

Liberty University

Truth from Fiction:

The Apologetic Use of Christian Allegorical Literature in the 21st Century

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics

by

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Lynchburg, Virginia

October 2023

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ABSTRACT

Christian allegorical literature is a genre that explores apologetic claims in a unique and creative way. Although this genre has attracted many readers over the years, there is hesitation and reluctance to accept this genre as one that should be used as an apologetic method. Namely, the didactic intent of this genre has caused some critics to question whether this genre promotes critical reading and thinking skills in a way that leads readers to make their own spiritual decisions. Some skeptics believe that sharing theistic truths that are disguised by fictional storylines is a creative way to forcibly push Christian theism onto readers, instead of allowing them to engage critically with the narratives.

This thesis argues that critical engagement skills are necessary to fully understand Christian allegorical literature. Furthermore, the critical reader's free will must be taken into consideration when analyzing books of this genre. Even if an author presents accurate theological claims, the critical reader has the ability to decide whether he will be moved to action by the apologetic truths he uncovers in the narrative.

The research of this thesis concludes that critical reading and thinking skills can readily be applied to Christian allegorical literature. Readers who engage critically with Christian allegorical texts have the tools they need to determine what parts of the text they believe should impact their spiritual lives. Although Christian authors might act as a spiritual catalyst, it is the reader who decides whether he will pursue or reject Christianity. For this reason, Christian allegorical literature continues to be used as a resource that encourages critical thinking about spirituality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for bringing me out of darkness and into His marvelous light. I would not have had the desire to pursue apologetics had He not shown me His lovingkindness and faithfulness throughout the years. Thank You for holding me fast, even when I did not want to be held.

Second, I would like to acknowledge my family's integral part in this journey. The Ladies of Boutte Manor, my mother and sister, have been my best friends and strongest supporters for as long as I can remember. My father and brother have always cheered me on in every academic, musical, and athletic endeavor I have pursued. Without my family's unwavering support, inside jokes, non-stop musical singing, and movie quotes, I do not know where I would be.

Third, thank you to my family at WoodsEdge Community Church. I am forever thankful for this godly community that God has allowed me to link arms with during this season of our lives. For the first time in a while, church feels like home.

Lastly, thank you to Dr. Talley and Dr. Matthews, who eagerly stepped aboard this project and helped me see it to completion. Your insights have been invaluable, and I appreciate you both for believing in this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

An unsuspecting atheist in his 40's stumbled upon a novel that altered the course of his life. The novel narrated a young man's journey through a world where fairies, tree spirits, and knights roamed free.¹ Although it was not overtly stated in the text, the story colorfully used the setting, plot, and characters to share how the world is perceived through a Christian worldview.² The author of this fantasy novel, George Macdonald, achieved this by using allegorical elements to represent theistic concepts and beliefs. Although the atheist began Macdonald's book with a heart that opposed Christianity, he later claimed that this imaginative literary work had a "profound" influence on his conversion.³

After reading this novel, the atheist embarked on a spiritual journey that was initiated by his questions and doubts concerning divine matters. Over time, he began to open himself up intellectually to the reality of theism and Christianity. He later recounted that the novel, *Phantastes*, was influential because it revealed a perspective of Christianity that spoke to him in a way that he had not experienced before.⁴ This self-proclaimed "reluctant" convert eventually became the author of one of the most popular children's book series: *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He also penned other books about the Christian faith, such as *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Great Divorce*.⁵

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1955), 180-1; Monika B. Hilder, "The Packed Reality of Heaven': C. S. Lewis's Imaginative Re-Education of the Modern Pilgrim," *Sehnsucht: The C.S. Lewis Journal* 12 (2018): 93.

² Hilder, "The Packed Reality," 97; Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 180-1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 179, 180-1.

⁵ Ibid., 228-9.

C.S. Lewis is not the only person whose life has been changed by allegorical literature, which is why the genre lives on.⁶ Allegorical literature that presents Christian beliefs is an effective apologetic tool that has influenced Christians and non-Christians alike. The way allegorical literature invites readers to think critically about spiritual matters cannot be overlooked as a powerful apologetic tool to evangelize unbelievers.

Statement of the Problem

Although allegorical fiction has a strong following, there is a misconception that Christian allegorical literature's overt emphasis on Christian theism prevents readers from thinking critically about spiritual matters.⁷ The problem is not solely in the didactic nature of the genre. The fact that allegorical literature strives to teach readers life lessons in a creative way is generally accepted in society; however, persuasive fiction that can potentially convert skeptics to Christianity is not as widely accepted.⁸ Although Christian literature once held a prominent place in literary circles, the last two centuries have revealed a shift in literary preferences that has not proven favorable to Christian literature.⁹ Dennis Butts and Peter Hunt found that readers have shifted from being sympathetic towards Christianity to believing Christianity is "positively toxic."¹⁰ For example, a leaked report from a HarperCollins executive revealed that although

⁶ Holly Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017), 16-7. Holly Ordway is another example of an atheist who was deeply affected by allegorical literature in a way that led her to convert to Christianity.

⁷ Han Madueme and Robert Erle Barham, "Stories that Gleam like Lightning: The Outrageous Idea of Christian Fiction," *Themelios* 46, no. 2 (2021): 387.

⁸ *Ibid.*; Dennis Butts and Peter Hunt, *Why Was Billy Bunter Never Really Expelled?: and Another Twenty-Five Mysteries of Children's Literature* (Cambridge, England: The Lutterworth Press, 2019), 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

readers desire captivating plots and relatable characters, they want these elements without any trace of Christian themes.¹¹

Additionally, allegory is often critiqued for being an unsuitable tool to share Christian truths. Between the text's hidden meaning, the reader's subjective interpretations, and the author's theological leanings, the spiritual conclusions that readers can arrive at do not necessarily reflect absolute truth.¹² Instead, critics believe that a reader's conclusions reflect how well the author was able to convince the reader of his spiritual views.¹³ If this is true, this proves that readers of Christian allegorical literature are not encouraged to make their own spiritual decisions. Instead of allowing readers to come to their own spiritual conclusions, some critics believe that Christian allegorical literature uses narrow-minded narratives to force Christianity upon readers.¹⁴ For these reasons, critics conclude that Christian allegorical literature does not promote individual thinking and decision making.¹⁵

¹¹ Butts and Hunt, *Why Was Billy*, 61.

¹² *Encyclopedia of World Religions: Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v. "Allegory in Catholicism"; Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 104-5.

¹³ Elin Anita Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence and Navigating Reality: A Critical Analysis of Adult Influence on Three Classic Children's Books* (Trondheim, Norway: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2023), 10.

¹⁴ Samuel Coleridge, *The Miscellaneous Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press, 1936), 31; Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence*, 10. Although a proponent of Christian allegorical literature, Kvisvik acknowledges that a common critique of this genre is that allegorical works can be viewed as a "vehicle" to promote religious ideas. Some readers, Kvisvik notes, shy away from books like this, as they believe readers cannot fully engage with a book that is so heavily didactic. This is especially true of readers who have different worldviews than the author.

¹⁵ Madueme and Barham, "Stories that Gleam," 387.

Statement of Position on the Problem

Decades of research reveal that critical engagement is not only welcome, but needed, to fully understand allegorical literature.¹⁶ In this way, reading allegorical fiction allows skeptics to intellectually engage with theological concepts through a creative perspective.¹⁷ Sometimes the perspective shift is a new setting where characters find themselves navigating other-worldly terrains on a quest for lost treasure. At other times, the perspective shift comes in the form of moral lessons learned from the mouths and actions of imaginary creatures. Regardless of the author's method of sharing the gospel through allegory, removing the reader from his "normal setting" may lead to new knowledge.¹⁸

Additionally, readers must utilize their imagination and reasoning skills to interpret a creative work.¹⁹ This synthesis of the reader's imagination and reason is what helps the reader decide whether to allow the ideas that were uncovered in the novel's fantastical world to influence his decisions about his spirituality.²⁰ If a reader can think critically about the books he reads, he will be free to make rationally informed decisions."²¹

Just like one style of teaching does not connect with every student, Christians must also vary their approaches when thinking about sharing biblical ideas with people who do not read the

¹⁶ Jennifer Duncan, "Reading Critically," *The Writing Center at University of Toronto Scarborough*, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://www.stetson.edu/other/writing-program/media/CRITICAL%20READING.pdf>.

¹⁷ Holly Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 103.

¹⁸ Maria Sachiko Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 78.

¹⁹ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Bible, believe in its reliability, or care for its message.²² Research has shown that Christian allegorical novels are an effective apologetic medium.²³ The genre is ambiguous in that it does not explicitly spell out the gospel.²⁴ Instead, biblical messages are woven into these creative narratives in a way that hides the didacticism between the lines of a fictional plot. This can be seen as a positive aspect for those who are unsure about their beliefs.²⁵

For the people who are not interested in Christianity despite the high-energy sermon, the gospel tract handed to them by a friend, or the worship music they hear in the coffee shop, there is another medium. C.S. Lewis gives credit to this medium by acknowledging the integral part it played in his conversion.²⁶ This small niche of books changes lives today, which is why it is important to dismantle the misconceptions surrounding the genre.

This being said, Christian allegorical literature works best as a supplementary tool.²⁷ The genre does not encourage skeptics to lock themselves in their houses and read Christian allegories until they are willing to call Jesus “Lord.” Christian allegorical literature is also not meant to replace the Bible as the authoritative book of the Christian faith. Ultimately, Christian allegorical literature exists as a differentiation tool. The genre is apologetic in nature because it makes theistic claims that can lead people to explore Christianity from different perspectives.²⁸ It is also apologetic because by looking at theism in a new perspective, readers will likely have

²² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21, 103.

²⁴ Madueme and Barham, “Stories that Gleam,” 386-7.

²⁵ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 60, 64.

²⁶ Hilder, “The Packed Reality,” 97.

²⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22-3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-3, 103.

new questions or observations about Christianity. For example, a reader might read *The Pilgrim's Progress* and have questions about how Jesus's death atoned for the protagonist's sins.²⁹ He might also wonder why Christian's burden fell away as Christian approached the cross.³⁰ Another reader might explore *The Prince Warriors* and ask how it is possible for water to cleanse the characters internally.³¹ Musings like these only scratch the surface. The apologetic claims that Christian allegorical authors make throughout their novels set the stage for a plethora of spiritual questions to surface.

Although some readers read an allegorical novel and find that they now have enough information to profess and believe in Christ, this is not the case with all readers. Some readers will walk away unchanged. Others might allow an allegorical work to help them correct their presuppositions about God. The Christian duty is not to save, but to plant and water seeds, trusting that God will provide the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-9, English Standard Version).³²

Importance of the Problem

Thinking of Christian allegorical literature as an apologetic and evangelistic tool is important because of America's general hostility towards Christianity.³³ In a culture where "Live your truth" is a popular standard for morality, Christians need to be able to express why God's

²⁹ Jose George, "John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a Vehicle of Allegory," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 6 (2016): 29; John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London, England: Oxford University Press Warehouse, 1903), 37.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets"; Priscilla Shirer, *The Prince Warriors* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Kids, 2016), 70.

³² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22.

³³ Madueme and Barham, "Stories that Gleam," 376, 389.

truth is the only standard of objective truth (2 Timothy 3:14, 1 Peter 3:15).³⁴ When talking to friends, coworkers, or family members about apologetic matters, it is beneficial to be able to explain why the Christian believes what he believes in.³⁵

Unfortunately, some Christians have found that certain propositional claims, such as “God is good,” are often perceived as trite expressions.³⁶ Propositions like this only go so far when talking to people who have heard the same message so many times that the meaning is lost.³⁷ Christians must recognize the fact that many people today do not desire to be approached by a stranger in the mall with a gospel tract. Some skeptics will not be swayed by “fire and brimstone” preaching or street evangelists with microphones. Additionally, for the skeptics who are convinced that they have an accurate picture of who God is, the traditional method of verbally presenting a propositional claim to them is likely to fall on deaf ears.³⁸

Researching the relationship between Christian allegorical literature and critical engagement is important because Christian allegories are uniquely situated for creative apologetic work.³⁹ Although a surface-level reading is possible, this genre is fully realized when

³⁴ Alisa Childers, *Live Your Truth and Other Lies* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2022), 7-8.

³⁵ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*, 2nd rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 16.

³⁶ David Lertis Matson and Joseph Grana, “Preach the Gospel—Just Don’t Use the Word Love: Insights from Paul’s Rhetorical Strategy in Romans” in *Looking Both Ways: At the Intersection of the Academy and the Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph C. Grana II*, ed. Wm. Curtis Holtzen and J. Blair Wilgus (Claremont, CA: Claremont Press, 2021), 74-5.

³⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 64.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-3.

readers are critically engaged.⁴⁰ While the eye notes the differences between reality and fiction, the critical mind explores the similarities through critical reading and thinking.⁴¹

This genre of literary apologetics encourages readers to use their imaginations to engage with spiritual propositions in a distinct way.⁴² Since references to Christianity, God, or salvation are disguised within an adventurous narrative, skeptics with presuppositions about Christianity will be more likely to engage with this literature.⁴³ This can prove beneficial for skeptics who are curious about Christianity, but who are reluctant to talk about spiritual matters with those around them.

This research is also important for those who find themselves unconvinced of the truthfulness of the gospel by way of other mediums.⁴⁴ This thesis is not arguing that “traditional” methods are ineffective or that they do not have the ability to change lives; however, this thesis is acknowledging that the God-given faculty of imagination can be used as an apologetic method that is worth studying.⁴⁵ If the presuppositions skeptics hold about the genre’s alleged propagandist intentions are successfully refuted, more people will be able to experience theism in a new light.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Mortimer J. Adler, *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1972), 207.

⁴¹ Coleridge, *The Miscellaneous Criticism*, 30.

⁴² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 20-3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 60, 64.

⁴⁴ Corey Latta, “Review of *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith*,” *Sehnsucht: The C.S. Lewis Journal* 12, no.1 (2018): 166.

⁴⁵ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 23.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

Spiritually speaking, theologically accurate Christian allegorical literature can correct spiritual misconceptions or introduce new theological ideas.⁴⁷ By engaging with both imagination and reason, readers are presented opportunities to engage with truths that could change their eternities.⁴⁸ This research will help to clear the stigma around Christian allegorical literature by showing that this genre encourages critical engagement.⁴⁹ If the research proves that critical reading and thinking are involved in a reader's literary journey when reading allegorical novels, it will be logical to conclude that Christian allegorical literature can be utilized as an apologetic tool.⁵⁰

This thesis will also show that spiritual decisions are dependent on the conclusions the reader draws, which means they are not a result of authors brainwashing their readers.⁵¹ Christian allegorical literature is meant to encourage skeptics to engage with Christianity in a different way than they might have before.⁵² By utilizing both imagination and reason while reading, skeptics might begin to see Christianity in a new light.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 103.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁹ Duncan, "Reading Critically."

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22-3; *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "brainwashing." Brainwashing in this context is not referring to the physical, "forcible indoctrination to induce someone to give up basic political, social, or religious beliefs and attitudes and to accept contrasting regimented ideas," as *Merriam-Webster* reports. The type of "brainwashing" suggests that by using literature in a persuasive manner, readers will abandon their previous religious ideas and adopt the religious ideas of the author. This type of "brainwashing" is akin to critics believing Christian allegorical literature is a vehicle to force Christian ideas on readers.

⁵² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 103.

⁵³ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 78.

Limitations/Delimitations

The first limitation of this thesis is that it cannot track the *effectiveness* of using Christian allegorical literature as an apologetic tool in the 21st century. A project that tracks effectiveness would best benefit from surveys over an extended period from people with different backgrounds. Including getting the survey group to read the same book(s), the researcher must be aware of each individual's literacy rate, as this would affect a reader's ability to read advanced fictional works. The participant's religious background would also be important to note. Did the participant grow up in an evangelical church? Is the participant an atheist? Did he convert from Buddhism to Catholicism? How often does the participant go to church? What are his general feelings about Christianity? Is he experiencing any personal hardships that have impacted his perception about God, either positively or negatively? These are a few categories that might influence an individual's interaction with Christian allegorical literature.

The author's own theological beliefs should also be taken into consideration when trying to track a novel's effectiveness. For example, if an author who claims to be a Christian narrates a story that allegorizes the belief that completing a certain amount of "good works" is a requirement for salvation, the reader will be left with an incomplete view of Christianity (Ephesians 2:8-9). For this reason, both the reader's worldview and the author's worldview must be carefully considered.

Additionally, although spiritual changes can happen overnight, it is also likely that a participant of this study might read the assigned book and acknowledge that it impacted him years down the road. For this reason, spirituality would be difficult to decipher in a survey or experiment. Also, presenting a survey to someone that asks if he was impacted by a book has the

potential for skewed answers. Nothing is to stop the hostile person from reading the book and giving it a scathing review, regardless of his actual inclination toward the narrative.

Another limitation is acknowledging that not everyone will express eagerness at the idea of reading a book. A recent study by Pew Research Center revealed that around a quarter of Americans have not read a book in the past year.⁵⁴ Even for those who do engage in reading, this does not mean they will be willing to read a Christian allegorical novel as their yearly book. That being said, evangelism does not have a “one-size-fits-all” mentality. Even after talking about how spiritually beneficial and thought-provoking reading allegorical literature is, some will not be persuaded to read. The limitation here acknowledges that this apologetic tool will not reach all people.

Lastly, this thesis is not an argument for theism. The presupposition of this thesis is that Christianity is the religion that best reflects reality. This thesis will assume the reader’s acceptance of Christian theism and the existence of God.

The first delimitation limits the analysis portion of this thesis to novels that were intentionally written as allegories. For example, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Lord of the Rings* are perhaps two of the most widely known books that are mentioned when discussing Christian allegorical fiction; however, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien both explicitly expressed that they did not intend their books to be read or analyzed as allegories.⁵⁵ Works like these might better be described as “quasi-allegorical,” which acknowledges their possible allegorical elements without

⁵⁴ Michella Faverio and Andrew Perrin, "Three-in-Ten Americans now Read E-books," *Pew Research Center*, January 6, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/06/three-in-ten-americans-now-read-e-books/>.

⁵⁵ Lawrence Krikorian, “Realism in Fantasy: The Lord of the Rings as ‘History ... Feigned,’” *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 59 (2018): 14; C.S. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2017), 283.

identifying the entire work as allegorical.⁵⁶ The reason behind not using these popular works lies in the importance of respecting the author's intent in writing.⁵⁷ If a reader decides to analyze a book as an allegory even though it was not intended to be allegorical, the tendency can be to overspiritualize other literary works.⁵⁸ For this reason, this thesis will not analyze *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *Lord of the Rings*.

This being said, countless authors have published Christian allegorical literature over the centuries. It is impossible to list and analyze them all within the span of this thesis. Instead of trying to give an overview of every Christian allegorical work, this thesis will only look at two Christian works that are intentionally allegorical.⁵⁹ These works are as follows: John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Priscilla Shirer's *The Prince Warriors*.

The Pilgrim's Progress will be analyzed first. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an intentionally apologetic work that has been in print since its first publication.⁶⁰ Bunyan's most famous novel has been translated to over 200 languages since 1678.⁶¹ *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been studied by scholars, theologians, and avid readers for over 300 years, which is why it is being analyzed in this thesis.

⁵⁶ Coleridge, *The Miscellaneous Criticism*, 10.

⁵⁷ Duncan, "Reading Critically."

⁵⁸ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 78.

⁵⁹ "Bunyan, John (1628 - 1688)" in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Ian Ousby. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 131-2.

⁶⁰ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. W. R. Owens (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), xii.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Priscilla Shirer's *The Prince Warriors* will also be examined. This modern work was published in 2016, making it one of the most recent additions to the Christian allegorical genre.⁶² This title was intentionally chosen to follow Bunyan's classic because although *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Prince Warriors* are both allegorical, they take different approaches to explain theological truths. For example, Bunyan intentionally uses his characters' names to represent spiritual concepts and ideas, which is where a lot of the allegory is seen.⁶³ The allegorical setting that Shirer presents is a fantasy world where creatures like sea dragons roam freely.⁶⁴ This is distinctly different from Bunyan, whose characters travel through a world that is not as far removed from reality. The purpose of comparing and contrasting these two works is to highlight the fact that although Bunyan's work can be recognized as more overtly didactic, they both draw theological parallels that can be understood when readers critically engage with the text.

Shirer's book was also chosen to complement *The Pilgrim's Progress* because of the time gap between her work and Bunyan's work. Although *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been edited and revised to reflect modern language, its origins are still far removed from the 21st century.⁶⁵ This being said, Bunyan's novel has easily withstood the test of time and is regarded as a classic Christian work.⁶⁶ Shirer's book is paired with Bunyan's because *The Prince Warriors* represents a modern allegorical tale that has emerged from the mind of an author who lives in the current century.

⁶² Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*.

⁶³ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, xx.

⁶⁴ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 156.

