

A Jewish Narnia?

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I've never had much use for fantasy literature. I'm aware that some of it is well done. But I prefer to read fiction rooted squarely in the real world. In the evangelical culture in which I grew up, this was sometimes an unpopular view.

I did read [The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe](#) as a kid. But while my sister and many of our friends were devouring the [Narnia series](#), I moved on to other things. Years later, when the [film adaptation](#) came out, I listened to these friends describe being magically transported back to their childhood. My reaction to the film was to remember that [not even J.R.R. Tolkien](#) found much to like in C. S. Lewis's overt allegory and endless talking animals.

Lewis

loomed large when I was at Wheaton College; during my four years he was the focus of multiple conferences in multiple disciplines, although the focus wasn't always on his fantasy writing. Tolkien was everywhere too, as ubiquitous a dorm-room presence in 1997 as the [first Counting Crows record](#). In a survey course in 20th-century British literature—one of few such classes, I suspect, in which D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster and Wilfred Owen were ignored—[The Lord of the Rings](#) was assigned in its entirety. When the [Tolkien films](#) came out, they were the only thing many of my Wheaton friends wanted to talk about.

There

may be obvious reasons for fantasy literature's popularity among Christian writers and readers. Less obvious is why there's no Jewish parallel. Michael Weingrad [raises this question](#) in his review of new books by Lev Grossman and Hagar Yanai, and he offers some provocative possibilities.