

Bacheloroppgåve

**The inescapability of fate and conflicted
identities in contemporary stories.**

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Språk og Litteratur
2023

Word Count:

8995



HØGSKULEN
I VOLDA

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Introduction

Humans thrive, entertain themselves, and are built upon stories. Stories enable us to escape the cruel realities of our own world, whether it be sickness, fatigue, authoritarian regimes, or war. As these realities' opposites we find dashing heroines, legendary creatures, adventurous plots and foretold prophecies of kings and queens, alongside inspiring stories of people in our own world. A central question which has occupied both philosophers and storytellers is whether or not humans are locked into a predetermined pathway, a certain fate, or if we possess free will in our endeavours. O'Conner points out that when we assess the significance of free will, "we are forced to consider questions about (among others) rightness and wrongness, good and evil, virtue and vice, blame and praise, reward and punishment, and desert"¹, all of which are traditional central opposites in storytelling.

The ongoing post-war era of contemporary literature is broad, and has enabled us to escape the cruel realities of our own world through the opposites O'Conner described. In the case of C.S Lewis' series *The Chronicle of Narnia*, and its most popular work *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*² (*LWW*), readers are alongside the Pevensie children sucked through a magical wardrobe portal and transported into the realm of Narnia, which stands as an escape from their war-inflicted lives. In Narnia, the arrival of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy is expected, and needed, in order to bring forth the Golden Age, led by the King of the forest, Aslan. A prophecy foretells that the children will end an eternal winter, but they are unaware of how they will fulfil this destiny. In another literary universe and time period, in *The Time Travelers Wife*³ (*TTW*), we follow Henry DeTamble, a man born with a genetic disorder which flings him back and forth in time beyond his control. Henry does not know where or when he will time travel, but he follows the pre-set timeline of his life, including the timeline of his future wife, Clare. Unlike the tale of the Pevensie children, the readers do not experience the same display of heroism or a prophesised greatness in the unpredictable life of Henry. This leads to an important question: if all our lives are predestined, why are some protagonists predestined to greatness and others to suffer? In this essay I will use the stories of C.S. Lewis and Audrey Niffenegger to combine the philosophies of Western philosophers with the doctrines of contemporary storytelling and discuss the following thesis question: how do stories reliant on predetermined narratives affect the readers' morals and thoughts on virtue

¹ O'Connor, 2002

² Lewis, 1950

³ Niffenegger, 2003

through their protagonists? Firstly, I will briefly discuss the main views upon hard determinism versus libertarian free will and compatibilism. How do philosophers, scientists and Christians view human actions or choices? Next, I will explore storytelling and their deterministic nature. Do readers find comfort in how predetermined lives are unfolded? Followingly, I will study the books' analogies, how Lewis' Christian values are juxtaposed to Niffeneggers' expressions of desire and personal fulfilments. Then I will explore and compare how the protagonists' character and morality are portrayed and intercepted by readers. Lastly, I will present a conclusion to my thesis.

The role of storytelling

Storytelling is as old as the human ability to speak and communicate. Abbott explains that we start making narratives “almost from the moment we begin putting words together”⁴. Literature theorist Brooks describes how our very definition as human being is “very much bound up with the stories we tell about our lives and the world in which we live”⁵. Barthes claimed a similar argument: “under the almost infinite adversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society”⁶. Whether these narratives are told from a child or adult's perspective, there seems always to be an overbearing element of omniscience or (pre)determinism in the worlds created, as Coats explains⁷:

The created secondary worlds of Middle Earth, Narnia, Neverland, Hogwarts and the Incworld are filled with compensatory wonders that fill up or cover over the sense of being alone in the world [...], but they also offer the comforting sense of being in a world where a firm, but non-intrusive narrative voice has complete imaginative control.

Determinism has existed within storytelling and literature at least back to the Mycenaean folklore and the myth of Oedipus. The Mycenaean age dates from 1350-1200 BC, the story was however famously quoted by Homer and later dramatized as a tragedy in 5th Century BC⁸. Oedipus is at first presented as an unborn child who is prophesised to someday kill his father and marry his mother⁹. In order to avoid the prophecy foretold, his biological father

⁴ Abbott, 2002/2021, p. 1

⁵ Brooks, 1996, p. 19

⁶ Barthes, 1982, pp. 251-52

⁷ Coats, 2010, p. 78

⁸ Leeming, et al., 2012, pp. 641-644.

⁹ Tollefsen, et al, 2019, p. 511.

decides to abandon his new-born in the forest to die. Oedipus is nevertheless found by a shepherd and adopted by King Polybus of Corinth and his wife to raise as their own¹⁰. When Oedipus comes of age, he learns of the prophecy from the oracle Delphi. In an attempt to avoid realizing his fate with his adoptive parents, he flees Corinth. On his way to Thebes, Oedipus quarrels with a traveller, and consequently ends up killing the stranger. The stranger happens to be his biological father, and when Oedipus met the stranger's widowed wife and married her, he unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy he tried desperately to avoid. They had four children before they learned the truth of their relation. Subsequently, Oedipus' mother hanged herself and Oedipus blinded himself and went into isolation. The tragic tale of Oedipus was in line with the argument that humans are predestined to a certain future, no matter which moral paths one chooses to follow. From this tale, the philosophers of old Greek gathered that there is no escaping fate and followed the stoic line of determinism: everything that happens is rooted in a cosmic cause and effect cycle, which is part of an overall divine plan¹¹.

