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FINDING FAITH IN FANTASY: EXPLORING THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA, HARRY POTTER, AND HIS DARK MATERIALS

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FINDING FAITH IN FANTASY: EXPLORING *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA*,
HARRY POTTER, AND *HIS DARK MATERIALS*

by

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ABSTRACT

Fantasy is often a controversial topic within the Christian community, especially when magic is involved and religious ideals are tested. This controversy is explored and questioned through the advocating of the creative, intellectual, and spiritual qualities of Fantasy that are positive and encouraging for a Christian, and by analyzing the presence and value of these qualities within three famous fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Harry Potter*, and *His Dark Materials*.

KEY WORDS

Fantasy, Fantasy Literature, Christianity, Magic, The Chronicles of Narnia, Harry Potter, His Dark Materials, C.S. Lewis, J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, J.R.R. Tolkien

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Finding Faith in Fantasy: Exploring *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Harry Potter*, and *His Dark Materials*

Introduction

Stepping into a wardrobe to find a snow-covered lamppost. Walking through a train station wall onto a hidden platform. Crossing through the lights of the Aurora Borealis to arrive in another universe. This is what one delightedly witnesses when diving into a fantasy novel. Some eagerly turn pages with eyes moving quickly, feasting on every word. Others calmly sit, absorbing the words that melt into images inside their minds, awe-struck. Fantasy is a genre for the creative, the imaginative, the adventurous, the passionate, the loyal, and the thoughtful. What could be bad about fantasy?

The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis is a famous fantasy series of seven books, written in the 1950s and considered a classic that has impacted and inspired fantasy literature since its creation. Lewis's Christian beliefs have impacted and given deep meaning to the texts, especially for Christians. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is perhaps the most well-known fantasy series in the world today. Since the series is about a young wizard who attends a boarding school focused on the teaching of magic, the series sparked controversy in religious communities. Philip Pullman wrote the popular fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials* which gained more fame after the first book, *The Golden Compass*, was adapted into a film. Pullman, a proud atheist, incorporated anti-religious ideas into his series, producing a negative reaction from Christians, who boycotted *His Dark Materials* and encouraged the bad reputation of the series.

All three of these series that are usually directed towards children and young adults have been perceived differently by the Christian community, yet all are considered

famous and impactful fantasy series that are laced with magic and the supernatural. Controversy exists in the Christian community over *Harry Potter* because of the prominent use of magic, and over *His Dark Materials* because of the atheistic ideals. Magic and atheism are often mixed and distinguished as anti-Christian, thus supporting the Christian community's negative response to fantasy, since the majority of fantasy literature involves magic. Yet, this understanding begins to break down when one steps back and questions why *The Chronicles of Narnia* is accepted by Christians if it includes magic. If the magic in *Narnia* and other series like it are accepted, why can't all fantasy that seemingly presents the same kind of anti-Christian themes be accepted?

From a Christian perspective and with support from scholarly and expert sources, an exploration of how all fantasy has the ability to engage and inspire the imagination, encourage intellectual and moral growth, and illuminate spiritual themes and ideals for both children and adults, religious or not, will be presented. Following, C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* will be analyzed according to their imaginative, intellectual/moral, and spiritual elements to address the controversies of each series and argue that each series, and therefore all fantasy literature, can be received positively in the Christian community.

Research questions include:

- How does fantasy literature affect one's faith?
- What makes fantasy literature Christian-worthy; what characteristics of fantasy literature appeal to the Christian faith?
- Should fantasy literature be judged according to authors' intentions?
- Is the presence of magic in fantasy literature a positive or negative quality?

Review of Literature

Many religious and/or literary scholars have sought out exploring fantasy literature's qualities and effects on readers, usually children and young adults, and its impact within the Christian community. Many argue that fantasy is rich with Christian themes and moral ideals that help readers grow mentally, ethically, and spiritually. Scholarly sources that dissect Fantasy and/or discuss the significance of the genre within the Christian faith will be presented first. The following sources that focus on analyzing the three fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Harry Potter*, and *His Dark Materials*, will be organized by the series they primarily discuss. Although, many of the sources will be used in more than one section.

Faith in Fantasy

In "Religion and Literature," T.S. Eliot discusses how a person should criticize all literature from a definite theological and ethical standpoint. By exploring different kinds of religious texts, he explains that literature is more than well-written language; there is a special spiritual awareness for religious writers, and a Christian work should be written unconsciously, instead of deliberately. Then, Eliot examines how people separate literary judgment from religious judgment, both as writers and readers, but goes on to say how this is a bad separation since literature can have a large influence on one just as spirituality does. Eliot concludes by stating that if one reads many texts and develops criticism according to his or her principles, a text will not have the ability to influence a person too much in a negative way.

Belden C. Lane explores how setting and story play a role in the religious imagination in "Fantasy and the Geography of Faith." Lane discusses how the human

spirit has always been attracted to imaginary, new places that inspire certain longings for such worlds (just as we yearn for the Kingdom of God) which ultimately help people better understand reality, and he gives specific Biblical references where storytelling and places, real and imaginary, are presented and support the idea that imagination encourages faith. Faith is impossible without having an active and open imagination, thus fantasy can help us better understand our faith and the world we live in.

In the article “C.S. Lewis’ Mythopoeia of Heaven and Earth: Implications for the Ethical and Spiritual Formation of Multicultural Young Learners,” Seung Chun Lee starts by examining how children’s values are affected by their schools and teachers, and presents the hypothesis that fantasy literature can help cultivate their morals, using C.S. Lewis’s and J.R.R. Tolkien’s philosophies as support. Lee presents a major controversy behind myths—they can be considered a waste of time because they are just fiction—but argues that fantasy offer new avenues of seeing real life truth. He provides Lewis’s defenses of myths and Tolkien’s idea that there are three structural components of fantasy stories that can influence the reader: discovery, escape, and consolation. These components were originally described by Tolkien in “On Fairy-Stories” which is summarized below, including more information about each component. Lee also discusses how one must approach fantasy literature, and how Lewis’s *Narnia* can appeal to many religions and moral backgrounds. To conclude, Lee states how Tolkien’s three structural elements of fantasy can affect children: recovery can lead a child to have a better self-image, escape can build his or her self-esteem, and consolation can give the child a self-ideal to aspire to.

In the short text “On Stories,” C.S. Lewis discusses the importance of Story in everyday life. He presents the idea that literature is sometimes seen as escaping reality, leaving the reader unsettled, but argues against that idea by saying that the happiness and simple, attainable pleasures displayed in stories allow the reader to relish those pleasures in life. Lewis also praises stories for giving the reader profound internal experiences, different kinds of excitement and surprise, and a search for underlying themes that connect with reality. The chapter ends with Lewis focusing on the fact that Story and reality share the same tension between theme and plot, that people strive for a certain ideal state but are always redirected by everyday events. Story sometimes allows people to grasp both.

In “Is Harry Potter Christian?” Dan McVeigh seeks to give the *Harry Potter* series a Christian label by comparing it with other British Romantic tradition “children’s literature” that authors Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien wrote, along with novels *Tom Brown’s School Days* and *Marjorie Dean*. While this article was written at the time when only four of the *Harry Potter* books were published and the first film was released, McVeigh promotes that the series feeds children’s imaginations, relates to their everyday concept of growth and education, and follows the character and plot footsteps of the novels mentioned above that were approved by Christians. McVeigh concludes the article stating that child-like faith, promoted by *Harry Potter* and other children’s literature, is what allows one to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Kathleen Norris wrote *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith* to explore the language of Christianity. In each chapter of her novel, she reflects on words such as *faith*,

judgment, theology, and salvation—words that have become heavy and abstract in the Christian faith and are hard to attach understandable meaning to. Her chapter on *imagination* provides insights that are helpful in the conversation about the imaginative depth of fantasy.

“Killing God? Secular and Spiritual Elements in Some Recent Literature for Children” by Geoff Robson is a summary and evaluation of several young adult texts, highlighting both secular and religious components in each tale. Robson discusses many young adult literature novels to expand upon Christian and anti-Christian themes in young adult literature, but his most detailed analyzes are about the prominent series, *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter*. *His Dark Materials* is considered one of the most anti-Christian of the group, while Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and some of the other shorter texts are more encouraging of Christianity. In the conclusion, Robson ends on a positive note, saying each work inspires adolescents to find spiritual meaning within life and overcome the evil obstacles thrown their way.

J.R.R. Tolkien seeks to vividly define and discuss the use of fairy tales and fantasy in his essay “On Fairy-Stories.” He begins by giving the definition of a fairy tale, describing what it is not and what needs to be involved in the story to make it a fairy tale, such as the supernatural. Next, he discusses the origin of the fairy tale, eliminating all genres that could be mistaken for fairy tale such as “traveller’s tales,” science fiction, and beast tales, and then points out that one must study the origin of language to understand the origin of stories. Tolkien moves onto discussing children, the general audience of the fairy story, and what the function and values of fairy stories are. He dissects the term *fantasy*, describing it as Art and how it works uniquely in fairy stories differing from

other forms of art, such as drama and magic tricks. The imagination allowing one to discover a different world thus rediscovering the ordinary, yet beautiful details of reality; the fairy story as escapist pleasure where people can escape their distorted, dark, or immoral views of reality and find freedom in the true, universally accepted moral laws of the world; and the emotional consolation of the joy or desire for a supernatural world that will provide one with unlimited happiness or satisfaction, which is often manifested in myths as life after death: all are values one can find within the fairy story. In the epilogue, Tolkien says there is a “joy” that marks true fairy stories (the happily ever after), and one can find the essence of fairy stories within the Gospels. This essay is a useful source for discussing why fantasy can be regarded positively in the Christian faith.

Every scholar encourages the reader to dive into literature, especially fantasy, without denying his or her spiritual and/or moral judgement, but using fantasy to build it. Many of the following sources that primarily focus on analyzing each series also tend to discuss the overall fantasy genre’s effect on children as well.

Lewis’s *Narnia*

In his book, *Into the Wardrobe: C.S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles*, David C. Downing vividly explores the *Narnia* series and highlights the intellect and imagination of C.S. Lewis. Downing offers a brief biography of Lewis's life, describes Lewis's inspiration for and creation of each book, and discusses the spirituality, morality, and classical and medieval elements of the series. He also writes about Lewis's literary artistry and the meaning of names in *Narnia*. In Downing’s discussion of the spiritual and moral qualities of *Narnia*, the reader is given insight into how Lewis incorporated

Christian themes and God as Aslan into the series, and the many lessons on morals in the books that can appeal to both Christians and those with other beliefs.

Frank Furedi examines the negative reception of films with religious themes, including *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, in “The Curious Rise of Anti-Religious Hysteria.” Since C.S. Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia* conscious of the religious themes within his writing, it is not surprising that the film adaptation would possess some Christian themes. Furedi states that the scornful response is from America’s secular, liberal elite worried about religious propaganda influencing the general American public and possibly affecting American culture and politics. Religious movies often address moral issues and the bigger questions of life that everyone is interested in, thus they become popular. Yet, liberal elites are insecure and afraid of the encouragement of fundamentalist ideas that oppose their own liberal, secular values. This article offers a glance at a negative, secular response to *The Chronicles of Narnia* that is different from the usual accepting attitude towards the series present in the Christian community.

C.S. Lewis’s ideas and beliefs about myth, and his own work with “myth-making” are expounded upon in Maria Kuteeva’s “Myth” from *Reading the Classics with C.S. Lewis*. After exploring several stages of Lewis’s life where his outlook on “mythonomy,” the study of the nature of myths, changed as his literary studies and spirituality changed, Kuteeva summarizes that Lewis considers myth as divine truth falling upon the human imagination. Kuteeva provides a plethora of examples where Lewis incorporates pre-Christian mythological ideas and details into his own motifs and characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Next to the well-known Christian message of *Narnia*, the myth parallels add an interesting classical, whimsical depth to the stories.

C.S. Lewis wrote *Of Other Worlds* to discuss his views on Story and the kind of stories that are dear to him: fantasy. He seeks to highlight the virtues of Story itself, explore his own experiences with fairy tales and science fiction, and explain why fantasy should not be restricted to an adolescent audience. He mentions some of his thoughts and experiences when writing *The Chronicles of Narnia*, giving insight into how his popular series came into being.

In *The Magician's Book: A Skeptic's Adventures in Narnia*, Laura Miller highlights her experiences with *The Chronicles of Narnia* and explores the dimensions of the series outside of the usual theological, Christian dimensions. When Miller first read *Narnia*, she was ignorant of the underlying Christian themes and allusions, and it wasn't until someone pointed them out to her that she realized their significance in the series. As someone who left the Christian faith, she was not a fan of those themes, yet the series still had a great impact on her. As she grew up, the influence of *Narnia* remained with her and she wrote this novel to dive into the many other themes and ideas that the series contributes to childhood experiences and literature in general. Different from the positive, Christian opinions, Miller offers new thoughts on Aslan, Lewis's theology and beliefs behind *Narnia*, and how the series could even discourage aspects of Christianity for some readers.

Philip Pullman wrote "The Darkside of Narnia" to explain how Lewis's *Narnia* is not the wonderful accomplishment of children's fantasy that many individuals regard it as. He states that *Narnia* is a great story for children in a superficial way, but when reading it more attentively, it can support life-hating ideology, sexism, racism, and it can take advantage of the emotions evoked by the story of Christ's crucifixion and

resurrection. Pullman provides a more negative outlook on *Narnia*, and it is interesting that he is also the author of a well-known fantasy series (*His Dark Materials*).

The goal in the discussion of *The Chronicles of Narnia* is to present ideas on a fantasy series openly accepted by the Christian community that offers support for the fantasy literature and is considered safe. These articles offer different viewpoints of the series—some support the usual Christian approval and others point out more negative, or less popular opinions.

