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The Magician's Niece: The Kinship between J. K. Rowling and C. S. Lewis

Abstract

Looks at parallels between the Chronicles of Narnia and the Harry Potter books in terms of plot, structure, symbolism, theme, and purpose.

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S. Chronicles of Narnia; Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter novels

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Joy Farmer

THE circumstance: a riddle with four clues, ending with the cryptic words, "UNDER ME" (*Silver Chair* 99; ch. 8). The scene: a subterranean chamber in the kingdom of Underland. The victim: Prince Rilian, enthralled in a silver chair. The villain: a witch who is using Rilian to usurp the throne of Narnia; when challenged, she turns into a great serpent "green as poison" (156; ch. 12). The heroes: three mortals, Eustace, Jill, and Puddleglum, who free the prince and kill the serpent. The means of victory: the name of Aslan and a trio of swords.

The circumstance: a riddle, specifically Tom Marvolo Riddle, anagram for "I AM LORD VOLDEMORT" (*Chamber of Secrets* 314). The scene: a chamber far "deeper below [Hogwarts] school than even the dungeons" (301). The victim: Ginny Weasley, a first-year student enthralled by a diary. The villain: a wizard who is using Ginny to return to power; when challenged, he summons the basilisk, "an enormous serpent, bright, poisonous green" (318). The hero, Harry Potter, a mortal boy who slays the serpent and rescues Ginny. The means of victory: the name of Albus Dumbledore and the trio of the Sorting Hat, the sword of Godric Gryffindor, and Fawkes the phoenix.

These strikingly similar plot lines are familiar to readers of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books. But whereas *The Chronicles* raise few eyebrows or hackles, the *Harry Potter* phenomenon raises plenty—charges that Rowling's writings are cultish, disturbing, and even Satanic; objections "from parents and conservative religious leaders who say Rowling advocates witchcraft" ("Why Harry's Hot" 55). Such criticisms reveal a major misunderstanding of works that on many levels evoke Lewis's celebrated children's series. Sometimes the resemblance is superficial: Lewis wrote seven *Chronicles*; Rowling plans seven volumes, one for each of Harry's academic years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Odd houses and quirky professors; mythological figures and fabulous beasts; Marshwiggles, veelas, and other strange beings found nowhere else in literature; clever names like Queen Prunaprisma and Reepicheep the mouse or Madeye Moody and Crookshanks the cat; and enchanted places

beyond this world are staples of both narratives. Closer analysis reveals a more profound kinship. Like Lewis, whose *Chronicles* are art for the soul of both child and adult, Rowling has crafted books that engage the minds and nourish the spirits of readers of all ages.

Perhaps the most obvious similarity between the works of Lewis and Rowling is the prominence of magic. In the *Chronicles*, readers encounter talking animals, a book of spells, flying horses, a little ivory horn that summons help whenever it is sounded, and rings that transport people to and from “The Wood Between the Worlds” (*Magician’s Nephew*; ch. 3). Aslan’s magic transforms the selfish Eustace from a treasure-hoarding dragon back into a boy, wafts Jill into Narnia on lion’s breath, and grows a lamp-post from an iron bar. “*Deeper Magic from Before the Dawn of Time*” resurrects the slain Aslan (*Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, ch. 15). Malevolent magic brings one hundred years of winter to Narnia, changes the White Witch’s enemies into stone, and calls forth the terrible god Tash. A Midas-touch pool turns to gold anyone and anything dipped into it, and enchanted Turkish Delight creates an insatiable craving for more.

Similarly, magic both benevolent and malign is central to the Harry Potter books. Good causes are served by Harry’s invisibility cloak; by the Sorting Hat, which places new students into one of Hogwarts’ four school Houses; by the Mirror of Erised, which shows people the “deepest, most desperate desire of [their] hearts” (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 213); and by a tiny hourglass that enables Harry’s friend Hermione to turn back time. Enchantments devised by six Hogwarts masters protect the Sorcerer’s Stone from theft, and Harry’s Patronus, a conjured guardian in the form of a stag, defends Harry from a dementor, whose fatal kiss extracts a wizard’s soul. Dark Magic enables Voldemort to open the Chamber of Secrets, to reunite his foul agents the Death Eaters, and to rise again in his own flesh.

