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Features of Crossover Literature

Analysis of Reader Responses

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**ABSTRACT**

Denna undersökning analyserar vuxna läsares reaktioner till litteratur ursprungligen riktad mot barn genom att analysera nätbaserade bokrecensioner av C.S. Lewis *Berättelsen om Narnia* och Philip Pullmans trilogi *Den mörka materian*. Undersökningens huvudsakliga teori tar sitt ursprung i litteraturgenren som på engelska kallas *crossover literature* samt i *reader-response* teorin, vars uppgift är att undersöka läsarens respons till läsmaterialet. Syftet med undersökningen var att ta reda på hur vuxna läsare reagerar till de två bokserierna genom sex kategorier som oftast nämns i läsarnas respons, för att ta reda på om böckerna innehåller element av *crossover literature*. Kategorierna som nämns mest i recensionerna är narrativa medel i böckerna, betoning på religion, gott mot ont, att läsa böckerna först som barn och senare som vuxen, problem med tidslinjen och filmversioner. Genom att använda dessa sex analys kategorier verkar förklaringen till intresset från vuxna ligga i bland annat böckernas mångskitiga innehåll, att man kan relatera sig till karaktärerna samt i intresset att föra en diskussion mellan text och läsare genom att skriva en recension om sina egna upplevelser kring böckerna.

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**KEYWORDS:**

Crossover literature, reader-response theory, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *His Dark Materials*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

“The extraordinary success of J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter, who was featured on the cover of Time magazine in the fall of 1999 with a caption informing readers that “he’s not just for kids”, made headlines all over the world, and brought the phenomenon of crossover literature to the attention of millions around the world. The Time issue seemed to herald crossover fiction as the prominent genre of the new millennium”. (Beckett 2009: 1)

The aim of this thesis is to discuss how adult readers react to and analyze crossover literature. This will be done by looking at reader reviews to two book series: *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956) by C.S. Lewis and *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995–2000) by Philip Pullman. 50 reader responses will be chosen for both Lewis’s and Pullman’s works from the web page Goodreads.com. The analysis will focus on six distinct points that are brought up frequently by reviewers on Goodreads. The points are: 1. Narrative features as described in Beckett’s analysis, 2. Emphasis on religion, 3. Good vs evil, 4. Reading the books as a child and later as an adult, 5. Timeline issues and 6. Movie adaptations. The analysis is carried out by incorporating parts from crossover literature theory and reader-response theory, in order to give a comprehensive answer to the question. The facts from these two are then combined with existing reader responses to the books.

Much of the theory dealing with crossover literature today is concerned with the history of the concept: its social, historical and political value (Beckett 2009, Falconer 2009) or critical studies of children’s literature and text alone to examine the crossover phenomenon (Harju 2012: 13–14, 179–180). Peter Hunt explains in his work *The International Companion Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature*, that cross-reading is a very new concept which does not only need more analysis of the topic itself, but also how readers react to the topic (Hunt 2004: 558). Maija-Liisa Harju criticizes in her dissertation *Being Not Alone in the World: Exploring Reader Responses to Crossover Books*, echoed by Jannica Österholm in her thesis *Crossover Literature and its Readers: A Comparison of Online Book Reviews* that research from the eyes of the reader is still lacking in the field of crossover literature. This is directly contradictory to the main idea of the topic, as

its main function is to be adopted by a varied readership in order to reach success, and according to Harju (2012: 13–14), reader responses is the strongest indication of the success of crossover literature. By concentrating on reader responses, it adds critical value to the importance of cross-reading, analyzing not only what crossover literature is, but what it does for readers (Falconer 2009). Harju further explains that focusing on better understanding of what crossover literature actually does for readers, and why adults choose to read books aimed at children or young adults is important for future understanding of the genre, and at this point it is lacking (Harju 2012: 13). Harju's study, which focuses more on the reader, will be significant for my thesis as I intend to analyze reader responses and experiences in connection to crossover literature.

Crossover literature, or cross-reading is a relatively new concept, emerging at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the simplest terms, crossover literature can be explained as adults rediscovering the addictive pleasure of a good story, told directly and without any postmodernist angst about the problem of representation (Hunt 2004: 559). Additionally, crossover also refers to literature written for children which crosses over to substantial numbers of adult readers, or the other way around, and which has frequently been employed in media, publishing and marketing circles to refer to novels targeted at dual audiences (Falconer 2004). Sandra Beckett and Rachel Falconer have studied the concept of crossover literature. Falconer (2009) introduces crossover literature in her book *The Crossover Novel* by referring to the huge success *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) had in Britain and around the world, as readers of different ages picked up the books. *Harry Potter* was published with children and young adults as its target groups, but quickly grew popular with adults as well. According to Beckett (2009: 1), *Harry Potter* is considered *the* crossover title, a kind of prototype of the genre. Following the huge success of *Harry Potter*, Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* won the Children's Book category of the Whitbread (now Costa) Award in 2001, then went on to win the overall prize of Book of the Year that same year, which at that time had never happened before. Likewise, in 2003, Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* was published simultaneously in two different editions, one for children and one for adults, marking the beginning of crossover literature as a mainstream literary genre. (Falconer 2009: 1–2)

However, according to Sandra Beckett in her book *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*, the idea of crossover literature is not a new concept, mentioning that adults throughout history have been captivated by literature aimed at children. A few examples of this type of literature include Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), and even older works such as Aesop's Fables and *Arabian Nights*. (Beckett 2009: 2) Moreover, after the success of *Harry Potter*, classic children's fantasy such as Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* reappeared in new editions, some of which were tailor-made for adult readers. And throughout the decade, children's fiction reached bigger audiences than ever before through the medium of film adaptation. (Falconer 2009: 2) Crossover literature is an extensive topic, and therefore demands a further look into some of the aspects of the genre. Appropriately, the genre will be looked further into by looking at two book series initially regarded for children but read by adults as well.

The decision to analyze reader responses to C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* are multiple. Firstly, both are mentioned by Beckett and Falconer as children's literature that has gained traction amongst adults, clarifying the idea that both work as crossover literature. Secondly, both have enough reviews on Goodreads in order to get a varied amount of reader responses. Finally, the reason for my choice is that both Lewis and Pullman heavily use religious symbols and metaphors to discuss their stories, and this is something a lot of readers point out on Goodreads. This is an important aspect of crossover literature, since the concept relies heavily on audience response. Additionally, as the concept is a relatively new one dating back only to the 1990s, but still reaches back further in time when we look at older books through a new perspective, I chose works that represents both times. *His Dark Materials* was among the first to be called crossover literature, while *Chronicles of Narnia* when revisited was considered to be a part of crossover literature as well.

An interesting issue within the phenomenon of crossover literature, is that many readers are not concerned with the idea that they are reading books classified as children's literature. The academic world considers works such as *Harry Potter*, *His Dark Materials* and the *Chronicles of Narnia* as children's or young adult literature, but in reality readers do not classify the books they read into children's, young adult or adult literature. The classification of books into different genres are made by academia or by publishers responsible for marketing the books. In some cases, the same book – because of its appeal to both children and adults – is published twice with different covers, one for children and another one for adults. A famous example of this phenomenon was the first book in the *Harry Potter* series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, which was published with different cover designs for 3 different audience groups: children, young adults and adults. (Beckett 2009: 242–243)

Consequently, reader responses are an important measure for publishers and authors to reach as wide an audience as they possibly can, and with the introduction of crossover literature this has become evident. Books published with different covers for different audiences became the new normal. At the center of this shift is the reactions of the reader. Reader-response theory has from the early years focused on practical criticism, which refers to a method of reading pioneered by IA Richards in the 1920s that encourages the reader to approach the literary text as a set of words on the page in isolation from its author, as well as its social and historical context (West 2017: 89). However, according to Rita Felski (2008), we should instead of only focusing on the act of reading, focus on why we choose to read certain books, on the connection the reader makes with the material and why this should play an important role in reader-response theory. By studying the amount of responses to Lewis's and Pullman's work on Goodreads, it is clear that the authors' stories have made quite an impact on their respective readers.

Goodreads.com is an online platform where its users have the opportunity to put together an interactive library. Goodreads is the world's largest site for readers and book recommendations. Their mission is to help people find and share books they love. A few of the things you can do on Goodreads include reviewing books that you have read, see

what books your friends are reading and to track the books you are reading, have read, and want to read. The platform has no specific guidelines as to write a review, but in order to write a review on any material one has to register to the site. This type of freedom gives extremely varied results, which will be examined further in the analysis section.

## 2 FROM CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO CROSSOVER FICTION

This section will study the topic of crossover literature and reader-response theory. Chapter 2.1 will deal with the difficulty of defining the genre and how it has developed over time. The chapter will also look further at the crossover narrative, also known as child-to-adult or adult-to-child dichotomy, and what lies behind the appeal of crossover literature. Chapter 2.2 will look into the topic of reader-response theory and the different approaches to the topic.

