

Feminism and spiritual heroism in C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*

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Tämä Pro gradu -tutkielma käsittelee aihetta feminismi ja henkinen sankaruus C. S. Lewisin kirjasarjassa *Narnian tarinat*. Tutkimuksen päätarkoitus on tutkia Lewisin kirjoissa esiintyvää naiskuvaa. Tutkimuskysymyksiä ovat: välittävätkö *Narnian tarinat* lukijalleen seksististä naiskuvaa vai voidaan väittää, että Lewisin tarinat ovat feministisen ideologian mukaisia; onko naisten käyttäminen pahoina roolihahmoina seksististä; ilmentääkö Susanin jättäminen pois ”pelastettujen” joukosta Lewisin naisvihaa tai seksismiä; ja onko *Narnian tarinoissa* esiintyvä patriarkaalinen hierarkia todistus naisia alistavasta ideologiasta?

Tarkastelen tutkimuksessa *Narnian tarinoita* feministisestä ja kristillisestä näkökulmasta. Feministinen näkökulma toisaalta osoittaa miksi *Narnian tarinoita* pidetään seksistisinä ja toisaalta selittää miksi esimerkiksi Susanin tuomitseminen ei ole seksististä, miksi tarinoissa suositaan näennäisesti epänaissellista naiskuvaa ja miksi muun muassa Susanin ja Lasaraleenin edustama, näennäisesti naisellisempi naiskuva torjutaan. Feministisen näkökulman tukemiseksi tutkimuksessa käytetään aineistona joidenkin feministien teoksia. Eräitä näistä ovat Naomi Wolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, Karin Fry, Monica B. Hilder, Sarah Zettel ja Cathy McSporran. Myös C. S. Lewisin omat apologeettiset kirjoitukset ovat tärkeässä osassa etsittäessä vastauksia tutkimuskysymyksiin.

Kristillinen näkökulma saadaan tarkastelemalla tarinoita muun muassa Monica B. Hilderin edustaman teologisen feminismin kautta. Teologinen feminismi on tärkeä näkökulma tässä tutkimuksessa, sillä sen avulla voidaan selittää naiskuvan myönteisyyttä. Hilderin edustama teologinen feminismi tarkoittaa yksinkertaistetusti, että maskuliinisen, klassisen sankaruuden sijasta suuremmissa arvossa on feminiininen, hengellinen sankaruus. Maskuliininen sankaruus tarkoittaa perinteistä sankaruutta, jossa suurin sankari on se, joka on vahva, itsenäinen, ylpeä ja häikäilemätön. Feminiininen, hengellinen sankaruus puolestaan perustuu sankarin nöyryyteen, Jumalaan luottamiseen, armollisuuteen, rakkauteen ja muihin sellaisiin piirteisiin, joita perinteisesti pidetään heikkoutena ja naisiin liitettyinä piirteinä maskuliinisessa, perinteisessä sankaruusajattelussa. Tarkastelemalla *Narnian tarinoita* teologisen feminismin näkökulmasta huomataan, että Lewisin niiden kautta välittämä naiskuva voimaannuttaa naisia, vapauttaa heitä alistaisesta asemasta ja jopa korottaa naiset suuremmiksi sankareiksi kuin useimmat tarinoiden miespuoliset roolihahmot.

Avainsanat: feminismi, teologinen feminismi, sankaruus

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Introduction

The Chronicles of Narnia have been enchanting readers ever since the novels were written in the 1950's. However, not all have been as excited about them and one of the reasons is that some readers and critics claim that the portrayal of female characters in the novels is sexist. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the way women are depicted in *The Chronicles* and to provide a counter argument to the alleged sexism of the Narnia series. I intend to point out how Lewis actually empowers women rather than subordinates them in the novels. Lewis's worldview differs from that of the secular writer and were his Christian background not taken into account when analyzing the novels, the interpretation will not be convincing. Therefore, I will examine the novels through theological feminism in order to find the true nature of heroism in Lewis's stories and to prove that Lewis's portrayal of female characters is empowering rather than sexist.

I will begin with a short overview on the debate about Lewis's alleged sexism. Then I will proceed to describe the connections between Lewis's thinking and theological feminism as explained by Monica B. Hilder, after which I will discuss Lewis's ideas on subordination and male authority. Next, I will discuss the use of wicked, power-hungry women in *The Chronicles* and the condemnation of Susan both of which points are used to accuse Lewis of sexism. Then I will devote a chapter to the comparison between chosen male and female characters in order to point out the spiritual superiority of the female. Lastly, I will discuss "good" female characters and the way their personalities, virtues, interests and activity point to a feminist, Christian ideology.

1. The Debate on Sexism

C. S. Lewis has been accused of sexism on many occasions and by many critics and writers throughout his career and even today it remains a controversial question whether or not he was sexist. For example, another reputed children's author, Philip Pullman, says in an essay titled "The Dark Side of Narnia" that Lewis's Narnia cycle is "one of the most ugly and poisonous things" he has ever read because of "the misogyny, the racism, the sado-masochistic relish for violence that permeates the whole cycle" (Pullman). According to Pullman, "Lewis didn't like women in general, or sexuality at all", and he "was frightened and appalled at the notion of wanting to grow up" (ibid.). Another critic despising the Narnia series is Philip Hensher, who shares his fierce criticism on the novels in *The Independent*: "They are revoltingly mean-minded books, written to corrupt the minds of the young with allegory, smugly denouncing anything that differs in the slightest respect from Lewis's creed of clean-living, muscular Christianity, pipe-smoking, misogyny, racism, and the most vulgar snobbery."

Cathy McSporran cannot overlook the misogyny of Narnia, either. In "Daughters of Lilith: Witches and Wicked Women in The Chronicles of Narnia", McSporran writes that Lewis's ideas on masculine authority are "highly dubious" (193) and claims that Lewis's evil villains are female because in Lewis's adventure story, a male villain would be "ineffectual" (*Revisiting Narnia*, 196). She writes: "In this insistence upon 'natural' authority and hierarchy, Narnia is a quasi-medieval world created in the twentieth century; yet, in its demonization of magical women, it is perhaps more medieval than the Middle Ages itself ... The Witches in Narnia are simply 'bad' – just like their foremother, Lilith the 'Jinn'" (203).

Several critics have defended Lewis against the accusations concerning the alleged sexism in his novels, including Gretchen Bartels, Sarah Zettel and Monica B. Hilder. Bartels suggests that Lewis's "preoccupation with theological symbolism causes him to overlook social realities" ("Of Men and Mice", 2). In other words, Lewis's views make him use male-female

relationships as theological symbols of God as the masculine authority and his people as feminine and subservient. According to this idea, “feminine” would, in Lewis’s mind, include the connotation “subservient” which he would also attach to all women. So, it is possible that by making the female subservient to the male in his stories Lewis is actually talking about human subservience to God. Confusing as it may be, it makes the subservience of the female a little less sexist as Lewis’s purpose is to exalt divine authority, not male authority per se.

In “Why I Love Narnia: A Liberal, Feminist Agnostic Tells All”, Zettel goes even further and praises Lewis for the way he portrays his female characters. While she acknowledges that the only women with real power are irredeemably bad and that power in Narnia is not only divinely appointed but also, except for the queens Susan and Lucy, male (*Revisiting Narnia*, 185), Zettel does not consider the display of evil women in the Narnia series to be a problem because they do not, in her opinion, teach children that grown women ought not to have any power. Zettel argues that the most important point in the novels is the way Lewis empowers his female characters, especially Lucy, Jill and Aravis, who are not only moral but also physical fighters, and is impressed by the fact that Lewis’s female characters are allowed to be heroines:

However, one does not even have to leave the world of Narnia to find the counter lesson to the unexamined evil in the female witches, and that is, of course, the steady heroism of the girls. The girls are consistently strong, respected and wholly themselves. The presence of kings, princes and older brothers never reduces the girls in any way. Their personal flaws are individual to them, not the result of their sex or their age. Even the inability to keep the points of a compass in one’s head is not held by the narrator to be universal female fault. And never do their flaws diminish the girls as humans. It is part of their heroism that they meet these internal demons and vanquish them, with the help of Aslan, of course, but then, *everyone* needs Aslan’s help in these books, and even a king can, and does, require a stern lecture from the Great Lion. (*Revisiting Narnia*, 186)

Hilder, too, defends Lewis against the accusations concerning his alleged sexism. In *Feminine Ethos in C. S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia* she argues that C. S. Lewis celebrates a Christian heroic ethos that not only contributes to contemporary gender discourse but challenges much of what we tend to privilege in Western thinking or, rather, what we believe that ‘Western’ thinking privileges (6). By “Western” reading Hilder points to the tradition of Greece and Rome

that has had a profound impact on European culture and literature until today. The Greek and Roman traditions prefer “masculine” characteristics such as power and independence to their “feminine” counterparts, submission and dependence. Hilder argues that Lewis challenges this hierarchy by representing the feminine attributes in a higher position in the value system than the masculine. By examining the kind of heroism that Lewis portrays in the books Hilder claims to prove that what some have seen as sexist in the novels only highlight the truly heroic features. Hilder writes: “Lewis, in the best spirit of what subsequent post-colonial theory promises, but finding the roots and impetus for his vision in Christianity, offers a radical *theological feminism* that may liberate readers from sexism” (6, italics mine). So, rather than concluding that *The Chronicles of Narnia* betray Lewis’s sexism, she suggests that these novels pose a significant challenge to our sexist paradigms. In the next chapter I will take a closer look at theological feminism and examine how it agrees with Lewis’s ideology.

2. Lewis and Theological Feminism

There are various degrees of theological feminism and feminist theology, of which Hilder's approach is one of the least radical. The most radical theological feminists, such as Mary Daly, consider the Christian tradition to be so hopelessly compromised that they choose to replace the patriarchal religion with an older pagan tradition. Mary Daly wanted to move beyond the "imprisoning mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual walls of patriarchy, the State of Possession", declared that God is not a single being but a "power that permeates the entire cosmos" and said that women should empower themselves but that this empowerment is impossible to achieve within Christianity (Grigg, 13-15). While some theological feminists attack Christianity and its patriarchal aspects, Hilder – and Lewis – work from within orthodox Christian tradition to criticize some patriarchal ideas instead of condemning Christianity as a whole.

Instead of comparing women to men, Hilder concentrates largely on comparing masculine classical heroism to feminine spiritual heroism. The liberation of women in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, according to Hilder's approach, appears in women's ability to fight and in female excellence in spiritual heroism. The meaning of spiritual heroism is easily understood when contrasted to classical heroism. Classical heroism in the tradition of Greece and Rome is "characterized by values such as reason, autonomy, activity, aggression, conquest, deceit, and pride" (Hilder, 7), characters that have been deemed positive and desirable in epic heroes like Beowulf, Achilles, Hercules and Odysseus and thereafter in most Western literary heroes such as Sherlock Holmes, Batman, Iron Man and Hercule Poirot. By contrast, Hilder notes that feminine spiritual heroism is characterized by values which have been considered weaknesses or women's traits in Western culture and literature; "imagination, interdependence, passivity, care, submission, truthfulness and humility" (7-8). Hilder argues that in the Narnia series Lewis "applauds the lesser understood spiritual hero who embodies 'feminine' qualities" (20). Hilder states that throughout *The Chronicles*, Lewis "gives these 'feminine' qualities to all his truly heroic characters, male and

female, and shows that there is always a battle raging between classical and spiritual heroism in every heart” (20), and, through this emphasis Lewis “challenges cultural sexism in his embrace of the ‘feminine’ ethos” (20).

According to Hilder’s theological feminism, all people are feminine to God and submission to the divine is the “Way” for every believer (Hilder, 5). As opposed to those feminists whose aim is to raise women out of their unequal and submissive position, Hilder argues that all people ought to be submissive – to God. Therefore, saying that all people should be “feminine” to God only means that we are to be submissive to Him, not that men should behave as women or that they should renounce their masculinity. Being “feminine to God” means to be in the position of a humble servant. Lewis clearly shares this view and writes about such a hierarchy on many occasions. For example, in *Preface to Paradise Lost* he states that “Everything except God has some natural superior” (73) and in “Priestesses in the Church?” he writes: “for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him” (261), meaning that we are all under God’s authority.

John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* may have affected Lewis’s views on heroism and subordination. Hilder notes that in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, “Milton associates classical masculine heroism with Satanic rebellion and seduction into rebellion: it is powerful and alluring, but ultimately doomed” (7). Satan is like a “masculine” hero; he is proud, power-seeking and treacherous. He will not submit to God’s authority but tries to challenge Him. Lewis acknowledges this in his *A Preface to Paradise Lost*: “All Milton’s hatred of tyranny is expressed in the poem: but the tyrant held up to our execrations is not God. It is Satan... He is the *chief*, the *general*, the *great Commander*. He is the Machiavellian prince who excuses his ‘political realism’ by ‘necessity, the tyrant’s plea’. His rebellion begins with talk about liberty, but very soon proceeds to ‘what we more affect, Honour, Dominion, glorie, and renoune’ (IV, 412)” (78). Pride and what

results from it are central themes in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Lewis takes up the same themes in his Narnia series.

