

ABSTRACT

The Spirituality of Female Characters in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*: Female
Traits and Interactions with the Divine

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This thesis examines the personal traits of the female characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, as well as the female characters' interactions with the divine. The women in C.S. Lewis's fiction have nuanced spiritualities, varying in their traits and ideologies. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is written as an allegory for the Christian faith, and therefore its characters represent spiritual followers of a divine God. This allegory projects both modern and medieval influences into the narrative of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and this affects how gender is addressed in the series. Lewis writes his female characters to experience spiritual development over time, and this distinguishes *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a text which empowers women in their spirituality.

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THE SPIRITUALITY OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN C.S. LEWIS'S *THE*
CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: FEMALE TRAITS AND INTERACTIONS WITH THE
DIVINE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Chapter One: Spiritual, Literary, and Feminist Discourse on C.S. Lewis.....	1
Chapter Two: Female Character Types in <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i>	18
Chapter Three: <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i> and Ideologies About Women.....	37
Chapter Four: Interaction with the Divine in <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i>	51
Bibliography.....	64

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This thesis has ignited within me a desire to study female faith in fiction literature at the graduate level. It was the trait of practicality which first interested me in the female characters of this series, along with the women's personal relationships with Aslan. C.S. Lewis was the chosen author of this project because he provides his female characters not only with a spirituality, but also with spiritual development over time. I believe my discourse on the spiritual development of Lewis's female characters is what distinguishes this essay most.

CHAPTER ONE

Spiritual, Literary, and Feminist Discourse on C.S. Lewis

“Lucy,” said Susan in a very small voice.

“Yes?” said Lucy.

“I see him now. I’m sorry.”

“That’s all right.”

“But I’ve been far worse than you know. I really believed it was him – he, I mean – yesterday. When he warned us not to go down to the fir wood. And I really believed it was him tonight, when you woke us up. I mean, deep down inside. Or I could have, if I’d let myself. But I just wanted to get out of the woods and – and– oh, I don’t know. And what ever am I to say to him?”

“Perhaps you won’t need to say much,” suggested Lucy. (*Prince Caspian* 161)

This passage, gleaned from C.S. Lewis’s *Prince Caspian*, is representative of the dynamic female characters in Lewis’s fiction works. The sisters Lucy and Susan engage in this conversation after an argument, and Susan apologizes. This apology is unique in that Susan—the elder sister—apologizes to Lucy—the younger sister—and admits that she should have listened to her. Not only this, but Susan also seeks the advice of Lucy. In their previous argument, Susan refuses to believe that Lucy could see Aslan the Lion in the distance. The “him” Susan refers to is Aslan, and Susan recognizes she was not faithful to believe that Aslan was present. Susan looks to her younger sister for advice on what she might say to Aslan, and Lucy settles Susan’s fears. This relationship between the two sisters is interesting because it does not equate age with authority, but rather spiritual maturity. Lucy, the sister who *can* see Aslan in the distance, is faithful. Lucy forgives Susan in an instant, showing grace, and she furthermore understands that Aslan

will extend grace, too. There is a parallel between Lucy and Aslan's actions towards Susan, and this reveals Lucy's connection with the divine Aslan. Lucy can even *see* the divine when her sister cannot. The forgiveness that Lucy provides is also matched by Susan's humility and trust. These two sisters, though at different stages of their spiritual development, have a complex bond. This passage depicts the characteristics of Lucy and Susan, and also their interactions with the divine, and therefore serves as an introduction into how to analyze Lewis's fiction through the lens of its female characters.

This thesis seeks to reveal that Lewis's female characters have complex spiritualities and experience spiritual development over time. The spirituality of these female characters can be understood as the ways in which the female characters express their relationship with the divine throughout the series. As the women interact with the divine over time they experience changes or development in their spirituality. The spiritual development of the women in Narnia is often overlooked in criticism about Lewis because many feminist scholars focalize on the medieval influences in the series and allow these influences to define Lewis's treatment of female characters. Lewis incorporates medieval aspects into his female characters, and also into the Christian allegory that pervades the series. However, understanding the spiritual depth of these female characters prompts the reader to rethink the role that gender and allegory serve in Lewis's fiction. Though gender is significant in Lewis's fiction, the female characters find their ultimate identity in their spirituality and not their gender. In addition, the medieval elements that Lewis incorporates in his fiction are meant to highlight the modern spiritualities of his characters. Lewis uses the simple, archetypal settings and plot structures of medieval literature in order to juxtapose his modern complex characters.

Lewis uses allegory to highlight the spiritual complexities of his female characters, and employs medieval and modern aspects to achieve this. Lewis's use of allegory and gender as a means of directing the reader towards spirituality suggests that spirituality is indeed significant for his characters. In C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as well as Lewis's later novel *Till We Have Faces*, there are spiritually complex female figures¹. This essay will express the spiritual complexity of Lewis's female characters by analyzing the traits of these female characters, the ideologies that pertain to women in the series, and the female interactions with the divine.

Because *The Chronicles of Narnia* is an allegory, looking at the spiritualities of all of the female characters together can give the reader insight into what female spirituality consists of. The traits of the women in *The Chronicles of Narnia*—meaning their personality types and commonalities—are impacted by both the modern and medieval influences on the series. Some women have sensibility—otherwise defined as gentleness or sensitivity—and embody the medieval literary model for women. Other women in the series have practicality—otherwise defined as directness or assertiveness—and this will be dubbed as a “modern” literary quality of women. These influences contribute to the varying ideologies about women that exist in the novel. Topics such as chivalry and purity are essential when discussing women in fiction. Equally as important when considering the spiritualities of the female characters are their interactions with the divine. Aslan the Lion is the divine figure in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, meant to represent the Christian God. C.S. Lewis centralizes on spiritual development when writing his female

¹ This thesis will not address C.S. Lewis's *The Space Trilogy* as a part of Lewis's fiction because it differs so greatly in setting from *The Chronicles of Narnia* series and *Till We Have Faces*

characters, and this is crucial to the empowerment of women in the series. As the women learn from life in the spiritual realm of Narnia and the earthly realm of nineteenth century England, they refine their spiritualities. Showing that the women in *The Chronicles of Narnia* have the ability to grow in confidence and ability because of their spiritualities is unprecedented in the study of C.S. Lewis's fiction. The result of this spiritual growth is the existence of a modern femininity in the series, which feminist criticism of Lewis has tended not to acknowledge. The female characters embrace their status as female due to the empowerment they experience through their spiritualities.

Entering into the conversation of gender in C.S. Lewis's texts is a complex business because the texts do offer both a medieval and a modern view of women. Lewis was a medievalist, and therefore writes his fiction with medieval settings and constructs. However, Lewis embeds modern ideas about spirituality in his novels, creating a conglomerate of medieval and modern influences on his writing. Feminist scholars rebuke the medieval lens which Lewis approaches his characters. Scholars Candice Frerick and Sam McBride argue that "C.S. Lewis's hierarchical understanding of gender, grounded in a medieval worldview" limits the role of women (Frerick and McBride 29). For example, though battle is a common plot device in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the medieval lens of the novels limits the female characters from participating in fighting to the same degree as the male characters.

This medieval lens requires that men and women be regarded as fundamentally different, because medieval texts understand men and women as separate genders. Critics mark Lewis as traditional due to his claim that men and women are distinctly different. Lewis's belief that men and women have different purposes is doomed for criticism.

Scholar Adam Barkman says that for “Lewis, the Bible makes it clear that all creation is feminine to God’s masculinity” and therefore male and female are separated by hierarchy (Barkman 418). Such critics believe that because Lewis sees God defined in Scripture as male, he therefore sees the male purpose as more closely linked to the importance of God than the female purpose. The female in this case would not only be distinct from the male, but less significant in terms of spirituality. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen sees this “hierarchical reading of gender that was rooted at least as much in Pagan mythology as it was in a biblical anthropology” as flawed (Van Leeuwen 396). Scholars Barman and Van Leeuwen view this feminization of humanity as evidence of Lewis’s inferior view of women, rather than evidence of his superior view of God. The medieval world of Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* is scrutinized for adopting medieval ideas about women instead of modern ideas. Though the medieval archetypes in Lewis’s novels are meant to illuminate the Christian themes in his writing, for these critics, the medieval dictates Lewis’s treatment of the female characters. This type of limited view is what my thesis argues against.

As an extension of Lewis’s traditional views, scholars worry that Lewis presents womanhood as forced domesticity. It is worth noting that there is little evidence of woman past the age of puberty in positions of power in Lewis’s fiction. The adult women in Lewis’s fiction tend to be either motherly figures, or villains. Jean E. Graham suggests that these adult characters also seem secondary to the children, and “On the other hand, the girls in the Narnian Chronicles play active, positive roles. The impression left on readers by Lewis’s children’s stories, and confirmed by his other fiction, is that puberty ends the freedom of girls to assume nontraditional roles” (Graham 32). The female

children, who are of primary importance to the text, are the adventurers. According to Graham, there is no evidence in Lewis's fiction that adult women can participate in the freedom that female children can, whether it be fighting in battle, exploring new countries, etc. Though there exist good, maternal women in Narnia such as Mrs. Beaver, these women hold traditional domestic roles. The only adult women in *The Chronicles of Narnia* who seek power and freedom are the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle—the villains. Supporting this claim, John Warren Stewig highlights the motif of the “Earth Witch” in literature (Stewig 5). The Earth Witch is connected with nature, but uses this connection for evil. This witch can be cold and cruel like the winter, or blooming and beautiful like the summer, depending on what she sees fit. If Lewis is operating under this motif, then the women who seek power are like deceptive witches.

Perhaps Lewis shames the power-hungry women in *The Chronicles of Narnia* not for their gender, but for their earthliness. It is significant that both the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle are both associated with nature, and they pervert nature for evil. Because Lewis's fiction is Christian allegory, this association with nature can mean corrupt, *human* nature. In this way, Lewis does not disapprove of emancipated women, but disapproves of women who seek power outside of the nature of God. These witches are antagonistic against Aslan, the Christ figure in the series, and therefore they exist in the story as women against God. These women seeking power are not shamed because they are women, but because they wish to strip God of his power and take it for themselves. For Lewis, the spiritual status of a female's character supersedes the impact of gender alone.

When including Lewis's late novel *Till We Have Faces* in the discussion of gender, scholarship as a whole determines a definite shift in Lewis's view of women. The novel *Till We Have Faces* will not be discussed in the following chapters of this thesis; however, when considering Lewis's presentation of gender in his fiction works it is a novel worth discussing. Though Lewis is constantly criticized for his portrayal of women in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Till We Have Faces* is accepted as a feminist text. Margaret Hannay says that "*Till We Have Faces* is a better representation of women than the *Narnia* series, women are fully human" (Hannay 15). The humanness of the females in *Till We Have Faces* is essential to the narrative. The story is told in first-person by Orual, and the first page indicates that the subject of the novel is Orual's spiritual struggle against the gods. More than this, the Christ figure in *Till We Have Faces* is Psyche, a woman. The depth of the women in this narrative is unescapable. Hannay, in her essay "'Surprised by Joy': C.S. Lewis's Changing Attitudes Toward Women," attributes this change to Lewis's marriage with Joy Davidman. Hannay argues that Lewis's relationship with Davidman expanded his understanding of female faith. While Lewis's relationships with the women in his life surely impacted how he wrote about women, another possible reason for Lewis's change is his audience. *Till We Have Faces*, unlike *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is not a children's book. Lewis aims to express female faith in *Till We Have Faces* just as he does in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but provides greater depth and interiority to the adult audience.