Determinism and libertarian free will

All human actions are determined and influenced by choice, and the range of choices we circuit when faced with different moral decisions. Morality is a “set of personal and social standards for good or bad behaviour and character”¹², thus it functions as the instrument we view and compare human actions and choices with. The morals we act upon are made when we display acts of care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and sanctity¹³, and are shown through our personal and intergroup beliefs, values, cultures, genes, heritage, education, and experiences. Academics of philosophy and science are however divided by whether these choices are of free will or not. Mainly, the branches of these debates are divided into libertarian free will, hard determinism, and compatibilism, as well as the expansions of hard determinism: predeterminism, omniscient fatalism and causal fatalism. *Libertarian free will* entails the idea that humans have a completely free will and consequently are fully morally responsible for their actions¹⁴. Its polar opposite, *hard determinism* (Latin: *determinare*, limit, decide) is the theory that “all events in the universe, including all human decisions and actions, are

¹⁰ Augustyn, 2023

¹¹ Tollefsen, et al., 2019, p. 152

¹² Cambridge Dictionary, 2023.

¹³ Ellemers, et al., 2013, p. 160

¹⁴ Grøn, A, et al, 1996, p. 337

inevitable consequences of prearranged terms”¹⁵. There is no choice. However, in *compatibilism*, Grøn et al. explains that one is engaged in combining the experiences of free will with a determined life. One believes freedom comes from an inner or outer force, and that an action is free when humans act upon their innermost wishes, attitudes, opinions, or characteristics, but only if one had an opportunity to act differently.

Pre-determinism brings the thesis of determinism even further in implying there is an omniscient power controlling the causal pathways we make. The omniscient being is foreknowing of all events, and “infallibly guide those who are destined for salvation”¹⁶. All events that occur, have already been determined. This sort of *fatalism* (Latin: *fatalis*, ‘determined by fate’) provides the idea that there is a specific outcome to your life. You will fall into the hands of fate, no matter which choices you make¹⁷. The theologian Augustin (354-430) termed this omniscient power of the Christian, almighty God to be *Predestination*, the power of ascertaining bliss or damnation to all individuals of mankind¹⁸. The Apostle Paulus emphasised that humans have an inert moral instinct in their hearts to follow God’s will¹⁹, and therefore follow the predestined life assigned to them.

In short, determinism entails that, “in a situation in which a person makes a certain decision or performs a certain action, it is impossible that he or she could have made any other decision or performed any other action”²⁰. The person is to a certain degree freed from the question of morality in their action, given they had no other choice. Having explored the paths of free will and determinism, the lives of the protagonists of *LWW* and *TTW* can be contracted into cases of *omniscient fatalism* and *causal fatalism*, both pathways of predeterministic nature, and of which I will explore further in the discussion part of the essay.

Do we as storytellers and listeners find comfort in predetermined or prophesied storylines? Stephens describes how western children’s literature traditionally have included biblical literature and “related religious stories”, such as myths, hero stories, medieval and quasi-medieval romance, folktales and fairy tales, oriental stories, as well as other modern classics. Stephens further emphasizes that such traditional stories come with “predetermined horizons and expectations and with their values and ideas about the world already legitimized, [...]”

¹⁵ Grøn, A, et al., 1996, p. 111

¹⁶ Merriam-Webster, 2023

¹⁷ Grøn, A, et al. 1996, p. 187

¹⁸ Tollefsen, T et al., 2019, p. 195.

¹⁹ Rom. 2, 14-15

²⁰ Duignan, 2022.

shaped by some kind of metanarrative expressing social values and attitudes prevailing in the time and the place of the retelling”²¹. He explains metanarrative as a “global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience”. For example, *truth* and *justice* is often portrayed as absolute moral ideals, and the protagonist’s quest in their story is to prevail with these high morals intact when faced with a great evil, obstacle, or enemy. This sort of resolute belief upon socially established morals have constantly been embroidered into narratives of storytelling. There is an impression that any attempt to defer from the moral ideals presented in stories, also defer from the ideals we all set upon ourselves to create a ‘righteous’ life, and instead create stories of tragedy, such as Oedipus. Abbott argues that Oedipus’ struggle against his fate is an instance of the general need to control what cannot be controlled: “The narrative, in negotiating Oedipus’ dilemma, negotiates at the same time the general conflict between determinism and the freedom to act”²². The observers of Oedipus’ life experience alongside the protagonist how his predetermined life unfolds, the tragic repercussions his avoidance brings, and are from his tale forewarned: one should not test fate.

Whether humans are exposed to stories aligned with myth or history, one could assume the suspense of the story would be somewhat removed if the audience were introduced to a prophecy or a prewritten journey. O’Connor, however, points to how Stokes, the author of the Irish myth *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (1902), uses prophecy “not only as a powerful storytelling technique in itself, [...] but also as a means of prompting reflections on his own saga and its larger importance”²³. Before the arrival of the Pevensies, the prophecy gives the Narnian residents hope to defeat the evil queen, and upon arrival, it guides them to lead the children towards Aslan. In *TTW*, however, Henry DeTamble’s disease enervates the self-written storyline of his life, and the knowledge that his life is fully predetermined functions merely to discourage the protagonist in his struggle to live a normal life. Whether the embroidered ideals in the fictional worlds are directed towards a younger or elder audience, the audience may find comfort in the stories where heroes are predestined to be triumphant in their quest, like the Pevensies, or they may find themselves driven to question their own lives or role in the world, witnessing the protagonist’s tragic mistakes and following repercussions, like in Oedipus and Henry’s life.

