

**QUEEN SUSAN THE PROBLEM: SUSAN PEVENSIE IN C. S. LEWIS'  
CHRONICLES OF NARNIA**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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## ABSTRACT

Queen Susan the Problem: Susan Pevensie in C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*

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C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* is one of the most acclaimed series in children's literature. One of the most controversial instances in this influential series is the exclusion of one of the main characters, Susan Pevensie, from Aslan's Country, which is symbolic of heaven. Many scholars have debated why this is or what this could mean. The most common interpretation is that Susan is condemned because of her femininity or discovery of sex. This paper takes an opposing view and suggests that Susan's story is not over because her character reflects Lewis himself and his walk of faith. In their early childhoods, Lewis and Susan experience faith that is shrouded in fear, and they turn to doubt and apostasy in their adolescence. In Lewis' life we see his return to faith after tragedy, making this a likely outcome for Susan as well. The idea that Susan Pevensie represents a faith similar to Lewis' adds a deeper meaning to her fate and suggest that she will return to faith in the future.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the field of children's literature, there are few series quite as well-known and beloved as C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. Most famous of all the books in the series is *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which follows the four Pevensie children as they discover the world of Narnia. In the final installment of the series, *The Last Battle*, readers are reunited with favorite characters from the series as Narnia comes to an end and those loyal to the Lion enter Aslan's Country. However, many readers are surprised to find Susan Pevensie absent from this reunion and largely excluded from the story. In fact, all that is said about Susan fits onto a single page, where Susan's siblings and friends tell King Tirian that Susan is no longer a friend of Narnia and was not with them when they appeared in Aslan's Country. Unbeknownst to the group at the time, they have all died and entered heaven, but Susan has not.

Many readers have questioned what happened to Susan after the events of this book since its publication in 1956. Scholars have also taken notice of how Susan is treated in this installment, and for a long time, the academic belief has been that Lewis keeps Susan out of heaven for liking frivolous, girly things and for acting grown up. Much of the scholarship has also focused on accusing Lewis of misogyny and using his choice to exclude Susan from Aslan's Country as proof of this. This paper seeks to look beyond the argument that this choice points to Lewis as a misogynist, and rather suggests that Lewis structured Susan's story to show a faith journey similar to his own. Both author and character share many of the same paths and struggles when it comes to faith. Lewis and Susan both show cautious faith in childhood and turn to apostasy because of doubt. Lewis' future as a devout Christian gives readers a more probable view into the eternal destiny of Susan Pevensie.

## 1. THE FEMINIST READING OF SUSAN

The scholarship about Susan comes almost exclusively from the feminist perspective. As early as the 1970s, scholars analyzed Lewis' depiction of his female characters, and they questioned if Lewis' choice to exclude Susan from the final book reflects his attitude toward women. Lewis' attitude toward women has continued to be a prevalent conversation in Lewis studies in recent years, and it has become one of the only perspectives scholars take when it comes to Susan. Very few scholars focus on Susan herself or see the deeper role her character plays as a reflection of Lewis.

Neil Gaiman's 2004 short story "The Problem of Susan" is the most popular reading of the fate of Susan Pevensie following the events of *The Last Battle*. The phrase "The Problem of Susan" has even become a term often used by scholars to discuss Susan (Gordon, Fry). In addition, the phrase is used by casual readers to describe the treatment of Susan in the series' final installment. A quick internet search reveals multiple blog posts and YouTube videos detailing readers' feelings on "the problem of Susan," with titles like "The REAL Problem of Susan Pevensie," "How do you solve a problem like Susan Pevensie?," and "Is Susan A Problem?". While it seems interesting that a work of fiction has so heavily impacted Lewis scholarship, it is actually very appropriate considering Lewis encouraged readers to write their own stories of what happens after the *Chronicles*. When responding to a child's letter about what else happens in Narnia, Lewis writes "I'm afraid I've said all I had to say about Narnia, and there will be no more of these stories. But why don't you try to write one yourself?" (*Children* 101). Gaiman accepts Lewis' invitation in writing his short story.

In “The Problem of Susan,” Susan, who has not been taken to Aslan’s Country, becomes a professor of children’s literature, and most of the story takes place during an interview with a young journalist many years later. Gaiman’s elderly version of Susan is resentful about what happened to her siblings. When describing the fate of her family to Gerta, the journalist interviewing her, she says, “It was a long time ago that they died. Were killed. I should say” (Gaiman 185). Instead of saying her family died in a train crash, Susan instead says they were killed, which would imply that someone caused their deaths. Susan seems to place blame on someone for the death of her family, likely Aslan or God due to the professor’s later comment that “a god who would punish me for liking nylons and parties by making me walk through that school dining room, with flies, to identify Ed, well...he’s enjoying himself a bit too much, isn’t he?” (187). Gaiman seems to believe that Susan’s exclusion from *The Last Battle* indicates an eternal exclusion from Aslan’s Country. He voices this belief through Gerta’s suggestion that “there must have been something else wrong with Susan...something they didn’t tell us. Otherwise she wouldn’t have been damned like that” (186). Gaiman suggests that this “something else wrong” is a fascination or discovery of sex and romantic relationships.

While Gaiman’s text is a work of fiction, an interpretation as valid as anyone else’s, it has influenced much of the scholarly discussion of C. S. Lewis’ treatment of Susan and her fate. Gaiman’s idea of the “something else wrong” with her being sexual maturity is one of the most common schools of thought about why Lewis made the choice to leave Susan out of the reunion in Aslan’s country. Somehow, her interest in only “nylons and lipstick and invitations” correlates in many people’s minds with a discovery of sex (*Last Battle* 169). Scholars also tend to believe that Susan is rejected from Aslan’s country forever because of her exclusion from the final book (Gordon, Fredrick and McBride). Some even go as far as to say Lewis attacks women



specifically by using common interests of young women to exclude Susan from Narnia (Gordon, Fredrick and McBride). Candice Fredrick and Sam McBride have published notable research on the Inklings, a group of friends at Oxford, including Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams, who would gather to read any manuscripts they had been working on and to discuss literature. Fredrick and McBride have used Susan's exclusion from Narnia to argue that Lewis has a negative opinion of women and that his female characters often reflect this attitude. Margaret Hannay argues that "many women have grown so sensitive to the underlying prejudice" they find in his work "that they no longer appreciate Lewis' work as a whole" (15). In fact, there is little literature on Susan Pevensie herself. Most of it simply uses Susan as a weapon against Lewis and a basis to claim he was a misogynist. Andy Gordon insists that "the 'problem of Susan' might not be Susan's problem so much as C.S. Lewis's problem" (72). It does seem odd that these scholars who are so concerned with the "problem of Susan" seem to spend most of their arguments discussing their problems with C. S. Lewis.

Fredrick and McBride refute the idea that Lewis' depiction of women is due to having little experience with women in his real life. They study the Inklings and their depiction of women, saying that "C. S. Lewis had the most complicated relationships with women" of the Inklings and that there was "something peculiar concerning his attitudes toward gender" (*Women* 56-57). The Inklings all had a strong bond with one another and have in recent years been criticized for being exclusively male. Lewis being a member of the Inklings has led to the idea that he was a "male separatist" and "misogynist," but Fredrick and McBride find that "the claim that Lewis had limited experience of women is surely overstated" (*Women* 55, 57, 95). They go on to list many women in Lewis' sphere of influence such as maids, Ms. Moore, students he taught, and Joy Davidman as proof that Lewis was familiar with women in his life.

Fredrick and McBride are most critical of Lewis' early depictions of women, and they find that his characterization of women progresses throughout his career. One example of this is their commentary on Lewis' exclusion of girls from physical fighting in his books. They take Father Christmas' assertion that "Battles are ugly when women fight" to be Lewis' own stance on the subject (*Lion* 118). However, while some girls, like Susan, prefer not to fight in battles, characters like Lucy and Jill are shown to participate in combat in later books, both being archers in conflicts in *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle* respectively. Fredrick and McBride do note the varying nature of girls in combat and praise Lewis for having female characters who are "diverse in personality" in the *Narnia Chronicles* ("Battling" 37). Fredrick and McBride also address *Till We Have Faces* as Lewis' best depiction of women in his writing. This is due to the well fleshed out character of Orual, who is a warrior, and who as the protagonist depicts a full range of human emotion and development. They, like others, credit Lewis' changing depiction of women in this novel to his relationship with his wife, Joy, saying "one is hard pressed to account for this growth without positing the influence of the woman who became his wife" ("Battling" 38). They suggest that Lewis' relationship with Joy helped him to write more developed female characters, culminating in *Till We Have Faces* in 1956.

