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## *The Chronicles of Narnia, and How C.S. Lewis Created Christian Fantasy Fiction*

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*The Chronicles of Narnia*, and  
How C.S. Lewis Created Christian Fantasy  
Fiction

By Amanda Callow

Thesis submitted to  
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05/27/2015

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The Narnia series by C.S. Lewis is a shining example of twentieth-century childrens' fiction. Many children (and adults) have fallen in love with the books, without ever knowing that it was not ultimately intended to solely be a work of fantasy. The genius of C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* was to artfully combine traditional Christian themes and iconography, with symbols from other mythic traditions, and narrative elements of his own. As a result, Narnia is finally neither purely fantasy literature, nor is it purely Christian fiction. Rather, when the first book appeared in 1954, it represented the entirely new genre of Christian fantasy fiction. Although Lewis was initially criticized by conservative Christian critics and mainstream critics alike, the popular appeal of the series, and its influence on later writers working in any fantasy sub-genre, has never waned.

Christian fantasy fiction, as a fiction sub-genre, can be identified as a piece of fiction with fantastical mythology and themes, with the addition of imagery and values drawn from the Christian tradition. Simply, the genre ought to be identified as fantasy written by a Christian, and intended to encourage Christian ideals, regardless of how that is achieved. Christian fantasy fiction attempts to use the mystical plot elements from fantasy, with recognizable Christian ideals, and meld them in such a way that they actually reinforce each other. In combining the fairytale, legend, and mythological aspects of fantasy, Lewis meant to inspire interest in Christianity differently than the way in which he had been exposed to the subject of Christianity and faith in his own childhood development.

Lewis reasoned that "The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history... By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the

miracle." (*Dock*) This quote comes from a collection of essays by Lewis, in which he rationalized why he believed that Christianity and myth were not as incompatible as others would willingly assert. He argued that Christian Fiction was the most natural type of writing that he could produce, since the nature of Christianity begins with myth.

Mythology and classical literature were in many of Lewis' earliest memories. He often described his home as having layers and rows of books, in many rooms. This meant that he grew an interest in the literature of many important authors, including George MacDonald, and early on, he also developed an interest in literary criticism, such as the critical works of H.G. Wells. George MacDonald is one of a select few predecessors to Lewis who focused on writing fiction, with such creativity that Lewis had not otherwise seen. MacDonald actually helped convince Lewis Carroll to publish "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*," which is one of the most beloved works of children's literature to this day. (Reis 25-26)

Since MacDonald had such strong theological points of view, and focused on writing creatively, he earned respect from Lewis, and ultimately, widespread credit for such influence on Lewis' writing. MacDonald credited his style and idealism to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was a well-respected group of artists, including painters such as Edward Burne-Jones, and poets such as William Michael Rossetti. They prioritized medieval imagery and Arthurian references, whenever possible. MacDonald also wrote religious novels for adults, but some readers avoided them due to their serious content, since he was writing during a time that there was a shift toward an enhanced interest in fiction. Lewis' writings have experienced similar judgment, although he learned techniques to develop an interest in his more serious works. (MacDonald 35)

Lewis gave the highest honor to George MacDonald, stating: “My own debt to this book (*Unspoken Sermons*) is almost as great as one man can owe to another... I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master; indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him.” (Smith, "Pre-Raphaelite Imagery") Lewis gratefully admitted that he had borrowed some of his creative ideas, and even looked to the works of MacDonald, when encouraging others to accept the faith of Christianity.

MacDonald's “The Imagination” made a distinct impression on Lewis’ writing content. MacDonald explained that the imagination is only present to create harmony within the mind. Not only did it create harmony, but in his mind, there was also a correct way to go about expression and encouraging ones imagination. George MacDonald once said, “The reveries even of the wise man will make him stronger for his work; his dreaming as well as his thinking will render him sorry for past failure, and hopeful of future success.” (as qtd. in Reis 25) Considering the level of credit Lewis gave to MacDonald, for helping to shape his own invention and creativity, it is difficult to imagine what type of writer Lewis would have become if he had not read the works of MacDonald, or if he would have become a writer at all. While MacDonald had a profound impact on Lewis' writing style, and intended audience, there was one major issue that Lewis believed he could improve upon. In a chapter titled, "On Juvenile Tastes," in Lewis' 1975 book *Of Other Worlds*, Lewis discussed the trend previous to his own style, that any fantasy writing was much more acceptable in juvenile literature, versus writing intended for a more serious reader. (*Other Worlds* 41) Lewis argued that fantasy writing did not belong solely to young readers.

Another influential author, while not writing with Christian ideology or themes, was Hans Christian Anderson. Stephen Prickett noted that prior to Lewis, Anderson was one of the

few authors who wrote "original tales told in seriousness," although they also included fantastical topics and imagery such as talking animals. (Prickett 66-67) Much as Walt Disney drew inspiration for his animation and theme parks in the twentieth century from Anderson's moralistic stories like *The Little Mermaid*, and *The Emperor's New Clothes*, Lewis drew the same creative inspiration from his childhood exposure to Anderson's approach to fiction, among others, while instilling his own Christian perspective and context. The ultimate influence that Anderson had on Lewis was the realization that there could be a positive reception, when joining two previously uncombined topics or genres.

Another writer to whom Lewis was indebted was H.G. Wells. As a literary critic, Lewis criticized H.G. Wells, in his book *Out of the Silent Planet*, in an introductory note to his own writing. His response to comments from others regarding his similarity to Wells was significantly incongruent with their conclusion. After learning that his writing style had been compared to that of Wells, he could not help himself but to comment on his disparity of opinion on more than one occasion. He responded, "Certain slighting references to earlier stories of this type which will be found in the following pages have been put there for purely dramatic purposes. The author would be sorry if any reader supposed he was too stupid to have enjoyed Mr. H. G. Wells's fantasies or too ungrateful to acknowledge his debt to them." (*Silent Planet*, note)

The topic of Christian writing had been only recognized as serious non-fiction, therefore blending fiction and the perceived reality of Christianity was unprecedented. The biggest proof for that is the lack of material, prior to Lewis, that would fit into this category. The line of thinking was that all Christian literature until then had been intended, and perceived, as purely sacred. Any additions of excessive fictional characters or activities could be considered sacrilege,



and a blatant misrepresentation of the faith. It took the bravery that Lewis possessed (and the encouragement of The Inklings) to be willing to risk his own public approval, by venturing into the uncharted territory of Christian Fantasy Fiction.

Due to the fact that there had been no real attempts by other authors to experiment with this new style of writing, any literature or art endorsing topics outside of the Bible would then be automatically labeled as "non-Christian." Therefore, combining Christian themes and anything in the "non-Christian" category was considered intentionally blasphemous. Not only did Lewis embrace the "non-Christian" techniques, but he employed the a large inventory of various worldwide mythologies and imagination, to show that the two genres could merge harmoniously. He endeavored to create something new, although he was not certain that his creativity would be remembered or appreciated by others.

