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A Land Called Narnia

As to Aslan's other name....Has there never been anyone in *this* world who (1) Arrived at the same time as Father Christmas (2) Said he was the Son of the Great Emperor (3) Gave himself up for someone else's fault to be jeered at and killed by wicked people (4) Came to life again (5) Is sometimes spoken of as a Lamb?...Don't you really know His name in this world?¹

—C.S. LEWIS

letter to an American girl

Around 1925 to 1926, Tolkien and several of his peers at Oxford began meeting to discuss what they were reading, writing, and thinking. They called their little club the Coalbiters, after the Icelandic *kolbítar*, a lighthearted term for people huddled “so close to a fire in winter that they could almost bite the coals.” It was a “Who’s Who” list of Oxford’s best minds.² Others wanted to join, but that honor came by invitation only. One person they invited was Clive Staples Lewis (1898–1963), better known as C.S. Lewis.

Lewis met Tolkien in 1926, then recorded in his diary, “[Tolkien] is a smooth, pale, fluent little chap...thinks all literature is written for the amusement of *men* between thirty and forty....No harm in him: only needs a good smack or two.” They became best friends. Tolkien in turn wrote in his diary, “Besides giving constant pleasure and comfort, [it] has done me much good from the contact with a man at once honest, brave, intellectual—a scholar, a poet, and a philosopher.”³

But it was an unlikely camaraderie: Tolkien, a dyed-in-the-wool Roman Catholic and Lewis, a non-Christian. Lewis, in fact, did not even believe in a God! He became a theist in 1929, only after having many conversations with Tolkien and others.⁴ Not until 1931 did he become a Christian. Around this same time the Coalbiters drifted apart, prompting Tolkien and Lewis to form another group: the Inklings.

They met from the 1930s into the 1940s on Thursday nights. Anywhere from 10 to 15 men would sit long into the evening, listening to each other’s literary works in progress. Everyone “would then give their comments, often not sparing the feelings of the poor soul who had just read out something he had been working on for months.”⁵

Lewis’s presentations to this circle eventually included a delightful tale he called *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.⁶ It would turn into the first volume in a series of seven books collectively titled *The Chronicles of Narnia*, published from 1950 to 1956, and is now a classic.

Aslan’s World

The other-dimensional land of Narnia, we learn in *The Magician’s Nephew* (Book VI),⁷ came into existence during the late Victorian Era in our world, around 1900. Its first contact

with our realm took place because of a boy named Digory Kirke, whose mother was dying. The series opens with them staying in London with Digory’s Uncle Andrew.

Andrew is an eccentric magician, who convinces Digory and a neighbor girl, Polly Plummer, to participate in an experiment with magic rings. The result is not good. Both Digory and Polly are transported to Charn, a dying world that has been devastated by Jadis, an evil witch. She is under a spell, however, and can cause no more damage to anyone; that is, until she is awakened by Digory.

Even worse, Jadis follows the children back into our world, where she unleashes havoc. Digory and Polly, however, are able to transport the witch and themselves out of our world. But they find themselves in another dimension that is totally empty; a place of Nothing. Then, from out of the darkness, they hear a creation song being sung by King Aslan, who turns out to be a magnificent lion that can talk. He also is the Son of the Emperor Beyond the Sea.

They have witnessed the birth of Narnia. But now Jadis is there! Aslan, however, reveals that her powers can be bound if Digory can retrieve an apple from a magic apple tree in a distant valley. Its seed will produce a tree that will protect Narnia. Digory not only accomplishes his task, but also is able to bring back another magic apple to London. His mother eats it and is healed. He then plants the apple’s core, and from it springs a marvelous apple tree, the wood of which is eventually used by Digory to build a wardrobe.

Forty or so years later this very same wardrobe serves as a portal into Narnia for the Pevensie children: Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy. When they arrive, however, Jadis (now the White Witch) has risen and by her magical power holds the whole land

in a state of unending winter where there is never any Christmas (see *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*).