### 2.1 Crossover Literature

Crossover literature is difficult to define as a genre, as it contains a varied body of literature. Beckett (2009: 4), defines crossover literature as the term which refers to fiction that crosses from child to adult or adult to child audiences. However, the term can be interpreted in many different ways and can contain many different varieties of novels, containing material and ideas such as conventional and avant-garde, sophisticated and straightforward, clear-cut and morally ambivalent (Falconer 2009: 7). While many critics agree that the crossover novel was hatched out after the success of *Harry Potter* in the end of the 1990s early 2000s, both Beckett and Falconer agree that today's genre of crossover fiction include a much larger variation of authors and books. Countless books within the children's literature genre could be redefined as crossover, because similar work has already been reprinted with a dual audience in mind (Falconer 2009: 26–28). Falconer argues in the introduction to her own work that:

While the crossover novel came into its own over the past decade or so in Britain, it is also important to see that its insights are retrospective. Contemporary cross-reading highlights how children's literature has never existed in a truly separate sphere. I have also avoided constructing any hard-edged definitions of what does and does not constitute "crossover fiction" because an essential feature of this category of fiction is that its boundaries are unfixed. Not only are the texts themselves often generically hybrid, but readers are hybridising different readerly identities when they "cross over" to reading a book that was intended [...] for someone other. (Falconer 2009: 9)

Likewise, Harju's (2012: 13) thoughts on the subject of crossover fiction is that readers can explore their sense of storied self by experiencing the narrative through multiple reading identities, those of a child, young adult, adult or elder, hinting on the diverse nature of the crossover genre. Furthermore Harju suggests that readers engage in cross-reading because it provides them with a unique reading experience that links the worlds of childhood and adulthood, touching on the duality of audience in crossover literature (Harju 2012: 13).

### 2.1.1 The Evolution of a Genre

While crossover literature became a mainstream expression at the beginning of the twenty-first century with the introduction of *Harry Potter*, we can dig further back in history to find countless works that fit into the category of crossover. According to Maria Nikolajeva (1997: 10), folk and fairy tales are among the oldest and most retold stories that crosses the line between adult and child literature. Folktales, oriental tales, myths and legends were originally created with no specific audience in mind, thus contained stories with religious overtones to stories including violence and child abuse in varying degrees. Before the introduction of folktales and fables, there was no specific literature aimed at children. However, authors' work, such as Zacharias Topelius's folktales and Alexander Pushkin's as well as H.C. Andersen's fairy tales, already had a dual audience, as their work were read by people of all ages. (Nikolajeva 1997: 10)

Additionally, classics such as *Arabian Nights*, *Fables* by Jean de La Fontaine (1668) and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift (1726) are all early cases of crossover literature that were quickly appreciated by a dual audience. Later crossover authors include J.R.R. Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, A.A. Milne, Kenneth Grahame, L. Frank Baum and C.S. Lewis. (Beckett 2009: 2) As both Beckett and Falconer mention, these authors among others such as Charles Dickens and Jane Austin were initially read by an adult audience, but the lines blurred quickly to also include a growing child readership. Even today some of these

works can be encountered in the children's or young adult sections of libraries (Falconer 2009: 10–11).

Nevertheless, it is important to point out how important an impact the *Harry Potter* books had on mainstreaming the crossover genre, and popularizing the authors and works mentioned above within crossover literature. The introduction of *Harry Potter* among others brought forth the blurring of lines between child and adult readerships that traditionally had been separated from each other. Moreover, some literature that was later dubbed as crossover, addressed a diverse, cross-generational audience from the start, which included children, adolescents and adults. (Beckett 2009: 3) However, with the introduction of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and later Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, children's literature was entering a new golden age, much in credit to a newfound market of adult readers. After that it did not take long until the publishing world realized the potential of crossover novels. Nowadays the term crossover is acknowledged by writers, readers, critics and publishers, with some deliberately claiming the title from the start in order to attract a larger audience. (Beckett 2009: 179–180)

### 2.1.2 Adult-to-Child and Child-to-Adult Narrative

A wider acceptance of cross-reading, especially adults reading children's books took place with the large scale success of the *Harry Potter* in the early 2000s. Before the introduction of crossover literature, cross-reading was already quite common, but usually the other way round. It was mostly children who read books originally intended for adults. This is something Beckett (2009: 5), calls adult-to-child crossover, because historically there was not a lot of literature specifically aimed at children. As more and more children started to read literature intended for adults, publishers followed up the interest by adapting adult literature for children by for example making abridged versions or illustrated editions of popular books, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* (1887). (Beckett 2009: 5) The general

tendency and pattern of crossover literature in the nineteenth century was adult-to-child crossover (Anggraini 2015: 8–9). Furthermore, even though many literary classics such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *Don Quixote* (1605) and science fiction stories by Jules Verne (1864) were not written with a younger audience in mind, they all contain essential narrative pattern of children's literature, namely: home – departure – adventure – homecoming, thus indicating that adult-to-child crossover was a widespread phenomenon (Nikolajeva 1997: 11).

Conversely, in today's society, it is child-to-adult crossover that has become popular. Historically, fantasy fiction in particular has always been treated as a specific genre in children's literature, especially the use of magic as a narrative device (Nikolajeva 1997: 14). Today, literature written for children or young adults is read more than ever by adults, and many question why it has become so popular. According to Nikolajeva (2010: 13), the universal appeal of the genre can be ascribed to the fortunate attempt to reintroduce the romantic hero character into children's fiction as Rowling did with *Harry Potter*. Likewise, literary critics conclude that it is due to the strength of children's fantasy fiction alone, while others claimed that there was some major cultural anxiety at the heart of the phenomenon (Falconer 2009: 2). Whatever the reason for the success, the reactions were grand, catapulting children's literature to the top of selling charts and book awards, with publishers printing two or three different versions of the same books in order to reach a larger and more diverse audience (Beckett 2009: 1–2). This phenomenon is more recent than adult-to-child crossover, and after the publication of the *Harry Potter* series, the child-to-adult crossover phenomenon became prevalent. Books for young readers were noticed by adults, and adults enjoyed reading such books without referring to educational purposes, but read them for pure enjoyment. This was a large shift in adult reading habits, as books that would earlier have been considered simply children's literature now took center stage among readers of all ages. (Anggraini 2015: 39–40) Publishers and scholars, including Beckett and Falconer, agree that a considerable part of this is due to the popularity of *Harry Potter*.

### 2.1.3 Allure of Crossover Literature

When J.K. Rowling published *Harry Potter*, she broke most rules regarding a conventional children's book, notably in regard to the length and the darkness of the subject matter. According to Beckett (2009: 259), while adult fiction has remained compartmentalized into specific genres such as fiction, romance, mystery and science fiction, children's and young adult literature has been pushing at the boundaries for years. This is also something crossover literature does, blending different genres and themes and through hybridization, creating a new genre altogether. Hybridization can be seen in many children's or young adult books, such as Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* (1991), which blends mystery with fantasy, Pullman mixes moral issue and fantasy in *His Dark Materials* and Stephenie Meyer mixes horror, suspense and romance in the *Twilight* saga (2005-2008) with a vampire tale, just to name a few (Beckett 2009: 259).

The appeal behind crossover literature and many of its writers is this kind of hybridization of different genres and topics, and there is more to the story than what you see at first glance. Children's literature gives authors a way to write more freely, as Philip Pullman said after finishing *His Dark Materials* trilogy:

There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book. In adult literary fiction, stories are there on sufferance. Other things are felt to be more important: technique, style, literary knowingness... The present-day would-be George Eliots take up their stories as if with a pair of tongs. They're embarrassed by them. If they could write novels without stories in them, they would. Sometimes they do. We need stories so much that we're even willing to read bad books to get them, if the good books won't supply them. We all need stories, but children are more frank about it. (Goodreads 2019)

Pullman has stated several times that he does not write with a particular audience in mind, and that his material is suitable for everyone. Nevertheless, *His Dark Materials* was first published by *Random House Publishing* in the US as children's literature, but with the rise in popularity of crossover literature, the trilogy was later republished with an older audience in mind (Beckett 2009: 243).

Harju (2012: 13), goes further in her research, claiming that crossover fiction continues to captivate readers because it can build bridges instead of barriers between childhood and adulthood. Crossover books can instead invite its readers to a unique and unambiguous story space where age is not an issue, and where the reader can chose the material they prefer (Harju 2012: 12–13). Falconer and Beckett also echo what Pullman says about writing for a particular audience. Even though one would think that a child choses a book based on the fantastical and adventure elements present, whereas an adult would chose a book based on the search for deeper meaning, it can also be the other way around. Falconer has researched how children react to books such as Pullman’s and established that children were also interested in the more intricate topics in the books. (Falconer 2009: 29) Likewise Beckett states that many children’s books, such as Russell Hoban’s *The Mouse and His Child* (1977), have received mixed receptions with some declaring the book a children’s classic while others think the book’s storyline and themes are too dark for children (Beckett 2009: 96). This would suggest that finding the right audience for a book is harder than it seems, with hybridization and cross-reading becoming more widespread topics within literature. Briefly put, an outstanding crossover piece presents readers to a good storyline while simultaneously providing them with an idea that engages them on an intellectual and emotional level (Beckett 2009: 268). Nevertheless, it is not only important to find out why certain topics or genres engage a dual audience, but also how they are received by their audience.

## 2.2 Reader-response Theory

Anggraini (2015: 13–14), remarks that reading is meaning making. When a person reads, they are not passively but actively interpreting the text in front of them. This form of interpreting is a manner of communication, and for the communication to happen two parties are essential, in this case the text itself and the reader. The text is there to suggest a frame, within which the reader then can build their own response to the particular text. (Iser 1978: 30) The communication between the text and the reader is not a one-way

process where the text does all the work, instead Wolfgang Iser (1978), argues that it is a two-way process where the reader is just as important to the process. Iser suggests that when reading, readers have assumptions based on what they read, and as they go on reading, the assumptions develop as the readers are provided with new material along the way (Iser 1978: 31). Therefore, combining the old and the new, the reader creates a whole new way of looking at the reading material. Beckett (2009: 145), also supports the idea that the reader is communicating with the text, and adds that the act of re-reading a book over the course of several years can give the reader new insights into the meaning of the book and how the readers themselves develop over time. Reading and re-reading is to a great extent actively formed by the individual reader, which correlate with the aim of reader-response theory, where the intention is to connect literary works with their readers and the process of reading (Beckett 2009: 145).