Lewis was a pioneer in combining the ideas of fantasy and Christian literature, before the Fantasy genre alone was even acknowledged. Fantasy, as its own genre did not emerge until Oscar Wilde was described as a "fantasist," in a 1923 supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. (Slusser 26-35) Even after the "fantasist" title had been used regarding Wilde, the term "fairy tale" was still the official name given to all works falling into this category. J.R.R Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, which was published in 1937, was the real turning point for the official recognition of Fantasy Fiction, into mainstream literature. (Pringle 558-561)

After encouragement from The Inklings, and two years after seeing the success of Tolkien's first offering of Fantasy Fiction, Lewis decided to start writing *Lion* in 1939 (published 1950). He began progress on *Caspian* in 1949 (published 1951), which was the same year he finished his work on *Lion*. During that same year, he also started on *Voyage* (published 1952). Both *Caspian* and *Voyage* were finished by early 1950, and Lewis immediately began writing

*Horse* (published 1954) and *Silver Chair* (published 1953). Both of these books were finished by mid-1951, and Lewis then started on *Nephew* (published 1955). While still writing *Nephew*, Lewis began *Battle*, in 1952 (published 1956). *Battle* was finished in 1952, and *Nephew* was complete in 1954.

Upon publication of *Lion*, the immediate response from readers was overwhelmingly positive, but the initial response from critics was not the same. One of the first responses was that Lewis' works had no place on fiction shelves. Lewis' response to such early negative critiques was, "If you take your stand on the 'prevalent' view, how long do you suppose it will prevail? ...All you can really say about my taste is that it is old-fashioned; yours will soon be the same" (Experiment 105-106) Since Lewis also became legendary for his own uncompromising style of literary criticism, other literary critics seemed to feel more compelled to critique his work. John W. Robbins (a Christian literary critic) claimed that "whatever the content of Lewis' heart, the content of his books was not Evangelical doctrine," (*The Trinity Review*), implying that Lewis may have had good intent, but the end result was not a purely Evangelical product. Robbins' criticism is only one of many examples from the fundamental Christian scholar viewpoint, with each having nearly the same argument.

Mark McKim found that "Lewis would assert that non-Christian faiths could be the entrée to Christianity," (Lewis and Hooper *Together*) and he bridged that gap by creating a place in which both worlds could co-exist. Lewis had focused his efforts on creating a piece of imaginative work, while centering on what he felt was a sound, theological lesson. Instead of using the same method as Tolkien, who claimed that he kept "all allusions to the highest matters down to mere hints," Lewis joked about "smuggling theology" into his stories, and he did so in a

different way. (Downing) Tolkiens works retained the separation between the fantasy and a plausible reality.

In the post-modern critic's perspective, it is notable that Lewis allowed more of a relaxed focus on Christianity, instead of the strict structure, rules, and attention to pious details. Lewis allowed for mythological characters, themes, and ideas, which many Christian critics felt was blasphemous, but other critics have proclaimed this act as genius. On this topic of Lewis' writing, a Christian literary critic, Berit Kjos, said "those who trust their imagination more than God will neither see God's greatness nor tolerate those who follow Him." (Crossroad.to) Lewis was able to reach the interest of all readers, while teaching biblical principles.

Lewis claimed that he did not initially intend to write the story of his faith, but at some point during the first few books, he had to then develop a plan, which was to express how he perceived the entire story of the Christian experience, from day one, all the way through salvation and realizing ones full potential.

New Historicism offers a potentially useful perspective for evaluating Lewis' upbringing. He was raised in pre-WW1 & WW2 times, and life was relatively simple when he was very young, helping him to develop a straight-forward thought process. He had a very strong relationship with his dog, and he was a strong-willed and creative child. Lewis spent much of his time either perusing the overflowing bookshelves in his home, or spending countless hours outside, inventing various scenarios, like the imaginary land of Boxen and the creatures who lived there. Since his mother died when he was transitioning from his boyhood to adolescence, that event certainly impacted his maturation as well. His environment drastically changed after his mother died, because both Lewis and his brother spent much of their following years in boarding schools. The imaginative play that Lewis had with his brother was restricted for a time

as they focused on their studies, and he determined that he needed to find a way to continue the imaginary worlds and creatures which they had fashioned. (McBride 69)

### The Spiritual Development of C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis was born at the turn of the 20th century, in Ireland. While his childhood was peaceful, this placed him in Europe during wars both civil and abroad, throughout his young adult years. The same fantasies of Boxen were the perfect starting-point for many of his Narnia concepts. Lewis' family was involved in the Church of Ireland when he was a young child, but after his mother died when he was eight years old, he quickly became cynical of the mere existence of God.

Upon the death of Mrs. Lewis, the young boy was transferred from one school to another, for various reasons. His personal obligation to continue involvement in the Church of Ireland became too much effort, and it no longer represented a family activity to him, since Lewis' mother was not present to encourage his interest. In a development typical of many adolescents, he had lost spiritual interest in the faith of his parents.

After having been taught the principles of writing, reading, and literary criticism from W.T. Kirkpatrick during his private lessons, Lewis said of Kirkpatrick, "My debt to him is very great, my reverence to this day undiminished." (*Joy* 65) Kirkpatrick encouraged Lewis to explore Greek, Latin, and Italian classical literature, and seek out the original intent of the works themselves. This thorough examination of literature is a practice that Lewis enjoyed throughout the remainder of his life, and something that he considered heavily, in everything that he wrote. It was at this time that he most identified with atheism, and attempted to rebel against what he had been taught during his own upbringing. He later wrote that he had actually been angry at

God, because "God Himself did not exist." (*Joy* 115) This is a paradoxical statement, since it is not possible to be angry at a being who does not exist. In saying this Lewis was admitting that he may not have ever been entirely convinced of the atheism which he had claimed so staunchly. Perhaps he merely wanted to be free from responsibilities associated with claiming to hold onto the theistic ideals, which had previously withheld him from his own creativity.

Lewis' journey through his early life and adolescence helped him find inspiration from which to build a world for the Pevensie children. This included their separation from family in difficult times, and the ultimate unification with Aslan (Jesus-figure), regardless of their missteps in the journey. Lewis experienced separation from his family when he was sent away to school as an adolescent, just as the Pevensies were sent away during wartime. Moreover, Lewis dealt with disbelief, and the denial of his own belief even when he knew it existed, just as Edmund did with his siblings. Then after many trials and journeys, he returned to his beliefs, with the help of those in his most trusted circle of friends. It is important to note that just as the Pevensie children were able to fulfill their destiny, while making mistakes along the way, they ultimately received redemption that had always been guaranteed to them. This journey is the same sincere voyage all individuals travel in reality, as they join any particular faith.

Around the age of fifteen, Lewis became interested in the occult, countless examples of mythology, and ultimately he decided that he was an atheist. During this time, Lewis fully immersed himself in his studies, expanding his literary interests to include Greek and Norse mythologies. Lewis had a great fascination with these works, although at the time he did not experience a spiritual connection to their deistic views. In his book "Surprised by Joy", Lewis later remarked that after reading works by Lucretius, he credited the author for his own enlightenment, which was at the heart of Lewis' original atheist philosophies: "Had God

designed the world, it would not be a world so frail and faulty as we see.” (65) Lucretius had made a point to write about the natural world in a spiritual sense, and his epic poem *On the Nature of Things* became a key argument for Epicurean philosophers. It was of utmost importance to Lewis that logic was the largest contributing factor to any philosophy, which is what gave him the greatest difficulty in reconciling the religious ideals that he had been taught as a child.