Scholar Neil Ribe agrees that Lewis's attempt to write from the perspective of a woman—Orual—in *Till We Have Faces* reveals his aptitude for understanding the true importance of gender. However, it should be addressed that in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

and *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis makes minimal mention of gender distinctions. Though *Till We Have Faces* especially is ridden with females who defy traditional gender norms, gender is little written about in the text itself. The complexity of Psyche's sacrifice as a woman or Orual's rule of a country as a woman is never addressed. One interpretation of this vacancy in his fiction is that Lewis desires his reader to look away from gender to focus on a greater message in his works.

After all, Lewis's theory on gender relies heavily upon the Biblical imagery of Christ and the Church. For Lewis, masculinity and femininity exist to assist humans in defining the relationship between Christ and the Church. C.S. Lewis clarifies man's role as spiritual leader, "emphasizing that Ephesians 5:25 speaks of the relation of husband and wife as parallel to Christ's relationship to the church. 'This headship, then, is the most fully embodied not in the husband we should all wish to be but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion'" Lewis says (qtd. in Hannay 20). Lewis relates ideas of gender, and even marriage, back to Christ. Lewis's writing is no different, and rather than halting at his specific definition of gender, he calls the reader to look beyond this towards God. Though the specific way in which Lewis presents gender is significant when studying his female characters, his presentation is ultimately aimed at reflecting humanity's relationship with God. Therefore, understanding Lewis's intentions for gender is not a matter of placing man above woman, but rather a matter of placing God above humanity. In the same way, the female characters that Lewis creates are not pit against the male characters to determine who is most important. Lewis views spirituality as available to all of humanity. However, Lewis clearly acknowledges that gender impacts spirituality, because he attributes one form of spiritual leadership—"headship"—to only men. In *The*

Chronicles of Narnia Lewis also depicts the female characters as uniquely empowered by their spirituality, and this is shown through the traits Lewis ascribes his female characters, as well as the unique experiences with the divine that his female characters have.

The Chronicles of Narnia exists as an allegory for Christianity, and with the knowledge that this series serves to address a spiritual narrative, careful attention can be given to the characters who thereby represent spiritual followers of a divine God. Rather than viewing Lewis's allegory only through a medieval lens, this thesis shows that Lewis's series allows for modern, complex characters who perhaps do not fit as clear a mold as *Pilgrim's Progress's* Christian. Lewis is interested in characters tethered between the spiritual realm of Narnia, and the earthly realm of twentieth century England. Lewis's characters, specifically female, struggle through aspects of faith, and the reader is allowed to form her or his own interpretation of this struggle. Scholar Patrick Garrett York notes that, therefore, "rather than encouraging readers to turn to Christianity for a "solution' ... [Lewis] encourages readers to avoid attempting to 'solve' the mystery at all" (York). Lewis adds modern aspects into allegory, and because of this, the events in the narratives can be distinguished from the Christian message embedded beneath it. What is modern about Lewis's allegory is that it is less rigid than traditional allegory. Not so concerned with a particular moral lesson, Lewis is interested in exploring moral questions. The modern spiritual allegory encourages mystery, and need not have a perfect solution for every spiritual qualm. This form that Lewis uses in his fiction is dimensional and allows for greater diversity in character and plot. The lack of

structure and resolution in Lewis's allegories are successful because they are reminiscent of real spiritual life.

Perhaps due to his background in medieval literature, Lewis does write *The Chronicles of Narnia* in the style of medieval fairytale. There is a child-like simplicity to the settings and events of the novels, and this black-and-white style of narration is criticized by some scholars. Because Lewis does not stray far from traditional narrative structures, some readers interpret his story-telling as unoriginal. One such scholar, Gretchen Bartels, comments that Lewis could only escape this medieval structure by taking up ancient myth, such as he does in *Till We Have Faces* (Bartels 324). Similarly, Sara Dudley Edwards in "The Theological Dimensions of the Narnia Stories" argues that Lewis is:

content to rely on largely straightforward fairy-tale conventions for the political and social filling-out of his imaginary world—the best king is always the rightful king, in other words the eldest son of the reigning king; usurpers are always bad people and bad ruler; the heroes are always valiant and skilled in battle (the children become so, if they do not begin so); they are also very good looking. (Sara Dudley Edwards 430)

This argument highlights one of Lewis's greatest techniques as a fiction writer. Though this argument criticizes Lewis's rigid plot and his use of tropes, it also recognizes that there is an element of order to Lewis's fiction which is not present in most works.

Perhaps Lewis makes clear the good and the bad sides of the narrative so that the reader can focus on the more nuanced portion of the allegory: spirituality.

Lewis depicts spirituality as that which springs forth from interaction with the divine. Lewis shares the story of characters who interact with Aslan or with Ungit, and it matters not the craftiness of the plot, but rather the effect the divine has on the character.

This medieval structure that Lewis writes in simplifies the distractions in the narrative, so that the reader must focus on the true message. Bruce L. Edwards writes that in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, “Aslan pulls them in, and they keep seeing pictures in their heads. How intriguing to witness the intrepid Lucy and irreverent Edmund stumbling into the chill and wonder of wintry Narnia” (Bruce L. Edwards). The characters drive the story, with Aslan being of primary importance, and the children secondary. Lewis harkens back to medieval images and archetypes, and then reveals how his respective characters react to this setting. With an emphasis on character, Lewis distinguishes his writing from traditional allegory, and causes the reader to overlook the barriers of gender so that the individual spiritual experience can be studied instead. Lewis allows gender to impact his characters, but not define them. Without such an emphasis on spirituality, gender becomes a barrier that prevents the reader from viewing a character outside of her or his gender. C.S. Lewis addresses ideologies like chivalry and purity which directly affect women in the narrative, but also allows the women to exist as individual characters.

A beautiful and puzzling character arc that Lewis carries throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia* series is the spiritual development of Susan Pevensie. Scholar Eleanor Hersey Nickel summarizes this transition, stating:

Susan’s character devolves from a somewhat concerned member of the family in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, into a flirtatious fool in *The Horse and His Boy*, an overwhelmed and fearful girl in *Prince Caspian* (though an excellent archer), and is finally excluded from Narnia in the rest of the series to the point that she does not appear in Aslan’s country in *The Last Battle*. (Nickel 256)

Feminist critics understand this devolution as evidence of Lewis’s contempt for empowered women. Certainly, Susan is used as an example of a Christian fallen away from the faith, but perhaps Lewis’s intentions for Susan’s character were not to punish

her. In the character of Susan, Lewis subtly develops a female mind grappling with faith and doubt.

The spiritual depth that Lewis highlights through the character of Susan and others is evidence that females have equal importance in Narnia. Hannay, who does not account for the spirituality of the female characters, worries that they are too simplistic. Hannay observes that "it matters that young girls see Mrs. Beaver in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* commended for her fussy domesticity" while reading the series (Hannay 15). Here Mrs. Beaver's domesticity is equated with her identity as a woman. This observation equates domesticity with female identity in Lewis's writings. Lewis, however, equates spirituality with female identity. Therefore, it is of no importance whether his female characters are domestic or not, because all of the female characters have a greater purpose through their faith. Similarly, in "Boy-Girls and Girl-Beasts: The Gender Paradox in C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*," the author Susana Rodriguez feels that Lewis "falsely leads readers into the story through a female protagonist that is soon replaced by a male one embarking on a redemptive journey" in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Rodriguez 188). Rodriguez also is operating under the assumption that female identity is equated with the role of protagonist. Because Lewis's narrative is a Christian one, the story is not defined by a male or a female protagonist, but by spirituality. The gender of Lewis's characters affects their spiritual experiences, but does not limit them. The female characters are developed to the same degree as the male characters, and this is because Lewis views spirituality as accessible to all people regardless of gender.

In fact, several female characters grapple with their spirituality throughout the series. Instead of labelling the women in his stories as incapable of deep spirituality,

Lewis delves into the intricacies of female spiritual development by revealing the struggles that the women undergo in their faith. Orual, the protagonist of *Till We Have Faces*, is similarly stubborn, intelligent, and misguided like Susan. Dabney Adams Hart notes that “Orual demanded not only the security of power, but the security of answers from the gods. Security, Lewis suggested... is an illusion” (Hart 142). Orual runs from the gods because the humanness inside of her rebels against divine order. The female characters that Lewis presents in his fiction are not written off as unable to interact with the divine or think with depth, but rather, are complex.

To summarize, this thesis will analyze the traits of Lewis’s female characters and the interactions with the divine that the female characters have in order to convey their spiritual complexity. Lewis’s own theological definition of women’s role in the Christian faith affects the reading of these fiction works. Lewis’s view on the role of women perhaps altered throughout his life and writing, and these views stain his literary works. However, *The Chronicles of Narnia* includes fictional characters created to represent humanity’s relationship with God, and therefore gender need not exist as a barrier. Gender is instead nuanced in the series by the modern and medieval influences on *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis articulates the spiritual experiences of the women subtly through his own form of allegory. Lewis also adopts medieval archetypes so that individual characters’ spiritualities stand out as modern and complex. This form of allegory does not demand spiritual resolution. The allegory also allows the female characters to evolve over time through spiritual development. This is significant because female characters throughout the history of literary discourse have not been developed to the same degree as male characters, especially in reference to Christian faith. Focusing on

this spiritual development over time is what is unprecedented in the study of Lewis's female characters. The characteristics Lewis ascribes to the females in his fiction as well as their interactions with the divine mark the complexity of female spirituality as it will be studied in this essay.

Chapter Two. Chapter Two explores the personality traits of the female characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The most well-known female characters, Susan and Lucy Pevensie, already present an interesting duality. Susan, older and more maternal, is practical and precise. Lucy, the youngest, is sensitive and idealistic. One of the most crucial conversations in regard to C.S. Lewis's female characters is the respective practicality or sensibility of these women.

Lewis provides an array of female personality types. The older women, such as Mrs. Beaver in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* or Letty in *The Magician's Nephew*, are painted as resourceful and busy. These characters make food and pay bills, and in a most practical way, provide comfort for others. However, these maternal figures focus on earthly provisions, and their feelings about spirituality are hardly mentioned. The Biblical character Martha can be compared to Lewis's own maternal characters. Perhaps Lewis means to say that the traditional housewife persona is spiritually inferior, or perhaps he means to say that this persona expresses spirituality through actions and not words.

Throughout this series, Lucy Pevensie seems to be an anomaly. Lucy is the female character who is most connected to nature and to the creatures of Narnia. Because *The Chronicles of Narnia* is an allegory, this might translate to Lucy being most

connected to God and his creation. Lucy embodies the Biblical principle of child-like faith in that she is the youngest and most spiritually mature character in the series.

As for the remaining female characters, there is another intriguing dynamic. Young women such as Jill Pole, Polly, and Aravis are each strong-willed and practical. These assertive women differ from the more matronly characters, because they are just as bold and forceful as the male characters of the series. More than this, Jadis, the White Witch and primary villain of the series, is described with similar diction as these assertive women.

Chapter Three. Chapter Three studies the various ideologies about women that Lewis addresses in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Understanding these ideologies can aid the reader in understanding the female characters in Lewis's fiction. It is interesting that the few chivalrous actions performed by the male characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia* go largely unacknowledged by the female characters. In addition to this, Lewis alludes to a hierarchy between the female characters who have sensibility and the female characters who have practicality. The sensitive women appear to receive greater spiritual respect, therefore implying the superiority of sensibility. Apart from the human women in Narnia, the female Narnian creatures offer another compelling ideology. The ethereal female creatures suggest that dwelling in the spiritual realm of Narnia results in complete purity. It is the purity of the female creatures that gives evidence of Aslan's presence in Narnia. In contrast with the ultra-spiritual Narnian creatures is the concept of worldliness throughout the series. Susan, who eventually discontinues her relationship with Aslan, is marked by worldliness. Worldliness is equated with vanity and the consumption of

materials of the earthly realm, and it prevents spiritual growth. Women in *The Chronicles of Narnia* cannot embrace their femininity if burdened by the limits of worldliness. In order to assume a modern femininity in which the female characters are empowered by their own spirituality, the characters must seek the guidance of Aslan. Jill Pole, the final female protagonist of the series, exemplifies the ideology of modern femininity. This ideology is the most important when considering female spirituality in *The Chronicles of Narnia* because it allows for spiritual growth and feminine empowerment.

