



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 1
Issue 2

Article 15

January 1971

The "Hnau" Creatures of C.S. Lewis

Ellen Rothberg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythpro>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rothberg, Ellen (1971) "The "Hnau" Creatures of C.S. Lewis," *Mythcon Proceedings*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythpro/vol1/iss2/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythcon Proceedings by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

SWOSUTM

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

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Abstract

Discusses various species in the Space Trilogy considered to be “hnau,” or rational beings: the eldila, sorns, hrossa, and pfiltriggi. Compares this treatment of rationality and self-awareness with the Talking Beasts of Narnia in *The Magician’s Nephew* and *The Last Battle*. Concludes that Lewis’s purpose is to show Man’s interconnectedness with, and responsibility for, the rest of creation.

Keywords

Lewis, C.S. —Characters—Hnau; Lewis, C.S. Space Trilogy (Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength)

The "Hnau" Creatures of C.S. Lewis

by Ellen Rothberg

In C.S. Lewis' Space Trilogy and his Narnia books, a number of creatures who resemble human beings in their apparent rationality are presented. They exhibit highly developed language and highly structured societies, but seem, for the most part, superior to Man in their peaceful and productive interactions with other creatures and Nature. The reader can readily relate to these "hnau" creatures because of two very human qualities which they all possess, reason and humor. Yet in many ways they are more than human. As Stella Gibbons says, "Lewis gives his creatures these two basically human characteristics and then subtly modifies them by the use of elements widely differing from those experienced by Man... (They) can think and smile, but their thoughts and smiles are not like human thoughts and smiles..."¹

One of the ways in which Lewis' creatures do resemble human beings, though, is in the hierarchical structure of their society as displayed in the Malacandran community. "Beasts must be ruled by hnau and hnau by eldila and eldila by Maleldil," explains an old sorn to Ransom in Lewis' Out of the Silent Planet.² A look at the four main species of creatures living on Malacandra will further indicate the contrasting levels of culture and authority inherent in each.

The Eldila have been described by Roger L. Green as "Angel(s) or Intelligence(s) or Vice-roy(s) of God."³ They are elusive in character and it seems easier, perhaps, to describe them in terms of what they are not rather than what they are. Eldila "do not eat, breed, breathe, or suffer natural death..."⁴ Lewis' Eldila are "creatures alien in kind, very powerful, and very intelligent." They are "... not animals... but they had some kind of material vehicle whose presence could (in principle) be scientifically verified."⁵ As one of the sorns explains to Ransom, "Oyarsa (highest of eldila) does not die... does not breed. His body is not like ours, nor yours; it is hard to see and the light goes through it... He (Oyarsa) is the greatest of eldila who ever came to a handra." When Ransom asks "What are eldila and why can't I see them? Have they no bodies?", the sorn replies, "Of course they have bodies. There are a great many bodies you cannot see... The swiftest thing that touches our bodies in light... But the body of an eldil is a movement swift as light..."⁶ In fact, in these almost-intangible bodies of the eldila, light actually takes the place of blood.

In Ransom's letter to Lewis in the Postscript to the first of his space novels, he says "the eldila had bodies different from those of planetary animals, and... they were superior in intelligence..." and that Augray, in describing eldila did not confuse the ideas of a subtler body and a superior being. The confusion on this point is Lewis', according to Ransom. Ransom even goes on to state in this letter to Lewis that "...there are also irrational animals with eldil type of body. (You remember Chaucer's 'airish beasts'?"⁷)

It is rather difficult to describe the eldila in concrete or familiar terms. Ransom explains that "We have really no knowledge of the shape or size of an eldil or even of its relation to space... in general. Like you, I can't help trying to fix their relations to the things that appear in terrestrial tradition--gods, angels, fairies. But we haven't the data."⁸ The eldils are not angels or devils, though, nor are they illusions. They are "... not all rational things perhaps. Some would be more like wills inherent in matter, hardly conscious--more like animals."⁹ In many ways the eldila appear to be one with nature, and not-human or super-human in this close connection with the Universe. Ransom explains that the eldila are "Not waiting. They never have that experience. You and I are conscious of waiting", but eldila are like "the featureless flame which did not wait but just was..."¹⁰

Lewis himself has explained that his eldila are not the angels so familiar in the traditions of Western Man. He says of them, "...I was very definitely trying to smash the 19th century female angel. I believe no angel ever appears with Scripture without exciting terror: they always have to begin by saying 'Fear not'... every creature is nearer to the creator than it can be to superior creatures. By the way, none of my Eldila will be anything like so high up the scale as Cherubim and Seraphim. Those orders are engaged wholly in contemplation, not with ruling the lower creatures..."¹¹

Praising Lewis' creation of his eldila, Stella Gibbons writes, "If it be marvellous to create credible creatures in whom earthly blood does not run, even more marvellous is it to create pure Spirits, creatures outside the range of mankind's eyes and ears which do not live in a body made of bones and flesh at all. But Lewis succeeds with his eldila even as he succeeds with his sorns and hrossa."¹² Yet though the eldila appear so strikingly different from human beings, they are related to us in some essential way. Oyarsa warns Ransom, "Do not think we are utterly unlike. We are both copies of Maleldil,"¹³ and Lewis declares that it is "spiritual, not biological kinship that counts."¹⁴

Without some sort of biological kinship, however, it may be difficult for a man to feel a unity with other creatures. Ransom feels the very eerie quality of the sorns, ("seroni"), another of the Malacandran species. They appeal to "an earlier, almost an infantile, complex of fears" in him. He views them as "Giants--ogres--ghosts--skeletons: ... spooks on stilts."¹⁵ Seeing his first sorn, Ransom "Recognized it

instantly as it moved slowly (and, he thought, stealthily) between two of the denuded plant-tops--the giant stature, the cadaverous leanness, the long, drooping, wizard-like profile."¹⁶