Lewis spent a short time serving in trench warfare with the British Army during World War One. His military themes and references throughout *Caspian* unquestionably paid homage to his time spent at war, as well as his experience with a friend who suffered with a post-war nervous disorder. (www.ctlibrary.com) After experiencing his own serious injuries and the loss of two fellow soldiers, he experienced depression and homesickness. This personal experience with the effects of war, both during and after the conflict, gave Lewis a backdrop for much of the warfare he wrote about in all of the *Narnia* series. In *Caspian*, combat logistics were very important, such as which troops and companies would serve the best purposes. The repeated reference to "bivouac," was a term more commonplace in British military operations, which Lewis must have heard regularly, while in the trenches. (*Caspian 7*) In *Horse*, a seemingly personal issue became a grand-scale political operation, and many aspects of military strategy were employed, to solve Rabadash's desire to seize Queen Susan. Most obviously, *Battle* resolves the entire story of *Narnia*, when Tirian overcomes the selfish and deceptive efforts of Shift.

After Lewis returned home from his military service, he again became heavily focused his education and interests. He continued with his interest in various mythologies, including Celtic traditions and mythology in his interests. Lewis' first three decades of life greatly

influenced his writing style and his choice of topics, especially since he always had a deep curiosity for learning of the creativity of all others before him. Ultimately, these studies helped to change his purpose for writing overall, since he was disenchanted with many examples of how he believed fiction had failed to incorporate any other genres. (*The Secret Country* 1974)

Following discussions with his friend J.R.R. Tolkien, reading some of the works of George MacDonald, and reading "*The Everlasting Man*" by G. K. Chesterton, he conceded his previously staunch atheistic viewpoint. (*George Macdonald* 66–67) The profound arguments that Chesterton eloquently made against the anti-Christian ideas stimulated Lewis to think more critically about his own reasons for whether or not he accepted theism (the belief of existence of god/gods). It took him two years of generally believing in theism, before taking a serious interest and affiliating himself with the Anglican Church. This was after years of effort to persuade Lewis, by Tolkien and other friends, to join them within the Catholic faith. (*The Inklings Part 3 ch. 3*)

While Lewis had officially converted, he still took interest in mythology and mysticism, both of which had been tremendously instrumental in shaping his youth. This is why there are so many uses of mythological creatures and imagery, despite the fact that these ideas were just not used together, before Lewis' time, and they were universally considered dangerous by many pious Christian readers. He became commonly known as a "literary evangelist," ([www.ctlibrary.com](http://www.ctlibrary.com)) after he used the term to describe himself, working to embolden young readers to explore and learn more about their own cultural mythologies, while simultaneously teaching them a new set of philosophies. By contrast, he also educated young Christian readers about the mythologies of the world, with more of a spiritual frame of mind. Just as he found his own instruction exceedingly significant, he included samples, to help educate every reader. In a

response to critic W.N. Pittenger, Lewis admitted that the majority of his writings were meant to be "evangelistic," (*The Christian Century*) meaning that his intention was to teach and convert his readers, simply by educating them.

The only way to get past the previous trend of unchanged fiction, as Lewis saw it, was to create a forum of writers, all encouraging varied reading material. Within "The Inklings," this group of writers including Lewis encouraged a new way of expressing themselves creatively, and this style ultimately guided future generations of fantasy writers to wisely form any subgenre they felt appropriate. Up until that point, Christians accepted fiction, as long as it did not cross the line of possibly mystifying Christian ideals. To many readers, anything combining mythology and Christianity would be discouraged, since it was considered blasphemous.

Mainstream fantasy writers even expanded their possibilities, since they were bound no longer by the original unspoken rules of the fantasy genre. After examining various works, it is apparent that Lewis intended to draw the interest of young children, while teaching the basic tenets of Christianity. Lewis was an encouragement for future authors, because of the oppositional relationship between the fantasy/science fiction genres and Christianity, but Lewis himself saw value in introducing the two types of writing, as compatible.

Lewis' faith-rich works provided imagery understood by all children, regardless of their religious experience. These philosophies and images had previously only been included in their respective culture and religious writings, so young readers foreign and non-foreign were more receptive to accepting his writing as familiar. Therefore, he introduced the idea that there was a technique to indulge the creative and often childlike curiosity in fantasy, without abandoning one's faith and ideals.



Compatibility between Fantasy and Christian literature was also a major goal of Lewis' friend J.R.R. Tolkien. Tolkien was Lewis' colleague from Oxford, making him an ideal subject for literary comparison. He was a significant participant in The Inklings, an informal literary group at the University of Oxford. As with all writers in the exclusive group, they exchanged creative ideas, discussed their strategies for upcoming projects, and influenced one another. This group had a strong focus on using the narrative style of storytelling, and the majority of them embraced the fantasy style of writing, and these two things combined in such a way that they enriched each other.

It is remarkable that such a close colleague, and long-time mentor, of Lewis has been denoted as “the father of high fantasy,” by Margaret Drabble (Birch). With Tolkien’s encouragement, Lewis helped bring Christian fantasy into acceptance in mainstream literature, by combining spiritual themes and mythological imagery.

While Hugo Dyson (another Inklings member) mocked Tolkien’s ideas for “*The Lord of the Rings*,” Lewis wrote: “here are beauties which pierce like swords or burn like cold iron. Here is a book which will break your heart. (Doughan) Lewis regularly appreciated the creative brilliance of Tolkien, where some others within their same writing group would not ascribe value to his work. Much of this difference in appreciation for Tolkien's method, intent, and style had a lot to do with the awareness that the group members had, about everyone else within The Inklings. Not all of them believed in the Christian faith, and since they knew that Tolkien's Fiction was intended to be a representation of Christian ideals (while using more of a subdued Christian undertone than Lewis eventually used), some Inklings members were not as eager to encourage Tolkien. Nonetheless, he did publish *The Hobbit* in September 1937, and he saw immediate success, with all 1,500 original copies selling out by December. Ultimately, since

Tolkien used only vague hints at Christian themes, he did not experience the same level and type of criticism with his series that Lewis later experienced, with *Narnia*.

Charles Williams, another member of The Inklings, wrote seven novels. Although he was in the same writing circle, his works did not focus on fantasy in quite the same way. Instead, Williams decided to insert supernatural elements into commonplace life events. (Matthew) The Inklings considered Williams' works to be a direct improvement on the style of previous fantasy and science fiction, such as that of H.G. Wells. His goal was to use poetry and the extraordinary to explain science and the seemingly supernatural events of reality.

Outside of meetings held by The Inklings, Lewis was also a member of the Oxford Socratic Club, where undergraduate students and others could discuss intellectual concerns regarding Christianity, and possibly religion in general. Ted Olsen theorized that a debate Lewis had with British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe in 1948 directly resulted in a steep adjustment in Lewis' writing style, thereafter. In a meeting within the Oxford Socratic Club, Anscombe confronted Lewis' argument against naturalism, from his recent book, called *Miracles*. (Lindsay *Miracles*) This was especially humiliating, because Lewis actually led this Club for several years, and the club members were his peers and others who respected him. In this meeting, she actually read a letter of criticism against the work, and by the end of the meeting, it was determined by some that she had won her argument that he hadn't given his topic the full attention that it deserved. Others believed that nothing significant changed, other than his shift from philosophical writing, because he did not feel inclined to study the newer analytic philosophy methods.

Since it has been argued that Lewis immediately retreated from his customary style of stringent apologetics writings, he returned to faith-based literature, but did so more through his

fiction writing. There are others who did not agree that Lewis changed his style, but the proof is in what he did not publish, for several years following the meeting with Anscombe (*qtd. in Olsen 19.1*).

