was originally the most condescending of the children towards Lucy, comes to see Aslan. Finally, the dwarf Trumpkin, who had refused earlier to consider the possibility that Aslan even existed, is forced to come to grips with the reality of Aslan when the Lion confronts him face to face.

The degree to which the members of the group are initially skeptical of Lucy's testimony seems to determine the extent to which they are later able to recognize the truth that Aslan is present with them. The religious implications here are obvious. As Lewis notes in a number of his writings, much of the evidence we have today for the central Christian claims about Jesus Christ comes in the form of testimony from the New Testament eyewitnesses and near-contemporaries. In this sense, the evidence for Christian truth rests on a kind of faith—specifically, a faith in the credibility of certain human testimony. Yet faith, Lewis believed, also produces its own authenticating evidence. Sin blinds, and faith opens our hearts and minds to God's gracious presence in our world and in our lives.

We've looked at four intellectual virtues central to being a responsible seeker of knowledge: valuing truth for its own sake; refusing to believe something simply because one wants it to be true; not allowing fears to dictate what one believes; and recognizing one's limitations as a seeker of truth. We've seen that Uncle Andrew utterly lacks these virtues. As a result, he, like the renegade dwarfs, lives in untruth and makes a prison of his own mind (LB, Chapter 13, p. 748).

3
Trusting Lucy: Believing the Incredible

THOMAS D. SENOR

Lucy is breathless with excitement as she tells her siblings her remarkable tale—how she had walked through the wardrobe into a wintry world, had tea with a Faun named "Mr. Tumnus," and listened to his stories of dancing Dryads, deep-delving Dwarfs, and a wicked White Witch who had cast a spell that made it "always winter and never Christmas" (LWW, Chapter 2, p. 118).

Lucy's excitement quickly turns to frustration, however, when it becomes clear that her brothers and sister simply don't believe her. And who could blame them? After all, what she told them was unbelievable.

Later, Edmund ducks into the wardrobe during a game of hide-and-seek and soon finds himself in Narnia, gorging on the White Witch's Turkish Delight. He confesses to Lucy that he has been through the wardrobe, although when she happily tells the others that Edmund can corroborate her story, he viciously turns on her and says that he was making the whole thing up. Edmund continues in this lie, making Lucy appear worse and worse for insisting on the truth of her tale.

The older kids, Peter and Susan, decide to seek the advice of the Professor who owns the house in which they are all staying. They tell him about the conflict between Edmund and Lucy, and explain that they are worried about Lucy because they've never known her to do anything like this before. They reason that she's either become a bald-faced liar (and a bad one at that) or else has lost her mind. They don't like the thought of either alternative.

The Professor's response surprises them. He asks who is generally more trustworthy, Lucy or Edmund? Peter says there

is little doubt that Lucy is. But, they say, they don't suspect her of lying as much as they fear she's gone mad. This possibility the Professor has little patience with. Madness is, after all, a general condition and Lucy has shown no signs of dementia. There are, the Professor reminds them, just three options: she's lying, she's crazy, or she's telling the truth (LWW, Chapter 5, p. 131). But past experience tells against the first option, and there is ample reason to disbelieve the second. Therefore, the Professor suggests, Lucy is probably telling the truth!

Peter and Susan are not sure what to think as they leave the Professor's study. On the one hand, the idea that what Lucy is saying could be true is utterly fantastic. How could there possibly be another world accessed through the back of a wardrobe? And not just any old world, but a world of Fauns and other mythical creatures who are ruled by a witch who has cast a spell of perpetual winter? Yet, on the other hand, there is no doubt that Lucy believes with all her heart in the reality of her experience. And with the exception of these wild stories about Narnia, Lucy is the rational, sensible person they've always known her to be. What are they to think?

What Would You Think?

