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The Latest Battle: Depictions of the Calormen in  
*The Chronicles of Narnia*

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**Abstract**

Two books in C.S. Lewis's young adult fantasy series *Chronicles of Narnia* – *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle* – paint an uncomfortable portrait of the Calormen, the traditional foil for the Narnians. Throughout the text, the Calormen are clearly marked both culturally and racially as Middle Eastern, perhaps specifically as Turkish or Arab in their socio-political power structure with harems, arranged marriages, and facial hair designating status. Even Tashbaan, the capital city of Calormen, reads somewhat like a description of Istanbul. Throughout these two books, the Calormen are portrayed as a sinister and conquest-driven culture threatening the freedom enjoyed by Narnia. This textual indictment is fairly consistent. In demonizing this group, Lewis took part in a literary tradition extending back hundreds of years, a tradition that has enjoyed renewed resonance with increased fears over the growth of Islam. From Sir John Mandeville to post-9/11 concerns over terrorism, western depictions of Islam have often revolved around fear and distrust. *The Last Battle* is particularly problematic in its allegorical depictions of Islam, as Lewis seems to suggest that salvation is only reserved for those who follow the lion Aslan, clearly marked throughout the series as a stand-in for Jesus Christ.

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In the months of angst and rhetoric following 9/11, a specific passage in C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle* gained renewed currency. In this concluding book of his *Chronicles of Narnia*, the fictional land is laid waste by an enemy, the Calormen,<sup>1</sup> who are uncomfortably reminiscent of traditional western depictions of the Middle East in general and Turks or Arabs

specifically.<sup>2</sup> The manner in which Lewis portrays the buildup to the attack is reminiscent of the 9/11 terrorists in their preparation for assaulting the World Trade Center and other targets. As the Calormen Emeth recounts: “I found that we were to go in disguised as merchants . . . and to work by lies and trickery” (Lewis, *The Last Battle* 161). In the wake of the attacks, the rhetoric employed by various American media outlets focused upon how the nation had been infiltrated by foreign operatives, at that point suspected to be Al-Qaeda and known to be Arabic, who had been trained specifically to dress and act like westerners and in all ways blend into American culture. After the ringleader of the attacks, Mohammed Atta, had been identified, those who had conducted business with him expressed surprise that he was involved. One person who had interacted with Atta shortly before 9/11 focused on his professional appearance, noting that he was: “nicely dressed, usually wearing a polo shirt, slacks and dress shoes” (Sack). How could someone so clearly marked as “western” do something so terrible!

The reasons underlying 9/11’s rapid canonization as EVENT are numerous. First of all, the unprecedented media saturation presented viewers with *ad nauseam* repetition of the attack, replaying the drama over and over until emotion overwhelmed all other forms of response. Furthermore, the fact that the targets chosen were civilian in nature, not to mention the clandestine methods employed, added further layers of emotional complexity. The appearance of the perpetrators was key, as these individuals did not conform to the wide-eyed, exotically marked extremists that consumers of American media had been conditioned to expect. As they lacked stereotypical indicators, it was more difficult to demonize them as true fanatics instead of people with actual political agendas. Compounding the surprise over appearance were updated fears of “passing,” as the new-age terrorist could, theoretically, be the seemingly normal neighbor you wave hello to every morning.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the fact that these individuals had been able to blend into western society, hiding in plain sight, called attention to potential cracks in the American Dream. How could these individuals live in the land of plenty and opportunity and not become westernized? This aspect of the event resonated with Lewis’ novel *The Last Battle*, where Narnia’s enemy, the

Calormen, infiltrate and eventually overwhelm King Tirian's realm. In this fictional episode, methods of trickery and deception compound the act of transgression, as even Calormen *soldiers* are ambivalent, if not scornful, of the strategies employed. As the United States expressed righteous indignation in the months following 9/11, becoming embroiled in military action first in Afghanistan and then Iraq, and engaging in a war of rhetoric with Syria and Iran, further similarities to Lewis' fictional apocalypse began to reveal themselves. This essay explores Lewis' problematic depiction of the Calormen by situating it within a larger oeuvre of western anxiety involving Islam, extending from the medieval crusades through the contemporary, post-9/11 period.

