The Shortest Way Home? A Geo-critical Return to C.S. Lewis's *Prince Caspian*

Sharon Jones

1 Introduction

C.S. Lewis achieved remarkable popular renown during his lifetime. But after his death in 1963, his name become known in households across the globe, both in the Anglophone world and beyond. The success of the Chronicles of Narnia played an important part in generating this appeal. For example, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has been translated at least 129 times, and the Narnia series as a whole exists in some forty-seven different languages.[1] In geographical terms, Lewis is perhaps most closely associated in the popular imagination with Oxford and, to a lesser extent, Cambridge; he spent most of his life teaching and writing in these great English university cities. His readers are perhaps rather less likely to connect his name immediately with the Northern Irish province of Ulster, or specifically to Belfast, the city of his birth.

Pioneered by Bertrand Westphal in France, geo-criticism harnesses the lens of geography in literary study to yield fresh insights. Specifically, the approach addresses the relationship between both physical and social geography and the creation of literary texts. Westphal called for an exploration of the organic relationship between human spaces and literature as a way to explore the complex issue of cultural identity.[2] According to Robert T. Tally Jr, 'geocriticism approaches texts as literary maps that, regardless of the ostensible

1. Betsy Susan Morgan, 'Lisa Tetzner's Translation of C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*', *Inklings Forever* 9 (2014), 102–108, <https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol9/iss1/12>.
2. Bertrand Westphal, *Géocritique; réel, fiction, espace* (Paris: Minuit, 2007), 17.

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real or imagined space depicted, help us to understand our world'.[3] As Westphal put it, 'la littérature fournit un complément à la géographie régionale: elle permet de transcrire l'expérience des lieux […]; elle exprime une critique de la réalité ou de l'idéologie dominante'.[4] According to Caren Kaplan, 'topography and geography now intersect literary and cultural criticism in a growing interdisciplinary inquiry into emergent identity formations and social practice'.[5]

Geo-criticism falls under the broader umbrella of 'spatial literary studies' characterised by an emphasis on space, place, and mapping.[6] Tally points out the value of this approach in the analysis of literature, including Lewis's Narnia stories:

> Many literary works are complemented with maps, whether actually included in the text or merely projected and held in the mind of the reader, which are intended to help guide the reader through the storyworld or geography of the text; this convention is equally valid in works where the setting is a "real" place such as James Joyce's Dublin, a mythic zone like that of Dante's tripartite afterlife, an imaginary realm à la C. S. Lewis's Narnia, or some combination of all of these, as in William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County.[7]

In this paper I will argue that the importance of Ireland and the Northern province of Ulster for Lewis, with respect to the Narnia series in particular, is worthy of renewed focus. Specifically, I wish to consider the relevance of Lewis's Irish identity in a geo-critical analysis of his 1951 novel *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia*. To achieve this, I read Lewis's work through the lens of the geography and culture of Ireland, and especially his home province of Ulster.

It is my contention that in *Prince Caspian* Lewis not only calls the reader's imagination to explore the past and its stories but invites us into consideration of a specifically Irish past. Thus, just as the protagonists in the Narnia stories

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3. Robert T. Tally Jr, *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination* (Indiana University Press, 2018), 47.
4. Bertrand Westphal, *La géocritique mode d'emploi* (Limoges: Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 2011), 57. 'Literature provides a complement to regional geography: it permits the transcription of the experience of places […]; it gives expression to a critique of reality or the dominant ideology'.
5. Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 144.
6. Robert T. Tally Jr, 'Introduction: The Reassertion of Space in Literary Studies', in Robert T. Tally Jr (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Place* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 3.
7. Tally Jr, 'Reassertion of Space', 1.

embarked on adventures that brought rich, even transformative learning, readers of *Prince Caspian* stand to be educated through Irish history and mythology. Moreover, an imaginative consideration of the past has the potential to deepen understanding of the present, and to point towards better ways to move into the future. In this respect, it could be argued that in a time of global conflict and ecological crisis, and the centenary (at the time of writing) of the Partition of Ireland in 1922, *Prince Caspian* presents lessons that are particularly pertinent. The paper will consider important themes that emerge in this second volume of the Narniad, including colonialism and conflict, and ecology, and argues for their enduring relevance both in Ireland and beyond.

2 Lewis's Identity as an Irish and Ulster-Scots Writer

In Ireland today there is no centre for Lewis studies, and there are relatively few Lewis scholars who are Irish. Of these, one contemporary scholar with a keen interest in Lewis and his writing is Alister McGrath, educated in Belfast at Methodist College, the school attended by Lewis's mother Flora. McGrath has spent much of his adult life as an academic in Oxford and has written and lectured extensively on Lewis. John Lennox, raised in Armagh, is another distinguished Irish scholar who recalls attending Lewis's lectures as an undergraduate student in Cambridge. Like McGrath, and Lewis before him, Lennox has made his home in Oxford and refers to Lewis often. As public intellectuals and Christians, Lennox and McGrath share common ground with Lewis; in a sense, he might be seen as a forerunner for both.

David Clare points to two significant studies of Lewis as an Irish writer, by Terence Brown and Ronald Bresland respectively.[8] Both were written before the publication of Lewis's *Collected Letters*.[9] Clare suggests that as Lewis was an Irishman and an outsider to English life, he tended to adopt the stance of an observer. Considering possible reasons why Lewis did not promote himself more actively as an Irish writer, Clare posits that he did not wish to be confined within the parameters of the Irish Literary Revival but rather to be counted with other Anglo-Irish and English writers that he perceived to have a more enduring greatness. This reluctance may be one reason why readers in the decades since have tended to associate Lewis more immediately with England, his adopted home.

In his biography of Lewis, McGrath highlights the potential importance of political sympathies in the development of attitudes towards Lewis's identity as

8. Terence Brown, 'C.S. Lewis: Irishman?', in *Ireland's Literature: Selected Essays* (Mullingar: Lilliput Press, 1988), and Ronald W. Bresland, *The Backward Glance: C.S. Lewis and Ireland* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast, 1999).
9. David Clare, 'C.S. Lewis: An Irish Writer', *Irish Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2010), 17–38.

a writer, within Ireland itself. He states that 'One of the reasons why Ireland has largely chosen to forget about Lewis is that he was the wrong kind of Irishman'.[10] It is likely that the 'wrong kind of Irishman' McGrath has in mind is a Protestant Unionist from the northern province of Ulster. Yet, as Clare highlights, Lewis's maternal grandmother, Mary Warren, was a supporter of Home Rule, and Lewis himself as a young teenager supported her views.[11] Letters to his childhood friend Arthur Greeves seem to suggest that these political views were not confined to Lewis's teenage years; he expressed awareness that his opinions about Ireland might have proved controversial, even distressing, for some within his social circles in Belfast, Greeves included.[12]