⁶⁵ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: A Readable Modern-Day Version of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Alan Vermilye (Mount Juliet, TN: Brown Chair Books, 2020).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

Although Shirer's novel is not the only modern Christian allegorical work that has been published, Shirer's intentionality in explaining the allegories and theological aspects of *The Prince Warriors* conveys theological truths in such a way that it dispels the objection that is being addressed.⁶⁷ She invites her readers to think critically about spiritual truths, which can be seen on the book's website.⁶⁸ Her website reveals "secrets" that are found in the book, which are explicit explanations about the allegorical elements found in the chapters.⁶⁹

The last delimitation is that this thesis will not cover how to write successful Christian allegorical literature. This is an important topic. If Christians cannot write compelling allegorical narratives, their words will be meaningless to society.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the task of composing a compelling narrative is a different task than the one that will be researched. For this reason, this thesis will focus only on the claim that Christian allegorical narratives are useful apologetic tools in that they encourage skeptics to think critically about spiritual matters.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One will identify the characteristics found in Christian allegorical literature. First, the broad genre of fiction will be explained. Next, Chapter One will define "allegory." After this, the thesis will discuss what it means for a literary work to be "intentionally apologetic," as well as discuss why this term is important to the problem. This chapter will contribute to the overall development of the thesis because the explanation of these key terms

⁶⁷ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets," *The Prince Warriors* at B&H Publishing Group, accessed July 20, 2023, <https://theprincewarriors.bhpublishinggroup.com/secrets/book-1/>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Latta, "Review of Apologetics," 166.

will set the groundwork for the remainder of the thesis, which heavily relies on the reader's understanding of these terms.

Chapter Two will contribute to the overall development of the thesis by identifying the internal tools needed for a reader to successfully analyze a Christian allegorical work. After the terms "critical reading" and "critical thinking" are defined, subcategories of critical reading for this genre will be introduced and described. This chapter will contribute to the overall development of the thesis by highlighting the relationship between Christian allegorical literature and critical engagement.

Chapter Three and Chapter Four will analyze John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Priscilla Shirer's *The Prince Warriors*, respectively. These chapters will provide concrete examples of how critical reading can be applied to Christian allegorical works. While Chapter Two will explore a broad look at this claim, Chapter Three and Chapter Four will take narrower stances by applying critical reading methods to published novels.

Chapter Five will contribute to the overall development of the thesis by using the research from the previous chapters to determine the best place for Christian allegorical literature in the 21st century. It will also discuss the placement of Christian allegorical literature in relation to the Bible. As not every work in this genre was covered, Chapter Five will end with recommendations for additional Christian allegorical novels.

The conclusion will restate the problem that was being researched and review pertinent information from each chapter. The arguments made by critics of Christian allegorical literature will also be restated. After reviewing the arguments, the thesis will conclude by determining if the research shows that Christian allegorical literature is an apologetic tool that promotes critical thinking and reading.

CHAPTER ONE

IDENTIFYING CHRISTIAN ALLEGORICAL LITERATURE

Introduction

“Christian allegorical literature” describes fictional narratives that use allegories to communicate Christian truths to an audience.⁷¹ This is not a standard genre. Instead, Christian allegorical literature is a combination of three distinct categories: fiction, allegory, and apologetics. For the purpose of this thesis, these three categories will be analyzed separately before referring to them as a unit. These key terms will serve as the foundation for the remainder of the thesis, which relies on a proper understanding of these categories.

Fiction

Introduction

Fingere, the Latin term for fiction, means “to fashion or form.”⁷² In the literary world, this creative fashioning usually takes place in an imaginary setting that hosts imaginary characters. As a popular literary genre, fictional books are connected by many subgenres.⁷³ Science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy fiction, and dystopian fiction are only a few of the categories that fictional works can belong to. Barnes and Noble’s online catalog boasts fourteen

⁷¹ “Christian allegorical literature” is not a standard term, as “Chapter 1: Identifying Christian Allegorical Literature” will explain. For the purpose of this essay, “Christian allegorical literature” will be used to describe a distinct collection of Christian books.

⁷² Eran Guter, “Fiction” in *Aesthetics A-Z* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 76.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

different subgenres in which to separate fictional works.⁷⁴ Regardless of their subgenres, all fictional works have the following in common: the narratives are not entirely based on reality.⁷⁵ Although some elements in fictional literature may be factual, it is the elements that do not align with reality that make a work fictitious.⁷⁶

The following section will provide a discussion about fiction's possible origins and characteristics. The section will conclude with a discussion about how fictional works have been perceived by notable figures in different time periods. The goal of the following section is to help illuminate fiction's relevance to the conversation about Christian allegorical literature.

Origin of Fiction Literature

Fiction's origins are difficult to pinpoint, which is partially due to the fact that many communities, like the Greeks and Hebrews, shared fictional stories orally before their words were inscribed.⁷⁷ The Bible, for example, records that the Hebrews shared fictional stories with each other to teach moral truths. During one of the lowest points of King David's life, the Bible records that Nathan told David a story about a wealthy man who selfishly stole a poor man's ewe lamb (2 Samuel 12:1-14). The goal of this story was to help David see his own evil deeds through the wealthy man's actions.

⁷⁴ "Browse Books by Subject and Genre," Barnes and Noble, accessed September 1, 2023, <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/h/books/browse>.

⁷⁵ Guter, "Fiction," in *Aesthetics A-Z*, 76.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, s.v. "The Trojan War."

The Epic of Gilgamesh is another ancient literary work. Some historians believe *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was the first fictional work because it was created around 2000 B.C. in Ancient Mesopotamia.⁷⁸ The story was likely spread orally before it was inscribed by Sin-Leqi-Unninni, who compiled a version of the story on twelve tablets around 600 B.C.⁷⁹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh* centers around Gilgamesh's adventure to gain immortality, which includes interactions with Utnapishtim, a mythological character who Gilgamesh seeks out for advice regarding immortality.⁸⁰

Another contender for the first fictional work is Homer's *Iliad*. Homer wrote this epic poem in the 8th century, which included the mythological characters Achilles and King Agamemnon. The poem was set during the Trojan War, which is an important war in Greek mythology.⁸¹

Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is another novel that is often referred to as the first example of fictional literature.⁸² This novel, which was originally written in 1605, became an international bestseller by the time of Cervantes' death.⁸³ The impact *Don Quixote* had on subsequent fictional works cannot be understated. Harold Bloom, a book critic, wrote that *Don*

⁷⁸ Sin-Leqi-Unninni, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* trans. and ed. Benjamin Foster (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), iv.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv, xi.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁸¹ *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, s.v. "The Trojan War."

⁸² William Eggington, *The Man Who Invented Fiction: How Cervantes Ushered in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), xv.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, xvi.

Quixote's influence is on par with Shakespeare's in the fact that it has inspired, sometimes unknowingly, every renowned author since its publication.⁸⁴

Others believe Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* was the first fictional work. *The Tale of Genji* was written in the 11th century for the purpose of entertaining the Emperor of Japan.⁸⁵ The story revolves around fictional Hikaru Genji's life as the son of Japan's emperor.

Although it is heavily debated as to when the first fictional work was published or created, it is clear that fiction has been an influential part of humanity's history for centuries. The literature mentioned above is still discussed, read, and analyzed today, which illuminates fiction's longstanding impact on human civilization. Additionally, authors in modern times are continuously adding to the seemingly perpetual list of published fictional works.

Fiction's "Removed" Setting from Reality

Fiction has a "removed" setting in that it does not provide an accurate reflection of reality. The same rules need not apply to fictional works as they do in reality. A flying Peter Pan and Wendy cannot exist in the "real world"; however, it is not difficult to imagine their adventures unfolding in the pages of a storybook. Likewise, there is not a location on earth that hosts a secret school for children who have magical powers, just as a magic bean cannot sprout from the ground and reach the heavens.

When one engages with a fictional narrative, he is not physically transported to an alternate setting, although it may feel like it. While the reader's body remains grounded, his mind is free to wander to enchanted lands. This allows the reader to experience dual realities

⁸⁴ Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2001), 1.

⁸⁵ Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Arthur Waley (Tokyo, Japan: C.E. Tuttle Co, 1970), vii.

simultaneously.⁸⁶ A dual experience is created when an author vividly paints a picture that invites the reader to accept both the reality he lives in and the reality of a fictional world.⁸⁷ According to author William Egginton, this is why fiction is an alluring genre.⁸⁸ Fiction fabricates an enticing reality for the reader to exercise his imagination. To do this, the reader must agree, for a time, to believe in what is unbelievable.⁸⁹ For a moment, it is possible that spider bites breed superheroes and princes save damsels in distress by climbing their hair. When a reader allows the narrative to remove himself from reality for a brief time, the reader can fully engage with all that fiction has to offer.

Imagination

Fiction successfully removes readers from their realities because of its reliance on the human imagination.⁹⁰ It is important to note that the human imagination can either refer to a “mental faculty” or an action.⁹¹ For example, a mother thinking of what she will cook for dinner on Tuesday night is utilizing her imagination. Internally, she might scroll through various options for dinner before deciding on a specific meal. In this way, imagination can be seen as a mental faculty. Imagining can also be an intentional action. When a child sings in front of a mirror, pretending she is a famous pop star, she is using her imagination.⁹² Although the mother

⁸⁶ Egginton, *The Man Who*, xv.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge - The Major Works*, ed H. J. Jackson (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 314.

⁹⁰ Adler, *How to Read*, 200.

⁹¹ *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, s.v. “imagination.”

⁹² *Ibid.*

choosing dinner might not identify her dinner musings as imaginings, she is still creating a mental image in her mind of what is not there.⁹³ The child, on the other hand, is intentionally utilizing her imagination to create a fictional scene.⁹⁴ When reading, critical readers use their imagination to make sense of the fictional world that the author has created.⁹⁵ In other words, the human imagination allows what is not real to be real in the mind.⁹⁶

Reading beyond the text is impossible without utilizing the imagination.⁹⁷ This is especially important in allegorical literature. Readers cannot take the text at face value, or else they risk not understanding the author's hidden meaning.⁹⁸ Allegorical literature encourages readers to imagine an alternate meaning in which words stand for symbols or ideas.⁹⁹

Critiques of Fiction

Using one's imagination has not always received favorable reviews. For Aristotle, experiencing reality was of more value than experiencing the world through the imagination.¹⁰⁰ Aristotle was not alone in this sentiment. Sigmund Freud, a renowned neurologist in the late 19th century and early 20th century, proposed that adults who engage in fantasy reading have failed to

⁹³ *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, s.v. "imagination."

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Eggington, *The Man Who*, xix.

⁹⁶ *Dictionary of Visual Discourse: A Dialectical Lexicon of Terms*, s.v. "imagination."

⁹⁷ *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, s.v. "imagination."

⁹⁸ Cleanth Brooks, *Understanding Poetry*, ed. Robert Warren (New York, NY: Holt, 1960), 635; Maria Sachiko Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 69.

⁹⁹ *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, s.v. "Allegory – as in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*."

¹⁰⁰ *Dictionary of Visual Discourse: A Dialectical Lexicon of Terms*, s.v. "imagination."

overcome their childish ways.¹⁰¹ Instead of growing into full maturity, Freud believed these adults irrationally attempt to conquer the reality of their aging and death.¹⁰²

Freud's doubt of imagination's usefulness is echoed by other scholars; however, authors like J.R.R. Tolkien stand in opposition to these conclusions. Tolkien acknowledged the fiction critics' assertions that fiction's fantastical elements and removed settings are not credible sources for truth to be drawn from; however, this did not dissuade Tolkien from creating fictional masterpieces.¹⁰³ In Tolkien's book, *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien highlights the benefits that fiction offers.¹⁰⁴ These fantastical stories, the *Lord of The Rings* author muses, provide a chance for adults to safely escape into an imaginary world, forgetting for a moment about the cares and burdens of reality.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, the fact that the imagination influences what people remember and understand explains why the imagination is such a beneficial faculty.¹⁰⁶ Combined with apologetic literature, imagination can help readers understand spiritual matters at an intellectual level.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 71.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 71-3.

¹⁰³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories* (Walton Street, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 26.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁶ *Dictionary of Visual Discourse: A Dialectical Lexicon of Terms*, s.v. "imagination."

¹⁰⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 103.

Allegory

Definition of Allegory

Allegory is a nonliteral form of interpretation that can be thought of as an extended metaphor.¹⁰⁸ Although the written words have a surface-level meaning, allegories encourage readers to look beyond the literal meaning of the text to find a hidden meaning in the narrative.¹⁰⁹ Authors write allegories by intentionally relating settings and characters to ideas and concepts.¹¹⁰ These hidden meanings are usually meant to motivate a reader morally, religiously, or politically.¹¹¹ A cleverly written allegory is an artistic way of disguising didacticism with creative storylines.¹¹² By utilizing allegories in fictional narratives, a reader might not even realize he is being influenced by the author's hidden agenda.¹¹³

Ancient Contributions

The Bible

The Bible has had a substantial influence on allegorical interpretation.¹¹⁴ In the third century, Origen of Alexander famously suggested that the Bible was best understood

¹⁰⁸ *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, s.v. "allegory"; Brooks, *Understanding Poetry*, 634.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Brooks, *Understanding Poetry*, 635.

¹¹¹ *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, s.v. "Allegory – as in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*."

¹¹² Richard White, "Walter Benjamin: 'The Storyteller' and the Possibility of Wisdom," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 51, no. 1 (2017): 86. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.51.1.0001>; Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence*, 41.

¹¹³ White, "Walter Benjamin: 'The Storyteller,'" 86; Coleridge, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 30.

¹¹⁴ Claire Noring, "Allegory Defined," Early British Survey at University of Portland, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://sites.up.edu/earlybritishsurvey/allegory-in-the-middle-ages-and-the-18th-century/allegory-defined/>.

allegorically.¹¹⁵ Origen recognized that the Bible was written in different genres and encouraged people to look beyond the written texts to find deeper truths.¹¹⁶ This method of biblical interpretation was also popular in the Middle Ages.¹¹⁷ For example, Christians in the Middle Ages believed Jonah's experience in the sea creature was an allegorical foreshadowing of Jesus' three days in the tomb (Jonah 1:17).¹¹⁸ Additionally, Song of Solomon is often interpreted as a historical allegorical work because of the belief that God would not have instigated the author of the book to compose a seductive narrative.¹¹⁹

According to a popular Latin saying, "The letter teaches what happened, the allegorical what to believe, the moral what to do, the anagogical towards what to aspire."¹²⁰ This reflects the practice of Christians in the Middle Ages, who divided allegorical interpretation into four levels. The first level is a literal interpretation, which is when a person reads and interprets a text at face value.¹²¹ The second level is allegorical.¹²² This level looks at the text and determines to understand the text's hidden meaning. The third level is moral interpretation.¹²³ This level encourages the reader to find the moral meaning behind the allegory. The last level is

¹¹⁵ Noring, "Allegory Defined."

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, s.v. "imagination."

¹²⁰ Noring, "Allegory Defined."

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

analogical.¹²⁴ This fourth level looks for the spiritual meaning behind the text. This model of interpretation prevailed not only among Christians, but also among secular social circles of the Middle Ages.¹²⁵ Some believe that this method of biblical interpretation set the standard for all secular interpretations of literary works.¹²⁶

This being said, not all Christians believe the Bible should be interpreted allegorically.¹²⁷ Protestants like Martin Luther in the Middle Ages strove to limit allegorical interpretations of the Bible.¹²⁸ Some Protestants at this time believed allegorical interpretations of the Bible should be restricted, which means they stood in opposition to Catholicism's preferred interpretation methods.¹²⁹ They viewed the Catholics' utilization of allegorical interpretation as a threat to accurate biblical interpretation because of the way it gave the interpreter power to determine the text's allegorical meaning.¹³⁰ In this way, the interpreter was free to disguise the Bible's objective truth with his own subjective views. Despite the dangers of abusing this method of interpretation, Origen of Alexander's method of interpreting the Bible allegorically continues to influence Christians today.

¹²⁴ Noring, "Allegory Defined."

¹²⁵ *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, s.v. "Biblical Hermeneutics."

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Encyclopedia of World Religions: Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v. "Allegory in Catholicism."

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Encyclopedia of World Religions: Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v. "Allegory in Catholicism"; "Luther and Biblical Interpretation," *Concordia University Irvine*, accessed October 13, 2023, <https://www.cui.edu/aboutcui/reformation500/articles/post/luther-and-biblical-interpretation#:~:text=Luther%20identified%20the%20shortcomings%20of%20this%20approach%2C%20which,from%20as%20it%20were%2C%20of%20the%20Holy%20Scriptures.>

Homer

Homer was a popular Greek poet in 8th century B.C. who utilized allegory in his poetry.¹³¹ Although his poems have been written and translated over the centuries, they were first transmitted orally.¹³² His entertaining stories are believed to reveal lessons about morality, philosophy, and physiology.¹³³ This being said, his works were not written like textbooks. They illuminated colorful, adventurous tales about foreign places and magical creatures, such as *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. Homer's poems immediately left an imprint on Greek culture, which later infiltrated the Western world through English translations.¹³⁴

Plato

Plato's *The Cave* remains one of the most popular examples of allegorical literature and is often regarded as a pinnacle allegorical work. Plato wrote *The Cave* around 380 B.C. and its influence is timeless.¹³⁵ On the surface, the story is about prisoners in a cave. Below the surface, it is a tale about the human quest for higher knowledge.¹³⁶ Instead of writing about Idealism,

¹³¹ Gregory Nagy, "Homer and Greek Myth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, ed. Roger D. Woodard (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 224, 486.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Stuart G. P. Small, "On Allegory in Homer," *The Classical Journal* 44, no. 7 (1949): 423.

¹³⁴ Joseph Russo, "Introduction" in *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey: Volume I: Introduction and Books I-VIII*, ed. Alfred Heubeck, Stephanie West, J.B. Hainsworth (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1988), 7, 14.

¹³⁵ Ed D'Angelo, "The Allegory of the Cave" in *Handy Answer: The Handy Western Philosophy Answer Book: The Ancient Greek Influence on Modern Understanding* (Canton Charter Township, MI: Visible Ink Press, 2021), 90-2.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

politics, or epistemology by using technical jargon and philosophical theories, Plato created an allegory that explained his views about life without overtly stating these views.¹³⁷

Today, *The Cave* still carries significance. This is due to its relevance to the human condition. Humans are curious beings and the path to enlightenment was not only a concept for people in Plato's time. Different religions claim to know the path to ultimate truth and people follow them, hoping to find the answers they seek. Plato's illustration shows the familiar journey of a human being brought from darkness into light. This is similar to Peter's words to the 1st century believers. Peter told the early Christians that since God chose to bring them from darkness into light, they are to "proclaim [God's] excellencies" to those around them (1 Peter 2:9). Likewise, the prisoner who was freed from the cave had the desire to return to the cave, telling the other prisoners about the true light that he found.¹³⁸

Intentionally Allegorical or Allegorical Elements?

There is a difference between works that are intentionally allegorical and works that have allegorical elements. One could either determine this by examining the author's intent or the audience's interpretation of the work. If allegories are to be determined by the author, a reader would benefit to know the author's purpose for writing the narrative. For example, Hannah Hurnard wrote a popular novel titled *Hinds' Feet on High Places*. In the "Preface" section, Hurnard explicitly refers to her novel as an allegory that was inspired by Psalm 18:33 and Habakkuk 3:19.¹³⁹ She also explained the symbolism behind the narrative, which allows the

¹³⁷ Shawn Eyer, "Translation from Plato's Republic 514b–518d: 'Allegory of the Cave,'" *Ahiman: A Review of Masonic Culture and Tradition* 1 (2009): 73.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Hannah Hurnard, *Hinds' Feet on High Places* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 1979), xiv-xv.

readers a preliminary glimpse into the spiritual and moral lessons Hurnard determined to teach.¹⁴⁰ Readers can be confident that Hurnard's novel is allegorical both because it has allegorical elements *and* because Hurnard explicitly stated its allegorical purpose.

Conversely, there are novels that are perceived to be allegorical by the public and not the author. Although the general public might interpret a work allegorically, this does not always mean the author intended for this distinction to apply to his or her work. An example of this is *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Readers often point out the similarities between Aslan and Jesus, Edmund and Judas, and the White Witch and Satan; however, this was not Lewis' intent.¹⁴¹ He recognized that the elements and characters he created did not have true one-to-one ratios with Christianity, which is why he did not label the series as allegorical.¹⁴²

This being said, Lewis did not deny that his novels included Christian elements and characters that loosely resembled historical Christian people or theological events.¹⁴³ As is the case with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the general public's opinion about a book's interpretation does not always align with the author's original intent. At these times, a reader must choose between his own interpretations or the author's intent. Even if the reader notes that *The Chronicles of Narnia* has allegorical elements, he cannot claim that it was intentionally allegorical on Lewis' part.¹⁴⁴ This distinction is important because it helps readers differentiate between the genre of allegory and the expressive use of allegorical elements in a fictional work.

¹⁴⁰ Hurnard, *Hinds' Feet.*, xiv.

¹⁴¹ C.S. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2017), 283.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁴³ Paul Ford, *Pocket Companion to Narnia: a Guide to the Magical World of C.S. Lewis* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2005), 6.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Critiques of Allegory

One critique against the effectiveness of allegories is that by writing a story that has an alternate meaning that readers must uncover, there will always be an ambiguous line between fact and fiction.¹⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin is a proponent of this view. People who share the same concern as Benjamin do not often believe that allegorical narratives are effective mediums with which to share moral lessons.¹⁴⁶ This view differs from Lewis, who believes fantastical storytelling is efficient for sharing spiritual truths.¹⁴⁷

Another critique of allegorical writing is that it can be overly didactic.¹⁴⁸ Although the underlying messages in an allegorical work are meant to be practical, allegorical authors have drawn criticism for sharing their moral messages overtly and aggressively.¹⁴⁹ For example, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been criticized for its didacticism, with critics claiming that Bunyan wrote in a way that made the story feel “forced or preachy.”¹⁵⁰ This can cause readers to feel like they are being aggressively indoctrinated by the author’s personal beliefs.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 75.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ White, “Walter Benjamin: ‘The Storyteller,’” 86.

