

# Fantasy places and imaginative belief: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe and The Princess and the Goblin.

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## **Fantasy Places and Imaginative Belief: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *The Princess and the Goblin***

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Sally Adair Rigsbee (bio)

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*In C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, both versions of the archetypal plot of initiation and maturation, belief in the reality of a fantasy place is a crucial issue in the developmental process of a child. Both authors create heroines who are gifted in imagination and, therefore, readily accept a fantasy realm as a valid reality. The heroines proceed without hesitation to explore the strange new worlds they encounter, and then teach their secret knowledge to their less enlightened companions. Both Lewis and MacDonald suggest that being able to see a fantasy place is the product of believing in its existence, a belief which indicates special gifts of imagination and spiritual vision. Believing in the reality of the fantasy realm represents a necessary openness to the deeper levels of the psyche that fosters the growth and individuation of the self. Failure to perceive the reality of the fantasy world can endanger and limit the characters just as much as blindness to unconscious needs can prevent human growth, and as the absence of imagination can impoverish life.*

*Both *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *The Princess and the Goblin* describe an archetypal journey from the realm of ordinary experience into a fantasy world, where the quester is tested, struggles, and overcomes destructive forces. The heroines return to the world of reality having achieved a new stage in development, a new status, and a new perspective on life. Their selfhood is enriched, for the memories of their experiences in the fantasy places undergird their belief in the value of the imagination and in the importance of the intangible, spiritual dimensions of human existence. Although Lucy and Irene are the heroic figures who undertake the task of spiritual development, their companions, Lucy's siblings and Irene's friend Curdie, may be regarded symbolically as shadow components of the hero's psyche. Lucy and Irene are the gifted visionaries, but the foibles of their close companions make them seem more human.*

Both novelists use setting to convey different states of psychic being. The isolated settings with which the novels open establish the fact of the children's separation from ordinary reality and foreshadow their descent into the imaginative world of the unconscious. Both children live in places where they have a special, prestigious position and enjoy greater freedom and authority than children normally do. In *The Princess and the Goblin*, Irene lives apart from her father in a lonely castle, cared for by many servants. Her royalty, her castle high on the mountain, and her superior moral sensitivity set her apart from others. Because of the war, Lucy and her siblings in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* have been sent away from their London home to the safety of the ancient house of an old professor "who lived in the heart of the country."<sup>1</sup> These isolated settings are transitional places which provide the children with ample time and space to amuse themselves apart from supervision by adults. Their freedom is a necessary prerequisite for their journey into fantasy places.

Significantly, both Irene and Lucy are completely separated from their parents, the authority figures from whom they must establish their independence. But Irene's grandmother and the professor possess the secret wisdom the children will learn from their experiences in the fantasy places. These mentors can, therefore, provide the setting and the support for the children's inward journeys.

The major action of both novels is preceded by a time of restless frustration,

when long, dreary, rainy days prevent the children from playing outside. Although the rain creates a sense of being enclosed by the environment, it is also a symbol of fertility and new birth. It represents the positive dark side of the life process; this period of containment is the necessary stage of gestation which provides the transition to new creation. When the rain restrains their freedom to explore the external world, the children are forced to turn inward and to entertain...

## Fantasy Places and Imaginative Belief: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *The Princess and the Goblin*

In C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, both versions of the archetypal plot of initiation and maturation, belief in the reality of a fantasy place is a crucial issue in the developmental process of a child. Both authors create heroines who are gifted in imagination and, therefore, readily accept a fantasy world as a vital reality. The heroines proceed without hesitation to explore the strange new worlds they encounter, and then teach their secret knowledge to their less enlightened companions. Both Lewis and MacDonald suggest that being able to see a fantasy place is the product of believing in its existence, a belief which indicates special gifts of imagination and spiritual vision. Believing in the reality of the fantasy world represents a necessary opening to the deeper levels of the psyche that fosters the growth and individuation of the self. Failure to perceive the reality of the fantasy world can endanger and limit the characters just as much as blindness to unconscious needs can prevent human growth and as the absence of imagination can impoverish life.

Both *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *The Princess and the Goblin* describe an archetypal journey from the realm of ordinary experience into a fantasy world, where the quester is tested, struggles, and overcomes destructive forces. The heroines return to the world of ordinary living achieved a new stage in development, a new status, and a new perspective on life. Their adulthood is enriched, for the memories of their experience in the fantasy places undergird their belief in the value of the imagination and in the importance of the intangible, spiritual dimensions of human existence. Although Lucy and Irene are the heroic figures who undergo the task of spiritual development, their companions, Lucy's siblings and Irene's friend Gwennie, may be regarded symbolically as shadow companions of the hero's psyche. Lucy and Irene are the gifted visionaries, but the fables of their close companions make them seem more human.

