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**A Beast's Best Friend:
Interspecies Friendship
in the Thought of C. S. Lewis**

by Edwin Woodruff Tait

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On May 15, 1942, C. S. Lewis wrote to Sister Penelope, “I am establishing quite a friendship with one of the rabbits wh. we now keep along with the deer in Magdalen grove. It was done by the discovery that he relishes chestnut leaves which grow too high for his teeth. He doesn’t yet allow me any familiarities but he comes and eats from my hand. If my jaws were as strong in proportion to my size as his I’d be able to pluck down the pinnacles of the tower with my teeth. But oh! The great lollipop eyes and the twitching velvet nose! How does He come to create both this and the scorpion?”¹

On July 29, he reported that “the Rabbit and I have quarrelled. . . . [H]e has cut me dead several times lately. . . . [S]o fair and yet so fickle!”² On December 10 he wrote to Arthur Greeves describing his relationship with the rabbit as “an acquaintance (almost a friendship)” and still lamenting that the rabbit wouldn’t look at him.³ But Lewis eventually found a new rabbit friend. On July 26, 1944, he wrote to Sarah Neylan that he was “getting to be quite friends with an old Rabbit who lives in the Wood at Magdalen,” whom he had tamed by picking leaves off the trees and feeding them to the rabbit (the same method he had used with the first rabbit), and whom he named “Baron Biscuit.”⁴ In December of 1944 he wrote to Laurence Harwood of the same rabbit, whom he had apparently discovered was actually female and was now calling “Baroness Bisket.”⁵

Of course these letters are whimsical, and perhaps I am taking them too seriously. But Lewis took friendship very seriously indeed.

1 C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters* 2:520-21.

2 *Collected Letters* 2:525.

3 *Collected Letters* 2:540.

4 *Collected Letters* 2:618-19.

5 *Collected Letters* 2:634.

Ironically, given his willingness to speak of being friends with a rabbit, he complained to Bede Griffiths that he was worried about the “decay of friendship” due to “the endless presence of women everywhere” as a threat to friendship. Friendship—specifically male friendship—was central to Lewis’s life. Furthermore, the theme of human-animal or cross-species friendship in particular shows up throughout Lewis’s work, as this paper will show. Lewis appears to have been haunted throughout his life by the possibility of a friendship that unites beings who are fundamentally different.

Lewis’s reference to his acquaintance with the rabbit as “almost a friendship” in the letter to Arthur Greeves may reflect his awareness of the fact that friendship between humans and “irrational” animals was declared impossible by the Aristotelian tradition. Thomas Aquinas treats the question in Question 25 of *Summa Theologiae* II/II, on “the object of charity.”⁶ According to Aquinas, charity is fundamentally the act of loving one’s neighbor “so that he may be in God” (article 1). Charity “has the nature of friendship” (article 2), which consists in willing good to another. The specific good that charity wills for another is union with God. Thus, when Aquinas comes to deal with the question of whether irrational creatures may be loved out of charity in article 3, only one of his three reasons for answering in the negative pertain to the specific nature of charity (willing eternal happiness to another, which Aquinas argues is impossible in the case of irrational creatures who are not capable of such happiness). The other two apply to friendship more broadly, and are based on separate passages in Aristotle.

Aquinas’ first reason why friendship between humans and “irrational” creatures is impossible is that friendship consists in willing good to another. However, an irrational creature cannot, strictly speaking, “possess good,” because it lacks free will. Only a being with intellect and will is capable of choosing a good for itself and thus being benefited or harmed. Aquinas cites Aristotle’s discussion of chance in Book 2 of the *Physics*. Aristotle argues there (chapter 6) that “an inanimate thing or a lower animal or a child cannot do anything by

6 Lewis suggested in a 1958 letter that most elements in his thought that people took to be Thomistic were really Aristotelian, describing Aquinas as a “top form” boy in the same class as Lewis, where Lewis was a “bottom form boy” and Aristotle was the teacher. (*Collected Letters* 3:995). That being said, Aquinas is important for placing Aristotelian ideas in a Christian context, and is often identified by writers on animal rights as a major (negative) influence on Christian attitudes to animals.

chance, because it is incapable of deliberate intention; nor can ‘good fortune’ or ‘ill fortune’ be ascribed to them, except metaphorically.” Both in his commentary on this text and in the *Summa*, Aquinas explains that this is the case because a being without free will does not have “dominion over its own action” (*dominium sui actus*).⁷

As Judith Barad points out, this view seems inconsistent with Aquinas’ recognition elsewhere that animals have inclinations and appetites and are not simply to be equated with plants or inanimate objects.⁸ Given that recognition, is it not more reasonable to conclude, on Aquinas’ own principles, that animals can experience “good and ill fortune” to some degree, albeit to a lesser degree than humans? This is one of a number of places where it seems to me that Aquinas’ reverence for Aristotle has a baleful effect on his thought.