Lewis's religious conviction would logically have caused him to create spiritual heroes. He was an enthusiastic defender of the Christian faith and wrote several apologetic books, such as *Mere Christianity*, *the Problem of Pain* and *the Weight of Glory*. In "Christianity and Literature" he writes: "we should get as the basis of all critical theory the maxim that an author should never conceive himself as bringing into existence beauty or wisdom which did not exist before, but simply and solely as trying to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom" (*Christian Reflections*, 7). Thus, it is presumable that he wanted to do the same in *The Chronicles of Narnia*; to "embody... some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom" by mimicking biblical stories and by giving his characters attributes similar to biblical heroes. For example, the creation of Narnia mimics the creation story in Genesis, Aslan's death and resurrection mimic the death and resurrection of Christ, and the "last battle" mimics the war in Armageddon prophesied in Revelation. Lewis's statement also confirms the fact that he is working from within the orthodox Christian tradition rather than criticizing it from the outside.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis devotes the whole of Book III to morality and virtues. He teaches with passion about the "Cardinal virtues"; prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude, which are equivalent to Hilder's description of feminine characteristics. Prudence, as Lewis explains it, means "practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it" (77). Lewis thinks that temperance is erroneously associated with only teetotalism, but originally it "referred not specially to drink, but to all pleasures; and it meant not abstaining, but going the right length and no further" (78) and so, even; "A man who makes his golf or his motor-bicycle the centre of his life, or a woman who devotes all her thoughts to clothes or bridge or her dog, is being just as 'intemperate' as someone who gets drunk every night" (79). The lack of this virtue is exemplified in Edmund, who, after tasting a bite of Jadis's Turkish Delight,

craves it so much that he would bring his siblings to the evil Witch only to have more. It is because there is a magic in the sweets: “this was enchanted Turkish Delight and... anyone who had once tasted it would want more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves” (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 39).

Although Lewis does not talk about spiritual heroism or theological feminism directly, it is easy to see, while reading *The Chronicles*, that the novels encourage the same kind of heroism as theological feminism; spiritual heroes with feminine characteristics. So, it is possible to argue that Lewis’s characters are not to be analyzed the same way as those of the majority of Western literature. What a reader might mistake for someone’s weakness is actually their strength. As Hilder notes, “unlike classical martial valour exercised in order to establish worldly power through brute force, spiritual heroism requires inner valour in order to establish the kingdom of heaven through humility” (8). Hilder goes on to note that this does not mean that Lewis was a pacifist; he was “a great admirer of the chivalric tradition for its emphasis on heroic courage and defense of the Christian faith” (8). Indeed, there are many chivalric characters in the novels, such as Reepicheep, Prince Caspian and Shasta. However, instead of traditional hard-boiled heroes, Lewis offers heroes of a different kind that are much closer to biblical heroes than, for example, to Odysseus and Achilles. Although there is classical heroism in the Bible as well, by “biblical” heroes I refer to the kind that is similar to a spiritual hero; spiritual heroism is clearly recommended especially in the New Testament but some of the greatest heroes in the Old Testament testify to the superiority of spiritual heroism, as well. For example, David, who was undervalued because of his young age, was able to kill the giant Goliath with a single smooth rock because he believed that God was on Israel’s side (*New International Version*, 1 Samuel 17:48-50). Also, Moses was a terrible public speaker and probably a bit shy but God gave him the words to speak and inspired courage in him so that he was able to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 4), and later, when Moses disobeyed God and hit a rock in the desert in order to produce water for the Israelites, thus acting as if it was his

own work and not God's, God punished him for his pride by not letting him or Aaron enter the Promised Land (NIV, Numbers 20: 6-12). One more example of spiritual heroism is found in the book of Daniel where three men called Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into a blazing furnace because they would not bow to the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had made, and because of their faith they walked out unharmed (Daniel 3). The heroes and heroines in *The Chronicles* are similar to these kinds of biblical heroes in that they do not rely on their own wisdom and understanding either but put their trust in Aslan.

In the next chapter I will discuss Lewis's thoughts on gender roles and subordination. As will become clear, Lewis's way of thinking differs greatly from the contemporary worldview, and it is important to be aware of his ideas about hierarchy and subordination in order to understand the hierarchy in the Narnia series.

3. On Subordination

Although it can be argued that Lewis defends gender equality in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, his thoughts on gendered social roles in the real world seem to contradict the ideology in his novels. Adam Barkman writes in *C. S. Lewis & Philosophy as a Way of Life*: “Lewis thought that scripture’s insistence on the subordination of wives to husbands was neither a fallen teaching nor merely the product of a patriarchal culture; rather, he believed that familial hierarchy, as with ceremonial monarchy, is a *mythical* representation of Reality itself” (192). According to Lewis, the family is an image of the Body of Christ, the universal family of believers (*The Weight of Glory*, 166). In other words, the roles inside a family – the father, the mother and the children – represent different roles inside the Body of Christ. Lewis writes: “I do not believe that God created an egalitarian world. I believe the authority of parent over child, husband over wife, learned over simple to have been as much a part of the original plan as the authority of man over beast” (*The Weight of Glory*, 168). Like the husband has authority over his wife and parents have authority over their children, so God has authority over his people who in the Bible have been referred to as the children of God as well as the Bride of Christ. Therefore God’s authority over people, according to Lewis, is the high truth which the authority of man over wife and parents over children symbolize. That is what is meant by familial hierarchy being a “mythical representation of Reality”. Thus, Lewis makes it clear that he supports social hierarchies within a family where the man has authority over his wife and children, and thinks of this system as an embodiment of the relationship between God and His people.

In addition to social hierarchies in the family, Lewis supports institutional hierarchies: the symbolization of authority does not present itself only in the family but also in the Church system. Just as it is ordained by God that the husband have authority over his wife, thus symbolizing God’s authority over people, so must a believer submit to the authority of the priest

who has the same symbolical role of the masculine God as the husband in marriage. As Barkman writes:

[Lewis] did believe the Church was a hierarchy and so laymen ought to practice the spiritual exercise of proper subordination to their spiritual elders. It should be the delight of laymen, Lewis argued, to kneel when they accept the Eucharist, kiss the cross, and pray, and it is helpful, as Lewis himself found out through practice, to confess one's sins to a priest, for while the priest does not forgive by his own power, he, according to the grand tradition of Christianity, acts as God's representative on Earth and thus should be respected. (Barkman, 194)

And because the priest represents the masculine God, Lewis argues, only a man can perform the role of a priest. In "Priestesses in the Church?" Lewis argues against permitting women to act as priestesses because only a man can represent the masculine God in front of a congregation (*God in the Dock*, 261).

The reason why Lewis is so strict about gender division is that according to him, gender is more than biological; it is spiritual. According to him, the masculine or feminine soul determines the biological sex of a person. Thus, Lewis sees men as masculine spirits and women as feminine spirits; as Adam Barkman writes, "Lewis believed that whatever masculinity and femininity are, masculinity entails authority and femininity entails subordination" (429). Lewis writes about the relationship between men and women in "Christianity and Literature" like this: "St Paul tells us (1 Corinthians 11:3) that man is the 'head' of woman. We may soften this if we like by saying that he means only man *quâ* man and woman *quâ* woman and that an equality of the sexes as citizens or intellectual beings is not therefore absolutely repugnant to his thought: indeed, that he himself tells us that in another respect, that is 'in the Lord', the sexes cannot be thus separated (ibid., 11:11)" (*Christian Reflections*, 4). So, man is to have authority due to his masculinity which represents the masculine God. Likewise, women must agree to be under the authority of men because of their femininity which represents subjection to God.

Lewis goes so far as to proclaim that women should not be allowed in ruling positions where they would be above men: "flowing from his general principle that man *qua* man has authority over woman *qua* woman, Lewis strongly opposed priestly orders for women in the

Church, almost certainly disagreed with direct combat roles for women in the military, likely disapproved of women in the highest positions of authority in schools, and, to a lesser extent, disliked queens who rule without a king over them” (Barkman, 433). It is no surprise, then, that in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, male authority is predominant; although both Susan and Lucy are Queens without husbands, the High King and Aslan, the Jesus figure, are male. Furthermore, clearly illustrating Lewis’s ideas about male authority, Aslan calls only males in his council in *The Magician’s Nephew*: ““And now,... Narnia is established. We must next take thought for keeping it safe. I will call some of you to my council. Come hither to me, you the chief Dwarf, and you the River-god, and you Oak and the He-Owl, and both the Ravens and the Bull-Elephant. We must talk together. For though the world is not five hours old an evil has already entered it”” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 142). Trees, too, are gendered in Narnia and it would seem impossible for the reader to determine which sex the Oak is since it is not mentioned here, but it becomes clear later that the Oak is male; in *Prince Caspian* Lucy thinks back to what the trees looked like when they were alive: “She looked at the oak: he would be a wizened, but hearty old man with a frizzled beard and warts on his face and hands, and hair growing out of the warts” (*Prince Caspian*, 122).

These negative attitudes towards women appear to correspond with Zettel’s reading of Lewis as hostile to the idea of women in authority. Zettel is of the opinion that Lewis does not have a good opinion of the abilities and attributes of women because he spent much of his life in an “all but monastic setting” (*Revisiting Narnia*, 182). According to Zettel, “Lewis had a very poor opinion of the wife of one of his academic colleagues” and included her in his Narnia series: “This shocking woman wrote professionally, and ran a school. In fact, it’s her school [Lewis] is taking potshots at in *The Silver Chair*” (ibid., 182). The school in *The Silver Chair* that Zettel points to is portrayed as a mess in the novel because of the poor leading skills of the people who run it and their “curious methods of teaching” (*The Silver Chair*, 9) owing to which the students do not learn anything useful. Although the headmaster’s competence in the novel is openly criticized, it is not certain that

the character impersonates a living being. However, it is quite possible that Lewis is making a point about the leadership skills of women: “the Head’s friends saw that the Head was no use as a Head, so they got her made an Inspector to interfere with other Heads. And when they found she wasn’t much good even at that, they got her into Parliament where she lived happily ever after” (257).

Yet, although from the above it is clear that C. S. Lewis can hardly be called a feminist, he should not be called a misogynist either because his attitudes are more complex than they seem. He believes in vocational and political equality. As Barkman notes, Lewis agreed with the feminists about the fact that women “ought to be given the right to vote, own property and get an education” (193). Also, Lewis did not think that the only place for a woman is at home. Barkman writes that Lewis “championed greater vocational equality for women than many of his Christian contemporaries” (432-433) and “given the extreme anti-feminist, old-boy culture of both Oxford, which only began granting degrees to women in 1920, and Cambridge, whose Magdalen College, Lewis’s college, only started admitting women in 1988, Lewis could arguably be seen as a fairly generous-minded conservative, especially considering the fact that he tutored an impressive number of female students” (193-194). Barkman adds that Lewis liked women *as* women and his reputation with his female students, not to mention the girls he privately tutored at his home, was generally very good (422) and that for those who think Lewis uncharitable toward women or a misogynist, it would be a good idea to read some of the letters that Lewis wrote to admirers of his Christian apologetics, because Lewis’s “sympathy with the plight of women is evident on every page” (423).

More importantly, Lewis’s ideas often coincide with a feminist ideology when it comes to empowering women. For example, he makes a point about male abuse of power in *The Horse and His Boy*. The story is about Aravis, one of Lewis’s strong female characters, and a boy called Shasta who meet while running away from their homes. Aravis proves unique strength and admirable self-esteem as she answers Shasta’s exclamation that she is “only a girl”: ““And what business is it of yours if I am *only* a girl? ... You’re probably only a boy: a rude, common little boy

– a slave probably, who’s stolen his master’s horse” (*The Horse and His Boy*, 31). Aravis, a Calormenian girl who is escaping from home because her father would have forced her to marry an old man, is about to kill herself when her horse starts talking to her, asking her not to commit suicide and telling her about Narnia where she would be happy because there “no maiden is forced to marry against her will” (*ibid.*, 40). Through this story Lewis undoubtedly wants to make a point about subordination and freedom of choice for women; the power of men over women can be misused, resulting in oppression, in which case it is perfectly acceptable for the woman to reject the oppressive authority. Aravis is on a journey from a patriarchal society to gender equality, from oppression to freedom, like the Jews travelling from a land of slavery towards the Promised Land. Hilder, too, points out that according to Lewis, the ideal of a husband’s rule is not tyrannous power but a humble servanthood, rooted in voluntary suffering and self-giving rather than in an essentialist Aristotelian hierarchy (13-14).

In politics, liberty means equality and requires decentralization of power so that all people can take part in the decision-making that concerns them. In a world where hierarchy has come to mean almost the opposite of democracy, it is not surprising that when someone like Lewis speaks of hierarchy among women and men, the thought is quickly rejected by the public not only because people do not want women to be oppressed by men (which was the case for a long time and still is in the most part of the world) but also because that kind of thinking seems archaic and people have already moved on to the new era. However, judging from Lewis’s ideas about hierarchy and the stories and characters in *The Chronicles*, there seems to be an inner battle in Lewis’s mind between the Victorian Lewis and the new Lewis where the first opposes the emancipation of women but the second writes stories of female heroines who are powerful both in spirit as well as in strength. As will become clear in the previous chapters, *The Chronicles of Narnia* speak for the fact that Lewis actually defends the emancipation and empowerment of women. To be clear, “empowerment” in this context means not “power over” someone but “power to” do whatever one

wants do, power to be and express oneself freely without conforming to the expectations of others. Rather than keeping women in the sexist prison of expectations, Lewis wishes to give them freedom to express themselves.