Rowling's *Harry Potter*

Amanda Cockrell presents the social context for the Christian attacks on the magic of the *Harry Potter* series in “Harry Potter and the Witch Hunters: A Social Context for the Attacks on ‘Harry Potter.’” She states two reasons for the focused attacks could be the series’ popularity, bringing it to the forefront of both children’s and parents’ minds, and the shift from the censorship of sex to the censorship of the occult in texts and media. Cockrell explores two answers to the question *why* do so many people see *Harry Potter*, in contrast with other fantasy works, as supportive of the occult, and not as fantasy: Harry lives in our real, contemporary world, and people who are against magic are parodied in the books. Cockrell points out that Rowling meant for the magic in *Harry Potter* to be seen as a skill or science to be learned, much like alchemy, yet it was not perceived this way. This article provides a background for the controversy over the *Harry Potter* series in the Christian community.

In the article “Harry Potter and Contemporary Magic: Fantasy Literature, Popular Culture, and the Representation of Religion,” Laura Feldt uses *Harry Potter* to analyze the role of fantasy in the media and religion, and discusses the representation of magic

within the series. Feldt examines the different reactions to the *Harry Potter* series from Christians, providing the idea that *Harry Potter* is “religious” or “secular” dependent upon who is reading it and his or her religious background. She also explores the representation of magic within the *Harry Potter* series, describing two types of magic displayed: everyday, ordinary magic and mysterious, deep magic. Feldt discusses the relationship between religion and magic, how fantasy can allow people to reflect on religion in new ways—some more seriously than others—and how the controversies over *Harry Potter* have inevitably moved in into the religious realm.

Emily Griesinger further explores the controversy over *Harry Potter* in “Why Read Harry Potter? J.K. Rowling and the Christian Debate,” arguing that the series is not anti-Christian but includes Christian themes like C.S. Lewis’s *Narnia*, and deserves better treatment as fantasy literature. Griesinger was encouraged by her job as a professor at a Christian university teaching Children’s Literature to research the *Harry Potter* series and write this article. She highlights C.S. Lewis’s and J.R.R. Tolkien’s positive perspectives on fantasy and children’s literature, dissects the magic within both *Harry Potter* and *Narnia*, pointing out the similarities, and assures that there are valuable moral and Christian lessons for children in the *Harry Potter* series. She states that Christian parents should take *Harry Potter* for what it is, a fantasy novel and nothing more, and explore how they can encourage their children to read, use their imagination, and help them pick out the positive spiritual themes like those in *Narnia*.

In “Harry Potter and the ‘Deeper Magic’: Narrating Hope in Children’s Literature,” Emily Griesinger explores the magic of the *Harry Potter* series in more depth. She introduces her topic by discussing the *Harry Potter* series’ fame and

controversy, and then dives in by talking about Christian eschatology and hope, which can be found in fantasy literature. Griesinger uses these ideas to review how *Harry Potter* can be used to communicate eschatology and hope through its “deeper magic,” like that of C.S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia*. She proceeds to summarize the first four books of the *Harry Potter* series, pointing out the Christian themes and ideals of sacrifice and mercy, but she also points out the unknown grey areas of the unfinished (at the time) series. Griesinger concludes that despite the controversies over *Harry Potter* and it not being openly confirming of Christianity yet, it promotes hope and strength for readers to meet the trials of life and develop their faith.

In “The Trilemma Revised: Harry Potter and a Landscape of Moral Uncertainty,” Rebecca Ingalls explores Christian rhetoric within C.S. Lewis’s *Narnia* and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*, picking out a three-part “trilemma” of rationalization called “Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?” which Lewis used in *Narnia* to rationalize that Jesus was the Son of God. The trilemma can also be considered present in *Harry Potter*. Ingalls starts by explaining the trilemma further through C.S. Lewis’s beliefs and how he reflected them in his writing. Next, she goes over the controversy of *Harry Potter*, and then, dives into analyzing the two series, applying the trilemma to them and picking out the Christian themes.

Alice Mills wrote “Harry Potter: Agency or Addiction,” to discuss the *Harry Potter* characters’ agency. Mills explores characters such as Harry, Voldemort, and Slytherin students who could have lack of agency, or predestined, stereotyped roles, which would make their parts lacking. Furthermore, the reader can distinguish between good and evil in the characters by recognizing agency or lack thereof in characters. Mills

also suggests that some characters' choices, whether good or evil, could be driven by addiction rather than agency. Love—parental, friendly, and romantic—is a force that drives many characters to decide upon their actions, and it can either be healthy for agency or an addictive obsession that confuses characters' true convictions. When the reader considers predestined roles or addiction as factors in characters' decisions, true agency seems impossible, thus distinguishing between good and evil becomes difficult. This article is useful when examining the moral and spiritual qualities of the series.

These articles explore the controversy, the magic, and the theological themes and ideals found in *Harry Potter*. After reading them, it is quite clear that the main reason for the controversy over the *Harry Potter* series is its intense incorporation of magic. These sources combined encourage one to see the magical aspects positively like one does with *Narnia*.

Pullman's *His Dark Materials*

In the article “‘Without Contraries is no Progression’: Dust as an All-Inclusive, Multifunctional Metaphor in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*,” Anne-Marie Bird defines and explores Dust in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series. Bird discusses the popularity of the Biblical story of the Fall on the Western imagination, such as Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, which uses the Genesis account of the Fall on several levels. Pullman focuses on the binary opposites of innocence versus experience, good versus evil, and spirit versus matter, and their importance to humanity in his series, using what he calls Dust. Bird goes on to define what Dust is in Pullman's series, explaining its many definitions, such as its representation of original sin and self-awareness, and relating it with John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. She discusses Dust in relation to daemons and how

Dust plays a role of connecting body and spirit in the series, Pullman's depiction of the Church being the villain in the series—trying to eradicate Dust from the world—and how Pullman regards angels and Satan in relation to Dust. Bird concludes that Dust plays a positive role in the series, supporting humanity's individuality and independence.

Sophie Elmhirst wrote the article "Philip Pullman Returns to His Fantasy World for *The New York Times Magazine* in honor of Pullman's new book release, *La Belle Sauvage*, the first novel of Pullman's new trilogy, *The Book a Dust*. Elmhirst provides direct quotes from Pullman about his beliefs and writing, biographical information about Pullman, and statistics about *His Dark Materials*.

In her article "Fantasizing the Fall: Reception and Transformation of the Bible in Philip Pullman's Fantasy Trilogy *His Dark Materials*," Laura Feldt uses three instances in Philip Pullman's series where Pullman rewrites the Genesis account of the Fall to support the series as not being anti-religious, but as encouraging of religious imagination and Biblical anthropology. Feldt discusses the reception and transformation of the Bible in literature, before exploring the three rewritings of the Fall in *His Dark Materials*. The first rewriting is a version adapted from the real-world Old Testament account, slightly changed to reflect the world within the series. The second rewriting is an alternative Fall account told by an alien race within the series, that has a more positive ending than the real-world Fall. The third rewriting is an interpretative reenactment of the Fall in which the two main characters of the series, Lyra and Will fill the roles of Adam and Eve. Feldt analyses the reception and transformation of the Fall within these three rewritten versions of the Fall to show how Pullman views the Bible with seriousness and as relevant to human existence and the current human condition. Feldt concludes that even though there

is ground for the series to be considered anti-religious, with how it questions traditional Christian values and criticizes authority-bound religion, the series is accepting of the anthropology of the Genesis Fall.

When *His Dark Materials* was beginning to become popular, Perry Glanzer wrote “Moving Beyond Censorship: What Will Educators Do if a Controversy Over *His Dark Materials* Erupts?” where he discusses how educators will respond to the controversy over Philip Pullman’s trilogy. He immediately jumps into the controversial topics within the content of the books, claiming that the books attack Christianity very clearly and support Philip Pullman’s personal beliefs as an atheist who is openly against Christian beliefs. Glanzer examines how educators could respond to the series and the option of using it in literature classes, which could upset many Christian parents. If *His Dark Materials* is taught in classes, Glanzer points out that it is only fair to teach pro-Christian texts as well, to provide a balance.

Burton Hatlen’s “Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*, a Challenge to the Fantasies of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, with an Epilogue on Pullman’s Neo-Romantic Reading of *Paradise Lost*” compares Philip Pullman’s theology with the theologies of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Hatlen starts by discussing Tolkien’s theology and how he incorporates his faith into his famous book series *The Lord of the Rings*, and conveys the differences between it and Pullman’s theology in *His Dark Materials*. Lewis’s theology and *Narnia* series are reflected upon next. Hatlen provides Pullman’s opinions of Lewis, and compares *Narnia* with *His Dark Materials*. To further communicate the differences of Pullman and Lewis’s beliefs, Hatlen explores both of their perceptions of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

In “‘Without Lyra we would understand neither the New nor the Old Testament’: Exegesis, Allegory, and Reading *The Golden Compass*” Shelley King describes how Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass* offers an interesting textual experience of how to interpret and find meaning within a text. King starts by comparing the overall novel to a device in the novel called the alethiometer, a “golden compass” that is used to tell the truth about anything. Reading the alethiometer is a complex interpretive act, and the main character Lyra is only able to read it because her mind is youthful. The other kind of reader able to read the symbolic language of the compass is a trained Scholar. King states that the novel *The Golden Compass* can be seen as an alethiometer, “a self-reflexive reader’s guide to its own interpretation and to the process of producing meaning” (108). Just like there are two types of readers of the alethiometer, there are two ways to understand the novel. After explaining this, King further explores the child-like reader and interpreter of texts, and then does the same with the scholar-reader. King conveys that both ways of reading are means to the same ends, and that everyone reads meaning in their own way. Lastly, King discusses Scripture’s role in *The Golden Compass* and makes the same conclusion that while people may try to dictate a proper way to read the Bible, interpretation is left up to the reader. Allegory is present in the novel, and Lyra is an example of personal interpretation fighting the abuse of power of Scholars interpreting texts.

In “Rediscovering Faith through Science Fiction: Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*,” Andrew Leet discusses Philip Pullman’s exploration of organized religion and faith development within *His Dark Materials*. Leet starts by discussing the relationship between science fiction and religion, and Pullman’s own religious beliefs. The majority

of the essay focuses on the themes of heaven and hell, the role of the soul, and the individual's journey of faith and defining faith. Leet concludes with a positive statement about Pullman's series: "Pullman's questions of that which is often unquestioned in the realms of organized religion and faith development is neither unnatural nor meant to be corruptive" (186). This article offers detailed religious connections and comments of *His Dark Materials* and argues that children should be able to explore religious questions and ideas in literature.

In their article "'A Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven': *His Dark Materials*, Inverted Theology, and the End of Philip Pullman's Authority," Jonathan Padley and Kenneth Padley explore how God is depicted in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. The authors discuss Pullman's atheistic beliefs and intentions to attack Christianity and the Church within his series. They pick out where Pullman contradicts himself within his books, how he denies belief in the "invisible" but includes constructs such as ghosts, souls, love, and hate, and how the God-figure in the books, the Authority, is supposed to resemble God, but resembles the traditional descriptions of the devil more. Pullman's purpose was to cast Christianity in a negative light, but readers could read the story and see an accidental pro-Christian angle.

In "Exposing *His Dark Materials*," Stephen Ross provides a review of Pullman's *The Golden Compass*. Ross presents how Pullman weaves his atheism into the novel and causes readers' Christian faith to be tested through his anti-Christian writing. Ross explains how Pullman does this in the series through the creation of the daemon, an animal, physical manifestation of a person's soul. A human and its daemon of the opposite gender share a close relationship that could resemble a relationship like one

between a person and the Lord, or between a husband and wife, but is just a relationship with one's self. Ross even connects how this relationship could be compared with the Holy Trinity, but also points out that comparison's flaws. To conclude, Ross states how dangerous Pullman's fantasy world is—that readers can easily have an emotional response to the text—and that it is wise to guard one's heart against such literature.

Naomi Wood uses her essay, "Paradise Lost and Found: Obedience, Disobedience, and Storytelling in C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman" to analyze authority and morality in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, exploring what these authors are trying to communicate to children about obedience and disobedience. Both Lewis and Pullman see obedience as being central to coming of age. The main difference between them and their texts is that Lewis encourages Christianity and obedience while Pullman criticizes organized religion and questions obedience. Wood discusses the authority, authorship, and narration of each author's series, picking out the differences of how they each see God and depict Him within their writing. Lewis encourages "good" as a natural human virtue from God, while Pullman seeks to question what "good" can be. This leads into the discussion of how each author sees obedience and disobedience in regards to Eve's decision to disobey and eat the fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge. Lewis depicts obedience as submission to God, therefore disobedience is bad, and Pullman sees Eve's disobedience as promoting the knowledge and self-consciousness of humanity. Wood shows the differences between Lewis's and Pullman's opinions on discernment, free will, and ethical action with Lewis displaying a clear, Christian direction in his stories for children, and Pullman encouraging children to analyze characters' choices and independently develop their own morals. To conclude, Wood

points out that both authors encourage using the imagination and seeking true knowledge to help one grow and mature.

Many of these articles simply communicate anti-Christian themes found in Pullman's series, but other sources strive to pick apart *His Dark Materials* and find positive Christian and moral meanings beneath the superficial atheistic perspective. The goal in exploring this series is to highlight both the negative and positive aspects to support that *His Dark Materials* is worthy of being read by young readers, whether it is for the exposure to and experience with more secular ideas or to absorb the unique, insightful spiritual ideas.

