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Editors
Apl. Prof. Dr. Annemarie Ambühl (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)
Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink (Universität Potsdam)
PD Dr. Christian Rollinger (Universität Trier)
Prof. Dr. Christine Walde (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)

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Contact
Principal Contact
Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de
Support Contact
PD Dr. Christian Rollinger
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de

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EMMA LJUNG
(Princeton University)

Ovid at Cair Paravel: Periodization and the Ages of Man in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*

Abstract Unlike many fantasy series, the *Chronicles of Narnia* have an explicit beginning, middle, and an end – a chronology. A mainstay of children's literature since their publication in the 1950s, the *Chronicles* have received a great deal of scholarly attention, but most of it directed to Christian allegorical themes. The way that Lewis composed his novels out of order, or the strategies with which he shaped the reader's expectations by doing interesting things with time, has gone largely unnoticed. Yet, in recent years scholarly approaches to the *Chronicles* have expanded to consider questions of mythology, cosmology, environmentalism, ideology, and even politics. This paper adds to that expansion by turning to the classical elements in the *Chronicles.* By examining the ways in which C. S. Lewis uses narrative techniques borrowed from Ovid's periodization in the *Metamorphoses,* this paper argues that Ovid was Lewis's main source of inspiration for devising a chronology for Narnia, and moreover, that we should not be surprised to find such a presence in Lewis's work. Although mostly remembered as a medievalist, Lewis wrote with a dizzying array of inspiration and influences, and to underplay his classical training is to obfuscate the subtlety in his compositional technique.

Keywords Chronology, classical reception, *Metamorphoses,* Narnia, periodization

Articles

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INTRODUCTION

'In the last days of Narnia, far up to the west beyond Lantern Waste and close beside the great waterfall, there lived an Ape.' So begins the first chapter of *The Last Battle,* the final novel in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia.* The next chapter echoes that end-of-days sentiment: 'About three weeks later the last of the Kings of Narnia sat under the great oak…' This ominously repeated emphasis on 'last' is suggestive of impending apocalypse and the end of Narnia as the reader knows it and has consistently been read as evoking – and indeed borrowing from – *Revelation.* Such a reading is aligned with the vast amount of scholarship on Lewis's Christian faith and its presence in his work. And although the purely allegorical reading of Aslan as Christ[1] and the *Chronicles* as reworkings of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Apocalypse[2] has given way to more nuanced understandings of Lewis's materials and the subtle ways in which the author engaged his faith to make the reader act upon the 'political implications' of the story[3], the reading of Narnia as Christian allegory remains persistent until this day.[4] It is perhaps because of that persistent lens that we fail to investigate how Lewis treats time in Narnia, how that 'last' is meant to function: the convincing Christian elements blind us to other alternatives.[5] But upon closer inspection, the division of time in Narnia – the elements that give it a chronology – follows not Biblical but classical precedents. In fact, the division of Narnian time draws from a surprising classical source: the Ages of Man in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* In this paper, I examine how Lewis used Ovid's approaches as a literary strategy for showing a change in time and to establish a chronology for his world. In Narnia, themes present in Ovid's periodization become vehicles for positioning reader and character in a world that is still the same yet also different because time has passed from novel to novel. Although Lewis does not *periodize* like Ovid

1 Wood (2003) 329.

2 Attebery (1980) 9.

3 Glasner (2014) 54–55 underscores the author's motivation to promote certain themes that function as a 'Christian call.' This is likely the reason for public criticism of Lewis's 'Christian propaganda' in the *Chronicles*: see e.g. Wolfe (2010) 174. Interestingly, Lewis himself argued that Narnia did not 'represent' anything: *Letters* 44–45.

4 Ravikumar et al (2018) 266 even call this 'recycling' the story of Creation.

5 In general, allegorical readings seem to focus mostly on the New Testament but Walls (2017) suggests that Lewis is more indebted to the Old Testament than what most scholars see.

does – Narnia only has one named age – he borrows subtly and effectively from the strategies the poet uses to demarcate between separate ages, and he does so because the passing of time is central to how the reader understands Narnia as a living world. Importantly, when viewed in order of composition, the *Chronicles* suggest that Lewis applied this strategy gradually, implementing more of Ovid's periodization as his world gained a beginning, a middle, and an end – a chronology. Consequently, periodization in Narnia underscores Lewis's competence in classical literature and offers an alternative to the canonical reading of Narnia as purely Christian allegory.

ALTERNATIVES TO ALLEGORY

To date, there is no published study of how Lewis intentionally draws on existing source material to describe the passing of time or how the concept of periodization operates within the *Chronicles.* This may be explained through subconscious cross-contamination: the obvious parallels between Aslan and Christ make us interpret the *Chronicles* as a Biblical journey through time from *Genesis* to *Revelation*: one Christian theme infers the existence of another. One may also suspect the genre Lewis wrote in – mythologized fantasy for children – for not inviting consideration of layered complexity in the author's process. Yet, the *Chronicles* are not just for children, and books for children are not separate from the mind of the adults who wrote them. To Maurice, books for children involve 'by definition an element of ideology' – the presence of the adult author.[6] And as Beckett demonstrates, the *Chronicles* are better understood as crossover literature, written for *all* readers, and Lewis himself argued that a children's story that is only enjoyed by children is not a good story.[7] And within this crossover space, scholars are gradually discovering room for alternative readings of Lewis's work that neither compromise the Christian allegorical reading nor stop at accepting those readings as the sole mode of explanation. Manlove, for example, suggests that while Lewis wrote 'mythopoeia within a resonant literary and Biblical tradition' and the story of Christ clearly informed *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe,* the Narnia books are best understood as 'a remarkable mix-

