

## **Miraculous Readings: Using Fantasy Novels about Reading to Reflect on Reading the Bible**

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### Abstract:

This paper reflects on the vivid images of reading in several popular fantasy novels, including *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, *The Great Good Thing*, and *The Neverending Story*, and suggests that these images can be used to help children, youth, and adults reflect on the nature of reading and the potential power of reading sacred texts. The paper draws connections to the work of a wide range of scholars including Wolfgang Iser, Phyllis Tribble and Anne Streaty Wimberly in addition to these popular fantasy novels.

### Introduction:

Reading theorists, Bible scholars, and religious educators suggest that there are limits to modern approaches to reading sacred texts in which readers objectively analyze a text in order to extract doctrines or moral propositions. Many therefore encourage readers to experience texts more fully by entering into the narratives, engaging not only their cognitive, but also their affective and ethical dimensions and to read them *as* sacred texts. These complex theoretical and theological concepts can be difficult to introduce to learners, especially to children and teenagers.

Fortunately, there are now several popular juvenile fantasy novels that offer vivid images of the power of reading. These books and the films based on them can serve as excellent resources for prompting reflection on the nature of reading with children, teenagers and adults. As is the case with many fantasy stories (cf. Dalton 2003), these narratives explore a number of religious themes. This essay, however, will focus on the images they provide to readers and viewers of the act of reading.

The purpose of this paper is not to use various scenes from these fantasy stories merely as illustrations of various theories. That would relegate the narratives to the role of illustrations of abstract propositions. Instead, the paper will allow the fantasy narratives to be full dialogue partners, speaking for themselves and allowing them to provide their own images of reading to the stories' readers. The essay will then discuss how these images of reading might resonate with narrative theories, reading theories, and approaches to the use of the Bible in religious education.

The author asked three of his children, his thirteen-year-old son and his eleven-year-old and eight-year-old daughters, how the reading of the books in these fantasy stories was like reading the Bible. Their responses are used here anecdotally, as a way of

illustrating how these stories might be received by children and without with any claim that they are part of a formal study or formal research. These children are all avid readers who do well in language arts in school and they are children of a religious educator, so their responses may not be typical of children their age. After the children offered their own reflections on the stories, the author was able to affirm their statements and further their thinking on the themes they raised by drawing connections to what literary critics, Bible scholars, and religious educators have said about the experience of reading literature and the Bible. While focus is on the use of the Bible in Christian religious education, these reflections may be relevant for reading other sacred texts as well.

### **I. Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black's *The Spiderwick Chronicles***

The five short volumes of Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black's *The Spiderwick Chronicles* tell the story of the Grace family and their discovery of a book that introduces them to an unseen world. Following their parents' separation, Jared, Simon and Mallory Grace, along with their mother, move into an abandoned home once owned by their mother's great uncle, Arthur Spiderwick. Soon after moving into the home, the children begin to observe mysterious occurrences and discover a hidden book, *Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You*. They read the book with a sense of awe and wonder. In the book, Arthur Spiderwick shares his observations about the unseen world of Brownies, Boggarts, Pixies, Elves, Goblins, Ogres, and other magical creatures. The children soon find themselves under siege by goblins who want to capture and destroy the book. While the field guide provides some valuable information about the unseen world, it does not give the children direct instructions on how to defeat the goblins or how to negotiate the dangerous situations that they find themselves in. They must depend on their wits, courage, friends and family in order to save each other.

#### *A. The Awe and Wonder of Reading Special Books*

In *The Spiderwick Chronicles* readers are presented with a book that tells about the unseen world around them. It is presented as a book that is important, even dangerous, and it is read with awe and respect. When I asked my children how the reading of Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide in the book was like reading the Bible, they all said that reading the Bible should be like this. All three of them easily drew the analogy to the power and importance of reading the Bible. This insight was perhaps facilitated by the fact that in the film version of the story, which they had all seen, the first time the book is opened is accompanied by a dramatic special effect showing what seemed like the silent and invisible concussion of a bomb. Sunday School curriculum plans, children's Bibles, and Bible Story videos increasingly present Bible stories as consumer-friendly stories on par with a children's picture book or cartoons rather than as ancient sacred texts (cf. Dalton 2007, 304-305). This scene helped the children reflect on the fact that the Bible is also a powerful and important book, and not a trivial cartoon. As one of the children put it, "The Bible isn't just boring Sunday School stuff."

