Bloom's Modern Critical Views

C.S. LEWIS

Edited and with an introduction by
Harold Bloom
Sterling Professor of the Humanities
Yale University

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Editor's Note

My Introduction acknowledges C.S. Lewis's eminence as a scholar-critic of Renaissance literature, while expressing a certain resistance to his dogmatic lay theology and his allegorical fantasy-fictions.

As is inevitable, some of the essays reprinted in this volume are considerably at variance with my own stance towards Lewis, beginning with Chad Walsh's, which actually places *The Screwtape Letters* on the aesthetic level of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Margaret Blount meditates upon Lewis's fictive animals, who culminate in *Narnia*'s Aslan, Christ the Lion, after which Margaret Patterson Hannay connects *Narnia*, literary criticism, and theology in Lewis by way of his concept of "joy" or "longing," which had a considerable role in his life.

Owen Barfield's oppositional yet close friendship with Lewis is sketched by Dabney Adams Hart, who emphasizes Barfield's deep influence upon Lewis, while Lee D. Rossi investigates divisions in Lewis's self between polemicism and fantasy and shrewdly concludes that "the more explicitly Christian his writing becomes, the less it convinces the reader."

The *Narnia* books extravagantly are judged by C.N. Manlove as capable of making us see "the Deep Magic of God," after which Joe R. Christopher praises Lewis's defenses of Christianity for their supposed wit.

In David Downing's reading, Lewis retrieves "the discarded image" of the world of Old Western Man, while the more disenchanted Kath Filmer confronts the indubitable misogyny of *Narnia* in Lewis's witches and the troubled androgyny of Glome in *Till We Have Faces*, surely the Great Apologist's most equivocal fiction, and perhaps therefore his best.

Because of the *Narnia* movie, Lewis is now best known as a story-teller for children, and is heartily praised as such by Lionel Adey, after which

Don W. King concludes this volume with a realistic account of Lewis-as-poet. I myself, who have read all of Lewis's poetry, can find in it only the truth of Oscar's Wilde's observation: "all bad poetry is sincere."

HAROLD BLOOM

Introduction

C.S. Lewis was the most dogmatic and aggressive person I have ever met. In 1954–55, I was a Fulbright scholar living at Pembroke College, Cambridge University. Lewis had just left Oxford to become Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge. I attended a few of his lectures, and for a while regularly talked with him at two pubs on the river. As I was twenty-four, and he fifty-six and immensely learned, I attempted to listen while saying as little as possible. But he was a Christian polemicist, and I an eccentric Gnostic Jew, devoted to William Blake. We shared a love for Shelley, upon whom I was writing a Yale doctoral dissertation, and yet we meant different things by "Shelley." Cowed as I was, the inevitable break came after a month or so, and we ceased to speak. The breaking-point was the metaphor "creation" which Lewis insisted pertained only to God. There was not a trace of creativity in Shakespeare, Dante, and Cervantes, Lewis told me. The greatest writers only rearranged building blocks provided by God. If, like Blake or Shelley, you had the illusion you were creating, what you actually created was Hell. On this, as on all things, C.S. Lewis was firm.

A profound scholar of allegory, Lewis dedicated his classic study *The Allegory of Love* (1936) to Owen Barfield, whom I met and learned from, and always revered. I remarked once to Barfield that I could not reconcile Lewis and Barfield on Shakespearean creativity. Lewis's strict view was that Shakespeare at most had reinvented Hell in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. How did Barfield receive such a judgment, since he had taught me that readers and audiences might well experience chagrin when what they considered to be *their* emotions actually turned out to be Shakespeare's thoughts? Barfield replied that dogma in Lewis might be bothersome, but much was to be learned from so great a scholar.

C.S. Lewis wrote more than forty books: I own and have read some two dozen of them. At seventy-five, I find it difficult to reread Lewis; he whacks me with a Christian cudgel on nearly every page. In preparation for writing this Introduction, I have just read through *A Mind's Awake*, a Lewis anthology edited by Clyde S. Kilby (1968), published five years after the polemicist's death. Kilby accurately remarks of Lewis: "He liked answers better than questions," and *A Mind Awake* certainly is a book of answers. I myself only can read, write, and teach by asking questions, which I suppose is why my contact with Professor Lewis endured just a month. Like most people I would prefer answers, but Shakespeare was not a problem-solver, and the refrain throughout *Hamlet* is "question" in its many forms.

Answer-persons attract followings: Lewis's *Mere Christianity* is a perpetual best-seller among American Evangelical Christians. His attitude towards Evolution is a touch more sophisticated than theirs, but differs from Creationism only in degree, not in kind. Indeed, Intelligent Design is a kind of parody of Lewis's general view of a Christian cosmos. I do not profess to know how many American Evangelical Christians can be considered either evangelical or Christian. C.S. Lewis, though as sedentary as myself, was a muscular Christian who is now the intellectual sage of George W. Bush's America, whose Christianity is mere enough to encompass enlightened selfishness, theocratic militarism, and semi-literacy. (President George W. Bush vaunts that he never read a book through, even as a Yale undergraduate.)

That a major Renaissance scholar, C.S. Lewis, should now be a hero to millions of Americans who scarcely can read is a merely social irony. Like Tolkien and Charles Williams, his good friends, Lewis is most famous for his fantasy-fiction, particularly *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I have just attempted to reread that tendentious evangelical taletelling, but failed. This may be because I am seventy-five, but then I can't reread Tolkien or Williams either. Lewis and Tolkien write better prose than Rowling does in her *Harry Potter* fantasies, but like Rowling they will rub down into Period Pieces, and end in the dustbins. There are of course the epic movies inspired by these works, but will they be viewable a decade hence?

