

Architectures of the Moral Self: A Psycho-Spatial Reading of Kohlberg's Developmental Stages in

C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles Of Narnia*

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ABSTRACT

This work looks at C.S. Lewis's Narnia books - *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952) - using Lawrence Kohlberg's model of moral growth. Instead of treating fantasy only as hidden lessons, it suggests Narnia becomes a kind of outer mirror for inner change in children like Lucy, Edmund, Susan, and Peter Pevensie. As they move through forests, battles, and seas, their choices reflect shifts from rule-following out of fear toward deeper personal ethics. Through terrain and trial alike, Lewis turns adventure into quiet training for conscience. Alongside this path, differences between boys and girls matter less than shared experience; decisions shape character more than identity ever does.

Keywords: Children's Literature, C. S. Lewis, Lawrence Kohlberg, Moral Development, Psycho-Spatial Mapping, Gender Parity

Introduction

Out here among made-up stories for kids, there's something real going on inside young minds. Not just play - something deeper unfolds when children step into strange lands filled with talking beasts or hidden kingdoms. Think of these places as practice grounds, where fears take shape and choices carry weight without true danger nearby. Long ago, a thinker named Bruno Bettelheim said such tales aren't about running away - they're about facing things too big to name at dinner. Inside those old plots full of witches and trials, small listeners sort out who they are becoming. Take C.S. Lewis - he wasn't only building pretty castles in snow-covered woods. His world had bones beneath the surface, shaped by books from centuries past and quiet beliefs he carried daily. Narnia didn't exist to dazzle eyes alone - it asked questions disguised as adventure. Most people spot crosses buried in the storylines and stop there. Rarely do they notice how carefully each child reacts - not like symbols, but like actual kids learning right while stumbling through forests.

Looking closely at how kids think changes what we see in the story. Lucy steps into snow-covered woods long before her siblings do, bringing fresh eyes each time she returns. Because she is youngest, rules feel alive to her - not just orders but promises made real when kept. Edmund follows later, after doubting what he cannot touch, making choices that tie him down until something pulls him back. Their brother Peter walks in with shoulders squared like an adult already, taking charge because nobody else will. Susan stands between them all, unsure whether to trust magic or maps more. Each book adds layers they must move through - the forest thickens, seas stretch farther, thrones stay empty too long. When faced with lies offered as truth, one sibling sees fear turned outward while another looks inward without blinking. A lion speaks seldom yet watches always, his presence changing who listens versus who only waits to speak. Crossing bridges over cliffs or signing treaties under stars marks moments where duty shifts shape. Punishments come not from anger but balance tipping slow. Older now than when first stepping past coats hung high on wooden racks, none return exactly unchanged. Moral sense grows unevenly - some leaps sudden, others built across quiet acts never named heroic.

What happens next shows something missing in most studies of Lewis. His characters face inner shifts that tie closely to who they are allowed to become, depending on being male or female. Not stuck in old patterns where men lead and women follow, the world inside Narnia pushes both rulers - no matter their sex - to act with equal weight when choices arise. This balance forms a clear blueprint, one built long before such ideas became common elsewhere.

Theoretical Framework Narrative Cartography and Developmental Psychology

One way to grasp Narnia's role in shaping character lies in blending Kohlberg's ideas about moral development with how stories guide understanding. Shaped by Piaget's early insights into children's thinking patterns, his model sees morality not as habits picked up from society, yet as an unfolding sequence of three broad tiers - each split neatly into two phases (Kohlberg, "Essays" 48).

Most young kids base right and wrong on what happens after they act. Following rules matters only because getting punished feels bad. Later, some begin to trade favors, doing good when it brings something back. Actions count as okay if they serve self-interest or strike a deal. This thinking ties fairness to personal gain, not shared values. Each choice links to payoff, nothing deeper.

Now comes a phase where getting along matters more than personal gain. At stage three, fitting in becomes key - people look out for what others think, aiming to keep friendships steady. Instead of just pleasing peers, some begin respecting rules because they see how systems hold things together. When society's balance feels at stake, following laws turns into a kind of responsibility. Chaos seems riskier now, so upholding order gains weight.

At last comes the Postconventional Level - ethical thinking guided by self-chosen principles. Instead of blind obedience, Stage 5 sees laws as agreements among people, changeable when they fail fairness or shared well-being. When rules harm rather than help, they lose their claim on loyalty. Moving further, Stage 6 holds certain truths higher than any statute: justice, respect for life, basic rights.