Reader-response scholars depend greatly on what individual readers have to say about the material they read and how they interpret it, in order to construct literary understandings and how they become visible throughout the reading process. Reader-response theory is difficult to define into just one category of theorists, instead reader-response criticism has become more and more divided. (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 330) Despite their common goal, response theorists interpret the concept very differently and across a wide continuum. According to Brooks and Browne (2012: 76), reader-response theorists can be divided into three broad categories.

The first group acknowledges that the author of the text is in the prominent role of creator, and that the role of the reader is to some extent decode what the author has to say. While still giving the reader an active role, these theorists pay greater attention to the ways the author guides the readers' interpretation of the text through a specific set of literary conventions. (Brooks & Browne 2012: 76–77) With this mindset as the base and the specific reading process suggested by Roman Ingarden, Wolfgang Iser developed the phenomenological analysis for reviewing individual works of literature (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 330–331). The experience of reading is an evolving process of anticipation, frustration, retrospection, reconstruction and satisfaction, as the reader

decodes what the writer tries to convey. This is partly due to the idea that the author's intentional acts establish limits to the reader's creativity, thus limiting the reader's possibilities to interpret the text. (Eagleton 1996: 58)

On the opposite end of the continuum, we find scholars who maintain that the text itself has very little to do with a reader's interpretation of meaning. Even though the content a reader observes is written by an author with their own ideas and motives, the reader constructs unique interpretations of the material in front of them. (Brooks & Browne 2012: 78) Roland Barthes was among the first to encourage a way of reading that opens up the text to an endless array of alternative meanings (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 331). This is supported by David Bleich (quoted in Brooks & Browne 2012: 74), who believes that each person carries out their own subjective reading, and if individual readers arrive at similar meanings, it is a result of the individuals, not the material itself. Alleged meaning embedded in literature by the author plays a very small part when trying to determine a reader's understanding of the text they are reading. Bleich continues by suggesting that literary interpretation is largely a result of someone's personality or psychology. Instead, factors that greatly influence their responses are age, sex, size, family situation, race, income and other cultural factors. (Brooks & Browne 2012: 75)

Finally, as a middle ground, some scholars describe reading as a negotiation between both the text and the person engaging in the literary interpretation. From this point of view, the main role is held by the collaboration between the text and the reader in how the two influence each other in the process of creating meaning. Louise Rosenblatt (quoted in Brooks & Browne 2012: 76), stands out as one of the earliest scholars who strikes this middle ground between the maker of the text and the reader of the text. She suggests that reading occurs as a "transaction, a two way process involving a reader and a text at a particular time, under particular circumstances". (Brooks & Browne 2012: 76) Furthermore, an idea to consider here is how one's culture might influence the communication process between writer and reader. Brooks and Browne (2012: 78) are two scholars who have looked further into the social aspect of reading, argue that few cultural influences such as values, practices and experiences affect both readers and

authors even meaning making. This is an important aspect to consider when interpreting reader responses, as so far, most of the complicating factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, social contexts, or racial backgrounds get grouped together and mentioned merely in broad strokes by response theorists, if at all. The cultural background of the reader matters according to Brooks and Brown, because it sets up the opinions and assumptions that the reader has, and will influence how a person experiences and understands a text.

For this thesis, the different categorizations of reader-response theory is not the main focus, but it is good to keep in mind that there is no one correct way of responding to a text. The one category that is closest to what the readers adhere to is the third, because most of the reviews studied commented on the authors' intentions with the text, especially if their own opinions shone through the story and how the readers reacted to it. The authors' intentions are particularly evident with the religious undertones and allegories in the two book series.

### 3 REVIEWING CROSSOVER LITERATURE

The primary material for this thesis analysis is reader reviews of C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Book reviews, according to Oinas and Leppälä (2013: 1785–1786), can look very different and serve several purposes. Initially, their purpose was purely informative; to inform readers of new books and to summarize their contents. As time went on, and books were published at a higher rate, the journals reviewing them became more selective in their choices of books, and a second, evaluative purpose of book reviews emerged (Oinas & Leppälä 2013: 1786). Moreover, Orteza y Miranda (1996: 193–194), remarks that the standard criticism in a review tends to be too limited or generic to be useful. To actually be valuable to readers, the book should be reviewed in the context of the relevant literature. This suggests a third purpose of book reviews, which can be called reflective. (Orteza y Miranda 1996: 193-194)

These three factors are good to keep in mind as book reviews today can look very different from one site to the other. Today, the best known and most widely consulted lists are those published by the *New York Times*. However, the *Times* has come under criticism that their reviewing process is not accurate nor objective, because the *Times* uses a system known as fast sales. Fast sales refers to how a book that never makes the best-seller list can in fact outsell books on the *Times*'s list. This is because the best-seller list reflects sales on a given week, not the books total sales. Therefore, one book might sell substantially in a given week and make the list, while another may sell at a slower pace, never making the list but selling more copies over time. (Greenspan & Rose 2000) In this thesis, however, the accuracy or objectiveness of a review is not the main intention, as the idea here is to find out how adults react to material considered children's literature. This is done in order to recognize crossover literature features found in Lewis's and Pullman's works. Nevertheless, many of the reviews chosen for this thesis will probably include informative, evaluative and reflective elements in some form.

### 3.1 Goodreads as a Review Forum Online

Goodreads is an online platform that allows people to freely browse its database of books, annotations and reviews. By signing up, users can register books to develop a personal library online and create reading lists in order for others to see what they are reading. Other features include making their own groups of book suggestions, surveys, polls, blogs, and discussions of different kinds. (Goodreads 2019) Goodreads was created in 2007 growing quickly, and within a year the site had over 650 000 members and over 10 million book titles were added. In 2012 the amount of members exceeded 10 million with over 360 million books up for reviewing. Goodreads is the world's largest site for readers and book recommendations, and as it grew in size it garnered interest from investors, and subsequently Goodreads was acquired by Amazon in March 2013. (*Tech Crunch* 2013)

Goodreads do not follow any specific guidelines as to how to write a review, but in order to post a review, you have to be a member of the site. There are however, terms of service that each member of the site has to adhere to: users agree not to post content that is illegal, obscene, threatening, defamatory, invasive of privacy, infringing of intellectual property rights (including publicity rights), or otherwise injurious to third parties or objectionable, and does not consist of or contain software viruses, political campaigning, commercial solicitation, chain letters, mass mailings, or any form of "spam" or unsolicited commercial electronic messages. (Goodreads 2019)

For the analysis, 50 reviews from Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and 50 reviews from Pullman's *His Dark Materials* will be chosen. The method of choosing starts from page one of each of the two book series reviewed and continues through the pages until 50 reviews written in English are reached for both works. Currently there are 9487 reviews available for the *Chronicles of Narnia*, and 4788 reviews for *His Dark Materials*, with additional reviews on each individual book within both series (last checked 15.1.2019). The analysis points originate from comments the reviewers mention in their texts. These points come up several times in different reviews, which legitimizes their importance in the eyes of the reviewers.

**Table 1.** Reviews chosen for the analysis from the two books, divided into their own categories. The material used is taken from Goddreads.com

	<i>Chronicles of Narnia</i>	<i>His Dark Materials</i>
Total number of reviews	50	50
Beckett's analysis points	41/50	45/50
Mention of religion	36/50	42/50
Reading the books as a child and later as an adult	35/50	26/50
Good vs evil	23/50	30/50
Timeline issues	16/50	13/50
Movie adaptations	15/50	14/50

### 3.2 Introduction to *Chronicles of Narnia*

According to Beckett (2009: 105), C.S. Lewis did not begin writing for children until he was fifty, when he introduced his readers to the *Chronicles of Narnia*, a seven volume fantasy series. However, as stated by Lewis himself “there is no such thing as writing for children”. In 1952, Lewis held a talk at the *Library Association of Britain* titled “*On Three Ways of Writing for Children*,” which was later on formed into an essay and published in *Lewis's Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*. In the talk Lewis mentions that there are three ways of writing for children, two of them are bad and one is good. The two bad ones include the importance of a “special thing” like a hat or a ring, or the idea that the story involves a child with special importance or power. According to Lewis, the only good way of writing for children is by writing a children’s story because it is simply “the best art-form” for something the writer may have to say. The best suited way in which Lewis chose to write his stories was through fantasy and fairy tales. (Lewis 1966: 63)

The *Chronicles of Narnia* does include a magical wardrobe and children of special importance, as exemplified by the legend of “sons of Adam” and “daughters of Eve” in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. However, it is the underlying meaning of the story that was the most important part for Lewis. It is not merely a story about chosen children that enter a magic realm through a wardrobe, but it is a story about growing up, choosing between right and wrong and the origins of evil and how to defeat it. This is particularly evident considering that Lewis was an avid theologian, and religious references can be found throughout the *Chronicles of Narnia* (Caughey 2005:219).