Interestingly, *The Last Battle* was also published in 1956, and Lewis is accused of sexism for his treatment of Susan, which was also written during his relationship with Joy. Why is it then that Lewis treats these two heroines so differently? *Till We Have Faces* is intended for an adult audience, while Susan's story is intended for children. The difference in audience may account in part for the vast difference in the depiction of the two women. It is also important to note that Lewis' accomplishment was not just being able to write a strong warrior queen like

Orual, but in being able to depict several different types of women, including a twentieth century teenage girl like Susan.

When it comes to Susan Pevensie, Fredrick and McBride have a pessimistic view of her fate and treatment in *The Last Battle*. They view what the friends of Narnia say as the final word on the matter, claiming that “more than simply disallowing [Susan] from Narnia, Lewis may have determined her future destiny” (*Women* 149). They do acknowledge that “there is no definite indication of Susan’s fate after her death, but they find that “her positioning as no longer a ‘friend of Narnia’ – that is, a friend of heaven – strongly suggests that she is not on the road to eternal bliss” (*Women* 149). Thus, Fredrick and McBride argue that Lewis has kept Susan out of Narnia forever. On top of that, they insist that “the fact that Susan is missing suggests that women are more prone to temptation, or more resistant to Jesus-Aslan’s justification and sanctification, than men” (*Women* 149). Fredrick and McBride do not only misread the fate of Susan Pevensie, but they take the argument farther by suggesting that her treatment means Lewis believes women are less likely to reach heaven than men, which was not Lewis’ stance.

Another major voice in the feminist reading of Susan is Andy Gordon, who views Lewis’ choice to exclude Susan from *The Last Battle* as “the discipline and containment of Susan Pevensie” (54). He finds that Lewis “disposes” of Susan because of her “aspirations to adulthood” and asserts that “sexual desire has no place in Narnia,” so “for Susan, Narnia might come to stand for the frustration, and her own collusive repression, of her desire” (71, 52, 65). He focuses on the failed relationship between Susan and Rabadash in *The Horse and His Boy* where Susan considers a marriage proposal from the Calormen prince. This is the only instance throughout the *Chronicles* of any of the Pevensies pursuing a romantic relationship. Since marriage is the only context where sex is permitted in Lewis’ children’s stories, Gordon suggests

that “the fact that she seems to be seriously considering this marriage suggests that...she is, then, not just desirable but desiring in her own right” (57). However, Gordon reads Susan’s relationship with Rabadash as something that must be corrected in Susan, saying she “must learn not to desire Rabadash” (61). He believes that her behavior has to be reprimanded because sex is not allowed in Narnia, so Susan desiring a relationship must be wrong. Susan soon does find Rabadash undesirable after seeing his childish and monstrous nature once he is back in his home country, where he is selfish and willing to go to war to get what he wants (*Horse* 68, 118). However, Gordon does note how interesting it is that Susan is missing from the story after she and Edmund escape from Calormen (68). He suggests that “Susan’s absence from the last chapters of *The Horse and His Boy* prefigures her absence from the final book, her absence from heaven” (68).

Gordon, like Gaiman, believes that “Susan’s interests in ‘nylons and lipsticks and invitations’ (LB 12.128) is an expression of her sexuality, and that she is punished for this by not being admitted to Aslan’s country in *The Last Battle*” (56). Therefore, he argues that “it must be Susan’s story in particular that” Lewis “did not want to write,” and he takes this as “recognition that her story might have had to include sex” (55). Gordon asks “If for Susan Narnia is a place of desire denied, frustrated, stifled and repressed, why would she want to be in a heaven like that? Why would she want to be a friend of Narnia?” (66). He concludes that Susan’s exclusion from Aslan’s country should be seen as “a rejection of what Aslan’s country—heaven—stands for.” (72). He finds that Susan is “turning away rather than being turned away” and that this is “something to be celebrated” (66). Gordon’s argument goes to the extreme of taking something that has upset casual readers and scholars alike, Susan’s exclusion from Narnia, by suggesting it

should be viewed as an absolute positive for Susan. What Gordon misses is that Susan does not need to repent of sexual desire, but of simple unbelief.

Other critics take a less extreme view of Lewis and his depiction of Susan Pevensie. Karla Faust argues that in *The Horse and His Boy*, “Lewis makes a definitive statement in support of a woman’s right to develop according to her talents and desires instead of along culturally defined pathways” (17). An important moment to discuss is Prince Corin saying that Susan is “not like Lucy, you know, who’s as good as a man, or at any rate as good as a boy. Queen Susan is more like an ordinary grown-up lady. She doesn’t ride to wars, though she is an excellent archer” (*Horse* 196). Many take offense from this comment because it seems to be putting Susan down because she does not ride into battle, and it suggests that Lucy cannot be as good of a fighter as a man because she is a girl. The idea of being as good as a man or a boy could be easily explained by it coming from the young and arrogant prince. Additionally, as Faust points out, “this reference to an ordinary grown-up lady, which at first appears sexist, is perhaps a simple observation of fact. Although women were permitted to fight in battle, it was not common for...women to do so” (16). The Narnian Queens are free to choose whether they fight or not, and the valiant Lucy prefers to, while Susan chooses not to participate in the battle. Faust emphasizes that Susan’s “options have remained open and she is free to pursue the adventurous life,” however, she has chosen what Faust dubs a “sedentary life” (16). In contrast to Calormene culture that forces women into marriage, Lewis writes Narnia as a place “where false restrictions based on sex are scorned and women are free to behave as they please” (Faust 17). This freedom of choice applies to both marriage and fighting.

Scholars like Margaret Hannay are more interested in digging into the accusations of misogyny against Lewis. She suggests that “Lewis must have done something to establish his

reputation as a misogynist at Oxford,” and claims that biographies suggest that “Lewis could properly be called a misogynist on at least the ‘theoretical level’” (15, 16). Hannay goes on to argue that Lewis was “decidedly not so in his personal relations with individual women,” especially after his marriage to Joy Davidman (15). She does also note Lewis’ changing attitudes towards women and how he depicted them in his books. She discusses how in 1945, Lewis “was not yet ready to portray a strong and godly woman as a fully developed character,” but “*Till We Have Faces* (1956) proves that Lewis...finally” came “to see that women are fully human rather than some separate and inferior species” (Hannay 18, 20). Again, this distinction is important when it comes to Susan because *The Last Battle* was published the same year as *Till We Have Faces*, meaning Lewis was writing well developed female characters at this time.

However, not all scholars align with the typical feminist view. Monika Hilder, in her book *The Feminine Ethos in C. S. Lewis’s “Chronicles of Narnia,”* argues that “the idea that gender discourse is the most controversial topic in Lewis studies today tells us perhaps more about our time than about C.S. Lewis” (159). She claims that “Lewis was not a theoretical misogynist, but rather, paradoxically, a theoretical feminist in theological thinking. For all his masculine bluster, he consistently affirmed values associated with the feminine” (5). Lewis does this by contrasting classical, masculine heroism with what Hilder calls “feminine,” “spiritual heroism” (Hilder 11). The idea that Lewis uses spiritual feminism that has been misread by many feminist scholars is what sets Hilder’s commentary apart. To Hilder, “classical heroism...is characterized by values such as reason, autonomy, activity, aggression, conquest, deceit, and pride,” while “spiritual heroism is characterized by values such as imagination, interdependence, passivity, care, submission, truthfulness, and humility” (Hilder 7, 8). Hilder describes theological feminism as “a metaphor for the ideal relationship between “feminine” humanity and the

“masculine” divine” (12). Hilder points out that “Lewis gives these “feminine” qualities to all his truly heroic characters, male and female, and shows that there is always a battle raging between classical and spiritual heroism in every heart. Through this emphasis Lewis challenges cultural sexism in his embrace of the “feminine” ethos.” (Hilder 20). Hilder’s work suggests that the feminist reading has been missing the theological layer of Lewis’ attitude toward gender. She argues that “we assume that Lewis is sexist when he is in fact applauding the “feminine” heroic... While we suspect or even denounce Lewis for sexism, he is in fact challenging our own,” and “[his] depiction of gender and gender-as-metaphor is much more fluid and nuanced than ours often seems to be. In this sense, he is ahead of his time — a peculiar progressive” (Hilder 160, 161). Hilder’s work has begun taking the scholarly discussion away from Lewis’ supposed sexism when it comes to his writing. While Hilder has refuted much of the previous feminist reading on C. S. Lewis, she has still not properly addressed what I find to be Susan’s ultimate role in the *Narnia* series.