What would you think? What *should* you think? This is an important issue because at some time or other we all will find ourselves in Peter and Susan's shoes. We have all heard stories, sometimes from apparently credible sources, of unidentified flying objects, "miracle" cures, apparitions, and mystical visions. What do we think when we hear such tales? Does reason require us to be always skeptical? And what does skepticism come to here? Or does reason sometimes surprise us with the advice of the Professor? Exploring questions such as these will be the purpose of this chapter. We will begin by considering in some detail the factors that Peter and Susan must weigh when figuring out whom to believe. We will then apply the results of our discussion of the credibility of Lucy's reports to the kinds of situations we face on this side of the wardrobe.[1]

[1] Those who have studied a little philosophy may be familiar with eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume's famous essay "Of Miracles" (from his book *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1748). Hume argues that one is never justified in accepting the report of a miracle. Although there are obvious parallels between purported miracles and Lucy's testimony, I've not included a discussion of Hume in this essay because it is essential to his argument that a miracle is a violation of a law of nature. But Lucy makes no claim to have experienced a literal miracle. For all she is claiming, her adventure in Narnia has an explanation that is perfectly in keeping with natural laws.

The Predicament

Although clear enough once pointed out, questions about what we ought to believe are rarely in the forefront of our minds. Indeed, I would guess that when you've read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, you never stopped to ask yourself what you'd do if you were in the older siblings' shoes. This is natural enough since we readers know that Lucy's story is true. But it doesn't take a lot of thought to see that Peter and Susan are in a bit of a predicament. In fact, they are in what philosophers call an *epistemic* predicament. What makes the problem epistemic is that it is concerned with what one should believe if one wants to believe the truth. And it is only true beliefs that allow us to know what is good for us, and how to change the world for the better. Yet the desire to acquire truth is even deeper than this; one fundamental way humans differ from the rest of the animal kingdom is our intellectual curiosity. Gaining knowledge of how the world does and should work is an intrinsic good.

Weighing the Evidence

We have good reason, therefore, to be concerned with epistemic matters. And among such matters, Peter and Susan's situation is particularly perplexing. For rational reflective belief comes about by carefully considering the evidence for and against a claim, weighing the totality, and then making a judgment in favor of the side the evidence favors. Normally, the factors one considers are of the same general kind on both sides of the issue. For example, if you are trying to figure out which of two driving routes to take to get from one city to another, you'll weigh, in each case, considerations such as total distance, speed limits, traffic density, possible road construction delays, and so

forth. You'll also weigh other, more subjective factors, such as a preference for freeway or back-road driving, and the scenic qualities of the respective routes—but in both cases, you'll look at the same kind of evidence for the two routes and compare them.

Part of what makes Peter and Susan's position so difficult is that the kinds of considerations that lead them to accept Lucy's testimony and the kind that lead them to be suspicious of it are of drastically different types. Against Lucy is much of what they think they know about reality. Undoubtedly, these imaginative, well-educated children retain some sense of wonder about the world; they don't expect to it to be devoid of mystery. Yet all of their experience seems to teach that there simply are no worlds of Fauns and witches. Doubtless, if the source of these claims were someone they didn't know, they would have no qualms about dismissing them out of hand. But the counterevidence in this case is precisely the character of the messenger. They know Lucy to be honest, and they have no reason (apart from her bizarre story) to doubt her sanity. So part of what makes Peter and Susan's position so difficult is the fact that the evidence against her testimony, and the evidence for it, are of very different types.

In addition to having to weigh two very different sorts of evidence, Peter and Susan's predicament is made all the worse by the strength of the evidence on either side. Certainly, their evidence that Fauns and witches are creatures of mere fantasy is very strong. Yet they've likely never been in the position of being unable to believe the trustworthy and sincere Lucy. Were anyone else to claim what Lucy is claiming, her testimony would be summarily dismissed. Were Lucy to be saying practically anything else, her word would be unquestioningly accepted. What's a rational person to think?