Faith in Fantasy

Introducing Fantasy

J.R.R. Tolkien, famous English scholar, Oxford University professor, devout Christian, and writer of the popular fantasy tales *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, specializes in the study and defense of fantasy literature. He wrote a prominent piece on the meaning and worth of fantasy tales, “On Fairy-Stories,” where he conveyed that the history and immensity of “fairy-stories” is probably more elaborate than the human race’s physical history, and just as intricate as the history of language (121). This idea is encouraged by the fact that the number of fantasy stories is impossible to count, and the influence of them in everyone’s lives is considerable. Anyone who reminisces about their childhood must recall being read fairy tales such as “Snow White” or “Goldie Locks and the Three Bears” before bedtime. Perhaps, one will remember learning the legends of the British leader King Arthur and his adventures with the Knights of the Round Table and the wizard Merlin. A simple stroll through the aisles of any bookstore will show that the fantasy genre is the current and ever-growing obsession of the modern literary public. Although *The Hobbit* was published in the late 1930s and *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1950s, copies of each still line the shelves today and each have a series of recent movie adaptations. The amount of fantasy-themed, animated Disney movies that are produced and seen by millions every year further proves that fairy tales and fantastical stories are present and thriving in the current culture, even if their literary background and value are not consciously considered.

Tales of unreachable, whimsical lands where noble warriors slay dragons, mysterious wizards whisper spells, and mythical creatures exist and sometimes talk—

whether they are considered fairy tales, myths, fables, legends, folklore, or today's epic fantasies—all seem to possess ancient roots in literary history and are part of the vast sea known as Fantasy. Tolkien offers an insightful and intricate description of “fairy stories,” or fantasy literature overall:

...for fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories *about* fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. *Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted. (Tolkien 113)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines fantasy simply as “a product of imagination, fiction, or a figment.” Yet, that doesn't seem to do Fantasy justice. Tolkien's definition encompasses both the basic elements of Fantasy and the realistic qualities that allow a reader to imagine, understand, and immerse himself or herself in magical worlds that are quite similar to our own. The fantastical elements intrigue and capture the reader's interest, and the realistic qualities create the familiarity needed for the reader to continue the journey with Fantasy, perhaps explaining why Fantasy is still adored today. This definition can be considered quite broad, and it's important to note that Tolkien follows his definition by saying Faërie cannot be defined directly or “caught in a net of words,” (114) but his description encompasses Fantasy in a way that is insightful and relevant in this conversation.

Controversy in Christian Community

Yet, despite its firm grip within history and the hearts of many, images of magic and imaginary places with dangerous beasts and mortals with god-like abilities instill uncertainty and distain in others, such as those with religious beliefs. Controversy over the reading of fantasy literature occurs often in the Christian community, the community probably most known for publicly discouraging Fantasy, and T.S. Eliot, an American/English writer known for his poetry, literary criticism, and essays on theology and philosophy, offers a reasonable explanation for the concern. He conveys that an author of an imaginary work writes to affect the reader completely whether it is intentional or not, and the reader is affected by it, whether he or she is conscious of it and willing to be or not (Eliot 201). What one reads takes residence in his or her mind and heart, sometimes more than he or she realizes. Eliot expresses that Christians must read everything consciously and critically, testing all literature by certain standards (207), and most Christians would agree with Eliot's ideas. Fantasy literature can pose several problems for a Christian trying to read literature in line with their spiritual standards.

First of all, when the word *magic* appears in the conversation about Fantasy, a certain amount of tension can arise within the Christian community. To understand, one must only recall the instructions given to the Israelites in the Old Testament on how they, the Lord's chosen people, were to consider witchcraft: "There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord" (Deut. 18.10-12), and "A man or a woman who is a medium or

a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them” (Lev. 20.27). Additionally, the New Testament warns the faith-seeking Christian against performing the sins of the flesh if he or she is to inherit the Kingdom of the Lord, and sorcery is included in that list of sins (Gal. 5.19-21). It is not unreasonable to think that some Christians regard reading fantasy novels that include witchcraft as dabbling with thoughts and ideas that may aim one in the wrong spiritual direction.

Furthermore, Seung Chun Lee, educator and scholar of education, teacher education, and intercultural competence, points out that there are educators who consider fantasy literature as fiction or a lie, thus it does not contain the element of truth and it is not worth exploring even if it communicates underlying valuable ideas (17). Many Christians, and others, may agree with those educators and consider fantasy not worth reading since it does not depict reality and could lead one to believe in and dream of unrealistic possibilities. In other words, it could be a way for one to escape reality—“the flight of the deserter,” which is a phrase of Tolkien that will be further discussed (148). When Christians are called to believe in God alone and purposely live life in a way that glorifies Him, escaping from what is considered real and true—the Lord, the Bible, the community surrounding one—does not seem to follow Christian ideals.

Audience of Fantasy & Fantasy’s Positive Qualities

These reasons for controversy and hesitation over Fantasy seem even more important when the Christian community considers the type of readers that writers and publishers primarily aim fairy tales and fantasy stories towards: children and young adults. Tolkien comments that the connection between children and fantasy is commonly

assumed to be as natural as the connection between a child's body and milk (130). Young readers seem to have more active imaginations than adults, empowering them to easily believe in the context of the literature, or enter a state of mind called "willing suspension of disbelief" when hearing or reading fantasy tales (Tolkien 132), thus they would seem more inclined to be interested in the fantastical. Yet, a young mind can be quite impressionable: "Children's knowledge of the world is often so small that they cannot judge, off-hand and without help, between the fantastic, the strange (that is rare or remote facts), the nonsensical, and the merely 'grown-up' (that is ordinary things of their parents' world, much of which still remains unexplored)" (Tolkien 133). It is common for Christian parents to worry about what their children are being exposed to and how they are understanding and judging it in their innocent and naive state, as described by Tolkien. Since one of the Christian's many duties is to raise and mentor his or her children to know and seek the Lord (Deut. 6.6-7, Eph. 6.4, Mat. 19.14, Prov. 22.6), allowing a child with little knowledge of and experience with discernment and conscious, critical thinking to read fantasy stories with content that portrays sinful actions and unrealistic ideas would not seem to be in the best interest of that child's spiritual growth. Thus, taking the Fantasy away from the children seems like the safest option.

However, Tolkien pointed out those limitations of children's knowledge and discernment to explain that children will often ask the question "Is it true?" after encountering a fantasy story. They have a desire to understand the literature, and it should not be assumed they will believe everything they read (Tolkien 133). In fact, the assumed audience of fantasy literature should not be confined to children. While recognizing that children are an understandable audience, Tolkien believes children do not like or

understand Fantasy more than adults do, and if a child does develop an adoration for fantasy stories, it would only increase with age (130). If Fantasy is worth reading at all, it is certainly worthy to be read by adults (Tolkien 137). C.S. Lewis, a close friend of Tolkien and another famous English scholar and novelist known for his fantasy writings (*The Chronicles of Narnia, Till We Have Faces*), Christian apologetics, and academic career at Oxford University, stands beside Tolkien in the defense of Fantasy. Lewis acknowledges that children are usually accused of reading books too mature for them while adults are accused of reading books that are too childish, but Lewis furthers Tolkien's ideas and thinks the reader should not have to alter their taste in certain literature according to a timeline (*Of Other Worlds* 28). Not only are adults worthy of engaging fantasy stories, they are welcomed to interact with them. Even if the primary readers of fantasy literature are children and young adults, Lee conveys that adults, whether parents or teachers, should respect the youthful and regard them as equal partners who share the same human experiences as adults in the context of education and engaging literature (25). Adults should recognize the capability for young minds to read without believing everything within a book, and recall that they would have wanted the same treatment when they were young.

Nevertheless, the controversy of Fantasy is still concerning for a Christian whether the reader is a child or an adult. Perhaps it is necessary for each Christian to individually and straightforwardly address the controversy of Fantasy to discover its true impacts on a reader. By picking up, reading, and exploring fantasy literature, a person of faith will discover there are artistic, moral, and spiritual qualities of Fantasy untouched by those who reject the literature before giving it a chance. Fantasy literature is meant to

stretch and exercise the imagination, to provide moral and intellectual growth through a creative, entertaining medium, and to connect one with spiritual, supernatural concepts not yet known, misunderstood, or struggled with. These individual conversations about imaginative, moral/intellectual, and spiritual qualities will often blend and overlap with each other, which further proves their depth within Fantasy. It is important to note that these qualities of Fantasy can be quite significant for the child reader and the child reader will often be focused upon, but the qualities are also relevant for the adult reader. Once these positive elements of Fantasy are explained, the previous reasons for controversy seem to shrink and become irrelevant.

Imagination

Since Tolkien and C.S. Lewis both wrote successful, ever-present fantasy literature and argued that Fantasy could be an expression and enrichment of the Christian faith, references to them will be—and already have been—made frequently. Tolkien encouraged that since God, the ultimate Maker, created humans in His image, humans are also meant to be creators. Thus, to create, God gifted humans with imagination—“the mental power of image-making” (Tolkien 138)—which is always needed to create any form of art, and Tolkien considered Fantasy as a higher form of art that is the most pure and therefore, potentially, the most potent form, since Fantasy contains images of things not present nor found in this world. When one creates a fantasy tale, he or she is “sub-creating,” in the likeness of the Creator, a secondary world inside which the laws of that world are “real” and “true” (Tolkien 132, 139). Lewis explains it simply as “a real though unfocussed gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination” (qtd. in McVeigh 208).

Belen C. Lane, theological professor and scholar of storytelling in ministry, points out that fantasy literature is loved because good stories allow one to imagine traveling to new places, experiencing different lives, and becoming new people (399). Readers enjoy momentarily ignoring their lives and their world to entertain these new, different ones. Yet, when Fantasy is considered escapist literature, both Tolkien and Lewis argue that Fantasy is, in fact, the opposite; through the use of imagination, Fantasy communicates reality and simple elements of reality in a new, fresh light, allowing one to return to reality with a fresh joyous and appreciative attitude. Lewis wrote that stories portray a happiness that is “full of the simplest and most attainable things—food, sleep, exercise, friendship, the face of nature, even (in a sense) religion,” which paradoxically frees one and strengthens one’s view of real life (“On Stories” 454). Tolkien agrees, and just as he pointed out in his definition of “fairy-stories,” he further notes that it was fantasy literature that first illuminated fundamental aspects of life for him, such as stone, iron, trees, grass, fire, bread, and wine. Thus, through using the imagination and creating Fantasy, which is rooted in the primary world, simple things are glorified, as in “by the making of Pegasus, horses were ennobled” (Tolkien 147). Tolkien calls this rediscovery and appreciation of reality *Recovery*. Lane also promotes Tolkien’s and Lewis’s ideas, expressing that to consider approaching Fantasy as escapism, is “to fail to recognize the importance of the imagination in questioning and dismantling the unjust structures of a world stubbornly resistant to change.” Put more simply, the creation and rhetoric of another world pushes one to question the reputation of the real world (Lane 401).

Furthermore, when Tolkien provides his defense against Fantasy being accused of escapism, he provides an excellent metaphor that has already been touched on. Those

who consider Fantasy as escapist literature see the “flight of the deserter”—a dive into a fantasy story is running away from reality and refusing to acknowledge the reality left behind—but Tolkien sees “the escape of the prisoner,” as in escape from a confined and perhaps distorted view of reality (Tolkien 148; Lee 20). Lee communicates that the meaning of *escape* is dependent on the phrase “from what” (20). For one to escape from the injustice, ignorance, pain, or any of the many negative, tragic elements of the world to find beauty, goodness, and truth in literature is not desertion. When the reader journeys into a fantasy tale, he or she is not forgetting about reality, he or she is using imagination to seek a new perspective of reality. If the world is truly a sinful place, it cannot be wrong to “escape” into literature to find enlightenment and truth.

Once the Christian understands how imagining fantasy worlds emphasizes natural aspects of reality and is not escapism in a negative sense, he or she can also comprehend a rather spiritual mannerism of immersing the imagination into a fantasy story. Lane expresses that artfully imagining a fantastical land can be a deep exercise of faith and an expression of one’s longing for the Kingdom of God (403-404). Without imagination, one is unable to truly declare and retain faith. When one ventures into a fantasy tale, he or she is investing to imagine, and momentarily invest his or her time and intellect in whatever world and culture the author has created even though they know it is not real, much like how a Christian reads the Bible and believes in all it tells and instructs even though he or she cannot see God. While not all imaginary places are sacred, Lane states that no place can operate as sacred apart from the imagination (400). Clearly, the imagination is an important part of both Fantasy and faith, and by engaging in fantasy literature, the imagination is exercised, enabling one to be better connected with both

God and reality. Lewis sums up these connections between imagination, faith, and Fantasy well by saying that reading Fantasy can “baptize the imagination” (qtd. in Griesinger, “Why Read *Harry Potter*?” 306).

Moral & Intellectual Growth

Underneath and beside those fantastical worlds, creatures, and objects that exercise and encourage readers’ imaginations, fantasy literature is full of ideals and lessons to develop and enrich the intellect and morality of readers. In regards to Fantasy being invaluable because it can be considered mere fiction or an absolute lie, Lee points out an interesting perspective. Many people think that the opposite of fiction is truth, implying that fiction *is* a lie, but pondered further, the opposite of fiction is technically fact, as in, fact refers to reality and fiction refers to fantasy. While fiction, or fantasy literature, is not fact, that does not mean that it cannot contain truth or the equivalence of truth (Lee 17). Within all fictional literature, one can find the truths of love and companionship, life and death, spirituality, and, most important within this conversation, the truths of knowledge and morality.