In western imagination, problems with this part of the world extend back further than either of the two competing religions of Christianity and Islam, finding mythological roots in the Judaic Old Testament with the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham's encampment (Genesis 21: 9-21). According to both Judaic and Islamic tradition, after wandering the desert, Ishmael settled down and founded the Ishmaelites, a competitor with the Hebrews for control of the Promised Land. Throughout the European medieval period and well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Islam was often portrayed as the foil to Christian interests as treated in both non-fiction (Sir John Mandeville) and fiction (Sir Walter Scott) alike. Sometimes, Islam was positioned as the evil power against which Christians must struggle, and triumph, during a final apocalyptic stage. However, with the 17<sup>th</sup>-century defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the gates of Vienna<sup>4</sup> – much as, in *The Horse and His Boy*, the Calormene army is defeated at the gates of Anvard in Archenland – and particularly with this empire's dissolution following World War I,<sup>5</sup> such discourse faded into the background, resuscitated mostly by medievalists such as Lewis who, in looking to the past, prefigured the latest phase of alarmism and polarization, one that has attended another crusade: the war on terror.

Lewis' depiction of the Calormen is thus best viewed as the most recent chapter in a story that extends back at least a thousand years. The locations (Jerusalem, Andalusia, Constantinople), players (Saracens, Moors, Ottomans), and cast of characters (Saladin, Osman, Tamerlane) have changed over time, but the overall drama remains the same: the fear

of a different culture that poses a potential challenge to European dominance. Satellite fears included such unlikely outcomes as forced conversion and white slavery. In many ways, the fear of Islam has played a large role in the development of the European character. As Edward Said notes:

For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma. Until the end of the seventeenth century the “Ottoman peril” lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilization a constant danger, and in time European civilization incorporated that peril into its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life. (59-60)

Naturally, the degree to which this trauma was felt by the various European powers depended on the intensity and proximity of a specific threat. Although at the edge of the continent, as an emergent power in Europe England was heavily invested in this struggle. One of England’s monarchs, Richard I (commonly called Richard the Lionheart), co-led the Third Crusade.

The English perception of the Islamic struggle for control of Jerusalem was largely mediated by a single person: Sir John Mandeville. This controversial, fourteenth century author most likely never journeyed to many, if any, of the places he claims to have visited. Scholars have long established that Mandeville drew from many sources in fashioning his brief biography of Mohammed, and in his exploration of Saracen laws and customs. As Malcolm Letts notes: “Chapter XV contains an account of the Saracens and their law, a chapter . . . which is now shown to have been taken, with details of the life of Mahomet, from William of Tripoli’s *Tractatus de Statu Saracenorum* (c. 1270) and Vincent of Beauvais” (49). Other sources Mandeville utilized included works written by the following: Friar Odoric, Philippe de Valois, Ramon Llull, William of Utrecht, and even Marco Polo (Adams 53-54). One might expect that given the danger the Saracens posed to Europe at the time of his writing, Mandeville would have been fairly one-sided in his analysis of Islam. However, he is surprisingly fair in his focus upon the similarities between Christianity and Islam, including the latter’s veneration of Jesus Christ: “And they say that Christ spake also as he was born and that he was and is a holy prophet . . . in word and deed, and meek and rightwise to all and

without vice” (Mandeville 94). Moses and Jesus Christ were viewed, along with Mohammed, as the religion’s major prophets, a truth about Islam that was not often articulated during the medieval period when demonization was the order of the day. Indeed, the term “Mohammedism” – which was used to describe Islam into the early twentieth century – misrepresents the true nature of the religion, obscuring the fact that Muslims worship God and not Mohammed. Switching the focus on this competing religion to a prophet exterior to Christian mythology aided in establishing a theological distance between the two. Mandeville’s depictions largely avoided these traps, however. As Josephine Bennett notes: “The book is not a plea for missionaries, any more than it is a plea for a crusade. Mandeville did not have Lull’s painful conviction that a vast army of souls was being lost every day for lack of Christian doctrine. His is a larger view of the infinite mercy and wisdom of God” (74). During a time of fear and division, Mandeville presented a relatively fair and balanced view of Islam, choosing to document the things he had read about from an appropriate distance.