If a law violates these deeper standards, standing against it becomes not rebellion - but duty. Kohlberg outlines this in Essay 136.

Inside made-up worlds, thoughts often shape the land itself. When kids step past a wardrobe door, cross some border, or swim into a painted sea, they slide between ways of knowing and judging right from wrong. The cold silence in Narnia under the Witch mirrors how people stop growing inside. Time there bends differently - one long life among kings might last just a breath back home. Because of that stretch, children live whole grown-up lives then return still young. Their choices hit hard, real fast, with weight behind every act. Growth happens quick here, shaped by each move they make.

Lucy Pevensie: The Exceptional Trajectory of Intuitive Axiology

Little Lucy, the smallest of the four kids, stands out right away. Not through loud actions but quiet and knowing, she just sees things differently. When she meets Mr. Tumnus in Narnia, fear tugs at her, yet trust steps forward first. Rules haven't shaped her mind much; instead, what matters grows from inside. Older brothers debate right and wrong like scholars. She feels it, like cold air on skin before the wind hits. At seven, logic hasn't crowded out instinct - not for her. That moment with the faun? A shift happens, unseen but real. Punishment once ruled her choices, obedience to avoid trouble. Now rewards aren't the point either - it's about connection. Decisions begin to stretch beyond self. Trust breaks through caution, even when danger whispers nearby. When Lucy finds out Tumnus was ordered by the White Witch to take captive any children of Adam and Eve, she doesn't talk about rules or laws. Instead, her thoughts go straight to how scared he must feel (Lewis, *Wardrobe* 57). Her plea, "We simply must try to rescue him," reflects an intuitive, relational empathy that bypasses the self-preservation typical of the Preconventional child.

Kohlberg's Moral Development Level	Stage	Lucy Pevensie's Behaviour in <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i>
Level 3: Postconventional	Stage 5 – Social Contract Orientation	Treats Caspian with political respect and recognizes the importance of fairness and justice.
	Stage 6 – Universal Ethical Principles	Attempts to heal Eustace in his dragon form, demonstrating compassion and selfless concern.
Level 2: Conventional	Stage 3 – Good Interpersonal Relationships	Cooperates with her siblings to maintain harmony and strengthen group relationships.
	Stage 4 – Maintaining Social Order	Rescues Trumpkin with her dagger, fulfilling her responsibility to protect others.
Level 1: Preconventional	Stage 1 – Obedience and Punishment Orientation	Obeys Mr. Beaver's instructions to avoid danger and ensure safety.
	Stage 2 – Individualism and Exchange	Receives Father Christmas's cordial as a reward, reflecting reciprocity and beneficial exchange.

Table: 1

Midway through the story, Lucy sticks close to Mr. Beaver's lead when danger shows up. One by one they move - Mr. Beaver first, Lucy right behind, Mrs. Beaver bringing up the rear (Lewis, *Wardrobe* 95). Not because she's afraid to speak up. She listens because it makes sense when things go wrong. Following him isn't weakness. It's knowing who to trust when the wolves draw near. Out of nowhere comes the magic cordial, handed to her by Father Christmas. Not quite a weapon, it mends injuries when battle leaves bodies broken. Obedience pays off - she earns it, not asks. What follows is

quiet proof: doing right brings tools, not just praise. Her role shifts without announcement, shaped now by what she carries. Healing becomes her way of stepping into chaos and pulling things back together.

Little Lucy, about eight, shows deeper right-and-wrong thinking in Prince Caspian. Her choices now hinge on keeping family bonds strong, fearing being left out by brothers and sister. At the broken castle of Cair Paravel, she follows Peter's lead without pause. Even when others hesitate, her voice rises - "Go on, go on... I've felt for hours that there was some wonderful mystery hanging over this place" (Lewis, *Caspian* 23). What drives her isn't rule-following, but trust in connection.

Yet the deepest challenge to her Stage 3 thinking comes when she alone spots Aslan but gives in to what others doubt. Instead of holding firm, shame follows - caught between fitting in and answering a deeper truth within. Later on, things shift; she decides Aslan must be followed, no matter if brothers or sisters turn away. This marks a quiet move toward making choices based not on approval but inner clarity. Her bond with Stage 4 takes shape as war stirs near Narnia's borders. With blade in hand, Lucy frees Trumpkin from ropes meant to silence him: "Lucy was busily engaged in cutting his bonds with a pocket knife" (Lewis, *Caspian* 36). Now it isn't praise she seeks - it is order restored, justice done, duty met without being asked.

