience there. Because of the profound physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences that Eustace experienced and the others witness, the characters feel as if they have come to know and possess the land, which reinforces the imperial practice of naming, controlling, and thus understanding nature on this spiritual and nation-building quest.

The presence of unredeemable environments in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is a crucial component of the environmental vision Lewis creates. According to Paul S. Fiddles, Lewis believed not only that nature is a mere "phase to be superseded by something else [God's country]" (95) but also that nature is an "enemy-occupied territory," full of sin and the battle between good and evil (96). In the series, the characters encounter many completely evil



environments, such as the ruins of Charn in *The Magician's Nephew*, the city of Tashbaan in *The Horse and His Boy*, and Deathwater Island and The Dark Island in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.<sup>16</sup> In each of these environments, no material means can save the characters from the evilness of the natural world; only Aslan alone can. In particular, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, after Aslan frees them from Deathwater's mysterious power, Reepicheep, the noble Talking Mouse, emphasizes the importance of naming the island and thus their fear: "this is a place with a curse on it. Let us get back on board at once. And if I might have the honor of naming this island, I should call it Deathwater" (Lewis 137). Lewis's treatment of evil environments suggests that it is these places in particular that require naming, binding the text to the imperial idea that "certain territories . . . require and beseech domination" (Said 9; author's emphasis). In naming their fears and placing their utmost faith in Aslan's power, these characters are able to blunt nature's evil capabilities. This would be less problematic if these environments were purely fantastic, but they also eerily reflect environments that we experience in reality. While these landscapes are awe-inspiring in their evilness, by starkly contrasting sublime environments with evil ones, Lewis implies that only environments that are openly inviting to human use are valuable, thus creating a troubling environmental hierarchy.

It is no surprise that the environments most valued by the Narnians are their own lands, which closely resemble Lewis's own English pastoral countryside. In *The Horse and His Boy*, for example, the North (where Narnia lies) is metonymically linked with the environments of England and is clearly a privileged landscape. The characters see it as a place of plenty, of hope, and of a finer race of people. In contrast, the environments that Lewis depicts as dangerous and

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<sup>16</sup> The water on Deathwater turns everything it touches into gold and also incites hateful greed in those who visit it. On the Dark Island, nightmares come to life and plague their dreamers.

undesirable in the text are those linked with the so-called Orient and Africa: desert landscapes, coastal fishing towns, and the dirty, anti-pastoral city of Tashbaan.<sup>17</sup> This privileges the pastoral English landscape, reinscribing the cultural notion that safe, pleasant, and valuable landscapes—in other words, those adapted for human needs—are only those with lush grass and trees; in short, those recognizable to the English child who is familiar with parks and gardens, but knows from countless stories and cultural training that large foreign cities are dirty and dangerous, as are certain environments, like the desert. In fact, the narrator, who can be so easily read as Lewis himself, draws this connection as he describes Shasta's awe upon seeing the Narnian landscape for the first time:

Then they began going up, slowly and zigzagging a good deal, for the hills were steep. It was all open, park-like country with no roads or houses in sight.

Scattered trees, never thick enough to be a forest, were everywhere. Shasta, who had lived all his life in an almost treeless grassland, had never seen so many or so

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Consider Veldman's helpful argument:

In Narnia, the speech of the beasts serves as a crucial link. Humans and animals exist in harmony; the mystery and power in the animal world remain, but humanity's terror has gone. In contrast, talking beasts and mythical creatures like the fauns and dwarfs do not live in Calormen, Narnia's enemy across the desert.

This land of cruelty and corruption has cut its ties to the natural world. (74)

To extend her point, the shadow text suggests that these othered environments (devoid of any English pastoral landscape) do not offer the same spiritual experiences and foster those who live immoral lives.

many kinds. If you had been there you would probably have known (he didn't) that he was seeing oaks, beeches, silver birches, rowans, and sweet chestnuts ...

"Isn't it simply glorious!" said Aravis.