Not all traces of centrist ideology are removed from *Mandeville’s Travels*, however. After all, Mandeville was a Christian, and it is unfair to expect him to be truly pluralistic. Despite portraying customs, faith, and culture as non-judgmentally as possible, strains of subjectivity are evident, and Mandeville is not above engaging in a bit of alarmist gossip. After noting how a sultan accuses Christian leaders of gluttony, lechery, pride, and envy, Mandeville enters the story by noting that the very same sultan sent disguised merchants into Christian lands in order to gather information about strengths and weaknesses (96), an incident prefiguring both *The Chronicles of Narnia* and 9/11 by hundreds of years. Mandeville’s good-natured exploration of Islam cannot completely escape from the ideologies of his time. Despite his false pluralism, he was a great deal more progressive than many of the contemporaries from whom he drew. As Giles Milton states:

Although Mandeville was fearful of Islam, he writes from an extremely informed point of view. Unlike many of his contemporaries—to whom killing of Muslims was a moral obligation—Sir John was both curious and

tolerant, and instead of stressing the differences between Islam and Christianity, he was interested in the similarities. (77)

*Mandeville's Travels* was, for hundreds of years, the key text modifying how the English viewed the rest of the medieval world. Although Mandeville was not successful in de-villainizing the forces of Islam—which were still very much a threat—he introduced an approach that paved the way for later authors—ones writing during the decline of Islamic power—to render even more sophisticated representations.

After the seventeenth-century loss at the gates of Vienna, the subsequent contraction of the Ottoman Empire – both in land and influence – led to a gradual easing of tensions, as is evidenced by European writings of the time. The role of Islam in the region was still of great interest, however, as a number of works can attest. Some of these writings furthered the exploration that Mandeville had begun several hundred years prior. Sir Paul Rycaut's *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668) and Lancelot Addison's *West Barbary* (1671) both recast Islam in a more reasonable light, bringing a comparatively balanced perspective lacking in most previous studies. The increase in “travel writing” further helped this trend. Notably, Lady Mary Wortley Montague introduced to Europe the concept of inoculation against smallpox after visiting the Ottoman Empire. The process of de-mythologizing continued during the nineteenth century with Richard Burton,<sup>6</sup> Rudyard Kipling, and others. Perhaps no other author took this détente as far as Sir Walter Scott, whose Saladin in *The Talisman* is reflective and fair-minded, even saving the crusading Richard the Lionheart from certain death by posing as a doctor and treating the Christian monarch's wounds. Although Lewis was a medievalist, he was extraordinarily well read and, as his voluminous writings attest, familiar with most of these texts.

Not all writers embraced the more progressive models, however. For some, including one of the era's greatest British authors, hundreds of years of resentment were not so easily erased. Muslims in general and Turks in particular are portrayed negatively in several of Daniel Defoe's works, including *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (1718).<sup>7</sup> As Lora Geriguis notes, Defoe's depictions suggest a

lingering resentment that indicate the fear of Islam had not entirely dissipated within the region:

This use of Islamic identity by Defoe, engaging as it does with the condemning language of colonialistic superiority, demonstrates the place Islam held in the imagination of the English in the early Eighteenth century. The Islamic other was threatening to Europe because it had a powerful cultural, religious, technological, and militaristic arsenal to bring to bear against its enemies. (4)

Although the influence of Islam throughout the region was in marked decline compared to a century earlier, European writers such as Defoe continued to exploit cultural fears and anxieties regarding this cultural and religious other.

This type of representation was not limited to just authors, however, as artists in other mediums found similar expression. For instance, visual artists such as William Hogarth contributed to the increasingly complex views of Islam's place in the early modern world. Hogarth's etched plate entitled "Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism" hints at the possibility of a resurgence in power by the Ottoman Empire.<sup>8</sup> As the title suggests, the engraving depicts members of a church engaged in different acts of spiritual madness or other excessive behavior, doing everything but listen to the minister, himself a fanatic. From the clergy through the simple parishioner, England is shown in this etching as not only embarking upon, but also wallowing in, a journey typified by the loss of cultural identity and unity. Watching over the scene is a figure peering in the window, seemingly amused by the failures of European religion and culture. This figure's turban, dress, and elongated smoking pipe mark him as a Turk. He looms over the scene in a self-satisfied, superior manner, establishing him as a threat to England and, by abstraction, the rest of Europe. At the far edge of the continent, England would have only been conquered if the rest of Europe was first subjected to that fate.<sup>9</sup> Below the plate is a quote from the King James' version of the Bible: "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4.1). Clearly, despite the fact that Islamic inroads into Europe had passed their high-water mark, and that the Ottoman Empire was in decline (Hogarth's plate was engraved 80 years

after the Second Turkish Siege of Vienna), fear still ran high that societal failures in Europe would allow the Turks to once again stream west and north.