What the current commentary is missing when discussing Susan and her problematic depiction is that Susan’s life and personality are reflective of Lewis’ own. A. N. Wilson, a Lewis biographer, finds that Lewis puts reflections of himself into his prose in texts such as *Letters to Malcolm*, *Chiefly on Prayer*, and *The Great Divorce*. Wilson asserts that “Lewis was in fact an obsessive autobiographer...he had a capacity to project images of himself into prose; sometimes, one feels, without quite realizing what he was doing” (Wilson xvii). Therefore, it would make sense that Lewis would depict a walk of faith similar to his own in a story as extensive as the *Chronicles*.

## 2. FEARFUL FAITH: THE EARLY LIFE OF LEWIS AND SUSAN

When comparing the similarities between C. S. Lewis and Susan Pevensie, it makes the most sense to start at the beginning. Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland in 1898. Lewis' autobiography and many biographies alike discuss how close he was to his brother Warnie when they were children, especially after the death of their mother. Wilson describes how "Warnie was really his only friend, the one with whom he shared his fantasies" (18). Lewis' parents were Protestant and raised their sons as such. In his autobiography of his early life and conversion to faith, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis explains that he simply took in what he was told about God from church in his early childhood, saying "I naturally accepted what I was told but I cannot remember feeling much interest in it" (*Surprised* 7). Overall, Lewis' early childhood was marked by closeness with his brother, the death of his mother, and a disinterested participation in Christianity.

It was in Lewis' school days that he accepted Christianity for himself and lived out his faith. After the death of his mother, Lewis' father sent him and his brother to several boarding schools. Lewis describes one of them, "Oldie's school," nicknamed after the headmaster, as the place in which he "became an effective believer," and "the effect was to bring to life what I would already have said that I believed." (*Surprised* 34). Instead of just taking in what he was taught about faith from those around him, Lewis began to live out his beliefs of his own accord. Lewis began to truly believe, but he confesses that "in this experience there was a great deal of fear" (*Surprised* 34). He "began to seriously pray and to read [his] Bible and to attempt to obey [his] conscience," but he did this out of a mix of faith and a fear of what the consequences would



be if he did not do these things (*Surprised* 34). Also, during his school years, adults often recognized Lewis' intelligence and considered him a "child prodigy" (Wilson 30). Academic achievement would come to be a large part of Lewis' self-identity. These elements of faith, fear, and intelligence were all combined within Lewis during his school years.

When reading about Susan Pevensie early in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, similarities are easily drawn between her life and the early life of the author. The reader first sees Susan in the context of her family, where she begins her adventures in the close-knit community of her siblings. Adults in her world focus on Susan's beauty, calling her the pretty one of her family, much as the adults in Lewis' experience had defined him by his intelligence (*Voyage* 3).

One of the main elements that Lewis shares with Susan is her cautious approach to adventure and faith. Fear characterizes Susan in her time in Narnia, as she is constantly concerned for the safety of her siblings and herself. At the first sign of trouble the Pevensies stumble across, the note on Tumnus' door saying he has been arrested, Susan says "I don't know that I'm going to like this place after all" (*Lion* 64). Afterwards, she is quick to suggest the group turn back and leave Narnia, saying "I wonder if there's any point in going on...I mean, it doesn't seem particularly safe here and it looks as if it won't be much fun either...What about just going home?" (*Lion* 65). Even Susan's gift from Father Christmas is one that will help her when she is afraid, a horn that will call for help (*Lion* 118). However, Susan's fear is not solely bad. One of the most important discussions about what Aslan the lion is like stems from Susan's fear and concern for safety when she asks "Is he — quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion" (*Lion* 86). Mr. Beaver responds, "Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King I tell you" (*Lion* 86). Lewis uses Susan's fear to highlight the good nature of Aslan regardless of

whether or not he is safe. Lewis is able to draw from his own fearful relationship with God through a relatable character who has a similar path to faith as he did in his early years.

Susan's siblings are able to convince her to stay in Narnia and participate in the adventure, despite her fear. After deciding to follow her siblings on their journey, Susan is able to build a deep connection to Aslan, partially because of her femininity. Leading up to the time of Aslan's death, it is the female characters who are closest to him and who have the faith to follow him wherever he goes. Most readers will quickly think of Lucy as having an intimate relationship with Aslan, but Susan's own devotion to Aslan is not to be ignored. "It [is] Susan and Lucy who [see] most of him" the day before Aslan will offer himself up in Edmund's place (*Lion* 160). While this instance shows us that Lucy and Susan are the ones physically closest to Aslan for much of their time with him, the reader can also see that the girls are close to Aslan on an emotional level as well. Susan has enough intimacy with Aslan to know that "there's been something wrong with him all afternoon" the day before his death (*Lion* 162). Not only that, but "this feeling affect[s] Susan so much that she [can't] get to sleep when she [goes] to bed" (*Lion* 161). Additionally, Susan and Lucy are present for the important moment of Aslan's sacrifice. Hilder points out "that it is not the physical battle, but Aslan's passion unto death—the ultimate passivity which the girls (and not the boys) accompany — that wins the war," and "in this Lewis subverts the typical understanding that consolatory females have lesser roles than military males" (Hilder 160). For someone who is concerned whether Aslan is safe or not, Susan develops a deep relationship with the lion quickly, which allows her to be present for the true victory of the story.

The relationship that Susan has developed with Aslan is reminiscent of the disciples' relationship with Jesus. This is not surprising, considering Lewis described his inspiration for writing Narnia to a child reader as "let us *suppose* that there were a land like Narnia and that the

Son of God, as He became a Man in our world, became a Lion there” (*Letters* 45). Due to Lewis’ work as an apologetic writer and his writing of Narnia as a reimagined gospel, it is safe to assume that he would have had the gospels in mind when writing the *Chronicles*. Specifically, Susan’s relationship with Aslan echoes the apostle Thomas’ relationship with Jesus. While the comparison of Susan to the apostle Thomas can be made for both of their tendencies to doubt, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, their statements of faith can also be compared. When many of the disciples are hesitant to go with Jesus to their friend Lazarus’ tomb, Thomas “said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him’” (John 11:16). Thomas is explicitly willing to follow Jesus even unto death, and in this instance, he does not show the doubt he is often characterized by. Likewise, when Aslan goes to leave camp in the middle of the night, Susan asks, “Please, may we come with you—wherever you’re going?” (*Lion* 164). Susan has developed such a deep faith in Aslan that she is willing to follow him anywhere, so much so that she unknowingly asks to accompany him to his execution.

Another correlation between Susan and Thomas the apostle is their willingness to ask questions. Later in the gospel of John, Jesus tells His disciples “I go to prepare a place for you...and you know the way to where I am going” (John 14:2,4). Thomas is willing to ask “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (John 14:5). It is this questioning statement that leads to Jesus’ famous words, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Similarly, Susan’s question about Aslan’s safety leads to the important definition of his good character. Like Thomas, Susan has true faith in Aslan, even if she is often characterized by doubt rather than belief.

