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sunlight blazed in his white hair" (199). The sun and the son are the Light, as the masculine authority sits at the center of all value systems in the book.

Susan Cooper herself defined fantasy as "the metaphor through which we discover ourselves."

> Our writing is haunted by those parts of our experience which we do not understand. As you, child or adult, are drawn to our work, your response comes from that same shadowy land. Like us you are escaping into yourselves. (22)

That "same shadowy land," as embodied in "The Dark is Rising" sequence, however, appears too precisely a map of the binary opposition between male and female, the territory of patriarchal authority, where not only the females but also non-adult males are marginalized. Cooper's fantasy sequence is not an exploration of the possibilities of human identity but rather a definition of the limitations adult value systems place on children's characters and actions.

We need, as critics of children's literature, to begin the process of looking clearly at the havoc which binary divisions of the world wreak upon the characterizations and value systems of novels meant to launch young readers, "escaping into yourselves." Nancy Veglahn's recent article suggests that the gender identity of evil characters in fantasy can help both male and female readers to understand the recognized and repressed sides of their own natures. When, however, the female's nature is represented only in its weakest/nicest version, such a mutually liberating outcome is not possible. The figures of the Dark may show us what one female writer fears in men but comparable balance in the portrayal of females, good or bad, is lacking. "The Dark is Rising" sequence, despite its promising moments, disappoints, not because Light and Dark are polar but because male and female are polarized. Late in the sequence, Will Stanton remembers a piece of learning from the Old Ones. Though it describes the willow tree, its conventionally gendered images and ending emotion characterize all too aptly Cooper's fantasy work: *"Strong as a young lion, pliant as a loving woman, and bitter to the taste, as all enchantment in the end must be"* (*Silver on the Tree* 185).

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What C. S. Lewis Took From E. Nesbit

by Mervyn Nicholson

For anyone who knows the Narnia books of C. S. Lewis, there is a story by E. Nesbit in her collection *The Magic World* that immediately stands out. It is called "The Aunt and Amabel"; it tells of a girl who damages a special flower-bed without meaning to. Her aunt punishes her by confining her to a "bedroom, the one with the wardrobe with a looking-glass in it" (228). The only furnishings described are a bed—and a wardrobe. Then Amabel finds a railway timetable that lists a peculiar destination: "the extraordinary name '*Whereyouwantogoto*'." Its nearest "station was '*Bigwardrobeinspareroom*'" (224). Intrigued, she opens the wardrobe door and steps inside, like Lucy in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. And like Lucy, Amabel discovers something in it besides coats—in her case a crystal cave. Lucy finds snowy woods, not a cave—but the faun Lucy meets immediately takes her to a cave. In Nesbit, Amabel finds a sumptuous place where she is lovingly welcomed by "The People Who Understand" (231). With their help she and her aunt are reconciled, exchanging forgiveness in a manner characteristic of Nesbit. The motif of *human* reconciliation is crucial. But the obvious point is that the motifs found in "The Aunt and Amabel" are also found in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Lewis was deeply indebted to E. Nesbit, not only in matters of plot, character and image, but even in small details of phrasing. When he set out to write his *Chronicles of Narnia*, he though of them as being Nesbit books: as belonging to a type or genre practised by E. Nesbit.[1] In many respects the Narnia books begin where the Nesbit books leave off: *The Magician's Nephew*, the first of the series, begins with an allusion to Nesbit. Much has been said about Lewis's place in the tradition of Christian romance and apologetic and of his links to Christian writers like MacDonald and Williams, but this emphasis has obscured his debt to non-Christian and even anti-Christian writers. Of these, E. Nesbit is the most important. What is striking is that Lewis, a belligerently orthodox Christian, who saw his imaginative writing as performing a quasi-evangelistic function, should have so much in common with a writer like Nesbit,

who was a Fabian Socialist with occult interests.[2]

In both writers, a division between two kinds of world is evident: the ordinary one of adult and childhood experience (the so-called "real" world), and an extraordinary world where impossible things happen—impossible by the standards of the "real" world at any rate. For convenience we may refer to them as, respectively, "This World," and the "Other World." This World is the realm of plausibility or actuality: the social context, normally the society of the author's time. The Other World is a realm of expanded possibilities: the place where anything may happen. Lewis uses the wardrobe as a threshold symbol to link This World with the Other World: the English countryside in 1940 with Narnia under Queen Jadis. E. Nesbit employs the wardrobe image in the same way, to link This World with the Other World, where This World is the realistic place of misunderstanding and punishment in turn-of-the-century England. By contrast the Other World is where such misunderstandings can be dissolved: here the desirable is the obtainable. The brevity of the short story form, however, dictates a very different use of the wardrobe image in Nesbit from what we find in Lewis, where the structure is far bigger and more elaborate. But that Lewis had "The Aunt and Amabel" in mind (however unconsciously) seems clear.

