# Re-Defining C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman: Conventional and Progressive heroes and heroines in The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe and The Golden Compass

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Abstract

C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman are two very popular authors of British Children's Fantasy. Their books The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe and The Golden Compass straddle the period of writing that Karen Patricia Smith calls the Dynamic Stage of British Fantasy: from 1950 to the present. Both of these books are part of a larger series and both have been made into recent motion pictures by Hollywood. This paper explores these two books through the lens of their conventional and progressive authors. I discuss in detail the gifts that the heroes and heroines are given, the setting of these books, and the function of destiny and prophecy in order to explore the irony of these books: C.S. Lewis, often viewed as the more conventional author by scholars, is in fact more progressive than his contemporary counterpart.

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# I. Introduction: Origins

A miraculous spider's web. A rabbit hole. A looking glass. This list could go on and on. The pages of children's literature are covered with images of the fantastic. Children have had amazing, wonderful adventures within the pages of these books for centuries. Arguably one of the most popular children's books is C.S. Lewis' The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe. Written in 1950, The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe is often considered fantasy at its best. It takes place in the wonderful world of Narnia where animals talk and act a lot like human beings. The story begins when four children, two boys and two girls, are sent from London to stay with a professor in the country during World War II and find a magical world on the other side of a wardrobe.

In 1995, Philip Pullman published the first book in his trilogy, *His Dark Materials.* Called The Golden Compass in the United States (Northern Lights in Britain), this book tells the story of young Lyra Belacqua and her daemon Pantalaimon. This book, unlike and yet similar in many ways to Lewis' work, transports the reader into a world different from our own yet startlingly familiar where polar bears talk and witches fly and a little girl is destined to save the world.

This project began, as so many do, as something else entirely. The current direction originated when I first heard Philip Pullman give an interview in the documentary called Beyond the Golden Compass. In it, Pullman tells his viewers "Lyra isn't an extra-ordinary child. I wanted to write about a girl who is very ordinary. There are hundreds of Lyra's walking the streets of Oxford right now." I was at first vehemently

opposed to this statement. Lyra is anything but ordinary, I thought, and there are definitely not hundreds walking around right now, but felt Pullman's statement deserved more consideration. What is it about Lyra, a child who we hear time and again is destined for her task that enables Pullman to even tell us she is ordinary at all?

When considering Pullman's 1995 book, it is hard to ignore C.S. Lewis' 1950 book – one that Pullman is a harsh critic of. It seemed natural to want to examine both of these authors, and see what Lewis, the "conservative" author, and Pullman, the "progressive" and more contemporary author, would do with the dilemma of giving their audience a fantasy hero who is destined for his or her task, yet also someone who could, in Pullman's words, be walking around Oxford right now. This paper will explore the gifts given to the children characters and then move into a detailed discussion of the setting of these books and the function of destiny and prophecy in both stories to reveal this irony: Pullman, despite his own suggestion, is *not* giving us a heroine "who is very ordinary." His story, while at times progressive, falls into many of the traps of conventional fantasy, in part because his heroine and her surroundings are very unordinary. Lewis' work, on the other hand, while known as being conventional, can be seen as quite egalitarian and has heroes and heroines who could easily be walking around Oxford at this very moment.

While these two books are distinct in a variety of ways, they both fall into what Karen Patricia Smith labels the Dynamic Stage of British Fantasy. In her book The Fabulous Realm: A Literary-Historical Approach to British Fantasy, 1780-1990, Smith gives a very detailed account of the history of this particular area of Children's Literature. She moves through discussion of the Didactic Stage (1780-1840), the Enlightenment

Stage (1841-1899), the Diversionary Stage (1900-1949) and finally into the Dynamic Stage of British Fantasy (1950-present). Smith notes about the Dynamic Stage that,

> Indeed, the careful development of hero and quest highlights a special gift on the part of many contemporary fantasists. It may be seen as the successful culmination of over two hundred years of devotion to the genre. We as readers place our fortunes with fantasy heroes and heroines, move with them through time and space, through deeds daunting but never entirely defeating, and feel that surge of hope that comes when envisioning the joy of the ever-beckoning goal and the ecstasy of its eventual attainment. (393)

Both Lewis' and Pullman's books ask us to "place our fortunes with" the heroes and heroines and move with them throughout their journey's. Each author and each story gives readers the "surge of hope" that comes with success, something Smith rightly notes. What Smith doesn't talk about, however, are the varied audiences of this new Stage of children's stories.

In all the previous stages of British children's fantasy, children's books had been written specifically for children alone (largely a result of the original didactic purposes of the books). With the Dynamic Stage, this began to shift. In his essay *On Three Ways of Writing for Children*, C.S. Lewis notes, "I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story. The good ones last. … This canon seems to me most obviously true of that particular type of children's story which is dearest to my own taste, the fantasy or fairy tale" (25). For Lewis, a children's story was written simply because that was the best medium for the tale. According to this canon of Lewis', adults should also enjoy any *good* story written for children. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* can indeed past this test: simply walking into

any bookstore can demonstrate that his books appeal to all ranges of age groups – they can be found in both the children section, and the ones reserved for adult books.

Philip Pullman's series is also classified as a children's book, yet it is clearly reaching for a wider range of readers. His book is filled with darker and more violent images than Lewis' book (and many others from the Dynamic Stage) more suited to an older audience, yet his heroine is still only a young girl. Lyra has yet to reach puberty, and (although we never know for sure) is probably about the same age as either Peter or Susan from Lewis' book. In some ways, these books might seem *too* different to be compared, but the similarities make a comparison possible. Both books are ready by a wide audience and both contain some of the most fundamental aspects of fantasy: the motif of gift giving, an otherworldly setting, and having a hero or heroine who is destined or prophesized for his or her task.

## II. A Definition of Terms

C.S Lewis is often considered a very conventional children's fantasy author. One of the reasons arises from the time period during which his book was published. It was the same year that Smith marks as the beginning of the Dynamic Stage of British Fantasy: 1950. In many ways, Lewis' book reflects the previous period, yet also begins setting the stage for the newer and more contemporary books that will develop in the Dynamic Stage. It isn't surprising that Lewis wrote with so many of the vestiges of the Diversionary period; he was a child during this period, and read books written during it. Fantasy stories were widely popular in this period upset by two major world wars, and these books "offered a richly varied array of characters to the British child" (Smith 212). One of the most popular types of characters were animals, both ones who talked and ones who didn't. Any reader of Lewis' Narnia series can see the connection here with his animal characters: many of them have similarities to Diversionary animals. Mrs. Beaver, for example, reminds me a lot of Peter Rabbit's mother from Beatrix Potter's 1902 story The Tale of Peter Rabbit. While we don't see the Beaver's wearing clothes, Mrs. Beaver is sitting at her sewing machine when the children encounter her – something Mrs. Rabbit is likely to have done for Peter when he lost his blue coat in Mr. McGregor's garden.

Authors in the Diversionary Stage also "sought to expand the world of the child, [although] there was still the desire to present an ordered cosmos to the audience; chaotic situations were avoided" (Smith 223). This is true for Lewis' book as well. His story, while set during World War II, doesn't deal with that war at all, but rather presents us

with a war in Narnia that takes place over the course of a few lines. The book is very structured, very orderly, and follows a conventional fantasy (as well as a biblical) pattern. As soon as the children step into Narnia, the chaos of the Witch's reign begins to deteriorate and Aslan is able to walk into the country again. Lewis, while writing in the Dynamic Stage, still takes to heart many of the techniques of the period in which was a child.