I should attempt to distinguish between the scholar-critic C.S. Lewis, admirable exegete of Edmund Spenser and other Renaissance poets, and Lewis the lay theologian, who composed fictions and Christian apologies, generally fusing them together. The scholarly Lewis's masterpiece is the wonderfully brief and useful *The Discarded Image* (1971), which traces the medieval image of the universe and its survival into the Renaissance. I

suppose that I cannot choose between Lewis's sermonizing fictions and fictive sermons because they all blend together for me.

Though some of Lewis's admirers wish to see him as a latter-day Dr. Samuel Johnson, that does the endlessly answering Lewis no service. Dr. Johnson was a wisdom writer, and his prudential wisdom did not depend upon dogma, though the great critic was a devout Christian. I would not even compare Lewis to G.K. Chesterton, whose best fictions far surpass the storyteller of *Narnia*, and whose Christian lay sermons are alive with wit and paradox.

The energies of C.S. Lewis were as intense as his learning was profound, and his co-religionists will maintain his public reputation for another generation or so. But he is neither an original thinker nor a canonical writer, and inflating his value will not enhance his ultimate status. It is not my lack of religious faith that renders me indifferent to Lewis's positive fervor. Kierkegaard, a great ironist, was also a religious genius. Lewis was religious, which is not in itself an achievement.

CHAD WALSH

Dreams and Letters

> "A dream? Then—then—am I not really here, Sir?"
>
> "No, Son," said he kindly, taking my hand in his. "It is not so good as that. The bitter drink of death is still before you. Ye are only dreaming. And if ye come to tell of what ye have seen, make it plain that it was but a dream. See ye make it very plain ...."
>
> — *The Great Divorce*, p. 131.[1]

Three of Lewis's books which employ unusual literary genres are *The Pilgrim's Regress*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Great Divorce*.

The first-named (subtitled: *An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism*) will never supplant *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It lacks the simplicity and eloquent naïveté of Bunyan; it is also disappointingly empty of the wit and grace that readers of the later Lewis have come to expect. The style is heavy and wooden; the allegorical figures heavier and more wooden. And the reviewers, who bestowed a few pats on the head of the young author, complained with some justice that the book was obscure.

The *Regress* is an allegory within the framework of a dream-vision. The narrator (never named and of no importance) has a dream in which he observes the interminable adventures of the hero, John, in his flight from Puritania (a land of grim but hypocritical religion, which resembles a satirist's caricature of Ulster). John, in several dozen short chapters, pursues the never-

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never vision of beauty and joy that haunts him. He tries all solutions: women, artistic movements, various schools of philosophy. Finally, with the aid of Reason, he is led to Mother Kirk, who makes him realize that his desire can be fulfilled only in Christianity, which he accepts by leaping into a deep pool and coming up through an underwater tunnel. Now a twice-born man, he retraces his steps, and sees the scenes of his earlier adventures in a radically different light. At the end, firm in the faith, he crosses the Brook (death), to the accompaniment of indifferent verse sung by the angelic Guide.

When Lewis edited the allegory for the 1943 edition[2] he added a Preface pointing out two of the principal defects:[3] a "needless obscurity, and an uncharitable temper." The temper had been directed mainly against the "counter-romantics" (such as the Neo-Scholastics and the American "Humanists") who professed to debunk the complex emotional experience which Lewis labels "Romanticism." The book is also an attack on the "subromantics" (such as the followers of Freud and D. H. Lawrence) but they are treated with more charity.

Mediocre as a work of literature, the *Regress* is invaluable for anyone tracing the development of Lewis's ideas. Practically all his later books exist within it in embryonic form. His belief in orthodox Christianity, his conviction that both "Romanticism" and Reason lead the quester to Christianity, many of his attitudes toward literary and philosophic movements—all appear in an early and incomplete form.

A much more successful use of an unconventional technique is *The Screwtape Letters*, which exploded in book form on the English literary scene in 1942 and soon bounded across the Atlantic.

The admirers of Lewis are divided into two groups: those who have read the *Letters*, and those who have read some of his other works in addition. The book has solved the gift problem for countless thousands. I know of a government office in Washington where *The Screwtape Letters* is almost invariably chosen when the girls arrange a birthday party for one of their number.

Ministers have preached from the *Letters*, and sent marked copies to parishioners in need of specific spiritual counsel. The critics, of almost every viewpoint, have loaded it with superlatives. Leonard Bacon[4] called it "this admirable, diverting, and remarkably original work," and added, "there is a spectacular and satisfactory nova in the bleak sky of satire." *The Manchester Guardian*[5] stated: "The book is sparkling yet truly reverent, in fact a perfect joy, and should become a classic."

The Screwtape Letters, then, have been adequately praised. Lewis, I suspect, is sometimes irked at the disproportionate fame of the infernal

correspondence. He has confessed that writing it serially for the *Guardian* grew to be a "terrible bore," and when I talked with him he said that it was far from being his favorite.

However, I have no desire to battle the whole weight of critical and popular opinion. The *Letters* are very good indeed, in a very specialized way. They afford little scope for their author's poetic or myth-making ability, but they reveal his psychological insight and his satire at their sharpest.

The *Letters* purport to be written by His Infernal Excellency Screwtape to his young demon assistant Wormwood, who is stationed on the earth. Wormwood's mission is to undermine the faith of a recent convert to Christianity—a pallid, feckless young man, rather like a christianized Mark Studdock. Screwtape bestows a great wealth of shrewd advice on the inexperienced tempter. Wormwood, being new at the job, is inclined toward dramatic techniques, but Screwtape, with the wisdom of many victories, advises him:[6]

> It does not matter how small the sins are provided their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts....

The book seems calculated to accomplish two things. First of all, Lewis uses the wisdom of Hell to turn the tables on disparagers of Christianity. Screwtape's knowing advice in the very first letter takes for granted that modern thought, such as philosophic materialism, is based not on reason but emotion, and warns Wormwood against any action that would tempt the patient into using his own mind.

The other purpose of the *Letters* is to encourage the wavering Christian by showing him that his uncertainties are nothing unique, and in all likelihood are planted in his mind by agents of Our Father Below.