6 Maurice (2015) 4.

7 Beckett 2009; *On Stories* 45–65.

ture of literary influences' ranging from Milton and Spenser to H. C. Andersen and Beatrix Potter.[8] Other scholars have uncovered elements of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in Lewis's work whose long academic career was devoted to medieval and renaissance literature.[9] These underpinnings have been explored at length by Ward, who convincingly argues that the *Chronicles* are modeled on a medieval cosmological tradition, each Narnia novel mapping onto a planet with its associated mythological themes.[10] Ward's argument seems to have opened the door for new interpretations of Narnia, even among scholars who accept the allegorical reading. Chapman, for example, maintains that the division of books roughly follows a *conception* of the Christian narrative but is convinced by Ward's cosmological reading.[11] In other words, there are other ideologies and mythologies at work in Lewis's world that coexist with Christian elements.[12] To that end, scholars now assess Lewis's academic training as a medievalist and its echoes in his work.[13] But the rich literary tradition with which Lewis wrote also included a classical presence. Recently, Slater has examined elements of classical myth in Narnia which function as 'classical memories' that playfully bubble up here and there without necessarily following the story patterns from their original contexts.[14] In *Prince Caspian,* for example, Bacchus steps straight out of Roman mythology.[15] Slater's concept of 'memory' is important because it underscores that Lewis wrote with a repertoire of influences and themes but also that he may not always have made a conscious decision to borrow specific content from his sources. Crucially, this subconscious reading invites consideration of Lewis's creative process because the strategies he implemented while writing might illuminate how deeply he had internalized certain myths, themes, or con-

8 Manlove (1993) 6.

9 Daigle-Williamson (2015) 157.

10 Ward (2008).

11 Chapman (2012) 13 n 3. Burton (2020) 358 also accepts this reading.

12 See for example Dickerson and O'Hara (2009) who takes an environmental approach to the *Chronicles.*

13 Niedbala (2006) reads *The Silver Chair* as the Odyssey, and Montgomery (2000) also suggests that it has Homeric elements.

14 Slater (2015) 171. Edwards (2010) 66 agrees that Greek and Roman myths exist in Narnia although 'they are seldom harvested.'

15 *PC* 159–160.

cepts. Although none of these scholars look at the concept of periodization, their interpretations illuminate the possibilities of discovering deeper complexity and additional modes in Lewis's work. And crucially, their work establishes that the presence of allegorical elements does not mean that Lewis cannot also periodize in ways that he learned from Ovid or that he cannot draw from his wealth of knowledge of classical and medieval literature while composing his work as a Christian. In fact, I posit that Lewis not only operated on several levels at once – Christian allegory, medieval cosmology, classical mythology – but that he drew with finesse on his detailed understanding of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* a text that has had unparalleled presence yet little acknowledgment in the retelling of classical myth for children.[16] Although this paper focuses on Ovid in the *Chronicles,* understanding his presence in Lewis's work, no matter how subconscious Lewis's use of his work, may provide a first step toward acknowledging the Roman poet's influence on children's fantasy at large.

OVID AND THE AGES OF MAN

Periodization, although a concept for a modern historian to describe historical structures in the past, is not a modern invention.[17] In fact, when Ovid wrote his *Metamorphoses* and divided mythical time into discrete, titled ages, he was not inventing a new way of thinking about the past. Already in the first century BCE the Romans were making use of a wide range of criteria and concepts to divide the past into periods.[18] For Ovid, the core concept that sits at the center of his epic is metamorphosis, transformation. Although most research on the *Metamorphoses* focus on fantastical changes and transfigurations in the pursuit of love, Kennedy suggests that this concept can 'serve to organize the way we

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16 Crucially, all these elements – cosmology, mythology, periodization, a medieval Nachleben – are wrapped up in Ovid's work. On Ovid's reception in the Middle Ages, see e.g. Dimmick (2002).

17 For an introduction to how the Romans conceived of the past, see Flower (2010). Rosen (2004) emphasizes how varied the approaches were with which ancient cultures addressed the concept of time.

18 Hay (2019) 233.

think about history.'[19] Through transformation, we see the passing of time, event following event, the present becoming the past: transformation and periodization, then, have similar utility as a narrative technique. No Roman historian would consider *Metamorphoses* actual history, of course, but the techniques and structures in the work suggest to the reader that we are 'hearing the narrative of events' the way we might approach history.[20] By 'flattening out distinctions' and 'exaggerating differences' between eras, Ovid employs periodization the way a historian would.[21] Moreover, the poet combines chronological order with analogic order into a 'vague and indefinite chronology' which suggests that the work is intended to convey a temporal quality – a sequencing of eras.[22] This is nowhere clearer than in the section commonly referred to as the Ages of Man.[23] Here, Ovid lays out the prehistoric phases of humanity, starting in a Golden Age of absolute purity and ending with doom in the Iron Age having passed through the Ages of Silver and Bronze. Each age is characterized by certain elements that did not exist in the previous age. For example, the Golden Age is described as an eternal spring – *ver erat aeternum*[24] –, but in the next age, seasons are introduced – *exegit quattor annum.*[25] In fact, Ovid intentionally separates his ages from one another by emphasizing their differences and lack of continuity: nothing that existed in one age will continue unchanged into the next. In the Silver Age, cattle have been domesticated and are used to plow the fields – *pressique iugo gemuere iuvenci*[26] – but in the Iron Age, those gifts of agriculture are not enough; instead, man extracts baneful metals from the earth – *nocens ferrum ferroque nocentius aurum prodierat* – leading to war and crime.[27] Ovid, then, periodizes by first characterizing an age and then exaggerating its differences. Never subtle in

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19 Kennedy (2002) 231. Michelakis agrees that periodization 'shapes *perception* of change' (my italics) which is useful to control the passage of time (2008) 219.