The sorns or seroni can be considered the intelligentsia of Malacandra, if not the most practical creatures. They are "helpless in a boat... could not fish... could hardly swim, could make no poetry... could understand only the inferior sort; but they were admittedly good at finding out things about the stars and understanding the darker utterances of Oyarsa and telling what happened in Malacandra long ago..." Again and again, when questioned by Ransom, Hroi (a hrossa) says, I do not know. The Seroni would know that", stressing their superior intellect.¹⁷ The Sorns are a rational species, and one of them named Augray speaks to Ransom early in the novel. Augray is quick to perceive that Ransom is from Earth or "Thulcandra" (the 'Silent Planet'), and he defends this idea with a series of rational and even scientific explanations:

You are small and thick and that is how the animals ought to be made in a heavier world. You cannot come from Glundandra, for it is so heavy that if any animals could live there they would be flat like plates--even you, Small one, would break if you stood up on that world. I do not think you are from Perelandra, for it must be very hot; if any came from there they would not live when they arrived here. So I conclude you are from Thulcandra.¹⁸

Augray the sorn is kindly, besides being highly intellectual; he gives food and air to Ransom and carries him on his shoulders. At first, Ransom is terrified by the sorns who seem human and inhuman at the same time. He sees the face of a sorn as "much more unpleasantly like a human face than any inhuman creature's face ought to be,"¹⁹ yet a little later he describes the sorn as inhuman and gigantic, with a monstrous way of walking. As Ransom becomes better acquainted with Augray, he has a more positive reaction to sorns in general, describing them as "Titans or angels, not ogres..."²⁰

The language of the seroni is not prevalent throughout Malacandra, though the other creatures are aware of their superior powers of thought. "No one learns the sorns' speech, for you can change their knowledge into any words and it is still the same... The sorns have big-sounding names like Augray and Arkal and Belmo and Falmy", explains Kanakaber-aka, a pfifltrigg.²¹

Oyarsa, the greatest of all eldils, describes the sorns in their role as messengers, saying "I sent certain sorns to show themselves and to teach the strangers (men) our language. I chose sorns because they are most like your people in form. The sorns went to them many times and taught them little."²² This was because Man is unteachable, however, and not because of any inability on the part of the highly competent and communicative sorns.

The hrossa, a third Malacandran species, are the country-dwelling, poetic creatures we meet first and with whom we become most thoroughly acquainted. Viewed by Ransom as a possible cross between an otter, a seal, a penguin and a stoat, the hross he meets presents a startling picture. It is "a round black thing like a cannon ball... eyes and mouth came up out of the water... gleaming black... six or seven feet high on its hind legs and too thin for its height, like everything in Malacandra. It had a coat of thick black hair, lucid as a seal-skin, very short legs with webbed feet... strong forelimbs with webbed claws or fingers. The slenderness and flexibility of the body suggested a giant stoat. The great round head, heavily whiskered, was mainly responsible for the suggestion of a seal; but it was higher in the forehead than a seal's and the mouth was smaller."²³

Ransom is startled to hear this most unhuman-looking creature speak in what he realizes is thoroughly organized and rational language. Pointing at himself, the creature, pronounces the name of its species, "Hross," and learns to imitate Ransome's pronunciation of "Man". The hross is not only eager to communicate with Ransom, but offers him water in a friendly way. The hross is fascinating in his combined human and non-human traits. He is able to navigate a boat carefully like a man, but displays a superhuman strength by lifting the boat effortlessly onto his head and walking with it there. This walk of his, too, has a non-human quality. He "walks" only "if the swinging movement of the hross' short legs from its flexible hips could be called walking."²⁴

The sorns feel intellectually superior to the hrossa, claiming they "know nothing except about poems and fish and making things grow out of the ground."²⁵ Ransom's first diagnosis of Hrossa culture is an equally low one, "old stone age", because they have few stone cutting instruments, no pottery, and clumsy vessels for boiling. They use a common object as drinking glass, dish and ladle all in one, an oyster-like shell. Though they have plenty of delicious and varied vegetables, fish seems to be their only animal food. Although the hrossa live in beehive-shaped huts of stiff leaves and sleep on the ground in their villages which are built beside the rivers for warmth, they display manlike organization in some phases of their society. In agriculture, for instance, they exhibit a high degree of carefully-planned activity. Ransom is surprised to observe "Food-producing areas... worked communally by the surrounding villages and division of labour... carried to a higher

point than he expected. Cutting, drying, storing, transport and something like manuring were all carried on...²⁶ There is even a kind of trade in Malacandra; a car van of hrossa carry a load of vegetable food on their heads as the fascinated Ransom watches, (p. 66). Man-like, too, is the funeral procession for Hyoui and the two other hrossa who have been killed so senselessly by Weston and Devine.

The hrossa are highly intelligent creatures, and are not to be "conned" by Ransom's childish explanation that he dropped out of the sky. Hnorra, one of this species, carefully explains that Ransom could not have dropped from the airless sky, but must have come from a planet ("Handra"). It appears to be possible that the hrossa have an understanding of astronomy, as well.²⁷ They answer Ransom's questions about Oyarsa slowly and calmly until he inquires if Oyarsa made the world. Highly indignant, they proceed to tell him of Maleldil's character and creation of the world. In giving this "religious instruction", they treat Ransom as though he is the savag. Ironically enough, he had been debating earlier as to whether it was his duty to instruct the hrossa in the ways of "civilized religion".²⁸ At this point, the hrossa also introduce Ransom to the word "hnau", giving a vague definition which embraces all men and Malacandrans.