For these reasons Lewis has often been viewed as a very conventional author. His story at times seems like something from the Diversionary Stage rather than the Dynamic. His series consists of very short narratives unlike many of the books we get from more contemporary authors, and his books are rich with Christian allegories and images of myths and legends. It is important to mention that Lewis was not only an author of children's books, but also a very influential medieval historian and Christian theologian. Any biography on Lewis will be filled mostly with information about his scholarly life, while a discussion of the Narnia books will take up at most a few chapters. That said, in Green and Hooper's biography of Lewis, they remark at the end of the chapter entitled *Through the Wardrobe* that

> In spite of anything that can be said against them, and considering *The Chronicles of Narnia* as dispassionately as possible, it seems safe to say that C.S Lewis has earned by them a place among the greatest writers of children's books and – surprising as it would have seemed to him – he will probably be remembered as a literary creator for them even more than for *The Screwtape Letters* and *Perelandra*. (256)

Lewis is definitely one of the foundational authors of the Dynamic period even though Smith doesn't discuss his books as being among one of the transitional ones. Instead,

Smith describes social and economic changes that transformed life in general, and therefore fiction and fantasy literature, as a result of World War II.

A commercialized youth culture was born in the period following World War II, something that we don't see any evidence of in Lewis' book. Parent-child relationships also became more important, and Smith tells us "the country entered the most child-centered period yet witnessed by the British populace" (273-4). While Lewis' book is very child-centered in that children play the major role, the only parent-children relationships that exist are between the children and the Beaver family (something that plays a large role in Lewis' book and will be discussed in more detail later). Many of the other factors of the world that are reflected in the new books of the period do not appear in Lewis' book, although it does align itself neatly with many of the qualities of fantasy literature that Smith describes. Lewis' book straddles the periods in numerous ways, and given his fame, it is important to consider them as one of the reasons he is often viewed as a more conventional author than someone like Philip Pullman.

Lewis' books are filled with both biblical and mythological images - another reason he is often considered a traditional writer. While Lewis has said that there was nothing biblical about the story when it first came to him (Green 249), it began with the children encountering a Faun, a classic mythological image. Lewis told the world that it was "a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood," (237) that first came to him sometime in the mid 1930s and became the first image of Narnia. This Faun became Mr. Tumnus, the first Narnian Lucy meets on her journey through the Wardrobe. Images like this extracted from ancient mythologies (Greco-Roman, Norse, and Celtic predominantly) are woven into the very fabric of Lewis' book. This characteristic caused

a problem for some of Lewis' friends when the book was being written, notably for fellow Inkling and fantasy author J. R. R. Tolkien. Tolkien told Roger Green (another Inkling) "I hear you've been reading Jack's children's story. It really won't do, you know! I mean to say: *Nymphs and their Ways, The Love-Life of a Faun*'. Doesn't he know what he's talking about" (241)? In his four-volume set about C.S. Lewis, Bruce Edwards includes an essay by Marvin Hinten entitled *The World of Narnia: Medieval Magic and Morality*. In this essay, Hinten notes

> Tolkien disliked the book almost entirely, but he particularly abhorred the mixing of images – the blending of mythology, history, Bible, and literature that is a prime feature of Lewis' style. The greatest target of Tolkien's wrath was the appearance of Father Christmas in a book featuring a Christ-figure. (72)

While Lewis' use of mythology and images from other classic children's fairy tales didn't work for Tolkien, they in fact create a "new mythology that grew out of and embraced the old and gave it a new life in another world" (251). Among some of the many images from other children's tales are the White Witch, who closely resembles Snow White with her blood red lips and snow-white skin, and the robin who leads the children to Mr. Beaver and functions much like the robin who leads Mary to the secret garden in Frances Burnett's 1911 novel The Secret Garden.

One of the biggest reasons Lewis is considered to have been such a conventional author is his use of biblical allegory in the Narnia series. The death and resurrection of Aslan in the first book is a very thinly disguised version of the Passion of Christ and has been seen as such by the vast majority of his readers. Hinten remarks that "Aslan is clearly intended to be like Christ in another world; in fact, Lewis would go further and say Aslan *is* Christ in another world" (75). There are other biblical images: the Stone

Table calls to mind the Ten Commandments, and Edmund's temptation is clearly a version of the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. Even the titles given to the children, Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve, calls to mind images and stories from the Bible. While Lewis is also working with texts like Milton's *Paradise Lost* in mind, an average audience (and particularly children) is more likely to pick up on the images of Snow White and Jesus Christ.

This conventional aspect of Lewis is something that Philip Pullman has spoken strongly against. In his essay *The Dark Side of Narnia*, Pullman discusses the legend of C.S. Lewis that has developed in Britain. Written in 1998 in time for the centenary of Lewis' birth, Pullman expresses disgust at the way Lewis was currently being received and portrayed. While he does note that Lewis, "said some things about myth and fairy tales and writing for children which are both true and interesting" (6), Pullman disagrees with the near-worship of Lewis' series. Pullman remarks that, "there is no doubt in my mind that [the series] is one of the most ugly and poisonous things I've ever read" (6). Pullman goes on to state that, "the supernaturalism, the reactionary sneering, the misogyny, the racism, and the sheer dishonesty of his [Lewis'] narrative method" is something that he will continue to argue against (7). In some ways, Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy can be seen as a reaction to Lewis' series – Pullman is definitely aware of Lewis' work, and even has his heroine Lyra hide in a wardrobe at the beginning of the story.

Pullman is often considered to be a more progressive author than someone like Lewis who was writing at the transitional period between the Diversionary and Dynamic Stages. While Smith's work doesn't cover Pullman's books (her study concludes with

books published in 1990) many of the elements she discusses apply directly to Pullman's novel. Smith discusses how "heroes [are] well aware of the difficulties of the natural world" and "try to deal with the situations in which they are placed" (308, 310). The heroes and heroines have "serious interactions with adults" (315), need "some assistance in overcoming danger" just like a real child might (320), and deal with temptation and fear in "situations far more complex than anything they had to cope with before" (324, 340). All of these aspects apply to Pullman's contemporary book which is filled with violence and the reality of sin and death in a way that Lewis' book is not.

Pullman gives his audience a female hero, something that along with his revision of Christianity has often allied his work with feminism. In his essay *Religious Subversion in* His Dark Materials in the collection *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, Bernard Schweizer tells his readers that

> Taking into account that Pullman's heroine is a female prophetess, that his witches are powerful and dignified characters, and that the only positive god figure in the trilogy is Xaphania, we might well conclude that Pullman is leaning toward Mary Daly's feminist theology [an overthrow of "oppressive elements in traditional theism"]. (168-9)

This message is strengthened in more detail in Pat Pinsent's article in the same collection entitled *Unexpected Allies? Pullman and Feminist Theologians*. She notes, "Many of the challenges that Pullman poses to established religion have already, quite independently, been set by feminist theologians" (199). Pinsent remarks about Lyra's importance in the text that

> Additionally his representation of Lyra as the most significant character in the establishment of the "Republic of Heaven" is consonant with the renewed understanding of the female role in a religious context, which is central to feminist theologians' readings of both biblical text and the history of the Christian Church. (200)

She goes on to discuss Lyra's position as a "new Eve" and the Fall that, "unlike traditional Christian theology" is not a "disaster but as a coming of age for the human race" (202). This prominent placement of a female character is very progressive: instead of causing the problems for the entire human race (a very traditional view of the story in Genesis and Eve's mistake), Lyra is rather "opening up … the human race to knowledge" (a feminist reading of the original Fall) (203).