This approach to the Bible resonates with one of the goals of Jerome W. Berryman's *Godly Play* curriculum in which children are prepared to engage Bible stories

with a sense of awe and wonder, and in the process are encouraged to have profound encounter with God (Berryman 1991).

*B. A Field Guide Not a How-to-Manual.*

In Holly Black's introduction, which appears in each volume of the Spiderwick series, she writes, "There is an invisible world around us and we hope that you, dear reader, will open your eyes to it." (DiTerlizzi and Black 2003) In the story, the Field Guide that the children discover describes that invisible world. Jared reads the book carefully, but he does not expect it to address directly every situation in which they find themselves. While Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide does offer some specific hints on how they can protect themselves against goblins (by surrounding one's house with a circle of salt, for example) it is more of a field guide than an instruction manual. The children must still use their own wits and alliances to solve their problems.

When asked to compare the reading of the Field Guide in the story to their own reading of the Bible, this aspect of the story prompted a pragmatic and pious answer from the eight-year-old. She said, "You can't survive the world without the Bible." This aspect of the story prompted some more nuanced reflection from the eleven-year-old. She said of the Bible, "It opens up a whole new world and without it you're not seeing the whole picture, but you look at life a whole new way." She added, "The field guide is like the Bible, it shows you the way things are, but it doesn't always tell you what to do." She also drew meaning from the way that the Field Guide held a great deal of knowledge and that the same was true from the Bible, adding, "You wouldn't expect that all to come out of the book, so people don't bother to read it."

In the film version of the story, there is a scene in which Arthur Spiderwick himself recognizes that Jared has read the Field Guide carefully, reflected on it, and internalized it. He encourages Jared to trust his own judgment now, telling him "You are the book." The thirteen-year-old compared this to his reading the Bible. "Jared was talking to Arthur Spiderwick and Arthur tells Jared he now *is* the book, like when we read the Bible in a way we are the Bible."

In this way, the use of the Field Guide in *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, helped introduce reflections on the nature and function of the Bible. For example, the children were able to hear the point made by Bruce C. Birth and Larry Rasmussen in their book *Bible & Ethics in the Christian Life*, when they suggested, "The Bible is not a manual of moral information to be mechanically applied." (Birth and Rasmussen, 1988, 168). The children's reflections also related more generally to what New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks called "The Heresy of Paraphrase" in which a story is reduced to one lesson or one moral principle (Brooks 1947). This 'heresy of paraphrase' is quite prevalent in religious education curriculum materials and the way they use the Bible, but the example of how the children in *The Spiderwick Chronicles* used the Field Guide helped my children reflect on how the Bible is not simply an answer book or how-to manual and that its stories cannot be reduced to a single lesson.

### C. *Interacting with the Text and the World*

*The Spiderwick Chronicles* have become a publishing phenomenon. In addition to the five-volume series that tells the tale of the Jared children, a large "reproduction" of the book the children find in the story, titled *Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You*, is also available. In this book, children can read for themselves Arthur's notes about "the invisible world" around them, including entries on Brownies, Boggarts, Pixies, and many other magical creatures. Also available is *The Spiderwick Chronicles Notebook for Fantastical Observations* which includes blank spaces and prompts them with empty frames and a variety of questions to make their own field guide drawings and write entries of their own observations of the unseen world around them. While the Field Guide is presented as something that is very serious and important in the story, these resources allow children to interact with the field guide themselves and to make their own imaginative observations and reflections and connect it to their own world.

When I asked the eleven-year-old about her *The Spiderwick Chronicles Notebook for Fantastical Observations* and how her efforts to write and draw her own stories of magical creatures might relate to reading and responding to the Bible, she offered the following thoughts:

This notebook says to make up your own character- and tell a story of what might happen in your own house that relates to your own life. It's like the parables. Those exact things probably won't happen to you, but you could write your own story using what you learned from the Bible, but in your own words and making it like your own life.