Aquinas’ second reason for denying the possibility of human/animal friendship is based in a different passage from Aristotle, this one from Book 8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There Aristotle defines friendship as “living together,” or, in Aquinas’ terms, a “sharing of life” (*communicatio vitae*).⁹ Humans and animals, according to Aquinas, cannot share life together in the way required for friendship. They do not have common goals (in part, again, because animals are not capable of deliberate intentionality according to Aquinas). Without sharing a rational nature, friendship is impossible.

Lewis’s account of his friendship with the rabbit follows exactly the lines sketched out by Barad, ascribing to the rabbit exactly the sort of intentionality that Aquinas would allow (a desire for food), but then extrapolating from that to allow for the use of language that Aquinas would no doubt find unacceptably anthropomorphic. The

7 Comm. in Phys. 229, <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/Physics2.htm#6>, accessed 12 May 2016. Similarly, in ST II/II 25.3, Aquinas says that good and bad pertains to “solum creaturae rationalis, quae est domina utendi bono quod habet per liberum arbitrium” (<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/sth3025.html>, accessed 12 May 2016).

8 Judith Barad, “Aquinas’ Inconsistency on the Nature and the Treatment of Animals.” Barad is unfair to Aquinas, I think, in her treatment of his claim that we should not treat animals cruelly because it will make us cruel to people. While it’s true that Aquinas doesn’t recognize that animals have any intrinsic rights or that we have moral duties to them directly, his “virtue ethics” leads him to conclude that treating animals cruelly develops a “habitus” of cruelty. This is, I think, more significant ethically than Barad recognizes.

9 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8, chapter 5, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.8.viii.html> (accessed 12 May 2016).

rabbit initially becomes friends with Lewis because he desires to eat leaves that are too high for him to reach. Lewis speculates that the rabbit later rejects his friendship because Lewis had inadvertently given him something to eat that “disagreed with him.”¹⁰ A desire for food is, after all, something humans share with other animals, even in the Aristotelian paradigm. A human may therefore seek to satisfy that desire by giving an animal good food, and thus establish precisely that “sharing of life” which Aquinas disallows. Of course I am probably making far too much of this episode, but the frequency with which Lewis refers to the rabbit(s) during the mid-1940s indicates, I think, that it was of some importance to him.

Another incident, this one narrated by George Sayer, confirms Lewis’s interest in the capacity of non-human animals for friendship and affection. Sayer describes walking with Lewis late in the latter’s life and seeing a young pig give food to an older pig. According to Sayer, Lewis responded excitedly to this incident, declaring the young pig to be a “pog” and the harbinger of a new stage in porcine evolution, and asking for its blessing.¹¹ Like the rabbit friendships, this incident is obviously playful and humorous, but it is further evidence of Lewis’s interest in the possibility of animal behavior that transcended the limits set by Aristotle.

The most systematic discussion of the capacity of non-human animals for friendship in Lewis’s work occurs in *That Hideous Strength*. Ivy Maggs, who functions in the novel as a voice of folk wisdom in contrast to the educated folly of characters such as Jane and MacPhee, refers to Mr. Bultitude the bear and Pinch the cat as “friends.” MacPhee insists that they can’t really be friends, and suggests various physiological explanations for their behavior, including the possibility of unconscious sexual attraction. Ivy responds defensively as if MacPhee were accusing the animals of moral indecency.¹² Ransom intervenes to say that MacPhee is ascribing to the animals a distinction that simply does not exist for them. What we call “friendship” among humans is for us more articulately distinguished from physical comfort, sexual attraction, etc., than it is for other animals, but that doesn’t mean that something analogous to friendship does not exist among animals.¹³ Lewis further illustrates this theory of animal psychology by narrating a later section of the book from the point of view of Mr. Bultitude,

10 *Collected Letters* 2:540.