The links are too important to ignore. Both girls, separated from parents before the action begins, find a magic wardrobe. Lucy, under the stress of a competitive game, and Amabel, under the stress of punishment, go through the wardrobe into a world associated with desire (Narnia in one, "*Whereyouwantogoto*" in the other). Lewis adopts not only the image of the magic wardrobe but even the phraseology used by his predecessor. In Nesbit, Amabel finds that domestic furniture has expanded into a geographical location ("The name of the station was '*Bigwardrobeinspareroom*'"). And while the room is called at first "the best bedroom," it is more often called the "spare room." Likewise, when Lucy tells Tumnus the faun how she came to be standing by the lamp-post in the snowy woods of Lantern Waste ("I—I got in through the wardrobe in the spare room" [9]), Tumnus turns her domestic landscape of rooms in a house into a geographical landscape ("if only I had worked harder at geography. . . I should no doubt know all about those strange countries" [9]), and when he says good-bye, he emphasizes this transformation: "I suppose you can find your own way from there back to Spare Oom and War Drobe" (10). "Wardrobe" becomes "War Drobe," and "spare room" "Spare Oom," altering the typography. Nesbit before him had also altered the typography: "*Bigwardrobeinspareroom.*" I emphasize this point because it reveals how thoroughly Lewis absorbed even a minor Nesbit story. He takes not only particular images—famous ones like the wardrobe—but particular words for building up his own mythical kingdom.

This is not all, either. When Amabel goes through her wardrobe, she enters a completely *white* world. Whiteness (of place, people, and things, even food) is repeatedly emphasized, reminding one of the white world, white witch, white reindeer, and white statues of the snowy Narnia that Lucy and soon Edmund happen into. Amabel boards a train with a marvelous system for meals: it supplies "*Whatyouwantoeat*" and "*Whatyouwantodrink.*" In the blink of an eye she is given the very food and drink she likes best. Lewis withheld this detail from Lucy and kept it for Edmund. When Edmund blunders in and encounters the Queen, she invites him up into her sleigh—much as Amabel gets up into her magic railway carriage. She offers him a delicious drink, then adds: "It is dull. . . to drink without eating. . . . What would you like best to eat?" and, like the food Amabel prefers, Edmund's special food—Turkish Delight—appears instantly. In Nesbit, the theme of the instant gratification of desire is part of the human reconciliation that Lewis calls the "healing of harms" (*Silver Chair* 194). But in Lewis, it is the opposite: instant gratification is part of the wicked witch's temptation strategy to entrap a young male. By means of it he is made her instrument.

Before leaving *Wardrobe*, we may note another Nesbit link. In her profoundest tale, *The Enchanted Castle,*[3] the statues in a castle garden come to life. The first of these magical beings to appear is a *faun*, who comes out of the woods past one of the children, like Tumnus the faun appearing to Lucy out of the woods—the first Narnian being to appear. The motif of statues coming to life is central to *Wardrobe:* the eponymous Witch turns people into statues that the eponymous Lion miraculously reanimates. This switching into statues and then back out of statues is the imaginative backbone of *The Enchanted Castle.* In Nesbit, the living statues are Greek gods (reminding one of Narnia's Greek dryads, naiads, etc.); much is made of the fact that those who wake up as one of them find themselves incapable of being afraid: even if they want to, they can't. But as soon as they revert to ordinary mortality, they once more experience fear. This is exactly the condition of the saved in Lewis's apocalyptic *Last Battle.* As Lucy puts it, "Have you noticed, one can't feel afraid even if one wants to? Try it" (156). The imagining of what life would feel like without the experience of fear forms a significant part in the profoundest visions of both writers.[4]