At the first ridge Shasta turned in the saddle and looked back. There was no sign of Tashbaan; the desert, unbroken except by the narrow green crack which they had traveled down, spread to the horizon. (148-149)

The shadow text suggests that the reader should pity Shasta since he has never known the colluded English/Narnian pastoral landscape as home, but instead has only resided in anti-pastoral landscapes, which, the texts suggest, are home only to those who do not abide by Aslan's rule and are thus devilish and othered. Lewis figures Shasta as pitiable and ignorant here, for he has not yet had the opportunity to reap the spiritual benefits of "the natural world." Yet here he also rises quite literally risen above the tainted environments of Calormen, so the passage suggests that the reader should rejoice for Shasta because he had been able to begin his escape from those anti-pastoral landscapes and all that they host and begin his own pilgrimage to Narnia, which is depicted as the promised land for any character who has the potential to become a follower of Aslan. This passage implies that Lewis assumes his own reader calls a pastoral or at least semi-pastoral landscape home, thus ostracizing any reader who does not know what "oaks, beeches, silver birches, rowans, and sweet chestnuts" look like or what it means to be in their presence while denying any worldview that might privilege or see spiritual value in anti-pastoral environments. Clearly, this series indicates that those are environments to be conquered, not revered as sacred or thought of affectionately as *home*.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the inexplicable elements of nature cause great anxiety amongst the voyagers, in part because the travel itself is about acquiring knowledge—namely concerning the demise of the seven lords sent abroad by King Miraz, what they will find at the world's end, and where Aslan's country is. The unknown is both exciting and terrifying, but nature, particularly the nature found in unfamiliar environments, resists understanding and control. The voyagers are left to faith, and, in fact, each encounter with a new environment appears to be a test for the characters and the reader. Will they trust in Aslan? Will they do his bidding? This could be said for any one of the books, but due to the episodic nature of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, where in each chapter the characters face a new environment and a new challenge, these questions of faith shine clearly on the surface of the text. In the chapter “the Island of the Voices,” for example, what nature can shield from their knowledge becomes an immediate psychological and physical threat. When they dock on the island, they discover that the landscape is highly cultivated in the style of a proper English garden, yet there are no visible people. What they see as comforting and familiar at home, here is an interruption in the imperial fantasy; instead of finding wild, untouched wilderness, they are confronted with an eerily empty human-shaped environment. The absence of people in such a constructed environment is much more ominous than in a vast wilderness since it suggests a human presence. These anxieties are confirmed when Lucy hears a steady, loud thumping; she becomes panicked and all the more so when she hears “the Voice”: “It was really very dreadful because she could still see nobody at all. The whole of that park-like country still looked as quiet and empty as it had looked when they first landed. Nevertheless, only a few feet away from her, a voice spoke. And what it said was: ‘Mates, now’s our chance’” (Lewis 142). In the following pages, the voyagers prepare to do battle with their invisible foes, but are overcome, namely because the children cannot fight what

they cannot see. It becomes clear that the invisible “creatures,” as Edmund refers to them, do not mean them physical harm, but instead need Lucy to recite a charm to make them visible once again (142-154). Since apparently there is no immediate threat from the invisible creatures, the characters’ anxieties shift to another invisible element of the island environment: the Magician who keeps the creatures invisible. As Lucy works to reverse the spell, she remains filled with unease until Aslan appears and tells her that she must “meet the master of this house” (171). Aslan’s endorsement of this master quiets all of Lucy’s fears and she unquestioningly prepares herself to do his bidding; this action, of course, serves to endorse Christian obedience.

The beginning of the next chapter introduces us to Coriakin, the master of the house. It is clear that his rule is not a joyous one, but it is, by Aslan’s rule, righteous; Aslan, after greeting him, asks, ““Do you grow weary, Coriakin, of ruling such foolish subjects as I have given you here?”” (173). The Magician, in a telling response, replies, ““No’ ... ‘they are very stupid but there is no real harm in them. I begin to grow rather fond of the creatures. Sometimes, perhaps, I am a little impatient, waiting for the day when they can be governed by wisdom instead of this rough magic’” (173-174). At this point in the novel, the reader and Lucy still do not know what kind of creature the Magician holds dominion over, but whatever type of creature they are, Aslan ordains their subordination. It is crucial to keep in mind that a crucial component of colonialism is the idea that certain people (and creatures), geographies, and knowledge are superior to others. The discourse of imperialist culture is rife with language and ideas that subordinate others while establishing the authority of the colonizer (Said 9; Adams 30). In this example, Lewis describes the Dufflepuds as less-than-human creatures with inferior intelligence. They cannot be left to their own devices, but instead require the supervision of Coriakin. Naysayers may argue that this holds no bearing to colonialism since the Dufflepuds are obviously not *human*, but this is really