As for the duality and influence of Lewis’ work, the *Chronicles of Narnia* has always been appreciated by adults as well as children. Furthermore, prior to the success *Harry Potter*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* was the world’s bestselling fantasy series. The *Narnia* books are read by students of all ages as well as adults, while remaining a favorite among children and adolescents. Although some adults read the books as allegorical Christian fiction, children mainly appreciate the novels for its fantastical elements. (Beckett 2009: 105) Falconer (2009: 11–12), mentions Lewis among other authors such as Tolkien and Rowling, who have had the ability to captivate readers of different ages, and made way for the rise of contemporary crossover fiction. Finally, the enduring popularity of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* among adults was clearly demonstrated when it placed ninth in the *BBC*’s 2003 “Big Read”, which is the largest survey of popular fiction ever conducted among adults, with the goal of finding Britain’s “Best-Loved Book”. The fact that Lewis’s children’s book appeared in the top ten proves that his fantasy stories appeal to a wide audience of both children and adults. (Beckett 2009: 106)

### 3.3 Introduction to *His Dark Materials*

Just as Lewis before him, Pullman does not write his material with children in mind. According to Pullman: “A book should help the reader either enjoy life or endure it. The trouble with pigeonholing books by genre is that once they have a particular label

attached, they only attract readers who like the sort of book that has that sort of label.” This is one of the reasons why Pullman has become extremely cautious in making sure that he never writes with a specific audience in mind. He further states that his strong belief that staying within the boundaries of one particular genre shuts out more readers than it includes. (Romano 2001: 43)

Pullman believes that there are some themes and subjects that are too large for adult fiction and can therefore only be dealt with adequately in a children’s book. He has also criticized adult fiction for no longer telling a story. (Beckett 2009: 27) By reading between the lines on Pullman’s statement, you can sense that Pullman is looking for a genre that is in-between children’s and adult’s fiction, suggesting a need for a hybridization of traditional genres, which is a characteristic of crossover fiction (Beckett 2009: 259). Furthermore, according to John Rowe Townsend (1981: 234), “the only practical definition of a children’s book is a book which appears on the children’s list of a publisher.” Thus suggesting that even though Pullman himself would not define his books as children’s literature, it is in the hands of the publisher to make the decision of what the material is classified as.

As for the duality in Pullman’s audience, both children and adults read the books in *His Dark Materials* trilogy. The third book, *The Amber Spyglass* won the Children’s Book category of the Whitbread (now Costa) Award in 2001, and would go on to win the Book of the Year Award that same year (Falconer 2009: 2). That a book classified as children’s literature is selected as the Book of the Year over other adult fiction titles had never happened before within the Whitbread Award, suggesting that the newly categorized crossover literature genre was becoming more mainstream (Beckett 2009: 6). Beckett (2009: 7) furthermore mentions that Pullman, together with Rowling and Haddon, were defining a go-between genre with their books as they had an appeal to all ages, thus emerging as crossover literature.

### 3.4 Pullman and Lewis

With apparent similarities between Lewis and Pullman, as both their most famous works are considered crossover literature enjoyed by both children and adults and both authors do not consider themselves writers of children's fiction, there are also other similarities between the two. In fact, Lewis and Pullman have a great deal in common: they both gained their degree in English Literature at Oxford University, they both write fantasy stories with influences from Classical, Norse and English myths, both use their material to comment and criticize our world and both write about naïve protagonists who enter adventures and become responsible for the destiny of a world. (Wood 2001: 237) Both authors, and especially Pullman have also come under fire for their description and use of religion and the criticism against it. Most of all, both authors were influenced by themes and symbols from the poetry by William Blake and especially John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. (Beckett 2009: 196) As for their storytelling, both Lewis and Pullman have written a book series that begin with children hiding in a wardrobe from where they are catapulted into worlds of adventure, both present beautiful, deadly women wearing furs who tempt and betray children through sweets, both feature young heroines - Lucy and Lyra - who have a special relationship with powerful and dangerous animals - Aslan and Iorek Byrnison. (Wood 2001: 239) This suggests that even though different in many ways, both authors have found a common niche within literature writing.

Nevertheless, there are also several issues that separate Lewis and Pullman, especially the criticism Pullman has audibly expressed about Lewis's writings and opinions. Pullman has gained a reputation for his public attacks on Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and on his views on God. Lewis, an avid theologian, uses multiple religious allegories, and symbols directly from the Bible, with Aslan symbolizing Jesus and the children from our world being called "sons of Adam" and "daughters of Eve" in *Narnia*. (Caughey 2005:219) Conversely, Pullman calls himself an atheist and his work *His Dark Materials* has been considered by many critics as a kind of "anti-Narnia" or an alternative to Lewis's Christian fantasy (Wood 2001: 239). In *The Dark Side of Narnia*, an article published in *the Guardian*, Pullman condemns the *Chronicles of Narnia* for being too tainted with

issues such as “misogyny, racism and a sado-masochistic relish for violence” to suite today’s children (Pullman 2001: 6).

The similarities and differences between Lewis and Pullman are good to keep in mind as reader reviews to their works will be presented in the analysis section. The significance of the authors’ intentions will also become clearer in the chapter dealing with reader-response theory, and its importance in understanding the readers’ interpretations of the authors’ material. As many of the reviewers not only comment on Lewis’s and Pullman’s work, but also on the authors themselves, it is useful to first understand the underlying motives the writers’ may have.

## 4 REACTING TO CROSSOVER LITERATURE

Reader responses from Goodreads.com have been chosen in order to analyze how adults react to books originally aimed at children, in order to identify if the responses come across as fitting to crossover literature. 50 responses were randomly chosen for both the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*. The analysis is divided into six different sections: narrative features as described in Beckett's analysis, emphasis on religion, good vs evil, reading the books as a child and later as an adult, timeline issues and movie adaptations. The sections are based on elements that are frequently mentioned by the reviewers.

### 4.1 Beckett's Analysis Points

The analysis begins with a further look into the topic of crossover, by looking at how readers react to narrative features in the books. As Falconer (2004: 557–558) puts it: "Even in this field, 'crossover' can refer to different aspects of the narrative communication act: the relation between authors and texts, the internal attributes of texts, or the relation between texts and readers", suggesting that interpreting text is an essential part of identifying crossover literature. Thus reader interpretations and comments to the books are critical. This section will also contain comments and evaluations of the books by the readers themselves as examples of the statements I am making.

By far the most mentioned aspect in the reviews mention one or more of the analysis points presented in Beckett's book *Crossover Fiction – Global and Historical Perspectives*. The reason I find this book to be of significance is that Beckett explores the different narratives as an important part in/of recognizing crossover literature. As mentioned before, crossover literature is a wide and very difficult genre to define. However, in this book Beckett distinctly defines each of the eight points she mentions and how they relate to defining crossover literature. The narrative points mentioned are

genre, plot, character and characterization, style, theme, perspective, setting and symbol (Beckett 2009). These points are also brought up several times by the reviewers.

#### 4.1.1 Reviewing the Books

When looking further into the reviews to the *Chronicles of Narnia*, out of the 50 chosen, 41 of them mention one or several of the narrative points mentioned above. Predominantly it is a form of explaining what the books are about: fantasy story about children from our world finding a magical land at the back of an old wardrobe. Furthermore, many also mention themes such as *Narnia* featuring a story of children growing up or developing a sense of right and wrong. This goes for *His Dark Materials* as well, with 45 out of 50 mentioning some kind of narrative feature, such as mentioning the main characters Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry, themes such as friendship and the struggle between right and wrong, as well as the general plot of the story.

As Goodreads.com is a book reviewing platform, it is not surprising that many of the chosen reviews for the books resemble the typical structure of a book report, usually with a short description of every book, the main theme, something about the characters and finally a line or two on what they thought about the books. This is true for both the *Chronicles of Narnia* as well as *His Dark Materials*. A book report, contrary to an academic text, is generally written without using any specific language to support one's reasoning. This is due to the fact that a book report is not aimed at any specific audience, instead open for debate to all readers. Additionally, book reports are generally directed towards people not familiar with the particular book, therefore book reports are usually more descriptive than evaluative. (Pool 2008: 9–10) This is very true for many of the reviews as many write something general about the books.

Another common theme within the reviews is not only that the books are described, but many also rank the books from best to worst and give them a certain amount of stars out

of five. As of writing this thesis the *Chronicles of Narnia* has a rating of 4,25/5 and *His Dark Materials* has 4,26/5. This is probably mainly due to the idea behind Goodreads – to review and rate books – as reviewers are given the option of star rating each book. However, for many it seems to be very important to express a specific rating generally for the whole series and then also to each individual book with the series, such as one reviewer comments on the *Chronicles of Narnia*: “Overall I would give this book 3 stars. Below I have provided specific ratings/reviews for each story”, suggesting that not only do they in fact follow a typical book review standard, but also have a personal interest in explaining what the reasoning behind it is.

Finally, a noteworthy fact about the reviews is the highly differentiating length of the reviews. Some of them are very short, quickly exclaiming things such as “Favorite books ever when I was a kid! So yea, sticking with 4 stars because I still love it” whereas others will write a lengthier review. The reviews chosen for this analysis span from long to short, from detailed to shallow, objective to subjective and critical to noncritical. All these points are confirmed by Nikolajeva on how we become readers: from childhood we are taught and trained by adult mediators, such as teachers and parents, to recognize genres and patterns, and to analyze plots and characters. Even though we might lack the analytical skills at an early age, in order to become “competent readers” and gain literary competence we are taught various reading strategies early on, which include placing books in relevant social, cultural and literary contexts. (Nikolajeva 1997: 102–103)

#### 4.1.2 Captivating Reading

As Joanne Golden (1986: 92–93) puts it, enchantment or being captivated by a text is an integral part for readers to enjoy what they are reading. So seems to be the case with the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, as many reviewers start out with sentences such as “Narnia is a wonderful place with the most incredible cast of characters”, “discovered the joys of”, “this is a terrific universe filled with possibilities” and “it

introduced me to this amazing world”. This suggests that many readers truly are enchanted by the world the writers paint with their words. Additionally, many of the comments I looked at also seem to agree that for book series such as *Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* to be successful, there needs to be a sense of being able to relate to the characters and feel like the readers are inside the story. This seems to be especially true for the *Chronicles of Narnia* as a large part of the readers mention that they read the books at an early age the first time. With *His Dark Materials*, an important part of the reading experience seems to be how intricate and multi leveled the story is, with a few readers commenting on the topics the books deal with “Nuclear Physics, Parallel Worlds, Quantum Particles and Theology snuggle right up against equally introspective looks at Love, Friendship, Loyalty, Family and Honor.” This gives the reader a lot to think about, with some reader expressing surprise that the trilogy is classified as children’s literature. According to Beckett (2009: 4–5), a sort of enchanted reading is another important factor of crossover literature, as a captivating book can appeal to any reader, such as children’s books appealing to adults in this case.