All of the children except Edmund, who falls under the spell of the Witch, side with Aslan in the battle for Narnia. Edmund is doomed. But Aslan offers himself to the White Witch in exchange for her release of Edmund. She agrees. So Edmund is freed, and Aslan willingly dies on his behalf at the witch's hands.

But unbeknownst to Jadis, there existed an altogether different kind of magic that only Aslan knew about; a deep magic based on love and self-sacrifice. This "magic" actually resurrects Aslan and brings life to all of Narnia. Winter fades away, and its passing brings the witch's destruction. All four children subsequently grow up in Narnia to reign as kings and queens over the land's Golden Age. But when they eventually return to our world through the wardrobe, they find that no time has passed at all. They are still children.

The sequel to this story, *Prince Caspian* (Book II), continues the saga a thousand years in Narnia's future. The Golden Age has passed, the Old Narnians who battled with the White Witch are gone, and the throne is occupied by the tyrant Miraz. But he has usurped his position. Prince Caspian is the rightful heir.

The prince needs help, and so he summons the children back to Narnia by blowing the magic horn of Queen Susan, which she had left behind. But time is so different in Narnia that when Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy are swept back into the land, even though it has been a thousand years, they are still children. They join Prince Caspian, and with Aslan's assistance, destroy Miraz.

The next book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (Book III), reads much like Homer's *Odyssey*. It follows a myriad of characters in adventures that range from searching for lost kings to seeking the land of Aslan himself at the world's end—past the Eastern Ocean. It is literally a volume of quests.

The Silver Chair (Book IV) again takes place in Narnia, after many years have passed. Young Prince Caspian is now an old king whose son is missing. Though one of the most memorable books in the series, it is also scary. Caspian's wife has been murdered by the Green Witch. There are Giants who eat humans. And Aslan gives commands that seem to make no sense. It is a mature tale, but one that is packed with lessons about faith, trust, hope, and perseverance.

Next is *The Horse and His Boy* (Book V). It takes readers backward in time to Narnia's Golden Age and revolves around Shasta, a boy who grew up in a fishing village. His real name is Prince Cor, and he is the lost son of a king. It also features a young girl, Aravis, who meets Shasta. Together they discover a plot to overthrow Narnia, and it is up to them to warn everyone.

Finally, in *The Last Battle* (Book VII), we have the initiation of a New Narnia (reminiscent of a New Heaven and a New Earth) after all of the land's inhabitants are judged by Aslan—in much the same way that Jesus, according to Christian belief, will judge humanity. It is an extraordinary work of fantasy that captured the prestigious Carnegie Award for the best children's book of 1956.

Christ in the Chronicles

The Chronicles present Christian ideas and beliefs in a far more obvious way than Tolkien's fantasy. Although not a true allegory of the Gospel story, it comes about as close to being one as is possible without crossing over the line. Parts of it *could* be read allegorically (for example, when Aslan dies for Edmund and then is resurrected). But a true allegory would *have to be* read as a symbolic representation of a deeper message.

Such is not the case with the Chronicles. Its Christian parallels were not deliberately inserted. “[Christianity] pushed itself in of its own accord,” Lewis explained.⁸

I did not say to myself “Let us represent Jesus as He really is in our world by a Lion in Narnia”; I said, “Let us suppose that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as he became a Man in our world, became a Lion there, and then imagine what would happen.”⁹

Lewis’s “Let us suppose” ultimately inspired “an imaginative expression of Christian truths, which could bring insights to readers....But, in the freedom of interpretation of myth, they need not necessarily be apprehended as such.”¹⁰ According to Lewis, his series works itself out as follows:¹¹

- ❖ *The Magician’s Nephew*—creation and how evil entered Narnia
- ❖ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*—the crucifixion and resurrection
- ❖ *Prince Caspian*—restoration of the true religion after a corruption
- ❖ *The Horse and His Boy*—the calling and conversion of the heathen
- ❖ *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*—the spiritual life
- ❖ *The Silver Chair*—the continuing war against the powers of darkness
- ❖ *The Last Battle*—the coming of Antichrist (the ape); the end of the world and the last judgment

Clearest of all are the allusions to Christ, who is represented by Lewis as Aslan—a regal lion reflecting the Bible’s figurative depiction of Jesus (Revelation 5:5). Christ’s dual nature (human and divine) is represented in Aslan by the Lion’s presence that is at once both terrifying and inviting.¹² And just being near Aslan refreshes both body and soul, sometimes by way of life-giving water¹³—a hint at Christ, who is the source of living water (see John 4:10; 7:37).

