The Lion, the Witch, but Little Else

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The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe has historically been condemned for being more a vehicle for Christian propaganda than an actual piece of literature. While such criticism is undoubtedly harsh, a sharp analytical look at the second novel in C. S. Lewis' popular Narnia series reveals some uncomfortable truths about a book so cherished by young and adult readers alike. To address properly such commentaries, this essay attempts not only to disclose transparent Christian metaphors in the classic novel, but also to show that it subverts the literary form to such an extent that considering it a novel whatsoever should be called into question.

The Christian allegories present in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe are so poorly adumbrated that the only conclusion to be drawn is that they are simply unintended to be subtle. Take, for example, the character of Aslan, a great lion described by Mr. Beaver as “the Lord of the whole wood” (p. 87) whose coming is preceded by Christmas and willingly gives up his life in repentance of another's sins (p. 159), only to return to the land of the living a few hours later (p. 167) – a palpable Christ figure. Another easily recognizable biblical allusion is Edmund's insatiable desire for the White Witch's Turkish Delight – imagery reminiscent of Eve and her curiosity regarding the forbidden fruit, as tempted by the serpent. Later, Edmund seemingly channels the spirit of Judas Iscariot when he knowingly attempts to sell his family for sweets and a title (p. 98). There are numerous other examples present in this novel – the most significant of which is probably the symbolism behind the stone table – but an analysis of such motifs is not the intent of this paper. The presented allusions between characters in the novel and their biblical counterparts are likely sufficient to impress a sense of validity regarding Christian propaganda.

Upon first read-through, the presentation of the children Peter, Susan and Lucy is mystifying – literally no explicit characterization is given. That the reader is given no information about the aspirations, mindsets or even appearances of these seemingly main characters is almost stupefying until

a realization is made – the children are not the protagonists of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe; Aslan is. Aside from being given a relatively rich physical description ("good and terrible at the same time... a glimpse of the golden mane and the great, royal, solemn, overwhelming eyes" (p. 113)), throughout the course of the book the reader is given almost every other character's (major or minor alike) thoughts regarding Aslan (the children's on p. 78, Mr. Beaver's on p. 88, an implied opinion of the Witch's on p. 122, among others).

Furthermore, upon closer inspection it is evident that Aslan's actions are directly responsible for all resolution of conflict throughout the book, and that the children themselves are altogether extraneous to the plot. "Aslan is on the move – perhaps... already landed" (p. 78) when the children arrive in Narnia and his presence weakens the Witch's curse preventing the arrival of Christmas (p. 113). Despite giving his army to Peter for the inevitable battle, Aslan first "[explains] to Peter his plan of campaign... and all the time he was advising Peter how to conduct the operations" (p. 150). Presumably these orders could have been given to his second in command, as it is wholly unclear why Peter is qualified to lead an army. Perhaps more egregiously, the battle itself appears unnecessary, since Aslan cannot be turned to stone by the Witch's magic (p. 88) and that her minions appear to be completely terrified by his presence (p. 155), despite knowledge that if he were to fight back he would condemn all of Narnia to "perish in fire and water" (p. 147).

Lewis' decision to not imbue protagonism upon the children is strangely puzzling, since they are likely to be the characters with whom the intended audience (children) would most easily identify. However, his choice of God as an omniscient and omnipotent protagonist is even odder, as it removes any sense of dramatic tension from the story. Given that plot structure is a critical aspect of literature, this eradication of both rising action and climax, combined with the aforementioned lack of characterization, could be considered an invalidation of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe's status

as a true novel – after all, what is literature if not a interweaving between plot and character?

As it stands, the author of this paper considers the earlier stated criticism of Lewis' work as Christian propaganda over literature to be somber, yet well-founded nevertheless. Lewis overtly and unskillfully parallels easily-recognizable Christian metaphors while cheerfully subverting the literary form, alienating his intended audience and throwing any sense of internal consistency out of the proverbial window. All things considered, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe is most certainly too concerned with drawing biblical parallels at the expense of being a well-written and otherwise exciting adventure for young readers.