

FANTASY, MORALITY AND IDEOLOGY:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF C. S. LEWIS' *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA*  
AND PHILIP PULLMAN'S *HIS DARK MATERIALS*

by

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A thesis submitted to  
The University of Birmingham  
for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

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## Abstract

This thesis begins with an introduction to children's literature, looking at its history in order to contextualise the texts under examination, and the specific arguments surrounding the study of children's books. It then looks closely at the complicated issue of ideology, specifically with regards to children's literature as a concept at the centre of any discussion of books for children. The discussion then investigates the nature of fantasy writing and the ways in which alternative worlds are used in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*. C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman use alternative world to very different ends, one to escape the present world and the other to deal with issues which concern the contemporary world. However regardless of Lewis' attempts to escape the present, his books still reflect his attitudes towards contemporaneity and in this sense are not escapist. It then looks at the morality expressed in each of their works and the various expectations and responsibilities of children's authors. Lastly it looks at four key areas of Lewis' ideology which Pullman addresses and challenges in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Conclusions about the message conveyed in each authors' work follow.

I dedicate this, and always intended to dedicate this, to a person who said:

*‘Dedication’s are a bit naff, I mean you don’t buy a top and see in the label all the names of all the people who helped to make it possible...’*

... You have no idea how *impossible* this would have been without you, but I shan’t write your name.

With many thanks to my supervisor Murray Knowles who encouraged me to undertake this research and whose advice and help throughout have been invaluable.

Finally, thanks to my parents, family and many friends who have so kindly talked about this subject on countless occasions with interest, enthusiasm and encouragement; two of whom in particular cannot go unmentioned: Natalie Gardner and Rosalind Watts. Lastly I owe many thanks to Thomas Walker for his support, patience and proof-reading skills.

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## A Note on Abbreviations

This thesis is concerned with the primary texts which constitute C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. Throughout the thesis references are shown in author, date, page number format, however where quotations are taken from the primary texts the title of the texts are abbreviated for ease of reading. The editions of *The Chronicles of Narnia* which have been used were all published in the same year making the standard author/date format confusing.

*The Chronicles of Narnia* consist of the following seven books, in chronological reading order, and have been abbreviated thus:

<i>The Magician's Nephew</i> (1955)	<i>MN</i>
<i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i> (1950)	<i>LWW</i>
<i>The Horse and His Boy</i> (1954)	<i>HHB</i>
<i>Prince Caspian</i> (1951)	<i>PC</i>
<i>The Voyage of the Dawntrader</i> (1955)	<i>VDT</i>
<i>The Silver Chair</i> (1953)	<i>SC</i>
<i>The Last Battle</i> (1956)	<i>LB</i>

*His Dark Materials* consists of the following three books and have been abbreviated thus:

<i>The Northern Lights</i> (US - <i>The Golden Compass</i> ) (1995)	<i>NL</i>
<i>The Subtle Knife</i> (1998)	<i>SK</i>
<i>The Amber Spyglass</i> (2000)	<i>AS</i>

Where either term '*The Chronicles of Narnia*' or '*His Dark Materials*' is used, the whole collection of above-named works is being referred to.

# Chapter One

## Introduction to Authors

C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman are both controversial figures in the modern literary world. The children's literature of both men has been fiercely debated from both sides of the Atlantic. Since the publication of the first book of *His Dark Materials* in 1995, media and audience responses have been divided. These responses have been extreme and almost unreasonable: searching the web for Philip Pullman's books turns up astounding numbers of sites both praising and damning his fiction. *His Dark Materials* are largely either viewed as immoral, loathsome, irreligious, irresponsible propaganda; or praised as the flawless perfection of a 21<sup>st</sup> century visionary.

*His Dark Materials* was only fully published six years ago and there is still little in the way of literary criticism on his books. There are many book reviews and, since the stage production, many theatre reviews which are helpful, however a student of Pullman's work will, at present, be limited to a small number of critical approaches which deal with *His Dark Materials*. There are a few lengthy works which take a literary approach to Pullman's work but *Children's Literature in Education* has published several excellent articles taking a critical approach to his children's literature. Nick Tucker's *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Phillip Pullman* (2003) deals solely with Pullman, though not from a critical perspective, providing helpful background information. However there is an ever increasing body of work approaching Pullman's literature. Millicent Lenz with Carol Scott edited an excellent collection of essays on Pullman's trilogy, *His Dark Materials Illuminated* (2005), comprising of fourteen essays taking various approaches to Pullman's trilogy.

In the same way that *His Dark Materials* has divided audiences, provoking extreme responses, Lewis' children's Narnia books also tend to divide audiences, in particular because of their religious message. Chad Walsh (1979) defends any criticism of Lewis by ignoring the flaws of his writing and instead focusing on the Christian message in them. David Holbrook, on the other hand, has famously criticised *The Chronicles of Narnia* for their violence, racism, sexism and classism. Both Pullman and Lewis concern



themselves with religion in their works of fiction and it is possibly this dynamic which has given rise to these unreasonable responses.

Peter Hunt notes that defences of Holbrook's criticism on Lewis have been unconstructive and irrational:

As might be expected, there has been a good deal of heated reaction to this attack – but it seems to be based largely upon the naïve religious premise that to speak against Lewis is to speak against religion and the imagination.

(Hunt, 1994, 36)

Where religion is concerned in any capacity, there is generally passionate and divided opinion and the effect that this has had on responses to both of their works is unfortunate: Lewis and Pullman have been compared too often as a Christian and as an atheist. Lewis, *Narnia*, it has been assumed by many Christian readers, is a good piece of moral writing for children, given Lewis' status as a Christian writer. In turn the works of an atheist writer, it has been assumed by some extremists, can have no moral value. There are plenty of web sites and news articles claiming that Pullman's work is immoral, and in Christian journal *World*, Cheany compares Lewis and Pullman saying that in contrast to Lewis, Pullman has 'no moral criteria', (Cheany, 2001). Such unfounded opinions are not helpful on either side of the argument and do not reveal the depths of each of these authors children's literature.

It must be acknowledged here that despite recent criticism tending to condemn Lewis' children's books, they are persistently popular amongst children; so much so that *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* has recently been made into a successful film by Disney/Walden Media, (*The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 2005). The first book of *The Chronicles of Narnia* was published in 1950 and as a collection they have never been out of print. 'Children have, it seems, found them consistently bright.' (Hunt, 1994, 135) This is difficult because any adult who reads *The Chronicles of Narnia* cannot deny that the messages conveyed in them are cause for concern. The question of whether a child reader perceives the often racist or sexist tendencies of the texts must remain unknown, but there are deeper and more worrying assumptions in the text than those of class, race and gender which will be discussed here in detail.

The next chapter will look at the history of children's literature in order to situate Lewis and Pullman in the literary tradition to which they most accurately, though not exclusively, belong. Chapter three will then look at the criticism of children's literature and the particular difficulties and specialities which concern this literature for a young readership. A closer look at the complex issue of ideology will then be taken in chapter four as an important concept in this thesis and in a discussion of children's literature. This will be followed by an examination of Fantasy as a literary genre and one which both Lewis and Pullman influence and are influenced by in chapter five. The subsequent chapters look closely at the key texts which this thesis is concerned with, looking at them in their capacities as fantasy writing, moral writing for children and finally the intertextual relationship between *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*.

Though their other works do not enter the discussion of this thesis, Pullman and especially Lewis, have written many other works of importance. Lewis, as a Christian apologist and an academic wrote prolifically and his writing, in particular in the former capacity, is well respected and widely read. As a Christian who was himself converted by, what he called, the evidence, his writing answered many of the common question waged against the Christian faith. *Mere Christianity* (1952) is considered a classic in Christian apologetics and aimed to reassert the main arguments of Christianity for both uneducated people and his contemporary intellectuals.

Pullman's background as a school teacher has led him into writing via children's fiction and before he wrote *His Dark Materials* he wrote extensively. His first book was published as early as 1972, *The Haunted Storm*, and between 1985 and 1994 *The Sally Lockhart Quartet* was published. This Quartet comprising of *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985), *The Shadow in the North* (1986), *The Tiger in the Well* (1991) and *The Tin Princess* (1994) exemplifies Pullman's intense interest in different forms of writing and experimentation.

## **Chapter Two**

### **History of Children's Literature**

A reading of any type of literature taken out of context is fruitless and unrealistic. It is important that the particular influences of children's authors be looked at and that the implications of a book being a 'children's book' are understood. It is necessary to understand that children's literature is not one single form, but a grouping of books which vary in form, style and genre in the same way that 'adult fiction' does. It is helpful to use the term 'children's literature' because statements can be applied to its texts with rewarding insights. All children's books, with the exception of a handful, are written by adults for children. Also, all children's books, once again with the exception of a handful, are read by both adults and children but criticised by adults. In no other form of literature could such a statement about the author, reader and critic be made.

Though this chapter aims to cover the history of the children's literature, the limitations of this short piece have meant that some omissions have been necessary. Where possible all works of importance and significance have been mentioned.

#### **Early Children's Literature: Moral Foundations**

Children's literature has always existed. From the fourteenth century adventure stories recited in verse of European romantic descent to folklore kept alive through the oral tradition, storytelling and childhood seem to accompany one another synonymously. However, in the mid to late eighteenth century a printed form of literature emerged that we can call 'children's literature' as we now know it. This is important because it is the natural starting point for an historical study of children's literature. It is difficult to start earlier due to the relatively small amount of printed material preceding this period. Most studies of the history of children's literature start around the middle of the eighteenth century.

The literature which emerged in the eighteenth century was highly didactic and moralistic. Furthermore there was a prevalent evangelical tone to them: the children's book was seen by many as a place to preach and instruct. In these early children's books 'correct' moral behaviour in the child characters was rewarded and praised whilst defiance and disobedience were brutally punished. The literature for children of the late eighteenth century is reflective of the pious attitudes valued in contemporary society which authors and patrons of this literature wished to perpetuate. Dennis Butts attributes this piety to the rising middle classes, who, 'influenced by the Evangelical movement at the beginning of the century, ardently embraced the protestant work ethic.' (Butts, 1997, 153)

The early nineteenth century saw little development in terms of children's fiction. There were, however, some children's stories of importance produced in this period, notably Johann Davis Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812). The evangelical tone and style continued to dominate the literature until a major change occurred in the 1840s. Inspired by Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) a sub-genre of children's literature developed into what became the popular adventure story, aimed at adolescent boys. This was a significant development for children's literature because it changed the way that writing for children was approached. It has been described as 'the genre which lays the foundations of modern children's fiction.' (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 5)

This new genre did not entirely break with the evangelical past. Knowles and Malmkjær go on to point to Captain Marryat's adventure story *Masterman Ready* (1841) as one such narrative stemming from *Robinson Crusoe* which captures the excitement of adventure whilst retaining the moralistic tone found in earlier works such as Anna Laetia Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778), Mrs Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories* (1786) or *The Guardian of Education* (1802). Trimmer's writing was morally instructive in content and tone to children and parents. Alison Lurie says Trimmer cautioned 'parents against allowing their children to hear or read fairy tales, which she considered immoral because they taught ambition, violence, a love of wealth, and the desire to marry above one's station.' (Lurie, 1990, 17) This is important for two reasons. Firstly the perceived 'danger' of romance and fictive works for children is of great importance for this study later, but secondly this remark illustrates the control and authority which was being exercised with regard to children's books and reading.

The early nineteenth century saw great change take place in Britain. In an essay in 1829 Thomas Carlyle described the age as the 'Mechanical Age' (in Butts, 1997, 154), owing to the priority and emphasis on industry and all things rational, calculated and mechanical. This influential shift in society was reflected in the literature of the time as 'secularism and rationalism were becoming dominant values.' (Butts, 1997, 154) Interestingly in this period, religion became a far less common feature in children's literature and though moral instruction became fractionally less explicit by the end of the century it was once again a notable feature of children's books.

Captain Marryat inspired a number of authors: W.H.G Kingston who wrote *Peter and the Whaler* (1851), and R.M. Ballantyne (*The Young Fur Traders* (1856)), who followed his lead, and by the end of the nineteenth century there was a variety of such books available to boys. Notably the period produced nothing matching this aimed at adolescent girls. Books produced were didactic and domestic in content and whilst stories for boys had begun to move away from the explicitly moral, girls' stories remained religious and moral.

Knowles and Malmkjær describe traditional juvenile fiction as comprising of two 'wings'. One of these is the adventure story, discussed above; the other is the school story. As early as 1749, Sarah Fielding wrote *The Governess, or Little Female Academy*, often seen as the first novel written expressly for children. In it, the lives of the nine children and their governess are followed with the objective that the girls reform their past wrong doings through self determination. Set at boarding school and aimed at children, this novel set a trend, to a degree, which was then followed by later authors. Thomas Hughes famously followed this tradition with *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) set in Rugby public school. In a sense this 'wing' of children's literature moves in the same direction as the boys' adventure story in that the plot becomes more involving than earlier evangelical children's stories, whilst there remains a strong element of their moralistic and instructive tone. However, arguably the element of instruction is equally as strong in the school story as these earlier works. Hughes admits, 'my sole object in writing was to preach to boys: if I ever write again it will be to preach to some other age.' (Hughes, 1857/1880, xiii) Frederick Farrar's *Eric; or, Little by Little* (1858) was self-admittedly written to discourage boys from leading impure lives and to warn them of the dangers of immorality. Though these books were entertaining and popular with boys in their time, the moral tone is overwhelming: John Rowe Townsend has described them as

a 'moral documentary' (Townsend, 1990, 58). During this period, the school orientated story was popular, however due to the moralistic, and now dated, preaching tone, few of these books are popular with young readers today.

The 1860s saw a huge growth in a literature written specifically for children, which is in part attributed to social changes and partly to economic changes. As printing became more efficient and the cost of books dropped, literacy increased. (See Rustin and Rustin, 2001, chapter 1) This period saw an ever growing demand for books which publishers met, supplying books designed for young readers on mass for the first time. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, adolescent male fiction was a well established genre and was largely formulaic. School fiction was invariably a classist literature, set in public school, condemning bullying and cheating whilst condoning honour and decency. It has been seen as a trivial literature, stock in its ingredients and unimaginative in its style. Similarly, 'the boys' adventure stories from the 1840s onwards can all be seen, to some extent, in 'formulaic terms' (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 10). This literature has since received far less critical attention compared with the period of literature that followed.

### **The First Golden Age of Children's Literature**

At the same time in England, another significant development was taking place in children's literature which Knowles and Malmkjær term another 'strand' of development. It is in the late nineteenth century that fantasy fiction for children begins to be produced with identifiable unifying features.

Fantasy is defined by Carpenter and Pritchard thus:

A term used (in the context of children's literature) to describe works of fiction, written by a specific author (i.e. not traditional) and usually novel length, which involve the supernatural or some other unreal element.

(Carpenter and Pritchard, 1984, 181)

It is in this strand of literature that the most popular authors of this era were successful, most of whom are still known and read today. Writers like Macdonald, Grahame, Kingsley, Carroll, Barrie, and Milne all produced literature in this period, which has been described as 'The First Golden Age' of children's literature. Seen generally to start in the

1860s, and include literature produced until around the first decade or so of the twentieth century, this period's writers have earned themselves a permanent and somewhat prestigious place in the canon of children's literature.

The publication of Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863) has been seen as one of the key texts that began this era of children's literature. It is imaginative where previously mass-opinion held that children should read factual material; it departs from reality where many thought that such a thing would leave a child unable to detect the difference between reality and fantasy; and it is also moral, 'a moral tale presented as a fairy tale...' (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 16).

Fantasy has its roots in the fairy tale, however where the fairy tale world,

assumes magic in the same way a realistic novel assumes its absence, fantasy fiction may incorporate a magical element, but when it does, that element, far from being assumed, is fantastic relative to the realistic aspects of the work.

(Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 17)

In other words fantasy exaggerates the magic or supernatural elements which it contains. Fantasy literature assumes the existence of its supernatural elements within the framework of the text to the same degree that realistic fiction assumes its own facts founded in the material world.

Probably the most important texts written at this time, instrumental in establishing not only a fantasy genre but also modern children's literature, are Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Alice through the Looking Glass* (1871). The *Alice* books are the first books to truly break away from the moral tones of children's literature and fully indulge in the imagination, establishing a new way of writing for children.

Barbara Wall praises the writers of this period. She says they were:

Innovative, skilful and original writers who sought individual solutions to writing for children in fiction, and found, at least when they were most successful, individual indeed sometimes highly idiosyncratic, voices.

(Wall, 1991, 40)

Though these writers were openly moving away from the explicitly didactic, there is still a conscious effort seen to take on board what people at the time felt children should be reading. With the exception of Carroll, they do not break with the moralistic past, good

behaviour is still uniformly rewarded, whilst naughty behaviour reprimanded. Furthermore, the literature of The First Golden Age is characterised by an idealisation of childhood which is difficult to condone in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The period from the 1860s to the early twentieth century saw an extraordinary explosion of creative and imaginary writing for children which was not matched until the period known as 'The Second Golden Age'. Between the two world wars little in the way of innovative or creative children's literature was produced. Though Tolkien published *The Hobbit* in 1937, he did not complete the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy until after the war, and it was not until the 1960s that it became widely popular.

### **The Second Golden Age of Children's Literature**

The years after World War II saw the commencement of the so called Second Golden Age of children's literature. For many Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) marks the beginning of this age though Tolkien is of major importance not least because of the influence he had upon writers in later decades.

Tolkien triggered what was to become another crucial development in children's literature. Not only did he write at a time when the so called second golden age was blossoming, he also marked the beginning of a trend which continues today of pairing fantasy with theology in children's books. This is evident in many major works which are clearly influenced by Tolkien. His close friend C.S. Lewis for example combined Christian theology with fantasy in his Narnia books and it is known that in their literary group, The Inklings, they discussed their literary projects. It is also worth noting that Tolkien's theology in his fantasy was far less explicit than Lewis' and that Tolkien was not an advocate of Lewis' exploration of religion through fantasy. In particular, Tolkien objected to the Christian allegory in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, though Lewis' himself denied the allegorical nature of the books.

Alongside this merging of fantasy with theology is the trend to merge dominant elements of fantasy with epic adventure in children's books. Tolkien and Lewis do this in their fictional works and it is a trend which persists into this century with writers like Ursula



Le Guin, Alan Garner, Philip Reeve, Philip Pullman and J. K. Rowling among many others.

The twentieth century has also been important in terms of an expansion in other types of children's literature. There have been significant developments in realism for children. In a sense, the form of the novel has been used as diversely for children as it has for adult fiction where it originated. Robert Westall's *The Machine Gunners* (1975) has been praised for its exploration of the world of the modern child with realistic relationships, situations and settings. Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War* (1973) also describes the world from the point of view of the child, exploring the contemporary, real world. Also the extensive works of Roald Dahl can hardly go unmentioned. Despite resistance from critics and parents, Dahl's work has been popular with children for the last 30 or so years. His subversive presentation of the family (in particular adults) and his gruesome punishments are wildly attractive to a child reader and Dahl has met with unfathomable success.

Other children's writers have met with huge success tackling contemporary social issues which affect children. Jacqueline Wilson's success is almost unmatched having been on countless shortlists and has won many awards, including the Smarties Prize, and the Children's Book Award. *The Story of Tracy Beaker* won the 2002 Blue Peter People's Choice Award, a testimony to her popularity with children.

Morality has been a strong and dominant theme in all children's literature but in particular in fantasy literature, which has an even stronger and arguably longer relationship with both children and morality.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Children's Literature: An Introduction**

Children's literature is a complex term to apply to a body of texts which by name seem to have nothing in common other than the ages of their audience. Children's reading is not confined to that which is intended for them and defining the term 'child' in itself is not without complication. Children's books collectively form a body of literature which is broad and varied. It is useful to look at them as a whole because there are distinct features which apply to almost all books for children. This literature is subject to study and interest from a number of professions: articles on children's texts are found in anything from education reviews to theologically discursive journals. Children's literature is not always looked at in the same way as other literatures. Its readership is viewed as requiring a form of protection. Consequentially the most common questions asked of a text for children are concerning its suitability, content and ideological stance. Children's literature is invariably a communication from the experienced adult to the inexperienced child and this relationship means that children's books constitute a powerful and important literature. Aside from this, children's literature is important in the same way that any literature is important. It accounts for a vast and significant contribution to English literature as a whole, the value of which must not be ignored or underestimated.

The term 'children's literature' at first sounds like a simple term used to point to books for children. However the meaning of this simple term is a heavily debated topic and its use has been exhaustively discussed. Critics have laboured over defining this term, drawing boundaries around the body of literature and making generic statements about the way this literature for a young readership works. The exercise of defining the term is helpful insofar as it helps us observe patterns and similarities which we can helpfully apply to the genre: through knowing how these texts tend to operate we can embark on intelligent discussion of them.

It is important to observe the specific ways in which children's literature, as a literary grouping, tends to function. It is a more complex literature to draw boundaries around than many. It is difficult to be conclusive about who the audience of such a literature is and in many ways it is more problematic literature to criticise. Hunt says when we enter the world of children's literature we are entering a world where the core of the texts is concerned with *play*, and where 'the pleasure of the text' is foremost. (Hunt, 1994, 26)

### Classifying Children's Literature

The first important task is to distinguish which books we are talking about when we say 'children's literature'. Does children's literature signify books which were written with a child audience in mind or are we simply referring to books which children themselves read, whether they were intended for children or not? The problem is that many books which seem to be children's books are often not read by children and other texts which were not intended for children are very popular with them. If either of these is true of a book should we then necessarily exclude it from an imagined canon of children's literature? The problem with children's literature is that children themselves are often left out of the equation.

Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* is universally categorised as a children's book, and a classic at that, yet it is probably more widely read by adults, be it in a nostalgic capacity. Sawyer describes *The Wind in the Willows* as a text, '...clearly "masquerading" as a children's book...' (Sawyer, 2003, 15). The problem with children's literature is that almost all the power lies with the adult rather than the child and so a book can become a 'children's classic' with very minimal positive response from children. Adults, in their various capacities, have the buying power, publishing power, critical power and the power to dictate to the child what they should read. Adults, of course, are not inclined to abuse such power malevolently and those involved in children's literature are on the whole concerned with the child primarily, but the manifestation of such an interest affects all literature for children. Though an adult may guide a child to read a book with intentions of it 'doing them good' similar guidance cannot so easily be given for enjoyment of the text.

Barbara Wall's extensive work in the field of audience with regards to children's literature draws children's writing into three modes of address. The first she calls 'single address', which is a direct address to the child with no awareness of an adult reader. The second she calls a 'double address', which addresses the child reader and the adult reader at different points in the text. The narrators of these texts will address child narratees,

overtly and self-consciously, and will also address adults, either overtly, as the implied author's attention shifts away from the implied child reader to a different older audience, or covertly, as the narrator deliberately exploits the ignorance of the implied child reader and attempts to entertain an implied adult reader by making jokes which are funny primarily because children will not understand them...

(Wall, 1991, 35)

Thirdly, Wall says that writers address both implied adult and child readers based on 'the nature and strength of their performance...' (Wall, 1991, 35), and this she calls 'dual address'. Wall notes that double addresses are far less common in modern children's literature and that C.S. Lewis was one of the last writers to use it in children's writing. Single and dual addresses however, are more common in recent writing for children due to the shift in attitudes towards childhood and children's reading in the C20th.

Pullman's trilogy is one work which could certainly be said to have a dual readership. It is widely read for pleasure by both children and adults, in the same way that Rowling's Harry Potter books are. Arguably, these books are largely read by adults based on the 'strength of their performance', rather than in any academic or investigative capacity connected to children. Pullman does not address the child or adult reader explicitly he simply addresses a reader – child or adult. Pullman's dual address is perhaps indicative of his modernity given that Barbara Wall suggested dual addresses have only become widely used in the C21st. In the same way, Lewis' double address is reflective of his antiquity. He speaks at times to the child and, often in an aside, addresses the adult also.