11 George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis*, 335.

12 C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 261.

13 C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 261-62.

or more precisely from the point of view of the omniscient narrator trying to explain how Mr. Bultitude experienced the events.¹⁴

The events in question include important parts of the novel's climax, in which Merlin, assisted by Mr. Bultitude and inhabited by the eldila, brings heavenly vengeance to the demonic N.I.C.E. And it is no coincidence that one of the N.I.C.E.'s principal activities is experimenting on animals. Mark Studdock betrays the inadequacy of his modern, sociological education as a form of moral formation by the fact that he has no moral revulsion to the awareness that the N.I.C.E. maintains a vast zoo of animals for purposes of experimentation, and no empathy with the animals.¹⁵ They simply represent, for him, evidence of the scale of the N.I.C.E.'s enterprise. This is an example of the way in which one's reaction to vivisection functions, for Lewis, as a moral test. Not to be disturbed by animal suffering—to have a purely “instrumental” view of animals—is evidence of a lack of participation in what Lewis elsewhere calls the “Tao.”¹⁶

The proper understanding of our relationship with non-human animals is found at the end of *That Hideous Strength* in the *epithalamium* of the beasts, in which all the animals (including the human ones) pair up under the benign influence of Perelandra: “she comes more near the earth than she was wont—to make Earth sane.”¹⁷ This sanity not only leads to amorous coupling, but to a restoration of the natural state of humanity: “We are now as we ought to be, between the angels who are our elder brothers and the beasts who are our jesters, servants, and playfellows.”¹⁸

This understanding of the human relationship with animals is found at more length in *Perelandra*, where the unfallen “Lady” commands the creatures of Venus and they obey her willingly. They are, as in Ransom's statement quoted above, her “servants.” There is clearly a hierarchical relationship. But it is also characterized by joyful companionship. Both Ransom and the “Un-man” benefit from the willingness of Perelandra's animals to serve human beings. The Un-man, of course, abuses that willingness, commandeering a fish in order to escape Ransom with no thought for the fish's welfare.¹⁹

14 *That Hideous Strength*, 306-08, 350.

15 *That Hideous Strength*, 102.

16 C. S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 70,

17 *That Hideous Strength*, 378.

18 *That Hideous Strength*, 378.

19 C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 158.

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He (it?) also casually tortures frogs, and Ransom's final confrontation with the Un-man begins when Ransom attempts to stop the torture of a bird.²⁰ One of the most disturbing signs of the Lady's slow "corruption" by the Un-man's temptations is her willingness to let him dress her in a cloak of feathers to make her more beautiful, and her casual disinterest in the question of just how the Un-man got the feathers.²¹ Animals are servants and in some sense instruments in *Perelandra*, but they are not mere instruments, and the slightest movement toward treating them as such is a matter of grave significance.

One of the Un-man's most telling arguments against Ransom in their extensive debate over the fate of the Lady and her planet is that Ransom's discomfort with the prospect of humans replacing non-human sentient beings as the focus of "Maleldil's" purposes in the universe mark Ransom out as "what we call 'Bad,'" which the Un-man defines as someone who turns away from the coming good out of preference for past good.²² The "Unman ethic," which led the human Weston to surrender himself to demonic forces and become the "Unman" and is identified by Lewis with Bergson's "creative evolution," is a worship of "becoming" for its own sake.²³

Weston tells Ransom that this ethic transcends conventional notions of good and evil because what is conventionally called evil is actually the driving force pushing into the future, while "good" is the ideal that beckons from the future. Weston admits to Ransom that his earlier views, evident in *Out of the Silent Planet*, were irrationally anthropocentrism. All that matters is "Life," whatever form Life may take.²⁴ Reading this text for the first time, I took this to be a sign of conversion and spiritual growth in Weston. Weston's violent, colonialist anthropocentrism is condemned throughout *Out of the Silent Planet*. Surely his willingness to recognize "Life" in non-human forms is an improvement?

But of course it is this "conversion" to Life-force worship that leads to "Weston's" horrific transformation from a misguided, perhaps evil human being to a demon wearing a human body, with the fragmented psyche of the original "Weston" still gibbering away somewhere in the depths and occasionally surfacing when the "Un-

20 *Perelandra*, 152.

21 *Perelandra*, 134-138.

22 *Perelandra*, 114.

23 *Perelandra*, 90-96, 121.

24 *Perelandra*, 91.

man” allows it to for pragmatic purposes.²⁵ The primary characteristic of the demonic form of “creative evolution” represented by the Un-man is its total pragmatism, its instrumentalizing of absolutely everything, even (as Ransom observes at one point) rationality itself. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Oyarsa had identified Weston’s loyalty to his own species as a genuine virtue, although a minor one.²⁶ Weston’s loss of this virtue represents not a step forward on the moral and spiritual scale but his final loss of the “good of intellect” and his descent into demonic madness.