Lewis was undoubtedly fond of Ireland, returning to visit at regular intervals throughout his life, and keeping in touch faithfully with childhood friends, including Greeves, who continued to live there. His correspondence with Greeves makes plain a particularly close and enduring friendship, and Lewis's published letters to him offer a rich source of insights into Lewis's life and experience. Lewis's letters to Greeves are coloured by a nostalgia for the land of his birth, even if his affections were somewhat divided. For example, he writes:

> I often think how lovely twould be if you could take up this city of Oxford bodily and put it down somewhere
> 'by a northern sea'
> between the mountains of Donegal'.[13]

This kind of nostalgia, even homesickness, also infuses the writing of Seamus Heaney, another literary giant from Ireland's north who moved away from his family home in mid-Ulster and settled elsewhere. Unlike Heaney, who was educated at St Columb's College in Derry and later at Queen's University Belfast, Lewis's formal education in Ireland was short-lived. He was sent to boarding school in England with his brother, Warnie, just a few weeks after his mother's death. Due to illness, he did return to Belfast and attended Campbell College during the autumn term of 1910, but after completion of formal schooling in England he was tutored privately in Surrey in preparation for Oxford entrance by William Thomas Kirkpatrick, formerly master of Lurgan College, in County Armagh.[14]

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10. Alister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis – A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2013), 13.
11. Clare, 'C.S. Lewis: An Irish Writer', 19.
12. C.S. Lewis and Arthur Greeves, *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 1914–1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979), 172.
13. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 564, 188.
14. Bresland, 38.

Even after the sale of his childhood home, Lewis continued to visit Ireland, bringing his wife, Joy, to County Down in 1958 to spend part of their honeymoon at the Old Inn at Crawfordsburn. This was close to Greeves's home and to East Belfast, where Lewis lived as a child. The couple later travelled further north and experienced together the 'blue mountains, yellow beaches, dark fuchsia, breaking waves, braying donkeys, peat-smell and the heather just then beginning to bloom'.[15] And in the closing years of Lewis's life, he held on to the hope of a holiday with Greeves in the picturesque village of Portballintrae, on the north coast of Ulster, between the ancient ruins of Dunluce Castle, the seat of the McQuillan and MacDonnell clans, and the Giant's Causeway.[16] This area that Lewis knew well formed part of the ancient Kingdom of Dalriada which embraced the north Irish coast and its close neighbour, western Scotland, with its spiritual capital and beacon of pre-Reformation Christian faith, the island of Iona. In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis mentions Samuel Johnson's image of Iona in ruins in his *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*.[17]

There are strong affinities between Ulster and Scotland. In fact, Lewis could be identified as an Ulster-Scots writer, given his Ulster Protestant upbringing, the Scottish connections in the maternal Hamilton branch of his family, and his ease in the use of Ulster-Scots parlance. His correspondence with Greeves suggests that family holidays to Scotland's West coast were important among their social circle and that the Lewis family numbered among their close friends at least one Ulster Scots enthusiast in William Hugh Patterson, literary translator and author of *A Glossary of Words in Use in the Counties of Antrim and Down* (1880). Patterson's son Bill would later publish a volume of poetry about Ulster.[18] Lewis's discovery of the writing of George MacDonald from Aberdeenshire is well documented, and many see MacDonald as a significant influence on Lewis's interest not only in faith but in the kind of flora, fauna, and fairy tales that the north of Ireland shares with Scotland.

3 Colonialism, Conflict, and Local Culture

Although Lewis appeared to maintain an emotional attachment to the North of Ireland throughout his life, it is generally held that, perhaps surprisingly, he did not write much about the turbulent politics of the place. It is important to note that Ireland as a whole is, as Seamus Deane pointed out, 'the only Western

15. C.S. Lewis, *Collected Letters, Volume III, Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950–1963* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), 967.
16. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 564.
17. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1943), and Michael Ward, *After Humanity* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021), 56
18. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 142.

European country that has both an early and a late colonial experience'.[19] In Deane's view, while English novelists 'brooded on the failure of Englishness in imperial and other foreign territories', writers in Ireland looked back to the legends of her pagan past.[20] As a young man, Lewis's identity was complex: a Protestant of Welsh, Irish, and Ulster-Scots extraction, born in the closing years of the nineteenth century in Belfast, the provincial capital of Ulster in Ireland's north, and living in the heart of cultural and academic England in the university city of Oxford.

Writing about Yeats, Edward Said explained that he can be understood to belong not only to Ireland, British culture, and European modernism but also to 'the colonial world' that in his day was 'bringing to a climactic insurrectionary stage, the massive upheaval of an anti-imperialist resistance in the colonies, and of metropolitan anti-imperialist opposition that has been called the age of decolonization'.[21] Britain's presence in Ireland was part of this global issue. In a similar way, Lewis belonged to Ireland and lived in a world in which Britain was a contested colonial power. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that experiences of colonisation emerged in his work as a recurrent theme. In Said's view, colonised land 'is recoverable at first only through the imagination', and this was made possible through literature, a particular brand of anti-imperialist literature characterised by 'the primacy of the geographical'.[22]

Lewis's letters to Arthur Greeves suggest that political upheaval in Ireland did matter to him. He wrote of discussing home rule with Theobald Butler, 'an Irishman and nationalist' whom he 'liked exceedingly'.[23] He also wrote that he felt increasingly well-disposed to Irish nationalism, given his ' interest in Yeats and Celtic mythology' and 'a natural repulsion to noisy drum-beating, bullying Orangemen'.[24] In 1921 Lewis observed 'provincialism, narrow Ulster bigotry and a certain sleek unreality' in members of his family's Northern Protestant social circle who came to visit him in Oxford.[25] Lewis's quietness about Irish politics might be attributed to a fear of offending; Warnie noted an intense focus on Irish politics in their Unionist family home in Belfast.[26]

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19. Seamus Deane, introduction to Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, and Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 3.
20. Deane, introduction, 9.
21. Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, 69–70.
22. Said, 'Yeats', 77.
23. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 183.
24. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 196.
25. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 289.
26. Brown, *Ireland's Literature*, 161.

The Narnia stories were initially conceived in Lewis's imagination in 1914 and were eventually published between 1950 and 1956. *Prince Caspian* went to print in 1951, but according to Walter Hooper, Lewis had completed the novel in December 1949 and had it ready to show to his friend Roger Lancelyn Green.[27] Around the same time, Lewis was working on his autobiography. McGrath suggests that 'Lewis's surge in creative genius during the late 1940s and early 1950s led to the writing of the Narnia series' and that the relationship between the two projects was strong.[28] As Michael Ward reminds us, Lewis was writing under the ominous shadow of global war, a war that had inflicted heinous personal wounds and changed his life irrevocably.[29] It is also important to note that between 1914 and 1950, broadly the first half of the twentieth century, Ireland was the setting for intense civil violence and tumultuous political upheaval, especially leading up to and just after the partition of the island in October 1922. Hundreds of people died in riots in the city of Belfast alone. Civil unrest and paramilitary violence played out against a backdrop of fear coupled with unjust discrimination against the Catholic minority in the North. One of the most poignant atrocities was carried out in February 1922 in Weaver Street in Belfast, in which a bomb killed a group of Catholic children playing beside a lamp-post.[30] The lamp-post was an important feature in children's games in the streets of Belfast during Lewis's childhood years. They were often used for swinging, and it is quite likely that Lewis would have remembered seeing children playing around lamp-posts in the streets of East Belfast close to his home. That children lost their lives while at play is tragic. It may be a strange coincidence, simply, that Lewis included a lamp-post in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, just after Lucy entered Narnia. On the other hand, we know that for Lewis, pictures were very important, and the association of a lamp-post with the death of a group of young children may have been a powerful one.