For neither series are these lists exhaustive, nor are the following illustrations from the Bible: Jesus changes water into wine, feeds a multitude with five loaves and two fish, and restores a blind man’s sight with spittle. Because the context is religious, these events are deemed miracles, not magic. Yet Lewis and Rowling both deliberately blur the distinction in such examples as Aslan’s Table, whose feast is daily renewed and daily cleared away; the dishes in Hogwarts’ Great Hall, which fill and empty (seemingly) by themselves; Lucy’s “cordial which would heal almost every wound and every illness” (*Prince Caspian* 22; ch. 2); and the tears of Fawkes the phoenix, which have similar curative powers.

Clearly, magic is both authors' way of talking about spiritual reality, which, according to Lewis, injects the marvelous into the mundane to reveal the "total harmony of all that exists" (*Miracles* 62; ch. 8). This harmony typically discloses itself when Lewis's and Rowling's characters are *in extremis*—for example, when Caspian and Edmund quarrel over Deathwater Island and Aslan passes in slow pace "across the grey hillside above them [. . .] shining as if he were in bright sunlight" (*Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 105; ch. 8) or when Harry squares off with Voldemort and has a vision of his own parents "[blossoming] from the end of Voldemort's wand" (*Goblet of Fire* 667). The theological overtones of Headmaster Dumbledore's explanation are unmistakable: "Your father [. . .] shows himself most plainly when you have need of him" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 427-28). Because this good magic always vanquishes the "evil dream of Magic," which the finite self exercises solely to grab power without paying the price of "obedience to the Father of Spirits," Lewis and Rowling affirm the supremacy of what Lewis calls "the unconditioned Divine Life beyond all worlds" (*Miracles* 155; 162; ch. 16).

To be sure, in the conditional world we inhabit, any magic or miracle is like the resurrection of Lazarus, who, Lewis notes, "was not raised to a new and more glorious mode of existence but merely restored to the sort of life he had had before" (*Miracles* 156; ch. 16). This sort of life includes anguish and suffering, against which temporal magic ultimately fails. The Harry Potter series and *The Chronicles* anticipate such failure in their common theme of loss. Malcolm Jones observes, "in all of Rowling's books there runs an undercurrent of sadness and loss," and Rowling herself admits, "In fact, death and bereavement and what death means [. . .] is one of the central themes in all seven books" ("Why Harry's Hot" 56). Hence, Harry lives in a foster home because his mother and father died saving him from Voldemort. When Harry sees their images for the first time, he experiences "a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness" (*Sorcerer's* 209). Harry's loss is hardly unique, for insanity has taken away Neville Longbottom's parents, and even Voldemort was an abandoned baby. The reverse situation, parental bereavement over the loss of children, occurs when Barty Crouch must sentence his only son to Azkaban Prison and the Diggorys suffer the death of their son Cedric.

Likewise, loss is a major theme in Lewis's *Chronicles*, where nothing—including royal birth, innocence, or innate goodness—confers immunity from ill. Prince Caspian has been orphaned by his wicked Uncle Miraz. Prince Cor loses his family when he is kidnapped by his father's Lord Chancellor. Prince Rilian witnesses not

only the emerald serpent's murder of his mother but also his father's death from old age and sorrow. Digory lives with his sorcerer uncle Andrew because Digory's mother is dying and his father is away in India. One by one, the children of Earth lose their access to Narnia when Aslan decrees that they are too old to return, and finally they witness the destruction of Narnia itself.

Not only do Rowling and Lewis believe that no shield can deflect mortal loss and grief forever, but also they believe in evil. Rowling personifies evil in Voldemort, who in his obsession to destroy Harry and bend all the other wizards to his own will perfectly fits psychologist M. Scott Peck's description of an evil individual, for Peck defines evil as the "force [. . .] that seeks to kill life or liveliness," manifesting itself in people as "the desire [. . .] to control others" (43). In thrall to Voldemort are such lesser villains as Professor Quirrell, whose body Voldemort possesses, and Peter Pettigrew, whom the Dark Lord coerces first to betray Harry's parents, then to deliver Harry into Voldemort's clutches. Rowling knows, however, that most evil is not grand but disgusting and banal. Thus, she has Quirrell crawl across the ground to lap the blood of a freshly killed unicorn and Pettigrew elude justice by changing into a scruffy gray rat named Scabbers. Her pages are full of ordinary human evil, too, such as child abuse and schoolboy rivalry: Harry's aunt and uncle make Harry sleep in a cupboard under the stairs, send him only a toothpick for his birthday, and incite their son Dudley to equally petty cruelties. Nor is Hogwarts a haven from boys like Dudley, as Harry discovers when he meets the slickly despicable Draco Malfoy and Malfoy's stupid, brutish lackeys Crabbe and Goyle.