As evident through his ties with feminist theology, Pullman's story is a clear critical commentary on the Christian religion. In addition to giving his readers a view of religion with a different Fall and a female deity, his series completely reforms the Church as an institution and gives us a world where death is preferred (by the adults at least) over even the hint of sin (present in the form of Dust). At the end of The Golden Compass, Lyra begins her journey to stop her father from destroying Dust, having realized that it is in fact not the evil that everyone thinks it is. She is doing far more than that, however: she is beginning her journey to destroy the Church.

Pullman's series deals with the existence of a very totalitarian (and very evil) government: the Church. In a chapter of the documentary entitled Beyond the Golden Compass, the narrator tells the audience (amid scenes of Nazi Germany and dark music) that

> One of the darkest elements of society as depicted in The Golden Compass is the absence of any form of Democracy. … The world is ruled by an absolute totalitarian government, not unlike the fascist and communist regimes of the 20th century. The difference is that government is not headed by politicians, but by clergy.

It is important to point out that this religious authority is *not* the Catholic Church we know headed by the Vatican, although as scholar Marie Dunley points out it is very

similar. Rather like a parallel universe, the Church in Pullman's trilogy is a Church that came into being when John Calvin overthrew the Catholic Pope's authority in the 16th century. Dunley tells us in the documentary that

> Pullman said many times he doesn't take a particular pop at any one Church; what he dislikes is the spiritual and secular coalesces into a kind of power-seeking and power-hungry and power-exercising authority.

Regardless of what specific Church Pullman is speaking out against, the important thing to mention is that any form of democracy is utterly lacking from Lyra's world. There is no freedom of anything. Even the exploration of Dust by Lord Asriel is forbidden. Not only does The Golden Compass set the stage for the discovery of what Dust really is, but Lyra is also beginning her journey to bring down the entire religious and governmental structure of her world. By its very definition, this is revolutionary, and very progressive in the way Pullman's novel restructures the entire governmental structure.

In addition to the aspects of government and religion, Pullman's story deals with "serious metaphysical issues, reflecting his conviction that 'children's literature should be about grown-up things'" (Lenz 2). Millicent Lenz goes on to note in her Introduction to *His Dark Materials Illuminated* that

> The trilogy may be seen as giving a new map to define our place in the universe and a perspective that might help us survive contemporary crises, through its portrayal of young people who overcome disasters both personal and universal, such as widespread despair and soul loss, chaos in social and political realms, ecological ruin, massive wars, and catastrophes of apocalyptic dimensions. (3)

As noted earlier, the treatment of chaos was very limited in books prior to 1950, and even in Lewis' book it is vanquished with the White Witch. Pullman, by contrast, embraces the

chaos of the modern world, as Lenz mentions in detail, and many critics view this as a large step toward books that reflect the world in which we now live.

Lenz takes things even one step further in her discussion of Pullman's trilogy. She remarks that,

> Elsewhere I have stated my belief that "the subject of *His Dark Materials* is nothing less than the story of how "human beings … might evolve toward a higher level of consciousness," and given the present course of events in the world, "might" should be changed to "must." (6)

By viewing Pullman's book as something we *must* take into our own lives as a model for evolving toward a higher level of consciousness, the term "progressive" seems well founded. In his book, Pullman is not only restructuring the way we view the world (Lyra's world is similar to our own in many ways) and giving us a lens through which to view the new contemporary (and very violent) world in which we live, but he is also offering us a new way of thinking that we *must* obey. This is all very different from a short story about four children and the talking animals they meet in Narnia. Lewis' conventional work seems to pale in comparison to the important messages in Pullman's. While Lewis' message of Christianity is very important to a large number of people, it seems that Pullman's message, according to Lenz and other scholars, can apply to everyone, regardless of religion or faith.

But is Pullman's work really more progressive than Lewis'? Simply by looking at a time-line it seems like this question has an easy answer: Pullman's book was written forty-five years after Lewis', so of course it is! It is clear the Pullman is also dealing with more progressive subjects: the destruction of an entire government power structure alone gives plenty of credence to the idea that Pullman is more progressive than Lewis. Or is

he? By examining the gifts given to the children heroes and heroines, the setting of the books, and finally the function of destiny in the stories in this paper I plan to expose the irony of these books: while he does do some things in a very progressive manner, overall Pullman's 1995 book is in fact more conventional than Lewis'. Lewis, on the other hand, gives us a more democratic power structure and more feminist heroes than Philip Pullman – a man who gives us a journey to overthrow a totalitarian regime and a sole female hero.

## III. The Tradition of Gift Giving

One typical element of contemporary fantasy books is the important or magical gifts or objects given to the characters. This is one of the most vital forms of help given to the heroes and heroines as a means of making the journey possible. It makes sense that heroes need help, something that Smith discusses in her book as typical in the Dynamic Stage:

> Contemporary authors do offer characters some assistance in overcoming danger, though it is expected that the initiative should come from the child. Assistance is necessary not only for the ultimate accomplishment of goals, but also because the frustration in achieving these goals is so overpowering. (320-21)

In both Lewis' book and Pullman's, our heroes are given gifts that enable them to complete their tasks. In The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, our children heroes are visited by Father Christmas on their way to the Stone Table with the Beavers. He gives Peter, Susan, and Lucy gifts that will help in the battle to save Narnia. To Peter he gifts a sword and a shield. To Susan he gives a bow and a horn, and to Lucy he gives a dagger for protection and a vial with a potion to aid those who will be hurt in the upcoming battle (88). In the end this potion saves Edmund's life, not to mention numerous other creatures. Without these gifts, it is likely that the story would have turned out very differently. While gift giving is the idea behind Father Christmas, it is clear that he is doing this to help them in their journey and not simply because they are on his nice list.

They *need* these gifts in order to be successful. Peter needs the sword to save Susan and fight in the battle against the Witch, and Susan needs the horn to call Peter to her aid when Fenris Ulf attacks her. Lucy needs the vial of potion to save Edmund's life

when he is injured in the battle with the Witch. Without Edmund to take the fourth throne, all is lost, as the Witch correctly deduces when she decides to have him killed. It is interesting that Father Christmas is the figure giving these gifts: most children (at least believers in the Christian religion) have received gifts of some sort from Father Christmas, or his American counter-part Santa Claus. This is a very domestic image, and it's worth mentioning that Father Christmas exists in both our world and Narnia; perhaps Narnia isn't all that different from ours after all. Having Father Christmas give our child hero and heroines gifts seems very natural; after all, he had previously been barred from Narnia, and with the children's presence and Aslan's he is able to come back.

The gifts he gives to Peter, Susan, and Lucy are all very traditional, at least for a fantasy novel. A sword, a horn, and a bow are all objects that would have been common in the medieval period that Narnia seems set in, and they are weapons that are present in a large number of fantasy novels. Even Lucy's potion seems fairly natural for Narnia: if the Witch can turn people to stone and Aslan can turn them back, why shouldn't someone have a magic potion that restores life? It goes farther than the gifts being traditional, however: these are things that *any* child could use if that child was in Narnia. These conventional gifts are very necessary and useful for Lewis' heroes and heroines, but they don't take any special insight or power to use. While yes, Peter has to know how to wield a sword and Susan a bow, these things were not uncommon to learn in Lewis' day, and perhaps are not even now. These are gifts anyone could get, and if in Narnia, any child could use the weapons to beat the Witch and become a King or Queen.

Lyra's gift, however, is unique. Pullman gives his heroine a fantastic and very complicated gift as a means of helping her throughout her journey, but in the end this gift

elevates Lyra to a level her readers cannot reach. Early in the book, the Master of Jordan College gives Lyra the alethiometer to help her; something that we soon find out sets Lyra apart from everyone else. When she joins the gyptians, Farder Coram is then able to tell Lyra the basic workings of the alethiometer, although she is left to figure it out for herself. Along with Lyra, the readers discover that it is a "truth measure" and that the pictures are "symbols, and each one stands for a whole series of things" and that Farder Coram would need a book to "read it fully" (111-112). Lyra can ask any question she can imagine by using the three handles and the different levels of meaning of each symbol. Even without these books, however, Lyra is able to start reading the alethiometer and her skill grows throughout the story.