The marking of the centenary of the partition of Ireland has proven to be a source of some controversy, highlighting the strength of feeling around political divisions that persists in Ireland today.[31] Lewis would have been familiar with

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27. Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 404.
28. Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 10.
29. Ward, *After Humanity*, 4.
30. Cormac Moore, 'Why Don't We remember the Weaver Street Massacre in Belfast?', *The Irish Times*, 13 February 2022, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/why-don-t-we-remember-the-weaver-street-massacre-in-belfast-1.4797959>.
31. Freya McClements, 'Northern Ireland at a Crossroads as Partition Centenary Underlines Divisions', *The Irish Times*, 3 May 2021, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/northern-ireland-at-a-crossroads-as-partition-centenary-underlines-division-1.4553701>.

such passions. Moreover, as part of the Protestant ascendency his family may have had genuine reason to be fearful and anxious about the security of their own situation; riots broke out among workers in the great shipyards, companies owned by wealthy Protestants moving in similar social circles to the Lewis family. This kind of violence may well have been a factor in sending young men to mainland Britain to school, in search of a better future. There was continuing sporadic violence in the years following partition, with a murderous Irish Republican Army campaign in the North of Ireland in the early 1940s. Lewis himself had made a short visit to Ireland for a holiday with Arthur Greeves in June 1947.[32] He appears to have eventually made a subsequent visit also, after aborted attempts, in March 1951.[33] These years were a period of significant change in historical terms in Ireland, with the Republic of Ireland becoming established as a state in 1948.

If Lewis was relatively silent in specific terms about the Irish conflict that he and his family had experienced, he was unmistakeably drawn to the past. He argued in 'Learning in War-time' that

> Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated man is merely temporary fashion.[34]

For Lewis, looking back into previous times had an important educative role.[35] Certainly, Lewis's academic publications reflect a predilection for old books and bygone ages.[36] In particular, Lewis's scholarly engagement with sixteenth-century literature would have directed his mind to colonialism. And at the same time, Lewis witnessed in his own lifetime the decline of the British Empire; India gained independence in 1947, just three years before the publication of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

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32. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 510.
33. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 519–520.
34. C.S. Lewis, 'Learning in War-Time', in The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 58–59.
35. In his preface to *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), Lewis writes that Owen Barfield, to whom the book is dedicated, 'taught me not to patronize the past, and has trained me to see the present itself as a "a period". I desire for myself no higher function than to be one of the instruments whereby his theory and practice in such matters may become more widely effective' (viii).
36. John V. Fleming, 'Literary Critic', in Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 15–28; 26.

Although not overtly specific to Ireland, there are threads woven throughout Lewis's fiction depicting colonisation: imperialistic invaders, the suppression of culture, and the exploitation of natural resources. These have been noted in the critical literature already, as outlined by Clare.[37] It might be argued that in *Prince Caspian* the atmosphere established by Lewis is particularly imbued with an awareness of history, colonialism, and conflict. The children arrive on an island known for seafaring in the middle of a civil war – a conflict that has to do with restoring a rightful prince to a throne that has been usurped. The child protagonists are dressed in medieval battle clothes, and they witness a great Council of War. Repeated usage of the vocabulary of war, coupled with references to historical conflicts, establishes what Michael Ward regards as a martial atmosphere. Even Reepicheep the mouse is described as 'martial', and at the end of the story Peter and Edmund become knights.[38]

From the outset of the story, Lewis draws readers' minds to days and ages gone by. There are multiple references to the passing of time, and the vocabulary Lewis uses reflects things temporal. The narrative is punctuated with phrases like 'ages ago', 'a year ago', 'at present', and 'presently'. This establishes an emphatic contrast between the present and the past, and in many ways the writing appears to be infused with nostalgia for former glories. For instance, there are the previous adventures and games remembered by the children: 'It brought back – oh such lovely times. And I remembered playing chess with fauns and good giants and the people singing in the sea and my beautiful horse – and – and –'.[39]

In the opening chapter, as the children begin to explore their new surroundings, there is a sense of *déjà vu*. They come to realise that they have reached the ruins of Cair Paravel, its stone walls now surrounded by ancient apple trees that together form the orchard that the children had planted many years before. The reader is aware of activities of return, even if little time seems to have passed in the intervening period. For example, Edmund remarks:

> You know that, however long we seemed to have lived in Narnia, when we got back through the wardrobe it seemed to have taken no time at all? […] And that means […] once you're out of Narnia, you have no idea how Narnian time is going. Why shouldn't hundreds of years have gone past in Narnia while only one year has passed in England?[40]

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37. David Clare, 'C.S. and the Irish Literary Canon', in *Irish Anglican Literature and Drama: Hybridity and Discord* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 87–121; 105–106.
38. Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88.
39. C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (Middlesex: Puffin Books, 1975), 23.
40. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 34.

Prince Caspian tells his Uncle Miraz that he wished he 'could have lived in the Old Days'.[41] He associates the past with mythical creatures: talking animals, forest dwellers, battles and adventures, and, ultimately, Aslan. Miraz consigns these to the world of the imagination, calling them 'nonsense' and a 'pack of lies'.[42] Doctor Cornelius, the young Caspian's tutor, liked history best of all the academic subjects; as it turns out, he is a history teacher, a vocation underpinned by a value placed on the past. Importantly, the view of history education in schools in the novel appears low: 'The sort of "History" that was taught in Narnia under Miraz's rule was duller than the truest history you ever read and less true than the most exciting adventure story'.[43]

On one level we know that Narnia exists as a world of the imagination, where time, as we understand it, is suspended. Lewis is careful to differentiate Narnia from England, as England is the world to which the children are accustomed. It is their primary, term-time world. Narnia, by contrast, is the world of the summer holidays, and for Lewis and his brother, Warnie, the world of the summer holidays was Ulster. Throughout the Narnia series, the children move between different worlds. In geo-criticism, 'space and narrative intersect not at a single point, but rather converge around […] interrelated issues'.[44] It is informed by an awareness of instability, movement, and the transgression of borders, and is thus particularly pertinent to writers with experience of migration. Having moved from Ireland to England as a young child, and having continued to move between the two places regularly throughout his life, Lewis is one such writer. It is of great interest that children in the Narnia books are often similarly on the move. Lewis may well have known a sense not only of adventure, given his regular travels as a child from Ireland to Britain by ship, and within and beyond Ireland by train, but of dislocation from Ireland after his move to study in England. It may even have seemed to him that Ireland and England existed in separate time zones or as different worlds. In *Prince Caspian*, the children's return to Narnia felt like time travel back to the past. It is quite possible that for Lewis returning to Ireland, particularly after the death of his parents, induced a similar experience of a return to former days, albeit in altered form.

