SUPPOSE THEY CAN SPEAK: REIMIAGINING THE HUMAN/ANIMAL DIVIDE
IN C.S. LEWIS’ THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

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ABSTRACT

Writing in the mid-twentieth century, when humanism—the “human-centered perspective”—passionately preached “the eminence of man over the rest of creation,” C.S. Lewis radically took to imaginative writing to suppose how an alternative perspective might understand man’s relationship with “the rest of creation” (Summit 666). In The Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis imagines how species relations differ in a world created not for man, but for animals. My argument in this thesis centers around Lewis’ reimagined version of the Genesis Creation story as told in The Magician’s Nephew. After examining contemporary juvenile biblical texts of the period, as well as Lewis’ own theological writing, I argue that Lewis’ juvenile fiction presents a radical departure from the pervasive humanist ideology of the period. The anti-anthropocentric world that Lewis creates in Narnia radically challenges the world-views exposed to children in mid-twentieth century England, and undercuts the assumptions that humanism presents as truth: man’s inherent superiority, the natural distinction between man and animal, and the essential connection between personhood and human- hood. My thesis focuses on retellings of the Genesis Creation story for children, particularly the power of the Creation narrative to inform the schema with which the child reader categorizes and interacts with the world. After performing an analysis of Lewis’ anti-anthropocentric
creation scene, I trace the impact of man’s decentering throughout the series, examining the way humans and animals interact in a world with different categories and definitions of personhood. Ultimately I argue that Lewis’ beloved series both questions the humanist tradition from which it emerges, and inevitably capitulates to it. Although at moments the text seems to overthrow the constructs of humanism, a shade of anthropocentrism consistently haunts Lewis’ radically decentered narrative.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way.

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May all the glory be to God.
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INTRODUCTION

At first I had very little idea how the story would go. But then suddenly Aslan came bounding into it. I think I had been having a good many dreams of lions about that time. Apart from that, I don’t know where the Lion came from or why He came. But once He was there He pulled the whole story together, and soon He pulled the six other Narnian stories in after him. (401)

In the passage above C.S. Lewis comments on the way Narnia came to be. Whether it really happened this way, or Lewis has embellished the writing process in hindsight, I do not know, but Aslan’s agential capacity in this description gives an appropriate foretaste of the agency that Lewis grants his animal characters in Narnia. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* stands out among its contemporaries in the cannon of religious Children’s literature in the way it presents the animal and the animal’s relationship to the human. The chapters that follow this introduction consider the Christian Creation story as it is retold to children, and its power to shape the reader’s understanding of the world and his/her relationship with it. While writing during a time when the humanities emphasized, above all, the study of the human, Lewis does not choose a little boy or girl, or even a king or queen, to occupy the center of his stories (Summit 667). Instead he follows the Lion’s leadership, and makes Him, that is, Aslan, the sun around which the whole series orbits.

Critical to my reading of Lewis’ creation story is an understanding of the biblical Creation in Genesis, chapters one and two. “In the beginning…God divided the light from the darkness,” He “divided the waters which were under the firmament from the
waters which were above the firmament,” He “divide[d] the day from the night,” He “divide[d] the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:1-18). The language of Creation is that of division. God shapes the “form[less]” “void” into a world of life by separating and creating opposition: heaven versus earth, light versus darkness, earth versus sky, land versus water, day versus night.\(^1\) On each of the first four days of Creation, God uses the language of separation to form the oppositions that structure the world. Without dark we would not know light, without land we would not know water, without earth we would not know sky. This division is essential to our categorization of the world and to making sense of time and space.\(^2\) Creation, even in its narration is emphatically divided into days. The language of division, however, disappears after day four. God creates the creatures of the sky, sea, and land, each according to its “kind,” and then He creates man. In the verses that describe the creation of those creatures, the word “kind” comes up seven times. In its earlier English form, “kind,” or as it was, “kinde,” was the word for genus or species, and referred to the distinct and innate character or nature of a person or thing. The word carries the connotation of difference, but not of opposition. The animal kingdom, after all, includes a variety of different species, but all are still considered animals. These many “kind[s]” coexist and are not separated in Genesis like we saw Creation separated in the first four days. The human, then, which is created on the same

\(^1\) “God divided the light from the darkness…And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so … And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years…And God made two great lights…And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to…divide the light from the darkness…” (Genesis 1:4-18).

\(^2\) On day four God not only divides the day from the night, but He uses this new binary to distinguish the seasons, days, and years from one another (Genesis 1:14).
day as the rest of the land animals, is just a different “kind” of animal, another species. God does not command for division to separate man from land animal like He does to separate, for example “light from darkness.” The narrative does not even separate the species by placing their creation on different days. In verse twenty-six God gives man dominion over all the creatures, but dominion is not division either. Stemming from the Latin words “dominus,” meaning lord, and “domus,” meaning household, the word “dominion” connotes a sense of community and required proximity and coexistence. In Genesis, then, the creation of humans and animals is emphatically not characterized by division.

The divide between human and animal, the one that positions the human in opposition with every other species, is not of God’s creation, I argue, but of man’s. The humanist tradition, which emphasizes the exceptionality of humankind, relies on this distinction to substantiate their claim to man’s ontological uniqueness. Other scholars have given full histories and definitions of humanism. In my work, by humanism I mean the school of thought that prizes man’s reason and ingenuity as distinguishing qualities of the human species, and insists on man’s God-ordained superiority over all other species. The Renaissance humanists, those who taught and studied “the humane studies[,] or the studies befitting a human being,”—“the knowledge and skilled use of language and letters,”—used the Christian Creation story to demonstrate their claim of human exceptionalism, basing their superiority on the assumption that the last of God’s creations was also his favorite (Summit 667). From the humanist tradition we get retellings of Creation that extrapolate wildly from the biblical source text to highlight man’s God-

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3 See, for example, Jennifer Summit’s article, “Renaissance Humanism and the Future of the Humanities.”
breathed soul as the source of his exceptional reason, and man’s charge of dominion as
his divinely-ordained dominance. We see an example of this in Giovanni Pico della
Mirandola’s Oration on the Dignity of Man (1486). Pico’s text, which
“validat[ed]…‘man’s importance in the world’” (Summit 666), offers a version of
Creation that explains the reason for man’s uniqueness:

when this work [Creation] was done, the Divine Artificer still longed for some
creature which might comprehend the meaning of so vast an achievement. Which
might be moved with love at its beauty and smitten with awe at its grander. When,
consequently, all else had been completed…in the very last place, He bethought
Himself of bringing forth man. (Pico)

Pico’s retelling, like so many others, emphasizes the great lack that was Creation before
man. The Bible acknowledges this lack, but characterizes it as a need for a work force:
“for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till
the ground” (Genesis 2:5). Like Pico, his fellow humanists use this verse to argue that
God’s creation was incomplete without man. This lack, though, goes from being a need
for someone “to till the ground,” to a need for someone to validate the work God has
done over the past five days of Creation. Pico identifies man’s reason, as expressed
through his ability to observe and praise, as his hallmark trait, and one that is so valued
by God that the rest of Creation was unfinished without it. His retelling also sets up a
relationship between man and God that the rest of Creation is denied. God does not care
if the other creatures can appreciate His work; after all, He does not give them the
capacity to appreciate it. Man is different, though; he is special to God, so God gave him
the ability to appreciate.
Pico’s retelling of Creation is not unique. It represents a whole tradition of thought that appropriates the Creation story to suit its anthropocentric ideology. Even as humanism changed over the centuries, the Christian Creation story continued to be used to substantiate the claim for man’s superiority. Humanism has not remained static in its definition since its inception during the Renaissance (Summit). That which started, not as a philosophy or world view, but as a disciplinary structure revolving around those studies that best suited the human being, became “the study of the human” in the mid-twentieth century (Summit 666-667). Even so, Pico’s retelling from the fifteenth century, and the retellings of children’s Bibles from the twentieth century sound remarkably alike in their characterization of man as the reason for, and pinnacle of Creation. Indeed, the first chapter of this thesis will show how this humanist interpretation of Genesis is recreated in children’s Bibles of the mid-twentieth century.

The underlying argument for human exceptionalism that unfolds in the rest of Pico’s *Oration* similarly makes its way into story Bibles for children. Pico not only grounds man’s claim of exceptionalism in his unique position on the chain of being, but in his distinction from the animals that occupy the rungs below him. Man might have the capacity to degrade himself and become like the animals, but he possesses reason, so he does not have to. Pico defines the human and his unique “mutability” and self-determination as distinct from the “defined and restricted” nature of all the other creatures (Pico). The definitions that Pico gives, of the natures of the animals and the angels show what man will become, should he either degrade or improve himself. But because Pico so clearly advocates for the latter, his definition of the animal exemplifies the humanist effort to define man by his opposite. According to Pico, the animal is
“sensual” and “brutish,” therefore the human—the ideal human, anyway—is not.

Furthermore, the spatial structure of the chain of being, which man alone is able to traverse, separates the human from the animal, as the good human will move up the chain, and away from the beast.

In his book *The Open: Man and Animal* (2004), Georgio Agamben considers the human-animal divide that humanists claim is natural, arguing that the divide is not natural at all, but rather manufactured within man: “The division of life into…animal and human…passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible” (15). This ability to identify the animal as separate from and opposite to the human is only possible because the two are so intertwined. “It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals,” according to Agamben, “only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place” (15-16). In other words, we continue to do the work of separation because the two are not actually separate at all. Agamben also argues that through the manipulation of this “intimate caesura” man has manufactured an identity for himself that is based completely on his division from the animal. The classification “*Homo sapiens*, then is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human” (26). He calls this device “the anthropological machine,” and defines it as “an optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already
deformed in the features of an ape. *Homo* is a constitutively ‘anthropomorphous’
animal…who must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human” (26-27). Thus,
this division that humanists have interpreted from an ideologically-motivated
appropriation of the Creation story creates man not in the image of God, but in the image
of not-animal. It is through this “anthropological machine” that man defines himself
through the process of “exclusion” and “inclusion” (37). “The machine actually produces
a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but
the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside” (37).
Man excludes from his constructed identity that which is animal, or non-man. My reading
of Genesis echoes Agamben’s argument: man has manufactured a division that is not so
real or distinct, or most importantly, natural, as he perceives it, and therefore, must
exclude the inevitable part within himself that resembles that which he has made
decidedly opposite to himself: the animal. Thus, the anthropocentric retellings of Genesis,
while perhaps valid interpretations of the text, leave an aftertaste of artificiality following
their efforts to distance man from the rest of the animal kingdom.

As a consequence of his understanding of the human-animal divide, Agamben
claims that the question of humanism must be considered in a new way:

In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction
of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element
and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must learn instead to think of
man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements...It is more urgent
to work on the divisions, to ask in what way—within man—has man been
separated from non-man, and the animal from the human, than it is to take
governments, and the animal from the human, than it is to take
positions on the great issues, on so-called rights and values. (16)

C.S. Lewis’ consideration of the human and the animal in *The Chronicles of Narnia*
adopts Agamben’s revision of the humanist question. Lewis’ beloved series grapples with
the humanist species divide, often turning it on its head. He experiments with moving the
“intimate caesura” and imagines how the divisions between man and animal might
collapse if the categories of differentiation are reconsidered (15). In this thesis I argue
that Lewis’ account of Creation, and the human-animal relationship that arises from it,
reimagines the proximity between the human and the animal, and the ethical effects that
come with the humanist endeavor to “exclude,” or other the animal (37).

The first chapter of this thesis will examine retellings of the creation story in
British mid-twentieth century children’s Bibles. I will consider the way these Creation
narratives are retold to children, and the ideological consequences of their repackaging.
In this chapter I sketch out the context in which Lewis is writing in order to show how
radical his anti-anthropocentric retelling is. I use Althusser’s theory of ideology to show
the way children’s Bibles, in particular their retellings of Creation, interpellate the child-
reader into a humanist understanding of the world. The discussion of interpellation in this
chapter is similarly applied in the following two chapters to show how Lewis constructs a
different world view for his readers, than did his contemporary authors.

In my second chapter I perform an Animal Studies intervention of Lewis’ creation
scene in *The Magician’s Nephew*. In Lewis’ retelling of Creation man is decentered in the
narrative, but he is ultimately not dethroned. In this chapter I identify a tension within
Lewis’ *Narnia* series between the impulse to radically overturn the humanist tradition
that surrounds the Creation narrative, and the inability to escape the framework that
necessitates the centrality of the human. This tension is further explored in the third
chapter in the way Lewis challenges the species distinction, but only by reinforcing the
humanist hierarchy that he, at first, seems to overthrow. My third chapter examines the
way the human-animal relationship that is established during Narnia’s creation permeates
the rest of the series. Primarily, this chapter considers the way Lewis reworks Cartesian
dualism to reorganize the categories that define personhood. While Lewis’ reimagination
of personhood questions the humanist categorization of the human and the animal, this
chapter discusses the ways his radically restructured hierarchy, which grants personhood
to both humans and animals, is contained, once again by language, within the bounds of
thought experiment. The restructuring that seems to promise to extend moral protection
beyond the human, to the animal, offers instead the mere potential for emotional
protection.

Overall the work Lewis does in *The Chronicles of Narnia* effectively questions
the assumptions that humanism insists are truths: man’s inherent superiority, the natural
distinction between man and animal, and the essential connection between personhood
and human-itude. Whatever power anthropocentrism has to thwart Lewis’ attempt to
overthrow it, it does not emerge unscathed. Through his supposal Lewis lodges wrench
after wrench in the cogs of the “anthropological machine.” Even though the machine is
not disabled, Lewis’ disruption of its mechanism prevents the machine from working
undetected. Supposing Lewis’ young, mid-century readers were also reading
contemporary children’s Bibles, his work counteracts the humanist worldview that the
children have been interpellated into subliminally. Because Lewis dares to imagine an
alternative world with alternative categories, hierarchies, and ethics, the child-reader can too.
Enid Blyton’s daily devotional book for children, first published in 1947 in England, and widely reprinted abroad in the United States and Canada, features a full-page illustration of Creation to accompany her day one reading, titled “The Beginning of Things.” The image depicts four primary school-aged children—two boys and two girls—in the foreground looking with expressions of awe onto a scene of Eden encapsulated in a circular window. Outside of the circle the sun, moon, stars and clouds frame the new Creation. Within the circle we see fish swimming, surrounded by depictions of breaking waves, a variety of animals, including a bobcat and an elephant, birds flying overhead, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and a mountain landscape in the background. At the center of the image are silhouettes of Adam and Eve holding hands. A serpent is coiled nearby. The sun outside of the frame shines on the pair. The image is in black and white, save for the sun and its rays which direct our eye to Adam and Eve, our focal point. This image has a clear agenda. It tells us that the story we are about to read is that of the creation of the world, and that the point of that story is the creation of man, the creation of you and me. The children in the foreground make clear the text’s intention to show the child reader where they came from and how their world, a world that distinctly revolves around the human, came to be. This story offers a window into the past, their past. The bold black silhouette of Adam and Eve stands out against the rest of Creation, which is mostly sketched, and not filled in. This image not only makes the pair the most prominent feature of the picture, it also, by representing Adam and Eve without distinguishing features, makes Adam and Eve
archetypes in which child readers can categorize themselves. This image sets up the contrast between the human and the rest of Creation, and trains the child to detect that distinction. More importantly, it establishes humanity as the focal point, the most important part of Creation, thus perpetuating the humanist hierarchy that advocates man’s preeminence over the rest of Creation. From this image the child is meant to learn his/her relationship to the natural world, and his/her relationship with God. Such a picture of Creation imparts exactly what Blyton intends her child readership to internalize—that the human is special to God, that the Creator favors the child reader over all the rest of His Creation.