The alethiometer, like the gifts given to Peter, Susan, and Lucy in Lewis' work, is able to provide help when Lyra needs it most. Unlike the gifts given by Father Christmas, the alethiometer is not a weapon, nor will it restore life. It simply tells the truth of things. The ability to read the alethiometer is in part what makes Lyra stand out as the heroine of this book. As Iorek Byrnison tells Lyra in a conversation about tricking bears, "We [bears] see tricks and deceit as plain as arms and legs. We can see in a way humans have forgotten. But you know about this: you can understand the symbol reader." Lyra questions this: she doesn't see the two as being the same. "It is the same," Iorek replies, "Adults can't read it, as I understand … perhaps you are different from others" (199). She is different from *all* others. Pullman has given his readers something very interesting to contemplate here: it isn't possible to trick bears because they think in a way humans, as a race, have forgotten, yet Lyra will do just that later in the book. This is also the same way of seeing the world that allows Lyra to read the alethiometer. Lyra can read a device that

no one else in the entire world can, and she can read it because she can see in a way humanity has forgotten. This is huge. This isn't a sword or a bow, or even a magic potion that anyone could use – Lyra is the only human being alive who can read the alethiometer.

Unlike Lewis' heroes and heroines, Lyra is given a unique gift that immediately sets her apart from the rest of the world. Why does Pullman do this? Yes, it makes her stand out as the heroine of the story, but why does her gift have to be *so* special? Pullman even has one of his characters (Iorek) allude to the fact that Lyra was born with this ability. Through her innate ability to read the alethiometer, Pullman is giving us a heroine who is special because of her birth. Pullman himself said he wanted Lyra to be ordinary, but his creation of a golden compass that can measure the truth is too much. There aren't hundreds of Lyra's walking around Oxford, or anywhere, if she is the only human born with the ability to read it. By giving Lyra this gift that is in essence *too special*, Pullman falls into the trap of truly conventional fantasy stories: the hero or heroine is given a gift that sets them apart from the rest of the world and allows them to succeed. Lewis, on the other hand, gives his hero and heroine conventional gifts, but there is nothing special about them. Anyone could use the bow or the sword that Susan and Peter wield. While Pullman himself may want his readers to relate to Lyra in very real ways, as his own statement declares, her ability to read the alethiometer is a mistake. No one can relate to her in this ability – Lewis, on the other hand, is giving his readers what Pullman attempted: gifts to help their journey that anyone could use.

## IV. The Role of Setting: Otherworlds and Helpful Characters

Just as the motif of special gifts are given distinct characteristics in the two narratives, so too the overall setting of Lewis and Pullman posses distinct and often oppositional characteristics. Both stories are set in very vivid and unique worlds, something very typical in fantasy books. Lewis' characters walk through a wardrobe into Narnia, whereas Lyra is already living in a fantasy realm. Narnia is in many ways a medieval world where wars are fought with swords (and claws) and the monarchy rules. Pullman's world is in many ways also similar to the medieval period of Western History where a Church rules and independent thought is forbidden. Lyra, however, is on a journey to destroy that system whereas Lewis' children are simply fighting to become Kings and Queens – something that on the surface makes Pullman's book look more progressive than Lewis. However, once you dig deeper, that idea begins to fade away.

In Lewis' book, it all begins with the Wardrobe. The Wardrobe sits in a room with nothing else, and the children stumble upon it on their first day in the Professor's house (it is England after all, and therefore raining). There is nothing unusual about the outward appearance of this wardrobe. It looks normal on the inside too (assuming one is used to looking in wardrobes – modern readers might in fact find this prop a bit dated). I like to imagine that this wardrobe is old, showing signs of wear, the wood a deep cherry red that borders on black, with two doorknobs just begging to be touched. Lucy, the youngest, does just that.

Lucy walks through it and emerges into a wintery wonderland. It is here that we get our first glimpse of this other world, Narnia, although we are soon reassured with some very familiar images. Lucy immediately finds a lamppost in the middle of the snowy forest, something that seems rather odd at first, but is also a very reassuring image. While this is the only lamppost in Narnia, it serves as a beacon for Lucy in her first journey, and at the end of the novel guides all four children back through the Wardrobe. The lamppost serves as a point of contact between our world and Narnia (as readers later find out in the book The Magician's Nephew the lamppost came into Narnia from London in the hands of the White Witch) in the first few pages of the book: we might be in a strange and foreign place, but the light of the lamppost casts a friendly glow that reminds us of the world Lucy left behind.

Shortly after entering Narnia, Lucy encounters Mr. Tumnus. At first he appears normal: he is a bit taller than Lucy and carrying an umbrella. Then we realize he isn't completely human; "his legs were shaped like a goat's (the hair on them was glossy black) and instead of feet he had goat's hoofs" (6). This man is, in fact, a Faun. Even this early in the book, we start to wonder: what sort of Faun would carry an umbrella? By carrying an umbrella and parcels from shopping, the Faun strikes readers as human, despite the hooves and fur. This is one image out of many that will reassure readers that, despite the fact that we are in a foreign world, it's still something we can understand and identify with. Throughout Lewis' descriptions of Narnia, we see numerous images of our own world, and in particular England, that make us feel very comfortable in this foreign place.

We see this again as Mr. Tumnus immediately invites Lucy back to his house for tea. Here they share a lovely, and very British, afternoon eating and drinking tea. Lucy's interaction with Mr. Tumnus is interesting because it is so perfectly normal, yet entirely fictional and fantastic as well. He has been shopping – perhaps even Christmas shopping. If you take Mr. Tumnus' goat legs out of the equation, he's exactly like a figure you could meet walking around London. We soon find out his house is a cave, which very slightly detracts from the image of normalcy, but it is easy to forget. Lucy does the same. She soon walks over to the bookcase and browses the titles. It is very easy to start identifying with Lucy here – why, this is exactly what she might do in England! By allowing our first interaction with a citizen of Narnia to be one we can identify with as at least partially human, and more importantly English for Lewis' English audience, it is very easy to see ourselves in Lucy's place, drinking tea and browsing bookshelves.

The titles on Mr. Tumnus' bookshelf are *The Life and Letters of Silenus, Nymphs and Their Ways*, *Men, Monks and Gamekeepers; a Study in Popular Legend*, and finally *Is Man a Myth?* Lucy doesn't seem to find anything odd about these titles, although as readers they leap off the page. Books, in Narnia? Lucy is in a totally other world here, that learns and shares information in the same way we do: through books. Lewis, as a scholar, was probably very fond of books, and by giving Mr. Tumnus books as well he is giving us yet another point of connection with this Faun. The first title seems normal enough: substitute Kipling for Silenus and it makes all the sense in the world. The second, *Nymphs and Their Ways*, could again be "humanized" very easily: try *Beavers and Their Ways* on for size. The last two, however, are a bit more startling when you stop to actually take in what you have read (which Lucy doesn't, as she immediately turns her

mind to tea). We see very clearly in these titles that Man *is* a Myth. The order of these titles is interesting as well: we can clearly answer "No" to the rhetorical question implied by the last title, but if we stop to think what Narnians would do, they would probably say "Yes."