This was the literary world that Lewis was born into. *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle*, the two Narnia books that feature the Calormen, can thus be viewed as more recent contributions to a literary tradition that has extended back for centuries. Unlike Mandeville, whose portrayal of Middle Eastern culture is fairly clinical, Lewis steeps his tales in unmistakable symbolism. Instances of allegorical transparency are legion, particularly as they apply to objects and iconography common throughout the Middle East. Scimitars, turbans, stylized beards, and minarets call to mind the medieval Islamic world, as does the ever-present image of the crescent. Lewis' descriptions of the Calormen, consistent whenever they make an appearance, contain stereotypical imagery still employed in some depictions of the Islamic world: "Then the dark men came round them in a thick crowd, smelling of garlic and onions, their white eyes flashing dreadfully in their brown faces" (Lewis, *The Last Battle* 25). Indeed, charges of racism have long been levied against Lewis for his *Chronicles of Narnia*, most recently by *His Dark Materials* author Phillip Pullman, who refers to the "peevish blend of racist, misogynistic and reactionary prejudice" (qtd. in Harris).

The references to turbans and garlic clearly indicate the Calormen as Middle Eastern figures generally and, in their socio-political power structure with harems, arranged marriages, and facial hair designating status, as Turks or Arabs specifically. Even Tashbaan, the capital city of Calormen, reads like a generic description of Middle Eastern cities such as Cairo or Damascus and specifically like Istanbul in the fact that it is surrounded by water and built upon a steep hill.<sup>10</sup>

Round the very edge of the island, so that the water lapped against the stone, ran high walls strengthened with so many towers that he soon gave up trying to count them. Inside the walls the island rose in a hill and every bit of that hill, up to the Tisroc's palace and the great temple of Tash at the top, was completely covered with buildings—terrace above terrace, street above street, zigzag roads or huge flights of steps bordered with orange trees and lemon trees, roof gardens, balconies, deep archways, pillared colonnades, spires, battlements, minarets, pinnacles. And when at last the

sun rose out of the sea and the great silver-plated dome of the temple flashed back its light, he was almost dazzled. (Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* 48-49)

Indeed, many of the particulars of Tashbaan are reminiscent of Istanbul. The focus upon architecture, particularly that symbolic of both the prominence of the religious life (temples, domes, minarets) and extreme variances between wealth and poverty, mirrors Istanbul. This Turkish city, due to its historical placement at the crossroads of Europe, Asia Minor, and the Middle East, is noted both for its Christian and Islamic architecture.

Throughout these two books, the Calormen are portrayed as a sinister and conquest-driven culture threatening the freedom enjoyed by Narnia. This textual indictment is fairly consistent. On several occasions, Calormen is described as “a great and cruel country” (Lewis, *The Last Battle* 21), one whose thirst for violent subjugation is unquenched. As represented in *The Horse and His Boy*, Calormene cruelty is fairly pandemic and appears to cut across class lines. From Shasta’s abusive adoptive father, Arsheesh, to Bree’s cruel owner to the cold calculation of the Tisroc, Calormene characters in this book are portrayed as fallen and generally beyond redemption, be they laborer or King. Even one of the protagonists, the princess Aravis, is corrupted by her time in Calormen and must be re-programmed in order to be acceptable in the more civilized, northerly countries of Narnia and Archenland. Apart from Aravis and Rabadash, both of whom are changed, in part, due to the ministrations of Aslan, there is little ambiguity to Lewis’ portrayal of the Calormen as barbaric others.<sup>11</sup>

