

Supernatural Perspectives and Redemption in *the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*: A Counter View to Literary Naturalism

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Abstract

*This paper explores how C.S. Lewis's positioning of supernatural themes in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* through the nuanced character development of Edmund Pevensie deliberately contrasts the deterministic perspectives ingrained in Literary Naturalism. Initially embodying pessimistic traits, Edmund undergoes a moral transformation due to Aslan's divine intervention, characterised by supernatural transcendence and transformative love. Aslan's Christ-like sacrifice and resurrection due to his unwavering belief in Edmund's capacity for change starkly contrasts Literary Naturalism's deterministic principles and pessimistic outlook. The narrative unfolds in Narnia, a fantastical realm constructed by Lewis as an antithesis to Naturalism. Nature in Narnia actively responds to the characters' moral choices, unlike being indifferent as in Naturalistic Literature. Edmund's journey becomes a vehicle for Lewis to transcend Naturalism, presenting a narrative rich in supernatural perspectives and themes of redemption, love, and the transcendence of predetermined destinies. Through Aslan's intervention, Edmund's trajectory defies Naturalistic predictions, ultimately culminating in his coronation as King Edmund the Just. This study illuminates how Lewis, influenced by his antithetical stance towards Naturalism, infuses Narnia with profound spiritual and moral dimensions, offering a narrative that subverts deterministic norms and enriches the thematic depth of the story.*

Keywords: *Naturalism, Determinism, Nature, Divine Intervention, Supernatural.*

Introduction

C.S. Lewis, the esteemed literary scholar, authored *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a heptalogy of children's fantasy novels published between 1950 and 1956. The series features imaginative characters like talking beasts and more lifelike ones like the Pevensie siblings. Arranged by their respective ages, the Pevensie siblings include Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy (Sammons 71). At the story's outset, the four siblings relocate to the countryside home of their guardian, Professor Digory Kirke, due to war. Within the professor's residence, the siblings discover an enchanted wardrobe that takes them to Narnia, a fantasy land, where their adventures become a significant narrative thread throughout the series. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first published book of the novel

series, the author intricately charts the character development of the Pevensie siblings. Starting with challenging circumstances, the Pevensies embark on a journey that ultimately leads to their coronation as rulers of Narnia, reflecting a significant character transformation reminiscent of the archetypal hero's journey. (Neal 12) However, within the Pevensie quartet, a distinct examination of Edmund's character progression in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* reveals a depth beyond the traditional hero's journey archetype. The intricacies inherent to Edmund's character position him as a compelling exemplar of E.M. Forster's concept of a round character, as outlined in *Aspects of the Novel* (Makaryk 317). Edmund's nuanced character trajectory serves as a vehicle for C.S. Lewis to present a supernatural perspective in contrast to some principles of Literary

Naturalism. This analysis of "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" explores C.S. Lewis's portrayal of Edmund Pevensie's character arc as an endeavor to transcend the confines of Literary Naturalism by presenting a nuanced narrative that incorporates supernatural perspectives and challenges deterministic principles, thereby enriching the thematic depth of the story. **C.S. Lewis's Antithetical Stance Towards Naturalism** C.S. Lewis maintained an antithetical perspective towards ideologies related to Naturalism, specifically within the framework of his Christian convictions and literary works. As a Christian apologist, Lewis frequently contended against the proposition of positing the material realm as the exclusive reality and asserting that all phenomena are explicable solely through Naturalistic and Scientific paradigms. In most of his writings, Lewis advocated for a comprehensive understanding of reality that includes spiritual and transcendent aspects consistent with his Christian philosophical framework (Yuasa 21–25). In 1947, Lewis authored *Miracles*, presenting a counter stance against an exclusively Naturalistic worldview and furnishing a robust argument supporting the plausibility and intellectual consistency of miraculous events rooted in his Christian beliefs. However, during a debate at Oxford, some philosophical underpinnings of Lewis's contentions against Naturalism in *Miracles* encountered critique from the analytic philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe. In response to this critique, Lewis made extensive revisions to a chapter, and these changes ultimately appeared in the 1960 edition of the book (Brazier 59–60). Therefore, it is evident that Lewis actively challenged Naturalism in the 1950s while concurrently crafting *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and other instalments in the Narnia series.