History and memory are presented by Lewis in *Prince Caspian* as treasure stores. As the children recalled past experience in the opening chapters, their memories triggered by the objects they had found in the castle ruins, they felt

41. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 42.
42. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 44.
43. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 170.
44. Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), 3.

increasingly a recognition of being at home: 'do you remember the dwarf making that for me – do you remember drinking out of that horn? – do you remember, do you remember?'.[45] It is the children's sensory experiences – the twang of the bow, for example – that open up the remembrance of past adventures: 'that one small noise brought back the old days to the children's minds more than anything that had happened yet. All the battles and hurts and fears came rushing into their heads together'.[46] There is a certain similarity here with the evocative tasting of the *madeleine*, the little French cake baked in the shape of the scallop shell so strongly associated with medieval pilgrimage, which acted as a powerful key in the unlocking of memory in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu.* The recovery in *Prince Caspian* of the gifts that had been given and enjoyed in the past, although joyful, is tinged with a sense of loss of former things. For example, Susan finds her bow, but not the horn. And later in the story, the children find carvings they had made long before, in the tunnel.

It might well be argued that memories of childhood experience offered Lewis a similar treasure trove as far as the creation of books was concerned. Indeed, there are certain similarities in *Prince Caspian* between the recognition of Narnia as previously known by the children, upon their return, and Lewis's own nostalgia and renewed acquaintance with the landmarks and landscapes of his Irish homeland during the return visits he made. As Clare puts it, 'One wonders whether Lewis, in creating Narnia, was consciously or subconsciously re-creating the Eden he lost by being sent to school in England as a boy'.[47] Clare notes suggestions by critics that support this idea. For example, he cites the parallel between Cair Paravel and Dunluce Castle highlighted by David C. Downing, and the similarities drawn by F.S. Kastor between Ulster's Lough Neagh and the blue lake in *The Magician's Nephew.* Furthermore, a number of details in the Narnia books have strong Irish resonances generally. For example, as Nicole DuPlessis highlights, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* a room in the house where the children are staying which is hung with green and contained a harp.[48] Even the food the children eat in Narnia – fried fish, potatoes, yellow butter, milk, beer, and tea – seems to have something of an Irish flavour. It is notable too that Peter's battle is with a wolf, a prominent creature in Irish mythology. And importantly, the name of the housekeeper is Mrs Macready. Macready is an Irish Scots surname derived from *Mac Riada*, translated son of Riada. It is thought that this name originated in Donegal,

45. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 29.
46. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 30.
47. Clare, 'C.S. Lewis: An Irish Writer', 26.
48. Nicole M. DuPlessis, 'EcoLewis: Conservationism and Anticolonialism in *The Chronicle of Narnia*,' in Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd (eds), *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 115–27; 117.

but it is closely related to the aforementioned ancient kingdom of Dal Riada, with its castle seat at Dunseverick in the far north of Ulster and spiritual associations with the Christian communities in Iona and Holy Island in Northumbria.

In *Prince Caspian*, the arrival by the children into Narnia is achieved through the portal of a railway station associated with school holidays. Connections with childhood summers as experienced by Lewis are strong; the setting is an island with sandy beaches and castle ruins. As a child, Lewis spent several summers on the northern coast of Ulster, in the village of Castlerock. Writing to Arthur Greeves in 1916 he recalled these holidays:

> I have some vague memories of the cliffs round there and of Dunluce Castle […]. Don't you love a windy day at a place like that? Waves make one kind of music on rocks and another on sand, and I don't know which of the two I would rather have.[49]

Lewis admitted that he had some memories of the same coast that were not at all vague; he knew the area around Castlerock in County Londonderry particularly well, holidaying there with his mother and brother in 1901 and 1904, and arriving via the small railway station in the village that so intrigued him.[50] Arguably, the descriptions of place at the start of *Prince Caspian* are strongly reminiscent of Castlerock, with a lone sandy beach, clear water, and a wooded hinterland comprising the forest at Downhill Demesne. Lewis's mother Flora mentioned in a letter to her husband that her boys were excited about walking from Castlerock to Downhill during their summer holidays.[51] Close to the wooded 'Black Glen' at Mussenden, between Castlerock village and Downhill Strand, are the castle ruins of a grand Italianate house built by the 'Earl Bishop', Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry, largely destroyed by fire in 1851. Although there are strong resonances already documented between Cair Paravel and the much older castle ruins at Dunluce, it is notable that the seaside village in which Lewis holidayed as a child with his mother counted a ruined castle surrounded by woodland in its environs, and a railway line.[52] The estate itself at Mussenden includes dramatic sea cliffs through which a tunnel is hewn for the passing of trains. The demesne was known not only for its palatial house but also for its gardens and arboretum, especially a walled garden complete with an apple orchard. 'Old people remember baths in the house filled to overflowing

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49. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 105.
50. Sandy Millar, *C.S. Lewis and the Island of His Birth* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2013), 104–111.
51. Millar, *C.S. Lewis*, 111.
52. Bresland, *Backward Glance*, 10.

with apples and the branches of the berry bushes and a damson tree bending under the weight of fruit.'[53]

It has been noted that much walking takes place in the Narnia stories. Since childhood, Lewis and his brother were enthusiastic walkers, often covering great distances together while holidaying in the Irish countryside.[54] Upon their arrival in Narnia at the outset of *Prince Caspian*, as the children walk along the beach towards the river channel, the sea is on the left with the wood on the right. This is just how it is when walking from Castlerock towards Portstewart, Portrush, and the Giant's Causeway beyond. The two seaside villages of Castlerock and Portstewart are separated by the Bar Mouth, where the river Bann flows into the sea. Like the channel described at the start of *Prince Caspian*, it is about thirty or forty yards wide. Unlike Portstewart, situated on the east side of the river channel, Castlerock on the west is connected to Belfast and Londonderry by rail, and a small rural seaside station designed by Charles Lanyon was opened there in 1853, a source of fascination for Lewis as a child.

Apart from spending time holidaying in later life in Ireland, and remembering its places fondly, Lewis's personal library contained a number of books relating to his home country. The books owned by Lewis included in the catalogue of the Wroxton Library included fiction, plays, and poetry, alongside a number of notable biographical and cultural histories.[55] Of particular note is T.W Rolleston's *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*, published by Harrap in 1912, which explores the history and religion of the Celts and recounts the legends of the Ulster Cycle, featuring mythic boats, magic hunting horns, ancient arts of healing, princes, rings, horses, and brooches. The parallels between these creatures and artefacts and those featured in the Narnia stories are clear.