The epistolary pattern makes it possible for Lewis to take swipes at many of his pet aversions by the simple expedient of having Screwtape praise them. A hasty glance through the *Letters* will reveal that the Historical Method, flippancy (as distinguished from joy, fun, and the joke proper), "pacifism-and-Christianity," the "historical Jesus," and various fashions in feminine beauty are all targets for witty condemnation.

Quite unintentionally, it may be, Lewis accomplished in *The Screwtape Letters* what he conspicuously failed to do in *The Pilgrim's Regress*—he rivaled

Bunyan. The temptations of the patient, and his eventual victory over the team of Screwtape and Wormwood, are the twentieth-century equivalent of the salvation of Christian, as told by the good seventeenth-century tinker.

When *The Great Divorce* appeared in 1946 the dust-jacket of the American edition hopefully described it as "brilliant symbolism very like the author's famous 'Screwtape Letters.'" No blurb-writer has ever missed the mark more sadly. The two books are alike only in the acute psychological insight that both reveal.

The Great Divorce was not received with the same unmixed delight that greeted the *Letters*. It is too disturbing for easy enjoyment. The theme might well be George Macdonald's warning: "No. There is no escape. There is no Heaven with a little Hell in it." Or to quote Lewis's own words, from the Preface:[7]

> Blake wrote the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. If I have written of their Divorce, this is not because I think myself a fit antagonist for so great a genius, nor even because I feel at all sure that I know what he meant. But in some sense or other the attempt to make that marriage is perennial. The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable "either-or", that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without our being called on for a final and total rejection of anything we should like to retain. This belief I take to be a disastrous error. You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind.

Throughout the book the drastic "either-or" is being forced upon the reader. There is very little sugaring of humor and satire to kill the bitter taste, and the beauty of the fantasy somehow only deepens the solemn feeling that, as the angel says to one of the characters,[8] "This moment contains all moments."

The plot amounts to little. Like *The Pilgrim's Regress*, the story is a dream-vision, but there the resemblance ends. The dreamer is Lewis himself, who does not discover he is dreaming until near the end of the book.

In the first chapter the narrator is wandering through the endless streets of a drab, gray town, likened by some of the British reviewers to

Manchester. He boards a bus and gradually discovers that everyone there—including himself—is a transparent ghost. The entire company travel to the borders of Heaven and are given the opportunity to remain permanently. Most of them decline the offer because they cannot bear to make a clean-cut break with their favorite sins. The greater number are afflicted with some form of pride or self-centeredness, which is more precious to them than all the joys of Heaven. An artist who can think only of artistic movements and his reputation decides on the return trip, as does a woman who insists on dominating her son even after death. The only ghost with the courage to surrender his vice and stay in Heaven is a man guilty of lust—a quiet confirmation of the traditional Christian hierarchy of sins, which considers the sins of the flesh as less deadly than pride.

Each of the ghosts is met by one of the "solid people" who reasons with it and tries to prevail upon it to stay. Beyond these largely futile dialogues there is little action. The setting of the story is of great loveliness: the outlying provinces of Heaven resemble the landscapes of Perelandra.

The high point comes when Lewis encounters[9] "a very tall man, almost a giant, with a flowing beard"—George Macdonald—who, Virgil-like, explains some of the mysteries of Heaven and Hell to his disciple and commands him to inform his readers that everything he has seen is part of a dream and not to be taken literally.

One feels that *The Great Divorce* is the work of a man distinctly older than the rollicking author of *The Screwtape Letters*. The greater and more obvious seriousness is reflected in the sharper diversity of critical opinion. *The Providence Sunday Journal*[10] was bored: "Basically, 'The Great Divorce' is a sermon cast in the form of an allegory. It's a good sermon, but as allegory it's full of straw-men and cloudy symbolism." (Lewis, incidentally, insists with some vehemence that the book is a fantasy, not an allegory: none of the characters stands for anything else.) *The New Yorker*, on the other hand, said that[11] "If wit and wisdom, style and scholarship are requisites to passage through the pearly gates, Mr. Lewis will be among the angels."

John F. Dwyer, writing in *Thought*, commented that[12] you feel the joy and happiness of the Bright Spirits, you share their keen pity for the foolish, self-willed ghosts who are their own damnation," while A. C. Deane, in *The Spectator*, goes to considerable length to damn Lewis for lack of compassion:[13] "The metallic hardness of its tone, its air of disdain, untouched by sympathy, for the various weaknesses of human nature.... The 'Ghosts,' as the excursionists are called, meet 'Spirits' from heaven who argue with them deftly but in vain. The narrator seems, as it were, to place each Ghost in turn on the lecture-table, to exhibit with deliberate

skill his special follies and impenitence, and then to drop him back whence he came."

This charge—lack of compassion—has been leveled against some of Lewis's other books. As though anticipating it, he has Macdonald say:[14]

> "Son, son, it must be one way or the other. Either the day must come when joy prevails and all the makers of misery are no longer able to infect it: or else for ever and ever the makers of misery can destroy in others the happiness they reject for themselves. I know it has a grand sound to say yell accept no salvation which leaves even one creature in the dark outside. But watch that sophistry or ye'll make a Dog in a Manger the tyrant of the universe."

With these words Macdonald brings Lewis—and the reader—back to the pitiless theme of the book: "no Heaven with a little Hell in it." The air-raid siren that wakes Lewis might better be the warning bell that troubled John Donne on his sick-bed: "And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; it tolls for *thee*."

Notes

1. From *The Great Divorce*. Copyright 1946 by The Macmillan Company and used with their permission. Published in England by Geoffrey Bles, Ltd.
2. Geoffrey Bles Ltd., London.
3. P. 5. By permission of the publishers.
4. Critique of Pure Diabolism," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, April 17, 1943.
5. February 24, 1943.
6. From *The Screwtape Letters*, pp. 64–65. Used by permission of The Macmillan Company. Published in England by Geoffrey Bles, Ltd.
7. P. v.
8. P. 101.
9. P. 60.
10. May 5, 1946.
11. March 16, 1946.
12. December 1946.
13. "A Nightmare," January 25, 1946.
14. P. 124.

