# Using Language to Define Narnia's Social Hierarchy

One of Narnia's most significant qualities is that most of its inhabitants are either part-human or not human at all; and yet, they can still communicate with the Pevensie children. C. S. Lewis establishes a social and racial hierarchy within Narnia. Although the system is not always clear, Lewis uses language and speech to indicate where certain characters sit in the hierarchy.

When the Beavers and the Pevensies arrive at the Stone Table to meet Aslan, Peter tries to get the Beavers to approach him first. Beaver says, "No, Sons of Adam before animals." This line reflects the status of the Beavers in relation to the Pevensies, even though the children are visitors to Narnia. Humans are at the top of the hierarchy, and animals are at the bottom. The Beavers use courser, more common language than the Pevensies do. Throughout the novel, they are really the only characters who use colloquial words like "plaguey" (104) and "cheek" (140).

The more the animals interact with Aslan, the more sophisticated their language becomes. A leopard brings the message to Aslan that the White Witch wants to talk to him. Not only is the leopard—a predator—more confident in Aslan's presence than the Beavers—who are prey—he also speaks more eloquently. His message, "there is a messenger from the enemy who craves audience," sounds more like the deferential, yet elevated, language of a courtier than the Beavers' vernacular.

Even though he is an animal, Aslan sits at the very top of Narnia's social hierarchy. Even the Pevensies submit to him, and he is the one who holds the power to make them Kings and Queens. Aslan speaks more poetically in his everyday, casual dialogue than anyone else in the novel. It takes the Pevensies decades of being royalty to speak as poetically and as nobly. The way Aslan addresses Peter when he shows him Cair Paravel is almost scriptural. "That, O Man, is Car Paravel," he says (130). When he goes to give himself up to the Witch, he discovers Susan

and Lucy following him. “Oh, children, children, why are you following me?” he asks them (149). He calls to them in the same formal, poetic way when he comes back to life and invites them to play with him (163). From the first time the children meet Aslan, they feel better at just the way he speaks (128)

Although the human-animal hierarchy is obvious, it’s not clear where part-humans fall. Mr. Tumnus is part-human. His speech is more elevated than the Beavers, and the narrator specifically points out that while Tumnus’ cave has a whole shelf “full of books,” (15), the Beavers have “no books or pictures” on their walls (73). Tumnus is clearly the more literate of the two creatures. And even though there’s evidence throughout the novel of other half-humans, such as centaurs, Rumblebuffin is the only giant mentioned in the novel. His language is more rough than even the Beavers’. He uses very informal, idiomatic language. “'Blowed if I ain’t all in a muck sweat,” he says. His language takes a second to figure out if the reader doesn’t hear that kind of speech every day. (172).

The White Witch also is not human (81), but she is the thing Narnia has until the Pevensies arrive. Though she has called herself Queen of Narnia for a long time, she has never adopted the kind of language that the Pevensies use when they have ruled for many years. When she first meets Edmund, the White Witch uses the royal “we,” but it is the only time in the novel that she really shows through her language that she is above any other character.

Of course, humans are almost at the very top of the hierarchy, right under Aslan. Not only are they the protagonists of the novel, but they also end up ruling over all the other creatures at the end of the story. The Pevensies speak very intelligently, even for children. Edmund asks Lucy to call “*pax*” on their argument, (30) which is a Latin word that means peace (“Pax”). A knowledge of Latin shows a high place in the English social hierarchy. The children regularly

use words that are usually above their vocabulary level and that do not usually belong in a children's novel, such as when Peter asks Mr. Beaver, "Couldn't we have some stratagem?" (78). When the children grow up and have "been Kings and Queens for so long," (184), they take on an elevated, almost Shakespearean language. Their new way of speaking reflects their elevated status.

Narnia, like Britain in the real world, has a complex social and racial hierarchy. It is not always easy to determine where a character should fall in the hierarchy. But by analyzing their language, we can get an idea of how they fit into Narnian culture.

# Works Cited

Lewis, C. S. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. New York: Scholastic, 1995. Print.

"Pax - Definition of Pax in English | Oxford Dictionaries." *Oxford Dictionaries*. Oxford Dictionaries, n.d. Web. 30 Sept. 2016.