Furthermore, for an adult reader to truly be able to enjoy and be enchanted by a story aimed at younger readers, they need to relinquish their autonomy, self-control and analytical judgement (Felski 2008: 55). Many of the reviewers to the books mention that while the books are considered for children they still get a lot out of them, some stating that they discovered new aspects of the stories when they read them at a later stage in life. Very few say anything about the books not being fit for adults, suggesting as I state in the introduction, that most people are not concerned about the fact that they are reading children’s literature. On the contrary, some even mention that they probably enjoyed the books more than their children that they were reading the stories to, as one reviewer writes: “Just finished reading them again to Eric, my 8-year-old, and [he] loved them maybe just as much as I did”. What some readers commented on however, was that there was an element of shame with reading children’s books: “There were just some aspects of reading about that world that made me feel, well, BAD, somehow. Guilty, or ashamed” suggesting that sometimes it is hard to overlook labels. This is an aspect even C.S. Lewis himself commented on in his speech *On Three Ways of Writing for Children*:

When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up. (Lewis 1966: 25)

Just as Lewis states, most readers agree and do not care which labels a book might have, they read because they enjoy the story.

Another important feature of crossover literature is world-building and crossing boundaries within a story (Beckett 2009: 24). For a story to be successful it is not only important that a reader is captivated by it, but also the ability for a reader to imagine the world and the characters within it. Many of the reviews take an interest in the characters and how they bring forth the story and plot. The common comment for both works is that readers are impressed with the world the authors have created, with one reader exclaiming her thoughts on the *Chronicles of Narnia*: “it can be enthusiastically appreciated by anyone who loves tales of imagination and adventure, fantasy and wonder; and the truths here, like those in Jesus' parables, are simple enough to speak to children but profound enough to challenge adults” while another reader explains the bond he made with the characters in *His Dark Materials*: “I cared about them, I felt like I had made new friends and was physically sad to say goodbye to them.” Both series also stress the importance of magic as a way to talk about heavier subjects, which many reviewers have also picked up on. Lewis (1950–1956) uses Aslan the Lion as a metaphor for Christ and talking animals to soften the realistic elements of war and loss in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Likewise, Pullman (1995–2000) introduces Dæmons as an animated image of a person’s soul in *His Dark Materials* and discusses the Creator, God and the Church through the idea of Dust, which is a particle that is attracted to consciousness, especially after maturation that the Church seeks to end, because it is associated with original sin.

Finally, while on the topic of metaphors and deeper meaning, a major element in the reviews regarding narrative elements is how heavy some of the topics both Lewis and Pullman include in their works. For Lewis it is the use of symbolism for religious elements, such as previously mentioned Aslan as Christ, and how he sacrifices himself to

save a human. Lewis also mentions biblical aspects such as the children being “Sons of Adam” and “Daughters of Eve”. The opinions of the reviewers are profoundly split in this case. About half think that it is a beautiful story due to the use of religious symbols and metaphors and gladly want to share the story with their children as a great way to teach them about Christ and biblical symbolism. However, the other half feel completely opposite, painting Lewis as a racist and bigot hiding behind religion. Most examples of racism come from how Lewis depicts the *Calormen* people as *Narnians* enemies, as one reviewer writes: “Remember the Calormenes? Those dark-skinned people with really intense garlic breath who wore turbans and worshiped a Satanic "false god" who demanded blood sacrifices from his followers?” The bigotry comments predominantly derive from how females are treated in the series. Evil seems to be depicted as feminine, with the examples of the White Witch. Also the faith of Susan, one of the four initial children to visit *Narnia*, is much talked about, as many point out: “Remember when Susan didn't come back [to *Narnia*], basically because she discovered her sexuality?” The reasoning for Lewis behavior are well discussed among the reviews, as many seem to believe it is because of the circumstances he lived in, as one reader commented: “I'm well aware of the prejudices and cringeworthy episodes inherent to the Narnia books. Lewis was a white, British, socially conservative man who was born in the 1890s and didn't have a healthy relationship with a woman until his sixties; all that shows, as it must, in his books.”

Similarly, Pullman’s use of metaphors symbolism is very polarizing, with a slight majority enjoying his criticism of religion and God worshipping. However, many critics of the trilogy and some reviewers on Goodreads, consider the literal killing of God (or the Authority as he is known in *His Dark Materials*) by Lord Asriel (whom some consider a “satanic” figure) is taking it a step to far. Nevertheless, according to Oliver (2012: 295), and Pullman himself, the idea of literally killing the Authority or whatever a reader wants to call the divine, is not to state an atheistic view that God does not exist, on the contrary, to recognize the humanity in an all mighty God. Pullman makes the Authority flawed and thus more human, and inserts him among humans to prove that by killing the Authority Pullman does not kill the belief in God (Oliver 2012: 295–296). This is echoed by some

reviewers who see beyond *His Dark Materials* being anti-Christian: "'God" is killed in Pullman's trilogy, but one must distinguish between Pullman's depiction of the Authority and the Christian image of God. Although Pullman's Authority is supposed to encompass all monotheistic and polytheistic beliefs in a god, God turns out to be just a corrupt angel and there is no one obvious creator". Pullman does criticize Christianity, and several readers even refer to him as anti-Lewis, as he does view Christianity very differently than what Lewis describes in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Yet what Pullman mainly tries to do is to push the boundaries on the topic, which is similarly what crossover literature aims for. Boundaries fixate people to certain categories, but by breaching them, one can discover new way of looking at things.

Finally, even though both works include very polarizing opinions and reviews, it seems as though the positive comments outweigh the negative ones. *The Chronicles of Narnia* maintains a 4.25 rating out of 5 with over 400 000 people that have given it a rating. Likewise *His Dark Materials* has a 4.26 average with over 100 000 ratings, suggesting that even though many have negative opinions about the contents of the works, it is far outweighed by the positive reviews.

#### 4.2 Emphasis on Religion

Out of 50 reviews that I studied, 36 mentioned religion in the *Chronicles of Narnia* and 42 in *His Dark Materials*. The two main ways in which opinions are presented are the authors relation to religion and secondly the Christian allegory that is presented throughout the works. This suggests that expressing opinions about the topic is important for the readers, as they have picked up the references to religion throughout the books. According to Harju (2012: 13), a focus on these reader reviews is crucial in understanding what makes a work of literature crossover literature.

#### 4.2.1 The Authors' Relation to Religion

C.S. Lewis was according to himself “an ordinary layman of the Church of England”. Lewis does not write as one who is authorized to speak on behalf of any Christian body; his authority is vested simply in his shared consensual vision of the Christian faith and his proven ability to communicate its themes by the written and spoken word (McGrath 2013: 147). Nevertheless, several reviews on Goodreads still point out that the symbolism in *Narnia* is heavily laden with messages about Christianity, with one reader posting: “Lewis embraces a type of Christianity that frightens me and then hides it in allegory and feeds it to children. That underhanded ideology-pushing is despicable, particularly when your ideology demonizes girl children for simply growing up.” The thoughts on Lewis pushing an ideology of religion on his readers, especially younger ones is something readers are very split on. Some think it is wonderful that an author so beautifully describes Christianity in a children’s fantasy story, while others warn parents from introducing what to some is essentially Christian propaganda.

Similarly, the thoughts about Pullman’s story is much divided. Some find it refreshing that a children’s author manages to criticize Christianity in a way where children and any reader can still enjoy the overall story. As a reader comments: “He is essentially challenging every reader, regardless of age, to look at the world around you. Why do we trust, why do we believe, what is faith, what is truth?” the idea with *His Dark Materials* is to reflect upon our own beliefs and open up a discussion about them. Both authors are questioned by the readers on their use of Christian allegory, but slightly more in the direction of Pullman. This might be because Pullman’s views on Christianity are not as conventional as Lewis’s. Lewis mostly stays within the frames of Christianity as a good thing, while Pullman more heavily criticizes it. As mentioned earlier, the issue where Pullman goes too far is when the Authority (symbolizing God) is killed. A few readers state a genuine fear for children reading these books: “This is not a series I would have exposed my children to. If you choose to (and I'm sure many will) that is up to you. There is a deal of indoctrination here, or if you consider the Narnia series indoctrination then maybe you won't use that term in this case.” Pullman does consider himself an atheist,

but his intention is not to mock Christians, but to question the authority Christianity has in our world. The idea is to look within ourselves and truly identify what we believe in. (Townsend 2002: 417–420) This is also what crossover literature sets out to do, to question set standards and form new ones.

#### 4.2.2 Christian Allegory

Religion is also, as previously stated, depicted in the book series through the use of allegory. Allegory is used through symbolic figures, objects and actions to convey truths or generalizations about human conduct. Many reviewers mention how Lewis is an admirer of Christian allegory. The opinions about the use of Christian allegory are again very split between the reviewers, some think it works well within the general story, while others think it is propaganda used by Lewis to express his own beliefs. As previously stated, Lewis was Christian, and his uses of religious symbols and metaphors is quite obvious to many readers: “They are a beautiful metaphor for the biblical story of Jesus's sacrifice for us.” “Even as a child I was aware of the Christian symbolism associated with them.” As a result most of the reviews that mention the use of religion in the *Chronicles of Narnia* mention it in one of the four ways stated below:

1. Knew about the symbolism and did not care
2. Knew about the symbolism and did care
3. Did not at first understand the symbolism but did not mind
4. Did not at first understand the symbolism but now does mind

Whichever way a reader mentions the use of symbols and metaphors, religion is at the center of it.