¹⁵⁰ Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence*, 10.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Conclusion

Allegories have been utilized in narratives for centuries. When presented effectively, authors can share their moral, spiritual, or political views with readers in an entertaining and creative way.¹⁵² Within Christian literature, allegories have proven a useful tool for sharing spiritual truths with those who have questions about the Christian faith.¹⁵³

Apologetics

Definition of Christian Apologetics

The word “apologetic” comes from the Greek word *apologia* which means “defense.”¹⁵⁴ When one participates in *apologia*, he is explaining and defending the reasoning behind a certain belief.¹⁵⁵ Religiously, Christian *apologia* refers to the defense of the Christian faith.¹⁵⁶ In other words, apologetics explains why Christians believe what they believe. The study of apologetics can be done formally, such as in an academic setting, or informally, such as in a self-study.

Apologetics covers a wide range of subjects, but all Christian apologies point back to God at the center. For example, a popular study for apologetics is the “problem of evil.” People who study this topic might wonder why evil exists and what role God plays concerning the evil in the world. Other apologetic studies center around moral dilemmas, such as human sexuality or the value of a human life. Another popular apologetic topic asks if there is enough evidence to

¹⁵² *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, s.v. “Allegory – as in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.”

¹⁵³ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 21, 103.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-3.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

believe that the Bible is reliable. Professional apologists specialize in researching and publicly defending questions like these verbally or through written text.¹⁵⁷

The Christian Call to Apologetics

Apologetics has two purposes. The first is to paint an accurate picture of the God of the universe.¹⁵⁸ When done correctly, apologetics can show others the characteristics of Jesus and give them an accurate view of the Christian faith.¹⁵⁹ The second purpose is to defend the faith against false accusations or beliefs.¹⁶⁰ When skeptics ask why Christians believe what they believe, Christians should have an answer for the faith that they live by (1 Peter 3:15).

This being said, it is important to note that apologetics is not only valuable for Christians who desire to speak to non-Christians. Christians can also engage in apologetics to help dismantle their own presuppositions about God or Christianity.¹⁶¹ For example, a young Christian woman who recently experienced the death of a loved one may find herself wondering if God is omnipotent like the Bible claims. An apologetic study on the problem of evil may prove beneficial for her in this time. Likewise, the woman might find herself in a conversation with a friend who is not convinced that the Bible is a reliable work. It would benefit the Christian woman to be able to explain her studies concerning the Bible's reliability to her friend.

¹⁵⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 17-22.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-22.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

Christians use apologetics to stand firm in the faith against the schemes of the world; however, the secular world is also adept at defending their beliefs. For the past few decades, secular media has been efficient in convincing adolescents that they are not beautifully and wonderfully made, which has caused many youths to abandon their God-given identities for feeling-based identities.¹⁶² If Christians do not know what God says about human identities and His intentional purpose for each person, they will not be able to engage in intellectual conversations about pressing matters.

Unfortunately, apologetics is not as readily utilized today as it was in the past. While the Puritans and Pilgrims celebrated an intellectual understanding of the Bible, their successors shifted their focus elsewhere.¹⁶³ According to J.P. Moreland, this shift began with the First Great Awakening, a revival that occurred in the 1700s.¹⁶⁴ The revivals, although they did produce many converts, exchanged intellectual conversations about the Bible for feeling-based conversations.¹⁶⁵ The emphasis on emotion over doctrine ensured that Christian converts were not intellectually prepared to defend biblical doctrine against opposing ideas.¹⁶⁶ This emphasis continues today, as can be seen in sermons that aim to evoke an emotional response over an intellectual response from the congregants. Moreland believes that the American church can counter this “rise of anti-intellectualism” by prioritizing apologetics regularly in the church

¹⁶² Melinda Mangin, “Supporting Transgender and Gender-Expansive Children in School,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 100, no. 2 (2018): 16-7. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26552437>.

¹⁶³ Moreland, *Love Your God*, 15.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

setting.¹⁶⁷ When apologetics is taught and practiced in church, Christians are better equipped to stand against accusations of the faith.¹⁶⁸

Biblically, apologizing is a command. Jesus commanded his followers to travel to the ends of the earth, telling others about their faith in Him (Matthew 28:19-20). The apostle, Peter, also encouraged all believers to engage in apologetics (1 Peter 3:15). Paul not only acknowledged that his own purpose was to defend the gospel, but he encouraged other believers to provide a defense for the gospel, as well (Philippians 1:16, 2 Corinthians 10:5). Christians, regardless of job, perceived influence, or stage of life, are called to engage in apologetics.

Apologetic Authors

Literary works can have a unique apologetic advantage. Since books are portable, apologetic authors can influence readers spiritually from any place in the world. Newspaper articles, blogs, or systematic theology textbooks are only a few of the ways apologetic knowledge is spread through text. Books that do not shy away from the “hard” questions about life and spirituality have become increasingly popular. For example, Paul Copan’s *Is God a Moral Monster?* boasts over 1300 ratings on the Amazon Bookstore.¹⁶⁹ Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek’s *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* is another popular apologetic work. Josh and Sean McDowell have also been large proponents in the Christian apologetic literary world. These authors are examples of Christians who engage in apologetics through text.

¹⁶⁷ Moreland, *Love Your God*, 19.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶⁹ “*Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*,” Amazon, accessed September 4, 2023, <https://www.amazon.com/God-Moral-Monster-Making-Testament/dp/0801072751>.

Christian Allegorical Literature as a Unit

Fiction, allegories, and apologetics can exist independently from one another. When fiction is mentioned, apologetics do not also have to be mentioned. Likewise, a Christian can engage with apologetics without using allegories. Together, these three terms create a literary label that covers a small niche of books. Although Christian allegorical literature is not a standard or commonly used term, this thesis will utilize this term to explain fictional works that use allegories with apologetic intent.

Who is this Genre For?

Although most literate adults have read fiction at some point in their lives, fiction does not have a positive connotation for all adults.¹⁷⁰ Tolkien suggests that transporting readers to another world and inviting them to believe in what is not true is easier when the target audience is the youth.¹⁷¹ Still, there is much value in inviting an adult into a fictional world.¹⁷²

When fiction is coupled with apologetics, literature has the ability to draw someone close or closer to the theistic God.¹⁷³ As a reader critically engages with an allegorical narrative, he may experience Christianity through a new perspective. As Maria Cecire notes, adults may stumble upon the pathway of “higher truth” by reading allegorical literature.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ David Brauner, “Fiction” in *Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature: Contemporary American Fiction* (Edinburgh, England: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 7-8, 11.

¹⁷¹ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 18.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷³ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 78.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Even Christian allegorical literature that is targeted at adolescents can still hold spiritual benefits for adults. Objective truth is objective truth, regardless of the intended audience. For example, a mother might watch *Veggie Tales* with her toddler and learn about how to cast her fears on the Lord. This biblical truth is not reserved for toddlers, even though it was presented through a medium toddlers would understand. The spiritual truths in the Bible are ageless, which is advantageous for Christian writers (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Regardless of the author's intended audience, the objective truths that the allegorical Christian author pulls from the Bible are relevant for adults and children.¹⁷⁵

Like all genres, Christian allegorical literature has books that are better suited for specific age groups. For example, a third grader might not fully comprehend the complexities of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim Progress*; however, he might understand Helen Taylor's adaption of Bunyan's work, *Little Pilgrim's Progress*.¹⁷⁶ This adaption did not abandon the spiritual truths Bunyan wished to convey to his audience; however, Taylor intentionally wrote in a way that was literarily accessible to a younger audience. This being said, the core of these spiritual lessons is not age restricted. Although these spiritual truths may be presented by different words or illustrations, depending on the age group, Christian allegorical literature is for all ages.

Conclusion

The previous section discussed the individual elements of Christian allegorical literature. Fiction, allegories, and apologetics were examined to determine their relationship to this unique

¹⁷⁵ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 69; Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 103, 108.

¹⁷⁶ Helen Taylor, *Little Pilgrim's Progress* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2021), 8.

niche of books. The remainder of this thesis will refer to Christian allegorical literature as a unit, with the intention of analyzing the genre's relevance and impact on the world today.

CHAPTER TWO
CHRISTIAN ALLEGORICAL LITERATURE, CRITICAL READING, AND CRITICAL
THINKING

Introduction

A full understanding of the content in Christian allegorical literature requires the reader to engage in both critical reading and critical thinking.¹⁷⁷ These two exercises, which are used to interpret literary works, are closely intertwined.¹⁷⁸ While critical reading describes the discovery and analysis of the text's contents, critical thinking describes the evaluation of these contents.¹⁷⁹

Rational decision making will follow when readers read and think critically.¹⁸⁰ This rational decision making is an important aspect of engaging with Christian allegorical literature because the goal of the genre is to be an apologetic tool that influences readers spiritually.¹⁸¹ This chapter will explain why these two exercises are needed for a reader to make logical spiritual decisions.

¹⁷⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 20; Kurland, "Critical Reading"; Duncan, "Reading Critically."

¹⁷⁸ Duncan, "Reading Critically."

¹⁷⁹ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Critical Reading

Description of Critical Reading

Critical reading is the active process of analyzing and interpreting a text.¹⁸² Instead of reading a novel at a surface-level, critical reading looks at the text in an intellectually stimulating way.¹⁸³ Questions are asked, reasoning is used, and the reader analyzes his own interpretations of the author's words.¹⁸⁴ Those who engage in critical reading gain an understanding of not only what the text says, but what it means.¹⁸⁵ Critical reading is for those who desire to know "how" and "why" a book is saying what it is saying.¹⁸⁶

When a reader engages with critical reading, he will also be able to understand the author's intent for writing.¹⁸⁷ Instead of learning merely facts or details, critical reading allows the reader to see the world as the author views it.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, critical reading addresses how the author presents the narrative.¹⁸⁹ Does the author have any biases? Does the author's upbringing affect the way he views a particular subject? How does he present people of different genders? Questions like these aid in a reader's critical reading process because they ask about the author's intent for writing.¹⁹⁰ Critical reading looks at elements like these and spreads them on

¹⁸² Duncan, "Reading Critically."

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

the table. After the information is gathered and presented, the reader can begin to think critically about the textual information presented by the author.¹⁹¹

Importance of Critical Reading

Critical reading is essential to readers who desire to travel beyond the surface of a text.¹⁹² Learning a list of facts or memorizing passages will not help a reader understand the author's purpose for writing.¹⁹³ When a reader utilizes critical reading skills, he is able to confidently interpret the author's words and draw his own conclusions.¹⁹⁴ From here, critical readers can make informed decisions regarding the text.¹⁹⁵

A lack of critical reading leads to a lack of comprehension.¹⁹⁶ Skimming will not allow the reader to fully grasp the author's meaning of a text, especially if the text is allegorical.¹⁹⁷ Allegorical literature requires critical reading to discern the hidden meaning beneath the author's words.¹⁹⁸ If the reader takes the words at face value, he will miss the second interpretation.¹⁹⁹

Lastly, critical reading is important because it allows the reader to compare the author's view of a subject against his own.²⁰⁰ Instead of relying on the author to tell the reader what is

¹⁹¹ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Brooks, *Understanding Poetry*, 635.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

right or wrong, the critical reader can weigh his own beliefs against the author's to see who has made the most convincing case.²⁰¹ This allows the reader to make an informed decision about whether he should adopt the author's view or hold fast to his own.²⁰²

Importance of Understanding Author's Intent

The questions that critical readers ask often lead them beyond the scope of the book.²⁰³ By examining external and internal sources related to the primary text, critical readers can interpret the text in the way the author intended.²⁰⁴ This will enrich the reader's experience as he embraces a holistic view of the chosen narrative.²⁰⁵ For example, on the surface, J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* is a mischievous adolescent who enjoys spending time with his friends and fighting pirates. Beneath his childlike antics, Barrie reveals that Pan is a boy who is desperate to remain young, regardless of the cost.²⁰⁶ This can be understood when readers engage with the text critically. For example, in Chapter Five of Barrie's original *Peter Pan: The Story of Peter and Wendy*, the narrator expresses that Peter took liberties to "thin [the Lost Boys] out" when they showed signs of aging, which was against Peter's rules.²⁰⁷ Life, as Peter knew it, was worthwhile

²⁰¹ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Victor Watson, trans., *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 555.

²⁰⁷ James Matthew Barrie, *Peter Pan: The Story of Peter and Wendy* (New York City, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1911), 63.

as long as he remained a child. He rejected any notion of adulthood, which is also reflected in Barrie's famous opening line: "All children, except one, grow up."²⁰⁸

Although the text shines a light into Peter Pan's childish heart, a more holistic understanding of *Peter Pan* can be found when the author's personal life is considered. When the critical reader researches Barrie, he finds that Barrie's background gives clues about personal events in his life that influenced his writing. Arguably, the most important contributor to Barrie's creation of Pan was the tragedy of Barrie losing his younger brother in his adolescent years.²⁰⁹ From this experience and his questionable relationship with two young boys in Barrie's adulthood, Barrie created what he believed was the quintessential boy: a boy who never grows up.²¹⁰ Peter Pan is a character who is perpetually stuck in boyhood, just as Barrie's brother was when he died.²¹¹ Barrie was also perpetually stuck in boyhood, as he grew to be an emotionally troubled man who did not fully recover from the death of his brother.²¹² Clues like these are not found within the pages of *Peter Pan*; however, they are accessible to the curious and critical reader who determines to travel beneath the surface of Barrie's original work. When a critical

²⁰⁸ Barrie, *Peter Pan*, 1.

²⁰⁹ Watson, *The Cambridge Guide*, 555.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid. For Barrie, his younger brother was "stuck" in boyhood. His untimely death as a teenager meant that he would never grow old. Barrie used this tragedy as inspiration for a magical character who, like his brother, never experienced life as an adult.

²¹² Ibid. Although Barrie aged physically, he did not mature mentally. This can be seen by his insistence to befriend and spend a copious amount of time with two young boys in his adulthood years. There has been controversy over the nature of Barrie's relationship with these children. While some biographers believe that Barrie's fondness of the Llewelyn Davies family was innocent and friendly in nature, others believe that Barrie had an unhealthy attraction to the boys. For example, he wrote a scene in *The Little White Bird* that was inspired by his desire to "pluck" one of the boys "from his family."

reader takes J.M. Barrie's background into consideration, he is better equipped to understand Peter Pan's immaturity and desperation to remain youthful.²¹³

The above example shows the importance of using critical reading to interpret an author's intent. Pan's dark origins are only one example of how readers can discover the "why" behind the text.²¹⁴ Reading a book with a critical mindset provides the curious reader with more insight into the complexities and hidden inspirations behind stories.²¹⁵

Personal and Critical Reading

Critically reading a story is not the only way readers should engage with literature. To fully experience the impact of literature, critical reading must be paired with personal reading.²¹⁶ Acknowledging the personal impact literature has on the human emotions is crucial to fully grasping a narrative.²¹⁷ Although facts speak to the mind, emotions speak to the heart.²¹⁸ For example, a student can read a fictional story about a soldier's experience during World War I. The student might already know facts about the war: who was fighting, what side won, and how the economy was impacted after the war. Facts like these appeal to the intellectual mind; however, an effective and creative author will also appeal to the reader's emotions.²¹⁹ An

²¹³ Watson, *The Cambridge Guide*, 555.

²¹⁴ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 128; William McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect and Imagination in Reading and Responding to Literature: Perspectives and Possibilities for English Classrooms," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 32, no. 1 (2017): 68.

²¹⁷ Coles, *The Call*, 128; McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

engaging author will take the reader inside of the soldier's head and illuminate his hopes, fears, victories, and failures as he fights for his country. This appeal to the emotion is what ties readers to fictional characters.²²⁰ When an author creates a believable character, he is more than a theory or a concept: he is a person.²²¹ Even though the reader has the knowledge that the novel is describing a fictional character's experience of a real event, it is the connection to the character that allows the reader to sympathize with the narrative.²²²

Some critics believe that focusing on both personal and critical reading is a self-seeking task; however, decades of research have proven that introspection can be positive in that it helps facilitate compassionate and empathetic relationships with others.²²³ The scholars who contributed to the article "Roles of Affect and Imagination in Reading and Responding to Literature: Perspectives and Possibilities for English Classrooms" argue that combining these two types of reading are essential ingredients for personal change.²²⁴ Reading with both a critical and personal perspective influences readers to be social, political, ethical, and compassionate individuals.²²⁵ For these reasons, personal and critical reading do not need to be separated. By including both concepts, readers are more likely to be moved to action.²²⁶

²²⁰ Coles, *The Call*, 128.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

²²⁴ Ibid., 69.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

Critical Thinking

Evaluation of Text

According to *Merriam-Webster*, an evaluation “determine[s] or fix[es] the value” of something.²²⁷ Regarding literature, evaluations are used to determine the value of a text.²²⁸ Once the text is read critically, critical thinking is the next step.²²⁹ Critical thinking allows the reader to evaluate the text for its usefulness.²³⁰ When reading a didactic novel, for example, a reader might not agree with all the information presented by the author. It is the critical thinker’s job to sift through the information and decide which parts should be applied to his life.²³¹ It is also the critical thinker’s job to determine what information is irrelevant, false, or unreasonable.²³² This process of evaluation will help the reader decide what to accept as true.²³³

Self-Awareness of Presuppositions

Presuppositions will undoubtedly interfere with a reader’s evaluation of a text if left unchecked.²³⁴ These presuppositions can affect how readers interact with certain texts. For example, a 15-year-old girl who was raised on a strict vegan diet might find it difficult to enjoy a

²²⁷ *Merriam Webster*, s.v. “evaluate.”

²²⁸ Kurland, “Critical Reading.”

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Kurland, “Critical Reading.”

²³⁴ Brandon O’Brien and Randolph Richards, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 29; Kurland, “Critical Reading.”

magazine article titled “Top 10 Barbeque Joints in Town,” especially if she believes that eating animals is cruel. Although her presuppositions are not objectively right or wrong, they still affect the way she interacts with this article.

This being said, there is no such thing as an unbiased reader.²³⁵ All readers have had life experiences that cause them to perceive the world in a certain way.²³⁶ These perceptions influence how people interpret and interact with texts.²³⁷ Christian allegorical literature is not an exception to this claim. All readers bring in their own thoughts concerning what they perceive about Christianity.²³⁸ C.S. Lewis acknowledged his presuppositions about Christianity when he read *Phantastes*; however, this book unsuspectingly changed his life.²³⁹ It does not take “forcing” the mind to empty itself of presuppositions to be changed by literature; however, it does take an open mind to not let presuppositions lead the critical thinking process.²⁴⁰

Open-Mindedness

A reader with an open mind is a reader who allows new ideas to challenge and change him.²⁴¹ Reason is closely aligned with open-mindedness because the open-minded reader is not led by his emotions.²⁴² Since the open-minded reader is not determined to remain stuck in his current

²³⁵ Kurland, “Critical Reading.”

²³⁶ O’Brien and Richards, *Misreading Scripture*, 29.

²³⁷ Kurland, “Critical Reading.”

²³⁸ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 64.

²³⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 179, 180-1.

²⁴⁰ Kurland, “Critical Reading.”

²⁴¹ McGinley et al., “Roles of Affect,” 68.

²⁴² Kurland, “Critical Reading.”

stage, he is free to be affected by the text.²⁴³ This being said, open-minded readers do not abandon their convictions at the first sign of opposition. Instead, they weigh each proposition, interpretation, or idea carefully by looking at the supporting evidence.²⁴⁴ The goal is for this careful evaluation to lead the open-minded reader to the truth, rather than to simply bolster his own convictions.²⁴⁵

Rational Thinking

Using reason to come to rational conclusions is a goal of critical thinking.²⁴⁶ Although all readers bring their own presuppositions to a text, critical readers value reason and rational thinking when critically engaging with literary works.²⁴⁷ This is especially important concerning persuasive literature. For example, there is no question that Rosaria Butterfield's novel, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, is meant to encourage and persuade readers towards theism.²⁴⁸ Butterfield wrote as a woman who denounced lesbianism for a relationship with God.²⁴⁹ As a tenured professor at a prestigious liberal college, one can imagine how much she walked away from by abandoning her past life. According to Butterfield, she "lost everything but the dog."²⁵⁰ If a reader is led by the presupposition that God is not worth abandoning relationships for, he is likely to dismiss this autobiography as irrelevant or foolish. This shows

²⁴³ McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

²⁴⁴ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2012), x.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 63.

that utilizing reason is important for both critical thinking and Christian apologetics. For the critical reader, presuppositions will be acknowledged; however, they will not take precedence in the critical reader's evaluation.²⁵¹ Instead, reason will be valued over emotion to ensure that the reader evaluates the text accurately.²⁵²

Decision Making

Rational decision making follows rational thinking.²⁵³ The acknowledgement that readers are free to make decisions about how they will allow literature to affect their lives is crucial when engaging with Christian allegorical literature.²⁵⁴ As a reader critically engages with allegorical literature, he will also evaluate the information he receives. With this information, the reader can make decisions on whether the information he has received is applicable to his life.²⁵⁵ . This decision is not dependent on the author, regardless of how convincing an author might be.²⁵⁶ The decisions and conclusions readers arrive at are a result of how a reader critically engages with the text.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Paul Linjamaa, "Free Will and the Configuration of the Human Mind" in *The Ethics of The Tripartite Tractate (NHC I, 5): A Study of Determinism and Early Christian Philosophy of Ethics* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 114; Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 20-3.