Lewis's *Chronicles* likewise depict grandly evil characters who manifest an obsession with controlling others—the White Witch who “has got all Narnia under her thumb” (*Lion* 14; ch. 2); Rabadash of Tashbaan, whose plot to force Queen Susan to marry him involves the conquest of a peaceful neighboring kingdom; and the Ape who manipulates Puzzle the donkey. But their evil, too, has the “small cheap tawdry dreariness” that Peck sees as characteristic of wickedness (263). The White Witch pilfers apples, urges Digory to snatch one too, and meanly suggests that he desert his friend Polly afterward so that no one will ever know. Prince Rabadash is so defined by his lust for Queen Susan that Aslan turns him into an ass. The Ape masquerades Puzzle as Aslan, chiefly to ensure himself a plentiful supply of nuts. Garden-variety human nastiness causes Edmund to lie to his siblings about visiting Narnia and Eustace to find “dozens of ways to give people a bad time if you are in your own home and they are only visitors” (*Voyage* 2; ch. 1). The

other children succumb to pedestrian evils as well: they bicker among themselves, whine “it wasn’t my fault” (*Prince Caspian* 117; ch. 10), and forget their promises.

In each series the forces of good and evil clash ruthlessly and often. The Harry Potter books end with fierce confrontations between Harry and Voldemort or Harry and Voldemort’s agents. Indeed, the showdown that concludes *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is so searing that Harry needs as much courage to recount it as to survive it, and Rowling has been denounced for describing such terrible events, including the callous murder of a child, in story intended for young people. Her response is instructive:

If you’re choosing to write about evil, you really do have a moral obligation to show what that means. So you know what happened at the end of Book IV. I do think it’s shocking, but it had to be. [. . .] We are really talking about someone who is incredibly power hungry. Racist, really. And what do those kinds of people do? They treat human life so lightly. (“A Good Scare”)

Lewis is equally forthright about the casualties that result when good and evil collide. A characteristically bloody scene follows a hand-to-hand combat between Peter and King Miraz. After Miraz trips and falls, one of his own treacherous lords stabs him dead. Then “Peter swung to face [another lord], slashed his legs from under him and, with the back-cut of the same stroke, walloped off his head” (*Prince Caspian* 163; ch. 14). Other Chronicles depict murderers as casual as Voldemort—calculating assassins like the King of Charn who “bade seven hundred nobles to a feast and killed them all before they had drunk their fill” (*Magician’s* 61; ch. 5). And *The Last Battle* describes a savage skirmish marked by this affecting death: “The Bear lay on the ground moving feebly. Then it [. . .] laid its big head down on the grass as quietly as a child going to sleep, and never moved again” (112; ch. 9).

Such violence and its painful aftermath accord with Lewis’s belief “that this universe is at war [. . .] a civil war, a rebellion, and [. . .] we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel” (*Mere Christianity* 51; bk. 2, ch. 2). If mortal creatures did not die horribly in wars, no one would take warfare seriously. Thus, for Lewis as for Rowling, the realistic depiction of evil’s consequences becomes a way to diminish what both writers acknowledge as evil’s innate seductiveness. “I think [it’s] very true [that evil is attractive],” says Rowling. “Harry has seen the kind[s] of people who are grouped around this very evil character. I think we’d all acknowledge that the bully in the playground is attractive. Because if you can be his friend, you are safe” (“A Good Scare”). Indeed, the most seductive character in *The Chronicles*

is just such an evil bully. Of Jadis, the venomous Queen of Charn who later becomes Narnia's White Witch, Digory thinks, "She's wonderfully brave. And strong. She's what I call a Queen" (*Magician's* 61; ch. 5). She remains attractive in spite of, and perhaps even because of, the fiendishness Digory witnesses firsthand so that "years afterward when he was an old man, Digory said he had never in all his life known a woman so beautiful" (53; ch. 4). The evil in her guarantees that she will always draw admirers—Black Dwarfs, Ghouls, Boggles, giants, and "people of the Toadstools"—eager to do her bidding (*Lion* 109; ch. 13), just as the evil in Voldemort assures him that his disciples the Death Eaters will reassemble at his command.