Lewis's engagement with Irish literature, as reflected in his work and correspondence, is discussed by Clare.[56] This aspect of Lewis's work has at times been disregarded. Particularly noteworthy is his admiration of Yeats. In 1916 Lewis wrote to Arthur Greeves that reading Yeats had reawakened his interest in 'things Gaelic and mystic'.[57] He would eventually meet the Irish poet in person in Oxford. Clare suggests that Yeats may even have provided inspiration for the character Ransom in Lewis's science fiction trilogy and traces

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53. 'Downhill Palace, The Lion Gates and Mussenden Temple', Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust, <https://binevenaghaonb.ccght.org/downhill-palace-lion-gates-mussenden-temple/> [accessed 26 Dec. 2022, para. 1 of 9].
54. Clare, 'C.S. Lewis: An Irish Writer', 20.
55. See Margaret Anne Rogers, *C.S. Lewis: A Living Library* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1970).
56. Clare, 'C.S. and the Irish Literary Canon', 90.
57. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 157.

a Yeatsian influence in Lewis's poetry. He presents the case that Lewis was influenced by a range of other Irish writers, including George Bernard Shaw, Jonathan Swift, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, Oscar Wilde, and George Berkley. In particular, Clare finds parallels between the attitudes of Lewis and Swift towards colonialism, concluding that,

> Given Lewis's Irish/British hybridity, as well as his diverse Irish literary influences and interests, it is not surprising that his oeuvre features some works in which the Irishness is completely overt […] and others in which it is present in a more occluded form.[58]

While Clare points out that Lewis 'implicitly critiques British colonialism' in his fiction and highlights a number of subtle allusions throughout his work to Ireland and its literature, he does not present a detailed account of Irish influence in the Narnia books.[59]

There has been much debate about how readers might interpret the Chronicles of Narnia. For example, since the publication of the first book in the series, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, critics have reached differing conclusions as to the extent to which they are allegorical. Bergen highlights this debate, noting that although most commentators accept that the stories are allegorical to some degree, critical opinion varies as to the way Lewis may or may not have chosen to employ allegory in the Narnia stories.[60] Of course, Lewis was well-informed in the use of allegory as a literary device, as his hefty monograph *The Allegory of Love* demonstrates.[61] Moreover, according to Bergen, 'Lewis was keenly aware of the allegorical potential of all fantastic stories'.[62]

In a letter to Arthur Greeves in 1914, Lewis considers the idea of writing a 'good allegorical story' based on Irish mythology.[63] His letters at that time also reflect a lively interest in Celtic mythology and 'faery forts', the focus of Rolleston's aforementioned book.[64] It is important to remember too that readers as well as writers bring their own imaginations to stories. In the case of Irish readers, imaginations are informed by an experience and knowledge of Irish life in all its dimensions: geographical, political, and cultural.

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58. Clare, 'C.S. and the Irish Literary Canon', 111.
59. Clare, 'C.S. and the Irish Literary Canon', 111.
60. Richard Angelo Bergen, '*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*: Mere Allegory or More Allegory?', *Journal of Inklings Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019), 43–62.
61. C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936).
62. Bergen, 'The Lion', 47; Fleming, 'Literary Critic', 17.
63. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 56, 57.
64. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 57.

What Bergen sees as problematic in terms of interpreting Narnia is what he terms 'hermeneutical exclusivism': a stance that allows no freedom for correlations between the stories and elements that lie outside of a given or received allegorical schema.[65] For a significant section of Lewis's readership, that schema has primarily been theological rather than related to Irish mythology, but perhaps these two were, for Lewis, related. In a letter to Anne Jenkins, Lewis described the focus of *Prince Caspian* as 'restoration of the true religion after a corruption'.[66] This has certainly been a preoccupation of many in the context of Ireland, both in Lewis's day and our own.[67]

In *Planet Narnia* Michael Ward addresses fundamental questions about the Narnia stories. He asks why they might have been written in the first place, and, secondly, why the stories do not appear to be, uniformly at least, allegorical. Thirdly, he wonders why there are so many seemingly disparate elements, ranging from the appearance of Father Christmas, echoes of E.E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, and violence. Finally, Ward considers reasons why the stories have come to enjoy such remarkable and enduring popularity. *Planet Narnia* presents a compelling case that Lewis was inclined to be secretive, not only in life but in writing, embedding or encoding his work with underlying, hidden messages. Ward presents a highly regarded interpretative framework drawn from medieval cosmology, a framework he believes to be very significant in answering each of the questions he poses in his book and a kind of key to unlocking the meaning contained in Lewis's stories and philosophy. Drawing on Lewis's concept of 'Donegality', broadly defined as the essence or essential quality of Donegal, Ward argues that each of the Narnia stories relates to a medieval planet and is coloured by its essence or characteristic atmosphere.[68]

As Ward reminds us, Lewis referred to a childhood fascination with Mars.[69] In his planetary framework, elements in the story of *Prince Caspian* are understood to resonate with the symbolic associations of this planet, namely conflict and sylvanism.[70] Furthermore, Ward sees this planetary symbolism as a key that can continue, over time, to illuminate the work upon each new reading. Accordingly, he has presented newly discovered pieces of evidence in support of his thesis, with particular respect to *Prince Caspian*, which emerged after his

65. Bergen, 'The Lion', 51.
66. Bergen, 'The Lion', 54.
67. Crawford Gribben, *The Rise and Fall of Christian Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 220.
68. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 98.
69. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 77.
70. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 87.

initial planetary thesis was conceived and published.[71] It is my hope that the arguments I make in this paper may serve a similar purpose.

Exploring possible reasons for Lewis's naming the protagonist 'Prince Caspian', Ward highlights geographical links to Scythia, an area between the Black and Caspian Seas, and the Caspian Pass, both of which feature in the classical literature familiar to Lewis. Ward presents several Martian allusions embedded in the text too, but he admits that they are 'all highly involved. There is subtlety and indirectness at play, so much so that some readers may be inclined to dismiss it as too complex to be believed'.[72] I am not qualified to comment on the validity of the classical or medieval threads that Ward finds in the novel's tapestry. However, I am emboldened to suggest that there is an arguably more obvious strand of geographical and cultural associations that could prove an important clue in unpacking the significance of *Prince Caspian* and perhaps Narnia more generally. In the case of *Prince Caspian*, the colour of this strand is emerald green: the colour of Ireland, Lewis's homeland.