To continue, while Eliot advocates the Christian to consciously test everything he or she reads by certain criteria and standards, he does not instruct the Christian to not read certain literature at all. Actually, Eliot expresses that “the good critic” reads plenty and widely to accumulate knowledge and acquire a “well-stocked mind” so that the reader is not dominated by one author, but a multitude. When the reader encounters each author and story, he or she is affected by each one, but he or she becomes able to shift between the many authors and stories, weighing them against each other and seeing differences between them. The reader becomes critical and protects himself or herself

from being too influenced by one literary personality or story (Eliot 202-203). By maintaining this criticism, the reader is in the best position to find the good, positive qualities in each story (Eliot 207). The Christian should not forget his or her theological standards, but should incorporate them into the way he or she compares and critiques all literature, to find what is valuable. Tolkien reiterates this idea by stating that the reader is a partner with Fantasy, sharing the experience of enrichment and delight, not a slave to be dominated and bewitched by it (143).

When it comes to the intellectual formations of children and young adults, the National Education Association website displays some findings of the Educational Testing Service which state that if a young mind reads more, they will become better readers and even have higher mathematical skills. Additionally, having a variety of reading materials in a home—which could and should include fantasy literature—can result in young learners having higher reading proficiency (qtd. in “Facts About Children’s Literacy”). Lee explains that children usually do not care for and will recoil at obvious approaches parents or educators take to teach them to behave in certain ways, just as nobody likes to be told how to think or act. Yet, if you present children and young adults with interesting and adventurous fantasy stories stitched throughout with life lessons, ethical ideals, and bursts of wisdom, the young minds will respond positively (Lee 16).

Furthermore, on both the intellectual and moral development of young individuals, Geoff Robson, an educator and scholar of religion and education, encourages that believable—as in both well-written and trustworthy—heroes or heroines in fantasy literature can provide children with imaginative insights that will help them face real life

situations that may be difficult (92). These real life situations could be loneliness and losing the people closest to one, being tempted to do something that is considered wrong or unwise, recognizing if someone is honest and reliable or not, having to decide between two directions of life one could take, and dealing with intense emotions like anger, misery, bitterness, and confusion. When children are exposed to these examples, they learn how they could deal with those issues themselves, whether they are experiencing them presently or will in the future. Even adults seeking fantasy stories for entertainment or relaxing stimulation are improving their reading skills and opening their minds to the same underlying qualities and themes that could expand their intellectual and moral capacities, helping them reflect on and face reality and, perhaps, guide their children to do the same.

Spiritual & Supernatural Concepts

It is already evident that spiritual qualities are laced into Fantasy just by discussing the value of exercising the imagination and the potential for one's intellect and morality to develop and mature. Emily Griesinger, an English professor who specializes in children's literature, presents fantasy literature as a form of "imaginative self-transcendence that works in similar fashion to equip children [and adults] to transcend difficult circumstances in their present lives and to hope for something better in the future" ("*Harry Potter* and the 'Deeper Magic'" 459). It is the mention of *transcendence* and *hope for a better future* that begins the departure of the focus on imagination and intellectual growth and launches the reader into the spiritual aspects of Fantasy, since, for a Christian, envisioning eternity with the Lord is the greatest hope and purpose of transcendence.

Before going further, an emphasis on the Bible, the way in which God primarily communicates with men and women, is necessary. Simply put, the Bible is literature—as in the Bible is a written work, a book of artistic and literary value. While it includes historical records and serious instruction for the Christian, it also incorporates poetic writings, such as the books of Psalms and Song of Solomon, and overall, the entire Bible is compiled to tell the story of the salvation humanity receives through Jesus Christ, who often taught by telling stories known as parables. Dan McVeigh, Christian scholar of fantasy literature, writes that Fantasy is not an enemy when one considers that “Jesus is its creator, not its product” (208). Jesus is the incarnation of the Lord and the ultimate example of glorifying God with one’s life, and Christians are directed to follow His example. If He communicated Christian ideals and values through stories, then humans, created in God’s image and gifted with imaginations, are capable of doing the same. When Laura Feldt, a professor and scholar of religion and fantasy, promotes that modern fantasy literature is similar to narrative religious writings such as myths and epic literature (“*Harry Potter* and Contemporary Magic” 103), one should consider parables within that list. Just as Jesus’s parables contained words and images that symbolized rich spiritual underlying meanings, fantasy literature has potential to contain the same.

Returning to Griesinger’s ideas, which contribute to Tolkien and Lewis’s theories, fantasy literature allows the reader to transcend personal, worldly circumstances in the similar fashion a Christian transcends the worldly because they belong to the Kingdom of God, thus Fantasy can prepare the reader’s mind for receiving the gospel (“Why Read *Harry Potter*?” 307), whether they are a child being raised in a Christian home or an adult who has not yet encountered the gospel. Examples of how Fantasy does this include

the theme of good triumphing over evil and the expectation and final joy of a “happily ever after” (Griesinger, “*Harry Potter* and the ‘Deeper Magic’” 461).

An essential way that these spiritual examples are acted out and achieved in Fantasy is the implementation of magic or the presence of the supernatural. Griesinger recognizes and advocates this by stating that magic is one of the best components of Fantasy that both exercises and expands the imagination, and opens the reader’s mind to the supernatural aspects of Christianity (“*Harry Potter* and the ‘Deeper Magic’” 457; “Why Read *Harry Potter*?” 306). With all of the previously discussed and understandable concern a Christian often possesses at the mention of magic, this seems a paradox, so it is important to evaluate magic within Fantasy in a delicate, yet intricate manner. When Tolkien provided the idea that sub-creating a Fantasy secondary world where there are laws and rules that are to be considered real or true, the presence of magic or the supernatural fall under those laws and rules. That does not mean the reader is to believe that magic is real or should try to study or partake in the occult within our world, but when he or she reads the story that takes place within that secondary world, he or she must accept that magic is a real and true “law” of that world, just as the law of gravity is real and true in our world. Described in a different manner, this is an example of a “willing suspension of disbelief,” where the reader momentarily stops believing that magic is not real or a negative thing only while he or she is addressing the world of the story being read.

Tolkien strengthens this idea by stating that secondary worlds of fantasy literature cannot truly be Fantasy without magic, and he specifies that this magic should be examined quite differently from how magic is regarded in reality (114). In fact, he does

not even want to acknowledge Fantasy magic with the word *magic*, but instead calls it *Enchantment*, the “elvish craft that Fantasy aspires to.” Enchantment is the magic that helps cultivate a believable secondary world and when it is pure, “it is artistic in desire and purpose.” When magic is scrutinized in the context of our world and reality, it is merely a practice meant to offer an alteration to our world; “it is not an art but a technique,” (Tolkien 143). To prevent confusion, the word *magic* will still be used within this discussion of Fantasy, while paying attention to distinction, but Tolkien’s suggestion of magic being a necessary art of Fantasy supports the differentiation of magic in reality and magic in Fantasy. If a Christian understands and accepts this differentiation, reading fantasy literature can become an enlightening experience.

For instance, the magic of Fantasy can help bring about the “happily ever after” ending, which alludes to underlying Christian themes, as previously mentioned. Tolkien conveys happy endings as a meaningful, positive characteristic of Fantasy, which he calls the “Consolation of the Happy Ending” (153). Despite the presence of sorrow and defeat in the worlds of fantasy literature, sudden and miraculous happy endings provide a sense of closure, grace, and joy which allude to the ultimate salvation, the ultimate “happy ending,” the believer receives due to Christ’s incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection, and the promise of eternity in His presence (Tolkien 153, 156).

The Consolation of happy endings, the Recovery or rediscovery of simple elements of reality as mentioned in the discussion about imagination, and the consideration of Fantasy as a freeing and insightful Escape from an incomplete, singular perspective of reality, as also mentioned in the imagination discussion: all contain Christian, spiritual themes. Lee presents three methods of spiritual enlightenment formed

about these theories, which are based on Tolkien and Lewis's ideologies about Fantasy, that all fantasy literature can empower readers to experience. Lee explains these methods in a detailed manner, but a simple, yet adequate summary will be given. When a reader engages Fantasy, and experiences Recovery, he or she is discovering a new depth of beauty of both the Earth and himself or herself. Furthermore, the consideration of reading Fantasy as Escape communicates a fresh sense of justice to the reader and inspires the reader to respect both others and himself or herself. Lastly, the Consolation of Fantasy arouses a hope within the reader to envision a future of peace for humanity and strive for an admirable self-ideal (Lee 26-27). The ideals of beauty, justice, and hope are common ideals that the Bible supports a Christian to aspire to learn, retain, and inspire in others. Additionally, the self-concepts of having a positive, but humble self-image, self-esteem, and self-ideal are also Biblical because one reads that he or she is made in the image of God and is a divine, spiritual entity, should respect himself or herself, and should model his or her life after Jesus's example and instruction. The depth of spirituality and Christian themes within Fantasy are intricate, endless and quite connected with the imaginative and intellectual qualities of Fantasy, and the Christian will discover that if he or she invests in reading one or more fantasy novels.

Conclusion

First and foremost, the goal of a Christian should be to love and glorify the Lord through all he or she does with their mind, heart, soul, and physical actions. Certainly, each Christian should have the personal freedom to choose what they want and do not what to read, based upon his or her spiritual convictions or not, but the goal of this paper is to provide proof that he or she should consider both himself or herself and others as

free to read and engage fantasy literature, and acknowledge that it can offer delight, creative inspiration, knowledge, and spiritual enlightenment. The majority of Fantasy will offer all or a variety of these qualities, often depending on the perspective of the reader. Yet, there will also be some that will provide little or none of them, and might even offer the opposite. Of this fact, Tolkien provides more insightful words: “Fantasy can, of course, be carried to excess. It can be ill done. It can be put to evil uses. It may even delude the minds out of which it came. But of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true? ...Fantasy remains a human right...” (144-145). Any word spoken can be either positive or negative, but the latter does not stop one from ever speaking. The same should be true for the reading of Fantasy.

Both Lewis and Tolkien confirmed that Fantasy does not provide an organized and clear transference from Christian beliefs and ideals to the fantastical realm of imagined secondary worlds (McVeigh 199). Some fantasy novels will offer clear Christian allusions and others might have them subtly stitched in between the lines, but does that mean they are not equally worth reading? Eliot admits that he would rather read literature that is unconsciously Christian, instead of deliberately and defiantly so (200). Is there as much value in unintentional Christian works as there is in purposeful ones? In the Christian community, C.S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* is recognized as a deliberately Christian fantasy series worth reading because of the Christian allusions, J.K. Rowling’s fantastical *Harry Potter* is considered a debatable unconsciously Christian series, and Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* is known as anti-Christian and not worth reading. Analyzing and comparing these three series by focusing on the imaginative, intellectual/ moral, and spiritual/supernatural qualities will offer examples of how these

concepts appear and work in fantasy series. This analysis will show that each series is equally valuable and worth reading whether they are intentionally embedded with Christian, spiritual themes or not.

The Chronicles of Narnia

As previously mentioned, C.S. Lewis is famous for being a prominent Christian apologist and writer of both theological works and fantasy stories, especially *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis was born in 1898 in Belfast, Ireland and raised by a family that attended the Church of Ireland, but he abandoned the Christian faith early in his life and even advocated against it for a time. When he was nineteen, he fought in the trenches of France during World War I, and later moved to England to become a Tutor and Fellow at Oxford University where he met fellow novelist and close friend Tolkien in 1926. Tolkien was a great influence on Lewis's conversion back to the Christian faith at the age of thirty-two. Lewis did not write and publish most of his works until after he re-embraced his faith, explaining why he is primarily recognized for his rich Christian, theological texts. While at Oxford, both Lewis and Tolkien are also known for meeting with other friends to casually discuss literary topics, such as their writings; the group was called "the Inklings" (Downing vii-xi, 1-25).

The Chronicles of Narnia, a seven book fantasy series that Lewis created during the early 1950s, is popular and accepted within the Christian community because of Lewis's reputation, his artistic skill of storytelling, and the Christian allusions and ideals that are evident within the series. Also, it is the primary work that has prolonged Lewis's fame and impact to this day, since it is still widely read as classic children's literature, has had a plethora of movie adaptations and stage performances, and has promoted and inspired Fantasy since its debut. Analyzing this series' imaginative qualities, intellectual/moral lessons, and spiritual themes in the context of encouraging all fantasy literature as worth

reading in the Christian community is simple since it is already widely accepted by Christians. Nonetheless, an analysis of *Narnia* will provide a foundation for comparing it with the less-accepted *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, and point out underlying elements of the series that may not be highlighted as often as the Christian themes. Both Christian and secular scholars will be referenced to reinforce its worth as fantasy literature.

The books center around the fantastical world of Narnia which is home to talking animals and mythical beasts, and follow various children as they adventure through and impact major historical events of Narnia. In all but one of the books (*The Horse and His Boy*), the children happen upon unique portals that transport them into Narnia from the real world. The creation of the land of Narnia with its tangible existence, unique characters, and rich history, and the many reflections of mythological beings and events communicate the imaginative qualities of the *Narnia* series. Laura Miller, writer and editor for magazines and other publications, captures the imaginative richness of *Narnia* perfectly in this statement about how the series greatly influenced her: “It showed me how I could tumble through a hole in the world I knew and into another, better one, a world fresher, more brightly colored, more exhilarating, more fully felt than my own” (4).

Narnia had an imaginative beginning, as most series do. While Lewis recognized the Christian themes and connections within *Narnia* and hoped that his series would better prepare children to receive the gospel, he stated that he did not begin writing the series with that purpose in mind: “Everything began with images; a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion. At first there wasn’t even anything Christian about

them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord” (*Of Other Worlds* 36). In a way, this may be evidence for one to consider *Narnia* as being, in the words of Eliot, “unconsciously Christian” (200), at least during its conception.