Chapter Four. Chapter Four analyzes Lewis's female characters in their interactions with the divine. Aslan, as the Christ figure in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is approached in unique and significant ways by the female characters. Aslan elicits awe from the female characters, produces fulfillment in their lives, exposes them to the depths of sorrow, disciplines their judgement, and empowers them. Susan, Jill, Lucy, and others first responded to Aslan with a strange sort of fright. Because this reaction is so prevalent, it can be inferred as the fear of God which Christian followers might experience. The strength and power that Aslan possesses is never minimized, but becomes less overwhelming to these women over time in the face of his gentleness and peace.

This is why Jadis, the White Witch, cannot look Aslan in the eyes. Jadis, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, relays that she is more powerful than Aslan. Due to Jadis's appearance as a human, and Aslan's appearance as a lion, this argument is first compelling. However, it is Aslan's gentleness and peace that overwhelm Jadis. She

cannot look him in the eye, and is clearly his inferior. This is discovered throughout the course of events in the novel.

Not only is Jadis's spiritual standing revealed over time, but each female character develops in her spirituality. One of the most significant aspects of C.S. Lewis's writing is that he realistically depicts the growth of spirituality over time. One such example is the gradual distinction between Susan and Lucy as characters. In the novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Susan and Lucy relate similarly to the great Aslan. They each have a child-like awe of him. However, in the novel *Prince Caspian*, Lucy's relationship with Aslan increases so much as to set her apart. She is able to see, hear, and feel Aslan when Susan cannot. Lucy even sees Aslan as physically larger, and this is because of her spiritual maturity. Susan instead distrusts Lucy and scoffs at Aslan's supposed presence as they wander without food or shelter at Cair Paravel. Jill Pole, though quite different from Lucy, also grows in wisdom as she interacts with Aslan. Aslan continually reminds Jill of the signs she must remember for her journey, and only then can she complete them. Jill is the female protagonist in the last two novels in the series, and rises up as a model for modern femininity in Lewis's fiction. Jill is empowered by her spirituality, and her more modern and assertive character sets an example for future depictions of female spirituality in fiction.

CHAPTER TWO

Female Character Types in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Though each female character in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series represents a distinct spiritual experience, the women can be understood through three female character types. Grouping the female characters based on their personality traits allows the reader to focus on the spiritual development of each group, and compare. The first character type to be examined is the matronly women. This type consists of characters such as Mrs. Beaver, Aunt Letty, Susan, and Hwin the horse. These characters offer advice to younger women in the series, and are often direct and practical in manner. This character type appears to undergo the least amount of spiritual development over time, and therefore the matronly women either require less spiritual growth than the younger women, or they are spiritually inferior to them. The second female type is the anomaly: Lucy. Lucy, arguably the most spiritually mature female character, is placed in her own character type. Lucy is an anomaly because she expresses a sensibility and connection to nature that is not expressed by any other female characters. Lucy is depicted as angelic at times, and while she does experience spiritual tensions, she rarely disobeys Aslan. Lucy stands out as the woman gifted the greatest spiritual respect in the series. The final character type includes the women with the most modern personality traits. Unlike Lucy whose gentleness and sensitivity reflect the medieval archetype for a woman, Polly, Aravis, and Jill are assertive women. The assertive women are practical much like the matronly characters are, but they are more active than the matronly characters. The assertive women often

serve as warriors, and challenge the medieval construct which dictates that women should be meek. The assertive women are refined by their relationships with the divine, and achieve a peace which they were not privy to before experiencing spiritual development. Each of these female character types illuminates a separate facet of female spirituality, and therefore all of Lewis's female characters are worth studying.

Understanding the nuanced characteristics of the female characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia* first requires examining the matronly women of the series, because these mother-figures are foundational to the novels, often acting as a steady and guiding force for the younger women along their journeys. These characters set an example for post-adolescent female conduct. Though not mothers biologically, these women raise the girls of Narnia. Characters such as Mrs. Beaver in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Letty from *The Magician's Nephew*, Hwin in *The Horse and His Boy*, and even Susan Pevensie, aim to shelter and serve. These women provide material necessities to others along their journeys in and out of Narnia. These characters are almost always working, nesting, cooking, and deliberating. Associated with motion and dutifulness, the older women of *The Chronicles of Narnia* are helpful. This helpfulness is not surface level, nor is it trivial, but rather it is essential to the survival of the Narnian boys and girls. These matronly women are helpful to such an efficient end that they must be called practical beings.

The notion of practicality is evident starting in *The Magician's Nephew*. This tale revolves mostly around the two children, Polly and Digory, and pitiful Uncle Andrew. However, Digory's Aunt Letty stands out as the only character not enticed by idealistic dreams or power. The children are enchanted by the more idyllic and spiritual realm of

Narnia. Uncle Andrew, along with the White Witch, is hungry for magical power. Aunt Letty pays the bills, and keeps the house. Her lack of imagination makes her a blunt, practical, and altogether mundane side character. Though she might easily be forgotten amidst the action of the novel, it is her dutifulness which aids Polly and Digory. Aunt Letty chases after Uncle Andrew, scolding him for his selfish and hair-brained schemes. Aunt Letty looks with disgust upon the villainous White Witch, throwing her out of her home. Letty appears to possess a quality in which the other characters of *The Magician's Nephew* don't: a lack of interest to engage with the spiritual world. Letty is unaffected by the chaos brought into her world from Narnia because she is devoted to her own sphere of housekeeping. Digory's aunt offers no comforting words, but she provides for the children, and stands up against the scheming of Andrew and the White Witch.

In contrast, Hwin, a majestic Narnian horse in *The Horse and His Boy*, proves to be a softer maternal figure. Aravis is a strong-willed young woman in need of guidance and she finds such in her trusted horse. Aravis lost her mother at a young age and the effects of this trauma are evident in Aravis's defensive nature. Her mother has died, and her stepmother despises her. When Aravis concludes that her life is treacherous and purposeless, Hwin comforts her. The female horse tells her that she might come to have good fortune, but all the dead are dead alike (*The Horse and His Boy* 38). This hope encourages Aravis and renews her strength. Hwin, who is advanced in years, and strong from carrying many on her back, offers her support. Though more expressive in words and softer in nature than Aunt Letty, Hwin is still a wild Narnian horse. She serves as a warrior horse for the determined Aravis, and practicality too is a part of her skillset. Hwin is a matronly spirit contained within the practical and powerful form of a warrior horse.

The character most suited to represent the matrons of Narnia is Mrs. Beaver. Lewis cleverly assigns the female beaver to be the busiest and most provisional. Mrs. Beaver cooks for the Pevensie children during their visit, and obsessively packs goods during their escape. Mrs. Beaver is received by the Pevensie children as a comforter—perhaps because of the manifold of food she gives—or perhaps because her constant nesting is a distraction from the impending war. Mrs. Beaver’s devotion to the earthly realm of caregiving makes the dark and spiritual war in Narnia feel distant for the Pevensie children, even for just a moment. While Mr. Beaver sits and speaks at length about Aslan and the history of Narnia, Mrs. Beaver is preparing dinner. She chimes in with acquiescing remarks. Mrs. Beaver does note her own reverence for Aslan, and therefore acknowledges the existence of the spiritual realm. She does not dwell on her own personal emotions though, but rather seeks resourcefulness. However, an important distinction is that Mrs. Beaver is never depicted as inept to participate in the deeper spiritual conversations. She is present during such conversations, yet employs herself with helpful tasks instead of voicing her opinion. Mrs. Beaver is self-assured and called to tend to the practical matters of life.

Among the matronly characters of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Susan Pevensie ought to be the most surprising. Though still a child, Susan is introduced in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* as a girl oriented towards care and decorum. She is the eldest sister, and often attempts to reign in the wild imagination of Lucy and the callousness of Edmund (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 49). Susan is devoted to her siblings. Susan and her older brother Peter seem to partake in an unspoken partnership: they are the leaders and peacemakers of the family. World War II has separated the Pevensie

children from their parents, and therefore as they enter into the mansion of the professor, and later on enter wintry Narnia, the eldest siblings must lead the group. Peter is the main executor of decisions, but Susan is his closest companion and consultant (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 65). The leadership of the boy and girl appears equal, and complementary. Susan and Peter's relationship is reminiscent of that of a husband and wife, perhaps in an effort to emulate the missing mother and father in their family. This portrayal of Susan as the co-leader of the Pevensie family allows the reader to understand her as a matronly character. However, Lewis does not depict Susan as a wise, angelic mother-figure, but rather, she shows signs of immaturity. Susan's character returns in *Prince Caspian*, often the voice of negativity. Susan says:

“I've never seen these woods in my life before. In fact I thought all along that we ought to have gone by the river.”

“Then I think you might have said so at the time,” answered Peter, with pardonable sharpness.

“Oh don't take any notice of her,” said Edmund. “She always is a wet blanket.” (*Prince Caspian* 125)

Here, Susan's attempt to protect those around her is shrouded in her own pride. Susan blames her siblings for choosing the wrong trail, claiming she herself could have lead them the right way. Her desire to lead others down the right path—literally, in this case—overcomes her desire to nurture others. For this reason, Susan is dubbed by Edmund as a “wet blanket.” Though Susan gives endless effort in guiding her siblings, the prideful manner by which she conveys her guidance is something closer to nagging (*Prince Caspian* 130). Perhaps the reader can easily overlook Susan's immaturity, because after all, she is not a mother but a child still. Lewis, however, does not write of Susan's pride as childish or innocent. Her care for her siblings is well-meaning, but the strife Susan

causes amongst her siblings serves as a warning towards the woman who is determined that she alone knows the right way.

One might collect that, while these matronly characters give their confident guidance, they themselves rarely participate in the action of the novels. This lends the reader to question whether Lewis's Christian allegory is meant to include these matrons, or if they are excluded from spiritual action, too. Characters such as Aunt Letty—nose-deep in the duties of the earthly world—might suggest that older women are in fact uninterested in spirituality. However, perhaps Lewis's intention was to create practical women, like Martha from the Bible. The Biblical story of Martha depicts a woman who performs tiresome duties for Jesus when he visits her house, instead of enjoying his company. Martha is skilled, hard-working, and provides for others. She exhibits great effort into her spirituality, but it is her devotion to practicality and self-provision which distances her from a deeper spiritual experience. Perhaps Mrs. Beaver, Hwin, Letty, and Susan Pevensie are meant to possess a spirituality but struggle to actively engage with it because of their duties to the earthly world. This definition reveals that the matrons are spiritually inferior to the girls of Narnia. If not inferior, then the reader can only conclude that these matrons do undergo spiritual action, but that their action is presented in a different way than the other women in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Like Martha, these motherly-figures have been given productive skills, and maybe these skills of guidance and protection are their own proclamation of spirituality. The feminist theory "Ethics of Care" would support the idea that these matronly characters express their spirituality through relationships. This theory suggests that women express morality differently than men do, and while women similarly seek after justice, they do so through relationships

rather than through principles. Perhaps for the matronly women, their guidance and protection are acts of care which express their spirituality in lieu of the spiritual speeches and quests embarked on by the other character types. The matronly figures appear to participate less in the world of Narnia, but that may only be because the marker for spiritual participation is designed to judge spiritual quests. The spiritual women of Narnia are not limited to quests that seek after spiritual principles, but can contribute spiritual action through their care towards others.