20 Rosati (2002) 271.

21 Hay (2019) 216.

22 Rosati (2002) 277–278.

23 Ov. met 1, 90–150.

24 Ov. met 1, 107.

25 Ov. met 1, 118.

26 Ov. met 1, 124.

27 Ov. met 1,141–142.

their differences, these characteristics function as temporal walls or bookends, neatly terminating one age for the emergence of the next. These discrete walls infer that not one element can go unchanged from one age to the next: there is either newness or decline because Ovid shows the passing of time through change. In the Golden Age, man lives in harmony with the natural environment, but in the following age, trees are felled to build houses, animals are tamed, the earth is tilled: that harmonious relationship between man and nature no longer exists which signals to the reader that time must have passed because the world is changed. Crucially, this 'temporal signaling' makes an age immediately identifiable as there can be no mistaking it for another era. Moreover, as a narrative technique, periodization enables Ovid to influence his reader's understanding of the past: so different from the reader's contemporary experiences, those long-lost ages require scaffolding to make sense as human prehistory. In other words, by treating the mythological origins of man as vaguely temporal – eras marked by identifiable differences – Ovid makes them more believable as history. And it is that explicit intended outcome for the reader, periodization generating a sense of history, that Lewis needs in the *Chronicles.* Importantly, in the Ages of Man, periodization has a retrospective quality: Ovid describes a time that is so distant from contemporary Rome that it is shrouded in mystery. This retrospective approach to history in part what makes Ovid's strategies so useful for a storyteller who, in a sense, is writing about something that is already over – stories set in an unfamiliar past.

THE PASSING OF TIME: CHANGE IN NARNIA

Narnia, of course, has only one explicitly named age: the Golden Age when the Pevensie children ruled at Cair Paravel, and it would be a mistake to seek direct comparisons between Ovid's eras and Lewis's treatment of time. Lewis, after all, does not technically periodize. Yet, the core approach to *change* in Ovid's periodization – the discontinuity of something old and the invention of something new, a *transformation* – echoes through Lewis's work. Because the passing of time is central to the relationship between reader and story, the methods with which Ovid periodizes become narrative strategies for how Lewis shows his reader that the Narnia they have just arrived in is not the exact same world that they experienced in the previous novel. But how? Importantly, although some of the *Chronicles* have a narrator who directly or indirectly addresses the reader,

that narrator never addresses the passing of time: only occasionally are we told which time period the novel is set in, and in those cases, only two eras are mentioned, the Golden Age under Pevensie rule and Narnia's 'last' days.[28] Instead, the passing of time is always placed within the reader's own experience of the text. Lewis achieves this by destabilizing the reader in several ways, but it is always through the characters who *experience* the change.

Lewis's most immediate and most obvious approach is to use setting. By always shifting the location the characters arrive to, and by establishing a clear visual difference between the two locations, Lewis suggests to his reader that they are in a time different to what they experienced in the previous novel. Notably, the 'coming and going' between novels never happens in the same place although it can be repeated within the same novel.[29] In *Voyage of the Dawn Treader,* Eustace leaves Narnia at the edge of the world, but in *The Silver Chair,* he arrives to the quay of Cair Paravel, a place he has never been before, and in *The Last Battle,* he arrives in the ancient forest of Lantern Waste far away from Ettinsmoor. The Pevensie children leave Narnia through the wardrobe in the Lantern Waste at the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* but they arrive in an unfamiliar, dense forest by a sandy beach in *Prince Caspian.* The arrival place both *is* different and *feels* different. The shifted setting immediately destabilizes the reader: although we know that we are in Narnia, we are not in the *same* Narnia that we just experienced in the previous novel. But the shift in setting to denote the passing of time extends beyond the location of initial arrival. Not two novels are set in the same location within Narnia: when Edmund and Lucy return in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader,* they do not even set foot in mainland Narnia as Lewis sets the entire novel in the Lone Islands. Eustace spends his entire first visit to Narnia at sea but in *The Silver Chair,* explores the northern moors on foot. Moreover, even when the characters revisit previously known locations, those places are experienced differently. The Stone Table, for example, the setting for Aslan's sacrifice in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and a place of intense trauma and grief for Lucy and Susan, is described in *Prince Caspian* as an ancient, broken thing,

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28 The narrator indicates that *The Horse and His Boy* is set in the Golden Age and mentions the at-that-point-distant era in *SC* 47: 'But I haven't the time to tell it now, though it is well worth hearing.'

29 The most obvious example is the wardrobe that both Lucy and Eustace use to enter Narnia before the four Pevensie children enter Narnia together in *LWW.* Each time, the wardrobe places them in the same snowy forest. See Jenkins (2003) for how Lewis uproots the coming-and-going in *The Last Battle* by turning literal readings into allegory.

'too magic a thing for any common use', but without any emotional resonance: all it holds is immeasurable age.[30] This intentional shift in setting closely mimics Ovid's use of place to show a shift: in the Silver Age, man tills the earth but in the Iron Age, he sails the seas, having left the fields behind.