The hrossa appear to have no arts except a kind of poetry and music which is practiced every evening by a group of four of them. At such a "recitation", "...One recited half chanting at great length while the other three, sometimes singly and sometimes antiphonally, interrupted him from time to time with song. Ransom could not find out whether these interruptions were simply lyrical interludes or dramatic dialogue arising out of the leader's narrative. He could make nothing of the music. The voices were not disagreeable and the scale seemed adapted to human ears, but the time-pattern was meaningless to his sense of rhythm".²⁹

In their affinity for poetry, the hrossa bear some resemblance to the Green Lady of Perelandra. While theirs is a consciously-structured and ritualized form of poetry, however, hers is an unconscious and spontaneous form of poetic utterance. Her language is full of expressive metaphors. She uses the term "old" is mean "wise", and "young" to mean "not wise". "Oh, Piebald Man", is her epithet for Ransom because of the sunburnt quality of half of his body.³⁰ In the words of the Green Lady, the waves become a simile for the passage of time. "We are on this side of the wave and they on the far side. All is new", she declares.³¹

Using further examples of poetic language, the Lady tells Ransom his world "has no roof. You look right out into the high place and see the great dance with your own eyes. You live always with that terror and delight, and what we must only believe you can behold. Is this not a wonderful invention of Maleldil ..."³² Sleep, in her language, becomes a metaphor for ignorance. "I have been so young... a kind of sleep. I have thought that I was being carried, and behold, I was walking..." she explains to Ransom.³³

Because she uses poetic symbol, images of sensuous things in the place of abstractions, the Green Lady does not understand Ransom's abstractions. "What is peace?... What is dead?", she asks in genuine bewilderment.³⁴ She uses trees as a metaphor for people, saying "I do not see why different worlds should bring forth like creatures. Do different trees bring forth like fruit?"³⁵ To convey the lack of reality and of any tangible quality in some of Weston's statements, the Green Lady states, "That saying of yours is like a tree with no fruit."³⁶

In another instance of spontaneous poetry, the Lady uses synesthesia, the mixing of the senses. "That light is the overflow or echo into the world of your senses of vehicles made for appearance to one another and the greater eldila", she observes.³⁷ When Ransom stands on the top of a mountain with the King and Queen, the Queen offers a lovely oration which is a form of poetry like a psalm.

The floating lands and the firm lands... the air and the curtains at the gates of Deep Heaven, the seas and the Holy Mountain, the rivers above and rivers of underland, the fire, the fish, the birds, the beasts, and the others of the waves whom yet you know not... My word henceforth is nothing: your word is law unchangeable and the very daughter of the Voice... Give names to all creatures, guide all natures to perfection. Strengthen the feeble, lighten the darker, love all. Hail and be glad, oh man and woman, Oyarsa-Perelandra, the Adam, the Crown... Maleldil... Blessed be He!"³⁸

Creatures other than the Green Lady also appear to be "natural poets" in some instances of Perelandra. Tor and others employ the metaphor of the Great Dance, an ordered, vital form of life and movement in which the whole universe is included. "The Great Dance does not wait to be perfect until the peoples of the Low Worlds are gathered into it... It has begun from before always... The dance which we dance is at the centre and for the dance all things were made... All which is not itself the Great Dance was made in order that He might come down into it... In the plan of the Great Dance plans without number interlock, and each movement becomes in its season the breaking into flower of the whole design to which all else had been directed".³⁹

The hrossa, as mentioned earlier, have a formalized poetry and consciously employ poetic principles in contrast to the Green Lady and these other creatures of Perelandra who emit pure poetry every time they speak. Hyoui, a hrossa, explains some of their poetry to Ransom. "What you call remembering is the last part of the pleasure, as the crah is the last part of a poem... You say you have poets in your world.

Do they not teach you this?" Furthermore, a hrossa never wishes to hear "one splendid line over again" because "the most splendid line becomes fully splendid only by means of all the lines after it; if you went back to it you would find it less splendid than you thought. You would kill it... in a good poem".⁴⁰

Although the hrossa do practice a more structured form of poetry than the Green Lady, they, too, have an antipathy toward writing down their poetry and would prefer to keep it "recorded" in their heads and memories. "The hrossa used to have many books of poetry, but now they have few. They say that the writing of books destroys poetry..."⁴¹

Although Augray the sorn is critical of the hrossa as poets and not doers, they are generally respected for their ability with words. "Everyone has learned the speech of the hrossa. They are our great speakers and singers. They have more words and better", explains a pfifltriggi to Ransom.⁴² Actually, the hrossa are not "just poets", but manage to combine hunting and poetry in their life-style. When Hyoui is killed by Weston and Devine, Hyahi gives him a manlike eulogy, saying "He was a hnak-rapunt (killer or hunter of the hnakra, a beast of Malacandra) and a great poet and the loss of him is heavy".⁴³

The pfifltriggi, the last species of "hnau" creatures of Malacandra to be considered here, are artisans with a highly developed civilization. This is rather startling in contrast to their animal-like appearance in the description in which they are first presented to us. They look like "frog-like animals--or tapir-headed, frog-bodied animals",⁴⁴ "They like making things... It is true they like best the making of things that are only good to look at and of no use. But sometimes they will make things for us, things we have thought, provided they are difficult enough".⁴⁵ The stone carvings viewed by Ransom on Malacandra represent the pfifltriggi in their role of diggers with tools, while the sorns are shown piling up earth and the hrossa making water channels. It is the pfifltriggi who own the "sun's blood" or gold of Malacandra, and they spend their days digging in the mines. They do not have anything resembling a capitalistic industrial society; rather, "Each digs for himself the things he wants for his work". It is the female pfifltriggi who keep the males at their work of extracting gold from the mines.⁴⁶ In contrast to the sorns, the pfifltriggi believe their females have a great deal of influence and importance in relation to their society.