Lucy, now twelve, moves through the world guided by something deeper than rules. Instead of clinging to old titles, she lets go - watching how things work now matters more. When she sees Caspian again, breath catching at the sight - "Ca-Ca-Caspian!" - it's clear she remembers what came before. Yet power isn't claimed here; it's given. She steps back not because she must, but because order holds better when roles make sense in their time. What once was queenly rank gets folded quietly into support. Stability grows where people honor current duties, even if past glories linger nearby. Lewis shows this shift without fanfare, just a girl acknowledging a king who earned his place.

Out of everyone on board, only Lucy moves toward the creature without hesitation. Though others back away, calling him dangerous, she sees pain first. Her voice softens - not because he's human but because hurt looks the same in any form. The moment she notices his injured limb, words

come gently, like offering help to a hurt animal near a village fence. Rules about who deserves care mean nothing here; instinct takes over. Even when fear spreads through the ship, her mind stays fixed on healing. Belonging doesn't matter - neither blood nor shape decides worthiness for kindness.

At last, stepping onto the Island of the Voices, she slips into the magician's home to find the hidden words that can reveal the unseen Dufflepuds. Inside the ancient book, a mirror shows her pride staring back. Yet, without pausing too long, she turns away - because others matter more than what glitters inside her head. This moment stitches together every lesson she has lived through. Not rules, not rewards, just something deeper pulling her forward. Her choices now breathe on their own, shaped by respect no spell could conjure.

Edmund Pevensie: Pleasure Doubt and Quiet Return

Out of everyone in Narnia's stories, Edmund changes the most - his mind twists, then rebuilds itself in ways others' do not. While Lucy moves step by step through clear phases of growing up, Edmund gets stuck early on, trapped in selfish thinking that only cares about personal gain. At first, everything he does centers around what benefits him directly, nothing more. When he meets the White Witch, she offers something irresistible - enchanted candy that hooks him fast. That moment isn't just about food; it shows how easily desire can shape choices when little else matters. What follows grows out of craving: one gift leads to loyalty built on sugar and lies.

Phase	Psychological/Moral Development	Illustrative Behaviour
The Crisis	Pathological Stage 2 – Hedonistic Orientation	Obsession with Turkish Delight; betrays his siblings to the White Witch.
Cognitive Restructuring	Aslan's substitutionary sacrifice initiates moral transformation	Dissolution of guilt; realignment of the ethical self.
The Rebound	Transition to Conventional Morality	Stage 3: Defends his siblings.

Phase	Psychological/Moral Development	Illustrative Behaviour
		Stage 4: Demonstrates chivalric respect toward Trumpkin.

Table: 2

Out of nowhere, Edmund sees bonds as deals to gain something. Because Peter leads, Edmund resists - not out of principle, but because control feels unfair when it isn't his. Instead, the Witch whispers rewards, so loyalty shifts toward her false claims. Acting rashly, he hands over those closest to him, yet ends up trapped by cold stone walls and colder lies. What pulls him back isn't advice or guilt - it's Aslan falling lifeless on ancient rock, given freely though owed nothing. That moment cracks more than rules; it splits open everything inside. Seeing someone die for a betrayer rewires thought patterns long settled. Slowly, selfish math fades, replaced by responsibility not earned - but received. A new kind of right begins where calculation fails.

Edmund steps forward in *Prince Caspian*, showing how much he has changed. Now thinking like someone who cares what others feel, he puts his brothers and sisters first. Loyalty pulls him close to Peter - no more fighting for control. When swords clash near the end, and one fight risks becoming many, he moves fast toward his brother. Voices rise around him but his rings loudest, calling out names of home and courage. The army stirs because he speaks not for fame, but for those beside him. Family holds him steady. So does duty. Not pride. His choices now grow from belonging, not winning. Others follow - not because they must, but because he means it. Even when noise fills the air, his purpose stays clear. Not about being seen. About standing where help matters most.

Out of nowhere, Edmund suggests a sparring session with Trumpkin, not because he holds authority, but because he values how things should be done fairly. Instead of acting superior as a former king, he speaks calmly, offering the dwarf a chance to prove himself. The way he says, "would you have a little fencing match with me... you'll be quite clever enough to disarm me without doing me

any danger" (Lewis, *Caspian* 92), reveals more than politeness - it reflects trust in structure, in agreed-upon rules. His behavior leans on shared expectations, not power plays. There's weight in that moment - how he chooses balance over dominance, procedure over privilege.