One such spiritual woman of Narnia is Lucy Pevensie, and she is an anomaly, because of her gentleness. Lucy is the youngest Pevensie child, and therefore represents a child-like innocence. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lucy is first presented as a timid child, and her only bold trait appears to be her altruism. Lucy is gentle, and this gentleness connects her to nature. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, it is Lucy who first interacts with the faun, Mr. Tumnus, and it is also Lucy who recognizes that the mice on the stone tablet are nibbling away at the cords to free Aslan (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 174). Lucy's understanding of nature and animals in the Narnian world does not merely reveal that she is gentle, but also that she is spiritual. Narnia is linked to the spiritual realm to Lewis, because England is assuredly the earthly world. Lucy's willingness to befriend a Narnian creature, and her understanding of the Narnian animals' contribution to Aslan's resurrection, reveal that Lucy is spiritually inclined. In the novel *Prince Caspian*, Lucy notes that her spiritual inclination is greater than that of her siblings, and greater than the nature around her. She knows "'They are almost awake, not quite,' said Lucy. She knew herself was wide awake, wider than anyone usually is" (*Prince Caspian* 146). Lucy senses within herself an awakening, because she can see

Aslan, while others around her cannot. Perhaps the notion of childlike faith is meant to be embodied by Lucy, the youngest and most innocent Pevensie. In *Prince Caspian*, Lucy turns to the trees and says, “Don’t you remember me? Dryads and Hamadryads, come out, come to me.’ Though there was not a breadth of wind they all stirred about her... Lucy felt that at any moment she would begin to understand what the trees were trying to say” (*Prince Caspian* 123). Lucy possesses an expressiveness and emotionality that might appear laughable to the adult reader, as she finds herself distraught over a grouping of trees. However, Lucy’s love for the dryads is moving, in that it is simple and direct. And it works. Lucy establishes a connection to the Narnian trees because of her lack of presumption; she asks them to awaken, so they do. Lucy is bold and passionate and these qualities are rewarded by spiritual movement in Narnia.

The bridge between Lucy as a timid, altruistic girl, and Lucy as a strong spiritual leader, is her passion. At the beckon of Aslan’s call, Lucy leaps through the forest in *Prince Caspian*, painting a poetic response of obedience. Lucy, ever sincere and emotional, does not robotically turn towards Aslan, but dances towards him. “She went fearlessly among them, dancing herself as she leaped this way and that to avoid being run into... She wanted to get beyond them to something else; it was from beyond them that the dear voice had called” (*Prince Caspian* 146). Lucy forgets her fear, and even forgets her own spatial awareness, in order to chase after Aslan’s voice. Not only is Lucy fearless, but she is purposeful as well, seeking after something that is beyond what she sees in front of her. Lucy’s spirituality is active, and aggressive. However, Lucy retains her gentleness and humility, because she does not yet see Aslan, and must instead trust the travelling sound of his voice. More than this, Lucy does not triumphantly arrive at a

quest upon interacting with the trees or with Aslan the Lion. She must wait for instruction amidst the mystery of nature and spirituality. In the moment, Lucy felt “that she had just missed something: as if she had spoken to the trees a split second too soon or a split second too late, or used all the right words except one.” (*Prince Caspian* 124). Lucy is human, and she does not have the ability to unlock all of Narnia’s mysteries. Lucy’s humanity makes her all the more passionate, because she strives and does not always succeed. Lucy earns the title of spiritual leader in these moments, because she is willing to grow in bravery, and in trust, in order to answer Aslan’s call.

Lucy Pevensie fades into the background of *The Chronicles of Narnia* series beginning in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and so does her fervor and passion. Lucy remains spiritually steadfast, but as younger characters enter into the allegory, it is her gentleness that defines her and not her strength. Lucy’s character arc coincides with the criticism that Lewis domesticates the post-adolescent women in his stories. Though Lucy does not revert to the timid girl of the early books, she does not advance in her role of spiritual leadership in the later books, either. Rather, the gentleness of Lucy is what spans the series. The result of Lucy’s gentleness is understood alongside Eustace’s conversion in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Lucy is the only female character in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and due to the allegorical style of the series, Lucy’s soft female voice seems to speak for all women. Her voice contrasts with the voice of the gruff and noble men at sea. Because Lucy is the only feminine voice on the ship, her femininity is accentuated. Eustace, who is distained by the men on the ship, is lovingly helped by his cousin Lucy. In fact, there are several instances of Lucy serving Eustace, and it is

arguably her primary role in the novel. When Eustace is green with seasickness, Lucy says:

“I’ve brought you something that will make you feel better, Eustace,” said Lucy.

“Oh, go away and leave me alone,” growled Eustace. But he took a drop from her flask, and though he said it was beastly stuff (the smell in the cabin when she opened it was delicious) it is certain that his face came the right color. (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 27)

Lucy’s dialogue is simple, and with Lewis, such simple dialogue is used to convey an allegorical message. As Lucy continues to selflessly serve Eustace, it is clear that Lucy’s servant-heartedness is meant to soften Eustace’s hard-heartedness. The concept that a spirituality should result in servitude is common amongst the Christian faith, and is demonstrated by Lucy. Eustace, writing about the scarcity of dinner portions, says “Lucy for some reason tried to make up to me by offering me some of hers” (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 76). Several days later, Eustace also writes, “Lucy gives me a little of her water ration. She says girls don’t get as thirsty as boys” (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 78). Both of these instances reveal that Lucy is tangibly willing to sacrifice for Eustace, giving up even the basic needs of food and water. This practical display of selflessness is meant to parallel the Christian ideal that Jesus sacrificed life for his followers. Lewis parallels Lucy with Christ in these scenes, attributing an angelic quality to Lucy as a character. Perhaps focalizing on Lucy’s gentle and maternal nature in the later books is meant to mature the character from an adventurous girl to an angelic presence. It is possible that Lewis’s intentions were to showcase Lucy as the most spiritually mature character of all, placing her on the pedestal of angel, paralleled to Jesus himself. The Biblical narrative might support such a reading, since it is common for angels to comfort humans and relay messages of God to them, much like Lucy’s comfort

brings Eustace closer to the world of Narnia. Lucy feels more than the other Narnian women do, and these feelings correlate to a heightened spiritual experience. In the final scenes of *The Last Battle*, Lucy has a “thrill in her voice” and drinks things in “more deeply than the others.” She is “too happy to speak” (*The Last Battle* 177). The new Narnia—an allegory for the Christian heaven—is the ultimate fulfillment for Lucy. She is happy, yet still obedient. As the group of Narnians enters the new land, Lucy is the one to speak and plead with Aslan and he answers her. Spirituality allows Lucy to emotionally revel, but there is a constraint in her adult behavior that reflects angelic obedience, rather than freedom.

It is the assertive female protagonists—Polly, Aravis, and Jill—who are oriented towards freedom and action. Each of these women is compelling because they are commanding as well as feminine. Polly is enchanted by Uncle Andrew’s rings, but fiercely challenges Jadis the evil witch. Aravis looks at dresses with Queen Lucy, but remains a fearless warrior. Jill cries, overcome with the pressures of battle, but possesses unmatched war strategy. These women are distinguished in Narnia as assertive, and do not appear to compromise their traits which align with the traditional female gender role.

Polly is an equal companion to Digory, and she exercises this right to a greater degree than the other women of Narnia. Though Susan has a partnership with her older brother Peter, she does not vocalize her opinions to the extent that Polly does. Polly is not younger than Digory, but rather is his same age. Polly speaks with authority when addressing Digory. The trouble which arguably stirs the novel *The Magician’s Nephew* occurs when Digory is swayed by the beautiful witch Jadis. Upon the arrival of the giant porcelain-like woman, Polly uses blunt language to indicate that she wants to leave the

witch behind (*The Magician's Nephew* 74). Digory does not consent however, and at one point dismisses women's opinions altogether, retorting that girls only want to know gossip (*The Magician's Nephew* 55). Polly exclaims, "'How exactly like a man!' said Polly in a very grown-up voice," and this indicates that she is aware of the history of men disrespecting women, and feels apt to scold such behavior (*The Magician's Nephew* 55). While the reader is likely meant to take Digory's comment as a childish act of insolence, Polly's response is pivotal. Though *The Magician's Nephew* takes place chronologically before *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Polly demands a distinguished respect for the female gender that is out of reach for characters Susan and Lucy. Susan and Lucy do not acknowledge gender discrimination in any direct manner. In contrast, Polly expresses herself to Digory, as well as to Uncle Andrew, without fear. Polly, as a girl, projects herself towards the men in *The Magician's Nephew* with confidence.

Polly's confidence is also matched by her aptitude. Several times throughout *The Magician's Nephew* it is noted that Polly is sensible; it is she who decides to mark the maze of pools that the two children encounter in-between worlds (*The Magician's Nephew* 41). She matches Digory in physical activeness in the novel as well, and this quality is unique to the assertive women in the series. Polly repeats the line, "I'm game if you are," throughout the course of the text, revealing that she is perpetually eager to overcome the next obstacle alongside her friend (*The Magician's Nephew* 10). Polly and Digory experience the events of the novel in tandem, and this contributes to this sense of equality amongst them. Polly heeds to Digory at times, but just as often, she enforces decisions. Digory concedes and follows Polly's sensible plan of going halfway in the room of stone, though he had wanted to surge ahead (*The Magician's Nephew* 55).

Similarly, Polly is not impressed by Jadis's beauty like Digory is, and is capable of clarity in her presence while he is not. Polly is marked by her prudence, while Digory is marked by his adventurous spirit. Lewis justifies this juxtaposition by writing that Polly is "quite as brave as he about some dangers (wasps, for instance) but she was not so interested in finding out things nobody had ever heard of before" (*The Magician's Nephew* 39). Lewis does not herald Polly's prudence as a valuable asset to the pair, but rather highlights her lack of imagination. Though only a slight comment, this perception of Polly perpetuates traditional gender roles in the novels. Polly, as a young woman, is not the visionary of the pair, but is the pillar of stability. Polly assists Digory in his pursuit of a new world, but does not herself pursue adventure. Such a stereotype strips Polly of the strength that she possesses as a character who is disciplined, intelligent, and reliable. Therefore, whether Polly is written as Digory's equal or his inferior is at times ambiguous.

The Magician's Nephew is the first novel in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Polly's presence in Narnia mirrors the Biblical character Eve's presence in the garden of Eden. Polly and Digory are the first humans to enter Narnia, and their entrance is reminiscent of the Biblical Fall of Man. Polly is wooed by the beautiful rings presented to her by Uncle Andrew, and places a ring on her finger, which transports her into Narnia. Digory then begins his quest to save Polly, which is the catalyst for the pairs' adventures in the new realm. An initial interpretation of this plot would deem Polly solely responsible for falling into Uncle Andrew's trap, because of girlish love for pretty rings. This view would depart even from the Biblical narrative, because while Adam and Eve revel in shame together, Digory would assume the role of hero, and seek to save his

weaker feminine companion. However, Polly's touching of the yellow ring is not representative of the Fall of Man. In touching the ring, Polly initiates travel to Narnia, and begins the beloved adventure which would continue on for many other characters throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. Polly transporting herself to Narnia is hardly a sinful action. In fact, it is arguably Digory who is the perpetrator of sinful action. Once transported out of England, Digory rings the bell in the ancient ruins of Charn, though Polly insists that he should not (*The Magician's Nephew* 56). This misstep causes much harsher consequences than being transported to a new realm; it awakens the evil witch Jadis. Polly works with Digory throughout the novel to curtail Jadis's evil actions. If the reader is to understand Polly within the Christian allegory of the novel, then she is no inferior character. Lewis does not give Polly a spiritual development over time like he does other female characters in this series, but Polly serves as the archetypal spiritual woman. Polly is with Aslan as he creates the world of Narnia, and is present at the end of the series in the new Narnia. The first woman of the series is assertive, but not as spiritually complex as many of the others to follow, and these characteristics are important when considering Lewis's portrayal of female spirituality.