At the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the reader sees the Pevensies as young adults in Narnia, and even here there are important elements to Susan’s character and

belief. When the siblings come upon the area where they first had entered Narnia, Susan is the first one to notice the “tree of iron” (203). However, she has been in Narnia so long and so much forgotten her life in England that she does not know what it is. Interestingly, even in Narnia, Susan has not yet matured out of her cautious nature, and she urges her siblings to “return to” their “horses and follow this White Stag no further” (204). Susan does not want to venture past the lamppost, which she does not know would lead the Pevensies back to England. Yet again, her brothers and sister convince her to “go on and take the adventure that shall fall to us” (204-205). This interaction offers an interesting contrast to Susan’s desire to return home to England earlier in the story, when she is convinced by her siblings to stay. Now, Susan has forgotten her other life and yet again wants to stay safe where she is. Susan is convinced to unknowingly leave Narnia by her siblings that are generally thought to have deeper faith. This should be considered when looking at where the Pevensie siblings end up at the end of the series.

Lewis uses inspiration from his personal experiences to depict the early faith life of Susan. Both author and character are close with their siblings, experience faith that is shrouded in fear, and have certain qualities pushed on them by adults. This combination of elements is part of what lead both Lewis and his character Susan to question and step away from their childhood belief.

### 3. DOUBT AND APOSTASY: THE ADOLESCENT YEARS OF LEWIS AND SUSAN

While the early years of Lewis and Susan's life are marked by cautious faith, as they become young adults, doubt begins to creep in. Doubt leads to a turn from God in both Lewis and Susan, and it will come to define the next period of their lives. Lewis' drift into doubt was aided by his move away from the church and school where he became a practicing Christian to a new school, Chartres. It was here that Lewis, in his words, "ceased to be a Christian...it had not begun when I went there and...the process was complete very shortly after I left" (*Surprised* 58). He attributes the loss of his faith to the influence of a Miss C., who practiced the occult. Lewis claims that "little by little, unconsciously, unintentionally, she loosened the whole framework, blunted all the sharp edges, of my belief...the Enemy did this to me, taking occasion from things she innocently said" (*Surprised* 60). Lewis adds that what was also "working against my faith" during this time was a "deeply ingrained pessimism...much more of intellect than of temper" (*Surprised* 63). Through his changing schools, pessimism, and the influence of the Enemy through Miss C., Lewis says "I became an apostate, dropping my faith with no sense of loss but with the greatest relief" (*Surprised* 66).

Interestingly, Lewis characterizes his time at school when he became an apostate by describing his concern with his appearance, clothing, and popularity. He describes becoming "dressy" with "'spread' ties with pins in them...very low cut coats and trousers worn very high to show startling socks, and brogue shoes with immensely wide laces" (*Surprised* 67). Lewis describes feeling "embarrassment" looking back and remembering "the concern that I felt about pressing my trousers and (filthy habit) plastering my hair with oil" (*Surprised* 67). Lewis

developed a “desire for glitter, swagger, distinction, the desire to be in the know” and says he “began to labor very hard to make [himself] into a fop, a cad, and a snob” (*Surprised* 68). A. N. Wilson suggests in her biography of Lewis that “his saying that he hates himself for becoming a ‘prig’ and a ‘snob’ is really another way of saying he hates himself for having grown up at all” (Wilson 29). Wilson finds that part of Lewis’ autobiography consists of him looking back on his boyhood and being ashamed of losing his faith. Therefore, Wilson ties Lewis’ concern with his appearance to his desire to grow up. It is this focus on appearing fashionable and grownup that characterized Lewis in his turn from faith.

Lewis also had a habit of separating elements of his life from each other in a peculiar way. Wilson describes Lewis as feeling that he “belonged to” an “old world,” and that he felt like an “alien” in the time he had been born into (36). During his later school days, he began to separate his life into an inner imaginative life and an outer academic life. Lewis himself admits that in *Surprised by Joy*, he is “telling a story of two lives. They have nothing to do with each other...fix your eyes on either and it claims to be the sole truth” (119). Lewis explains that, when looking back, “the two lives do not seem to influence each other at all” (78). Later in his young adult years, C. S. Lewis lived with an army friend’s mother Mrs. Moore and would travel back to his father’s house for visits. Wilson describes “Jack moving to and fro between his two homes, trying in each to pretend that the other did not exist” (67). This separation of lives is part of what kept Lewis in apostasy, and it was only when he returned to faith that his lives merged together.

Pessimism was also a strong force in Lewis’ young adult years. He describes himself as someone who “had always been more violent in my negative demands than my positive demands” (*Surprised* 116). His negative stance was so strong that “the pessimism, or cowardice...would prefer non-existence itself to even the mildest unhappiness” (*Surprised* 117).

Lewis carried this attitude with him when we went to his next level of schooling, private instruction with a Mr. Kirkpatrick. Lewis claims that his “atheism and pessimism were fully formed” when he arrived there, and “what [he] got there was merely fresh ammunition for the defense of a position already chosen” (*Surprised* 140). At Kirkpatrick’s Lewis was taught rhetorical argumentation, and his knowledge and intellect that he had been praised for in his early childhood soon became the way he understood and defended his position against God.

Many of these elements that are evident in Lewis’ life during his young adult years show up in his depiction of Susan Pevensie. While Susan shows strong elements of faith in the first installment of the *Chronicles*, there are some times when her fear appears like doubt. Faust suggests that Susan’s characteristics in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* “are harbingers of her future rift with Narnia” (16). For example, the first impression the reader receives of Susan is Edmund accusing her of “trying to talk like mother,” and from that point forward, it seems that Susan is often trying to act or appear grown up (2). Faust points out that Susan “is presented as sensible and practical, the older sister with a tendency to talk like a grown-up...noticeably concerned with comfort, complaining of hunger and cold...repeatedly [expressing] the desire to go home” (16). Additionally, Susan’s first response to being told she will understand more about Aslan when she sees him is to ask, “But shall we see him?” (86). Susan is not as quick to believe there is an Aslan to be seen, although she has already seen some of the wonders of Narnia. Faust notes that “Susan does express genuine affection for Aslan early in *The Chronicles*, yet she is prevented from a deep relationship with him by her fear” (16). Faust cites Susan’s concerns that Aslan would leave Edmund to the mercy of the White Witch and her hesitance to turn around after hearing the stone table crack as examples of Susan’s fear keeping her from intimacy with Aslan. Susan’s response to hearing about the Deep Magic requiring Aslan to give Edmund up to

the White Witch is to question Aslan, asking “you won’t, will you?” (156). Susan has just met Aslan, and she is scared that he will give her brother up to death. Later, when Lucy and Susan hear the stone table break, Susan says “I feel afraid to turn around,” fearing “something awful is happening” (177). In this moment, it seems that Susan is so hopeless after watching Aslan’s execution that she assumes whatever has happened must be bad. To Faust, all of these characteristics point to Susan’s eventual doubt and turn from Narnia.

Susan’s doubt and concern for safety also lead her to ask dangerous questions. When Susan hears that Edmund must be given over to the White Witch, she wonders if Aslan would actually go through with it, hesitant to trust him. However, she goes on to ask “Can’t we do something about the Deep Magic? Isn’t there something you can work against?” (*Lion* 156). Aslan responds, “Work against the Emperor’s Magic?” and he turns to her “with something like a frown on his face. And nobody ever made that suggestion to him again” (*Lion* 156). Susan is unknowingly asking Aslan to go against the Magic of his father, the Emperor, to save her brother. Aslan is then visibly upset or disappointed by Susan’s suggestion.

This instance may remind the Christian reader of the apostle Peter having a similar moment with Jesus in the gospel of Matthew. In chapter 16, Jesus tells his disciples that he will suffer, die, and be raised again on the third day. Peter responds, saying “Far be it from you. Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matthew 16:22). Jesus responds to Peter with “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hinderance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Matthew 16: 23). Peter, like Susan, is rebuked for suggesting going against God’s plan. However, Peter was one of Jesus closest friends and went on to be a great leader of the church in spite of this incident. So, although Susan may be setting her mind on things of man, she still has potential to serve Aslan loyally.