The Magic World (in which "The Aunt and Amabel" appears) is minor Nesbit. But it was major in its influence on Lewis, and other stories in the collection offer prototypes for Narnia, too. One, "The Cat-Hood of Maurice," is crucial for *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader.* It tells of a boy named Maurice, who, like Lewis's Edmund and his unreformed Eustace, is a particularly obnoxious lot. Maurice is to be sent to a special school (the motif of the special school is prominent in *The Silver Chair* as "Experiment House"; it also turns up in *Wardrobe* as the cause of Edmund's nastiness). But after abusing a cat called Lord Hugh, Maurice is changed into the cat. He attempts to communicate with the humans about his dreadful predicament by using his saucer of milk: "He carefully dipped his right paw in it, for his idea was to make letters with it on the kitchen oil-cloth. He meant to write: 'please tell me to leave off being a cat and be Maurice again,' but he found his paw a very clumsy pen, and he had to rub out the first 'P' because it only looked like an accident" (18). Later he tries with ink, with unintelligible, even disastrous results. For example:

> It was not Mabel
> itwas Maur
> ice I mean Lord Hugh (20)

One of the most memorable episodes of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* occurs when the self-centered Eustace turns into a dragon—because spiritually he is a dragon—and then tries to explain to the others, by writing in the sand, what had happened to him:

> But this never succeeded. In the first place Eustace (never having read the right books) had no idea how to tell a

> story straight. And for another thing, the muscles and nerves of the dragon-claws that he had to use had never learned to write and were not built for writing anyway. As a result he never got nearly to the end before the tide came in and washed away all the writing except the bits he had already trodden on or accidentally swished out with his tail. And all that anyone had seen would be something like this—the dots are for the bits he had smudged out—
>
> I WNET TO SLEE...RGOS AGRONS I MEAN DRANGONS CAVE CAUSE ITWAS DEAD AND AINIG SO HAR...WOKE UP AND COU...GET OFFF MI ARM OH BOTHER... (89)

Note the typographical attempt in each case to represent the unsuccessful message from the metamorphosed human (Lewis knew a similar episode in the myth of Io. Io, transformed into a cow, tries to communicate by means of hoofmarks in the sand of her father's river).

At the end of "Cat-Hood" Maurice regains human shape, having learned something from the experience of metamorphosis. Nesbit comments:

> Please dismiss any fears which you may entertain that after this Maurice became a model boy. He didn't. But he was much nicer than before. . . he is almost always nice to Mabel, for he cannot forget all that she was to him when he wore the shape of Lord Hugh. His father attributes all the improvement in his son's character to that week at Dr. Strongitharm's. . . Lord Hugh's character is unchanged. Cats learn slowly and with difficulty. (25)

With the same tone and ambivalence Lewis assesses the reforming Eustace:

> It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that "from that time forth Eustace was a different boy." To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun. (99)
>
> Back in our own world everyone soon started saying how Eustace had improved, and how "you'd never know him for the same boy"; everyone except Aunt Alberta (Eustace's mother), who said he had become very commonplace and tiresome and it must have been the influence of those Pevensie children. (210)

The dragon image itself in this episode of *Dawn Treader* is a Nesbit-style dragon—a dragon quite unlike those of other children's writers Lewis knew, such as Tolkien. Nesbit was something of an expert on dragons, with a book of dragon stories in 1899 (recently republished as *The Last of the Dragons and Some Others*). In his dragon story in *Dawn Treader* Lewis writes:

> Eustace nodded his terrible dragon head and thumped his tail in the sea and everyone skipped back (some of the sailors with ejaculations I will not put down in writing) to avoid the enormous and boiling tears which flowed from his eyes.
>
> Lucy tried hard to console him and even screwed up her courage to kiss the scaly face. (88-89)

Like Eustace the lonely dragon, the dragon in "Justnowland," another *Magic World* story, is pathetically eager for human contact. One of Nesbit's many brave girls, a model for Lucy, comforts the dragon thus:

> The pinky sunset light fell on its face, and Elsie saw that it was weeping! Great fat tears as big as prize pears were coursing down its wrinkled cheeks.
>
> "Oh, don't," said Elsie, "*don't* cry! Poor dragon, what's the matter?"
>
> "Oh!" sobbed the dragon, "I'm only so glad you've come. I—I've been so lonely. No one to love me. You *do* love me, don't you?"
>
> "Give me a kiss, dear," said the dragon, sniffing. (200)
>
> It is no joke to kiss a dragon. But Elsie did it—somewhere on the hard green wrinkles of its forehead. (201)

Lewis emphasizes the paradoxical image of the crying dragon ("A powerful dragon crying its eyes out under the moon in a deserted valley is a sight and a sound hardly to be imagined" [85]): a dragon very unlike Tolkien's Smaug or the Fafnir of Wagner and Northern mythology—but one very like the human and vulnerable dragons to be found in Nesbit.