²¹ Stephens, 1998, pp. 5-6

²² Abbott, 2002/2021, p. 206

²³ O’Connor, 2008, pp. 57 - 58

The agon and moral inflictions in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

Abbot points out that in every narrative of any interest, there is a conflict, an *agon*, in which power is at stake. Therefore, with a convincing storytelling, the conflict that threatens to fracture or make living difficult, can also be resolved²⁴. The resolution of the agon enables the readers to point out a moral direction from the values, ideas, feelings, and world views which were overpowering the protagonist in the first place. In *LWW*, the main conflict reigns between spring and winter, good and evil, represented through Aslan, the ‘King of the Forest’, and Jadis, the White Witch. She is the creator of Narnia’s eternal winter and the self-made sovereign of the frozen woods into which the young Lucy Pevensie enters through a magical wardrobe. Lucy first brings her brother Edmund to witness the magical land, and soon the elder siblings, Peter, and Susan, follow. The readers follow the Pevensies through an omniscient narrator, who at times breaks the fourth wall in order to engage his readers further, e.g., at the start of chapter 9²⁵: “And now of course you want to know what had happened to Edmund”. Whilst separated from his siblings, Edmund is enchanted and pledges his allegiance to the White Witch. Simultaneously, Lucy finds that her Narnian friend, Mr. Tumnus, is lost, and the siblings seek help amongst Narnian habitants to find him and later Edmund. Upon meeting Mr and Mrs Beaver, the children learn of the Golden Prophecy, and are asked if they are “the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve”²⁶. The Golden Prophecy asserts how two boys and two girls, with help from Aslan, will end the Evil Witch’s rule and steer Narnia towards a new, peaceful era²⁷. The ancient prediction is two separate sayings, which read as follows:

Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes to sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.

When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone,
Sits at Cair Paravel in throne,
The evil time will be over and done.

²⁴ Abbott, 2002/2021, p. 61

²⁵ Lewis, 1950, p. 84

²⁶ Lewis, 1950, p. 66

²⁷ Lewis, 1950, pp. 77 - 78

Many children's stories and fairy tales are able to communicate how light prevails and dispels the darkness²⁸, and in *LWW*, Lewis communicates the power of being able to navigate through the moral obstacles of right and wrong, good and evil. The predeterministic nature of the Golden Prophecy provides the children and the readers with the resolution for their newfound quest. They are not, however, aware of which choices they have to make or obstacles they have to overcome to reach this resolution. Velarde argues that "what characters decide to do, has repercussions on their own lives and the lives of those with whom they are connected"²⁹. The first example of this is Lucy bringing her siblings along to Narnia in the first place, to save Mr. Tumnus' life. Lucy is often described as "a child of uncommon innocence and deep intuition"³⁰ – both are default traits in her nature created by her upbringing, being the youngest of the siblings and having followed her brothers' and sister's guidance throughout her life. Therefore, Lucy's instinct to find her siblings for guidance and support is a good and rightful act, which enables Peter, Susan, and Edmund to experience the magical land and help find her friend. On the other side, she puts her siblings in danger, bringing them into an unknown, icy realm. One might argue that because Lucy is so young, only eight years old, she is not culpable for her decisions, as she does not yet know how to fully separate right from wrong. Barker claims that child protagonists strive with the balance of individual interest as well as to establish themselves in their communities. "[The child protagonist] negotiate ethical conflicts between self-interest and self-sacrifice [...] and follow moral principles with a determination to assert their individuality"³¹. The 'community' of which Lucy establishes for herself is the newfound abode of the quiet British countryside alongside her overbearing siblings, and later Narnia, where she makes a friend of her own, and is by this establishing and exploring a place for her individuality to emerge.

Lucy's act is also the catalyst which leads to Edmund's betrayal, which by the other Pevensie siblings' virtues is considered a wrongful act. Professor Churchland argues that as social animals, we can't help but hold people accountable, and assign either praise or blame for their actions³². Annoyed and jealous of the attention towards his younger sister Lucy, Edmund is beguiled by the White Witch's offer of power, to make him a solitary regnant king of Narnia. By Christian morals, this sort of envy, greed and pride is amongst the seven capital sins from

²⁸ Ware, 2003, p. 7

²⁹ Velarde, 2005, p. 18

³⁰ Guroian, 1998, p. 129

³¹ Barker & Mills, 2014, p. 103

³² Churchland, 2015/2016

the Bible. Also, by aiding the White Witch in her reign, Edmund is defying the Golden Prophecy, the prophesised aid towards peace and prosper upon Narnia. Even after he learns of the true nature of Jadis beyond her enchantment, he is entrapped and risks the safety of his siblings and any Narnian allies in the attempt to rescue him. Christian theologian Augustin believed that intellect is not superior to will, but equal to it. He also pointed out that self-centrism and lust can overpower the intentional good will, and humans commit immoral actions³³. Guroian claims that the youthful pride, sibling rivalry, and jealousy displayed in Edmund's case are "the only imperfections evil needs in order to capture his youthful imagination, twist his mind and set him on a disastrous course from which he has to be rescued from another"³⁴. Compatibilism follows the same argument, judging that Edmund has full moral responsibility for his action: it was an inner, self-centred motivation that drove him to betray his siblings. The supporters of hard determinism could however argue that Edmund's feelings towards his siblings and his desire for power was inevitable. Having escaped a traumatizing world of bomb raids, endured the separation from his parents and being neglected by his brother and sisters, there was no other outcome than for Edmund to be spellbound by the White Witch's proposal.