But setting itself is not a sufficient vehicle to tell the reader that time has passed. Lewis also employs a variety of creatures to suggest change. In a sense, the Narnian creatures become reminders of a world having changed: there are no badgers in *The Silver Chair,* but at an earlier time in Narnian history – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian* – they played an important role for the plot. Similarly, a marsh-wiggle takes center stage in *The Silver Chair,* a creature mentioned in no other novel and it is unclear if the creature even existed in earlier periods. And although many Narnian creatures exist and indeed get reused throughout the *Chronicles* – most notably centaurs, Dwarfs, and dryads – they are most often bystanders and not part of the plot. For the reader, the outcome is immediately felt: the Narnia of fauns living in comfortable caves in the forest or beavers in cozy dens has become a Narnia where marsh-wiggles, like humans, build huts and live in bleak villages. Society has changed because time has passed, and the world is different – a technique straight out of Ovid's playbook.

And yet, sometimes changing the setting and placing different Narnian creatures at the center of the plot is not sufficiently impactful to show the passing of time, or at least not sufficiently specific in determining *how much* time has passed. In those cases, Lewis uses ruins. The most obvious example is Cair Paravel which in *Prince Caspian* has fallen into such a ruinous state that not even the Pevensie children whose home it was for most of their Narnian lives recognize the castle for what it is. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* the castle is described as a massive, wonderful place with an ivory roof, visible from far away, but in *Prince Caspian,* it is so overgrown with trees that the building itself is not even recognizable as architecture at first glance, and it takes the Pevensie children several hours to recognize where they are. Notably, not until they overcome their confusion about the ruins can they accept that they are in Narnia. Moreover, ruins also play an important role in creating a retrospective. In *The Silver Chair,* ruins are central to Jill and Eustace's quest to find Prince Rilian, and Lewis intentionally makes their age a point of confusion. The ruinous city south of Harfang is so old, its origins so obscure, that even Prince Rilian – an educated

30 *PC* 95.

Narnian – misreads them. Jill and Eustace read UNDER ME, thinking that the ruins cover an entrance to a lost underground city, but Rilian refutes this, instead suggesting that the inscription is an ancient epitaph to a king buried long ago.[31] Importantly, Rilian's alternative interpretation underscores that so much time has passed that it is reasonable to both accept that all meaning has been lost and that things can become so ruinous that they are no longer recognizable for what they once were. In other words, ruins function as a deliberate shorthand to tell the reader that Narnia has aged – and in the case of *The Silver Chair,* is now an old country with an almost mythical prehistory.

In this shift of setting to denote the passing of time, Lewis often lets his characters experience a prolonged moment of confusion, thereby destabilizing the reader's expectations. For example, when arriving to the sunny beach in *Prince Caspian,* the Pevensie children *hope* they are in Narnia, but see nothing in their surroundings that supports this hope. Everything they see confuses rather than clarifies: the beach is empty, there is no sign of life, and there are no recognizable cues to where they are. Even when they find the ruins and begin to interpret the architectural layout of the former castle, they remain uncertain of their whereabouts until they find unmistakable evidence that they are at Cair Paravel: a little chess-knight of gold that they had played with when kings and queens of Narnia. And even then, the passing of time seems so monumental, so unbelievable, that Edmund has a hard time accepting it.[32] Since they experienced time 'normally' when they were last in Narnia and so much Narnian time seems to have passed in a single lived year, Edmund's confusion will not quite let go of him. He is only convinced once the evidence is irrefutable – in this case, the children discovering their own belongings in the treasury behind the throne room. In other words, because the transformation is so complete, and because there is no continuity of anything Edmund had experienced when he was last there, he cannot overcome his doubt and accept that this is Narnia. This kind of confusion plays a similarly destabilizing role in *The Silver Chair* when Eustace arrives. Never having been to mainland Narnia, the quay at Cair Paravel is unfamiliar to him, but more importantly, so is the aging king embarking on a sea voyage. Confused by what he sees, Eustace refuses to believe this to be King Caspian whom he knows to be a young man, and therefore rejects Jill's sugges-

31 *SC* 153.

32 *PC* 20.

tion – and thereby Aslan's signs – that he immediately approach the king.[33] And just like Edmund, Eustace refuses to let go of his doubt until presented with irrefutable evidence. By employing confusion this way, Lewis very directly indicates that time passes differently in Narnia and effectively tampers the reader's expectations: the book they are about to read will not be set on the same 'stage' as the previous novel. Since the characters who have been to Narnia before are confused about what they encounter, the reader cannot expect repetition. This confusion has practical outcomes for Lewis's storytelling. By focusing on how the characters react to the passing of time and to a past they have or have not experienced, he can avoid necessary parallels between Narnia and England, and is also at liberty to tell a dramatically different story to the previous one.

But Lewis shows us the passing of time not only through his characters' confusion to evidence thereof. He also centers the passing of time in how his characters *relate* to it. In fact, when Lewis wants to show that time has passed, he employs a Roman tactic by making characters react with skepticism. This approach to history – characters doubting what they see or what they are being told about events that seem mythical or impossibly distant – follows Roman precedents. Hay, for example, suggests an expressed increase in skepticism in the 1st century BCE (contemporary with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*): mythological aspects of the past simply could not be considered to have happened.[34] Interestingly, the more skepticism you express toward the past, the further distanced that past becomes. In a sense, Lewis's characters react with skepticism because they cannot see through the 'wall' Lewis has erected between the time they live in and the time that is being referenced: the 1st-century-BCE Roman saw no evidence of a time before the republic, and in Ovid's degenerate Iron Age, there was no evidence of the purity of the long-lost Golden Age. Skepticism toward the past becomes a reasonable response because the past shares no elements with the present. Edmund's confusion is reasonably tinged with skepticism: the ruinous structure just *cannot be* glorious Cair Paravel. Similarly, the Witch in *The Silver Chair* challenges the children and Rilian that Narnia ever existed: taking control of their expectations, she deprives them of the setting that is familiar to them and thereby makes them doubt. Occasionally, skepticism and doubt even tip over into denial. In *Prince Caspian,* King Miraz chides Caspian for his curiosity about the distant past: 'There never were those Kings and Queens… And

33 *SC* 36.

