

Analyzing the
character of the white
witch in the lion, the
witch and the
wardrob...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When it comes to works of fiction, it is always most interesting to see where the author draws inspiration for the major characters from and what the underlying message of the story at hand. Disillusioned from faith as a child, C. S. Lewis would find himself re-embracing Christianity in his adult life, which likely played a major role in the not-so-subtle Biblical messages presented throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Where antagonists can sometimes double as the unsung, misunderstood hero of the story, Lewis uses *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* to bring to life a villain that is evil to the core and equate her to the reality of evil and temptation. In this paper, which will focus on the character of the White Witch in Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, I will examine the general qualities and the role of her character with respect to the other characters and the author's intent in writing her character in the way that he did and how I think it could have been improved.

The White Witch's role as the primary antagonist of the story divulges her as one of the most blatantly evil, unremorseful villains of any work of fiction. Upon the introduction of her character by Tumnus in chapter two, there are many things that the reader can assume about the essence of her character simply due to the facts given or the lack thereof. First, the fact that she is addressed as the White Witch and never referred to by a real name sets her apart from the rest of the characters and says a lot about her character before the reader even learns more about her. It holds a negative connotation already as white is in reference to the pale, ghostliness of her skin and the white snow of the endless winter that she caused. Witch clearly refers to the powers she possesses but as opposed to a good witch, she uses

her powers for bad. With his identification of her as the reason why it is “always winter and never Christmas,” she can be quickly recognized as a malevolent person, a cold, power-hungry woman whose identity centers around her position of power and using her magic abilities for evil. His surprise at how innocent and nice Lucy is is a testament to the way that the White Witch has brainwashed the Narnians into thinking that humans are the enemy. And when he reveals that it is his job to report all humans back to her, it shows the lengths she has gone to in order to prevent any potential threats to her throne from allowing the prophecy that tells of her overthrow to come to fruition, something a good, fair ruler would not have to place such an emphasis on. But what gives the reader the most insight into the Witch’s nature is Mr. Tumnus’ fear that she will: ...have my tail cut off and my horns sawn off, and my beard plucked out, and she’ll wave her wand over my beautiful clove hoofs and turn them into horrid solid hoofs like wretched horse’s. And if she is extra and specially angry she’ll turn me into stone. (Lewis, 15) Something so detailed is hard to fabricate so this lets the reader know that what he describes can’t be far from the truth and the elaborateness of the punishment indicates that she doesn’t punish for justice but rather out of enjoyment or the love of evil. Where she could simply imprison those who wrong her or have them punished in a more humane manor, she prefers to turn the creatures to stone.

Additionally, the absence of a king or of any mention of a traditional companion also adds to the perception that she is so sinister, unpleasant and focused on maintaining ultimate control of Narnia that she is incapable of showing love and perhaps unlovable. The reader can assume from her

relationship with the Dwarf, who is perhaps the closest thing to a companion that she has in this book, that in any relationship she has, the White Witch must still be the dominant one and subservience is a necessity. Her character seems to be defined by the selfish, carelessly cruel way that she rules Narnia, and the use of her dark magic to keep the Narnians oppressed and afraid of her. Her magic and her lack of emotion then acts as her biggest strengths because they are what permit her to have leverage over the others and commit wicked acts without any regard for how it affects her victim, as exemplified by the many instances of her turning creatures to stone for small offenses. However her weakness lies in her greed for unchallenged power and her sense of entitlement to a throne that was never meant for her. Her rules are only beneficial to her and work to manipulate situations in her favor, as she would likely be killed if she applied her laws to herself. A prime example of this is when she is about to kill Edmund but is interrupted by Aslan and says, " You know that every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and that for every treachery I have a right to a kill... And so, that human creature is mine. His life is forfeit to me. His blood is my property." (Lewis, 41) This mentality is what allows her to forcibly seize the throne in the first place and kill so mercilessly. She could have gained more respect from the Narnians and worked with them in her reign but instead, she chose to rule with fear and thus, she herself constantly fears the usurpation of her throne. Her unrestricted authority has made her superior to everyone else in her mind, and that coupled with her aforementioned sense of entitlement are what led her to believe that she had a chance against Aslan, and her eventual demise.