Given the moral and spiritual dimension of Rowling's books, it is no surprise that they contain almost as much religious allegory as *The Chronicles*, whose Christian emblems have been so well explored that I will mention only one here: Aslan, who conveys the orthodoxy of the Trinity. As God the Creator whose Word was the beginning, Aslan sings Narnia and its creatures into existence (*The Magician's Nephew*). As God the Christ who was crucified for the sins of humankind and rose victorious, Aslan dies to redeem Edmund and then comes back to life (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). As God the Holy Spirit who is with us always, Aslan guides Shasta through the perilous Misty Mountains (*The Horse and His Boy*) and shows Lucy the way to Aslan's How (*Prince Caspian*).

In Rowling's books, much of the religious allegory centers on Harry, whose life seems modeled on Christ's. Recalling Jesus's mixed parentage, Harry has a wizard father and a Muddblood mother, that is, a woman from a non-magical line. Targeted for death as an infant, Harry is hidden from that would-be Herod, Voldemort, in an all-Muggle household as worthy of scorn as Nazareth. Certainly, nothing good ever comes out of Number Four, Privet Drive, until Harry, of whom Professor McGonagal prophesies, "every child in our world will know his name" (*Sorcerer's* 13). Brought to the attention of the Hogwarts sages at the age of eleven, Harry becomes celebrated as someone who "risks his own life for his friends" (*Chamber* 179). Most important, Harry's unique and miraculous survival of Voldemort's attack, which leaves a lightning-shaped scar as distinctive as nail wounds, has changed everything. Says Hagrid, "No one ever lived after he [Voldemort] decided ter kill 'em, no one except you" (*Sorcerer's* 55-56). Dobby the house elf later adds, "Since you [Harry] triumphed over He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and the Dark Lord's power was broken, [. . .] it was a new dawn [. . .] and Harry Potter shone like a beacon of hope for those of us who thought the Dark days would never end"

(*Chamber* 178). Hagrid's and Dobby's words echo Lewis's musings on the change wrought by the Resurrection:

The New Testament writers speak as if Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. [. . .] He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened. (*Miracles* 150; ch. 16)

Moreover, like Christ the Second Adam, Harry represents all humanity after this chapter was penned. When Harry's mother died to save him from Voldemort, she "left upon him the traces of her sacrifice" (*Goblet* 653). This mark of her love now guards Harry's life. Therefore, Voldemort craves Harry's blood, reasoning that "the lingering protection his [Harry's] mother gave him would then reside in my veins too" (657). Voldemort calls this phenomenon "old magic" (354); Peck calls it the "methodology of love," saying that the conquest of evil "can be accomplished only by the love of individuals. A willing sacrifice is required. [. . .] Whenever this happens there is a slight shift in the balance of power in the world" (qtd. in Yancey 204). Philip Yancey pursues Peck's idea to its theological conclusion, observing, "The balance of power shifted more than slightly [. . .] on Calvary" (204). In other words, because God loved people enough to die for them, He instilled His protection into their very essence, empowering them to triumph over the ultimate evil: death.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis expresses this concept through Aslan's voluntary self-sacrifice and resurrection, when "Death itself [starts] working backwards," bringing instant springtime to Narnia, life to the stone statues in the White Witch's courtyard, and victory to Peter's flagging army (133; ch. 15). Through the religious allegories of the Harry Potter books and *The Chronicles*, readers learn the profound theological truths that give Aslan's words to Lucy such resonance: "This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there [in Lucy's world]" (*Voyage* 209; ch.16).

Further informing these allegories are the themes of temptation, free will, sin, and forgiveness. A notable instance occurs in *The Magician's Nephew*. When Digory first encounters temptation, he yields, ringing the little golden bell that breaks the spell on the abominable Queen of Charn and unleashes her destructiveness. The second time, in a situation inspired by Genesis, Digory is even more sorely tempted, for "the apple of youth, the apple of life" that the queen is prompting him to steal

would cure Digory's dying mother (175; ch. 13). This time, however, he resists, and Aslan later assures him, "[The apple] would have healed her; but not to your joy or hers. The day would have come when both you and she would have looked back and said it would have been better to die in that illness" (191; ch. 14). The self-seeking queen, on the other hand, greedily devours the forbidden fruit that promises "unwearying strength and endless days like a goddess." Thus begins her "length of misery," which Aslan defines as "length of days with an evil heart" (190; ch.14).