"Accidental Magic," another important story for Lewis in *The Magic World*, offers a prototype for *The Last Battle*. A boy named Quentin de Ward goes to sleep on the "altar" at Stonehenge. When he wakes up he has gone back in time, and is on a boat from Atlantis bound for England, carrying the altar stone for Stonehenge. He is inside a pavilion enclosing the stone. When he steps out he amazes and terrifies the crew—except for the priest on board, who welcomes him as "the Chosen of the Gods" (80). The priest then cows and terrifies the rest, using the boy's miraculous arrival to frighten them. But when he and the priest are alone together, the priest assails him angrily, wanting to know who he actually is: "'This Chosen of the Gods business is all very well for the vulgar. But you and I know that there is no such thing as magic'" (82). Thus he is a non-believing priest who uses religion to intimidate others: exactly the kind of figure to attract Lewis's attention. The non-believing leader who uses religion (=superstition) to control people is a favorite target of his. Later, the boy is sacrificed on the altar stone—and wakes up in his own time. Terror turns into joyous awakening, just as, earlier, the putative fiction turns into a reality.

This unbelieving priest reappears as Rishda Tarkaan, the Calormene invader in *The Last Battle*. He pretends that Aslan is hidden in a stable behind him, and even insists that Aslan is the same as the Calormene demon-god Tash. He parades a false Aslan out of the stable, who cows and terrifies everybody, just as the surprising appearance of the "Chosen of the Gods" astounds the crew in "Accidental Magic." Rishda assumes that belief is nonsense, good only for controlling others. Lewis emphasizes the motif of unbelievers manipulating those who do believe. Thus Rishda, to his horror, discovers the truth after all when Tash actually *does* turn up inside the stable. In "Accidental Magic," the priest calls magic nonsense—but events prove him very wrong. Likewise, in *The Last Battle* the unscrupulous Rishda actually meets the god he doesn't believe in. Later the Calormenes sacrifice Narnians (just as Nesbit's Quentin is sacrificed) by casting them all into the stable. The Narnian king is thrown into the stable, but instead of dying, he finds himself in a totally different time and space—his true, proper home—exactly like Nesbit's Quentin, who wakes up not dead but free, in his proper time, and united with Nesbit's

equivalent of heaven—his mother. Again, the nightmare dissolves into joyous liberation, just as, earlier, the unbeliever discovers his fiction to be the truth.

In *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, the four children transport their cook by magic to a paradisal South Sea Island, where she is made queen. Later, they bring a working-class Londoner who originally came from the country and prefers country work to the hand-to-mouth existence he has now, and the two are married. In *The Magician's Nephew*, a cabdriver, like the Londoner in Nesbit, originally came from the country and prefers country life; he is brought to Narnia suddenly by magic. Aslan makes him king. His wife, washing clothes back in England, is magically transported to Narnia to be queen. (Lewis, one notes, begins with a king and then gets a queen for him; Nesbit, a feminist, begins with a queen and then finds a king for her; see Wilson 226.)

Lewis drew upon Nesbit frequently, often in quite small details. For example when Uncle Andrew in *The Magician's Nephew* experiments with magic rings, he ties tape around a guinea-pig with a ring on top. But the guinea-pig is unable to return from the place to which the ring sends it, and it never comes back. Denis in Nesbit's *Would-Be-Goods* ties sashes around the middle of guinea-pigs, with "bows stuck up on the tops of their backs. One of the guinea-pigs was never seen again" (21). The guinea-pig disappeared in Nesbit and reappeared in Lewis. Her depiction of the attic in *The Would-Be-Goods* and her warning about stepping from rafter to rafter (90) is essentially repeated (warning included) in *Nephew* (13). In *The Phoenix and the Carpet* the children, trapped in a ruin, push away some debris against the wall and find a hidden door with steps leading down behind it (17 in all) to a treasure chamber. In *Prince Caspian*, the children, trapped on an island with a ruin, find a hidden door behind debris that they remove; again there are steps down (16 in this case) leading to a treasure chamber. Such echoes are common, even in phrasing. In *The Silver Chair*, the claustrophobic Jill panics when the children enter a tunnel. "'I can't go in there, I can't! I can't! I won't,' she panted" (130). In Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, the children must go into a dark tunnel; one girl has an identical panic: "'I don't like it. It'll be pitch dark in a minute. I *won't* go on in the dark. I don't care what you say, I *won't*'" (178). The importance of holding hands when there is magic about is emphasized throughout *The House of Arden* and by Lewis at the beginning of *Prince Caspian*. On a larger scale, the superb episode of the mer-people in *Dawn Treader* has a direct precedent in Nesbit's *Wet Magic*.