just another way in which this pastoral narrative diffuses its imperial alliances. Since the Dufflepuds are near facsimiles to humans, they function as a clear allegory for the dangers of disobeying those who possess superior knowledge and authority.

Like Caspian, Coriakin is a traditional authority figure: he is white, male, ordained by Aslan, and preaches the virtues of Christian stewardship and morals. Further still, like the tendency of colonialists to classify “indigenous people as fauna rather than as human beings” (DeLoughrey and Handley 18), Lewis colludes the Dufflepuds with the island environment. When Coriakin takes Lucy out to meet the Dufflepuds, at first she does not see them; instead, she just notices some “mushroom things.” As she looks at the objects,

Each of the ‘mushrooms’ suddenly turned upside-down. The little bundles which had lain at the bottom of the stalks were heads and bodies. The stalks themselves were legs ... She saw in a moment why they had looked like mushrooms. They had been lying flat on their backs each with its single leg straight up in the air and its enormous foot spread above it. (Lewis 179)

As the Dufflepuds wake and begin hopping about, Lucy is struck with the humor of it all: ““Oh, the funnies, the funnies’ cried Lucy ... ‘Did *you* make them like that?’” (180; author’s emphasis). The Magician, also laughing, admits that he did in fact make his subjects monopods. By transforming them into strange, ineffectual, and monstrous creatures Coriakin exerts his own superiority by dehumanizing his subjects. The injustice of such behavior is minimized and obscured within the text, however, since Lewis’s careful description of the Dufflepuds as stupid and humorous creatures who are part of the indigenous landscape suggests that Coriakin’s rough rule is necessary and even kind. In this sense, the pastoral qualities of this text and this section

especially “tend to emphasise the stability, or work toward the stabilisation, of the dominant order, in part through the symbolic management — which sometimes means the silencing—of less privileged social groups” (Huggan and Tiffin 84).

The Dufflepuds also serve to quell anxieties about colonialism and the Other. Although the characters feel intense fear when they initially arrive at the island, by revealing the Dufflepuds as silly, stupid, and harmless indigenous creatures who are closely aligned with the earth, but incapable of properly manipulating it, the narrative suggests to the reader that he need not fear the far-off colonies nor their indigenous inhabitants. Not only are they not a threat, the shadow text suggests, but they are also clearly in need of colonial rule. Once again, Lewis propels the fantasy of the white man’s burden: the Dufflepuds need Coriakin’s stewardship. In this chapter, then, Lewis presents a mysterious and threatening environment and, in a mere matter of pages, recreates it as a welcoming place to the colonizing child voyagers by first exposing its mysteries and then bringing them fully under colonial control.

### **The Way to Heaven**

Up to this point, this discussion has only briefly touched upon one of the most prominent elements of Lewis’s environmental vision: the idea that human encounters with and uses of nature should be intended to bring each individual closer to God. The reward for respectful stewardship and spiritual communion with the material world, Lewis insinuates, is entry into heaven, which *The Chronicles* presents as the elusive—yet promised—perfectly Edenic world free of all unpleasant material realities. It is nature and it is not nature. It is a fantasy of nature, the ultimate pastoral landscape outside of place and time. My earlier discussion of Eustace’s transformation in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* raised this point, but this section will more closely examine the ways in which Lewis reduces environmental appreciation and stewardship to

a duty—albeit a duty to be performed joyfully—in order to leave it for Heaven. While this environmental sensibility may not seem inherently problematic, in the series it manifests itself as a colonizing imperative—the Narnians use the exploration and conquering of new lands to commune with Aslan and bring Aslan back into fallen (anti-pastoral) environments. The model Lewis presents does not tell the reader to look at nature, but to look through nature to God. In a sense, every conscious experience with nature—that is, places outside of culture—should be a search for the sublime, for the Edenic heaven on Earth. While this belief in itself is not inherently imperial, the behaviors that arise from it mirror prominent imperial attitudes, which paint indigenous people as heathen, their environments in need of reclamation, and prize certain types of environs and encounters with nature over others.