34 Hay (2019) 224 looks especially at Scipio in Cicero's *de Re Republica.*

there's no such thing as Aslan. And there are no such things as lions. And there was never a time when animals could talk. Do you hear?'[35] Miraz thus rejects the existence of Narnia's Golden Age and simultaneously denies that Narnia has changed. In doing so, he makes Narnia atemporal which in turn justifies his reign: if there is no prehistory and no time before the present, then Telmarines never harmed anyone when conquering Narnia. A similar denial occurs in *The Last Battle* when the Dwarfs outright reject Aslan's existence: if there was no Aslan before, there is no reason to follow him now and the Dwarfs can control their own fate.[36]

And yet, the passing of time is not only confusing. It is also an element of what makes Narnia Narnia and not England. Some characters are simply curious about how time in England maps onto time in Narnia, but they tend to arrive at the same superficial conclusion: time just does not work the same way in Narnia. For example, Jill and Eustace spend a week in England but only a moment passes for Tirian in Narnia: this discrepancy is met with immediate acceptance.[37] Similarly, when the Pevensie children first return to Narnia they experience shock at how much time has passed since they ruled at Cair Paravel, but when Edmund and Lucy return the following year, they are unsurprised when King Caspian tells them that three years have passed. 'Time talk' becomes a commentary on difference rather than the characters trying to make sense of how much time has passed or indeed *how* time passes. In *The Last Battle,* Eustace does not even react to finding out that two hundred years have passed since Prince Rilian died: this is just how time behaves in Narnia.[38] But notably, Lewis was aware that the time difference could confuse the reader more than necessary: thus, in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* he explains that 'Narnian time flows differently from ours.'[39] And in *Prince Caspian,* Lewis lets Peter speculate that their return to Narnia is as if they were 'Crusaders or Anglo-Saxons or Ancient Britons or something coming back to modern England!'[40] Importantly, the characters are never dissatisfied with their conclusions: they never seek out information about what specific

35 *PC* 44.

36 *LB* 83.

37 *LB* 54.

38 *LB* 57.

39 *VDT* 11.

40 *PC* 32.

events they have 'missed', the eras that have passed. All that matters is that time has passed but they are still in Narnia. And if the characters accept this passing of time, so must the reader.

So far, Ovid is only somewhat visible in Lewis's approach to time. In fact, the themes Lewis employs – destabilizing his reader by showing a shift in setting, employing confusion, and having his characters respond to the past with varying degrees of skepticism – look like practical solutions to an unusual storytelling problem for an author who is finding himself writing what amounts to history, albeit fictional. And yet, when viewing the *Chronicles* in order of their composition, a crucial element emerges: Lewis's gradual employment of foreshadowing and temporal signaling that draw subtly on the way that Ovid differentiates between his Ages. In fact, it is only when assessed in the order of composition that the *Chronicles* illuminate the extent with which Lewis shaped Narnia's chronology drawing on Ovid's narrative techniques.

COMPOSING WITH OVID: ESTABLISHING A CHRONOLOGY

Famously, Lewis stated that every book began with a picture in his mind's eye: a faun standing in a snowy forest, arms full of parcels, an umbrella in tow.[41] When writing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* Lewis did not know that there would be another six books, let alone another one, nor did he know that there would be an immediate successor to *Prince Caspian* whose subtitle was *The Return to Narnia.* But once he started writing, the stories followed, although their order of composition neither map onto the order of publication nor onto the temporal arc of Narnia. In fact, Lewis composed the *Chronicles* in bursts with writing and publication sometimes overlapping, and the temporal bookends – Narnia's birth in *The Magician's Nephew* and its demise in *The Last Battle* – were completed and published last, although their writing overlapped.[42] Ford divides the Chronicles into four compositional periods. First, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was completed in 1948–1949 although Lewis began it as early as 1939. Next, *Prince Caspian* and *the Dawn Treader* were composed (mid-1949 to early 1950), immediately followed by *The Horse and His Boy* (begun and

41 *Other Worlds* 42. See also Jacobs (2010) 266.

42 Ford (2005) 15–22; *Letters* 68–69.

finished in 1950) filling in the backstory to the first two works, Finally, *The Silver Chair* (begun late 1950, finished early 1951), *The Magician's Nephew* (begun after *The Silver Chair's* completion but abandoned in late 1951 and not finished until early 1954), and *The Last Battle* (begun late 1952, completed mid-1953) were completed.[43] When Lewis returned to write Narnia into existence in *The Magician's Nephew,* then, he had written Narnia's end, and importantly, the publishers held off on *The Horse and His Boy,* chronologically set before *Prince Caspian,* so as to publish the three novels centered on Caspian in succession.[44]