When he began the Narnia books, Lewis seems to have had Nesbit's important trilogy *Five Children and It*, *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, and *The Story of the Amulet* particularly in mind, especially *The Amulet*, the greatest of them. Thus just as there are four children in *The Amulet*—Cyril, Anthea, Robert, and Jane—there are four children, two of each sex arranged in the same age sequence, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. But while *Wardrobe* has features typical of Nesbit, it is *The Magician's Nephew* that is perhaps closest to Nesbit. Lewis actually refers to her on the opening page. *Nephew* is set in her world: turn-of-the-century London. Nesbit's children are separated from their parents and must live in a house occupied by a single older woman; the topmost room of the house is occupied by a "poor learned gentleman," who is "very long and thin" (41, 42). *Nephew* similarly centers on the boy Digory, who is separated from his parents and must stay with a single older woman. In the attic of the house is the study of an eccentric old bachelor, who spends his time doing obscure research—exactly like the "very long and thin" bachelor upstairs in *The Amulet*.

In *The Amulet*, the children are guided by the supernatural Psammead to use a magic object—the amulet—to visit different places in history, including Atlantis on the day of its apocalyptic flood. The amulet, which they first see lying on a tray, in fact was made in Atlantis. Similarly, in Lewis's *Magician's Nephew*, Digory and his friend Polly, under the stimulus (compulsion might be more accurate) of his magician-uncle Andrew, visit other worlds by means of magic rings, which were created from material in a box made in Atlantis, and which are first seen lying on a tray. The *Amulet* children witness the total destruction of Atlantis and flee as they are about to be overwhelmed, just as Jadis (the future White Witch) and Polly and Digory barely escape Charn as it is being totally destroyed.

One of the most memorable visits in *The Amulet* is to Babylon. Nesbit's Babylon is the prototype of Lewis's Tashbaan in *The Horse and His Boy*, a huge, exotic city. Each is capital of a great empire; in each city, the children are dangerously separated from one another. The King of Babylon in Nesbit is ritually referred to with the invariant formula: "The King (may he live for ever!)" (103); the ruler of Calormen has the same ritual formula attached to his name: "the Tisroc (may he live for ever)" (16). The title Lewis invented for the Calormene king ("Tisroc") echoes the terrifying god of Babylon that Nesbit's children encounter—a god named "Nisroch."

Nesbit's depiction of Nisroch the Babylonian god, furthermore, is very like Lewis's demon-god Tash of Calormen. Nesbit says: "it had eagle's wings and an eagle's head and the body of a man." The cruel king swears by its *beak*. Its coming terrifies the children: "It came towards them, strong and unspeakably horrible" (*Amulet* 127). Lewis depicts Tash as "roughly the shape of a man [like Nisroch] but it had the head of a bird; some bird of prey with a cruel, curved *beak*. . . .its fingers—all twenty of them—were curved like its *beak* and had long, pointed, bird-like claws instead of nails" (*The Last Battle* 77; my emphasis). Its loathsome appearance terrifies the Narnia group, just as the children in Nesbit are terrified and revolted. (Significantly, the pagan god in Nesbit, while horrible, also proves helpful; in Lewis, the pagan god is simply demonic.) In both Babylon and Tashbaan, the children are almost killed because they know a terrible state secret: the Word of Power in *The Amulet*, the Tisroc's invasion plan in *The Horse*. Nesbit's "Word of Power," moreover, is a prototype for Jadis's all-powerful "Deplorable Word" in *The Magician's Nephew*—her city of Charn being a kind of dead Tashbaan.

But the key point in *The Amulet* is the amiable Queen of Babylon. She appears to be the model for the chatty but otherwise harmless Lasaraleen in *The Horse and His Boy*, the Calormene princess who helps the heroine. Both talk about weddings. But it was another aspect of the Babylonian queen's character that interested Lewis: her imperious will. In this she is the model for Jadis in *The Magician's Nephew*, the Queen of Charn. The episode of Jadis's visit to London is essentially a duplicate of the visit of the Queen of Babylon to London in *The Amulet*. In Lewis, Digory and Polly travel to Charn and inadvertently bring back with them Charn's Queen (Jadis) to London. There is a phase of separation and also a phase of

tense waiting for the queen to appear. A dramatic confrontation follows between the queen, who has plundered a jewelry shop, and a crowd of working class Cockney types who taunt and jeer at her. The scene builds to a fight ("The Fight at the Lamp-Post," chapter 8), from which the queen and the children are suddenly, magically withdrawn. Separation, waiting, dramatic confrontation, sudden disappearance: these form the sequence of motifs.