Thus, the Un-man’s argument to the Lady about Ransom’s “badness” is complex and ironic. He is evoking the orthodox anthropocentrism which the Lady assumes, in order to seduce her to his own worship of pointless destruction in the name of change and evolution. Ransom’s sorrow that there will be no more sentient “beasts” but only anthromoporphic beings now that the Incarnation has taken place is, in the context of the Space Trilogy, a response to his experiences in the first book and his choice to identify with the nonhuman Malacandrians over Weston’s murderous anthropocentrism.

The unfallen Lady cannot understand this impulse. She knows only a healthy hierarchical relationship with animals who are not *hnau* (rational), the kind of relationship sketched by Ransom at the end of the third book.²⁷ (Indeed, Ransom’s own journey to spiritual maturity in the course of *Perelandra* consists in part of his coming to see the beauty and fittingness of this kind of anthropocentrism.) The Lady is thus ironically in danger of accepting Weston’s demonic ideology in contrast to Ransom’s flawed but basically virtuous sympathy for the “older” forms of rational creation represented by the Malacandrians. Yet Ransom’s point of view is not all wrong, as indicated by the “Great Dance” at the end of *Perelandra*, which affirms that *everything* in the universe is in its own way a “center” and that the Malacandrians are not just disposable precursors to the real show.²⁸

Moving backwards within the Trilogy, we come finally to *Out of the Silent Planet*, where we find (for the first time in Lewis’s work if we don’t count the Boxen material) a fictional depiction of a society of non-human rational beings (*hnau*). As Ransom journeys through the Malacandrian landscape, he journeys spiritually from an initial abject fear of non-human life (filtered through the deeply depraved

25 *Perelandra*, 96.

26 *Out of the Silent Planet*, 137-138.

27 *That Hideous Strength*, 378.

28 *Perelandra*, 214-219.

imaginings of Weston and Devine), to a gradual understanding and acceptance of the great diversity under which rationality manifests itself.

Ransom's friendship with the *hross* Hyoui is the catalyst for his coming to a sober understanding of his species' place in the universe—which will, ironically, make him reluctant to accept the revelation of just how important humans are in the cosmic scheme in *Perelandra*). When he first meets Hyoui, he interprets him as an “animal,” just as he sees the *seroni* as monsters.²⁹ Ironically, Hyoui's animality helps Ransom deal with the shock of dealing with a sentient alien lifeform. When he thinks of Hyoui as a man, he finds him monstrous, but when he thinks of him as an animal, he finds him a kind of “animal 2.0,” with everything one might wish in a pet plus the ability to function as an intellectual equal.³⁰

Weston and Devine's killing of Hyoui induces in Ransom a deep guilt for being human, an awareness of just how murderous and fallen his species is. The narrative has prepared us for the possibility that Hyoui will be killed by the monstrous *hnakra*, but in fact he successfully kills the *hnakra* only to be killed by the humans, driving home Lewis's point about just who the real monsters are in the story.³¹

The multispecies rationality of Malacandra is not essential to its “unfallenness,” but Lewis clearly suggests, through Ransom's complete lack of comprehension of the possibility of the three species living in harmony, that it is only possible on an unfallen world and is thus one of the signs of the planet's innocence. One of the *sorns* remarks at one point that the people of “Thulcandra” (our planet) must be “at the mercy of their blood” because we cannot compare thought with thought that “floats on a different blood.” Toward the end of the book Ransom stays in a guesthouse with all three Malacandrian species, and realizes that Malacandrian humor arises largely from the interactions of *hnau* who have different biologies.³² In a purported letter from Ransom to Lewis appended to the book, he claims that while we can have friendship with other humans and affectionate relationships with animal pets, on Malacandra the two experiences may be combined in a single relationship. Hence, the Malacandrians do not need pets.³³

29 *Out of the Silent Planet*, 55, 45.

30 *Out of the Silent Planet*, 58.

31 *Out of the Silent Planet*, 125.

32 *Out of the Silent Planet*, 117.

33 *Out of the Silent Planet*, 156.

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Four years after writing this, Lewis was telling various correspondents about his friendship with the rabbit in the Magdalen garden. It is probably not a coincidence that the years during which he writes about these “rabbit friendships” are also years when he was working on the Space Trilogy, developing his first major fictional universe that explored the possibility of multiple rational species and the disastrous consequences of a purely instrumental approach to life.