A Closer Look at the Predicament

The crux of the problem for Peter and Susan is that they are in the following situation. Let "Lucy's Story" stand for the entire story Lucy has told about her trip to Narnia put in purely objective terms. That is, Lucy's Story does not include the fact that it is Lucy who has made these claims; it includes only what she has said and not that it was she who said it. So Lucy's Story includes claims like "By stepping into a wardrobe, Lucy discovered a magical kingdom" and "Lucy had tea with a Faun."

Now just before Lucy tells Peter and Susan of her experience, what should we say is the probability of Lucy's Story's being true given what Peter and Susan believe? For example, suppose that just before Lucy relates her experience, we were to play a little game with Peter and Susan in which we ask them to consider various statements and whether, given the totality of what they believe, these statements are likely to be true. We give them, for instance, statements like "In a hundred years there will be no king or queen of England" and "The Professor knew Winston Churchill when they were both boys." We then ask them to judge, given all they believe about the world, how likely these statements are to be true or false. So, for example, the kids might judge it highly unlikely that the Professor knew Churchill (because they think that they'd know about something so remarkable if it were true), and not particularly likely or unlikely that there will be a monarch of England in a hundred years (because they take themselves to not have much of a basis for making such a judgment).

Now suppose we then have Peter and Susan consider Lucy's Story, and we ask them whether it is likely or not that most of the claims that make up Lucy's Story are true. The answer will be that these claims are unlikely indeed. The probability that there is a magical kingdom accessed through the wardrobe is, they will think, awfully close to zero. On the other hand, they know Lucy to be reliable and trustworthy. And that is an important factor to be weighed.

A First Lesson

There is a lesson here. When confronted with testimony you are tempted to disbelieve, you should ask yourself the following two questions: (1) how does the testimony fit in with my overall system of background beliefs?[2] and (2) how trustworthy is

[2] There is a further complication that I will mention only in passing. If a person has been intellectually irresponsible or irrational in forming a great many of her beliefs, then her background system itself will be epistemically tainted. It might be, then, that even if a claim she is now considering coheres well with her background beliefs, we might hesitate to think she should add it to her

the testifier, both in general and with respect to this particular topic? It is important to see that the answer to the first question does not have to be that the probability is high. The truth is actually that if the testifier is generally reliable, then even if what she is saying is somewhat improbable given your background beliefs, you still ought to believe her. For example, suppose I have some friends over for a dinner party. A half an hour after my guests leave, one of them calls to tell me that there has been a bad automobile accident on a certain street not far from my home, but that no one from my party was involved in the accident. Now the probability that there would have been a serious accident at that particular time and place is rather low if only because such accidents are rare. However, judgments based only on general probabilities are easily overridden by testimony to the contrary by a reliable source. After all, even if the probability is low that there would be an accident just there and then, I have no particular reason for thinking that there isn't an accident there now. Indeed, I have good reason to believe that there are accidents happening right now at many different locations and no reason to believe that the location my friend is referring to isn't one of them. So it won't take too much to override my initial evidence to the contrary.

If you lack a specific reason to believe that some particular testimony is false, and if your evidence against it is only that there is a general statistical reason for believing it is unlikely to be true, then you are surely justified in believing the testimony. Yet the accident case is importantly unlike the case of Lucy. For, assuming the person reporting the accident is reasonably trustworthy, we won't have any inclination to disbelieve her. Yet Peter and Susan quite rightly have a strong initial disinclination to believe Lucy.

The difference between the accident case (in which we readily believe the statistically unlikely testimony of our friend) and

stock of beliefs. After all, why should coherence with a set of irrationally formed beliefs confer rationality? This is a good question, and one without a clear answer. However, we can leave it aside because the primary issue we are dealing with in this essay is what you should do when you hear potentially incredible testimony. Now even though your past irresponsibility or irrationality may have put you in a poor position to evaluate the truth of a surprising claim, nevertheless, the best you can do now is to make a judgment about its acceptability on the basis of what you believe.