Most classics of children's literature are accompanied by similar problems as Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. Double readerships have existed for as long as a distinct children's literature has: texts as early as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1863) certainly used 'double addresses'. Books published in the same period as Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books were greatly enjoyed by children, but were often the sort of children's book, 'that could be fully appreciated only by grown-ups.' (Matthews, 2002, 17) Though the protagonist is a child, much of the material is adult in content and many of the jokes ones that only an adult would understand. This does not mean that it is not *for* children but it

may mean it is not particularly popular with them. When it comes to children's books dual readership is also an important issue for the author to consider: a book which will be read aloud by an adult must entertain the adult reader as well as the child in order for it to be a success.

Furthermore, children's books are very often read and enjoyed by adults and not always in the capacity of the parent reading to a child. There is interest from a substantial adult readership in some children's books, an interest entirely independent from a connection to children. Books such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, written for children, and the *Lord of the Rings*, written for adults, exist between the worlds of adult and children's fiction finding equal popularity with both audiences. J.K. Rowling's immensely popular Harry Potter series, which is undeniably written for children, have been published with a 'grown-up' cover for its older readership, as have Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*.

Sheila Egoff points to two texts with the reverse problem. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* both contain adult, political content and were certainly not written with a child audience in mind but are nonetheless popular with children and have been since they were written. Both texts have been published in adapted and abridged versions in order to make them more accessible for children. Despite their popularity with children, Egoff excludes these texts from a supposed canon of children's literature on this basis: the authors did not write with the difficulties of 'writing for children' in mind (Egoff, 1981, 1).

Many critics like Egoff choose to define children's literature in this way, on the basis of the authors' intended or implied reader. However, should they be excluded from discussion if they are widely read by children? The argument lies in the perspective of the critic. If the critic is interested in the child, then all that the child reads should be taken into account; however where the interest is founded in literature, and therefore the author, then authorial intent is the only reliable guide.

There is a strong case in favour of using authorial intent as an indicator in the way Egoff does, and many critics would agree with this means of identification. Peter Hunt, though aware of the problems of using such means states that: 'the definition of children's literature is an immensely complex and variable one, and generally rests upon authorial intention (however deduced), or the reader 'implied' in the text...' (Hunt, 2001, xvi).

Children's literature is, by name, defined by its audience and therefore perhaps the intention for a child to read it is the most reliable guide.

Each critic in turn has their own criteria for distinguishing what they do and don't classify as children's literature. In *Narratives of Love and Loss* (2001) the psychoanalysts Rustin and Rustin make a marked move away from the debates about which texts are children's and which are not. They maintain that creating an imagined canon of children's literature is 'more of an obstruction than a help...' (Rustin and Rustin, 2001, 2). Instead they choose to look at works of fiction (mostly fantasy) about which they have something in particular to say. They favour an approach which looks closely at individual texts allowing them to make a more detailed and insightful discussion.

John Rowe Townsend, on the other hand, suggests that the classification of a book as children's or adults' is down to the publisher.

If he puts a book on the children's list, it will be read and reviewed as a children's book and will be read by children (or young people), if it is read at all. If he puts it on the adult list it will not – or at least not immediately.

(Townsend, 1990, 197)

This final addition is crucial because books packaged and marketed for adults have become popular children's books and many children's books have been republished with a new 'adult' jacket to appeal to its adult readership.

Karin Lesnik-Oberstein also supports this point of view saying, 'the definition of a 'children's book' is still variously based on publishers' and editors' decisions...' (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994, 5). This is true to a degree; however, when authors write with the intention of speaking to a child audience, and their work ends up being read by a child audience, surely we can say that authorial intent carries more responsibility for the classification of the book than the publisher?

### **Criticising Children's Literature**

Children's literature, restricted in a sense by its very terminology, is a literature for a particular and less experienced reader. In 1994, Peter Hunt described the place of

children's literature in the literary hierarchy as at the 'bottom of the heap'. He suggested that children's books be removed from the literary hierarchy altogether and 'be treated as a separate group of texts, without reference (at least in principle) to 'literature' as it is known and misunderstood.' (Hunt, 1994, 7) Hunt looks at children's literature as 'an important 'system' of its own, not as a lesser or peripheral part of 'high' culture.' (Hunt, 1994, 7) Hunt means here to make sure that children's literature is not compared to other literatures unfairly or unfavourably simply because it is for children. He says that 'much of the confused thinking about children's books stems from including them in – or reacting against their inclusion in – the standard hierarchy.' (Hunt, 1994, 7) It is important to contextualise children's literature and make comparisons within the field to understand its equality to literature as a whole. However, in practice, children's authors are influenced by and influence all the literature which surrounds them. By isolating children's literature from other texts in its criticism, its own attempts to transcend the implied limits of its classification are denied. Andy Sawyer has criticised Hunt saying he 'still speaks of children's literature as a subordinate genre which must be justified.' (Sawyer, 2003, 11)

Children's literature is all too often referred to as a 'genre', probably because it is treated as a genre and for ease of terminology, but it should not be referred to as such. Children's literature is a field of study; a grouping necessary for publishers who are targeting young readers; a term to point to books which belong in a certain area of the library or bookshop. It is a term for teachers and parents to use to point to books for pupils of a certain age and reading ability. Children's literature is a literary grouping rather than 'a genre' and this is important because referring to it as a genre assumes that it is all of the same subject matter: children. It is comprised of as many genres as the grouping 'adult literature' would, were such a term to be in common use.

Children's literature must not be criticised in isolation from other literature and its intertextuality taken into account despite the difficulty of comparison. Criticising children's literature is problematic precisely because it is for children. There is an increased emotional involvement with the literature of childhood and a subsequent intellectual distance. Hunt suggests that the reluctance to criticise it seriously is due to a fear that, 'the spell will be broken...' (Hunt, 1994, 2). It is difficult to criticise in a literary capacity because it is viewed so differently to other literature, with almost sacred or mystical perfection and idealism. The literature we read as a child is a cherished part

of childhood and deconstructing it, it is feared, may bring about a loss of the innocence with which it was read.

### **Reading and Childhood**

Defining which texts we are discussing under the heading 'children's literature' is a difficult task for the reasons outlined above and it is a similarly complex and inconclusive, yet necessary, task to define the term childhood. The perception of childhood by society is important not only in terms of who is reading children's literature but also crucially in terms of how children's authors write for their audience. Perceptions of childhood are forever changing and not just from one period to the next. Different societies and cultures have vastly different perceptions of childhood. Maturity amongst children from similar backgrounds varies enormously without taking into account social, economic and political factors. It is impossible to say that childhood ends at a certain age and in turn it is restricting to say that a children's book is for children up to a certain age.

Sheila Egoff defines children's literature as follows: she says that put simplistically it has 'two basic characteristics: it is writing *for* children (that is, people up to the early teens) and it is intended to be read as literature...' (Egoff, 1981, 1) Both of these distinctions are problematic when looked at more closely. The term 'literature' is difficult because it is commonly used to distinguish books of literary merit but also simply to point to reading material of any description. The later statement is difficult because the fairly recent development of teen fiction has meant that we cannot categorically or conclusively determine childhood as an age. In fact it is more helpful to be flexible on the matter. Knowles and Malmkjær include a wider range of texts: 'For us children's literature is any literature written and published for children and we include the 'teen' novels aimed at the 'young adult' or late adolescent reader...' (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 2) Childhood is not an easy age to draw boundaries around. Its beginning is marked from birth, but its ending is so variable that we cannot suggest an actual age at which it occurs. Hunt draws an apt and unrestrictive definition of childhood saying, 'perhaps the most satisfactory generalisation is that childhood is the period of life which the immediate culture thinks of as being free of responsibility and susceptible to education.' (Hunt, 1994, 5) He goes on



to say that from a literary point of view we can helpfully see a children's audience as one of 'developing readers'.

Children's books are a site of play, entertainment and development and often a book read as a child can make us feel deeply nostalgic later in life. Hunt sees children's literature as a crucial part of childhood and furthermore describes it as a 'root' of western culture. He emphasises the crucial role played by children's books in our culture, going so far as to say that 'its characters are part of most people's psyche' (Hunt, 1994, 1). There is something about children's books and the way we read them when we are children that make them special and it is therefore necessary to remember these differences when looking at them critically.

### **The Persistence of Children's Literature**

It is particularly interesting to note that some children's books seem to remain popular for a long time. Books written at the turn of last century are often as popular now as when they were written. Texts such as *Little Women* (1869), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *The Secret Garden* (1911) have been printed and reprinted and are still read by millions of children. As classics they are a natural choice for children to read and a natural choice for adults to buy. Hunt attributes this to the fact that children's books have a longer shelf life than other literatures. He suggests that this is because 'children seem to be less sensitive than adults to 'dated' content...' (Hunt, 1994, 8). However, Marshall (1988) attributes the persistent popularity of older children's books to the financial feasibility for publishing houses of re-printing ready written books. It is financially viable because the majority of the work has already been done but also because the generation with the buying power is likely to buy books which they cherished as children for their own children. Another contributing factor to the long 'shelf-life' of children's literature may be the nostalgia of the publishers themselves. They may publish old books wishing to share, with a new generation of children, the wisdom imparted to them by the great children's authors of their own childhood.

As mentioned briefly above, children's literature is subject to interest and influence from a number of groups. It is of interest to educationalists, psychologists, parents, teachers,

academics, children and publishers. Each of these groups has a different agenda and different reasons for their interest in the subject and so we find that the literature on the subject is diverse. Hunt says, that ‘children's literature is not so much suffering from neglect, as from a cacophony of approaches...’ (Hunt, 1994, 20) Hunt separates the people who are interested in children’s literature into two groups which he calls the “book people” and the “child people”. He outlines the conflicts which stand between the two groups saying that one has been accused of ignoring the child and the other has objected to academic study of children’s literature to such a degree that it has sacrificed intelligent discussion of the literature, (Hunt, 1994, 17). These extreme approaches which exclude either the book or the child are unnecessary if children’s books are looked at as literary artefacts which are read by children. ‘Books and readers are inevitably intertwined.’ (Hunt, 1994, 23)

Children’s literature must be looked at as an important literature and one deserving of serious critical attention. There are some who would argue that applying literary criticism to children’s books is a futile activity and one which ignores the special features of the field. In disagreement with the ‘child’ people who have argued this, Hunt goes on to point out that to look at children’s literature with the tools of literary criticism is actually ‘a tribute to the value of the subject...’ and shows them as literary artefacts which need to be taken seriously. (Hunt, 1994, 18) To look at children’s literature critically is to enhance rather than diminish its meaning.

Children’s reading is an important activity: books read as children influence us unlike any other literature we are exposed to. This alone is the most important and differentiating feature of children’s literature criticism. Child readers are developing readers and the literature which they read has an arguably more influential impact than the way an adult reads with experience and knowledge. With this in mind some have seen children’s books as somewhat sinister in their power to influence. When J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter books gained popularity, protests from evangelists and fundamentalists claimed that they were satanic in their presentation of a world without God or a Church. The books were feared to hold such persuasive power that there were suggestions they would corrupt young readers and encourage witchcraft.

Similarly, Roald Dahl’s subversive children’s literature was, certainly at the time, met with hostility from parents, teachers and critics alike. Though quantitative research has

shown him to have been the most popular author amongst young readers at certain times (Knowles, 1998), his commercial success is not matched with critical success. Since this research was undertaken, a great shift in popularity has taken place. Were the popularity of children's writers to be reassessed now it would, no doubt, demonstrate the overwhelming popularity of writers such as J. K. Rowling and Jacqueline Wilson. Hunt says:

Those books that have been accepted (however marginally) into the scheme of 'literature', or have been awarded the highest prizes, are most likely to remain unread by children; the others, like Enid Blyton or Roald Dahl or Judy Blume, are the most popular and, for practical purposes the most useful. The uncanonical works are the more likely to be of and for childhood, and less likely to conform to adult social and literary norms.

(Hunt, 1994, 6)

It is clear to see that using a term like 'popular children's literature' is not really possible without further explanation. It is necessary to ask with whom they are popular. Some of Dahl's children's work has been popular with adults, *Matilda* (1988) for example and, vice versa, some of his writing for adults has been popular with children. However, Dahl has met with pejorative criticism on the basis of some of his attitudes. Though less common now, some critics, (Michelle Landsberg, Eleanor Cameron) thought that Dahl was unsuitable reading for children. He was charged with criticisms such as sadism, violence and sexism as well as 'a generally unhealthy attitude.' (Hunt, 1994, 21)

It has been shown that the critical success of a book does not reflect its actual popularity with children. This is most apparent when we consider the controversy and criticism surrounding Lewis' Narnia books. Though they were written over 50 years ago now, they have never ceased to be popular with young readers. Despite the wealth of negative criticism with reference to their ideological content and their political incorrectness, they are still read and loved by children today. Similarly, despite the critical success of Pullman's books there is no guarantee that children will actually read them and in this curious fact lays the difficulty in dealing with children's literature. It is difficult to measure the popularity of a children's book because children have little buying power and little power in the way of criticism.

It was discussed above that children seem to be less sensitive to dated content, and that this may account, in part, for the persisting popularity of older books. Perhaps, with reference to the issue of audience, it becomes most clear that Pullman and Lewis are men of different generations. Lewis wrote using what Wall terms 'double address', whilst

Pullman uses 'dual address', (Wall, 1991, 35-36). Where C21st writers address their readers with modern attitudes toward childhood reading, Lewis' generation and those before him wrote with 'double address' because of a self-consciousness of the child audience and the parent reading to them. Perhaps the C21st century shift in attitudes towards childhood reading places less emphasis on the difference between childhood and adulthood therefore allowing writers to address both adult and child with one voice. In many instances Pullman's and Lewis' differences may be attributed to generation; however this does not fully account for the wealth of difference between the men. Given this, reliance should not be placed on the historical period within which they wrote to account for their differing attitudes towards writing for children, amongst other things.

## Chapter Four

### Ideology: The Power of Children's Literature

As an important and powerful literature, what is said in children's literature matters. Its audience is far reaching and its influence in our society is deep and significant. 'Literature written for children must constitute one of the largest and most important social domains in this country.' (Knowles, 1998, 2) In this capacity, what we find being conveyed in literature for children must be seen as important. Peter Hunt says, 'Children's literature is a powerful literature, and...such a power cannot be neutral or innocent, or trivial.' (Hunt, 1994, 3) Hunt goes on to describe children's fiction as, 'an ideological minefield.' (Hunt, 1994, 186) This discussion aims to display the degree and nature of this ideology and its power.

The word ideology was coined by Count Destuitt de Tracy (1754-1836) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to define *the science of ideas*. However its association with Marx and Napoleon Bonaparte over the following centuries left the word with a somewhat negative 'even pejorative' sense about it. (Knowles, 1998, 48) John Thompson also points out the negative sense of the word saying: 'To characterise a view as 'ideological' is, it seems, already to criticise it, for the concept ideology seems to convey a negative, critical sense.' (Thompson, 1990, 5) Despite attempts to neutralise the word, it still suffers this negative association. 'In the twentieth century, the term 'ideology' has never completely overcome its pejorative status, but nevertheless, the term is much used as a near-synonym for a belief or a set of beliefs and in particular it has been associated with political beliefs.' (Knowles, 1998, 51)

Carter and Nash have defined 'ideology' thus:

Ideology has been taken to mean several things but it can be understood in two main senses. The first is that of a classical Marxist conception of ideology as false consciousness, in which ideology is a distorted image of the real network of inequality and asymmetrical power relations which exist in societies. The second sense is that of

ideology as a socially and politically dominant set of values and beliefs which are not out there but are constructed in all texts especially in and through language.

(Carter and Nash, 1990, 20-21)

All literature is ideological in that language and ideology are inextricably intertwined. ‘It has been argued from a number of social and critical perspectives that language as a system of signification – what is commonly referred to as *discourse* – is endemically and pervasively imbued with ideology...’ (Stephens, 1992, 1) Language itself is the carrier of ideology and so, ‘a narrative without ideology is unthinkable: ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language.’ (Stephens, 1992, 8) In this respect, even the simplest language found in literature is loaded with social and political significance on some level. As a carrier of ideology literature has the power to persuade and change perspectives and beliefs. ‘Fiction must be regarded as a special site for ideological effect, with a potentially powerful capacity for shaping audience attitudes.’ (Stephens, 1992, 3) There is no literature which is neutral, innocent or free of an ideological position in the same way that no people could be described as free of ideology. ‘Ideologies impregnate a society’s mode of thinking, speaking, experiencing and behaving...’ (Carter and Nash, 1990, 21). Kimberly Reynolds points out that at times it may be easier to recognise the ideological biases of a text, for example in texts from the past rather than in contemporary ones, but says nevertheless ‘...it is important to remember that all texts are ideological...’ (Reynolds, 1994, 9).

The issue of ideology in literature has received somewhat more attention with regards to literature for children than it would were it for a less ‘vulnerable’ audience. This is for a number of reasons, two of which stand out as the most obvious and the most important.

The first is that children’s books have been seen as a site of socialisation. ‘Adults see it as their task to socialise children. (Socialisation here refers to the process by which values are transmitted to members of a society, in particular with a view to integrating them within the dominant value system.)’ (Knowles 1998, 54) Without necessarily having morbid intentions of indoctrination, adults may use children’s literature as a way of introducing societal normalities to a young audience to ensure that this manner of behaviour is carried forth into the next generation. This is inevitable because children quite naturally learn how we behave and think in society from adults. This is not necessarily an explicit process whereby the author instructs the reader, telling them how

to behave, speak or view the world but children's books are, whether they intend to be or not, always didactic in some way as they always involve an experienced adult conveying information to an inexperienced child. Peter Hollindale says, 'all children's literature is inescapably didactic.' (in Hunt, 1992, 30)

Children's literature plays a vital role in the process of socialisation. Stories always take place within the world to which a child is socialised and in cases where they don't it is exceedingly difficult for a writer to entirely depart from the socio-political foundations with which they themselves have been socialised. Even in fantasy where an author writes an adventure in another world altogether, it is difficult to escape the values, routines or institutions which make our society function. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), the Beaver family functions on the model of a British family (if a stereotypical one). Mr Beaver goes out into the cold with Peter to catch dinner, 'meanwhile the girls were helping Mrs Beaver to fill the kettle and cut the bread...' (*LWW*, 69). This is perhaps an unfair example as C. S. Lewis determinedly perpetuated an old fashioned model of not only the family, but of British life, but the assumptions that underpin this set up are communicated to the child reader on an implicit level. This example demonstrates the extent to which the institution of the family is ingrained in the Narnia books and the roles assumed by male and female characters.

Stephens discusses the process of cultural reinforcement with regards to the role played by society to integrate its new members:

Culture is an historical process of human objectification and the level and quality of a national culture depends on the socialisation developed by human beings to integrate young members into the society and to reinforce the norms and values which legitimise the socio-political system and which guarantee some sort of continuity in society.  
(Stephens, 1992, 1)

The second reason children's literature receives special attention with regards to ideological content, discussed in brief above, is the invariably unequal power relationship between reader and writer when it comes to literature for children.

Since there is an imbalance of power between the children and young people who read the books, and the adults who write, publish and review the books, or who are otherwise engaged in commentary upon or dissemination of the books, either as parents, or teachers, or librarians, or booksellers, or academics, there is here immediately a question of politics, a politics first and foremost of age differential.

(Sarland, 2004, 56)

The power of the author to transmit the values and beliefs of a society is not always used to convey convention. In some cases we see authors use children's literature to reshape conventional attitudes in a way that may perhaps be seen as undesirable by conservative society.

Since a culture's future is, to put it crudely, invested in its children, children's writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould audience attitudes into 'desirable' forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose.

(Stephens, 1992, 3)

Put like this, the presence of intentionally ideologically persuasive material in children's books could begin to sound rather sinister and authorial power to shape developing readers rather portentous.

Subversive children's literature which questions convention is not uncommon. On the contrary, many popular children's books express a mode of behaviour or a belief which is unconventional even rebellious. Ordinarily accepted voices of authority are thrown into question in such literature and we often find the authority of the child being honoured over that of the parent or teacher. Dahl is one such writer who deliberately undermines the authority of the adult to the delight of the child reader. In *Matilda* (1988), the parents are absurd and the authorial voice constantly challenges their parenting skills handing the authority and respect of the reader to Matilda, the child. Alison Lurie (1990) praises such works and points out that subversive literature 'will endure long after more conventional tales have been forgotten.' (Lurie, 1990, xi) Lurie explains:

The great subversive works of children's literature...mock current assumptions and express the imaginative, unconventional, non-commercial view of the world in its simplest and purest form. They appeal to the imaginative, questioning, rebellious child within all of us, renew our instinctive energy, and act as a force for change.

(Lurie, 1990, xi)

In this she includes such works as Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and Barrie's *Peter Pan* which show children in a position of authority and where adults are either absent or subject to mockery. Lurie also notes that these subversive works of literature are often the most popular ones.



Ideology does not exist in texts as a separate, recognisable entity. As discussed above ideology is imbedded in language but it also exists on several levels. According to Peter Hollindale (1988) it operates on three levels. These three types he calls, explicit ideology, passive ideology and inherent ideology, which is imbued in language as discussed above.

The first type Hollindale describes as an explicit, surface ideology. This is the kind of ideology that we can easily identify (Stephens, 1992, 9), it is overt and the author is aware of its presence. This type of ideology is largely present in 'books which advocate 'progressive' or 'enlightened' ideas.' (Knowles, 1998, 12) It is this kind of ideology that is easy to observe in early children's literature which was very often evangelical and deliberately didactic. Thomas Hughes's (1822-96) earlier quoted comment that he wrote children's books to 'preach to boys' comes to mind. Lurie sees this kind of tone in literature as synonymous with poor quality literature, having little entertainment value for any reader. She divides children's literature into what she calls 'the sacred texts of childhood' (*Tom Sawyer, Peter Pan, Little Women, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz*), and the literature which serves the sole purpose of socialising the reader into society. Lurie mocks the latter type of literature where the ideology is explicit and exists on the surface: 'Sit up straight dear. Don't go too far into the woods. Say thank you to Auntie Etta...' (Lurie, 1990, x)

The second type of ideology is that which the author is not necessarily aware of. Hollindale calls this passive ideology. This is the most powerful type of ideology. It is the 'implicit presence in the text of the writer's unexamined assumptions.' (Stephens, 1992, 10) This ideology may be virtually impossible to observe especially in contemporary texts where the values expressed by the author are in line with our own. Reynolds says: 'If we fail to notice the ideological stance of a contemporary text, it is because its messages are in accordance with our own point of view and therefore seem natural.' (Reynolds, 1994, 9-10) This type of ideology is very powerful in that it subconsciously penetrates every level of a text. Stephens says that the power of texts with passive ideology lies in the fact that, 'they consist of values taken for granted in the society that produces the text, including children.' (Stephens, 1992, 10) This type of ideology is more influential than explicit ideology because, 'the more explicit the ideological statement...the more likely there are to be problems... [i.e.]...the more likelihood there is of encountering reader resistance.' (Knowles, 1998, 62)

Where passive ideology dominates a text there is a reduced chance of meeting resistance from the reader because the author's assumptions preside with such force. These assumptions, Hollindale says, are 'dangerous' precisely because they get taken for granted. He says passive ideology reflects values which are taken for granted by both author and reader in a society 'which unthinkingly accepts them. In turn this means that children, unless they are helped to notice what is there, will take them for granted too.' (Hollindale, 1988, 30)

The third type of ideology is called inherent ideology and is that which is inherent within language. It is similar to passive ideology in that it is not a conscious product of the imagination. It is differentiated from passive ideology in that it is found within 'the codes which constitute the text', rather than the unconscious assumptions of the author's and the reader's values. (Stephens, 1992, 10) This type of ideology is similarly difficult to perceive because it is imbued in the text.