In any case of Christian doctrine or predeterminism, the most expansive repercussion of Lucy and her brother's actions is the Great Lion Aslan's sacrifice to save Edmund's life from the Evil Witch. As Velarde points out, there is an intriguing similarity between Aslan's death at the Stone Table and the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross³⁵. Aslan is described by Narnians as "the King of the wood and the Son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-sea"³⁶. Throughout the chronicles of Narnia, Aslan is the voice of virtue, and Velarde goes as far as to call him a "Christ-figure"³⁷. Velarde and others point out that the all-powerful God of Narnia is Aslan's father, and therefore, Aslan is the Narnian embodiment of Jesus Christ. Like Christ sacrifices himself for the sins of mankind, Aslan sacrifices himself for the immoralities of Edmund and is the foremost figure in the fight against the darkness and witchcraft of Jadis. Upon hearing Aslan's name at the Beavers' home, the children display different emotions, as if caught in a deep dream³⁸:

³³ Tollefsen et al, 2019, p. 192

³⁴ Guroian, 1998/2023, p. 127

³⁵ Velarde, 2005, p. 13

³⁶ Lewis, 1950, p. 76

³⁷ Velarde, 2005, p. 25

³⁸ Lewis, 1950, p. 67

Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.

From this excerpt, we are able to forecast the relation the children will have towards Aslan in the upcoming battle between good and evil. It is evident that not only the Golden Prophecy functions to familiarize the readers with the upcoming narrative and roles the protagonists play; the omniscient narrator here enables the readers to experience the feelings the children have towards meeting Aslan – the guilt, excitement, love, and warmth they hold towards Aslan and themselves – as Aslan represents the story’s centrepiece for all that is “good, holy and [morally] just”³⁹. Edmund aligns himself with the White Queen and is subsequently rescued by Aslan taking his place at death’s door. Peter, as the oldest and the leader of the group, gains newfound bravery in the face of dangers threatening his siblings. Finally, Susan and Lucy are the last to see and support Aslan before his sacrifice at the Stone Table, and his resurrection shortly after. After his resurgence, he sets out a powerful roar, and as the prophecy foretold: *At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more, [...] and we will have spring again*, much like Lucy’s feeling of ‘the beginning of summer’.

Readers tend to identify with the characters through whose perspective they view the events of the story⁴⁰. In *LWW*, readers are able to read and sympathize with the thoughts of the children, but are unable to share the same advantage with the paramount creatures Aslan and Jadis. Jadis is the daughter of Adam and his first wife, Lilith, who from old Mesopotamian mythology is depicted as a demon of storms, sickness, and death⁴¹. Hence, if Aslan’s origin is divine, and Jadis’ origin is infernal, they represent the outer spheres of good and evil. The protagonists’ mission is to find their moral high ground within these spheres. As Edmund realizes that the objective of Jadis is damaging and wrong, he subsequently make amends with his siblings, Aslan, and the Narnian allies. Nodelman argues that children’s stories, such as *LWW*, assume that children’s personalities and morals will change, and that “the texts attempt to encourage children to change in the proper way”⁴². In other words, Lewis indirectly encourages his young readers to take lesson of Edmund’s mistakes, be inspired of Peter’s

³⁹ Velarde, 2005, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Nodelman, 2008, p. 18

⁴¹ Smith, 2008, p. 11

⁴² Nodelman, 2008, p. 78

courage, grow fond of Susan's compassion, and adopt Lucy's adventurous spirit. If the readers recognise these positive traits in admired characters, they might want to embody some of those characteristics themselves.

The agon and moral inflictions in *The Time Traveller's Wife*

When we reflect on the nature of our lives, Torres argues that “whereas we think of the past as settled, fixed, and closed, we think of the future as unsettled, alterable, and open”⁴³. In the world of fiction, the time travel-narrative is a storytelling-device which enables the traditional chronology of past, present, and future to be challenged. Time travel has frequented the narrative structure of literature, theatre, and other productions since its popularization by one of the earliest works of science fiction, *The Time Machine* (1895) by HG Wells⁴⁴. The protagonist, the *time traveller*, is a character who possesses the ability to travel to different periods of time and space, of past, present, and future. Gamel discusses how most time travel-narratives consists of alternate history which “presents [events] as infinitely malleable and open to an endless number of possibilities”⁴⁵. However, in the case of the *TTW*'s protagonist Henry DeTamble, he is born with a disease which makes him travel back and forth in his own timeline, but unable to control when or where he is travelling to⁴⁶. Additionally, when jumping in time, only the organic molecules of his body travels, thus he often travels to populated places in the city, or isolated places in the wilderness, completely naked. Henry is therefore an untraditional time travel protagonist, who suffers through the emotional severity of his unpredictable life, rather than experience the uplifting adventures of his time traveller adversaries. Henry's agon is the unpredictability and vulnerability of his travels, as well as his longing for an equable life with his wife, Clare. He is unable to change tragic events he knows will happen, and must often interact with his younger selves, unable to warn them of what is to come. He has for example once witnessed first-hand the suicide of a former lover, and witnessed the scene of his mother's death hundreds of times, because he repeatedly is pulled towards moments of the most emotional gravity in his life. Henry first time travels at 5, and after travelling involuntarily some years in his young adult life, he is left mortified. Constantly trying to survive without clothing, money or shelter, Henry becomes a fatalist. He

⁴³ Torre, 2011, p. 360

⁴⁴ Marcus, 2017

⁴⁵ Gomel, 2009, p. 348

⁴⁶ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 14

starts to believe that all the events of his life are predetermined, so his further choices and actions make no difference. He has to follow the timeline written for him, and no action, moral or immoral, can defer him from the life and death he inevitably will experience.