This image of the children looking in on Creation characterizes a whole category of children’s literature that I will study in this chapter: juvenile Biblical literature, particularly examples from the early to mid-twentieth century. This genre includes children’s Bibles, story books, and daily devotional texts. While the childish bedtime reader that the above-described image appears in makes the illustration seem trivial, this blatantly anthropocentric vision of Creation does important cultural and ideological work by shaping the child’s conception of his/her humanity and the schema through which he/she categorizes the world. Scholars know that these pedagogical texts serve to reproduce certain hierarchies. Ruth Bottigheimer argues that children’s Bibles perpetuate societal power dynamics between child and parent and male and female (xi). But, the critics have only examined these hierarchies within the category of the human. There is a more fundamental category that children learn from these texts: that of the animal. Like other texts written for child audiences, children’s Bibles are rife with animal characters and images, and similarly participate in reproducing the species divide that both separates
the human animal from the nonhuman animals and claims the human’s inherent superiority.

After providing an overview of the history and conventions of the juvenile biblical literature genre, I will use this chapter to consider the ways in which these children’s Bibles participate in the project of ideological subject formation, and identify the role they play in perpetuating the “anthropological machine” that excludes the animal in an effort to define the human category (Agamben 37). While animals crop up in nearly every Bible story for children, for the purpose of my study I will focus only on retellings of the Creation narrative to situate Lewis’ reworking of Creation in The Chronicles of Narnia. It is only in this context that we can see how radical, in relation to the human/animal divide, his anti-anthropocentric version of the Creation story is. While I provide textual examples from only four texts in this chapter, these texts are representative of the larger sample of more than ten texts that I examined.  

According to Ruth Bottigheimer, author of The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to Present, the genre of the children’s Bible, as we recognize it today, has its roots in Germany with the invention of the printing press, and flourished in the seventeenth century, when it came to England (4). Children’s Bibles, according to Bottigheimer,

consist of the story sections of the Bible, to which commentary, verses, summaries, questions and answers, or bits of ancient history are sometimes added.

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4 The Children’s Story Bible (Begbie 1948); Before I go To Sleep: A Book of Bible Stories And Prayers for Children (Blyton 1953); The Best Story Book In the World: 366 Bible Stories for Young Disciples (Bushill 1935); Stories from the Bible (De la Mare 1929); Fifty Favourite Bible Stories (Hayes 1947); Children’s Bible (Hillman 1959); The Bible Story (Hogner 1943); The Bible Story: The Book of Beginnings/Volume 1 (Maxwell 1939); A First Book of Bible Stories (Rolt 1942); From Creation to Christmas: Stories from the Old Testament (Van Zeller 1943); The Child’s Story Bible (Vos1934)
Titles and illustrations unwaveringly affirm their biblicity; their forewords assure readers that their pages are sacred or that they contain “no less than the words of GOD ALMIGHTY himself.” (4)

These “prose re-workings of the narrative sections of the Bible for child-readers” take many forms; some narrate the Bible in its entirety, making up heavy, several-hundred-pages long volumes, others select only a hand full of stories to comprise a biblical story book, and some intersperse Bible stories, among prayers and moralizing lessons, in daily devotional books (4). They are usually illustrated, and include a forward or introduction to explain their intended purpose. As a genre, children’s Bibles are carefully curated to present an account of the Bible that is both suitable for a child audience and tailored to convey whatever moral the author determines most important. For this reason, many stories are excluded from these juvenile biblical compendiums, and the beginnings and ends of stories are determined, according to the writer or editor’s discretion, to sanitize the mature content of the Bible and to complement the desired intent of the volume.

Authors and editors of these texts for children must make such decisions as whether or not to separate their volumes with chapters, and how and when those chapters should segment the source text, whether to use the original biblical text or to re-narrate the stories, and which scenes to emphasize with illustration. In the Creation story in particular, authors and editors must grapple with the duplicated account of Creation in Genesis, chapters one and two, and the discrepancies between the two accounts (Should they include both accounts or try to merge them in some way? Should they use one account and not the other? How should they choose which account to favor? Which details should they choose in the cases of discrepancy?). Thus, through the authors’ and
editors’ decision-making, these abridgements put forth specific interpretations of the source text. Each of these choices plays its part in mediating the child’s access to the original text, and inevitably the abridgements put forth the authors’ and editors’ interpretation of said text. Whether such interpretations are in service of a specific ideological agenda, or mere byproducts of condensing the expansive Word of God into a kid-friendly storybook, it is imperative to recognize the world-shaping work that these authors and editors partake in when they abridge the Bible for children. By examining these choices I will consider the way these texts reproduce and reinforce the humanist categorization of man as separate from and superior to the animal.

Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology, as articulated in his essay “On Ideology,” offers a framework of subject-formation that explains the way these juvenile biblical texts interpellate their child readers. Althusser puts forth two theses on ideology: first, that “ideology represents individuals’ imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence,” and second, that “ideology has a material existence” (181, 184). For the purpose of this chapter, his second thesis is of greater relevance. By material, Althusser means that because the ideas that make up an ideology are housed in the individual’s beliefs, they become “material acts” that are “inserted into material practices,” and “regulated by material rituals[,] which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which...[the individual’s] ideas derive” (186). Such material acts and practices, to use Althusser’s example of religious ideology, might be going to church, kneeling for prayer, confessing one’s sins, or doing penance (185). Because it resides in the subject and is, as Althusser puts it, “material,” Ideology importantly has the power to enact practical effects through its subjects (188). “There is no ideology, he writes, except for
concrete subjects (such as you and me), and the destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject” (188).

Althusser calls the process of forming subjects to carry and perpetuate an ideology interpellation. To interpellate means “to call out or address,” and this is exactly what the authors of children’s Bibles do to indoctrinate their readers. “Ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions,’” Althusser writes, “in such a way as to ‘recruit’ subjects among individuals…or ‘transforms’ individuals into subjects…through the very precise operation that we call interpellation or hailing” (190). To explain this notion of “interpellation or hailing,” Althusser gives the example of being hailed by the police: “Hey, you there!” (190). In the scene that ensues, when the hailed individual turns around, he/she becomes a subject (191). The physical gesture of turning around proves that the individual “has recognized that the hail ‘really’ was addressed to him and that ‘it really was he who was hailed’ (not someone else)” (191). Althusser, for the sake of explanation, makes ideology speak through the mouth of the police officer. But, in reality, interpellation is “always-already” happening; it does not occur in a single moment, nor is it always a conscious occurrence. In the case of the children’s Bibles studied in this chapter, the authors allow ideology to speak as well, making interpellation more consciously perceivable through direct address. I will use the example of the first volume of Arthur Maxwell’s famous children’s Bible series, *The Bible Story: The Book of Beginnings*, to demonstrate this process of interpellation. The narratives use the second person pronoun to hail the child reader. From the very first sentence of Maxwell’s Bible the narrator addresses the reader: “Have you ever wondered how everything in the world began?” (13). Like the police officer’s call, this direct address to the child reader—an
address that is likely vocalized, and therefore accentuated, by the parent who reads it—hails the child. Maxwell’s narrator is more forceful with his interpellation than the other authors I encountered. Another example from the next chapter illustrates this. The narrator hails the child: “would you like to go and see what the world was like back in the very beginning of time?” (17). After hailing the reader, “you,” the narrator responds: “You would? All right. Let’s imagine…” (17-18). The narrator not only hails the child, but confirms that the child has been hailed. This is a pattern of question and response that Maxwell’s narrator uses throughout the volume, and while the answer part is not consistently used by the other authors in this study, it, like Althusser’s Police officer example, offers a play-by-play of the interpellative process that the direct address rhetorical style achieves. Not only does the narrator seek to hail “you,” he tells you that you have been hailed. The sentence that follows the question—“You would?”—indicates that the child has responded in the affirmative to the narrator’s invitation. This implied “yes” is the same gesture of recognition that the individual on the street makes when he/she turns around to face the police officer. The sentence that follows, “let’s imagine that there is an archway through which we can pass and travel back across the years,” affirms our implied understanding that the child has been interpellated and shows him/her participating in the ideological apparatus to which they have just been invited. The child conceivably joins the narrator in “imagin[ing],” if he/she continues reading, and a subject has been formed.

What, you might ask are these texts interpellating their child readers to believe? While they certainly profess to foster faith and teach doctrinal lessons, these children’s Bibles’ primary purpose is to explain to the child where he/she—the human—comes
from, to provide instruction for how to live well, and to situate the child in the hierarchy of Creation. At the same time that these texts were being written, humanism was undergoing a redefinition in the academy. The humanities’ mission in the mid-twentieth century was “to enable man to understand man in relation to himself, that is to say, in his inner aspirations and ideals”\(^5\) (Summit 666). As a result of this self-centered turn in the discipline, mid-twentieth century humanism “testifie[d] to the eminence of man over the rest of creation”\(^6\) (666). The texts under examination in this chapter fall right in line with the agenda of the “new humanists,” as they revolve every bit of their retellings around the human child in an effort to help him/her understand what it means to be human and what his/her place is in this world (666). Of primary importance to my study is the way the etiological and moralizing goals of these biblical texts for children betray the humanist agenda that underlies the genre. These juvenile abridgements feature the Bible “repackaged” for children, and this packaging is deeply intentional, and not at all subtle. Bottigheimer writes that “the choices of Biblical stories and parts of stories included in children’s Bibles has depended on authors’ sense of the Bible’s purpose” (5). By examining the choices that these authors of children’s Bibles make it becomes clear that in addition to teaching biblical narratives and Christian doctrine, these texts are deeply invested in shaping their readers into particular kinds of subjects. Thus, the accumulation of these choices produces a text centered completely around the child reader, around the “you” that Maxwell writes to. An effect of tailoring their abridgments so completely to the child reader is the Creation narrative’s orientation around and emphasis of the creation of man. By speaking to and about the human “you” throughout the narrative

\(^5\) Summit quoting General Education in a Free Society (1945)
\(^6\) Summit quoting Ralph Barton Perry’s “Definition of the Humanities” (1940)
these retellings evoke the creation of man even before it occurs, thus framing Creation as a thoroughly anthropocentric event. The ubiquitous presence of man in these retellings conveys a distinctly humanist interpretation of the biblical Creation story, such that these children’s Bibles might be confused for little humanist manifestos.

The introductions to these texts—almost each example has one—prime the reader to privilege the human. For example, in his book *From Creation to Christmas: Stories from the Old Testament* (1943), Hubert Van Zeller sets his intention in his introduction: “We don’t read the Bible only to know how people acted long ago” (vii). First, Van Zeller assumes that we read the Bible only to trace the history of humankind, thus framing the Bible itself as an anthropocentric text that only lends to anthropocentric readings. He claims that this is not the only way to read the Bible, though, positing that the Bible is not just a historical text, but a morally instructive text as well. This reading, which zooms in even more on the human, further crops out any potential to take notice of the nonhuman within the Bible. Previously titled *From Creation to Christmas: The Story of the Chosen People*, it comes as no surprise that Van Zeller identifies “the people of Israel” as the main characters of the Bible, or at least the characters worthy of our primary focus (vii). Van Zeller’s packaging of the Bible sums up the Word of God as a study of the fall and redemption of “human nature” (vii). “Human nature never quite got back its balance after the Fall, and from Creation to Christmas that human nature really learns to stand on its feet again” (vii-viii). By framing the Bible as purely an instructional guide, a manual for good behavior, Van Zeller limits the Bible, making it into a text for humans and about humans. The variety of other creature in its pages, whether animals or celestial beings, are made secondary to man; indeed, the animals in this genre only garner
any particular attention when they serve as foils to emphasize how different from and
superior to the animals man is. It comes as no surprise, then, that the retelling that
follows, through its narration and curation, delivers a story of a Creation that is made to
be used and consumed by God’s premier creation: man.

Van Zeller is not alone in his humanist repackaging of the Bible. Enid Blyton, a
prominent British author of children’s books in the mid twentieth century, composed a
children’s devotional book complete with selected prayers and Bible stories that she
believed would be most appropriate and effective in “guid[ing]…children along the right
path” (vii). Blyton’s book *Before I go To Sleep: A Book of Bible Stories And Prayers for
Children*, in its narration, at least, stays more faithful to its source text. Even so, Blyton
emphasizes the importance of selecting “the most suitable Bible stories,” remarking in
her note to mothers that “all mothers want to guide their children along the right path
from the very beginning” (vii). Blyton’s repackaging of the Bible, while a little different
from the other authors, participates in the same humanist curating that we saw in Van
Zeller’s text. Blyton categorizes the Bible as an instruction manual for good living,
ultimately reducing the Bible to human guidebook. Surely, the Bible is meant to direct
the steps of man and inform his morals and behavior, however, reducing the Bible in this
way equips children with a limited lens with which to read the text, potentially preventing
readings that take notice of the nonhuman and readings that offer insight outside of the
scope of human nature.