The same is true of *The Last Battle*, where the depiction of the Calormen takes on an even harsher edge. In *The Horse and His Boy*, the cruelty exhibited by these characters is often diffused by their buffoonish behavior, particularly in the genuflecting of the Grand Vizier (118-19) and the manner by which Prince Rabadash loses the battle for Archenland. He leaps off a wall in an act of grandiose defiance, gets caught on a horse-hitching hook, and then is turned into a donkey by Aslan, thus earning the moniker “Rabadash the Ridiculous” (206, 231-35). In *The Last Battle*, none of this outlandish and humorous behavior is in evidence as the

insidious designs of the Calormen lead to the occupation of Narnia and the enslavement and even genocide of its citizens. Rishda Tarkaan, the Calormene captain of this invasion force, is a calculating murderer who not only controls the population by creating a fictional, hybrid god—Tashlan—out of Aslan and the Calormene god Tash, but later admits that he does not believe that either entity exists (Lewis, *The Last Battle* 31, 79). Throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis portrays unbelievers, and worse, those who prey on true believers, to be beyond redemption. The success of the Calormen due to strategies such as deception and cruelty perhaps suggests that Lewis felt the same way about various groups within Islam. Lewis' suspicion, disguised in the form of the fictional Calormen, is perhaps understandable, given his focus on the medieval period and his service in World War I, a conflict where many British soldiers lost their lives at the hands of the Ottoman Empire. Political and theological suspicion becomes *racially* problematic, however, in Lewis' continued use of the word "darkies" to designate Calormene characters, bringing to mind not only European inroads into the Middle East and Asia Minor, but also Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

That is not to say that the *Chronicles of Narnia* do not contain *some* complexity. According to David Downing, although certain stereotypes might apply, correlating the Calormen directly with real-world Islamic groups is overly simplistic, ignoring a larger project engaged in by Lewis, one in which beliefs from different faiths conglomerate in an indictment of paganism and polytheism:

Islam is strictly monotheistic, its foundational teaching that there is no god but God (Allah). The Calormenes, by contrast, speak of their "gods," including Tash, Azaroth, and Zardeenah. Also, in the Islamic tradition, Allah speaks through his prophets. He does not physically come to earth as Tash does. In fact, Tash is much more similar to an Efreet, an evil spirit of hideous appearance and foul odor, as described in *The Thousand and One Nights*. In the figure of Tash, Lewis is not demonizing Islam; he is demonizing demons, as depicted in Middle Eastern folklore. (159)

Indeed, as Downing implies, to equate the Calormen with Islam on a one-to-one basis runs the risk of obscuring the fact that Islam is both western

and monotheistic, and as such a close cousin to Christianity. Lewis' tendency to mix various religious traditions is further indicated by an examination of Jadis, the White Witch. Appearing in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *The Magician's Nephew*, this character is far more evil than any singular Calormen, and perhaps more so than any other character in the entire breadth of the *Chronicles*. She is suggestive of an Islamic jinn demon, but also of the mythological women of creation: Lilith (Judaism) and Eve (Judaism and Christianity). In this regard, Jadis can be viewed as a combination of the three major western religions.

Furthermore, in Lewis' fictional world, not all of the Calormen are doomed to damnation. Several distinguish themselves as, at the very least, worthy candidates for salvation. In *The Horse and His Boy*, the aforementioned Aravis and Rabadash find redemption. Aravis is able to break free from the stifling gender structures that threaten to overwhelm her. Despite her wealth and class status, as a Calormene woman she is coerced into betrothal, as if she were a piece of property. Evan Gibson points to her redemption as evidence that freedom for Lewis is available to everyone regardless of race, religion, or gender (148). There are some mitigating circumstances to her story, however. She resorts to trickery in order to escape her situation, a strategy that culminates in the whipping of an innocent slave. Aslan's punishment by marking her with his claws, "throb for throb, blood for blood" (Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* 194), seems less about repentance and salvation than about providential retribution. In many ways, Aravis represents Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern, and is a character who stands at the intersection of oppressed gender and race (90-91). Aravis is tart-tongued, and throughout the narrative verbally spars with Shasta. However, she has no voice, and at no time, even following her escape from an arranged marriage, is she in control of her situation. At the end of the narrative, Aravis becomes a background character, marginalized not only by her gender—while the men discuss what to do with the defeated Calormene army, Aravis and Lucy repair to the room that has been set up for the former, discussing "the sort of things girls do talk about on such an occasion" (Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* 229) – but also due to her racial status as a Calormen.