Lewis’s fullest exploration of a world filled with multiple intelligent species was, of course, his *Chronicles of Narnia*. When Lucy Pevensie steps out of the wardrobe into that snowy wood, she steps into a world where our normal assumptions about the place of humanity appear to be upended. Mr. Tumnus is astonished to meet a human, and his library contains books suggesting that humans are mythical creatures.³⁴ The White Witch attempts at first to put Edmund in Narnian categories, suggesting that he must be an overgrown dwarf who has cut off his beard.³⁵ The Beavers tell the Pevensies that “there’s never been any of your race here before.”³⁶ While the White Witch looks human, the Beavers assure the children that she isn’t really human at all.³⁷

Yet it turns out that humans are not as alien to Narnia as first appears. There are those four thrones in Cair Paravel destined to be filled by “sons of Adam and daughters of Eve.”³⁸ While humans in this first Narnia book appear to be a novel introduction into Narnia, they are not unheard-of and a place has been prepared for them by prophecy, as rulers of the land under Aslan. At the same time, a “pseudo-human” ruler oppresses the various creatures of Narnia, favoring some (wolves, dwarfs, and various kinds of monsters) over others and mimicking with her tyranny of dark magic the properly hierarchical rule Aslan intends for Narnia. The White Witch’s regime is in fact a reversal of the attitudes of the N.I.C.E., although it is similar in its use of dark magic and its ultimate reduction of rights and dignity to one all-powerful figure.

In the sequel, *Prince Caspian*, Lewis returns to themes familiar from the Space Trilogy. A tyranny of *humans* has now slaughtered the sentient non-humans or driven them into exile, and has put in place a

34 C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 115 (all Narnia citations are to the omnibus edition from HarperCollins).

35 *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 124.

36 *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 147.

37 *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 147.

38 *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 148.

stodgy, boring, materialistic society that denies magic and mystery and suppresses freedom. At the same time, in this book the importance of human rule is emphasized far more than in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Trufflehunter insists that things were never right in Narnia except when a Son of Adam was king. It isn't a country for men, but it's a country for a man to be king of.³⁹

Finally, in the penultimate book to be published, *Magician's Nephew*, Lewis provides his most systematic account of the Narnian universe. Aslan creates all kinds of creatures and then chooses to breathe sentient life into certain of them, giving the talking animals authority over the non-sentient creatures while exhorting them to treat them gently.⁴⁰ He also (proving the Beavers wrong) makes a human couple rulers of Narnia, exhorting them to treat all their subjects with fairness and equality.⁴¹ Uncle Andrew's stubborn insistence on closing himself off from the voice of Aslan makes him unable to hear and understand the voices of his non-human fellow creatures, and makes him similarly opaque to them. But while he regards them as mere "brutes" to be feared or used or destroyed, they show their virtuous character by attempting to treat him kindly according to his nature, even if their efforts are not very successful. By the end of the book they have come to see him as a pet—an exception to the rule that in Narnia, as in Malacandra, there don't seem to be pets.⁴²

Thus, in Narnia Lewis depicts a hierarchical society but one where freedom and equality of dignity are highly valued. Friendship among different kinds of creatures is not only possible but highly valued. It is Lucy's friendship with Tumnus that gives him the courage to defy the Witch, and the children a motive for staying in Narnia in spite of the dangers. In *Prince Caspian*, Dr. Cornelius, stranded in a world of hostile humans, tells Caspian "what friend have I in the wide world save Your Majesty?"⁴³ In the same book, Trumpkin earns the nickname "the dear little friend" from the children. Reepicheep's friendship with Lucy, in particular, is an important theme in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. In *The Silver Chair*, the three Narnians respond to the realization that they've been eating Talking Stag in varied ways that correspond to their immersion in Narnian multispecies society: Jill merely feels sorry for the stag, Eustace is horrified because he has

39 C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 347.

40 C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 69-71.

41 *The Magician's Nephew*, 81.

42 *The Magician's Nephew*, 71-79, 97-98.