The Chronicles are not the only books where Lewis seems to change his strict, archaic opinions about gender roles. Indeed, although Lewis defends patriarchal authority in some of his writings, in others he turns against it. In “Membership” Lewis hints that patriarchal authority does not work in our world because anyone in the position of power is very likely to misuse it; Lewis states that he believes in political equality, but in his opinion the true ground of democracy is that fallen people are “so wicked that not one of them can be trusted with any irresponsible power over his fellows” (*The Weight of Glory*, 168). According to Lewis, “if we had not fallen... patriarchal monarchy would be the sole lawful government” (ibid., 168). What he, perhaps, means is that if we went back to our original state, God, who is “the Wholly Masculine” (Barkman, 429), would govern us who are, in Lewis’s words, “feminine to Him” (*God in the Dock*, 261). However, Lewis explains that since we have learned sin, we have found that “all power corrupts”, and “the only remedy has been to take away the powers and substitute a legal fiction of equality” (*The Weight of Glory*, 168) to protect us against each other’s cruelty. He writes in “Membership”: “The authority of father and husband has been rightly abolished on the legal plane, not because this authority is in itself bad (on the contrary, it is, I hold, divine in origin), but because fathers and husbands are bad” (ibid., 168-169). Likewise, theocracy and man’s authority over beast have had to be abolished because of man’s misuse of power (ibid., 169). So, due to the Fall, men can no longer be trusted and it has been necessary to strip them of their power. In the fallen world, while submission and obedience are admirable, human imperfection and sin require legal protections and equal rights as sinful humans will inevitably misuse their positions of power.

Considering Lewis’s writings on patriarchy on the one hand, and on man’s fallen state on the other, it is possible to conclude that Lewis is a defender of fair patriarchal authority, which

would work only if men in power showed feminine characteristics of submission, service, modesty and restraint. His writings seem to point out that an *ideal* world would be patriarchal, but because in reality it is impossible for men not to abuse their power, patriarchy does not work. Thus, it is possible to conclude that his ideas on gender hierarchy are only for the ideal world and in reality he recommends equality between the sexes. And even more, rather than relegating women to an inferior position as imperfect beings, he sees the stereotypically feminine characteristics as the model for all godly behavior since, according to theological feminism, all people are feminine to God and submission to the divine is the “Way” for every believer (Hilder, 5). Thus, feminine characteristics such as humility and obedience that are typically associated with women should, according to the ideal of spiritual heroism, be considered a virtue for all.

In the following chapters I will concentrate on Lewis’s portrayal of women in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. First, I will discuss the evil women whose presence has roused some irritation and who have been seen as proof of Lewis’s sexism. Second, I will examine spiritual heroism and the exemplary role of female characters and, lastly, I will examine the “good” female characters more closely and point out that their spiritual heroism as well as their individuality point to a feminist ideology.

4. The Beastly Beauties

The fact that the worst villains in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are female has received strong criticism by many critics because it has been interpreted as sexist. In addition to the evil Witches, also the condemnation of Susan in the last novel has drawn fierce criticism. In “Daughters of Lilith: Witches and Wicked Women in The Chronicles of Narnia”, Cathy McSporran writes about the two Witches in *The Chronicles* – Jadis the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle, aka the Green Witch – and discusses the reason why Susan is not accepted in Heaven in *The Last Battle*. According to McSporran, Daughters of Eve may make mistakes and be forgiven but there is no similar treatment for Daughters of Lilith. By “Daughters of Eve” McSporran refers to female human beings as they are called in *The Chronicles*, and by “Daughters of Lilith” she means the female descendants of Lilith, who, according to Mr. Beaver (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 88), was Adam’s first wife and one of the “Jinn”, a kind of Witch figure.

McSporran believes that the Witches are shown no mercy because in them, “wickedness is conflated with rebellion against the principle of ‘natural’ authority, particularly masculine authority”. Also, McSporran argues that “while villainous males are shown as human – and therefore capable of redemption and worthy of mercy – villainous females tend to be depicted as monstrous and unnatural, and as such are to be killed as swiftly as possible”. Lastly, McSporran writes that when “human women – Daughters of Eve – become corrupt, they take on attributes of Lilith and her witch-descendants, and so are much less likely to be redeemed than transgressive males”. (*Revisiting Narnia*, 192).

However, it is possible to argue that the frequent use of female villains on one hand and female heroes on the other merely reinforces what is said about women by the demon Screwtape in *The Screwtape Letters*:

You will find, if you look carefully into any human’s heart, that he is haunted by at least two imaginary women – a terrestrial and an infernal Venus, and that his desire differs qualitatively according to its object. There is one type for which his desire is

such as to be naturally amenable to the Enemy – readily mixed with charity, readily obedient to marriage, coloured all through with that golden light of reverence and naturalness which we detest; there is another type which he desires brutally, and desires to desire brutally... which even within marriage, he would tend to treat as a slave, an idol, or an accomplice. (104)

Later in this chapter it becomes clear that Lewis may have thought of these two kinds of women – terrestrial and infernal Venus's – as he wrote *The Chronicles* and that he wanted to deliver some sort of message through both kinds of characters. In this chapter I will concentrate on the evil female characters in the novels. I will begin by comparing Jadis, a classical “masculine” hero whose actions emphasize masculine features such as seduction, deceit, violence and pride, to Aslan, a “feminine” spiritual hero whose authority is based on feminine attributes of love, mercy and kindness. After that I will discuss McSporrán's interpretations of the Daughters of Lilith and compare her ideas with Monica Hilder and Karin Fry's writings about the matters. Lastly, I will discuss the issue of Susan, the most feminine of the female characters, as the corrupted woman who did not get to Heaven.

4.1 Masculine classical heroism: Jadis

As discussed in chapter 1, characteristics can be divided into two groups according to their nature: masculine and feminine. Masculine characteristics such as power, independence and pride were more popular in the Greek and Roman traditions than feminine characteristics such as kindness, mercy and obedience. However, Lewis represents feminine attributes in a higher position in the value system than masculine attributes. In *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, evil is explained as “good things perverted” and the “perversion arises when a conscious creature becomes more interested in itself than in God... and wishes to exist on its own” (66). According to Lewis, the reason for the Fall and for the first sin, Satan's revolt, is pride because Satan would not submit to God's will but wished to have subjects of his own (66). Also, as Lewis points out, Eve was tempted to eat the forbidden fruit because Satan used her pride against her by praising her beauty and, more importantly, “by urging her selfhood to direct revolt against the fact of being subject to God at all”

(69). In *The Chronicles of Narnia* falling into temptation often means adopting masculine characteristics, for example, in *The Last Battle*, when the Dwarfs decide to be independent and not rely on Aslan anymore: “We’re on our own now. No more Aslan, no more Kings, no more silly stories about other worlds. The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs” (91). Like Milton’s Eve, the Dwarfs decide to be independent of their deity.

A central character in *The Chronicles of Narnia* plays a similar role as Milton’s Satan and is an embodiment of masculine heroism; Jadis the White Witch. Being a powerful Witch, she is of a different, more fearsome species than humans and therefore bears a resemblance to a fallen angel. She, like Milton’s Satan, is arrogant, deceitful and lusts for power. She says to Digory: “I had forgotten that you are only a common boy. How should you understand reasons of State? You must learn, child, that what would be wrong for you or for any of the common people is not wrong in a great Queen such as I. The weight of the world is on our shoulders. We must be freed from all rules. Ours is a high and lonely destiny” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 71). Jadis is a member of a royal family in another world and treats people like they are her possession; when Digory and Polly are astounded by her cruelty, Jadis answers: “What people...? ... Don’t you understand?... I was the Queen. They were all *my* people. What else were they there for but to do my will?” (71). Judging by her attitude, Jadis is, as Hilder says, a utilitarian classical hero who regards existence as a one-person act in which all others are objects (119). Jadis shows ultimate arrogance and self-centeredness by claiming that she is freed from all rules because she is Queen (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 71). Her arrogance is emphasized by the way she treats others; she calls the children “minions”, Uncle Andrew a “fool”, “dog” and “slave”, Frank, the first King-to-be of Narnia “dog” and the London crowd “scum” (Hilder, 120). As opposed to the kings of Narnia and Archenland, Jadis thinks that she is above the law and the people she rules. There is no-one in the whole Narnia series that Jadis treats as equal. None of her followers are even accomplices; they are merely her minions, which only strengthens the contrast between her and good leaders such as the humble King

Lune. By making the Witch a proud tyrant Lewis underlines her evil nature and her unsuitability to be Queen because, as mentioned in chapter 4.1, only humble people qualify as good rulers. In other words, only people with “feminine” spiritual characteristics such as humility, obedience and mercy are worthy to rule. Being a version of Satan, a “masculine” hero, Jadis possesses no such characteristics.

Although Jadis is clearly female, according to Hilder, she is a “masculine” hero and where she comes from, the city of Charn, serves as a metaphor for “masculine” classical heroism; the very name of the city is associated with destruction: “burning to char” and a burial place, “charnel” (117). Like Calormen in *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle*, Charn was “a cruel world of tyrannical conquest built on slavery and warfare” (Hilder, 117). Many things speak for the moral decay of Charn: the torture chambers, seven hundred nobles killed because they had had “rebellious thoughts” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 66), Jadis pouring out the blood of her armies “like water” (*ibid.*, 70) to win the war against her sister, and finally, using the forbidden Deplorable Word to kill every other living thing in the whole world (*ibid.*, 71). According to Hilder, it is logical that such classical worlds are doomed in a moral universe and “Queen Jadis’s dissolution of Charn through the use of the Deplorable Word is only a logical consequence of a world fueled by violent conquest” (117). In *The Magician’s Nephew* Aslan gives a warning to the human kind: “you [Earth] are growing more like it [Charn]. It is not certain that some wicked one of your race will not find out a secret as evil as the Deplorable Word and use it to destroy all living things” (212). The Deplorable Word can be read as a metaphor for an atomic bomb; in a letter to Douglas Bush, Lewis writes that scientists are related to magicians to the extent to which they make power their aim and use it without ethical conscience (*Hilder*, 118). Jadis’s lust for power knows no boundaries as she readily sacrifices every living creature only to have victory over her sister.

Jadis is “the most pronounced image of ‘masculine’ classical heroism” according to Hilder (118). She is much taller than humans, exceptionally beautiful – a reference to sexual power

- and “with a look of such fierceness and pride that it took your breath away” (ibid., 54). Hilder argues that Jadis’s female identity in no way weakens her classical masculine ethos (118), perhaps because she possesses no traditionally “feminine” attributes. Instead, as Hilder notes, Jadis despises “all things ‘feminine’” such as “smallness, humility and love” (22). She feels no compassion even for her sister but considers her a “weakling” for thinking that Jadis would not use the Deplorable Word (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 70). Destruction and evil seem to give Jadis great satisfaction; she sounds proud of having been strong enough to destroy her own world (ibid., 69), she sounds almost happy as she threatens to destroy London the way she destroyed Charn (ibid., 111), she cannot stand to watch Aslan sing Narnia into being: “Ever since the song began she had felt that this whole world was filled with a Magic different from hers and stronger. She hated it. She would have smashed that whole world, or all worlds, to pieces, if it would only stop the singing” (118-119).

Because of the aforementioned characteristics of “masculine” heroism that are present in Jadis – lack of compassion, arrogance, lust for power, pride, physical violence, deceit, et cetera – it is possible to argue that she does not represent the “feminine” but the “masculine”, and therefore she is, paradoxically, the “masculine” attacking the “feminine”. Next, I will examine the feminine characteristics in Aslan and compare him as a leader with Jadis.

4.2 Feminine spiritual heroism: Aslan

Lewis believes in universal innate moral values and those that he highlights in his writings fit with the idea of a feminine spiritual heroism. He is against the Nietzschean idea that values are invented and writes about Nietzsche’s subjectivism in “The Poison of Subjectivism”: “the Nietzschean ethic can be accepted only if we are ready to scrap traditional morals as a mere error and then to put ourselves in a position where we can find no ground for any value judgments at all” (*Christian Reflections*, 77). Instead, Lewis believes in the Law of Nature (ibid., 78), a moral code written in the hearts of all people everywhere throughout the history of time. The Law of Nature and spiritual

heroism are very similar because both carry the meaning of goodness and justice, of which Lewis writes in several occasions. In “Membership” Lewis writes: “Obedience is the road to freedom, humility the road to pleasure, unity the road to personality” (*The Weight of Glory*, 167). In *Mere Christianity* Lewis writes:

as St. Paul points out, Christ never meant that we were to remain children in *intelligence*: on the contrary. He told us to be not only ‘as harmless as doves’, but also ‘as wise as serpents’. He wants a child’s heart, but a grown-up’s head. He wants us to be simple, single-minded, affectionate, and teachable, as good children are; but He also wants every bit of intelligence we have to be alert at its job, and in first-class fighting trim. (77)

As is evident, feminine virtue is not simply passive for Lewis but can include the exercise of intellectual power and even heroic action, but done in a spirit of service rather than of self-assertion. All of the attributes mentioned in the citation above are compatible with spiritual heroism and they are all praised in *The Chronicles* as well as other features of spiritual heroism such as imagination, interdependence, faith, care and truthfulness.

According to Lewis, justice means the same thing as “fairness” and includes honesty, give and take, truthfulness, keeping promises, and so on (*Mere Christianity*, 79). And fortitude includes both kinds of courage; “the kind that faces danger as well as the kind that ‘sticks it’ under pain” (79). Lewis stresses that all of these virtues are of great importance and it is not enough that one does some particular just or temperate action now and then, but that because God wants “people of a particular sort” (79-80), one must *be* just, temperate, fair, et cetera. He says that a man who perseveres in doing just actions gets in the end a certain quality of character, and it is the quality, not the action, that is a “virtue” (80). It goes without saying that Lewis is very passionate about Christian morals and it is only logical that he would want to teach about them through his novels and create what Hilder calls “spiritual heroes”. As said in the previous chapter, Jadis is a sort of embodiment of masculine heroism, and as there is no evil without goodness, the story needs an embodiment of spiritual heroism: Aslan.