It also contradicts another important aspect of Lewis's attitude toward nature within this series: that, through death, the material world will be transcended for heaven, a place free from all unpleasant ecological realities. This large contradiction points to others. For Lewis, nature is to be revered as God's creation, but also feared for its abilities to host sin. It can bring people into communion with God, but it must also be controlled, mapped, and understood. In short, nature must be loved, but also feared (much like Aslan and many Christian interpretations of God). Despite these contradictions, throughout the series, Lewis communicates one very clear message: Christian stewardship is essential, but as means to gain entry into heaven, and consequent release from the sin-riddled natural world.

This becomes apparent in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*: the environments closest to Aslan's country and the end of the world (and thus the furthest from civilization) are the most Edenic. Symbolically, the sublime landscapes the voyagers encounter suggest that those who move physically and spiritually closest to God, or Aslan, deserve to experience the most perfect



environments, which are free of sin, evil, and degradation. The ethereal landscapes they encounter while sailing through the Last Sea are the most sublime, fantastic, and beautifully pastoral of the text; they, in part, function as a bridge from the natural world of Narnia to heaven. Gone are the threats of storms, monsters, and malevolent magic; instead, the voyagers are privileged to drink sweet water from the ocean (247), sail quickly without wind (250), and experience awe-inspiring sights shining with golden light. In actuality, they are the most sublime and fantastic environments we see, the most unlike those we would find in this world, and the least burdened by material inconveniences. In this place, outside of culture, the characters see Nature. This untouched nature, the text suggests, is as close to Edenic and, in a word, sinless, as nature can be. The material world pales beside it.

As they approach the end of the world, Caspian and his crew, by Aslan's orders, must return to Narnia—their duties to the material world are incomplete (259-263). However, Aslan permits Reepicheep, the Pevensie children, and Eustace to continue onward. Reepicheep is the only one who fully moves into Aslan's country, where it is the narrator's "belief that he came safe to Aslan's country and is alive there to this day" (266). Reepicheep's joy, coupled with Caspian's displeasure for having to return to his duties in the natural world, implies that death, the transcendence of the material world, is a reward, while life itself is merely a passage that readies and earns a subject entry into heaven, the ultimate Edenic and immaterial environment (Fiddles 95). The impetus to earn release from the material world reduces nature to a burden that must be carried in order to eventually escape it. Caspian's behavior here is telling: he does not wish to return to Narnia; he wants to continue on to Aslan's land.

However, the fate of the Pevensie siblings and their cousin Eustace is more important to my ultimate argument concerning the connections between *The Chronicles*' environmental

sensibility and colonial ideology than Caspian's behavior, because it illustrates just how overtly instructive the books actually are. In a passage teeming with Biblical references, the children leave Reepicheep and walk through the paradisaal landscape; a lamb meets them, and offers them a breakfast of fish. After they dine, Lucy asks if this is the way to Aslan's country: "'Not for you,' said the Lamb. 'For you the door into Aslan's country is from your own world'" (268). The Lamb then quickly transforms into Aslan, who informs the children that there is a door into his world in every country. Even so, Lucy is still afraid that she will never know him outside of Narnia. It is at this moment that Lewis's Christian message is most apparent. In response to Edmund, who asks if he is "there too," Aslan remarks: "... there I have another name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there" (270). The implications for this are multifold, but with regard to this specific argument, this passage reinforces the environmental principles presented throughout the entire series. As Dickerson and O'Hara suggest, the children and readers "will return ... and are *meant* to bring back to our world the lessons they learn in Narnia" (64; author's emphasis). Since pastoral is a discourse of retreat, "there must in some sense be a return ... to a context in which the results of the journey are understood" (Gifford 81). In other words, a successful pastoral will make its lessons relevant to the audiences' lives, which is what this passage ultimately seeks to do. It implies that those who adhere to Christian standards are entitled to the land and the lesser subjects who reside on it, so long as the hero of the stewardship model remains humble, patient, and abides by an imperially inflected understanding of Christian environmental stewardship. The pastoral qualities allow these messages to masquerade as universal. Through his pastoral children's stories, Lewis implies that the only rightful environmental stewards are those sons of

Adam and daughters of Eve who seek to find God through nature, serve him, and ultimately transcend the material world for heaven.