In addition to carrying on the practical work of digging in the mines, the pfifltriggi create many artistic articles. The pfifltriggi Ransom meets proceeds to carve an elaborate picture in stone, depicting the planets of the solar system, the space ship and three "idealized" versions of Ransom. Elaborate houses with murals are the dwelling places of these highly-cultured creatures who live in the forest lowlands, below the "handra". Kanakeberaka comments on the high degree of civilization of his artistic species, saying "We do not live in holes like the sorns nor in bundles of weed like the hrossa".⁴⁷ Like Man, the pfifltriggi are clothed in artful garments, rather than looking natural like animals. They wear richly decorated, furry clothes, like a comforter. Dark goggles, rings, chains and other manlike adornments complete their outfits. It is this clothing and the other human characteristics of the pfifltriggi that please Ransom. Expressing the kind of hospitality he was used to on Earth, the pfifltriggi put him at his ease by placing him in one of their richly-decorated "guesthouses". Other anthropomorphic characteristics Ransom sees in the pfifltriggi include their rationality, as well as their busy, impatient way of explaining the work carried on in their society.

Although they are somewhat like men in the ways described above, the pfifltriggi also possess supernatural powers which astonish the men who observe them. At a signal from Oyarsa, one of the pfifltriggi touches the corpses of Hyoui and the other hrossa with glass of crystal and leaps away. There is a burst of wind and a blinding light, following which the bodies disappear.

Stella Gibbons is enthusiastic in her admiration for Lewis' creation of these marvelous Malacandran beings.

In their creation, his gift soars until it touches the beings established... in Shakespeare's nature out of which the poet drew Ariel and Caliban, falling short only in that Shakespeare's fair-monsters are archetypes, all-fairy and every-monster, and his supreme genius is shown in this... (Presenting) images which exist apparently only in the mind of man... Lewis' sorns and hrossa and pfifltriggi are not quite in this Olympus. But they dwell far up the sacred slope... The stock figure of science fiction is what someone called the Bug-Eyed Monster. But the sorns and hrossa and other unknown creatures on Malacandra are monsters in Ransom's eyes only before he has met them, and Lewis cunningly fast arouses the reader's imagination, then disturbs and frightens it, and lastly sets it furiously to work when he tells us Ransom's thoughts about them...⁴⁸

Lewis' creatures, the inhabitants of Malacandra, Perelandra and Narnia can be called "now creatures" as well as "hnau creatures". The Green Lady, Queen of Perelandra, is a particularly vital example of such a being who lives totally in the present and delights in the world as she experiences it. Until she meets Ransom, she has no concept of Man's triple sense of time, his way of reflecting on the past, and anticipating the future, as well as existing in the present. "This is great wisdom you are bringing, O Piebald Man... This looking backward and forward along the line and seeing how each day has one appearance as it

comes to you and another when it has gone past, like the waves", she declares.⁴⁹ Some human beings, in their struggle to live more fully in the present may question the value of the "great wisdom" Ransom has imparted to the Green Lady.

Not bound by human abstractions like death, peace, home and a loneliness, and unable to comprehend Man's indirect communication (if they wish a man to be silent, why do they not say it instead of saying that he talks too much?⁵⁰), the Green Lady exhibits a rich and sensuous delight in the "nowness" of her experience and environment. "Everything is beyond all others. The fruit we are eating is always the best fruit of all", she says in an attempt to communicate her spontaneous delight to Ransom.⁵¹ Free of Man's self-imposed sense of morality and the limits of possible experience, the Lady freely embraces all of the world of the senses. When questioned by Ransom whether she wants the King, she replies, "Want him?... How could there be anything I did not want?..." Ransom, a properly civilized gentleman is, of course, repelled by her uninhibited reply.⁵²

Although the Lady has lived an almost totally sensuous life before meeting Ransom, she responds eagerly to his attempts to reason with her and she feels herself growing "older" (wiser) with each new human idea he imparts to her. Ransom, aware of her purity and peace, begins to see the senselessness and even the harm of replacing her delight in pure being with the rational, human concepts of his own world. "There was no reason why she should step out of her happiness into the psychology of our race; but neither was there any wall between to prevent her so doing."⁵³

The Lady, native of Perelandra, seems to have none of the sense of time which so fully dominates Man's universe. When Ransom says there is no time to explain, she asks "No time? What has happened to the time?" as if time is a material thing like all the things she experiences empirically.⁵⁴ Gradually, though, as she grows "older" through Ransom's teaching, she does become aware of a sense of time that exists within herself.

One goes into the forest to pick fruit and already the thought of one fruit rather than another has grown up in one's mind... But this I never noticed before... that the very moment of the finding there is in the mind a kind of thrusting back or setting aside. The picture of the fruit you have not found is still... before you. And if you wished... you could send your soul after the good you had expected, instead of... to the good you had got. You could refuse the real good; you could make the real fruit taste insipid by thinking of the other.⁵⁵

The Lady's use of the metaphor of "fruit" for experience illustrated above emphasizes her unconscious translation of abstractions into sensuous and satisfying bits of reality. Or perhaps it would be clearer to say that it is Ransom (and all men) who translate reality into abstractions, while the Green Lady experiences the world directly, forsaking the abstractions which cause Man's psyche to dominate his true being and his organic connection with all nature.