A few points will immediately become clear. First, Lewis had no initial thought of a Narnian chronology and therefore no conception of the passing of time – he just wanted to tell a story. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* starts in media res: an imperfect Narnia already exists, as if Ovid's Ages of Man had started with Silver instead of Gold. It is therefore not surprising that Narnia at first seems oddly atemporal: the eternal winter underscores only that the Witch is powerful and that the coming of the Pevensie children will provide release from evil. There is no suggestion of *how* Narnia came to be, only that there was something before Narnia: the Stone Table responds to magic that extends into the night before the first sunrise, and does so because it serves the plot. This explains why *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* contains idiosyncratic elements that occur nowhere else in the *Chronicles*: most notably, Adam and Eve and Father Christmas. If the world is atemporal and has no temporal scaffolding of its own, then Narnia can borrow elements from England. But already when composing *Voyage of the Dawn Treader,* Lewis seems to have realized that his world needed a chronology to strengthen the historical quality of his storytelling, even if he had not yet conceived of what that chronology would entail. Therefore, Ramandu's daughter tells Caspian's party that the knife that killed Aslan will be kept on her father's island 'while the world lasts' – the first signal that Narnia will not last forever.[45] And crucially, by the time Lewis wrote *The Silver Chair* he had internalized a need for this temporal scaffolding because it had become clear to him that Narnia would one day end. Father Time, sleeping underground, serves no role in that book except for having been placed there so as to exist in *The Last*

43 The *Chronicles* were published in the following order in the UK: *LWW* (1950), *PC* (1951), *VDT* (1952), *SC* (1953), *HHB* (1954), *MN* (1955), *LB* (1956).

44 See Ford (2005) 464 for an illuminating timeline of Lewis's compositions.

45 *VDT* 168.

Battle. And it is against this compositional background that Lewis's use of Ovid comes into focus.

Because periodization is characterization, Morris maintains that it 'constraints thoughts about the past but also enables it.'[46] This is precisely how Ovid becomes useful to Lewis. Because when we think of periodization as a means of organizing history, and of Ovid exaggerating differences between discrete ages to show the passing of time, Ovid's strategies become useful for creating a chronology: the constraints provide an opportunity for scaffolding, to emphasize the differences between eras to make them recognizable from one another. But interestingly, since much of Narnia was already in place when Lewis realized the need for a chronology, Ovid's approach could not be applied as is: Lewis could not start inventing ages because time was already in motion. For that reason, Lewis had to subvert Ovid's thinking. Instead of using periodization to make the reader think a certain way about a certain time in the past and to maintain a critical distance to it, Lewis uses Ovid's approaches to *foreshadow* – to create a connective thread through time. And since Lewis's composition is not sequential, sometimes that foreshadowing technique had to become retrospective: Lewis writing an idea into place in a later novel that will eventually be important in an earlier one. That is why Father Time is sleeping in *The Silver Chair*: his sleep foreshadows the awakening of Jadis in Charn before the birth of Narnia as well as his own awakening at Narnia's end.

But importantly, as Murrin points out, there is no change in Narnia.[47] All changes happen *between* the books, not during them, and each book occupies only a few weeks of Narnian time. For Lewis, this makes foreshadowing an important strategy. In fact, we might best understand this Ovidian reversal as Lewis creating temporal anchors between the novels, anchors that serve to constrain the reader's thoughts. When Lewis wrote *The Magician's Nephew,* he knew what Narnia's Long Winter looked like and how readers had responded to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.* In that first-published novel, readers had encountered cozy and recognizable elements of an England-like civilization: a library in Mr. Tumnus's cave, fireplaces, flagstone courtyards, even Turkish delight. They had done so in the presence of fantastical Talking Beasts: fauns, dryads, centaurs, and others, and in the setting of a wintry forest canopy. Those characterizations had defined Narnia and established the world to reader and characters alike. So,

46 Morris (1977) 96.

47 Murrin (1991) 248.

when composing *The Magician's Nephew,* set many generations before the atemporal Long Winter, Lewis had to emphasize the difference in characterization to underscore that time will have passed when the reader next encounters Narnia, that the reader is currently in an earlier era. To that end, in *The Magician's Nephew* Narnia is sunny and warm, the main Talking Beast is a horse, and no one attempts to create a built environment: the coronation takes place outdoors, under the sky.[48] Since Lewis knew where the reader would go next in the context of Narnian chronology, he could characterize Narnia in ways that made it visibly different to the 'next' Narnia. Because history, as Barkan says, 'is a series of skewed travels.'[49] In *Metamorphoses,* the travel is one-directional: we always move *forward* in time, from the older era to the younger, and the changes that demarcate the passing of time do so by transforming known entities – there is never a reversal. For example, the untouched trees in the Golden Age metamorphosize into boats in the Iron Age – never the reverse. Therefore, Lewis, composing his *Chronicles* out of chronological order, could take control of the reader's 'travel' through time by intentionally and deliberately showing differences between the Narnia he was composing and the Narnia he has already composed. By ascribing characteristics to the newborn Narnia in *The Magician's Nephew* that do not exist in the following novel, Lewis elegantly and effectively shows the passage of time through transformation – and so, Narnia gains a chronology.

Reader familiarity with known entities contributes substantively to the success of this technique. In *The Last Battle,* for example, Lewis's reader knows what the worlds of the earlier and middle novels were like, which allows Lewis to accelerate the passing of time by emphasizing change even more: the 'last of the Kings of Narnia' is familiar because the reader has encountered other Kings of Narnia. Because of this familiarity, *The Last Battle* can be made into a bookend, the last discrete age after which there is no other age: time will stop, and so will the *Chronicles.* In the same way, *The Magician's Nephew* can be made to set time in motion. In fact, in that novel Aslan's speech takes on a prophetic quality simply due to the events Lewis had already described in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: 'Evil will come of that evil, and it is still a long way off, and I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself. In the meantime, let us take such order that for many hundred years, yet this shall be a merry land in a merry world.'[50]

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48 *MN* 150.

49 Barkan (1986) 28.

50 *MN* 121.