Prince Rabadash, who suffers from an over-abundance of pride, partially redeems himself at the end of the tale. Rabadash's punishment is swift but ultimately opens the path to his redemption. After transforming him into a donkey, Aslan prescribes the manner in which the hapless Calormen can regain human form. It is interesting to note that the cure comes with a permanent restriction that will keep Rabadash from ever again leaving home:

You must stand before the altar of Tash in Tashbaan at the great Autumn Feast this year and there, in the sight of all Tashbaan, your ass's shape will fall from you and all men will know you for Prince Rabadash. But as long as you live, if ever you go more than ten miles away from the great temple in Tashbaan, you shall instantly become again as you now are. And from that second change there will be no return. (236)

Much as in the case of Aravis, Rabadash has no choice in the matter, as he receives a directive from Aslan as to how he might shed his donkey form and return to being a man. And Lewis makes it clear that Rabadash's subsequent reign is peaceful as much due to the fact that he cannot leave the city to make war as it is about a legitimate reformation. In this regard, Rabadash's redemption is best seen as a conditioned behavior instead of an actual transformation.

In *The Last Battle*, one Calormen finds genuine salvation, the brave and proud "Emeth" (a Hebrew word for "truth"). However, as Aslan explains to the soldier, he was saved not because of his service to Tash, who delights in cruelty and murder, but instead because he was unwittingly serving Aslan all along:

All the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me . . . I take to me the services which thou hast done to him, for I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. (Lewis, *The Last Battle* 164-65)

The first statement in this passage – “all service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me” – appears on the surface as an ecumenical acknowledgement of difference, that gods in different cultures represent equal avenues to the same truth. In his theological writings, Lewis appears to support this viewpoint, citing religion as a primary site through which people from different cultures share common ground. In *The Joyful Christian*, Lewis states: “how much more one has in common with a *real* Jew or Muslim than with a wretched liberalizing, occidentalized specimen of the same categories” (177). Taken out of context, the above passage in *The Last Battle* might suggest that Lewis holds up Tash as a viable alternative to Aslan.

However, the second part of the passage makes clear that Aslan is completely and wholly representative of goodness and morality whereas Tash is illustrative of evil and malice. In this light, Emeth’s salvation and acceptance into the afterlife does *not* spring from ecumenical plurality.<sup>12</sup> Due to his righteousness and belief, he was really following Aslan all along. If various elements in these two Narnia books can be viewed as symbolic of the struggle between Christianity and Islam, there is precious little complexity in the rendering of those who represent the latter. Not all Lewis scholars agree with this assessment, however. Jerry Root views the presentation of the Calormen as a harmless exercise in imaginative creation: “The story of Emeth is nothing more than Lewis’s imagination engaged in hopeful theological speculation – though it was perhaps an unfortunate choice to speculate on the *ordo salutis* in a children’s book” (233). Root glosses over the harmful nature of employing racial and religious stereotypes, dismissing hundreds of years of European context whereby “imagination” and “theological speculation,” as he puts it, resulted in tremendous amounts of conflict. Perhaps Lewis simplifies salvation to make it age-appropriate for his notional readership, but the resultant polarity seems dogmatic in nature.

To further illustrate this point, the redemption of several characters linked to Narnia are critical, chiefly Edmund Pevensie in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and Eustace Scrubb in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Unlike Aravis and Emeth, whose salvations seem to lie in the arena of works, in proving through their actions a distance between

themselves and their Calormene heritage, Edmund and Eustace find redemption through a much more complicated system involving transgression, sacrifice, and choice. In both cases, Aslan plays a key role. Edmund, who doesn't get along well with his siblings, allows himself to be duped, betraying the other Pevensies to the White Witch. Although they find their way free, Edmund's treason necessitates sacrifice. In an episode symbolic of Christ's crucifixion, Aslan dies willingly at the hands of the White Witch in order to save Edmund (Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 39-42, 107). Several books later, Aslan helps Eustace transform not only his physical but also emotional and spiritual being. Eustace is unfriendly and greedy, taking a cursed piece of treasure which results in his transformation into a dragon. This traumatic event affects him deeply, and he elects to undertake a painful process that results in his reversion to human form. Aslan aids Eustace in the journey back to his human self by clawing away the boy's dragon flesh (Lewis, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 113-17). The lion's function in the redemptions of Aravis and Rabadash is more punitive and prescriptive, whereas his role in those of Edmund and Eustace is more facilitative. Identity politics play a key role when it comes to salvation in *The Chronicles of Narnia*; the road taken by sinners is set up differently for those who avoid the original sin of being born Calormen.