In Nesbit an identical sequence occurs. After their adventure in Babylon, Nesbit's children remember one day that the Queen had acquired the power to visit them in their own city and time. There follows a period of tense *waiting* for the queen to turn up. Like Lewis, Nesbit emphasizes the inconveniences of having to wait around for someone who may show up any moment. When she finally arrives, the children borrow money to take the queen on an excursion (Uncle Andrew tries to borrow money for the same purpose in Lewis). They take her to the British Museum, and the children are *separated* (Anthea has to wait for the others). Like Jadis plundering the jewelry shop, the queen promptly appropriates all the Babylonian artifacts she finds in the museum. Later there is a sightseeing trip in a hansom cab (just as there is an excursion in a hansom cab in Lewis), and the Queen of Babylon soon finds herself in a dangerous *confrontation* with a crowd of lower-class types who laugh at—then attack—her. The rising tension explodes in a terrifying and bloody struggle that ends very suddenly (like waking from a nightmare) with the *magic exit* of both queen and children—exactly as in Lewis.[5] The conspicuous difference between these episodes captures the difference that defines each writer: Nesbit gives her scene a political message ("'You'll have a revolt of your slaves if you're not careful,' said the Queen" observing the impoverished workers of east end London [148]). Lewis picked up nothing of this socio-political emphasis; naturally, for him it is religion that is the way to human liberation, not social reform.

Many more examples could be cited, and I omit the whole area of style (Lewis's style in the Narnia books is extremely close to that of Nesbit) but perhaps the extent of Lewis's appropriation of Nesbit has been established sufficiently for me to consider why Lewis took so much from her—what it was about her vision that was so compatible with his own—and what was not assimilable. E. Nesbit's plotting technique is based, generally speaking, on a very simple formula. The typical Nesbit story begins with a group of children who are *separated* from their parents—sometimes from one parent, sometimes from both. The motif of separation from parents is often linked to one of two other, related motifs. The first of these is a *move* away from home, a change of living quarters that combines the fear of insecurity with the excitement of novelty and adventure. The other important motif used at the beginning of the Nesbit story is the *change of fortune*: somehow or other the family has lost its money or social status, and must now come to terms with "reduced circumstances." Separation has therefore three aspects: social, geographical, and financial. Thus separation sets the logical and natural goal of the plot: namely, to reunite parents with children; to return to the rightful home; and to restore the lost family fortune or status. In other words separation generates its opposite, unification, as the plot aim.

Between separation and reunification, we find a loose episodic sequence of events. Nesbit was essentially an episodic writer; several of her books are compilations of originally independent short stories. This series of adventures often works by bringing unfamiliar individuals into the original group of children, and, alternatively, by taking the children deep into a variety of unfamiliar social interactions. The action is designed to confront the child with the unfamiliar child (or adult or group), and to show that the alien being is really one of us. The strange is actually an aspect of oneself. The stranger may be as genuinely strange as the psammead in *Five Children and It* or as painfully familiar as the troublesome Madeline in *Five of Us—and Madeline*. From a structural point of view, E. Nesbit is not a great craftsman of form. Her stories include episodes that are not vital; material could be added or subtracted without qualitative loss or alteration. She does not write the kind of snap-together plot where every element in the narrative is essential to the final outcome and would be missed if it were absent, and where additions would be superfluous and even destroy the balance of the whole. There are exceptions—*Harding's Luck* (one of her best books) has a tight, formally satisfying construction. But for the most part her stories have a certain energy, freedom and spontaneity of creation in their narrative line indicating that perfection of form interested her less than concerns such as character and emotion.

Lewis took over the basic Nesbit framework. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the four children are sent away from home and parents (separation). In *Prince Caspian*, the action begins after the children have left home for boarding school, with a further separation imminent as they go to different schools. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the parents (and two children) are separated from the two younger children, who are forced to stay with their uncongenial cousin Eustace, of dragon fame. In *The Silver Chair*, the two principals are at a boarding school ("Experiment House") more like a children's concentration camp than a school. In *The Last Battle*, Digory Kirke has mysteriously lost money and mansion, and lives in reduced circumstances, just as he and his mother do in *The Magician's Nephew*, again after a fall in family fortunes. *The Last Battle*, with its apocalyptic final vision of heaven, uses the drastic device of having the children actually killed in order to get them across the magic threshold from This World into the Other World of Narnia. Hence they are not merely separated from home, they never do return—but only because they are reunited with their true home, their true family, and their true fortune.