While the Lady is gaining a rational understanding of concepts of Man, Ransom is becoming more of a "now creature" himself in giving himself freely to the sensuous delights of Perelandra. Unhesitatingly tasting a piece of Perelandran fruit, he is joyously overwhelmed by its taste. "Well might the Lady say of her world that the fruit you ate at any moment was, at that moment, the best," he reflects.⁵⁶

In his Narnia books, Lewis presents a "hnau creature" as strikingly appealing as the Green Lady, but totally different. It is Aslan the Lion, who carries out the creation of Narnia in The Magician's Nephew. He "sings" the world into being, creating objects and organisms out of the ideas in his head. In this Platonic form of creation, the world can be seen as the embodiment of "visual translation" of these ideas. In a marvelous burst of life the earth bubbles and swells as panthers, leopards, deer, butterflies and many other creatures emerge from it. After being chosen by the Lion, the cab horse becomes "hnau", and begins to talk like a human being.

In several ways the creation of Narnia is comparable to the creation of the Garden of Eden. Aslan's advice to his creatures is reminiscent of God's words to Adam and Eve, in which he urges them to live in harmony with each other and the creatures over whom they have dominion.

Creatures, I give you yourselves... I give to you forever this land of Narnia. I give you the woods, the fruits, the rivers. I give you the stars and I give you myself. The Dumb Beasts whom I have not chosen are yours also. Treat them gently and cherish them but do not go back to their ways lest you cease to be Talking Beasts. For out of them you were taken and into them you can return. Do not do so.⁵⁷

Evil enters the world of Narnia as it entered the Garden "brought... by this son of Adam (Digory)", according to Aslan.⁵⁸ The King and Queen of Narnia are like Adam and Eve; they are told to rule and name the creatures of Narnia. In Narnia, too, there is an apple tree and the children are forbidden to take its fruit for themselves. Like Adam and Eve, Digory experiences a strong temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit in the garden. Jadis, the witch, resembles the serpent in the original Garden, telling Digory to eat of the "tree of life."

At one point, one of the children declares "By Aslan!" and the Lion does indeed resemble the Son of God. He is utterly compassionate and very aware of the suffering of Mankind. "My son, my son, grief is

great... Let us be good to one another," he says.⁵⁹

In her reaction to the figure of the Lion as Christ, Stella Gibbons first expresses shock, but comes to accept the creature as a valid symbol.

I found the great lion who has haunted the former stories given a capital H-' and as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion-'I felt a shock not, of course... of disapproval, but pure shock, as if cold water had spouted up from the page... Hints of what was to come are given in the earlier (Narnia) books, as when the Lion dies- and returns to life again... Most of us modern Christians... tend to see Christ as pictured and static and past. I do not believe Lewis was thus hampered. I believe that his faith conspired to give him a personal feeling for Christ and an intellectual conception of his immediacy for Christ and an intellectual conception of his immediacy that was exceedingly strong; it would be a commonplace, to Lewis, to conceive of Christ under the likeness of a Lion, a Lamb, a Fish. In the interplanetary stories he dares to give Him another name--Maleldil... Thinking it out, I was no longer shocked by the symbol of Christ as a mighty golden Lion, combining majesty and tender fatherly comfort. It is a child's picture, this dazzling golden heraldic Beast on fire with Divine Love that can yet be nestled up to, and perhaps the true shock comes from picturing the contrast between the enormous creature's power, and its gentleness when it call the child 'dear heart'.⁶⁰

Not all the rational creatures in Lewis' books are as benevolent and productive as Aslan. They display unpleasant traits as evidenced, for instance, by the boasting of Shift the Ape who feels superior to all other creatures. In The Last Battle he asserts:

I hear some of you saying I'm an ape. Well, I'm not. I'm a Man. If I look like an ape, that's because I'm very old; hundreds and hundreds of years old. And it is because I'm so old that I'm so wise. (As in Perelandra, "old" is equivalent to "wise".)... And it is because I'm so wise that I'm the only one Aslan is ever going to speak to. He can't be bothered talking to a lot of stupid animals.⁶¹

As Shift's sense of power increases, so does his imperious attitude toward the other creatures of Narnia.

'Now don't you start arguing,' said the Ape, 'for that is a thing I won't stand. I'm a Man: you're only a fat, stupid old Bear. What do you know about freedom? You think freedom means doing what you like. Well, you're wrong... True freedom means doing what I tell you.'⁶²

Besides merely annoying characteristics like the Ape's braggadocio, some of Lewis' "hnau" creatures display true evil in a vivid form.

The Last Battle... tells of the final end of Narnia-when Aslan has ceased to be seen walking visibly through his world, and the powers of evil are strongly undermining it. These are manifest in the neighbouring Calormenes who worship the devil Tash and their idol the Ape Shift who dresses the simple, kindly Ass, Puzzle, in the skin of a lion and passes him off... as Aslan Himself...⁶³

What finally emerges from Lewis' fanciful stories of "hnau creatures" is a sense of Man's interconnection with all other creatures of his world and even with those of other worlds. Man, feels Lewis, can relate to all other beings in a peaceful and creative way; he is not forced either to isolate himself from them or to attempt to dominate and destroy them like Weston and Devine in Silent Planet. "In the long run one is related to everyone on the planet: in that quite literal sense we are all 'one flesh'," writes Lewis in a letter of January 26, 1954.⁶⁴ Considering Lewis' philosophical outlook, one can extend this remark and apply it to Man's relationship to the as yet undiscovered creatures of other planets as well as to other men.

How people do relate to these "hnau creatures" of Lewis is revealed in the various attitudes of human beings toward the non-human figures. Uncle Andrew, in The Magician's Nephew, is unable to communicate with the Narnian animals. When he calls the Talking Dog "Good Doggie," he appears to be just like Weston and Devine who also are terribly patronizing toward the creatures of other worlds. Andrew is fearful, practical, selfish and totally "adult" unbelieving and rational in his attitude toward the non-human "hnau" beasts of Narnia. Therefore, he misses the whole meaning and beauty of Aslan's creation.