Then, in *The Magician’s Nephew* we see Aslan, again like Christ, as Creator (Colossians 1:16). And in *The Horse and His Boy*, Aslan reveals his identity in a way that is reminiscent of the name by which God revealed himself to Moses, “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14 KJV; compare Christ’s use of “I am” in John 8:58). Aslan, like God in the Old Testament, is asked, “Who are you?” Aslan answers three times, “‘Myself,...and again, ‘Myself,’...and then a third time ‘Myself,’ the triple response being a Trinitarian allusion.”¹⁴

Aslan also is the only one who offers wrongdoers an opportunity to repent. They can then correct their mistakes, or if needed, be healed or changed by Aslan: Uncle Andrew and Digory (*The Magician’s Nephew*), Edmund (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*), the Dwarfs (*The Last Battle*), Eustace (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*), and Aravis (*The Horse and His Boy*).

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* we even have Aslan appearing as a Lamb—the quintessential symbol of Christ, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29 NKJV). Here also Lucy asks Aslan if there is any way into his country from her world. He answers yes and adds,

But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why

you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.¹⁵

And Lucy does indeed learn her lesson, for she says at the end of *The Last Battle*, “In our world too, a Stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.”¹⁶

Biblical Narnia

In addition to the inclusion of a Christ figure in Lewis’s fantasy, there can be found numerous aspects of Christian theology, including the characteristics of God, doctrines surrounding salvation, and beliefs about the end times.

For example, the Christian assertion that Jesus is the only way to God and that all religions are *not* equal can be seen in *The Last Battle*. In this book, some characters claim that Aslan and the pagan god Tash are one and the same. They go so far as to begin using the term “Tashlan” for the supposed Tash/Aslan ruler of Narnia. But in the end, Aslan proves them wrong by revealing himself, and then allowing Tash—a terrifying monster—to destroy all those who worshiped him.

Concepts linked to Christian salvation through faith in Jesus are displayed in Narnia each time an individual submits to Aslan and is subsequently obedient to his commands. According to Paul F. Ford, a renowned expert on C.S. Lewis, obedience is “a major theme in all of Lewis.”¹⁷ As Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Even more interesting is John 14:21, in which Jesus, in a very Aslan-like way, promises, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” Aslan basically echoes this promise when, during his creation of Narnia in *The Magician’s Nephew*, the animals he has brought to

life “pledge their obedience.” Their Creator responds: “I give you myself.”¹⁸

The revealing, or revelation, of Aslan–Christ is a recurring theme in the Narnian Chronicles. Again and again Aslan shows himself to those willing to obey him. Lewis, however, is not interested in advocating submission that is given begrudgingly. Instead, he depicts what Paul Ford’s *Companion to Narnia* describes as followers who are “freely attentive” rather than “slavishly devoted.”¹⁹

As Lewis said during a 1945 lecture, “Authority exercised with humility, and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live.”²⁰ Closely linked to this concept are faith and trust in Aslan–Christ. Consider the scene in *The Silver Chair* in which Rilian tells the children he must be bound at night or else he will kill them.²¹ They have no idea that these words actually are a result of his bewitchment.

So at night he is bound. But that is precisely when the enchantment leaves and he is restored to a sound mind! He pleads in the name of Aslan to be released. A dilemma is presented because Aslan had previously said that the children’s success would depend on “the first person” who asks them to do something “in the name of Aslan.”²²

They must make a decision in the midst of Rilian’s entreaties. One character asks, “Do you mean you think everything will come right if we do untie him?”