Rowling links similar themes of temptation, free will, and sin to the Sorting Hat and Hogwarts' four school Houses. When Harry puts on the Hat and thinks, "*Not Slytherin, not Slytherin,*" it slyly responds, "Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that" (*Sorcerer's* 121). Later Dumbledore tells Harry, "You happen to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students" (*Chamber* 333). Harry is devastated until he understands that the Sorting Hat put him in Gryffindor because he "asked not to go in Slytherin." Through exercise of his own free will, Harry ends up in a House different from the one that produced Voldemort. As Dumbledore explains, "It is our choices [. . .] that make us what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (333). Voldemort, by contrast, not only yields to the temptation that Slytherin poses but also upon leaving school elects to follow a path that leads him "deeply into the Dark Arts" and traffic with the worst of wizard-kind (329). The result is a man who gains enormous power and various means of prolonging his mortal existence but who forfeits any chance at heaven because he no longer has "enough human left in him to die" (*Sorcerer's* 57).

Voldemort's excesses have positioned him beyond redemption; like Lucifer, he "went [. . .] bad as you could go. Worse. Worse than worse" (*Sorcerer's* 54). Indeed, critics fault Voldemort as a villain precisely because "he is just bad to the bone" ("Why Harry's Hot" 56). Furthermore, the Potter series draws fire because of what some people regard as its unrelenting theme of vengeance against Voldemort. They forget that the Dark Lord, like the White Witch, personifies pure evil, which cannot be forgiven precisely because it never regards itself as sinful or asks for absolution. Certainly, other characters in both series do seek and are freely granted pardon. Notable examples from *The Chronicles* include Edmund, absolved of his treachery in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Eustace, forgiven his selfishness in *The*

Voyage of the Dawn Treader; the Talking Horse Bree, forgiven his pride in *The Horse and His Boy*; and Lucy, absolved of her disobedience in *Prince Caspian*.

The Potter books likewise contain penitent characters whose grievous faults are met with mercy. For instance, though Hagrid is guilty of a terrible indiscretion that falsely implicates him in releasing a deadly monster at Hogwarts, he is hired as the school's gamekeeper. Expecting expulsion for the part she unwittingly plays in assisting Voldemort, a sobbing Ginny hears, "There will be no punishment. Older and wiser wizards than she have been hoodwinked by [the Dark] Lord" (*Chamber* 330). And Dumbledore grants Snape, a reformed Death Eater, both clemency and a faculty appointment. But perhaps the most striking instance of mercy occurs when Harry learns that Peter Pettigrew, and not Sirius Black, betrayed the Potters to Voldemort. As Black pronounces Pettigrew's doom, Harry protests, "You can't kill him. [. . .] You can't" (*Prisoner* 375). Dumbledore calls Harry's impulse "noble," saying, "This is magic at its deepest, its most impenetrable. [. . .] But trust me . . . the time may come when you will be very glad you saved Pettigrew's life" (426-27). On one level, certainly, Dumbledore means that Pettigrew now owes Harry very much, but on another level he just as surely means the divine mystery that forgives our debts in the measure we forgive our debtors.

As this study makes clear, the Harry Potter books and *The Chronicles* fuse the sacred, cosmic, and magical with the secular, parochial, and prosaic. Though Harry triumphs in every volume, he remains, engagingly, a real boy: he excels at Quidditch, a kind of soccer played on flying broomsticks, but is at best an average student. To survive the grueling Triwizard Tournament, he accepts all the unauthorized help he can get. Courageous in the heat of a duel with Voldemort, "he [screws] up his face against the howl of misery fighting to get out of him" when Mrs. Weasley hugs him like the mother he does not remember (*Goblet* 714). Rowling's other characters are equally real: ignoring the blessing of an intact nuclear family, Harry's best friend Ron openly envies Harry's inherited wealth; the quintessential geek Hermione nearly spells her own scholastic doom by taking too many subjects in a term; and Professor Snape finds fault with every Dark Arts teacher because he covets the position himself.