²⁵⁵ Kurland, "Critical Reading.,"; Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22.

²⁵⁶ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22, 104-5.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

Reading Christian Allegorical Literature Critically

Introduction

The previous section spoke generally about critical reading and critical thinking. The following section will explore Christian allegorical literature from a critical perspective to show that critical engagement is possible and necessary to fully understand this genre. This chapter will conclude by summarizing the necessity of critical engagement in Christian allegorical literature.

Understanding the Genre's Didactic Nature

Christian allegorical literature is didactic in nature, which means that its main goal is to teach.²⁵⁸ This niche of books strives not only to teach moral values, but spiritual values.²⁵⁹ The didactic teaching point(s) may be explained directly or covertly in allegorical literature. Some authors prefer a more overt approach, like John Bunyan's intentional naming of his characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.²⁶⁰ Other authors, like Chuck Black, prefer to keep their didactic intentions more hidden. Black uses a "Dark Knight" to represent a spiritual enemy and sets his story in the medieval land of Arrethrae.²⁶¹ In both instances, the narratives are both didactic and creative, which is what makes Christian allegorical literature an appealing apologetic method.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "didactic."

²⁵⁹ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 103.

²⁶⁰ Liam Purdon, "John Bunyan's '*The Pilgrim's Progress*' and Mark Twain's '*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,'" *Mark Twain Journal* 56, no. 2 (2018): 72-3.

²⁶¹ Chuck Black, "Kingdom's Dawn Book 1," Perfect Praise Publishing, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.chuckblack.com/kingdom-series-books/kingdoms-dawn-book-one>.

²⁶² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 16, 103.

This being said, some critics believe the didacticism of this genre is meant to simply promote an agenda.²⁶³ They complain that some Christian allegorical novels are “overly didactic,” which takes away from the creative element of the narrative and forces a persuasive agenda onto readers.²⁶⁴ Teaching without forcing is a delicate art to gauge because of art’s subjectivity.²⁶⁵ Some people will feel like a Christian allegorical novel is “shoving religion down their throats,” while others will think the author has disguised his didactic intentions so well that the book reads more like a secular adventure novel.²⁶⁶ This being said, even if the narrative seems forceful, the reader still has the free will to read and think critically.²⁶⁷

Overall, this critique relies on personal preference.²⁶⁸ Some people prefer straight-forward teaching, while others prefer to search for the hidden treasure in the figurative language.²⁶⁹ While undoubtedly didactic, this does not mean that Christian allegorical literature should be discarded because of the reader’s prior knowledge that he is reading a book in which the goal is to teach or inform.

²⁶³ Butts and Hunt, *Why Was Billy*, 56; *Protecting Innocence*, 10, 29; Coleridge, *The Miscellaneous Criticism*, 31.

²⁶⁴ Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence*, 10.

²⁶⁵ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 21-3; Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence*, 10.

²⁶⁶ Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence*, 10; Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 78.

²⁶⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 104-5.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Understanding the Apologetic Nature of Christian Allegorical Literature

As previously discussed, Christian apologetics defends the Christian faith against false beliefs and gives others an accurate perception of the Christian faith.²⁷⁰ One of the most common forms of sharing apologetic messages is in the form of public debates. For example, William Lane Craig and Sam Harris used a public platform at the University of Notre Dame to defend their views about the origin of morality. They stood on opposite sides of the spectrum, with Craig as an evangelical theologian and Harris as an atheist. While Craig argued that objective morality came from God, Harris reasoned that science and nature held sufficient explanations for the existence of objective morality.²⁷¹ In this two-hour debate, each scholar listened to the other defend why he believes what he believes and responded to his opponent's views. Although this is not the only way apologetic conversations can take place, this extended debate is an example of what a formal apologetic discussion could look like.

Christian allegorical novels will not usually arrange their narratives like a transcript from a formal apologetic debate. Instead, the reader must use critical reading skills to discern what perspective the author is speaking from and what position he is arguing against. The characters and ideas that the author paints in a positive light can give the reader an idea of what position the author is advocating for. This concept will be described in greater detail in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

This being said, the hidden nature of Christian allegorical literature's apologetic intent does not mean that Christian allegorical literature is not apologetic. By presenting parts of the Bible as messages that are true, these novels are also saying the opposite: that anything that

²⁷⁰ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 17-22.

²⁷¹ William Lane Craig and Sam Harris, "The God Debate II: Harris vs. Craig" (video), April 12, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqaHXKLRKzg&t=2s>.

contradicts the biblical message is false. Critical reading of a Christian allegorical novel reveals what an author is claiming to be true about God, religion, and the Christian worldview, which is why these novels can be used as apologetic tools.

Utilizing the Imagination

When apologetics is discussed, imagination is not often a part of the conversation.²⁷² This is because apologetics is known to focus on objective facts, reason, and proofs. This can make apologetics seem more like a science; however, apologetics is holistic because apologetics also values creativity and critical evaluation.²⁷³

Utilizing the human imagination is essential to apologetic fictional works because the author asks the reader to create a mental image of a make-believe scene.²⁷⁴ By asking a reader to explore a world that does not reflect reality, the reader's imagination is at the forefront of the reading experience.²⁷⁵ Tolkien calls reality the "Primary World" because this is the reality that humans experience each day.²⁷⁶ A vibrant "Secondary World" awaits readers of fictional literature that is not available to those who determine to remain in the Primary World.²⁷⁷

Although the imagination and critical engagement should be used simultaneously when reading allegorical works, utilizing the imagination while applying critical reading skills does not

²⁷² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 20.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁷⁴ Adler, *How to Read*, 200.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 23. This thesis will continue to utilize Tolkien's terms of "Primary World" and "Secondary World" to contrast reality versus an author's fictional world, respectively.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

give the reader the liberties to be critical of the fictional aspects in a narrative.²⁷⁸ The reader must approach the narrative with an understanding that the author did not write words that will reflect reality.²⁷⁹ This is a different kind of critical reading than non-fiction works require because in fictional works, the reader is not checking every claim for validity.²⁸⁰ Some claims will have no evidence. For example, an author can write a talking tree into the narrative. While it is common knowledge that trees do not talk, the writing is not ineffective simply because its text does not reflect reality. This is where the imagination is useful. If the reader decides that the author was effective at painting the talking tree in a Secondary World, the author has been successful.²⁸¹

The successful Christian allegorical author simultaneously appeals to the reader's reason and imagination.²⁸² This allows readers to understand spiritual truths while being entertained by a creative story.²⁸³ This speaks to the goal of Christian allegorical literature: to encourage readers to engage with the text in a way that allows them to draw spiritual conclusions.²⁸⁴

Comparing and Contrasting

Utilizing the skill of comparing and contrasting textual elements can help form connections from fictional settings to the Primary World.²⁸⁵ When a reader examines an event in

²⁷⁸ Adler, *How to Read*, 199, 207.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 205-7.

²⁸² Latta, "Review of Apologetics," 166.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 103.

²⁸⁵ Adler, *How to Read*, 202.

a narrative, it is also an opportunity to examine the event's probability in the Primary World. For example, in Andrew Peterson's *The Wingfeather Saga: On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*, the character Leeli finds herself atop a cliff near Fingap Falls.²⁸⁶ Others watch as she sings a melody to a group of dragons, who are mesmerized by her "dragon song."²⁸⁷ Dragons do not exist in the Primary World, at least not in this form. A critical reader can easily determine the difference between the Primary World and Peterson's fictional world; however, the reader might also find that there are some comparisons he might draw from this scene. An unknown talent revealed publicly, for example, is not unusual in the Primary World. Even though the setting of the novel is magical, the plot still shares similarities with the Primary World.

When trying to find comparisons, the reader can see how alike an author's Secondary World is with the Primary World.²⁸⁸ The reader can take into account the character's actions, reactions from other characters, and the aftermath of certain events. Likewise, contrasting can help the reader leave what is fiction in the fictional world and take what is real to the Primary World. A critical reader will not exit Chapter One of Peterson's book believing he can sing a beautiful melody that mesmerizes dragons; however, he might think of a time when he felt awe-inspired by a beautiful vocalist.

This being said, comparing and contrasting concepts and ideas can also prove detrimental. One of the dangers of comparing and contrasting elements in a Christian allegorical novel is that this exercise may encourage overspiritualization of events and concepts.²⁸⁹ Just

²⁸⁶ Andrew Peterson, *The Wingfeather Saga: On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2008), 51-5.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Adler, *How to Read*, 199-200.

²⁸⁹ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 78.

because Satan was personified as a conglomeration of animals and beasts in *The Pilgrim's Progress* does not mean that bears and lions are trying to damn people to Hell.²⁹⁰ Likewise, just because the children in *The Prince Warriors* fought the forces of evil with physical swords does not mean Christians should go purchase swords from the nearest pawn shop.²⁹¹ Overspiritualizing certain events or concepts can lead to a type of secularism that Saler warns about.²⁹² When one tends to link everything to the supernatural world, he is essentially creating his own religion that is not of God.²⁹³ When readers overspiritualize texts, even an event as simple as an apple falling from a tree can mean the world is ending and Jesus is coming back. Overspiritualization like this hinders the reader's ability to understand the text's true meaning, which also means the book's influence on the reader will be diminished. When comparing and contrasting, it is wise to make sure that the comparisons align with reality. For Christian books, it is wise that the comparisons readers draw have the foundation of the Bible to support them.

Understanding the Reader's Free Will

There is great value in presenting a narrative that allows the reader to come to his own spiritual conclusions.²⁹⁴ As Holly Ordway states, the Christian's job is not to save people.²⁹⁵ Christians are dutiful to follow God's leading, while believing that the Holy Spirit will turn

²⁹⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 54.

²⁹¹ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets.>"; Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 159-60.

²⁹² Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 78.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

hearts to God (1 Corinthians 3:6).²⁹⁶ All readers have the free will to make decisions with the didactic information they receive from Christian allegorical literature.²⁹⁷ Perhaps the decision the reader makes is to write down and begin researching questions that the reader had about a spiritual concept in the text. Another possible action is for the reader to decide to pray for the first time in many years. Actions like these are what Christian allegorical fiction encourages; however, this also means that readers have the free will to harden their hearts against God.²⁹⁸ Some readers will draw closer to God as a result of reading Christian allegorical literature, while others will remain skeptical.²⁹⁹ The conclusions a reader comes to is dependent on the reader and not the author.³⁰⁰ Even if a biblical allegory is presented in a theologically accurate manner, it might not convince the reader of the Bible's truthfulness or God's goodness.³⁰¹

Furthermore, the reader could have interpreted the book in a different way than the author intended, which might prevent him from coming to the spiritual conclusions that the author hoped for. By using figurative language, the author has opted to leave the interpretation up to the reader.³⁰² This means that interpretation is subjective, at best.³⁰³ This being said, Christian

²⁹⁶ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 104-5.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16, 103.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104-5.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

allegorical literature is still useful because by allowing the reader to come to his own conclusions, the author is creating space for critical reading and thinking to occur.³⁰⁴

Conclusion

Critical engagement is essential to understanding Christian allegorical literature because it promotes life-changing action and transformation.³⁰⁵ A surface-level view is not sufficient for this task because of the hidden meanings in allegorical literature.³⁰⁶ By acknowledging the didactic nature of these works, utilizing the imagination, comparing and contrasting, and understanding the reader's free will, readers can engage with Christian allegorical literature at a critical level. This critical engagement is important because it helps readers see the apologetic intent in a narrative. Once the apologetic intent is realized, readers have the ability to make logical spiritual decisions regarding the new information they discovered.

³⁰⁴ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22, 104-5.

³⁰⁵ McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 78.

³⁰⁶ Brooks, *Understanding Poetry*, 635.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL READING APPLIED TO *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

Introduction

Chapter One's evaluation of key terms explained "Christian allegorical literature," while Chapter Two's call to engage critically with Christian allegorical literature connected the genre to the problem of the thesis. Foundations aside, an in-depth look can now be taken concerning two Christian allegorical novels. As stated in the thesis's "Introduction," John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Priscilla Shirer's *The Prince Warriors* will be critically evaluated to determine if their books provide an opportunity for readers to engage critically and spiritually with the texts. This chapter will analyze *The Pilgrim's Progress*, while Chapter Four will analyze *The Prince Warriors*.

Author John Bunyan

Bunyan was born in 1628 in England.³⁰⁷ He was poorly educated and only attended school through grade school.³⁰⁸ As a young child, Bunyan acknowledged the existence of a spiritual reality. As an adult, Bunyan recounted a childhood filled with harrowing nighttime terrors that included visions of evil spirits and devils.³⁰⁹ Although these troubling nights were

³⁰⁷ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 2.

³⁰⁸ C.J. Lovik, "Editor's Introduction" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 12.

³⁰⁹ Edmund Venables, "Biographical Introduction" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London, England: Oxford University Press Warehouse, 1903), xii.

difficult to endure, some critics believe that Bunyan's vivid imagination as a young child paved the way for his literary success.³¹⁰

Surprisingly, Bunyan did not grow up with a desire to be a writer. Instead, he pursued a career as a tinker, which was his father's trade.³¹¹ Bunyan entered England's Civil War in his early 20's and then proceeded to get married.³¹² His father-in-law presented the married couple with two religious books, which Bunyan read with his wife.³¹³ At this point, Bunyan expressed an intellectual interest in Christianity, but not an internal conviction.³¹⁴ Bunyan later recalled being convicted repeatedly, but ignoring the conviction to leave behind his sinful life.³¹⁵ Believing he was already condemned, he saw no use in abandoning his sinful ways.³¹⁶ Bunyan's cynical attitude persisted until the day that he was publicly humiliated for his rancid profanity.³¹⁷ This conviction caused Bunyan to swear off swearing. Shortly following this humiliation, Bunyan joined a Bible study, in which he began to express interest for reading the Bible, especially Paul's epistles.³¹⁸ This prompted him to attend church regularly and he slowly began giving up

³¹⁰ Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xii.

³¹¹ Ibid., xi.

³¹² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 2; Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xiii.

³¹³ Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xiv.

³¹⁴ Ibid., xv.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

the things that he believed were ungodly.³¹⁹ Over time, Bunyan grew increasingly zealous for the Bible. This led him to become a Puritan preacher in 1656.³²⁰

Seven years before Bunyan became a preacher, Charles II was sworn into kingship and prohibited all religious gatherings that were not affiliated with the Church of England.³²¹

Although Charles II attempted to control his subjects' allegiance to the Church of England, he was not successful on all fronts. Independent groups who refused to conform continued to meet in secret with others who rejected Charles II's orders.³²² Bunyan was among those who chose to meet and preach the gospel in private.

With Charles II pushing the Church of England's authority onto his subjects, many were afraid to speak out concerning their religious beliefs.³²³ Charles II ensured that people who spoke against the Church of England were punished. Under the Clarendon code, warrants were issued to arrest people who preached any message contrary to the Church of England, even in private gatherings.³²⁴ Members of religious groups were being dragged from their beds to prison cells, by order of the king.³²⁵ A sense of paranoia spread among the inhabitants of England and many presumed that government decisions were being enforced out of the fear that the Church of England would lose its authority.³²⁶ This did not deter preachers like Bunyan, who continued

³¹⁹ Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xv.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, xix.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, xxii.

³²² *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Clarendon Code."

³²³ Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xxi.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, xxii; *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Clarendon Code."

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

preaching the gospel boldly. Four years after Charles II was sworn in, Bunyan was arrested and imprisoned for this crime against the Church of England.³²⁷

A prison cell in Bedford was where one of Bunyan's most famous works, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, was written.³²⁸ Since he was in prison, he was not provided a plethora of resources to aid his research. The only reference material Bunyan had was the Bible.³²⁹ Although he was released from prison in 1672, Bunyan did not publish *The Pilgrim's Progress* until 1678, for fear that his work would be critiqued harshly.³³⁰ To Bunyan's surprise, his allegory was received exceptionally well by the common public, as was his second installment of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1684.³³¹ Although people who were not committed to the Church of England were being heavily persecuted, their zeal for their religious beliefs was not snuffed out. With the threat of Charles II and his government officials still looming over their heads, readers welcomed Bunyan's book and responded positively to *The Pilgrim's Progress*.³³²

This being said, England's upper class did not receive *The Pilgrim's Progress* well in the 17th century. Members of England's elite group critiqued Bunyan's style of writing because his use of common phrases and colloquialisms did not appeal to their well-educated dialect.³³³ They also harbored presuppositions about *The Pilgrim's Progress*' religious value, believing that

³²⁷ Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xv, xxii.

³²⁸ Ibid., xxii, xxvii.

³²⁹ Lovik, "Editor's Introduction" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 12.

³³⁰ Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xxviii.

³³¹ Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xxix; Lovik, "Editor's Introduction" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 12; Harold Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," *The North American Review* 223, no. 831 (1926): 330.

³³² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, xii.

³³³ Marta Coghetto, "'My Pilgrim is with Some, Worth More than Gold': the British Reception of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*" (Masters thesis, Ca'Foscari University of Venice, 2013), 64-6.

allegory was not an appropriate way to share thoughts about religion.³³⁴ They believed that allegories were only used to deceive, which caused them to prematurely look down on Bunyan's work.³³⁵ Additionally, Bunyan's book was critiqued for being fictional. In 17th century England, the general belief was that fictional works corrupted society.³³⁶ As an allegorical work, *The Pilgrim's Progress* fell into this category.

Despite its critiques, it is clear to see that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an influential novel, as *The Pilgrim's Progress* has remained in print since its inception.³³⁷ In fact, after Bunyan published *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he received multiple invitations from churches to preach at their gatherings.³³⁸ Although Bunyan passed away in 1688, his impact lives on through his narratives.

Authorial Intent of *the Pilgrim's Progress*

The full title for the original edition of Bunyan's most famous work is *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that Which is to Come*.³³⁹ From the title alone, Bunyan's intent is clear. Bunyan's title refers to the Christian's journey from this world to the future world that God has prepared in the afterlife.³⁴⁰ Between Bunyan's public profession of faith, decades of experience as a devout Christian and preacher, the title of his novel, and Bunyan's apology that

³³⁴ Coghetto, "My Pilgrim," 64-6.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence*, 10.

³³⁷ Coghetto, "My Pilgrim," 64-6.

³³⁸ Venables, "Biographical Introduction," xxix-x.

³³⁹ Leland Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014), i.

³⁴⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 2; Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 329.

he wrote for the novel, there is no question that Bunyan intentionally wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* through the worldview of a Christian. Readers can also be confident that Bunyan intended his work to be read allegorically because Bunyan acknowledged the allegory.³⁴¹

Originally, Bunyan was not attempting to write with this kind of figurative language in mind. He confessed that as he wrote, he discovered that he was writing an allegorical tale about Christian doctrine.³⁴² Although fictional, Bunyan wrote his book to be “truth within a fable.”³⁴³

Initially, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was not intended for public distribution. Bunyan wrote this novel to satisfy himself, although it ended up capturing the hearts and eyes of many.³⁴⁴ After he wrote his first draft of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he shared his manuscript with others, in which he received mixed reviews.³⁴⁵ Despite the critiques he received, he decided to print his narrative. This decision was partially due to the fact that he believed it would help someone spiritually.³⁴⁶ He intended for the book to “make a Traveller out of thee,” encouraging others to seek the Holy Land that Christian seeks in the narrative.³⁴⁷ Bunyan's hope was that his engaging story would impact people spiritually in a way that they would not soon forget.³⁴⁸

Furthermore, critical engagement with the text reveals that not only is Bunyan's story an entertaining allegory, but it is also apologetic in the way that it claims the Christian faith is the

³⁴¹ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 3.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid., 8.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 3.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

only path that will fully satisfy a people who are otherwise damned.³⁴⁹ His didactic intentions with an emphasis on biblical principles illuminate the fact that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a resource that both promotes Christian ideals and defends the faith against skeptic claims.³⁵⁰ For example, *The Pilgrim's Progress* rejects the claim that one can live according to the Law to be saved.³⁵¹ It also highlights the claim that following God is the only way to experience a satisfying eternity.³⁵² With examples like these in mind, *The Pilgrim's Progress* will be analyzed to see if it is a novel that creates space for readers to think critically about spiritual matters.

Summary

The narrator begins by telling the reader that the following events are events that he saw in a dream.³⁵³ This dream begins with Christian, a humble man who lives in The City of Destruction. Christian, the protagonist, reads a book and is burdened by the conviction that he must flee the City of Destruction.³⁵⁴ Following the Book's instructions and a character named Evangelist, Christian abandons his family and community to head for the Celestial City, which he believes is where he will find eternal life.³⁵⁵ The remainder of the narrative recounts

³⁴⁹ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 19.

³⁵⁰ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 17-22.

³⁵¹ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 20-5.

³⁵² Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 18-20.

³⁵³ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 11.

³⁵⁴ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 12-3; Leland Ryken, *Christian Guides to the Classics: Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 19.

³⁵⁵ J. Edward Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read (or Reread) John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*," *Knowing and Doing, Knowing & Doing* (2018): 1; Ryken, "Foreword," in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, v.