Aslan is the highest authority and, therefore, “wholly masculine”, as Lewis describes God, but as Hilder puts it, “not the classical version of ‘masculine’ ego-driven conquest, but the stronger spiritual masculinity with its ‘feminine’ characteristics of love and mercy” (127). Hilder writes that whereas “the Witch’s strength constitutes rejection of all others, the Lion’s strength constitutes loving embrace” (127) and whereas “Jadis is the ‘masculine’ tyrant, a parasite who steals life from others, Aslan is the ‘feminine’ divine who gives himself in order to give life to others” (130). Although the arrival of evil into Narnia is not Aslan’s fault, he says, “I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 161), which of course means that he will die on the Stone Table when the time comes, and so, “The Lion’s ‘feminine’ self-sacrifice subverts classical ‘masculine’ strength so that redemption will win out” (Hilder, 127).

Aslan’s feminine attributes are also accentuated in his governance. It is easy to see the difference between the reign of the Witch and the reign of Aslan: Jadis is only feared but Aslan is both feared and admired; the reign of the Witch brings eternal winter in Narnia whereas Aslan’s arrival brings spring; Jadis’s intention is to destroy and to lead astray, but Aslan’s desire is to create and empower. Hilder calls Aslan’s song during the genesis of Narnia a “‘feminine’ nurturing power that is superior to classical ‘masculine’ force” (128). Also, Hilder notes that unlike the classical tyrant who establishes rule through bloody conquest, Aslan calls Narnians to “wakeful existence as rational and therefore free moral agents” (128). As Hilder points out, Aslan is a just ruler and gives his rightful subordinates freedom of choice; he asks Frank if he wants to rule Narnia, if Digory is ready to undo the harm he caused, if Polly has forgiven Digory, if Strawberry would like to be a winged horse and if he is willing to carry the children on their mission (130). Contrary to telling people and animals what to do, Aslan lets them make decisions themselves. Also, Aslan shows compassion for those who are suffering; when Digory asks for his help to save his dying mother, Aslan’s eyes are filled with “great shining tears” and Digory feels that “the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 168). Through all these

examples of feminine nurture, love, mercy, patience and empowerment, Lewis highlights his admiration of “feminine” spiritual heroism.

It is noteworthy that Jadis knows that her power is inferior to Aslan’s and she fears him: in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* she cannot look Aslan straight in the eyes (154) and when Aslan roars at her, she runs for her life (158). Also, in *The Magician’s Nephew*, when she tries to hurt Aslan with an iron crossbar, she notices to her horror that it has no effect on him, so she shrieks and runs away (128). These examples illustrate that Aslan, the one who possesses more “feminine” characteristics of spiritual heroism than any other character, is stronger than Jadis who possesses only “masculine” characteristics of classical heroism. Through Aslan and Jadis, Lewis is making a point about the superiority of spiritual heroism with its feminine characteristics as opposed to classical heroism and masculine characteristics.

However, in addition to denoting the superiority of spiritual heroism, the superiority of Aslan as opposed to Jadis could signify the superiority of masculine authority, as well. It is to be expected that there would be a paternal hierarchy in Lewis’s Narnia. As mentioned before, Lewis did not believe in equality between the sexes. He was strictly of the opinion that man ought to be the “head” of woman. McSporran writes: “Throughout *The Chronicles*, Lewis expands this highly dubious conclusion from husbandly authority alone to masculine authority in general: particularly Divine authority, in the shape of Narnia’s god, the lion Aslan” (*Revisiting Narnia*, 193). Aslan is, of course, male, and this is easy to determine because he has a mane – the only clearly visible physical feature that separates male lions from females. Jadis rebels against the paternal hierarchy as she aspires to overthrow Aslan. According to McSporran, Jadis “represents not just her foremother Lilith (rebel against male authority)” but also “Satan (rebel against God’s authority)” because “she tries to usurp Aslan’s authority as sovereign of Narnia” (194). It is no coincidence that before Jadis kills Aslan on the Stone Table she has his mane cut off, thus stripping him off the token of his manliness; the whole act of killing Aslan is about defying masculine authority. The cutting off of

the mane resembles the Biblical narrative of Samson and Delilah, where Samson is similarly defeated by a woman and emasculated. The Samson story has been interpreted by Christian thinkers, such as John Milton in the play *Samson Agonistes*, as showing Samson's development from the proud mighty warrior to a more submissive role as subject to God's will, which leads him to a greater triumph, so that allowing himself to be humiliated and stripped of his masculine pride actually leads him to greater glory. In Milton's play, Samson's last heroic act, killing the Philistines and himself by destroying the building they are in, is depicted as "yet greater" than his previous deeds (1644).

Jadis not only plays the role of Satan but also the role of Eve from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Lewis writes in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*: "The same process [Satan's rebellion] is at work in Eve. Hardly has she swallowed the fruit before she wants to be more 'equal' to Adam; and hardly has she said the word 'equal' before she emends it to 'superior' (IX, 824)" (78); Jadis does not only want to rule Narnia but, like her foremother Lilith, she wants to be above the authoritative sex, the male. When Aslan comes to life again, his mane, the symbol of his masculinity, is miraculously regrown; his authority is retrieved. The way the Witch dies is another confirmation of the triumph of the male: "Then Lion and Witch had rolled over together but with the Witch underneath" (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 194). Finally, as McSporran writes, the Witch who wanted to rule and would not obey masculine authority is put in her place; underneath the man (*Revisiting Narnia*, 196). As will be discussed in the following chapter, according to the legend, Lilith did not want to be "underneath" Adam either figuratively (inferior to him) or physically (while having sex).

4.3 Daughters of Lilith

As mentioned earlier, the use of evil women in *The Chronicles* has drawn fierce criticism and many have accused Lewis of sexism because of it. McSporran, too, is evidently annoyed by the depiction of power-seeking women as evil witches and those who, on the other hand, do not question Aslan's

authority as “good girls”. However, it is noteworthy that not only women try to replace Aslan as the ruler of all Narnia; also the Tisroc in *The Horse and His Boy* and King Miraz in *Prince Caspian* have similar intentions. It is possible to argue, however, that the way the Witches are depicted seems sexist. Therefore, a closer examination of the Witches is needed in order to decide whether they are a proof of Lewis’s sexism or not.

McSporran argues that Lewis brought the idea of terrestrial and infernal Venuses into *The Chronicles of Narnia*. If so, the Daughters of Lilith, Jadis and the Lady of the Green Kirtle in *The Silver Chair*, represent infernal Venuses and the Daughters of Eve represent terrestrial Venuses. The connection between Jadis and Lilith is mentioned in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where Mr. Beaver says that she is “no Daughter of Eve” and that she “comes of your father Adam’s... first wife, her they called Lilith” (88). According to an ancient Hebraic legend, Lilith rebelled against Adam because she did not want to be beneath him, and because of her rebellion she became the mother of demons (Hefner). The same rebellion against masculine authority is seen in the Daughters of Lilith who, similar to their ancestress, use sexuality to gain power over men. Their power only works on men, as becomes evident by Polly and Digory’s different reactions to Jadis; on encountering her for the first time, Polly sees what an evil person she is whereas Digory is struck by her beauty. Uncle Andrew is also bewitched by Jadis’s beauty at once and willingly becomes her servant. As McSporran notes, while most women are routinely described as beautiful in Narnia, the Witches are the *most* beautiful (*Revisiting Narnia*, 195). Also, the Lady of the Green Kirtle is in Prince Rilian’s words “the most beautiful thing that was ever made” (*The Silver Chair*, 59). According to McSporran, male desire for the infernal Venus is not just qualitatively different; it is quantitatively different, more powerful and more extreme – the terrestrial Venus, notwithstanding her “golden light”, never possesses supreme beauty; that distinction belongs to the seductresses, the Daughters of Lilith (*Revisiting Narnia*, 195). Most importantly, the Daughters of Lilith use their supreme beauty in order to seduce and rule men.

The fact that the Witch is not a Daughter of Eve also explains why she has no right to the throne. Only humans have a right to rule in Narnia and this fact is repeated many times in *Prince Caspian*. First, Trufflehunter says of Narnia: “It’s not Men’s country... but it’s a country for a man to be King of” (71). Second, the bears confirm that “a son of Adam ought to be King of Narnia” (76). And third, Aslan says: “You, Sir Caspian,... might have known that you could be no true King of Narnia unless, like the Kings of old, you were a son of Adam and came from the world of Adam’s sons” (231). What is noteworthy about these comments is the emphasis on the need for the King to be not only human but a man, which illustrates Lewis’s ideology about the masculinity of authority, as explained in chapter 3. As mentioned before, Lewis did not like women in ruling positions where they would be “above” men, and therefore, although there are female Queens without husbands in Narnia, the High King is male.

The origin of the Lady of the Green Kirtle is never told, but it is evident that she is a Witch and a seductress, so it is likely that she, too, is a descendant of Lilith. She plays the role of the serpent in Eden; she can take the form of a snake and when she is a woman, she is “tall and great, shining, and wrapped in a thin garment as green as poison” (*The Silver Chair*, 60). The symbolism of the description has a reference to Satan who also took the form of a snake in order to perform the same task that the Lady of the Green Kirtle is about to do – to seduce someone to fall. Also, her garment is “green as poison”, a symbol of her own poisonous nature. Lastly, the garment is depicted as thin, alluding to a sexy look, which is important because the power of a Daughter of Lilith is in her sexual attractiveness. Lord Drinian, a friend of King Caspian’s, thinks at once that the woman is evil, but Prince Rilian, Caspian’s son, falls in love with her not knowing that she is the serpent who poisoned his mother. Being a descendant of Lilith, the Green Witch not only wants Prince Rilian’s love but, first and foremost, she wants power. The Green Witch, like Jadis, wants to conquer and rule all Narnia and she uses the Prince to achieve her plans the same way that Jadis uses Digory, Uncle Andrew and Edmund to achieve her goals. It is said that the Prince stares at the

Green Witch “like a man out of his wits” (*The Silver Chair*, 60), and when he goes away with her, she poisons his memory and personality with the silver chair. Both of the Witches demonstrate that the infernal Venus wants complete control over men.

So, it is evident that the Witches exploit sexual power to seduce all men and become their master. Lewis’s use of female Witches as seductresses and usurpers of power in Narnia may at first seem contradictory to feminist ideology and the empowering of female characters in *The Chronicles*. However, the occurrence of Daughters of Lilith in the novels may, surprisingly, accentuate feminist ideology and not diminish it. As Hilder points out, to merely point to the use of the Lilith tradition as evidence of the author’s sexism is a curious tendency because it is Lilith herself who is an archetypal sexist in the “masculine” classical heroic tradition; Lilith loathes the “feminine” ethos of humility and care and instead uses her sexuality as a weapon against both males and females (120). Therefore Hilder argues that, in the Witches, Lewis depicts how misogyny is integral to the “masculine” heroic ethos that he rejects (121). So, it may be that Lewis uses the Daughters of Lilith to make a point about the means of power that women should not use. Using sexuality as a means of power is an act of self-reduction, so pursuing empowerment through sex is actually a sexist act that involves rejecting feminine virtues in favor of a stereotypically masculine pursuit of power, and therefore not the right way for women to truly empower themselves. In conclusion, although the Witches’ use of sexuality as a means to an end is sexist, it does not mean that Lewis is because he uses the Witches as an example of how not to become empowered. The right way to become empowered is depicted through Lucy, Polly, Aravis and other Daughters of Eve which I will discuss in chapter 6. Next, I will discuss the problem of Susan as the fallen Daughter of Eve.

4.4 Susan

Susan is the most controversial character in *The Chronicles* because she is the only one of the four siblings who does not make it to New Narnia, in other words, Heaven. According to McSporran, she is left out because she becomes “like the Witches; defined by how she appears” (*Revisiting Narnia*, 202). Peter, Eustace, Jill and Polly discuss Susan’s absence in New Narnia:

“My sister Susan,” answered Peter shortly and gravely, “is no longer a friend of Narnia.”

“Yes,” said Eustace, “and whenever you’ve tried to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says, ‘What wonderful memories you have! Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children,’”

“Oh Susan!” said Jill. “She’s interested in nothing except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up.”

“Grown-up, indeed,” said the Lady Polly. “I wish she *would* grow up. She wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now, and she’ll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay that age. Her whole idea is to race on to the silliest time of one’s life as quick as she can and then stop there as long as she can.” (*The Last Battle*, 169)

The condemnation of Susan is without a doubt the most shocking part in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Some critics, such as Philip Pullman and Jacqueline Carrey, have accused Lewis of being sexist, assuming that Susan is condemned because of her interest in fashion. Carrey says in “Heathen Eye for the Christian Guy”: “I resent the implication that a fondness for invitations and lipstick can render one no longer a friend of Narnia” (*Revisiting Narnia*, 163). However, it is possible to argue that the condemnation of Susan is in line with feminist ideology. Although Susan’s femininity seems to be presented in a negative way, there is another way of interpreting it.