MARGARET BLOUNT

Fallen and Redeemed: Animals in the Novels of C.S. Lewis

> My first stories were written and illustrated with enormous satisfaction: they were an attempt to combine my two chief literary pleasures—dressed animals and knights in armour.
>
> —*Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis

Invented Edens have never been equally shared between animals and men until the decline of religious belief and man's displacement as the centre of the universe. It is ironic that the most memorable of such places is Narnia, a land that is under the power of Aslan, the Christian Lion. C.S. Lewis only manages this pleasing arrangement by putting the action outside the earth and into a parallel world (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) or on Mars, where animal and human sharing is even more marked, in *Out of the Silent Planet*. Mars, or Malacandra, reduces the humans to animal status; Narnia raises the animals to human heights by turning them into Talking Beasts.

The animal strain is present in all the *Narnia* books, and in the science-fiction trilogy. It shows itself in two ways: the homely (the dressed mice in Snug Town) and the heroic (the knights in armour) combine not only in C.S. Lewis's unpublished juvenilia, the stories of Animal-Land or Boxen, but in his children's stories, culminating in Aslan himself and the courtly mouse Reepicheep.

Mouse Town is not everyone's idea of heaven, but it is significant that an imagination whose first promptings of beauty (we are told) came from the illustrations to *Squirrel Nutkin* should indulge in 'dressed animals' and perhaps, wanting to write grownup novels or histories that were not allowed to get interesting on the first page but only on the second, should change this into the country of Boxen, the name given to the invented place 'Animal-Land' that adjoined India. It was the way that this imagination wanted to go; it is no coincidence that among the children's stories he most quotes from and must have most enjoyed, *The Wind in the Willows* is prominent.

The animals in Boxen are there because they have to be, but as animals they are rather an arbitrary assortment—a bull, an owl, horse, sheep or cat, ruled over by a frog (Lord John Big). It seems to have been as natural for C.S. Lewis to write about animals as it was to write religious allegory. The *Narnia* books and the science-fiction trilogy combine the two and it is interesting to see how in both series, ideal worlds are shown to be populated first by animals, later by humans, who tend to bring evil, conflict and doubt. In every case the animals exist as themselves, never as counterfeit men, always 'good' and uncorrupted. From Boxen—which, in its way, must have been rather like *Reynard the Fox*—we have moved to worlds containing rational, talking creatures in animal form, equal to men but quite different from them.

But in the first two novels of his science-fiction trilogy—*Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) and *Perelandra* (1943)—Lewis describes worlds of astonishing beauty with virtually no human populations at all, but very definite animal ones, with fur, feathers and scales. Earth is made to appear dull by comparison, its inhabitants dark, flattened and bulging to a Martian eye. In much science fiction other planets are alien and terrifying; to describe them otherwise is as untraditional as writing successful children's stories full of explicit religious allegory (of which there is far more in Narnia than in the work of George Macdonald).

Ransom's arrival on Mars in *Out of the Silent Planet* is marked by terror. He is a reluctant, kidnapped traveller and when he overhears that he is to be given to creatures called Sorns, he immediately thinks of horrors—perhaps of the two things that most frightened the author as a child—insects and ghosts.

'Wait till he sees a Sorn,' say the villains Weston and Devine; and Sorns are bird-ghosts of giant height, disturbingly almost human. Ransom's one thought on seeing one is to escape. He runs through, and hides in, the beautifully coloured and strangely elongated country, until he meets more living things, a herd of tall, pale, furry giraffe-kangaroos who are eating the tops of trees. Reassured with the idea that the planet has animals on it as well as ghosts, he is still unprepared for his first meeting with yet another

inhabitant: a gleaming black creature six or seven feet high, 'something like a penguin, something like an otter, something like a seal, something like a giant stoat'. He is rooted to the ground with fear, until, in one of the great passages of this book and the key to the *Narnia* stories, the creature opens its mouth and begins to make noises. Ransom—a scholar and a philologist—at once realises, in spite of his terror, that it is talking. That animals could be rational had not occurred to him, and as it did, it overturned the world: animal and human had no more meaning.

This, one feels, is how C.S. Lewis wanted things to be, for he had created a world in which it was so. Hross and man confront each other with a kind of balletic advance and retreat, each afraid, yet each attracted—it was 'foolish, frightening, ecstatic and unbearable all in one moment'. Later, when they have learned each other's names, Ransom and Hyoi sit on a river bank eating a kind of Martian vegetable, Ransom is struck with fear because the creature is not a man, but is seven feet high, covered in hair and whiskered like a cat. But it is when he can make the change and consider it as an animal that he can love it 'as though Paradise had never been lost and earliest dreams were true', for it has the charm of speech and reason. Here is the romantic Eden before the fall, glimpsed in John's Island in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, 1933, where man and animal are not only equal, but friends. In more mundane fashion, it is the old story of the child who longed for his dog, or his Teddy bear to speak, and as a man, made up stories in which they did. It is Animal-Land and Paradise combined. All the science-fiction stories and the whole of the *Narnia* cycle are played on this note. In *Out of the Silent Planet* there is Eden, in *Perelandra* the reader witnesses the story of the fall, in *That Hideous Strength*, the fall has already happened. But in all three there is the reminder that the fall of man brought the fall, or fate, or exploitation of animals with it.

Out of the Silent Planet has other interesting ideas concerning Mars—or Malacandra, in Martian language—as an idealised Animal-Land. Ransom comes to realise that this is a planet with no countries, only three different races. Manlike, he tries to rationalise their society (late Stone Age?) and to wonder which of the three species—the Hrossa, the ghostly birdlike Sorns, or the reptilian Pfifltriggi—is the dominant one. He finds out that they are equal but different in nature, one poetic, one philosophical and one physically creative, and that the same God that made them made men too. He hears of an earlier race which has died out, for none are intended to live for ever.