Anscombe provided a copy of her letter to Lewis, and after thirteen years, Lewis officially edited chapter three of "*Miracles*," which is where Lewis' work had been so heavily criticised. In the introduction to one of her books, Anscombe later recognized that the edits had shown careful thought, and although she still had criticism for the content, it did "correspond more to the actual depth and difficulty of the questions being discussed." (Anscombe ix)

Lewis developed a strong determination, after having been denied professorship at Oxford University multiple times (despite having held various other positions there, and taking an important role at Cambridge University), to prove himself. He desired to create something entirely new, that not even a critic could take away from him. Even though other Christian authors and critics had argued his methods and the purity of his message, he pushed to create the innovative genre of Christian fantasy fiction. This allowed for individual interpretation of Christian texts, especially in regard to symbolism and imagery. As both a writer and a literary critic, Lewis knew what he was doing, when he confidently presented his self-proclaimed "children's fiction series." As a supportive literary criticism, Ted Olsen reminded other critics that "Lewis was always first a scholar." (Olsen 26) Olsen went on to explain how Lewis continued writing literary history and criticism, and valued an ongoing discourse between writers and critics alike. This helped to put perspective on the issue of Lewis' intent, in writing any of his material. Lewis inspired young children to grow their imaginations, and to believe in things based on their own faith. This would then open the doors for children to develop the capability for faith in the ideals of Christianity itself. He enjoyed functioning primarily as a caring

educator, as shown by his recurring advice in book one, to be careful of carelessly entering wardrobes.

Despite such conviction of what he felt were necessary improvements to the fiction genre (as previously mentioned, regarding the works of Wells), he was convinced that he would be completely forgotten within five years of his passing. (Peterkin) Little did he know that he would be considered one of the most revered and most easily recognized writers of all time.

### C.S. Lewis and the Development of Christian Fantasy Fiction

Often considered highly allegorical, *Narnia* was, in Lewis's view, a "supposition of ideals." (Friskney *Sharing*) In explaining his intentions, Lewis wanted to emphasize that allegory was not his original goal, but he intended to bring spiritually abstract ideas into the understanding of readers of all ages. After Lewis had written the full seven installments of the tales of *Narnia*, he responded to some critics of his work, explaining what each story represented. In a letter written just a few years before his death in 1963, he explained *Narnia*, one book at a time. According to Lewis, *Lion* represents the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Hooper 1245) *Caspian* represents the restoration of the true religion, following corruption. *Voyage* represents the spiritual life of an individual, and in the story, that is primarily exemplified by Reepicheep. *Silver Chair* illustrates the continuing war with the powers of darkness. *Horse* refers to the calling and conversion of a heathen. *Nephew* tells of the story of Creation, and how evil entered Narnia. And finally, *Last Battle* portrays the coming of the Antichrist (who is represented by the Ape), as well as the end of the world and the Last Judgment. (Ford)

Throughout the Narnia series, the narrator was reminiscent of an older relative, telling a true story from his youth. This narratology was a key element of Fiction that Lewis, and his Inklings counterparts valued greatly. Because of their encouragement, Lewis added in this story-telling style, which made the narrator seem more credible to children. It has also been a key part of all mythology, since verbal story-telling began in all cultures. Specifically in his first book, he departed from his third-person omniscient narrator voice, and as a wise and more experienced person would, he reminded the reader of the dangers of climbing into wardrobes. This occurred several times, but the first is the most often quoted; “She had, of course, left the door open, for she knew that it is a very silly thing to shut oneself into a wardrobe.” (*Inside Narnia*) Most of all, it seemed as though he sincerely cared for the safety of his readers, and hoped to avoid incidents which could be inspired by his story of children having grand adventures in wardrobes. When he directly addressed the reader, saying “we” know what is safe, he generated the rapport of a wise relative, who takes any opportunity to show care for a child.

On the opening page of *The Lion*, Lewis mentioned the historical significance of the children being sent away from London, due to air raids during World War II. The detail given in the first few pages helped to acclimate the reader to the serious circumstances which the children faced. This mirrored what Lewis had experienced as a child. The Pevensies had a sudden change of living arrangements, and they supported each other, since they were without their parents for the first time. Within a short amount of time in the home of the professor, the dialogue between the children began to shift to imagination, and wondering what types of animals might be lurking around the house. Lewis and his brother had done this exact exercise in fantasy when they had been children, where they would also expand upon the various imaginary characters, which might exist in the same space, or in entirely different worlds.

There are many times in *The Lion*, that the author offered advice, as a self-aware first-person narrator. In addition to Lewis' warning against searching for mystical lands and accidentally locking themselves into a wardrobe, there were several other asides where he addressed the audience directly in his narrative voice. This first book was dedicated to his goddaughter Lucy, therefore it made sense that he would take great care to help keep her (and any other child readers) safe.

In *The Lion*, the biblical representation of Narnia was undeniably obvious to any reader with exposure to the basic principles and major stories within the Bible. Lewis intended to make the spiritual journey relevant for all readers, young and old, alike. Beyond the biblical stories and lessons, nearly any modern reader who had been through primary school would have been exposed to imaginary characters, and learning about the importance of symbolism. Any child who had been exposed to the main tenets of Christianity would have immediately recognized these same things. Several of the main characters, who are specifically and meticulously developed, represent various aspects of biblical ideals and journeys.

Aslan symbolized Jesus, who is often represented within Christianity as the lion, primarily based on a verse comforting believers about His final destination. (*Revelation 5:5*) Aslan's sacrificial death, which Aslan himself chose to endure in place of Edmund, is a direct illustration of the death of Jesus, who Christians believe died for mankind. Aslan did so willingly, and specifically as payment for the contractually obligated death owed due to one of Edmund's mistakes (recognized in Christian ideology as "sins"). He also exhibited extraordinary forgiveness and benevolence to Edmund, even when his substitution came at great cost. Furthermore, after his torture and death, he was resurrected in the same way as in the story of Jesus. (*Mark 28:5-6*) Similarly to the women in the story of the Bible, it was Susan and Lucy

who first discovered that Aslan had been resurrected. In the biblical account of Jesus' resurrection, Mary Magdelene and another woman are the individuals who found the tomb empty. It became their job to inform others of what had happened.

Similarly, Peter showed the bravery of an adult, and he began his journey with a staunch disregard for any idea which he believed was improbable. He represented the skeptic's stance, much like the Pharisees of the bible, who lived based on rules, schedules, and tangible proof before belief. (Mark 8:11) As the eldest child, he naturally had already developed more of the tendencies of an adult, which served to illustrate the differences in mindset, from that of a more open-minded child. In *Lion*, Peter attempts to get Lucy to admit that her stories of *Narnia* were in the same category as their combined imaginary stories, and only for fun. (*Lion* 21) After having some proof to reinforce the fantastical ideas, Peter gave Lucy credit for standing firm in her belief that she had seen Aslan, and directly acknowledged her as their "hero." (*Caspian* 131) Strict reality had been the only truth that Peter would legitimately acknowledge, and the rest had been merely playful imagination, until he had his previously unfathomable experiences in *Narnia*.