The White Witch holds rank in the story as the general symbol of malice and sinfulness and her influence is felt most strongly by Edmund. She is as purely evil as Aslan is good. She is the source behind any evil lurking in Narnia and her works portray the evil that is always present in life, whether it is sin, cruelty, hatred, lies or selfishness. She does all she can to disrupt and destroy those around her in order to gain control of Narnia, yet she struggles to maintain the upper hand. One of her powers was her ability to recognize Edmund's insecurity and use her magic to act on it, swaying him to become as power-hungry as her but without him realizing the error in what he did. In chapter six, when he speaks to Peter about her, he says, "If comes to that, which is the right side? How do we know that the Fauns are in the right and the Queen (yes, I know we've been told she's a witch) is in the wrong? We don't really know anything about either." (Lewis, 60) Although Edmund knew deep down that he was wrong about the possibility of the Witch being good, he wanted to convince himself that it might be true so that he didn't feel guilty about working with her and against his siblings. She also influences the way that the Narnians live and behave. Her spell over Narnia that has produced an endless winter makes her presence felt at all times and creates a melancholy overtone that gives the Narnians nothing to look forward to but the many winter days to come. In one instance, a fox wanted to give a toast to the queen but when the Witch asked him about where he and his herd had gotten the food and he replied that he got it from Father Christmas, the witch was so angry that she turned them all into stone. She was so blinded by the coming of Father Christmas and what his arrival foretold about the return of Aslan that she did not consider the fox's life and how she would be

affecting him. Through this persistent malice and unfair treatment of the animals, however, Edmund is able to realize the error of his ways.

Lewis successfully creates an archetypically villainous antagonist in the White Witch and her role as a creature that is pure evil makes her synonymous with Satan when compared to the God-like Aslan and representative of all things bad. At the fundamental level, the world of Narnia enforces justice and will not allow for wickedness to truly or permanently take root just as it cannot take root in Edmund. Seeing that it was Lewis' intent to create a story that could serve as a metaphor for Christian temptation and the power of Christ through the use of symbolism and conflict, her unwavering greed and need to get ahead at the expense of others makes her a perfect symbol for sin and the fundamental goodness of Narnia makes the perfect symbol for the innate goodness of people before evil is introduced. The moment that best exhibits her villainous nature is when she deceitfully discusses her plans for Edmund saying, " There are whole rooms full of Turkish Delight, and what's more, I have no children of my own. I want a nice boy whom I could bring up as a Prince and who would be King of Narnia when I am gone." (Lewis, 26) Much like the serpent that tempts Eve in the book of Genesis, the White Witch tempts Edmund with food that leaves anyone who consumes it eternally desiring more. In this instance, he represents humanity and its willingness to sin for objects of their desire and throughout much of the rest of the story, Edmund experiences a deep yearning for more Turkish Delight, which symbolizes human greed, one of the seven deadly sins. Likewise, here, the Witch represents the temptation that Satan possesses that allows him to lure

people to give in to sin. Although she was already planning to use him in order to find out about his siblings and secure her power, her ability to hide her agenda and appeal to his own greed and selfishness is a quality any good villainess ought to possess.

Lastly, and the most prominent indicator of the Witch's role, in the book of Revelation, found in the Christian Bible, Satan rules over all the Earth before God eventually comes to take all His followers to Heaven. In *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the White Witch has claimed to be the rightful ruler of Narnia in Aslan's absence and once he returns, winter ends and the Witch is dethroned. These are all examples of the underlying Biblical message that appears throughout the entire story and in most of the characters' identities. However, the lack of depth or a real motivating factor makes for a rather two-dimensional character, in my opinion. Although I understand how the White Witch's tendency to perform acts of unnecessary evil adds to the Biblical metaphor by equating her inherently evil nature to that of Satan, Satan is at least believed to have attained his desire to promote evil as vengeance for his expulsion from Heaven. And while providing an incentive for her evil acts might lend too much complexity for the intended child audience and cause other readers to sympathize or relate to her character, without it, one is left to wonder what the bigger picture is and why she lacks compassion. Therefore, presenting some sort of justification in this story is preferred. Along those same lines, information about her past, such as the state of her family, her age and the extent of her magical capabilities, could have been used to advance her character's story line and give her depth beyond just being Edmund's manipulative temptation

in his search for attention. Nonetheless, for the purposes of what Lewis hoped to convey with her character, he succeeded in doing so.

On the surface, the White Witch is a person driven by the love of evil and the desire to do whatever it takes to sustain power over Narnia for as long as possible. Upon examining her role in the story, however, she can be recognized as the symbol of sin needed to tempt Edmund, who is himself a symbol of human infallibility, and the evil force that unites the siblings with Aslan against her. Lewis, in his large analogy for Christian ideology, created a character simple enough that the undertones of what she meant were imbedded but not so evident that it was too complicated for children to follow along with. Although, her depiction and what she stands for makes it easy to dismiss her as 100% evil, I think that giving her more of a backstory and more depth in this book would have helped. Nonetheless, the White Witch is a classic figure that offers many lessons on morality to the characters and the reader.