The second assertive woman appears in the following novel, *The Horse and His Boy*. Aravis flees to Narnia to avoid a marriage being forced upon her, and she has all of the independence of a voyager forging through new land. Aravis is cunning, and deceives her father by inserting a sleeping potion into his servant's drink in order to escape. Aravis rebels against the patriarchal Calormenes and their marriage laws, as does Queen Susan who is also threatened by a forced marriage in this novel, and the young people band together to fight for social change. Though this story is told within a medieval time

construct, Aravis is a leader in providing independence for women. Aravis's independent nature also manifests itself in her limitations. Aravis struggles to be vulnerable amongst her companions, and admits only to her horse Hwin how her abandonment of her family has affected her. She washes her face, as if to wash away her internal pain, and then takes out her dagger. She holds her dagger and says she wishes to stab herself, but Hwin stops her, saying she might have good fortune, but all the dead are dead alike (*The Horse and His Boy* 38). Hwin suggests that Aravis should have hope, because hope is what distinguishes the living from the dead. Aravis retracts her dagger, and is filled with shame. Though Aravis exhibits independence, her own inner strength is not powerful enough to subdue her darkest moments of distress, and Aravis learns the sacredness of vulnerability through her relationship with Hwin. Lewis's depiction of a young woman grappling with despair and suicidal thoughts contributes to the authenticity of his characters. Aravis is written as confident and self-assured, yet she is not idolized as unbreakable. Aravis struggles to balance her independence with her human limitations throughout the novel, and this contention leads to her spiritual development.

Aravis's relationship with Shasta exemplifies her spiritual growth over time. At first Aravis dislikes Shasta, and suggests that he is not a utile companion for her on their journey. Aravis is hostile towards the innocent Shasta because she at first struggles to trust others. Shasta at times confronts Aravis about her harsh behavior, and voices his disapproval. Aravis maintains her independent nature, informing Shasta that she does not do any of the things that she does for him to approve (*The Horse and His Boy* 43). This response on behalf of Aravis reveals that Shasta's good nature challenges her actions, but does not restrict them. Aravis becomes comfortable listening to the guidance of others as

well as comfortable expressing her own opinions. By the end of their adventure, Aravis is neither prideful or defensive, but informs King Lune of Shasta's valor. When the king praises Aravis for her actions, she replies, "It was he who did all that, Sir... Why, he rushed at a lion to save me" (*The Horse and His Boy* 212). This is evidence of the maturation of Aravis's character. However, it is also worth noting that Lewis intends his strong female character to divert her own praise onto her male companion. Aravis's growing attachment towards Shasta is one of love, and while Shasta does not limit Aravis's power, it is possible that Lewis's construct of gender roles does prevent Aravis from accepting praise. Regardless of the reader's interpretation of Aravis's humility, it is clear that she has gained unprecedented joy by the end of the novel. After experiencing the healing power of community alongside others, and meeting Aslan the Lion, Aravis is fulfilled. In contrast to her near-fatal scene with her dagger, Aravis "hopes" and "rejoices" and "sings and dances" (*The Horse and His Boy* 39). No longer a runaway, Aravis has a place in Archenland, and becomes their queen. Shasta and Aravis marry, and the two become closer companions than any other Narnian pairing. This union emphasizes the role that community plays in Aravis's adoption of spirituality and peace.

The ending to Aravis's story is light-hearted compared to her weighty journey of war and spirituality. Aravis is a valiant woman, but she also quibbles with her spouse and likes to talk about clothing. Lewis ends the novel by commenting that Aravis and Queen Lucy bond over the beautiful clothes and furniture in Archenland, which is "the sort of things girls do talk about on such an occasion" (*The Horse and His Boy* 213). This sentence not only feels disjointed because of its root in sexism, but also because of its triviality. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is written in medieval style, and Lewis rarely

mentions characterization outside of the construct of the plot, which is a mark of medieval writing. Here, though, Lewis remarks that Aravis forms a friendship with Lucy, and that she enjoys “girlish” pass-times. He goes on to quip that Aravis and Shasta often have disagreements with one another, and that they “got married so as to go on doing it more conveniently” (*The Horse and His Boy* 224). Her journey concludes with personable anecdotes, and this is memorable. Perhaps due to the interpersonal growth that Aravis experienced throughout the novel, this assertive woman now channels her vigor into her spirituality, and can take comfort in her relationships with others instead of approaching them with aggression.

In the character of Jill Pole—the third assertive woman in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series—the reader is exposed to a subtler form of aggression. Jill is bullied at her school in England, and does not possess any particular boldness in fighting against her adversaries (*The Silver Chair* 2). Jill welcomes the knowledge of Narnia, however, and it is her willingness to understand spirituality which eventually makes her strong. Jill is a friend of Eustace, and her reaction to his spiritual conversion is a further indication of her impending spirituality. Eustace asks her to “wash out” his old behavior, because he acts differently now (*The Silver Chair* 4). The phrase “wash out” implies a baptismal cleansing. Jill accepts Eustace’s request, and accepts his improved personage because of the evidence of his spirituality. Jill is also not hesitant to believe Eustace about this other world, a magical world, but not one with spells (*The Silver Chair* 7). She worries that Eustace’s reformed behavior will only make the bullies angrier, but as the cruel kids chase after them outside, Eustace calls out to Aslan. The two companions are then transported into Narnia. Jill enters into Narnia with Eustace rather abruptly, and this

reveals that Aslan—who allows each child to enter into Narnia—believes that Jill is ready to begin her spiritual journey.

Jill struggles with pride, as is evident by her attention-seeking behavior on the cliff in *The Silver Chair*. Jill runs to the edge of the cliff in an attempt to prove that she is braver than Eustace, but she slips off, and Eustace falls with her. Aslan uses his breath to blow Eustace to safety towards the river on the ground. Aslan carries Jill across the sky, and the two of them discuss her misstep. Jill does not apologize to Aslan or to Eustace, but instead chooses to deflect responsibility for her actions (*The Silver Chair* 17). Jill blames others for her mistakes because she is too prideful to admit when she has faulted. After further encounters with the divine Aslan, as will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis, Jill experiences a baptism of her own. Throughout the remainder of *The Silver Chair*, Jill is linked to Aslan and his instruction. As she assumes the quest that she has been given, Jill's strength increases. Jill is called a "tigress", and is "fierce" and "indignant" (*The Silver Chair* 6, 8, 14). It is notable that Jill's strength is associated with the tiger, an animal who is akin to the lion. Aslan the Lion possesses similar passion and fervor, and therefore Jill becomes more like Aslan throughout the novel. The assertive women in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series are examples of female characters given the gifts of strength and leadership that derive from Aslan himself. These women transcend traditional gender roles, and are the foundation for the modern femininity that Lewis begins to embrace by the end of series.

In this chapter, the female character types in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are analyzed in terms of their traits. It is important to analyze the distinct traits of each female character in order to understand the complex spiritualities that Lewis bestows on

each of them. The matronly women, Lucy, and the assertive women each possess qualities that are reflected in Aslan himself. The different character types express their spiritualities in varying capacities, and this is because of the mingling of medieval and modern influences on the female characters. The female characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia* have nuanced personalities, and this results in them having unique spiritual struggles and passions.

CHAPTER THREE

The Chronicles of Narnia and Ideologies About Women

C.S. Lewis not only delves into unique character types throughout his fictional series, but he also embeds crucial ideologies in relation to women within the texts. The ideologies that Lewis projects into the narrative are ones which usually apply to gender, yet Lewis applies these ideologies to spirituality instead. C.S. Lewis attempts to acknowledge the ideologies which affect women most and also transcend gender by applying these ideologies to the spirituality of all humans. The first of these ideologies is chivalry; the female characters in Narnia make no comment towards the chivalrous actions of the male characters, and in fact chivalrous actions only occasionally occur. Lewis seems to diminish the barrier of gender throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*. More relevant than chivalry is the hierarchical debate between sensibility and practicality in women. Some female characters possess sensibility—a gentleness and sensitivity, and other female characters possess practicality—a directness and assertiveness. Lewis alludes through the events of the novel which ideology is more conducive to spiritual growth. Throughout the entire series, yet specifically in the novel *Prince Caspian*, Susan and Lucy represent the dichotomy of these two ideologies about women. The practical Susan and the sensitive Lucy both pursue relationships with Aslan. Lucy continually succeeds in obeying Aslan, while Susan struggles to obey him. Lucy is spiritually rewarded for her sensibility, and it can be inferred that C.S. Lewis respects sensibility more than practicality. The female Narnian creatures offer yet another ideology about

women, because these creatures are altruistic and pure. The female creatures reside in the spiritual realm of Narnia, and perhaps transcend above the human Narnian women in spirituality. The prime culprit for spiritual degradation in the human women of Narnia is worldliness. Unlike the Narnian creatures, Susan is consumed by the pleasures of the earthly realm of England. Her worldliness prevents her from further spiritual development. The other human women continue their spiritual growth, and this in turn allows them to embrace their femininity. Jill Pole represents a woman engaging in a spiritual development which empowers her. The ideology of modern femininity argues that the spiritual development of women allows them to fully embrace their status as female. Modern femininity, along with the many other ideologies discussed, provides a comprehensive look at female spirituality in C.S. Lewis's fiction.

The protagonists in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are invariably some pairing or grouping of boys and girls, and because of this balanced representation of gender in the series, the women are rarely addressed with added gentility. However, chivalry is occasionally present within the narrative, most often expressed by the older and more traditional Narnian men. In *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, children Eustace and Lucy are in the company of the male warriors of Narnia. Reepicheep the knight exudes integrity, and challenges Eustace's selfishness in the presence of Lucy. Eustace says that "Lucy has been given a whole room on deck to herself, almost a nice room...[and] Caspian says that's because she's a girl. I tried to make him see what Alberta says, that all that sort of thing is really lowering girls but he was too dense" (*Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 32). Lucy is given special accommodations by the knights aboard because she is a female, and Eustace retorts that some women find special privileges "lowering." Perhaps because the

knights are from Narnia—a place described by Lewis through medieval constructs—Lewis writes them to have a medieval perspective on the delicacy of women. Eustace, an English boy in the nineteen fifties, offers the perspective of his mother Alberta. This perspective rejects chivalry; men who give women additional aid must see them as inferior. Eustace’s rebuttal introduces modern feminist ideas into a text which celebrates medieval life. His claim is treated as insignificant by the reader though, because Eustace only argues this claim in an attempt to selfishly gain Lucy’s room.

Nevertheless, there are few other moments of dialogue which question chivalry in this series. The female characters do not acknowledge any favors that they receive, and these favors are few. It seems that—as was stated in the first chapter of this thesis—Lewis would like the reader to disengage from gender distinctions, and they need not note when chivalry is present and when it is not. Lewis represents chivalry as a character quality present in the mature men of Narnia rather than as a statement about the equality of women. Lewis chooses to incorporate the chivalry tokened by medieval men, and not the oppressiveness. King Tirian in *The Last Battle* challenges a dwarf and says, “will you give a lady the lie to her very face?” (*The Last Battle* 91). King Tirian is angered that the dwarf would lie, and is exacerbated that he would lie in the presence of Jill as well. This dialogue is meant to reveal Tirian’s strong sense of integrity. Tirian treats Jill with equality in battle, and therefore his assertion does not indicate that he views her as too weak to hear a lie. Instead, Lewis uses medieval language to suggest selfless love. Later in *The Last Battle*, Tirian calls Jill his daughter, and tells her well done in battle (*The Last Battle* 148). Such a sentence is reminiscent of Christ encouraging his female followers in the Bible, calling them daughter as well. Lewis does provide instances of

chivalry in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, but these are meant to mirror familial spiritual love that is sacrificial. Lewis uses chivalry to reveal the selflessness of the men of Narnia which stems from their spiritualities. While this does not have a large impact upon the reader, it is notable that chivalry does make a statement about the equality of women, whether it is intended to or not. Just as often, though, female characters serve male characters in similarly selfless ways, and this creates a more complete picture of spiritual love in the series.