E. Nesbit was a Fabian socialist whose writing is secular, with the ethical values of an egalitarian social democrat. Her interest in the structure and functioning of society is completely absent from Lewis. Two features of her stories are conspicuous: (1) the emphasis on social interaction and (2) the vision of what she calls "heart's desire." Nesbit is fascinated by the dynamics of the social group, the spectacle of several very different people learning how to cooperate, how to compromise, how to help and sustain one another, how to lead and how to follow, how to face difficulty together. In her work, each individual, no matter how young or how strange, has something to contribute to the well-being of all. Nesbit's vision of "Heart's Desire" (a phrase Lewis uses in *The Magician's Nephew* for Digory's wish to have his mother healed) is the quest for a better society, one where everyone could fulfill his or her potential in a world of freedom, peace and plenty. This is the crowning vision of *The Amulet*: the visit to the utopian society of the future—a vision very like William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (or Eldorado in her own *House of Arden*). Nesbit's Heart's Desire has to do with

human creative power and wishes. It is emphatically not the fulfillment of God's will. Yet divinity is certainly present in Nesbit, notably in the court of heroism in *Harding's Luck*, in the Hall of Granted Wishes and the gathering of the gods in *The Enchanted Castle*, and in the Amulet numen, especially in its power to fuse/transform the identity of the Egyptian priest with that of the learned gentleman in *The Amulet*.

In Lewis, by contrast, the dynamics of group interaction are much less important. Lewis takes the basic Nesbit plot—children are separated from parents, travel or pass out of ordinary experience in quest of parents, and then at the end achieve restorative reunion—and attaches it instead to an enormous superstructure. This superstructure is a cosmic plot of divinely ordained creation, destruction and re-creation. Everything in the world he invents is connected to this framework and to a divine creator. Everything that happens is part of a divine scheme. Whereas in Nesbit, the goal is to gain certain qualities and ideals, here the goal is to gain relationship with Aslan: this is the purpose of the seven chronicles and the reason why the children were brought to Narnia in the first place. Lewis's imagination is polarized: absolute Good (Aslan) on one side and beings very like absolute evil (Jadis, Tash, the Lady of the Green Kirtle, the cannibal giants) on the other. Nesbit's world is much less polarized; there are no totally evil beings—and no totally good ones, either. As in human society, people are a mix of good and evil: that is, they are capable of good and evil actions. The powerful and apparently wicked woman of *The Magic City* (one of Nesbit's feeblest books) turns out to be good and loving after all. The idea of the apparently bad authority figure revealed in the end to be good fascinated Lewis and forms the basis of his *Pilgrim's Regress*. But one is a family member; the other is an allegory of God.

In some ways Aslan is Lewis's most impressive and important creation, a being only remotely like Jesus in the Gospels. There is nothing like an Aslan—a coordinating creator who is all-powerful—in Nesbit. There are smaller figures: Psammead, Mouldiwarp (in *The Hose of Arden*), Phoenix (in *The Phoenix and the Carpet*), ghost (in *The Wonderful Garden*); but these are all fallible, intermediate. They correspond to—and provided models for—figures like Reepicheep and Puddleglum in Lewis (the two finest examples of his skill in creating character): not Aslan. The image of the furry little Psammead disappearing at the end of *The Amulet* (it gave "one last lingering look at Anthea—a loving look . . . and—vanished" to the place of its heart's desire, the temple of Baalbec [280]) lies behind the image of Reepicheep the Mouse at the end of *Dawn Treader*: Lucy embraces it—"Then it vanished" into the place of its heart's desire, Aslan's country (207).