Blyton’s devotional book also exemplifies the way the authors and editors of
juvenile biblical literature use the formal elements of their texts not only to convey a
moral message but also to mold the child’s world view. Blyton’s text is a little different
from the rest of the children’s Bibles that I studied, as her devotional book includes a mere thirty-five Bible stories, one chosen for each day of the month, and four selected to be read for special occasions. The stories in Blyton’s book are not connected in a coherent narrative, but are individually selected to teach a particular message on a particular day of the month. Naturally, the Creation story is featured on day one, and is selected for the purpose of establishing the child’s understanding of the world order and how he/she fits into it. Blyton’s day one reading aptly follows the chronology of the Biblical source text, only mentioning the making of man at the end of the reading when he is created: “Then last of all God made man…and made him lord of all the creatures of the earth” (3). The day one reading sketches out the natural order of world, which was established at its origin, and shows the child what man’s station is and the role he is to play in it: “lord.” This is not an inapt translation of the Hebrew word that is often also translated as dominion, but her choice to use the word “lord” carries with it a distinct connotation of hierarchy and human superiority which, compounded with the prayer that accompanies that day’s reading, establishes a relationship between man an animal as that of ruler and subject, user and used. The accompanying prayer reads: “Thank you for the horses that work for us, the dogs that guard us, the cats that sit by our fireside, the sheep whose wool warms us and the cow who gives us milk” (3). The animals in this prescribed prayer—which is intended to be repeated once a month and integrated in the child’s consciousness—are presented as gifts made explicitly for the use of man. The reasons the child thanks God for the animals explains the animals’ professed worth, which is based entirely on their usefulness to the child. The prayer’s system of values encapsulates Blyton’s essential message for day one: the earth was made by God, for man, and we
should be grateful to receive such a gift. Thus, Blyton’s day one reading teaches a desired moral (gratitude toward God), but through its particular form and curation it also subconsciously conveys a particularly humanist ideology.

Caroline Vander Stichele and Hugh Pyper echo my concern with the drastically mediated versions of the Bible presented to children in their introduction to *Text, Image, and Otherness in Children’s Bibles: What Is in the Picture?*. In their introduction Vander Stichele and Pyper comment that “a common theme in these contributions is the risk that, in adapting the Bible for children, moral and cultural assumptions become the driver at the expense of the complexity and diversity that characterize the biblical canon” (7). In an effort to repackage the Bible stories to put forth their didactic agenda, “the biblical narratives are themselves narrowed in focus and reduced to a simple moral message, often one that is not borne out by the biblical text itself…in order to instill in children what is claimed to be a biblical set of categories to distinguish us and them, good and bad” (7). As a result, “the biblical text and the range of its possible readings is also separated into what is suitable or unsuitable for children on the basis of a culturally determined sense of what children can cope with” (7). Thus, it is not just the impulse to sanitize the unsavory, or inappropriate portions of the Bible, but the rhetorical intent to put forth a particular lesson that limits, and in many cases distorts the teachings of the Bible in juvenile adaptations and retellings. It can be argued that this challenge is part and parcel with the act of retelling any narrative, and perhaps it is even inevitable. Even so, the serious ideological implications that come with instructing children through these mediated texts should not be overlooked, as the effects of these curated texts have significant implications not only on defining the child reader’s identity and perspective,
but, perhaps more significantly, on defining the adult that he/she grows into, and thus defining the perspective and identity of an entire generation. While perhaps the thin volumes and pretty illustrations give story Bibles a benign veneer, these texts do the important work of imparting the ideology that the child as subject will carry with him/her all his/her life, the ideology that, according to Althusser, the child reader will participate in perpetuating. Not only do these texts shape the way the child learns to categorize the world, they teach the child how to read the Bible, equipping them with a lens through which they will continue to approach this text and others. While these child readers will likely grow up to read the Bible in its unabridged form, the anthropocentric lens through which they were trained to read in childhood will, unless questioned, perpetuate reductive readings of the Bible that continue to reinforce the ideology interpellated during their youth. The “now-forgotten parents, teachers, and preachers” (Bottigheimer xii) who authored and edited these texts might appear inconsequential next to the intellectual giants of history, but through their texts they hold the power to mold and “[transmit]…cultural norms and values from one generation to the next” (Vander Stichele and Pyper xii).

I have already discussed the way the authors of children’s Bibles use their texts to perpetuate humanist ideology; next I will consider how the ideology itself manifests on the pages of these texts for children. To begin I will discuss the way these mid-century children’s Bibles position the human, first in relation to God, and then in relation to the animal. In addition to endeavoring to construct the child’s identity, these Bibles for children also take on the task of constructing for the child the character of God. Many of the texts begin with a depiction of God, explaining his existence before humanity, before
Creation, “before the beginning of the first things, before the beginning of time” (Vos 3). Of course these texts convey the character of God as infinite and eternal, but in addition to doing so in service of their theological aims, their characterization of God also emphasizes the importance of man, for he is chosen by this God. Again, the children’s Bibles directly address the child, calling on his/her imagination to help convey that which is unfathomable: “Have you ever wondered about the long ago days, before you, or your mother and father, or any other people were born? Before there were any kittens or puppies, any birds or flowers or grass or trees?” (Hayes 7). These texts invite the child reader to conceive of eternity, to try to grasp at the impossibility of God, while reinforcing His presence: “In the beginning there was always God” (7). Some texts depict a scene of chaos—“When everywhere was filled with cloud and mist and fire”—to present God as the great organizer—“God was over all” (7). When these retellings finally get into the story of Creation they use the story to convey God’s majesty and goodness. In the moments when the texts seek to convey God’s character, we see the animal featured more prominently, as evidence of His magnificent work. Furthermore, the authors emphasize God’s power to Create, which sets Him in a category apart from man: “When a man builds a house, he must first have wood, nails, glass, and many other things. If he does not have something out of which to make it, he cannot build a house. But God made the world out of nothing at all. God made the world in a most wonderful way” (Vos 6). By setting God in a category different from man the authors create a dynamic that allows man to be chosen. In order for man to be chosen—to be special—he needs someone to choose and elevate him. Thus, the authors of these children’s Bibles aim to produce an image of the unimaginable God, to identify Him as greater than and
separate from man in every way, so that when God chooses Adam as His favored
creation, this choice means something. By making God great the reader understands what
a great big deal it is to be favored by God.

   The relationship between God and man, with God as the bestower of favor and
man as the favored, captures the notion of anthropocentrism that grounds the humanist
tradition. Man is exceptional because of his special relationship with God. Giorgio
Agamben, in his book, quotes eighteenth century scientist Linnaeus: “Man is the animal
which the Creator found worthy of honoring with such a marvelous mind and which he
wanted to adopt as His favorite, reserving for him a nobler existence; God even sent His
only son to save him” (23). While Agamben notes that Linnaeus, a great lover of apes,
found this claim unconvincing because of the biological similarity between the ape’s and
the human’s physical bodies, Linnaeus’ contemplation of the species difference “on the
moral and religious level” defines the concept of anthropocentrism as I use it in this
project, and as I identify it at work in these children’s Bibles (Agamben 23). The effect of
this anthropocentrism makes the rest of Creation terribly ancillary in these juvenile
biblical accounts. Creation is often presented as preparation for God’s great plan to bring
man into the world; He has to make the world so that He has a place to put man. Maxwell
exemplifies this with the closing of his chapter, “Great Preparations”: “How very
wonderful!” exclaims the narrator, “Yesterday only an ocean. Today a beautiful world.
Now we know for sure that God has a great plan in mind. He is building something,
building a home for somebody He loves” (24). Almost every one of the texts studied in
this chapter refer to God’s “great plan” when describing Creation, and that “plan” always
refers to the building of a “home” for man. The entire narrative not only culminates in
Adam’s creation, but anticipates it. Maxwell’s narrator imagines God assessing His creations in the following chapter: “And I think I can see Him moving from one beautiful tree to another, perhaps even tasting the fruit, and saying to Himself, “He’ll like this. I’m sure he will. And this, and this” (27). The lower-case “he” the narrator refers to here is man. In the biblical source text, after each day God assesses what He has made and calls it good. Maxwell takes this hallmark of the original biblical account and repurposes it to remind the reader that God is creating a world just for man—just for them. “It was good” becomes “He’ll like this,” and Creation becomes Adam’s great home (Genesis 1:4).

This framing of Creation as God’s gift to man sets up and naturalizes a relationship between man and animal as that of consumer and consumed. Maxwell’s narrator shows us man in God’s mind’s eye as He creates a world to give to him: “For God was not thinking of Himself but of someone else. Someone who at the moment existed only in His mind, but who soon would be a real, living being. Someone who He was planning to give all this beauty and loveliness, all this wealth of treasure and delight” (27). This embellishment of the Genesis account, which so many of the children’s Bibles participate in, has no foundation in the source text. The original Genesis account makes no mention of man before Adam’s creation at the end of chapter one. Furthermore, the consequences that come with framing man as the reason-for and beneficiary of Creation perpetuates a relationship of ownership between the human and the animal that is typical of the humanist tradition. The language of “wealth” and “treasure” in the passage above transforms Creation into commodities for man’s use and consumption. And by placing these thoughts in God’s supposed mind lends authority to this characterization of
Creation as commodity, as it is now God-ordained and natural. Such language goes beyond the notion of “dominion,” and straight to that of commodification and use.

The opening of Van Zeller’s chapter titled “The Creation of Man” reinforces this same notion of the animal as commodity, but in his case it is even more striking:

It was as if…a man had prepared a banquet and there was no one there to eat it…Good as creation was before the coming of man, there was (apart from God Himself) nothing there which could see how good it was, nothing which could marshal its forces…Man would be able to do all this. Let there be man. The table in the banquet hall had now a new purpose. There were to be guests as well as a Host. Guests who would know (roughly) how to treat various dishes, guests who would turn grateful eyes (sometimes) to the Head of the table; guests who would be at liberty to mix curious little salads of their own... (2)

This opening passage, which calls on Jesus’ parable of the great wedding banquet, casts God as the host, Creation as the decked-out banquet table, and man as the guest who makes the feast worthwhile. Once again, Creation is presented as important only in its relation to man; Creation gives man purpose (dominion), and man gives Creation its worth (use and consumption). Van Zeller’s account of Creation, through his extended simile, colors the human-animal relationship with a hue of inevitable violence. Before the fall, before the world becomes a carnivorous place, God intends for man and beast to eat only “green herb for meat” (Genesis 1:29). Creation—more importantly, the animals—is presented here as that which exists for man’s consumption, and this consumption is portrayed as glorifying to the Creator. What makes man a suitable guest is his ability to

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properly “treat the various dishes,” the animals. His carnivorous proclivities please God, according to Van Zeller, who writes that man pleases the host by “turn[ing][Him] grateful eyes,” for the meal that He has provided. Van Zeller concludes his account with direct quotations embedded in his simile: “And really the words of the Bible which describe the sixth stage of creation might almost be applied to the guests of a dinner party: Let them have dominion over the fish... and over the foul... and over the cattle. Man was to be lord of all creation” (2, italics original). Through his use of direct quotation Van Zeller commandeers the authority of the Bible to validate his very creative retelling of the Creation narrative. “Dominion” becomes consumption, and not just the consumption of the plants, which was God’s initial intention, but of explicitly the animals. This is what it means to be “lord of all creation.” Thus, such an account defines the relationship between species as that of dinner guest and dinner, hunter and prey, eater and eaten. Van Zeller’s ‘creative’ integration of quotations presents a blatantly inaccurate representation of its source text, but of more concern is the biblical authority that he simulates to authenticate this relationship. By using the very words of the Bible, which stand out as original quotations because they are italicized, this relationship of man as consumer and animal as consumed becomes, yet again, God-ordained.

The way these children’s Bibles position the human in relation to the animal not only defines their roles and relationship, it also establishes the categories that allow us to know what it means to be either human or animal. The texts under consideration in this

8 “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every foul of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so” (Genesis 1:29-30).
chapter establish these categories by ‘othering’ the animal, that is by alienating one from the other, by establishing the animal as entirely separate and different from the human. By othering the animal, these texts can use the established other to construct the category of the human by telling the child what they are not. Thus the human identity becomes that which is ‘not animal.’

In their book, Vander Stichele and Pyper compile a series of essays that explore the relationship between text and image in children’s Bibles, paying particular attention to the way such texts for children participate in constructing the other. The essays included in the book ask “how…the child reader [is] taught to identify the other? What models are offered of ways to engage with the other? And how is the issue of the other as potential enemy dealt with?” (3). In their introduction Vander Stichele and Pyper identify “the others in question” as “women, foreigners, enemies, children, disabled people, poor people, [and] ‘bad’ people” (2). It was not until recently that the animal started to occupy the focus of literary and critical thought, therefore, the animal as other is absent from Vander Stichele and Payper’s list. I argue that it should be added to this list of others. Particularly in the case of the Creation story, which establishes the very first world order, the cultural and ideological assumptions embedded in retellings of the narrative reinforce as natural the establishment of the categories of “us” and “them,” and dictate the correct treatment of the other.

Catherine F. Vos, author of the widely popular The Child’s Story Bible (1934), offers a prime example of the way man is distinguished from the animal in these repackaged Creation narratives. Like her fellow writers and editors, Vos participates in the humanist tradition that attributes man’s differentiation to his possession of a soul.
“But God made [man] different from an animal,” Vos writes, “by giving him a wonderful gift which the animals did not receive. This soul-body dualism is key to Christianity, and later becomes a mind-body philosophy articulated in Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* (1693). Writing within this dualist tradition, Vos tells her readers: “Inside of man’s body God put a living soul” (Vos 7). The human body for Vos, like Descartes, is nothing more than a vessel that carries the “rational soul” (Descartes 163). After narrating the creation of the animals in a previous chapter of her children’s Bible, entitled “The First Man, Adam,” which she notes as corresponding with the first two chapters of Genesis, Vos briefly details the creation of man before launching into a metaphysical discussion of the human soul that occupies the remainder of the chapter. Vos and the others take this notion of the human soul from the second account of the creation of man in Genesis chapter two: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). This very same verse can be used to establish a similarity between species, as the animals—the land animals, anyway—come from the earth, just as Adam does (Genesis 1:24). Instead, however, the authors of these children’s Bibles, like Vos, use this verse to make the animal ‘not human,’ other. Vos attempts to explain the concept of the soul to her child reader, giving examples that emphasize the materiality and perishability of the body, versus the immateriality and transcendent quality of the spirit. She writes: “You cannot see your soul, but it is there just the same, inside of your body. Your body is the house of your soul” (7). She goes on later to give the example of the child losing his/her arm: “would you be gone when your arm is gone?...Your arms...are parts of your body. They are not your soul. It is your soul that is you” (8). Through these explanations Vos not only
denies the animal a soul—something that is not explicitly stated in the Bible, but has long been debated by philosophers and theologians—but in doing so, she denies animals identity. The animal is not allowed the distinguishing feature of a soul, which constitutes “you[ness],” or identity, and thus is denied individuality. Like a limb “the animal” is undifferentiated, and therefore, perishable and unnecessary.