Both David C. Downing, a C.S. Lewis expert, award-winning author, and English professor, and Maria Kuteeva, English and linguistics professor and researcher, point out that while *Narnia* is abounding with Christian teachings, it includes a plethora of creatures, characters, and motifs originating in myths, legends, and folklore (Downing 110; Kuteeva 279). Lewis’s experiences reading and studying classical and medieval literature throughout his life profoundly affected him as a writer (Kuteeva 279), and he later established ideas about mythical images and plots having an “unchangability” or “good unoriginality,” which supports his incorporation of these mythical icons and themes in *Narnia* (Kuteeva 277). Centaurs, dwarves, fauns, giants, nymphs and more live in Narnia, accompanied by the occasional appearance of mythological gods and deities, such as Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and revelry, in *Prince Caspian* (Downing 109). Furthermore, just as there are allusions to Biblical stories, many classical, mythological tales and myths are referenced: *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* imitates a traditional Irish sea adventure called a *immram*, *The Silver Chair* is like a Roman or Greek tale of journeying into the underworld where there is a Persephone queen figure, and *The Last Battle* is similar to the Norse apocalypse myth *Ragnarök* (Kuteeva 279). The integration of these medieval and mythological associations might surprise or confuse Christian readers, but they are one of the reasons *Narnia* is successful, imaginative fantasy literature.

Among these fantastical, creative beings and themes, the children's actions and journeys in Narnia allow the reader to observe intellectual and moral lessons. Miller mentions that a primary aspect of *Narnia* that attracted her was the important and thrilling moments that taught virtue and morality (61). Furthermore, these moments were not presented in a stereotypical, simple way, but realistically through human characters (Miller 62-63). Most of the wisdom and morals Lewis sought to incorporate are taught through the children who experience Narnia in each book, and less through the typical villain and hero characters. There are many lessons about respect, selflessness, and treating others kindly in *Narnia. The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, where four siblings, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie, discover Narnia inside a wardrobe and help Aslan, the Great Lion and King of the Beasts, defeat the evil White Witch who is ruling over Narnia, includes a worthy example. Edmund, who is jealous and bitter towards his siblings during the beginning of the book, eventually betrays them to the White Witch once they all are in Narnia, looking to fight on the side of the Narnians and Aslan. When he realizes he originally chose the wrong side, he must face guilt and regret, apologize to his brother and sisters, and accept the possibility of punishment for his betrayal. Aslan is selflessly gracious toward Edmund by volunteering to receive the punishment meant for Edmund, but this forces Edmund to realize Aslan's sacrifice is only necessary because of his poor actions. Miller conveys that this situation provides a great moral lesson about children examining their motives when they feel injured and self-righteous (64). More examples of these lessons about being kind towards others are present in the rest of the series, such as Lucy's siblings learning to trust her in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*, Caspian respecting the Narnians and

not following his corrupt uncle's example in *Prince Caspian*, and Eustace Scrubb, the Pevensies' cousin, changing his rude, selfish attitude in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

Obedience and perseverance are the themes of other prominent intellectual and moral lessons present in the series. In *Prince Caspian*, as Lucy and her siblings are trying to find the Narnians' camp, Aslan appears only to Lucy to offer her the best directions but her siblings do not listen to her. Later, he appears to her again to question why she did not persist in guiding her siblings to follow his directions, and persuades her to try leading them once again. She listens the second time and they not only find where they are trying to go, but Aslan finally becomes visible to all of them. Additionally, in *The Silver Chair*, Eustace and Jill Pole, his friend from school, are recruited by Aslan to follow specific Signs to find the lost Prince Rilian. At one point, one of his Signs allows them to escape being eaten by giants. In each of these cases, the children must obey Aslan, whether it be to fulfill their desires, to survive, and/or to be able to help Narnia in the way they are meant to, which communicates the value of obeying those in authority over one, even if he or she does not immediately want to or understand why they should. These examples also serve for promoting perseverance in that the children must continue their journeys even as the path they are following has obstacles, much like one must persevere through many difficult times in reality. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is full of lessons on perseverance since it is an adventure in unknown, sometimes perilous waters to the edge of Narnia, which no one had ever accomplished before. The list of intellectual and moral qualities within *Narnia* are endless.

There are spiritual themes laced throughout every *Narnia* book, such as their clear Biblical parallels which, alone, validate the positive reputation of the series within the Christian community. *The Magician's Nephew* tells Narnia's creation story which reflects the Genesis account of Creation, and *The Last Battle* alludes to Revelation, disclosing the ultimate battle that ends Narnia and reveals a more pure Narnia. The most well-known allusion is in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* when Aslan sacrifices himself to the White Witch in place of Edmund and rises from the dead soon after, greatly resembling Jesus's Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Naomi Wood, English professor and scholar of children's and young adult literature and fairy tales, notes that the moral lesson of obedience in *Narnia* is usually communicated through Lewis's depiction of God in Aslan. Reflecting on Christian scripture, theology, and history, Lewis presents a "divinely established order with a built-in hierarchy," which shows God as the ultimate authority (239-240). Aslan, the only character that is in every book of *Narnia*, is a clear representation of Jesus Christ. He is the creator, guard, and savior of Narnia, the eternal son of the Emperor-Over-the-Sea, and the guide of the human children who visit. He is not always tangibly present in Narnia, but his authority never wavers, and when he is seen in Narnia, he has a purpose and a supernatural ability to affect important events.

Downing suggests that through Aslan, "Lewis hoped to portray a God who is both awe-ful and good, inspiring equally a wholesome fear and whole-hearted love" (63). Most of the Narnians believe in and respect Aslan immensely, and when they are in his presence, they offer themselves as his humble servants. Yet, Aslan is also loving and personable, hosting joyous feasts of merriment for the Narnians in several of the books,

and allowing the children to touch and hug him. Lewis mentioned that while he was developing Narnia, Aslan came bounding into the story: "...I don't know where the Lion came from or why He came. But once He was there He pulled the whole story together" (*Of Other Worlds* 42). Lewis's capitalization of the noun and pronouns referring to Aslan seem to suggest Lewis felt God's clear presence and guidance in his writing of *Narnia* through Aslan, since it is proper to always capitalize the Lord's name, even when using pronouns. Through Aslan, most of the spiritual themes are ignited and explained, whether it be Aslan mentoring to the children or sending them on missions that will reveal spiritual depth.

It was mentioned that Aslan possesses supernatural abilities in *Narnia*. As a character embodying Jesus, it is not unrealistic for him to have this power since Jesus has miraculous, supernatural abilities, but Aslan is not the only character to present magical abilities in the series. The White Witch, the Lady of the Green Kirtle in *The Silver Chair*, Andrew Ketterley, Digory's uncle, in *The Magician's Nephew*, and Coriakin in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* possess and use some form of magic. Since Aslan is good, the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle are villains, and Andrew and Coriakin are more neutral, magic does not lean a particular direction on the spectrum of good and evil throughout the series; it is a significant element of *Narnia* that is woven into each novel. Usually, the magic is meaningful and symbolic. For Aslan, magic has deep theological meaning that reflects many Biblical themes, such as the "Deeper Magic" that allows him to return to life after sacrificing himself on behalf of Edmund in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and how he sings stars, plants, and animals into being during Narnia's creation in *The Magician's Nephew* (Downing 121). Yet, the other characters

still use magic as any typical witch or wizard character would, communicating that *Narnia* is much like other fantasy stories that include magic.

It is important to notice that not everybody recognizes the spiritual qualities of *Narnia*, at least, not immediately. Miller describes how she adored *Narnia* upon her first experience reading it—completely unaware of its deeper religious meanings—and then became surprised and bitter when she found out about Lewis’s underlying theological intentions (3). Eventually moving past her bitterness, Miller decided to write *The Magician’s Book* to illuminate *Narnia*’s other, unsung dimensions, such as its role in the universal experiences of childhood and in the study of literature, and convey that, in some ways, *Narnia* is not “Christian” (15). She points out that fundamentalist Christians might not promote Lewis’s metaphorical series since it retells “the story of Jesus with a lion god, talking animals, and semi-human creatures from classical myths set in an imaginary country where the Bible doesn’t exist,” which is quite opposed to the way fundamentalists strictly view the Bible as literal and word-for-word true, discouraging a metaphorical modification (Miller 108). Of course, not every Christian is a fundamentalist—which Miller mentions—and not all fundamentalists think and believe exactly the same, so no one should assume a Christian’s interpretation, but this explains part of why Miller personally views *Narnia* as “Christianity’s antidote” (96). Her personal experiences with Christianity are “boring and subjugating” compared to the “liberation and delight” she found within *Narnia* (Miller 96), and she believes that one can enjoy and value *Narnia* for its other qualities—such as its moral wisdom—without confirming Christianity (Miller 64).

Others go farther than Miller and offer negative perceptions of *Narnia*, and discourage the reading of the series. Philip Pullman, the author of *His Dark Materials*, considers *Narnia* as religious propaganda and says it is one of the most ugly and poisonous things he has read. He claims it supports sexism, racism, and life-hating ideology, and the examples he uses to reinforce these views include a well-known negative description of Susan in *The Last Battle*, the enemies of *Prince Caspian* and *The Boy and His Horse* being dark-skinned and ugly, and *The Last Battle* ending with the death of the main characters Edmund, Lucy, and Peter, but positively, since they are told they are going to a better place, the Kingdom of Heaven (“The Darkside of *Narnia*”). Pullman is not the only one who expresses an aggressive critique of *Narnia*; Frank Furedi, sociology professor, scholar, and author, writes about how there are many critics and people who express outraged and bitter declarations about *Narnia* and other artistic texts communicating religious motifs that they label religious propaganda (7-8). Furedi explains their reasoning behind these harsh attacks might include an insecurity over their own values and moral vision, thus they are afraid of expressions of strong beliefs that promote the opposite of their opinions (12). Burton Hatlen, literary scholar and professor, even points out that Pullman did not seem to completely reject Lewis’s writing and theology, but appeared oddly inspired by him during the creation and development of the theology behind *His Dark Materials* (82). Miller interviewed Pullman in 2005, and he said, “...although I dislike profoundly the moral answers Lewis finds, I respect the wrestle for truth, the struggle that he’s undergoing as he searches for the answers” (qtd. in Miller 172-173).

Whether the critiques are extremely positive or bitterly negative, the impact of *Narnia* is strong in both the Christian community and secular world of literature since Lewis was an author who knew how to incorporate and combine imaginative qualities, intellectual/moral lessons, and spiritual themes within his works. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a perfect series to analyze beside and compare with other, more controversial series because this analysis proves *Narnia* is not all that different from other fantasy series. As with most series, it includes more than just Christian themes and ideals—such as magic, and mythological gods and creatures—so why accept *Narnia* without accepting all other fantasy literature, which is not all that different?

Harry Potter

J.K. Rowling is one of the most well-known women in our world today due to her famous and unique *Harry Potter* series that has sold more than four-hundred million copies and been translated into sixty-eight languages (Rapp and Thakker). She was born in England in 1965, and grew up reading and wanting to be a writer. The idea for *Harry Potter* appeared to Rowling during a delayed train ride in 1990, and she developed the plans for the series with handwritten notes and manuscripts over the next five years. During this time, she moved to Portugal to teach English, and married Jorge Arantes. After they had a daughter named Jessica, the marriage ended and Rowling moved back to the UK, continuing to write *Harry Potter* as a single mother. After being rejected by twelve publishers, the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was published in the UK in 1997, followed by its US publication in 1998 as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. The seventh and final novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, was published in 2007, and by then the series was beloved all around the world. In 2001, the first novel had been adapted into a film and by 2011, there were eight film adaptations with the seventh novel spanning across two films. During 2015, *Harry Potter* became the second-highest grossing film franchise ever, with the eight movies making more than seven billion dollars worldwide (Rapp and Thakker).

Yet, unlike most book series with film adaptations, *Harry Potter* has continued to grow in content and popularity. In 2010, Universal Parks and Resorts opened The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, the first of many sections of their theme parks based on the *Harry Potter* universe with attractions and merchandise available to guests as they walk through intricate, tangible locations straight out of the films and books. During

2012, Rowling launched a website called *Pottermore*, which features news, quizzes, and articles about the series and upcoming content. Rowling had published three small works that were introduced as books in the universe of the *Harry Potter* novels—*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, *Quidditch Through the Ages*, and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*—and in 2016, Rowling was the screenwriter for the film based on *Fantastic Beasts*, which appears as a prequel to *Harry Potter*. Rowling also collaborated with Jack Thorne and John Tiffany to write a stage play sequel to the *Harry Potter* series called *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*; the script was published at the same time the play opened in July 2016 at The Palace Theatre in London. In the midst of all this, Rowling also wrote several adult novels. Currently, she lives in Edinburgh with her husband, Dr. Neil Murray, whom she married in 2001, and their son, David, and daughter, Mackenzie, and is planning on writing four more films to follow *Fantastic Beasts*, making it a five-film prequel series (“J.K. Rowling”).

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone begins the story of an eleven-year-old orphaned boy, Harry Potter, living with his uncle, aunt, and cousin, the Dursleys, who have treated him horribly his whole life. He soon finds out he is a wizard, and is invited to attend a boarding school, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, to learn how to use magic. Each book in the series records one school year at Hogwarts, where Harry meets his two best friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, and the three of them experience amazing and dangerous adventures each year. The main plot of the story is about Harry defeating the evil wizard, Lord Voldemort, who murdered his parents and tried to kill Harry as a baby, but failed, leaving Harry with a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. Harry is famous in the wizarding world as The Boy Who Lived for surviving

Voldemort's attack and causing Voldemort to lose power and disappear. Voldemort regains his power and returns in the fourth book, and is ultimately trying to gain immortality and control of the wizarding world while killing anyone standing in his way, especially Harry, who was prophesied to defeat Voldemort.