Lewis's characters are likewise recognizable human beings. They can be bullied by their peers and cry, as happens to Jill Pole at Experiment House; they can weary of battles and forced marches and wish that "there could be more of *this* sort of adventure," as when Jill strolls with the Unicorn Jewel (*Last Battle* 83; ch. 8); they can be horrid, as when Edmund hopes that Tash will eat the tiresome Dwarfs; they can die in a British Railway accident, as several characters do in *The Last Battle*; and

they can cease to be friends of Narnia, as Susan sadly does—Susan who all too humanly “wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now, and she’ll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay that age” (127; ch. 12).

Both series derive their extraordinary impact precisely from having such ordinary protagonists, for when these characters prevail over adversity, they affirm the human capacity for heroism. Theologian Robert Funk calls stories about such characters “the myth of the *internal* redeemer” (308). Citing Joseph Campbell, Funk defines this redeemer as the limited and finite “hero with a thousand faces [. . . who] undergoes trials and tribulations in an alien space but manages a victory over evil powers, usually assisted by helpers” (308). The internal redeemer thus proves that similar triumphs lie within the means of everyone “chained to earth and mortality” (308). By contrast, the myth of the *external* redeemer assumes that “evil is stronger than human powers,” so the hero must “[come] from beyond and [belong] to a reality not our own” (307). “Myths in this category,” concludes Funk, “tend to tranquilize, to function as escapist fare” (308).

In the alien space called Narnia, Digory and Polly, Jill and Eustace, and the four Pevensies confront and vanquish not only witches, dragons, Calormenes, “ogres with monstrous teeth, and wolves, and bull-headed men” but also the worst entities devised by imagination: “Cruels and Hags and Incubuses, Wraiths, Horrors, Efreets, Sprites, Orknies, Wooses, and Ettins” (*Lion* 122; ch. 14). Aided by one another as well as assorted Talking Animals and creatures out of fairy lore and Bullfinch, these children undertake arduous journeys, wage wars, and sail dangerous seas for the sake of all Narnians. Similarly, in the alien space called Hogwarts, Harry and company decommission a troll, outmaneuver Aragog and the giant spiders, and render a boggart *riddikulus*. With helpers as diverse as a house elf, a werewolf, and his school pals Hermione and Ron, Harry keeps the Sorcerer’s Stone from falling into Voldemort’s hands, rescues Ron’s little sister from the Chamber of Secrets, and delivers the innocent Sirius Black from certain re-incarceration in Azkaban Prison, where dementors control the inmates by “[draining] peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them” (*Prisoner* 187).

By creating ordinary human saviors rather than Supermen and Wonder Women, Rowling and Lewis reflect and embrace our everyday world. They plunge us into the corporeality of struggle and triumph, not only in the case of strong characters like Harry Potter and High King Peter but also in the case of weaker ones like Eustace Stubbs and Neville Longbottom: Eustace, who finds the grit to do “the first brave thing that he had ever done” in attacking a sea serpent with a borrowed

sword (*Voyage* 96; ch. 8); Neville, who shows that “there are all kinds of courage. [. . .] It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends” (*Sorcerer's* 306). Though Eustace accomplishes “nothing beyond breaking Caspian's second best sword into bits” (*Voyage* 96; ch. 8) and Hermione simply binds Neville with a Full Body-Bind Charm, what matters is that Eustace and Neville tap into strengths hitherto unknown. Writes nine-year-old Rachel Johnson, “The [Harry Potter] books have taught me that I will find my own special powers. I can't do magic, but I can believe in myself. I can't fly on a broomstick or become invisible, but I will stop saying 'I can't'” (“A Magical Breakfast of 'Potter' Champions”). Rowling's and Lewis's books are about many things, but especially they are about the potential for the life uncommon incarnate in each human being.

This attribute makes them the “right books,” which Lewis says are not “books of information [. . . with] pictures of grain elevators or of fat foreign children doing exercises in model schools” (*Voyage* 68; ch. 1). Instead, the right books anticipate what he calls the “Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before” (*Last Battle* 174; ch. 16). The Chronicles anticipate this Story when a host of major characters leaves the Shadow-Lands through death and Aslan exclaims joyfully, “The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning” (173; ch. 16). The Potter series likewise anticipates this Story when Dumbledore observes, “To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure. [. . .] As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all—the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them” (*Sorcerer's* 297). These lines—and the philosophy underlying them—are worthy of Lewis himself. Surely J. K. Rowling is the magician's niece!

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