Like Devine of Silent Planet, Uncle Andrew is a total materialist. "The commercial possibilities of this country are unbounded. I shall be a millionaire... The first thing is to get that brute shot", he says.⁶⁵ Completely insensitive and egotistical, Andrew can think only of the possibility that in Narnia he has discovered the "land of youth".

The cab driver, on the other hand, has an instinctive grasp of what's going on in Narnia and of how to act. "Oh, stow it, Guv'nor, do stow it... Watchin' and listenin's the thing at present: not talking", he replies to Andrew's lengthy orations.⁶⁶ In contrast to the exploitative and violent attitudes of Andrew, Weston, and Devine, the cab driver shows a high regard for the non-human creatures he meets. "Guns be blowed... That horse 'as more sense than some 'umans as I could mention", he says.⁶⁷

In her reply to Andrew's plan to kill Aslan, Polly shows a similar dislike of violence and a concern for the creatures of Narnia.

"You're just like the Witch: all you think of is killing things", she reproaches Andrew.⁶⁸

In contrast to Andrew, Digory tends to think of others besides himself. When he hears Andrew say that Narnia may be the Land of Youth, he eagerly asks if there may be anything there that would cure his Mother's illness. Always the egotist, Andrew replies, "This is not a chemist's shop... But as I was saying..." and goes on with his dreams of exploiting the wealth of Narnia for himself.⁶⁹

Lewis presents a number of different attitudes of humans toward his "hnau" creatures in his Space Trilogy as well as in the Narnia books. Ransom displays an empathy for the creatures of Malacandra. Though the hrossa are terribly different from Man, he understands their song and is deeply moved by it.

Now first he saw that its rhythms were based on a different blood from ours, on a heart that beat more quickly, and a fiercer internal heat. Through his knowledge of the creatures and his love for them he began... to hear it with their ears. A sense of great masses moving at visionary speeds, of giants dancing, of eternal sorrows eternally consoled, of he knew not what and yet what he had always known, awoke in him with the very first bars of the deep-mouthed dirge, and bowed down his spirit as if the gate of heaven had opened before him.⁷⁰

Lewis projects an attitude of distaste and fear in his own imaginary observance of an eldil early in Perelandra.

The fact that it was quite obviously not organic--the knowledge that intelligence was somehow located in this homogeneous cylinder of light but not related to it as our consciousness is related to our brains and nerves--was profoundly disturbing... Here at last was a bit of that world which I had always supposed that I loved and desired, breaking through and appearing to my senses, and I didn't like it. I wanted it to go away... The other thing--the creature that did not wait (the eldil) was there, and the fear of it was upon me.⁷¹

Ransom, too, shows a combination of disgust and delight with the hrossa he meets on Malacandra. He experiences...

...loses of confidence... when the rationality of the hross tempted you to think of it as a man. Then it became abominable--a man seven feet high, with a snakey body, covered, face and all with thick black animal hair, and whiskered like a cat. But starting from the other end you had an animal with everything an animal ought to have--glossy coat, liquid eye, sweet breath and whitest teeth--and added to all these, as though Paradise had never been lost and earliest dreams were true, the charm and speech of reason. Nothing could be more disgusting than the one impression; nothing more delightful than the other. It all depended on the point of view.⁷²

At another point, Ransom's distaste for and fear of the sorns becomes intensified. "Those old terrestrial fears of some alien, cold intelligence, super-human in power, sub-human in cruelty, which had utterly faded from his mind among the hrossa, rose clamoring for re-admission."⁷³

One of the ways in which Ransom can really relate pleasurable to the hrossa is in his role of the philologist. He enjoys communicating with them and dreams of writing a Malacandran (Martian) dictionary.

Not only is there confusion on Ransom's part in his attitudes toward the "hnau" creatures; the bewilderment is mutual as he and the Green Lady react to each other. It seems that Ransom's ability to relate to the creatures of other worlds can be correlated with the degree to which they appear man-like and rational. "Man-like, when he saw the artifact (the boat) he felt more certain of the hrossa's rationality."⁷⁴

Although the works of C.S. Lewis can and should be read as complete within themselves, they do have a striking connection with certain aspects of Swift's Gulliver's Travels, particularly with Book IV on the Houyhnhms. Both Lewis and Swift use uncharted lands and invented creatures to contrast with the world of men. Lewis and Brian Aldiss have said, "Swift, if he were writing today, would have to take us out to the planets, wouldn't he?"⁷⁵ As narrators, both Ransom and Gulliver come to realize the wickedness of Man, especially compared to the rational creatures they discover on their journeys. In Silent Planet Ransom acknowledges "Our world is very bent... There are false eldila in the wild parts of our world; men kill other men before them--they think the eldil drinks blood."⁷⁶

When they meet the "hnau" creatures of other worlds, Ransom and Gulliver are struck by the greed, ignorance and fear so prevalent in Man. Oyarsa recounts to Ransom how Weston and Devine stuffed as much "sun's blood" into their rocket ship as possible as soon as the sorns told them they would not be allowed to have any more of it. In Perelandra, when Ransom tastes the fruit he suddenly realizes that wars would be fought and nations betrayed for one taste of it by men on earth. "Bent creatures are full of fears," says Ransom, apologizing for the lack of wisdom and courage in his fellow men. Oyarsa comments that Men ("bent creatures") are fearful of sorns and very unteachable.⁷⁷ Similarly, in Gulliver's Travels the protagonist observes that "the Yahoos (later equated with men) appear to be the most unteachable of all animals... of a cowardly spirit".⁷⁸