As Hunt says that children's literature is powerful and is therefore neither innocent nor trivial, we must consider the implications of what is said in the literature of Lewis and Pullman as serious and important. Furthermore, as children's books have been used as a means of socialising readers, or as Stephens says, to 'mould' audience attitudes into 'desirable' forms, we must consider authorial intention with caution. Lewis and Pullman both confront issues of a controversial nature with explicit ideology as well as subtly communicating their own assumptions through passive and inherent ideology. Carter and Nash say that ideology is, on one level, socially and politically dominant values which are constructed in all texts in and through language. In this sense it is important to look closely at the linguistic choices made by each author and where possible, this will be done.

Lewis and Pullman, in their capacities as children's writers, have drawn attention because of the issues which their literature deals with and because of the values that each set of children's books is perceived to represent. Lewis, in particular because of his passive ideology which has tended to be read, by his critics, as racist or sexist; Pullman because of his explicit ideology, which expresses a dislike for Christianity, the Church, God and Christian eschatology amongst other things. It is interesting to note that awareness of Lewis' passive and inherent ideology has been noted more commonly in recent years than by his contemporaries. Reynolds notes (Reynolds, 1994, 9-10) that it is easier to observe

the political and ideological assumptions in dated texts because the views are more likely to be at odds with ones own. This would explain the trend, though by no means rule, that modern critics view Lewis' underlying ideology as undesirable and that his contemporaries criticised the more explicit ideology in his Narnia books. In the same way, we must be conscious that though attitudes and political ideas expressed in *His Dark Materials* have been praised and criticised, there is a great deal of passive and inherent ideology present which is more difficult to observe, simply because it is less likely to conflict with our own unquestioned assumptions about the world.

Though Hollindale is dismissive of literature with explicit didactic content he says we should not 'underestimate the powers of reinforcement vested in quiescent and unconscious ideology.' (Hollindale, 1988, 30) Instructive ideology invariably centres itself on the moral conduct of the child. The last chapter showed how children's literature has been, since its foundations, a literature concerned with morality. Whether passively, or overtly, children's writers have shown a particular concern for themes of morality in their work and this is also true of Lewis and Pullman.

## Chapter Five

### Fantasy Literature

It seems to be more or less traditional for books on fantasy to begin with a collection of definitions, marking out academic or conceptual territory – and on the whole it seems to be a fairly defensive exercise.

(Hunt and Lenz, 2001, 9-10)

The two points that Hunt makes here will be crucial to this discussion of fantasy literature. Firstly discussions on the subject tend to begin with a list of definitions because there is generally a poor understanding of what fantasy actually is. In the past fantasy has not received the serious critical attention it deserves. Secondly it has been a largely defensive exercise because academics have been forced to justify their interest in the topic. Fantasy literature and children's literature have long been associated with one another and this has created the false illusion that fantasy literature is only for children.

This chapter on fantasy is, to a large degree, limited in that it looks only at English language fantasy. In a wider study of fantasy, more could be made of the variety of fantasy, but for brevity and relevance to the fantasies of C. S. Lewis and Phillip Pullman, it is necessary to make this restriction.

Doubtless most people would be able to name some of the features of fantasy literature and it is easy to imagine that almost all people would also be able to name some fantasy titles, but defining the term explicitly is actually a complicated task. Furthermore the negative misconceptions that the term 'fantasy' has suffered under make it necessary to define the term as far as possible, as doing so makes it clear that these are indeed misconceptions.

As with children's literature, defining fantasy in terms of the texts that constitute the genre is difficult and inconclusive. It has been widely suggested that a key text at the birth of modern fantasy writing for children was Lewis Carroll's *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) because for the first time we have a children's story which is creative,

imaginative and free from the didacticism of the moral tales which preceded it. This text has also been seen as one that gave birth to modern children's literature and also the beginning of the first golden age of children's literature. However in *Modern Fantasy*, C. N. Manlove makes it clear that he would not include *Alice* in a canon of fantasy writing. He says, '...where the supernatural is seen as a symbolic extension of the purely human mind ... the work in which it appears [is not] a fantasy. This is the case in the *Alice* books, where the happenings are presented as Alice's dreams.' (Manlove, 1975, 7) Manlove lays out explicit terms with which to define fantasy writing and therefore rules out *Alice*. (See below)

Hunt and Lenz say that the three most common misconceptions applied to the genre are that 'fantasy is formulaic, childish and escapist.' (Hunt and Lenz, 2001, 2) In the introduction to *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, they go on to dispel these myths about the genre. It is fairly easy to see where the first of these misconceptions, i.e. that fantasy is formulaic, comes from. Terry Pratchett says:

People ... think its all swords and dragons – which is as silly as saying that 'Booker books' are all about foul mouthed scots and lonely ladies taking tea on wet Thursdays.  
(Pratchett and Briggs, 1997, 467)

Dispelling this fallacy that fantasy is formulaic, Hunt says that 'original fantasy... is not hard to find' (Hunt and Lenz, 2001, 3), a suggestion easily backed up by looking at the texts which constitute the modern fantasy genre. By looking at some key fantasy texts and considering the array of styles, narrative techniques, characters and attitudes employed in each text, the word formulaic would be most difficult to apply. Though there are features that many have in common, they are not imaginatively repetitive. As writers or readers we cannot imagine far beyond what we truly know and so writing entirely originally, were it possible, would be rather an alienating experience for a reader. Hunt says:

Fantasy cannot be 'free-floating' or entirely original, unless we are prepared to learn a new language and a new way of thinking to understand it. It must be understandable in terms of its relationship to, or deviance from, our known world.  
(Hunt and Lenz, 2001, 7)

The second misconception under which fantasy suffers is that it is childish. There are a number of reasons why this generalisation has come about, not least the fact that children's literature and fantasy literature have a strong and well established connection. This relationship has been a beneficial one as far as the development of children's literature is concerned: children's fantasy publishing is a thriving industry. However,

where fantasy fiction has broken away from children's audiences it has, perhaps, suffered for some as a result of its association with children and therefore childishness. Tolkien said the following of fairy stories but the same is true of the association between children and fantasy. Tolkien says the relationship is, '... an accident of our domestic history. ... Children as a class neither like fairy-stories more nor understand them better than adults do.' (Tolkien, 1964, 34)

Furthermore, the act of reading fantasy requires the use of the imagination. Fantasy is, by name, the exploration of the fantastic. It is not the exploration of what can happen but what the writer (and reader) imagines *could* happen. In this sense the interplay between writer and reader in fantasy is even more important than in other literatures. Because the role of the imagination is so important, the readers have much to contribute as they read fantasy. The writer provides the substance, plot, characters, setting and much more, but the readers add with *their* imagination whatever the text allows. To enjoy fantasy literature requires the 'willing suspension of disbelief', an action undertaken by the reader. Fantasy is not tied to reality; it is limited only by the writers' imagination during its creation, to the readers' imagination once written. 'The Maps and contours of fantasy are circumscribed only by imagination itself.' (Matthews, 2002, 1)

There has been a tendency for critics of fantasy literature to defend their study and to argue against the perceived marginalisation of fantasy literature. In Lucie Armitt's words, fantasy is seen as 'popular' rather than 'serious' fiction and has been somewhat dismissed or marginalised in literary terms because of this. She says:

...if you place 'fantastic' in a literary context...suddenly we have a problem. Suddenly it is something dubious, embarrassing...Suddenly we need to justify our interest in it.

(Armitt, 1996, 1)

There is a certain amount of scepticism towards a manner of reading which calls upon the indulgence of the imagination. The embarrassment that Armitt speaks of is perhaps why it has been easier to put children's literature and fantasy literature together. If the indulgence of the imagination is not considered to be an intellectual or literary activity then it must belong to children and their reading. Hunt suggests: 'To the post modern adult reader, absorption into a text while reading is unfashionable; children (and unfashionable readers) do it – and (therefore) it is childish to do it.' (Hunt and Lenz, 2001, 6) Hunt notes the irony that reading fantasy literature does involve the use of 'romantically constructed 'child-like' talents' (Hunt and Lenz, 2001, 4), but it is perhaps

because they have come to be seen as child-like, and therefore unsophisticated, unliterary talents that such an attitude towards fantasy has developed. Though it is a fallacy in the first place that fantasy is childish, it is interesting to note C. S. Lewis' famous comment: 'When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.' (Lewis, 1966, 25)

The third misconception which Hunt and Lenz talk about is that it is escapist. This is certainly not the case with the majority of fantasy writing. Fantasy has often been used for quite the opposite function being used as a genre through which contemporary issues can be evaluated. This idea is looked at in much more detail below.

### Defining Fantasy Literature

Defining fantasy in terms of what the narrative is actually composed of is almost impossible. As E. F. Bleiler says, the closer you look into the genre, the harder it is to define because the literature is so creatively varied. In his opening to *Modern Fantasy*, Manlove quotes Bleiler:

If anyone were to ask me what is meant by 'fantasy', I fear I would have to admit my ignorance. A year or so ago I would have had no difficulty answering, but the compiling and reading involved in the preparation of the *Checklist* has forced me to realise that fantasy may be almost all things to all men. I have often wished that the subject of this book were something with an objective reality...

(Manlove, 1975, 1)

There are numerous definitions which cover aspects of modern fantasy writing. Swinfen says modern fantasy is composed of, 'structures, motifs and marvellous elements derived from its predecessors in myth, legend, fable, folk-tale and romance.' (Swinfen, 1984, 2) She sees it as a development from the literary past calling on all these elements to produce a genre of its own. Sheila Egoff calls it 'a literature of paradox.' She says that it is 'the discovery of the real within the unreal, the credible within the incredible, the believable within the unbelievable.' (Egoff, 1981, 80) She defines it in terms of what it achieves in terms of the reader's insight and perspective. Ursula Le Guin defines fantasy as, 'the natural, the appropriate language for the recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle of good and evil in the soul.' (Le Guin, 1992, 64) Richard Matthews says,

‘Fantasy as a distinct literary genre...may best be thought of as a fiction that elicits wonder through elements of the supernatural or impossible.’ (Matthews, 2002, 2) This is in contrast to Rosemary Jackson who says that ‘Its association with imagination and with desire has made it an area difficult to articulate or to define [...] The ‘value’ of fantasy has seemed to reside in precisely this resistance to definition...’ (Jackson, 2003, 1)

Were we to attempt to state the composites of fantasy, a sensible start may be to say that a fantasy is set in a fantastic or imagined world, however whilst many fantasies have been set in another world – Lewis’ Narnia, Tolkien’s Middle Earth – other stories have been set in this world – Rowling’s Britain and Pullman’s world of *The Subtle Knife* – and the elements of other-worldliness enter the known world. It would be equally misleading to say that all fantasies have sword flights and dragons (though a fair few do); a fight against good and evil (though again many do); or that there are magical creatures, witches and goblins; or any other generalisation.

Manlove gives this fitting and succinct definition which seems to cover all aspects of fantasy without being limiting. He says that fantasy is:

A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms.

(Manlove, 1975, 1)

This statement can be applied to any work of fantasy and by doing so we see the elements they share which have brought them together to form the wealth of fantasy literature that exists.

Perhaps the worst of the three misconceptions which Hunt goes about to disprove in the opening chapter of *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction* is the notion that fantasy is escapist. In essence fantasy does escape from our world in that it frees itself from the restraints of everyday life and normality. However, fantasy literature is one in which contemporary issues are frequently examined through the very medium of the departure from reality. Much fantasy literature is allegorical or simply uses features of the other-worldliness in various capacities to comment on modern life. Fantasy often seeks to examine a deeper and more mysterious element of human existence. Armitt says fantasy is, ‘that intangible source of unconscious fears and desires which fuels our dreams [and] our phobias...’ (Armitt, 1996, 1). However it is important to remember, as Hunt puts it,



‘the one thing that can rarely be said of fantasy is that it has nothing to do with reality.’  
(Hunt and Lenz, 2001, 2)

Modern fantasy is closely related to many other literary forms: the gothic novel, the fairy tale, science fiction and utopian literature are all similar in ways; however it is only in fantasy literature that a significant departure from reality is consistently found; only in fantasy literature that the creation of another world entirely departs from the foundations of realism. Science fiction may create another world for its setting, but within this world fictional logic takes the place of magic therefore cementing it to the inherent systematic rationale of material reality.

Though it has been discussed above whether *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) triggered the beginning of children’s fantasy, the roots of fantasy literature do not, arguably, lie within the canon of children’s fiction at all. Many fantasy critics (Jackson, Matthews, and C.W. Sullivan) name William Morris (1834-96) as the writer who gave birth to modern fantasy. The literature which surrounded Morris was factual and mimetic. His generation largely valued factual forms of writing, his was the era in which forms such as the essay, scientific reporting and newspaper writing thrived. ‘Morris was the first to consciously break from that realistic tradition and create the world in which the action of *The Wood Beyond the World* [1895] is set.’ (Sullivan, 1996, 307) Though Carroll was undoubtedly reacting to the same dissatisfaction with realism in his children’s literature, much of modern fantasy has more in common with Morris’s true departure from reality.

It is helpful in looking at children’s fantasy to see the roots of both children’s literature and fantasy literature. The development of children’s fantasy and literature in general is much indebted to Kingsley’s and Carroll’s bold imaginings in their moves away from didactic, moral, realism for children. Furthermore, fantasy itself does not have a linear ancestry and is descended from, and branches into, science-fiction, fairy-tale, adventure, myth, satire (i.e. *Gulliver’s Travels*) and even utopian literature. However, modern fantasy literature for children also owes much to William Morris. Fantasy is a deeply investigative genre but also has historically shown a longing for past ways of life, something Morris placed value on and can later be seen in the works of C. S. Lewis in particular but also Tolkien and Le Guin. *The Story of the Unknown Church* (first published in 1856) sees a dead narrator, personifying the past, speaking to the present in

the capacity of giving advice. Matthews says, 'Morris brought to fantasy a rich visual, philosophical, poetic, philological, and revolutionary sensibility that enlarged the concept of fiction to shape a new genre.' (Matthews, 2002, 44)

### **Fantasy Literature of 'The First Golden Age' 1860-1920**

1860 commenced a decade described by Townsend as the one in which fantasy 'took wing' (Townsend, 1965, 71). Since this time it can be seen very clearly that fantasy literature has tended to confront contemporary issues and deal with moral and political issues, rather than escaping them, in a way that past literatures had done more directly perhaps, but also less successfully too. David Sandner writes:

Moral tales, the primary children's literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were books of instruction, written with a manifest purpose: to help children become adults. In counterpoint, nineteenth century children's fantasy presented itself as oral, told in a moment of childlike spontaneity, as without purpose except delight, as revelling in the imagination – what cannot be seen and what cannot be taught.

(Sandner, 1996, 3)

In 1863, Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* delved into an imaginary adventure in a way that earlier literature for children had not done. The under-water world into which Tom escapes his hard chimney-sweep life is different to the adventures seen in earlier fairytales or myths. In this stage of literary transition from the moral tale to what became fantasy literature, are elements of both the freeing of the imagination expressed in Carroll's *Alice* books, but also the moral tone of his direct predecessors. Rather than travelling through an unknown world, Tom is transformed into another creature altogether, a creature that suits his new environment. As Manlove described in his definition of fantasy, there is an irreducible element of supernatural with which the mortal character significantly interacts.

One may argue that Tom's escape from the cruelty of his reality, a reality shared by many contemporary children, constitutes escapism. This is not the case. *The Water-Babies* confronts these contemporary issues, in particular highlighting the contrast between rich and poor, good and bad and Kingsley's benevolent treatment of good but poor characters

demonstrates his sympathy for the poor. The text deals with many political and contemporary issues; in one abridged version a foreword from Edric Vredenburg states:

*The Water-Babies* was written as far back as 1863 ... and the story contains many allusions to men and topics of that day, which, while interesting then, would not now be understood by the young people for whom this special edition has been prepared. These parts, therefore, have been omitted.

(Vredenburg, in Kingsley, 1863, 12)

Tom's underwater journey is not an escape from life; it is a moral journey on which he must learn important lessons for the life to which he returns.

This is one important function that fantasy performed from the outset: it confronted, and continues to confront, contemporary and often serious issues. Egoff says that it is a paradox that fantasy has come to be looked on as an escapist literature, for 'though the premise is perfectly true, yet no literature could be less "escapist"... [modern fantasists] force us to ... confront the "truths" – truths that are often awesome and bitter.' (Egoff, 1981, 80-81) Furthermore, fantasy literature has a long history of dealing with moral issues just as children's literature in any form has.

As discussed in chapter two, children's authors have often seen the moral education of their readers as part of their role as children's writers. This almost automatic connection between children's books and moral messages is similar to that within fantasy literature. Right from the outset of fantasy literature, there has been a moral tone to it. *The Water-Babies* does not just deal with political issues; Victor Watson says that though the narrative style suggests spontaneity and freedom, the liberty of the narrative style is an 'illusion'. He says that, 'an insistent moralistic view is projected on to every detail of the universe. Every fish, bird and water-bug is judged *morally*. The adult voice is severely and confidently in charge.' (Styles et al., 1992, 15)

Two years later, though more widely heralded as the text which gave birth to modern fantasy, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) was published. It has been read as both a discovery of the inner self and a satirical political and social allegory. Alison Lurie notes that Lewis Carroll's original title for the text, *Alice's Adventures Underground*, was rather fitting.

Modern critics have tended to see Carroll's heroine as exploring the inner world of the unconscious; but it is also possible to read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* as underground literature in the social and political sense.

(Lurie, 1990, 5)

Carroll's fantasy is a remarkable emancipation in terms of imaginative literature for the period. It is not simply a story about a girl's adventure in a strange and unreal world; it is addressing contemporary political issues and an exploration of the unconscious.

Carroll, an Oxford Don, uses the narrative and its characters to express, for example, his contempt for modern education. The infuriating character of the caterpillar, a satire on an old school master, forces Alice to recite lengths of verse and then tells her it is all wrong.

Alice's thoughts as she falls down the rabbit hole, and Carroll's authorial commentary, further mock contemporary schooling:

Down, down, down. Would the fall NEVER come to an end! 'I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?' she said aloud. 'I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think –' (for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the schoolroom.

(Carroll, 1907, 4)

The mockery of schooling is apparent in the pointlessness and inaccuracy of the information Alice has been taught. Carroll uses his children's literature to make comment on contemporary social and political issues.

1872 saw the publication of George Macdonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, which sees this commitment to serious issues in fantasy writing continued, though Macdonald's fantasy is more closely connected to the earlier fairy tale than Carroll's fantasy. Elements such as the magical old grandmother, the beautiful Princess Irene, the goblins of the mountain and the poor, but righteous, working-class boy, all hark back to early fairy-tale narratives. Also harking back to earlier narratives is MacDonald's moral tone. However, Macdonald shows a concern for modern social issues in both *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and *The Princess and Curdie* (1883). 'In the Victorian fairy tale class lines tend to be sharply drawn and the superiority of the upper-class taken for granted.' (Lurie, 1990, 104) Macdonald subverts this assumed superiority of the upper class as Curdie, the hero of *The Princess and the Goblin*, is only the son of a miner, though he is noble and brave.

Whilst Macdonald tries to express his concern for class issues, the gesture falls short of dispelling Victorian upper-class superiority. Curdie is not equal to Princess Irene and in this sense Macdonald's attitude is comparable with Kingsley's in *The Water-Babies*. Robert Leeson draws the comparison between Curdie and Tom saying Tom '...is only fit

to join Ellie when he is cleansed of dirt and sin.’ (Leeson, 1985, 106) Despite attempts to portray the lower classes in a good light, class bias is not overcome in the texts for they employ the language and medium of a Victorian upper-middle class.

Francis Hodgson Burnett shows a similar concern for the depiction of poor characters in *The Secret Garden* (1911). Though this is not as obviously a fantasy work as Carroll’s *Alice* books, there is, ‘... a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms.’ (Manlove, 1975, 1) The manor to which Mary moves is large and mysterious with many unused rooms and long empty corridors; there are secret movements in the night and screams and crying which are suggestive of supernatural goings on. However, it is the secret garden and the elements of nature in the text which reinforce the sense of magic and supernatural imbued in the text. Mary sees the moor one spring morning: ‘The moor was blue and the whole world looked as if something Magic had happened to it.’ (Burnett, 1951, 133) There are further suggestions of magic in the text, for example the robin which visits Ben Weatherstaff and the garden shows Mary where the key is hidden.

Burnett also depicts the poor in a favourable light. There is a deliberate depiction of the working class as benevolent, happy and content; rich characters as selfish and discontented. Mr Craven is a cold and miserly parent unable to deal with his emotions after his wife’s death. This is in sharp contrast with Martha and Dickon’s hard working mother who manages to feed herself and all her children, run a house and still have enough money to give Mary a skipping rope.

Mary is not happy until she discovers what pleasure can be gained from selfless acts such as helping her cousin Colin to health and Colin is certainly not happy until he discovers the pleasure and joy of nature in the garden and its fresh air. Burnett’s entire narrative seems to reinforce the idea that true happiness comes from that which is free in the world, therefore simultaneously reinforcing the idea that those who are poor have true happiness.

Fantasy literature of the first golden age deals with contemporary issues and always confronts moral issues but in a style not previously seen in literature for children. *The Secret Garden* instructs morally without an intrusive narrative voice. Mary is to learn the way to true happiness through selflessness but this lesson is learned through experimentation and self-discovery rather than instruction. The freedom with which this

new fantasy literature for children approached story telling is part of why books of the period have survived to be widely read, often more than a century later. Stories such as Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1<sup>st</sup> stage production 1904), Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* (1908) and Beatrix Potter's (1866-1943) children's stories are still read and are still popular today and continue to be published.

Fantasy produced in this period reflects, perhaps, many of the values of the period and in this sense holds much value for today's readers.

### **Modern Fantasy: The Second Golden Age**

The early decades of the twentieth century are not known for their production of quality children's literature. Robert Leeson describes the period between the wars as 'The Age of Brass', (Leeson, 1985, 110), quoting John Rowe Townsend's description of the period: 'a great expansion of quantity, but a sad lack of quality,' (Leeson, 1985, 110). The first golden age is seen by some to extend into the 1920s and it was in this period that A.A. Milne published both *Winnie the Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928). Also in the inter-war years P.L. Travers' *Mary Poppins* (1934) and T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* (1938) were published. Furthermore there was no shortage of quality writers, the period saw Arthur Ransome, Mary Norton and Hugh Lofting amongst others writing. Leeson suggests simply that in this period, 'the spirit had gone...' (Leeson, 1985, 111). Perhaps after the radical changes and liberation of the imagination seen in the first golden age the following period was destined to look uncreative by comparison.

Most famously it is in this period that J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit or There and Back Again* (1937) was published. This has been widely attributed for the resurgence, albeit after the World War II, in fantasy writing. 'Beginning with the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937, a great resurgence of fantasy occurred in England that was to establish the genre as a significant and serious literary mode.' (Matthews, 2002, 31) Ann Swinfen says where realism had begun to push fantasy aside and marginalise the genre, 'Tolkien made fantasy "respectable".' (Swinfen, 1984, 1)

Amongst the books that followed Tolkien's *The Hobbit* are a great many classics, similar to the boom in production witnessed in the pre-war period. However, in this post-war literature there is a key difference. Though fantasy literature of the period between the 1860s and the beginning of the twentieth century dealt with serious issues, as discussed above, the literature produced after the war took a far more serious tone.

Though, on the whole, fantasy did not begin to confront serious issues such as the conflict of good against evil until later in the C20th, MacDonald's children's literature in particular deals with the on going struggle of good against evil. Importantly C.S. Lewis felt indebted to MacDonald: C.N. Manlove says that he was 'Lewis's literary and spiritual mentor, in the nineteenth century.' (Manlove, 1987, 120) It is possibly from MacDonald's example that Lewis created the evil enemies in Narnia.

The fictions of modern fantasy writers such C. S. Lewis, Alan Garner, Susan Cooper and Ursula Le Guin are generally far darker in subject matter and the implications of the characters' actions more serious than early fantasy. Though Macdonald's fantasies show a similar darkness, this was not commonly seen until the new era of modern fantasy. This new fantasy, Sheila Egoff says, 'should be seen, not so much as a new trend, but as a return of fantasy to its mythic roots.' (Egoff, 1981, 82) Egoff notes that a move towards the use of features of the legend appeared in the works of MacDonald, Beverly Nichols and Kipling. It is not until the epic fantasies of those authors mentioned above that 'the possibilities of casting fantasy within the structure of legend have been realised.' (Egoff, 1981, 82) Whilst early fantasies such as Carroll's *Alice* books and Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* approached contemporary issues, modern epic fantasy struggles with issues on a greater scale.