### **Improper Stewards and the End of Nature**

Lewis, like many children's authors, sharply juxtaposes his heroes to his villains. The true villains of the series—Jadis (the White Witch) and Shift (the ape in *The Last Battle*), for example—are not leant psychological complexity, but instead are painted as wholly, essentially evil antagonists who highlight the equally essential virtues of the heroes, such as Peter and Lucy, whose faith and virtue never falter. In creating this binary, Lewis offers his readers a clear division of good and evil. While this binary is muddled by characters, such as Edmund (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*) and Eustace (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*), who suffer momentary lapses in character before being redeemed through various means, they serve more to model redemption and the temptation of evil more than anything else. The series' villains are beyond salvation, and this clear division reifies the right ways of doing things.

Similarly, all of the series' plot lines address, in one way or another, with anxiety concerning power. What happens when the wrong people achieve power? More importantly, what happens when Narnia itself is colonized? The obvious consequences include the subjugation of Aslan's followers, but colonization also brings about significant environmental destruction. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Jadis disrupts the seasons; it is always winter when the Pevensie children first enter Narnia. Jadis uses climate change as a means to control her subjects; psychologically, the perpetual winter (without Christmas) serves as a constant reminder of her power and the bleakness of their situation. But it also has material consequences left unaddressed by the narrative: if there is only winter, how do the Narnians acquire food? Under Jadis' reign, Narnia sees no growth, only death. The text does not bother

with this question, but instead offers a simple, faith-based resolution. When Aslan returns to the land, spring rushes in. With the return of proper stewards (the Pevensie children), the climate rights itself (121-133).

*The Last Battle*, an overt allegory of Revelations, raises similar questions of colonization, improper stewardship, and environmental degradation, but, through its apocalyptic imagery and plot, it offers a much more damning message than *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Whereas Aslan and the Pevensie children succeed in regaining power of Narnia in the earlier novel, *The Last Battle* depicts an older, wearier Narnia riddled with corruption and nonbelievers.

While environmentalists and religious zealots alike commonly employ apocalyptic narratives (Garrard), the novel's shadow text also carries powerful cultural fears concerning race, colonization, and unchristian worldviews. Apocalyptic narratives tend to put forth "an extreme moral dualism that divides the world sharply into friend and enemy" and, at the same time, emphasize the "'unveiling' of trans-historical truth and the corresponding role of believers as the ones to whom, and for whom, the veil of history is rent" (Garrard 86). In other words, proleptic apocalypse posits a moment when God reveals a divine truth that validates a particular world-view. *The Last Battle* is no different. Furthermore, as the series' coda, the apocalyptic novel solidifies the messages presented in the earlier texts by presenting them as divine and final truths.

The novel opens with Puzzle, a foolish donkey, and Shift, an old ape, who have come across a lion hide. Shift, to benefit his own self, tricks Puzzle into masquerading as Aslan by wearing the hide (10-14). Shift, the reader quickly learns, cannot be trusted—he profits off of others' goodness and desire to please Aslan. The racial and geographical implications of Shift's character are ludicrously apparent, but the overt symbolism also reveals the more insidious

discursive underpinnings that make such associations possible and even “natural.” Placed in contrast to the series’ fair skinned heroes, Shift’s explicit connection to Africa exposes a shadow text that reiterates a now familiar message concerning who can and cannot be a responsible environmental steward.