Christian's journey towards the Celestial City.³⁵⁶ He meets characters along the way, such as Worldly Wiseman, Piety, and Mistrust. Some of the characters, like Help, assist him in his journey.³⁵⁷ Other characters, like Ignorance, attempt to impede Christian's journey or discourage him from staying on the correct path.³⁵⁸ He also travels through difficult terrains: the Valley of the Shadow of Death, the Hill Difficulty, and the River of Death are a few of the places Christian finds himself.³⁵⁹ Despite the difficult terrains, wayward characters, and challenging moral dilemmas, Christian finally arrives at the Celestial City.³⁶⁰

Allegorical Elements in the Pilgrim's Progress

Introduction

Allegorical elements in *The Pilgrim's Progress* are found on nearly every page. Character's names and locations are intentionally used to fuel the allegory. In this way, Bunyan makes the "abstract...concrete."³⁶¹ Bunyan also teaches Christian doctrine through the events in the fictional plot. Instead of attempting to identify all the allegorical references in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the following section will select twelve references to be representative of the whole narrative.

³⁵⁶ Glancy, "An Encouragement," 1.

³⁵⁷ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 17.

³⁵⁸ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 20.

³⁵⁹ Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 328.

³⁶⁰ Glancy, "An Encouragement"; Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 15.

³⁶¹ George, "John Bunyan's," 28.

Locations

The City of Destruction

The titles Bunyan chooses for locations in *The Pilgrims Progress* represent ideas, warnings, or concepts.³⁶² For example, Christian begins his journey in the City of Destruction. The name of this city is not an exaggeration, as the city was destined to be destroyed.³⁶³ Although Christian's family and community determined to remain in the doomed city, Christian chose to abandon his hometown in search of eternal life.³⁶⁴

The margin of the 1903 edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* notes that the City of Destruction represents the Primary World.³⁶⁵ This location in the allegory reflects the biblical belief that the world and all the things in it are destined for destruction.³⁶⁶ The City of Destruction is where all people start, and each person must decide whether he will leave behind what he knew to search for new life.³⁶⁷ For Bunyan's character, Christian, this was a physical departure. Although Christians in the Primary World might not physically leave their hometowns and travel to a specific city that promises eternal life, the Christian's heart must change as he decides to abandon what he thought was true and good (Jeremiah 17:9).³⁶⁸ Christian's departure

³⁶² Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 13.

³⁶³ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 11.

³⁶⁴ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 19.

³⁶⁵ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 11.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 19.

³⁶⁸ This biblical reference was not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, this verse is applicable because it shares the depraved nature of the human heart when left to its own devices.

from the City of Destruction is a call for readers who have not begun their spiritual pilgrimage to start the journey.³⁶⁹

The Celestial City

Reaching the Celestial City is Christian's ultimate goal because this is where he believes he will find relief from his burden and eternal life.³⁷⁰ The ideas Christian has about the Celestial City come from biblical descriptions of the afterlife. For example, the apostle Peter writes about an imperishable inheritance that is kept in Heaven and promised to those who are born again believers (1 Peter 1:4).³⁷¹ Christian describes this inheritance with confidence and determination to his neighbor Pliable, who soon decides the journey to receive this inheritance is not worth the trouble.³⁷²

For Christians in the Primary World, the Celestial City is not a place that can be reached on earth.³⁷³ Hebrews 11:16 describes a "better...heavenly" country that faithful Christians look forward to. Bunyan brought the concept of Heaven into the reality of his Secondary World so Christian had a physical goal for his journey.³⁷⁴ In the Primary World, Christians have faith that this will one day be a reality; however, Bunyan assigned his protagonist the task to pursue this heavenly country in his Secondary World (Hebrews 11:16).

³⁶⁹ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 19; Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 8.

³⁷⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 14.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 14-6. The margins of *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition include this biblical reference.

³⁷² Ibid., 14-6.

³⁷³ Ibid. The margins of *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition include the biblical reference to Hebrews 11:16.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

Hill Difficulty

Christian encounters Hill Difficulty on his way to the Celestial City.³⁷⁵ At this point in his journey, he is accompanied by Formalist and Hypocrisy. Climbing Hill Difficulty proves to be daunting for the three characters. Of the three characters, only Christian succeeds in this climb.³⁷⁶ The journey to climb Hill Difficulty was not easy for Christian, just as the journey to sanctification is not easy for Christians in the Primary World.³⁷⁷ Bunyan detailed that Christian had to traverse the hill on his hands and knees because of its steepness.³⁷⁸ This allegorical reference does not mean that Christians in the Primary World must climb a physical hill to enter heaven; however, the Bible does warn readers that the path to eternal life is a difficult path that is only traveled on by few (Matthew 7:13-14).

Characters

Christian

The names in *The Pilgrim's Progress* were intentionally chosen by Bunyan to strengthen his allegory.³⁷⁹ The main character's name is no exception to this rule. In the Primary World, Christian's allegorical purpose is two-fold. First, he represents believers and their journeys toward eternity.³⁸⁰ Bunyan's call for his readers to decide if they will follow in Christian's

³⁷⁵ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 40.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁷⁷ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 22.

³⁷⁸ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 41.

³⁷⁹ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 13.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

footsteps makes this connection logical.³⁸¹ Bunyan makes Christian's character personable by highlighting the highs and the lows of his journey.³⁸² Like Bunyan's protagonist experienced, parts of the Christian pilgrimage are peaceful, while others are excruciatingly painful. Bunyan described Christian's experiences in a way that relates to the experiences of Christians in the Primary World.³⁸³

Second, Christian represents Bunyan and his difficult spiritual walk.³⁸⁴ Bunyan's creation of Christian was akin to a creative autobiography because Bunyan was also weighed down by the heavy burden of sin.³⁸⁵ As a child, he had nighttime terrors that convicted him of his sin.³⁸⁶ As an adult, he was persecuted because of his beliefs.³⁸⁷ He feared eternal judgment from a young age and later struggled with obsessive thoughts about abandoning his relationship with God.³⁸⁸ Like Christian, Bunyan carried a heavy spiritual load that felt physical.³⁸⁹

³⁸¹ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 8.

³⁸² Coles, *The Call*, 128.

³⁸³ McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68; Coles, *The Call*, 128.

³⁸⁴ Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, iii.

³⁸⁵ Kevin Seidel, "Pilgrim's Progress and the Book," *ELH* 77, no. 2 (2010): 510; Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, iii.

³⁸⁶ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 4.

³⁸⁷ Lovik, "Editor's Introduction" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 13.

³⁸⁸ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, xvii.

³⁸⁹ Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 332.

Apollyon

Apollyon is the primary antagonist of the story. He appears multiple times throughout Christian's journey. His name, which means "Destroyer," is taken literally in this novel.³⁹⁰ As the ruler of the City of Destruction, Apollyon's goal is to "steal, kill, and destroy" all who dare venture towards the Celestial City (John 10:10).³⁹¹ He appears to be a physical combination of a bear, fish, lion, and dragon.³⁹² Apollyon represents the biblical Satan, who desires for Christians to remain in their "Cities of Destruction" instead of pursuing eternal life.³⁹³ Like Apollyon, Satan has power to inflict pain and confusion on the inhabitants of the world (2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 John 5:19). Both Apollyon and Satan are formidable, but conquerable foes. In the Bible, Satan is defeated by Jesus Christ (Revelation 20:10, Romans 16:20). In Bunyan's story, Christian defeats Apollyon with a two-edged sword.³⁹⁴

Mr. Worldly Wiseman

Christian encounters Mr. Worldly Wiseman near the beginning of his journey. This man, who appears wise to Christian, persuades Christian to stray from the narrow path.³⁹⁵ Instead of influencing Christian to continue towards the Wicket Gate, Mr. Worldly Wiseman encourages Christian to seek an alternative route that he insists will be easier and will provide a greater

³⁹⁰ *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Apollyon."

³⁹¹ Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 326. This biblical reference was not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, this verse is applicable because of Apollyon's shared malicious intentions with Satan.

³⁹² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 54.

³⁹³ Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 326.

³⁹⁴ Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 326-7; George, "John Bunyan's," 29.

³⁹⁵ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 20.

reward than what Evangelist promised.³⁹⁶ Mr. Worldly Wiseman is insistent on following the Law and persuades Christian that his comrades, Legality and Civility, can rid Christian of his burden.³⁹⁷

Mr. Worldly Wiseman's attempt to get Christian to seek out Legality's and Civility's help represents a secular belief that one can follow rules and laws to get to Heaven.³⁹⁸ This tactic, Evangelist later explains to Christian, leads many pilgrims astray.³⁹⁹ Although the works of the Law appear to be good, worldly wisdom seeks salvation by ways that are not outlined in the Book.⁴⁰⁰

Bunyan uses Evangelist to share an extended apologetic message, which exposes Mr. Worldly Wiseman's wayward ideas concerning salvation.⁴⁰¹ Through Bunyan's Evangelist, he defends the claim that although worldly wisdom looks beneficial in the world's eyes, it is foolish (Isaiah 5:21, Proverbs 12:15).⁴⁰² Furthermore, Bunyan claims that a theology that convinces believers to pursue anything other than the cross is deceitful.⁴⁰³ As Jesus reminds his followers, the only way to eternal life is by believing in him (Matthew 7:13-14).⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁶ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 20; Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 20.

³⁹⁷ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 20.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21-5.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ George, "John Bunyan's," 28; McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

⁴⁰¹ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 21-5.

⁴⁰² These biblical references were not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, these verses are applicable because they share the biblical view of worldly wisdom.

⁴⁰³ George, "John Bunyan's," 28; McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

⁴⁰⁴ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 23. The margins of *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition include this biblical reference.

Doctrine

Repentance

Christian was not a perfect traveler. There were times when he strayed from the path that led to the Celestial City; however, Christian expressed great remorse when he was made aware of his shortcomings.⁴⁰⁵ For example, after Christian was lulled to sleep in the Arbor, he was convicted that he had been slothful in his journey.⁴⁰⁶ He asked God for forgiveness, admitting to God that he allowed himself to indulge in his fleshly desires.⁴⁰⁷

Honest repentance is a heart posture that is also seen in the Bible. For example, King David earnestly repented from his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah (Psalm 51). Christian followed in the footsteps of those who went before him when he turned to God with a repentant heart. Additionally, Christian references a biblical story of repentance from the Israelites (Numbers 15:25).⁴⁰⁸ This adds another layer on to the connection between the Book Christian carries with him and the Bible.

Salvation

The second page of the narrative introduces the doctrine of salvation as Christian asks the following question: “What shall I do to be saved?”⁴⁰⁹ This is a direct quotation from Acts 16:30, when the overwhelmed jailer asks Paul and Silas how to be saved. Christian understands that

⁴⁰⁵ George, “John Bunyan’s,” 21-5, 42.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 42

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 42

⁴⁰⁸ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 43.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 12.

salvation cannot be found in his hometown.⁴¹⁰ It is important to recognize that Bunyan's placement of Christian in the City of Destruction resembles the desperate state of all humanity.⁴¹¹ According to Romans 3:23 and Romans 5:12, all humans are born into sin. No one is worthy of salvation, but some hear God's Word and determine to flee from the fate of eternal death.⁴¹² This is the path Christian took. It is also the path Bunyan desires his readers to take, as Christian's journey is meant to encourage others to seek eternal life through God.⁴¹³

Christian is instructed by Evangelist to travel to the Wicket Gate, which proves to be the only way to the joys of the Celestial City.⁴¹⁴ In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the Wicket Gate symbolizes the beginning of Christian's journey as a forgiven sinner.⁴¹⁵ At the gate, Christian admits his sinful nature, acknowledges God's mercy in saving him, and asks for admission through the gate.⁴¹⁶ The gate, although physical, represents Christian's salvation.⁴¹⁷ A gate similar to the one in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is also found in the Bible. During Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, Jesus informs his followers that there is only one way to find forgiveness for one's sins: entering the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14).⁴¹⁸ He also warns his followers that although many desire to enter the narrow gate, not many are successful because of the difficulties that

⁴¹⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 11.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read," 1.

⁴¹⁴ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 13.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 13-5.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 20.

accompany the journey (Matthew 7:13-14).⁴¹⁹ The Bible also promises that those who knock at the gate, like Christian did, will be received (Revelation 3:20).

When Christian and Hopeful converse, Christian asks Hopeful about the faith inside of him.⁴²⁰ Hopeful provides a defense, giving his testimony about how he came to follow God. He tells the story of his fallen nature and his redemption, pointing out that he was not saved by the works of the Law.⁴²¹ He also shares the knowledge he has about Jesus Christ's redemptive work on the cross.⁴²² In this conversation between Christian and Hopeful, Bunyan explores an in-depth discourse about salvation through his Puritan worldview.⁴²³

The Pilgrimage

Bunyan's story reminds readers that it is not easy or simple to walk as a Christian.⁴²⁴ In the novel, Christian endures many difficulties. He fights Satan, struggles against the temptation to stray from the narrow path, and climbs hills on his hands and knees. Although Christian does show character growth as the narrative unfolds, he also has moments where he fails miserably.

Like the Israelites in the Bible, and followers of Christ today, Christian experiences victories and failures. His poor decisions lead him to fall, which is what James reminds his readers of in his epistle (James 1:15). Christian is not a character who had a few bad days.

⁴¹⁹ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 20.

⁴²⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 126-32.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴²³ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 126-32; Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, vi.

⁴²⁴ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 22.

Christian's journey represents the Christian walk condensed into a novel.⁴²⁵ The pilgrimage that all Christians choose to embark on presents itself with difficulties and joys, which is why Bunyan's protagonist's journey is relatable to readers.⁴²⁶

Good versus Evil

The archetype of good versus evil is blatantly obvious in Bunyan's novel.⁴²⁷ The characters that influence Christian to follow the Book are good, while the things and characters that influence Christian to abandon the Book's instructions are bad.⁴²⁸ As can be seen in Christian's defeat of Apollyon, *The Pilgrim's Progress* follows the biblical belief that good will ultimately trump evil (Isaiah 25:8).⁴²⁹

Following the Bible's warnings regarding temptation, Bunyan also paints evil as a detrimental, but alluring trap.⁴³⁰ The enticing world of pleasure, for example, led Hopeful to indulge in evil activities.⁴³¹ Likewise, Talkative is perceived to be an evil character because although he talks about faith, his actions do not match his words.⁴³² Hopeful, on the other hand, is

⁴²⁵ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 22.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴²⁷ George, "John Bunyan's," 28; McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

⁴²⁸ George, "John Bunyan's," 28; McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68; Seidel, "Pilgrim's Progress," 515.

⁴²⁹ Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 326-7; Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 54. This biblical reference was not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, this verse is applicable because it shares a core biblical doctrine that Bunyan presents in his novel.

⁴³⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 127.

⁴³¹ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 127; George, "John Bunyan's," 28; McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

⁴³² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 71-2.

iron that sharpens iron for Christian (Proverbs 27:17).⁴³³ He encourages Christian when he wants to abandon hope in the Doubting Castle.⁴³⁴ Since Hopeful is also determined to live his life by the Book, he is perceived as a good character.⁴³⁵

Spiritual Tools

The Book

The Book represents the Christian Bible.⁴³⁶ Without the Book, Christian would not have realized that he was living in a place that was doomed for destruction.⁴³⁷ He also would not have realized that his sins were what doomed him.⁴³⁸ Christian's acknowledgement of his sinful state caused him to leave his familiar home, desperately searching for what could save him. Likewise, Paul acknowledged that he would not have known that he was breaking the Law if it were not for God's Word (Romans 7:7-12).

The Book is what Christian relies on to guide him throughout his pilgrimage.⁴³⁹ It plants the idea of eternal life in Christian's head and heart in the first page of the narrative.⁴⁴⁰ With its promises of a precious inheritance and eternal life, Christian abandons everything to find a

⁴³³ This biblical reference was not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, this verse is applicable because it highlights the biblically sound relationship between Christian and Hopeful.

⁴³⁴ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 107-9.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 18; Seidel, "Pilgrim's Progress," 509.

⁴³⁷ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 12.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 18.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 19.

treasure that would be more satisfying than anything he had previously experienced.⁴⁴¹ The Bible promises the same inheritance (1 Peter 1:4, Hebrews 11:16).⁴⁴² Like Christian, Christians in the Primary World have an eternal inheritance awaiting them at the end of their journeys. Those who believe in the Bible's message and act accordingly, as Christian did, are the ones who the Bible promises will be saved (Romans 10:9-10).⁴⁴³

Christian not only read the Book, but he devoured it, allowing it to affect his inmost being.⁴⁴⁴ Reading the Book, he wept bitterly as his eyes were opened to his fate.⁴⁴⁵ It haunted him to the point where he was not able to focus on anything except the words in the Book.⁴⁴⁶ With his whole heart, he believed the words of the Book were true. For this reason, Christian was eager to share the Book's content with those around him.⁴⁴⁷ Sharing the contents of the Book is also the call for Christians in the Primary World. Jesus commanded his followers to teach others about what they learned while with him (Matthew 28:19-20). Believers are to be just as eager to evangelize as Christian was to share the Book's contents with those around him (Isaiah 6:8, John

⁴⁴¹ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 14.

⁴⁴² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 14.

⁴⁴³ This biblical reference was not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, this verse is applicable because it shares a core biblical doctrine that Bunyan presents in his novel.

⁴⁴⁴ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 11-2.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-4.

4:35-36, Romans 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 2:8).⁴⁴⁸ The fact that Bunyan wrote and published *The Pilgrim's Progress* shows that he shared this sentiment.⁴⁴⁹

The Burden

The burden on Christian's back weighs him down as soon as he reads the contents of the Book.⁴⁵⁰ This burden represents sin, which Christian believes means that he is unworthy of even "The Grave."⁴⁵¹ He desperately expresses his belief that the burden will sink him down to Tophet because of its size and weight (Isaiah 30:33).⁴⁵²

Christian's burden is loosened and falls from his back as Christian approaches the cross.⁴⁵³ He acknowledges that the sight of Jesus hanging and bleeding from the cross gave him respite from his burden, which causes Christian to rejoice greatly.⁴⁵⁴ The fact that Christians can look to the cross and remember that Christ died for their burdens marks a relation between Christian's relief and the relief of the forgiven sinner (1 John 2:2). Although Christians in the Primary World do not always carry a physical burden, the sense of relief after one realizes his

⁴⁴⁸ This biblical reference was not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, this verse is applicable because it highlights the Bible's emphasis on evangelizing, which is what Christian participated in when he told others about the Book.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁵⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 12; Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, iii.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 12. This biblical reference was not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, this verse is applicable because it gives biblical context regarding Bunyan's use of the location Tophet.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 37, 47.

sins are forgiven is still relevant. Like the paralytic who was forgiven of his sins, Christians can “get up and walk” without the burden of sin weighing down their lives (Matthew 9:5-7).

Conclusion

Bunyan’s intentional use of allegorical references highlights the fact that Bunyan’s purpose was to present an entertaining didactic story that draws readers closer to God.⁴⁵⁵ The figurative language Bunyan utilized is beneficial for those who desire to explore a different perspective of Christianity than they might have been exposed to previously.⁴⁵⁶ By using creative elements to talk about Christian beliefs, Bunyan has authored a powerful apologetic tool that has influenced readers for centuries.

The allegorical references mentioned above are not all the allegorical elements in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. This being said, the elements that were explored above do give a glimpse into what a reader can expect as he reads through Bunyan’s narrative. The following section will apply critical reading skills to *The Pilgrim’s Progress* to determine if utilizing these skills allows readers to come to their own spiritual conclusions.

Critically Reading Through the Theological Elements in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

Personal and Critical Reading in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

Personal and critical reading can be readily applied to Bunyan’s Christian allegorical work. Although Bunyan shared that his purpose was to influence readers spiritually, he also had

⁴⁵⁵ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 2-3.

⁴⁵⁶ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 77, 103.

a desire for readers to engage with the characters personally.⁴⁵⁷ If one only grasps an intellectual perspective of Bunyan's novel, he might come away with a wealth of knowledge about Christian doctrine without allowing it to affect his heart to action.⁴⁵⁸ Relating to the characters is what makes a novel memorable and impactful.⁴⁵⁹ Christian is a flawed human, which is relatable for all people (Romans 3:23).⁴⁶⁰ At times, he needs help getting back on his feet and resuming his trek.⁴⁶¹ Christian's journey of highs and lows has the ability to draw the reader in emotionally, while Christian's struggles with righteous decision making engages the critical mind.⁴⁶²

Bunyan's decision to write this narrative with Christian as the central figure speaks to the personal connection that many readers build with Christian.⁴⁶³ The reader is allowed entrance into Christian's despair, his grief at abandoning his family, and his hopelessness while trapped in the Doubting Castle.⁴⁶⁴ In these ways, Christian is more than a character in a fictional narrative: he is a person.⁴⁶⁵

The fact that Christian is a relatable character does not draw away from Bunyan's didactic intentions.⁴⁶⁶ Approaching this book critically allows the reader to use his relation to

⁴⁵⁷ McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68-9.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁶⁰ This biblical reference was not included in *The Pilgrim's Progress's* 1903 edition; however, this verse is applicable because it highlights the moral depravity of man in his fallen state.

⁴⁶¹ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 17.

⁴⁶² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 15.

⁴⁶³ George, "John Bunyan's," 28; McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Coles, *The Call*, 128.

⁴⁶⁶ McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 69.