Similarly, many readers point out Pullman's use of symbols and metaphors, many times to state his own opinions about faith and Christianity. Many critics, echoed by many of the reviews that I looked at, agree that Pullman deals with the topic in almost a sacrilegious way, by having the Authority killed, which symbolizes God himself in *His Dark Materials*. There is however a split in opinion here as well, while some think it is wrong to criticize religion in a book series aimed at children, some think it is constructive to deal with heavy topics in children's literature as well. As one reader puts it:

The trilogy is categorized as for children and teens, but it is as much for adults as it's themes and views take on an anti-religious, anti-church point of view. Many Christians denounced the book as "atheism for kids". However, Pullman says it is more about the dangers of strict, rigid religious doctrine and institutions than it is anti God or anti Faith.

Some reviewers go even further as to place Lewis and Pullman on opposite sides of the Pro/Anti religion spectrum, mentioning statements such as: "First, it [*His Dark Materials*] clearly wants to be the anti-Narnia, and that's fine, but I wish it wasn't so blatant about it." and "Apparently, Pullman hated the Narnia Chronicles and wrote this as an antithesis."

What both authors have in common is that they are pushing the boundaries of children's literature with topics conventionally saved for adult literature. This is something Beckett (2009: 260) also acknowledges as more and more children's book author expand the topics in their stories. Today's children's authors do not hesitate to present a more pessimistic, dark or disturbing view of the world (Beckett 2009: 260). Furthermore, some reviewers remark on the atypical endings of the two series. *Narnia* has a happy ending where most of the main characters throughout the *Chronicles* (except Susan) end up together in the new *Narnia*. However, to get there, all of the characters have to die in the real world, for instance Peter, Lucy and Edmund die in a train crash, which is not as happy of an ending you would expect from a children's story. Likewise, in *His Dark Materials* while Lyra and Will do make the world's they come from better, in the end they do not end up together. Furthermore Lord Asriel and Madam Coulter (Lyra's parents) manage

to kill the Authority, but at the cost of their own lives, leaving Lyra an orphan. The happy ending, which is usually a combination of structural and psychological closure, is something that many adults associate with children's literature (Nikolajeva 2002: 168). However, in both the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, the ending is much more multileveled and allegorical, suggesting that child-to-adult crossover is a major subject in many children's books. According to Beckett (2009: 264), the broadening horizons of children's literature have blurred the distinction between children's fiction and adult fiction, and thus facilitated the crossover in both directions.

#### 4.3 Good vs Evil

Another main theme of motif present in both series, and which many reviewers commented on is the idea of good versus evil, and how it is depicted in the books. The reason this theme also has its own topic is because it is so prevalent in both series. Out of 50 reviews, 23 mention something about Good vs Evil in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, and 30 in *His Dark Materials*. The two predominant ways in which the books deal with the concept is the duality of it. *Narnia* handles good and evil in a very black and white manner, while *His Dark Materials* looks further into the grey shades of it. Also, the moral dilemma of good vs evil is examined. The motif of a struggle between good and evil, along with quest and journey are typical for children's literature (Nikolajeva 1997: 35–36). This is also the case with these two series, however, they also deal with deeper and darker topics. Themes dealt with in many children's books today are wide-ranging, freeing themselves from the rigid moral codes and taboos that have long governed children's literature (Beckett 2009: 262). In Lewis's and Pullman's cases they explore more "adult" themes such as sexuality, cruelty, murder, terror, war, disease and death.

#### 4.3.1 Black and White or a Hint of Grey

As for the reviewers, many mention good vs evil as a central concept or theme in both book series. When it comes to how the two authors use the theme they use it in very different ways. For Lewis, good vs evil is generally depicted in a very black and white way. Throughout the series, the reader quickly knows who is good and who is evil. Aslan is always the good guy, while it is quickly obvious that the White Witch for instance is evil. This black and white view of things is somewhat criticized by the reviewers, with many expressing frustration at Lewis for depicting evil as feminine. The boys/men are leaders because of their goodness and leadership qualities, while women become second class citizens as soon as they reach maturity.

As for the theme of good vs evil in *His Dark Materials*, it is much greyer scaled as to who is considered the good guy and who is evil. As one reader puts it: “Then the battle of good and evil and the shaking of our belief of what has always been considered good may not necessarily be good.” This suggests that, just as in real life, it is not as easy to declare one good and another evil, but that each person has a little bit of both inside them, and they decide which part to act on. Another reader discusses the different ways good vs evil is present in different books, in this case compares *His Dark Materials* to the *Harry Potter* series, which uses the concept of good vs evil in a very similar way as the *Chronicles of Narnia* does:

While Harry Potter deals with the strong ideals of good vs. evil, His Dark Materials leans heavily into the actual concepts of both, dissecting each, questioning the origins, challenging the pedestals each stand on. In Harry Potter, evil is simply evil. His Dark Materials doesn't assume any such nonsense. If there is evil, it forces the reader to consider why they think that something is evil. Is it really? Or are you just looking at it from a different perspective?

Characters, as well as themes, in today's children's fiction are not good and bad or black and white, but complex and ambiguous, which according to Beckett (2009: 260), is just what Pullman clearly illustrates with his trilogy.

#### 4.3.2 Moral Dilemma

Additionally, an issue brought up several times in the books are the morals of the characters, so not only to differentiate good and evil, but also right from wrong. In both series characteristics such as courage, loyalty and friendship are important, and these are often things the main characters deal with. A moral dilemma often rises where the main characters have to decide between what is easy and what is right. Moral issues most often discussed are the ability to tell the truth, which both Edmund in *Narnia* and Lyra in *His Dark Materials* faces at several points. To keep your promises, to treat others as you want to be treated, to be trustworthy, to not judge others, to be dependable, to respect others, to be forgiving, to have integrity, to be accountable and take responsibility, to be tolerant of differences and to seek justice are just some of the moral issues the characters face at some point throughout their adventure.

This is something that readers of both works react to in their reviews, mentioning that it is a good idea to teach children moral issues and dilemmas from an early age. This also works well with the theme of growing up. In both works the children start out as young, innocent and ignorant, but grow up to understand their worlds and the issues that their worlds has to deal with. As one reader writes about the growing up story of Lyra in *His Dark Materials*: “She [Lyra] grows gradually and beautifully through the course of a harrowing but never the less exciting adventure from an almost feral child into a breath taking young woman. Her's is every child's painful journey to adulthood.” This is not merely done by leaping from one adventure to the next, but through difficult choices, loss and by learning from different moral lessons. Some however mention that in *His Dark Materials* the subject of morals is just one of the many heavy subjects that the trilogy works with, and that the moral teachings can get lost in between other subjects such as physics, theology and other science based topics. Furthermore, some readers react negatively to the moral lesson on faith, as many think Pullman paints a too harsh and pessimistic view of faith and religion, not only by killing God, but by criticizing Christianity and religion in general. Some feel that criticizing religion as Pullman does, does not belong in a children’s book.

Meanwhile many readers enjoy the lessons that the *Chronicles of Narnia* teaches children about how to act and how important a moral code is to uphold. They also think it is good to show what happens if one chooses the wrong path, and how you can still come back after making a bad decision. However, where some readers feel cheated is when the moral code in *Narnia* is based so heavily on the Christian faith. Aslan literally dying to save Edmund, and later rising from the dead is for some readers taking it too literally as a chapter straight from the Bible. As one reviewer puts it: “I can't be the only who felt cheated, almost betrayed, when I realized one of my beloved childhood books really was about religion, Christianity and actually worked more like a sermon than an actual adventure.” The idea of including religious symbolism and morals is very polarizing for the reviewers, as many who dislikes it, really dislikes it while those who appreciate it, really enjoy it.

#### 4.4 Reading the Books as a Child and Later as an Adult

The next topic mentioned in many reviews is rereading the books, so reading the books in their childhood and later again as adults. From the 50 reviews observed, 35 mention reading the books as a child and later again as an adult in the *Chronicles of Narnia* and 26 in *His Dark Materials*. This topic studied by first looking at the issue of suitable age, so is it better to read these books as a child or as an adult. The other way is how the books have shaped the readers' worldview, especially if they read the books as a child. As crossover fiction literally refers to crossing from child to adult, or adult to child (Beckett 2009: 4), this topic is at the heart of what it means for adults to react to children's literature, and how it comes across as crossover fiction.

#### 4.4.1 Suitable Age

When it comes to the basic building blocks of a children's book, both the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* incorporate many of them, especially in the plot and the characters. As for the plot both series include the typical standard of a plot, where it follows a pattern of: home – departure from home – adventure – homecoming (Nikolajeva 1997: 32). Although the two series both include this kind of plot development, they do it slightly differently. In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, each individual book follows this plot pattern, while in *His Dark Materials* this happens over all three books, expanding the adventure part. As for the characters, both works emphasize typical features used in children's books. First of all, Lewis and Pullman use children as the main protagonists, which elevates the fictional children to a position superior to adults (Nikolajeva 2010: 42). Furthermore the authors remove the parents, making the protagonists “functional orphans” (Nikolajeva 2002: 172). In *Narnia* the children have to leave their mother in London to resettle in the countryside. In *His Dark Materials*, Lyra even believes that she is an orphan in the beginning, and in Will's case his father is missing and leaves his mother to go search for him in a parallel world. Finally both Lewis and Pullman subject their protagonists to what Nikolajeva (2012: 13) calls “adult heroism” where the children take on important responsibilities, difficult tasks and sometimes even serve as role models to others.