When Shift enters into a trade agreement with the Calormenes, allowing them to fell Lantern Waste, the animate woods of Narnia, the message becomes compounded (20-28). King Tirian and Jewel, a unicorn, quickly learn of the destruction, and they travel to “find the villains” (21). This marks the beginning of the novel’s central conflict. They quickly come across a scene of great environmental destruction and cruelty, which Lewis describes in rich and telling detail:

Right through the middle of that ancient forest ... a broad lane had already been opened. It was a hideous lane like a raw gash in the land, full of muddy ruts where felled trees had been dragged down to the river. There was a great crowd of people at work, and a cracking of whips, and horses tugging and straining as they dragged at the logs. The first thing that struck the King and the Unicorn was that about half the people in the crowd were not Talking Beasts but Men. The next thing was that these men were not the fair-haired men of Narnia: they were dark, bearded men from Calormen, that great and cruel country ... (26)

Upon the realization that the Calormenes are harvesting Narnia’s holy wood and enslaving the Talking Beasts, the King and Jewel take violent action, but it is already too late. The Calormenes effectively colonize Narnia. Although the environmental message appears straightforward, the text’s racial and cultural anxieties trouble it, especially once the real Aslan appears and it becomes clear that the plot mirrors Revelations.

As the Narnians do battle against the Calormenes and their allies, it becomes apparent that evil will prevail (161-162); it is too entrenched in the land to not. However, as rapidly as it becomes evident that the Narnians would lose the battle, it becomes clear the world of Narnia is ending. As Aslan gathers his subjects to join him in heaven, all other living creatures, including the Calormenes, are left behind, dividing the world neatly into the saved and the damned (191-193).

Thus the fear of colonization and desire to escape the material world presented separately in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* come together in *The Last Battle* in such a way that the series' environmental messages compound and confuse. At the end of the series, Narnia's noble populations and environments suffer under the colonization of racialized villains before escaping to heaven. The apocalyptic denouement reiterates the series' concern with power, stewardship practices, and original sin, but it also offers the readers an escape. In fact, the characters witness the end of nature as they make their way to heaven. Only the good has a place there; it is "more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below" (225). The final pages abound with descriptions of an Edenic land exactly like England and Narnia, but without the unpleasant environments, people, and creatures the heroes battled throughout the series. Here, and throughout the other books, pastoral diffuses culture and environmental stewardship into simple binary pairs (right and wrong, good and evil, Christian and unchristian) that fall apart under scrutiny. We cannot understand nature and our place in it through such simple terms. Moreover, examined concurrently, the pastoral elements of each text give way to a shadow text inseparable from the cultural, racial, and environmental discourses prominent during the mid-twentieth century and, in certain cases, today.

## Conclusion

While some may argue that Lewis's use of mythopoeia to create a fantastic world does not apply to our real environment and attitudes toward nature, the widely accepted view that *The Chronicles of Narnia* are to be read as allegories, or parallel images of our world meant to educate our children, disallows such a simple dismissal of the imperial ideologies that appear within this series. As Adams claims, "ideas forged under colonial rule still fly, like a comet's tale of ideological debris ... They have enduring power" (19). While the environments Lewis creates within his novels are certainly awe-inspiring and complex, we must not blindly accept the claim that the environmental vision he presents is unfailingly ubiquitous and just. The legacies of colonialism—including its social and environmental impacts—demand that we critically examine dominant Western environmentalisms, moving beyond parochial and imperial behaviors in order to address the multitude of global environmental problems we face. Simply cultivating an appreciation for pastoral environments and "true" Nature in our younger generations will not suffice because it will not help our children understand the complicated relationships between lingering forms of imperialism, such as economic and cultural globalization, and the environmental degradation prompted all-too-often by the neocolonial workings of global capital.

Should we toss *The Chronicles of Narnia* aside then? Not necessarily. Considering the lasting popularity of this series and the recent and forthcoming film adaptations produced by Walden Media, the battle would be futile. Instead, we should adopt Kutzer's recommendation for using "classic" children's works in productive ways:

There can be no formula, only questioning, and the label 'classic' immediately forecloses questioning. The answer is guided reading. Read in context, followed by fair and open discussion, against and along with other accounts, other experiences, such books are valuable, not simply as tools but as conduits. To

encourage and facilitate such reading is not asking too much of the child, but it is asking a lot of the adult. (197)

This does ask a lot of the adult, but it is a challenge that we must confront if we continue to give our children *The Chronicles of Narnia* and other classic works that carry problematic ideologies with them from their particular moments of creation. The assertion that children do not pick up upon the messages circulating within the shadow text is one which denies the possibilities of a perceptive child reader and assumes an innocence that might not exist, which is a form of colonization in its own right, as Nodelman argues in “The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children’s Literature.”