Vos gives another example to explain the soul: “when you love your mother, is it her hands or her feet that you love? No, it is something inside of your mother that you love, something that you cannot exactly see or touch. It is her soul that you love. And it is your soul in you that loves your mother’s soul. Your body cannot love or think” (7). This explanation of the soul reinforces the notion that the animal is both unlovable and incapable of love. The consequences of this claim might seem trivial, but consider the implications of this word “love.” The language of love conveys a relationality, and by precluding the animal from either giving or receiving this love, because of its lack of a soul, Vos eliminates the possibility for human-animal relationships. By this construct, the animal is permanently other, as the absence of a soul prevents the possibility for relationship-formation that might bridge the gap between species. This permanent othering allows for violence toward animals, whether in the form of condoning abuse, or merely in the form of eating meat and wearing leather. Perhaps the first thing children learn is that their parents love them, and therefore, that they have a relationship with their parents. By precluding the animal from giving or receiving love, Vos establishes a model for the way the child should engage with the animal, one that lacks the emotion that later...

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9 Derrida identifies the problem with referring to all animals through “the general singular that is the animal” (The Animal that Therefore I Am 40). Vos’ insistence that animals lack a soul, and therefore an individual identity makes their “general singular[ity]” not just linguistic but also actual.
might be nuanced with compassion, care, kindness, and gentleness. What, then, does this leave for the human/animal relationship? As I will discuss later, in chapter three, Lewis reconsiders this relationship, using his supposed characters to engender a relationship of empathy between the child-reader and the animal. By putting a name and a personality to the animal face, Lewis facilitates an imaginative relationship with the animal that has the potential to extend beyond Narnia, into the human world.

The othering, in the case of the animal, that the children’s Bibles participate in, separates the human from the animal permanently, thus creating discrete categories between those, which Linnaeus argues, might not be so different after all. This othered relationship, which keeps the animal always at a distance, is necessary for humanist ideology to exist. To close the gap might betray similarities which would question the exceptionality that man uses as evidence of his special position in God’s universe. Thus, these children’s Bibles are essential in the humanist mission to perpetuate man’s special status in the hierarchy of Creation. Althusser writes:

It is characteristic of ideology to impose self-evident facts as self-evident facts (without in the least seeming to, since they are ‘self-evident’) which we cannot not recognize and before which we have the inevitable and eminently natural reaction of exclaiming…: ‘That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!’ (189)

Children grow up perceiving as “obvious” the ontological categories established in the Bibles they read as children, and thus the relationships that they form with animals are “inevitably” shaped by those categorizations. By providing children with these anthropocentric retellings of Creation, authors and editors of juvenile biblical literature
locate the founding of human exceptionalism on day one, not only at the moment of
Adam’s creation, but “in the beginning” (Genesis 1:1).
C.S. Lewis “is one of those writers who takes hold of a person’s intellect and imagination, and rearranges the furniture…the inner landscape changes,” writes literary scholar James Como (quoted in MacSwain 2). The version of ‘mere Christianity’ constructed by Lewis’ writings has become a standard against which traditional Protestant theologies take measure (3). His tremendous impact on both the intellectual study and lived-faith of Christianity, which has been “adopted as the face of traditional, Evangelical Christianity,” however, is anything but orthodox (3). In fact, Lewis’ theological doctrine in many ways counters traditional orthodox Christian teachings (3). His writings, which perceive scripture as “myth become fact,” sharply contradict the orthodox treatment of scripture as literal and inerrant truth (Vanhoozer 75). His discussion of the loss of his wife in *A Grief Observed* articulates the inadequacy of the promised afterlife to console his grief. Lewis’ series of children’s literature is no less radical in its treatment of Christian doctrine. It is in his children’s books—his fiction—though, that Lewis not only expresses his radical conception of Christianity, but also takes liberties in imagining worlds existing outside the constructs of humanist ideology that govern his nonfiction writing. Even while his theological writings deviate from Christian orthodoxy, they firmly adhere to the “new ‘humanities’” of the mid-twentieth century in their insistence on man’s exceptionality and centrality in Creation (Summit 666). Lewis argues for man’s exceptional importance to God in *The Problem of Pain*, and supports the anthropocentric notion that “all that exists on our plant is related to man, and even the creatures that were extinct before men existed are then only seen in their true
light when they are seen as the unconscious harbingers of man” (Lewis, 636). Lewis’ fictional writing, his science fiction novels included, deviate from the deeply humanist content of his discursive writing. In *Narnia* Lewis sheds the humanist ideology found in his nonfiction writing and dares to imagine other worlds and supposes how Biblical events and Christian concepts might work in those worlds and apply to their populations. Through his children’s books, Lewis “rearranges” the humanist understanding of the human-animal species divide established by his contemporary juvenile biblical writers. The following chapter focuses on Lewis’ creation scene in *The Magician’s Nephew* and argues that it displaces but does not fully evacuate anthropocentrism. While man is decentered in Narnia, he is not dethroned, and the impulses of anthropocentrism continually haunt the narrative.

To begin I will summarize two traditional interpretations of Genesis to show how Lewis’ stories make room for a third. Erica Fudge summarizes Genesis exegesis, which provides two traditional interpretations of the way the Christian Creation story has shaped the way humans perceive their relationship with nature and animals. In the first interpretation, Creation provides a means through which to know the Creator. From this interpretation have come developments in science and technology that aim to extract this knowledge from Creation (Fudge 14). In the second interpretation man is given dominion over Creation, but is charged with responsibility to act as “steward rather than master” (15). Fudge points out that in both of these interpretations of the Genesis Creation “the human remains central” (16). I argue that Lewis encourages a third interpretation, one that decenters man. Lewis’ animal-centric creation scene in *The

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10 Fudge on Lynn White Jr.
11 Fudge on F.B. Welbourn
*Magician’s Nephew* questions the humanist assumptions that locate man as the focal point of Creation. While the narrative does not fully overthrow anthropocentrism, the work Lewis does to decenter man in his creation inspires new possibilities for species relations. Man reigns as the center of humanist structures of Creation, so by decentering him Lewis radically destabilizes traditional preconceptions of Creation. He questions the supposedly inherent dominance, whether in the form of “dominion or stewardship,” of man over animal, which allows for new ways of interpreting Creation, and the relationships between the human and nonhuman that it engenders, outside of a humanist perspective (Fudge 15).

To set up my reading of Lewis, I will introduce those scholars whose work has defined animal studies as it frames my reading of Lewis’ creation scene. Cary Wolfe, in his article, “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities,” offers an explanation of animal studies, the kinds of questions it asks, and the way it pushes back on the humanist tradition. Wolfe’s article seeks to dismantle the artificial binaries between man and animal put in place by humanism, and questions the supremacy that man has constructed for himself. Wolfe’s conception of animal studies offers a new way of looking at the animal: as a serious “topic or object of study…with unique demands” (576). He asks how “the meaning and stakes of a novel or film change…after (at least some of) the animals treated in it undergo an ontological shift from things to, in some sense, persons” (Wolfe 567). This new way of considering the animal, he argues, must “unsettle” previous studies within history, literary studies, and philosophy (566). This notion of “unsettl[ing]” is key to Wolfe’s definition of animal studies. At the crux of his argument is the distinction between animal studies and other “cultural studies.” “Cultural
studies,” Wolfe argues, falls into the humanist trap of “pluralism,” which “extends the sphere of consideration (intellectual or ethical) to previously marginalized groups without in the least destabilizing or throwing into question the schema of the human who undertakes such pluralization” (568). In other words, it is not sufficient to merely extend our “consideration” to marginalized groups by assimilating them into the existing set of categories defined by our preexisting ideologies. In order for Animal Studies to have any real impact, “the schema of the human,” the patterns of thought that organize our set of categories and the relationships between them, must undergo fundamental change. When properly executed, animal studies must “destabilize” existing structures. It must, through a consideration of the animal as animal, open up new ways of conceiving of the human and “the humanist schema of the knowing subject who undertakes such a reading” (569).

Equally foundational to my work, Erica Fudge identifies a tension in the relationship between man and animal as one full of contradictions: “Not only are animals both like and not like us, they are also friend and foe, individual and dissected, loved and eaten; and it is these apparent oppositions that I am interested in here” (9). She locates the crux of the species struggle in man’s simultaneous desire for communication with the animal and his inherent disgust as a product of fear. Fudge claims that what emerges from this tension “is not so much the problem of the animal as the problem of the human” (8). The paradoxical and illogical relationship we sustain with animals on a daily basis, one characterized by interacting with them simultaneously as objects and subjects, creates an uncomfortable dissonance. This hard-to-reconcile dissonance is one that “on a day-to-day basis, we choose to evade, even refuse to acknowledge” (Fudge 8). Animals, Fudge argues, present persistent reminders of limitation on our power: “They are the limit case,
if you like, of all our structures of understanding. They stand between us and our sense of ourselves, but they also allow us to think about ourselves” (8). “This contradiction,” she writes, “is the reason for [her] book” (8). In Animal, Fudge sets the stakes for animal studies. She writes: “What is at stake ultimately is our own ability to think beyond ourselves, to include within the orbit of our imaginations as well as our material existences, those beings of other species” (22). Wolfe would push Fudge further, claiming that it is not enough just to include other species within the “orbit” of human consciousness, but that the categories within our “orbits” of consciousness must be rearranged by the inclusion.

Children’s literature is saturated with anthropomorphized animals: curious monkeys, mischievous rabbits in blue waistcoats, and hyperactive tigers. These characters defy the pleas of both Fudge and Wolfe by exploiting the animal without decentering the human in the least. Lewis’ animals, because they resist the reduction of allegory, can be read as actual animals. Lewis adamantly resists allegory in his children’s books, exercising instead what he calls suppositions. Where allegory ‘speaks otherwise,’ with its characters pointing to a meaning beyond themselves, suppositions grant supposed reality to an imagined scenario. Lewis clarifies with an example: “The Incarnation of Christ in another world is mere supposal [as opposed to fact]: but granted the supposition, He would really have been a physical object in that world as He was in Palestine, and His death on the Stone Table would have been a physical event no less than his death on Calvary” (Hooper 425, brackets original). Lewis’ notion of suppositions provides the basis of my reading of the Narnian animals as animals, rather than as anthropomorphized symbols. In The Magician’s Nephew Lewis supposes what Creation might look like in another world,
with an animal creator. Aslan, Lewis’ supposed Christ-figure, has been present throughout the series, and is revealed in the sixth installment as the creator of this fantasy world. Because Lewis writes *The Chronicles of Narnia* as supposals, we are invited to suspend disbelief and take the occurrences as supposed truth. We are to suppose that other worlds can exist, that children from our world can find their way there, and that animals in those worlds can talk. Because of Lewis’ supposal narrative experiment, the animals we confront in Narnia defy mere allegory. They are central agents within the stories and possess the same autonomy and “personhood”\(^\text{12}\) as any human character.

Unlike, for example, Una’s Lion in Spencer’s *Faerie Queene*, which allegorizes natural law, Lewis’ Lion does not point away from his animality to a ‘more real’ human world. Aslan is just as real as the humans; not just in Narnia, but conceivably in any world. In Narnia Lewis asks us to imagine what animals might be like in a different world. If things in another world are other than they are in this one, what prevents animals from talking and reasoning? These animals, I argue, are to be read as real, and allowed to exist as more than just man’s helpers, or human symbols in animal clothing.

Once the animal breaks free from the constraints of allegory and anthropomorphism, it can take on the power to reorient our reading of texts. The potential of the animal to reorganize traditional thought is, I argue, precisely how Lewis “rearranges” our conceptions of Creation in *The Magician’s Nephew*. We saw this potential to shape the child’s categorization of the world in the children’s Bibles of chapter one. This capacity is not unique to sacred texts. A major task for Children’s

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\(^{12}\) “…doesn’t our assessment of the meaning and stakes of a novel or a film change, animal studies asks, after (at least some of) the animals treated in it undergo an ontological shift from things to, in some sense, persons…” (Wolfe 576).
literature at large is to determine the human in relation to the animal, which is why books for children are filled with happy farm animals, wise crickets, and didactic bear families. Indeed, one survey of children’s literature found that two-thirds of the books for children are about nature, the environment, and animals (Fudge 70). The nagging desire to reconcile the complexity of species relations, as articulated by both Wolfe and Fudge, crystallizes in the treatment of ‘the animal’ in children’s literature. Scholarship in Animal Studies, however, has just begun to understand the role of children’s literature in the construction and perpetuation of species relations. In her book *Animality and Children’s Literature and Film*, Amy Ratelle argues that the animal consistently counters the objectives of Western philosophy “to establish a notion of an exclusively human subjectivity…in the very texts that ostensibly work to configure human identity” (Ratelle 4). By raising the animal to personhood in his series, Lewis counters the humanist “hailers” with a new voice that aims to scramble the world view in which the child-reader has been interpellated by his/her children’s Bible (Althusser). In this chapter I pick up Ratelle’s cause and consider the way Lewis’ children’s books push back against traditional belief in human superiority, while also acknowledging the way these stories simultaneously perpetuate those humanist traditions that they seek to undercut. In a further departure from Ratelle’s study, the work done in this essay broadens the scope of impact to show how Lewis’s writings concern doctrines that matter well past childhood development.

The simultaneous impulses of children’s literature, as discussed by Ratelle, manifest in the tension between man and creation in *The Magician’s Nephew*. Man is marginalized by this new model of creation, and yet he reasserts his importance as a
necessary observer, and later participant. In the opening scenes of Narnia’s creation Lewis creates two discrete focal points: the humans and creation. As Narnia comes into existence, the narrative repeatedly shifts its focus between the subjects, preventing them from occupying the same frame at the same time. Lewis creates this oscillating narrative through man’s perpetual disruptions, and articulates the phenomenon through the narrator as it happens: “The nuisance of it, as Polly said afterwards, was that you weren’t left in peace to watch it all. Just as Digory said “Trees!” he had to jump because Uncle Andrew had sidled up to him and was going to pick his pocket” (Lewis 64). The human distractions are sudden and intrusive, even to the other humans. And in attributing verbs like “jump” and “sidled” to the humans prevents them from being just background noise, allowing them, instead, to pull focus with their gesticulations. The narrative conspicuously excludes man from among Narnia’s creation—in fact, the human presence as observer and distractor accentuates this exclusion from creation—and yet, he persistently asserts his voice, despite his secondary role in the narrative. The humans’ relegation to the periphery of the narrative threatens the structure of anthropocentrism that relies on man’s position as the centerpiece of Creation to claim his superiority. In the children’s Bibles discussed in chapter one, spectatorship is part of the humanist conception of Creation. Man is made so he can appreciate the spectacle of God’s Creation. In Narnia, though, Aslan’s creation is not intended for a human audience. Lewis calls Narnia “a world of Talking Beasts,” so nothing in this world is for man, but for the Beasts alone (Hooper 426). Human presence at Narnia’s creation is merely a product of Digory’s mistake, and so human spectatorship in Narnia is not framed as the intent of God’s creation, as it was in the children’s Bibles, but as the intruding gaze of the
party crasher who is uncomfortable just looking in from the periphery and itches to burst in and make him/herself the center of attention.