Lucy's case (in which we are naturally more skeptical) is that in the latter Peter and Susan have beliefs that are straightforwardly inconsistent with what Lucy is telling them. Peter and Susan believe that outside of make-believe, there are no worlds of the sort that Lucy is describing. It isn't as though they think there are such worlds but are dubious that they can be accessed via the wardrobe. Rather, they believe that there are no such places. And they believe this very strongly. So they take the probability of Lucy's Story, relative to their background beliefs, to be virtually zero. In contrast, although it would, of course, be very hard to assign any specific probability to the claim that there has been an accident at that particular place and time, the probability of that given our background beliefs is low but still many times higher than the probability of Lucy's Story is for Peter and Susan.

Lucy Disbelieved a Second Time

Let's now compare the epistemic position of Peter and Susan in the case we've been discussing with that of Lucy's three siblings in a pair of scenes from another book in the *Narnia* series. About midway through *Prince Caspian*, the four Pevensie children and the brave dwarf Trumpkin are on a journey and are having trouble finding their way. Suddenly, Lucy sees Aslan and takes him to be trying to lead them in his direction. But when the others look, Aslan is nowhere to be seen. Lucy reports that she is absolutely certain that she has seen Aslan, but Peter and Susan don't believe her. It's not clear whether Edmund believes her either, but he admits that she was right the last time she reported something remarkable, so he supports Lucy. However, Edmund and Lucy are outvoted (PC, Chapter 9, p. 374).

A short time later, Lucy has a conversation with Aslan while the others sleep. Aslan tells Lucy that the others won't be able to see him at first, but that she is to wake them up and tell them that Aslan says they must be on the move at once. Lucy does as she is told and stirs her resting siblings. She tells them that she has seen Aslan—in fact, that she can still see him—and that Aslan has instructed her to do as she is doing. Peter, Susan, and Edmund look where Lucy is pointing but they see nothing. When Edmund asks Lucy straight out how it could be that she sees Aslan but he doesn't, Lucy answers honestly that she doesn't know but that Aslan said he might not.

So once again, Lucy has remarkable experiences that she reports to her siblings. And once again they find her story incredible. Yet this time we might be excused for taking Lucy's side. Her later story is likely to strike us as more worthy of belief than was her original tale. We now can see why Lucy is more believable in these later episodes. Recall that what made the original predicament so sticky was that Lucy's testimony directly contradicted deeply held beliefs about the nature of reality. So even though she is the model of reliability, believing her required rejecting some fundamental beliefs to which, like the rest of us, her siblings were deeply committed. However, the epistemic position of her siblings when she tells them of her sightings of Aslan is rather different. First, and most significantly, all of the parties involved share a relevant body of background beliefs according to which Lucy's seeing Aslan is a live possibility. For they now believe all kinds of wild things they didn't believe before they came to Narnia. They believe, for instance, that animals can speak, that trees can become fully animated, and that at least one lion has been killed and come back to life. Now, given all these current beliefs that previously they would have regarded as absurd, the claim that this powerful, resurrected lion could appear selectively to Lucy seems not only to not contradict any deeply held background beliefs but coheres reasonably well with what they do know. In these circumstances, believing Lucy is a no-brainer. Shame on Peter and Susan!

We've seen that in order to assess whether a person's testimony is believable, you need to consider the reliability of the testifier, and then consider the content of what is being claimed in light of your system of background beliefs. If you have good reason to believe that the source is highly reliable, and if the content of what is being claimed is not deeply at odds with the other things you know or rationally believe, then you should generally believe the testifier. For instance, if it's a gray, overcast day and your sister comes home and says, "It's raining," you will immediately believe her because (a) you know her to be generally reliable, and (b) what she is saying fits in well with your background information.

Most cases of testimony are like this. Most of what we are told comes from sources that are reliable with respect to the messages being relayed, and the messages cohere well with our

prior beliefs. However, when what we hear is highly surprising, we are likely either to reconsider the reliability of the messenger (at least with respect to this particular testimony) or to rethink some of what we thought we knew.