The reader, familiar with Aslan's sacrifice at the Stone Table, will immediately understand this foreshadowing reference. Similarly, in *The Silver Chair* a Dwarf can say 'these Northern Witches always mean the same thing, but in every age they have a different plan for getting it' and at once both remind the reader of the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* which the reader has already read, and have primed the reader for eventually encountering Jadis in *The Magician's Nephew.*[51]

In fact, for Lewis, chronology becomes a question of connecting the various stories to one another in a reader-friendly way – of keeping Narnia Narnian while creating a temporal arc through the novels. Since the characters keep being confused about *when* they are but ultimately assured of *where* they are, the differences between a later or earlier time can be made to coexist with an unchangeable Narnian identity in the reader's mind. In fact, the element of character confusion helps place the reader in a new place on the Narnian timeline. So long as certain locations are referenced – Cair Paravel and the Stone Table – and some elements are maintained – Aslan and Talking Beasts – the reader, and the characters who experience them, can accept substantial changes caused by the passing of time, because those changes, too, have become part of Narnia's fabric. This explains why *The Horse and His Boy* (begun in the spring of 1950) opens by telling the reader that it is set during the Golden Age – not during the reign of King Caspian X who ruled in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (completed in the winter of 1950): chronologically it overlaps with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* and in that overlap it departs from reader expectation of a new time. And compositionally, it butts up against a novel set a thousand years later, suggesting that Lewis felt the need to clarify to his reader that we have in fact 'traveled' backwards in time – we are not following a strict chronology from book to book.

Importantly, because of the reader's familiarity with an everchanging temporal fabric that still maintains a specific Narnian quality, by the time we get to *The Last Battle,* Lewis can unravel all those unique characteristics the reader needed for Narnia to remain Narnia: there is no need to maintain continuity for the sake of chronology when we are at the end. And that is why we see Dwarfs denying the existence of Aslan, Talking Beasts enslaving other beasts, Dryads having their trees felled, the murder of a centaur: all the known entities that make Narnia Narnia can be destroyed because we have come to the end of Narnia's chronological time – there will be no next novel, no more Narnia.

51 *SC* 227.

It is now clear that while Lewis had no conception of chronology when he first created Narnia, the element became a gradual concern as he wrote more of his world into being. To Lewis, to tell a good story well was to make it convincing, and for a fictional world to be convincing, it needs historic fabric. Just like Ovid, Lewis wrote 'believable history' as transformation, and to that end, he effectively borrowed strategies from the Roman poet.

LEWIS AND THE CLASSICS

Although we know him today mostly for his creative writing, in his lifetime Lewis never stopped being an academic and academically, he was first and foremost a medievalist. After decades of teaching English at Oxford, he held the newly founded chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Magdalen College, Cambridge from 1954 until the end of his life. It is unsurprising that Boenig sees clear parallels between the Arthurian romance *The Quest for the Holy Grail* and *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*: our knowledge of Lewis as a medievalist helps us identify medieval influences in his work.[52] But the medieval period did not exist in isolation nor did Lewis's teaching of medieval literature. Kramer argues that Lewis saw classical mythology and philosophy 'as the primary influence on the medieval period'[53] and Edwards maintains that Lewis was an avid reader of Latin and Greek throughout his life.[54] But despite Lewis's robust training in the classics – as a student at Oxford, he did Mods (Greek and Latin) in addition to English and received First Class in each – and despite the profound presence of classical antiquity in the British educational system Lewis grew up in, Lewis is rarely considered a classical scholar.[55] And it is true: he never held an academic position teaching Greek and Latin.

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52 Boenig (2012) 80.

53 Kramer (2017) 155.

54 Edwards (2010) 58–71.

55 Montgomery (2000) 52. Maurice (2015) 9 demonstrates that classical studies were the 'backbone' of the British educational system. Hall (2008) underscores that this system was reserved for the elite but describes other ways in which people became familiar with the classics at this time.

But one does not have to abandon broader training to specialize in something specific, nor does one have to be an expert to write with inspiration. Slater, for example, argues that Lewis both thought and wrote with a wide range of influences accumulated through childhood and his undergraduate years – not only with the expertise gained through his academic career.[56] Moreover, classical influences need not be considered different to medieval ones nor necessarily that separate from Lewis's own life: in Montgomery's words, Lewis 'would not view that distant age as something foreign and discrete from our own experience.'[57] To Wood, there is an 'essential continuity' between things pagan and Christian that were central to how Lewis thought about the world.[58] And Lewis himself emphasized the importance of the classics on numerous occasions: 'I am no enemy of the classics… Hardly any lawful price would seem to me too high for what I have gained by being made to learn Latin and Greek. If any question of the value of classical studies were before us, you would find me on the extreme right.'[59] He even connected his training in the classics to his work as a medievalist: 'There are perhaps no source so necessary for a student of medieval literature to know as the Bible, Virgil, and Ovid.'[60] So, to avoid Lewis's classical training is to reduce Lewis to something that he was not, to omit something meaningful from our study of Lewis's work. Given the presence of classical thought in medieval literature, which Lewis taught, and Ovid's presence in the dissemination of classical myth for children, which Lewis was interested in, this omission seems particularly peculiar. How can we explain this reluctance toward examining the classical presence in the *Chronicles*?

56 Slater (2015) 171.

57 Montgomery (2000) 57.

58 Wood (2003) 333.

59 *Image* 8.

60 *Discarded Image* 22. Lewis repeats this sentiment in *Image* 9 in which he ranks Boethius, Ovid, and Virgil among 'the great Kings whose reign had begun before *Beowulf* was written and had not ended yet.' Notably, Plato, who is referenced several times in the *Chronicles,* is not among these 'great Kings.' For Plato in the *Chronicles,* see Johnson and Houtman (1986).