It is for this reason that the humans in Lewis’ narrative refuse to sit still. The discomfort created by this decentering of the human manifests in the human characters’ inability to passively observe creation; they must be active participants, even if that participation is disruptive. Man cannot be a mere spectator or observer. Instead, he is tied up in his own, often petty, concerns and distractions. The humans do not just linger on the periphery; they insist on pulling focus from the real action of creation happening center stage. These constant interruptions, I argue, are man’s defensive efforts to reorient the narrative around himself. The humans’ consistent attempts to reassert themselves, however, fail in reclaiming man’s centrality in the narrative; instead, they create the oscillation between focal points described above. This constant reorienting between the human interruptions and the unfolding of creation produces a palpable and disorienting tension. It is interesting to note that the shifting focus is not necessarily desired by the humans, or at least by all of the humans. In the previous passage, Polly calls Uncle Andrew’s distractions a “nuisance,” and a few paragraphs later in the story the Cabby tells the others to “stow it…Watchin’ and listenin’ the thing at present; not talking” (Lewis 65). These human interruptions are undesirable, but apparently also inevitable for the humans. They too want to watch creation happen, to coexist with it, but cannot keep from causing distractions and shifting focus away from Creation. The narrator’s split point of view crystallizes the difficulty of making the human share its spotlight. The presence of man is distracting, and in some cases unwelcome, yet it is necessary for Creation to be documented.
The tension created by the scene’s shifting focus proves that man is out of place in Narnia, even if in its nascent state. Man is foreign to this world, and his many distractions disrupt the natural proceedings of creation. That man, especially adult, upper-class man, does not naturally belong in Narnia is made clear through the character of Uncle Andrew. His perpetual attempts to steal back his magic rings and escape to the human world, and his hostile reactions to the animals in Narnia, operate as recurring reminders that he does not fit there; this creation is not for him. His discomfort with the sights and sounds of Narnia, which is shared by Jadis, and to an extent, Digory, evokes a dissonance between the human and this animal-dominated world. As a most obvious example, Aslan’s creation song, which is depicted as indescribably beautiful by the children, is threatening to Uncle Andrew. The narrator tells us that “[Uncle Andrew] was not liking the Voice,” and that “[Jadis] hated it” (62). The “Voice,” which is the origin of creation in Narnia is not only not for Uncle Andrew and Jadis, it is depicted in opposition to them; or rather, they depict themselves in opposition to it. What is creative for Narnia is destructive and disturbing for them. The trepidation that the humans feel when confronting the animals of Narnia betrays the inherent conflict between species. Lewis writes:

Look here,” said Digory to Polly, “I’ve got to go after him—Aslan, I mean the Lion. I must speak to him.”

“Do you think we can?” said Polly. “I wouldn’t dare.”

…I’ll come along with you,” said the Cabby. “I liked the looks of ‘im. And I don’t reckon these other beasts will go for us. And I want a word with old Strawberry.”
So all three of them stepped out boldly—or as boldly as they could—toward the assembly of animals. (72)

In this passage we see the paradox that Erica Fudge speaks of: the desire to interact with the animal, and the simultaneous fear of that interaction. The hesitation with which Digory speaks Aslan’s name—he is unsure whether to call him by name or by his species label—and Poly’s doubt as to their ability to speak to the animals emphasizes the separation between the species. Not only do the trio have to physically close the gap between them and the animals, they have to bridge the mental chasm between the species that the “anthropological machine” manufactures. While the humans vary in their degrees of fear toward the animals, Lewis writes that all three “stepped out boldly,” implying that they all required courage to pursue an interaction with the animals. Although the animals have not behaved in a way that warrants a reaction of fear or anxiety, that they must be “bold” conveys the inherent threat that latently resides between species, and the courage required to overcome that threat.

Furthermore, the animals’ reception of the humans makes evident that man is not from Narnia, nor is he a natural citizen of that world. While the animals seem to coexist with one another with ease, and do not question the variety of their species, they are immediately skeptical of the presence of humans. When Digory, Polly, and the Cabby approach the assembly of animals, the creatures “all stopped talking and stared at them” (73). This is the first inter-species encounter in Narnia, and it creates a disruption; the animals’ discussion is abruptly cut short. The He-Beaver is the first to speak up: “What, in the name of Aslan, are these?” (73). The Beaver’s question is followed by a series of guesses from the other animals, ranging from “a talking lettuce” to Narnia’s “second
joke” (73). The dialogue that follows proves how foreign man is to the world of Narnia. Although the animals come in a variety of species, all of which are welcomed as natural and familiar by one another, man is conspicuously an outsider. The animals “stared” at the humans as they approached, creating the image of a ‘human zoo.’ The humans are the exotic novelty in Narnia, the unfamiliar creatures to be examined and identified. This inability to name the human species locates man outside of the consciousness of the animals. Although they speak, the animals do not have language to label the humans. This shows how totally foreign the human is to this new animal world. Even humans have the capacity to describe animals. The world created in Narnia is so anti-anthropocentric that the language to describe humankind is absent from their code. Man’s status as alien in Narnia does not last long, but the initial interactions between humans and animals prove that the natural state of Narnia (before it knows the presence of evil) is void of even the notion of humankind.

While man is conspicuously out of place in Narnia, the story’s mediated narration allows the tinge of anthropocentrism to permeate the narrative that it, in other regards, pushes back against. The narrator in The Magician’s Nephew, who has narrated the five books that come before, is human, and refers to his stories sporadically as tales he picked up from the children in the series. By writing through the mediation of a human narrator, Lewis reaffirms the necessity of the human in Narnia, for without man we would have no way of experiencing this supposed land. It is only because Digory and Polly accidentally find themselves in Narnia that we are able to witness this alternate creation. In fact, the simultaneity of man’s arrival in Narnia and the instantaneous beginning of its creation indicates a linkage between human presence and Narnia’s existence. Other worlds (like
Charn, whence Jadis comes) and locales (like the many lands visited in The Voyage of 
The Dawn Treader) certainly exist in the realm of Lewis’ narrative imagination, but 
human presence, whether central or otherwise, is always felt. Whether man exists in these 
places as a visitor, colonizer, or native, his presence seems to predicate the very existence 
of these locales, or perhaps their existence to the human reader’s imagination.

From the start of Lewis’ creation scene, before the reader is made to understand 
what is happening, Aslan’s voice is introduced as omnipresent and disorienting.

In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It 
was very far away and Digory found it hard to decide from what direction it was 
coming. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once. Sometimes he 
almost thought it was coming out of the earth beneath them. (61)

Aslan’s voice comes from all directions at once. It is both near and very far, both 
immediately present and approaching. Digory cannot place the voice and is disoriented 
by its ubiquity. The mode of creation in Genesis is language, which maintains a 
consistent formula for creation: words are spoken and Creation springs into being: “And 
God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (King James Bible, Genesis 1:3). The 
process is explicit and is expressed in terms humans can understand. Lewis disrupts this 
structure by changing the mode of creation; Aslan’s creation is the product of song, more 
importantly, wordless song. Language, according to Western thought, has been a firmly 
human ability, thus creation via language is an inherently human performance. By taking 
creation out of the confines of language, Lewis proposes that creation is not just a human 
capacity. When the framework of language is lost in Lewis’ creation, so is the familiarity 
that comes with it. The song perplexes the children: “There were no words [in the song].
There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it” (Lewis 61). Not only is the song non-verbal, it
does not have a tune. It defies the constructs that man has established to understand music. Described first as “noise,” Aslan’s song is not even a song at this point; it is just sound. This description of the song as “noise” evokes the notion of sound that precedes conceptualization. It is a meshing of notes and tones that defy human organization and categorization. The song, according to the narrator, is even difficult for the human mind to consume: “it was so beautiful he could hardly bear it.” Also, while the song affects the humans, it is intended for creation, not man. The narrator notes that the song “made Digory hot and red in the face” and that “it had some effect on Uncle Andrew…But what the song did to the two humans was nothing compared with what it was doing to the country” (68). The song defies human conceptualization because it is not sung for humans. The song seems to ‘speak’ the same language as “the country,” and later we discover, the same language as the animals. While the children begin to catch on to the connection between the song and creation, it is not a creation in which they can participate. The song can act on them, but they cannot themselves wield or control the song.

Much like his song, the character of Aslan is disorienting and destabilizes the foundation of humanism on which the creation tradition has been built. Rather than orienting his creation around Adam, as we see, for example, in Milton’s version of Genesis, Lewis makes the animals the pinnacle of Narnian creation. Even more radically, Lewis replaces the human center with a great lion. Rather than orbiting the series around a human character, Lewis gives Aslan the greatest gravitational force in the solar system
of his series. The books are held together by Aslan’s gravitational pull, and all that happens anticipates and points to the great Lion. If the Adam-centric Creation narratives of the children’s Bibles in chapter one are like the geocentric model, with Adam being the earth, Lewis gives us the heliocentric model, with Aslan as the sun. This new center that Lewis gives us, however, is a moving target. During the course of the first five books of the series, Aslan is characterized as unpredictable. His reputation, as articulated in the following refrain, precedes him: “He is not a tame lion.” The characters never know when he will appear. Sometimes he comes as an invisible presence, or shape-shifted as a domestic cat (The Horse and His Boy). Sometimes he appears to only some and not to others (Prince Caspian). And yet he is always present, always the focal point of the series. Aslan’s slippery nature speaks to the difficulty for humans to grasp an animal center. The animal, as represented by Aslan, is unpredictable and elusive, making the center similarly difficult to pin down. Aslan’s motion is also of great importance to the narrative, especially to the creation narrative. “All the time the Lion’s song, and his stately prowl, to and fro, backwards and forwards, was going on” (65-66). Aslan’s constant and unpredictable motion tears down any illusion that there is a fixed and central focal point. He not only decenters the human, he destabilizes the humanist structure in its entirety.

Even so, the phantom of anthropocentrism is not so easily shaken. While Aslan is indeed an animal, he cannot evade human characterization. His prowl is described as “stately” in the passage above. This description participates in the tradition of anthropomorphic projection that characterizes the lion as ‘king’ of the beasts. The cliché that Lewis adopts here proves the impossibility of evading the categories of
anthropocentrism that help us divide the world. Yet again, the tension caused by the
double motion of both pulling away from and being constantly drawn back into
anthropocentrism is encapsulated in this two-word description. The phrase “stately
prowl” places the anthropocentric cliché directly next to the perhaps purely animalistic
verb. This juxtaposition crystallizes the simultaneous effort of Lewis’ creatures to resist
anthropomorphism as it creeps back upon them.

We experience the creeping presence of anthropocentrism most concretely
through the narrator’s mediated account of creation. The world of Narnia is new and
different, but we experience it through a human lens. As the earth and the animals are
created they are sometimes described, but they are always named:

Digory did not know what they were until one began coming up quite close to
him. It was a little, spiky thing that threw out dozens of arms and covered these
arms with green and grew larger at the rate of about an inch every two seconds.
There were dozens of these things all round him now. When they were nearly as
tall as himself he saw what they were. “Trees!” he exclaimed. (64)

The creations in Narnia are distinct from those in the human world because of their
abundant vitality and Aslan-given abilities, but they still fall into man-made categories.
There is an impulse to name the creations as they pop up, and somehow they all fit neatly
into the archetypes established in the human world. Instinctively the narrator, who
conceivably recounts the creation as told to him by the children after the fact, not only
names the kinds of creations conjured by Aslan’s voice, but identifies them by human
names:
The tree which Digory had noticed was now a full-grown beech whose branches swayed gently above his head. They stood on cool, green grass, sprinkled with daisies and buttercups. A little way off, along the river bank, willows were growing. On the other side tangles of flowering currant, lilac wild rose, and rhododendron closed them in. The horse was tearing up delicious mouthfuls of new grass. (65)

All the species are the same as those in the human world, and once they are created, they are easily identified and categorized by the names they have in the human world. The narration’s impulse to name reasserts man’s supposed duty of dominion in Genesis 2:19: “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” Just as God exercises his inherent dominion by naming creation in the preceding chapter (“God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night”), so Adam’s God-given dominion over the animals is manifested in his charge to name them (Genesis 1:5).

Later on Lewis’ narrator describes the creation of animals, and again, they pop out of the ground embodying the name and attributes of animals as they exist in the human world. As the animals come into being, the narrator describes them according to the following pattern: name, plus essential attribute. The animals are not described by their physical appearance, which would allow the reader to imagine for him/herself what the creations are like in Narnia. The narrator leads with the name of the animal, so even when we receive a description of the stags sprouting from their antlers, we already know that the animal coming into being is a stag. There is no allowance for the Narnian animals
to occupy different categories than the ones they occupy in the human world. Right away the narrator identifies the animals according to their human world categorization, and accompanies the naming with some sort of phrase that familiarizes the animals to human understanding. The moles emerge “just as you might see a mole come out in England” (Lewis 69). The dogs come out “barking…and struggling as you’ve [human you] seen them do” (69). The frogs appear “near the river [and go] straight into it” (69). The big cats instinctively “[sit] down to wash” themselves (69). The dog’s bark, the frog’s affinity for water, and the feline’s fastidiousness are described as inherent attributes of the animals. The way the narrator introduces the creatures implies an inevitability that the animals, no matter the world, will act according to a prescribed archetype. The narration begins to sound like a young child’s ‘learn the animals’ books: “butterflies fluttered” and the “bees got to work on the flowers” (69). Through the narration, man not only asserts dominion through naming, but also dictates the animals’ behavior and tendencies so that they adhere to human preconceptions. These labels define the animals according to human observation and are a product of the human need to assimilate nature, through categorization, into the human conception.

As humans we readers are limited in our ability to understand this new world, so the narrator assimilates creations into human categories so that it can be translated into a language the human reader can understand. Once again man implicitly asserts his dominion by this process of naming. Fudge analyzes Genesis’ treatment of naming. She writes:

As God had absolute power over Adam, so Adam had absolute power over the animals. This power was made manifest in Genesis 2:19, when Adam named the
animals…It is as if the animals had no identity, no presence without Adam, and their inherent powerlessness, perhaps most easily described as their inability to name themselves, has persisted in human relations with animals. An animal cannot think, we argue, and therefore it is down to us to think for it. (Fudge 13)

Lewis pushes against this idea that man must think for the animal; after all, the animals in his stories have more than the ability to think and speak—they frequently offer council to the humans and act as their guides and teachers in Narnia. Even so, this impulse to name the creatures in Narnia locks Lewis into this same humanist pitfall of assuming meaning only through human categorization. Indeed, because of our reliance on language to understand the world around us, we as readers rely on the narrator’s naming to give “identity” to the creatures emerging from the ground. The perpetual encroachment of this anthropocentric impulse, however, reveals human limitations more than anything else.