Susan's character showed the responsibility, maturity, and a certain level of maternal instinct of an older child, which benefited the others, in the absence of their parents. She helped everyone to communicate collectively, in a loving way. Compared to the gentle yet firm love that Aslan (representing Jesus) had for the children, she was a good realization of how the reader is to mimic such care. On the other hand, Susan also showed the same doubt in Lucy's stories, until she had proof for herself, as shown in her fond recollections when she found the gold knight chess piece, a year after the Pevensie's first visit to Narnia. (*Caspian* 16) Lewis was showing that with maturity and other positive qualities, also comes the loss of imagination and acceptance of

possibilities, which Lewis found ultimately unfavorable. Susan's character served as proof, that negative learned behaviors and attitudes could be rectified, with the correct inspiration. In *Caspian*, Susan apologized after unintentionally causing Trumpkin embarrassment for beating him at a shooting competition, showing her true regard for others. It was obvious that Trumpkin had not handled his loss well, as it represented his honor.

In *The Last Battle*, Susan was only mentioned as "no longer a friend of Narnia," and being interested in "nylons and lipstick and invitations." This earned Lewis heavy criticism from feminist critics, (Grossman)(Pullman) who claimed that this represented (among his other works) an angry and misogynistic viewpoint. Their claim drew from the fact that his mother died when he was young, and the only references to female adult humans in the Narnia series tended to be negative. The White Witch was an obvious example, but Susan's desire to grow up and use lipstick was seen as useless and unnecessary, if his intent was not to insult the sexuality and development of a young lady. In *Voyage*, Lucy was jealous of Susan's beauty, but when the opportunity arose to use Coriakin's magic book, she chose to remain an imaginative child and to have self-appreciation.

The third sibling, Edmund, represented the egotistical doubter or betrayer, like "Doubting Thomas", in the Bible (John 20:24-29). Christians and Humanists alike have always believed the tendency to doubt to be a basic part of human nature, to a degree. Edmund entered the wardrobe alone at first, but only after Lucy had told him and his siblings about this new land. His first Narnian experience was with the White Witch. He was apprehensively trustful at first, but inwardly, it truly did not take him long to determine that the White Witch had corrupt intentions. The stark difference between Edmund's experience, and that of Lucy, was that Edmund met the White Witch before anyone else, and she successfully persuaded him to return with his siblings,



to fulfill her desire to fully control the land. It was partially due to the fact that she was using an enchanted potion, which turned into a warm drink and Turkish Delight, to further convince him that she was willing to give him any reward that he desired. His desires easily overcame him, since the witch was already showing him what she was promising.

Regrettably, Edmund followed along with the plan of the Witch, because she promised to reward him greatly. The Turkish Delight that he consumed was enchanted in a way to control him, but he also craved the power and reward, more than he considered the safety of his family. This served as a direct example for how many adolescents tend to follow along with whatever makes them feel powerful and more adult-like. He was at the age of development when most children are unsure of themselves and they have a difficult time deciding if they still enjoy the things of their youth, or if the trappings of adulthood are more appealing. Lewis repeated this idea that striving for things of adulthood would not result in immediate satisfaction, since he believed that maturation was not necessarily a positive thing.

After returning from his own visit to Narnia, Edmund denied Lucy's claims that such a land existed; even resorting to teasing her in front of their other siblings, so that he wouldn't appear childish or naïve, as well. It may have been purely to save face from his previous mockery of Lucy, but he certainly demonstrated a level of selfishness that was not resolved until the children returned the following year, in *Caspian*. While traveling through steep terrain, Edmund easily admitted that he had misjudged the circumstances. When Susan was referring to a statement that Edmund had previously made out of frustration, he responded by saying, "I'm not saying it now." (*Caspian* 20) He was finally able to admit that he realized he had been wrong, and saving his own ego was not his highest priority. Edmund's maturation toward a more well-rounded awareness mirrored the way that professed non-Christians (although being secretly

believers) deny faith continually, due to concern for their own self-preservation and affectation. Generally, the objective of any faith is that those who may not have been willing to admit that they actually did believe, would eventually care less about the opinions of others, and more about their own personal convictions.

In regard to Edmund's experience with the White Witch, readers could see that she was plotting against Edmund and his siblings, and that she was not the benevolent power Edmund had wanted to believe she was, but he could not see that because of his immaturity. After spending time with the witch and seeing how she mistreated others, Edmund became aware of her character, but didn't know how to escape from her clutches. His maturity throughout the remainder of his journey through Narnia showed a vast amount of personal growth and maturity.

The final Pevensie child, Lucy, represented curious and innocent youth. Her siblings viewed her as naive, and easily excitable at first, but they soon learned that they would have been better off believing what they felt was an over-active imagination. Lucy was the first child to travel to Narnia, giving the reader their first glimpse of the new world, through the eyes of a child. Not only was she in wonder, but she innocently believed without question, all that she had been told. She immediately trusted Tumnus, her first contact from this new world within the wardrobe. She was confused, when he eventually divulged that he had been working for the White Witch, and that he had intended to deliver her to the witch. After deciding that it was against his conscience to do this, he took Lucy back to the lamp post, so that she would again be safe from the witch. The reader was already invested in Lucy's story, since her relationship with Tumnus developed quickly, due to Lewis' creative narration style.

While Lucy's first encounter with Tumnus was an excellent example for readers on how Christians are expected to forgive even the worst of personal offenses, this made her story seem

even more preposterous to her siblings. She shared that her quick trip from reality had lapsed enough time that she had met a friend, had been betrayed, and had enough time to process and forgive the offense. This is an excellent illustration of forgiving others, regardless of the severity of their offense. (Mark 11:25) This difference in time experienced by a character, versus time spent in the real world, is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and has become a hallmark characteristic of fantasy fiction. Lucy trusted that her venture into the woods was not a dream or a lapse in sanity, and it wasn't until her brothers and sister joined her in Narnia, that her truthful honor was restored.

A possible influence for Lucy's initial recounting to her siblings was based on Lewis' understanding of Plato's *Republic* (Annas), written around 380 B.C. Plato's story was a Greek dialogue which has been honored as a valuable concept, that alternate realities would not be easily accepted if an individual had only ever known one reality to exist. Instead of Lewis Carroll's example of a different reality existing solely in a dream, as in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Plato and Lewis both postulated that simultaneously separate realities could occur.

Lucy and Edmund showed the most character development in the first Narnia book, especially since their siblings did not find Narnia until the sixth chapter. From then on, all but Edmund followed generally the same character development. When Edmund left his siblings at the home of the Beavers, he followed his deceptive motives encouraged by the White Witch from his first visit to Narnia. Many other characters are vital to this first Narnia book, including Tumnus, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, the White Witch, and Father Christmas. These characters are representatives of the non-Christian side of Lewis' creativity, where he drew inspiration from various worldwide mythologies.

Tumnus (formally, Mr. Tumnus) the faun lived in Narnia, and Lewis later credited his inspiration for the entire Narnia series to his original image of the faun walking through snowy woods. (*It All Began* 53) The faun was the first example of Roman mythology represented. Lucy recognized Tumnus as a faun immediately, and she was delighted to meet him, since he expressed himself as having a helpful personality. At first, Tumnus seemed welcoming and thoughtful, ensuring that Lucy had anything that she would need to be comfortable. He used his musical abilities to enchant Lucy, and to lull her into a deep sleep, so that he could deliver her to the White Witch. This was exactly the same way fauns from Roman mythology (and satyrs, from Greek mythology) would enchant their human prisoners, even if the intent wasn't for malice. They were depicted as forest-living creatures, who might either help or taunt travelers, depending on their personality. ("Faun") It was not long before he felt compelled to acknowledge to himself that he was truly committing an act which was against his good nature. The reader had already formed a connection with Tumnus, given how gentle he was, and even after he confessed his intentions to Lucy, she (and the reader) could not help but have pity on him. He apologized profusely, and he redeemed his character by helping Lucy return to safety, away from the proximity of the White Witch, since her intentions with Lucy were to harm her. In doing so, Tumnus exemplified his human tendency to first justify his self-preservation, due to a promised reward, but then his integrity caught up to him, and he had to keep Lucy safe.