In the works of these authors, as well as their contemporaries, there is often a presence of evil and a necessary fight against these evil forces for the sake of all good. Egoff suggests that this is partly because of the two world wars and the rise and fall of Nazism witnessed by the majority of these writers. She says: 'It is perhaps no accident, that most of the practitioners of epic fantasy are British.' (Egoff, 1981, 91) Furthermore, they show a particular desire to confront contemporary issues and 'offer a critique of contemporary society.' (Swinfen, 1984, 2) Though it is the development of so called 'epic fantasy' that will be concentrated on in this thesis, there are other works which were influential.

Not all fantasy literature has attempted to deal with 'big' issues such as the struggle of good against evil. Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) was surely an instrumental text at a time when magical and mystical elements were being involved into fantasy writing after the war. Indeed Fred Inglis believed this to be the text which gave birth to the beginning of a second golden age. (Leeson, 1985, 120) *Tom's Midnight Garden* is imbued with a mysterious and intriguing magic which in itself is delightful, but the plot is concerned with the adventures and development of one boy. Tom is not a metaphor and nor are his adventures with the past-world of the garden, they are, if anything, learning experiences.

Egoff and Swinfen both note that modern fantasists are more concerned with morality than writers of other literatures. If early fantasy was concerned with morality then modern fantasy has not shirked the responsibility established by its predecessors. Ann Swinfen says, 'fantasies published during the period [c.1950-1980] are frequently imbued with a profound moral purpose ...' (Swinfen, 1984, 2).

This is one particular feature which modern fantasists share. The seriousness of their work fills their fictions with a sense of importance. Sheila Egoff distinguishes modern fantasists from their earlier counterparts because of this seriousness of subject and style. She says: 'There is ... a sense in which most writers of modern fantasy are the moral arbiters of our time...' (Egoff, 1981, 81). This is certainly true in the case of Lewis and Pullman. Lewis' Narnia books are deeply concerned to express moral codes of conduct, moral behaviour and to distinguish right from wrong and good from evil. Many specific episodes in *The Chronicles of Narnia* highlight the consequences of immoral actions, though the entire framework of the seven books also reflects this. In *The Voyage of the Dawntrader* when Lucy performs the spell that allows her to overhear a friend saying something unkind about her, Lucy is taught that eavesdropping is wrong because it is dishonest. Similarly, in *The Voyage of the Dawntrader* Eustace's selfishness and unwillingness to help is punished with his transformation into a dragon. It is only as a dragon that he realises the value of his friends, of doing good and helping. The entire book from beginning, where Eustace is rude, selfish and ungrateful to the end, where he rises as the hero in defeating the sea-monster is punctuated by this lesson in moral behaviour. By the end of the story he has transformed.



Both Lewis and Pullman's fantasies contain the level of seriousness that Swinfen says sets modern fantasists apart from their predecessors, whilst simultaneously dealing with a significant moral aspect. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the Pevensie children are charged with the responsibility of saving Narnia from perpetual winter and the rule of the evil White Witch. Each book in turn consists of a quest, journey or battle of great consequence on which the survival of good over evil hangs. Similarly the overarching narrative upon which the whole of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy is hung is the determination of one girl to keep a promise to her friend. Lyra continually strives to reach the Land of the Dead in order to keep her promise to Roger and this drives the entire plot throughout.

By setting Lewis and Pullman within the context of fantasy writing as a whole we see that the approaches they both take, and the moral seriousness of the texts, are part of a greater movement. Fantasy as a whole is a serious literature and the next chapter will look at this in terms of it being a method of approaching reality: something that surely could not be achieved without the weighty seriousness of modern fantasy that has been discussed in this chapter.

## Chapter Six

### Fantasy: A Method of Approaching the Contemporary World?

At its most basic level, fantasy literature can be seen as one of escapism. By creating another world, the reader and protagonists leave their own surroundings and ‘escape’ into a totally new and different environment. However, as shown in the previous chapter, the suggestion that fantasy literature is escapist is an unfounded one. Both C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman create alternative worlds in their children’s literature, escaping the immediate socio-political and economic settings of the real world. Whilst the immediate setting of fantasy may be an escape, fantasy is actually a literature of great relevance to the real world which it most often strives to make comment on.

Perhaps the greatest paradox is that fantasy is firmly identified as a literature of escape. Although the premise is perfectly true, yet no literature could be less “escapist”... [Fantasists] force us ... to confront the “truths” – truths that are often awesome and bitter.  
(Egoff, 1981, 80-81)

By looking closely at Lewis’ world of Narnia and Pullman’s various other-worlds in *His Dark Materials* it can be seen that not only are their fantasy works not escapist but that they actually comment on, confront and challenge contemporary issues. The fantasy world may only be understood in relation to the known world thus often providing a basis for comparison. In his essay ‘On Fairy Stories’ (1964), Tolkien emphasised that fantasy, far from being an escape, is a more complete means of understanding the world.

Modern fantasy writing has shown a deep concern for approaching the issues faced by its readership which was not seen in the fantasy writing of the first golden age. The fantasy writings of Carroll and Barrie, though escaping into another world, do not deal with issues of growing-up with the same intensity or directness as more recent adolescent literature. Barrie’s Peter Pan is suspended in a state of perpetual childhood, refusing to grow-up. This denial of growing up is supported by the alternative world in which such an attitude is valued. However, Alice’s sudden changes in size have been read as an

exploration of the inevitable growth from childhood to adulthood. It is well accepted that various adventures of the *Alice* books explore the inner child-like longings of the adult writer rather than issues of childhood for the child reader. Hunt says that post-war fantasists:

began to explore the potential of fantasy to deal with the kind of problems children inevitably faced as part of the process of growing up: fear of separation, loss, sexuality, death, anger...

(Hunt, 1990, 41)

Fantasy for children since the two world wars has provided a rich literature dealing with issues universal to humankind and issues especially associated with childhood and adolescence. 'Fantasists wrestle with the great complexities of existence – life, death, time, space, good and evil – and a child's struggle to find its place within these awesome concepts.' (Egoff, 1981, 80) Both Lewis and Pullman's child protagonists are faced with epic challenges, journeys and battles in the created-world upon which great importance is placed. By placing this struggle in an alternative world, the consequences and actions of the child are given adult proportions and importance, whilst the safety of the known world, to which they will return, remains. The setting to which the characters of fantasy are removed provides the materials needed for such experiences to be had on an epic scale.

Many of these issues have been dealt with above; this chapter will focus on the way that Lewis and Pullman have dealt with issues of contemporaneity in their fantasy worlds. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* are typical of post-war fantasy in using, 'the fantasy world to make comments about the present state of civilisation.' (Hunt, 1991, 41) Lewis negates modern life, he rewrites the Biblical story of creation and when Narnia seems to be in moral decline largely comparable with his contemporary society, he ends Narnia altogether. Perhaps a sense of despair following the two world wars led Lewis to reject his own world so profoundly. However, Narnia is nonetheless a direct comment on his dissatisfaction with his contemporary world. Lewis draws heavily from the past to create a new, more satisfactory world. Pullman, on the other hand, draws from the world directly around him for setting, theme and imagery. Using controversial contemporary issues as well as the literary and historical past, Pullman constructs a world which comments on our own effectively.

It is to be expected that the world-views presented by Lewis and Pullman would be at odds with one another. Some 50 years separate the publication of the texts in question over which time much has changed. ‘As a literature of ‘unreality’, fantasy has altered in character over the years in accordance with changing notions of what exactly constitutes ‘reality’.’ (Jackson, 2003, 4) A reading of fantasy which takes into account the influences and conditions under which it was written reinforces its relationship with reality and its undeniable basis in contemporaneity. A significant proportion of what is said in fantasy is a ‘critique of contemporary society.’ (Swinfen, 1984, 2)

It is well acknowledged that the successful fantasy world relies on the author imagining a world as comprehensive and complete as reality. In doing so the writer becomes creator and every constituent of that world reflects either desire or admiration for that which it relates to in reality. Fantasy cannot be understood in relation to anything other than the empirical for it is, ‘a method for approaching and evaluating the real world.’ (Swinfen, 1984, 230)

### **Narnia: Rejecting Reality**

Lewis’ creation of the world of Narnia is a direct response to his immediate world. It is a rejection of modernity on many levels showing a profound preference for pastoral settings and an almost complete absence of technology. Burton Hatlen in many of Lewis’ works there is a longing for ‘the presumed certainties of the Middle Ages.’ (Hatlen in Lenz with Scott, 2005, 81) Taken chronologically the seven books follow the biblical story of the world from creation, through the Fall of humankind, to the final judgement with a social structure based loosely on Arthurian legend throughout in its use of ancient monarchical structures. Lewis’ use of imagery drawn from the past is never explicit, rather it is drawn from various points in history and literature. Hatlen says, ‘There is a good deal of vague medievalism in Lewis’ fantasy world...’ (Hatlen, in Lenz with Scott, 2005, 83) In the *Chronicles* Lewis draws on the past in preference to the present for imagery, social structure, warfare and religion. Lewis felt that modern science had had a negative impact on the world. His other works show this longing for the past and nostalgia also, ‘...in *The Discarded Image* he sought to reconstruct a picture of the universe that had – regrettably

in his judgment – been destroyed by modern science.’ (Hatlen in Lenz with Scott, 2005, 81) Arguably the same sort of reconstruction is evident in Lewis’ vision of Narnia.

Sullivan and White say, ‘the fantastic is a conscious production, a deliberate response to a gap between the real and the desired.’ (Sullivan and White, 1999, 1) Narnia can be seen in this way on a number of levels. It fulfils the desires of the child to find a secret world where his or her actions will have great significance, a world where their achievements are of epic proportions, but on a more significant level Narnia fills that gap between the real and the desired for Lewis himself.

Peter Schakel has written a great deal on Lewis and in way that Narnia should be read. He recognises the allegorical elements of the books but says, ‘To take the chronicles as allegory...raises the danger of breaking their spell...’ (Schakel, 1979, 3). Schakel goes on to suggest that reading the chronicles as allegory alongside the bible, closes the text to uninformed readers and suggests that the books are not self sufficient. Lewis by no means intended the books to be read as allegory, and indeed they need not be. However there are so many parallels with the bible and episodes so frequently mirror episodes in the New Testament that the word ‘allegory’ is very widely applied to the chronicles.

*The Chronicles of Narnia* contain several passages which can quite easily be read, and indeed frequently are, as allegorical of biblical episodes. Most obviously the beginning of Narnia in *The Magician’s Nephew* allegorises the beginning of the world in Genesis; Aslan’s murder in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* allegorises Christ’s passion; and the final scenes in *The Last Battle* are allegorical of Judgement Day. There are also other elements of allegory in Narnia but these are the most apparent episodes. In particular, the presence of Aslan who appears to be an allegorical Christ figure. However, it is important to acknowledge that Lewis said Aslan was not allegorical and instead said that he was a supposal: “an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, ‘What might Christ become like if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as He actually has done in ours?’ This is not allegory at all.” (Lewis, 1958)

*The Magician’s Nephew* (1955), chronologically the first, begins by negating the present in favour of the past. Lewis idealises the past by tempting the child with its beneficial constituents. *The Magician’s Nephew* is set in the ‘days when Sherlock Holmes was still

living in Baker Street' and Lewis says 'meals were nicer; and as for sweets I won't tell you how cheap and good they were, because it would only make your mouth water.' (MN, 9) Examples of this nostalgic sentiment are found throughout the chronicles. The reader's attention is continually drawn to elements of the present which are outdone by their past equivalents with explicit authorial comment. However, it is not only linguistically that Lewis rejects the present in favour of the past. The very foundations of Narnia negate the present. Its political structure rejects modern democratic governing systems and returns to an elite monarchical system derivative of a pre-medieval English monarchy; the clothing worn by the human characters is similarly drawn from English medieval times; even the language of the characters at times, though not consistently, reverts to old fashioned sentence structures, simulating a mock medieval courtly speech. In *The Last Battle* (1956) King Tirian muses on the news that Aslan may be returning to Narnia: "I can think of nothing but this wonderful news. Think you we shall hear any more of it today... How can they choose but be true?" (LB, 17)

Hunt says for Lewis, 'the creation of another world is a rejection of the present one, in which Christianity subsists.' (Hunt, 2001, 200) The Christian allegory in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is most apparent in *The Magician's Nephew* (Genesis), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Christ's passion), and *The Last Battle* (the final judgement), though Chad Walsh suggests that the entire seven books are a history of humankind (see Walsh, 1979, 146). In particular the first and the last, show a distinct dissatisfaction with the world.

Once the brand new world of Narnia has been sung into creation by Aslan in *The Magician's Nephew*, Digory is charged with the task of picking and returning an apple to Narnia from a far away garden; in doing so Narnia will 'remain a place of innocent joy for hundreds of years.' (Hourihan, 1997, 165) The apple which Digory returns is planted and the tree which grows guards Narnia from evil. In Lewis' new world, Genesis is reworked and the 'sons of Adam' and 'daughters of Eve' are not expelled from paradise. The fall from grace is reworked in order to avoid the loss of grace, and the shame and the loss of innocence. This preference for innocence and negation of adulthood is looked at more closely in chapter eight. Here suffice to say that Narnia is a place of innocence but that only the innocent can enter Narnia. At the end of *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, Aslan tells Lucy "Dearest...you and your brother will never come back to Narnia...you are too old..." (VDT, 188).

Though Narnia remains a place of innocence after the reworking of the fall myth in *The Magician's Nephew*, Digory's earlier weakness has already caused evil to enter Narnia. Lewis shows here that humans are weak and that such weakness is the cause and root of evil. Though his allegory is not complete and there is never any explanation of how other countries and races (almost all enemies) come to exist, the cause of the first evil entering the world is human weakness to temptation. Perhaps this is in part due to Lewis' own claim that Narnia is not allegorical. Peter Schakel says that it is true that the books have 'a religious significance beyond their plots...' but that a reader must crucially remember that not everything is allegory. (Schakel, 1979, xii) By striking the bell in Charn and awaking the Empress Jadis, Digory has awoken and brought evil into Narnia. Aslan says, "before the new, clean world I gave you is seven hours old, a force of evil has already entered it; waked and brought hither by this son of Adam... Evil will come of that evil, but it is still a long way off..." (MN, 126) The implication is that without the Witch, the first evil to enter the world, there would be no such thing as evil or indeed sin in Narnia. Lewis' theology here is unclear for it is not known whether he sees humans as destined to sin or evil as something imposed on the good from without. Nevertheless, Lewis suggests at the inevitably corrupt nature of human beings. It is Digory's weakness and susceptibility to temptation which has brought evil into the world, and his sinful nature which is the source of corruption in Narnia in *The Last Battle*. Lewis creates a new world, an edenic paradise, rejecting this world, whilst simultaneously burdening it with the same flaws as his own world.

Historically Narnia does not carry on in the same ways as ours; it is suspended in a state of idealism for the majority of its history. The build up of the final judgement is the most explicitly critical commentary on our world in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Chad Walsh draws parallels between the history of Narnia and our world. In *The Last Battle*, Aslan's appearances have become sparse. Narnians are beginning to question his existence. Walsh says this corresponds to 'the present world, with its confused struggle of good and evil...' (Walsh, 1979, 146). This representation of the modern world emphasises the dangers of a world without faith in Christ. When Shift the ape persuades the ass Puzzle to imitate Aslan there are clear echoes of similar blasphemous imitations of Christ in this world. Puzzle questions the morality of such an imitation and Shift persuades him thus:

I expect he'd [Aslan] be very pleased. ...Probably he sent us the lion-skin on purpose, so that we could set things to right. Anyway, he never *does* turn up, you know. Not nowadays.

(LB, 16)

Shift's megalomania is a symptom of his agnosticism. He mocks Puzzle for believing in Aslan: "the real Aslan as you call him" (*LB*, 16). This doubt in Aslan's existence has spread though Narnia and is shown as the cause of corruption. Lewis' vision of a corrupt world is one without faith or structure. The ass dressed up as Aslan symbolises the falsity and weakness of faith which Lewis perceived in his own society. It is because of this that Aslan does return and the final judgement is enacted.

The waning faith in Narnia has opened it to corrupt forces. At the climactic point of this disbelief, the dwarf Gruffle says, 'We've no more use for stories about Aslan...' (*LB*, 71) From this point there can be no redemption; the solution is to 'cleanse' Narnia. The final judgement scene is a purging of evil from Narnia so that the good can move on into 'everlasting Narnia's', the Narnia which the good characters enter is even better than the one before. There is no attempt to resolve the problems in Narnia in *The Last Battle* and the solution to the problem of a corrupt world is to wipe the slate clean. This is the ultimate rejection of reality. The ending shows good triumphing over evil; however it is Lewis' dissatisfaction with the agnostic state of his contemporary world which provokes this drastic ending.

## War

Lewis' uses Arthurian and antiquated imagery in many instances. However, it is evident particularly in the warfare in Narnia. In a further rejection of contemporary society Lewis' new world is set entirely in the past, rejecting modernity and especially its technological advances. In Narnia there is no technology, though there is one electric light; there is no machinery, though there are weapons, armour, books and many other things requiring mechanical production; and there are no modes of transport more modern than a cart, characters travel by foot, horse back or magic. This is not to suggest that Lewis' Narnia is an incomplete or unconvincing fantasy world, but the exclusion of any mechanical and technological advancement after roughly the industrial revolution is deliberate. Lewis attributes any materially unaccountable features of Narnia to magic and a child would probably not question such an explanation, reinforced as it is within the



text. However, it is significant because Lewis presents a negative view of the modern world.

In reality, World War II highlights the fact that war was no longer only fought on the battle field and no longer were the victims of war exclusively soldiers. World War II saw heavy bombing of civilian areas of Britain forcing the realisation that anyone could be a victim of war. This reality has informed the literature of both Lewis and Pullman; however Lewis does not include this shift in warfare in his Narnia books. Interestingly it is from these air-raids that the Pevensie children are removed in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* only to face their own wars, ones in which they are important and one which they can win, in Narnia. Egoff emphasises the importance that the world events of the first half of the twentieth century had on fantasy writers.

The early twentieth century experienced two world wars and Nazism. Until then it had probably never seen so clearly that ordinary people could become agents of malevolence, caught up in a great awesome evil that seemed beyond the power of the individual to combat.

(Egoff, 1981, 91)

In the face of this epic threat Lewis created Narnia with its Arthurian landscape, morality and battles in which it is not beyond the power of the individual to combat evil. In Narnia enemies are clearly defined (be it crudely by the colour of their skin), battles take place on battle grounds and are fought by the elite and battles *are* won.

The children of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are taken to a world where as individuals they can make a difference. There is not a sense in which the wars involve everyone: they are fought by the elite for the good of the proletariat. This is in accord with a medieval ethos of warfare and once again negates the military climate of Lewis' world. 'The world of Narnia embodies Lewis' belief in the ordered, hierarchical world of medieval Christianity.' (Swinfen, 1984, 149)

Not only did Lewis write with two world wars behind him, but also with the contemporary threat of nuclear weapons and the cold war. In the 1950s the threat of nuclear destruction was at the forefront of the British, even international, consciousness and Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia* at a time when such a colossal threat was not only a new concept, but also a very real threat.

In an explicitly didactic speech, Aslan warns Polly and Digory of such a power. In the world of Charn in *The Magician's Nephew*, we learn that one evil person has come to know 'the Deplorable Word', the utterance of which will destroy the world in which it is spoken. Such a destructive weapon is made use of and as the children and Aslan stand at the edge of this now empty pool which once provided entrance to that world. Polly asks him, "But we're not quite as bad as that world, are we, Aslan?" to which he replies:

"Not yet, Daughter of Eve...But you are growing more like it. It is not certain that some wicked one of your race will not find out a secret as evil as the Deplorable Word and use it to destroy all living things. And soon, very soon, before you are an old man and an old woman, great nations in your world will be ruled by tyrants who care no more for joy and justice and mercy than the Empress Jadis. Let your world beware."

(MN, 164)

Such explicit instruction is conspicuous and no adult reading it could be unsure as to his meaning. The use of 'we' in Polly's question infers our own world including the reader in the question and Aslan's reply is direct address to the reader, the words 'you' or 'yours' appear five times in this short paragraph. In this direct speech, there is a sense that Lewis is warning his reader rather than Aslan warning the Victorian children Polly and Digory. The 'tyrants' bring to mind leaders of the great world powers of the post-war period and his warning about a weapon which could be used to 'destroy all living things' clearly refers to the threat of nuclear war and its power to destroy whole nations and wipe out human life.

It is then interesting that Lewis dates the end of his world of Narnia with the advent of the nuclear bomb in his own world. By ending his world and starting it afresh it is suspended in a state of innocence, natural harmony and joy. The profound dissatisfaction with his own world is perhaps most disturbingly expressed in the ending of *The Last Battle*. In the middle of the book, it is hinted at that the children have actually died in a train crash in their own world, but rather than this being a cause for distress, it is an occasion for celebration. The following conversation takes place between Jill and Eustace, wondering what would happen in their world if they died in Narnia. Jill says:

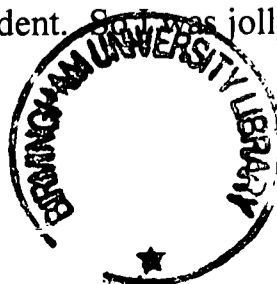
"I *was* going to say that I wished we'd never come. But I don't, I don't, I don't. Even if we *are* killed. I'd rather be killed fighting for Narnia than grow old and stupid at home and perhaps go about in a bath-chair and then die in the end just the same"

"Or be smashed up by British Railways!"

"Why d'you say that?"

"Well when that awful jerk came – the one that seemed to throw us into Narnia – I thought it *was* the beginning of a railway accident. <sup>Sally</sup> I was jolly glad to find ourselves here instead."

(LB, 92)



The implied incompetence of modern education is present throughout the *Chronicles* and here it is suggested that not only is stupidity inevitable, but that one grows stupid with old age. Lewis continually implies that growing up is undesirable. Also in this sequence it is explicitly stated that dying for a good cause is morally preferable to living a long and non-eventful, if peaceful, life. Death is further made light of in a joke between Lewis and the adult reader about British Railways.

At the end of *The Last Battle*, Aslan finally confirms their deaths.

“There *was* a real railway accident,” Aslan said softly, “Your father and mother and all of you are – as you used to call it in the Shadowlands – dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

(*LB*, 171)

Real life and the real world are referred to as only a dream, Lewis’ belief in the afterlife allows him to reject this world and send his protagonists into a better world. However, this ending with a positive view of an exit from reality (undesirable) into the fictional world (desirable) not only breaks the expectation of a circular journey, where the reader expects a return to normality, but also reflects a severe and disparaging view of reality for the child reader. Burton Hatlen says that it is this worldview that Pullman is reacting against in *His Dark Materials*. Hatlen says that Pullman is reacting against the view expressed in both Lewis’ and Tolkien’s fantasies ‘as essentially life-denying. Accordingly, he has set out to create a new kind of fantasy, a secular humanist fantasy.’ (Hatlen, in Lenz with Scott, 2005, 76)

Lewis communicates a negative and hopeless view of the modern world in his children’s books. However, by setting the stories in the past, the present is less explicitly criticised than it might be. In a biography of Lewis, Wilson says, ‘His writings, while being self-consciously and deliberately at variance with the twentieth century, are paradoxically in tune with the needs and concerns of our time.’ (Wilson, 1990, ix) Despite Narnia being a rejection of modernity, it is also a commentary upon it and fills the all important gap between desire and reality which Sullivan and White talk about. The role played by the children from our world fulfils a desire for the actions of the child to be significant. Furthermore, the triumph of good over evil is a dominant theme throughout the books and is one of Lewis’ successfully positive messages about the world and the nature of mankind.

