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Capstone Project Transcript

Welcome to my contribution to the capstone project. For my topic, I will be exploring *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as apocalyptic literature and how it compares to John's Revelation.

First, what is an apocalypse? Contrary to more modern connotations, an apocalypse does not necessarily mean destruction or end times. The word "apocalypse" stems from the Greek word for "revelation" and means an unveiling. So, instead of the end of the world, a more accurate definition would be the end of the world as it is now. Now, on a more technical base, an apocalypse has a few criteria to meet: it must be cosmic in nature, meaning that the conflict is on a universal scale; two evenly matched sides must collide in mortal combat, and in this conflict one side must be destroyed; it deals with the eschatological, or last things, or perhaps less specifically in duality such as good and evil; it is often presented in fantastic allegory by a speaker; and the visions come to some great figure from the past. This last point is not always necessary, nor is it always included in apocalyptic writings, with notable exceptions like John's Revelation which we'll look at later.

So, now that we've gotten all that out of the way, we arrive at *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* as apocalyptic literature. The children are prophesised to end the Narnians' suffering – through the wardrobe, they are brought into another world by an unknown force, into a conflict that seems just as dangerous as the one they initially left behind. Sounds pretty cosmic to me. This one's pretty easy: Aslan and the White Witch. Now, we as readers can infer that the two are pretty much evenly matched simply because prior to the children's arrival, neither has been able to destroy the other. In fact, it's heavily implied by the Beavers that the children's arrival allows Aslan to start moving within Narnia. A good way to determine how Aslan and the Witch match up is to see where their powers intersect, like with the stone statues and the stone table. The Witch can turn people to stone, but Aslan can turn them back. The Witch does, technically succeed in killing Aslan. However, due to a cosmic loophole he comes back, putting them firmly at a stalemate once again. But, perhaps most compellingly, in the final battle Aslan and his army can *only* defeat the White Witch and hers after the children destroy her wand – which tips the

balance in his favor. This next one is pretty straight forward as well. Some notable eschatological elements we see in this book are: judgement, which we see when the children reward their friends and “good” Narnians for their loyalty; repentance, which we see perhaps most clearly in Edmund’s story arc; and life and death, which in this book often takes the place of being turned to stone and then turned back – it’s important to note that only those who are explicitly on Aslan’s side, as in they were found in the Witch’s castle actively fighting her and therefore are worthy, are turned back. Fantastic allegory. A couple notable examples are the perpetual winter, which serves as allegory for a few things which I will discuss later on, and Aslan who, surprise, serves as an allegory for the Lion of Judah, or Jesus as he’s more commonly known today. Also, the lion appears on the British royal crest. The apocalypse in this book does not have some great figure from the past – we could argue that the events of the book is a vision seen by the narrator, but we also have no idea who the narrator actually *is*.

What purpose does an apocalypse serve? If we look at the historical context in which an apocalyptic text was written, we’ll probably see a time of great suffering – this is no coincidence. An apocalypse’s purpose is pretty much to tell people that hey, there’s a light at the end of this tunnel, so hang on. Apocalyptic literature is meant to bring comfort and encouragement to those suffering, to reassure the faithful that they are on the right path, to get the not-so-faithful a kick in the pants to get their act together, and perhaps the most important, to bring meaning to the peoples’ suffering.

How does *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* compare to John’s Revelation? Obviously, this book isn’t an allegory for Revelation, and it’s more than likely that Lewis had no intention of making any parallels between the two. That being said, there are enough similarities that we can argue that Revelation had an influence on the creation of this story. An interesting connection between Revelation and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is the four beasts and the four children – both are in positions of power and holiness under the divine, both have a role in beginning their respective apocalypses, and, if you can remember back to Anna’s handout from module 1, they both refer back to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Another interesting comparison is with the four riders, specifically the first and the last ones, and the White Witch. While we can certainly argue that at times she embodies elements of all four riders, I think that she best resembles the white and pale horse riders best. Once again, we come to the topic of resurrection. In Revelation, only the faithful, and of that group only those who have died

defending their faith, are resurrected. Similarly, only certain stone statues are healed. In both texts, we witness the rise of the Golden era – in Revelation it's God's kingdom brought down on Earth where it's always party time for the faithful, and in Narnia it's when the children take their supposedly rightful place on the throne.

Now that we've established that yes, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is apocalyptic literature, we must now figure out what the fantastical allegories in the book translate to in the real world.

First, I'll establish Lewis' own personal context. To do so, we need to go back over a hundred years to 1908. At this time, Lewis was 9 years old when his mother dies. This event in his life will, unsurprisingly, go on to affect much of his adult life. Fast forward to 1918 and Lewis, now 20, is a veteran of the First World War. Just take a minute to picture that – living through the first few years of the war as a child, going off to war as a young adult, coming back after what feels like a lifetime, with a lifetime of change on your shoulders, only to find that the world you left behind is practically unchanged. Now imagine an entire generation having that shared experience. Remember the symbolism of the perpetual winter? It could mean a lot of things, but I'm going to argue that it best represents how these two events, the death of his mother and returning from the war, froze him at key moments in his life. Kind of like the stone statues. Then, over 20 twenty years later in 1939, Lewis sees that happening again. So, he starts writing the first Narnia book, in part to help the children navigate the war and in part to help himself come to terms with his own trauma. This is most apparent in *The Magician's Nephew*, where Lewis explores, through the Narniaverse that he created, healing his mother.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe was originally published in 1950 and is intended for children aged 8 to 12 years. So, let's say you're a 10-year-old child in England on the day that this book is published. Here are some things that have happened in your lifetime:

- When you were born, World War Two had already been going on for at least a year, and the London Blitz was happening
- When you were 5, the war ended and the United Nations was founded
- When you were 7, the Cold War began
- When you were 9 NATO was founded
- A few months ago, England sent troops to the War in Korea

- Oh, and unless you were born before January 8th, you would have spent your entire life during a time when England was using a wartime rationing system which wouldn't be lifted until you were 14.

Given that the intended readers had lived their lives in such uncertainty and fear and death in the Second World War – an experience that Lewis, being a child of war himself, would be very familiar with – and would continue to live in uncertainty and fear in the era of the Cold War, the apocalyptic message of this book would have resonated deeply with its readers. Their suffering, just like Narnia's, *will* come to an end. And things *will* be better, even if it doesn't seem that way now. They just need to have faith.