Christian to draw parallels to his own spiritual journey.⁴⁶⁷ By asking questions about the didactic intentions of Bunyan, one can also relate to this novel critically.⁴⁶⁸

Self-Awareness of Presuppositions

The Pilgrim's Progress has an overt Christian theme, which means it is not unusual for readers to begin this book with their own presuppositions.⁴⁶⁹ Christianity is a major theme in this allegory, and most Americans have presuppositions about what they believe Christianity is.⁴⁷⁰ A reader who lets his presuppositions lead his critical reading process might begin reading this book with a jaded heart, looking for errors or flaws in the narrative that attempt to discredit Christianity. Others might feel like they already know all they need to know about Christianity.⁴⁷¹ Whatever the presupposition, it is important to acknowledge these biases as a critical reader.⁴⁷² By acknowledging what initial perception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* the reader has before reading through the book, he will be able to notice when his presuppositions are interfering with an honest interpretation of the text.⁴⁷³

Additionally, acknowledging presuppositions against Christianity or Christian allegories is important when discerning Bunyan's apologetic intent. For example, a critical reader may discern that the conversation between Evangelist and Christian is apologetic in the way that

⁴⁶⁷ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 22.

⁴⁶⁸ McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 69; Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁴⁶⁹ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 15.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

Evangelist argues against the validity of a works-based salvation.⁴⁷⁴ Evangelist explains in detail why he believes what he believes about salvation and about the path to destruction.⁴⁷⁵ For readers who harbor negative presuppositions regarding salvation or Christianity, there is a temptation to interpret this scene as an unwelcome lecture or sermon.⁴⁷⁶ Similarly, readers who believe allegories should not be used to share spiritual truths will disregard the apologetic claims in Bunyan's novel. If one is set on thinking like the elite members of England's 17th century society, he will miss the apologetic teaching points Bunyan shares through his narrative.⁴⁷⁷ For these reasons, critical readers must acknowledge their presuppositions. This is beneficial to the reader who desires to interpret any Christian allegorical work fairly.

Understanding the Genre's Didactic Nature

The Pilgrim's Progress is clearly didactic. Biblical references are found throughout the narrative, with some editions adding biblical text references in the margins.⁴⁷⁸ In the editions where the biblical references are included in the margins, the reader is led to feel like he is holding the Book just as Christian holds the Book.⁴⁷⁹ For example, the notes on the first page of the 1903 edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* inform the reader of multiple scriptural references that align with Christian's posture and circumstances: Isaiah 64:6, Luke 14:33, Psalm 38:4, and

⁴⁷⁴ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 21-5.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Kvisvik, *Protecting Innocence*, 10.

⁴⁷⁷ Coghetto, "'My Pilgrim,'" 64-6.

⁴⁷⁸ John Newton, "Preface" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014), xxxix.

⁴⁷⁹ Seidel, "Pilgrim's Progress," 509.

Habakkuk 2:2.⁴⁸⁰ The verse in Isaiah describes how men have become unclean, like filthy garments (Isaiah 64:6). This is the condition that the narrator finds Christian in at the beginning of the dream.⁴⁸¹ Luke 14:33 is a call from Jesus to renounce one's past life and follow him. This is the call Christian is being burdened with.⁴⁸² In Psalm 38:4, David complains of his overwhelmingly heavy burdens that have been caused by his sins. This reflects Christian's acknowledgement of his burden of sin in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.⁴⁸³ Finally, Habakkuk 2:2 is a call for the words of God to be written down so others can read it. Within the first two paragraphs of the narrative, this is exactly what Christian is doing.⁴⁸⁴ By only reading the first page of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the critical reader can discern that Bunyan's intent is spiritual.

Understanding the Apologetic Nature of *The Pilgrim's Progress*

Bunyan does not spell out his apologetic intent as overtly as William Lane Craig and Sam Harris do in their public debate; however, this does not mean that the apologetic intent is missing.⁴⁸⁵ *The Pilgrim's Progress's* apologetic intent is revealed through critical engagement with the text. Aligning with his worldview, Bunyan wrote from the perspective that following the Bible leads to eternal life, while following worldly ideas leads to eternal death.⁴⁸⁶ In the Notre Dame debate, characters like Christian, Evangelist, and Help would represent William Lane

⁴⁸⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 11.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ London 11; Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, iii; Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 18.

⁴⁸⁴ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 11.

⁴⁸⁵ Craig and Harris, "The God Debate."

⁴⁸⁶ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 11-2, 126-32; Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, vi.

Craig's evangelical perspective.⁴⁸⁷ Characters like Apollyon, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, and Talkative would represent Sam Harris' nontheistic perspective.⁴⁸⁸ Although Bunyan's characters are not in front of podiums with prepared speeches, they express their theological views through their words and actions.

The allegorical nature of *The Pilgrim's Progress* hides the apologetic intent under a layer of a fantasy world, but it still speaks clearly to those who engage with the narrative critically. For some, reading Bunyan's work will be the first time they have heard of the dangers Bunyan presents in his narrative. For example, Worldly Wiseman's insistence that there is an easier method for salvation seems appealing and logical.⁴⁸⁹ Evangelist explains that the shortcut Mr. Worldly Wiseman speaks of is a trap that will lead Christian on the path to destruction.⁴⁹⁰ For those who were raised with a strict legalistic worldview, the concept of not earning salvation by works of the Law might illuminate a perspective of Christianity that they have not interacted with before. Bunyan's perspective is helpful not only to skeptics who are unsure about the Bible's view concerning salvation, but also to Christians who struggle with pursuing a works-based salvation. This is only one example of how the apologetic nature of *The Pilgrim's Progress* can promote critical engagement concerning apologetic matters.

⁴⁸⁷ Craig and Harris, "The God Debate."

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 20-5.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 21-5.

Utilizing the Imagination

Even though *The Pilgrim's Progress* is overtly didactic, critical reading's use of the imagination is still needed to fully engage with this narrative.⁴⁹¹ Christian journeys through fantastical scenes, including a scene where he defeats a talking dragon.⁴⁹² For the reader to understand the meaning of this scene and the other creative scenes, the reader must use his imagination.

The reader who is too preoccupied by the fact that Apollyon does not exist in the Primary World will miss Bunyan's point.⁴⁹³ To engage in critical reading, the reader must understand that the fairy tale elements of the novel are not meant to be judged for their truthfulness.⁴⁹⁴ They are to be judged by their effectiveness, or how well the allegory was presented.⁴⁹⁵

Comparing and Contrasting

When utilizing the imagination, it is important to understand the difference between possible events in the Primary World and an author's Secondary World. For example, by critically reading, the reader can understand that Christian's fight with Apollyon should not be considered a possible event in the Primary World. This allegorical reference represents the fight between good and evil.⁴⁹⁶ This event is a stark contrast from a battle in the Primary World;

⁴⁹¹ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 21.

⁴⁹² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 55-7.

⁴⁹³ Adler, *How to Read*, 199-200, 207; Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 326; Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read," 19.

⁴⁹⁴ Adler, *How to Read*, 199-200, 207.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 54-57; Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 326.

however, there are still comparisons that can be found in this scene. For example, the Bible states that there is an unseen spiritual battle that rages on in the Primary World (Ephesians 6:12). Even though the enemy might not be physically visible, Christians believe that the enemy is just as destructive as Bunyan's character, Apollyon (John 10:10).⁴⁹⁷ This is a comparison that readers can come to by engaging critically with the text.

Engaging critically with the text allows readers to compare and contrast scenes from *The Pilgrim's Progress* and determine which events are useful to apply to their realities.⁴⁹⁸ This can help a reader make an informed decision about what pieces of this literature he should apply to his own life.⁴⁹⁹ While not everything is prescriptive, many of the didactic lessons in Bunyan's novel are descriptive. Descriptions can help people understand that while not everything in the novel can be directly compared to the Primary World, general concepts can still be applied.⁵⁰⁰ Christians should not expect to wield a sword and defeat a mighty dragon who rules the City of Destruction, but they should expect to fight enemies spiritually with the sword of the Spirit, God's Word (Ephesians 6:17).⁵⁰¹

Understanding the Reader's Free Will

Even with the didactic intentions of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the reader still has free will to decide what he will do with the information he gleans from the story.⁵⁰² The reader is not

⁴⁹⁷ Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 327.

⁴⁹⁸ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 21.

⁴⁹⁹ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁵⁰⁰ Golder, "John Bunyan's Hypocrisy," 326.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22.

forced to adopt Bunyan's outlook on Christianity, just as a shopper is not forced to buy a can of condensed milk because he read the ingredients on the can.⁵⁰³ The material was presented for the consumer to analyze and the shopper then makes the decision to buy the can or return it to the shelf. Likewise, Bunyan presents the allegorical information needed for readers to think about spiritual truths. Although Christian allegorical novels can influence conversion, they cannot force conversion.⁵⁰⁴ When a reader thinks rationally and critically, he is able to evaluate the text in a way that he can make an informed decision about what he believes.⁵⁰⁵

The reader's free will is a key component in the conversation about using Christian allegorical literature as an apologetic tool. If readers are free to make their own decisions and think individually, there is no evidence to believe that Bunyan is forcibly pushing his own agenda onto readers.⁵⁰⁶ Readers choose to read Bunyan's work. Likewise, they also choose what they do as a result of reading Bunyan's work. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an apologetic book that presents Bunyan's views about Christianity, but the reader is free to compare the didactic information found in *The Pilgrim's Progress* with his own personal experience and with other sources.

Reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*

C.J. Lovik once recalled that there was a time when it was unusual for him to hear a church sermon that did not use *The Pilgrim's Progress* as an illustration or reference.⁵⁰⁷ *The*

⁵⁰³ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁵⁰⁶ Madueme and Barham, "Stories that Gleam," 387.

⁵⁰⁷ Lovik, "Editor's Introduction" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 15.

Pilgrim's Progress was a common household book in the late 1900s for Christians and non-Christians.⁵⁰⁸ Although the book has waned in popularity over the last decades, it still remains one of the most read classics in the English language.⁵⁰⁹

The Pilgrim's Progress was esteemed soon after its publication; however, Bunyan revealed that some of the critiques around his book centered around the fact that people would rather receive a straightforward biblical message than a didactic lesson written as an extended metaphor.⁵¹⁰ To this, Bunyan reminded his readers that the Bible also uses figurative language to teach spiritual lessons.⁵¹¹ Furthermore, the Bible does not forbid using parables to share gospel-centered messages.⁵¹² Even though allegorical messages are not as straightforward as some readers prefer, Bunyan still shared a biblically sound message.⁵¹³

Some find Bunyan's words difficult for children to understand.⁵¹⁴ These critics liken Bunyan's original dialect to the King James Version of the Bible.⁵¹⁵ Although biblical truths are objective, some readers and critics have expressed their doubts toward a child's ability to understand some of the more technical doctrinal conversations Bunyan explored through his characters' dialogues.⁵¹⁶ For this reason, many adaptations have been released that are geared

⁵⁰⁸ Lovik, "Editor's Introduction" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 16.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁵¹⁰ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 6; Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read," 4, 7.

⁵¹¹ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 6; Seidel, "Pilgrim's Progress," 509.

⁵¹² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 7.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 6.

⁵¹⁴ Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read," 4.

⁵¹⁵ Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, vi.

⁵¹⁶ Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read," 4.

specifically towards children.⁵¹⁷ This being said, the same sentiment also applies to modern readers. In a time where the modern reader is not as familiar with vernacular from the 1700s, editions have been written to rewrite Bunyan's words into words that most modern readers would understand.⁵¹⁸

Although some critics believe Bunyan's "personified abstractions" leave his characters without personality, others believe Bunyan has done an excellent job of allowing these characters to have more personality than their descriptor adjectives imply.⁵¹⁹ Leland Ryker, for example, believes Bunyan's characters embody different personality types, social types, and spiritual qualities.⁵²⁰ This is astounding to Ryker because of how Bunyan fit all three of these elements into each character.⁵²¹

Lastly, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been criticized because it often breaks from the allegory.⁵²² For example, Bunyan often steps out of the allegorical mode to openly speak about God and Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.⁵²³ This brings the reader out of the Secondary World that Bunyan has created and back into the Primary World.⁵²⁴ This creates a disconnect between the fantastical elements of the story and the spiritual elements.

⁵¹⁷ Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, "Preface" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Philadelphia, PA: The John Winston Company, 1909), 5-6; Ryken, "Foreword" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, vi.

⁵¹⁸ Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read," 4.

⁵¹⁹ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 16.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² George, "John Bunyan's," 29.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

Overall, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been received well in the public's eye. Like all creative works, there are people who support the artist's work and people who express their dissatisfaction. Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* has enjoyed an extended time in the spotlight and continues to be modified and edited for readers today.

Conclusion

The Pilgrim's Progress has been an influential book in Christian and literary circles for centuries. Its longstanding popularity speaks to the effectiveness of Bunyan's allegorical storytelling skills. By reading through *The Pilgrim's Progress*, readers can see that critical engagement with the text is not only useful, but necessary, to fully understand the depth of this allegory.⁵²⁵

When readers use critical reading skills to identify and analyze the allegorical elements found in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it is clear that Bunyan's apologetic intent is to show that leading a life where the reader abides by the words of the Bible will lead to eternal life.⁵²⁶ Conversely, Bunyan's painting of characters like Apollyon, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, and Talkative point to the Christian belief that following a worldly view of morality will lead to destruction.⁵²⁷ When readers engage with Bunyan's work in a critical manner, the apologetic intent and allegorical parallels are revealed. This being said, the allegorical contents and the fictional narrative still provide room for the reader to make his own rational decisions about his

⁵²⁵ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 21.

⁵²⁶ Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read"; 1; Ryken, "Foreword," in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, v.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

spirituality. Even if a reader successfully interprets Bunyan's work, it is still his decision to decide if he will embark on his own spiritual pilgrimage.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRTICAL READING APPLIED TO *THE PRINCE WARRIORS*

Introduction

The Prince Warriors, written in 2016 by author and speaker, Priscilla Shirer, is an allegorical tale that targets young readers. This book is the first of a four-part series; however, only the first book will be analyzed in this chapter. The initial book, titled *The Prince Warriors*, is a Christian allegory based on Ephesians 6:10-18. Like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Prince Warriors* will be analyzed to determine if it provides an opportunity for readers to engage critically with the text in a way that influences them spiritually.

Author Priscilla Shirer

Priscilla Shirer was born in 1974 to a father who worked as a pastor and an author.⁵²⁸ Following in his footsteps, Shirer earned a master's degree from Dallas Theological Seminary and started a non-profit organization.⁵²⁹ Shirer now travels the United States, preaching in churches.⁵³⁰

The Prince Warriors is not the only book Shirer has written. She has also authored spiritual devotionals, Bible study guides, and books about prayer.⁵³¹ According to Shirer, *The*

⁵²⁸ Gary Wallace, Betty Lou, and Gavin Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince Warriors Full Interview Fully Edited," (podcast), directed by Gary Wallace, 2016, 6:45, <https://www.spreaker.com/user/waynation/priscilla-shirer-prince-warriors-full-in>.

⁵²⁹ Shawn Hanks, "Priscilla Shirer Bio," Premiere Speakers Bureau, accessed September 23, 2023, <https://premierespeakers.com/christian/priscilla-shirer/bio>.

⁵³⁰ Priscilla Shirer, "Get to Know Priscilla," Going Beyond Ministries, accessed September 23, 2023, <https://www.goingbeyond.com/ministry/biography/>.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

Prince Warriors was written over a six-year timeline, making it the longest she has ever worked on a book.⁵³² Curiously, most of Shirer's works are nonfiction, which means that *The Prince Warriors* is a drastic shift from her usual medium of sharing biblical truths.⁵³³

Shirer is an example of an author who uses fictional storytelling as an apologetic tool.⁵³⁴ While reading through an entertaining plot, readers are also learning how to rely on God's Word and why He is worth following.⁵³⁵ The mix between reason and imagination is what makes this novel an effective apologetic tool.⁵³⁶

This being said, *The Prince Warriors* was not a lone project. Shirer received help from a Christian fantasy writer from Pennsylvania, Gina Detwiler.⁵³⁷ Together, these women undertook the arduous task of creating a fantasy storyline from the biblical truths found in Ephesians 6.

Authorial Intent of *The Prince Warriors*

Shirer describes her book as a guide that can be used to equip Christians with the tools needed to engage in spiritual warfare.⁵³⁸ Like Bunyan, Shirer is not shy about her Christian intentions. Originally, Shirer wrote this book to encourage her own sons spiritually.⁵³⁹ For Shirer,

⁵³² Aaron Earls, "Priscilla Shirer's '*The Prince Warriors*' Tackles Spiritual Warfare," Lifeway Research, last modified April 25, 2016, <https://research.lifeway.com/2016/04/25/priscilla-shirers-the-prince-warriors-tackles-spiritual-warfare/>.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 1:00.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁵³⁷ Gina Detwiler, "About Gina," Gina Detwiler, accessed September 23, 2023, <https://www.ginadetwiler.com/about-gina>.

⁵³⁸ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 296.

⁵³⁹ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 1:00.

this was not an opportunity to make the *New York Times Bestsellers* list. Instead, *The Prince Warriors* began as an apologetic mission to teach her elementary age sons how to engage in spiritual warfare.⁵⁴⁰

Even though *The Prince Warriors* started as an apologetic bedtime story for Shirer's children, it grew into a full-length novel.⁵⁴¹ From one primary passage of scripture, Shirer equipped readers with a creative visual of what it looks like to prepare for spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:10-20).⁵⁴² She wanted to give readers the confidence that they are able to be victorious against the spiritual enemy.⁵⁴³ She also provided parents with teaching resources so they could discuss the spiritual aspects of the novel with their children.⁵⁴⁴ By writing *The Prince Warriors* and providing resources to accompany the narrative, Shirer created a space for parents to engage in spiritual conversations with their children. These conversations, as well as reading through the book, encourage critical thinking about spiritual matters.

So as not to stray from biblical teaching, Shirer held herself accountable by inviting other theological scholars to read her drafts while she was writing.⁵⁴⁵ Although fantasy writing utilizes a different approach than writing a book about prayer, Shirer still desired to present a biblically accurate message to readers.⁵⁴⁶ This biblical message can be seen in the novel's allegorical references to the Bible.

⁵⁴⁰ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 2:20.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 1:00.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 1:25.

⁵⁴⁴ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 1:40; Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁵⁴⁵ Earls, "Priscilla Shirer's."

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

Shirer also noted that she intentionally decided to hide some spiritual elements, acknowledging the fact that children are aware when adults try to force didactic principles onto them.⁵⁴⁷ Since she did not want to publish a novel that her readers perceived as “cheesy,” Shirer intentionally tried not to be too straightforward with her didacticism.⁵⁴⁸ Instead of using a plethora of biblical quotes and explaining Christian doctrine through conversations like *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Shirer settled for a more covert approach. At the end of the novel, Shirer included a link to her website, which has a page dedicated to sharing the biblical references found in each chapter.⁵⁴⁹

Summary of *The Prince Warriors*

The Prince Warriors tells the story of two brothers, Evan and Xavier, who have recently moved to a house in the country. One night, the boys follow a creature in a purple robe into a storm.⁵⁵⁰ The creature leads them to the lake near their house, where they jump in.⁵⁵¹ The boys arrive in Ahoratos, the “unseen” world Shirer created that exists simultaneously with the Primary World. The robed character reveals himself as their guide, whose name is Ruwach. Ruwach prepares the brothers and their friends for a spiritual battle by equipping them with physical armor.

Along with their new friends, Evan and Xavier travel through Ahoratos, navigating different challenges in this unusual world. They meet a friendly dragon, encounter dangerous

⁵⁴⁷ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, “Priscilla Shirer Prince,” 8:06.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Priscilla Shirer, “Secrets.”

⁵⁵⁰ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 30.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 39-40.

Ents, and struggle against the temptation to stray from the paths they are instructed to follow. The Warriors are led by the words of The Book and their breastplates, which illuminate their paths to tell them which way to go. The Warriors eventually travel to Skot'os, where they rescue a prisoner from their enemy's lair. At the end of the novel, the protagonists return to the Primary World with the expectation that they will soon return to Ahoratos. The Warriors arrive home with new confidence and compassion for those around them.⁵⁵²

Allegorical Elements in *The Prince Warriors*

Introduction

The Prince Warriors, an allegorical novel that was influenced by Ephesians 6, uses allegorical elements differently than Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.⁵⁵³ Instead of matching characters to specific personalities or concepts, Shirer uses modern names for most of her characters.⁵⁵⁴ This being said, some of the characters and locations in Ahoratos receive their names by Greek or Hebrew translations of biblical concepts.⁵⁵⁵

The following section will look at how Shirer used allegorical elements to advance her apologetic mission of creating an entertaining novel that allows readers to engage critically with spiritual truths. Although not all the allegorical elements will be explained, the following section will stand as a representative for all the allegorical elements in this work. This will show how Shirer intentionally utilized parallels to draw connections between her Secondary World and the Primary World.

⁵⁵² Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 262.

⁵⁵³ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁵⁵⁴ Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 16.

⁵⁵⁵ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 3:25.