Nesbit works episodically within a form that has a loose containing plot. Lewis, by contrast, was not comfortable with the leisurely, improvisational form that inspired Nesbit. It did not cohere with his belief in a providential, all-inclusive intelligence at work in the world. Lewis is characterized by an instinctive sense of formal harmony, as his literary-critical masterpiece *The Discarded Image* demonstrates. Only in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* do we find an episodic plot. In Lewis, there is an in-built telelogical order; each part fits together in a totalizing structure; each event is a step toward the final consummation. Thus he concluded the series by writing a creation narrative (*The Magician's Nephew*) and an eschatological narrative (*The Last Battle*): that is he tidied up his creation. He answered the question of how Narnia got here in the first place and how it ends: he completes the unfolding of a divine plot of creation. He also explained smaller points—why there was a lamp-post burning in the middle of a wood, how the wardrobe came to be magical (and even why it sometimes opened into Narnia and sometimes did not), what the purpose of the sleeping dragons in Underland was, and so on. Nothing is accidental; no loose ends here. All that matters is following the will of Aslan, as Puddleglum makes clear in *The Silver Chair*. The ideal of duty to a hierarchical authority is basic to Lewis.

By contrast Nesbit is full of accidents, loose ends—and respect for personal impulse. That is because her worldview is one where fallible, struggling human beings are the final authority. In Nesbit, the driving energy is that of human desire—not God's will: respect for human wishes is thus central. As Oswald puts it in *The Would-Be-Goods*, repeating something he says in *The Treasure Seekers*, "when you want to do a thing you *do* want to, and not to do something else, and perhaps your own thing, a week later" (111). Hence the conflict of desire and frustration is a key theme in her writing. Learning how to handle frustration and bafflement without panic, without making things worse, is an essential skill in the struggle for a better world. The difference is between acting within a pre-ordained framework determined by a superior power—and of human beings creating, or recreating, a framework for themselves. In one, human beings are responsible to God; in the other they are responsible to themselves and one another. Which makes more sense will depend on the worldview of the reader.

Yet on the deepest level the two writers do share a spiritual vision. Lewis, one notes, absorbs many elements of Nesbit's social concern; thus the heroine of *Nephew* expresses outrage at the Queen of Charn's callous use of "her" people, "All the ordinary peope who'd never done you any harm" (61), in the manner of Nesbit. And Nesbit displays a reverence for a spirit beyond ordinary life, for example in the numinous amulet and its uncanny utterances. But in a deeper way what the two writers share is a spirituality of the imagination (hence their common concern with "reading the right books"): a perception of truth in human imagining, a value that has something infinite in it, what Lewis in *Experiment in Criticism* calls "the mythical." This heightening/expanding of experience typifies the closing scenes of *Dawn Treader* and the ecstasy of the gods in *The Enchanted Castle*.

Lewis integrated this heightened vision into his Christian system, of course, whereas Nesbit did not. And yet Lewis also powerfully articulates it in a non-Christian context. The profoundest moment in the Narnia stories occurs in *The Silver Chair* where the Queen of Underland or Lady of the Green Kirtle (metaphorically fallen nature, hence her green dress) attempts to put a spell on her visitors from above. Each in turn succumbs; each agrees with her that there are no stars or sky or sun or Aslan. There is only her dark realm under the ground: total alienation, with its machine-like workers glumly drudging for no real purpose, like the alienated laborers of Nesbit's London. Then Puddleglum stops the enchantment by putting out her magic fire; he makes a defiant speech to the Witch. This corresponds to the turning point in Lewis's adult fantasy *That Hideous Strength* when Mark refuses to degrade a crucifix—not because he believes in Christianity—but because human dignity does not allow him to degrade it, him, or himself, regardless of rewards, punishments, truth or untruth.

Puddleglum's words constitute one of the great passages in Lewis:

> All you've been saying is quite right, I shouldn't wonder. . . But there's one thing more to be said, even so. Suppose we *have* only dreamed, or made up, all those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom *is* the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world that licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play-world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia. (164)

This expression of the dignity of human imagination could not be stronger. This is, finally, what Lewis found in Nesbit: a spirit that does not depend on external deities but upon something infinitely valuable within us.

NOTES

[1] See Walter Hooper, *Past Watchful Dragons* (30).

[2] She knew not only H. G. Wells and Eleanor Marx but Annie Besant. See the fine new biography of E. Nesbit by Julia Briggs; Knoepflmacher 320-23.

[3] "The highest peak she was to reach, *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), the most completely satisfactory and most coherently plotted of all E. Nesbit's full-length books" (Green 212).

[4] The experiencing of life without fear is a Shelleyan motif—in "The Cloud" and in one of the major influences on Lewis (and, less directly, on Nesbit), *Prometheus Unbound*.

[5] Lewis's use of Nesbit here is especially evident, as noted by C. N. Manlove (73), who also suggests Chesterton as a source.

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