A significant quality of the *Harry Potter* series that caused it to become so famous is its detailed imaginative elements. Rubeus Hagrid, the half-giant wizard who is the gamekeeper of Hogwarts, is responsible for informing Harry that he is a wizard and reintroducing him to the wizarding world, which is hidden amongst the normal world of Muggles, or non-magical people. When Hagrid leads Harry into Diagon Alley, a central location for wizards and witches in London that is full of shops and restaurants, the reader is also glimpsing Rowling's detailed universe for the first time, a universe that is centered around magic. Laura Feldt and Emily Griesinger both discuss Rowling's use of magic, suggesting she incorporates three types of magic in *Harry Potter*—an artistic, structural magic, an ordinary, everyday magic, and a deeper magic ("*Harry Potter* and Contemporary Magic" 105-106; "Why Read *Harry Potter*?" 308, 310). For now, Griesinger's presentation of artistic, structural magic will be focused on. It is the magic that relates back to Tolkien's Fantasy magic, which he calls Enchantment—the magic that allows a reader to successfully visualize a secondary fantasy world ("Why Read *Harry Potter*?" 308; Tolkien 143). Rowling creates a secondary world that is credible and attractive to the imagination of readers.

As the reader follows Harry's adventures, one excitedly becomes absorbed in the unique, creative aspects of his world. Diagon Alley is filled with stores to get wizarding supplies, like wands, flying broomsticks, potion ingredients, books, robes, and magical

pets, which Harry must obtain before heading to school. Hogwarts is an enormous enchanted castle hidden in the forested mountains of Scotland, towering on a cliff above a lake with giant squids and mermaids and next to the Forbidden Forest full of magical beasts. The castle contains fantastical and mysterious things: animated portraits, ghosts, changing stairways, and secret passageways and chambers. New students arrive and are sorted into one of four houses that reflect students' primary characteristics: Gryffindor for the courageous and chivalrous, Hufflepuff for the loyal and hard-working, Ravenclaw for the intellectual and creative, or Slytherin for the ambitious and cunning. Harry, Ron, and Hermione are sorted into Gryffindor. Each year the students take classes such as Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Divination, Herbology, Potions, and Transfiguration, which teach them the different skills of wizardry and how to live a successful life in the wizarding world. They participate in extra-curricular activities, like dueling club or the wizard sport Quidditch, where teams fly around on brooms playing a mixture of basketball and baseball. Close to Hogwarts is a little wizard town called Hogsmeade, where students can go to visit places like Honeydukes, a candy shop that sells magical candy. These details are only a small selection of the "literary art" of Rowling's imaginative universe that mesmerizes readers, especially young readers ("Why Read *Harry Potter*?" 308).

While Rowling invents unique magical creatures, objects, and ideas for her universe, she also interweaves elements of European folklore and classical mythology, much like Lewis did with *Narnia*, which is evident in her characterization, the way she shapes the wizardry of *Harry Potter*, and the many magical creatures—centaurs, mermaids, giants, dragons, and werewolves. Just as *Narnia* was an alternate universe that

existed next to the real world which the children of *Narnia* traveled between, the wizarding world exists within the real world, yet is still its own separate universe. The children of *Narnia* must travel through unique portals, such as wardrobes and paintings hung on walls, to arrive in Narnia, like wizards in *Harry Potter* must enter wizarding world locations through their own version of portals—the wall in Kings Cross Station that wizards walk through to get to Platform Nine and Three Quarters and board the Hogwarts Express, fireplaces which allow wizards to travel through a network of magical fireplaces with a substance called Floo Powder, and The Leaky Cauldron, a pub hidden to Muggles in the midst of London, which allows access to Diagon Alley. A reader may imagine Narnia or the wizarding world parallel to and accessible through the real world; both are worlds of Fantasy.

Beside the artistic magic that fabricates the wizarding world of *Harry Potter*, there is an ordinary, everyday magic that every witch and wizard uses, and through which intellectual and moral lessons are communicated. Since the wizard community exists among and next to the real, normal world, there are qualities of the magical world adopted from the normal world (“*Harry Potter* and Contemporary Magic” 105). For instance, young wizards go to school, interact in social situations, face puberty, and go home for the holidays to spend time with their family, and adult wizards get jobs, find spouses, and create families. These are elements of real life that readers can relate to and understand, only magic is added to emphasize and modify the experiences. Feldt communicates that the magic of *Harry Potter* represents and correlates with science and technology in the Muggle world (“*Harry Potter* and Contemporary Magic” 106),

particularly this everyday magic. It is a skill to be mastered, and not every wizard or witch is automatically gifted with magic (Cockrell 27).

A primary reason that wizarding schools like Hogwarts exist is to teach young wizards and witches the right and wrong ways of using magic (“Why Read *Harry Potter*?” 309). The wizarding world has rules about legal and illegal uses of magic, and enforces these rule to be followed. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry learns about the three curses known as the Unforgivable Curses. They are known as the most evil curses a wizard could cast, and if a wizard or witch uses one of them, he or she would receive a life sentence in Azkaban, a wizard prison. The curses consist of the Killing Curse that causes instant death, the Cruciatius Curse that inflicts excruciating pain on someone, and the Imperius Curse that allows the caster to completely control another person. There is a clear foundation of morality for wizards—they are to use magic responsibly and respect others, even Muggles.

This plays into one of the main themes of *Harry Potter*, the battle between good and evil, which definitely focuses on the battle between Harry and Voldemort, but more deeply, the personal battle within everyone that they must address at some point. Amanda Cockrell, author, editor, and educator of creative writing, states that in the *Harry Potter* universe, “It is the wizard, the practitioner of the magic, who makes it good or evil...” (27). Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts and Harry’s mentor and primary father figure in the series, encourages this when he says, “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (*The Chamber of Secrets* 333).

Agency, having the power and ability to act as one chooses after weighing many possible actions, could be what Dumbledore is promoting here. Alice Mills, professor and

scholar of fantasy and children's literature, suggests the presence of agency allows a reader to distinguish between the good and evil characters, with agency usually being present in the good. Although it is rare, a character can still practice agency and choose evil (Mills 292). Mills began this conversation to discuss the character depth of *Harry Potter*, whether or not the characters only portray predestined roles, such as hero or villain, or if they practice agency, thinking for themselves. Yet, this idea of agency in good characters is worthy in regards to the presence of morality in the series. Agency can simply stand for thinking before acting. Dumbledore is known as the most powerful wizard of his time, and he exhibits and advocates agency; the reader is told that when Dumbledore was younger, he was tempted by the darkness and power of magic, but eventually decided against taking that path, holding himself responsible. In contrast, Voldemort fulfills his role as the evil villain without ever portraying agency—he acts on selfish impulse and desire instead of carefully thinking about his actions and their consequences (Mills 292-293). In another way, *Harry Potter's* magic could be a metaphor for power (“Why Read Harry Potter?” 310), and how the characters decide to yield this power is a key theme of the series.

Certainly, the character whose agency speaks to the reader the most is Harry's. Throughout the whole series, the reader witnesses Harry building his morality by learning to exercise agency and take responsibility for his actions, including how he uses magic. When Draco Malfoy, Harry's rival at Hogwarts who belongs in the Slytherin house and comes from a family that follows Voldemort, first meets Harry and offers to be Harry's friend, Harry declines since Draco bullies other characters and is very prideful. Harry defends those who Draco bullies and values kind, meaningful relationships much more

than superficial relationships that revolve around social status. He also takes responsibility for saving those in danger, beginning with small instances, such as helping Hermione escape from a troll in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and Ginny from Tom Riddle in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. As Harry matures, so does his morality, and he is soon friends with and defending many wizards whom Voldemort is after, and taking on the huge responsibility of saving the whole wizarding world from Voldemort.

Of course, Harry faces many personal struggles along the way. As Voldemort returns and begins hunting Harry, Harry loses many close friends in the midst of dangerous confrontations and fights, such as Sirius Black, his godfather, and Dumbledore. He must deal with grief, guilt, anger, and pressure, usually while feeling alone since his friends cannot always understand what he is dealing with. At times, he lashes out at his friends when they try to comfort him. Harry worries he might give into his anger and bitterness, and become like Voldemort, using his reputation and magical skills selfishly. These qualities only make Harry appear human, which is not negative. It gives the reader reason to identify with Harry, since all humans must face these emotions throughout life. Harry has equal capacity for both good and bad like everyone. Griesinger writes, "We identify with Harry not because he is a wizard but because in the war between good and evil he makes the right choices" ("*Harry Potter and the 'Deeper Magic'*" 464). At the end of the series, after everything he has been through, Harry chooses good and defeats Voldemort, saving the wizarding world.

Agency being associated with good characters is also a quality of *Narnia* and many fantasy stories (Mills 296). While *Narnia's* characters tend to be clearer on the

good and evil scale, Rebecca Ingalls, a literature professor, conveys that *Harry Potter* seeks to explore defining *good* and *evil* through its characters, showing that everyone travels a different path to figure out what is *good* and what is *evil* (18-19). Even so, what *Harry Potter* defines as good is usually the same as what *Narnia* communicates. Both series promote the intellectual and moral lessons of respecting others, being selfless, and persevering during difficult circumstances through their characters' mental and moral development.

Harry Potter contains substantial spiritual depth and it is mostly communicated through a deep, meaningful magic, the last kind of magic to be discussed. Feldt suggests that just as there are things that are special and fantastical in the normal, or Muggle, world, such as love and friendship, there is an extra-ordinary magic in the wizarding world ("*Harry Potter* and Contemporary Magic" 106). An important moment of Harry's story is the death of his parents, particularly his mother, where this deep magic is most present in the series. Before the beginning of the first book, Voldemort sought out baby Harry to try to kill him and prevent the prophesy that predicted Voldemort being defeated by Harry from being fulfilled. After killing Harry's father, James, Voldemort went upstairs in the Potter's home to find Lily, Harry's mother, standing in front of Harry's crib. The moment that Voldemort killed Harry's mother, the deeper magic, which many wizards and witches are unaware of, was achieved. Griesinger describes it as "the triumph of voluntary sacrificial love on another's behalf for the purpose of overcoming in oneself or rescuing another from the forces of death, destruction, and evil" ("*Harry Potter* and the 'Deeper Magic'" 467). Lily Potter's loving sacrifice is what saved Harry from Voldemort and caused Voldemort's killing spell to backfire on him. At the end of

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry touches a weak Voldemort, which burns and weakens Voldemort even more, since Lily's sacrifice still protects Harry until Voldemort finds a way around it.

Harry himself also makes the same type of sacrifice to stop Voldemort. What makes Voldemort so powerful and indestructible are his horcruxes, objects that have been enchanted with dark magic to hide a fragment of a wizard's soul so that he may attain immortality. A horcrux is one of the darkest magical inventions since it requires the creator to commit the supreme act of evil—murder—to create one. Voldemort made seven horcruxes, so Harry must hunt down and destroy each one at the end of the series, allowing Voldemort to finally be defeated. It is not until the final pages of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* that both Harry and the reader find out that Harry himself was made into an accidental horcrux when he was a baby. After already creating several horcruxes and then killing Harry's parents, Voldemort's soul was in the perfect position for the killing curse that backfired on him to break his soul once more, with a fragment of it attaching to baby Harry while the main part of the soul continued to exist in a weakened, corporeal state. At the end of the series, Harry realizes that he has to die if Voldemort is to be defeated. Just like his mother, Harry willingly sacrifices himself to Voldemort, who unknowingly kills the piece of his soul that is in Harry. Harry wakes in a limbo state after Voldemort's killing curse hits him, and Dumbledore appears and tells Harry he is not really dead and has the option of returning to life or "moving on." Harry decides to return and finally defeat Voldemort. Whether he truly died and his experience in limbo was real or not, Harry's sacrifice ultimately won the battle against Voldemort.

Both Lily Potter's and Harry's sacrifices promote the spiritual themes and Christian ideals of love and selflessness. Harry and Lily represent what is good in *Harry Potter*—love, friendship, bravery, loyalty—while Voldemort is the image of selfishness, cowardice, and evil. Furthermore, Lily's and Harry's sacrifices could allude to Jesus's death. Just as Aslan selflessly sacrificed himself on behalf of Edmund in *Narnia*, Lily did the same for Harry, and Harry did the same for the wizarding world. Both Aslan and Harry return to life, stronger, further paralleling Jesus's Crucifixion and Resurrection. Of course, Harry is not meant to fully represent Christ as Aslan is, but he is a good example of a Christ figure. He sacrifices his life to save the wizarding world and defeats Voldemort, thus he is a savior and inspiration to all wizards. Harry is a human being, capable of both good and bad, who strives to accomplish good, just as Christians are sinful humans who strive to follow Christ's example and live a Godly life as much as possible. Griesinger states there are spiritual laws that never change no matter what fantasy world one is exploring, and these are the laws of deep magic, which one finds in both *Narnia* and *Harry Potter* ("*Harry Potter* and the 'Deeper Magic'" 476).

Sometimes people miss the creative, intellectual/moral and spiritual dimensions of *Harry Potter* because the characters are wizards ("*Why Read Harry Potter?*" 310). As the *Harry Potter* novels were being released, many in the Christian community were hesitant to accept and read Harry's story, since the presence and centrality of magic can conflict with Biblical teachings and Christian conviction, as was covered in the Fantasy section. Yet, once *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was released, wrapping up many of the theological questions and mysteries of the series, much of the controversy settled down. Perhaps that is because the Biblical allusions and Christian themes in the series were not

complete and understandable until the final book was published. However, while the controversy has calmed down, there are still many Christians who refuse to acknowledge *Harry Potter's* significance in fantasy literature, and its creative, moral, and spiritual worth. Additionally, next to *Narnia*, *Harry Potter* only receives meek encouragement from Christians who do read and enjoy *Harry Potter*.