This issue of naming, which is a product of man’s inability to comprehend outside of the constructs of his language, proves the inevitable intrusion of anthropocentrism as a weakness. In Lewis’ narrative, the ever-looming presence of anthropocentrism, which is manifested in language, hijacks his decentering project. Wolfe talks about the limiting force of language as one of man’s vulnerabilities. In his discussion of human finitude, Wolfe identifies language as “the radically ahuman technicity” that man is “subject[ed]” by (571). What it means to be human is constructed by language, a tool that is in itself outside the human, but necessary for human understanding. Man is reliant on this tool of language that he can only roughly wield. This tool prevents humans from fully conceptualizing themselves, so the prospect of understanding the animal is even further beyond human ability. Thus, the text itself registers the limits of conceptualizing the anti-
anthropocentric project. Since this is a text written by man for man, Lewis cannot help but participate in this humanist tradition of naming and categorizing. The animals are still given autonomy over themselves (“I give you yourselves”), but the anthropocentric lens keeps man in the position of dominion, both on the level of plot and construction (Lewis 71). Narnia requires a human king and queen, and the construction of the book must abide by the constraints of human language.

The distribution of dominion that comes toward the end of the creation scene further troubles the already complex relationship between man and animal. Aslan reigns supreme and omnipotent over all worlds and creatures—including our own—and he bestows authority first to the speaking animals he selects, and then to the Cabby and his wife, whom he names the first king and queen of Narnia.

“Creatures, I give you yourselves,” said the strong, happy voice of Aslan. “I give to you for ever this land of Narnia. I give you the woods, the fruits, the rivers. I give you the stars and I give you myself. The Dumb Beasts whom I have not chosen are yours also. Treat them gently and cherish them but do not go back to their ways.” (71)

Aslan’s “giv[ing]” in this passage creates relationships and levels of authority between the talking animals and their surroundings. Aslan does not speak of dominion or authority, and yet implications of power dynamics are detected in his command. He does not address the non-speaking animals at all, implying that he does not “give” them anything. In giving the talking animals themselves, Aslan bestows upon them autonomy which elevates them over the “dumb beasts,” whom, we learn, belong to their talking counterparts. Aslan commands the talking animals to “treat [the Dumb Beasts] gently and
cherish them,” implying a kind of dominion of lordship (dominus) and community (domus)—certainly not tyranny—that harkens back to the Genesis account (Genesis 1:28). But Aslan’s gift of himself complicates the power dynamics. Lewis uses the verb “give” consistently in the passage, and yet I think it would be incorrect to read the giving of himself as forming the same kind of relationship. Because of Aslan’s omnipotence, the gesture of giving himself to the talking animals seems to take on a different relational nature than those discussed above. The talking animals still obey him, and throughout the series, their dependence on his power and transcendence is evident. The gift of dominion that he seems to be giving the talking animals over their “dumb” counterparts is not the same kind of relationship that comes with the gift of himself.

It is not until the next chapter that the relationship between man and animal in Narnia is established. A chapter later Aslan invites the Cabby to remain in Narnia, and after the Cabby accepts, Aslan calls the Cabby’s wife into Narnia as well. Polly comments on the song Aslan sings to beckon the Cabby’s wife: “she felt sure that it was a call, and that anyone who heard that call would want to obey it and (what’s more) would be able to obey it, however many worlds and ages lay between” (Lewis 81). It is important that Aslan asks the Cabby if he would like to live in Narnia, and that Polly uses the word “obey” in her description of the song. Aslan’s offers are compelling but not compulsory, suggesting man’s autonomy in Narnia. This distinction sets up a power dynamic between the humans and Aslan. While the humans are later given dominion over the other animals in Narnia, there is no question that Aslan continues to reign over them, which ultimately places an animal at the highest point in the hierarchy of power. Furthermore, while Aslan later charges the king and queen with the task of “rul[ing] and
nam[ing]” the animals, Aslan continues to name the animals anyway; in fact, he renames both the Cabby and his wife (85). If naming goes hand in hand with dominion, this signifies Aslan’s omnipotence.

While both humans and talking animals are given autonomy in Narnia, Aslan grants the humans dominion over all of the creatures:

“My children,” said Aslan, fixing his eyes on both of them [the Cabby and his wife], “you are to be the first King and Queen of Narnia…You shall rule and name all these creatures, and do justice among them, and protect them from their enemies when enemies arise. And enemies will arise, for there is an evil Witch in this world.” (81)

Lewis’ creation falls back in line here with the humanist interpretations of Genesis. Once again, Adam is granted dominion over the animals and is commanded to assert his power through naming (Genesis 1:28, 2:19-20). The dominion that the Cabby and his wife are granted is different than Adam’s, though, or at least more explicit than Adam’s charge in Genesis. Lewis subtly justifies human dominion in Narnia, and by doing so, he undercuts the humanist notion that man is inherently superior to the animals. According to Aslan, the human king and queen are meant to protect the animals from evil in Narnia, an evil that is already present. This evil Witch, Jadis, is the White Witch from The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, and is related to the Queen of Underland in The Silver Chair. She is the root of evil that exists in Narnia since the moment of its conception, and she is brought to Narnia by a man. Just as Adam and Eve succumb to the “subtle” serpent’s temptation and eat from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil,” Digory gives into temptation and wakes Jadis from her sleep in Charn (Genesis 3:1, 2:17). In an attempt to
bring Jadis back to her own world, Digory brings her to Narnia instead, thus it is because of a human that evil exists in Narnia. Human dominion in Narnia, then, is not attributed to man’s inherent dominance or superiority. His dominion is merely a way for humans to take responsibility for bringing evil into Narnia. Man is not given the charge to protect the animals because he is more able, but because he is the one who put them in danger.

Although Lewis’ creation of Narnia uses the animal to destabilize the anthropocentric tradition of the Creation narrative, the recurring presence of the human in Narnia’s creation proves that man is not dethroned, but merely decentered. The double movement that on the one hand decenters the human, while on the other hand, reasserting the dominance of anthropocentrism creates a tension in the narrative that characterizes the greater cannon of children’s literature. While humans remain in positions of dominance in the narrative, this dominance subtly subverts the humanist notion that man’s supremacy is natural. While the narrative does not overthrow anthropocentrism, the work Lewis does to decenter man in his creation scene makes room for new interpretations of species relations. A total overhaul of anthropomorphism is not necessary for Lewis to “rearrange” the reader’s conception of species relations. By destabilizing the rigid humanist structure, Lewis questions the supposedly inherent dominance of man over animal, and plants the seeds of potential for new ways of interpreting Creation outside of a humanist framework. Through his supposed account of creation, Lewis’ narrative offers an alternative genesis that opens up new ways of reading the Biblical Creation narrative, ways that resist the tradition of anthropocentrism that have dominated Biblical exegesis thus far.
It is important to remember that these texts, while compelling for readers of all ages, were written for children. In *The Chronicles of Narnia* Lewis offers new conceptions of species relations that add a contrasting voice to the chorus of humanist hails that seek to interpellate the child reader. While Lewis’ books allow adult readers to reimagine the Creation story in Genesis and to reconsider their notions of species relationships, the instability of Lewis’ creation scene allows its young readers to experiment with their own understanding of the human-animal divide. Because of Lewis’ back-and-forth battle of tug-of-war between anthropocentrism and its opposite, the texts do not project a single way to understand the species divide, but rather invite their readers to suppose with Lewis, and consider the relationship for themselves. The fetters of humanist thought, while not cast off, are loosened through Lewis’ narrative. The decentered creation story prevents readers, both young and old, from taking the dominance of man as unquestionable truth. Thus, to complicate the anthropocentric lens that the children’s Bibles provide their readers, Lewis offers the child a new, more imaginative lens through which to read Creation and the manifestations of that Creation in their world.
CHAPTER 3

THE GREAT DIVORCE: SEPARATING PERSONHOOD FROM HUMANHOOD

_The Chronicles of Narnia_, as I discussed in the previous chapter, are a great “supposal,” or thought experiment, in which C.S. Lewis imagines how scenarios might play out in a supposed reality. Starting with _The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe_, Lewis supposes what it might be like for a different world—one made up of animals—to need a savior, and how that savior might appear to them. Lewis uses this space of imagination as an opportunity to think outside the bounds of humanist ideology that govern the writing of his contemporaries, and even his own nonfiction texts. In the previous chapter I discussed, through an analysis of _The Magician’s Nephew_, how Lewis supposes what Creation might look like in his imagined world, and how the nature of these texts as supposals allows us to read the animals as autonomous persons rather than as allegorical symbols. In chapter two I also identify a tension in Lewis’ supposal, between the impulse to radically question the humanist tenet of human centrality and superiority, and the inability to escape the specter of anthropocentrism. In this chapter I trace this tension throughout the series, focusing primarily on _The Last Battle_ for concrete examples. Lewis, I argue, successfully challenges “the schema of the human,” while

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13 Recall my explanation of “supposals” in chapter two: Where allegory ‘speaks otherwise,’ with its characters pointing to a meaning beyond themselves, supposals grant supposed reality to an imagined scenario. Lewis clarifies with an example: “The Incarnation of Christ in another world is mere supposal [as opposed to fact]: but granted the supposition, He would really have been a physical object in that world as He was in Palestine, and His death on the Stone Table would have been a physical event no less than his death on Calvary” (Hooper 425, brackets original).

14 Recall my discussion of Wolfe in chapter two: “Cultural studies,” Wolfe argues, falls into the humanist trap of “pluralism,” which “extends the sphere of consideration
struggling to overthrow that schema entirely. I argue that Lewis disassociates the
language divide from the species divide, allowing him to reconfigure the humanist
hierarchy—which grants man ontological superiority over the animal—in a way that
promises new moral protection to the animal. A closer look at the treatment of non-
speaking animals in the series, however, reveals how Lewis’ rearranged hierarchy, when
put to practical effect, merely collapses back into the same humanist hierarchy that he
initially seems to overthrow. He can only divorce the species divide from the language
divide by maintaining the marriage between language and personhood. Because language
is all we have to express reason, and reason all we have to express the soul, and because
the animals outside of Lewis’ supposed world cannot, in fact, speak, Lewis cannot help
but recapitulate the hierarchy that gives humankind dominance. Even so, Lewis’
supposal, while not extending the moral protection of full personhood to the non-
speaking animals of our world, does extend to them the protection afforded by empathy.
By creating such vivid animal characters Lewis pairs names and personalities with faces,
and makes opportunities for the reader to adopt the characters, if not as kin, at least as
friends.

The argument of this chapter, like the others, is grounded in the Genesis Creation
story. Like his contemporary authors of juvenile biblical literature, Lewis also latches on
to the question of the soul, and whether it is a uniquely human provision. Man’s
possession of a soul is founded in the second biblical account of Creation: “And the
LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath

(intellectual or ethical) to previous marginalized groups without in the least destabilizing
or throwing into question the schema of the human who undertakes such pluralization”
(568).
of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). While the Creation story does not
deny the rest of God’s creations a soul, the narrative does not explicitly attribute one to
them either, and philosophers, theologians, and as we have seen, authors of children’s
Bibles, have extrapolated from this absence in the text, concluding that the absence
indicates that humans alone are given immortal souls. From this extrapolation comes the
humanist tenet that upholds the soul as the fundamental distinction between the human
and the rest of Creation.

One of the hallmark thinkers who writes on the separation between the soul and
the body, and therefore, the human and the animal, Descartes, establishes the framework
of dualism that informs my reading of Lewis’ treatment of the soul. In his treatise
*Discourse on the Method* (1637), Descartes delineates the separation between the soul
and the body, using the subjects of the human and the animal as evidence of this divide.
His claim for this separation comes, as I have alluded, from this same verse in Genesis.
He claims that God formed the body of man, all of its organs and mechanical capacities,
but “at first placed in it no rational soul” (Descartes 163). Thus, in the case of the body,
Descartes claims that the human and the animal are no different, as our bodily forms are
merely a mechanical “arrangement of the parts,” and the difference only transpires when
God breathes a soul into Adam’s body (165). Descartes’ notion of the body as machine,
or the beast as machine, establishes the separate purposes of the body and the soul.
While, made up of “the fabric of nerves and muscles,” the body has the “power to move
[its] members,” it is the soul that gives man the ability to think and reason. The soul,
according to Descartes, is the source of thought, which is the application of knowledge
through reason (167). Animals, Descartes claims, do not “act from knowledge, but solely
from the disposition of their organs” because they lack the “instrument” of reason that would allow them to function beyond the mere mechanical “arrangement” of their bodily systems (167). Thus, animals have only bodies, and no souls.

Most important to my own argument in this chapter is Descartes’ discussion of language as the evidence of reason, and therefore evidence of a soul. “Were there such machines exactly resembling organs and outward form of an ape or any other irrational animal,” he writes, “we could have no means of knowing that they were in any respect of a different nature from these animals” (Descartes 167). This is not the case with the human, for “if there were machines bearing the image of our [human] bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible,” such a machine’s inability to speak would betray that it is mere body and no soul (167). Descartes defines language as “words or signs arranged in such a manner as is competent to us in order to declare our thoughts to others” (167). Language is a tool by which we convey those qualities—thought and reason—that characterize the soul. Language, then, is symptomatic of a soul, and the evidence that humanists have used to set the bounds of the category of human.

This categorization by language is also how personhood is determined. I reference Cary Wolfe’s distinction between “things” and “persons” here, and will use the term personhood to refer to any being possessing a soul, and therefore the ethical consideration that comes with it. Such “persons” are elevated from the mere material that is the beast as machine, to sentient beings worthy of the same ontological status and ethical protection as those categorized as humans.