The women of *The Chronicles of Narnia* have varied along the scale of sensibility and practicality. Sisters Susan and Lucy represent well this dichotomy. Lucy is perhaps the most sensitive woman in the series, while Susan is perhaps the most practical. Lucy appears angelic, and extensively spiritual, while Susan drifts into a life of worldliness. The two women begin to challenge each other in *Prince Caspian*, and find their respective responses to stressful situations distasteful. Lost in the woods and tired of travelling, the Pevensie children seek solution. Lucy believes that she sees Aslan, and claims that he will help them. She asks the others if they can see Aslan too, and Susan responds, “‘No, of course I can’t,’ snapped Susan. ‘Because there isn’t anything to see. She’s been dreaming. Do lie down and go to sleep, Lucy’” (*Prince Caspian* 155). Susan patronizes Lucy, reasoning that it is not possible that Lucy should see Aslan, but rather Lucy is tired and imagining things. Susan operates from a place of practicality, and is frustrated when others attempt to emotionally engage with stressful situations. Lucy operates with inverse priorities. After Susan scolds Peter for leading them in the wrong direction, Lucy says, “‘Susan!’ said Lucy reproachfully, ‘don’t nag at Peter like that. It’s so rotten and he’s doing the best he can’” (*Prince Caspian* 130). Lucy is hurt that Susan

would cause strife during a trying time; Lucy believes that tearing down others' emotions is a direct hindrance to solving any problem. Even in situations involving no duress, the sisters are fundamentally different. Lucy begins to contemplate human nature as the family journeys across Narnia, and "the practical Susan" replies they have enough to worry about "without imagining things like that" (*Prince Caspian* 128). The sisters struggle to respect each other as they recognize their conflicting priorities.

Despite their opposing postures, Susan and Lucy share a love for guiding others. This is significant because however different their interactions with others may appear, Lewis writes them to have a similar intensity and spirit of helpfulness. Lucy is a healer, and silently devotes herself to those in battle (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 113). Lucy channels her strong emotions into physically aiding the people in battle. Interestingly, Susan uses physical tasks to express her emotions that she does not often express in words. Susan is an excellent archer, and in chapter three of *Prince Caspian*, she shoots down the men who are about to kill a dwarf (*Prince Caspian* 112). Both sisters are service-oriented individuals, and their acts of service grow the parts of their character which they are weakest in. Through healing, Lucy finds a productive avenue to express her sensibility. Susan uses her skilled fighting to practically express her care for those around her. The sisters also share an intense devotion to their principles. Susan, though a renowned archer, "hated killing things," and purposefully missed shots to ensure that she won't fatally harm anyone (*Prince Caspian* 127). When Susan properly balances efficiency with care, she is just as devoted to her convictions as Lucy is. Lucy almost never doubts her own beliefs, and is characterized by her faith. When Lucy's siblings question the validity of her glimpses of Aslan, Lucy responds by stating "I don't know

why you shouldn't believe it" (*Prince Caspian* 105). Lucy is guided fully by her spirituality and intuition from Aslan. Both sisters share a passion for guiding others, but Lewis would suggest that Lucy is more successful at this, as she is not burdened by the distractions of the world like Susan is.

Therefore, when ordering the traits of sensibility and practicality according to Lewis, sensibility is regarded as superior to practicality. While sensibility is not an exclusively female ideology, it is true that sensibility is exercised more by women in the series than by men, and perhaps this suggests a spiritual quality that belongs primarily to the female gender. However, sensibility is rare even amongst the female characters. The matronly women and assertive women of the series often employ practical measures along their journeys, and while Lewis does not condemn this, Lucy's sensibility is further rewarded. Lucy receives the most intimate and numerous interactions with Aslan, and this is because her spirituality allows her to supersede the worldly tasks which distract humans from spirituality. Lucy is called by Aslan in *Prince Caspian*, "trembling with excitement but not with fear" (*Prince Caspian* 144). Lucy's emotions allow her to connect with the spiritual realm. Not only this, but Lucy is called by Aslan individually, unlike the majority of the characters in the series who are put in pairs on their journeys. Lucy is deemed as emotionally mature, and for this reason is commanded by Aslan to follow him on her own (*Prince Caspian* 149). Lucy, though young, is regarded as worthy of respect because of her allegiance to Aslan. Lewis reinforces this throughout *Prince Caspian* especially. Lucy is called a lioness, and is compared to Aslan the Lion much like Jill Pole is when she is called a tigress, and this alludes to Lucy's high moral standing in the novel (*Prince Caspian* 150). Not only is Lucy compared to Aslan, but she is

consistently juxtaposed to Susan. During Susan and Lucy's conflict in this novel, it is Lucy who bites her tongue and refrains from speaking in anger towards her sister, and it is Lucy who forgives her sister (*Prince Caspian* 157, 161). Though the majority of the women in *The Chronicles of Narnia* operate logistically through their quests for Aslan, Lucy and her sensitivity rank superior. However, while it is possible that the trait of sensibility is viewed as superior to the trait of practicality in these novels, it is the practical women who make the best warriors.

It is essential to establish the correlation between strong female warriors and practicality, because the villains of Narnia are attributed with both of these qualities. Jadis, the evil witch introduced in *The Magician's Nephew*, is described to have a cold composure; she is "terribly practical" (*The Magician's Nephew* 79). In the character of Jadis, Lewis equates coldness with practicality. Jadis assumes the title "The White Witch" in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, because she has the power to freeze living creatures, and is as white as snow. That which distinguishes her as most cruel is that her destruction is premeditated. She is cold even in her approach to decision-making, and this is the dark shadow of practicality. Yet practicality is not a villainous quality, and neither is coldness. Characters Polly and Aunt Letty in *The Magician's Nephew* are described as "cold" and "icy" at times (*The Magician's Nephew* 80, 86). As previously discussed, several of the female characters in Narnia are deemed practical women, not only Jadis the witch. Lewis uses similar diction when describing the female heroes and the female villains of his allegory. Perhaps Lewis intends to incriminate all women, by making his villains female, and describing them comparatively to the rest of the female characters. An alternate perspective would argue that Lewis conflates the traits of the

women who seek Aslan with the women who fight to destroy Aslan in order to reveal the subtly of evil. Both Jadis and The Green Lady employ their beauty and powers of enchantment as weapons, and this is evidence of the nuance of evil. Jadis is tall and beautiful, and her looks distract Digory from her evil intentions (*The Magician's Nephew* 58). In the same way, The Green Lady uses spells to lure in Prince Rillian and trap him in a perpetual enchantment as her servant (*The Silver Chair* 163). Not only can practicality be warped towards villainy in Narnia, but so can beauty. The image of Green Lady may also be a parallel to the evil serpent who enchants Adam and Eve in the Biblical book of Genesis. The serpent distracts Adam and Eve with the forbidden fruit much like The Green Lady distracts Prince Rillian with her spells. The color green is often associated with sorcery, and with snakes, and this female villain is both green and deceptive like the Biblical adversary. The Green Lady is an allegorical reference to the evil serpent, or Satan. It is significant that Lewis chooses two women to represent evil in a Christian text, and it is possible that Lewis wishes to condemn these powerful women for exercising their beauty and cunning. Yet it is also possible that Lewis wishes to highlight a distinct difference in the powerful villains of Aslan, and the powerful followers of Aslan. This distinction is a personal relationship with Aslan, which the villains do not possess because they are spiritless.

The female Narnian creatures reaffirm this distinction, because they exude purity. These female characters are ethereal, and lack the spiritual tension between sensibility and practicality that the human Narnian characters have. Such women in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series are portrayed as beautiful and pure, like the women of medieval literature. In the history of Narnia that is recited in *The Last Battle*, there is a story about

Swanwhite, the Queen. She was “so beautiful that when she looked into any forest pool the reflection of her face shone out of the water like a star by night for a year and a day afterward” (*The Last Battle* 110). The beauty described in this tale has a spiritual quality, causing water to shine like a star. The image of light shining on water is reminiscent of purity. The female Narnians even speak with medieval diction. A dryad in *The Last Battle* shouts to the children, “‘Woe, woe, woe!’ called the voice. ‘Woe for my brothers and sisters! Woe for the holy trees!’” (*The Last Battle* 20). The dryad uses the word “woe” which is derived from medieval vernacular. Lewis incorporates this dialogue to express an “other-worldliness” about the Narnian creatures, who dwell fully in the spiritual realm and not the earthly one. The dryad calls the others in Narnia her “brothers and sisters,” a phrase often associated with spiritual fellowship. The dryad is consumed by spirituality, and seems to transcend above the traits of practicality and sensibility. She is also beautiful, “like a woman but so tall that her head was on a level with the Centaur’s yet she was like a tree too... something different in the color, the voice, and the hair” (*The Last Battle* 20-21). Just as Swanwhite’s beauty could make water shine, the dryad’s beauty has something different about it. These Narnian women are not from earth: they are pure, magnificent, and spiritual. These characters exist as symbols of the spiritual splendor that Aslan offers those who are obedient.

By the end of *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, Susan is a symbol for the opposing ideology: worldliness. Susan is welcomed into the spiritual realm of Narnia, but she later rejects it so that she may dwell on earth. Susan, like the villains of Narnia, lacks the spirit which comes from seeking Aslan. Susan is not cruel and spiteful like the Narnian villains, but she is fully focused on earth, and therefore she also does not possess a spirituality.

Susan is no longer a friend of Narnia because she thinks she knows better, “she says, ‘What wonderful memories you have! Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children’” (*The Last Battle* 169). Instead of recognizing spirituality as prevalent, Susan belittles the concept of spirit, calling it a game played by children. Susan disassociates her memories from Narnia because they oppose her earthly values. Lewis emphasizes Susan’s attachment to the world by noting how she likes “nylons and lipstick and invitations” (*The Last Battle* 169). She cannot accept a spirituality, but instead makes materialism her god. However, it is not merely Susan’s desire to indulge in her appearance which condemns her. Lewis alludes that Susan’s lack of spirit stems from her need for control. Susan’s siblings lament that “‘Her whole idea is to race on to the silliest time of one’s like as quick as she can and then stop there as long as she can’” (*The Last Battle* 169). She wants to control time and pleasure. A most human idea, Susan attempts to find satisfaction on earth, and fight to stay in that satisfaction forever, though time will always put an end to life on earth. Susan chooses a life on earth, where she can control the world around her—her appearance, the parties she attends. Susan cannot accept Aslan because then she would have to give up control over her life. Lewis is criticized for condemning Susan like he condemns the female villains of Narnia. But Susan is not condemned for liking lipstick; she is condemned for wanting to be her own god. This condemnation is not an insult to women, but rather a realistic portrayal of a woman who has chosen to reject spirituality. Susan’s spiritual journey is one of the most complex in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and her journey adds to the spiritual breadth of women in the series.

Jill Pole, as the final female protagonist of the series, represents a modern femininity; she is empowered by her spirituality as a woman. Jill adds a modern facet to the spirituality of women in Narnia because her character has both practicality and sensibility. Jill is the youngest women to enter into the new Narnia, and therefore suggests a new ideal of the spiritual woman. Jill fulfills the role of warrior in *The Last Battle*, but also gentleness.