On her second visit to Narnia, Lucy learned that Tumnus had suffered consequences for his defiance against the White Witch, and she insisted on rescuing him since she felt personally involved. This forgiveness and loyal friendship, despite offenses, showed Lucy's altruism and true friendship, at any cost to herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Beaver represented the humanitarian ideal of having people placed in the world as wise and benevolent helpers. While the children ate fish at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, there was another major aside from Lewis, which served to remind reader to stay with the fictional story, because even more make-believe would be around the next corner. In his literary asides, he mirrored the Beavers' storytelling, by using the voice of a librarian reading to a group of children, or that of a loving uncle, with a child on each lap and several more children strewn along the floor. Not only did the Beavers educate the children on the sordid past of Narnia, but they also came up with ideas to help the "Sons of Adam and the Daughters of Eve," which was the term used by all Narnian creatures, based on their own mythology. It was obvious that they would have done so, even without the knowledge that their home was at risk of attack. Readers learned the importance in seeking out a wise person who could be trusted, to ask for advice and guidance. Lewis' use of hospitable characters, such as Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, showed the good side of humanity (as personified as beavers could be). They helped the children gather up their own resources that would be needed for their trip, and they did their best to lead the children to Aslan. This education and leadership is an outstanding example that Lewis gives for anyone guiding children on the path to Christianity, especially when they are so young and malleable.

Exactly opposite such examples of generosity and guidance, was The White Witch. Her first act, upon determining the identity of the children, was to deceive them about her foul intentions. The White Witch was referred to as offspring of Adam's first wife (*Lion* 77), but not related to the children through Adam. As recounted in the Jewish folklore of *Alphabet of Ben Sira* (Taylor 238) and Arabic mythology borrowed from that of Judaism (Schwartz 218), Lilith (Adams first wife) was part offspring of the Jinn. The Jinn were not considered inherently evil,

but they were said to have free will, and were regularly shown as evil, especially since they were powerful enough to overtake a person and possess their conscience. Lilith was also part giant, but that seemed not to play much into the explanation of the personality of the White Witch. In the first book, the witch was meant to be the character foil to Aslan, and the main antagonist. The majority of those who acted on behalf of the witch seemed to do so out of fear and/or greed for the rewards she had promised. Where some critics have judged Lewis' views on women, based on the White Witch, it was more of a representation of the general power hunger of adults, and more intensely, by Satan himself. As a foil character to the male Aslan (representing Jesus), a female character would also be easier to identify for young readers.

Father Christmas' visit was vital to the story of Narnia, because Christmas represented the pinnacle of excitement for children, during winter. Often, winter meant confinement to the indoors, boredom, and as the sole source of entertainment, celebration of the winter holidays. When the good characters of Narnia sadly proclaimed that it was always winter but never Christmas, it was meant to stir up a great sadness among children readers. This neverending winter mirrored the story in Norse mythology of Fimbulwinter, which is said to precede Ragnarok (war between the gods). (Lindow 254-258)

Any reader whose family celebrated Christmas would be able to relate to the sense of loss felt by those who had it taken away from them. Thankfully, he appeared during *The Lion*, to renew the spirits of the Narnian citizens. Father Christmas also recognized the importance of Aslan, as a direct endorsement between Santa Claus and Jesus, for the young reader. At this point in Lewis' lifetime, the idea of Santa Claus was truly starting to become more popular, and a full celebration was beginning to take root during the Christmas season. (Weightman 31) It seemed that Lewis was attempting to reconcile these two significant beings, so that they would

essentially join forces, as benevolent beings. It would also help young readers to continue the traditional values of giving and generosity, instead of hanging onto the new socially accepted trends.

Near the end of *Lion*, when the White Witch was preparing to kill Edmund at the stone table, Aslan offered himself as a replacement. This was the biggest, and most important, reference to Christianity in the entire series. (John 10:18) This pleased the witch, since that had been a goal more important than taking Edmund for herself, therefore she was satisfied with the trade. After Aslan's death, mice chewed through the ropes which had held Aslan onto the table, even though he had made no effort to escape. The imagery of mice helping a lion in distress is suggestive of Aesop's fable of "The Lion and the Mouse," where a lion had made peace with a mouse, and the mouse later helps the lion escape from hunters who had tied him to a tree with rope. (arts.gla "fables") This has been another enduring prominent story, which was familiar, and automatically more credible to a young reader, who may have already had knowledge of Aesop's fables.

Aslan came back to life stronger than before, and along with the Sons of Adam and the Daughters of Eve, his army defeated the White Witch. The "deep magic" referred to in *Lion* portrays the all-encompassing power and compassion possessed by the God of Christianity, and exemplified in the actions of Jesus himself. This is also the most important part of the Christian faith, since it determines the fate of those who would take their own part in this story of faith.

Although the White Witch was killed near the beginning of the series, that did not mean that all evil was overcome. This was a clear picture of evil having dominion over the world, whether or not "the evil one" was still present. Just as the White Witch had influenced some creatures in the land of Narnia, Satan, as the evil being in the story of Christianity, also left his

mark on the world. The evil influence remained, and it was obvious that it ought to be tamed, both in Narnia and in the representation within Christianity.

In *Caspian*, the Pevensies were called back to Narnia when Prince Caspian blew the horn which had once belonged to Susan. The land of Narnia had experienced a time lapse of 1,000 years, whereas the children had only experienced one year, which meant that their entire landscape had changed, physically, and politically. Prince Caspian had to escape from his Uncle Miraz, since his uncle's wife had just delivered a son, and Caspian was no longer needed to keep as a pawn for political purposes. The children persevered on a long and difficult journey, to reach their goal of helping to reinstate Caspian to his rightful throne. After several setbacks, and some lessons learned, such as perseverance, selflessness, and cooperation, the children finally reached their goal. *Caspian* showed the effort required to overcome corruption, the need for help to accomplish this goal, and the importance of returning to one's rightful place. Miraz had been opportunistic in taking what did not belong to him, and it was up to Caspian to regain the honor and respect of his people. In the case of Prince Caspian, his rightful ownership of the throne parallels the story of the biblical "Prince of Peace" returning to His throne.

One year after the events of *Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* brought back Edmund and Lucy, as well as their cousin, Eustace. This time, the children returned through a photograph in Lucy's assigned room. Caspian had aged three years in that time, and he was leading an expedition (along with Reepicheep) to search for the seven lords whom had gone missing, after Caspian's Uncle Miraz had banished them, many years before. Since part of his reinstatement entailed searching for the missing lords, he had to follow through on his promise. On the first island they encountered, several on board were taken captive and sold into slavery.



Caspian's request for all on board to stay calm concluded with their safety, because his confidence was rewarded by finding out that the man who bought them as slaves was one of the lords for whom they had been searching. This lord released Caspian and his crew, to continue their search for the next missing lord.