Later in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Edmund, now thirteen, begins thinking more about deeper ideas of right and responsibility. Instead of just following rules, he weighs what matters beyond personal gain. When Caspian considers leaving the mission to chase distant horizons, it's Edmund who speaks up - not out of fear, but because promises mean something. He points out that leading isn't only about adventure; it ties back to people waiting at home. Loyalty pulls harder than curiosity. Duty sticks even when excitement fades.

Later on, Edmund shows his grown-up thinking once he hears how scared the sailors feel near the Silver Sea: "they're right we can decide what to do with the three sleepers tomorrow we daren't eat the food and there's no point in staying here... as the whole place smells of magic and danger" (Lewis, *Treader* 150). Instead of reacting out of fear or chasing praise, he chooses based on care for everyone aboard, mixing leadership with real empathy. By now, he has moved far past being that bitter kid only fixated on sweets, becoming someone willing to put others first - this shift paints one of the clearest pictures of inner growth found in young adult fantasy tales.

Susan and Peter: Navigating Rules and Power

Lucy and Edmund shift morally through each stage of Kohlberg's framework, unfolding change step by step. In another direction, Susan and Peter follow paths shaped less by theory, more by being the older ones in the family. Their choices stick close to duty, shaped by position rather than progression. Growth shows up differently when responsibility arrives early.

Right away, Susan worries about staying safe and keeping things calm. Known sometimes as 'Susan the Gentle,' she leans on care, practical choices, and a slow step forward when unsure. Right from her earliest steps into Narnia, comfort and routine matter deeply to her. The cold, endless winter

frightens her, so does the threat of the White Witch - this makes her hesitate at first. Her way of growing fits within what's expected, focused on pleasing others and upholding rules. Getting along with people shapes much of how she sees the world early on. Later, structure and duty start guiding her too.

Midway through *Prince Caspian*, Susan keeps choosing peace whenever tensions rise among her brothers and sister. Standing near the broken walls of Cair Paravel, just before sleep, she whispers, "Hold hands, oh I do wish it would stop" (Lewis, *Caspian* 12). Her choices line up with the others not from fear or habit, yet because she trusts calm connection more than personal wins. What matters most unfolds quietly - her quiet voice pulling them together when things might otherwise drift apart.

Out of nowhere, an arrow flies past Trumpkin's head. The soldier holding him jerks upward, hands opening as the dwarf slips free - caught off guard by what comes next. One shot, no warning, that changes everything in seconds. Justice arrives sharp and sudden, without asking permission. What looks like violence fits neatly into something stricter, more measured. A rule kicks in when lives hang by thread. Protecting one means stopping another cold. Balance returns only after force cuts through noise. Laws bend little when survival speaks louder.

Still, something halts inside Susan, growth stuck mid-step. Relying on logic and what society expects pulls her away from Narnia over time - those old journeys now just called 'child's play.' For Lewis, she becomes a quiet warning: fitting in neatly can mean losing wonder, trading vision for routine.

The Hierarchical Spectrum	High King Peter	Queen Susan the Gentle
Dominant Kohlberg Stage	Stage 4 – Maintaining Social Order	Stage 3 – Good Interpersonal Relationships
Primary Moral Orientation	Preserves institutional order and justice.	Prioritizes the safety and well-being of her siblings.
Representative Action	Engages in a chivalric duel with Miraz	Uses her archery skills to defend

The Hierarchical Spectrum	High King Peter	Queen Susan the Gentle
	to uphold justice and legitimate authority.	Trumpkin and protect her companions.
Guiding Principle	Governed by external duty, responsibility, and leadership.	Guided by interpersonal care, empathy, and pragmatic domesticity.

Table: 3

Peter steps into Narnia not with hesitation but purpose, taking hold of duty like something handed down through time. Because he is the eldest, leadership finds him - quietly, without debate. His choices flow from a sense of justice built on fairness, not fear. When danger rises, he stands first, not because glory calls, but because someone must shield the others. Care shapes his actions more than rules do. Though young, authority rests steady in his hands, shaped by loyalty to family and land alike.

When Peter steps into battle in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, it's because Narnia needs someone to stand up. Not once does he think about winning glory for himself. What moves him forward is responsibility - his siblings rely on him, so do the people caught under the witch's rule. Leadership finds him, rather than being chased. Though young, he carries the weight without looking away.