15 “…doesn’t our assessment of the meaning and stakes of a novel or a film change, animal studies asks, after (at least some of) the animals treated in it undergo an ontological shift from things to, in some sense, persons…” (Wolfe 576).
Now I will turn to *The Chronicles of Narnia* to examine the way Lewis experiments with this ontological categorization in his supposed world. Lewis adopts the Cartesian model of categorization in his series; that is, characters with a soul are categorically different from those without a soul. At a pivotal moment in Lewis’ creation scene, Aslan selects some animals out of those he has just created to grant them a “living soul” (Genesis 2:7). At this moment we see the ordinary animals transform: “gradually a change came over them. The smaller ones—the rabbits, moles, and such-like—grew a good deal larger. The very big ones—you noticed it most with the elephants—grew a little smaller” (Lewis 70). This change is physical. The ability to speak, which is revealed as the ultimate fruit of this transformation, is not the only indication that these “Talking Animals” are different. The physical change provides a phenotypic expression of the soul that they carry, and emphasizes the differentiation between the newly-forming categories. At the end of this scene Lewis reveals how this transformation occurs: “The Lion opened his mouth, but no sound came from it; he was breathing out, a long, warm breath” (70). This is the same God-breathed soul that Adam receives (Genesis 2:7). Lewis draws on the same verse from Genesis that children’s Bibles and philosophers have used to ground the species divide and substantiate the claim for human exceptionalism. Through this allusion Lewis collapses the species difference by eliminating the assumption of human’s unique claim to language and a soul that separates the human and the animal, and creates new categories through which to divide up the Narnian world. If we refer a few paragraphs earlier in the narrative, Lewis displays the reconfiguring of categories as those categories are established. After the animals have been created, Aslan selects pairs from different species. The pairs that he selects “instantly [leave] their own kind and [follow]
him” (Lewis 69). Like with the physical transformation that the “Talking Beasts” undergo, through this narrative detail Lewis makes the categories even more tangibly evident. The animals are no longer bound to each other based on “kind,” but rather on their ability to speak. Species divisions no longer govern categorization in this world. This marks a major shift away from anthropocentrism. Even if this new categorization must rely on existing binaries—those who possess language and those who do not—the ability to speak is no longer uniquely human, thus the “schema of the human” is indeed questioned, and, I argue, radically disrupted. For the remainder of the series this divide shapes the way we categorize the Narnian universe. By dislocating the “caesura” between logos and alogos, Lewis denaturalizes the assumption that language alone is sufficient criteria for separating the human from the animal.

Not only does the attribution of speech to the animals in Narnia challenge the fundamental distinction between the human and the nonhuman, it also grants personhood to the “Talking Beasts.” This is the same personhood that I established in my earlier discussion of Descartes. After Aslan breathes a “living soul” into the beasts he has set apart, he gives them a command: “Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak” (Lewis 70). Aslan imbues the “Talking Beasts” with the very qualities that Descartes attributes to the soul: the ability to “think,” that is, possess knowledge and wield it through reason, and the ability to convey their thinking through language. It is important to note that Lewis’ notion of language is consistent with Descartes’. Right after the animals are created, and before they are chosen to speak, the animals exhibit the ability to

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16 “The division of life into…animal and human…passes first of all as a mobile boarder within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible” (Agamben 15).
utter the sort of animal sounds that Descartes calls “vocables,” but it is not until the “Talking Beasts” are given “living soul[s]” that they acquire the ability to “arrange” words or... signs... in such a manner that we perceive them “competent” in “declar[ing] [their] thoughts” (167). In the next chapter the “Talking Beasts” verbally confirm their new personhood: “Hail, Aslan. We hear and obey. We are awake. We love. We think. We speak. We know” (71). This verbal declaration once again summarizes those qualities Descartes stipulates as the elements of the soul, the characteristics that were previously, to use Derrida’s turn of phrase, “proper to man.” More importantly, the declaration upholds the notion that, in this world too, language is necessary to prove one’s possession of these qualities, to prove one’s personhood.

In extending personhood to the “Talking Beasts” Lewis creates a hierarchy in Narnia that obscures the ontological divide between human and animal while accentuating the divide between the soul and the body. The hierarchy established in Narnia’s creation mimics the structure established in Genesis. Aslan speaks to the “Talking Beasts”:

Creatures, I give you yourselves... I give you the stars and I give you myself. The Dumb Beasts whom I have not chosen are yours also. Treat them gently and cherish them but do not go back to their ways lest you cease to be Talking Beasts.

For out of them you were taken and into them you can return. Do not so. (Lewis 71)

17 “…for we may easily conceive a machine to be so constructed that it emits vocables... but not that it should arrange them variously so as appositely to reply to what is said in its presence, as men of the lowest grad of intellect can do” (Descartes 167).
Aslan first gives the talking beasts autonomy (“I give you yourselves”), and then he gives them dominion (“The Dumb Beasts…are yours also”). This is the same dominion that God gives Adam over all the animals in Creation (Genesis 1:28). By replicating the Genesis structure of dominion, Lewis similarly predicates his hierarchy on personhood, but dislocates dominion from the species divide. Since these beasts are so emphatically differentiated because they can speak—it is in their name: “Talking Beasts”—this hierarchy of personhood is decidedly inextricable from the possession of language.

Lewis also harkens to the hierarchy discussed in Pico’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), thereby using this moment in the text to both invoke the structure of the chain of being and further reduce the categorical difference between man and animal. In the preface to his 900 Theses, Pico identifies man’s mobility on the chain of being as the source of his exceptionality. Man, Pico argues, is unlike the rest of God’s creations, because he can traverse, by his “own free will,” the chain of being by either improving himself to be like the angels, or by degrading himself to be like the beasts. Lewis attributes a version of this exceptional mobility to the “Talking Beasts.” “Do not go back to their ways,” Aslan commands, lest you cease to be Talking Beasts” (Lewis 71). The conjunction “lest” conveys causation, proving that the position of these “Talking Beasts” on the chain of being is contingent on the choices they make. They too, by their “own free will,” are given the possibility of moving down the chain, of losing their souls, by giving into their “brutish” natures (Pico 2). This, “brutish” nature, after all, is what it means for the “Talking Beasts” to “go back to their ways” (Lewis 71). “Their,” in this case, refers to the “Dumb Beasts” from which the “Talking Beasts” came. Thus, the “Talking Beasts” share the same exceptionality as Pico’s man, and the same status on the
chain of being as humankind, as long as they remain “Talking.” By ascribing Pico’s
criteria for human exceptionality to the “Talking Beasts,” the division between man and
animal diminishes, and Lewis’ use of the soul as criteria for classification is fortified. As
a result, the hierarchy goes from human rules animal, to speaker rules non-speaker, or
person rules “thing” (Wolfe 576).

The ontological hierarchy that Lewis establishes in Narnia dissociates the
language divide from the species divide, which therefore dissociates personhood from
human status. The worth of human life and “Talking Animal” life are the same, which
provides those “Talking Animals” with the same benefits of personhood that are
promised, by the humanist tradition, to humankind: namely the promise of eternal life
and the promise of ethical protection from commodification. As a Christian, Lewis is
tremendously concerned with the fate of one’s eternal soul, so naturally, this surfaces in
the supposed world he imagines. Lewis’ judgement scene at the end of The Last Battle
displays the ultimate consequences of his rearrangement of the humanist hierarchy as it
plays out in the Narnian universe. The scene depicts judgement as a moment of one-on-
one eye contact with Aslan, which results either in the creature’s admittance through the
stable doorway or into the unknown of “[Aslan’s] huge black shadow” (Lewis 751). The
good animals “looked in the face of Aslan and loved him…and all these came in the door
on Aslan’s right” (751). This door admits the good into heaven, the universal resting
place for all good creatures, both human and nonhuman. The children who have visited
Narnia throughout the series, as well as the creatures that readers have grown to know
and love, end up in “Aslan’s real world” (759). The promise of heaven, then, is equally
available to all persons, both human and nonhuman.
The fate of the bad animals is perhaps more vivid in proving the reconstructed hierarchy which gives equal personhood to humans and speaking animals. Lewis writes: as the bad creatures “looked straight in his [Aslan’s] face, the expression of their faces changed terribly—it was fear and hatred,” and in the case of the “Talking Beasts, the fear and hatred lasted only for a fraction of a second,” during which time, “they suddenly ceased to be Talking Beasts. They were just ordinary animals. And all the creatures who looked at Aslan in that way…disappeared into his huge black shadow, which (as you have heard) streamed away to the left of the doorway” (Lewis 751). Just as the good—both human and nonhuman—go to the same place, so too do the bad. The passage does not indicate what happens with the “bad” humans, but because of the children’s shock at seeing a Calormene soldier—a soldier from the frequently villainized, pagan, Calormene race that attempt to invade Narnia on two occasions in the series—in heaven, we can assume that the bad humans, like the bad creatures are sent beyond the “huge black shadow…to the left of the doorway”—presumably hell. Thus, not all humans go to heaven, and not all animals don’t. The criteria for entrance into “Aslan’s real world” is not humanness, but personhood. And personhood, we see, is stripped away at judgement from those whose life choices proved that they do not deserve it.

The judgement scene also dramatizes the relationship between the eternal soul and exceptionalism. Lewis writes that at the moment of judgement “you could see” the transformation from “Talking Beast” to “ordinary animal” occur. Just as the possession of a soul comes with a phenotypic expression, the loss of one’s soul manifests similarly. This scene aligns the loss of speech, which is, at an earlier point in The Last Battle, revealed as Aslan’s punishment for “Talking Beasts” if they “weren’t good,” with
damnation (727). In becoming “ordinary animals,” these creatures are sentenced to the opposite of heaven, whatever that is, but more importantly, they lose their personhood, their exceptionality. The word “ordinary” is not merely used to describe those animals that cannot speak. It is used only in the two instances when talking animals lose their speech, when they degrade to share the rung of the “Dumb Beasts” on the chain of being. The text in these places participates in the language of exceptionalism that the humanist tradition is very much invested in. By participating in this language of exceptionalism, and tying it so closely with the promise of heaven, Lewis follows a similar pattern as his contemporaries discussed in chapter one; he aligns personhood with salvation and eternal life. For the writers of juvenile biblical literature, and for Lewis too, what makes personhood exceptional is not merely the ability to think, speak, and reason, but the promise of eternal life that comes with an immaterial soul. Like Christine Vos discusses in her children’s Bible, the soul is the location of the child’s true identity, and the source of his/her free will and ability to love. The child’s soul gives him/her the ability to connect with God and to make such decisions as repenting of sins and dedicating his/her life to Christ. This God-given ability to choose Him, according to these authors, is what makes humanity truly exceptional. Lewis, in his supposed world, gives this exceptional quality to the “Talking Animals.”

\[18\] It is unclear what exactly the opposite of heaven is in the Narnian universe. The narrator comments that “The children never saw [these animals] again,” and that “[he] [doesn’t] know what became of them” (751). The series makes no mention of the existence of hell, but whatever the fate of these bad and “ordinary” creatures, it includes an eternal separation from Aslan and his glorious world.

\[19\] “You cannot see your soul, but it is there just the same, inside of your body. Your body is the house of your soul…would you be gone when your arm is gone?...Your arms…are parts of your body. They are not your soul. It is your soul that is you” (Vos 7-8).
Lewis is incredibly vague about the eternal fate of the “ordinary” animals—those that started out dumb, and those that become dumb at judgment. His noticeable ambiguity regarding the fate of those animals that could never speak in the first place—the ones that never had souls—echoes a similar ambiguity that crops up in his nonfiction writing. In The Problem of Pain (1940), Lewis devotes a chapter to the problem of animal pain and animal salvation. His discussion, particularly of animal salvation, is rife with indecision. While he ultimately argues that “certain animals may have an immortality, not in themselves, but in the immortality of their masters,” this argument seems only to work for animals that have masters, and therefore comes with a whole slew of caveats regarding wild animals (Lewis 635). In writing The Chronicles of Narnia ten years later, Lewis takes up this same quandary of animal salvation again, this time allowing himself the freedom of fiction and supposal to explore. Even so, this problem of animal salvation, which is so wrapped up in animal personhood haunts this scene of judgement, even Narnia.

Lewis shows the benefits of personhood from a secular perspective as well. Personhood comes with ethical consideration that morally prohibits commoditization.\(^\text{20}\) Without a soul, the “Dumb Beasts” are mere “arrangement[s] of parts” without any reason with which to process the feeling of pain, and without an eternal soul to warrant ethical consideration (Descartes 165). From this line of reasoning the commoditization of animal bodies for the use of consumption, testing, labor, and sport, is made conscionable. By granting the “Talking Beasts” personhood Lewis protects them from this fate. Lewis acculturates the reader into the Narnian code of ethics that emerges from his new

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\(^{20}\) I use the term ‘commodity’ to refer to “things” that can be used and exploited by “persons” (Wolfe 576).
hierarchy by offering moments of judgement to help reprogram the way we receive instances of animal commoditization. An especially poignant instance of this comes in *The Silver Chair*, when the protagonists, Jill and Scrubb, and their nonhuman guide Puddlegum, learn that they have mistakenly eaten a talking stag while being held captive in the Giants’ castle:

For a moment Jill did not realize the full meaning of this. But she did when Scrubb’s eyes opened wide with horror and he said, ‘So we’ve been eating a *Talking* stag.’ This discovery didn’t have exactly the same effect on all of them. Jill, who was new to that world, was sorry for the poor stag and thought it rotten of the giants to have killed him. Scrubb, who had been in that world before and had at least one Talking beast as his dear friend, felt horrified; as you might feel about a murder. But Puddlegum, who was Narnian born, was sick and faint, and felt as you would feel if you found you had eaten a baby. (Lewis 608)

Lewis gives us three reactions to the deed of consuming a souled creature. Jill’s reaction is, perhaps, the same reaction an animal-lover might have the first time he/she realized that the hamburger on his/her plate was once a cow. She finds it unpleasant that she has just eaten a talking animal, but because she is so distanced from the stag by its ‘otherness,’ she is not as repulsed as her companions. In calling the stag’s death “murder,” Eustace demonstrates an acknowledgement of the animal as person. His

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21 Recall my explanation of “othering” in chapter one: The texts under consideration in this chapter establish these categories by ‘othering’ the animal, that is by alienating one from the other, by establishing the animal as entirely separate and different from the human. By othering the animal, these texts can use the established other to construct the category of the human by telling the child what they are not. Thus the human identity becomes that which is ‘not animal.’
reaction to the situation still indicates the stag’s otherness, though. Eustace has not adopted the Narnian perspective that categorizes by personhood rather than by species. Puddle-gum, on the other hand, has been interpellated to understand the stag as part of “us,” rather than “them.” This becomes clearer when we think about Puddle-gum’s reaction to eating the talking stag. His response is visceral: he “was sick and faint.” The experience is likened to how “you” would feel if you ate a baby. The second person pronoun addresses the reader directly, forcing him/her to imaging eating one of its own kind. The use of “you,” as well as the invocation of the image of harm to an innocent and defenseless “baby,” is not only for emotional effect or shock factor. These two devices work together to emphasizes the kinship between Puddle-gum and the stag. Because he categorizes the world by personhood and not by species, eating the talking stag is eating one of his own kind; it is cannibalism. The difference between murder and cannibalism highlights the difference between Eustace’s and Puddle-gum’s methods of categorization. The concept of ‘cannibalism’ conveys a sameness between the one that consumes and the one that is consumed, and is marked by disgust. Conceiving of the incident as murder conveys a similar distaste for what has happened, but not the same sense of proximity to what has been eaten. The stag is not other to Puddle-gum, it is same. From his presentation of the three responses, Lewis teaches the reader which one is the most appropriate. Puddle-gum, he writes, “was Narnian born,” and therefore, his reaction is how a true Narnian would respond. Through this scene Lewis teaches us the proper way to categorize. Eustace’s way is good, because it shows that he understands the hierarchy that places speaking animal over nonspeaking animal, but Puddle-gum’s is better because it displays the dislocated personhood distinction produced by categorizing based on
personhood rather than by species. By acculturating the reader into the Narnian structure of categorization, Lewis helps us to internalize the consequences of the ethical protection that comes with personhood.