Another replies, “I don’t know about that.” He adds, “You see, Aslan didn’t tell Pole [one of the characters] what would happen. He only told her what to do. That fellow will be the death of us once he’s up, I shouldn’t wonder. But that doesn’t let us off following the sign.”²³

They decide to be obedient and release Rilian, which turns out to be the best thing they could have done.

This does not mean that those who swear allegiance to Aslan are perfect.²⁴ They are flawed followers, but Aslan is always there to guide them back on course, often using their missteps to reveal to them a hidden weakness. And after they learn their lesson, they are better for it—more courageous, honest, faithful, trusting, hopeful, kind, and sensitive. Aslan’s loving corrections present a most poignant and accurate reflection of how Jesus deals with his followers.

The reader, in fact, is inundated with Christianity. Lewis pulls so much inspiration from his faith that the Narnian Chronicles contain subtle rephrasings of, and allusions to, many Bible passages (see note 25).²⁵ Yet all of these hints of Christianity are overshadowed by grandeur and import of the fantasy’s climax. It is a majestic portrait of Christ’s final judgment upon humanity—Narnian style.

The Last Battle offers the most explicit depiction of how our choices here affect our destiny there—that is, in the eternal realm. Our destination depends on whether or not we have chosen to follow Aslan—Christ. Lewis paints a profound, as well as a disturbing, portrait. Lewis expert Kathryn Lindskoog described the scene in *The Lion of Judah in Never-Never Land*:

At the end of Narnia millions of creatures, all of the living men and beasts of that world, came streaming toward the doorway where Aslan waited. As they approached him, some of their faces filled with fear and hate. And these swerved to his left, disappearing into his huge black shadow. Those who loved him came in at the Door at his right.²⁶

The parallel to Jesus’ eschatological imagery about one day separating the sheep from the goats is undeniable (see Matthew

25:31-46). The reference to Aslan’s followers entering his eternal country (or “True Narnia”) through a “Door” likewise draws our minds to Christ, who called himself the door of life (John 10:9).

Like today’s Christians who joyfully await the second coming of Christ, the Narnians longed for Aslan’s return. An old rhyme recited by the goodly Mr. Beaver in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* sums it up nicely:

*Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.*²⁷

The Anti-Lewis

Despite his popularity among adults and children alike, Lewis is not without critics. As of 2005, the most visible and vitriolic detractor continued to be bestselling author Philip Pullman, author of the series *His Dark Materials* (see chapter 1). Thanks to Pullman’s widely publicized condemnations of Lewis, he has earned himself a title with which he seems completely at ease: “The Anti-Lewis.” And his trilogy has correspondingly been labeled “C.S. Lewis for Atheists.”²⁸

However, against the dark background of Pullman’s secular writing and criticisms, the generous and Christian nature of the *Chronicles of Narnia* is illuminated even more brightly than we have already seen.

Pullman has explained that when he first read the *Chronicles* as an adult he “realized that what he [Lewis] was up to was propaganda in the cause of the religion he believed in.” Elsewhere he has described the fantasy series as “loathsome, full of bullying and sneering, propaganda, basically, on behalf of a religion whose

main creed seemed to be to despise and hate people unlike yourself."²⁹

Pullman has also castigated Lewis personally, falsely accusing the beloved Christian author of holding the vilest of views:

When he was writing fiction...he went mad...What I really cannot understand is why C.S. Lewis's books are...hailed as great Christian books. They're not! In many ways they contradict what you read in the Gospels....They're profoundly racist. They're misogynistic. He hates girls and women. He thinks they're no good at all—they're weak; they're useless; they're stupid. In fact, he hates life, basically. 'Cause at the end of them the greatest reward these children have is to be taken away from it, and be killed in a railway accident.³⁰

Pullman expresses his overall view in a word: "I hate the Narnia books, and I hate them with a deep and bitter passion."³¹ He, of course, is entitled to his opinions. However, the serious accusations he makes are problematic. First, and foremost, Pullman is being terrifically hypocritical in lodging any complaint against Lewis for writing "propaganda." Does he really think that the *His Dark Materials* books, which preach atheism, are not propaganda for certain beliefs (or nonbeliefs) about "God" and related issues?