With these considerations in mind, let's turn our attention to a type of real world situation that bears a significant resemblance to Lucy's case. Among the hard-to-believe stories we sometimes hear are those in which people apparently have direct experience of God, or encounter aliens, or know of someone who has had a sudden and completely inexplicable recovery from a disease that had put him at death's door. Because we don't have time to consider each of these kinds of reports, and because the epistemic issues are basically similar, we'll limit ourselves to a discussion of just one of these topics: reports of religious experiences.

A Case of Testimony of Religious Experience

Suppose a friend, Julia, comes to you and tells you the following story:

> I had the most remarkable experience last night. I came home from a Bible study and began to pray for a good friend who has been struggling with a debilitating depression. As I was praying, the room seemed to me to become very warm. At first I figured that I had just worked myself up into a sweat, but then I felt as though there was someone in the room with me. My eyes shot open and I looked around frantically. I was sure that someone had come into my apartment. But after looking in every room, I became convinced that there was no other human there but I felt a presence still. Then I heard a voice. Actually, I didn't hear it audibly, but it was not something I was thinking—it was something said to me. It's as though the words were put directly in my head without the need to be spoken. And what was said was that God loved my friend and that no permanent harm would come to her. I'm sure this sounds crazy but that's the way I see it. After I received the message the voice stopped, the presence left, and the room cooled. I sat up all night thinking about it.

What is one to make of a report like this? Given the principles we drew out of the Lucy cases, we should have some idea of how to proceed. To decide whether Julia's story is credible, we must consider two primary factors: (1) the degree to which

Julia is a reliable person, and (2) the fit of what Julia is saying with our background beliefs. Let's consider these issues in order.

Knowing whether Julia is reliable can be a tricky business. And as with most questions of even minimal complexity, some distinctions are in order. First, when we wonder about Julia's reliability, we might have in mind her *general* reliability. What percentage of the statements that Julia makes with apparent sincerity turn out to be true? Obviously, the higher the percentage, the more reliable Julia is. The trouble is, of course, no one other than God is really in a position to know the answer to this with any precision. Nevertheless, if we know a person reasonably well, we can be in a position to make a pretty fair judgment about his or her general reliability. However, general reliability is not infallibility. Even a reliable source will sometimes be misleading.

Recall that after their discussion with the Professor, Peter and Susan came to believe that there were only three options regarding Lucy's testimony: she was either insane, lying, or telling the truth. Given that the first two possibilities were completely inconsistent with what they knew to be true of Lucy, they saw good reason to accept what she was saying. Now these three options do seem to pretty much exhaust the possibilities for Lucy. But it is important to see that in most cases there is one more, very common, way in which a bit of testimony can go wrong: the testifier might be sincerely mistaken. She might be sane and believe she's telling the truth but simply be wrong about the cause of her experience. It's easy to see why this possibility doesn't apply to Lucy: she's claiming to have gone into a wardrobe and thereby entered a world of talking Fauns and wicked witches. While this story might be the result of an insane hallucination or knowingly concocted out of whole cloth, is there really any possibility that she just was *mistaken* about her experience in the wardrobe? That what she took to be a talking Faun was really just an old coat? No, in her case, an honest mistake seems out of the question. But in most real-world cases, an honest mistake is very much a live possibility.

There are two ways these considerations are relevant to the acceptability of testimony. First, if you know that the testifier frequently gets things wrong and yet sincerely and confidently reports these errors as facts, then you have good reason to be suspicious of his reports generally. Second, even when a person

isn't frequently unreliable, a healthy recognition of the limits of human knowing can still tell against what she says. When someone reports an experience that doesn't cohere with your background knowledge, then even if you have good reason to believe in the person's general reliability, the possibility of simple error is a real one. So when someone reports an experience that is rightly hard to believe, there are three ways the testimony might be wrong: the person is insane, lying, or simply sincerely mistaken.