In Susan's later adventures in Narnia in *Prince Caspian*, Lewis also reflects his tendency to keep his world separate through Susan's treatment of England and Narnia. When the Pevensies are called back to Narnia and find themselves in the ruin of a great castle, Peter tells Susan "anyone would think you had forgotten that we ourselves were once Kings and Queens" (14). Susan does not seem to remember Narnia as easily as her siblings do, but she does remember their "castle of Cair Paravel," and asks, "how could I forget?" (15). The longer she is in Narnia, the more she can remember about it and the further away England feels. At one point, Susan refers to "that other place —England, I mean" (26). She seems to forget about England when she is in Narnia as quickly as she forgets about Narnia when she is in England. When it is time for the siblings to leave the ruins of Cair Paravel, it "had begun to feel like home again" to them, including Susan (116). It is also interesting that the "one small noise" that "brought back the old days to the children's minds more than anything that had happened yet" was Susan plucking her bowstring (28). Susan may seem to have forgotten some about Narnia, but it was her horn that called the Pevensies back there. Also, the sound of Susan's bow holds the deepest memories of Narnia for all the siblings. Susan's ability to completely immerse herself in Narnia, so much so that she seems to forget all about England echoes Lewis' tendency to keep areas of his life entirely separate from one another.

Susan also acts more grown up in this novel. She is "practical Susan," always trying to make a plan, but this practicality leads to conflict with her siblings (128). In an argument, Edmund claims that "she always is a wet blanket" (125). The practical and more grown-up side of Susan contrasts with Lucy's childlike faith. When Lucy is trying to convince the others that she has really seen Aslan, Susan responds "in her most annoying grown-up voice, "You've been dreaming, Lucy"" (152). Lucy becomes frustrated with this treatment, and she tells Susan "Don't

talk like a grown-up” (132). When Lucy continues to say that she sees Aslan, Susan argues that “there isn’t anything to see. She’s been dreaming,” and she tells Lucy “Don’t talk nonsense” (155, 156). When the Pevensies and Trumpkin are trying to decide what to do, Susan even uses Lucy’s age against her, saying “It’s four to one and you’re the youngest” (157). In this entire disagreement between Lucy and her siblings, the narrator tells the reader “Susan was the worst” (157). Overall, the conflict between the siblings highlights Susan’s pragmatism and tendency to act grown up.

However, Susan’s grown-up nature does not just lead to conflict with her siblings, it also reveals her doubt. Lucy really has seen Aslan, and eventually Peter and Edmund see him too because of their faith. Hilder suggests that “the older siblings can only see Aslan when they relinquish self-reliance for childlike trust, as Lucy does.” (52) At this point, “everyone except Susan and the dwarf [can] see him” (160). Susan and Trumpkin are the last to see Aslan because they are the ones that doubt the most that he is there. Hilder argues that in *Prince Caspian*, “the contest is between rationalistic self-reliance and childlike faith that is maturing in commitment” (49). It is only when Susan gives up her independent arrogance that she is able to see Aslan. Susan is willing to apologize to Lucy when she does finally see Aslan, saying “I see him now. I’m sorry” (161). She goes on to tell Lucy “I’ve been far worse than you know. I really believed it was him...yesterday...I really believed it was him to-night, when you woke us up. I mean, deep down inside. Or I could have, if I’d let myself” (161). This confession from Susan allows the reader to see the nature of her doubt. Deep down, she believed, but she did not let herself fully believe in Aslan when she could not see him. Hilder claims “the role of choice in belief and unbelief is critical” (52). This also shows the reader how believing in Aslan is a choice, and that Susan still has the ability to make the choice to see him.

Susan is scared to approach Aslan after her doubtful journey to him. “Susan and the Dwarf [shrink] back” when he [approaches], and Susan wonders “what ever am I to say to him?” (162, 161). However, Aslan does not push her away, but draws her in, saying “you have listened to fears, child” (162). Aslan uses his breath to help Susan turn from her fears. He says “Come, let me breathe on you. Forget them. Are you brave again?” (162). Susan responds, “a little, Aslan” (162). Hilder explains that “Aslan mercifully encourages her to trust him; and with the Lion’s breath on her she can begin to exchange her fears for bravery” (52). Aslan does not turn Susan away for her doubt, but draws her to him, teaching her not to give into fear. Later on in the novel, the reader sees Susan restored to an intimate relationship with Aslan when he invites Susan and Lucy to “ride on my back again today” (211). This invitation shows the restored relationship with Aslan, as he invites the girls to ride with him into battle, and Susan agrees to do so. Hilder describes Susan’s journey throughout the novel, saying “*Prince Caspian* represents “the second stage of spiritual development” in which the somewhat older child experiences “the mood of doubt and disillusionment ... associated with early adolescence”” (39). She also claims that Susan’s “return to Narnia after one year’s absence requires a rediscovery of Aslan and of [her] relation to him” (48). Susan develops an even deeper relationship with Aslan because her faith has been challenged, and she has come out the other side back in a right relationship with him. This is a pattern the reader sees repeatedly in Susan’s walk of faith, and the reader can safely infer that this pattern will continue throughout her life.

Lewis’ apologetics background appears again in how Susan’s journey in this book echoes a story in the gospel of John. Susan’s progression in *Prince Caspian* is easily compared to the story of the apostle Thomas. After His resurrection, Jesus appears to his disciples, but “Thomas...was not with them when Jesus came” (John 20:24). When the other disciples tell

Thomas that they have seen Jesus resurrected, he tells them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (John 20:25). About a week later, Jesus appears again to the disciples, this time with Thomas present, and says to Thomas “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:27). Afterwards, Thomas answers him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Thomas is returned to a correct relationship with Christ, and Susan and Aslan’s reconciliation reflects this. Jesus uses this moment to give the lesson that “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,” but he does not push away or disqualify Thomas for believing after seeing (John 20:29). This exchange is reflected in Aslan’s conversation with Susan. Jesus and Aslan alike address the unbelief in their disciple, but they do not push Thomas and Susan away, but help them to believe. Jesus and Aslan both do not refute their disciples who doubt them, but they do refute the doubt itself.

Later in the gospel according to Matthew, the disciples and others gather to see Jesus before He ascends to heaven. In this instance, before He gives them the well-known great commission in verses 18-20, the reader is told about the doubt of the group. Scripture says, “when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). It is important to note that while the apostle Thomas often receives the characterization of “Thomas the doubter” several of Jesus’ followers doubted, even when they saw him standing before them, resurrected from the dead. In Luke’s account of the gospel, he records Jesus asking, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” (Luke 24:38). Again, Jesus refutes doubt itself, but he still commissions His doubting followers to go and make more disciples. Likewise, all the Pevensies doubt that Aslan is there at some point, and Aslan uses their doubt as a teaching

moment for them. Doubt is not exclusive to Susan and Thomas, even if they are the ones who are known to suffer from it. It is important to keep this parallel in mind when continuing on in Susan's story throughout the *Chronicles*.

Susan is not physically present in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, but the reader still feels her presence in how others speak about her. Peter and Susan are now too old to return to Narnia, and the only information we receive about Susan in this book is what other people think about her. The Pevensie's parents are going on a trip to America, and they choose to take Susan with them because "grown-ups thought her the pretty one of the family and she was no good at school work (though otherwise very old for her age)" (3). In this less than flattering depiction, the reader again sees Susan's tendency to appear grown up. However, this time we are told that adults think she is mature for her age and that she is beautiful. Interestingly, the reader is never told how Susan feels about her appearance, and the reader is not shown any particular pride or vanity from Susan herself about her looks. The focus on her appearance seems to come from those around her, particularly adults. This echoes the attention Lewis received from his professors regarding his intelligence from the time he was young. Lewis was so often told how intelligent he was, that soon, academics became the sole focus of his life. As he grew older, he was also able to use his secular reasoning to argue against God. Likewise, Susan has the label of beauty thrust upon her, and it appears that she begins to play that part, possibly even neglecting school. Susan begins to turn her attention onto herself and her appearance because that is what those around her value her for. As with the emphasis in Lewis' life on his intelligence, the focus on her appearance is an integral part in her drift away from faith.