There are exceptions to this double standard, however. As discussed earlier, Aravis and Emeth manage to find salvation despite their upbringing. Furthermore, not all of those associated with Narnia are saved, including the usurper Miraz in *Prince Caspian* (really a Telmarine instead of a Narnian) and the talking ape Switch in *The Last Battle*, a character who is often viewed in his publicly mediated, even sensationalized, perversion of doctrine as symbolic of the anti-Christ. Also intriguing is Susan, a "daughter of Eve" who not only rejects her heritage but also her own experiences, suggesting that the trips to Narnia were mere childhood games. Susan is denied entrance into the afterlife due to her lack of faith and pursuit of the shallow, shadow life. However, those who should know and love Aslan yet reject him are few and far between, and generally there is a *de facto* salvation offered to those affiliated with Narnia; going with the flow, perpetuating the status quo

will result in salvation. However, a similar deal is not extended to the Calormen, who must achieve their salvation individually and in spite of their cultural and religious background, a much more difficult task.

One might think that, due to Lewis' overwhelmingly negative representations of the Calormen, his numerous philosophical and theological musings would contain many negative references to Islam, but that is simply not the case. There are allowances for difference between Islam and Christianity, but most are stated in a matter-of-fact manner instead of judgmentally. For instance, on several occasions Lewis focuses on the transformation of God into man and man into God within Christianity as a marker of difference from Islam, but more in regards to demonstrating the former religion's uniqueness rather than its superiority: "[Islam] will not allow that God has descended into flesh or that Manhood has been exalted into Deity" (Lewis, *Arthurian Torso* 124). Indeed, much of Lewis' focus upon Islam and Christianity involves the narrative differences between the two mythologies, in the fact that Christianity tells a more compelling story. As Root notes:

Other religions may set the stage for the play, but the drama of redemption and reconciliation is manifest only in Christianity. For Lewis the significant difference between Christianity and the other religions was that of a historic event. God the Son became a man in order to set man right before God. (224)

Indeed, *theologically* Lewis situates Islam more often than not alongside Christianity and often Judaism, contrasting these three religions with alternate belief systems such as pantheism, polytheism, and atheism. Consistently, whenever Islam appears in Lewis' theological discussions, it is collapsed along with Christianity under a general discussion of the monotheistic religions. Even when dogmatically discussing Christianity's superiority as a world religion, as Lewis occasionally does, Islam is implicitly privileged as a more acceptable alternative than most. In *The Joyful Christian*, he asserts that: "As in arithmetic—there is only one right answer to a sum, and all the other answers are wrong: but some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others" (177). Furthermore, nothing of any real significance regarding a strong dislike, or even suspicion, of Islam appears in either volume of *The Collected*

*Letters of C.S. Lewis*, which cover 44 years of his life. Due to the long period from which these letters derived, and to expectations of privacy, surely any hidden agenda regarding Islam would have appeared here. Indeed, most of Lewis' musings focus on the philosophical over the historical, and universals of human behavior free from localized, regional concerns. His focus instead seems to be on the larger issues of the religious life: loyalty, temptation, sin, redemption, and salvation. Perhaps his desire for more general philosophic inquiry when writing to fellow academics explains this gap, but really there is no easy answer as to why Lewis was dogmatic in his portrayals of Islam through the thinly veiled metaphor of the Calormen when compared to the lack of vitriol present in his letters.

Lewis' paradoxical suspicion of and fascination with the Calormen follows in a vein that has long troubled Christians writing about the complicated space occupied by Islam in the imagination of the West. This obsession over difference is hidden behind layers of symbolism, but present nonetheless: during the time of the crusades, when Lewis was writing about the Calormen, and in the post-9/11 era. Lewis' addition to this tradition was certainly original, allowing children to immerse themselves in narratives of faith and salvation. However, while some writers who lived when Islam posed a much larger threat to Europe – such as Sir Mandeville – were more optimistic about the ability for co-existence, Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* establishes a system whereby equal service to different faiths does *not* lead to an equal shot at salvation. This ideology is perhaps established most clearly in *The Silver Chair*, where Jill Pole considers looking for a different stream despite her terrible thirst, fearing that the talking lion guarding it, whom she does not yet know to be Aslan – and thus her path to salvation – might kill and eat her.