Following strict fatalism, no human actions are free. All future events are inevitable, and we do not have the power to affect them⁴⁷. In causal fatalism one cannot consider the future as alterable and open, and our choices and morals adhere to the pathways already trodden. Philosopher D'Holbach believed that humans and our actions are just part of the physical world, bound by its physical laws.

[Man's] life itself is nothing more than a long series, a succession of necessary and connected motion; which operates perpetual changes in his machine; which has for its principle [...] causes contained within himself, such as blood, nerves, fibres, flesh, bones⁴⁸

Much like D'Holbach describes, Henry's life is operated and driven by the "causes contained within himself", his biology and innate sickness. Aristotle shared the idea that there is order in nature and laws that humans abide to⁴⁹, but he also pointed to how everything wants to fulfil their form, their purpose in the universe. Henry questions his own life's purpose as he lacks the continuity to pursue a normal adolescence, adulthood, friendships, and relation to those around him. Henry DeTamble is born June 16th, 1963, to Richard DeTamble, a violinist in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Anette Lyn Robinson, a world-renowned opera singer. Anette dies in a car accident when Henry is six (H6), and H6 is able to survive the crash because he time travels out of the car at **the time of** impact. His father, Richard, never really recovers from his wife's death. He finds life meaningless, and spends the rest of his life in alcohol abuse, which causes nerve damage that forces him to give up the violin. The abuse is much to young Henry's dismay, who is guilt-struck by having survived the crash and not his mother. H28 explains that his father "hated me for surviving"⁵⁰, but otherwise finds the disease to be a gift when he is able to travel in time and on occasion see his young mother:

"I see her walking around the neighborhood, with you, with me. She goes to the park and learns scores, she shops, she has coffee with Mara at Tia's. I see her with Uncle Ish. I see her at Julliard. I hear her sing!"

⁴⁷ Rice, 2023.

⁴⁸ D'Holbach, 1770.

⁴⁹ Tollefsen et al, 2019, p. 136

⁵⁰ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 227.

Both Richard and Henry experience severe survivor's guilt. Richard's guilt is found in the set feeling that he should not continue to live or go on in his wife's stead. Henry's guilt is shown in the repeated witness of his mother's death, his interactions with her glowing youthful self before the accident, and the powerlessness he feels as he cannot stop the accident itself from happening. In a way, the inevitable death of Anette is the catalyst of Richard's ruin and Henry's detachment from his father. However, the realization Richard has of his wife existing somewhere in time and space, and the newfound gratitude of his son's ability to interact with her, finally enables him to recover from his long-held grief. This is where the importance of Henry's free will is exercised, if he indeed possesses it: it is evident that he can make small changes of interaction when he is in his own present time. Henry visits his father to obtain his mother's engagement ring in order to propose to Clare, but given that their relation has been a truculent one, and Richard often has doubted the validity of his disease, Henry could have chosen to not seek out his father or tell him about his interactions with his mother. Within libertarian free will, the principle of alternate possibilities states that "an action is free only if the person could have done otherwise"⁵¹, and in this case, Henry could have distanced himself from his father and merely obtained the ring, which is the objective of his visit. Still, he chooses to talk with his father, and changes Richard's fate for the better through recognising their collective feelings of guilt, loss, and sorrow for Anette.

Although Henry's disease enables him to see his mother's chapters of energetic life, he does not undermine the toll that time travel pose on his everyday life. "When I am out here, in time, I am inverted, changed into a desperate version of myself. I become a thief, a vagrant, an animal who runs and hides."⁵² Henry expresses that the largest pleasures in life are the 'homey' ones, all the "sedate excitements of domesticity"⁵³. The most central of domesticity is to be close to his wife, Clare. Still, Henry is forced to undertake all the adventures of the extreme outdoors as well as the awkward, undressed meetings of the social world, in the strive towards his quiet librarian life. At one point, H27 travels back in time and teaches H8 how to pickpocket. He explains it as providing himself with urgently required survival skills. H27, our first-person narrator, jokingly comments that

⁵¹ Robb, 2020

⁵² Niffenegger, 2003, p. IX.

⁵³ Niffenegger, 2003, p. IX.

Other lessons in this series include Shoplifting, Beating People Up, Picking Locks, Climbing Trees, Driving, Housebreaking, Dumpster Diving and How To Use Oddball Things Like Venetian Blinds And Garbage Lids As Weapons⁵⁴

All of the actions the narrator lists, point to future crimes which young Henry will commit. H27 insinuates that many of the skills that young Henry will adhere to are taught to him through his older selves. Traditionally, committing such law offences is the opposite of what the ancient Greeks imagined morally right in their encapsulation of *the Rule of Law*, the principle that no one is exempt from the law, even those who are in a position of power⁵⁵. That is to say, Plato also argued that “happiness or well-being is the highest aim of moral thought and conduct, and the virtues are the dispositions/skills needed to attain it”⁵⁶. Similarly, Henry only seeks his own well-being and survival when he breaks the law. Whilst acquiring the skills needed to commit the crimes, he is merely breaking the rules of a society in which, he does not fit in.