Jill is skilled, and earns respect as a woman who is strong and decisive. She wields weapons in battle: both a dagger and a bow and arrow set. Tirian notes that “There was no sword light enough for Jill, but he gave her a long, straight hunting knife which might do for a sword in a pinch” (*The Last Battle* 69). Jill carries this dagger, along with her bow. When asked about her archery skills, Jill blushes and claims that her skills are nothing worth talking about, but Eustace chimes in and assures Tirian that she is as good as he is (*The Last Battle* 70). Jill is willing to train and assume the role of warrior, though she is a woman and is physically smaller than the men fighting. There is perhaps also a symbolic purpose behind Lewis assigning Jill both the dagger and the bow. Lucy was given a dagger in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and Susan was given a bow and arrows. Just as Jill possesses Susan’s practicality and Lucy’s sensibility, she also possesses their weapons. However, Jill fights more than Lucy or Susan ever did, and is not just the conglomerate of both sisters, but is the more modern version of them. Jill is resourceful and brave, and can kill and clean animals during war (*The Last Battle* 72). She is also a remarkable tracker. Her scouting skills are superior to the other warriors, and “As soon as Tirian saw that she was the best pathfinder of the three of them he put her in front. And then he was astonished to find how silently and almost invisibly she

glided on before them” (*The Last Battle* 74). Jill guides the group without sound, and Eustace whispers as they walk that it is her small size that helps her. Jill “from in front said: ‘S-s-sh, less noise’” (*The Last Battle* 74). Jill is comfortable leading the group, and comfortable commanding silence. Jill does not let her smaller size hinder her as a fighter, but rather embraces it; her small size allows her to track soundlessly. She is physically competent, and also succeeds at the intellectual aspects of battle. While giving instruction, “She said *thee* for *see* not because she had a lisp but because she knew that the hissing letter S is the part of a whisper most likely to be overheard” (*The Last Battle* 75-76). This is a strange sentence for C.S. Lewis to include, but it reveals the careful and intentional mind that Jill has. She has acute mental strength, which no woman in Narnia has displayed so far in the series. In the thick of battle, Jill is overwhelmed by the horrible scenes before her, but she does not allow her emotions to overpower her mind. She still puts “her right leg back and her left leg forward,” and shoots her arrows, not allowing her tears to wet her bowstring (*The Last Battle* 154, 158). Jill rises up as a fierce warrior, and this shows both her maturity and her unwillingness to be trapped by traditional gender roles.

Jill is naturally assertive, yet grows in compassion due to her spirituality, and this indicates spiritual development over time. *The Silver Chair* depicts Jill as a girl struggling with pride, but *The Last Battle* signifies the softening of her heart. Jill is called “a wondrous wood-maid” because of her heart for the creatures of Narnia (*The Last Battle* 74). Much like Lucy, Jill is at ease with nature, and it allows her to be more empathetic. Upon seeing Puzzle draped in the lion’s mane, Jill gives “little explosions of laughter” (*The Last Battle* 80). Jill laughs like a child at the fake-Aslan. She sees that Puzzle is a

sweet creature, and did not mean to disobey the true Lion, and so she laughs. When Tirian and the other Narnians wish harm on Puzzle, Jill rushes to his defense. Tirian says to Jill, “you are the bravest and most wood-wise of all my subjects, but also the most malapert and disobedient. Well: let the Ass live” (*The Last Battle* 81-82). It is her tender heart, alongside her practical skills, which convinces Tirian to listen to her wisdom. Tirian also alludes that Jill’s femininity is what allows her to exercise the empathy she feels. Eustace marvels at Jill’s bravery in saving Puzzle, and says, “well it was a perfectly gorgeous thing to do. If she was a boy she’d have to be knighted, wouldn’t she, Sire?” But Tirian replies that “If she was a boy...she’d be whipped for disobeying orders” (*The Last Battle* 81). Tirian’s response is interesting because he acknowledges that Jill’s gender aided her success in caring for others. Had Jill been a male soldier who saved an enemy, she would have been whipped. But Jill is a woman, and women are allowed to be compassionate. Perhaps Tirian means to insult Jill, or threaten her with this comment, but it is more likely meant as a compliment. Again, Jill uses her femininity to succeed in unconventional ways. She swears her allegiance to Narnia, and she weeps in battle (*The Last Battle* 120,152). Jill is a woman of emotion, and she learns to channel her emotions towards serving others. Jill is the embodiment of modern femininity because she uses her role as woman to aid her physically, mentally, and spiritually.

The final scene of the *The Last Battle* displays the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve entering into the new Narnia. Lewis writes of only moments in the new land, but it is clear to the reader that this adventure is grander than all of the others put together. Jill and Lucy are the focal characters of this last scene. The two girls kiss the new and clean Puzzle on the nose, showing him love and forgiveness (*The Last Battle* 208). Lucy gives

spiritual counseling to Puzzle, who shakes, afraid to face Aslan after his disobedience. Lucy gives the same advice that she gave her sister Susan years before, when Susan felt too afraid to face Aslan. Lucy says, ““You’ll find it will be all right when you really do”” (*The Last Battle* 208). She offers guidance to Puzzle, representing the strength of female leadership which extends even in new Narnia. Lucy acts as the gentle, grounding female presence, while Jill is her younger, more active companion. Lewis ends the novel with several beautiful images of the new land. Perhaps the most beautiful of them all is his description of Jill climbing up the waters of a rushing waterfall (*The Last Battle* 217). The bounds to her adventures are limitless now, Jill realizes, and this image is a banner for the modern spiritual woman.

CHAPTER FOUR

Interactions with the Divine in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

In tandem with the spiritual attributes of the women in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis uses interactions with the divine Aslan to form the spiritual narrative of his female characters. The women consistently grow in spirituality as the novels progress, culminating in *The Last Battle* where the characters arrive at an eternal residence which Aslan brings them to. Starting in *The Magician's Nephew*, the human characters experience an awe towards Aslan akin to fear and trembling. This awe is a prevalent response to Aslan's power throughout the series, but this response evolves over time. Aslan's interactions with the female characters offers them a unique fulfillment which they were not previously exposed to. This fulfillment brings the women great joy, because Aslan often acts as playmate and counselor. Interacting with divinity also causes the women to experience the depth of sorrow. As the women develop personal relationships with Aslan's character, all that is opposed to Aslan in the world becomes more disheartening and tragic to them. Aslan uses these moments of sorrow to strengthen and discipline the spirituality of the female characters. The result of this refinement is ultimately confidence. Aslan's presence allows the women to assume greater assurance in themselves and the world around them, and he exists as a figure of true empowerment. While the novels focus primarily on the human characters navigating the spiritual land of Narnia, Aslan becomes the true focus, as the characters near closer to his presence. It is Aslan who elicits emotions and spiritual growth from the women. Through his might and

miraculous actions, Aslan elicits awe from the characters. Once they enter into relationship with him, Aslan provides a fresh sense of fulfillment for the women, who before lived their lives void of this wholeness. The fulfillment Aslan provides gives the females ultimate spiritual satisfaction, but does not guard them from the sorrows of the world, in fact, it enhances their understanding of pain. As the women grow in their spiritualities, Aslan disciplines them to overcome obstacles such as sorrow or selfishness. The result of Aslan's interaction with the women of Narnia is not just an emotional confidence, but a spiritual confidence. The confidence of the female characters contributes to the positive portrayal of spirituality in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The introduction of Aslan to each female character in the series is marked by awe. The women recognize that Aslan is large and majestic in appearance, but also that he has the power to form and understand all things. Because of Aslan's divine sense of understanding, he knows and relates with the female characters even before meeting them; he is an active presence. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Polly witnesses Aslan forming the creation of Narnia, and begins to "see the connection" (*The Magician's Nephew* 39). Polly is too excited to be afraid, unlike the others, because she begins to comprehend that Aslan is strong, but also good. The combination of power and goodness within Aslan creates a perfect balance in the newly created Narnia, and Polly sense this peace. In contrast to the peace that Polly feels, Jadis is filled with dread in the presence of Aslan. Jadis, The White Witch, is capable of leading a rebellion against Aslan. She can speak hatred towards him, as well as inflict physical pain towards him that leads to death. The reader may initially find that Jadis is an exception to the women who are awestruck by Aslan, but this is not true. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Mrs. Beaver

notices that Jadis can't look Aslan in the eyes (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 85). She can transgress the divine through slander or violence, but she is unable to look him in the eyes. This comment suggests that it is Aslan who allows Jadis to transgress him, and that she is truly his inferior, and that is why she cannot meet his gaze. Jadis too is in awe of Aslan's power, so much so that Mrs. Beaver, another woman of Narnia, takes notice. The Pevensie sisters are the women with whom *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* centers around, and their initial connection with Aslan also reveals his superiority to them. Aslan does not assert his divinity over Susan and Lucy, but the girls still understand that he is the possessor of all knowledge. Their awe leads them to acknowledge Aslan's omnipotence, and spurs Susan to ask Aslan questions about the Emperor's Deep Magic (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 156). The sisters take interest in Aslan's superiority, and are in awe of all they can learn from him. In *The Silver Chair*, Jill is far less comfortable with Aslan's divinity. Jill describes her meeting with Aslan as frightening, but in a unique way (*The Silver Chair* 21). She fears the power of Aslan, specifically his power to know her well, though they have only physically met moments before. Aravis, another assertive woman of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is also resistant to Aslan's power at first (*The Horse and His Boy* 144). Aravis thinks that the lion is attempting to attack her, and is riddled with fear, only to later discover that Aslan was protecting her.

These instances of awe continue in the women's relationships with Aslan, and they exist to remind the women of Aslan's presence, even when he is not physically before them. In *The Silver Chair*, Jill experiences the miracle of Caspian receiving his new body (*The Silver Chair* 253). Caspian, now an old, dying man, has great faith in

Aslan's provision. Such a miracle provides hope for Jill, who will be entering into a terrifying battle. Even in the final moments of the series, Aslan reminds the humans that their valiant efforts in battle are not necessary to fulfill his plans. King Tirian asks Eustace how he and the other men and women made it to the new Narnia:

“So you never used the Rings?” said Tirian.

“No,” said Eustace. “Never even saw them. Aslan did it all for us in his own way without any Rings.” (*The Last Battle* 64)

Eustace, along with women like Lucy and Polly, are brought to new Narnia despite never accessing the Rings that they needed. This final act incites awe in Aslan's plan over human effort. The female characters are all confronted with Aslan's power and goodness, and their responses of awe establish how personal of a connection that Lewis's female characters have with the divine.

Aslan does more than leave his female followers in awe, because he also provides them with fulfillment. The moments which the women spend in the presence of Aslan bear greater significance than the other events in the series, and Lewis emphasizes this distinction. Lewis utilizes poetic language to express the beauty and meaning that Aslan contributes to the lives of the female characters. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Susan and Lucy walk with Aslan, and pet his fur. Lewis writes that they “buried their cold hands in the beautiful sea of fur and stroked it and, so doing, walked with him” (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 164). This illustration of the sisters warming their hands in the vastness of Aslan's fur suggests comfort. Aslan offers them warmth and soothing, and these effects of his presence are the fulfillment that the girls had been lacking before. Susan and Lucy are desperate to continue walking with Aslan, and they speak of their devotion to him. It is significant that the women are following

beside Aslan, because their physical following of him is allegorical for their spiritual following of him. Susan and Lucy are devoted to following the spiritual guidance of Aslan, and trust him as their deity. The result of following beside Aslan is an unprecedented fulfillment. Susan and Lucy experience great joy with Aslan: laughing, running, playing (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 179). The energetic playfulness of their relationships with Aslan represents purity. To follow Aslan is to be filled with joy, like a child. Following Aslan also quenches every other desire, like an eternal drink of water. Just as Christ in the Bible tells his followers that those who drink of the water he gives them will never be thirsty again, so too does Aslan quench thirst. Amidst running with Aslan, Lucy and Susan notice that they can run fast and not feel at all tired or thirsty (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 180). Jill Pole experiences a similar sensation in *The Silver Chair*. Jill undergoes a spiritual conversion with the guidance of Aslan, and her conversion involves drinking water. Jill develops a painful thirst, and she must overcome her fear of the lion in order to reach the water which fulfills her need. Jill's thirst is evidence of the inadequacy of life without a relationship with the divine, according to Lewis. Jill grows closer to Aslan spiritually as she moves towards him physically, accepting the gift of the rejuvenating water. Jill is fulfilled in this moment, but this body of water also foreshadows a future fulfillment for her. One of the final images of *The Last Battle* is of Jill Pole climbing a waterfall, reaching a level of fulfillment in new Narnia not limited by gravity. This parallel shows the longevity of Aslan's fulfillment for the female characters he guides. Lewis does not confine his female characters to a fulfillment of earthly marriage as many texts do, but instead showcases the vast joy and meaning that Aslan gives them each.