Now what are we to make of Julia's report? Should it be believed? Having completed our discussion of Peter and Susan's predicament, we are now in a position to tackle this question. Let's take the above reasons for rejecting her testimony one at a time:

Julia is insane: we can state for the purposes of the case that you know Julia well, and you have no prior reason for questioning her sanity. Furthermore, in talking with Julia after she tells you her story, you get no sense at all that her rational faculties have been compromised.

Julia is lying: we can also pretty much rule this out. You know Julia well and have never had any reason to doubt her. If you have vast experience with a person and have never known her to lie, and if you can't think of any good reason for this situation to be any different, then there is no reason to take the lying possibility seriously.

Julia is sincerely mistaken: this is clearly the most likely skeptical possibility. Unlike Lucy's experience, Julia's could plausibly be thought to be produced by a sane, yet anxious and emotionally upset mind. Although she might be honest in reporting what she believes her experience to be, she might be mistaken about the nature of that experience. She felt the room heat up because she was praying so intensely. Perhaps her feeling of the presence of someone was caused by the strength of her conviction that God draws nearer to us in prayer and in times of distress. And the explanation for the inaudible voice could possibly be the workings of a subconscious wish-fulfillment process. This explanation is consistent with Julia's sincerely reporting her experiences. But if her experience is the result of purely natural processes, and there is good reason to think that God was not atypically present to her, then her report is false.

We should tread carefully here and notice that there are two ways of taking what Julia is saying. First, you might read her as merely reporting what her experience was like and the way things *seemed to her.* On this interpretation, believing Julia means only believing that she had a peculiar experience of some sort or another. This interpretation is consistent with both Julia's experience being caused by God and is also consistent with its being the result of purely natural psychological processes.

The second, more robust understanding of Julia's testimony is that she is asserting that the presence in her room was that of God, and that God did indeed speak comforting words to her about her friend's prospects. If you take Julia to be saying this, you are committed to the claim that her experience is genuinely caused by God; furthermore, you must deny the naturalistic psychological explanation of her unusual experience. Clearly, this is a more substantial commitment. Should you make it?

So What Should We Say about Julia?

We've said that you reasonably judge Julia's general reliability to be high, and that you can pretty much eliminate the insanity and lying possibilities. So your remaining choices are that she is honestly mistaken or that she's right. Now the reason you have for thinking she's right is that she usually is. This is a significant point in favor of accepting her testimony. Indeed, you *should* believe her unless what she says is quite unlikely given your background beliefs. So is what she says quite unlikely given your background beliefs? I can't answer this question for you.

"Why not?" I hear you silently objecting, "You've not been bashful about telling me what to think until now!" Fair enough, and what is stopping me now is not a sudden rush of shyness. Rather, I can't tell you if this belief is unlikely given your background beliefs because I don't know what your background beliefs are. As we've seen, one of the two key issues to consider when someone relates an experience is how well what is said fits with your background beliefs. And while most of us share a great many such beliefs, there is also a lot of variation from person to person. One possible belief that is clearly relevant to your consideration of Julia's testimony is belief in the existence of God. If you are a theist, and if you also believe that God does sometimes draw close to those in prayer, then although Julia's story might

be somewhat surprising, it will not conflict with anything that you hold deeply. Indeed, it seems to confirm some of your convictions. On the other hand, if you have a firm belief that God doesn't exist, then you will quite reasonably disbelieve Julia—at least if her testimony is understood in the stronger way. Instead, you'll likely weigh what you know about Julia's trustworthiness against your conviction that she can't have an experience of something that doesn't exist, and come to the conclusion that although she is mistaken about the ultimate cause and significance of her belief, she surely did have an unusual experience that she sincerely believes to be an experience of God.