Society, whether in 400 BC, the 1940s or 2023, is grounded upon morals, principles of right and wrong. Virtue is how our behaviour show these high moral standards. Many compatibilists and believers of free will argue that “morals pertain only to the sphere of man’s free will – only to those actions which are open to his choice”⁵⁷ These actions of free will are however limited for Henry, as he finds himself in a simultaneous perpetuating and fluctuating state of distress. His ‘dishonest’ actions are committed upon a threat on life, e.g., when he at 19 breaks into a house to seek shelter⁵⁸, or during his young teens when he shoplifts in order to eat, trespasses private property in order to get home, or breaks arrest as he vanishes into his own present again. Additionally, one might argue that the immoralities that Henry, at whichever age or year he is stuck in, considers committing, already have been committed by a future version of himself. At one point, H15 of the present is visited by H15 from the next year⁵⁹. He explains to his former self that whenever he travels back in time, he is incapable to change the events that have already occurred. Every attempt to change future events becomes his past, so any event that will happen is inevitable. If a person’s virtue is measured on their actions, Henry does not have the opportunity to separate right and wrong.

⁵⁴ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 49.

⁵⁵ Waldron, 2016

⁵⁶ Frede, D; Mi-Kyoung Lee, 2023

⁵⁷ Churchland, 2015/2016, p. 3

⁵⁸ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 59

⁵⁹ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 55

Plato's cardinal virtues of life state that humans should strive for wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice⁶⁰, and though Henry's life is unorthodox, he displays a great deal of wisdom in his survival and an even greater courage to live. He finds injustice in his perplexing existence, but shows moderation in his everyday living. Henry tries to live life as normal as possible, but time travel does come with some advantages as well. He utilizes his ability to see his mother sing in concert, protect the younger Clare from an abusive jock⁶¹, and win the lottery, which enables Clare and H30 to buy their dream house⁶². Theoretically, Henry could have chosen to win the lottery every day and become the richest man alive, but his goal and vision of wealth is never material; it is the safe space and time he gets to spend with friends and family.

Clare Abshire is the only constant in Henry's life. In a letter to Clare, he writes that "our love has been the thread through the labyrinth, the net under the high-wire walker, the only real thing in this strange life of mine I could ever trust"⁶³. Clare is the second point of view that we are able to perceive the story through, and it is that of *the time traveller's wife*. Clare first meets Henry at the age of six when H36 travels back in time to the meadow behind Clare's childhood home. With frequent visits during her childhood and young adolescence, she grows to know and fall in love with the strange, but charming time traveller. Clare is one of the few people in the world that knows of Henry's disease, and therefore often discusses the nature of Henry's travels and whether free will or determinism will alter her life as well. At 13, Clare admits that "sometimes you tell me something and I feel like the future is already there, you know? Like my future has happened in the past and I can't do anything about it"⁶⁴. To this Henry answers that it is called determinism and it terrifies him: "I am constantly running up against the fact that I can't change anything, even though I am right here, watching it"⁶⁵. The self-awareness Henry displays is in line with atheist philosopher D'Holbach's understanding of man's relation to himself and his predetermined role: "In short, had man fairly studied himself, everything must have convinced him, that in every moment of his duration, he was nothing more than a passive instrument in the hands of necessity". D'Holbach is here comparing humans place in the universe as cogs in a grand machine, and Henry regards his

⁶⁰ Frede, 2023

⁶¹ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 92

⁶² Niffenegger, 2003, pp. 287-288

⁶³ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 519

⁶⁴ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 72

⁶⁵ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 73

life similarly. To Henry's luck, Clare's timeline is intertwined with his, relieving him of the solitude and pain of his condition.

The narrative of *TTW* centres around the relation of Henry and Clare. Henry becomes a huge influence in Clare's life and persona because they spend so much time together during her adolescence. Paradoxically, they only spend so much time together because Henry's travels draw him towards people and places with heavy emotional gravity. Correspondingly, when 20 year old Clare meets with H28 at his job at the library, Clare has an equally strong influence on the man Henry matures into once they meet in his present timeline. Henry would therefore not have grown into the man that Clare fell in love with, unless Clare had sought him out and explained to him that they are married in the future. However intertwined their timelines are, they know they will come back to each other. Although love is the dominant emotion throughout their companionship, Clare often expresses frustration of Henry's disappearances⁶⁶.

I go to sleep alone, and wake up alone. I take walks. I work until I'm tired. [...]
Everything seems simple until you think about it. Why is love intensified by absence?

Clare's fate is tied up with Henry's although she does not share his time travel gene. They merely share the limited time they have together, periods which are intensified by Henry's sudden absences. Clare suffers many miscarriages through her mid-twenties, and the losses weigh heavy on the mind of the time traveller's wife. By the age of 30 however, baby Alba is conceived, and the time travel gene has passed on to their daughter. Alba is however in much more control of her sickness than her father is. She seems able to travel more on demand rather than on emotional infliction. Henry is relieved that Alba, to a larger extent, possesses free will in her travels and therefore can control her own fate. He recognises the torment his absence has caused Clare over the years. In a letter he writes "What an uncertain husband I have been, Clare, like a sailor, Odysseus alone and buffeted by tall waves, sometimes wily and sometimes just a plaything of the gods"⁶⁷.