Whereas Lewis draws on an historical preferable social structure for his new world, Pullman makes use of the scope of creating an alternative world and forms his own structures. 'Fantasy provides the writer with greater scope to construct his own scheme of morality, his own time structure, his own political and social order.' (Swinfen, 1984, 231)

### **Pullman and Fantasy**

Before discussing Pullman's fantasy in detail, it is necessary to justify the discussion of him as a fantasy writer. Pullman has famously said, '*Northern Lights* is not a fantasy. It's a work of stark realism.' (Parsons and Nicholson, 1999, 131) This is a problematic statement. Pullman's work has been published as fantasy literature, he is written about in fantasy journals, his work is compared to works of other fantasy writers and if we look at the definitions of fantasy given by academics in the field, his work can be readily defined as fantasy.

In spite of this assertion in interview with Parsons and Nicholson, Pullman has also said in interview with Melvin Bragg: 'I realised slightly to my consternation that this was going to have to be a fantasy, I say slightly to my consternation because I'm not a fantasy writer, I'm not a fantasy reader and I don't really know much about fantasy...' (The Southbank Show, 2003) However, in many ways Pullman does move away from some of the conventions of the genre. Sullivan felt that the only effective imagery for fantasy was to be taken from the past. Pullman draws many original images and looks to the future for imagery and ideas. His use of futuristic imagery invites comparison to science fiction and science fantasy writing. In this sense we can helpfully see *His Dark Materials* as 'stark realism', especially as his worlds draw on, comment on and contrast so profoundly with reality. Pullman has clarified his use of the term 'stark realism' saying, 'I'm telling a story about a realistic subject, but I'm using the mechanism of fantasy.' (Weich, 2003, 1)

In the previous discussion of fantasy, the following definition was taken as an all encompassing definition to apply to fantasy texts.

A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms.

(Manlove, 1975, 1)

Though the boundaries are not clearly defined, it is logical and sensible to look at Pullman's works within the fantasy tradition. There is clearly a departure from this world, there is an irreducible element of the supernatural, the characters become deeply familiar with these elements and there is a substantial element of wonder evoked by the story and its epic settings.

### **Pullman and the Pleasures of the Flesh**

In strong contrast to Lewis' rejection of this world, Pullman's trilogy constructs a positive view of the world and earthly life. This is conscious on Pullman's part. He says of Narnia, 'there is a profoundly world-hating emotion behind these books... [of which] I feel almost the reverse. This world is a most precious place. We shouldn't hurry to get out of it, we should cherish every moment that we have here.' (The Southbank Show, 2003) This view is at the forefront of Pullman's work. Pullman takes Christian eschatology as the main perpetrator of this 'world-hating' view and reverses its images of heaven and hell to make a more constructive and positive view of this life. In *His Dark Materials*, ideas of heaven and eternal, blissful, spiritual afterlife are seen as ones which detract from the pleasures of this life. For Pullman, a self-professed atheist, this is not surprising, but Pullman goes to great lengths to not only deconstruct a Christian idea of heaven, but to construct a positive view of this world and the physical, material pleasures it offers.

Drawing on and inverting images of heaven and hell, Pullman strives to express a profoundly world-loving view in the books. His underworld of souls who are caught in perpetual, spiritual existence is a powerful image set to contrast the Christian view of the afterlife as eternal bliss. The ghosts in the world of the dead are weak and desperate 'they

could only whisper' (AS, 311) and they yearn for the power and warmth they once had as physical beings, they '...crammed forward...to warm themselves at the flowing blood and the strong-beating hearts of the two travellers.' (AS, 311) Balthamos tells Will that the world of the dead, "is a prison camp," (AS, 35) and Baruch says, "Everything about it is a secret. Even the churches don't know; they tell their believers that they'll live in Heaven, but that's a lie." (AS, 35) Pullman shows the souls in the underworld aching to rejoin the world and be part of it again. This celebration of the material world and physical pleasure is an assertion of the validity of earthly life in contrast with the view expressed by Lewis at the end of *The Last Battle*.

Pullman reinforces the idea that earthly life should be cherished and that the Christian view of eschatology denies and depletes that pleasure, on several levels. As Will and Lyra leave the world of the dead and rejoin the earth they are seen to indulge in this physical pleasure. Pullman creates stark contrast between the grey emptiness of the world of the dead and the sumptuousness of the world: '...Will and Lyra fell exhausted on the dew-laden grass, every nerve in their bodies blessing the sweetness of the good soil, the night air, the stars.' (AS, 382) Pullman's trilogy shows the material world and physical life as sacred and beautiful, but above all to be treasured and enjoyed. In turn the afterlife, or spirit life, is shown as inferior to that of the flesh.

Pullman employs 'flesh' as a powerful symbolic theme in the trilogy. Physical material existence is empowering and spiritual existence is weak. The angels of the trilogy have much that humans fantasise about, (omniscience, flight, near immortality), however without flesh they are ultimately weak. In *The Subtle Knife* Will wrestles with an angel and kills it, realising his own power over it to his horror. Will says, 'angels can't understand why we don't enjoy the world more. It would be a sort of ecstasy for them to have our flesh and our senses.' (AS, 463) Mrs Coulter manipulates the angel Metatron with the power of her flesh. 'She trusted to her flesh, and to the strange truth she had learned about angels ... lacking flesh, they coveted it and longed for contact with it.' (AS, 420)

This celebration of mortal, physical life is taken to an even deeper level by the representation of the witches. The witches pity the angels: the earth literally thrills the witches' senses and their sensitivity to the material world is much cause for celebration.

As the witch Ruta Skadi flies through the air after a group of angels she is seen to relish her physicality.

She felt a fierce joy possessing her...she rejoiced in her blood and flesh, in the rough pine bark she felt next to her skin, in the beat of her heart and the life of all her senses, and in the hunger she was feeling now, and in the presence of her sweet-voiced bluethroat daemon, and in the earth below her and the lives of every creature, plant and animal both; and she delighted in being of the same substance as them, and in knowing that when she dies her flesh would nourish other lives as they had nourished her.

(SN, 149)

Pullman employs language such as 'joy' and 'rejoicing' here, which are associated with Christian writing, to celebrate life and earthly pleasures rather than spiritual ones to further cement his conviction that earthly life is precious and more valuable than any spiritual existence. Serafina Pekkala watches the angels with pity and compassion, 'How much they must miss, never to feel the earth beneath their feet, or the wind in their hair, or the tingle of starlight on their bare skin!' (*The Subtle Knife*, 289) Pullman uses the angels' desire for flesh and the witches' pleasure in their flesh to embrace this world and negate the view that life on earth is only a stepping stone. In doing so, Pullman expresses an attitude which is completely and deliberately at odds with Lewis' metaphor at the end of *The Last Battle*. Lewis calls earthly life a dream and life after death the *true* reality. As the characters have died and are passing into everlasting Narnias, Aslan says: 'The dream is ended: this is the morning.' (*LB*, 171)

### **Pullman: Contemporary Images and Settings**

As discussed much above, Lewis draws on archaic settings and images in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis' fantasy is not unique in its use of historic, mythic and legendary imagery. Many fantasists (Tolkien, White, Le Guin, and Garner among others) have made use of the rich stock of myth and legend that our culture and its stories have to offer. Traditionally alternative fantasy worlds have been set in the past or borrowed heavily from the past for elements of that world. Sullivan says:

The future of high fantasy lies in the past. Because it is a form which draws so heavily on the past for virtually all of its context, content, and style, there can be little literary innovation in the genre. Rather, the best high fantasies to be written will be written by those authors who, like Tolkien, can most successfully synthesise their knowledge of the traditional narratives and the cultures in which they were popular and who can also tell a story well.

(Sullivan, in Hunt, 1996, 312)

This statement is interesting when we look at Philip Pullman's fantasy writing. Sullivan's statement that there can be no literary innovation in fantasy and that it must draw on the past is defied by Pullman. In *His Dark Materials* Pullman creates a plethora of secondary worlds, some admittedly taking constituents from the past, but many of innovative origin. However, it is not simply his plethora of imaginary worlds, nor the interaction between these worlds which exemplifies his innovation: Pullman re-casts fantasy into a secular humanist form. Furthermore, the suggestion that the most effective fantasy should follow Tolkien's formula would be questioned by Pullman who in creating secondary worlds said he wanted to move away from 'the superficiality of the shire.' (Southbank Show, 2003)

Pullman's settings display a deep concern with contemporaneity and are frequently drawn from reality. Not only do these settings comment on the world but in using evocative images from reality Pullman brings with them the associated emotional connections from reality. In *The Amber Spyglass* Lyra and Will travel to the world of the dead to free Lyra's friend Roger. The world of the dead is described as one of despair and lifelessness. The first town they come in the land of the dead effectively sets a scene of hopelessness and emptiness. The temporary buildings are at odds with the permanency of the town. The Gallivespian, Tialys, says that the town, 'looks like a refugee camp, but it's obviously been there for centuries or more.' (AS, 265) The scene is one of ruin yet permanency:

Here and there, fires had been lit among the ruins. The town was a jumble, with no streets, no squares, and no open spaces except where a building had fallen. ... Between the shells of the stone buildings, a mazy clutter of shacks and shanties had been put together out of lengths of roofing timber, beaten-out petrol cans or biscuit tins, torn sheets of polythene, scraps of plywood or hardboard.

(AS, 267)

This refugee town is a holding place for the dead before they move onto the final land of the dead. This camp summons images of refugee camps from the contemporary world and brings with it the same sense of restless yet permanent homelessness. The despair and depravity of images from real refugee camps brings to this setting in the fantasy world a borrowed but fitting understanding. By drawing on real images, Pullman is able to evoke an even more powerful landscape, one which is in direct reference to reality. Pullman's world of the dead further draws on imagery from myth and legend with resonances of Virgil's underworld and the Hades of Greek legend. This rich



intertextuality combined with expressly contemporary images increases the complexity and significance of the landscape. David Gooderham says Pullman,

...describes the world of the dead in graphic contemporary terms as a prison camp – perhaps better, with its grim hopelessness, a concentration camp – suffused, however, with archaic elements which speak to deeply rooted human fears.’

(Gooderham, 2003, 163)

This idea of the world of the dead as a concentration camp is connected to Pullman’s whole representation of the afterlife as a painful yet eternal semi-existence. The dead are no longer living yet held in a state of torturous existence. The image of a concentration camp is a helpful one in understanding the mood and atmosphere of Pullman’s world of the dead. Not only does this association bring understanding to our reading of the world of the dead, but the very idea of aligning this unending torturous existence with such an image, comments upon the reality of this situation for many real people. ‘His novels not only reflect the reality of the world, but they also create that reality.’ (Moruzi, 2005, 56)

In *The Northern Lights* Lord Asriel tears a hole in the fabric of his world creating an opening into another world. In doing so, the natural stability of the earth is disrupted and the polar ice caps begin to melt. Pullman clearly draws this from the particularly topical contemporary issue of global warming and the actuality of the ice caps melting. Pullman utilises contemporary images of natural disaster to bring epic proportions to his fantasy in the language of the modern world.

The convulsions had affected the earth differently in different places, Will saw; village after village stood up to its roofs in water and hundreds of dispossessed people tried to salvage what they could with rowing boats and canoes.

(*AS*, 119)

Furthermore, the images which he draws on are ones easily recognisable to his contemporary readership carrying with them real meaning and consequence.

Similarly Pullman’s vision of war is drawn from the contemporary world. Whereas Lewis derives the tools and tactics of warfare in Narnia from legend, Pullman’s concept of war attempts to share the strategic complexity of modern warfare. Perhaps Pullman’s quoting of Byron in *The Amber Spyglass* is an indication that he felt no choice but to draw on reality. Byron said, ‘I hate all things fiction... there should always be some foundation of fact...’ (*AS*, 291) This synthesises the idea that Pullman’s work is a fantasy, but that it is also ‘stark realism’.

Like Lewis, Pullman's approach to war and violent resolve is informed by the threat of nuclear war. Margery Hourihan outlines how it has affected people's attitudes.

The invention of nuclear weapons has forced us to realise that, at the political level, the automatic resort to violence and intimidation as a response to perceived threats is no longer an available option.

(Hourihan, 1997, 105-6)

The effect of this threat has been a feeling of universal involvement. Contemporary warfare involves and potentially affects everyone and this is reflected in *His Dark Materials*. As shown above, in *The Amber Spyglass* the effects of Asriel's actions in *Northern Lights* are still resonating in another world and many miles away.

Pullman attempts to radically re-conceptualise war in *His Dark Materials*. Drawing on contemporary images and scenes of war, Pullman displays the modern realities of war whilst keeping the reasons for war at the forefront of the story. However, Pullman fails to move the war into a conceptual dimension resorting to materialism and physical fighting in order to combat the ideas promulgated by the God whom he wages war on.

The war in the trilogy is essentially a war of ideas and this radical concept promises much. Like many real wars, in this instance there is a tyrant at the head of the opposition: Asriel intends to wage war on the Kingdom of Heaven and God. However, Pullman takes an epistemological war and makes it a material one. In the books, the Kingdom of Heaven is a material place and God is a material being. The clouded mountain which is the Kingdom of Heaven is described as almost impossible in physical terms,

it was less like a rock than like a force-field, manipulating space itself to enfold and stretch and layer it into galleries and terraces, chambers and colonnades and watch-towers of air and light and vapour.

(AS, 415)

Despite this description which attempts to defy material physicality, it is nonetheless a material entity which Mrs Coulter lands on, hides on and eventually penetrates the centre of, to find the angel Metatron. Similarly, God, as Lyra and Will find him at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* is a physical being and yet so fragile that with a gust of wind 'his form began to loosen and dissolve.' (AS, 433) He is described as almost metaphysical as 'a mystery dissolving in mystery...' (AS, 433) whilst still comprised of actual matter.

In making his enemy a physical one, Pullman puts to great use the freedom which fantasy offers but necessarily reverts to conventional concepts of war. Though the premise of a war on God seems to offer a different way of approaching the problem, it seems the resort to violence and physical war is inevitable.

Asriel leads this war on Heaven and God but the forces he gathers are similarly material. Pullman's vision of the location of this force is essentially a castle, '...on a peak that commanded wide views of the plain below and the valleys behind, a fortress of basalt seemed to grow out of the mountain...' (AS, 58). This physical fixedness of this fortress further reinforces the materiality of the war and Pullman's failure to imagine a war as radically as he imagines its premise. Pullman describes the materials being gathered for war:

In the vast caverns beneath the rearing walls provisions of every sort were stored and labelled; in the arsenals and magazines, engines of war being calibrated, armed and tested; in the mills below the mountain, volcanic fires fed mighty forges where phosphor and titanium were being melted and combined in alloys never known or used before.

(AS, 58)

This stock image of preparation for war, which rather reminds the reader of Saruman's preparations for war in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1968), is not innovative and does not concur with the founding concept that this is a unique war. Pullman's assertion at the end of this paragraph that metals 'never known or used before' are being created, is a minor innovation where a drastic one is needed. Essentially Pullman's concept of war is a conventional one with a battle ground, weapons and physical enemies. In this sense perhaps Sullivan was right in saying that 'the future of high fantasy lies in the past.' (Sullivan, 1996, 312)

### Contemporary Commentary

Pullman uses modern images to bring meaning to his settings, but also creates settings to bring meaning to the modern world. Fantasy affords the opportunity to create new worlds in sharp contrast to our own, and to promulgate views which are at odds with mainstream thinking. In an article on Pullman, Kristine Moruzi points out the advantage for Pullman

in creating alternative worlds. 'Pullman can both comment explicitly on our universe and make implicit critiques through his choices about the other universes.' (Moruzi, 2005, 66) In the world of the mulefa in *The Amber Spyglass*, Mary observes the successes of their society with delight and admiration compared with the failings of her own.

Once the mulefa began to build the platform for Mary, they worked quickly and well. She enjoyed watching them, because they could discuss without quarrelling and co-operate without getting in each other's way...

(AS, 383)

Though it is not explicitly stated, it is clear that this is pleasant for Mary to watch because it is unusual in her world. However, this is very different to the way that Lewis negates his world. Pullman creates a world in which the society is comparable with our own and yet more structured and efficient. In the world of the mulefa Pullman is able to promote a co-operative ethos and show a world where respectfulness and collaboration lead to a more constructive way of life. 'The fantasy genre...provides Pullman with an opportunity to re-define social institutions and relationships...' (Moruzi, 2005, 66)

Pullman comments further on contemporary issues in his representation of the church. *His Dark Materials* forms a complex manifesto against the Church drawing on current issues such as child-abuse/paedophilia, abuse of power and corruption, whilst at the same time using history to present a negative, though incomplete, view of the Christian religion. Pullman creates a church with which he is able to highlight what he sees as the flaws of religion in this world. When asked about the extreme antipathy given to the church in his books he says, 'it comes from history. It comes from the record of the inquisition, persecuting heretics and torturing Jews...Every single religion that has a monotheistic god ends up persecuting other people...' (Spanner, 2002).

It is the Church in the world of *Northern Lights* which has arranged the Oblation Board for the experimentation of the separation of children and their daemons. This in itself is clearly an evil act. However the connection between this and the Christian church in our world resonates when we discover the motivation for the experiment. The attempt to sever a child before dust/original sin settles upon them is presented as connected to the Christian belief that the innocence of childhood is preferable to the experience of post adolescence. Mrs Coulter explains to Lyra in *The Northern Lights* that ever since the beginning of time, 'sin' or 'dust' has settled on children as they grow up. This is seen by the church as most undesirable, and they are attempting to prevent this from happening.

Pullman takes particular issue with the negation of adolescence which is looked at more closely in chapter eight, in particular against the Christian preference for innocence over experience and the way that Lewis deals with this.

Though Lewis comments on contemporary society by rejecting it on every level in his creation of Narnia whilst Pullman appears to be embracing contemporaneity, there is one area in which they are not at odds with one another. Lewis uses pastoral settings as preferable to cities without exception. Narnia is an almost entirely natural country with few buildings and no towns. It is not until *The Last Battle* that any towns are actually mentioned in Narnia, 'When they wanted anything from the towns further down the river it was Puzzle who went down with empty panniers on his back...' (*LB*, 7) In turn, Narnia until this time has been a place of perfect natural beauty and idolatry, evil forces come from without. Interestingly Narnia's demise is synonymous with the destruction of its natural landscape. Tirian discovers that Calormenes are cutting down the Dryads: his 'grief and anger were so great he could not speak.' (*LB*, 21) The destruction of the natural landscape is described as 'the worst thing in the world,' (*LB*, 24) and where the trees have been torn down 'a hideous lane like a raw gash in the land...' has appeared (*LB*, 24).

In keeping with this alignment of pastoral setting with perfection and happiness, is the corruption and evil of the city in *The Horse and His Boy*. The city of Tashban is greatly feared and a place of peril for the protagonists of the book to escape from. It is also dirty and crowded, full of undesirable people, 'soldiers, beggars, ragged children, hens, stray dogs, and bare-footed slaves...unwashed people, unwashed dogs.' (*The Horse and His Boy*, 50) This negative view of metropolitan settings is also seen in Pullman's work. Cities are often employed as the setting of corruption. The city of Citagazze in *The Subtle Knife* which is infested with soul eating spectres is the place where the knife was made and where the corruption which it has brought was also born. Though not all of the urban settings in Pullman's work are negative settings, a great many are.

For though Pullman tends to confront contemporary issues, there is a sense of preference for pastoral settings in his work as much as there is in Lewis' work. At the climactic point of the trilogy, where Lyra and Will re-enact the second 'fall', the natural, pastoral setting is an edenic paradise. The open country and absence of buildings or urbanisation implicitly conveys a negative view of the mark that man makes on earth.

In both of their fantasy works, Pullman and Lewis strive to make serious comments about their own worlds. Lewis does this by rejecting his own world, both implicitly in his creation of Narnia, and explicitly in authorial comment. Pullman similarly constructs alternative worlds which comment on our world implicitly in their differences to our own world, and explicitly in their similarities. For Swinfen, this the most important thing that fantasy writing does. She says, ‘...the fundamental purpose of serious fantasy writing is to comment upon the real world and to explore moral, philosophical and other dilemmas posed by it.’ (Swinfen, 1984, 231) This is certainly something achieved by both authors discussed here. Pullman strives to confront pressing contemporary issues, ecological, political and ideological in his contemporary world and attempts to shift conventional perceptions. Lewis rejects his world criticising its flaws harshly. The end of *The Chronicles of Narnia* shows him unable to remedy the corruption which has overtaken Narnia. The solution which Lewis offers in ending that world is unsatisfactory. The *Chronicles* up to this point can be seen as a rejection of, but nonetheless a comment upon, the contemporary world. In ending the world of Narnia at its crisis point, thus deserting its problems Lewis’ fantasy does become a literature of escape. Perhaps this ending of hopeless desertion is reflective of the despair in the post-war 1950s. However such a rejection of life and negative view of society’s problems is so at odds with the view expressed by modern authors such as Philip Pullman that a reader cannot feel comfortable with them. In light of this, Pullman’s ending, with the children returning to their own worlds full of hope for change, is a far more satisfactory and positive ending.

The message spoken to the audience of fantasy is a powerful one. Fantasy reading requires a substantial level of absorption into the text and its influence is thus of great proportions. Though Egoff’s comment predates Pullman’s publications it can still be helpfully applied to the scope of his work. Egoff says ‘there is an awesome seriousness to many of these modern fantasy books; they seek to convince us that the adventure has momentous consequences.’ (Egoff, 1981, 98)

## Chapter Seven

### Morality: Enemies, Choice and Violence

There are a number of reasons for looking at morality in the children's literature of C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman. Firstly, children's books have historically been an institution through which moral instruction has been conveyed with special intention. Secondly and most importantly, fantasy writers of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries have taken serious and committed issue with the morality conveyed in their literature. Ann Swinfen says that children's books from the post-war period onward are, 'imbued with a profound moral purpose,' (Swinfen, 1984, 2) and Sheila Egoff has described modern fantasists as the, 'moral arbiters of our time...' (Egoff, 1981, 81). Because of the complex power relationship formed between the book and the reader, children's books have been seen as carrying great responsibility. In this sense children's writers have a 'moral responsibility'.

Morality is a complex issue. Most people know what they mean when they talk about something or someone being moral or immoral, however defining the term is somewhat more complex. Looking at the most simple explanation of the term, a dictionary definition highlights the complexity surrounding morality. *Moral* is said to mean both 'ethical', 'conforming to what is considered by society to be good, right, proper' and 'based on conscience'. (Higgleton, 1999, 1047) Within these separate meanings we see that morality is both related to systematic beliefs held within society and also relating to one's personal conscience. In this case moral behaviour would be dependent on the actions and decisions of the individual.

Morality, it can be seen, is both a shared and an individual phenomenon and the morality of the individual/s both informs and constructs the moral system of a society. There are many institutions which inform and impose these moral systems, the family, education, religion and of course the law. The accepted moral behaviour in a society is not always reflected by its laws but laws are often formed as a result of change in societal norms.

The moral values of a society tend to change over time; the same applies to its laws. In the United Kingdom, legal changes have tended to lag behind moral ones, coming only when the process of moral acceptance is well advanced.

(Elliot and Quinn, 1998, 445)

This suggests that the moral systems which are dominant in a society actually dictate the law and act as a force for change. This theory is readily backed-up by many examples from recent changes in the law: the possibility of marital rape (1991), the legalisation of gay marriage (2005).

As these examples and the above definitions demonstrate, morality concerns actions. This is a key principle in the discussion of morality in literature. Morality does not concern so much the ideological suppositions of a text as the actions and implications of those actions in the text. Learning from Plato, who wrote and lectured widely on moral philosophy and the theory of ethics, Aristotle divided philosophy into three components which cover all philosophical arts. He said that philosophy comprises of three types, Speculative Philosophy (whose aim is truth), Poetic Philosophy (whose aim is art), and Practical Philosophy (whose aim is action). (Mills, 1964, 5) Aristotle placed ethics within practical philosophy and so we see that the philosophy of ethics has its roots in the actions of humans and society.