LEWIS, OVID, AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The culprit, I suggest, is the source Lewis drew so heavily from: Ovid himself. Because once you start looking for evidence of Ovid at Cair Paravel, you immediately find it. For example, Miles recently examined the transformative elements in Narnia – Eustace being transformed into a dragon – to argue that Lewis intentionally both drew on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for inspiration and subverted some of Ovid's most Ovidian themes to fit the Christian ethos with which he was composing. In Miles's reading, Lewis endows Ovid's amorous tales with a moral seriousness that was lacking in the original source.[61] Huttar, too, suggests that the *Metamorphoses* are present in Narnia, and in a recent article, Boler elegantly demonstrates that Ovid's presence in *The Screwtape Letters* 'looms far greater' than Milton or any other medieval source.[62] In fact, Ovid's presence in Lewis's work is no more difficult to ascertain than Christian allegory or the medieval cosmological elements analyzed by Ward, and I agree with Miles that it is surprising that scholars do not see it. Lewis's Narnia is sufficiently flexible that allegory, mythology, philosophy, ideology, and cosmology can coexist: it is not Lewis's composition that makes it difficult to understand his source material. Rather, I posit that this omission is best understood through Ovid's massive reuse in the retelling of classical mythology in 20th-century children's literature on the one hand and the near-silence about their Ovidian debt among the authors who reuse him on the other.

Despite Ovid having a varied and at times questionable reputation in the Middle Ages, he is everywhere present in modern literature, and no one overtly denies that presence.[63] Kennedy, for example, shows influences of the *Metamorphoses* on numerous authors ranging from T. S. Eliot to Ezra Pound.[64] The narrative techniques Ovid used are almost universally productive for a writer that seeks to write character-driven plot where the central characters undergo some kind of transformation, and the reflective qualities of his composition suggest to the reader that we are hearing the 'narrative of events' – a quality that makes a

61 Miles (2018).

62 Boler (2019) 22; Huttar (1977).

63 Dimmick (2002) 264 ff. Barchiesi (2002) underscores that it is Ovid's narrative techniques that make him so useful.

64 Kennedy (2002) 320 ff.

story believable.[65] It is therefore unsurprising that so many writers acknowledge their debt to Ovid.[66] Moreover, by expressing their connection to Ovid, writers place themselves in a millennia-long cultural context in which the *Metamorphoses* is the ever-present source from which we draw both knowledge of classical mythology and inspiration for transformative themes of love.[67]

Yet, in the genre of children's fantasy, a genre that retells known myths explicitly for a young audience, Ovid is almost entirely omitted, and when he *is* acknowledged, it is in passing: Maurice interprets this as a reflection of negative attitudes toward Ovid as a source.[68] Robert believes that this tendency, although negative, is better understood as a writerly preference for privileging 'the idea of the folktale' over a classical text.[69] Both authors, however, agree that this omission is intentional. To Roberts, writers benefit from downplaying their debt to Ovid because it helps them present their myths as either Greek or universal. If Rick Riordan wants to remain an original author and provide a gateway to Greek mythology through his *Percy Jackson* series, he is not served by acknowledging that much of the transformative fabric of his novels derives from *Metamorphoses* – a Roman source. And if *The Magicians* is supposed to explicitly riff on Narnia which many scholars believe it is, Grossman has no reason to acknowledge Ovid.[70] Moreover, mythologizing authors may not be aware of how influenced they are by Ovid since some of their source materials have been anthologized, thereby separating the Roman poet from the myths that they are retelling.[71] And if Attebery is correct that to modern writers, myth is 'ancient, anonymous, and traditional' it is not strange that nobody pursues their own ties to Ovid: in their view, it is not in the nature of myth to have an originator.[72]

65 Rosati (2002) 271.

66 For example, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is prefaced by a quote from *Metamorphoses.*

67 Graf (2002) 108.

68 Maurice (2015) 13.

69 Roberts (2015) 235.

70 Kramer (2017).

71 Roberts (2015) 237.

72 Attebery (1980) 166.

This can be further explained by scholarly approaches to children's fantasy. Although always of interest to literary scholars, only in recent years has the genre garnered attention in the context of classical reception.[73] Lewis, because of the lasting success of Narnia and the *Chronicles* consistently being marketed for younger readers, has remained a steadfast presence in study of children's literature – but not in reception studies. And since 20th-century authors who themselves are engaged in classical reception by retelling classical myths for children do not acknowledge where their inspiration comes from, it is no longer strange that we cannot see Ovid at Cair Paravel. If we could, we might falsely conclude that the beloved *Chronicles* are no longer original, that Lewis is a borrower rather than a creator: he would no longer be one of the great inventors of children's fantasy, because he is using the same source material as everyone else. Yet, the opposite perspective has more promise. If we can instead see how competently Lewis uses Ovid's strategies and how effectively the poet's approaches can be adapted to a modern author's creative processes, we can both begin to restore Ovid's reputation as an intrinsic contributor to children's literature, and to appreciate the extraordinarily rich and varied repertoire with which one of the most admired authors of the 20th century wrote. Lewis may not have been a classicist, but his clever and subtle use of Ovid's techniques underscores the depths to which he had internalized the fabric of classical mythology – the fabric which helped him build the *Chronicles.*

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73 Hodkinson and Lovatt (2018); Marciniak (2020); Marciniak (2016); Maurice (2015).

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Emma Ljung
Princeton University
2 New South Building
Princeton, NJ 08544
eljung@princeton.edu

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