Here is a human girl, or Daughter of Eve as she is referred to by the Narnians, sitting in a cave having tea with a Faun, next to books implying that Man is in fact a Myth. At first, this may seem startlingly odd, but soon Mr. Tumnus apologizes for his plans to turn Lucy over to the White Witch and declares, "I hadn't known what Humans were like before I met you" (15). This is a very human-like saying: we might say this ourselves if we ran into a Faun. Lewis is once again giving us a point of connection with a *Faun* even when he lives in a cave and the books on his bookshelf that imply that Man is a Myth. This is probably the reason we meet Mr. Tumnus first: he is essentially human. He shops and lives like a man. He even reads books. His little house reminds me of what a scholar's office might look like. His name, unlike the animals later in the book, has nothing to do with what type of animal he is (even Aslan is Turkish/Persian for "lion" and was a term used by Ottoman rulers). It goes beyond simply giving Mr. Tumnus a conventional house (while it may be a cave, it doesn't look like one when Lucy is inside); Lewis is giving his readers a *very* human figure and deliberately making things as normal as possible (and as English as possible) so that his audience feels more comfortable in Narnia.

Despite the fact that most of the other characters in the book are animals, they seem very human in some ways. After the children meet Mr. Beaver, he takes them back to his house and we see a domestic picture emerge. They go inside the quaint little home,

and see “a kind-looking old she-beaver sitting in the corner with a thread in her mouth working busily at her sewing machine” (57). This image of normalcy is something curious because it is such a domestic image. Why is Mrs. Beaver sitting at a sewing machine? This is something that Lucy and her siblings could easily have seen in their own homes with their mother, perhaps, or another female relation. This image of a maternal figure who will also serve the children dinner is something that makes Narnia seem almost like the world the children left behind, even if the couple caring for the children are beavers. Mr. Beaver then takes Peter outside to catch some fish for dinner, something else that makes the Beaver family look startlingly human. Lewis is going beyond the traditional idea of a foreign fantasy world that looks nothing like our own by giving us a string of familiar and domestic images. A fantasy world doesn't have to be completely different, Lewis tells us with Narnia, but rather can be filled with things that make it look very normal.

Pullman's story, on the other hand, begins largely in the realm of the fantastic (the first lines are, in fact, “Lyra and her dæmon moved through the darkening hall”) yet we already know that we are in Oxford, given the title of Part One. Pullman weaves his readers in and out of the world of Jordan College at Oxford with the presence of the dæmons (in fact a physical representation of the human soul) and a “typical” trip to the North is overlaid with talk of Dust and *panserbjiørne* (the talking, warlike bears Lyra encounters). Numerous critics have remarked on this blurring of our world with a fantasy one. In his essay *Pullman's* His Dark Materials*, a Challenge to the Fantasies of J. R. R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis,* Burton Hatlen remarks,

> Pullman's most distinctive contribution to the fantasy genre is his blurring of the line that separates the "real" from the fantasy worlds. At the start of *The Golden Compass*, we find ourselves immediately in an Oxford that is both "ours" … and wonderfully different: no cars, zeppelins rather than airplanes, a history in which the Reformation never occurred, and so forth. (Lenz 75)

Pullman's story takes place in a completely different world, although it is definitely a world modeled on our own. In one of the chapters of the documentary Beyond the Golden Compass, this topic is talked about in detail. The narrator notes that "Lyra's world is a composite of many different worlds, hovering somewhere between the late 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ centuries" yet also including some elements from as early as the 17$^{th}$ century.

Aside from the many similarities with our own world, however, Lyra's world is at times utterly alien from our own in ways Narnia isn't. Lyra's story begins with a murder attempt, and in the first three chapters the reader witnesses conversations about poison, invasion, war, scalping, and kidnapping. There is no friendly Mr. Tumnus here to offer Lyra a cup of tea, or Mr. and Mrs. Beaver to offer a meal and a warm fire on a cold wintry night. These images of normalcy that Lewis offers us at the beginning of his book simply don't exist in Lyra's story. Even Lyra's stay with Mrs. Coulter is anything but happy once we find out that Mrs. Coulter is the head of the Gobblers and the one who has been kidnapping the children. Then Mrs. Coulter's London apartment becomes something that Lyra *must* escape. And from there, she is almost kidnapped herself and ends up with the gyptians going North into the lands of the Gobblers and violent, terrifying, talking bears. Similarly, Lewis' children do have to escape from the Beaver's home after Edmund's defection is discovered, but they are aided in their flight by the Beavers – Lyra is alone except for Pan when she flees from Mrs. Coulter. She can't even

afford a meal, whereas Peter, Susan, and Lucy are given breakfast by Father Christmas himself.

Pullman does give Lyra large moments of help through the gyptians and Iorek Byrnison, although Lyra is still on her own at times. She is saved from the kidnappers after fleeing from Mrs. Coulter by the gyptians and they offer her care and protection. While that rescue was complete luck, Lyra has a wonderful experience with the gyptians and Pullman can show is readers true democracy in action. Lyra witnesses firsthand the meetings of the gyptians (a Roping) with "eight wooden chairs set out" (101). While John Faa, "lord of the western gyptians" takes one set, seven other men, heads of the families, take the other seats. Like the joint-rule that will take place in Lewis' story, this power structure is at times rather conventional but also very progressive. While the men may sit at the table because of their status as the head of the families, John Faa gives all gyptians the right to ask questions at the Roping and they all vote on the matter at hand. While the gyptians do have strong leaders, through them we see a more ideal power structure than the one currently ruling Lyra's world.

The gyptians help Lyra out in moments of need, although at first they don't want to take her North at all. Lyra goes with them when the gyptians realize how useful the alethiometer is and Lyra is watched over and protected by the gyptian men and Iorek Byrnison. While the gyptians help Lyra begin her journey into the North and to free Bolvangar, Pullman doesn't let them finish it with her – he forces her out on her own. When the Tartars attack, Lyra is kidnapped and this time, no one can save her. She is taken to Bolvangar alone with no one but Pan to help her. It is here that Lyra again has to rely on complete luck – Mrs. Coulter, her mother, saves her from being severed. There

are no gyptians, or anyone, here to help her. Instead, Lyra is forced to rely on perhaps the woman she hates most to save her life: her own mother. By having the Tartars kidnap Lyra so she can be on her own and find a way to independently save the day, Pullman is undermining the moments of help that Lyra does get from the gyptians. They can't always be there – something that isn't a problem in Lewis' book.

The gyptians do show up in time to help save the escaping children after Lyra has destroyed the facility but she is not reunited with them. Lyra continues on her journey, and this time Iorek is the one helping her. Again, Pullman gives Lyra a very helpful figure who becomes a friend but in the end but can't be there when Lyra needs it most. Pullman orchestrates two more random events that push Lyra out on her own: she falls from Lee Scoresby's balloon into Svalbard by herself, and Iorek can't cross the ice bridge when they are trying to save Roger at the end of the novel. Iorek does come rescue Lyra from the bears, and as a result of a very feminist seduction of Iofur Raknison by Lyra he is able to fight to save her. He then helps her by taking her to her father, Lord Asriel. When Lyra realizes that Lyra has taken Roger, she is again able to turn to Iorek for help. He has already left his newly restored Kingship to aid her, and he goes even farther by rushing her after her father and Roger. He can't make it across the bridge of ice, however:

> This bridge had clearly felt the strain of the sledge's weight, for a crack ran across it close to the other edge of the chasm, and the surface on the near side of the crack had settled down a foot or so. It might support the weight of a child: it would certainly not stand under the weight of an armored bear. (340)

Lyra has to go on by herself. She crosses, and "there was no way back … she was alone" (341). This solitary hero quest where the hero has to do everything on his own is a very masculine quest – while Pullman does break this tradition in some moments, he still

forces Lyra out on her own in some of the most pivotal moments of the book. Why did Pullman include that bridge? Lyra doesn't even have the option of asking to go on alone – she simply *has* to. As Ursula Le Guin, perhaps the most well-known feminist fantasy author, says about her early career as quoted in Lise Rashley's article *Revisioning Gender*,

> When I began writing heroic fantasy, I knew what to write about. My father had told us stories from Homer before I could read, and all my life I'd read and love the hero-tales. That was my own tradition, those were my archetypes, that's where I was at home. Or so I thought. (26)

Le Guin continues in her non-fiction essay *Earthsea Revisioned* to explain that these stories describe "the story of a quest, or a conquest, or a test, or a contest" (Rashely 27). Lyra's journey is at moments very feminine, as when she outwits the false bear-king, but then her journey turns back into a traditionally male quest when she is forced, by events in the book, on her own. Lyra's reliance on luck in moments to save her as with Mrs. Coulter and the lack of help she gets at crucial moments in the book detracts from all of the things Pullman does so well in his novel: the moments of democracy-in-action and progressive feminism are undermined by the moments when the help isn't there (and *can't* be there).