Niffenegger's analogy of the classical Homer tale resonate well with the story of Henry and Clare. Henry is thrown into fate's hands, and separated from his home to endure the difficulties of his disease, much like Odysseus suffered through the difficulties of the Trojan

⁶⁶ Niffenegger, 2003, p. vii

⁶⁷ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 519

War and his challenging return home⁶⁸. Clare is as patient as Odysseus' wife, Penelope, waiting loyally for years for her husband to return, being a "symbolic embodiment of home"⁶⁹. Henry dies tragically at 43, but Clare still awaits visits from her husband 47 years later, and at 82, and her patience is rewarded by his presence one last time. Clare and Henry's daughter, Alba, can also be compared to Odysseus and Penelope's son, Telemachus, who spent years in search of his wandering father. Similarly, Alba searches for glimpses of her father in his unpredictable temporal journey. Whilst Telemachus' name translates to "far from battle" (Greek)⁷⁰, Alba translates to "fortunate" or "white city" (Latin)⁷¹. Upon Henry's interactions with Alba, he truly reigns her as fortunate for being more in control of her condition, and indeed "far from [the] battle" he has endured. Henry simultaneously questions the unruly conditions of his own fate. Was there a way for Alba to break the chains of his genetics' deterministic grasp on their lives? Henry is unable to prevent his death, but Alba's abilities signify the possibility of change, and gives him hope for the future: Alba's adolescence will be less traumatic than his own. With the potential to take control of her own life and fate, Henry hopes that she will not be a "plaything of the gods", nor the subject of a fatalistic journey, but a force of her own.

Navigating the morals and motivations of adventure and domesticity

Stories also function as forces of their own, in that they convey powerful messages to help their readers "expand their skills, knowledge, and understanding" to the world around them. Bohlin discusses a phenomenon named "the schooling of desire". She explains how "the internal world of moral motivation and aspiration that gives rise to a character's desires and choices", might pierce the mind of the adolescent reader and enable them to draw their own moral distinctions from a fictional character's life⁷². The protagonists' agons serve to "illustrate questions of desire and the narratives account for the relevant context of [the readers'] lives and motivations". In children's literature, such as *LWW*, elements like sibling rivalry, friendship, comradeship, as well as the dichotomy of good and evil are tangible themes of which young readers can identify themselves in or recognise the moral inflictions of. Lewis pointed out that children at some point will encounter such evils in the real world,

⁶⁸ Lawrence, 1994, pp. IX – X.

⁶⁹ Lawrence, 1994, p. 1

⁷⁰ Brann, 2002, p. 277

⁷¹ Niffenegger, 2005, p. 384

⁷² Bohlin, 2005, p. 5

and that “there is nothing wrong in allowing them to be exposed to evil via fairy tales, as long as good prevails”⁷³. Velarde follows up this by claiming that “the everyday choices we make are turning us into people who are helping the good cause to win or who are standing in the way of the good”⁷⁴, which is precisely the moral compass of which children must navigate into their adolescence.

In young adult and adult fiction, however, the inert moral compass is often challenged, as the areas of good and evil, or right and wrong, are blurred, much like in the case of Henry in *TTW*. Whilst both children and adult readers long for happiness and have a desire to “impose structure on the world’s chaos”⁷⁵, adults recognise that their freedom of choice and opportunity to make these structural changes may be restricted. Pape points out that the structure of stories for children has “generally reproduced the dominant interpretation of the world, which anticipated a happy end”⁷⁶ *LWW* depict such interpretation, as the Pevensie children are made kings and queens, as predicted by the Golden Prophecy. In *TTW*, however, Henry does not experience a happy ending. Towards the end of his timeline, he first suffers an extensive frost injury, which subsequently forces him to have both feet amputated, and on his later travels, with a considerable handicap, he is accidentally killed by the father and brother of Clare, the love of his life. Although *TTW* offers some closure regarding Alba’s survival and control of the disease she has inherited, the closure is nevertheless a tragic one. From Henry’s unpredictable journey and diegesis, there lies an expectation of his early death, but not the painful experience of his amputations and suffering. Cambridge professor Poole’s assertion illustrates the tragic nature of Henry’s story: “Tragedies raise painful questions about ends, endings, and dreams of a possible future, whether in this world or another. [...] Tragedy makes a mockery of average life expectancy, as it does of everything else”⁷⁷. In both cases of *LWW* and *TTW*, the protagonists are subject to a predetermined narrative- a fate lined with sacrifice, faith, hope, and love at its centre- but with vastly different endings in regard to their own happiness and their thoughts on virtue aligned with these fates.

Whilst happy endings are an important aspect of storytelling and the morals we draw from them, duty and faith may be of equal merit in the impact of readers thoughts on virtue. Both in classical philosophy and Christian theology, frequently referred in the letters of Paul, the

⁷³ Velarde, 2005, p. 15

⁷⁴ Velarde, 2005, p. 16

⁷⁵ Pape, 1992, p. 181

⁷⁶ Pape, 1992, p.180

⁷⁷ Poole, 2005, p. 113

theological virtues of *faith, hope* and *love* plays an “indispensable role in Christian theorizing about a person’s duties with respect to God”⁷⁸. The tale of *LWW* is in many aspects a fictional analogy of God and his son Christ, and the Pevensie children largely act upon the guidance from Aslan, who is a representative of good, in the fight against Jadis, the figure of evil. The children’s faith in Aslan and hope for the Narnians’ future never waver, and they are therefore rewarded with the love and esteem from the Narnians and the “King of the Wood”. Aquinas argued the theological virtues as the most central of Christian values, and those who do not possess them would “neither have the awareness of nor the will to strive for salvation”⁷⁹. In one sense, Henry does seek salvation from his disease, but rather than seeking God, he searches for answers in medicine, an empirical entity he can interact with. This decision may resonate well with readers in an increasingly secular society. H35 expresses that “to me things seem too random and meaningless for there to be a God”⁸⁰ It is hard for Henry to believe in an omniscient being which in one side claims to have “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”⁸¹, and on the other side foists him a condition which ultimately strips his future away. Instead, Henry pledges his senses of faith, duty and care towards Clare and Alba.