Later in *Voyage*, the other mention we get of Susan is from a vision Lucy has while looking through the magician's book. As Lucy ponders whether or not she should use a spell to

make herself beautiful, she sees “Susan (who had always been the beauty of the family) [coming] home from America. The Susan in the picture looked exactly like the real Susan only plainer and with a nasty expression. And Susan was jealous of the dazzling beauty of Lucy, but that didn’t matter a bit because no one cared anything about Susan now” (164, 165). While this vision tells the reader more about Lucy’s jealousy of her sister’s beauty than about Susan herself, there are some things to note here. Again, we see that other people have often reiterated that Susan is beautiful, so much so that Lucy seems to repeat a phrase that she has heard others say most of her life which makes her feel insecure. What is most interesting is that what happens in the vision is a bit of what has happened outside of the books. Readers often adore Lucy, and they forget or villainize Susan for the ending of her story. It is also important to note that while being away in America, Susan is separated from her community of people who believe in Narnia. Overall, the comments about Susan in this book show us what others think of her, and they show us that she is isolated from those that share her faith.

In *The Last Battle*, all that is said about Susan fits onto a single page. King Tirian and his friends have just unknowingly arrived in Aslan’s country. There, he sees the friends of Narnia dressed as kings and queens. Tirian addresses Peter, saying

“If I have read the chronicles aright, there should be another. Has not your Majesty two sisters? Where is Queen Susan?”

“My sister Susan,” answered Peter shortly and gravely, “is no longer a friend of Narnia.”

“Yes,” said Eustace, “and whenever you’ve tried to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says ‘What wonderful memories you have!’

Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children."

"Oh Susan!" said Jill, "she's interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up."

"Grown-up, indeed," said the Lady Polly. "I wish she would grow up. She 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. Her whole idea is to race on to the silliest time of one's life as quick as she can and then stop there as long as she can."

"Well, don't let's talk about that now," said Peter (*Last* 169).

What Peter, Eustace, Jill, and Polly say about Susan is all we know about her at this point. Many readers and scholars alike take Peter's declaration that Susan "is no longer a friend of Narnia" as a final condemnation of Susan (169). However, it does not have to be so. Peter's declaration is not the final word when it comes to Susan's fate, Aslan's would be. Additionally, Peter does not have all of the information about where he is. He along with the other friends of Narnia do not yet know that they have died and have entered Aslan's Country. Peter is simply speaking about Susan excluding herself from the meetings about Narnia, not about her eternal fate. While Susan may no longer choose to be a friend of Narnia, that does not mean that Narnia has ceased to be a friend to Susan. While Peter's words may be harsh, they reveal her current relationship with the friends of Narnia, not her eternal fate.

Eustace says more about Susan's current relationship with Narnia. He reveals that Susan still has some memory of Narnia, but only as a game they played when they were children. This is not surprising considering Susan's pattern of forgetting one world as soon as she enters another. Due to Susan's tendency to keep the worlds of England and Narnia completely separate

in her mind, it appears that she forgotten that Narnia is a real place. However, it seems she still has positive memories with her siblings attached to the idea of Narnia. Susan's forgetfulness is to be expected, especially when considering her similar memory loss in *Prince Caspian*, when Susan seems to quickly forget about one world as soon as she enters another. Eustace's remark about Susan saying "Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games" shows a condescending attitude toward the friends (*Last* 169). Because of this, Eustace's comment about Susan also highlights her desire to sound grown up.

Afterwards, Jill complains that Susan only focuses on things like nylons, lipsticks, and invitations. Many scholars (Gordon, Fredrick and McBride) have taken these examples of things in which Susan is interested to mean that Susan has been excluded from Aslan's Country because these feminine items must mean she has discovered sex or fallen into temptation. Hilder suggests that "the older Susan chooses to pursue societal expectations for the 'pretty' woman over faith in Aslan" (146). However, Susan's apparent interest in her physical and social appearance actually echo Lewis' concerns with these same things in his school days. Just as Lewis was concerned with keeping up with the latest fashions and turning himself into a snob to fit in, Susan seems to be more interested in worldly things than in Narnian things. Hilder explains this idea, quoting Michael Ward, saying:

The operative word in Jill's remark is the word 'nothing': Susan is interested in nothing except superficialities and ephemera...Cosmetics and clothing are not "condemned" as such, but only when replacing "more lasting and rewarding aspects of existence...Susan is not yet in Narnia because she has forfeited what Lewis called "first things" for secondary things...Ward goes so far as to suggest that in view of Lewis's understanding



of first things, “Jill's comments should be taken as a defense of lipstick and nylons...not as an attack upon them!” (145).

The items given as examples are what a young woman Susan’s age would likely have been interested in. Just as Lewis pursued education and popularity above all else, later calling himself an “idolater” for it, these items were chosen to fit Susan’s personality and point to the idolatry in her life (*Surprised* 167). They are not an attack on women and their interests, but a warning against worldly desires like those Lewis pursued in his youth. Karla Faust makes a similar point, saying

The reference to Susan’s preoccupation with lipstick and nylons is not an attempt to identify her with female frivolity, but to represent attractions of the real world which are grossly incongruous with Narnian life. Instead of making a general statement about women, Lewis is using Susan to demonstrate the “hesitant convert,” lured away from Christianity by worldly conventions of her time. Her defection is a question of loyalty, irrespective of age or sex (Faust 16, 17).

Lewis’ own experience as someone lured away from the faith by focusing on how others perceive him shows that Susan’s path in this story is not exclusive to women, in Narnia or in real life.

The last element that the friends discuss about Susan is her desire to appear grown up. Interestingly, Jill, the youngest, is the first to claim that Susan acts too much like a grown-up. While this could be seen as a child simply complaining about what they are not allowed to participate in, Polly, who is an older woman, continues after her, which shows the reader this is not a matter of Jill’s possible immaturity. Polly points out that while she may be trying to act grown up, Susan still has quite a bit of growing up to do. Polly is able to look at Susan’s choices

from a retrospective lens, as she has experienced the age Susan is now. In an essay about writing for children, Lewis describes the childish fascination with being grown up. He says

To be concerned about being grown up, to admire the grown up because it is grown up, to blush at the suspicion of being childish; these things are the marks of childhood and adolescence...to carry on into middle life or even into early manhood this concern about being an adult is a mark of really arrested development...When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up (*Stories* 34).

Susan has not yet reached middle life, so she cannot be charged with arrested development. However, by Lewis' definition, Susan has not yet become grown up because she seems much too concerned with appearing so.

After these comments are made about Susan, Peter changes the subject. This is the end of what we know for certain about her. What is interesting about the exchange is not just what the friends have to say about Susan, but which of the friends do not speak. As Susan's older brother, it makes sense that Peter would be one of the people to tell us about Susan's attitude toward Narnia. Eustace is a cousin; however, he is not as close to her as her younger siblings. Then, the reader hears from Jill and Polly, whom we have never seen directly interact with Susan. Thus, the conversation about Susan seems to be coming from people who are less and less close to her. What is also interesting is that Edmund and Lucy, to whom Susan is closest to do not speak in this interaction. Throughout the *Chronicles*, Susan seems to be closest to her sister and her younger brother. Lucy and Susan share moments of intimacy with Aslan, and Susan trusts Edmund's judgement in Calormene surrounding how to escape her failed relationship with Rabadash. Therefore, their noticeable absence from this conversation is striking.

Later, Lucy tearfully asks Aslan if anything can be done about the dwarfs stuck outside of Aslan's Country, but she never raises any questions about helping her sister. Likewise, Edmund is quick to forgive others, saying of Rabadash "even a traitor may mend. I have known one that did" (*Horse* 230). However, like Lucy, Edmund is silent during the discussion of Susan, and he does not show the same love or forgiveness to her. It seems out of character for Lucy and Edmund not to speak up in defense of their sister or to ask what will become of her after they discover they have died and entered Aslan's Country. Additionally, Aslan never speaks about Susan or if she will be allowed to enter heaven or not. This is important because Aslan's decision would be the final say on the matter. However, we never hear Aslan's judgement of Susan, or that she is forever excluded from paradise. Could these key characters be silent on the topic of Susan because they already believe she will enter Aslan's Country in the future? Could Lucy and Edmund, who know Susan best and have strong faith know that she will return to faith, and that is why they focus on the fate of others or do not waste time asking questions about Susan? The little information we get about Susan does not come from the people closest to her or the highest authority, Aslan. The absence of these important voices could further illustrate that the comments about Susan in *The Last Battle* are not definitive of her faith or her eternal destiny.