The only character in Lewis' book who has to rely on luck is Edmund, but Edmund has fallen to temptation and gone over to the White Witch. Had he done the correct thing and refused her (biblically, something Eve should have also done), he would have been with his siblings at the Stone Table with Aslan and the beavers. When Edmund was saved from the Witch and the threat of death by the party of animals and taken to Aslan, he is reunited with his siblings and together, as a family unit, they are able to take

down the Witch and then jointly rule Narnia. While Lyra does get help in moments, is still forced to depend on luck time and again, whereas Lewis offers us a more democratic and feminist picture of heroism by constantly offering his heroes and heroines help and by letting them work together toward a common goal.

The setting of Pullman's book becomes even more complicated when discussing the amount of violence in Lyra's world. While Lewis' children have escaped World War II by going to the Professor's house and then into Narnia, they are not likely to be preventing a murder of their Uncle (something Lyra does in the first few pages). While WWII was an incredibly bloody war with death and violence beyond imagination, Lyra's own personal existence is filled with aspects like these *every day*. This is a very pessimistic view of the world: violent things happen, we hear, and nothing can be done about it. It just *is*. Unlike Narnia where violence is often overshadowed by other events, it is a way of life in Lyra's world: does something have to be bloody and violent to be progressive? No, as a discussion of the war in Narnia will reveal.

While Lewis' characters do fight in a war themselves in Narnia, that war in a way seems much safer than the war the children left behind in England. While no war is *safe*, the children have agency in Narnia's battle, whereas in London they would have been passive targets for a bomb. There is no way to prevent or protect against that, but in Narnia, Peter *can* fight to save Susan, and Edmund *can* battle the Witch and knock away her wand to ensure victory. The battle scene in Lewis' book occurs over a few scant lines, and we don't ever see any killing except when Peter is forced to kill Fenris Ulf to save his sister Susan and when Aslan sacrifices himself. Even the evil White Witch simply turns Aslan's forces to stone – something that Aslan himself can cure. To win the battle,

Edmund fights his way to the Witch (although we don't hear anything about the actual fighting he does to get there) and breaks her wand rather than attacking her directly. This gives Aslan's army a chance, and they end up victorious. There is very little violence present here.

Lewis knew his audience, and knew what horrors his readers had probably seen a few years earlier in the war. While it could be argued that he was taking an easy way out by not describing the battle and having the Witch turn her enemies to stone rather than killing them, he was clearly providing an alternative view of war. This view of war fought with swords and bows and wands can be viewed as a very conventional and almost childlike war (in comparison to World War I and II, at least), but it is in fact more progressive. In Narnia, killing isn't necessary and Lewis offers his readers a way to settle differences in other ways. By having the Witch, the most evil being in Narnia, turn characters to stone Lewis is offering his readers the idea that killing isn't the only way to settle a conflict – something very different from the ideas communicated by World War II. Aslan can change these stone animals back and offer them another chance at life. We also never see the Witch's forces being killed: while we never hear what happens to them, Lewis' text is filled with such a positive view of conflict and change that it is hard to believe anything happens other than rehabilitation.

Pullman's world may look a lot like our own on the surface, but underneath it is more sinister. While our modern world is violent and terrifying in its own right, Lewis balances out that terror with warm caves and beaver homes and Father Christmas. Pullman, on the other hand, just offers his readers more violence and a frequently lone heroine who is forced to rely on luck over and over again in order to survive. Pullman,

despite his reputation for being a progressive and more contemporary author than Lewis, gives his readers a world where help can't always be there and where violence is the only way of life. Narnia, despite it's setting as a totally different world from our own, is in fact more similar to our own than Lyra's violence-filled world. While at times Pullman does an excellent job of offering Lyra aid and help throughout her journey, the moments when she is forced out on her own undermine his efforts to make her "an ordinary girl." Lewis offers us a more democratic set of heroes and heroines who work together toward a common goal and who have constant help whenever they need it that provides readers with a community of heroes and never a single figure.

This community, this *family*, is much closer to finding heroes "among housewives" and seeing the world "through a woman's eyes," in the words of Le Guin (Rashley 27). Family is seen by many feminists as a way of life, and something of value: Lewis' work espouses that throughout by offering the parental figures of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. While Lyra has help at moments, and even parental figures with Lee Scoresby and Serfina Pekkala, they aren't always there. Pullman still feels the need to force Lyra out on her own: something that in comparison makes him a more conventional figure than Lewis.

## V. Destiny and Prophecy: A Traditional Technique

In her book, Smith notes that the hero of Dynamic fantasy are often, "a person possessed of unusual talent, ability and significantly, *power*" (307). Something that Smith does not note is that almost all fantasy heroes are destined for their task. From the early origins of stories written by the Greeks and Romans to even the story of Jesus Christ, heroes often have to do what they do. Destiny is a major factor in even the most contemporary of books. Destiny is present in both Lewis' and Pullman's books, and in order to truly reveal the irony of these two authors to determine which one is in fact the conventional author, it is necessary to examine this factor in detail.

In Lewis' book, our four heroes and heroines are greeted by the Narnians with a title simply by virtue of their humanity, something we can all claim. Shortly after the children have all entered Narnia together for the first time, they encounter a beaver. The beaver questions them, "Are you the Sons of Adam and the Daughters of Eve?" This question seems rather curious. Peter replies with a very logical answer: "We're some of them" (53). The children don't seem to sense any importance in this title despite the fact that "Sons of Adam" and "Daughters of Eve" calls to mind the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man. It also seems to be a very formal title. You can almost hear "Son of Adam" being spoken with the same reverence as "Your Majesty" would have been in the Sun King's France, for example. The animals, even Aslan will use this title, are giving the children a superior title simply by virtue of their race.

Throughout the book this title will be used simply because Lewis' characters are human. While I can't even imagine being called a "Daughter of Eve" in our world, it's not hard to close my eyes and imagine myself in Narnia being called that. After all, according to the Christian religion *everyone* is a descendent of Adam and Eve. The *only* thing that makes Lewis' characters special throughout their journey in Narnia is their humanity: how wonderfully democratic. Anyone who reads Lewis' book can not only relate to Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy; now, we can identify with them. After all, we are human too. The heroes and heroines of Lewis' tale don't need any special powers or magical abilities (although they do need gifts and help, but Lewis supplies that as well) to rule Narnia – they simply need to be human.