One of the earliest feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft, writes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

Women are every where in this deplorable state; for, in order to preserve their innocence, as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them, and they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength. Taught from their infancy, that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison. Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give character to the opening mind; but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts

constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour. (82)

Wollstonecraft strongly opposed the subjugating of women already in the end of the eighteenth century when the world was quite different from how it is now. She fought for women's right to have the same education as men in order to raise them from their oppressed state and to change the general mode of thinking that, in her opinion, was sexist. As is clear from the passage above, Wollstonecraft considered the emphasis on female beauty to be a means of oppressing women and distracting them from their intellectual development, an issue that has continued to be a concern for many feminists right up to modern times. For example, Naomi Wolf writes about the same problem in *The Beauty Myth* which will be discussed in more detail later. It is possible to argue that Lewis, by condemning Susan because of her interest in trivial things – things that a sexist ideology expected girls to be interested in – is in line with Wollstonecraft's ideas. With Susan's story Lewis tells his readers that a girl should not put herself in the prison that a sexist society has forced on her, but to strive for a fuller character and genuine self-expression.

So, it can be concluded that Lewis made Susan an example of the sort of woman that one should not be. In addition to vanity and confining oneself to a sexist female stereotype, there are other traits of Susan's character that point to her being the bad example, traits that highlight Lewis's ideology of masculine authority and spiritual heroism. First, Susan questions the High King Peter's authority more than once. As the four of them and Trumpkin are trying to find their way to Caspian, they get lost in the forest and she says: "I've never seen these woods in my life before. In fact I thought all along that we ought to have gone by the river" (*Prince Caspian*, 124). Later Susan says once more that she knew all along that they would get lost in the woods, and Lucy scolds her: "'Susan!' said Lucy, reproachfully, 'don't nag at Peter like that. It's so rotten, and he's doing all he can'" (*Prince Caspian*, 130). Lucy never makes the mistake of not obeying masculine authority. So

blatant is Susan's rebellion that even Trumpkin, the Dwarf who is with the royal siblings in the woods, makes a point of reprimanding Susan, saying: "Obey the High King, your Majesty" (157).

Second, Susan often tries to act and sound grown-up, which is a sign of pride; when Lucy tells the others that Aslan has come and they must all go with him, and that if the others choose not to go, she will have to follow him alone, Susan says: "Don't talk nonsense, Lucy...Of course you can't go off on your own. Don't let her, Peter. She's being downright naughty...You've no right to try to force the rest of us like that. It's four to one and you're the youngest" (*Prince Caspian*, 156-157). By taking this attitude Susan is not only trying to be reasonable, she is being the big sister; she is trying to have authority over Lucy because she is older. What makes this crime even greater is that she says later: "But I've been far worse than you know. I really believed it was him... yesterday. When he warned us not to go down to the fir wood. And I really believed it was him tonight, when you woke us up. I mean, deep down inside. Or I could have, if I'd let myself" (*Prince Caspian*, 161). So, not only is Susan against Lucy but she is also against Aslan because she believes "deep down inside" that he has come, but does not let herself believe it fully.

Lastly, Susan is inclined to "bend the rules" even though the rules were holy. When Jadis comes to claim Edmund's life which is duly hers according to the Deep Magic, Susan asks Aslan whether he could work against it. As the "Deep Magic" is the Narnian version of God's law, the crime is greater than may seem to a regular reader. Therefore, Susan's question may be interpreted as rebellion against divine authority. All of the aforementioned traits – questioning her brother's authority, pride, and rebellion against divine authority – indicate that her nature is more flawed than, for example, Lucy's who possesses the feminine characteristics of trust, humility and obedience. Not only are Susan's aforementioned qualities masculine characteristics but they are also linked with Daughters of Lilith, which makes her a little more similar to them.

Some have interpreted that Susan's femininity is portrayed as a bad characteristic in the same way as her disobedience and pride. Karin Fry notes in "No Longer a Friend of Narnia"

that Susan is the only feminine main character in the stories and that her femininity is presented in a negative way. Fry claims that “Susan’s tendency to be mothering is usually described as a negative trait because she is overly protective, seeking to limit the behavior of her siblings without the right of an actual mother” (Bassham, 104). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Susan suggests that it is time for Edmund to go to bed, and Edmund answers: “Trying to talk like Mother... And who are you to say when I’m to go to bed? Go to bed yourself” (2). However, the “tendency to be mothering” can also be interpreted as a tendency to be bossy, which is a more likely interpretation knowing Susan’s disposition towards pride. Susan is also more cautious, gentle, passive and fearful than the others, which, according to Fry, are presented in a bad light because they accentuate her femininity (Bassham, 104). Fry is of the opinion that Susan’s unwillingness to ride to wars is due to her tender-heartedness and seems to claim that Susan’s gentleness is rejected as a negative trait because it is a feminine trait and therefore inadequate. However, claiming that Susan is proof of Lewis preferring masculine women over feminine women is a hasty assumption. It is more likely that Susan’s unwillingness to fight in wars, her caution, passivity and fearfulness are signs of vanity and spiritual weakness, not of her femininity. Or, if they are signs of femininity, they belong to the age-old stereotype of a weak and passive woman who does not expect greater things of herself, much in the same way as portrayed by Wollstonecraft, as discussed earlier: “Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give character to the opening mind; but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour” (82). So, by making Susan a stereotype of an old-fashioned, oppressed woman who without noticing her own prison consents to restrict her being according to the definition of “woman” that has been given to her, Lewis demonstrates his negative attitude towards this kind of stereotype. As said before, Lewis wants women to take control of their lives and become stronger and not to limit themselves like

Susan, imprisoned inside the walls of her house, her main interests being keeping up a lady-like image and finding a man who will take care of her.

In addition to her femininity, some have argued that Susan's interest in men is portrayed as a bad quality. Indeed, Susan is different from the other female characters when it comes to sexuality. Only two Daughters of Eve show clear interest in men in *The Chronicles*; Susan and Lasaraleen in *The Horse and His Boy*. Judging by the behavior of Susan and Lasaraleen, and knowing what happened to Susan later, it is possible to say that Lewis might not portray sexual desire in a very positive way in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lasaraleen is similar to Susan in that she, too, is vain. She craves attention and likes to gossip but most importantly she is attracted to men with power and wealth. McSporrán notes that Susan differs from her siblings in a profound way because she is the only one of them to consider getting married: "Her brothers and sisters are content with the company of one another... But Susan doesn't want this childish idyll. Susan wants a man" (*Revisiting Narnia*, 200). However, what is noteworthy about Susan's will to find a man is the way it is similar to Lasaraleen's attitude. It seems that Susan, too, is not looking for just any man but a royal man, which explains why all of her suitors are either princes or kings. Furthermore, it seems that Susan is not only looking for a husband but that she is playing with the ones who are interested in her. An example of one such a case is Prince Rabadash, of whom Edmund says that he is Susan's "dark-faced lover" (*The Horse and His Boy*, 67), a man of whom Susan's family never approved. Despite his duplicity and domineering behavior, which were obvious from the beginning, Susan keeps flirting with him. Both of these qualities, not settling for anything but a wealthy royal and playing with men, are, again, traits that Lewis disapproves of. So, the qualities that Lewis portrays as examples of bad behavior in Susan are not, as has been claimed, her femininity and sexuality but the *kinds* of femininity and sexuality that she practices. William Gray, too, argues that "the problem with Susan is not so much her adolescent sexuality as such but the fact that she allows the construction of that sexuality to be so all-absorbing that she doesn't want anything else" (*Death*

and Fantasy, 90). Susan is a so-called gold-digger and a player, a woman who has a tendency to exploit rather than love men in which respect she is similar to the Daughters of Lilith who also want to seduce and exploit men.

McSporran, too, sees a clear connection between Susan and the Witches. Not only is she exceptionally beautiful like the Daughters of Lilith but also, for Prince Rabadash, she is an “infernal Venus” to be “desired brutally”: “‘But I *want* her,’ cried the Prince. ‘I must have her. I shall die if I do not get her – false, proud, black-hearted daughter of a dog that she is! I cannot sleep and my food has no savor and my eyes are darkened because of her beauty. I must have the barbarian queen’” (*The Horse and His Boy*, 118). Rabadash says that he would treat her as his slave if she were his wife and that he would drag her to his palace by the hair (*The Horse and His Boy*, 234). As the infernal Venus that Lewis writes about, Susan would be treated as “a slave, an idol, or an accomplice” within marriage (*The Screwtape Letters*, 104). And that is not because Susan’s interest in men is greater than most other female characters’ but because, similar to the infernal Venuses, her interest stems from the thrill of seduction and lust, not from love and respect.

In addition to portraying the wrong kind of attitude towards the opposite sex and expression of sexuality, Lewis also portrays the kind of relationship between a man and a woman that he thinks is ideal, which is in accordance with the feminist ideology. The ideal partnership is exemplified in Aravis and Cor whose marriage is based on friendship and mutual respect rather than mere sexual desire, which resembles greatly the kind of marriage that Mary Wollstonecraft speaks for in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft, who is against the idea that a wife’s foremost duty is to please her husband, writes: “Why must the female mind be tainted by coquetish arts to gratify the sensualist, and prevent love from subsiding into friendship or compassionate tenderness, when there are not qualities on which friendship can be built?” (61). Therefore, the absence of sexual tinge in the marriage of Aravis and Cor and the fact that their marriage is based on friendship and love is in accordance with the ideas of one of the earliest feminists.

In conclusion, the condemnation of Susan is due to the various similarities of her nature with the Daughters of Lilith, not because she is the most feminine character or that she shows an interest in men. Gender-specific expectations and presumptions such as disinterest in serious matters, a kind of stupidity and frivolousness, interest in looks, gossip and clothes, is equally annoying to feminists as the women who actualize those expectations and presumptions. That is exactly what Susan does when she submits to mimicking the picture of a “feminine woman” that the sexist culture imposes on women. She has renounced her unique character and become a product of a sexist ideology. Thus, by condemning such behavior, Lewis shows that he is against such sexist stereotypes and that he wants women to be as much themselves as possible, unique and less impressionable, the kind of women that will be discussed in the next chapters.

5. Becoming “more feminine” in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

The Narnia books are full of moral teachings woven into the stories the function of which is to guide the reader towards spiritual growth through identification with the characters. By creating spiritual heroes, Lewis changes the nature of heroism and gives his readers biblical role models. Also, by creating active, brave and witty female characters Lewis liberates women from their traditional role of, for example, a house-wife or a helpless victim and shows his sympathy with feminist ideology. In this chapter I will demonstrate how the spiritual characteristics of humility, obedience, temperance and mercy are shown in the novels and how Lewis praises women by giving these superior characteristics especially to his female characters.

5.1 Humility: Bree and Hwin

Humility is the opposite of pride, the sin that led Satan to corruption (i, 36) and Eve to dream of superiority over Adam (ix, 825) in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Perhaps it is because pride is the source of disobedience against God and against authority that it has become one of the predominant themes in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. For the same reason its counterpart, humility, is greatly accentuated in the novels. As said in the previous chapter, humility is one of the feminine characteristics which, although typically associated with women, should be considered a virtue for both women and men according to the ideal of spiritual heroism. In *The Chronicles* Lewis emphasizes the importance of humility through many ways, including the manner and dress of Narnian people, and the necessity of humility in those in the position of leadership. Also, as will become clear, by making inherently humble female characters Lewis grants women spiritual superiority over male characters.

There are several characters that either demonstrate inherent humility or receive a lesson from Aslan in order to learn to be humble. For example, in *The Magician’s Nephew* a horse called Strawberry who accidentally arrives in Narnia and becomes a Talking Horse is an example of an inherently humble character. When Aslan asks him whether he wants to be the first winged horse

in Narnia, Strawberry replies: “‘If you wish, Aslan – if you really mean – I don’t know why it should be me – I’m not a very clever horse’” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 170). This reply pleases Aslan and so he makes Strawberry a winged horse and renames him “Fledge”.

The inherent humility of the kings and queens of Narnia is obvious throughout the novels. The first King and Queen of Narnia, the cabby and his wife, are no exceptions. When Aslan says that they are to be the first King and Queen of Narnia, the cabby answers: “‘Begging your pardon, sir,’ he said, ‘and thanking you very much I’m sure ... but I ain’t no sort of chap for a job like that. I never ‘ad much eddycation, you see’” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 165). What is accentuated here is that Aslan is not interested in people’s social status or their level of education; what matters is what kind of attitude the cabby and his wife had. Similarly, in the crowning of Caspian humility is emphasized as Aslan says to Caspian: “‘If you had felt yourself sufficient [to be King], it would have been a proof that you were not. Therefore, under us and under the High King, you shall be King of Narnia, Lord of Cair Paravel, and Emperor of the Lone Islands’” (*Prince Caspian*, 220).

It is clear that humility is one of the most important characteristics of spiritual heroism that Lewis underlines. It is the humility of these people who “never ‘ad much eddycation” and who did not feel themselves “sufficient” that convinces Aslan of their suitability to be rulers. Vanity and pride are features which Aslan does not like, and certainly does not approve of when it comes to kings. As Hilder says, in theological feminism, headship requires “Christ-like humility” (13). Like Jesus who did not judge people according to their social group but according to their actions, also Lewis gives people equal opportunity and expects royalty to be like Jesus; although he is the King of Kings, he spent his life serving others and told all his followers that if one wants to be great, one is to be a servant (Matthew 22:11).