Both Pullman's and Lewis' fantasies concern themselves with the struggle of good against evil. This is best understood as a moral struggle, the battle for good deeds to be done over evil ones. When we look at Pullman and Lewis more closely below it will be seen that this division is not so simple, but for now it will suffice to say that the resolution of this struggle almost always manifests itself in violence of one form or another. This chapter will look at the construction of the polar concepts of good and evil in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* and the moral implications of that construction. As morality primarily concerns actions, this chapter will then look at the actions taken by characters on their enemies as a fruitful place to examine the morals transmitted by the text.

This discussion of morality will, to some degree, rely upon the philosophy of ethics and especially the work of one particular moral philosopher. Immanuel Kant has been one of the most, if not the most, influential moral philosopher in modern times and has greatly influenced modern society. Most modern philosophy, especially that concerning ethics,



owes some debt to Kant and his life's work. Wood emphasises the importance of Kant's work in modern society saying that his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) 'is one of the most important texts in the history of ethics.' (Wood, 2002, ix) J. B. Schneewind said that, 'Kantian views of morality are a central topic of contemporary moral philosophy.' (Wood, 2002, 83) Given this, his writings and influence cannot be ignored. In particular, two principles of Kant's moral philosophy will be drawn upon in this chapter, firstly, the principle of 'universalisation'. Kant's famous Categorical Imperative, also known as the Formula of Universal Law, says: 'I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.' This view of moral actions as consistent and uncompromising has since become an influential dictum in modern moral philosophy. In lay terms the theory of universalisation is frequently found in modern society. For example, when a parent wishes to stop a child acting in a particular way the question, 'What if everybody did that?' may be asked. This provokes consideration of the consequences of the child's actions on a greater, and therefore more significant, scale.

This first theory of Kant's is not only important in terms of the field of philosophy but has also 'exercised...a powerful influence on people's thinking about morality...' (Kant, 2002, xi). The second of Kant's principles which is central to his philosophy, and has also had a great deal of influence on ethics and people's thinking since, is the inward personal conflict between duty and inclination: 'no one could do justice to Kant's moral philosophy without settling this conflict at the centre of his account.' This conflict is a deep-rooted conviction in Kant's theory of ethics. His belief that, 'the moral life is a continuing struggle between the call of duty and the lure of inclination...' is at the centre of his philosophy of morality. (Wolff, 1973, 1-2) Once again this principle manifests itself as an action, for in order to follow either the call of duty or the lure of inclination requires an actual act to take place.

As mentioned above, but necessary to discuss again before the morality of Lewis and Pullman's fantasy works are examined, writers play an important role in society. As Robert Leeson says, 'writers matter. Writers change people's perception of the world, and help to change the world itself.' (Leeson, 1994, 144) The written word is powerful and the influence which a text has cannot be measured nor underestimated.

Morality concerns the code by which we live and act. Whereas ideology has been described as a 'near-synonym for a belief or a set of beliefs' (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 51), concerning thoughts, morality can be seen as the system by which we base our conduct and behaviour, concerning actions. There is a great deal of critical discussion regarding ideology and children's literature, however, surely where the moral assumptions and teachings of a text concern action, the morality of a text should be viewed as equally important.

### **Polar concepts: 'Good and Evil' in Lewis and Pullman**

Lewis' treatment of the concepts of good and evil in Narnia is highly significant in relation to morality in Narnia. The Chronicles are essentially adventure stories and by taking their setting into the fantasy world Lewis is equipped with the ideal tools for exploring moral issues. In the new world, where things look different, the protagonists are offered the chance to use their moral judgement to decide for example who their enemy is or what action to take. On her first trip into Narnia, Lucy is shown to have good judgement (and indeed to be a good character), trusting the faun, Mr Tumnus, and seeing the evil in the White Witch. Edmund, on the other hand, is shown to have poor judgment (and in turn to be a bad person), trusting the White Witch, and desiring what she offers him for his own selfish desires. However, Lewis constructs enemies and gives characters the means to defeat these forces in a world which almost completely denies free will and choice. There is no doubt that the White Witch is anything other than pure evil, and though Lewis could have offered Edmund that change to realise it for himself, he does not until she locks him up and the fact is made obvious. In cases where free will is exercised it is often proven to be fatal. Therefore moral issues which could be examined become sparse.

Holbrook has taken particular issues with Lewis' morality and its reductive simplicity:

His morality is essentially black and white. Take Edmund's treachery, for example. Edmund has foolishly betrayed his siblings – but for a child to do so, when so ignorant and immature, is this so serious? ...How is it an analogy, leading to Christ's sacrifice for fallen man?

(Holbrook, 1991, 51)

Edmund's betrayal of his siblings at the beginning of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is an important episode in terms of Lewis' simplistic morality. In falling prey to the Witch's enticements, Edmund is guilty of weakness to temptation and perhaps of the sin greed. In terms of the religious allegory this aligns Edmund with Adam and Eve and original sin: 'on the more allegorical plane, it ...places Edmund on the side of evil...' (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 259). From the beginning of the story, Edmund is a less than popular character shown to be naughty and mean. Lewis ensures that the reader knows Edmund is the 'naughty' one. When Edmund gets into the wardrobe and discovers Narnia himself it is only because 'he wanted to go on teasing [Lucy] about her imaginary country.' (*LWW*, 30) This negative commentary on Edmund ensures that when he does meet the white witch and is tempted by her, we know she is on the 'wrong' side. This is further reinforced by Peter's reprimand of Edmund, "You've been perfectly beastly to Lu ever since she started up this nonsense about the wardrobe...I believe you did it simply out of spite." (*LWW*, 45) 'By clearly differentiating between the children from the beginning of the story, Lewis ensures that his readers will find it easy to identify with the right side' (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 260). The negative commentary on Edmund is however superficial compared with the consequences of his actions. In a sense Edmund's betrayal does not seem substantial enough to result in Aslan's allegorical crucifixion.

So often in the *Chronicles*, Lewis simplifies complicated moral issues and in doing so removes the value which they could have. Lewis' Narnia books take as their central theme the Christian struggle of good against evil. Swinfen claims that 'the didactic element in the fiction of C.S. Lewis is more overt than in the work of any other recent English author.' (Swinfen, 1984, 147-8) The characters' actions are almost always centred on their moral goodness and their willingness to fight evil, with this goodness often being quality enough to conquer the evil forces which thrust themselves upon Narnia. The narrative contains explicit didactic comment regarding these actions and the morally instructive tone to the books penetrates their foundations. However, there is never an alternative in Narnia. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Aslan explicitly instructs Peter to fight and gives him directions for battle, 'all the time he was advising Peter how to conduct the operations...' (*LB*, 132), this advice is then referred to as 'instructions' several lines later. Aslan's supremacy and the children's trust in him are assumed to such a degree that entering battle on his behalf is done unquestioningly.

‘Critics have wondered over the books’ popularity when the omniscient Aslan denies, in effect, free will and adventure.’ (Hunt, 1994, 136)

The value of Lewis’ Narnia books is clearly important if we are to see them as a piece of moral didacticism. Lewis establishes the foundations of the seven books as the on-going struggle of good against evil and in doing so provides a platform for the examination of morality, choices and ethics. However, where there could be much room for moral investigation, Lewis denies the child reader the opportunity to consider the qualities of enemies before their status is revealed. The concepts of good and evil are shown in Narnia in simple and divisive terms. As a rule, Narnians are good and outsiders (with the exception of Archenland) are evil. ‘Narnia is a fiercely dualistic, Manichean world where all creatures are either good or wicked, and the good are constantly under threat.’ (Hourihan, 1997, 103) Evil comes to Narnia from elsewhere, challenging their politics, human rights and freedom. In *The Last Battle* it is the abominable abuse of ‘one of the free Talking Horses of Narnia’ that moves the king Tirian to rage. (*LB*, 25-6) Furthermore, enemies of Narnia are frequently distinguished by their appearance which is always different from those of Narnia. In this particular section Calormenes are, ‘not the fair haired men of Narnia: they were dark bearded men...’ (*LB* 25). The simplicity of this stance means that in Narnia enemies are easy to identify. Thus the righteousness, or ethicalness, of the ‘good’ characters to fight and defeat anyone expressing views at odds with Narnian ideology is accepted within the text through implicit ideology. The text assumes the righteousness of the ‘good’ side to such a degree that the child is not lead to question the actions of the characters.

The clear division of good and evil in Narnia denies children the opportunity to use their own understanding of morality in order to make decisions and take actions. There is no need for analysis of the enemy in Narnia because there is no question about the certainty of their absolute evil nor of the absolute necessity and righteousness to fight them. ‘Such gross splitting of good and bad is characteristic of much of the cruder writing for children...’ (Rustin and Rustin, 2001, 49). Evil characters in Narnia are described as purely evil and good characters are essentially pure and innocent. ‘The distinction between good and evil, as has been suggested, is brought to a point in the contrast between Queen Jadis and the cabbie and his wife. No explanation is ever offered of why the witch is evil. ... It is not that she is filled with evil. She *is* evil...’ (Walsh, 1979, 136) This view of evil as possessing someone, rather than something anyone is capable of

doing, further simplifies Lewis' view of good and evil. In this sense, Narnia denies the reader the learning opportunity which it could offer. In this other world, the potential for learning how to decipher evil is vast yet the actual learning experience offered is nil. 'So often in Lewis, the solution to the spiritual problem is conceived in terms of the assertion of a self-righteous hostility to enemies who are completely black, unremitting evil.' (Holbrook, 1991, 59)

Taken as a whole *The Chronicles of Narnia* are primarily concerned with the persisting strength of good against the forces of evil. Lewis' notion of good and evil is founded in Christian belief: the polar concepts of good and evil, and heaven and hell are at the very root of his almost uncompromising division of characters and characteristics. Swinfen says: 'The central theme which provides the entire framework of the *Chronicles* is the archetypal Christian battle between good and evil, the Holy War.' (Swinfen, 1984, 148) However, the fundamental implication of this mode of recognising enemies and responding to their threat with aggression is surely cause for concern. Because Lewis shows good and evil in such black and white terms, the moral value of the books is perhaps questionable. They deny judgment, choice and decision making and reduce the complexities of deciphering good from evil to unquestioning absolutes which are explicitly stated as such. However, this must not be seen as an entirely negative point. Though Pullman attempts to confront this simplification of good and evil in *His Dark Materials*, the Narnia books are shorter for a start, and more heavily illustrated indicating a younger reading age. It is possible that the simplified 'sides' in Narnia are actually preferable to the age of the reader being addressed. As Rustin and Rustin suggest, Narnia 'may be in accord with the simplifying moral preferences of the latency child.' (Rustin and Rustin, 2001, 58)

In almost direct response to this polar representation of sides, Philip Pullman blurs the boundaries between good and evil. He also goes some way to promote and allow free will, adventure and choice. Pullman takes the Christian notion of the Fall and original sin and inverts it as a positive event, therefore dust, the physical presence of original sin, becomes positive. In doing so, Pullman shatters the very foundations of the Christian polarisation of good and evil as separate and mutually opposite concepts.

In the trilogy, there are no good and evil characters, rather good and evil actions. Pullman says that evil is something people do rather than something they are. In this

sense, the actions and moral decisions of characters in the trilogy carry far greater significance and also form a far more valuable experience for the reader. Pullman shows his characters wrestling with greatly complex moral issues such as murder, euthanasia, responsibility and sexuality accompanied by the complete process by which such difficult decisions are made.

This blurring of the boundaries between good and evil is important in Pullman's morality. In showing actions rather than people as evil, Pullman offers not only a more realistic representation of human behaviour but also a more realistic system of morals by which to live. The character, Mrs Coulter, exemplifies Pullman's deliberate move away from the polarisation of good and evil as we see them converge in one character. Her callous cruelty in the first two books is sharply contrasted with her selfless sacrificial act at the end of the trilogy and yet her moral journey to arrive at such a destination is followed by the reader. As she and Asriel stand on the brink of this sacrifice she laments about her change in character, 'I was corrupt and full of wickedness...But I love Lyra.' (AS, 426) At the moment of sacrifice, Asriel's character is similarly shown to be more complex and compassionate than his previous depiction.

In a final showdown at the margin of the apocalyptic battlefield, Asriel and Lyra's mother, both cruel and ruthless characters throughout the story, sacrifice themselves to kill Metatron and thus end the reign of 'heaven'. This is clearly a sacrifice of love and thus Asriel, the 'Satan' figure throughout the novel, now assumes the role of a 'Messiah'.  
(Kölzer, 2004, 176)

Similarly Lyra's journey throughout the trilogy, marked with lies and storytelling, is concluded with her realisation of the value of truth. 'She learns through her journey that telling the truth is a moral imperative.' (Moruzi, 2005, 57) Pullman's fusion of the concepts of good and evil is part of his conscious effort to create a discourse which reflects the secularism of his society. In depolarising good and evil he undoes the foundations of Christian thinking and morality. David Gooderham says Pullman 'is about establishing the humanistic values of a new secular world...' (Gooderham, 2003, 167).

A prominent theme of the trilogy is choice and the necessity for people to act on their own decisions. He also repeatedly affirms the necessity of actually taking action. In his morality inaction is as bad as the wrong action. Faced with difficult decisions in *The Amber Spyglass*, the narrative explains, 'At the moment all Will's choices existed at once. But to keep them all in existence meant doing nothing. He had to choose...' (AS, 15) In

*The Subtle Knife* the seal-hunter explains to Lee Scoresby about a witch's love and the difficulty of making choices.

“A witch offers you her love, you should take it. If you don't, it's your own fault if bad things happen to you. It's like having to make a choice: a blessing or a curse. The one thing you can't do is choose neither.”

(SN, 123)

Pullman determines to show that without the option of choice, we cannot learn how to decide which actions to take. He urges the necessity of taking action at all times.

The child protagonists in *His Dark Materials* are shown traditionally without their parents throughout the adventure narrative. By removing the adult from the story, the child is forced to face and confront challenging moral issues alone. ‘The lack of family is instrumental in helping the children become more independent.’ (Moruzi, 2005, 58)

Pullman constantly returns to the issue of choice as a dominant theme, however, though linguistically there appears to be a great deal of choice offered to the protagonists, at the deeper level of the plot's foundations, choice and free will are actually limited if not absent. Though the plot is driven by Lyra's choices, the fact that she must unconsciously live up to the prophecy that she will be ‘Eve again’ shows predestination as a dominant belief at the heart of the trilogy. Lyra acts without knowing her destiny and so arguably within her own domain she is still granted the liberty of choice. Despite this the presence of destiny as an ideal undermines that liberty.

Moruzi argues that the end of the trilogy, with Will and Lyra's necessary return to their own worlds and their subordinate, child-positions within those worlds, is the ultimate denial of choice. The passage at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* in which each child's future is discussed consists of an offer for a place for them on return. ‘Although each child is ostensibly given a choice about whether to accept these offers, in neither case are there other options.’ (Moruzi, 2005, 59) She points to their subordination on return to the ‘real’ world and the accompanying denial of their learning experiences in this subordination. However, the fantasy journey is a metaphorical one and almost always a circular one also. A return to normality is absolutely essential. It completes the reader's own journey aligning themselves with the protagonists within the fantasy.

Gooderham has also picked up on Pullman's harsh ending with the separation of the protagonists, criticising it saying: ‘the sudden, absolute and emotionally crucifying end to

their brief encounter with which he contrives to advance the plot, cannot leave any reader comfortable.’ (Gooderham, 2003, 170) As stated above this separation at the end is absolutely necessary. Within the framework of the fantasy world and the fantasy journey there are rules which must be obeyed by the fantasist. By lineating the circular journey, the fantasist alienates his reader and in doing so breaks the trust on which the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ is based. Pullman makes a stark return to pure ethics and the principle which Kant described as the choice between the call of duty and the lure of inclination. Lyra and Will long to stay with one another but their duty is at complete odds with their desire and the only moral choice for them is to do their duty. Though Moruzi criticises the return of the children to their subordinate places as children in their own worlds, this return is not really a demotion. They return to their separate worlds to fulfil what could be construed as unimaginative roles, compared with the epic proportions of their adventure, but their return on the basis of the ‘call of duty’ reinstates them as important in their own worlds. Their lives, it is strongly implied, will be of great significance and this is achieved almost synonymously with a natural and necessary return to reality. The success of this ending, though Gooderham calls it ‘crucifying’, is in keeping with one of the key functions which children’s literature has played in the last half a decade. The pain which the child protagonists must endure reflects the pain which real life may present. In this ending Pullman continues to deal with issues of loss, separation and rejection thus fulfilling the expectations of the genre and meeting his responsibility as a writer to convey a realistic message. He says, ‘I have long felt that realism is a higher mode than fantasy.’ (Pullman, 2002, 4)

### **Violence and Authorial Responsibility**

Lewis’ world of Narnia is an elaborate and convincing alternative world within which the actions of the characters hold great significance. Within the persuasive and seductive world of Narnia, the child experiences a great deal of violence and almost all conflict in Narnia is physically and aggressively resolved. Much attention has been given to the books as a result of this and it could be said that this violence, which is imbued in the texts, makes the *Chronicles* an irresponsible piece of children’s literature. Lewis does not simply reflect the violence of his own world, he exaggerates it. The children in *The Lion*,



*the Witch and the Wardrobe* are evacuated from the war to the peaceful countryside, only to fight in Narnia.

Holbrook questions the aggressive attitude of the books. As Christian allegory, they have, or rather had, largely been seen as morally and didactically positive reading for children. ‘How is it that Lewis’ incitements to enjoy ... cruelty has come to be accepted as a religious message and a good children’s book?’ (Holbrook, 1991, 25) The depth of the seduction of Lewis’ fantasy is, in part, responsible for this but also because on one level this battle is always justified. Lewis’ war is a Holy War, enemies of Narnia threaten the ideals on which Narnia thrives and so protection is absolutely necessary. ‘The battle between good and evil is fought on a spiritual, as well as physical, plain...’ (Cooper and Cooper, 1998, 206). It is not that the battles are necessarily unjustified so much as the enemies are ‘paranoically conceived menaces’ (Holbrook, 1976, 117).

Perhaps the synonymy of religion and violence for Lewis, given the conflict in Ireland with which he grew up, is a natural association. Wilson says of Belfast:

In no place on earth does it seem truer that Christ came to bring not peace, but a sword...Every week that passes, a bomb explodes or a gun is fired because of ancient, atavistic religious prejudice.

(Wilson, 1990, xi)

In Narnia, the existence of the enemy is absolutely certain and, just as in real life, the threat of this ideological difference is cause for conflict. With the enemy as a given the *Chronicles* necessarily consist of and are dominated by the suspense and event of this violent conflict.

In a sense, nothing happens in the Narnia books except the build up and confrontation with paranoically conceived menaces, from an aggressive posture of hate, leading towards conflict. And in this there is often an intense self-righteousness, which must surely communicate itself to children.

(Holbrook, 1976, 117)

The concern here is essentially that Lewis’ message is a powerful one. Violence is so ingrained in the text and its absolute necessity is assumed so naturally that it is difficult to oppose it. There is a sense in which, as absorbed readers, we also incite this violence and will the enemy – whom the reader also hates – to die. This irresponsible presumption surely communicates itself to the child readers, encouraging them to see violence as a healthy solution to ideological conflict. The consequences of death are not examined at

all and though it is possible to speculate, as Rustin and Rustin have suggested, that Narnia, 'may be in accord with the simplifying moral preferences of the latency child' (Rustin and Rustin, 2001, 58) the casual observation of dead enemies is completely irresponsible. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, after the battle, Lewis says: 'The battle was over in a few minutes after their arrival. Most of the enemy had been killed in the first charge of Aslan...' (*LWW*, 162). The celebration of the loss of life is implicitly implied as they celebrate victory without any remorse. It is important also important to realise that in the 1950s when Lewis was writing *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the massive losses of life during the two world wars was still at the forefront of the nation's psyche.

Violence in Narnia is not only encouraged, it is assumed as necessary and enjoyed. When Peter is given his sword it is a moment of pride, a rite of passage. Indeed the presents which Father Christmas gives the children are 'the equipment to solve one's problems by inflicting pain and death...' (Holbrook, 1991, 39). Perhaps it is not the frequency of violence in Narnia which is most alarming, but the degree to which it is accepted. Aslan, the Christ-like figure who guides the children through their moral journey, is the embodiment of violence in the animal kingdom. In making him a lion, Lewis implies Aslan's supremacy in terms of aggression.

Then with a roar that shook all Narnia from the western lamp-post to the shores of the eastern sea the great beast flung himself upon the White Witch. Lucy saw her face lifted towards him for one second with an expression of terror and amazement.

(*LWW*, 161)

Aslan's physical, dominant strength is as important as his moral strength. The alignment of aggression and morality is at the root of Lewis' imbedded acceptance and promotion of violence. In making Aslan a lion, Lewis is not only suggesting at his physical supremacy but also drawing on traditional Christian imagery, where the lion is often used to represent Christ. The phrase appears in the New Testament;

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

(Book of Revelation, 5:5)

Though the image of the lion is also used in Judaism, Christianity has adopted it as a symbol of Christ.

Perhaps the key cause for concern within the issue is the fact that Lewis promotes these attitudes not only with assumed acceptance, but that this is in a children's book with child protagonists. The child reader deeply aligns themselves with the protagonist so learning and mimicking their actions. Hourihan says that the protagonists, 'bring the attitudes of children with them to these war games and this has the effect of presenting violence as both ordinary and acceptable.' (Hourihan, 1997, 102)

In a passage quoted in the previous chapter, Jill speculates that dying for Narnia would be preferable to living an ordinary life at home, '...the view is expressed that a warrior's life is infinitely superior to the life of peace.' (Holbrook, 1991, 25) On one level, Lewis encourages his reader to be loyal to their beliefs, it is seen as positive that Jill would die for Narnia; however the children, especially Jill, never express any understanding of what Narnia really stands for. In Lewis' own terms one should only die for a cause to which one is loyal and yet Lewis neglects to demonstrate to his reader that the children have this conviction for any reason other than his willing it. There is reliance instead on the children's personal relationship with Aslan to explain their loyalty to Narnia. The superficiality with which each 'side' of Lewis' spiritual battle are constructed is surely Lewis' greatest failing as a story teller. *The Chronicles of Narnia* promote an attitude of aggression, suggest that violence is justified if you are on the 'right' side, and encourage violent resolve to conflict.

The excessive and automatic resort to violence in Narnia underpins the narrative and is so readily accepted within the framework of the texts that the reader does not question it. This is another element of Lewis' storytelling with which Pullman takes particular issue. In *His Dark Materials* there is an anxiety about violence not felt in Lewis' narrative. The self-righteousness of fighting in Narnia simultaneously gives the children immunity from the consequences of entering battle. Despite the fact that almost every one of the seven books contains battle, fighting or violence of some kind, there is never any real pain or wounds. Indeed Lucy's gift from Father Christmas is a magic potion to heal wounds. In light of this, consequential pain from fighting is removed. The end of *The Last Battle* further denies pain as all the characters die unknowingly and therefore painlessly, instead 'the distinction between the living and the dead becomes blurred.' (Walsh, 1979, 151)

Interestingly, Pullman's books contain arguably no less violence than Lewis'. The story begins with the attempted murder of Asriel and ends with the murder of Metatron and the

death of both of Lyra's parents. Everyone, Pullman shows, is engaged in some kind of conflict, and warfare is a persistent theme throughout the trilogy. The playing children in Oxford are said to be 'engaged in deadly warfare...This rivalry was hundreds of years old, and very deep and satisfying...' (*Northern Lights*, 36); the gyptians pool resources to fight in the north when their children start being kidnapped; the witches join Asriel's war on heaven; the angels are similarly involved in this war. However, Pullman consciously reflects the reality of violence and its consequences. Though there is a great deal of violence in *His Dark Materials*, there is also a great deal of care taken to show the consequences.