On another island, Eustace experienced drastic character development, when his selfishness led to his condemnation to living as a dragon, and it was only with his humility and Aslan's help, that he was returned to his original state. On Deathwater island, crew members became excited to find a cavern filled with gold artifacts, but they learned about how greed again caused an unfortunate end to one of the lords, and it also would happen to them, if they were not cautious. It seems that each island had a lesson for the crew to learn, and especially important for Eustace. While he helped the crew fulfill their goal, he learned just as much as he participated. At the end of *Caspian*, the children were sent home, but only after Reepicheep was told it was his time to sail away by himself to Aslan's Country, representing Heaven. Reepicheep was rewarded with space in Aslan's Country, after an honorable life and service to others.

Eustace returned to Narnia within a year, in *The Silver Chair*, with a classmate who was suffering from bullying by others, and they were seeking an escape. Jill did not believe Eustace's story, until they had no choice, but to try something to get away from the taunting schoolchildren. Upon arrival, Jill and Eustace were given four signs from Aslan, to help guide them in their quest to find Prince Rilian. After difficulty remembering the signs from Aslan, having owls fly them to the company and care of Puddleglum (a Marsh-wiggle), being poorly guided into the home of giants who planned to eat them, and then they fell into a deep cave, they finally came to a tormented man who turned out to be Prince Rilian. The children had spent a great amount of time concerning themselves over which sign would come next, that they lost

sight of what was naturally occurring in front of them. This lesson, to be present and participating in one's future, would be valid advice for any reader. Even more important, was the character quality of determination, regardless of the obstacle, or fear of repeated failure. Just as Jill had been suffering from the ills of her classmates, Rilian had suffered at the hand of the powers of evil in his own world. In the plot line of *Chair*, the powers of darkness had been overcome, with knowledge and help from friends.

*The Horse and His Boy* took place within Narnia entirely, and only involved characters who were from Narnian territory. The boy, Shasta learned from the horse Bree that his new destined owners intended to treat him as a servant, so they escape together, and make plans to travel as a pair to Narnia. Aravis and her horse Hwin were also traveling, but in an effort for Aravis to avoid an arranged marriage. After Aravis overheard Rabadash's plans to invade Narnia and take Susan for his own, all four escapees agreed to join the Narnian army, and to help fight against Susan's attackers. Eventually, Shasta learned that he was a prince, and that he unknowingly fulfilled a prophecy by helping to save Archenland. Shasta and Aravis later had a son named Ram. This story represents how a heathen, or someone who doesn't feel as though they belong, could be called to convert to a better life.

*Nephew* explained how Narnia was created, and how evil arrived. Digory and Polly traveled to other worlds, which existed simultaneously. In another pool/world, Digory's curiosity won, when he could not help himself but to ring a bell with a riddle about what he could have found out. Digory learned that he had awoken Jadis, who had eliminated every other person within her world. After Jadis caused destruction and havoc within their world, the children pulled her back out of it, and they got to see Aslan's creation of a new world. He told Digory to bring an apple into the new world, so that a tree could be planted. This was an obvious reference to the

forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, and like in the Bible, this tree had rules. Eventually one apple seed was planted back in England, and that tree ended up being carved into the Wardrobe that Lucy would later discover. Temptation, sin, and natural consequences were all major lessons learned from *Nephew*.

*The Last Battle* was Lewis' way of wrapping up his series, by explaining how the Christian "end of times" would happen. After all of the events from the previous books, Lewis showed an entirely new set of characters, who demonstrated gullibility that could fatally damage them. Shift, an ape, represented the Antichrist and deceived others, convincing them to do bad things in his name. Puzzle was naively convinced to pretend that he was Aslan, in order to persuade others to do what Shift wanted. What followed was the entire dismantling of Narnia, in the same fashion that it had been created (and that earth is said to have been created, in the Bible). The Last Judgment (much like that in the Bible) was a counting of "sins," to determine whether a creature had earned their passage with Aslan, or if they would be turned into a non-talking creature, and ultimately disappear. Aslan had a discussion with Emeth, wherein they discussed Emeth's lifelong worship and service to Tash. Since Emeth hadn't known any better, Aslan stated that any good deeds done previously would be credited to his honor of Aslan. This showed a type of theology that not all Christian readers would agree with, but he at least honored the service of an individual who had a pure heart, all along.

### Criticism

When the first Narnia book was published in 1949, Lewis received heavy criticism from both Christian critics and mainstream literary critics. According to David Cook, the initial reception of *Lion* actually so concerned the publishers that they assumed Lewis' other works might also receive less attention, and that their value might also decrease. (qtd. from Veith 11)

Cook also stated that adults felt that the Christian ideals would not be recognized by younger children, older children would become indoctrinated (which was partially Lewis' intent), and that and "violent incidents" involving death or violence would possibly even terrorize young children. (qtd. from Vieth 12)

Many Christian critics were strongly offended by what they considered abhorrent and sacrilegious, that a so-called piece of Christian literature would include mythical and magical elements while also representing the Christian story of Jesus, and redemption through Him. Until the mid-1900s, there had not been much Christian-based fiction of any type, and Lewis was accused of combining religions and other belief systems. The progressive environment that developed following Lewis' groundbreaking methods resulted in the desire to become educated about other cultures and belief systems, and this inspiration to learn is exactly what Lewis wanted to occur. This willingness to learn simply did not exist in such an open way, before the time of Lewis' writing.

In the other critical camp were the secular literary critics, who felt that Lewis' use of Christian themes was excessive and forced. Many literary critics also felt the need to protect their children from indoctrination, since Narnia could have been an otherwise harmless piece of fiction, but the religious aspect of the writing was undesirable for parents who felt the need to prevent propaganda of any sort.

In 1958, Professor W. Normal Pittinger wrote that "there can be little doubt, that among those who write popular apologetic for the Christian faith, C.S. Lewis is the best known and most admired." (Nelson ) This sounded like a compliment, but it was actually an insult, since there were no other "popular" authors who wrote Christian apologetics. Pittinger wanted to make sure that Lewis felt the sting of being the most popular member of the group in which he was the

only member. In a response to critique from Pittenger, Lewis had much to say about critics creative use of words, including many creative phrases of his own, about Pittenger's findings. Lewis did not withdraw from his desire to write or critique, based on the accusations of character from Pittenger. (Dock 178-179)

More recently, in a paper presented at the 2003 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, just days from the 50 year anniversary of Lewis' death, a serious fundamental question was asked about whether or not C.S. Lewis went to Heaven. (Robbins) As pertains to his many writings, Robbins found what he believed were errors in Lewis' theology, and he was convinced that Lewis' understanding of Christianity never developed to the point that he would qualify for entrance to heaven itself. Robbins may have considered the Bible verse found in Romans 2:2, which states that "the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things," which is referring to judgment of others. Nonetheless, the concern about Lewis' intentions, and his long-lasting impact, topics which many writers and critics still find of interest.

Jonathan Rogers compiled a collection of literary criticisms on the Christian meanings within *Narnia*, and he found that Christianity is based on the ability to see that there is more to this world than just what is visible. (Rogers 1) It is exactly what Rogers sought out to prove, that Lewis accomplished his goal of helping readers to see that there is more to this world than an individual might see, based on proof and their own experiences.