Humility is not only a general characteristic among the “good” people in the novels but can also be seen in their outward appearance. In *The Horse and His Boy* the striking contrast

between Narnian and Calormenian royalty is evident. Whereas the dress and manner of all the rich and royal people in Tashbaan is flamboyant, the Narnians prefer simplicity; they arrive in Tashbaan by foot, not carried on slaves or litters like Calormenians. They are bare-headed and their over-all impression is friendly, honest and peace-loving. The King of Calormen, the Tisroc, is the opposite of humility: “The least of his jewels with which he was covered was worth more than all the clothes and weapons of the Narnian lords put together: but he was so fat and such a mass of frills and pleats and bobbles and buttons and tassels and talismans that Aravis couldn’t help thinking the Narnian fashions (at any rate for men) looked nicer” (115). Also, the King of Archenland, who is of Narnian origin, is very different compared to the Tisroc. Aravis is surprised to see the king looking so ordinary in his old clothes and dirty hands (227-228). Still, the king greets Aravis and the others in a most stately manner and talks to them as equals (228). Also, King Lune calls his servant a “friend” (230) whereas the Tisroc’s servants and animals are disposable; Prince Rabadash says: “why should we think twice about punishing Narnia any more than about hanging an idle slave or sending a worn-out horse to be made into dog’s-meat?” (120). With such sharp contrasts Lewis portrays the humility of a good ruler and respect for others which emphasize characteristics of spiritual heroism. A good ruler does not set himself above those he rules but, like King Lune, calls his servants “friends”, thus signifying that they are his equals. These examples show that, in Lewis’s point of view, authority needs to be tempered with a sense of humility and an egalitarian ethos.

However, not all “good” characters are as humble as they ought to be. As said, some characters in the novels are inherently humble while some need to learn humility. When Reepicheep loses his tail in battle, which, according to him, is a mouse’s “honor and glory” (*Prince Caspian*, 222), Aslan subtly rebukes him for being proud: “I have sometimes wondered, friend... whether you do not think too much about your honor” (*ibid.*, 223). Reepicheep’s honor is not a sufficient excuse to grow his tail back, but when all the other mice draw their swords to cut theirs because

they will not “bear the shame of wearing an honor which is denied to the High Mouse” (ibid., 223), Aslan suddenly changes his mind and says: “You have conquered me. You have great hearts. Not for the sake of your dignity, Reepicheep, but for the love that is between you and your people, and still more for the kindness your people showed me long ago when you ate away the cords that bound me on the Stone Table (and it was then, though you have long forgotten it, that you began to be *Talking Mice*), you shall have your tail again” (ibid., 223-224). This way Aslan shows that love is greater than honor. With fatherly love he teaches his followers about moral priorities; selfish pride and separating oneself from others is nothing compared to the comrades’ will to humble themselves in solidarity with those with less than they have.

Humility thus having been put on a pedestal as one of the most important attributes, it is noteworthy that most of the inherently humble characters are female. Hwin, Polly, Lucy and Aravis are a few examples of female characters that are humble by nature and whose male friends’ pride is repeatedly contrasted to their humility in order to emphasize the female characters’ spiritual superiority. It is most often the male character that is in need of a lesson and the female character that sets the example. For example, the contrast between Bree and Hwin is significant not only because it stresses humility over pride, but because it exemplifies the strength of humility in the female, Hwin. Bree, a Talking Horse, is a proud and vain character. He thinks that he is better than dumb horses and is very careful not to conform to their customs. He is worried that one of his favorite pastimes, rubbing his back on the ground, would be unmannerly behavior in Narnia, a “silly, clownish trick” he has learned from “the dumb ones” (22). Also, as he and Shasta walk at night, he says: “Shasta, I’m ashamed of myself. I’m just as frightened as a common, dumb Calormene horse” (27). The plan is to look very poor on arriving in Tashbaan, which means that the Horses’ tails need to be cut short. However, due to Bree’s vanity he finds this very hard: “‘My dear Madam’, said Bree. ‘Have you pictured to yourself how very disagreeable it would be to arrive in Narnia in *that* condition?’” (49-50). Hwin answers: “‘Well,’ said Hwin humbly (she was a very

sensible mare), ‘the main thing is to get there’” (50). In addition to being more sensible and humble than Bree, Hwin is also more persistent. When the four of them – Bree, Hwin, Aravis and Shasta – are wearied from traveling through the desert, Hwin is the one who has more stamina. She tries to encourage Bree by saying that when horses have humans on their backs, they are made to go on and they find that they can even though they are tired (145). Bree, who is a war-horse and a stallion, should be stronger, but he answers in a proud manner: “‘I think, Ma’am,’ said Bree very crushingly, ‘that I know a little more about campaigns and forced marches and what a horse can stand than you do’” (145).

Later, Bree is completely defeated and depressed because he feels that he has disgraced himself; the four of them are racing toward the gate of a walled garden with a lion right behind them, but as the lion closes in on Aravis and Hwin, Bree will not turn around to help them. However, Shasta jumps from Bree’s back and runs towards the lion and the girls in order to try to save them. Due to his fear of lions, Bree is unable to help the “damsels in distress” as a brave war-horse ought to do. The Hermit talks to him about humility:

My good Horse, you’ve lost nothing but your self-conceit... If you are really so humbled as you sounded a minute ago, you must learn to listen to sense. You’re not quite the great Horse you had come to think, from living among poor dumb horses... But as long as you know you’re nobody very special, you’ll be a very decent sort of Horse, on the whole, and taking one thing with another. (161-162)

The Hermit confirms that Bree has a reason to be proud of being a Narnian Horse but reprimands him for having thought any more of himself than what was necessary.

Hwin, however, sees through Bree’s excuses of not wanting to rush going to Narnia because it is “essential to make a good impression” (213). Hwin understands that the real reason why Bree is unwilling to go is because he wants to wait until his tail has grown again (213), and says: “Really, Bree, you’re as vain as that Tarkheena in Tashbaan!” (213). The Tarkheena that Hwin refers to is, of course, Lasaraleen, who is a very vain and histrionic character. Even though Lasaraleen is a female character, Lewis is still challenging the stereotypical portrayal of women and men by depicting Hwin as logical and modest, and Bree as vain and histrionic.

By using Bree and Hwin as examples, Lewis is able to convey a moral lesson about the “right” kind of attitude; one is to be humble but persevering like Hwin, not proud and selfish like Bree. Most importantly, it is notable that it is the mare who is more reasonable and humble and, when the circumstances are tough, stronger than the stallion who has prided himself on having been to many wars and having won many battles. Hwin possesses “Fortitude”, one of the Cardinal Virtues, which Lewis describes in *Mere Christianity*: “Fortitude includes both kinds of courage – the kind that faces danger as well as the kind that ‘sticks it’ under pain” (79). The story about Bree and Hwin can be seen as a tribute to women’s humility, strength and perseverance in troubled times. As will become evident, female characters in the Narnia series often set the example of spiritual heroism.

5.2 Obedience: Digory and Polly

The story in *The Magician’s Nephew* about Digory and Polly in another world is quite significant in the way Lewis reverses the roles of the tempted Eve and the passive Adam in the Garden of Eden; when Digory is tempted to strike a magical bell despite the unknown consequences, Polly is strongly against it and tries to convince Digory not to satisfy his curiosity. However, unable to obey his “inner voice” that tells him not to do it, Digory violently holds Polly while striking the bell, causing the awakening of the most evil character in *The Chronicles*, the White Witch. His curiosity, according to Hilder, is a version of Jadis’s and Uncle Andrew’s classical drive for power through knowledge (123). As opposed to the age-old interpretation of woman as the cause of sin, Lewis rewrites the story of the Fall by making the male the cause of the Fall and the female an emblem of virtue. In Lewis’s version of the Fall, it is not the woman who is tempted but the male who is not only tempted but also weak enough to fall into temptation, causing irreversible damage.

The reason why Lewis’s rewriting of the Fall is groundbreaking is because it absolves the woman (or, in this case, the girl) from all blame. In this case, it is not the female who is weaker

but the male whose lack of prudence starts a chain of events that ends in the death of the Christ figure of Narnia, Aslan. It can be argued that by making the male responsible for the Narnian version of the “original sin”, Lewis emancipates the woman who, in the Christian tradition, has often been accused as the reason for the Fall. Furthermore, Lewis, again, highlights the spiritual strength of the female as opposed to the weaker male. Digory’s curiosity and “drive for knowledge” is a kind of masculine pushing of boundaries, opposed to the more stereotypically feminine virtue of restraint and respect for limits that are demonstrated in Polly. Unlike Digory, Polly has “Prudence”, one of the Cardinal Virtues, of which Lewis writes: “Prudence means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it” (*Mere Christianity*, 77). Polly expresses spiritual strength by being sensible and cautious, making her spiritually stronger than Digory, much in the same way as in the case of Hwin and Bree. While Digory has to learn prudence and obedience the hard way, Polly possesses those characteristics innately just as Hwin naturally possesses humility and perseverance.

The second time Digory’s obedience is put to the test the outcome is different because he has met Aslan who sends him to fetch an apple from a garden outside of Narnia in order to plant a tree that will protect Narnia from Jadis. Having been made to accept that it was his fault that evil entered Narnia, Digory humbly accepts the task. In the garden Digory confronts Jadis who tries to seduce Digory to eat one of the fruits so that he and Jadis could rule Narnia together for all eternity. However, as that strategy is not working, she uses a much greater power than pride against him by saying that one bite of the fruit could heal his dying mother (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 192). While Digory is trying to make up his mind, his mother’s instructions have a good influence on him, and he says: “Mother herself... wouldn’t like it – awfully strict about keeping promises – and not stealing – and all that sort of thing. *She’d* tell me not to do it – quick as anything – if she was here” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 194). What is interesting about this line is that it is not the male authority of Aslan that persuades Digory in this critical moment, but the female authority of the mother. By

making Digory recall his mother's advice, Lewis accentuates a new aspect of feminine power; the power of the mother. Also, by recalling his mother at a critical moment, Digory "becomes more feminine" by thinking of what mother would say and is able to make the right decision. Again, a woman is portrayed as the epitome of righteousness and serves as a model for the male.

However, the pivotal factor that helps Digory make the right choice is the idea of leaving Polly alone in a strange world, which highlights how much Digory has changed from the selfish, curious and disobedient boy that he was in the beginning. When Jadis suggests that Digory leave Polly behind, Digory finally realizes the evil of the Witch's suggestion and sees the hollowness of all the other things that the Witch said to persuade him. It is Digory's gallantry – not even considering leaving an innocent girl in trouble – together with his mother's advice that helps him resist temptation. Digory has learned obedience and "Justice", the Cardinal Virtue that, according to Lewis, means "fairness" and includes "honesty, give and take, truthfulness, keeping promises, and all that side of life" (*Mere Christianity*, 79). Like Bree, Digory becomes a more "feminine" person, more like his female companion who has the feminine, spiritual characteristics by nature.

5.3 Truthfulness: Edmund and Lucy

The most important things that Edmund's story conveys are, firstly, that sexism, deceit and pride are pre-reform features of human character. Secondly, as was in the case of Bree and Hwin, and Digory and Polly, again, the morally deficient male is contrasted with the spiritually superior female who in Edmund's case is his sister, Lucy.

Edmund's growth process is probably the most distinguishable one in the novels as he turns from a bully and a betrayer to a humble servant of Aslan's. It is noteworthy that a character's sexism, such as Edmund's words about Lucy: "Just like a girl ... sulking somewhere, and won't accept an apology" (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 32), and Digory's sexist comment when

he is arguing with Polly about whether they should strike the enchanted bell or not: “‘That’s all *you* know ... It’s because you’re a girl. Girls never want to know anything but gossip and rot about people getting engaged’” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 5) only occur as pre-reform features of their character. In addition to being sexist, Edmund is also a bully before he reforms; Peter says that Edmund has always been beastly to anyone smaller than him at school (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 49) After their conversion, every character becomes “better” and are no longer, for example, sexist. Therefore, it is safe to say that Lewis condemns sexism in his novels by making it a feature of the “sinful” state.

While in his pre-reform state, Edmund is proud and power-hungry and therefore easy prey to a Daughter of Lilith. In the same way as she tried to seduce Digory to eat the forbidden fruit, Jadis uses Edmund’s pride against him by saying that she would make him a King of Narnia and that he is the “cleverest” and “handsomest” young man she has ever met (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 40), as she lures him to bring his siblings to her. Edmund, not yet humbled like Digory, falls prey to Jadis’s seduction and promises to bring his siblings to Narnia. Again, the White Witch plays the role of the serpent of Eden as she lures another victim to commit betrayal.

In his “sinful”, pre-reform state Edmund commits two crimes both of which result from the masculine characteristic of pride. First, having come back to his own world from Narnia, thus knowing that Lucy had been truthful when she had told her siblings about the magic wardrobe, he betrays Lucy by pretending that they never went to Narnia and by implying that Lucy is a liar: “And Edmund gave a very superior look as if he were far older than Lucy ... and then a little snigger and said, ‘Oh yes, Lucy and I have been playing – pretending that all her story about a country in the wardrobe is true. Just for fun, of course. There’s nothing there really’” (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 48). This is Edmund’s first betrayal and exemplifies the contrast between him and Lucy who truthfully tells the others about her trip into another world through a wardrobe although there is little chance that anyone will believe her, thus risking being called a liar or a

lunatic, while Edmund, having realized that Lucy was not lying, would rather lie and say that the place is fictitious than swallow his pride and admit that Lucy was right. Again, as mentioned before, the morally deficient male is contrasted with the spiritually superior female.