It is notable that there are strong correlations between what might be perceived as 'martial' in *Prince Caspian* and what might be understood to be Irish. As a reader born in Belfast and still living, writing, and teaching in Ulster, I find it quite plausible that the planetary symbol Mars, which calls to mind war and forests, could be drawn upon to reflect something of Lewis's home place. For example, the feast day of the Roman god Mars was celebrated on 17 March, a date which has subsequently become the feast day of Saint Patrick, patron of Ireland. Crawford Gribben paints early Ireland as a melting pot of Celtic mystical religion and Roman polytheism, pointing out that '[e]arly Christians both rejected and appropriated the Irish religious past'.[73] 'Roman writers', Gribben argues, 'were the first to evaluate the religion of the Celts. They acknowledged that the gods of the Celts were very much like their own deities, and they interpreted them in that light.'[74] He points to small Roman communities in Ireland which may not have practised the Christian faith and notes that the church was careful to Christianise pagan festivals in Ireland.[75] St Patrick's Day aside, the feast of Saint Brigid, for example, is celebrated on the festival of a Celtic goddess. In Roman culture, 17 March was also the festival of Liberalia, or Bacchus, the god of wine. In Catholic Ireland this same date came to mark the lifting of the restrictions of Lent, thus allowing the imbibing of

71. Michael Ward, 'Return to Planet Narnia', *An Unexpected Journal* 1, no. 4 (Advent 2018), 91–106, <https://anunexpectedjournal.com/return-to-planet-narnia/> [accessed 26 Dec. 2022].
72. Ward, 'Return', para. 31 of 32.
73. Gribben, *Rise and Fall*, 35.
74. Gribben, *Rise and Fall*, 15.
75. Gribben, *Rise and Fall*, 21.

alcohol. And in Roman culture, the date marking the festival of Mars celebrates the coming of age into adulthood of young men. It seems fitting, then, that the valiant young evangelist Saint Patrick would be honoured on such a day. It may be significant too that Caspian's story has been aligned with Mars and, by association, its Roman, and later Irish, feast days.

Bacchus and Silenus appear on two occasions in *Prince Caspian*, in the company of Aslan. Silenus, the old man, offers refreshments in chapter 11, namely the most perfectly satisfying grapes:

> Really good grapes, firm and tight on the outside, but bursting into cool sweetness when you put them into your mouth, were one of the things the girls had never had quite enough of before. Here, there were more than anyone could possibly want.

The taking of the refreshments was accompanied by laughter, and by 'cries of Euan, euan, eu-oi-oi-oi-oi'.[76] In Greek, *Eu-oi* is an evocation of Dionysius. However, *Euan* is also a Celtic name associated with the yew, with all its mystical, pagan relevance. Mac Coitir goes as far as to propose that the etymology of the name Ireland itself may in fact derive from the yew tree.[77] Certainly the yew was closely associated with Ireland and with its ecclesiastical and monastic sites, including Glendalough. It is a tree held to be a sacred source of healing in ancient tradition, and even today it is considered to be regenerative, with pharmaceutical relevance.[78] The awakening of the trees in *Prince Caspian* seems to be accompanied by a healing of earlier wounds, exemplified in the incident of the budding of the stick when the man ceases from beating the boy with it. And afterwards, the trees form a fire that warms the children and acts as a beacon of light.

Later in *Prince Caspian*, Bacchus is instrumental in the revival of an elderly lady in a cottage who was very ill and about to die:

> She was at death's door, but when she opened her eyes and saw the bright, hairy head of the lion staring into her face, she did not scream or faint. She said, 'Oh, Aslan! I knew it was true. I've been waiting for this all my life. Have you come to take me away? / Yes, Dearest,' said Aslan. 'But not the long journey yet'.[79]

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76. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 138.
77. Niall Mac Coitir, 'Ireland–Land of the Yew?', *Archaeology Ireland* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2016), 38–40.
78. Patrick Barkham, 'Britain's Ancient Yews: Mystical, Magnificent – and Unprotected', *The Guardian*, 28 Sept. 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/28/britain-ancient-yews-mystical-magnificent-and-unprotected>.
79. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 173.

At the end of the chapter, Lewis informs his readers that the old lady was in fact Caspian's nurse. The placing of this statement at this point in the chapter lends it an intriguing degree of prominence. It has been suggested that this may be an oblique reference to Lewis's own nurse, Lizzie Endicott. Lizzie, of whom Lewis was very fond, had shared the ancient folk tales of Ireland and the legends of its ancient gods with him as a child. It is possible, then, that Caspian might actually be Lewis himself.[80] Irish readers might be reminded also by the old lady of Cuchullain's nurse in Ulster mythology. And in terms of Irish hagiography, Saint Brigid, patron saint of Ireland and on a par with St Patrick, was known as the patron saint of women in childbirth and thus associated with nurse figures. She was also the patron of poets and craftsmen.[81] Brigid was associated too with healing and provision, with cattle, and with the miracle of turning water into wine. More accurately, she was associated with the turning of water into ale, since wine was not produced in Ireland. Brigid's feast day, 1 February, is believed to usher in the end of harsh weather and mark the illumination of darkness, when winter gives way to spring. According to tradition, Brigid's remains were buried in Downpatrick in Lewis's home county of Down, alongside those of St Patrick and St Colmcille. Interestingly, given the closing sentence of *Prince Caspian*, interpreted by Ward as another Martian clue, a popular Irish hymn compares Brigid to a torch:

> I sing the praises of Brigid, she is dear to Ireland,
> Dear for generations, we all praise her.
> She is the bright torch of the Leinstermen, shining through out the land,
> The queen of the maidens of Ireland, the queen of women in gentleness[82]

Lewis's enduring interest in myth and fairy tales is well documented. Malcolm Guite argues that Lewis's *Till We Have Faces* is a 'reworking of mythic material to express contemporary insights and dilemmas'.[83] In terms of Ireland, '[a]lmost all Irish fairy tales are grounded in the idea that the Danaans, as an ancient race of artistic, magical, and wise people, are working wonders and mischief on the descendants of the Celts'.[84] It is fascinating to

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80. Devin Brown, 'Is Caspian Really C. S. Lewis?', *Christianity Today*, 22 April 2008, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/aprilweb-only/isthismancaspian.html>.
81. Dorothy Anne Bray, 'The Image of Bridget in the Early Irish Church', *Etudes Celtiques* 24 (1987), 209–215; 209.
82. Quoted in Sean O'Riordan, 'The Cult of St Brigid', *The Furrow* 2, no. 2 (Feb. 1951), 88–93; 92.
83. Malcolm Guite, 'Poet', in MacSwain and Ward, *Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 294–310; 298.
84. Richard Johnson-Sheehan and Paul Lynch, 'Rhetoric of Myth, Magic, and Conversion: A Prolegomena to Ancient Irish Rhetoric', *Rhetoric Review* 26, no. 3 (2007), 233–252; 237.

note that the name Danaan was also associated with the Greeks. This geographical and linguistic relationship between ancient Ireland and the classical Greeks,