Many of the "hnau" creatures of Lewis and Swift are morally superior to Man. In contrast to Man's propensity for war and destruction,

Oyarsa declares that he did not wish to stretch his authority beyond the creatures of his own world, and that it is a terrible thing to kill someone else's hnau. Hyoui the hross assures Ransom that the life of a hnau is not likely to be "bent". In fact, the creatures of Malacandra have no word for "evil" and "bent" is the only way they can describe the traits so common among men. There is no word for "war" in the hrossa's language, and Hyoui does not understand this concept. It appears ridiculous to him that the three species of Malacandra would want to go out with weapons against each other. This reaction is similar to that of the Houyhnhms to Gulliver's description of war and its various causes. They are utterly startled and intrigued about why men of the same world would want to destroy each other to gain lands, power and prestige. In the language of the Houyhnhms there is no word for not telling the truth. "For they have no word in their language to express lying or falsehood".⁷⁹ Similarly, to say that a person is not telling the truth in Perelandra, one must claim that his statement is "like a tree without fruit," as mentioned earlier.

Oyarsa, too, is aware of the moral superiority of his creatures to Man. He tells Ransom that they left fear, murder and rebellion behind on the harandra and that if men were subjects of Maleldil they would have peace, too.

Besides a very conscious morality which forbids them to hurt or kill any creature of their own or other species, the "hnau" of Malacandra practice a sexual morality. The three species are naturally monogamous and promiscuity is rare among them. The instincts of the hrossa resemble man's unreached ideals which are so divergent from his instincts in regard to morality. The Houyhnhms, like the Malacandrans, display a kind of faithfulness and morality in the sexual realm also. "The violation of marriage or any other unchastity was never heard of; and the married pair pass their lives with the same friendship and mutual benevolence that they bear to all others of the same species... without jealousy, fondness, quarreling or discontent."⁸⁰

That the "hnau" creatures of Lewis are morally superior to Man is further illustrated by these words of Margaret Hannay:

...concept of hnau, or created being, is one of the finest mythic elements of the novel. Lewis portrays three rational corporal species living in harmony, all subject to the commands of the eldila... and the eldila's ruler Oyarsa. Each hnau had his own place in that world: none harmed or exploited another. There was not even a word for 'evil' on that planet; the only parallel concept was "bent" or a twisted good.⁸¹

It is Man, not the creatures of other worlds, who kills every creature with which he has contact. Both Lewis and Swift are painfully aware of the evils of Man. In Lewis' words:

Man destroys or enslaves every species he can. Civilized man murders, enslaves, cheats, and corrupts savage man. Even inanimate creatures he turns into dust bowls and slays. There are individuals who don't. But they are not the sort who are likely to be our pioneers in space. (They will be)... the needy and greedy adventurer or the ruthless technical expert. They will do as their kind has always done... If they meet things stronger (than themselves), they will be, very properly, destroyed.⁸²

This pessimistic attitude toward man, while always biting evident in Swift, forms a strange contrast to the joy that is so much a part of Lewis' books, letters and autobiography. Nonetheless, it is there and because of his lack of faith that Man will reach his potential for good, Lewis has stated:

I have no pleasure in looking forward to a meeting between humanity and any alien rational species... at the very least we shall corrupt it with our vices and infect it with our diseases. We are not yet fit to visit other worlds.⁸³

Both Lewis' creatures and Swift's Houyhnhms have a more intelligent attitude toward death than Man. To the hrossa, death appears predictable and never untimely. No coffins, sextons, churchyards or undertakers are to be found in Malacandra. They believe in immortality and though they are solemn at a funeral, they show no signs of the passionate grief which is so often exaggerated in Man. The Houyhnhms have a similarly rational attitude toward death; to them it is no different from returning home from a neighbor's house.

Gulliver and Ransom share an empathy with the creatures of the other worlds they visit, learning eagerly the language and customs of the "strange creatures" they meet there. As their affection for the non-humans grows, they experience a growing antipathy toward Man. Like Gulliver, Ransom comes to accept the strangers and to see men as strange and odious "Yahoos". In Perelandra, Ransom "...knew his body to be a little ugly and ridiculous. Still less was her (the Green Lady) colour a source of horror to him. In her own world that green was beautiful and fitting; it was his pasty white and angry sunburn which were the monstrosities".⁸⁴

In Silent Planet, too, Ransom undergoes a change in his perception which favors the Malacandran creatures over his own species. He sees Weston and Devine as

Two creatures he did not recognize... shorter than any animal on Malacandra... lower legs... heads were neither round like those of the hrossa, nor long like those of the sorns... The two prisoners were Weston and Devine and he, for one privileged moment, had seen the human forms with almost

Malacandran eyes.⁸⁵

This incident resembles Gulliver's distasteful reaction to the kindly captain who rescues him, to his wife, children and the other "Yahoos" after his exposure to the higher culture of the Houyhnhnms.

Both Gulliver and Ransom looked back on their voyages to other worlds as the most peaceful, happy times of their lives. Among the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver discovered a delightful and advanced culture abounding in poetry, architecture, and other accomplishments. In his letter to Lewis, Ransom said simply "Those quiet weeks, the mere living among the hrossa, are to me the main thing that happened. I know them, Lewis; that's what you can't get into a mere story."⁸⁶

In *The Magician's Nephew* there are some superficial, but still strong resemblances to Gulliver's *Travels*. The animals thought that Polly's and Digory's clothes were part of them like furs and feathers, just as the Houyhnhnms thought Gulliver's clothes were part of his body. In another instance, the animals keep Andrew as a pet, in the same way the Houyhnhnms kept Gulliver.