Second, after all four of them have arrived in Narnia, Edmund betrays the rest of his siblings by going to the White Witch in order to tell her that they are there. However, the second crime is not quite as bad because he thinks that the Witch might be good (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 96) and, furthermore, he is under an enchantment because he ate the Turkish Delights that Jadis gave him on their first encounter (*ibid.*, 39). Edmund is not quite himself after eating the sweets and is driven by his craving to have more; the magic of the Turkish Delight and the Witch's flattery cloud his judgment.

Edmund's final conversion comes after he has realized that the Witch is evil and he and Aslan have a private talk after which Aslan tells the others not to remind Edmund about the bad things he did (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 153). After the encounter with Aslan, Edmund no longer wavers but stands strong in faith, and his pride has been replaced by a firm belief in Aslan; when Jadis comes to Aslan and demands to have Edmund, saying: "You know that every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and that for every treachery I have a right to a kill" (*ibid.*, 155), Edmund's eyes are fixed on Aslan. He knows that only Aslan has the right to tell him what to do and he patiently waits for Aslan's orders. From then on Edmund is a changed boy and later in the *Chronicles* he shows great spiritual heroism; in *The Horse and His Boy* he is humble and merciful because he remembers his own treason and therefore understands human weakness; when Peridan tells Edmund that he would have the right to strike off Rabadash's head because of his surprise attack, Edmund answers: "That is true... But even a traitor may mend. I have known one that did.' And he looked very thoughtful" (230). In *Prince Caspian*, while no-one else believes Lucy when she says that she saw Aslan, Edmund is the only one of the siblings who believes her because he remembers that he should have believed her the first time Lucy told them about Narnia (152).

Similar to Digory, Edmund's masculine pride and sexism has been taken over by feminine humility and mercy and he has become as truthful as Lucy.

The main point of Bree, Digory and Edmund's stories is connected to the ideology of theological feminism: turning from evil ways means becoming "feminine" to God. Both Digory and Edmund have to "learn away" from their masculine traits and become more feminine. As discussed, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* this learning process usually concerns proud boys, whereas girls seem to have a natural tendency for the feminine characteristics of humility, mercy, obedience, et cetera. In the next chapter, I will examine the spiritual heroism of the girls and discuss how the portrayal of spiritually superior female characters highlights Lewis's sympathy towards a feminist ideology.

6. The Blessed Plain

One of the motives to write stories for children has always been to teach them something, whether it is to warn them not to go into the woods alone or to teach them about moral codes and gender roles. Stories are effective tools for upbringing because they offer examples of right and wrong behavior that are easy to remember. According to Roberta S. Trites, “as early as the eighteenth century, parents and educators recognized books as a way to indoctrinate their children into socially sanctioned behaviors, and authors have met that recognition for centuries” (*Waking Sleeping Beauty*, 4). Cedric Cullingford, too, notes that books for girls and boys differ greatly from each other especially in the way gender is described: “The analyses of stories set in girls’ schools tends to concentrate on the extent to which readers are being subtly taught how to become good, possibly subservient, wives and mothers, to play a feminine role as clearly and simply as boys are being taught to be masculine” (*Children’s Literature*, 36). Likewise, Karin Fry points out that gender theorists “largely view gender roles as culturally constructed because what is appropriate behavior for males and females differs throughout the world and throughout time” (“No Longer a Friend of Narnia”, 101-102). In other words, authors have, perhaps subconsciously, adjusted gender roles in their work according to the demands of their time.

Mirroring our time, the trend in the contemporary literature has shifted towards gender neutrality and, as Trites writes, “many texts for children have been published that make a point of rejecting stereotypical gender roles” (4). The same rejection of gender roles can be found in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. However, in order to find out whether *The Chronicles* are feminist novels, we must first define a “feminist novel”. Trites writes:

What is a feminist children’s novel? Defined simply, it is a novel in which the main character is empowered regardless of gender. A key concept here is ‘regardless’: in a feminist children’s novel, the child’s sex does not provide a permanent obstacle to her development. Although s/he will likely experience some gender-related conflicts, s/he ultimately triumphs over them. (4)

Also, Trites clarifies the definition by contrasting a feminist protagonist to a protagonist in a prefeminist novel where “she tends to become ‘Sleeping Beauty’ in a movement from active to passive, from vocal to silent”, while “the feminist protagonist remains active and celebrates her agency and her voice” (8). As Trites writes, “feminism’s greatest impact on children’s literature” is that “it has enabled the awakening of the female protagonist to the positive power she holds” (8).

It is arguable that Lewis does not convey a narrow-minded gender ideology as the girls’ and boys’ books about which Cullingford writes. So far it has been concluded that Lewis rejects the idea of women confining to sexist stereotypes, for example, by condemning Susan’s passivity while waiting in the castle while others brave dangers on the battlefield. As discussed in the *Beastly Beauties* chapter, Lewis sends a clear message through Susan and the Daughters of Lilith of what kind of a woman *not* to be in order to avoid confining to sexist expectations. What needs to be found out still is what Lewis recommends instead. In this chapter I will discuss the “good” female characters in *The Chronicles* who are all more or less gamine, or, “tempered with masculine characteristics” thus embodying Lewis’s ideal of a woman (Barkman, 431). The focus is on finding out whether Lewis’s portrayal of “good” female characters is consistent with feminist ideology.

As will become clear in this chapter, many things speak for the argument that Lewis empowers his female characters. Fry, too, is of the opinion that “the typical female heroine in the *Chronicles* is frustrated with female gender roles, and surpasses the conventional limitations of her sex by bending the gender rules” (102). It is noteworthy that all of the good female characters are fighters and willingly go into battle beside men and this does not seem to be portrayed as a bad thing. On the contrary, they are praised for being just as good as men and worthy of being knighted. In his female characters Lewis shows that a girl does not need to conform to archaic expectations, but that she can fight, run, ride horses and do all the things that boys can do if she wants to because

she is a free agent. Lewis liberates his girl characters to be who they are without the boundaries of a subjecting, male chauvinist ideology.

Given the idea of theological feminism according to which feminine spiritual heroism is deemed higher in the value system than masculine classical heroism, it seems contradictory that Lewis's Daughters of Eve are fighting in wars and that the readiness to fight is portrayed as an essential characteristic of "exemplary" women. Therefore, it is necessary to explain the seeming controversy in order for the reader to understand why fighting is portrayed as a positive thing from a theological feminist point of view. It is possible to find two reasons why women's fighting is not "bad" masculine heroism although physical violence normally is. First, by setting women on a battlefield side by side with men Lewis breaks the stereotype of a passive woman who waits patiently at home while the stereotypically more active man runs, rides horses, fights, et cetera. Second, and more importantly, Narnian wars symbolize a spiritual war where the fight is between good and evil. Therefore, willingness to fight is, in fact, a sign of righteousness and, respectively, unwillingness to fight is a sign of ungodliness of which, for example, Susan is guilty. In this way, the readiness to fight for Narnia is, confusingly, characteristic of spiritual heroism.

I will begin this chapter by examining Lucy who is one of the key characters. She appears in five of the seven books and is one of the most virtuous characters. After that, I will discuss the other girls as both physical and spiritual fighters.

6.1 Lucy

According to Hilder, Lucy is an archetype of the feminine spiritual hero who is open to wonder (36). Throughout *The Chronicles* Lucy is kind, loving, innocent, righteous, and brave – almost too perfect to be a human being and unlike any real little girl. Hilder says that Lucy's role as the youngest child metaphorically represents some of the qualities essential to true heroism: trust, willingness to risk and care (36). According to Hilder, Lucy's friendliness and innocence are her

“protective moral strengths” because they defeat evil (36); it is possible to say that Mr. Tumnus regrets his plans to kidnap the girl because on seeing her innocence, he regrets his evil plans and reforms (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 18-21). This occasion speaks for the power of feminine innocence, a spiritual characteristic that appears powerfully in Aslan. Lucy’s kindness also results in her determination to save Mr. Tumnus from the White Witch.

Hilder writes that Lewis subverts the classical heroic in creating the youngest and female child as the spiritual leader (37). “Unlike the self-reliant and egotistical male hero of superior physical and sometimes intellectual stature, Lucy, the loving female of least physical stature, embodies the humility characterizing spiritual heroism” (Hilder, 37). She, unlike her sister Susan, never questions the authority of the High King. Also, she is the only one with enough faith to see Aslan when he appears to them in *Prince Caspian*. Perhaps none of the other siblings can see Aslan although he is standing right in front of them because they have not been waiting for Aslan to come, or, because they did not believe Lucy when she saw him the first time. Their disbelief results in a disability to see him in the same way as Uncle Andrew’s own mind makes him unable to hear Aslan’s words in *The Magician’s Nephew* (202-203) and as the Dwarves’ decision not to believe in Aslan makes them unable to see anything but darkness in the New Narnia (*The Last Battle*, 185-186). Lucy, however, has been waiting to see Aslan since their arrival in Narnia; she expresses the spiritual characteristics of faith, perseverance and patience. It is only after the others decide to take a leap of faith and follow Lucy and the invisible Lion that they start to see first Aslan’s shadow and then all of him. As her name indicates, Lucy is a “light” that guides the others into Narnia and to Aslan. Lucy is Lewis’s spiritual hero and an example for both girls and boys.

As female characters have traditionally been mere sidekicks and secondary characters in literature as well as the cinema, Lucy’s prominence and active role in the novels can be regarded as proof of feminist ideology in *The Chronicles*. As Mary Sheridan-Rabideau writes, pervasive superhero stories tend to assign girls pretty, passive, sidekick, or victim roles (104). However, Lucy

is constantly a key character in the novels. For example, her faith saves everyone again in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* when the travelers, including Lucy, Eustace, Edmund, Reepicheep, King Caspian and his crew, have sailed in a place full of darkness and despair. When all the others on the ship have despaired and lost all hope of getting out, it is Lucy who still has a little bit of faith left: “Lucy leant her head on the edge of the fighting-top and whispered, ‘Aslan, Aslan, if ever you loved us at all, send us help now’” (200). A moment later they see a tiny speck of light ahead. There is something in the light that looks like a cross, an airplane or a kite before Lucy realizes that it is an albatross. The albatross comes to the ship and flies in front of them, leading them to where they had come from, back to the light. No-one except Lucy hears the albatross whisper, “Courage, dear heart,” and Lucy recognizes the voice as Aslan’s. Aslan saves his people once again, but it is thanks to Lucy’s faith that he comes to their aid.

Lucy differs from her older sister, Susan, in many ways, but perhaps the most significant thing is that she, unlike her sister, is able to resist the temptation of the power of female beauty. Lucy’s allegiance and resilience is put to the test when she finds a Magic Book in a Magician’s house where there is a spell called “an infallible spell to make beautiful her that uttereth it beyond the lot of mortals” (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 163). While looking at the pictures on the page, Lucy sees a vision of herself as dazzlingly beautiful, and all the Kings of the world fighting over her. Before the vision fades, she sees Susan, jealous of her beauty. After seeing all this Lucy is tempted to read the spell aloud although she has a strong feeling that she must not. She is only stopped when Aslan’s face, wearing a terrible expression, appears on the page of the Book and Lucy realizes that she was about to do something very wrong. Frightened by Aslan’s angry face, she turns the page and is able to resist temptation (163-165). Clearly, beauty is associated with power over men and superiority among women in Lucy’s vision. Therefore, the temptation that the spell represents is not only to become more beautiful but, most importantly, to become like the Daughters of Lilith, seeking power through sexual attractiveness. Also, saying the spell represents conforming

to a sexist ideology because by so doing Lucy would diminish herself to a mere object of desire. As discussed before, Wollstonecraft says that a woman's beauty has been claimed to be her "sceptre", her power source. Lucy's temptation to become powerful through beauty and Aslan's intervention can be seen as Lewis's protest against that claim and, thus, proof of his tendency towards feminist thinking.

6.2 Girls as Heroines

It is without question that Lewis portrays Lucy, Aravis and other female fighters in a good light. In "Why I Love Narnia: A Liberal, Feminist Agnostic Tells All", Sarah Zettel praises Lewis for making his female characters active: "Lucy was a physical fighter, not just a moral one. She took up arms" (*Revisiting Narnia*, 183) and "like Lucy, [Jill] is not just a passive, supportive hero. Jill also fights. She fights in *The Last Battle* standing right beside Eustace and King Tirian... Jill also dies bravely in battle right beside the men and boys" (*ibid.*, 184). As discussed earlier, the difference between girls fighting in Narnia and the fighting of a masculine hero is that a war in Narnia is equivalent to a war between good and evil. Therefore, participating in a war on Aslan's side actually means being on the side of good against evil, so it is not comparable to a regular war. Thus, although fighting and other kinds of physical violence are normally considered masculine classical heroism, participating in a war in Narnia is, due to its religious meaning, classified as feminine spiritual heroism. Also, by allowing women to fight side by side with men Lewis breaks the old stereotype according to which women are to stay at home while men are being active.

Therefore, although Lucy and Jill both fight in the war beside men, nothing in the novel suggests that it is unacceptable. On the contrary, the girls are complimented for being brave enough to fight. As Lewis's ideal woman, the girls are "tempered with masculine characteristics" in that they are often interested in not only fighting but also riding horses, running and swimming and they are as daring to explore new worlds as men; things that only boys were allowed to do in

Cullingford's time. The contrast between them and Susan, a more "feminine" girl, is explicit; Prince Corin says of Susan: "She's not like Lucy, you know, who's as good as a man, or at any rate as good as a boy. Queen Susan is more like an ordinary grown-up lady. She doesn't ride to the wars, though she is an excellent archer" (*The Horse and His Boy*, 196). However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, Susan's lack of interest in taking part in the wars is a sign of selfishness rather than of femininity. Knowing that she could use her skills to contribute to the common good but choosing to stay in the castle instead while others fight is paralleled to a disinterest to fight in God's side in a spiritual battle, a characteristic that heralds her future apostasy. Also, staying in the castle means that Susan is submitting to the old sexist stereotype of a weak and vain woman.