The joy that Aslan provides his followers is coupled with a deeper understanding of the sorrow that pervades without him. Susan and Lucy dance and run and adventure with Aslan, but only after enduring the hardship of his death. It is Susan and Lucy who walk with Aslan to the stone table, and it is they who would find him killed the next morning. The girls kiss and cry over Aslan, not afraid to touch his dead body (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 178). Though only young women, the Pevensie sisters act with surprising maturity after Aslan's death. The women hold Aslan, and take off the ropes which bind his body. They recognize the horror of his death and do not shy away from the grief which overtakes them. This is the first instance of grief in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and it is crucial that Lewis saves this experience for the female characters. Lewis writes Aslan's death to be experienced only by Susan and Lucy as a parallel to the gospel of Luke in the Bible, in which Mary and Mary Magdalene weep over Jesus's death. These women then discover the empty tomb of Jesus, just as Susan and Lucy discover the empty stone table. Perhaps this parallel is meant to highlight a stereotype, in which women are the only emotionally expressive gender. In this case, Lewis would assign grief to Susan and Lucy because they are female and delicate of heart. An alternate perspective suggests that Lewis chooses Susan and Lucy to witness the death of Aslan to prove that women are spiritually important. The women characters are not kept at a distance from Aslan and his power, but are kept closest to him. This perspective celebrates Susan and Lucy's femininity, because Aslan allows these women to participate in such an emotionally weighty event. It could be inferred that the death of Aslan is a distinctly feminine experience, and that Aslan equipped only women to endure the loss of the divine.

The resurrection of Aslan does not end the existence of sorrow in the lives of the female characters. Even in the final moments of the series, just before the humans enter new Narnia, Lucy cries. She is overcome with sadness at the sight of the lost dwarves. The dwarves refuse to accept Aslan as their ruler, and instead burrow themselves into the ground. Lucy cannot bear the notion of excluding the dwarves from new Narnia, and pleads with Aslan:

“Aslan,” said Lucy through her tears, “could you—will you—do something for these poor Dwarfs?”
“Dearest,” said Aslan, “I will show you both what I can, and what I cannot, do.” (*The Last Battle* 183)

Aslan replies that he cannot force the dwarves to trust him, and this brings Lucy great sorrow. Though Aslan can provide fulfillment for all people, he cannot force them to accept that fulfillment; it must be their own choice. According to Lewis, the divine can only be accepted through free will. Lucy is saddened by the dwarves’ free will, which allows them to reject salvation. Sorrow is an integral part of interacting with the divine in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, yet the divine one continuously guides the female characters through these trials.

Aslan’s guidance towards the women in these novels can be understood as parental discipline. As the divine, Aslan is perpetually present in the lives of the female characters, and intercedes whenever they go astray. The women wrestle with Aslan’s discipline, but always choose to follow his instruction in the end. This appears to be an oversimplification of divine wisdom. The women at times make unjust decisions when Aslan is not there, but when Aslan is present, they always obey. The relationship between discipline and obedience would be more complex in *The Chronicles of Narnia* if Lewis depicted the female characters disobeying Aslan on occasion. Perhaps Lewis means to

suggest that it is impossible to disobey Aslan after choosing to follow him. Or perhaps Lewis romanticizes the challenges that the women face. In either case, Aslan offers guidance to the women when they fail to act rightly. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Aslan instructs Lucy to heal the others in battle, and not only her brother Edmund (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 197). Lucy is selfishly tempted to only heal her brother, and save the rest of her healing gift, but Aslan encourages her to think of others first. Not only does Aslan lead Lucy towards selflessness, but he also instills in her a greater purpose. Aslan advises that Lucy heal all the others, making her the designated healer. Because she heeds his advice, Lucy assumes an important new title in Narnia. Similarly, Jill is given a list of instructions by Aslan in order to complete her quest, yet she forgets his words along the way. Aslan appears throughout *The Silver Chair* to remind Jill of the steps, and recites them to her repeatedly with patience (*The Silver Chair* 24). Aslan is not harsh with Jill when she forgets his words, but disciplines her with gentleness. Aslan notes that Jill won't be able to see the plan clearly now, but will understand his instruction later (*The Silver Chair* 25). Aslan speaks his plan to Jill, who will not understand it until it has come to fruition, and this is an allegory for the providence of God. Jesus tells Peter in the gospel of John that Peter does not understand who Jesus is now, but will understand later. Lewis parallels Peter's discipleship with Jesus to Jill's discipleship with Aslan. In *The Silver Chair*, Aslan mentors Jill in a direct manner, but in *Prince Caspian*, he guides Lucy in a more subtle fashion. In this instance, Lucy is not being guided towards a quest, but rather guided away from vanity. The enchanted book that Lucy encounters tempts her to use magic for her own selfish reasons, such as to make herself more beautiful. Aslan appears, giving Lucy the strength to avoid

this temptation (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 165). Aslan's discipline for his female followers is dynamic, and also a sign of spiritual maturity in the female characters. Lucy and Jill are the two characters whom Aslan disciplines the most, and they are also the two women who interact with Aslan most in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. The implication is that the more spiritual depth that the women acquire, the more they Aslan notice Aslan's aid when they are in need. This discipline bolsters up the female characters, forming them into strong spiritual leaders.

Lewis creates female characters that are spiritually mature, and also confident. The confidence that each female character adopts through a relationship with Aslan represents modern female empowerment through spirituality. It matters not the spiritual maturity of the women, because all of the women who interact with the divine are strengthened. In *Prince Caspian*, Susan spends the majority of the novel wallowing in doubt and frustration, and refuses to acknowledge Aslan's presence. When Susan finally does meet with Aslan, Aslan does not punish her disobedience, but rather calms her fears (*Prince Caspian* 162). Susan is given encouragement from Aslan because he empathizes with her fear. Human judgment would deem Susan inferior because of her doubting, but Aslan's divine judgment deems Susan as worthy of confidence. *The Horse and His Boy* reveals that Aravis is not condemned for her ignorance either. Perhaps a traditional religious text would scold these women for their lack of submission and obedience, but *The Chronicles of Narnia* does not. Like Susan, Aravis does not yet trust Aslan, and prays to the Calormene gods that she knows of (*The Horse and His Boy* 37). It is Aslan who hears her prayers, and sends aid unbeknownst to her. Aslan uses the community around Aravis—such as Hwin and Shasta—to instill confidence in her. The female

characters in Lewis's novels obtain personal confidence as they grow more confident in Aslan's abilities. It is as if Aslan imparts his divine confidence onto the human women who seek his support. Jill Pole is a prime example of transferred confidence. Jill first sees Aslan in *The Silver Chair*, and he is forming wind out of his own breath. Aslan rectifies Jill's fatal mistake of leading Eustace off the edges of the cliff, and need only blow air from his mouth to save Eustace (*The Silver Chair* 16, 26). Jill begins to believe in Aslan's power, because she witnesses the ease with which he saves Eustace. Jill grows even more in confidence later in novel, when she has forgotten the signs that Aslan entrusted her with. In a dream, Aslan comforts her, and gives her the intuition to find the right path (*The Silver Chair* 120). With the help of Aslan, Jill is able to accomplish her quest, and this not only assures Jill of Aslan's divinity, but also of her own usefulness. By the time of *The Last Battle*, Jill is convinced of Aslan's power, and also convinced that he will supply her with the necessary strength to follow him. In response to the dwarfs who don't believe that Aslan is divine, Jill says, "But I've seen him. And he has sent us two here out of a different world" (*The Last Battle* 91). Jill is so confident in her mission and her deity that she attempts to persuade those around her. Jill's spiritual journey is not immediate, but evolves over time. Lewis's development of Jill as a spiritual leader indicates a sanctification process. As Jill continues to grow in confidence of her spirituality, and herself, she shares her spiritual views with the dwarves and others around her. Jill becomes more optimistic because of her spirituality, viewing life as "the adventure that Aslan would send them" on (*The Last Battle* 117). Just as Susan and Aravis's fears are mitigated by Aslan's sovereignty, so too are Jill's worries about the world. A relationship with Aslan offers the female characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

a chance to assume full confidence in themselves and the life they live. While many spiritual texts suggest that women must give up their own confidence in order to submit to a deity, Lewis suggests the opposite in his fictional series. The women in these novels are given a modern confidence and authority over their own fears, and achieve this through trusting in Aslan as the divine.

The Chronicles of Narnia is one of the few fictional series in which female characters interact extensively with the divine. The women in Narnia are paralleled to characters from the Christian Bible, and participate in spiritual leadership. Aslan relates to his female followers as a father relates to a daughter. He protects and leads the women in the series such that they become more righteous versions of themselves. The female characters are each in awe of Aslan when they are first introduced to him, and this awe serves as a glimpse into the fulfillment the women experience once they choose to follow Aslan. The fulfillment and joy that each woman partakes in as a follower of Aslan is unprecedented in their lives, and marks the transformative power of a personal relationship with the divine. Aslan does not excuse his followers from sorrow, but rather guides them through the depths of pain. Aslan's death was experienced only by Lewis's female characters, suggesting that females have a unique spiritual capacity for sorrow which men do not have. Aslan notices these strengths in his female followers, and encourages them to be disciplined and selfless in their actions. This discipline is a mark of spiritual maturity, which the women of Narnia develop over time. The result of the women's spiritual refinement is confidence and empowerment. Interacting with the divine allows the women to expand their vision of their life and their abilities, because divine power is there to guide them.

To summarize, C.S. Lewis crafts complex spiritual journeys for the female characters of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis incorporates his own Christian perspective on gender and spirituality into his narratives, and intermingles both medieval and modern influences. This combination of medieval and modern writing styles creates a non-traditional allegory. The allegory of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and of Lewis's later novel *Till We Have Faces*, does not require spiritual resolution, but rather challenges the reader to struggle along with the characters in their spiritual trials. *Till We Have Faces* follows the character of Orual who actively rejects a spirituality, and the character of Psyche who sacrifices her life like Christ does in the Christian Bible. The dichotomy of these two sisters is evidence of the breadth of the spiritualities of Lewis's female characters by the time of his later novels. Not only this, but the spiritual trials of the female characters are distinct because of the various female character types Lewis employs. These character types reveal that spirituality can exist for women of all types of personalities, and at all stages of maturity. The diversity of spirituality in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is critical, because it gives a more accurate portrayal of female representation in literature. These character types coincide with the ideologies about women and their role in spirituality which Lewis presents in his fiction. While critics argue that Lewis punishes independent women in his fiction, he in fact celebrates freedom through spirituality for both men and women. The various character types and ideologies exist to reveal that all humans have access to spirituality. C.S. Lewis gives careful detail to the traits of his female characters, but the ideologies he discusses apply to all spiritual followers. Female interactions with the divine impact feminine spirituality even more so throughout the series. Each interaction with Aslan reveals the posture of the female characters towards the divine.

The divine causes spiritual development for the women in Narnia, bringing them fulfillment and refinement along their journeys. The most compelling of these developments is the confidence which the divine instills in the female characters. In the end, rather than portraying limited, medieval notions of female characters, Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* showcases a modern femininity in which its female characters are empowered by their own spiritualities and by the divine who guides them.

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