In one sense in this book there are man-bird, man-seal and man-toad, yet in another the men in the story are made to feel small, insignificant, ugly and at the end, for all their space ships, foolish.

At the very end comes animal vengeance which C.S. Lewis uses and re-uses to remind us that since the fall animal creation has been consistently killed, enslaved and abused. In this novel it is comic vengeance taken on one of the men, the wicked scientist Weston who is here the villain, later to become the arch villain of Perelandra. He is removed to have his head bathed in cold water, 'to cool him off'.

This is a joke to the Hrossa and Pfifltriggi but to Weston, whose plans would have prostituted and exploited both animals' and humans, it is a real revenge. From first to last he has never realised the Malacandrian's nobility, but takes them to be animals or creatures of a low order: he can never regard the non-human as equal.

> We dipped his head in the cold water seven times (says a hross). The seventh time something fell off it. We had thought it was the top of his head but now we saw it was a covering made of the skin of some creature ... then we dipped it seven times more. The creature talked a lot between the dips and mart between the second seven, but we could not understand it.

The ignominy was cruelty to Weston, who was expecting torture and a martyr's death. A very similar incident happens in the *Narnia* story at the end of *The Magician's Nephew* where the Wicked Uncle, another Weston figure (but even worse because he is a magician as well as a scientist), is dealt with by the Narnian Talking Beasts of whom he is naturally terrified and whose language he does not understand. The Beasts' intention is kind but the result is nightmare, quite unbearable if it was not comic. They think he is a tree and try to plant him, the wrong way up.

The animals' revenge in *That Hideous Strength* is nightmare come true, brought about, significantly, by confusion of language and man's reduction to the level of the animals he has been exploiting. Once again the animals are not guilty—they are doing nothing except obeying instinct.

In both the Edens of Mars and Venus the evil comes from without in the shape of a man, and animal characters, rational or otherwise, are shown to be guiltless and uncorrupted. They do not even understand evil; it is so rare among them that it has to be explained in terms of something of almost legendary rarity, strange and unfortunate.

The classical and northern elements which always combined in Lewis's work—making the inhabitants of Narnia a combination of Chiron and Squirrel Nutkin—reappear in Perelandra, the Venus of the trilogy, a planet as warm and fluid as Malacandra was hard and cold. Ransom speculates among other things on whether situations and creatures regarded as legendary on one planet become real on another: an idea which appealed greatly to Lewis and which he used in Narnia and in the science-fiction short story 'Forms of Things Unknown'. On Malacandra Ransom is shown comparing the Sorn Augray with the Cyclops of Ulysses, and throughout the *Narnia* books there are an astonishing and not always happily mixed number of creatures from different legends—the ones that appealed to the author most—inhabiting a created world that is obviously England only better.

In *Perelandra* the legend is that of the temptation of Eve, which Ransom is allowed to witness in the hope that he will be able to prevent it. But the tempter is not an animal, not even the most unpopular one of all, whose only apologist has been Rudyard Kipling; it is the wicked Weston again, the power-mad humanist, a type Lewis regarded as the worst in existence and who is later taken over by the forces of evil becoming, like them, unkillable and all but invincible.

The animals in this novel do not speak and are all in a state of nature in an Eden which, allowing for differences of climate and ecology, is rather like that of the Bible. Eve is shown at the summit of creation, 'The Lady' whom the animals know and love and obey. The devil in the form of Weston tries to bring about her downfall by argument and persuasion, leading up to the great temptation—the invitation to walk on the fixed land, the forbidden place. The interesting idea is advanced that God put it there in order to be able to say No; it would have been equally interesting if C.S. Lewis had suggested that Adam was the one vulnerable to temptation (but in the last novel of the trilogy a man is tempted, by the offer of power: Eve in Perelandra is tempted through latent feminine vanity).

The Perelandrian animals are beautiful, mythical and heraldic: a tame, winged dragon, flying frogs, rideable dolphins and a creature called the Singing Beast which suggests an okapi but which is described as being like a dog with the legs of a camel, the neck and head of a horse, but vast in size. It is a cuckoo beast, suckled and reared by a mother of another kind. Lewis shows it existing with such strange, hidden, sad joy, beauty and shyness that words other than his own reduce it to a cartoon anomaly.[1]

The animals in *That Hideous Strength* are earthly ones, non-rational, but important enough to be heroes or victims, in the former sense pets (of a kind), in the latter, inhabitants of a zoo. C.S. Lewis's insect fear, exorcised by a harmless monster in *Perelandra*, also suggested 'either machines that have come to life, or life degenerating into mechanism', and dominance of the female and the collective. *That Hideous Strength* shows just such a process beginning to take hold when the mysterious Ministry, the National Institute

of Coordinated Experiments with its ambiguous initials, takes root and gains power by infiltration and persuasion as a prelude to inevitable force. One of its principal officers is the sadistic lesbian Miss Hardcastle.

A subsidiary interest of this devilish symposium is animal experiment and a large zoo is kept for this purpose. The opposing side, who live in a place called The Manor, St Anne's, an almost enchanted country house, have animals as pets including a vast bear called Mr Bultitude who has escaped from a circus and whose delight it is to sit in the bathroom on cold days. It is Eden again; all the pets seem to have arrived by their own free will and to lead lives of equality with the humans, unencumbered by leads, fences or locked doors, in harmony with man and each other. The opposition torture their animals in cages.