The same distinction of a "feminine" girl and a tomboy is made between Aravis and Lasaraleen: "The fuss [Lasaraleen] made about choosing the dresses nearly drove Aravis mad. She remembered now that Lasaraleen had always been like that, interested in clothes and parties and gossip. Aravis had always been more interested in bows and arrows and horses and dogs and swimming" (*The Horse and His Boy*, 106). The distinction that Lewis makes between Aravis and Lasaraleen is meaningful. It is only after Aravis spends some time with her childhood friend, Lasaraleen, that Aravis realizes that she would rather travel with Shasta, a lower class boy, than live a fashionable life in Tashbaan. On seeing the superficiality of Lasaraleen's upper class life, Aravis understands that status, parties, attractiveness, et cetera, do not matter to her. She wants much more than her friend, Lasaraleen, who exemplifies the image of a female according to a sexist ideology. Lasaraleen tries to turn Aravis's head and to "reason" with her: "But darling, only think! Three palaces ... Positively ropes of pearls, I'm told. Bath's of asses' milk ... You always *were* a queer girl, Aravis ... What more *do* you want?" (108). By making Aravis turn away from that, Lewis shows that he expects girls to want more than what the sexist worldview asks of them.

The fact that Aravis decides not to conform to the expectations that people in her home country have of women exhibits feminist ideology. In *Understanding Feminism* Bowden et

al. write that whenever the various forms of feminism are scratched, what shows is a desire and a call for women's agency, for a capacity for self-determination and autonomy according to which women are able to be effective against their own oppression (123). Similarly, Trites writes that the "most powerful way that feminist children's novels reverse traditional gender roles, however, is by their reliance on the protagonist's agency" (6):

In these novels, the protagonist is more aware of her own agency, more aware of her ability to assert her own personality and to enact her own decisions, at the end of the novel than she has been at the beginning. Unlike her literary antecedents in such novels as *Little Women* or *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), the feminist protagonist need not squelch her individuality in order to fit into society. Instead, her agency, her individuality, her choice, and her nonconformity are affirmed and even celebrated. (6)

Also, Trites says that "any time a character in children's literature triumphs over the social institutions that have tried to hold her down, she helps to destroy the traditions that have so long forced females to occupy the position of Other" (7). The development of Aravis's acceptance of her different personality is obvious because in the beginning of the novel she thinks that the only way out of the patriarchal system is by death, but later, when she is told that there is another choice, an escape to a land where her individuality is not frowned upon, she leaves no stone unturned to get there. She has become like Trites depicts a feminist protagonist, "aware of her agency, more aware of her ability to assert her own personality and to enact her own decisions" than she was in the beginning of the story. By making Aravis turn away from the patriarchal society of Tashbaan, a tyrannous father and a forced marriage, Lewis affirms and celebrates her agency, individuality, choice and nonconformity.

Also, Lucy's and Aravis's rejection of both vanity and obsession with beauty reflect a feminist ideology. Naomi Wolf, a "Third Wave" feminist writes about women's obsessions with looks and blames it on "the beauty myth", according to which:

The quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty

must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless. (*The Beauty Myth*, 5)

According to Wolf, “the beauty myth is a political weapon against women’s advancement”: “As women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it waned to carry on its work of social control” (2-3). Wolf compares beauty to “a currency system like the gold standard” and claims that, “like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact” (5). So, women who fall for the beauty myth and spend most of their time worrying about their looks and use their energy on “self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control” – the effects of the beauty myth on women – succumb to the oppression of the dominating male who wish to keep women down (2). Wolf and Lewis’s ideas are similar in this respect because Lewis, too, expects girls to want more and to focus their attention to more important matters than make-up, boys and parties. Lewis’s girls are witty heroines, not brainless princesses. Zettel calls Aravis a “heroine of epic” (184) and praises Lewis’s girls for their straightforwardness: “Lewis never made his girls foolish or coy, or had them say what they did not mean to try to get their way. He did not let their courage, or their brains, fail them in a crisis, not even to showcase the courage of his boys” (185). Indeed, Lewis’s ideas are similar to those of feminists such as Wolf in that he does not wish women to conform to sexist expectations which are all embodied in Lasaraleen: vanity, gossip and main interest in parties and rich men.

Jill’s passivity in a crucial situation may seem controversial as regards Lewis’s good opinion of women. The Green Witch was killed by the men of the party – Prince Rilian, Puddleglum and Eustace – while Jill was doing nothing: “Jill had very wisely sat down and was keeping quiet; she was saying to herself, ‘I do hope I don’t faint – or blub – or do anything idiotic’” (*The Silver Chair*, 193-194). Jill might seem passive and dumb, even, but Zettel focuses on what Jill does *not* do:

[Jill] doesn’t get into the fight at that point, but, she also doesn’t scream, faint or run. She certainly doesn’t get in the way. She doesn’t do any of the hundred clichéd things

we see poorly armed and untrained women do in a hundred bad comedies and fantasies which either hinder the fight or result in their needing a rescue. Jill, understanding she is poorly armed for this particular fight, does keep her head, her nerve and her dignity, and gets out of the way, allowing the fight to be quickly resolved. This is no small thing. It is, in fact, a sort of bravery not frequently portrayed in fantasy novels, and it is a moment I have always enjoyed. (*Revisiting Narnia*, 184)

So, instead of blaming Jill for being passive and weak, Zettel praises her wisdom and combat skills; it is equally important to know when not to get into a fight as to know how to use a sword. Also, it is noteworthy that Digory thinks very similarly on meeting Aslan for the first time: “[Digory] had been growing more and more uncomfortable. He hoped that, whatever happened, he wouldn’t blub or do anything ridiculous” (*The Magician’s Nephew*, 167). So, hoping not to “blub” or act weird is hardly sexist coming from Jill if it is not sexist coming from Digory. It is a very common reaction on encountering something remarkable and thrilling.

Hilder also notes that it is not Jill or any other girl who needs to be saved, but Prince Rilian. In any kind of story it is usually a woman who needs to be saved but in this story Lewis has reversed the roles and now there is a girl among the saviors of a Prince. In fact, as Zettel points out, Lewis’s female characters are never abducted, never bound and gagged where the men and boys are free (184). “They are never snatched up and held with swords or knives to their throats. Not once in any of the Narnia books does Lewis give in to such scenarios which are shown repeatedly in our modern, egalitarian fantasy novels. He never renders his girls more helpless than the boys” (*ibid.*, 184). In *The Last Battle* Jill fights in the war beside men and is definitely not in anyone’s way. On the contrary, Jill is a good fighter and she is also the one with the best pathfinding skills:

And of course she knew her Narnian stars perfectly, having traveled so much in the wild Northern Lands, and could work out the direction from other stars even when the Spear-Head was hidden. As soon as Tirian saw that she was the best pathfinder of the three of them he put her in front. And then he was astonished to find how silently and almost invisibly she glided on before them. (74)

Also, Zettel argues that Lewis’s girls are “consistently strong, respected and wholly themselves” (186) and the presence of royal and older men never reduces the girls in any way. Naturally, the girls are not without flaws, but Zettel argues that the flaws are always individual to the girls, not the

result of their sex or their age, and they never diminish the girls as humans (186). Zettel writes: “It is part of their heroism that they meet these internal demons and vanquish them, with the help of Aslan, of course, but then, *everyone* needs Aslan’s help in these books, and even a king can, and does, require a stern lecture from the Great Lion” (186).

However, there is one event in *The Chronicles* that remains controversial in relation to the aforementioned points about women fighting for Narnia, an event that has justly been considered sexist. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Father Christmas gives Peter a shield and a sword, Susan a bow, a quiver full of arrows and a horn to call for help saying: “You must use the bow only in great need ... for I do not mean you to fight in the battle.” He gives Lucy a bottle of healing cordial and a small dagger and says: “And the dagger is to defend yourself at great need. For you also are not to be in the battle.” And when Lucy asks why – because she thinks she could be brave enough – he answers: “That is not the point ... But battles are ugly when women fight” (118). The question is, what does Father Christmas mean when he says that battles are “ugly” when women fight? Hilder explains that what Father Christmas’ comment might mean is that “battles without consolation and healing (qualities belonging to ‘feminine heroism’) will be ugly indeed” (32), but the explanation seems fabricated. Another explanation is given by Fredrick and McBride in *Battling the Woman Warrior* where they write that Lewis “suggests women must be ugly ... or at least distance themselves from femininity in order to fight”, and that the “idea is not simply to protect women, as a weaker sex, from the ugliness of war, but to preserve them from their own possible ugliness, for the men’s sake as much as the women’s” (40-41). However, not allowing women to fight because they would have to become ugly seems even more far-fetched than Hilder’s explanation. The only possible explanation to the controversy seems to be that Lewis had not thought of the metaphoric connection between Narnian battles and spiritual battles yet when writing the first Narnia novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. If so, Father Christmas’s comment is about other kind of battles than spiritual ones. So, perhaps the religious symbolism of fighting for

Narnia only occurred to Lewis after writing the first book, which would explain why women are first not recommended to fight and then their willingness to fight like men is portrayed in a favorable light.

However, even if Lewis's first intention was to keep women away from the battlefield, it may not mean that Lewis is understating women by doing so. Hilder thinks that it is the predominance of the classical paradigm that makes it easy to overestimate the boys' contribution to battle (30). Since spiritual heroism does not privilege physical combat, the boys are hardly in a better position than the girls when Father Christmas allows them to fight. Hilder writes:

Since the decisive battle is Aslan's suffering and death, and [Susan and Lucy] accompany him for part of his journey and observe the entire event with tears and great love, it would seem that here too "feminine" consolation is a vital heroic feature of the battle of pathos. In this Lewis subverts the typical understanding that consolatory females have lesser roles than military males. In terms of the "feminine" heroic ethos, the girls illustrate surprising leadership. (30)

Within a classical paradigm, Peter, Edmund and other courageous male fighters would be more heroic than the girls but within a spiritual paradigm the girls are *spiritual leaders* and therefore they are heroes of a different kind. As Hilder notes, "[whereas] the brothers faithfully fight in the physical battle, as Aslan has ordered them, the sisters fight in the spiritual battle of Aslan's self-sacrifice for Edmund and Narnia" (37) and "in Lucy and Susan Lewis applauds the superior 'feminine' and truly human heroic of humility, consolation, and love" (38). Only a little while before Aslan's death Susan and Lucy, unable to sleep, have a "horrible feeling" as if something were hanging over them (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 162). Women are sometimes said to have a unique intuition and this occasion highlights that feminine characteristic. The girls know that "[either] some dreadful thing is going to happen to [Aslan], or something dreadful that he's going to do" (ibid., 162). The foreboding feeling and inability to sleep possibly represent the girls' spiritual alertness. According to Hilder, Susan and Lucy "repair the failings of the sleeping disciples at Gethsemane, and so demonstrate a leadership that, like the victory of Christ's passion, is often

misunderstood: the weakness that overcomes Satanic strength” (30). Aslan’s example shows the way to true heroism: one must become weak in order to defeat evil.

So, in all but the first novel Lewis portrays fighting girls as heroines because fighting for Narnia is the same as fighting for God. Also, by making female characters key characters not only in the everyday life but also in the battlefield, Lewis is breaking boundaries and speaking for a feminist ideology according to which women can take action and fight for important causes as much as men can. Lewis’s female characters are active agents and free to express themselves without the imprisoning constraints of a sexist ideology. As discussed, in addition to raising women on the same level of freedom as men, Lewis exalts them even higher by making them spiritual leaders. Thus, their feminine characteristics of love, tenderness, perseverance and intuition make them superior to men because, as the example of Aslan shows, feminine spiritual heroism is greater than masculine classical heroism.

Conclusion

Lewis's ideas about hierarchy and male authority may be interpreted as sexist in the modern age. Many critics and readers have found his Narnia series equally sexist due to several issues that I have discussed in this thesis: the male authority of Aslan and the High King, the demonization of women who want power, and the alleged condemnation of female sexuality, to name a few. However, the purpose of this thesis has been to provide a counter argument against the aforementioned accusations. As Lewis admits, his ideas about patriarchy and male authority only work in an ideal world where no man is tempted to misuse their power. In the real world Lewis supports equality between the sexes which becomes clear in *The Chronicles of Narnia* where his female characters play a significant role in the stories, surpass their male companions in rationality, fight alongside men and decline submitting to the expectations that a sexist ideology poses on women – vanity, passivity, interest in all things trivial, and obsession with beauty.

Also, as has been pointed out, Lewis's Narnia series is first and foremost a Christian series. That is why Lewis's intentions are best understood by examining the novels through theological feminism which explains the supremacy of spiritual heroism over classical heroism, sacrifice over revenge, obedience over independence, humility over pride, et cetera. Most importantly, only by taking into account the theological feminism in *The Chronicles* can the superiority of Lewis's female characters be understood. Knowing that spiritual heroism is of higher value than classical heroism in the novels, it is possible to see that female characters are not only equal to men in the battleground and everyday life, but they also excel in spiritual heroism, making them superior to men in the most important matter. Therefore it may be concluded that Lewis's Narnia series is not as sexist as has been claimed. On the contrary, the novels demonstrate Lewis's espousal of female empowerment and a feminist ideology.

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