> specifically [the] Achaeans, in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, may not be coincidental. According to the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, a compilation of Irish annals from the seventeenth century, […] Nemed, leader of the first Danaans, sails from the Caspian Sea to settle Ireland in about 2350 BC. So the Irish and Greek names may have originated in a similar geographic area.[85]

As Clare points out, Lewis did acknowledge the influence of Irish saga and myth, including the Ulster cycle, in his creation of Narnia.[86]

Writing to Arthur Greeves in 1931, Lewis made it clear that although pagan myths maintained a spontaneous appeal for him, they were 'mere beginnings – the first whisper of the wind from beyond the world – while Christianity is the thing itself.'[87] Ward brings Lewis's 'sincere respect for Paganism' to our attention, arguing that pagan espousal of traditional values 'had a moral stance that was superior to the vacuity of subjectivism'. A return to such an outlook 'would be the long way round, but it might well turn out to be the shortest way home'.[88] In Oxford, Lewis was surrounded by a circle of Catholic friends, most notably Tolkien, but also his doctor, Humphrey Havard, a convert to Catholic faith. In fact, Lewis dedicated *Prince Caspian* to Havard's daughter, Mary Clare. But, as Forster notes, the Lewis family in Belfast were staunchly Protestant, and Lewis may have felt hindered from converting personally to Catholic faith.[89] Tolkien was apparently disappointed about this and attributed Lewis's reluctance to an 'ulsterior motive'.[90] One important cultural difference between Irish Catholicism and Protestant faith in Ireland is their differing attitudes towards pagan mythology. In the context of Ireland, Lewis's openness to the myths of paganism might be characterised as more typical of traditionally Irish Catholic rather than Protestant faith and culture. An example of this might be seen in the cult of St Brigid, suggested by Gribben to have close connections to the veneration of a pagan goddess.[91]

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85. Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch, 'Rhetoric', 250.
86. Clare, 'C.S. Lewis: An Irish Writer', 26.
87. Lewis and Greeves, *They Stand Together*, 430.
88. Ward, *After Humanity*, 22.
89. Mary Forster, 'C S Lewis came so close to Catholicism', *The Catholic Herald*, 22 November 2013, https://catholicherald.co.uk/c-s-lewis-came-so-close-to-catholicism/.
90. Clare, 'C.S. Lewis: An Irish Writer', 24.
91. Gribben, *Rise and Fall*, p. 45.

As any Belfast native who maintains continuing associations with the city and its surrounding counties can attest, Lewis's roots were inextricably entangled in a history of colonialism, an experience of conflict, and a complex local culture in terms of identity and allegiances. Although it may not be immediately obvious to all readers, that Lewis's imaginative literature would be imbued with related preoccupations should come as no surprise.

4 Ecology

An awareness of Lewis's identity as a writer from Belfast may also be pertinent to understanding his ecological interests more fully. Lewis's emphasis on trees in *Prince Caspian*, for example, might be related to his attraction to Irish pagan myth. Early Ireland was characterised by a sensitivity to trees, and this was reflected in the Ogham alphabet.[92] As Marjan Shokouhi notes, citing Miranda Green,

> In Ireland, feelings of geopiety as well as regional and national identity have often evolved around trees like oak, hazel, holly, and ash, which carry strong cultural implications. In Celtic cultures, "Every tree, mountain, rock and spring possessed its own spirit or numen" which had the power to "both foster and destroy living things".[93]

Malcolm Guite traces in Lewis's poetry a concern for ecology and an emphasis on the special value of trees as early as 1938, in 'The Future of Forestry', casting him as 'in advance of his times and profoundly relevant to ours'.[94] Lewis's treatment of landscape, plants, and living creatures, in his fiction and in the Narnia series in particular, has garnered critical attention and continues to do so. Nicole DuPlessis's work is formative in arguing for the value of an ecocritical approach to Lewis's writing. She highlights Lewis's own love for nature and his concern about humanity's role in its demise.[95] DuPlessis sees *Prince Caspian* as arguably the 'most overtly political' of the Narnia books and contends that it 'introduces [Lewis's] readers to notions of exploitation and oppression of indigenous peoples through the "silencing" of nature'.[96] Importantly, in DuPlessis's reading, treatment of the environment and the injustices of imperialism and colonisation in *Prince Caspian* are intertwined. For Alison Waller, the natural environment is central to the construction of its

92. Gordon D'Arcy, 'Glenconkeyne: How Ireland's Largest Native Woodland Became the Timber Yard of the Plantation of Ulster', *New Hibernia Review*, 25, no. 2 (Summer/Samhradh 2021), 89–107.
93. Miranda Green, Animals in Celtic Life and Myth (London: Routledge, 1992), 1–2.
94. Guite, 'Poet', 305–306.
95. DuPlessis, 'EcoLewis', 115–127.
96. DuPlessis, 'EcoLewis', 120.

child protagonists, a process characterised by memory, and by dislocation and exile.[97] Margarita Carretero-Gonzalez focuses on Lewis's concern for animal welfare, finding resonances with the views of St Thomas Aquinas, who invited humanity to respect and care well for other living creatures. Narnia is beautiful, she argues, but marred by a 'breach with nature', one symptom of a fallen world.[98] Furthermore, the stories repeatedly depict the detrimental consequences of human mistreatment of the natural world. In *Prince Caspian*, for example, the trees rise up, ultimately, in battling the usurping, exploitative forces that they encounter. Deborah Klein sees Lewis's literary treatment of the natural environment as 'rhapsodic':

> For example, in the first published Narnia book, as the hundred-year winter of the White Witch melts, Lewis reveals in the space of nine ecstatic paragraphs firs, oaks, beeches, elms, celandines, snowdrops, crocuses, larches, birches, laburnums, mosses, currants, and hawthorns, not to mention singing waters and chorusing birds.[99]

Klein goes on to argue that Lewis calls humanity to stewardship of the physical world, according to the biblical model of Adam and Eve as they cared for the Garden of Eden. Klein argues too, however, reflecting the view of Carretero-Gonzalez, that although Lewis placed great importance on flora and fauna, he placed greater importance on human beings. In her reading of Lewis's fiction, Aishwarya Subramanian argues that he depicts Narnia as 'a space which can be possessed – essentially, a colonizable space'. And importantly, she sees his treatment of imperialism as 'informed by his Irish heritage'.[100]

It is my view that understanding Lewis's combined interests in ecology, Ireland, and the sixteenth century can prove helpful in reading *Prince Caspian*. In the early modern era, Ireland and the province of Ulster were heavily wooded. D'Arcy notes that Elizabeth I had granted estates of land in Ireland to notable figures, including Spenser and Sir Walter Raleigh, and that the new

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97. Alison Waller, 'Revisiting Childhood Landscapes: Revenants of Druid's Grove and Narnia', *The Lion and the Unicorn* 34, no. 3 (2010), 303–319; 310.
98. Margarita Carretero-Gonzalez, 'Sons of Adam, Daughters of Eve, and Children of Aslan: An Environmentalist Perspective on *The Chronicles of Narnia*', in Bruce L. Edwards (ed.), C.*S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy: Fantasist, Mythmaker, and Poet* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 93–113; 98.
99. Deborah Klein, '"They Have Quarreled with the Trees": Perverted Perceptions of "Progress" in the Fiction Series of C.S. Lewis', *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 32, no. 2 (2014), 65–80; 63.
100. Aishwarya Subramanian, '"The Whole Country Below Them": Gazing Imperially on Narnia from Above', *Space and Culture* 23, no. 4 (2020), 370–381; 372.

landowners cleared many trees. The scale of such operations was astounding. D'Arcy explains that '[a] grant of the Stuart administration to the Irish Society permitted the felling of 50,000 oaks, 100,000 ash, and 10,000 elms from the woods of Killetra'.[101] The English authorities, although aware of the exploitation of the forests in Tudor Ireland, did little to intervene. D'Arcy draws on the study of Irish literature and place names in a discussion of a number of creatures that may have disappeared with the forests' demise.