This is not hard to see. Britain's *The Guardian* reviewed *His Dark Materials*, saying, "At their core, Pullman's books are profoundly humanistic." And the *Church of England Newspaper* noted, "By setting out to do the opposite of Lewis, Pullman's own work is propaganda."³²

The two main differences on this issue between Pullman and Lewis are 1) Lewis's fiction advances theism, while Pullman's fiction advances atheism; and 2) Lewis's talent enabled him to avoid *explicit* pro-Christian declarations, while Pullman was forced to use blatant "in your face" anti-Christian remarks and references. (Regarding the latter issue, religion journalist Amy Welborn has commented, "[Pullman] fails as a writer in *His Dark Materials*, not because of his views on religion, but because he simply cannot resist the temptation to preach about them, putting art to the service of manipulating his young readers' opinions."³³)

A Microcosm of Misogyny?

According to Pullman, *The Chronicles of Narnia* are "disparaging of girls and women" to the point of being "misogynistic" (woman-hating). This is not only inaccurate, but also odd, given the way Lewis exalts the girls that appear in his stories.

We have Lucy, for example. She is the initial Pevensie to see Aslan and throughout the series continues to see him most often. She is one of his "closest friends."³⁴ Although the youngest of the children, Lucy is in many ways central to the entire series.³⁵ She comes to be known during Narnia's Golden Age as Lucy the Valiant. Interestingly, it is through Lucy, rather than one of the boys, that "Lewis expresses his own religious and personal sensibilities."³⁶

The *Chronicles* also feature Polly Plummer, who like Lucy, paves the way for others. She is a born leader: independent, brave, trustworthy, rational, sensible, cautious, perceptive, and insightful.³⁷ Susan and Aravis have dispositions that are more complex. They each display admirable traits as well as serious weaknesses, but overall are obviously "good." The difference between them is the path they eventually choose. Aravis pursues a relationship with Aslan that not only brings out her best qualities, but also

imparts to her qualities that make her fit to be a queen: humility, gratitude, and a forgiving heart. Susan, however, allows the cares of the world to overshadow what should be uppermost in her mind: serving Aslan. We never know how her story ends.

Finally, the White Witch and the Green Witch are set at the opposite extreme of Lucy and Polly. They typify the worst traits of *all* humanity—not just women. Nothing is said that suggests their femaleness means anything. They are simply vehicles that help round out the complete spectrum of good and evil.

Lewis the Racist?

Equally overstated is Pullman's claim that the Narnian Chronicles promote racism. He is no doubt referring to parts of the series that refer to Narnia's enemies: the Calormenes, who live to the south, across the desert. They and their society are definitely modeled after Middle Eastern cultures.

In truth, some of his comments do irritate modern sensitivities—and rightly so. For instance, at one point in *The Last Battle*, wicked Dwarfs refer to the Calormenes as “darkies.”³⁸ The Calormenes also are artistically inept, barbarous, and enemies of Aslan. Is this “racist”? Or was Lewis simply voicing the expressions and perceptions of his day?

According to Gregg Easterbrook's article “In Defense of C.S. Lewis,” the British author was “employing language then in common parlance.” Easterbrook also notes that “many older books contain race or gender references discordant to modern ears.... We don't stop reading Twain or Darwin because they used racial terms no author uses today.”³⁹

But it must be admitted that Lewis's portrayal of Middle Eastern-like individuals is unflattering. They are dirty, cruel, and inhospitable. Lewis showed insensitivity toward, and ignorance of, Middle Easterners. And these blind spots invaded his

otherwise stellar tale. Such insensitivity and ignorance, however, is *not* racism. It is, at most, mild prejudice born of ignorance.⁴⁰