Narnia: An Antithetical Domain to the Principles of Naturalism

C.S. Lewis has constructed his fantasy land, Narnia, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* as an antithetical domain to the tenets of Naturalism. Apart from emphasising magic, mythical creatures, and the supernatural, the narrative design of Narnia inherently opposes the basic principles of Literary Naturalism. Within a Naturalistic framework, Nature is indifferent to human suffering (Thompson 56). However, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis utilises the same to orchestrate a form of poetic justice, wherein the natural world reflects and responds to the characters' moral choices. For instance, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the White Witch's evil reign over Narnia is mirrored in the long winter, freezing the land and plunging it into darkness. Conversely, Aslan's arrival brings hope, initiating a spring thaw and revitalising the land. (Brown 162–65)

A research article in the academic journal *Children's Literature in Education* presents Nature in Narnia as a driving force behind "good's triumph over evil." (Selden). Contrary to a passive observational role, Nature in Narnia actively facilitates self-realisation in individuals. As noted by Martha C. Sammons in one of her writings, upon entering Narnia, everyone undergoes a degree of internal transformation and identifies their latent qualities (Sammons 63). In contrast to the inherent pessimism of Naturalistic novels, *The Chronicles of Narnia* transmits hope, even amid complex and challenging circumstances. Although Lewis considered the world bleak, he found optimism in the Christian outlook. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis presents an idea of the world as an 'enemy occupied territory' and Christianity as the account of Christ, the rightful king, reclaiming it for the greater good of his people (Lewis 44). From a Christian allegorical perspective inherent in *The*

Chronicles of Narnia, Aslan, the majestic Lion who governs the kingdom of Narnia, symbolises Jesus Christ. (Veith 66) While Lewis disagreed regarding Aslan as a symbol, it is noteworthy that he explicitly acknowledged Aslan as a suppositional incarnation of Christ. (Lickona and Pike 73). Aslan represents hope and redemption for the inhabitants of Narnia, just as Christ does for Christians. When Mr. Beaver claims that “wrong will be right” (Lewis and Robinette 27) and sorrows will end once Aslan returns to Narnia, he echoes the writer of Revelation, who wrote that Jesus would wipe away all tears at his second coming (“Revelation 21:4 (NIV)”). Within the realm of Narnia, under the watch of Aslan, Edmund’s character development follows a narrative path that defies any predictions one might formulate through the lens of Literary Naturalism. Edmund Pevensie’s moral and spiritual transformation in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* challenges Literary Naturalism’s deterministic depiction of characters, as it ultimately stems through his own free will and the intervention of the supernatural being, Aslan.

Survival of the Fittest: A Pervasive Theme in Naturalistic Literature

Naturalism’s core principles are connected closely to the scientific understanding of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin. (Strauch 108) Based on Darwin’s evolutionary theories, Herbert Spencer devised the concept of “survival of the fittest,” which also underlies many works of fiction based on Naturalism. According to Darwin’s theory, creatures born into favourable circumstances with suitable features have a greater chance of survival than other species since they can adapt to their environment more effectively (Logan et al. 567). Applying this theory to human society, Social Darwinists argue that individuals displaying higher adaptability, intelligence, and

resilience are likelier to succeed and gain prominence. In contrast, those with weaknesses or inadequacies may encounter obstacles in their societal progression and influence, mostly succumbing to a tragic fate. (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The pessimistic destinies of characters deemed weak in Literary Naturalism stem from its Social Darwinistic undertones and an emphasis on determinism, a concept opposing free will that asserts that individuals have limited control over their fate. (Encyclopaedia Britannica) In Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the tragic destiny of the titular character implies that “one’s life conforms to the demands of the struggle, or it is extinguished.” (Fitelson) Despite Jurgis Rudkus finding a glimmer of hope through socialism at the end of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, the irreplaceable loss of his family vividly captures the essence of determinism.