Locations

Ahoratos

Ahoratos is the Greek word for “unseen” or “invisible.”⁵⁵⁶ Although the realm that Shirer’s characters travel to is hidden from the naked eye, Shirer stresses that the spiritual world is as real as the Primary World.⁵⁵⁷ The Warriors first hear about Ahoratos through a book.⁵⁵⁸ Initially, the characters believe this book is simply a fairy tale; however, they soon realize that the words on these pages describe a real location.⁵⁵⁹ The book that the characters read in their Primary World describes Ahoratos as a beautiful kingdom with dragons, castles, and princes.⁵⁶⁰ Like in most adventure stories, there is a battle between good and evil raging on in Ahoratos. The main character of the book, the prince, goes on daring adventures to save the kingdom from its magical enemies.⁵⁶¹

Although Ahoratos is not a physical place in the Primary World, Shirer states that the “unseen” exists simultaneously with the Primary World (Ephesians 6:12). In the Primary World, believers engage in conflict while acknowledging that the battles they fight are against spiritual powers and principalities (Ephesians 6:12). Although the enemies in the Primary World are invisible, Shirer points out that invisible is not synonymous with fictional.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁶ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, “Priscilla Shirer Prince,” 3:25; *Strong's Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. “invisible.”

⁵⁵⁷ Priscilla Shirer, “Books,” *The Prince Warriors* at B&H Publishing Group, accessed July 20, 2023, <https://theprincewarriors.bhpublishinggroup.com/books/>.

⁵⁵⁸ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 25.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15, 25.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 28.

Skot'os

Skot'os is the location of the primary antagonist's lair, which is in Ahoratos.⁵⁶³ *Skot'os* is Greek for “darkness.”⁵⁶⁴ Ruwach warns the Warriors to steer clear of this location, as this is where Ponéros and his army reside. Ponéros' headquarters in Skot'os resembles a prison. Ponéros' minions lure creatures and people inside this prison with empty promises, only to enslave them once they enter Skot'os.⁵⁶⁵

Skot'os is not a physical location in the Primary World. Shirer's novel personifies Ephesians 6:12, bringing the powers and principalities to life and housing them in a physical fortress called Skot'os. Like the rest of Ahoratos, Skot'os is an unseen location in the Primary World. Even though it is not visible, the battle against Skot'os is still real. The enemy resides in the spiritual realm, looking for those who he can lure away from God (1 Peter 5:8).⁵⁶⁶

The Gate to Destruction

In Chapter Eight, the Warriors are given the task to choose between entering one of three gates.⁵⁶⁷ One of the gates is wide and looks appealing, while the two other gates show a dark city and a sandstorm. As they approach the gates, they receive the following instruction: “Lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5-6).⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶³ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 145.

⁵⁶⁴ Strong's Concordance of the Bible, s.v. “darkness.”

⁵⁶⁵ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 150-1, 254.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The Warriors also receive the following instruction from their breastplates and plaques above the gates: “Enter by the narrow gate” (Matthew 7:13).⁵⁶⁹ The instruction warns the Warriors that although the wide gate seems like the most pleasant option, this gate leads to destruction. The narrow gate, which few choose to travel through, will lead to life (Matthew 7:14). This warning, coupled with Proverbs 3:5-6, leads the Warriors to believe they should avoid the wide gate, even though it looks like the most pleasant route.⁵⁷⁰

Although three of the characters choose the correct gates, Levi chooses to enter the Gate to Destruction. Here, Levi nearly loses his life on account of the Forgers that Ponéros sent to capture him.⁵⁷¹ The advice that Levi received earlier proved to be accurate. Shirer plucked this advice from the Bible, using Matthew 7:13-14 and Proverbs 3:5-6 to show an illustration of what it looks like to enter the Gate to Destruction. Although the Warriors who entered the correct gates struggled with the challenges of their environments, they were rewarded for their faithfulness. This shows that although the narrow gate is not the easiest gate to enter, it is the one that leads to abundant life (Matthew 7:14, John 10:10). The wide gate, on the other hand, only leads to destruction (Matthew 7:14).⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁹ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 86

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 114-5.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

Characters

Ruwach

Ruwach is the Prince Warriors' mysterious spiritual guide in Ahoratos.⁵⁷³ He gives the characters advice, equips them with armor, and encourages them along the way. The name *Ruwach* is Hebrew and it means "breath."⁵⁷⁴ According to Shirer, Ruwach is meant to represent the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷⁵

The Prince Warriors could not have navigated the otherworldly terrain without Ruwach as their guide. As a guide who had been in Ahoratos long before the children arrived, he was able to share wisdom about Ahoratos that helped keep the Warriors out of danger. For example, Ruwach warned the children to always follow the light that shone from their breastplates.⁵⁷⁶ When they did not heed this warning, the Warriors found themselves in perilous predicaments.⁵⁷⁷

In the Primary World, the Holy Spirit is not a physical being. Instead, he dwells within believers, giving them internal guidance.⁵⁷⁸ He instructs believers on how to follow the righteous path, just as Ruwach does for the Prince Warriors. God promises the Holy Spirit will reside in believer's hearts to guide their spiritual pilgrimages (Luke 24:49, Romans 5:5, Romans 15:13).

⁵⁷³ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 3:55.

⁵⁷⁴ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 4:04; *Strong's Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. "breath."

⁵⁷⁵ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 4:11.

⁵⁷⁶ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 116.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵⁷⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Henderson Academic, 1999), 144.

The Source

The Source is the creator and sustainer of Ahoratos.⁵⁷⁹ He represents God, who is omnipresent and omnipotent.⁵⁸⁰ Like the biblical God, The Source is the author of The Book, the physical guide that the characters read to learn about how to walk wisely in Ahoratos and in the Primary World.⁵⁸¹ The Source exists in Ahoratos and on earth, which means the words in his book are pertinent for both the spiritual and physical realm.⁵⁸² Likewise, God authored the Bible to help believers live in the physical world while fighting battles in the spiritual realm (Ephesians 6:12, 2 Timothy 3:16).

Like the Source, God is invisible (Romans 1:20).⁵⁸³ Believers in the Primary World cannot see Him, although they have faith that He is always present (Romans 1:20).⁵⁸⁴ The Source also shares the perfect qualities of God: His justice, mercy, and love (Isaiah 30:18, Psalm 86:5, Psalm 119:37).⁵⁸⁵ Lastly, The Source and God stand for objective truth, and there is no truth except that which is found in their words (John 14:6).⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁷⁹ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 75, 167, 214.

⁵⁸⁰ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 75; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 60; Wayne A Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 156.

⁵⁸¹ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 75.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 156.

⁵⁸⁵ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 167.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 214.

Ponéros

Ponéros represents the biblical Satan in *The Prince Warriors*. Ponéros' origin story closely resembles Satan's, which Ruwach reveals to the curious Warriors.⁵⁸⁷ Like Satan, Ponéros was a prince who rebelled against the ultimate ruler, the Source (Isaiah 14:12-20, Revelation 12:7-11).⁵⁸⁸ His rebellion failed; however, he still resides in Ahoratos with his malicious army.⁵⁸⁹

In the Bible, Satan tempts men by offering to fulfill their desires (Matthew 4, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:10).⁵⁹⁰ *The Prince Warriors* shows Ponéros doing just this, as he entices Rook to steal a key from Ruwach.⁵⁹¹ Promising Rook great wealth, Ponéros showed his true colors when he instead trapped Rook in his dungeon.⁵⁹² The Bible informs readers about falling victim to lies from the enemy by constantly reminding readers that Jesus is the only source of true satisfaction (Psalm 16:11). Ponéros, on the other hand, seeks two things: chaos and confusion.⁵⁹³ His attempts to thwart the Prince Warriors on their mission is a parallel for Satan's attacks in the Primary World.⁵⁹⁴

This being said, Ponéros does not exist in a physical form in the Primary World. This understanding relies on Ephesians 6:12, which reminds believers that while they cannot see the enemy, he is a real foe. Shirer equips her Warriors with the tools to fight against a physical

⁵⁸⁷ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 167.

⁵⁸⁸ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 167; Louis Berkhof, "Creation of the Spiritual World" in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 141.

⁵⁸⁹ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 167-8.

⁵⁹⁰ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 124.

⁵⁹¹ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 215-6.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

enemy, which also helps them fight against the powers and principalities of the enemy when they return home.⁵⁹⁵ For example, after Levi returns from Ahoratos, he interceded in an incident where another student was being harassed. Even though he did not fight this battle with a sword, he understood that the enemy was still at war in his hometown.⁵⁹⁶ Taking courage from Ruwach's words, he stood boldly against the bully, believing he was equipped with everything he needed to stand firm against the enemy.⁵⁹⁷

Doctrine

Repentance

While on a mission, Levi disobediently enters the Gate to Destruction, which nearly costs him his life.⁵⁹⁸ Although he survived the ordeal, Levi was left with a metal arm as a result of his sin.⁵⁹⁹ After reconnecting with Ruwach, Levi expresses great remorse at his shortcoming.⁶⁰⁰ He thinks of himself as unworthy to wear the title of "Prince," just as Isaiah thought of himself as unworthy to be used by God because of his unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5-9).⁶⁰¹ The Bible reports that Isaiah's lips were cleansed, which gave him the confidence to follow where God sent him (Isaiah 6:5-9). Likewise, Levi's arm was healed by Ruwach and Levi was encouraged to continue his

⁵⁹⁵ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 174-5.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 114-5.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 164-5.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

journey as a Prince Warrior.⁶⁰² In this moment, Shirer exemplified both repentance and forgiveness.

Rook also expresses repentance after being rescued by the Prince Warriors. Once he was freed from Ponéros' prison, Rook returned to Ruwach and admitted that he sinned against his guide.⁶⁰³ Like the prodigal son's father, Rook was quickly forgiven and welcomed back into the Prince Warrior family (Luke 15:21-24).⁶⁰⁴

Temptation

When temptation is not addressed, it gives birth to sin (James 1:15). One of the characters, Brianna, experiences this as she is lured away from the narrow path by a butterfly.⁶⁰⁵ Although the butterfly seems harmless, it reveals itself to be a Maribunta, an evil monster sent by Ponéros to lead Brianna astray.⁶⁰⁶

In the Primary World, temptations might not come in the form of killer butterflies; however, the enemy does use what appears tempting to humans to entice them to abandon God (James 1:15). Brianna's weakness was a butterfly, but that is not prescriptive of all people. In the Primary World, the butterfly could look like a relationship, a guilty pleasure, or finances. This excerpt from *The Prince Warriors* is descriptive, warning the reader that the enemy will use the reader's weaknesses to tempt him to sin (James 1:15).

⁶⁰² Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 164-5.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 254.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 127, 171.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

The Bible does not hide the fact that sin looks enticing (Proverbs 5:3-6). The forbidden woman in Proverbs 5 lures people in with speech that is smoother than oil, like Mr. Worldly Wiseman in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Proverbs 5:3-6).⁶⁰⁷ Although the forbidden woman looks and sounds appealing, the Bible alerts readers that her steps lead to Sheol. This warning to fight against temptation is relevant to the protagonists in Ahoratos and to readers in the Primary World.

Spiritual Tools

The Book

According to Shirer, The Book represents the Christian Bible.⁶⁰⁸ The creator of The Book in *The Prince Warriors* is The Source, which correlates to God's authorship of the Bible.⁶⁰⁹ Ruwach points out that The Book must be studied carefully to fully grasp the meaning of the text.⁶¹⁰ This is similar to the Bible, which cannot be fully understood with a surface-level reading (Joshua 1:8).⁶¹¹ The contents of The Book are important for the Warriors to understand because The Book shares pertinent information that helps the Warriors fight while in Ahoratos and on earth.⁶¹² Likewise, the Bible teaches Christians how to live on earth and how to fight in the spiritual realm (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

⁶⁰⁷ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 21-5.

⁶⁰⁸ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 77.

⁶¹¹ Cheu-Jey Lee, "Biblical Reading and Critical Reading: How Do They Inform Each Other in Interpreting the Text?" *The Journal of Educational Thought / Revue de La Pensée Éducative* 49, no. 2 (2016): 157-8.

⁶¹² Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 75.

The Water

The Warriors enter Ahoratos through a body of water.⁶¹³ The Water serves as an invitation for the Warriors to voluntarily enter the spiritual world of Ahoratos.⁶¹⁴ Brianna finds the Water after searching for relief from a sandstorm.⁶¹⁵ After Brianna jumps in the Water, she realizes she does not have an ounce of sand left on her clothing. According to Shirer, this resembles the fact that Brianna was spiritually cleansed by the Water.⁶¹⁶ The redemptive work of the Water resembles Jesus's redemptive work on the cross, which is seen as a red splotch on the Water when the Warriors jump in.⁶¹⁷

Jesus, the Living Water, offers salvation to those who follow him (John 4:14). Like salvation in the Primary World, the Water was not forced upon the characters in *The Prince Warriors* (Joshua 24:15). Each character had to freely choose to dive into the Water to experience its redemptive power.⁶¹⁸

The Belt of Truth

The Prince Warriors are presented with the Belt of Truth in Chapter Four (Ephesians 6:14).⁶¹⁹ These belt are physical belts that the Warriors wear on their bodies; however, they are also more than fashion accessories. The belt represents objective truth, which Ruwach tells the

⁶¹³ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 68-9.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 56.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 68-9.

⁶¹⁶ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets.>"; Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 70.

⁶¹⁷ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 50.

Warriors holds all things together (Ephesians 6:14).⁶²⁰ When the characters trust in the truth, they are able to fight against the enemies' lies.⁶²¹ For example, Levi's evil doppelganger tricked him by convincing Levi that he would help him escape the torturous fate of drowning in quicksand.⁶²² Shortly after Levi put his trust in the doppelganger, it was revealed that the doppelganger was only trying to turn Levi into a prisoner for Ponéros.⁶²³ When authentic helping hands arrived, the Belt of Truth was the tool that helped Levi escape.⁶²⁴

This being said, simply having the belt on did not help the Warriors rescue Levi. Levi had the belt, too. The Warriors had to use the belt as it was intended.⁶²⁵ This relates to the Primary World because simply knowing the truth does not save people (Romans 1:21). Although the Romans knew the truth about God and His desires for their lives, they chose to pursue lives contrary to God's Word (Romans 1:21-32). One must choose to live his life according to God's objective truths to be saved (John 14:6).

Conclusion

The allegorical elements in *The Prince Warriors* are visible throughout the entire narrative. Approaching the allegorical elements in *The Prince Warriors* without thinking critically will not allow the reader to draw correlations between the characters and places that

⁶²⁰ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 180.

⁶²¹ Ibid., 51.

⁶²² Ibid., 164-5.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 180.

relate to the Primary World.⁶²⁶ From reading the text critically, the reader can discern where the allegorical elements lie.⁶²⁷ Additionally, Shirer's contribution of a personal analysis of her own book on her website allows the reader to think critically about the text.⁶²⁸ Through critical reading, the reader can draw spiritual parallels to the fantastical elements in *The Prince Warriors*.

The reader might find that Shirer's allegories allowed her to present Christian views from a perspective that is unfamiliar to the reader.⁶²⁹ By looking at the allegorical elements as a differentiation tool, the critical reader can see how *The Prince Warriors* serves as an apologetic method for curious minds. Furthermore, critical readers can determine if they will abide by the apologetic truths Shirer presented or reject her claims.

Critically Reading Through the Theological Elements in *The Prince Warriors*

Personal and Critical Reading in *The Prince Warriors*

Shirer states that her goal is not only to teach spiritual truths, but to create connections from the readers to her fictional characters.⁶³⁰ Shirer's desire to create a relatable story does not limit her ability to invite readers to think critically about spiritual concepts.⁶³¹ Engaging with *The Prince Warriors* on only a personal level will allow readers to find connections between self and the characters; however, this will also prevent readers from understanding Shirer's didactic

⁶²⁶ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁶²⁹ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22-3, 103.

⁶³⁰ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 1:00.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

message. Only engaging with the novel on a critical level also has its setbacks. When readers are only looking for the critical elements of a novel, the text reads more like a textbook than an adventure story. Like McGinley et al. states, both personal and critical connections are needed to move readers to action.⁶³²

Self-Awareness of Presuppositions

Like in Bunyan's book, readers will undoubtedly approach *The Prince Warriors* with presuppositions about what they expect Shirer's novel to be like. Since Shirer openly shares the book's Christian themes and intent, critical readers would be apt to acknowledge their presuppositions regarding Christianity prior to reading this novel.⁶³³ In this way, the critical reader can discern when his presuppositions are interfering with his interpretations.⁶³⁴

For example, some Christians might approach this book with the presupposition that fantasy is not an appropriate way to share the gospel.⁶³⁵ For those who are weary of anything that appears like it might be magical, this presupposition is relevant.⁶³⁶ Judging the book for its content and not for its use of magic-like elements is necessary to evaluate the usefulness and effectiveness of *The Prince Warriors*.⁶³⁷

⁶³² Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 16; McGinley et al., "Roles of Affect," 68-9.

⁶³³ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Glancy, "An Encouragement to Read," 4, 7.

⁶³⁶ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise*, 73, 78.

⁶³⁷ Adler, *How to Read*, 199-200, 207.

Acknowledging presuppositions will also help readers correctly interpret Shirer's apologetic intent. When a reader is convinced that he does not need the Holy Spirit's help to guide him, for example, Ruwach will be nothing more than a secular character with good intentions.⁶³⁸ The critical reader acknowledges his presuppositions about the faith so he can recognize when he is allowing his biases to cloud his interpretation of the text.

Understanding the Genre's Didactic Nature

Shirer is not shy in saying that *The Prince Warriors* is meant to teach its readers how to apply Ephesians 6 to their daily lives.⁶³⁹ This book is meant to entertain as well as to teach Christian doctrine.⁶⁴⁰ It is not purely meant as a fantasy book, just as it is not meant to be something that is akin to a sermon transcript.⁶⁴¹

Understanding the didactic nature of *The Prince Warriors* is crucial to a full understanding of the story. The words in The Book are not simply wise proverbs that Shirer has learned through experience. They represent the Word of God, which is living and breathing (Hebrews 4:12).⁶⁴² These words are not meant to stay on the page. As much as they are meant for the Prince Warriors, they are also meant for readers in the Primary World to follow.⁶⁴³ The Warriors' journey teaches them to obey and trust the instructions in The Book. The call to follow and trust the Bible is just as pertinent for Christians (Psalm 119:11). The narrative of this novel

⁶³⁸ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁶³⁹ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 1:20.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁶⁴³ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 1:20.

teaches the Warriors to follow The Book, while the Bible teaches believers in the Primary World to follow the Bible.

The didacticism in *The Prince Warriors* is different from that in *The Pilgrim's Progress* because while Shirer does quote Bible verses, she does not do so overtly. There are no notes in the margins telling readers where they can find scriptural references.⁶⁴⁴ There is also no mention of Jesus, the cross, or God in *The Prince Warriors*.⁶⁴⁵ While the characters are in Ahoratos, they remain in the allegory. Bunyan, on the other hand, chose to break the allegory to share the news of Jesus's sacrifice in plain language.⁶⁴⁶ While both authors approached sharing the gospel's message differently, they both did so in a way that leads readers to think critically about spiritual matters.⁶⁴⁷

Understanding the Apologetic Nature of *The Prince Warriors*

Like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Prince Warriors* does not explain its allegorical purpose in a formal setting like a debate. Critical engagement with the plot reveals that Shirer did have an apologetic purpose in writing *The Prince Warriors*. The novel began as an apologetic way to explain to her children the reality of the spiritual world and how to fight well against the powers and principalities that exist in the Primary World.⁶⁴⁸ From the beginning of her writing process, Shirer was aware that her book would serve an apologetic purpose.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁴ John Newton, "Preface" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014), xxxix.

⁶⁴⁵ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 130.

⁶⁴⁶ George, "John Bunyan's," 29.

⁶⁴⁷ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 6:00; Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 2.

⁶⁴⁸ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 1:00.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

The characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress* represent one of two sides. The first side is the position of evangelicals. The evangelicals in Shirer's novel are the four Prince Warriors, Ruwach, and the Source. The other side of the apologetic argument is led by Ponéros and his army. These characters do everything they can to dissuade the protagonists from following The Book, which helps the Warriors fight against Ponéros' evil schemes. Ponéros represents the Sam Harris of the apologetic argument, while the protagonists represent William Lane Craig and his evangelical views. Although the apologetic purpose cannot be discerned from a face-value reading of *The Prince Warriors*, critical engagement with the novel reveals that the two opposing forces support Shirer's claim that there exists a spiritual battle in the Primary World.⁶⁵⁰

Shirer's book also has the possibility of introducing new spiritual concepts to readers. For example, Shirer affirms the existence of a spiritual realm and a spiritual enemy, which might be new information for some readers. For other readers, *The Prince Warriors* could serve as a way for them to view the spiritual realm in a different light.

Shirer's illustration of the spiritual realm may also address misconceptions that readers have about the simultaneous existence of the spiritual realm and the Primary World. For example, when a reader engages critically with *The Prince Warriors*, he sees that although people appear to fight against flesh and blood, there are forces at work that influence people to make malicious decisions (Ephesians 6:12). This is seen through the way Ponéros sends his army out to tempt the Prince Warriors into making provisions for the flesh (Romans 13:14). For Brianna, this meant distracting her long enough to lure her into a vulnerable place where she could be harmed.⁶⁵¹ The critical reader asks questions about this scene that help him make

⁶⁵⁰ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 2:20.

⁶⁵¹ Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 127, 171.

connections to his own life. The following are examples of questions critical readers might ask: In what ways are people tempted to follow something that they have been warned to avoid? What are the effects of being tricked by a wolf in sheep's clothing? Why would Shirer use something as harmless as a butterfly to double as a dangerous, evil creature? Questions like these allow readers to discern Shirer's apologetic intent in a way that leads them to think critically about spiritual matters.