In the twenty-first century, Lewis' works are honored as one of the greatest examples of Fantasy Fiction, with John Mort claiming that Lewis was a "prolific writer who wrote works of Christian science fiction and theology for the average person," making him the most influential Christian science fiction author. The Fantasy Fiction and Science-Fiction genres are sometimes

interchangeable titles, for readers. Furthermore, *Narnia* is respected in the Christian Fiction genre, even among those who do not typically enjoy Fantasy Fiction. Many libraries around the world consider Lewis to be at least one of the most distinguished Christian Fiction authors. From the website of one Public Library: "C. S. Lewis is the literary, philosophical grandfather of modern Christian fiction." ([www.arrtreads.org](http://www.arrtreads.org)) The *Narnia* series has gained long-standing status on many top reading lists, including the number one position in the Christian Fantasy category at [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com). The *Narnia* series has been equally easy a text for teachers to withdraw the Christian parallels, if they wished to retain a non-Christian perspective.

### Lewis' Successors: The Legacy of a Genre

Lewis felt a strong responsibility to educate young readers about the Christian perspective, which was more important to him than writing for his own creative outlet, or as a way to get rich. Not only did he want to create a piece of fiction which incorporated what he considered to be comprehensive doctrine, but he also wanted to demonstrate for future authors that the doors for additional types of creativity were accessible. While Tolkien had surpassed the previous boundaries of Fantasy, Lewis desired to improve upon this further, by using more pronounced Christian themes mixed into the standard fantastical imagery.

Considering that the genres of Fantasy and Science-Fiction have significantly developed in the time since Lewis wrote, that alone shows how his influence has been far-reaching. The writers below who Lewis greatly influenced, only represents the absolute most successful and most well-known examples of writers, all of whom have acknowledged in one way or another, C.S. Lewis impacted his genre.

Tim LaHaye is an excellent example of influence from Lewis and his contemporaries. His “*Left Behind*” series (1995-2007) includes 13 books, and the series had an excellent reception in the Christian Fiction genre. It was obvious that his works were not going to appeal to the greater mainstream audience, but his focus was directed toward encouraging Christian Fiction readers anyway. LaHaye has said, "I write the best I can. I know I'm never going to be revered as some classic writer. I don't claim to be C. S. Lewis. The literary-type writers, I admire them. I wish I was smart enough to write a book that's hard to read, you know?" (Olsen "*Newsweek Catches Up.*")

Likewise, Madeleine L'Engle gave the same credit to Lewis, which Lewis gave to George MacDonald, for help understanding a simple explanation of how God uses punishment to teach people, while taking no pleasure in the punishment itself. Her writings were influenced by Lewis' methods and style, especially in her later writing career. L'Engle enjoyed a focus on ideas from modern science, as well as some lessons from her own Christian experience. “*A Wrinkle in Time*” was her most notable piece of writing, although it was written sporadically and over a long period of time, delayed because of events in her life. She wrote this book while also studying quantum physics, and experienced the same frequent rejection of her works that Lewis had endured. Critics made accusations that the book was too serious to be considered a children’s novel, and that a female should not have been a protagonist. After two years, 26 rejections, and the insistence of the author, her book was finally published in 1962. (L'Engle 236)

Gene Wolfe is not a best-selling author, but he is revered among readers and authors alike, as one of the best science fiction authors alive today. He has been presented with sixteen writing awards, as well as twenty-four other nominations. “*The Book of the New Sun*” is his greatest recognized piece of writing. The works of Wolfe seem to be less focused on

Christianity, but like Lewis, he also purposely writes outside of conventional genre rules. The principal reason he offers for deviating from those guidelines, is that he wants more of a realistic representation of the ordinary individual. He says that most people are undependable for various reasons. Some narrators will lie or “omit truths,” in order to put their spin on a story. Some are supposed to be represented for accurate personality, intelligence, or regional differences.

("Renowned Science-fiction Author") (Gaiman)

“Bridge to Terabithia,” by Katherine Paterson, took an obvious cue from the world of Narnia, regarding place names. She said, "I thought I had made it up. Then, rereading *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C. S. Lewis, I realized that I had probably gotten it from the island of Terebinthia in that book. However, Lewis probably got that name from the Terebinth tree in the Bible, so both of us pinched from somewhere else, probably unconsciously." (Paterson Terabithia.com) Paterson also focused on education (she served on the board for children’s reading organizations) and her faith (Paterson was highly involved in her local church). Like Lewis, Paterson has written with her audience in mind, concentrating on topics which are relevant to young children, especially in regard to dealing with difficult topics. As seen with Paterson, the creative outlet, in encouraging children’s creativity, was an objective Lewis inspired in all children’s fiction writers.

Arguably the most successful contemporary author to use Lewis’ methods of fantasy writing, and directing her efforts toward children and pre-teens is J.K. Rowling, with her “Harry Potter” series. As with Lewis’ Narnia, her saga following Harry (the protagonist) takes place over seven books, and while much of what he experiences is supernatural, he still learns life lessons and matures in the same way as many of those reading the Harry Potter books. Although several decades have passed since the era of Lewis’ writings, they received similar reception and



cult-like following, when readers remarked that the authors had something special to offer to them. Rowling has also experienced a hefty amount of criticism for including excessive amounts of mysticism, and too much evil content, for reading intended for new readers.

Unlike Lewis, Rowling was writing quickly, to catch up to film production, and became a public icon for children's fantasy literature. The difference between their immediate popularity is largely a result in the change in media and society, because Lewis reached his own level of popularity, but it took a few years for the momentum to pick up for him. Not only has Rowling inspired young readers to be more creative, but now the phenomenon of “fanfics” has developed. Fan fic(tion) is a piece fiction writing, in response to an original work, which is meant to show how the reader was inspired by that work. Rowlings’ work has no short supply of fanfics, which will forever remain a big part of her legacy, as the fantasy genre evolves and grows. (Rowling). These criticisms have more or less been toned down, because the ideals behind Lewis' work in Narnia have become more main-stream. In general, those seeking Christian literature are now more accepting and willing to sort for themselves what is reality. Those seeking purely fictional content are usually able to either ignore the Christian symbolism, or accept it as another part of fiction, and move on.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, regardless of the intentions of C.S. Lewis, when he began writing “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,” he created the new genre of Christian Fantasy Fiction, and publishers and readers alike demanded that his series continue through to completion. Lewis did not initially intend to shape fiction the way that he did, but he did want to produce something that others were not. With that being said, he honestly thought he (and his works) would be forgotten within five years of his death, as most authors come to pass, sadly. Fortunately for

*Narnia*, and the imagination of adults and children alike, his works have become universally-known, well-respected, and highly valued. Educators, young children, and the young at heart, see significance in the artful way in which Lewis combined the various literary ideals.

He developed a generally overwhelming desire to impact the genre of fiction, and eventually to carve out his distinct niche in fantasy fiction (especially that of Christian Fantasy Fiction), which has also been highly successful. Along with the popularity of his books, there have been several adaptations of his *Narnia* series, including a public broadcasting version, and a high budget Hollywood version.

Lewis effectively convinced young readers that these other worlds could exist, and that the adventures within were merely a reflection of the adventures that they experienced in the mundane non-fiction world. Despite his many challenges and criticisms, and the evolving process of his creation, his overall influence is still far-reaching in the secular and Christian literature genres alike, especially the beloved children's series many now refer to simply as "*Narnia*."

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