Out of nowhere, Peter steps forward to face King Miraz one on one. This fight follows strict rules, almost like a ceremony meant to stop wider violence. A clash with blades unfolds - old style, just Peter versus Miraz, steel meeting steel. Instead of rage driving him, it's something quieter: duty to Narnia's right to stand free. Behind every move he makes lies not vengeance, yet a belief in fairness carved into tradition.

Even though he doubts it makes sense, Peter still listens when Lucy says she spotted Aslan - his choice shows a shift toward trust rather than control. Instead of insisting on logic, he accepts her word, caught between doubt and loyalty. This moment reveals more care for unity than command.

Rather than hold tight to rank, he steps back - not because he must, but because connection matters more just then.

Still, once Peter and Susan get told they're too old to go back to Narnia after *Prince Caspian*, their growth inside that world just stops. While Lucy and Edmund move forward into deeper understanding during *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Peter and Susan stay fixed where they were - tied tight to rules and roles common in youth and young adult years. Their sense of right never stretches beyond what those early stages allow.

Gender Balance and Shared Hero Journeys

What stands out in Lewis's storytelling is how both girls and boys carry the weight of right choices. Instead of following old patterns that kept girls quiet or stuck at home, his books let young male and female figures face challenges side by side. When ruling Narnia, Lucy and Susan stand on level ground with their brothers - not set apart, not lesser. They receive lands just like the others do. Each child must act when honor calls - no exceptions.

Democratized Agentic Spectrum	Female Agency	Male Agency
Representative Characters	Lucy Pevensie; Susan Pevensie	Peter Pevensie; Edmund Pevensie
Symbolic Weapons/Gifts	Lucy: Cordial of Life and Dagger Susan: Bow and Ivory Horn	Peter: Rhindon (Sword) and Shield Edmund: Broadsword and Royal Shield
Primary Moral Imperative	Healing and Combat	Protection and Combat
Dominant Ethical Orientation	Compassion, restoration, and defensive courage	Leadership, guardianship, and martial responsibility

Table: 4

Out of nowhere comes a shift - anyone can be brave now, it seems. Gifts arrive from Father Christmas, each one meant for battle, not play. Peter takes up steel: a blade, a guard for his arm. Lucy slips a small knife into her belt, plus liquid that mends wounds when poured. Susan gets arrows ready, fitted to a bow, along with a pale horn carved from bone. These objects carry weight, far beyond mere storybook charm. When fighting spreads across Narnia's lands, neither girl waits. They move on their own terms, striking, choosing, saving lives. Power sits in their hands, used without asking permission. When things go wrong for the Pevensies, it's Susan's horn that cuts through the noise, bringing help just in time. Her skill with a bow pulls Trumpkin back from danger, quiet and precise. On the field where breaths run short, Lucy carries a small bottle holding more than liquid - courage shaped by trembling hands. She reaches for it even when her legs want to flee, pouring drops into mouths stopped by pain, one of them her own blood, Edmund, pale and still. What she does isn't bold, never flashy, only necessary.

Out front stands Lucy, then Edmund follows, each step shaped more by what they've learned than who they are. Authority here grows from choices, not titles handed down through old rules about boys leading girls. When Peter speaks, it carries weight because he listens first - because he changed. Aslan does not pick sides based on birth order or bloodline. Instead, right action matters most, clear across every trial faced together. Susan aims true, not because she's told, but because the moment demands it. Leadership shifts like weather, depending on need, not habit. Moral growth isn't owned - it shows up when courage meets truth. Each child earns their place simply by moving forward. The story doesn't elevate one kind of soul above another. It watches them rise - not as types, symbols, roles - but as people learning how to do better.

Conclusion

Little doors open into big lessons. C.S. Lewis built Narnia like a mind growing up, long before scientists gave names to those changes. Through *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, then *Prince Caspian*, followed by *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, places shape people - forests, castles, seas

become steps in thinking deeper about right and wrong. Lucy moves without proof toward fairness for everyone, not because rules say so, yet because it feels true beyond law. Edmund stumbles at first, chasing only what helps him, until pain teaches care for others' lives. This world does not treat kids as blank pages. Instead each trial draws out courage, judgment, choice - mistakes burn bright, decisions weigh heavy, character forms through walking muddy paths under strange stars.

Not everyone sees it, yet right and wrong in Narnia spread evenly between women and men, each given equal weight in shaping how things unfold. In the end, the land isn't just about running away from reality or hiding behind old sermons - it works like a quiet teacher, carefully shaped to help children grow into better versions of themselves.

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