As I discussed in chapter two, Lewis’ radical supposal of an anti-anthropocentric world is repeatedly contained by the human language and conceptions that he is forced to operate within. While his rearrangement of the categories of personhood do challenge the “schema of the human,” that schema still exists, and remains the only tool with which he can perceive the world (Wolfe 568). Lewis continues to rely on language as evidence of one’s possession of a soul, preventing his intellectual experiment from extending personhood beyond the human when it is applied to the reader’s world, because none of the animals in the human world actually speak. Indeed, even in Narnia the reliance on language as indication of a soul protects only some animals, as only some animals speak. It is noted at the moment of creation that Aslan selects some animals to whom he gives the gift of speech, and “some sorts of animals he passed over altogether” (Lewis 69). Without speech these animals are denied a soul, and therefore personhood. Thus, the humanist hierarchy that privileges the soul over the body is recreated in Narnia. By denaturalizing the relationship between speech and personhood, Lewis ends up reinforcing the relationship between the soul and personhood instead. Thus, while Lewis destabilizes the structure of anthropocentrism, we see him, once again, unable to overthrow it entirely.

According to Althusser’s conception of ideology, Lewis cannot succeed in restructuring the child readers’ ideology if the subjects cannot relate their imaginary ideology with their “real conditions of existence” (Althusser 181). This, I argue, is how
Lewis’ reconfiguring is contained to his imagined world. Althusser’s theory claims that “Ideology represents individuals’ imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence,” and that it “has a material existence. (181, 184). The imaginary enacts practical consequences through the subject’s actions and decisions, when his/her beliefs becomes practical. While Lewis’ texts construct a new way to imagine the world, they sever the relationship between this new imagined belief system and the subject’s real world. At the moment when Lewis’ new system of categorization promises to extend personhood to the animal, through his subjects newly formed “world outlooks,” Lewis reminds us that Narnia is an imagined space, and that the rules do not quite carry over to reality in the same way. For example, in The Last Battle, King Tirian encounters horses being abused by their rider. The narrator remarks that

Up till now Tirian had taken it for granted that the horses which the Calormenes were driving were their own horses; dumb, witless animals like the horses of our own world. And though he hated to see even a dumb horse overdriven, he was of course thinking more about the murder of the Trees. It had never crossed his mind that anyone would dare to harness one of the free Talking Horses of Narnia, much less to use a whip on it. But as that savage blow fell the horse reared up and said, half screaming: ‘Fool and tyrant! Do you not see I am doing all I can?’ (680)

That Tirian “had taken it for granted” that the horses being abused were “dumb” animals displays the way Lewis’ hierarchy recapitulates the humanist structure that allows soul to commoditize body. It is unfavorable for “even” dumb animals to be mistreated, but it is perfectly acceptable, even expected for them to be used for labor, even hard labor. The narrator tells us that before he realized that the horses could speak, Tirian was worried
more about the Trees than about the mistreatment of the horses. The trees, which
humanists\(^\text{22}\) have typically placed lower on the chain of being than animals, are more
worthy, in this case, of Tirian’s concern because, as we have learned throughout the
series, in Narnia they have souls; they can think and speak, even though they often
choose to stay silent. Lewis’ rearranged hierarchy, in theory, is beneficial for this very
reason; it elevates the personhood of the tree so that its treatment becomes an ethical
concern, something we take notice of. In practice, however, Lewis’ new hierarchy does
nothing to protect the abused horses. Even though personhood, as I have discussed,
supposedly comes with a phenotypic expression that sets those with souls apart from
those without souls, apparently speech continues to be the only consistent way to identify
personhood, as Tirian only realizes that the horses are worth his ethical concern when the
they speak up at the end of the passage. The confusion between who is person and who is
commodity—who can speak and who cannot speak—reveals the challenge intrinsic to
separating ontological categorization from species distinction. While language is a
measurable trait, like reason it has no phenotypic expression, and can therefore, in a
moment’s glance, be difficult to differentiate between those who have it and those who
do not. Additionally, the fact that Tirian expects the horses to be used for labor proves
that protection from commodification is contingent on the ability to speak. The dumb
horse’s purpose in Narnia is to be ridden, just as the dumb fish’s purpose is to be eaten, or
the dumb stag’s is to be hunted.

\(^{22}\) Aristotle, in the first book of *Politics*, sketches out a hierarchy which locates plants at
the bottom, below both man and animals (6). In Pico’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*,
which adopts much of Aristotle’s philosophy similarly claims that plats occupy the rungs
the beasts on the chain of being.
Sprinkled throughout *Narnia* are examples of anthropocentrism getting the best of Lewis’ radical argument. This scene with Tirian and the horses is one example. Lewis poignantly pulls away from his radical rearrangement of personhood and the species divide in the moment when Tirian likens what he assumes are “dumb, witless animals” to “the horses of our own world” (Lewis 608). “Our,” here refers to the human narrator and his human readership. In this line Lewis acknowledges that the animals in the reader’s world are also “dumb” and “witless;” they cannot speak, and thus are not considered persons. The experimental hierarchy that Lewis arranges in Narnia has no practical bearing on the reader’s world because there are no talking animals that populate it. As long as speech remains the qualification for personhood, it does not matter that Lewis has separated the language divide from the species divide, since there is no other species in the reader’s world, but humankind, that can speak (that is, speak in accordance with the Cartesian definition discussed at the start of the chapter). Without the presence of speaking animals, Lewis’ new hierarchy merely replicates the traditional humanist hierarchy and reinscribes the categorization of the animals of “our world” as soul-less. This precludes the reader from extending them personhood, and therefore, allows the treatment of animals as commodities to continue in both theory and practice.

Another example of Lewis’ teetering between anthropocentrism and its opposite, is his careful selection of the animals he makes “Talking Beasts,” and those which he allows to be eaten. To ensure that the divide between those animals that can be eaten and those that cannot be eaten remains clear to the child reader, Lewis does not allow the two categories to overlap. We know that it is egregious to eat a talking stag partially because we hear the Giants say that the stag tried to talk them out of eating him, but also because
we see Aslan pick out the stag to be made a talking beast during creation (Lewis 608, 69). Of all the “Talking Beasts” in Narnia, Aslan must have “passed over” the cow, pig, fish, and chicken during creation (69). These animals only appear in Narnia at meal time, on the plates served to the “Talking Beasts.” Meat is not a forbidden food in Narnia; in fact, it is a staple of the many meals and feasts we see throughout the series. Rather than establishing in his supposed world a state of pre-fall vegetarianism, Lewis carefully maintains a discernable divide between those animals that we can eat and those that can speak. He ensures that the reader will know how to judge the actions of those bad characters—the ones who eat “Talking Beasts”—and simultaneously protects from guilt any child who might become attached to the character of a talking cow (making sure that reading his series will not inflict any ethical dissonance the next time the child sits down to eat his/her mother’s beef stew).

Lewis does allow the child to imagine the capacity for some animals to speak, but in the process he also exacerbates the humanist notion that some animals—particularly those that we eat—are so sub-person that we conceive of them as nothing more than meat “machines” (Descartes 167). Lewis’ intentional demarcation between talking species and dumb species shows the child which animals they should even attempt to extend personhood to, and which they are permitted to treat as commodities. Those animals which get the most speaking time in the series fit into four categories: those that we keep as pets in the human world (like dogs and cats), noble creatures (like horses, bears, and leopards), cute woodland creatures (like mice, badgers, and rabbits), and mythical creatures (like unicorns and centaurs). By elevating these species to personhood in the series, they are person-ified in the child’s imagination. While they cannot speak in the
human world—some of them do not exist there at all—these talking animals lend an imagined identity to what is otherwise a homogenous species. A child, for instance, might be less inclined to incur violence on a mouse with the thought of the beloved Reepicheep in his/her mind. Lewis does not lend the same assistance to the “meat animals.” He gives them no speech, no identity, and often no body. The parts of the animal that we consume are dissociated from the animal body itself. We receive images of ham strung up in the Beavers’ house and jugs of “creamy milk” and lumps of “deep yellow butter” on the dinner table, preventing us from putting a face to the food, let alone attaching any empathy to the dead beasts (Lewis 143). Thus, Lewis constructs greater bounds between the species that man is meant to care for, and those that he is meant only to use. While perhaps he does not, through the series, provide the species represented by “Talking Beasts” the moral protection that personhood would promise, Lewis does at least provide them with emotional protection (they will be protected, at least partially, by the child’s emotional connection to the characters they meet in the Narnia series, who put names and voices to animal faces). Even if we do not view these animals as Puddlegum does—as kin—we might acknowledge them, like Digory does, as friend. Therefore, consumption of these beasts might not be cannibalism, but it is, at the very least, murder. That being said, the same protection is not extended to the animals that we eat, and this distinction further stratifies the chain of being to the detriment of the “meat animals.”

Whether or not Lewis’ treatment of “Talking” or “Dumb Beasts” inspires their treatment in the human world as persons, the work Lewis does to denaturalize the categories that define personhood does disrupt the cogs of the ever-churning “anthropological machine” (Agamben 26). While Lewis’ radical anti-anthropocentrism is
inevitably contained by its opposite, he persists in making the reader rethink the assumptions about categorization and personhood that govern our ethical beliefs. As I argued in the previous chapter, while Lewis does not succeed in evacuating anthropocentrism from the text, his work does undercut the myth that this anthropocentrism is natural. Through his experimentation with the mechanisms of humanism, Lewis draws back the curtain on this ideological apparatus to reveal the many cogs at work, functioning in overdrive to manufacture the human category and uphold its exceptionality.
CONCLUSION

At the very end of *The Last Battle* Lewis writes an exchange between Emeth, the Calormene soldier, and some dogs:

“And this is the marvel of marvels, that he called me Beloved, me who am but as a dog—”

“Eh? What’s that?” said one of the Dogs.

“Sir,” said Emeth. “It is but a fashion of speech which we have in Calormen.”

“Well, I can’t say it’s one I like very much,” said the Dog.

“He doesn’t mean any harm,” said an older Dog. “After all, we call our puppies *Boys* when they don’t behave properly.”

“So we do,” said the first Dog. “Or girls.”

“S-s-sh!” said the Old Dog. “Remember where you are.” (Lewis 757)

I have read Lewis’ series paying particular attention to the animal, but in this comedic exchange between species Lewis’ own concern about the humanist assumptions that govern our understanding of the world surface the most clearly. The dogs question Emeth’s “fashion of speech”—a “fashion of speech” that I am sure we have all used in some form or another—forcing us to question it as well. This portion of dialogue represents in microcosm the conversation that the series as a whole has with the humanist tradition that surrounds it, and sometimes even with itself. Lewis questions the assumptions that have become “fashion,” or second nature, experimenting with them and imagining alternate realities to prove that these ideological “fashions” are anything but natural. Lewis turns Emeth’s idiom on its head, imagining its inverse form in the dogs’
vocabulary. Lewis similarly denaturalizes the categories and hierarchies that make up the humanist ideology. Those beliefs that seem obvious, and often benign to us—for example, man’s special status in the eyes of the Creator—are exposed as having serious implications. Emeth’s idiom offends the dogs, but the Calormene ideology that permits such a “fashion of speech,” as well as the abuse of all animals (even speaking animals), shows the dangerous potential of such an anthropocentric perspective. The pang of discomfort that the reader feels when we hear our own name—“boy” or “girl”—used as a curse word gives us a comedic glimpse at what it might be like to occupy the un-favored rung on the chain of being. And perhaps he is not as direct as Maxwell, but Lewis indeed “recruits” the reader in this moment (Althusser 191). Both little “boy” and “girl” readers are hailed in this scene. When they squirms at the idea that their name is a bad word, the child readers acknowledge that the hail was addressed to them, and are interpellated into an ideology that considers the possibility for other species to possess personhood (191). The child’s “schema,” which has been shaped by Lewis’ contemporary writers, is rearranged by the voice of a new ideology (Wolfe 568).

In this thesis I have used an animal studies intervention to understand the work that Lewis does to parse through the assumptions that make up the child’s etiological and ideological education. His supposal thought experiment challenges readers to reconsider the story of origin that has been packaged so intentionally to interpellate them into an anthropocentric ideology. While Lewis, in the series, grapples with the assumptions more than he overtly overturns them, and sometimes contradicts his own efforts to displace anthropocentrism in the text, his work questions the assumptions that the ideological
apparatus has naturalized. Thus, his series throws a wrench in the “anthropological machine” in which his contemporary writers choose to act as facilitating cogs.

This project has examined only a couple of the many moments of tension that an animal studies intervention opens up in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The work I have done so far would lend itself well to further investigation in the treatment of evil in Narnia. Lewis connects the problem of evil very closely with the problem of almost-humanness. He writes in the first book of the series: “That’s why she’s [Jadis, the White Witch] bad all through…true enough…there may be two views about humans…but there’s no two views about things that look like humans and aren’t” (Lewis 147). Lewis identifies this almost-humanness as a problem of categorization, writing that “when you meet anything that’s going to be human and isn’t yet, or used to be human once and isn’t now, or ought to be human and isn’t, you keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet” (147). These characters occupy a liminal space between the human and the animal which transgresses the categorical boundaries around the human and is therefore not to be trusted. The anxiety surrounding mythical half-humans, or the animals that are too human-like for comfort, echoes the humanist anxiety regarding “the precariousness of the human” (Agamben 30). The “anthropological machine” exists for the purpose of refuting such beings, and works tirelessly to exclude the non-human in an effort to manufacture the pure human, some “extreme figure of…human[ness]” (38). Lewis mostly aligns the “intermediate animal” with evil, but not always (25). His inconsistent treatment of these creatures seems to both convey the inevitable threat they pose to the human identity and question whether blurring the boundaries between the human and the animal is as dangerous as the “anthropological machine” suggests. A study of these almost-human
characters, like the White Witch and Shift the ape—the troublingly human-like ape that
tricks Narnia into believing in a false god, all for selfish gain—as well as the very human
characteristics that they use for sinister purposes, would enrich our understanding of
Lewis’ fraught relationship with humanist ideology, and open up insightful
reconsideration of the human animal divide.


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