43 *Prince Caspian*, 343.

actually had a talking animal as a friend, while Puddleglum feels as if he had eaten a baby.⁴⁴

But the Narnian book where interspecies friendship plays the most important role is arguably *The Horse and His Boy*. Lewis may be influenced by medieval romances such as *Bevis of Hampton* in which horses speak to their riders and indeed play an important role in training their riders in chivalry.⁴⁵ Bree becomes a tutor to Shasta not only in riding but in courtesy and “free” behavior. At the same time, it turns out that Bree himself has a lot to learn. Friendship between Shasta and Aravis, divided by social class, turns out to be even more difficult than friendship between Shasta and Bree. In the end, the four fugitives, two human and two equine, are brought together by their shared journey from slavery to freedom, in which the strengths of both species, both sexes, and a diversity of social experiences all contribute to make their quest for freedom successful. The key moment in Aravis’ development from an arrogant (though honorable) Calormene lady to the future Queen of Archenland is her decision to go across the desert with a lower-class boy and two horses rather than stay in Calormen with Lasaraleen.⁴⁶

In the *Chronicles*, Lewis explores playfully the theme first suggested in *Out of the Silent Planet*, that a world with multiple intelligent species would have a capacity for rich and varied friendships that surpasses our own and combines the emotional satisfaction we get from friendship and the kind we get from pets. He explores *Perelandra*’s suggestion that there might be different ways of configuring the “center,” asking how God might be manifest in a world of talking animals. And yet Narnia is in a sense more robustly anthropocentric than the world of the *Trilogy*. There humans are central because Maleldil has become human. Narnia is supposedly an entirely other world, with a parallel “incarnation” of the Logos as a lion.

Yet it is also a world where “Sons of Adam” are supposed to reign. Lewis never explains why. Does the significance of the Incarnation radiate outward even to worlds reachable only by magic? Is Narnia, after all, a kind of shadow world to our own? Or did he just not think it through? Nonetheless, the Narnia books underline Lewis’s fascination with the possibility of friendship with the “other” and his hatred of all forms of tyranny of one kind of creature over another, and all forms

44 C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 608.

45 See Bonnie J. Erwin, “Beyond Mastery: Interspecies Apprenticeship in Middle English Romance.”

46 C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 253.

of cruelty to animals—or to anyone. The hierarchy of Narnia, like the hierarchy of the Trilogy, is fundamentally non-coercive. All beings act according to their natures, and thus a spontaneous order emerges in which difference does not involve dominance or competition.

One interspecies friendship in Narnia, however, towers above the rest—that between Aslan and the human children.⁴⁷ Of course, Aslan is a special case, because at the end of *The Last Battle* “he no longer looked to them like a lion,” and he is clearly intended to be a “parallel incarnation” of Christ in some sense.⁴⁸ (Whether this implies a kind of Docetistic Christology, as one Catholic critic has claimed, is a separate issue).⁴⁹

But by making the children experience the divine as an animal, Lewis provides us with his most daring example of interspecies friendship. Aslan really is “the wholly other,” and yet he embodies an archetype that has powerful resonance in our world as well. Lewis had always been fond of human-animal relationships as a symbol of our relationship with God, particularly using dogs in this way. In Narnia, he reverses the imagery—the humans have a relationship with an animal who is also a manifestation of the divine. The characters who see Aslan as merely a “wild beast” are characters who at best (like Trumpkin) need some serious spiritual growth, or at worst (like Uncle Andrew) are stubbornly closed off from the divine, and indeed from recognizing the dignity of their fellow creatures no matter the species.

Lewis’s imaginative explorations of human interactions with non-human species, as well as his frequent discussions of the subject in letters and nonfictional works, suggest that he was both working within and implicitly challenging the Aristotelian/Thomist framework. He clearly accepted the premise that friendship involves the ability to share goals and a way of life, and he imagined ways in which humans and other animals might do so. He accepted the premise that willing the good of another implies that the other has agency, and again, he repeatedly ascribes agency to “irrational” animals. Furthermore, he developed fictional universes in which non-human “rational” beings existed.

These universes are still (in a qualified sense) anthropocentric, and (in a less qualified sense) hierarchical. But it is also an imaginative celebration of diversity and multiculturalism that (one would think)

47 I am indebted to Padmini Sukumaran for pointing this out in conversation.

48 C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 767.

49 Eric Seddon, “Letters to Malcom and the Trouble With Narnia.”

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ought to shatter the preconceptions of people who see Lewis as simply a defender of traditional British mores and the privileges of straight white males. In the words of *Perelandra*: “Thus each is equally at the center and none are there by being equals, but some by giving place and some by receiving it, the small things by their smallness and the great by their greatness, and all the patterns linked and looped together by the unions of a kneeling with a sceptred love. . . . We also have need beyond measure of all that He has made. Love me, my brothers, for I am infinitely necessary to you and for your delight I was made. . . . Love me, my brothers, for I am infinitely superfluous, and your love shall be like His, born neither of your need nor of my deserving, but a plain bounty. Blessed be He!”⁵⁰

50 *Perelandra*, 217.

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