In *The Subtle Knife* the story of Will and his reluctant yet necessary resort to violence is used to explore the nature and morality of aggression. In a sense, right from the beginning, Will is the hunted, defending himself. He is a reluctant fighter and over the course of the trilogy comes to a deep understanding about his feelings towards violence. Initially in his own world he is forced to push a man down some stairs in order to defend himself however, Will cannot justify his use of violence to himself. The reality of this attack is highlighted to the reader as Will continuously re-imagines the image of the man lying on the floor, 'twitching and crumpled at the foot of the flight' (*SK*, 7). His feelings of regret and guilt weigh heavily on his mind.

Once Will is the knife-bearer there is an even deeper sense of the reality and vulnerability of human life and the realities of violence. The knife wounds Will very seriously and he almost bleeds to death but he also learns that violence can have far more complicated consequences. 'The knife can hurt, even in ways that are not immediately visible.' (Russell, 2003, 71) This bloody yet faithful depiction of pain and human vulnerability acts as a visual reminder of the consequences of violence and further supports Pullman's conviction that with power comes responsibility. Pullman emphasises the emotional and moral consequences as well as the physical. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Will shoots a man and as the bullet meets its target the text reads, 'the bullet found the man's heart.' (*AS*, 171) The language in Will's reaction to his action mirrors this. It is both a physical and emotional revolt, afflicting his body and heart just as the bullet did the soldier.

the first thing Will did was to hold his stomach and retch, heaving and heaving with mortal horror. That was two men he'd killed now...Will *did not want* this. His body revolted at what his instinct had made him do, and the result was a dry, sour, agonizing spell of vomiting until his stomach and heart were empty.

(*AS*, 171)

This last sentence emphasises the physical (stomach) and emotional (heart) penalties of violence and the poetic repetition of 'heart' - of the condition of Will's heart (aggressor) and the soldier's heart (victim) - is ironically succinct. On the surface, violence is depicted as horrifying, great cause for remorse and ultimately as a last resort.

However, violence is continually used to resolve conflict, as in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and crucially the climactic event, to which the entire narrative has been building up, is a war. Perhaps, as Lewis, Pullman sees that the world around him resorts to violence in order to resolve conflict. The on going friction in the Middle East which continued during the time Pullman wrote *His Dark Materials* is essentially one of ideals and yet has been widely approached with violence. Pullman's contentiousness to reflect and represent reality in his fantasy explains, in part, why he resorts to war. In a sense, he draws on reality and is only equipped with what the real world offers to solve problems in the fantasy world. Where reality resolves great conflict with war, Pullman's fantasy is not only obliged to do the same, but limited to do the same also. However war is also necessary for dramatic climax and epic scale. There are no conceivable means by which the same dramatic result of destroying the kingdom of heaven could come about other than war. In everyday language and with the tools offered by the contemporary world, Pullman has little choice but to portray the waging of a war on heaven if he wishes to destroy it.

Despite the constant use of violence, *His Dark Materials* is a responsible and careful depiction of the significance, brutality, pain and guilt of violence. Pullman shows the moral decision making and emphasises the moral consequences of resorting to violence. The resulting deaths from Will's actions are very real and his decision at the end of the trilogy is the result. He says to his father's ghost:

"You said I was a warrior. You told me that was my nature, and I shouldn't argue with it. Father, you were wrong. I fought because I had to. I can't choose my nature, but I can choose what I do..."

(AS, 440)

The dramatic setting of this speech ensures that the impact of Will's statement resonates. As he speaks the ghosts of his father and Lee Scoresby disperse amid, 'explosions and the shouts and cries of anger and warning and pain...' (AS, 440). Though violence is the ultimate tool for the resolve of conflict in Pullman's trilogy, it is neither the ultimate

choice of the protagonists, nor their moral choice for the future. In departing the fantasy world, they return to their heroic, yet peaceful, places in their real worlds.

Lewis and Pullman take very different stances towards morality in their children's fictions. Lewis writes a moral tale, and in each moral episode within the Chronicles, the lesson is learned. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Edmund learns the value of loyalty and the dishonesty of betrayal. In several places in *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, a moral lesson is learned – Lucy learns not to eavesdrop, Eustace learns not to be selfish. However, the rudimentary division of good and evil and the superficial construction of the enemy undermine the intrinsic value of adventure set in the fantasy world. None of the child characters in the books are fundamentally evil or even bad and when they are flawed, the flaw is corrected within the tale (with the curious exception of Susan at the end of *The Last Battle*). Lewis' battles are not justified with logic or reason and the depth to which violence is assumed and promoted is cause for concern. Violence in Narnia is not treated with the responsibility with which Pullman treats it; indeed the consequences are entirely absent.

Pullman shows violence as accompanied by severe consequences. His use of aggression, weapons and fighting in the trilogy is not sparse but it is always responsible. The message which the reader takes from *His Dark Materials* is of the weighty consequences of one's actions and the necessity to evaluate the moral implications of actions before any action is taken. Pullman shows that good and evil are not as simple as Lewis' polarised depiction. Pullman shows, rather than says, that people are neither wholly good nor wholly evil, but that what they actually do can be. It is deeds or actions in Pullman which can be called good or evil.

Since morality has been shown to be directly related to action, and all actions have a consequence, Lewis' Narnia books fail to be of the great moral value they could because the consequences of characters' actions are so rarely considered.

## Chapter Eight

### Purpose: *His Dark Materials* as a Response to Narnia

The previous chapters have, to some degree, looked at the specifically intertextual relationship between *His Dark Materials* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This chapter will look at the ways in which Pullman's fantasy is a response to *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Pullman has been openly critical of Narnia and has said that he feels the same way towards C.S. Lewis as Bernard Shaw felt towards Shakespeare when he said: "My indignation with him reaches such a pitch that occasionally I am tempted to dig him up and throw stones at him." Pullman says, 'That's how I feel about Lewis...I think his influence is actually pernicious.' (Parsons and Nicholson, 1999, 130-1)

There are numerous ways of reading Pullman's vastly complex and ambitious trilogy, one of which is to view them as a response to the ideology expressed by C.S. Lewis in Narnia. Some fifty years stand between the publications of each of their fantasy works, during which time much has changed. A historically contextualised reading of the relationship between *His Dark Materials* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* would no doubt be extremely rewarding.

Within the Marxist tradition it has long been recognised that literature is a product of the particular historical and social formations that prevail at the time of its production.  
(Sarland, 1999, 47)

Though much can be gleaned from reading these texts as products of their social, political and economic production environment, such a reading does not entirely account for the rich and stark contrasts between them. In essence Pullman's fantasy challenges the very foundations of Lewis' fantasy world. Hatlen says:

...rather than simply rejecting Lewis as a model, Pullman has, in *His Dark Materials*, offered a kind of inverted homage to his predecessor, deliberately composing a kind of "anti-Narnia," a secular humanist alternative to Lewis' Christian fantasy.  
(Hatlen, in Lenz with Scott, 2005, 82)

There are some specific areas of Lewis' thinking which Pullman deliberately confronts in *His Dark Materials*. He takes issue with four key areas of Lewis' ideology and inverts or confronts them in *His Dark Materials*; his Christian worldview, his attitudes towards sexuality, childhood, and his eschatology as conveyed in *The Last Battle*. These are the four main areas of Lewis' fantasy which Pullman makes a deliberate move to rework in his own particular way, and each will be looked at respectively.

### **The Judeo-Christian Fall Myth**

C. S. Lewis draws on the Genesis story of the creation of the world and the subsequent Fall of mankind in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In *The Magician's Nephew* the reader does not need to look hard to see parallels between this story and the story in Genesis. In chapter six it was shown that Lewis uses the Genesis myth to create his own new world, free from the problems of his own world. Here the particular aspect of the Genesis myth which is important is the Fall. Lewis' depiction of the Fall has been criticised for its simplicity, but it is actually rather complicated. Hourihan explains that Digory, the "Son of Adam", or in the new world of Narnia allegorically Adam himself, picks an apple in the garden, is tempted by a female witch, resists temptation and plants the apple. Therefore Narnia 'remains a place in innocent joy for hundreds of years.' (Hourihan, 1997, 165) However, there *is* a scene which allegorically symbolises the fall. Narnia does remain a place of innocent joy for a period of time, but Digory still enacts the temptation and the consequence is the existence of sin in Narnia.

In his new and 'clean' world of Narnia Lewis, it seems, is unable to depict an act of temptation. Instead this sinful act takes place in another world and importantly before Narnia has been created. As Narnia symbolises inherent goodness, this source of evil cannot come from Narnia itself, it intrudes and imposes its evil from somewhere else. Lewis' notion of the sin is in line with traditional Christian thinking. In eating the apple of the tree of knowledge, Eve caused sin and shame to enter the world. This explanation of how suffering, evil and pain entered the world is sustained in Lewis' theology throughout the *Chronicles*. Though Narnia does not succumb to this evil for hundreds of years, the source of the evil which eventually corrupts Narnia can be traced back to



Digory's sinful act of giving in to temptation. The notion of the Fall for Lewis is that it is at the very root of every negative aspect of the world. Without the witch whom Digory awakes in *The Magician's Nephew*, it is implied, there would be no imperfection in Narnia.

This is directly connected to another of Lewis' ideas about the Judeo-Christian myth of the Fall and one which is very important here. In the last chapter it was shown that Lewis' belief of good and evil are as two separate absolutes. People are evil, rather than deeds. In the same way that the Genesis story shows Eve being tempted by the snake, Lewis' shows Digory being tempted by the engraving in the world of Charn. Were it not for these evil forces which are, 'thrust into one' (Holbrook, 1991, 41-2), Lewis' suggests there would be no evil. The intention to commit sinful acts, according to Lewis, does not reside within good people; rather evil forces take hold of good people.

Anne-Marie Bird acknowledges the satisfactory nature of the story of Genesis and the answers it gives to important questions:

One reason for its endurance lies in the fact that it provides a series of answers to the most basic and profound questions such as how the universe was made, how humanity began, and why suffering and death entered the world.

(Bird, 2001, 111)

Perhaps this is why Lewis makes use of this myth. In creating a new and perfect world for his fantasy to take place in, and his child characters to delight in, Lewis also allegorises the Christian version of the world whilst providing simple and understandable explanations for the existence of cruelty and evil.

Pullman entirely reverses the Judeo-Christian myth of the Fall showing it not only as a fortunate fall but, '...the best thing, the most important thing that ever happened to us.' (Parsons and Nicholson, 1999, 119) In Lewis' version of the Fall, the Christian one, it is a falling away from grace, a weakness of humans to curiosity for knowledge and therefore a falling away from innocence. In Pullman's story it is an awakening, rather than a falling away. Pullman takes the notion of the Fall and makes it something positive. The temptation is not to be resisted, rather explored; the state of innocence is not preferable to knowledge; and the child-like grace we are born with, once lost, can be regained. Peter Hunt says of *His Dark Materials*, 'It is nothing less than a version of

*Paradise Lost*, but with the idea that grace can be regained and that it is a necessary part of making.’ (Hunt, 2001, 114)

Pullman takes Lewis’ notion of the Fall and, using dust as a metaphor representing inherent goodness, knowledge and human consciousness, reverses the idea that innocence is a preferable state to experience. Dust is not only something gained during adolescence, therefore inherently tied to the loss of grace, but as a metaphor for the Christian ‘original sin’, a necessary constituent of every human life. ‘Pullman describes the ‘fall from grace’ not as the origin of all sin and woe but as a necessary step on the path to maturity.’ (Kölzer, 2004, 181) Pullman says:

“The Fall is something that happens to all of us when we move from childhood through adolescence to adulthood and I wanted to find a way of presenting it as something natural and good, to be welcomed and celebrated, rather than deplored.”

(Butler et al, 2004, 89)

For Pullman the Fall must be seen as positive because it represents the necessary and natural transition from childhood to adulthood. In a sense the whole structure of the trilogy mirrors this natural process of discovering, experiencing, learning about the self and crucially the self in relation to the world, ‘the structure of the trilogy is mirroring the consciousness of a growing, learning, developing consciousness.’ (Weich, 2002, 1) This process of becoming self-aware necessarily involves the loss of grace which Lewis viewed so negatively, but Pullman sees it as an undoubtedly good thing.

Pullman takes this idea, that grace can be regained, from Heinrich Von Kleist. In his essay, ‘On the Marionette Theatre’, Kleist compares the grace of childhood to that of the puppet. He says that in lacking self-consciousness the puppet has grace because it is entirely free of the notion that it is being watched. Kleist says that the ballet dancer can recapture this grace through a life time of hard work and a great deal of effort. Pullman describes his excitement at Kleist’s theory, ‘We lose the innocence that we are born with, and we then go on through life. But...the point is that we can regain grace.’ (Parsons and Nicholson, 1999, 118)

Kleist’s metaphor of the child as the puppet and the ballet dancer as the adult with regained grace is mirrored in the story of Lyra and her use of the alethiometer. At the end of *The Amber Spyglass* Lyra’s fall from grace is simultaneous with her loss of ability to

use the alethiometer: ‘At the same moment as she achieves this higher consciousness, Lyra loses the innate ability to read the alethiometer.’ (Moruzi, 2005, 61) This innate ability, Pullman infers, is a product of her child-like innocence and lack of self-awareness. However, this is not something she cannot regain, and it is explained to her that after a life time of learning, her reading of the alethiometer will be even better. “Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely...” (AS, 520). The alethiometer and Lyra’s loss of this innate skill to read it symbolise Pullman’s strong belief that as an essential part of growing up, the fall from grace is not a falling away from goodness, but a step towards it. His emphasis here is on learning and hard work to achieve rather than settling for what we already know.

This positive attitude towards experience, life and age is deliberately at odds with Lewis’ negative view of adulthood, which is imbued in *Chronicles* alongside his notion of innocence as preferable to experience. In *The Last Battle* Peter introduces Tirian to all the Kings and Queens of Narnia. ‘Then he led him to the eldest of the Queens – but even she was not old, and there were no grey hairs on her head and no wrinkles on her cheek.’ (LB, 127) This negative attitude towards age is also found in *The Silver Chair*. Prince Caspian has died and his body lies old and grey in its last stage of life. Instead of making the children, Jill and Eustace, accept this natural progression through life into old age and death, Lewis describes a scene in which death and age are defied and denied.

His white beard turned to grey, and from grey to yellow, and got shorter and vanished altogether; and his sunken cheeks grew round and fresh, and the wrinkles were smoothed, and his eyes opened, and his eyes and lips both laughed, and suddenly he leaped up before them – a very young man, or a boy.

(SC, 188)

Not only are death and age rejected, but the actual physically preferable features of youth are exaggerated in this rapid reversal of age. It is interesting that Lewis takes him back to the age of the children, but also to a pre-adolescent stage of life which is preferable to Lewis. This reversal of age is immediately contradicted by one of Lewis’ characteristic authorial asides in brackets. He says, ‘(But Jill couldn’t say which, because of people having no particular ages in Aslan’s country...)’ (SC, 188) This confusing notion of age, which is not supported by the immediately preceding description of age being reversed further suggests at Lewis’ negative attitude towards age.

Pullman further takes issue with Lewis’ treatment of innocence as opposite, and preferable, to knowledge. In *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Edmund is aligned

with evil because he suggests that ‘knowledge is superior to faith.’ (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 252) In this sense, faith is aligned with the instinctive or inherent innocence. Knowledge and understanding are essentially relegated to the side of evil by the very basis of the Christian religion which polarises virtue and knowledge. This is an idea which Plato thought almost the opposite of. Plato drew the conclusion that, ‘if man did not possess virtue, it must be because he was ignorant of what constituted virtue. Knowledge...in this way became synonymous with virtue, and vice with ignorance.’ (Mills, 1964, 11) Pullman takes this notion of virtue and knowledge as positive and desirable, promoting the Fall. He has said, ‘Innocence can’t be wise, wisdom can’t be innocent’ (Southbank Show, 2003), and though inverting the Fall myth Pullman synthesises the idea that grace which is regained through knowledge and understanding is a far more worthy grace than that of innocence.

Pullman also draws on the Old Testament fall myth to give his story a deeper and more significant weight. *His Dark Materials* is rich with intertextual references and a deep sense of interconnectedness. Pullman uses the Judeo-Christian myth of the Fall to create an even deeper sense of interconnectedness and relevancy in his story. In drawing on the church and its very founding mythology, Pullman brings epic proportions and dimensions to his narrative. Pullman uses, ‘the heavy machinery of a reconceptualized fall to constitute the event as the defining moment of the text.’ (Gooderham, 2003, 169) Furthermore in deploying the language and mythology of Christianity, Pullman attempts to unpick the foundations which he believes to be untrue and misleading. Pullman challenges the foundations of Christian thinking in his reworking of the Fall. His notion of grace as something that can be regained, the idea that knowledge is better than innocence and his metaphorical dust which represents this, all inherently challenge Christian theology. In *Challenging Christian convention*, Mary Harris Russell says he often departs from expectations. ‘...These departures...can best be understood in the context of Pullman’s desire to imagine a post-Christian, post-theistic ethics.’ (Russell, 2003, 68) In his imagining this post-Christian infrastructure Pullman not only reflects elements of modern atheistic thinking, but informs and constructs this mode of thought. Pullman creates a new way of thinking about this myth, or even a new myth itself with which to imagine the processes depicted in the Judeo-Christian myth of the Fall.

## Sexuality

The idea of the Fall is closely related to that of sexuality and sexual awakening. There is a definite and noticeable absence of normal sexuality in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This is not a passive or incidental feature of Narnia's framework, it is deliberate and worked. Though *The Chronicles of Narnia* are children's books, written in the 1950s, where we would not expect to see explicit sexual content, the complete denial of sexuality and sex in Narnia is achieved with some difficulty. The creation of the world of Narnia, which helpfully uses the Genesis story of creation, is in itself, a denial of sex and the nature of birth. In *The Magician's Nephew*, the creatures are breathed into being by Aslan and they are then 'born' from the earth itself.

Few readers will quickly forget the rapid stages of Narnia's creation, and such startlingly effective pictures as the little hillocks out of which all varieties of animals burst forth into the splendour of existence.

(Walsh, 1979, 136)

The creatures arrive in pairs which might then reproduce however there is no evidence, explicit, implied or intrinsic, of reproduction throughout the entire *Chronicles*.

Throughout the entire seven books there is not one complete family where there are both parents and a child present. The beaver family of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are childless; the King of Archenland in *The Horse and His Boy*, though with two sons is mysteriously wifeless; the first rulers of Narnia are without children in the beginning and though they provide the royal line of Narnia for many years, the only mention of those children is to say that, 'King Frank and Queen Helen and their children lived happily ever after.' (MN, 170)

This denial of reproduction which is a denial of sex is found in every instance of family which may suggest this natural process. This is further supported by the almost complete absence of females and especially Queens in Narnia. Though the male line is often referred to throughout the chronicles, there is no mention of their partners and their means for propagating this male line. Though Lewis 'is generally scrupulously careful to include among his main characters equal numbers of males and females, there are times when his females become curiously invisible linguistically speaking.' (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, 66)

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, sexuality is intrinsically absent in the Pevensie children. Though they grow old in Narnia ruling as Kings and Queens, their gender pairing amongst brothers and sisters is satisfactory to fulfil the conventional assembly of male and female. Hourihan says that this is conventional in the heroic adventure, 'The hero typically avoids any significant sexual involvement for such a relationship would compromise his dedication to his mission...' (Hourihan, 1997, 68) However, this absence of sexuality is tied to innocence and purity. This point is emphasised in those characters present at the moment of judgement in *The Last Battle*. Many critics have pointed out the absence of Susan from heaven: 'for playing a female role...' (Hourihan, 1997, 68) and Wood says,

...children can enter the kingdom of heaven, but independent adults are more problematic, hence Lewis' troubling dismissal in *The Last Battle* of Susan... Good grownups such as Professor Kirk maintain their childlike openness and ignore the tricky adult issues of sexual desire.

(Wood, 2001, 248)

Normal sexuality and sex itself are not only denied and viewed as sinful and unnatural in Narnia, sexuality is actually used to generate fear. 'The seductive sexuality of the Witch, which ensnared Edmund, makes it evident that women whose sexual natures are acknowledged are profoundly to be feared.' (Rustin and Rustin, 2001, 53) In Lewis, sexuality, and specifically female sexuality, is equated with evil. When the Witch tempts Edmund in *The Magician's Nephew*, the scene is enacted like a seduction. The fulfilment of Edmund's physical desires with food, drink and her furs for warmth all implicitly suggest at a sexual satisfaction. Holbrook says, 'Edmund's sin, though it is not made plain, is to be seduced by the witch into self-indulgent pleasure as one is tempted to masturbate.' (Holbrook, 1991, 41-2) The eventual consequences of this act and his attempts to satisfy his decadent physical desire directly bring about the scene in which Aslan is murdered. In sacrificing himself for Edmund, Aslan metaphorically sacrifices himself on behalf of mankind who sinfully seek sexual gratification.

Pullman deliberately inverts this denial of sexuality. At the apocalyptic moment at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* it is adolescent sexual-awakening itself which saves the world. Pullman is deliberately open about sexuality and sex. There are many relationships in the trilogy which directly and often explicitly imply sexuality. The witches talk about relationships with men, falling in love and having children and the relationship between Serafina Pekkala and Farder Coram is woven into the plot quite

seamlessly. There is also an implied gay relationship between the angels Balthamos and Baruch, though this is not a bodily one. There is also a great deal of openness about romantic love in this relationship which is echoed throughout the book.

In the letters which Will reads from his father, there is intrinsic romance and sexual longing. *'My Darling...Wish me luck my darling...I love you for ever...'* (SK, 119) Similarly the nature of Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter's sexual relationship is open and frank. At a climactic point in the plot Asriel kisses Mrs Coulter. *'She felt as soft and light in his arms as she'd done when Lyra was conceived...'* (AS, 426). This reference to sexuality, tenderness and reproduction represents the overall attitude to sex in Pullman's writing. In this one sentence Pullman achieves the honesty, naturalness and physical joy of sex which is lacking in Narnia.

Pullman also takes Lewis' notion of female sexuality as fearsome and predatory and plays with this notion. Mrs Coulter is a villainess in the vein of traditional characters of children's literature. She is independent, shockingly beautiful, cruel, callous, is manipulative and, in keeping with the ultimate villainess characteristic, she preys on young children who are both enraptured by her and terrified of her. However, the stock traits end at this point because Pullman complicates this issue. Though Mrs Coulter at several junctures in the plot uses her sexuality manipulatively and for her own benefit (Lord Boreal, Charles Lantrom), she ultimately uses it in the selfless sacrifice of her own life. She seduces Metatron with her flesh and in doing so saves Lyra's life. Whilst Mrs Coulter's sexuality is at times predatory, Pullman avoids a simplistic representation of such a complex and varied issue and presents her sexuality as a weapon which applied ethically actually achieves a morally acceptable end. Metatron is indulgently seduced by her and so falls as a result.

Controversially, Pullman further represents sexuality and in particular sexual awakening in his child protagonists. Pullman shows the exact moment of sexual awareness and in doing so shows the natural and tender nature of this moment of realisation. However, the sentiment of Christian groups, who have banned his books not only for their anti-Christian message but also because of the considered inappropriateness of this sexual content, is echoed by Moruzi who disapproves of this promotion of sexuality. *'Pullman works the Fall of humanity into an ascent and suggests that ascent into adulthood through sexual experience is the desired goal for children.'* (Moruzi, 2005, 55) Perhaps in

focussing so intently upon a positive attitude towards sexuality for teenagers, Pullman's emphasis appears to be a recommendation rather than a representation. However, though the sexual awakening of the children is implied as a desired goal, it is almost immediately withdrawn. Though Lyra and Will discover sexuality, it is immediately confiscated by the absolute necessity of their separation at the end of the trilogy. Pullman does not explore adolescent sexuality any further than an impassioned kiss, 'before they knew how it happened, they were clinging together, blindly pressing their faces toward each other.' (AS, 492)

### **Idealisation of childhood**

Pullman in part, however, uses the idea of sexual awakening to make a more realistic representation of childhood and the progression towards adulthood. In direct response to Lewis' representation of childhood as a state of perfect innocence void of sexual awareness of any kind, Pullman depicts childhood more realistically as a state working towards adulthood, awareness and consciousness. Pullman has said he hates Narnia and their 'view of childhood as a golden age from which sexuality and adulthood are a falling-away.' (Vulliamy, 2001, 18) Instead he represents growth and development as positive.