The 'good' humans are an odd collection of the simple and the intelligent. Perhaps one is justified in peopling Eden, or even Heaven, with the characters one has most loved and admired (in *The Great Divorce* George Macdonald is Heaven's interpreter and guide) and Hell with those for whom one feels the most horror—scientists, experimenters, those whom sheer logic has rendered inhuman, the power-mad manipulators, the merely vain. In a scene of orgiastic horror during after-dinner speeches at a banquet, the humans lose the power of language and with it their ascendancy, and the beasts from the laboratories attack and destroy them. The 'good' bear Mr Bultitude annihilates the evil 'head' of the Institute by eating it, prompted by simple hunger. The animals are neither good nor bad; they are themselves, simple and amoral, creatures with whom the planet is unequally shared, neither agents of witchcraft nor of heaven. Though at the end a few of them appear to speak in the manner of Balaam's Ass, they are not rationally intelligent; but in the war between good and evil they have a large part to play. At the end, when the occupants of the Manor are revealed to each other in beauty that has always, in mundane life, been hidden, the mating of the animals in the garden is part of the joy of revealed love.

It would appear to have been as difficult for C.S. Lewis to avoid religious allegory, as it was to avoid the prominent role that animals, usually intelligent and often humanised, play in it. It is, of course quite in order to write heroic romance dealing with the struggle between good and evil without any religious theme. *The Hobbit* is such a book. When *The Lord of the Kings* first appeared one critic found its lack of religious feeling remarkable enough for comment—as remarkable as its lack of women. But aim at the distant hills and you find yourself going in at the front door, as Alice did. Whatever kind of story Lewis thought he was going to write, religious allegory appeared. This is illustrated yet again in the recorded conversation

between Lewis, Kingsley Amis and Brian Aldiss (*Unreal Estates: Of Other Worlds*, 1966) when Lewis remarks, 'The starting point of my second novel, *Perelandra*, was my mental picture of the floating islands. The whole of the rest of my labours in a sense consisted of building up a world in which floating islands could exist. And then, of course, the story about an averted fall developed.' To which Aldiss replied, 'I am surprised you put it this way round. I would have thought that you constructed *Perelandra* for the didactic purpose,' which shows how wrong one can be.

In a sense, Narnia is Malacandra and Perelandra over again; in another, it is Mouse Town and Knights-in-armour; but it is a long, long way from Animal-Land.

In the beginning of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lucy, exploring, enjoying the feel of the fur coats, discovers with a beautiful tactile pun that they are turning into pine and spruce and the mothballs into snow. Lewis uses the device of the Parallel World, a favourite in Fantasy literature. It is a world not reached by space ships but by magic (Lewis quickly abandoned the space ship as a device for travel). Lewis Carroll does this too, and so does E. Nesbit who has exactly the same opening of a cupboard or wardrobe door in a story called 'The Aunt and Amabel'; it is used by contemporary writers such as Alan Garner. C.S. Lewis makes Narnia an ideal world in which the oreads and enchanters mingle with dwarves and talking mice. Few writers have given a magic place such definition, such solid geography and such a gallery of characters. From the mind of a writer so stocked with images of the classical and 'northern' kind, so coloured by Christianity, the first elements of the story appear; the faun, the ice-queen and the golden lion. The result is a wonderful and at times uneasy mixture of ingredients, like a rich but indigestible Christmas cake. Critics of Narnia have tumbled out the words *rich* and *strange*, thought for a bit, and then come up with *strange* and *rich* again, as if almost at a loss; indeed, it has some affinities with Prospero's island. This ideal land has, for the sake of adventure and dramatic conflict, to have evil in it, and it is presented as an unredeemed country, waiting for Aslan's death and resurrection.

As the books progress, one can see the creative imagination at work. At first, the classic strain—the fauns, dryads, centaurs and others—is far stronger. It blends with the Northern European element, the witches, giants, dwarves and earthmen, and the inevitable Talking Beasts, ruled over by Christ the Lion, Aslan, son of the Emperor over the sea. Perhaps the uneasiness that adults feel is not shared by children, who do not notice that the child Edmund is made to play the part of Judas, being led astray by such ordinary means as sherbet and Turkish Delight (evil confections from *The*

Arabian Nights that Lewis disliked as a child); or that Susan and Lucy are like the two Marys at the tomb on the morning of Easter Day.

The Talking Beasts come, in the end, to dominate the whole narrative, resulting in the wonderful animal characters of Reepicheep, Bree and Puddleglum. Aslan is shown creating and dissolving the world, and at the very end it is animal nature that brings about its destruction. The cycle has returned to its beginning, in Animal-Land, and Mouse Town. The animals have become human enough to have heroes and villains, tragedy and triumph, but C.S. Lewis never quite returns to his original. There is never any confusion as to *which* order his creatures belong to: they are always themselves.

But in the first book, this element is muted, the classical and religious elements are strong. It is interesting to note that in all the *Narnia* stories the classical characters are invariably 'goodies'. There is never an evil dryad, faun or centaur; creatures like hydras, gorgons, chimeras or harpies have not found their way into Narnia. But when one comes to the 'Northern' animals, Lewis seems more at home and characters are more flexible. The White Queen is a snow queen rather than a Circe, some dwarves are good and some corrupt, there are good and bad giants (but no clever ones) and even a pleasantly childlike and enthusiastic lion. The really bad characters are all from the Northern kind—wolves, fungi, ogres, ghosts and werewolves. Northern and classical do not emulsify with smoothness. Perhaps it is inevitable that they find themselves in opposing armies.