The stories of *LWW* and *TTW* align in their predetermined narratives and themes of courage, sacrifice, hope, and love; however, they separate by their characters’ motivations. Whilst the Pevensies seek adventure, Henry seek domesticity. Pape refers to Rousseau’s claim “both the happiness of children and adults consists in their use of freedom”, and argues that children’s happiness is restricted by the “adults by bourgeois society”⁸² When the Pevensies first escape London and arrive at professor Digory Kirke’s home in the countryside, the children are excited to learn “that old chap will let us do anything we like”⁸³. The children has likely endured strict adult authority and living conditions during the London bomb raids, and for the first time in a long time they are free to explore and play as they would like. This world of opportunity is expanded once they reach the frozen realm of Narnia and “could pretend [they] are arctic explorers!”⁸⁴. Their excitement grows by the Narnians greeting the children as royalty – Edmund especially, visualizing himself as solitary King of the realm, and ironically,

⁷⁸ Mann, 1998

⁷⁹ Mann, 1998.

⁸⁰ Niffenegger, 2003, p. 76.

⁸¹ Jeremiah 29:11

⁸² Pape, 1992, p. 187

⁸³ Lewis, 1950, p. 10

⁸⁴ Lewis, 1950, p. 56

putting himself in the position of the “adult bourgeoisie”. Furthermore, the Narnians bestow Peter, Susan and Lucy with armour and weapons, important equipment to explore and complete any adventure, to free their brother and fulfil their newfound quest.

As the strong opposition, Henry’s only equipment is his survival skills, and his only ambition is to return home safely. Whilst the Pevensies grew weary of the restrictions by adult society, young Henry lacked adult role models. He would more often interact and seek guidance by an older version of himself, rather than his addict father. An article from Princeton University stated that children who experience such psychological parental maltreatment often develop trust issues in other relations, which leads to feelings of being unloved and unwanted⁸⁵. This feeling of abandonment and solitude may therefore be motivation enough for Henry to seek domesticity – to seek love and build a home with Clare – regardless of his sickness.

When exploring these protagonists’ inner thoughts and desires, one does not need to ponder how age and motivation cohere. Children’s literature such as *LWW* let the child protagonists explore the new and unknown. Coats writes that “Children often possess the ‘innocent eye’. [...] They invite readers to not just think about what it means to be a child, but about what it means to possess a child’s lack of knowledge”⁸⁶. Nodelman argues that themes in children’s literature deal primarily with questions of desire and knowledge, what children want to do or say, or are wise not to act upon: “As a result, they often depict the consequences of children’s wishes being fulfilled; and they often report ‘happy endings’ that represent the adults’ wishes for children being fulfilled.”⁸⁷ On the other hand, the ‘adult’- stories show more directly the consequences of a person’s thoughts and desires, but rarely end in happily- ever- afters, such as the tragic story of Henry. The protagonists of *LWW* and *TTW* have in common that they are thrown into situations they did not create and yet must make something of. The Pevensies found their door to adventure by accident, whilst Henry, likewise a child when first travelling, was forced into an unalterable timeline. Henry may – as most adults – look ‘back’ at significant decisions and events in his life, and wish to prevent his mother’s death, his father’s withdrawal from music, or his former lover Ingrid’s suicide. Although it seems possible for Henry to alter small interactions, he does not have the power to change the course of his life. It is not the small acts of free will that necessarily constitutes life; it is how one navigates through the events one holds no control over.

⁸⁵ English, 1998, p. 48

⁸⁶ Coats, 2010, p. 12

⁸⁷ Nodelman, 2008, pp. 79-80

Conclusion

Stories are essential in the human connection to reality, to thoughts on our destiny, and to our judgements of right and wrong. Narratives and their protagonists have the power to affect the readers' morals and thoughts on virtue through their adventures. Some adventures are otherworldly, like that of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, where we get to explore a world beaming of possibility together with the Pevensies. But then, some adventures remind us of the restrictions of the life we lead, and how we must not take for granted or waste the opportunities of happiness once life offers it, like Henry DeTamble experiences in the *Time Traveler's Wife*. Researchers of science and philosophy are divided on whether or not humans are subject to a predetermined life, but one may find that predeterminism within storytelling is a powerful narrative technique which can offer the readers reflections upon their own lives and the roles they fulfil in their everyday pursuits. Children may create their own moral directions from the values, ideas, feelings, and world views overpowering the protagonists, as well as learn from the mistakes that set their heroes back⁸⁸.

My thesis questioned how stories reliant on predetermined narratives affect the readers' morals and thoughts on virtue through their protagonists. Due to our constant navigation of right and wrong, care of ourselves and of others, all humans are prone to envy, greed, pride, and other capital sins, but the protagonists of the stories we voice have the power to influence our ethic senses into adolescence and adulthood. The doctrines of predeterminism states that all our choices are based on inevitable prearranged terms, and that our futures are set from these terms. However, unlike Henry and the Pevensies, we are not certain what our own future holds. We do not have a Golden Prophecy or a disease which carves our futures into stone, but we do however control our pursuit of happiness, sense of duty, and where to embed our faith. Whether one finds life too "random or meaningless for there to be a God", or embracingly fulfilling like "the beginning of summer", contemporary stories might provide the readers with inspiration to adhere to their favourite protagonists' ethics and choose virtue over vice in their own lives.

⁸⁸ Bohlin, 2005, p. 27

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