Both novelists use setting to convey different states of psyche being. The isolated settings with which the novels open establish the flux of the children's separation from ordinary reality and, first, draw them down into the imaginative world of the unconscious. Both children live "in places where they have a special, prestigious position and enjoy greater freedom and authority than children normally do." In *The Princess and*

*the Goblin*, Irene lives apart from her father in a lovely castle, cared for by many servants. Her happy, her castle high on the mountain, and her superior moral sensitivity set her apart from others. Because of the war, Lucy and her siblings in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* have been "cut away from their beloved home to the safety of the ancient house of an old post-box" (what local is the heart of the country?). These isolated settings are transitional places which provide the children with ample time and space to arrange themselves apart from supervision by adults. Their freedom is a necessary prerequisite for their journey into fantasy places.

Significantly, both Irene and Lucy are completely separated from their parents, the authority figures from whom they must establish their independence. But Irene's grandmother and the professor possess the secret wisdom the children will learn from their experiences in the fantasy places. These mentors can, therefore, provide the setting and the support for the children's inward journeys.

The major action of both novels is precipitated by a time of restless frustration,

*Both Lewis and MacDonald suggest that being able to see a fantasy place . . . indicates special gifts of imagination and spiritual vision.*

when long, dreary, rainy days prevent the children from playing outside. Although the rain creates a sense of being enclosed by the environment, it is also a symbol of fertility and new birth. It represents the positive dark side of the life process. It is a period of containment, a necessary stage of gestation which provides the transition to new creation. When the rain ceases, their freedom to explore the external world, the children are forced to turn inward and to discover themselves with an examination of the mirror of their homes, first as the deeper levels of the psyche contain varied and mysterious moods and intuitions which are sources of creative vitality, then "water" offer the children new and varied dimensions of existence. The houses are huge, with rooms leading mysteriously into hidden new rooms that suggest the rich and endless potential of the inner life of the self.

While both MacDonald and Lewis use rather traditional motifs—doors, passageways, and stairs—to portray the

transition from consciousness to the imaginative world of the unconscious, both are unusually skilled in creating a pattern of events which captures the magic and the rich imagery of the unconscious world, as well as a sense of its close proximity and relative accessibility to consciousness. The passageway to Narnia is an old wardrobe where Lucy conceals herself during a game of hide-and-seek. In *The Professor's Story*, Gaston Bucheland writes, "Wardrobes with their shelves . . . are suitable organs of the secret psychological life. . . . Every poet of fantasy . . . knows that the inner space of an old wardrobe is deep. A wardrobe's inner space is also intimate space, space that is not open to any anybody." Lewis suggests that Lucy's discovery of the "magical passageway to Narnia signifies her spiritual superiority over her siblings who enter Narnia only by following her."

In *The Princess and the Goblin*, Irene opens a previously unnoticed door in her nursery and magically discovers an ancient staircase leading systematically to a series of identical doors and passages. When she becomes lost, she attempts unsuccessfully to use her rational powers to locate her steps and return to her room. Despite her distress, when she sees a door to a new stairway, her curiosity forces her onward, even though she knows the stairs will lead her further upward into fantasy realms that exist in reality. At the top of this last stairway Irene finds a square landing with three doors, lined by a pleasant humming wind, she opens one of the doors and enters a room where she discovers a waggled great great grandmother working at a spinning wheel. Later, on another visit, this ancient woman gives Irene a ring from which an invisible thread flows that connects her perpetually to her grandmother. With the magic thread Irene can journey safely into the dark caverns underneath the castle to rescue her friend Ouzie from the goblins. The potential danger of complete immersion in the world of fantasy is balanced in both novels by the assurance of a path back to reality. Lucy knows to leave the wardrobe door ajar. ". . . it is very foolish to shut oneself into any wardrobe" (p. 5). MacDonald assures the reader of Irene's safety: "It doesn't follow that she was lost, because she had lost herself. . . ."

These houses, with their enclosed fantasy regions, are effective images of the whole psyche. Narnia, the true home of the grandchildren, and the caverns where the goblins live are concrete images which make the intangible world of emotions and imagination articulate and visible. The



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