Analysing Edmund’s initial character from the lens of Darwinistic Determinism reveals the characteristics contributing to his limited adaptability within his environment, aligning him with individuals who usually face diminished survival prospects under challenging conditions.

Edmund’s Traverse Across the Challenges of Narnia

Within the realm of Naturalistic Literature, characters often grapple with survival challenges in unforgiving, fiercely competitive settings, a theme subtly mirrored in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where Edmund and his siblings find themselves in an unfamiliar Narnian environment, setting the stage for their survival endeavours. Nonetheless, it becomes apparent that except for Edmund, the remaining Pevensie siblings, under the guidance of the Beavers, embark on a journey to locate Aslan, the benevolent and formidable Lion, as their strategy for

ensuring their survival. In contrast, Edmund pursues a distinct course of action due to his apparent lack of prescience concerning the complications of Narnia. Edmund's pride and lack of proper foresight into the inherent complexities of Narnia contribute to his vulnerability to the machinations of the malevolent Queen Jadis, the imposter ruler of Narnia, whose false promises he opts to believe. Queen Jadis, also known as the White Witch, is ambitious to kill the Pevensies and stop an ancient prophecy about them taking over the throne of Narnia. She adeptly manipulates Edmund's shortcomings, particularly his self-centred tendencies and susceptibility, to her advantage. Edmund's inability to make sound moral judgements is evident through his interactions with the White Witch. Despite the malice of the White Witch, Edmund remains oblivious to her nefarious intentions due to his intense desire for the Turkish delight that she entices him with. In addition to using the sweet temptation of the Turkish delight as bait, the evil queen strategically lures Edmund by pledging to elevate him to a princely status within Narnia contingent upon his compliance with her malevolent objectives. Edmund, driven by his unbridled appetites and selfish ambitions, commits an act of treason against his siblings by disclosing their whereabouts to the White Witch, who intends to harm them all. From a deterministic perspective, the prospects for Edmund's redemption seem bleak, as his inherent tendencies isolate him from his siblings within Narnia and steer him toward a pessimistic trajectory, presenting minimal opportunity for personal transformation and a victory over fate.

Aslan's Intervention: A Catalyst for Redemption

Aslan's intervention in Edmund's life marks a turning point in the narrative, challenging the deterministic perspective and introducing the possibility of redemption. As a character, Aslan goes beyond a

mere advisor or mentor; he represents divine intervention, a force surpassing human limitations and deterministic principles. In the fantastical world of Narnia, Aslan embodies a dual symbolism, portraying the majestic essence of a lion—historically regarded as the king of the wild—while also functioning as a Christ-like figure, symbolising supernatural transcendence. (Holt) Aslan's involvement in Edmund's rescue demonstrates a seamless integration of Nature and the supernatural, challenging Naturalism's principles that deny supernatural influence in personal transformation and assert Nature's indifference to human suffering. Failing to capture or destroy any of the Pevensies under Aslan's protection, the Witch devises a plan to sacrifice Edmund to thwart the prophecy. Aslan's timely intervention, dispatching forces to rescue Edmund, prevents the execution of the Witch's scheme. Following the rescue, Aslan's protracted conversation with Edmund emphasises his unwavering belief in Edmund's inherent capacity for goodness despite his earlier transgressions. While the text does not delve deep into the conversation, Edmund's positive transformation after the conversation indicates a renewed perspective, likely influenced by Aslan's potential counsel urging him towards virtuous behaviour. (Downing 102)