Once the reader has evaluated and analyzed his questions, he can begin to explore these concepts spiritually. For example, a reader might ask himself if he has been guided astray by something that has led him to harbor false beliefs about Christianity. He could also analyze if he feels like he has been following a path that looks right, but leads to destruction. The Bible warns readers about this in Proverbs 14:12. If a reader decides that he has been following a destructive path, he has a decision to make. He can either stay on the wrong path or decide to pursue the path that will lead him to salvation. For Shirer's characters, this was illustrated by the characters physically jumping into the Water.⁶⁵²

The decisions readers make after engaging critically with Shirer's novel are made on an individual basis. Readers are not forced to adopt Shirer's view of the spiritual realm, just as they are not forced to purchase the can of condensed milk from the grocery store. The critical reader has the ability to decide whether he will stay on dry land or join Shirer's characters as they experience new life in the Water.

Spiritual musings like this speak to the apologetic purpose of Shirer's work. The above example is only one way *The Prince Warriors* can be used as an effective apologetic tool that

⁶⁵² Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

encourages readers to think critically about spiritual matters.⁶⁵³ Although a surface-level reading will not lead a reader to these conclusions, critical engagement with the text reveals that Shirer's novel is just as didactic as it is entertaining.

Utilizing the Imagination

Critical engagement with *The Prince Warriors* requires utilizing the imagination.⁶⁵⁴

Although there are elements in the novel that closely resemble the Primary World, there are also fire-breathing dragons and homicidal butterflies. For this reason, critical readers must utilize their imaginations to make sense of the world Shirer has created.

Judging this fantasy allegorical work like a Bible study or a sermon would not prove beneficial.⁶⁵⁵ While both Bible studies and Christian allegorical literature present biblical doctrine, they do so differently. Christian allegorical literature is a creative way to present spiritual truths, so it should not be judged by the fantastical elements of the plot alone.⁶⁵⁶ For example, if a reader concludes that *The Prince Warriors* is not useful apologetically because it embodies the Holy Spirit as a mystical, ghost-like character, his conclusion will fall short of the author's intent. It is not Shirer's goal to convince the reader that he will encounter Ruwach in the Primary World. Her objective is to teach or remind readers that the Holy Spirit is a real guide

⁶⁵³ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁶⁵⁴ Adler, *How to Read*, 200.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 199-200, 207.

who helps Christians fight spiritual battles.⁶⁵⁷ One must understand the imaginative elements in this genre to be a critical evaluator of the text.⁶⁵⁸

Comparing and Contrasting

Comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between the Primary World and Shirer's Secondary World is an important critical reading skill.⁶⁵⁹ The "Secrets" section of Shirer's webpage for *The Prince Warriors* shares some of the elements from the Bible that are pertinent to her characters and to readers.⁶⁶⁰ The contrasting features in Shirer's book are the elements like the dragons, sand gobels, Forgers, and Ents. These creatures do not exist in the Primary World; however, Shirer's mission was to create a colorful allegory that brings to life the spiritual enemies that Christians encounter.⁶⁶¹

For example, a teenage boy in the Primary World will not meet a boy who looks exactly like him and later find out that he is a metallic monster in disguise.⁶⁶² This scene is strictly descriptive. The relatable element of this scene is being fooled into thinking that something that is evil is actually safe (Proverbs 5:3-5). This was Levi's dilemma, and this is a dilemma that many people in the Primary World face, as well.

⁶⁵⁷ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 4:11.

⁶⁵⁸ Adler, *How to Read*, 199.

⁶⁵⁹ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁶⁶⁰ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets."

⁶⁶¹ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, "Priscilla Shirer Prince," 1:00.

⁶⁶² Shirer, *The Prince Warriors*, 164-5.

Using critical reading skills to compare and contrast events like these allow critical readers to apply different elements directly to their lives.⁶⁶³ Like in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, not all the concepts covered in *The Prince Warriors* will be able to be applied directly. That being said, critical readers can discern which general observations they can apply to their lives.

Understanding the Reader's Free Will

Readers of *The Prince Warriors* are free to draw their own spiritual conclusions. If a reader chooses to read *The Prince Warriors* without acknowledging its spiritual elements, he will finish the book thinking it was an ordinary fantasy story about children who go on a magical adventure. For those who read critically and understand that Shirer's allegory draws on spiritual concepts and ideas, a different conclusion can be found.⁶⁶⁴

This being said, just because a reader engages with *The Prince Warriors* critically does not mean he will be willing to be equipped with armor to fight the enemy.⁶⁶⁵ It is possible that he will choose to continue in secularism, ignoring the Christian belief that professing Jesus as Lord is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6). It is also possible that this allegory surrounding Ephesians 6 might lead the reader to ask additional questions that *The Prince Warriors* did not cover. For example, a young man might wonder what it would look like to equip himself with the armor of God while interacting with the other members in his pickleball league. Reflections like these can ignite spiritual conversations, as well. At the end of the day, the reader is free to choose if he will allow this book to move him to action or remain spiritually complacent.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶³ Kurland, "Critical Reading."

⁶⁶⁴ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22; Kurland, "Critical Reading."

Reception of *The Prince Warriors*

The Prince Warriors has not enjoyed as much time in the limelight as *The Pilgrim's Progress*. For this reason, there has not been as much research completed over this allegorical novel. Still, readers have their opinions about the effectiveness of the book.

One review of Shirer's book states that *The Prince Warriors* is overly didactic.⁶⁶⁷ According to this review, *The Prince Warriors* is comprised of practical moral lessons that are ruined by Shirer's attempt to push her "charismatic doctrine" on readers.⁶⁶⁸ This is a complaint that is common for Christian allegorical novels, as readers do not always find that authors have settled on a middle ground between didacticism and entertainment.⁶⁶⁹ Like with *The Pilgrim's Progress*, this is a subjective critique that is impossible to reconcile as long as humans have differing opinions about their likes and dislikes.

Multiple readers reported that *The Prince Warriors* is a "copycat" of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.⁶⁷⁰ Between the alternate universe, medieval-like fighting styles, and fantastical creatures, this conclusion is logical. The similarities between Narnia and Ahoratos are not difficult to identify. Andrew Latta believes that many Christian authors appear to repeat the same storyline and arguments, making their books sound less like originals and more like C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* or J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.⁶⁷¹ This is the trap that some readers believe Shirer has fallen into.

⁶⁶⁷ Joey, review of *The Prince Warriors* by Priscilla Shirer, Goodreads (January 2020), <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/28101773-the-prince-warriors>.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ White, "Walter Benjamin: 'The Storyteller,'" 86.

⁶⁷⁰ Joey, review of *The Prince Warriors*; Annie Johnson, review of *The Prince Warriors* by Priscilla Shirer, Goodreads (June 2021), https://www.amazon.com/The-Prince-Warriors-audiobook/product-reviews/B01DOEIDP2/ref=cm_cr_unknown?filterByStar=two_star&pageNumber=1.

Despite the critical comments towards *The Prince Warriors*, Shirer's novel has also received praise. Out of 1,455 ratings on Amazon, *The Prince Warriors* received a 4.8 rating.⁶⁷² One review on Goodreads expresses that although the reader is not currently a Christian, he appreciates how *The Prince Warriors* encouraged him to think about his spiritual life.⁶⁷³ Another reader talks about how she was able to apply the lessons the Warriors learned in Ahoratos to her personal life.⁶⁷⁴ Reviews like these show that Shirer's work was not only received well, but that her apologetic intent was also accomplished.

Conclusion

Like Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, critical engagement with *The Prince Warriors* reveals how this story can be used as an apologetic tool. *The Prince Warriors* defends a claim that argues against the reality of a spiritual battle and a spiritual enemy. Furthermore, Shirer claims that the only way to defeat this spiritual enemy is by equipping oneself with the armor of God. For those who are skeptical about the reality of the spiritual world, Shirer makes connections from the spiritual world to the Primary World that allow the reader to see how spiritual battles are fought on earth.

Critically reading this apologetic allegory will allow readers to engage with not only an adventurous story, but with objective truths that will help them prepare to fight spiritual battles.

⁶⁷¹ Latta, "Review of Apologetics," 166.

⁶⁷² "*The Prince Warriors*," Amazon, accessed October 8, 2023. <https://www.amazon.com/Prince-Warriors-Priscilla-Shirer/dp/1433690195>.

⁶⁷³ Bookwork23, review of *The Prince Warriors* by Priscilla Shirer, Goodreads (July 2016), <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/28101773-the-prince-warriors>.

⁶⁷⁴ Jeanie, review of *The Prince Warriors* by Priscilla Shirer, Goodreads (June 2016), <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/28101773-the-prince-warriors>.

Perhaps this book will help open a reader's eyes to the way Ponéros has been leading him astray or spark a reader's interest in reading Ephesians. By reading this book critically, a reader can make informed decisions concerning spiritual matters.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHRISTIAN ALLEGORICAL LITERATURE'S PLACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Introduction

The previous two chapters critically analyzed two Christian allegorical fiction novels. Although *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Prince Warriors* use different approaches to draw parallels from their Secondary Worlds to biblical truths, the analyses concluded that they both present apologetic messages that encourage critical thinking about spiritual matters. With this conclusion in mind, Chapter Five will now explore Christian allegorical literature's place in the 21st century.

Allegorical Fiction as a Bible Replacement or Supplement?

This thesis argues that the Bible does not need a replacement. Although both the Bible and Christian allegorical literature claim to present objective truths to readers, the Bible is the only "God-breathed" piece of literature (2 Timothy 3:16). This means that the appropriate place for Christian allegorical literature is as a biblical supplement. Although Christian allegorical literature can be used as a differentiation tool, no other piece of literature can replace reading and analyzing God's Word.⁶⁷⁵

Furthermore, Christian allegorical literature does not claim to be a replacement for the Bible. This is seen in the way that Christian allegories point to the Bible as the main source of objective truth and to God as the ultimate source of life. For example, the "Books" in *The Prince*

⁶⁷⁵ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 102.

Warriors and *The Pilgrim's Progress* are both allegorical parallels for the Bible.⁶⁷⁶ They do not claim to *be* the Bible, but only to represent the Bible in an allegorical fashion.

Fictional allegories cannot stand by themselves because they receive their apologetic information from another source.⁶⁷⁷ For this reason, Christian allegorical literature is best thought of as a small part of a whole.⁶⁷⁸ This genre can be added to the toolbox Christians use when evangelizing. Along with tools like gospel tracts and formal apologetic debates, Christian allegorical literature can be used as an apologetic method that helps stimulate critical thinking about spiritual matters.⁶⁷⁹

Biblical Parables and Fictional Allegories

Biblical parables are similar to Christian allegorical novels in the way that they both present fictional stories with a didactic purpose.⁶⁸⁰ Instead of using hundreds of pages to share spiritual messages, parables are usually short stories.⁶⁸¹ According to Leland Ryken, a biblical parable has two purposes. The first purpose is to teach others spiritual truths, while the second

⁶⁷⁶ Priscilla Shirer, "Secrets"; Ryken, *Christian Guides*, 18; Seidel, "Pilgrim's Progress," 509.

⁶⁷⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 102.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Leland Ryken, "Parable" in *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2014), 136-7.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

purpose is to entertain.⁶⁸² Parables are often allegorical, which means they are fictional in nature.⁶⁸³

Although the entire Bible is not written in parables, The Old and New Testaments show that using parables to teach spiritual truths is an effective method. For example, Jesus told his followers a story about a sower who plants seeds (Mark 4:3-8). In reality, Jesus was not trying to teach his followers to plant physical seeds.⁶⁸⁴ Instead, Jesus explained that the seeds represented people and the seeds' locations represented the spiritual fates of the people after they were told about the gospel (Mark 4:14-20).⁶⁸⁵ Since Jesus used parables to teach, it is logical to conclude that the Bible does not frown upon using fictional stories to share spiritual truths.

Like in Christian allegorical literature, the allegorical parables that the Bible uses promote critical engagement. One cannot understand the hidden meaning behind parables without engaging critically with the narratives, which can be seen by the way Jesus told his followers that only people in the kingdom of God would be able to decipher his parables (Mark 4:11-12). Although all people could listen to Jesus' parables, Jesus warned that not everyone would understand their hidden meanings (Mark 4:12).

Difficulties for Christian Fiction Authors in the Mainstream World

The Christian literary circle is small compared to other genres. Since Christian books are not as popular as romantic comedies, mysteries, or thriller novels, Christian fiction authors often

⁶⁸² Ryken, "Parable" in *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible*, 136-7.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

struggle in the writing and publishing community. The following section will give an overview of some of the problems Christian authors face as religious artists in a secular world.

As seen in Chapters Three and Four, presuppositions can affect the way readers interact with literary works.⁶⁸⁶ Christian authors must predict these presuppositions and attempt to write in a way that draws skeptical readers to their books.⁶⁸⁷ Although the Bible is the most direct resource for sharing Christian truths, if an author simply quotes entire passages of the Bible in place of a creative narrative, he is apt to lose readers.⁶⁸⁸ Shirer considered this when writing *The Prince Warriors*.⁶⁸⁹ Although she valued apologetics, she also understood that her book would only be engaging if the didactic teaching points did not come across as excessively “preachy.”⁶⁹⁰

Another difficulty for Christian authors in a mainstream culture is that they are called to present controversial messages.⁶⁹¹ In a post-Christian society, people who strive to align their lives with biblical truths are not always received positively.⁶⁹² For example, the Bible claims that Jesus is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6). This is not a popular view in a culture that tells people that their feelings should determine their decisions.⁶⁹³ The fact that Christian authors address countercultural messages presents difficulties in that readers might approach Christian allegorical novels with negative presuppositions before engaging critically with the narrative. If a

⁶⁸⁶ O’Brien and Richards, *Misreading Scripture*, 29; Kurland, “Critical Reading.”

⁶⁸⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 29.

⁶⁸⁸ Wallace, Lou, and Granstrom, “Priscilla Shirer Prince,” 8:06.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹¹ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 75.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁹³ Childers, *Live Your Truth*, 7-8.

reader has the foreknowledge that a book will be presenting a controversial topic in a way that might not seem favorable to him, he might be less likely to read the novel. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, for example, is countercultural in a nation where same-sex marriage is approved and championed.⁶⁹⁴ Even reading the summary of Butterfield's book has the propensity to turn skeptical readers away. While the messages that Butterfield presents are biblically sound, her stance is not culturally popular. Regardless of popularity, Christian authors are called to publish books that will unashamedly point people to objective truth.

Another difficulty for Christian authors who write creative apologetic works is that they must look at topics from a skeptic's angle.⁶⁹⁵ Even though the author is convinced of the truthfulness of the gospel, skeptics are not. The author must create arguments from the point of view of someone who is doubtful of God's existence, the Bible's reliability, or Christianity in general.⁶⁹⁶ For example, Bunyan's Atheist shared his views with Christian and Hopeful about the impossibility of the Book's reliability.⁶⁹⁷ Atheist allowed his life experiences to dissuade him from believing the Celestial City existed. This is similar to some nontheists today, who have let disappointments lead them to believe the Bible does not hold the words of eternal life.

The Christian author who writes books with apologetic purposes must balance the acknowledgment that he is writing primarily to a skeptical audience while remaining committed to biblical values.⁶⁹⁸ Christians cannot rephrase God's words so that the Bible's message is more appealing to a secular culture. Paul reminds Christians that they should not be ashamed of the

⁶⁹⁴ Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts*, x.

⁶⁹⁵ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 29.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁹⁷ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 139-40.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

gospel (Romans 1:16). Instead, they are called to preach the gospel boldly. This being said, Christians must balance truth with grace when telling others about why they believe what they believe (1 Peter 3:15).

The publishing world presents an additional difficulty for Christian authors. The Christian book market is not as substantial as the secular book market. Many publishers will dismiss a Christian author's book because of ideological differences.⁶⁹⁹ It is not unusual for secular publishers to reject publishing a Christian book because they do not want their names on a work that is countercultural or that will likely be perceived negatively by the mainstream public. Regardless of the difficulties of publishing Christian allegorical literature, Christians authors are called to reflect objective truth in their writings.

For Further Christian Allegorical Literature Reading

As mentioned previously, this thesis did not claim to examine or mention every Christian allegorical literary work. There are many works that have been helpful to both Christians and skeptics that were not named in this thesis. This section will give readers references for further reading regarding Christian allegorical fiction works.

The first example comes from C.S. Lewis. Although *The Chronicles of Narnia* is not considered an intentionally allegorical novel, Lewis wrote other books that he considered to be allegorical. For example, *The Great Divorce* is an allegorical tale about a deceased man's bus ride from Hell to Heaven.⁷⁰⁰ The novel's extended allegory explores the realities of life after

⁶⁹⁹ Madueme and Barham, "Stories that Gleam," 388.

⁷⁰⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001), 6-11.

death. Lewis used this fictional story to present his views about the afterlife, which were a result of his Christian worldview.⁷⁰¹

Hannah Hurnard's *Hinds' Feet on High Places* is also an allegory. Written in a style that is similar to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Hurnard names her characters for the concepts or ideas that they represent.⁷⁰² This allegory narrates Much-Afraid's journey to find the High Places, which represents union with God, the Shepherd.⁷⁰³

Lastly, *The Postmodern Pilgrim's Progress* is a postmodern retelling of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Set in the 21st century, the protagonist, Ryan, begins his pilgrimage when he gets hit on the head by a large television screen in a mega-church.⁷⁰⁴ In a dream-like state, Ryan finds himself on a journey to find The City of Gold in an unusual world. Books like *The Postmodern Pilgrim's Progress* are valuable because they revise classical allegories to fit the modern language and time. This might be more appealing to readers who desire to read a Christian allegorical novel but who do not desire to decipher vernacular that is unlike their own. *The Postmodern Pilgrim's Progress* has the same apologetic intent as Bunyan's original, which means it is a book that can be used to help readers make spiritual decisions. Setting the story in a time that readers are familiar with also helps readers draw similarities between Ryan and themselves.

⁷⁰¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001).

⁷⁰² Hurnard, *Hinds' Feet*, xiv.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Kyle Mann and Joel Berry, *The Postmodern Pilgrim's Progress: An Allegorical Tale* (Irving, TX: Salem Books, 2022), 23-5.

Conclusion

Christian allegorical literature is best used as a biblical supplement. This apologetic tool can be used to supplement the Bible's message because it shares biblical truths creatively. While Christian allegorical authors may have a difficult time publishing novels in the 21st century, the fact that readers are still buying and engaging with this genre shows the usefulness of Christian allegorical literature as an apologetic tool.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to evaluate if Christian allegorical literature's overt emphasis on Christian theism prevented readers from thinking critically about spiritual matters. The evaluation began by defining the following key terms: fiction, allegory, and apologetics. These terms were crucial to understanding the genre of Christian allegorical literature.

The evaluation continued with Chapter Two, which discussed how readers critically engage with literature. The next two chapters evaluated and analyzed two Christian allegorical fiction novels. First, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was analyzed. His personal life was explored to give the reader insight into his intent in writing this allegorical work. Next, some of the allegorical elements in *The Pilgrim's Progress* were identified, which revealed that Bunyan used the plot and characters as foundations for his allegorical elements. After the book was proven to be allegorical and didactic in nature, the thesis explained how engaging critically with *The Pilgrim's Progress* was necessary to fully understand Bunyan's apologetic intent. The reader's free will was also addressed in this chapter, as some critics believe that the genre Bunyan wrote in prevents readers from thinking critically about spiritual matters. Through careful evaluation of supporting and opposing views, the thesis concluded that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a useful apologetic tool.

After *The Pilgrim's Progress* was analyzed, the thesis analyzed a modern Christian allegorical novel by Priscilla Shirer. Shirer's personal and professional life were explored, which gave the reader insight into the humble origins of this allegorical novel. The allegorical elements were then identified and explained. Shirer's allegorical elements were presented differently than Bunyan's, which is why *The Prince Warriors* was chosen as the second novel to be analyzed. While Bunyan used every character's name to represent a concept or idea, Shirer only named the

characters in her Secondary World with allegorical intent. *The Prince Warriors*' plot also had allegorical elements that spoke to biblical doctrines. The critical analysis of *The Prince Warriors* revealed that Shirer's book was intended to be an apologetic resource for Christians and skeptics of the faith.

Together, Bunyan's and Shirer's works were evaluated for their apologetic intent and their ability to promote critical engagement that encourages individual decision making regarding spiritual matters. These books presented biblical truths in a creative way while still allowing readers the freedom to exercise their free will, which is possible when readers critically engage with the text. Ultimately, Christian allegorical authors present spiritual truths, and the readers decide what they will do with the claims that are presented to them. This is what makes theologically sound Christian allegorical literature a valuable apologetic tool.

As mentioned previously, Christian allegorical literature is not an apologetic tool that saves.⁷⁰⁵ Although this genre may have an impact on a reader's conversion, like *Phantastes* did for C.S. Lewis, Christian allegorical literature is not synonymous to the gospel.⁷⁰⁶ This creative genre is useful in the fact that it addresses apologetics in a unique and creative way. Used as a differentiation tool, Christian allegorical literature can help show readers concepts and beliefs about Christianity in a way that they have never considered before.⁷⁰⁷ Christian allegorical literature's defense of the Christian faith and illumination of Christian beliefs offers the reader an opportunity to learn more about biblical truths through an extrabiblical resource. By using a

⁷⁰⁵ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22.

⁷⁰⁶ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 22; Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 179, 180-1.

⁷⁰⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian*, 103.

combination of apologetic messages and creative storytelling, Christian allegorical literature has impacted the lives of many readers.

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