It isn't long before the children hear the actual prophesy claiming they will rule in Narnia, and we see a curious omission on Lewis' part: the children never react to the prophecy. "When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone / Sits at Cair Paravel in throne, / The evil time will be over and done" (65). Despite this startling pronouncement, the children never question it, or even comment on it. Peter's question after the prophecy is revealed deals with the White Witch, not the prophecy. A few moments later we hear of another prophecy, one that requires two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve to take the thrones. Even this gets no reaction. "All the children had been attending so hard to what Mr. Beaver was telling them that they had noticed nothing else for a long time". Edmund, however, has gone (67). They become so focused on finding out where Edmund has gone (and exactly when he left) that they don't have time to talk anymore about the prophecy. This isn't the last time it is mentioned, however, and we *never* see a reaction to it other than simple acceptance.

Readers see another curious factor emerge with this second prophecy: Narnia requires four rulers to take the throne to rid the land of the White Witch. Here, Lewis is giving us yet another very democratic moment that could easily have simply been very conventional. When Peter, Susan, and Lucy arrive at the Stone Table, Susan makes Peter go first to meet Aslan. He is the oldest, after all, and will be High King of Narnia. It may at first seem very conventional of Lewis to elevate Peter over his other siblings in this way, but Lewis had always been a fan of the monarchy. In her essay *Sons of Adam, Daughters of Eve, and Children of Aslan* published in Edwards' book C.S. Lewis, Margarita Carretero-Gonzalez remarks "C.S. Lewis was a clear supporter of the concept of the British monarchy (104)." She goes on to say that

> One must necessarily agree with Walter Hooper's observation that "[t]he books in which Lewis most rejoiced in Monarchy and Inequality are, of course, the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Indeed, in Narnia, a responsible monarchy is the best answer to all evils. (105)

Lewis gives us an unusual form of monarchy, however. In Narnia, there are two Kings and two Queens. Given the history of the English monarchy, it could just have easily been Susan as High Queen in the same vein as Queen Elizabeth or Victoria. England was no stranger to a female ruler, although it was definitely more common for the eldest son to take the throne. Even though he gives us a rather formulaic structure with Peter as High King (rather than Susan, perhaps), he gives us *two Kings and two Queens*. This has never happened in our world. By definition of the word, a monarchy is a government run by a single person, traditionally with absolute power. Here in Narnia, our heroes and heroines are sharing power. Yes, Peter might have more as High King, but readers never see any evidence of this. They simply share their power, and rule jointly. This is

cooperation, and even democracy, in a way that goes against *all* conventional aspects of a monarchy.

Peter goes up to Aslan and we are given a very real visual reminder that he is still a boy, and as readers we are given time to wonder yet again why the children haven't reacted to the news that they will rule Narnia. Peter holds out his sword to greet Aslan, and then Aslan takes him to see the castle "where you are to be King." Yet again, Peter doesn't question this announcement. He follows, "with his sword still drawn," reminding us just how young he really is (104). Perhaps there is no reaction to the announcement because Peter doesn't have time – soon after seeing the castle shining "like a great star resting on the seashore" Susan's horn sounds and he must go and save her. Similarly to when Lucy realized Edmund was gone, the events have just been going too quickly for the children to process everything they have heard, although this seems rather odd. Children tend by nature to be very curious, although in my experience they also tend to accept things they are told. Why didn't Lewis think it was necessary for the children to question the prophecies?

Questioning the prophecy would have questioned their humanity. As seen already, the children in Lewis' book are destined to take the thrones at Cair Paravel because they are human beings. The children have no reason to doubt their humanity, so they don't. If Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve need to rule in Narnia, then Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy will do it. This brings us back to the story in Genesis when God commanded Adam to look after the fish of the sea, birds of the air, and beasts of the earth. The commandment given to Adam is now being fulfilled through his Sons and Daughters – something that doesn't need to be questioned. However even this biblical allegory isn't

conventional when we remember that the siblings have to rule together. In all of England's traditional power structures, one person has ruled (normally a man, although sometimes a woman). By giving us four egalitarian rulers in Narnia, Lewis gives his readers a very democratic monarchy.

Pullman's story is also filled with destiny, although unlike Lewis' story this destiny ends up destroying Pullman's idea that Lyra is a normal girl and that his work is completely progressive. Lyra seems like an ordinary girl in the first few pages of the tale, walking around and exploring rooms she isn't supposed to be in. It isn't long before we find that she isn't as normal as she seems, though. The Master of Jordan College and the Librarian talk about Lyra after the meeting with Lord Asriel and we see that Lyra is going to be important in the upcoming conflict. The Master tells the Librarian and the reader that, "Lyra has a part to play in all this, and a major one. The irony is she must do it all without realizing what she's doing. She can be helped though …" (28)

In Pullman's book, it soon becomes apparent that destiny *is* blood and that Lyra is anything but an ordinary girl. Lyra might begin the story as an orphan (a typical aspect of many children's stories), but she knows her parents were nobles (something more rare). Later she finds out that Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter are her parents – the two most important adult characters in the book. Why does Pullman set Lyra apart in this fashion? It isn't the only way she is different, as we see. As Maude Hines remarks in her article entitled *"Daemons and Ideology in* The Golden Compass," "Lyra is clearly an exceptional child, standing out among the gyptians with her blonde hair" (40). Why does Lyra need to have blonde hair? It is such a stereotypical image – it seems hard to believe

that progressive author Philip Pullman would give his heroine blonde hair without considering what it might mean.

For many critics, Lyra's gender is very important. Giving children, especially little girls, a female heroine is a wonderful thing, but what does Lyra's femininity bring to the story? Nothing. Not a thing, other than blonde hair and stereotypes. Yes, she's independent and faces fear on her own terms and is able to succeed, but there is nothing in the text that suggests Lyra needs to be female. She might as well have been Luke, or Louis, or any other boy Pullman could have picked. Everything about Lyra, from being dirty to lying to being independent, reinforces the typical and traditional *male* hero – by simply making Lyra a girl Pullman is doing nothing to give his readers a female hero who is successful because she is female. This is very important in a feminist reading of any text: for Le Guin, feminist writing requires looking at things through female eyes and "[s]peak[ing] with a woman's tongue" (Rashley 29). Pullman's work is not consistent in "appropriating a literary genre in order to revise or even reverse its assumptions, ideologies, or paradigms" that is one of the main aspects of a feminist text (Rashely 36). Lewis, however, *is*. Lewis' characters are the ones who have help from parental figures, reinforcing the importance of the family, and who cooperate and end up sharing the thrones: a more feminist and democratic view of heroism. Pullman might have wanted to revise the role of the hero by making his main character female, but he was unsuccessful because he didn't alter the traditional images of what a hero should be.

Yet another curious aspect of Pullman's heroine is the fact that, unlike Lewis' characters who are special simply because they are human, Lyra is special because of her parents. While Lewis' children get help from paternal figures, those figures are motivated

by love and provide help throughout the entire book. Lyra's parents only help her when it means saving her life. Lyra would have been severed from Pan in Bolvangar if Mrs. Coulter, her mother, hadn't stepped into the room and rushed to save her daughter. Even a figure as mean and evil and cold as Mrs. Coulter can't let harm come to her daughter, something Lord Asriel can't do either. Lord Asriel is a man who can murder a child simply to further his own ends, but even he couldn't do that to his daughter. Lyra's blood saves her in both of these instances, something that doesn't make sense for a progressive text. Why didn't Lyra have help from a figure who loves her because of who she is, not whose child she is? We'll never know.