Although Gulliver's *Travels* and Lewis' Space Trilogy are fictitious, they contain truths about human nature and the idea that Man must improve his nature in order to survive in an expanding world. It is interesting to consider the possible purposes the two authors had in writing their books. Lewis himself says he did not write *Perelandra* to be didactic, that he never starts a work from a message or moral. Rather, he wrote it for the "simple sense of wonder, extraordinary things going on... These are the motive forces behind the creation, (as Kingsly Amis says in an interview with Lewis)." In this *Encounter* interview, Lewis also says, "I suppose Gulliver started from a straight point of view (meaning didactic). Or did it really start because he (Swift) wanted to write about a lot of big and little men?"⁸⁷

That is not to say there is no truth or moral to be found in Swift's or Lewis' books. However, "... the story itself should force its moral upon you. You find out what the moral is by writing the story", explains Lewis in his talk with Amis and Aldiss.⁸⁸

C.S. Lewis was not writing merely fantasy stories or children's books, even though he says the story itself was his motive for writing them. His Space Trilogy, like Gulliver's *Travels* was written for a serious purpose, too, to help awaken the people of the Silent Planet. "If we could even effect in one per cent of our readers a change-over from the conception of Space to the conception of Heaven, we should have made a beginning", declares Ransom who is perhaps speaking for Lewis himself.⁸⁹

No, Lewis' "hnau" creatures were not created chiefly for the entertainment of children, at least not those of his Space Trilogy. "I should have thought *That Hideous Strength* both unsuitable and unintelligible to children, and even *Perelandra* rather doubtful..." he wrote in a letter of January 24, 1954 to an American lady, which was cited earlier in this paper.

In expressing his views on the value of Man's travel through space and the possibility that he might meet other rational creatures of non-human species, Lewis has said: "But let us thank God that we are still very far away from travel to other worlds.... I have wondered whether the vast astronomical distances may not be God's quarantine precautions. They prevent the spiritual infection of a fallen species (Man) from spreading".⁹⁰ These words of Lewis, the man who often seemed so full of hope and joy about the world, bring his philosophy uncomfortably close to that of Jonathan Swift---the view of Man as murderer, betrayer, and exploiter of his own and other species.

Bibliography

- Aldiss, Brian; Amis, Kingsley; and Lewis, C.S. On Science Fiction, "Unreal Estates," *Encounter*, (XXIV, No. 3, March, 1965).
- Gibbons, Stella, "Imaginative Writing," *Light on C.S. Lewis*, Jocelyn Gibb, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966).
- Green, Roger Lancelyn, C.S. Lewis, (New York: H. Z. Walsh, 1963).
- Hannay, Margaret, "The Mythology of *Out of the Silent Planet*," *Mythlore*, ed. Glen GoodKnight, (I, No. 4, October, 1969).
- Lewis, C.S., *Christian Reflections*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964).
- Lewis, C.S., *The Last Battle*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967).
- Lewis, C.S., *Letters to an American Lady*, ed. Clyde S. Kilby, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967).
- Lewis, C.S., *The Magician's Nephew*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966).
- Lewis, C.S., *Out of the Silent Planet*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969).
- Lewis, C.S., *Perelandra*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969).
- Lewis, C.S., *That Hideous Strength*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 8th printing, 1969).
- Lewis, C.S., *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960).
- Swift, Jonathan, from "Gulliver's Travels," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams, (Vol. I, New York: W.H. Norton and Company, Inc., 1968).

Footnotes.

1. Stella Gibbons, "Imaginative Writing," *Light on C.S. Lewis*, Jocelyn Gibb, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 91.
2. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969,) p. 102.
3. Roger Lancelyn Green, *C.S. Lewis* (New York, H.Z. Walsh, 1963), p. 28.
4. C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, (New York, Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 9.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
6. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, pp. 93-94.
7. *Ibid.*, pg., 157.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
9. C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, (New York, The Macmillan Company, 8th printing, 1969), p. 285.
10. C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, p. 29.
11. C.S. Lewis, *Letters to An American Lady*, ed. Clyde S. Kilby, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1967), pp. 12-13.
12. Gibbons, p. 91.
13. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 120.
14. C.S. Lewis, *Letters to An American Lady*, p. 91.
15. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 47.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 69.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 67.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
30. C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, p. 60.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 57 and 67.
35. *Ibid.*, p.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 214-216.
40. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 73.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 116.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
48. Gibbons, p. 89.
49. C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, p. 60.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
57. C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, (New York: The Macmillan Company), 1966, p. 105.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
60. Gibbons, p. 101.
61. C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 29.
62. Green, p. 46.
63. C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, p. 30.
64. C.S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady*, p. 24.
65. C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, p. 94.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
70. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 131.
71. C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, pp. 18-19, 30.
72. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 58.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
75. "Unreal Estates", On Science Fiction. C.S. Lewis, Kingsly Amis, Brian Aldiss. *Encounter*, (XXIV, No. 3, March, 1965), 61-65.
76. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 121.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
78. Jonathan Swift, from "Gulliver's Travels" in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams, (Vol. I, New York: W.H. Norton and Company, Inc., 1968), p. 1617.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 1603.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 1620.
81. Margaret, "The Mythology of *Out of the Silent Planet*," *Mythlore*, ed. Glen GoodKnight, (I, No. 4, October, 1969), 13.
82. C.S. Lewis, "Religion and Rocketry", *The World's Last Night Night and Other Essays*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960), 890.
83. C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964) p. 173.
84. C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, pp. 57-60.
85. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 125.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
87. "Unreal Estates", *Encounter*, p. 60.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
89. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 154.
90. C.S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night*, p. 91.