At the outset of her important study of Irish woodlands, McCracken points out that '[i]n 1600 about one-eighth of Ireland was forested; by 1800 the proportion had been reduced to a fiftieth as a result of the commercial exploitation of the Irish woodlands following on the establishment of English control over the whole country'.[102] Ireland's woodlands were an ancient treasure composed of an astonishing variety of trees, including 'birch, willow, pine, hazel, elm, oak, ash, yew, mountain ash, alder, juniper, bird cherry, whitebeam, and holly'.[103] The woods offered shelter not only to wildlife, including wolves, but also to dispossessed Irish, who came to be known as 'woodkernes', and later as 'tories'. Wolves and woodkernes were seen by the colonisers of Ulster as its most serious dangers, and rewards were offered for their capture. Certain species, such as the Scots pine, were reintroduced to Ireland by Cromwell, but the Plantation of Ulster, an agricultural experiment in colonisation of Ireland's north by the British, saw significant areas of timber felled and used for building or export. In the seventeenth century, Irish timber was used to manufacture ships, housing, and wine casks and to fuel iron furnaces.[104] Shokouhi highlights that it was in the sixteenth century that deforestation began in earnest in Ireland in order to meet the English demand for cheap timber required for shipbuilding. The felling of trees continued during the agricultural colonisation of land in Ireland by Scottish and English farmers, especially in Ulster. This had a significant adverse impact on natural habitats of animals as well as the human population.[105] It is worth remembering that one of Lewis's important and influential academic books was *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, part of the Oxford series on the history of English literature. This book was the fruition of many years of study of sixteenth-century

101. D'Arcy, 'Glenconkeyne', 95.
102. Eileen McCracken, *The Irish Woods since Tudor Times: Their Distribution and Exploitation*, Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971), 15.
103. McCracken, *Irish Woods*, 17.
104. McCracken, *Irish Woods*, 45.
105. Marjan Shokouhi, 'Despirited Forests, Deforested Landscapes: The Historical Loss of Irish Woodlands', *Études irlandaises*, 44, no. 1 (2019), 17–30.

England, the backdrop against which the drama of Ireland's colonisation and deforestation unfolded.

Ward is also careful to trace Lewis's recurrent references to trees and forests in *Prince Caspian*.[106] The children enter the world of the story through the portal of a railway station in wartime but have to emerge through a thicket onto a sandy beach beside a wood, 'such a woody place that branches were sticking into them and there was hardly room to move.'[107] Trees are constantly present, even at the beach; apple trees supply the children's diet, and cooking is made possible by use of firewood. There are the Wood People who cast spells and make prophecies, and there are awakening trees; the forest comes to life and moves, helping to secure victory for the children in the climactic battle. Forest animals feature too. These are associated by Ward with Mars: the wolf and the woodpecker, alongside the horse. However, these animals and trees are also closely associated with Ireland.

Caspian is made aware by his tutor that his 'great-great-grandcesters' had conquered the land. Cornelius informs him that his people were in fact Telmarine invaders who had colonised the homeland of the old Narnians. The history of the land in the story is marred by aggression towards the natural environment by the human inhabitants; from the point of view of Trufflehunter, 'Since the Humans came into the land, felling forests and defiling streams, the Dryads and the Naiads have sunk into a great sleep'.[108] It was the modernising Telmarines 'who silenced the beasts and the trees and the fountains, and who killed and drove away the Dwarfs and Fauns and are now trying to cover up even the memory of them'.[109] Yet when Aslan is present, and moves through the trees with Lucy, the trees assume human form. As they stir to life and move towards him when he roars, they become 'woods on the move. All the trees of the world appeared to be rushing towards Aslan. But as they drew nearer […], [Lucy] saw that it was a crowd of human shapes'.[110] The woods subsequently come to the aid of the children in the battle and in so doing they interrupt a history lesson in a school. According to Dickerson and O'Hara, the battle of *Prince Caspian* 'is really between what might be called *preservationism* (represented by the Old Narnians) and *exploitation* (King Miraz and his followers)'.[111] Preservationism would choose to operate inside the traditional values of the Tao. It is notable that Caspian loved the 'Old

106. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 90–91.
107. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 12.
108. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 73.
109. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 50.
110. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 36.
111. Matthew Dickerson and David A. O'Hara, *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 52.

Things'.[112] In the context of an Irish reading of *Prince Caspian*, preservationism and exploitation might be understood to be a question of values, whether cultural, political, or ecological, and they are particularly relevant to Ireland's experience of colonisation, as discussed earlier in this essay. Perhaps Lewis envisages the novel itself as a more engaging, imaginative revisionist account of Irish history and a more powerful form of education.

In the light of contemporary environmental concerns, both local to Ireland and global, Lewis's 1951 novel might be seen to be ahead of its time. The same might be said about its focus on the injustices of colonialism. The martial atmosphere established in the story that is highlighted by Ward still hangs over the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland, one hundred years since its inception, even as the region emerges from conflict into a longed-for, if fragile, peace. And, sadly, the dark clouds of conflict loom large on the global stage also, with wars and rumours of wars in various parts of the world, most recently in Ukraine.

The geo-critical lens adopted in this paper helps to unpack the significance and depth of Lewis's preoccupations, so deeply rooted as they appear to be in the landscapes, history, and culture of his homeland. These preoccupations infuse the imaginary world he creates in *Prince Caspian* and are of enduring relevance locally and globally. This essay's Irish reading of the novel thus brings into sharp focus the critical-hermeneutical vigour of geo-critical approaches to literary texts and to Lewis's work in particular. *Prince Caspian* addresses key moral and political dilemmas of enduring relevance, not only in Ireland but beyond. The story has the potential to educate and transform readers and thereby demonstrate the power of imaginative literature. In this way, geo-critical readings of Lewis's fiction may well shine a torch on the imagination as the shortest way home – for Lewis as well as his readers.

112. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 52.