The only non-human characters to be given any depth in this first story—which is full of ideas, images, descriptions and incident without much character interest apart from the reform and repentance of Edmund the traitor—are the beavers, and Mr Tumnus the faun. They are all essentially homely, and the faun, a highly intelligent person, is Northernised. He lives in a cave and serves tea. The cave has a carpet, chairs, table and dresser, and bookshelves with such titles as *The Life and Letters of Silenus, Men, Monks and Gamekeepers: a study in popular legend*. If a faun could be found living in an English wood, his home would certainly be like this. The beavers are even more literally Northernised: they live in a log cabin with snowshoes, rocking chair, stove, sewing machine and fishing tackle. They are completely humanised (apart from Mr Beaver's fishing by paw). Mrs Beaver, when at last they leave the lodge in haste, wants to bring her sewing machine. 'I can't abide the thought of that witch fiddling with it and breaking it,' she says. On the journey the beavers walk on two legs and hand round spirits in a flask. There is even the odd adjective 'wrinkled' applied to one of Mrs Beaver's paws, indicating age and slight animal-person confusion.[2]

The later animals that join in the battle with Peter to help win him his kingdom are all of the fairy-tale, heraldic or mythical kind: bears, leopards, stags, lions, horses, nothing either odd or ordinary and nothing comic, no elephants, giraffes, cats or monkeys (these appear in later books). It is clear that the animal strain is not the strongest, or even among the strongest strains, of this story which is concerned with human sin and redemption in an invented world. The animals are always present, they talk and fight and everything ends with a mixture of thrones and sand-between-the-toes, the four children living happily ever after into a courtly middle age before they find their way out through the wardrobe into the world again. Everything is harmony—animal, myth, classical and northern are all united as is suggested by the little party in the wood that is the sign of the end of the witch's rule: squirrels, fox, dwarves and fauns all having Christmas dinner together. Father Christmas and Silenus should surely have joined them.

In the second and less successful book *Prince Caspian*, the animal element is stronger—as with each succeeding instalment. The Prince's lost kingdom consists almost entirely of Talking Beasts who are exiled or in hiding, and who later make up the rebel army with a number or dryads, fauns, dwarves, centaurs (why is it that Northern myth does not supply any heroic or delightful animal-human creatures?). Here we see the Narnian creatures beginning to form themselves into a workable population. The 'small' animals are larger than life and the 'large' ones smaller; and as in Malacandra, the racial mixture is slightly comic.

The book is most notable for the introduction of C.S. Lewis's best animal character, significantly, a mouse. But Reepicheep is not part of Snug Town, a place that the faun Mr Tumnus belongs to, but of the Knights-in-Armour and Courtly Mice mentioned in *Surprised by Joy*. He is described as 'gay and martial', makes grand gestures and talks like a mixture of Sir Thomas Malory and an old-fashioned general: he wears a rapier and twirls his long whiskers as if they were moustaches

> 'There are twelve of us, Sire,' he said with a dashing and graceful bow, 'and I place all the resources of my people unreservedly at your Majesty's disposal.' Caspian tried hard (and successfully) not to laugh.

The joke, even though Reepicheep is described as over a foot high, is his smallness—always the joke with Mouse characters in stories displaying them as bustling housewives in doll's houses, or triumphing over impossible odds (*The Rescuers*). Reepicheep starts off as part of this tradition, the joke

being made even more pointed by the largeness of his heart, the size of his courage and self-esteem and Caspian's and Peter's tact and politeness in dealing with him.

At the end of the book, Reepicheep actually answers Aslan back—a thing that no other animal, creature or human dares to do, in any of the *Narnia* stories. Aslan is rather like a schoolmaster with an outsize but invisible cane. He tells the Mouse that he should think a little less of honour and glory, and the Mouse reminds him that 'a very small size has been bestowed on us Mice' and that they cannot help guarding their dignity above all. It is a courageous and prompt answer and Aslan is won by it.

This is a very long way from the tiny Aesop creatures who, mouse-sized and dumb, gnawed away the ropes that bound Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The third and best of the *Narnia* books, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, has Reepicheep the mouse as its central, tragic hero; and this, in a fairy tale involving humans, is unique. At last, animal creation has taken human status and intelligence; we are back with the Hrossa and Sorns again. The status of the Mouse is the same as that of the courtly members of the crew (he is a Knight of the Order of the Lion) and the story concerns, among other things, his quest for the end of the world culminating in his strange and poetic death which has true heroic sadness. But there is a difference between Reepicheep and the humans—he is not quite a human in disguise. He is in some ways better and braver (in the adventure of The Dark Island and the Magician) and more level headed (with the Sea Serpent). He gains and loses by being a mouse and not a man, and the differences are explicit. He does not feel the shudders of horror that the others feel in the Dark Island; he has no dreams and cannot understand human fear of nightmare; he feels no exhaustion in the tropics and can stay awake to guard the water supply (or else is able to subdue the flesh more easily than the humans).

It is odd, perhaps, that *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the most satisfying of the *Narnia* books, is the one with the least of Aslan in it and the fewest Talking Beasts. Religious allegory is unobtrusive and there is a strong Arthurian odour. Part of the interest, especially at the beginning, is the improvement and redemption of Eustace, the ordinary boy. We first see Reepicheep through his eyes.

> Something very curious indeed had come out of the cabin in the poop and was slowly approaching them ... it was a Mouse on its hind legs and stood about two feet high. A thin band of gold passed round its head under one ear and over the other and in this was stuck a long crimson feather. (As the Mouse's fur was very dark, almost black, the effect was bold and striking.) Its left paw rested on the hilt of a sword very nearly as long at its tail. Its balance, as it paced gravely along the swaying deck, was perfect, its manners courtly.

This personage is unstrokeable, uncuddleable. Indeed Reepicheep and Talking Beasts in general inspire a certain amount of awe; the only people who do not feel it and do not like the situation are the strangers or evil humans or those who have got into Narnia by some sort of mistake, such as the Telmarines, who, when given the chance to stay in Narnia, decline.

> 'Live here, with a lot of blooming performing animals! No fear,' they said. 'And ghosts too,' some added with a shudder. 'That's what those Dryads really are' ... 'I don't trust 'em,' they said. 'Not that awful Lion and all.'