In his young adult years, Lewis suffered from many of the faults the friends find in Susan. Lewis is also guilty of apostasy, separation of worlds, concern with appearance, and a desire to seem grown-up. In fact, Susan's entire relationship with doubt reflects Lewis' own turning away from faith. However, looking into the rest of Lewis' life offers more insight into what may be in store for Susan after *The Last Battle*.

#### 4. IDOLATRY AND TRAGEDY: THE FUTURE OF LEWIS AND SUSAN

Lewis' shift from apostasy back to faith is well documented in his own words, as well as in various biographies. After years of living as an apostate, interested in gaining more knowledge and reputation in the world, Lewis began to long for the joy of his old, imaginative life. In fact, it was the search for the thrill of the imaginative that began his journey back to faith. Lewis says there "arose the fatal determination to recover the old thrill, and at last the moment when I was compelled to realize that all such efforts were failures" (*Surprised* 166). Lewis sought after the joy he had experienced in his youth, and nothing he tried was able to satisfy his longing. He explains this, saying "nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless" (*Surprised* 170). At this point, Lewis began to search for a "Desirable," which he refused to call God. He tried to make the joy he searched for this "Desirable," but he explains that these happy memories "had never been what I wanted but only symbols which professed themselves to be no more, and that very effort to treat them as the real Desirable soon honestly proved itself to be a failure" (*Surprised* 204). What Lewis would eventually realize was that he was putting his old thrill and joy above God, and that idolatry was why his efforts were unsuccessful.

Looking back, thirty years after these experiences, Lewis is able to further explain the correlation between his search for joy and idolatry. Lewis explains he "would not recognize [God] there" in the joy he had experienced in his early years and refers to himself as an "idolater" (*Surprised* 167). The joy that Lewis was searching for and the things he thought would cause it became idols in his life. He was seeking God's gifts above God himself. Lewis

recognized that the joy he was seeking “was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer. While that other was in doubt, the pointer naturally loomed large in my thoughts” (*Surprised* 238). The outer that Lewis refers to here is God, and Lewis had to learn that the things that brought back his old imaginative joy were not actually what he desired, but were an indication of the good God who provided it. At the end of his autobiography, Lewis explains that “all the images and sensations, if idolatrously mistaken for Joy itself, soon honestly confessed themselves inadequate. All said, in the last resort, “It is not I. I am only a reminder. Look! Look! What do I remind you of?”” (*Surprised* 220). All of the positive feelings and memories Lewis sought were not meant to become idols but to point him to Christ.

While Lewis struggled with making joy and imagination idols, his search for them did eventually lead him to return to faith. In his search for the imaginative, Lewis took a step closer to God, making the shift from atheism to theism. Because of his recognition that Joy was a pointer to something else, “he had slowly, and unwillingly, come to feel the necessity of believing in an Absolute...so long as this was firmly distinguished from the God of ‘popular religion’” (Wilson 107). Lewis’ turn to theism was marked by hesitance, and clear separation from Christianity. In 1929, Lewis “gave in and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed; perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England” (Wilson 110). While Lewis acknowledges the existence of God at this point, this “was not a conversion to Christianity” (Wilson 110). Humphrey Carpenter, who knew the Inklings personally, says that “the notion of an ultimate truth made sense to [Lewis]...on the other hand ‘God’ still seemed a crude and nursery like word” (39). Although there was still hesitance toward Christianity, as Wilson points out, “Lewis himself represents the summer of 1929 as the turning point of his whole life,” and this change “coincides more or less with the death of his father” (105, 128). The

relationship between Lewis and his father was tumultuous after the death of Lewis' mother, and Lewis kept his father at arm's distance in his adult years. However, the death of his father was a sorrowful moment of his life that helped him return to faith. The mix of tragedy and the recognition of idolatry helped Lewis to take his first steps back to God.

The relevance of imagination continues to be important in Lewis' story as he makes the shift from theism to Christianity. Looking back, Lewis says "I do not think the resemblance between the Christian and the merely imaginative experience is accidental. I think all things, in their way, reflect heavenly truth, the imagination not the least" (*Surprised* 167). Therefore, it is not surprising when Lewis admits "there was some willful blindness" during his time in theism (*Surprised* 209). He began to believe in a God, but tried to refuse Christianity, although he was surrounded by it. Many of Lewis' closest friends were practicing Christians, and he wanted the benefits of their faith without following Christ. Wilson suggests that in his later works "Lewis is extremely good at describing...the extent to which we enable ourselves to be deluded about ourselves and other people" (177). Lewis is able to write about these things because of his own willingness to ignore his drift closer and closer to Christianity. One of his closest Christian friends, J. R. R. Tolkien, noticed Lewis' drift toward faith and his desire for his old imaginative life, and "he saw that Lewis would not re-enter Christianity by a new door but by the old one" (Wilson 135). In his continued search for the joy of imagination, now in theism, "it was the sense of another world which drew" Lewis to Christianity (Wilson 137). Lewis also "adopted a benevolent but condescending attitude to Christianity, which he said was a myth conveying as much truth as simple minds could grasp" (Carpenter 40). Carpenter says "he was frightened of what he called 'the danger of falling back into the most childish superstitions', by which he presumably meant Christianity. He still had an immense resistance to the idea of returning to

anything so nursery-like” (40). While the correlation between imagination and faith drew Lewis in, he still resisted conversion to Christianity due to his desire to not fall into childishness.

Lewis’ conversion back to Christianity took place during a particular conversation with Tolkien and Owen Barfield. Tolkien, knowing Lewis’ desire for the imaginative, “had taught him [that] the inability to believe in Christianity was primarily a failure of the imagination” (Wilson 135). Carpenter explains that “Barfield also did his best to convince Lewis that imagination and aesthetic experience did lead, if not automatically to objective truth, then at least to a better understanding of the world” (Carpenter 37). After this conversation, Lewis fully converted back to Christianity and saw the gospel as the true myth. Lewis loved folklore and wanted to believe in a myth-like story that was true and had real implications in his life, finding this combination in the gospel. Yet again, this change is described with much hesitance on Lewis’ part. He highlights this by asking “who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape?” (*Surprised* 229). Although still reluctant, Lewis was finally brought back to Christ due to the connected nature of imagination, myth, and faith.

Throughout the years, Lewis became an avid apologist for the Christian faith, writing fiction and nonfiction alike about Christianity. Wilson suggests that specifically “in the Narnia stories Lewis is deeply and unselfconsciously engaged in the stories he is creating” (Wilson 228). She attributes this engagement to the way Lewis drew inspiration from his own life for the novels. Wilson describes how Lewis “launched back deep into the recesses of his own emotional history, his own most deeply felt psychological needs and vulnerabilities. It is this, surely, which gives the books their extraordinary power” (228). Additionally, Wilson refers to 1954-1957 as

“the years of autobiography” in Lewis’ life (251). Therefore, because Lewis was writing so much based on his own faith experience, Susan’s fate after *The Last Battle* could likely echo Lewis’.

In a couple of letters he wrote to children who were fans of *Narnia*, Lewis offers a little insight into what may have happened to Susan. In one, Lewis explains that in an upcoming novel, Peter goes back to Narnia but Susan does not. He asks the recipient, “Haven’t you noticed in the two you have read that she is rather fond of being too grownup. I am sorry to say that side of her got stronger and she forgot about Narnia” (*Children* 51). This letter reiterates that Susan’s desire to act grown up is part of what keeps her out of Narnia in *The Last Battle*. However, Lewis does not suggest that Susan can never return to Narnia. In another letter, written after the entire series had been published, Lewis writes, “The books don’t tell us what happened to Susan. She is left alive in this world at the end, having by then turned into a rather silly, conceited young woman. But there is plenty of time for her to mend, and perhaps she will get into Aslan’s country in the end-in her own way. I think whatever she had seen in Narnia she could (if she was the sort that wanted to) persuade herself, as she grew up, that it was “all nonsense”” (*Children* 67). This letter does tell us that Susan is still alive in our world at the end of the series, and Lewis leaves her ending open for her to return to Narnia, or to convince herself that it was all made up.