Throughout this essay, I have been writing as though when you hear a surprising report you must respond either by believing or else by disbelieving what has been said. However, there is a third option that will, in many circumstances, be the most reasonable. To see this, again consider Julia. Now suppose that you aren't sure what to think about the existence of God. You think you see some reason for belief, but those reasons don't seem overwhelming and, in your eyes, are at least counterbalanced by the evil and suffering that seems too prevalent for a world designed and ruled by an all-powerful, benevolent creator. In short, you're an agnostic. Julia, your good friend who has always struck you as sensible and reliable, reports a truly unusual experience. There is no question that you believe that something out of the ordinary happened on that night. And while you think it might be that she experienced God, you also think there is about an equal chance that some purely naturalistic cause produced her experience. In this case, the rational response for you is to *withhold* belief. To withhold from believing something is to neither believe nor disbelieve it; it is to not have a settled opinion on the matter.

Notice that withholding belief is not only rational for the agnostic; the theist and atheist might also reasonably withhold belief about Julia's testimony. A believer might withhold belief if she thinks that even though God exists and sometimes becomes directly present to people, the great majority of such reports are false. She might think that people are far too quick to think that their every high or low experience has a supernatural cause. On the other hand, someone might believe that God doesn't exist, but have such confidence in Julia's discriminating intelligence that her report of the presence of God causes the

atheist to have less confidence in her atheism. Such a person might then simply withhold belief (and thereby withhold disbelief) in Julia's testimony.

In addition to the possibility of withholding belief, there is one more complication that needs to be mentioned. Although it is common to think of belief as an all-or-nothing phenomenon, the truth is that it is not. Beliefs come with a wide variety of conviction. Some beliefs are clung to so firmly that it would take a great deal to dislodge them; others we hold by a thread. This means that there are lots of possible ways to respond to Julia. While the primary categories are *believe*, *disbelieve*, and *withhold*, there are many different degrees of strength with which one can do the first two.

A Modest Conclusion

So what should we conclude about Julia's experience? In general, what should one do when confronted with an unusual or surprising testimony? Should you ever believe reports of UFOs or disappearing cancers? As this essay shows, these are neither particularly easy questions to answer nor questions for which there is a single reply. What we can say is that whether it is rational for you to believe such reports will depend on what you know about the reliability of the testifier together with your background knowledge relevant to the subject of the testimony. Generally, if you have good reason to think the person is usually reliable, and you've got no reason to think that she's lying or in some other way mistaken about this particular report, and what is being said does not contradict well-considered, firmly held beliefs, then you should believe her. But applying these considerations to specific cases often yields no straightforward answer.

Is this disappointing? Perhaps a bit. But that doesn't mean that our reflections have not been of value. For we began by recognizing Peter and Lucy's epistemic predicament, but without any clear sense of the nature of the predicament or how to think about what should be done in such cases. We now have a clear understanding of their situation and what rationality requires of us when we are presented with surprising (if not strictly incredible) reports. Philosophy is often a great help in getting us to see how to think about problems, even if it offers answers only sparingly.

4

Breaking the Spell of Skepticism: Puddleglum versus the Green Witch

STEVEN LOVELL

As readers of the stories, we can all agree that Narnia isn't real, that "there is no Narnia." But we don't expect those in the stories themselves to agree with us. And yet, at a crucial moment in *The Silver Chair* several of the main characters are found with these philosophically puzzling words on their lips. We begin by reminding ourselves of how this odd-sounding situation came about.

How the Enchantment Begins

Jill Pole and Eustace Scrubb have been summoned from our world into Narnia to find Prince Rilian, lost son of the now aged King Caspian. The children and their pessimistic guide, Puddleglum the Marsh-wiggle, eventually come to an underground world where the wicked Queen of Underland, the Green Witch, has Rilian under her spell. Following the signs that Aslan has given, the three release Rilian from the bewitching silver chair while the Queen is away. But she returns just as the four are about to make their escape, and immediately attempts to bring them all under an enchantment.

Since Jill, Eustace, Puddleglum and Rilian aim to escape to Narnia, the Witch's strategy is to bring them to believe that no such world exists. The green powder the Witch throws on the fire fills the room with a sweet and soporific smell that makes it hard to think, and her monotonous thrumming on a mandolin has a similarly hypnotic effect. In this situation, the Queen