Read without questioning or guidance from an adult willing to engage in these difficult conversations, *The Chronicles of Narnia* can indeed colonize the child. I am in no way attempting to present Lewis as a villain or suggest that he intended to maliciously brainwash his child audiences, but as Kutzer and Singh argue, all stories carry with them their cultural baggage. As Kutzer argues, “for the most part, empire is presented as natural and good to children, and that although diluted, this presentation of empire continues well into the twentieth century, although gradually empire is encoded as nostalgia for a more arcadian and ordered English life” (xvi). As I have demonstrated, the series does present certain forms of imperialism positively, whether Lewis did so consciously or unconsciously is a moot point. The pastoral nature of these texts presents childhood as “an ideal, innocent kingdom of its own,” separate from the adult sphere but which also strives to maintain that supposed innocence:

Adults may be aware that a long-accepted cultural code is crumbling, that the world is shifting in unnerving and poorly understood ways, but they want both to



shield children from these changes and encourage them to continue believing in and practicing cultural beliefs and codes that are no longer unquestioned in the adult world, perhaps in an unconscious desire to maintain those earlier cultural codes. In this sense, children's fiction is highly conservative, interested in preserving the past rather than in preparing children for a realistic adult future. (Kutzer xvi)

Our children deserve for us to stop assuming they cannot read the shadow texts of the books we give them; they deserve to read texts that present a realistic representation of the past, present, and future political, cultural, and environmental moments; and they deserve for us to stop assuming they are naïve and incapable of understanding. Instead of hoping that they will not notice the problematic messages promoted in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, we should prepare to openly and honestly discuss them.

We cannot teach our children environmentalism by simply presenting them with descriptions of beautifully Edenic environments. That is not our reality; doing so is subscribing to a pastoral fantasy that reduces our current pressing environmental realities and needs, such as climate change, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and continued reliance on fossil fuels. Geraldine Massey and Clare Bradford define children's environmental texts as those "which thematize contemporary ecological issues" and function "to socialize young people into becoming the responsible and empathetic adults of tomorrow by positioning readers as ecocitizens, dedicated to both sustainable development in the local sphere and also global responsibility" (109). Their emphasis on the local and the global is key; we must teach our children that local needs might not be universal. When we employ this definition, *The Chronicles of Narnia* do not qualify as environmental texts, for they present a pastoral and parochial

environmental vision that does not recognize the diversity of ecological thought, practice, and needs, nor does it acknowledge that all environments deserve our appreciation, not just those that fulfill a Edenic fantasy.

Instead of wholeheartedly accepting this series as a tool to educate our children about environmental stewardship and appreciation, we should read them against and in conjunction with other texts that represent differing environmental perspectives, such as *Ship Breaker* (Paolo Bacigalupi); *Hoot* (Carl Hiassen); and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Mildred D. Taylor).<sup>18</sup> In doing so, we can teach our younger generations that environmentalism is not simply about privileging wild or pastoral landscapes at the expense of the denying very real racial, cultural, and economic situations. Instead, we can help our youth develop a worldview that sees environmentalism as inseparable from questions of hegemonic and oppressive systems of power.

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to those I have listed above, *Green Boy* (Susan Cooper), *Julie of the Wolves* (Jean Craighead George), and *the Island of the Blue Dolphins* (Scott O'Dell) each offer a very different environmental perspective from *the Chronicles* and each other. Even more contemporary and popular work, such as the *Harry Potter* series (J.K. Rowling) and the *Hunger Games* trilogy (Suzanne Collins) contain environmental themes. For a more expansive list, The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment's website offers several extensive bibliographies of environmental children's literature.

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