Lewis also refers to the idea of a renaissance in a young person’s life. He describes a renaissance as “that wonderful reawakening which comes to most of us when puberty is complete. It is properly called a rebirth not a birth, a reawakening, not a wakening, because in many of us, besides being a new thing, it is also the recovery of things we had in childhood and lost when we became boys. For boyhood is very like the ‘dark ages’” (*Surprised* 71). Why could this idea not be applied to Susan? Perhaps she has been in the dark ages of her adolescence, and the events of *The Last Battle* will be the catalyst for her entrance into the renaissance of her life.



Much like the death of Lewis' father preceded his first conversion, it is likely that the death of Susan's family will push her back to faith in Aslan. In *A Grief Observed*, written later in life after the death of his wife, Lewis claims "if my house was a house of cards, the sooner it was knocked down the better. And only suffering would do it" (*Grief* 32). Susan will face suffering as she faces the death of her entire family, but perhaps the house of cards of her idolatry will come crashing down because of this suffering.

There is a book in Lewis' repertoire that specifically explores the idea of eternal destiny, *The Great Divorce*. While a work of fiction about souls in hell deciding whether or not they will take difficult steps in order to enter heaven, this novel does show the reader some of Lewis' ideas on the future of people like Susan. It seems that Lewis agrees with one character who says, "I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road" (465). By this argument, while Susan may be on the wrong road in *The Last Battle*, she may yet be placed back on the correct path, perhaps in the wake of a great tragedy. Lewis also speaks of a love of things of the world over a love of God, saying "when that first kind of love was thwarted, then there was just a chance that in the loneliness, in the silence, something else might begin to grow" (*Great* 518). After the loss of her family, it is likely that Susan will find her love of things of the world inadequate, and in the void that is left, faith may be able to move in. And a little faith is all that it would take, as Lewis writes, "it is only the little germ of a desire for God that we need to start the process" of redemption (*Great* 518). Susan has evidence of faith in her early years, and she still has a partial memory of Narnia, so these small remnants could be able to grow and restore her faith now that tragedy has revealed the inferiority of idols in her life.

Susan still has the opportunity to turn from her idolatry and apostasy. Hilder supports this suggestion by saying that “with the loss of youth, [Susan] might return to first things and be mature enough to pursue them” (146). The tragedy in Susan’s life may cause her to cease worrying about appearing grown-up, and she may enter into the renaissance of her childhood faith. Lewis’ own words support this argument because he has told us in his letters that, in time, Susan may mature and return to faith. Lewis also supports Susan’s return to Narnia in Aslan’s promise that “Once a king or queen in Narnia, always a king or queen” (*Lion* 199). The assumption that Susan is permanently excluded from Aslan’s country goes against the fulfillment of this promise. Hilder addresses this issue, saying:

[Susan’s] rejection of Narnia as childish play in *The Last Battle* puts into question Aslan’s prophecy that the four Pevensie children will always be royalty in Narnia. But perhaps this prophecy contains a promise that will be fulfilled beyond the limits of the plot in the seventh book?...it is obvious from his own comments that Susan’s rejection of Aslan need not be permanent. (146)

It is reasonable to assume that Aslan has not gone back on his promise because he has not cast Susan out. Therefore, Susan’s story is not yet over.

That Susan is probably redeemed can also be argued when compared to other characters, especially when considering the diversity of believers admitted into Aslan’s Country in *The Last Battle*. In *The Magician’s Nephew*, Lewis writes that “in his old age [Uncle Andrew] became a nicer and less selfish old man than he had ever been before” (221). Hilder argues that “his improvement indicates that “Lewis has not given up hope for him,” and “Uncle Andrew’s gentle demise illustrates the inexorable but sometimes merciful judgment that awaits the classical hero” (123). If Lewis treats Uncle Andrew, a villainous character, with such mercy at the end of his

story, surely Lewis would extend such mercy to a character who not only had genuine faith but is so like himself.

In *The Last Battle*, Aslan admits many of the creatures currently living in Narnia into heaven. These are many of the same creatures led astray by Shift, Tash, and the Calormenes, and when their time of judgement comes they “looked into the face of Aslan and loved him, though some of them were frightened at the same time” (*Last* 193). The admittance of these creatures who have been led astray and approach Aslan with fear suggests Susan’s own entrance once she dies. Hilder describes the Narnians being deceived by explaining their “distance from Aslan’s physical presence has resulted in a diminished understanding of the Lion’s character so that ignorance, doubt, fear, and, alternatively, indifference, take root in Narnia. In this state, the Narnians model a modern crisis of faith” (Hilder 139). The Narnians’ distance from Aslan could reflect Susan’s distance from the community of the friends of Narnia while she is in America. This distance gives room for doubt to creep in, but it does not disqualify them from entering Aslan’s Country. Although the Narnians in *The Last Battle* are distant from Aslan, experience doubt, and possibly cease to believe in him when being deceived, many are still allowed to enter paradise. In fact, “Eustace even recognized one of those very Dwarfs who had helped to shoot the Horses” entering heaven (*Last* 193). If a Narnian who turned on his own people because of fear is welcomed into Aslan’s Country, why would Susan not also be welcomed in? Even Puzzle, the donkey who dressed as a lion and pretended to be Aslan, is allowed to enter paradise. Although “the sight of the real lion had made him so ashamed” and he hid, “the very first person whom Aslan called to him was Puzzle the Donkey” (*Last* 208, 227). The group of Narnians admitted into Aslan’s Country consists of doubters, traitors, and deceivers, but they are forgiven and welcomed in. Why would Susan not receive the same treatment?

Finally, Emeth's story also suggests an optimistic ending for Susan. Emeth is a Calormene soldier who finds himself in Aslan's Country, though he believes he has been serving Tash all of his life. When the friends hear that he is there, Peter declares "whether he meets us in peace or in war, he shall be welcome" (*Last* 199). Now that the group knows that they are in Aslan's Country, they welcome the young man. Although they seem more hospitable to a soldier who has previously been their enemy than they are to Susan a few chapters previously, it is important to remember that they were speaking about Susan as part of their group and not her admittance into Aslan's Country, as they are in Emeth's case. Aslan himself refers to Emeth as "son" and tells him "thou art welcome" (*Last* 205). If someone who has not heard of Aslan before may enter his country, then Susan, who has had an intimate relationship with him, would surely be welcomed in.

Aslan's Country is filled with many doubters, traitors, and enemies who have been redeemed. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that Susan will be welcomed with open arms when it comes her time to enter. Lewis and Susan's battles with idolatry can be described in Jewel the Unicorn's description of Aslan's Country, "this is the land I have been looking for all of my life, though I never knew it till now" (*Last* 213). Like Lewis in his search for the old joyful imagination, Susan is seeking Aslan in the wrong places, and she may not even know that is what she is looking for. However, when looking at Lewis' life and seeing how tragedy and imagination led him to return to faith, one can confidently read a turn from apostasy and idolatry and a return to childhood faith in the life of Susan Pevensie after the conclusion of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

## CONCLUSION

As discussed throughout this paper, there is ample evidence that C. S. Lewis based his character Susan Pevensie off of himself. Both grew up in families of faith, and they both took a cautious and fearful approach to the divine. After an early period of intimacy, both Lewis and Susan began to experience serious doubt. This doubt when coupled with the pressure of adults and a concern for their appearance led them to turn from faith. Lewis eventually converted back to faith after facing tragedy and addressing idolatry in his life. As Carpenter reminds us, with *Narnia*, “the reader is left free, as he never is with allegory, to interpret in whatever fashion he pleases” (223). Why therefore, could one not interpret the ending of Susan’s story as a reflection of Lewis’ later life?

The reason that Lewis may not have detailed the rest of Susan’s life in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is because her story would not take place in Narnia, but in our world. Because the Narnia that Susan knows is no more, her story would not be fit for *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Susan’s story also might not be suitable for the younger audience intended for the *Chronicles* due to the tragedy and grief Susan would face at the death of her family. Aslan’s silence on the matter of Susan is the greatest encouragement for readers to believe that she returns to faith. The Lion has not barred her from paradise, and he has promised that Susan will always be a queen of Narnia. Additionally, the autobiographical nature of Lewis’ writing at this point in his life would not easily lend itself to the eternal damnation of a characters that is so like his younger self in many ways. Therefore, one can infer with confidence that the end of Susan’s story is one of redemption, where she returns to what is important and lives a life of faith, in this world and beyond.

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