By analyzing both series, it is evident that they both contain worthy imaginative, intellectual/moral, and spiritual elements, making them equal fantasy series that deserve to be read within the Christian community. While *Harry Potter* portrays magic on a larger scale, it operates the same as the magic within *Narnia*. The land of Narnia can resemble a paradise or Heaven of sorts that ignites delight and hope within readers, while Harry's wizarding world is darker but represents a more current, human world that readers can easily relate with (Ingalls 19). Griesinger even claims that Lewis himself would probably encourage readers to view *Harry Potter* as any other work of fantasy and enjoy it with a childlike interest and imagination ("Why Read *Harry Potter*?" 305).

His Dark Materials

Philip Pullman, the author who is famous for *His Dark Materials*, was born in 1946 in Norwich, England. When he was a child, Pullman's family moved often before settling in Wales, and Pullman adored reading and eventually won a scholarship to Oxford University. Pullman incorporated many of his experiences during his childhood and time at Oxford into *His Dark Materials* and many of his other books and fairy tales aimed towards children and young adults. The first book of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy was published in 1995 in the UK as *Northern Lights*, and in the US as *The Golden Compass*. *The Subtle Knife* was published in 1997, and was followed by *The Amber Spyglass* in 2000. The series has been released in more than forty languages, selling almost eighteen million copies, and adapted into a stage performance and a radio play, and a film of *The Golden Compass* was created in 2007. BBC is currently planning a TV series adaption of *His Dark Materials*. Today, Pullman lives in a farmhouse outside of Oxford with his wife, Judith, and is working on a new trilogy, *The Book of Dust*, which is a prequel to *His Dark Materials*. The first book, *La Belle Sauvage*, was already released in October of 2017 (Elmhirst).

His Dark Materials is about a twelve-year-old girl Lyra Belacqua and her twelve-year-old friend Will Perry, who is not introduced until *The Subtle Knife*, as they travel through parallel universes. At the beginning of *The Golden Compass*, Lyra lives at Jordan College in the Oxford, England of an alternative Earth where human beings have lifelong animal companions called daemons, which are the embodiment of the humans' souls. Lyra enjoys small adventures with her daemon, Pantalaimon, and her friend, Roger, around Oxford until she witnesses a mysterious lecture for the Oxford scholars hosted by

her harsh uncle, Lord Asriel, who is secretly her father. Lord Asriel traveled to the North to study Dust, a mysterious elementary particle, and the northern lights, which appear to contain a portal to a parallel universe. These discoveries peak Lyra's interest and she aspires to travel to the North, but Lord Asriel refuses to take her with him when he returns. Soon after, Roger is kidnapped by a notorious group of child abductors called Gobblers, who supposedly take the children they abduct to the North. Lyra is introduced and taken under the wing of a powerful, charming woman, Mrs. Coulter, who is secretly Lyra's mother and the leader of the Gobblers, which is a research project funded by the Magisterium. In Lyra's world, the Magisterium, which is also called the Church, is the oppressive international religious government. After finding out Mrs. Coulter's position, Lyra flees and finally begins her journey to the North, with the sole intention of finding Roger, but as Lyra learns more about what is happening to the kidnapped children, what Lord Asriel is experimenting with in the North, and who she really is, her journey turns into a much longer adventure, traveling through different universes to ultimately help save the world from the dark intentions of the Magisterium. This brief summary doesn't even begin to communicate the deeply intricate imaginative, intellectual, and spiritual elements that Pullman has constructed in *His Dark Materials*, but as each of these elements are analyzed, Pullman's story will unfold in an enlightening manner. However, the imaginative qualities and intellectual/moral aspects of the series will be discussed briefly because almost every significant detail of *His Dark Materials* has spiritual connotations that blend with imaginative and intellectual/moral elements.

The settings of the series can be considered a valuable imaginative quality of the series. *The Golden Compass* solely takes place in Lyra's Earth in a parallel universe,

which is similar to, but quite different from our real Earth. Technology and culture seems a bit old-fashioned, but is still advanced; people dress in a style similar to the British Victoria era, zeppelins and boats are popular modes of transportation, and their version of electricity is called anbaricity. Along with humans and their daemons, witches and a sentient species of polar bears called Panserbørne exist in this world. The witches are humanoid beings who have daemons with the addition of having magical abilities, living longer than humans, and being adapted to live in the cold weather of the North. The Panserbørne are able to speak and have opposable thumbs, and are known for their strength and skill of crafting armor from sky-iron. Lyra befriends both a witch, Serafina Pekkala, and a Panserbørne, Iorek Byrnison, in *The Golden Compass*. *The Subtle Knife* introduces the reader to Will's universe, which is simply supposed to be our modern, real Earth, and another universe in which Lyra and Will visit a city called Cittágazze. It is a seaside town with ancient architecture that is populated with groups of children. A unique quality of this world is its abundance of spectres, creatures that are invisible and harmless to children, but appear as transparent shimmers in the air to adults that will engulf them and feed on their souls, leaving them alive, but as mindless bodies. This is why no adults are found in Cittágazze, since they fled to find safety. Throughout *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra and Will travel between many parallel universes, including Lyra's, Will's, the world of Cittágazze, and the world of the dead.

Just as Rowling and Lewis imaginatively incorporated mythological images and allusions to classic European literature in their works, Pullman does the same within *His Dark Materials*. The world of the dead is modeled after the underworld of Greek and Roman mythology. Once a person dies and arrives in the world of the dead, he or she

must take a ferry to a desolate land guarded by harpies, creatures with a body of a bird and a face of a human woman, which torment the ghosts. Furthermore, Pullman based much of *His Dark Materials* off John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Chapter Three of Genesis. The phrase, "His dark materials" actually comes from several lines in Book II of Milton's *Paradise Lost*—which are quoted in the first pages of *The Golden Compass*—particularly, "Unless the almighty maker them ordain / His dark materials to create more worlds" (II, 915-916). *His Dark Materials* can be considered a response or a deconstruction of *Paradise Lost*, which will be further analyzed when discussing the spiritual elements of the series.

One more imaginative quality of *His Dark Materials* are the three instruments which inspire the titles of each book. Before going to live with Mrs. Coulter in *The Golden Compass*, Lyra is given a mysterious object by the Master of Jordan College. It is a device called an alethiometer, which is described as looking like a golden compass with three needle hands and thirty-six symbols and is able to reveal the truth to whoever is operating it. By turning the three needles to align with certain symbols, the holder asks it a question and must interpret its answer according to the symbols that it then independently points to. Each symbol carries multiple levels of meaning, so reading the alethiometer is not simple. It is a complex interpretive act that only certain minds can engage (King 107). Lyra quickly learns to use and understand the device and it helps her through the entire series.

The second instrument, the subtle knife, is found by Lyra and Will in *The Subtle Knife* and it is the reason they are able to travel between parallel universes frequently and easily. It is an ancient knife with a double edge—one edge can cut through any form of

physical material, while the other, sharper edge can catch and rip through the fabrics of space, creating gateways between universes. Since its creation, there has been a designated bearer of the knife who has an instinctive gift for using the knife and is responsible for keeping it safe. Upon finding the knife, Will is affirmed to be its new bearer. Lastly, within *The Amber Spyglass*, the reader witnesses the creation of said spyglass. Mary Malone, a physicist from Will's world and a former nun who helps Lyra and Will along their journey, finds her way into a parallel universe where she meets intellectual creatures that resemble elephants and who attach large seedpods from special trees in their world to their feet, like wheels. She constructs the spyglass out of a sap lacquer from the special trees, and with it, she can see Dust and its movements.

These instruments play key roles in the unfolding story of *His Dark Materials* and they help communicate some of the intellectual and moral elements of the series. A primary theme of *His Dark Materials* is innocence versus experience, which is touched upon by Shelley King and her discussion about the interpretive reading of the alethiometer. King states that there are only two types of readers of the alethiometer presented in the series: Lyra, an innocent, intuitive child who instinctively understands the alethiometer, and trained scholars who have spent the majority of their lives studying books and commentaries to try understanding the alethiometer (King 107-109). The innocence of children reflects an objectivity and ignorance of self that makes them capable of interpreting the many meanings of the symbols of the alethiometer accurately. Once they grow up and become adults with experience, their minds change to be subjective and hyperaware of their own desires and feelings. An adult would not be able to easily read the "truth" the alethiometer is trying to communicate without training and

difficulty, since his or her mind is subconsciously skewed to interpret what he or she wants to read as the “truth.” This is more understandable if one thinks about how rich a child’s imagination is in contrast with an adult’s more skeptical imagination. It is the same faith and openness of the young imagination, which is fresh and unblemished, that correlates with the ability to interpret the symbols of the alethiometer.

King’s purpose in pointing out the two different methods of understanding the alethiometer is to say that the methods can speak directly to the reader about how to approach interpreting texts, including the Bible—spontaneous, intuitive understanding of meaning, like that of a child, or conscious and cognitive effort to comprehend meaning, that like of a literary critic (107-109). Yet, these different ways of being able to read the alethiometer can attribute to Lyra’s character development, or the development that every child must go through as they grow up and transition into adulthood. The theme of innocence versus experience is communicated through Lyra as she matures, both physically and mentally, and as her relationship with the alethiometer develops and changes.

At the beginning of her adventures in *The Golden Compass*, Lyra is an ignorant, innocent child approaching puberty with barely any knowledge of things outside her small world of Jordan College. She is a bright girl who enjoys being devious at times—she is willing to lie to avoid conflict or further her desires—but she has a compassionate and determined heart. She is not unlike the many protagonists of fantasy novels who have brave, strong dispositions which make both the reader and other characters in the stories cherish and advocate them. As she travels through universes to help her friends and find justice for the multiverse with the assistance of her alethiometer, her childlike ignorance

and mannerisms fade as her confident and benevolent spirit grows. Her innocence slowly turns into experience, yet her innocence is still important through the majority of the books. Andrew Leet writes, "...Lyra's journey from innocence to experience must be a personal one; with an implied moral for the reader, Lyra must be allowed to move intuitively, always keeping in touch with the compassionate center that serves as her spiritual guide, her ultimate concern" (Leet 183). Lyra, with her innocent mind and strong heart, is destined for greatness she must achieve on her own, and many of the adults in her life figure this out and make sure to guide her without persuading her a certain way or revealing too much information too soon, so that they do not change her personal journey.

Of course, by the end of the series, Lyra has fully transitioned from childhood into adulthood, losing her innocence by gaining experience. She loses the intuitive ability to read the alethiometer, but also obtains an understanding of herself while saving the multiverse from a disastrous plot. In a way, this saddens her because she realizes she loses everything that came with her innocence—she would not return to her Oxford the same carefree, ignorant child she left as. Yet, she would not erase her adventures nor give up the friends she made along the way for anything. Lyra eventually decides to spend her life studying how to read alethiometers without her childlike innocent nature, like the many scholars who did the same. Every reader understands and relates to this aspect of growing up, and the emotions of excitement and nostalgia that come with it. In regards to the theme of innocence versus experience within his series, Pullman insightfully says, "Having lost our innocence, we must pursue understanding, knowledge, and experience to its furthest reaches. There, we can hope to regain not our lost grace, but perhaps a

superior one” (qtd. in Miller 174). Lyra’s story suggests that while everyone loses their childhood innocence, they are able to regain a different kind of innocence and grace that coexists with their experience, through time and the wisdom of living. Thus, Lyra expresses moral qualities that can encourage readers to reflect upon their own lives and how to conduct themselves (King 115).

The theme of innocence versus experience is also a key feature of the many spiritual and supernatural elements of *His Dark Materials*. Before getting into the details of the spiritual elements though, it is important to note Pullman’s beliefs. He often calls himself a “Church of England atheist,” because he grew up learning Christian theology from his clergyman grandfather before becoming an atheist (Wind-Cowie). Pullman purposely wove his beliefs into *His Dark Materials*’s plots, themes, and characters, so the story has been received as having prominent atheist opinions. As mentioned above, *His Dark Materials* is a response and deconstruction of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* because Pullman presents the story of the Fall of Man from the opposite of the traditional view. Essentially, Will and Lyra are a second Adam and Eve who will be faced with a temptation that if engaged will affect the status of the multiverse. From a Christian perspective, the innocent, pure state of Adam and Eve before original sin is good, while the experience and self-awareness that sin brings is bad. Pullman portrays the opposite, communicating that “the Fall is the actual beginning of true human freedom” (Glanzer 167).

Since the series is a lengthy retelling of the Fall, Pullman constructs several important features of the story which hold deep spiritual meaning. As mentioned earlier, a daemon is a physical extension of a human’s soul that takes the form of an animal and

is the opposite sex of its human. A daemon goes everywhere with its human and cannot stray far away without causing physical and emotional pain for both of them. A daemon can talk and often acts as its human's conscience, articulating its human's mental or emotional feelings to him or her. The relationship between a human and his or her daemon is a lifelong companionship. A child's daemon frequently changes its form according to the mood and attitude of the child, from a lion to a dog to a bird to whatever else possible. Once the child reaches the age of puberty, beginning their transition into adulthood, his or her daemon will acquire a fixed, single form. This is another feature that reflects the theme of innocence versus experience. A child's ever-changing daemon communicates the idea that a child does not yet have a self-identity, and once he or she approaches adulthood and becomes self-conscious, his or her daemon will take on a sure, true form that matches his or her sense of self. A servant in Lyra's world would often have a dog daemon which reflects the servant's loyal and serving self, while the powerful Mrs. Coulter has a golden monkey daemon that conveys her seemingly loving personality that is secretly mischievous.