Aslan's Belief in Edmund's Capacity to Change

Aslan's unwavering belief in Edmund's capacity for change finds profound expression in his ultimate sacrificial deed, wherein he offers his life as a substitute for Edmund's. Upon the exposure of Edmund's duplicitous actions, the imperatives of the Deep Magic of Narnia decree the surrender of his life as restitution for his betrayal. Seizing upon this opportune moment to eliminate Edmund and fortify her authority over Narnia, the White Witch

vehemently insists on executing the mandated penalty. The White Witch, asserting her rightful position as the designated executioner of traitors in the realm of Narnia to Aslan, explains the dire consequences of interference, articulating that the land will “perish in fire and water” (Lewis and Robinette 44) should anyone attempt to obstruct her fulfilment of executing a traitor like Edmund, in alignment with the imperatives of the law. The White Witch’s warning of the land perishing in fire and water in response to any interference with her execution of Edmund underscores Nature’s active role in maintaining moral order. In contrast to being a passive observer, as in Naturalistic novels, Nature, infused with the potent force of Deep Magic, functions as a guardian of justice in Narnia, guaranteeing that consequences align with the established laws.

Nevertheless, embedded within the profound Deep Magic is an option that provides a glimmer of optimism amid the shadows of Edmund’s death warrant. This provision stipulates that if a willing substitute, untainted by the crime, offers themselves in sacrifice, the life of the guilty party may obtain pardon. This provision allows Aslan, driven by his unwavering love and compassion, to step forward and offer his own life to the Witch in exchange for Edmund’s, mirroring the selfless sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of humanity. Aslan, recognising the depth of Edmund’s remorse and his potential for redemption, willingly takes upon himself the burden of Edmund’s sins, demonstrating the extraordinary depth of his love and selflessness. (Ruud)

The Reversal of Death and the Redemption of a Traitor

Aslan’s sacrifice shatters the shackles of Edmund’s death sentence and paves the way for his redemption. (Misener) The White Witch’s assertion,

aligning with the truth of the Deep Magic, that the land will “perish in fire and water” in case of interference with the execution of Edmund gets subverted by a more profound truth: that within the realm of Narnia, it is love rather than fear that serves as the sustaining force, possessing transformative and healing capacities. Aslan imparts this wisdom to Lucy after his resurrection, elucidating that according to an even Deeper Magic unbeknownst to the White Witch and predating the dawn of time, the willing sacrifice of an innocent victim for a sinner nullifies the consequences of death due to the transformative power of love in the act of self-sacrifice (Lewis and Robinette 50). While the novel does not explicitly address whether Edmund becomes aware of this act of unconditional love—given that only Lucy and Susan are privy to Aslan’s sacrifice—the sacrificial gesture gives Edmund the space to transcend his preordained fate and positively alter the course of his life. In the final battle against the Witch, Edmund, standing with his siblings on Aslan’s side, decisively shatters the Witch’s wand, symbolising his rejection of her tyranny and marking a turning point in his character arc as he ultimately sheds his traitorous identity and embraces the mantle of a virtuous hero. Edmund’s transformation journey culminates in his rule as King Edmund the Just.

The epithet “the Just” implies Edmund’s unwavering adherence to ethical principles, a testament to the transformative power of Aslan’s sacrifice and Edmund’s unwavering determination towards self-improvement.

Conclusion

Through Edmund Pevensie’s character development in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis presents a counterview to deterministic perspectives ingrained in Literary Naturalism. Initially exhibiting

pessimistic traits such as self-interest, susceptibility to manipulation, and a penchant for decisions driven by personal gain, Edmund undergoes a profound moral transformation catalysed by Aslan's intervention. Aslan's intervention, resembling the divine act of Jesus Christ, embodies the transformative potential of love, crucially moulding Edmund into a just and virtuous ruler in Narnia, paralleling Christ's intervention that transforms the repentant sinner into a possessor of eternal life

The unwavering belief of Aslan in Edmund's capacity for change, his self-sacrifice for Edmund's redemption, and the transformative influence of love inherent in the Deeper Magic of Narnia collectively serve as appealing counter perspectives against the deterministic principles advocated by Literary Naturalism. Edmund's journey signifies the intrinsic potential for redemption, the transformative efficacy of love, and the capacity to transcend predetermined destinies, all of which adhere to Christian supernatural values in stark contrast to the fundamental tenets of Literary Naturalism.

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