The truth is that the “profoundly racist” charge has become a very convenient way to quickly stigmatize someone. As one article astutely noted,

Pullman is using crass propaganda here. Racism and sexism have become such large problems in contemporary culture that the words have almost stopped having any objective meaning. They are just dirt-words, to throw at anyone whose opinions you do not like, in the hope that some mud will stick.⁴¹

So although Lewis may have harbored false stereotypes about Middle Easterners, he was not a racist. He was uneducated about a certain people. This is not Lewis's fault. Only recently, with the advent of better communications, a more global society, and greater cultural exchange have Europeans and Americans started to understand the Middle East and its people (although a great deal remains to be learned).

Death Is Delightful?

Perhaps the most outlandish accusation Pullman has made against Lewis is that “he hates life” because at the end of the Narnian series the children and several others are “taken” from life (that is to say, they are killed) “in a railway accident.” Pullman is appalled, declaring that the Narnian books “celebrate death.” “For the sake of taking them off to a perpetual school holiday or something, he kills them all in a train crash. I think that's ghastly. It's a horrible message... It's a filthy thing to do,” he rants further concluding that the God Lewis depicts in his fantasy “is a god who hates life.”⁴²

But Lewis's message is only "horrible" and "filthy" to Pullman because he is an atheist—and for him, this life is all there is. It is no surprise that as an atheist he would find multiple deaths highly offensive (if not very disconcerting). Pullman's atheism, however, utterly blinds him to what Lewis is conveying: the *celebration* of life—real life in the truest and most perfect sense of the word.

Death happens. And kids can either be taught that it is the *end* of all they know, or an *extension* of all they know—plus more. Lewis is celebrating the latter, what we call the afterlife. Pullman's fantasy, on the other hand, celebrates life *only as it exists here*, as he clearly declares: "I believe in the absolute preciousness of the here and now. Here is where we are and now is where we live."⁴³

The railway accident is a tragedy, to be sure, but it also is an occasion for joy. The most faithful characters in Narnia get what they have always wanted: life with Aslan in his country forever. They will not only enjoy new adventures and unimaginable peace and bliss, but also be reunited with the old Narnians who lived during the Golden Age and the courageous Reepicheep, who is featured in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.⁴⁴ Lewis explained it most beautifully himself:

We can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.⁴⁵

In the words of Aslan, "The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."⁴⁶

Weird Sexuality or Wise Commentary?

Finally, a word must be said in response to Pullman's rather off-the-wall notion that in *The Last Battle*, "one girl was sent to hell because she was getting interested in clothes and boys."⁴⁷ What he is referring to here is the passage in Lewis's concluding volume where we learn that Susan (formerly Queen Susan the Gentle during Narnia's Golden Age) has lost her love for Narnia and Aslan.

She has convinced herself that it was all just make-believe, a childish delusion. The character Jill tells us that the adolescent Susan is "interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations."⁴⁸ As a result she is not with her siblings at the railway station when the fatal train accident whisks them all away to "Aslan's country"—heaven.

Pullman explained his interpretation thus, claiming that "for Lewis, a girl's achieving sexual maturity was 'so dreadful and so redolent of sin that he had to send her to Hell.'⁴⁹ But why, according to Pullman, would Lewis write something so atrocious and cruel?

This seems to me on the part of Lewis to reveal very weird unconscious feelings about sexuality. Here's a child whose body is changing and who's naturally responding as everyone has ever done since the history of the world to the changes that are taking place in one's body and one's feelings. She's doing what everyone has to do in order to grow up.⁵⁰

But if any “weird unconscious feelings about sexuality” are to be found, they will not be located inside Lewis’s mind. As a recent article rightly observed, “Lewis’s grand theme is about individuals’ transformation of character through knowing and being known by Aslan.” On the other hand, “Pullman’s grand theme is about individuals’ transformation through puberty and by throwing off any beliefs or rules imposed by the church.”⁵¹

Sexuality is pivotal to Pullman, who presents it in His Dark Materials books as a kind of litmus test of maturity, independence, self-expression, and ultimate love—everything that the “evil Christian church” has tried to suppress. Pullman seems to view sexuality (especially a child’s increasing curiosity about it) as one of the truest marks of adulthood, or at the very least, of one’s progress toward it.