This is Uncle Andrew's reaction in *The Magician's Nephew*; it is also that of Professor Weston in *Out of the Silent Planet*. 'Ugh, take it away,' says Eustace when, brought unwillingly and by mistake into Narnia, he sees Reepicheep. 'I hate mice. And I never could bear performing animals. They're silly and vulgar and—sentimental.' One feels a certain sympathy for him, though this is far from the author's intention. Reepicheep immediately has cause for single combat with Eustace; and one can hardly blame Eustace for disliking this adventure into which he has been pulled. It promises to be uncomfortable, messy, dangerous, and starts by making him seasick and is going to be full or characters and situations he has never met and would not have chosen (this is blamed on the wrong school—a potent Progressive source of corruption, responsible for the treachery of Edmund—and the wrong books, or rather, lack of the right ones). Eustace does the only things he knows; complains and threatens, tries to contact the British consul, tries to maintain his identity by talking about liners and aeroplanes, and in the end keeps an aggrieved diary. In short, he behaves in typical Professor Weston fashion. The first half of the book has considerable pace and fascination through the conflict between Eustace and his surroundings.

Of course Eustace cannot win; Heaven is larger than the world. He must learn to like Heaven, or Eden, with its Equality for Animals, or go away. There is an exactly similar situation in *The Great Divorce* where the visitors from Hell neither recognise not like Heaven. The scene is set for the Animal Revenge, which here is two-pronged. Eustace tries to humiliate Reepicheep—it was meant as a joke, he says afterwards, but the Mouse has

no sense of humour and again offers single combat. 'I'm a pacifist,' says Eustace, but the Mouse has never heard of them and Eustace is beaten with the flat of his sword. As he has never experienced corporal punishment at the Progressive school, the sensation is new. His subsequent dragon adventure—being changed not only into an animal but into the ugliest, most feared and hated creature in the world, with a boy's consciousness but carnivorous and cannibalistic instincts, to say nothing of a painful iron band immovably stuck on his foreleg—is a punishment almost too terrible to contemplate; far beyond anything meted out to Weston or Uncle Andrew. But as this is a children's story Eustace emerges at last, a sadder and a wiser boy. He has been made to fit into Narnia, like a bulgy Lost Boy into his tree (Peter did something to him and it was all right).

The Mouse throughout behaves with gallantry and courage so great as to be almost foolhardy, but never comic; always as immune from human envy, fear and greed as if he were lacking in some faculty. The end of the book becomes more and more like the quest for the Grail as they reach Ramandu's Isle with its holy relic, and the Utter East, where prophecy has told the Mouse that he will meet his heart's desire. And so dies Reepicheep, launching himself over the world's edge in his tiny coracle, heroic, courteous, tiny, humourless and unforgettable, nonhuman, lesser and greater and completely other.

The only other characters to compare with Reepicheep in stature are Puddleglum the Marsh Wiggle and Bree the horse. Puddleglum, in 'The Silver Chair', is hardly animal; he is a humanised Pfiltrigg, animal in his webbed feet and fingers with serious saurian views of life. It is made quite clear that Wiggles are a separate species in the Narnian world. Puddleglum is something between Mark Tapley and a frog. His arms and legs are very long—long enough to frighten the Giant Queen; Pauline Baynes' illustration shows Puddleglum on the floor before the Giant's feet in a half-collapsed position, rather as if a small human grasshopper or locust was poised for a spring, its knees higher than its ears. Puddleglum's hair is green-grey and flat like reeds, and he smokes strange, heavy tobacco that trickles out of his pipe like foggy water.

He—always 'he' and not 'It' as Reepicheep is described—appears to hope for disaster and to thrive on it, to court it by mentioning the worst before it can possibly happen. In reality he is well prepared, sensible and the best companion Eustace and Jill could have chosen for their adventure (or have had chosen for them by Aslan, who, though absent, influences the happenings in this story, Will-of-God fashion). Puddleglum is slow, sure, steady and has the reptilian virtues of being cold blooded and reliable. One

would imagine that in winter he might hibernate, but on the contrary, he leads the children through storms and snows to the wild lands of the North, his only weakness being drink, his greatest strength his clear-sighted, unemotional pessimism—always ready to doubt a honeyed voice or a deceitfully fair face. He is not taken in by the Lady, the wicked queen who is an enchantress and a shape-changer. (Beware! Aslan has warned elsewhere against half-and-halfers. It appears that the author only admits the fixed and finished off categories into the animal Eden; there is no evolution and certainly no blurring. It is all like Genesis.)

Puddleglum remembers Aslan's rules when the children have forgotten them, is unexpectedly brave and—another animal virtue similar to that of the heroic Mouse—toughly immune when the witch tries to drug and hypnotise the party into forgetfulness and make them believe that the counterfeit, underground world is the real one. Puddleglum has a heroic last stand in which he uses his cold webbed feet to stamp out the Lady's fire, and asserts his belief in the sun and his determination to spend his life, however short, in looking for it.

As a character he is vivid and unique and earns the children's love and gratitude. As a species he is lacking, as he is the only one of his kind we are allowed to see; Wiggles are said to be solitary. He is the most manlike of Narnian creatures, perhaps only a canny, careful East Anglian after all.

If Reepicheep is the most memorable mouse ever created, Bree is one of the most interesting horses. 'The Horse and his Boy' has the amusing situation of animal creation being not merely equal or different from human but, in its own rather snobbish opinion, better. Aslan, after all, created the animals in his image, and humans were an afterthought, a transplant, as is shown in 'The Magician's Nephew'. 'The Horse and his Boy' takes place outside Narnia and had the most purely human excitements about it—battle, treachery and fugitives—but in many ways it is the least characteristic of the *Narnia* books and bears about the same relation to the others as *A Tale of Two Cities* to the rest of Dickens. It concerns the adventures of a Narnian Talking Horse (trained by mistake as a warhorse of Calormen), a Boy who is from Archenland and does not know it, and their struggles to find their way home.

Calormen, the Eastern land on the borders of Archenland and Narnia, is neutral, but inclined to burst into enmity and conquest. Its inhabitants are practical, money-minded, devious and reflect the sad fact that the author as a child could not stand *The Arabian Nights*; his allegiance appears to have gone as far south as Greece and no further (the strongly Eastern flavour of Christianity has been absorbed into Europe for so long that it has almost lost its original tang).