“I daren't come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion. (Lewis, *The Silver Chair* 17)

For Lewis, there is only one stream and therefore only one source of refreshment; whether in this verse he speaks of Christianity in particular or faith in God in general, is debatable. However, given his generally negative portrayal of a cultural other so reminiscent of a specific geographical region and religion, it would certainly appear as if this passage refers specifically to a highly particular path to salvation. As the post-9/11 film versions of the *Chronicles* continue to be released and allow these stories to reach an even wider audience,<sup>13</sup> it is important to continue analyzing how intolerance, transgression, and salvation play out in the Lewis universe, particularly considering the uneasy and complicated relationship currently held between Islamic regions and the West.

#### Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Consistent with Lewis, the noun “Calormen” will be employed to denote the nation and its people. The term “Calormene” is the adjective form of the word.

<sup>2</sup> This study suffers from an unfortunate but unavoidable slippage in terminologies. European authors have, at various points of history, written about the threats posed by Islam, Mohammedism, Muslims, the Turks, the Arabs, Middle-Easterners, Mohammed, and Saladin, among others. All of the texts discussed in this paper were responding to different threats contingent upon time and place, which explains why the danger is portrayed at various points along cultural, religious, geographical, and even individual lines. However, despite this extreme variance in “naming the enemy,” all of these episodes are pieces of a bigger picture. Whenever possible, more general terms such as “Islam” and “the Middle East” or “Asia Minor” will be employed in order to focus on the overall arc of western perception. The term “western” also suffers from a similar slippage. I use it to denote the historical European positions (including former colonies such as the United States) from which the perception of Islam has been mediated.

<sup>3</sup> For more information about the phenomenon of passing, particularly in the colonial and post-colonial contexts, please see Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*.

<sup>4</sup> This defeat occurred on September 11, 1683, leading some to wonder if the attacks on the World Trade Center were chosen to fall on an anniversary of this defeat, signifying a resurgence of Islamic power.

<sup>5</sup> “The Great War,” as it has become known, radically altered the face of central Europe and Asia Minor by removing four empires/imperial families from power, ones that had exerted influence over the region for hundreds of years. The Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires had each held sway for over 600 years, and the Hohenzollern family had ruled parts of Germany for over 800. The comparatively young Romanovs had only been in power in Russia for a paltry 305 years!

<sup>6</sup> As one of few non-Muslim Europeans to have ever entered Mecca, Sir Richard Burton offers a different perspective in his book *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Mecca and Al-Madina*.

<sup>7</sup> The latter is a group of articles supposedly penned by a Turkish spy operating in Paris; the entire collection was almost certainly written by Defoe. Once again, the fear of clandestine penetration plays a key role in this fictional account.

<sup>8</sup> Shesgreen Plate #95, most likely engraved in 1759 but perhaps as late as 1762.

<sup>9</sup> For more information about pictorial representations of race in eighteenth century England, please see David Dabydeen's *Hogarth's Blacks*.

<sup>10</sup> Constantinople, a city that served as the capital for a Christian empire (Eastern Roman) and church (Eastern Orthodox), was conquered by the Ottomans in 1453. The city promptly became a political, economic, and cultural center for this Islamic power.

<sup>11</sup> In *The Horse and His Boy*, Aravis is accepted by the citizens of Archenland, eventually becoming queen of that country (228, 41). Queen Lucy of Narnia also welcomes her without any sign of hesitancy (229). Rabadash does not enjoy this level of acceptance, as Susan's violent reaction to the possibility of a marriage to him suggests (67-68). It is important to note, however, that Susan's revulsion is more about Rabadash's arrogance and pride than about his race or culture.

<sup>12</sup> Emeth is another example of a Calormene subaltern. Much like Aravis, he speaks yet has no voice. In Aslan's Country, the Calormene soldier wanders around as in a dream. Although Aslan is the one to grant entrance to everyone, regardless of their origin, Emeth stands by mutely as the lion outlines the roundabout reasons for his salvation. No other supplicant is held to this same standard.

<sup>13</sup> In the 2005 film version of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Peter's garb during the final battle (armor with a red cross emblazoned on the front) is reminiscent of traditional portrayals of clothing worn by Christian knights during the Crusades.

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