In regards to the *Chronicles of Narnia*, most reviewers that mention something about rereading the books, explain that when they first read the books they simply enjoyed the journey and adventures that the children in the story experience. Not until they reread the books as adults did they recognize the finer layers of plot development and characterization, or the deeper message of the story, referring especially to the religious features of the *Narnia* stories: “Now I could dismiss my love of these books as some quaint, childhood memory that I was unwilling to let go of. However, the magic has never faded. I've read them all so many times that I've memorized them.” and “What child hasn't climbed into a closet and explored the back cracks in hope of finding an entrance to a new

and exciting world after reading this book?” with one reader even exclaiming: “Narnia is my childhood!”

As for rereading *His Dark Materials*, most readers have a different connection to that series than what readers have to the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Fewer mention reading the trilogy as children because they felt that they were difficult to understand and get through, with some complaining on the length of the books. Many that mention reading *His Dark Materials* as a child say that they got through one and gave up, only to continue reading them fully in adulthood. However, the reviewers that did read the entire trilogy as a child compare them to such works as *Harry Potter*. Nevertheless, even though not as many reviewers read *His Dark Materials* as a child, many more say that they enjoyed more as adults, because they understood the deeper meaning in the books. As some reviewers write: “This is one of those series that is written for children on the surface, but that is highly relevant and readable for adults as well as it contains layer upon layer of meaning and symbolism. I'm sure that you can read this trilogy again and again and still constantly discover new things” or “Also, being 10 years older now than when I first read it helped me to notice a lot more of the subtle references to religion, souls, sex, body image and so on. None of these were things I was even considering when I was young, but now these things become a vital part of the story, making this book one which bridges the gap between fun for kids and interesting for adults.” These remarks suggests that *His Dark Materials* has more to offer for both young and adult readers.

Concerning the matter of suitable age for these works, several reviewers have something to say about it. When it comes to the *Chronicles of Narnia*, many say that they have either read the books initially as a child, which they found appropriate, as the story itself is about themes suitable for children, such as adventure, magic, friendship or love. The one thing that seems to create some friction is how Lewis deals with certain topics that some, now adult readers, feel are inappropriate for children, or at least requires some explaining. On the top repeatedly is the use of religious allegory, but also instances of racism and bigotry that might have been more customary during the 1950s when Lewis wrote the *Chronicles*, but which in today's society are no longer as politically correct. These opinions are

however only expressed by a few reviewers. Generally most agree that *Narnia* is a very suitable story for young children, many even stating that they are going to or are already reading the story to their own children.

In the case of *His Dark Materials*, the opinions are a little more negative. Not only do many readers think that the religious symbolism is too heavy laden, but also that the book is difficult to read. Even for some adult readers, the contents of the story were too difficult and too long to keep up the interest until the end. A few reviewers even go as far as to claim that *His Dark Materials* is unsuitable for children, and that the trilogy is actually meant for adults and just disguised as a story for children. Some thought that the topics the trilogy deals with are too dark and frightening for children. However, the reviewers who did manage to finish the books as a child declare that *His Dark Materials* are up there with other childhood favorites such as *Harry Potter* and Tolkien's works, which all work to define the genre of fantasy and crossover literature. This suggests that there are alternatives to reading *His Dark Materials* as some children might be frightened by the story, while others might consider the dark and scary parts as the best of all. According to Tucker (1976: 115), this might be a way for children to flirt with their own fears in a safer and more controlled way than for instance today's video games or films that contain violence.

#### 4.4.2 Shaping one's Worldview

Along with suitable age, reviewers who have read the books as children and later as adults also mention how the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* helped in shaping their worldview. Especially Lewis was very strong in creating the world of *Narnia* by blending medieval allegory, Norse myths and classical legends, thus reaching a larger audience of readers of different ages (Townsend 1981: 238). Many of the readers who finished the *Chronicles of Narnia* at a young age, felt that the stories helped make their childhood magical and more fantasy filled, by the colorful ways Lewis builds the world

of *Narnia*. The use of talking animals, the changing seasons and the development of the children to kings and queens of *Narnia* where each child has a certain quality that makes them special, are all ways in which the reviewers feel that their childhood became more magical. Some do even stating that they would search for a magical entrance to *Narnia* at the back of their own closets. *Chronicles of Narnia* also helped some reviewers reach for other similar fantasy stories, as they were so enchanted by *Narnia* and the magic within.

Similarly, in the world, or worlds of *His Dark Materials*, many readers are enchanted by the magic and fantastical elements presented. Most mention the inclusion of dæmons, which is an expression of a person's soul in the form of an animal, as something that they would have loved to have by their side in real life. As one reader puts it: "Just as owls in Harry Potter, I would love to have a dæmon by my side!" Other magical elements the readers enjoyed in Pullman's trilogy were the three devices the books are named after: the Golden Compass, the Subtle Knife and the Amber Spyglass. Just as *Narnia* has its wardrobe, *His Dark Materials* also has magical artefacts that appeals to younger readers, while beneath having an intriguing plot that attracts older readers. Also, the layers of meaning in *His Dark Materials* have appealed to the readers that read them as children, one reader even stating: "These books were very important to me as a child, second only to maybe Harry Potter in terms of shaping my worldview." This suggests that by reading these sorts of stories at a young age the magic also follows you throughout your life, shaping your reading preferences and even how you look at the world. While some critics and reviewers feel that Pullman's material is not suitable for children, some will argue that because of the controversy in the books, it is just what children need in order to be able to look at the world around them more critically.

#### 4.5 Timeline Issues

The ensuing chapter will deal with timeline issues that some readers have brought up in their reviews. From the 50 reviews I chose to look closer at 16 mention something about

timeline issues in the *Chronicles of Narnia* and 13 mention it in *His Dark Materials*. In the case of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, the issue at hand deals with the chronology of the seven books in the series. This due to the fact that there is a difference in when the books were published and what the internal timeline order of them are. As for *His Dark Materials*, the issue reviewers bring up is if the work should be viewed as a trilogy or more as one long book just separated into three parts. Furthermore, the topic of sequels and prequels will be discussed in connection to Lewis's and Pullman's works.

As for the *Chronicles of Narnia*, every reviewer who mentions something about timeline issues does so by discussing the chronology of the books. The initial publication chronology of the novels state *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) as the first one, then followed by *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955) and finally *The Last Battle* (1956). There has however, been intensive discussions among readers about a different order in which to read the books. The internal order of the books, which refers to the order in which the story of *Narnia* unfolds, recommend that the books should in fact be read in the following order: *The Magician's Nephew*, *The Lion, the Witch and Wardrobe*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *The Silver Chair* and *The Last Battle*.

The discussion about chronological versus internal order has been so fiercely debated among readers, that even Lewis himself had to deal with the issue. Lewis received so many questions about the issue that he actually answered some of the queries, and one copy of his answer has been saved. According to a letter Lewis wrote to one of his young readers in the US, Lewis suggests that the books should be read according to the internal order:

Dear Laurence, I think I agree with your order for reading the books more than your mother's. The series was not planned beforehand as she thinks. When I wrote *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* I did not know I was going to write any more. Then I wrote *Prince Caspian* as a sequel and still didn't think there

would be any more, and when I had done *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* I felt quite sure it would be the last. But I found I was wrong. So perhaps it does not matter very much in which order anyone reads them. I'm not even sure that all the others were written in the same order in which they were published. I never keep notes of that sort of thing and never remember dates. (Lewis 1966: 68)

The reviews that I looked closer at are mostly of the opinion that both ways work, with a slight favoring for the internal order simply because it makes more sense to read the books in order of how the story unfolds and it flows better. Nevertheless, there are some that will read the books exclusively in the order of publication, as that is how the books were originally written. One reader even writes: "It seems that there is a hot dispute going on about the order in which the books should be read. After reading them in the chronological sequence, I would advise reading them in the sequence of publication. IMO, the last two - *The Horse and His Boy*, and *The Last Battle* - are better left unread, especially the last one." This suggests, as many other reviewers also chime in on, that the final book in the series is not as respectable as the other six. This is predominantly due to the fact that many did not like the ending of the series, or felt dissatisfied with some of the plot choices Lewis made at the end.

In *His Dark Materials*, the comments on the timeline is a bit different. The reviewers that mention something about timeline issues, comment on the flow of the books. Comments such as: "The biggest problem this trilogy has is the fact that it's not really a trilogy. It's essentially one big book, one story." and "This is how you write a book. (I consider the three as one giant, thousand page novel)" explain the issue the best. Many of the reviewers consider the trilogy as simply one long book divided into three parts, with some comparing *His Dark Materials* to the *Lords of the Rings*, which is similarly one long story divided into three parts. One reader goes even further to explain why he found *His Dark Materials* hard to read in the beginning:

When I read this [*The Subtle Knife*] the first time I completely overlooked a main component of the book. I approached it as if was the second book in the series, a massive mistake. I wrote a review criticising the fact that the novel felt awkward; it had no beginning or end: it just felt like the typical content you'd

find in the middle of the story. The ironic point of this is that most critics take the trilogy as one whole book, rather than three separate works. And this really is the best way to approach the story.

This could also explain why some have difficulties finishing the trilogy, because if you do not read them all back to back, it can be difficult to start up again.

Lastly, an important issue concerning any chronology problem an author can face is that they someday might want to expand the world that they have created. Relating to children's literature, sequels and prequels are very common means used by authors (Nikolajeva 1997: 99–100). Sequels and prequels are also a mainstream tactic used by many writers in today's literary circuits. This is something that reviewers to *His Dark Materials* also comment on, as Philip Pullman is writing a new trilogy regarding the same universe as he created in *His Dark Materials*. The first book, *La Belle Sauvage: The Book of Dust* was published in 2017 and will work as a prequel to *His Dark Materials* (Womack 2017). Other authors who have made use of sequels and prequels include Tolkien with *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion* working as prequels to *The Lord of the Rings*, and Rowling, where *The Cursed Child* is a sequel to the *Harry Potter* series and the *Fantastic Beasts* series are prequels.