In truth, it is Pullman’s own apparent preoccupation with sexuality that he imposes on Jill’s comment about lipstick, nylons, and invitations. The remark indicates to *his* mind that Lewis was depicting “childhood as a golden age from which sexuality and adulthood are a falling away.” He alleges, “Susan is shut out from salvation because she is doing what every other child who has ever been born has done—she is beginning to sense the developing changes in her body and its effect on the opposite sex.”⁵²

However, although Susan did not go to heaven (Aslan’s country) with those who died in the railway accident, *nothing* says she did not go later on, presumably when she died. Then, sexuality has nothing to do with the line about lipstick, nylons, and invitations. These things are merely symbols of Susan’s long-standing fixation on being “adult.”

The problem is, “Nylons and lipstick and invitations have not been *added* to her other interests and tastes, but have replaced them.”⁵³ As the character Jill tells us, Susan is interested in “nothing” but them. Susan is so overwhelmed by them that she

has lost sight of what is really important. Lucy agrees: “Nowadays all she cares about are parties.” So rather than being a sign of her “growing up,” these interests show her ongoing immaturity!

Susan is stuck at *wanting* to be an adult, without moving on to *becoming* an adult by cultivating deep insight, thoughtful reflection, and spiritual maturity. The sad result is childishness.

Worse, Susan has relegated Aslan and Narnia to the illusory world of childhood make-believe, even when the other children try to talk to her about it. As religious-studies professor Robert Houston has noted, “For Susan, being grown-up means regarding God, beauty, and imagination as worthless fantasies.”⁵⁴

This runs contrary to true maturation, according to Lewis, and contravenes the very reason the children were brought into Narnia. Aslan wanted them to recall their experiences there, and by doing so, discern his identity here: that is, his identity as Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ Things like sexuality, curiosity about sexuality, and sexual experiences have nothing to do with being grown-up, mature, and more adultlike—not to Lewis. That is all in Pullman’s mind. Lewis, instead, sees maturity as something irrespective of both age and sexuality. Growing up means growing closer to God.

A Shining Beacon

C.S. Lewis’s legacy is one of incalculable worth. Beyond his fiction, he produced some of the finest available works on philosophy and Christian apologetics. Even Philip Pullman has had to acknowledge that “when he was writing the books of Christian apologetics such as *The Screwtape Letters*, for example, he is perceptive, and very psychologically shrewd.”⁵⁶

But Lewis also was a man “in love with imagination,” and as such, he wrote fiction that imparted a “real though unfocused gleam of divine truth fallen on human imagination.” He used

fantasy as a means of converting the reader “in the same manner in which Lewis himself was first drawn to Christianity: by baptizing the imagination in the hope that the reason will follow.”⁵⁷

To accomplish his goal, Lewis (like Tolkien) firmly rooted his fantasy in Christian doctrines, morality, ethics, and biblical ideals relating to life, love, eternity, and spiritual growth. He could not have done otherwise, for as he once explained, an author’s views will spontaneously arise “from whatever spiritual roots” that author has “succeeded in striking during the whole course” of life.⁵⁸

In a very natural way, then, Lewis’s Christian faith wove its way into his fantasy. Authors still infuse their works with whatever spirituality or morality they have embraced. Unlike in Lewis’s day, however, many of our most popular authors are creating a whole new kind of fiction culled from decidedly non-Christian spiritualities, moral perspectives, and ethical ideals.

This new kind of fantasy makes explicit use of real-world occultism, magick, or both (see chapter 2). The most prominent example, and a typical one, is J.K. Rowling’s mega-bestselling Harry Potter series—the subject of chapter 7.