Why does Pullman even put these moments into the book? Why does he leave his character helpless in these instances, with no agency at all (unlike Lewis' heroes and heroines)? Why does Lyra have to have important parents? While it does give her some motivation to follow her father at the end of the novel, the simple fact that he killed her best friend Roger would have been enough to explain why Lyra would want to follow Asriel and stop him from destroying Dust. Unlike in Lewis' book, these moments do nothing to provide the image that the family as a unit is important: even Lyra herself tells us that she can never think of Mrs. Coulter as mother (202). It doesn't matter who Peter's parents are: he is still going to be King because he is a human being. Lewis gives his audience a more liberal view of destiny in his books by having humanity play the deciding factor, rather than birth.

Lyra, in addition to having privileges because of her parents, is destined to save her world. There are moments when this destiny is discussed that Pullman seems to be attempting to break from the conventional structure of a destined hero, but he is never

able to completely shatter the structure. In the middle of the book, the Witch Consul Dr. Lanselius tells Farder Coram that the witches

> have spoken of a child such as this, who has a great destiny that can only be fulfilled elsewhere – not in this world, but far beyond. Without this child, we shall all die. So the witches say. But she must fulfill this destiny in ignorance of what she is doing, because only in her ignorance can we be saved. (154)

The wording of this revelation is worth exploring. Lanselius begins by saying "a child *such as this*" (emphasis added) – something that if left alone could have been seen as a break with the traditional structure of a specific destined hero. If anyone *like this child* could save the world, that means it doesn't necessarily have to be Lyra (although someone similar to her in many ways, which begs the question whether that way would include having noble blood). We have all known children *like* Lyra, I'm sure, or perhaps were one our self. She is naughty at times, prefers to be dirty and playing on the roof rather than sitting in her lessons, and she is has the wonderful ability to be able to love those around her. However, Lanselius goes on to say, "without *this* child" (emphasis added). Now we're talking about Lyra, not "Adam's blood and Adam's bone."

Similarly, Serafina tells Mr. Scoresby that

> We are all subject to the fates. But we must all act as if we are not, or die of despair. There is a curious prophecy about this child: she is destined to bring about the end of destiny. But she must do so without knowing what she is doing, as if it were her nature and not her destiny to do it. If she's told what she must do, it will all fail; death will sweep through all the worlds, it will be the triumph of despair, forever. The universes will all become nothing more than interlocking machines, blind and empty of thought, feeling, life … (271)

Again, Pullman writes the phrase "about this child." He continues with another troubling line, that she "is destined to bring about the end of destiny." What does that even mean? Is it even possible to *end* destiny if it clearly functions in the world?

We never find out. While this seems to be a strategy that Pullman is trying to use to get out of the formulaic aspects of destiny as necessary in fantasy, it doesn't work. By making Lyra the daughter of Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter, Pullman has already undermined his efforts to make her someone who could just as easily be walking around *our* Oxford right now. In her essay entitled *Dust to Dust* published in the collection Navigating the Golden Compass, Sarah Zettel discusses Pullman's use of destiny. She states that

> Left to itself as it is, the ability of Will and Lyra to save all seems to come down to destiny, which is extremely jarring because one of the main thrusts of the story is that pre-destination is a bad and artifical thing created by a cruel and mindless angle with delusions of grandeur and abetted by a cruel and mindless Church.
>
> The power of destiny is the last major fantasy trope that Pullman takes on, and, unfortunately, the one he seems to do the least well by. Over and over he explains how pre-ordination is connected with the forces that want to promote mindless obedience. And yet, without the fundamental explanations of their parents and their powers, Will and Lyra become creatures of destiny. (47)

Pullman is simply unsuccessful at explaining why this destiny exists, why it matters, and why it should function in his book: it definitely doesn't make Lyra ordinary.

Pullman tries another approach as well to attempt to make his heroine more ordinary. By constantly focusing on how Lyra *must at all costs* remain ignorant of what she is doing, Pullman tries to maintain some illusion that Lyra is normal. However, it doesn't work: why *shouldn't* Lyra know she is special and destined for her task? Lewis'

heroes and heroines know they are the future rulers of Narnia, and they simply accept it. There is no drawback to his characters' knowing their destiny. In Pullman's, story, however,

> If she's told what she must do, it will all fail; death will sweep through all the worlds, it will be the triumph of despair, forever. The universes will all become nothing more than interlocking machines, blind and empty of thought, feeling, life … (271)

Why is it so important that Lyra know nothing of her destiny? It has already been established that, destiny aside, her blood makes her exceptional. She can read an instrument no one else in the world can – Lyra is already special in ways that make her anything but ordinary. Is Pullman worried that she could become too powerful if she knew her destiny? Or perhaps wouldn't be able to handle it? If he had destroyed the conventional hero quest structure by making her a more feminist heroine (or at least a more *feminine* heroine), this might not be an issue. In fact, Lyra might have a lot of the agency that Lewis' characters have if she *had* known she was destined to save the world and bring about the end of destiny. In the end we'll never know why Pullman worked so hard to keep his heroine from knowing she was special, when it is clear that she is special in many other ways as well.

## VI. Conclusion: Offering a New Definition

Karen Smith says that perhaps the most important part of Dynamic Fantasy is that, "the contemporary fantasist aims for realism in fantasy" (321). This realism comes in a variety of ways: some authors give us heroes and heroines we can relate to, while others try to give us a setting that is familiar in some way. Despite the fact that Lewis was writing over 50 years ago at the very beginning of this Stage, he does exactly that. While it may not look it at first, Narnia is a lot like our own world with friendly people (or animals) willing to help our heroes and heroines out. Lewis' characters are given very logical gifts to help them succeed from perhaps the most famous gift-giver in the Western world, and Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy are destined to rule simply because they are human beings. Lyra, on the other hand, might live in a world that looks at a lot like ours on the surface, but her gift is much too exceptional to be realistic and she is *anything* but ordinary.

While Philip Pullman was trying to do many progressive things with his text, not all of them succeeded. As Sarah Zettel notes, "What he [Pullman] does well, he does very well indeed. There is so much in *His Dark Materials* that is rich, original and fearless it shines in a genre overloaded with the drab and the everyday" (47). But not everything. Pullman did offer his heroine very helpful friends in many situations, but they aren't always there. His heroine has moments of extreme feminism, but she is constantly being pushed into the masculine ideal of a hero: being by herself. Overall, he fell into too many traps: there simply aren't hundreds of Lyra's walking around right now. Peter could be anywhere, however. Lewis gave us heroes and heroines that we could identify with who

lived in a world untouched by the horrors of World War II. His characters work together (and the one who doesn't almost dies because of his betrayal) with help from parental figures in order to save Narnia. Lewis' story puts an emphasis on cooperation and a more democratic leadership system than Pullman's world. Lyra might be trying to overthrow the totalitarian government of the Church Pullman has created, but she herself is simply a part of the aristocracy. By giving us a female hero whose femininity doesn't matter and who is the daughter of what are perhaps the two most powerful nobles in the world, we as readers see nothing but the same conventional fantasy story being told over again.

There is a lot to like about Pullman's story, but the formulaic elements have been largely ignored by critics and are too important to overlook. C.S. Lewis is in fact the progressive author in giving us a unique story about *four* children who save Narnia, not Pullman with his lone heroine Lyra. While Lewis' story may seem cute and quaint in comparison with Pullman's much longer and more violent work, Lewis avoids the pitfalls that Pullman can't. For decades Lewis has been seen as a conventional author of British children's fantasy, but it is time to rethink that view. It is in fact Lewis' characters who would easily be walking around Oxford right now. While, as Sarah Zettel notes, there is a lot to like about Pullman's book, it is necessary to look at the whole picture: he fell into too many traps by trying to make a heroine we "is very ordinary." In many ways, although definitely not all as noted above, Pullman is the more conventional children's fantasy author and in comparison, C.S. Lewis rises to the forefront by offering his readers a very progressive book.

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