#### 4.6 Movie adaptations

Finally, the last aspect that is mentioned by reviewers quite frequently is how the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* have been adapted for the big screen. In the case of *Narnia*, 15 reviewers mention something about the movie adaptations, while 14 mention it in *His Dark Materials*. This topic will be further investigated by firstly looking at what kind of power the movie versions have in introducing new readers to the books. Secondly, an aspect that will be considered is the idea of books vs movies, as in which media reviewers prefer of the two.

#### 4.6.1 Introduction to the Books

As earlier stated in the analysis, many of the reviews that were looked at include comments of how readers have discovered the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* either in their childhood or later on in life. However, there is always a part that has never even heard of the books, until the movie version of it was in the making or premiering at the box office. Many popular children's or young adult books have been made into movies, such as *Harry Potter*, *the Hobbit*, *the Hunger Games* trilogy, the *Divergent* series, *Eragon* to just name a few. This is also the case for *the Chronicles of Narnia*, where *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005), *Prince Caspian* (2008) and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (2010) have already been made into movies with *The Silver Chair* being developed into one. Likewise, the first part of *His Dark Materials*, *The Golden Compass* was made into a movie in 2007. Both series are even being considered to be turned into TV shows, with Netflix developing a story on *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Business Insider 2018) and the BBC developing a story for the first part of *His Dark Materials*.

Furthermore, to spark even more interest in movie versions of the books, or the books themselves, production companies and publishers market them on different platforms in order to reach as varied of an audience as possible. According to Harju (2012: 20–21), a release of a film can target several platforms, such as Youtube, Facebook and Twitter as the next frontier in film marketing, not forgetting forums and blogs. Moreover, in today's society theme parks (such as *Harry Potter World*), film screenings pre premier, exhibitions (such as *ComicCon*) and online marketing campaigns (such as "Meet Your Daemon" for the film release of *The Golden Compass*) are strategies that companies use in order to generate more visibility for their upcoming movie (Harju 2012: 21).

The aspect of a movie version to the books seems to be an important aspect for some readers, as they would maybe not have grabbed the book unless they had watched or heard about the movie version. As one reviewer writes about *Narnia*: "When the movie came out I took my family to see it...even my father who grumbled about going to a kids movie.

They all fell in love with the story. They finally understood my childhood obsession.” or another on *His Dark Materials*: “Until recently, this series had somehow flown under my radar. It wasn’t until I saw the trailer for the upcoming *The Golden Compass* movie that I was introduced to Lyra’s world. The trailer made the movie look AMAZING, so naturally (as I always do), I thought...I MUST read this book!” This is also something that Falconer (2009: 2) touches on, as many classic children’s fantasy works reached bigger audiences than ever before due to film adaptations. Some reviewers also mention that the film adaptations also reignited their interest for the stories, as one reader comments: “I read the first two books when they came out (my middle school years) but got tired of waiting for the third. However, when this whole controversy over *The Golden Compass* film adaptation was started by the Christian right, I decided it was time to read the series again.” This suggests that readers do react when film versions of a book is released, either that the film version introduces new readers to the books or welcomes back old readers.

#### 4.6.2 Books vs Movies

Concerning the polarizing views on book versus movies, some reviewers comment on this as well. Most comments react negatively towards the movies versions, which is not that surprising as it can be challenging to include all aspects of the book version into the film version. Comments such as: “The movies did NOT to the books justice” or “All due respect to the movies, but as usual the books are much better.” to the *Narnia* movies, and “The film was incredibly disappointing (they stopped two-thirds of the way through the book, for God’s sake)” was a common theme throughout the comments. However, not all reviewers saw the movies as a bad thing, as one reviewer puts it: “This was kind of disappointing. I love the movie adaptations and was hoping to find the same magic and heart-warming feeling I had while watching it.” This implies that most of whom have read the books first are disappointed that the films do not reach the level of the books, while some find it easier to relate to the movies, as the characters and the magical world itself is painted on a screen for the viewer. It can be easier for children to relate to external characterizations of a character if they actually can see the character in front of them

(Nikolajeva 2002: 183), which is something a movie version can do, as all the guesswork of what a character would look like is taken away. This is also something a reviewer points out: “I did enjoy reading these books. I’d thought them awfully dry the first time through—stuffy English children in a fairly entertaining magical land, etc... The difference this time was, I watched the 2005 movie first. The movie completely blew me away, and while reading the first book I was able to imagine those warm, courageous and yet flawed children in place of the stuffy English ones, and it added a wonderful new dimension to the story.” This can however also backfire if the audience is not satisfied with which actors have been chosen to play certain parts. Daniel Radcliffe will probably always be remembered as *Harry Potter*, but as the first *Harry Potter* movies were released, many readers were disappointed as it is mentioned several times in the books that Harry has green eyes while Daniel Radcliffe actually had blue eyes. Even small details can derail a movie version, especially ones that people have waited on for years.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to discuss how adult readers react to and analyze material classified as children's literature, in order to find out if the responses make it come across as crossover fiction. This was done by looking at reader responses to the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis and *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman, two book series classified as children's literature. 50 responses for both book series were looked at, and the responses were then divided into six different categories based on what the readers reacted to the most. The responses looked at were very varying in length, depth and contents, however there were a few themes that reoccurred more often than others, which finally made up six different categories that were looked closer at in the analysis section. The six points were: narrative features as described in Beckett's analysis, emphasis on religion, good vs evil, reading the books as a child and later as an adult, timeline issues and movie adaptations.

From the analysis of the responses, some tendencies of how the responses came across as crossover literature were identified. First of all, the relationship between the text and the reader is important to note, as different people react differently to the same text. Likewise, the reaction of the reader is the central idea for both reader-response theory and what crossover literature means. Without response from the reader, crossover literature might not be as prominent as it is today. Furthermore, interpreting text and narrative features are at the heart of most of the responses I looked at. Not only have most reviewers written a summary of the books, but they have also analyzed the different features in the books, and why they are important to them. Narrative features mentioned by reviewers come across as crossover fiction in several different ways: they are analyzed, which creates a conversation between the text and the reader, they captivate the reader, which draws in readers of different ages - both children and adults, and narration is important when the author creates the world which the reader can jump into when reading.

Secondly, the two main themes that Lewis and Pullman introduce the reader to are of major importance in attracting readers of different ages, which is also a considerable

factor in crossover literature, as crossover literally refers to literature crossing from child-to-adult or adult-to-child. The two main themes that the reader is introduced to in the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* are the emphasis on religion and the idea of good vs. evil. In the case of religion, both authors, but especially Pullman questions the role of religion in a society. Religion is a controversial topic in both book series, as some reviewers think it is great that the authors mention it, while other feel it ruins the integrity of the story, because it takes up such a large part of the stories. As for good vs evil as a theme, many reviewers think that it is an important part of the story, as the theme is something every human is faced with at some point in their lives. In both book series the protagonists face a choice between good and evil, but in different ways. In *Narnia* the theme is very black and white, where the reader quickly knows who is good and who is bad, whereas in *His Dark Materials*, the theme is grayer scaled, with many characters possessing both good and evil traits. As for how these themes come across as crossover features, religious aspects in the books, especially in *His Dark Materials*, question set standards and form new ones, which crossover literature also aims to do. The books also introduce more pessimistic and adult themes, thus setting out to push boundaries on children's literature with topics conventionally saved for adult literature.

Thirdly, the act of rereading is a major element for both book series. As mentioned earlier, an important component of crossover literature is that people of all ages read crossover books. As for the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* a large part of the reviewers mention rereading their childhood favorites again as adults. This is especially the case with the *Narnia* books, as several reviewers mention that they read the books as a child and later as an adult because either they loved the story or they wanted to read the books again to better understand the underlying themes and symbolism. Additionally, some reviewers mention that they are reading the stories to their children, hoping that their children will find the same magic as they did. Also, some literary components of the books, such as making children the protagonists and having the children take on important responsibilities and difficult tasks, makes the story appealing to a wider audience. Some readers, including the authors themselves, question the suitable age of the two book series,

as many feel that categorizing the books as children's literature might limit their potential audience.

Finally, the last two categories mentioned by reviewers and that are a part of the analysis are the timeline issues and the movie adaptations of the books. These two are less mentioned by the reviewers, but still to such an extent that they are worth analyzing. The timeline issue is especially mentioned in the *Narnia* reviews, as there are two ways of reading the seven books. Either you read them in the order of publication, or in the internal order, in which the stories play out in chronological order. Lewis himself preferred the second order, however many reviewers feel that it is more genuine to read them in the order they were published. Timeline issues mentioned in *His Dark Materials* is that the trilogy should instead be viewed more as one long book divided into three parts. The importance of the timeline issues and how it makes the book series come across as crossover fiction is that a number of reviewers mention it, therefore making it an important observation. Likewise, the movie adaptations of the two series and their importance lay in the fact that some reviewers take the time to mention them. To some reviewers, the making or breaking of reading the books rely on how they initially came across information about them. Some would not even have read the books had it not been for the movie versions.

As the analysis points out, there are several reasons people read and review these two book series. Different people have different reasons for picking up the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, but what they have in common is their action of actually writing a review after reading the books. Some might have written a review as a school assignment, but a major part wrote a review because they wanted to do so. The idea of analyzing these reviews is rooted in the idea of crossover literature itself, to create a conversation between the text and the reader. Early on in this thesis I highlighted a statement by Maija-Liisa Harju that research from the eyes of the reader is still lacking in the field of crossover literature, and that this is directly contradictory to the main idea of the topic, as its main function is to be adopted by a varied readership in order to reach success. Furthermore, that reader responses is the strongest indication of crossover

success. I hope that this analysis has added something to that conversation, and that further research will be done on the subject.

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