Dust is another theological feature of the series. At the beginning of *The Golden Compass*, Lyra witnesses Lord Asriel's lecture for the Oxford scholars from within a wardrobe, looking out through the crack between the doors. Lord Asriel displays a picture he took in the North that captures what Dust looks like. There is a man depicted, "bathed in light, and a fountain of glowing particles seemed to be streaming from his upraised hand" (*The Golden Compass* 20). Dust is not mere particles of dirt, earth, or waste matter, but something that is supernatural. Anne-Marie Bird, scholar of young adult literature, provides an insightful definition: "Dust appears to correspond to the

scientific phenomenon known as cosmic dust: the small particles of matter that are distributed throughout space... In short, Dust is the actually physical ‘stuff’ that holds the universe together” (113). Yet, Dust carries more weight. In many ways, it represents the original sin of Adam and Eve from chapter three of Genesis.

Pullman includes a direct passage from Chapter Three of Genesis at the end of *The Golden Compass*, only he alters it slightly to reflect the context of Lyra’s world, and it provides insight into Dust. After Adam and Eve have sinned, God speaks to them: “*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*” (Gen. 3.19; *The Golden Compass* 373). Since dust is mankind’s origin and demise, Pullman is suggesting that Dust is a metaphor for human physicality, inspired by God’s judgment (Bird 112-113). It represents humanity’s rejection of the heavenly for the earthly (Bird 116). Regarding the theme of innocence versus experience, Dust symbolizes experience—it symbolizes the human consciousness, individuality, and free will that is not entirely possible for innocence, or the perfect human state of Adam and Eve before the Fall. Dust itself is conscious and it became attracted to humans, like the man in Lord Asriel’s photo, once Adam and Eve sinned and became self-aware. Furthermore, Dust is not attracted to children, since children are still in an innocent state, the same state that allows their daemons to change and protects them from Spectres. Dust begins to attach to children when they reach the age of puberty, of experience, perhaps causing the daemon to find a permanent form. The fixed daemon is physical proof of Dust, of adulthood, of experience. When Adam and Eve sinned and Dust attached to them, their daemons became fixed.

Since Pullman is promoting experience and original sin, he establishes the villain of *His Dark Materials* as the Church, or the Magisterium, and by extension, God, who is called the Authority. As previously noted, the Magisterium is the international religious government that controls Lyra's world. With all of Dust's underlying meaning, the Magisterium is against it; it views the human body as material and sinful, along with Dust, while the soul, which is represented by the daemon, is divine (Bird 118-119). In *The Golden Compass*, the Magisterium funds Mrs. Coulter's research project, called the General Oblation Board and known as the Gobblers, which takes children to a facility where a procedure called intercision is performed on the children. In hopes of reversing original sin and finding a way to protect children from losing innocence and attracting Dust, intercision separates children from their daemons, basically separating body and soul. The process is painful and leaves the children like zombies and close to death. Upon seeing a boy who experienced intercision, Lyra describes him as "someone without a face, or with their ribs laid open and their heart torn out..." (*The Golden Compass* 214). The Magisterium thinks this will protect people from being tainted by Dust and experience, and without their self-consciousness and liberty to think and feel, the Magisterium and the Authority will keep absolute power (Bird 118).

Ever since the creation of the subtle knife, Dust began leaking out of the portals created by the knife into the Abyss, the void between universes. Over the time span of *His Dark Materials*, the amount of portals increases, and the flow of Dust leaving quickens. After the General Oblation Board's destruction, the Magisterium finds out about Lyra's destiny of becoming a second Eve and the possibility of a second Fall that will stop Dust from disappearing, thus the Magisterium becomes intent on either killing

her before she encounters the temptation or somehow preventing the temptation.

Ultimately, they are unsuccessful. Lyra and Will fulfill their roles as a second Adam and Eve and give into the temptation, which is embracing the fact that they have fallen in love with each other, completing their passage from childhood innocence into experience and adulthood. When they kiss, Dust envelopes them. It is their love and transference into experience that stops the quick flow of Dust from disappearing into the Abyss. While Eve's original sin brought Dust into the world, Lyra's Fall stopped Dust from leaving.

All of these spiritual themes of *His Dark Materials* certainly seem overwhelming for a Christian at first. To read something that supports the complete opposite of what one believes is not easy or enjoyable, and it is often angering. Most of the Christian community decided to boycott *His Dark Materials*, and the controversy over the series' religious themes is part of why the second and third novels were not adapted into films. Several scholars touch on the many reasons why Christians are insulted by and ignore the series. Stephan Ross, Christian scholar of literature and faith, expresses his concerns about daemons:

...human beings are most truly human only when in loving submission to, and communion with, their Creator and, to a lesser degree, fellow bearers of the image of God, especially within marriage between a man and a woman. In *The Golden Compass*, however, each human and daemon pair essentially forms a complete, autonomous male and female union such that to be human is to commune with and submit to no one but one's self. (Ross)

The relationship between human and daemon is portrayed as a fulfilling, loving companionship, but since each being are two parts of the same human, the love can seem

self-centered, which speaks against the Christian ideal of selflessness and the incompleteness of humans without God (Ross).

Naomi Wood also mentions the religious drawback of *His Dark Materials*, particularly Pullman's portrayal of authority. He makes the Church a "corrupt ecclesiastical and political authority to whom allegiance would be evil," and God a "tyrannical usurper" (Wood 239-240). "...Pullman exploits the known offenses of institutional religion... to buttress his thesis about the poisonous effects of religion on humanity and the rest of nature" (Wood 243). Wood points out the fact that Pullman molds Christianity to fit his agenda. Perry Glanzer, professor, writer, and scholar of religion issues and philosophy in education, conveys that unlike J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and other fantasy series, Pullman's series encourages a particular religious worldview—one that is not positively presented, but one that is perceived as an attack on a different worldview, the worldview of Christianity (Glanzer 166-168). Furthermore, Pullman has assertively positioned himself in opposition to Tolkien and Lewis, along with their Christian ideals (Hatlen 76). In addition to all these reasons, Christians may also be troubled about Pullman's rendering of the Fall and original sin being a positive moment for humanity. These are all valid, understandable concerns for the Christian community's rejection of the series.

However, there are positive perspectives and enlightening ways of understanding *His Dark Material's* spiritual themes that are worth exploring. Even though daemons can symbolize an unhealthy self-love, they can also symbolize an encouraging self-love. Andrew Leet suggests that daemons can represent a type of guardian for their humans (179), and as mentioned early, one's conscience. Both humbly loving one's self and

being aware of one's identity and feelings are not negative. Furthermore, the importance of love and companionship between separate individuals is still present in *His Dark Materials*—for instance, the love between Lyra and Will.

When it comes to Pullman's portrayal of the Fall of Man, Laura Feldt states that his series "stages the Fall story as being of decisive importance for an understanding of human life," and is indebted to the anthropology of Genesis, Chapter Three ("Fantasizing the Fall" 53, 62). Leet explains this idea well: "A utopian vision of a world without sin may be an appealing one, but as Pullman realizes and reaffirms throughout his trilogy, such a world would be both unnatural and ultimately disastrous from the perspective of free will" (180). While Adam and Eve's innocent state is how God intended humans to be when he created them and original sin was an act of disobedience towards God, without self-conscious free will and sin, humans would not be able to experience a relationship with God established upon His grace (Leet 181). The General Oblation Board's intercessions are awful because they do not give children the same innocent state of Adam and Eve before the Fall, but take away the children's humanity and free will (Leet 182). Thus, Dust, which reflects self-awareness and experience, is an energy vital to human existence. If Dust disappears, so does thought, imagination, feeling, and individuality (Bird 117). While Pullman advocates self-conscious experience over childlike innocence, he promotes an innocence and grace that develops over time in union with experience, much like the grace Christians continually seek to obtain through their faith and relationship with God although they know they regularly fall short.

Furthermore, Pullman's negative illustration of the Church through the Magisterium does not speak against Christianity as much as the controversy implies. The

Magisterium resembles Catholicism, but is actually quite non-Christian in a way, because there is never any mention of Jesus or a similar Christ figure and no suggestion of the Holy Spirit (Leet 176). Feldt conveys that instead of an anti-religious work, *His Dark Materials* is an attack on institutional, totalitarian religion and ideologies, and favors individually-based religion (“Fantasizing the Fall” 61). Pullman does incorporate many key Christian ideals such as love, wisdom, perseverance, and the divine soul. In addition, while Pullman bases the Authority on God according to Christian scripture and theology, the Authority is not at all like God in reality. The Authority is described as the first angel that came into being—angels are created when Dust condenses—and claimed to be the creator of the rest of the angels and the worlds. When Lyra and Will find him in *The Amber Spyglass*, he appears frail and ancient, and is kept alive in a crystal box by his regent, Metatron, another powerful angel who betrayed him. Jonathan Padley, English professor, and Kenneth Padley, clergyman and scholar of theology, offer more factors that make the Authority nothing like the God of Christianity. The Authority has a physical being and is not omnipresent, is an old, fallen angel that was once a power-crazed liar, and is not everlasting since he dies at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* when Lyra and Will open his crystal box. Padley and Padley suggest that these qualities actually make the Authority more similar to depictions of the devil (329-331). Leet states, “The male angel that Pullman visually creates is only a godlike representation of what mankind has designed for its own purposes and needs, not an actual image, as God is a mystery...” (185). Pullman does not deny Christian theism, but he constructs an image of God that brings into question how humans and the Church portray Him. Metatron and the Magisterium could symbolize the Church when it becomes too focused on the earthly,

such as control or success, and uses God as an icon, straying away from the divine, like personal faith and relationship with God.

What Pullman intended to communicate through these detailed religious themes cannot be completely known. Yet, Wind-Cowie says, “Pullman is open and honest about how conflicted he feels about God. This shines through in his books. He cannot bring himself to denounce Christianity as wholly false, choosing instead to focus on how misused and abused, misinterpreted and misapplied our faith can be.” Pullman’s reputation as an anti-Christian atheist seems to breakdown when one considers all the explorative theological material in *His Dark Materials* and how it can actually be received positively, or at least, less negatively. In comparison with *Narnia* and *Harry Potter*, *His Dark Materials* contains the same detailed imaginative qualities that often allude to Biblical or mythological themes, intellectual and moral messages communicated through his characters’ growth and experiences, and intricate spiritual motifs that can allow readers to explore their own theology and spiritual beliefs. Pullman certainly lacks subtlety and questions traditional values of Christianity unlike *Narnia* and *Harry Potter*, but *His Dark Materials* is well-written, engaging fantasy literature, and perhaps it wouldn’t be the same without his blatant opinions of theology.

The positive qualities of *His Dark Materials* will not seem like enough for some Christians to give the series a chance, and that is understandable. Nonetheless, the Christian community should consider the opportunity for growth in maturity and spirituality that the series offers. *His Dark Materials* presents readers, especially young minds, valuable lessons about transitioning into adulthood and a chance to be exposed to secular ideas that they will most definitely face throughout time in modern culture.

Adults may cringe at this idea, but it is a fact that children will one day approach a situation where their faith is challenged and adults are nowhere in sight to shield them from that challenge or encourage their thoughts in a certain direction. At times, faith is meant to be tested. Reading a series such as *His Dark Materials* offers a more controlled environment to interact with secular ideas that cause one to view their faith in a new, perhaps more questioning, manner.

Conclusion

By reviewing how Fantasy can encourage the imagination, provide intellectual and moral lessons, and communicate spiritual themes within a Christian context, fantasy literature can be considered appealing and worthy instead of controversial in the Christian community, since these qualities promote Christian ideals. *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Harry Potter*, and *His Dark Materials* are some of the most prominent fantasy series today, and include concrete examples of these elements, making them all worth reading by Christians. In addition, each of these series have had different experiences under the spotlight of the Christian community.

Kathleen Norris, Christian writer and poet, says, “For novelists who are not Christian, especially those telling stories that are anything but safe, a curious narrowness as to what constitutes religious art can mean that the religious dimensions of their work will not be appreciated by a Christian audience” (307). C.S. Lewis’s *Narnia* is accepted in the Christian community significantly because he is forward with his Christian theology, making his series fit within the narrowness of “religious art” that Norris mentions. J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* have been regarded as not fitting within that narrowness. Rowling is a member of the Church of Scotland, so *Harry Potter* must be denied because it seems unsafe by involving too much magic. Pullman, on the other hand, is an atheist and involves ideas that seem significantly unsafe, ensuring that *His Dark Materials* will usually be pushed aside by Christians. The analyses of these series, along with Norris’s quote, confirm that the religious perspectives of authors should not be a factor Christians focus on when pursuing fantasy literature. Instead they should be open to the creative, intellectual, and

spiritual qualities that can speak to their interests and beliefs, trusting that all Fantasy potentially has religious dimensions. The magic of fantasy literature should be seen as a positive medium through which these characteristics can be communicated. McVeigh notes that “Lewis and Tolkien both insisted that fantasy did not involve a neat transference from Christian belief system to imagined realm” (199).

Of course, there are many other fantasy novels and series that each carry all, some, or maybe none of these qualities, which make them different and unique when analyzed. Furthermore, every reader of fantasy will perceive the creative, intellectual, and spiritual qualities—and maybe more elements—differently because interpretation is quite dependent on the individual reader, thus diverse. Perhaps there will be fantasy novels or series created that go too far with negativity, such as dark magic, outlandish morals, and severe religious claims, that they cannot be saved by other favorable qualities or positive interpretation. Nonetheless, these factors should not stop the Christian from enjoying and exploring fantasy literature. Fantasy resembles the oceans—rich with unique wonders and trenches undiscovered, a glimpse of God’s ingenuity. Christians should further investigate how Fantasy can benefit readers, analyze *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Harry Potter*, and *His Dark Materials* even more, and/or dive into fantasy literature with an open mind, hoping to see the bravery, faith, and love of God.

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