Hourihan says that *The Chronicles of Narnia* 'certainly depict childhood as a state more desirable than adulthood, a time when access to paradise is still possible.' (Hourihan, 1997, 165) Narnia, as the spiritual world, or as the fantasy world, is a place of innocence. There comes a point when each child is too old to come to Narnia again, except for the final time, and the implication of this is that after a certain age Narnia cannot or will not allow entry. This explicit preference for childhood and the immaturity which is necessarily accompanied by innocence is a sentiment seen in much children's literature in the period leading up to the 1950s. Pullman criticises the attitude towards childhood expressed by A. A. Milne and his generation. He says, 'that sentimental view of childhood is one that I have never had...' (Parsons and Nicholson, 1999, 130).



Pullman's representation of children is notably realistic and faithfully imperfect. The children at the opening of *The Northern Lights* are seen to be rebellious and aggressive in their playing. 'He rejects nostalgic impressions of children and childhood, insisting on a more realistic portrayal.' (Moruzi, 2005, 59) Lyra, his female child protagonist is continuously seen as dirty, disobedient, rebellious and rude. At the beginning of the trilogy Lyra is a rude, obnoxious liar. In a sense this foundation of imperfections allows for her growth over the trilogy in which the journey she takes mirrors her own personal and inner growth. Similarly, Will begins his part in the trilogy with the accidental murder of a policeman. His journey throughout the trilogy mirrors his inner growth and development to come to the understanding of the consequences of human's actions and the responsibility that every person has in the world.

Importantly for Pullman, his children are allowed to make mistakes. There are very few mistakes made by the children in Narnia and under Lewis' black and white morality they are severely punishable mistakes. One mistake made in Narnia is Edmund's betrayal of his brother and sisters and the consequences are heavily punished; another, in *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, is when Lucy performs a spell and is similarly punished with a severe reprimand. Lewis' protagonists, though children, are expected to know right from wrong and to always act on this knowledge. However Pullman shows the development and learning processes of the children in *His Dark Materials* as the plot mirrors their growth and understanding.

Pullman shows the growth towards adulthood as positive and rewarding in many ways. Pullman explicitly determines not to represent childhood as a state preferable to adulthood and also deliberately represents childhood realistically as a reaction to the idealisation of childhood seen in the literature of both golden ages. However, Moruzi suggests that the idea of the dæmon and its infinite ability to change in childhood compared with its fixedness from adolescence onwards is idealising the state of childhood. 'Pullman's depiction of changing dæmons reflects a sentimental idea about the infinite possibilities of children.' (Moruzi, 2005, 63) Though the idea of the changing dæmon in childhood appeals to children reading, and probably adults, the idea in itself does seem to suggest a plasticity in children which is at odds with Pullman's use of pre-destination and destiny. Pullman uses the question often asked by and of children about what they will be when they grow up and makes it something physical. The material presence of this question in the dæmon, acts as a constant reminder that the

place of the child and their nature are not yet fixed. To a degree this does reflect sentimentality about childhood; however Pullman is careful to express the positivism of the dæmon settling.

### Afterlife

In each of these respective authors' fantasy works, a particular view of the afterlife is expressed. Lewis' notion of the afterlife is essentially a Christian one and 'everlasting Narnias' are quite clearly a variation of the Christian idea of heaven. At the final judgement Aslan separates the good and the evil, casting the evil in a dark shadow whilst good characters travel through a door of light on his other side. This clearly divisive act of separation is the final display of Lewis' polarisation of good and evil.

In response to this, and indeed in response to the very Christian notions of heaven and hell, Pullman not only creates the republic of heaven, but places a profoundly world-bound emphasis on his notion of the afterlife. In the German journal *Inklings*, Christian Kölzer asks what is left when Pullman takes away the foundations of Christian thinking viewing them as important in answering fundamental existential questions:

Since the abolition of traditional religion does not end the need to ask those fundamental questions about human existence...we must ask: Is Man now alone in the universe with no deeper meaning of life but that of survival and materialistic needs?

(Kölzer, 2004, 177)

This seems to neglect the particular emphasis Pullman does place on answering these fundamental questions. Pullman said of heaven that, 'it is a very difficult idea to give up' (Southbank Show, 2003), and admitted that in destroying God and therefore the 'kingdom' and hierarchy, that he then found it unnecessary to give up the idea of heaven entirely. However, the concept of new heaven at the end of *His Dark Materials*, is nothing like the traditional notion of it as a place. Pullman says that heaven is important for humans because it embodies a lot of essential concerns about life. It completes the idea of meaningfulness of life and interconnectedness between humans and their world. It fulfils the desire of human beings to have a 'part to play in a greater story.' Pullman's notion of heaven synthesises with one of the key functions of fantasy writing and of

Pullman's trilogy and that is to fulfil the human desire to be part of a great story. In the fantasy world, the human struggle and the importance of their actions are given epic proportions which stay with the reader long after they finish reading.

For Pullman there really is no afterlife, but everything that human beings do in their actual life makes the world a better place. Pullman shows ghosts longing to rejoin the world of the dead, God's prison camp, and in doing so, undoes the very basis of the notion that the afterlife is eternal bliss. Instead the state of un-bodily spiritual life is portrayed as a torturous semi-existence. The Christian idea of the afterlife places emphasis on the necessity to act well in the earthly life because it will be rewarded in the afterlife. Pullman places emphasis on acting well in this life, because it will make this life itself better.

The notion of heaven is an important and dominant one in all mono-theistic religions, and is one which has penetrated many societies. The ideas of reward for good behaviour and of interconnectedness - that what we do has a deeper significance - are central to the human need for an afterlife. Pullman takes this idea and works it into his eschatology. Pullman considers the interconnectedness inherent in Christian eschatological theory an important thing. He thinks it is crucial to feel yourself connected to the world, saying:

“When we have a sense of who we fully are and the world we fully belong to, you tend to get things right on the whole because then you see yourself ... in a moral connection with the rest of the universe. It's when you feel yourself isolated from that ... that's when things go wrong.”

(Butler et al, 2004, 56)

Pullman takes this basic principle and basic human need which is ingrained in the notion of heaven and transmutes it to his own atheistic depiction of the afterlife. Pullman uses his multifunctional metaphor, dust, to create a profound sense of interconnectedness and purpose without the idea of heaven. ‘Pullman's task is to replace the old myths with a new, more honest story, written to replace the delusion of an afterlife.’ (Gooderham, 2003, 161)

In doing this, there is an inherent embracing of life. As shown in the last chapter, Pullman celebrates the value of flesh and bodily life therefore showing this world to be more valuable than the speculated next. In this sense the earlier discussed issue of the ending of *The Amber Spyglass* is absolutely crucial to Pullman's thinking. There is a

marked sense with which the protagonists of the epic trilogy must return to their own worlds, taking with them the valuable lessons they have learned.

*The Chronicles of Narnia* then seem to reject this notion with absolutism.

We may take Narnia as “the spiritual world” if we wish, and we may agree with Lewis that is a good thing to slip into this other world when we least expect it, but surely everything depends on what you learn while you’re there?

(Holbrook, 1991, 61)

It is then interesting to consider, that after all of the adventures in Narnia, and all of their supposed learning in this “spiritual world” that Lewis concludes the chronicles with the untimely death of all of the characters. They do not have to return to their own world to apply what they have learned; they simply die and receive their reward in the afterlife. This shocking rejection of the real world not only negates the value of the children’s adventures but the notion that they would prefer to die is imbued in their feelings towards Narnia. *In the Last Battle* as the children stand before Aslan looking afraid, their concern is that he will send them home again, as he has so many times. When Aslan reveals the truth to them, that they have died and will not return home, this is much cause for celebration. Of course, a fearless and accepting view of death as natural is not an undesirable one for children; however, the view expressed here is that death and the afterlife are actually preferable to life and the real world.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Conclusion: A More Positive Message?**

The last three chapters have looked at Pullman and Lewis' work in three different ways and the conclusion will draw upon the key issues raised in these chapters. Fantasy, it has been shown, is a genre which invariably comments upon reality and contemporary issues; this is despite its necessary escape from the real world through creating an alternative fantasy world. Children's literature has historically been a literature which deals with morality and this is clearly a dominant issue in both Pullman and Lewis' children's literature. Lastly, comparing their work, and the specifically intertextual relationship created by Pullman between *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, highlights the conflicting messages which are communicated by each author in their children's literature.

#### **Approaching Reality through Fantasy**

Though Pullman and Lewis take very different approaches to their representations of their contemporary realities in their fantasy work, they both nonetheless comment upon their contemporary world in their creation of the secondary world. As Ann Swinfen says, fantasy is 'a method for approaching and evaluating the real world.' (Swinfen, 1984, 230)

Pullman's alternative worlds provide two Key functions. Pullman creates a series of imperfect imaginary worlds in *His Dark Materials*, drawing on elements of his world and subverting other elements in order to create a series of worlds in sharp contrast and close comparison with our own. Pullman simultaneously praises and criticises the modern world by making selective and precise changes to the alternative world. By creating a

series of worlds which differ variously from reality, Pullman can make positive suggestions about reality. In contrast to this, Lewis draws a world which in no way makes positive comment about his contemporary world. The new world of Narnia deviates from what Lewis sees as the primary fault of our world by delaying the expulsion of man from Eden. In the initial throws of the creation of this perfect world, Lewis postpones the loss of paradise; the eventual fall of man and rise of corruption are then simultaneous with the end of that world. Lewis constructs Narnia from purely historic, archaic imagery and in doing so rejects modern advancements and modernity in the very material structure of his new world. He also brings the social hierarchical structure of this historic past to his new world thereby further rejecting the modern world and its political and social structures. Lewis makes almost no explicit comments regarding the contemporary world in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and yet Narnia, as a new world, highlights what Lewis saw as the shortcomings of his world. Where Lewis does comment on the real world, it is usually a sentence or two of explicit criticism, usually about modern schooling which also serve to criticise the failings of secularism. In *The Silver Chair* Eustace wants to swear by something but can't think of anything so says, "I swear by – by everything." (SC, 12) This is followed by explicit authorial commentary as Lewis says, '(When I was at school one would have said, "I swear by the Bible." But Bibles were not encouraged at Experiment house [Eustace's school].)' (SC, 12) Lewis' attitude towards his contemporary society, where explicitly expressed, is consistent with this example. By drawing on the past for setting, imagery and structure in the creation of a perfect world Lewis implies his negative view of modernity further.

Where Pullman uses the secondary world to highlight the successes and failings of contemporary reality, Lewis creates a new world which rejects every level of his contemporary reality. In creating Narnia, Lewis creates a new world; a world where his own system of morality is dominant and reinforced by the authoritative structures in place; a world where the values he believes to be important are valued; and a world whose history over the entire *Chronicles* can act as a prediction for the destiny of our own should the corruption evidently perceived by Lewis continue. Fantasy is a mode for evaluating reality and modern fantasy writers have taken this charge with utmost seriousness. Lewis however, as a writer whose publications only just precede this shift in the fantasy genre, does not directly evaluate the real world in his fantasy writing.

Though it has not been closely examined here, Lewis has received a great deal of criticism for the racist, sexist, classist and bullying attitudes expressed in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. These attitudes are now so at odds with common, or socially acceptable, opinion that critics have almost unanimously questioned their value and suitability for children. However, surely his negative view of the contemporary world is equal cause for concern. Perhaps the reason for the endurance of the books lies in the fact that they are set so far in the past that they defy the sense of datedness which would otherwise alienate the reader. They certainly appeal greatly to the child's imagination in their alternative world setting where the children's actions are momentarily important. However, in creating a world which so strongly denies the situational reality of the reader, Lewis not only creates a world which the child-imagination can delight in, but suggests that that imaginary world is better than reality. This is certainly not a helpful suggestion for a developing reader, least of all within the powerful seduction of Lewis' writing. In strong and deliberate contrast to this, Pullman creates fantasy worlds which, whilst highlighting the faults of the readers' world, have faults of their own.

### **The Moral Responsibility of the Children's Author**

Children's literature has been shown as an historically instructive literature. Whether authors intend their works to be didactic ones, the necessary imbalance of power and knowledge between adult writer and child reader means that every reading experience for the developing reader is a didactic one. However, it has also been shown that children's literature has historically been concerned with morality. Children's literature is an institution through which morals and socially dominant values are inherited. 'Adults see it as their task to socialise children...' (Knowles 1998, 54), and this is perhaps particularly true of children's authors. Morality must be seen as a vitally important constituent in children's literature because it primarily concerns actions. The child protagonists in children's literature are virtual role models for the child reader and so their actions and behaviour carry great relevance.

Lewis' representation of life as inferior to the afterlife is not necessarily something which communicates itself to the reader and there is no way of measuring the effect that the

ideology in a text will have upon its reader, but for Lewis to express such an attitude indicates a degree of irresponsibility with which Lewis deals with other issues in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In a sense, Lewis' fantasy, in showing all of the children enjoying eternal happiness at the end of *The Last Battle*, fills the gap between the real and the desired which Sullivan and White talk about, (Sullivan and White, 1999, 1). However, with its Christian allegory and determinedly didactic morality, it is clear that Lewis has a greater purpose in mind. *The Chronicles of Narnia* are intended to communicate Lewis' morality to his readers. As it has been shown above, morality primarily concerns actions, and the action which are taken by the characters in the *Chronicles* are strangely inconsistent with Christian values. The children are encouraged to act brutally and violently towards their enemies and compassion is almost entirely lacking in all of the books. Lewis does not equip his reader with the tools of reason to discern good from evil, his characters are simply drawn with absolute and distinct division. However, in the chronicles there is an almost complete lack of consequences and this is surely an omission which is cause for great concern. Without consequences in Narnia, there is no reason not to act immorally and so Lewis' moral instruction is incomplete.

Pullman similarly employs violence as a natural mechanism to resolve conflict, however, the consequences are highlighted as vitally important. The characters are made acutely aware of the consequences of their violence and in turn the decision to take violent action is often more reluctant. This attitude towards violence is not only more realistic to life, but accompanied with the decision making processes which determine the action is surely a more morally responsible attitude for a children's author to project. Furthermore, Pullman's morality, with its thoroughness and constancy is a far more functional morality for the reader.

### **Childhood and Children's Literature**

Pullman deliberately inverts Lewis' positive representation of childhood and negative representation of adolescence with the ultimate target of projecting a more positive message to his readership. The four areas looked at in chapter eight, the Fall, sexuality, childhood and the afterlife, are all connected to the fundamental, and often ideologically



passive, belief in Lewis' work that adulthood is an undesirable state of being and that childhood is a 'golden age from which sexuality and adulthood are a falling-away.' (Pullman, in Vulliamy, 18) Pullman takes this idea and asserts the absolute opposite. In *His Dark Materials*, the move to show adolescence and adulthood as desirable is so emphasised that he has been criticised for neglecting the state of childhood. Moruzi says, 'Ultimately, Pullman suggests that the maturity of adulthood is more valuable to society than children and childhood.' (Moruzi, 2005, 56) Perhaps Pullman does assert his inversion of Lewis' attitude to an extreme and in doing so projects a negative view of childhood but the attitudes about sexuality and adolescent change are certainly approached more honestly. The views expressed by Pullman in *His Dark Materials* are not only more desirable to the modern reader than those in Lewis' fantasy but they are also more in line with the attitudes of contemporary society. The inevitable datedness of Lewis' work, though it does not wholly account for his attitude toward childhood, does perhaps explain to a degree the difference in attitudes expressed by Lewis and Pullman.

By denying sexuality and sex in *The Chronicles of Narnia* Lewis denies the most natural of human impulses and nature itself. It is understandable that children's literature is edited of explicit sexual content, but the completeness with which sex and sexuality are denied signifies Lewis discomfort with the subject. He not only eliminates sex from the *Chronicles*, but in the various evil female Witches (Jadis in *The Magician's Nephew*, The White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, The Green Witch in *The Silver Chair*,) sexuality is actually shown to be dangerous. Pullman takes this view of sexuality as dangerous and without explicitly sexual content displays both the dangerous and manipulative element of sexuality in Mrs Coulter's relationships with other men and the tender side of sexuality in her relationship with Lord Asriel.

### **The Afterlife: Positive Endings**

Pullman and Lewis' eschatology is certainly the area in which they are most clearly at odds with one another. Pullman's series of imperfect worlds are not created to suggest that there is a better version of reality elsewhere but to express the attitude that one must cherish precisely what one has. At the end of the trilogy, the return of the protagonists to

their own worlds signifies this necessity to embrace your own reality. This idea is consistently reinforced and Pullman's concept of the afterlife further substantiates this positive attitude towards reality. The Harpy, No-Name, comes to an agreement with Lyra that passage through the prison-camp-like world of the dead and back out into the free world is dependent on what you have done with your life. She says if people, "live in the world, they *should* see and touch and hear and love and learn things...if they come down here bringing nothing, we shall not guide them out." (AS, 334) The focus of human existence in Pullman's trilogy is, at all times, bodily, earthly, material existence. The idea that physical, fleshly pleasures are the essence of joy in life is continuously reiterated throughout the trilogy. In *The Amber Spyglass*, a Martyr in the world of the dead speaks and expresses her regret at the way her life was spent. She says:

When we were alive, they told us that when we died we'd go to heaven. And they said that heaven was a place of joy and glory...And that's what led some of us to give our lives, and others to spend years in solitary prayer, while all the joy of life was going to waste around us...

(AS, 336)

Lewis' notion of the afterlife and his belief in heaven clearly inform his interpretation of earthly life and its purpose. The absolute certainty of belief in the notion of reward in the afterlife underpins the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Where Pullman's emphasis on human existence is clearly this life, Lewis' belief in the afterlife determines his view that true joy and glory lie in the next life. There is a constant impression throughout the *Chronicles* that the ultimate goal has not yet been achieved. The final words of *The Last Battle* clarify this as the case. Aslan tells them as they enter 'ever-lasting Narnias', "The term is over: the holidays have begun." (LB, 171) Furthermore, the notion of 'ever-lasting Narnias' in which every one is better than the one before projects the view that there is no ultimate happiness or satisfaction but that life and indeed the afterlife consist of a continual search for something better. When they have died, Lucy describes the Narnia which they are in as, "more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below..." (LB, 169), the one from which they came. It is in this interpretation of the afterlife, and the deeply embedded assumption that it is better than real life that Pullman so strongly opposes.

Pullman's notion of the afterlife creates the interconnectedness and the sense of deeper purpose in every human life which Christianity and heaven provide. Mary discovers Dust

and its connectedness to human life and the earth and feels that it gives life a sense of purpose.

This was the very thing she'd told Will about when he asked if she missed God: it was the sense that the whole universe was alive, and that everything was connected to everything else by threads of meaning. When she'd been a Christian, she had felt connected too; but when she left the Church, she felt loose and free and light, in a universe without meaning.  
(AS, 473)

Pullman crucially employs his metaphor, Dust, to provide a secular reason for living morally. David Gooderham says Pullman 'is about establishing the humanistic values of a new secular world...' (Gooderham, 2003, 167). Pullman describes eternal existence as a living hell and shows the souls of the dead yearning to rejoin the earth and their matter. Furthermore, this process is crucially understood as a spiritual and nourishing one. The body and its nourishing the earth in death is a dominant theme, and in turn the soul nourishes other human life. The angel Xaphania explains the material reason for moral secular existence: "Dust is not a constant... Conscious beings make Dust – they renew it all the time, by thinking and feeling and reflecting, by gaining wisdom and passing it on."  
(AS, 520)

Though Lewis' child characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia* have a happy ending, the ending for the reader is not so satisfying, neither is it a positive ending for the reader. At the end of *The Last Battle* the entire cast are reunited in a glorious afterlife, however the very premise of the story is a circular journey and this abrupt departure from reality is a betrayal of the readers' investment in the story and the alignment of the child reader with the protagonists. By removing the child heroes from their real world and sending them into an eternal fantasy world, the life outside of the story is also brought to an abrupt end. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the children enter the fantasy world and play the role of adults within Narnia before returning to their own world with the lessons they have learned. In a sense the whole purpose of the journey is about the experience; 'surely everything depends on what you learn while you're there?' (Holbrook, 1991, 61) Given this, the story, with the ending showing the deaths of all the key characters who never return to their own worlds, seems not only artificial but purposeless.

Though the ending to the *His Dark Materials* trilogy is harsh, there can be no other faithful ending. In this epic fantasy, the child protagonists are sent out on a dangerous and threatening journey and the reader embarks on this journey with the understanding

that at the end, though much will have changed, the characters will return home. These are the conditions, it is understood by the reader, on which the journey is undertaken. Furthermore, without this ending of a return home, the reader is not only alienated from the heroes of the story, but the knowledge and self-discovery acquired on the journey become void.

## Suggestions for Further Study

Pullman's and Lewis' children's works have been compared since the first book of *His Dark Materials* was published and yet there still remains much to compare. C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman have a great deal in common and a study of their work with an emphasis on their own social contexts would complete the picture of the intertextuality between their works. Perhaps a Marxist reading of their works would further explain the differences in their theology, ideology and philosophy as well as their varying world views.

There has been a great deal of criticism looking at the undesirable ideology expressed in Lewis' children books. The racism apparent in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and in particular in books such as *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle* is undeniable. Critics have similarly looked at his sexist attitude apparent in his representation of women and his neglect of female characters. A study of these issues compared with Pullman's work would perhaps show the natural equality of his representation of the genders. However, though Pullman's trilogy features a cast of multi-nationals, the comparison with Lewis may perhaps highlight a similarity rather than deliberate re-working. The heroes of *His Dark Materials* are of the white, educated, British, middle-class and Pullman fails to imagine heroes outside of this traditional representation of the hero. Margery Hourihan says, 'In western writing the hero has always been white, in "fact" and fiction, even in fantasy tales, because the story is about the superiority of white culture.' (Hourihan, 1997, 61)

There is already research which looks at the different levels of ideology in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Research of this nature looking at *His Dark Materials* is now much needed. The majority of Pullman's literary critics have focused on the storytelling aspects of his work and a study of his ideology from a linguistic perspective would be extremely fruitful and helpful to students of Pullman's work.

Comparing *The Chronicles of Narnia* with *His Dark Materials* provides varied and rich topics for comparison. *His Dark Materials* is a deliberate response, in some ways, to Narnia and in this sense comparing them opens up aspects of Narnia for discussion. However, the comparison is, at times, rather limiting in terms of Pullman's scope. The

loaded intertextuality of *His Dark Materials* is necessarily excluded from a comparison with Lewis' work thus neglecting a vast area of discussion. The three most important literary influences are Kleist's essay, *On the Marionette Theatre*, the works of William Blake and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. However his other literary influences in *His Dark Materials* include the Bible, Coleridge, Emily Dickinson, Edmund Spenser, John Ruskin, John Webster, Lord Byron, John Donne, Andrew Marvell, John Keats and Christina Rossetti among others. Future research could look at Pullman's work in terms of these influences to help gain a fuller understanding of Pullman's literature.

Pullman has, to some extent, been situated within the fantasy tradition in this thesis, however there are a great many modern fantasy authors whose work would provide fruitful comparison for Pullman's fantasy. Though Pullman expressly claims not to be a fantasy writer, he admits that *His Dark Materials* is indeed a fantasy work. Despite saying that he does not read fantasy, his work shares a great deal in common with other modern children's fantasy writers such as Alan Garner, Ursula Le Guin, Lucy Boston and Philip Reeve. Modern fantasists have taken serious issue with themes of morality, and often secular morality, alongside big philosophical ideas. Pullman clearly sits comfortably within the fantasy tradition in some ways, and yet also creates new rules for the tradition, the study of which would provide fruitful research.

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