It's like with this Spiderwick notebook, you use what you learned from the Spiderwick Chronicles. And I could not write my stories as well if I didn't read that first. It's like that with the Bible. I couldn't write a story about my life or even live my life the same without reading the Bible first.

The type of imaginative response to the Bible that my eleven-year-old daughter describes is the sort of imaginative engagement advocated by a number of religious educators. Roger and Gertrude Gobbel's *The Bible: A Child's Playground*, for example, encourages teachers to allow children to explore and reflect on Bible stories in their own way and on their own level (Gobbel and Gobbel 1986). The Godly Play approach to religious education, in the tradition of Maria Montessori, encourages children to respond to their own imaginative engagement with the story in their own creative ways (Berryman 1991).

### D. *For Advanced Study: Fiction and Reality*

While aimed at children, *The Spiderwick Chronicles* could also be used for some advanced reflection on the nature of sacred texts. One of the conceits of the series is the

consistent insistence by the authors that everything in their stories *really* happened. The DVD of the film version carries on this conceit, with both an introduction and final word by the director telling viewers that everything depicted in the film really happened. For older readers, this aspect of the series could be used as a starting point to explore a number of issues about the nature of myth and legend and the importance of truth. Also, in the story of *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, the book is presented as a dangerous thing and the Graces find that it causes as many or more problems than it solves for them. At times they want to destroy the book. In what ways, one might ask, is it 'dangerous' to read the Bible?

## **II. Roderick Townley's *The Great Good Thing***

In Roderick Townley's 2001 novel *The Great Good Thing*, twelve-year-old Princess Sylvie and her friends and family are characters in a fairytale storybook that is also titled *The Great Good Thing*. The characters spend most of their days biding their time, waiting around for the book they live in to be opened by a Reader so that they can act out their parts and recite their lines. In the past, the book was often read by a girl with dark blue eyes. Then, after years of not being opened, the book is finally found, read and loved by Claire, who is the granddaughter of the girl with dark blue eyes. Claire reads the story carefully and repeatedly, even whispering many of the words aloud. Nothing is ever supposed to change in the story, but Princess Sylvie is such a strong character that she begins to take on a life of her own and do things a bit differently each time the story is read. She eventually even breaks the rule of all storybook characters and looks up out of the book and into the face the Reader. Princess Sophie develops a relationship with Claire. She hates being trapped inside a closed book when Claire needs help and guidance, so she eventually leaves the story and enters into Claire's memories and dreams. But Claire's life and her dreams are troubling places. Her beloved grandmother is growing old and ill. Her brother has a tendency to play with fire, and eventually burns and destroys the book, which is the last existing copy in the world. In the process he destroys Princess Sylvie's fairytale world as well. Princess Sylvie helps the other characters escape the blaze and enter Claire's memories as well. As the years pass, however, Claire herself grows old and ill, and the characters begin to rust away from lack of use. Claire had told the story to her daughter Lily, however, who is now grown into an adult. The eternally twelve-year-old Princess Sophie makes a desperate, courageous move and crosses over into Lily's memories and dreams and urges her to do a great good thing herself in order to keep the story alive. Lily remembers and publishes a new version of the story, keeping the story and the characters alive for generations of readers to come.

### *A. Readers Actualizing the Potentiality of Texts*

The story of *The Great Good Thing* seems to offer a helpful image of the potentiality of texts waiting for actualization by a reader. The world of the storybook is ready to burst forth with life, but waits patiently for a Reader to bring the story and the characters to life.

The children seemed to perceive this on a basic level. When asked to compare the reading of *The Great Good Thing* to reading the Bible, the eight-year-old girl did not have any thoughts on the matter. While she had many fascinating reflections on these fantasy stories, the task of drawing analogies to reading the Bible was, perhaps predictably, usually not the level on which she engaged the stories. The eleven-year-old girl was struck, however, by the way the characters were sitting around waiting. She said, "God is always there even if you can't see God. Like the characters were always there. The Reader had to find the book, but the characters were always there." She added that with the Bible, as with the storybook in the story, "Once you read it, it's really an amazing thing and makes a big change in your life when you read it." The thirteen-year-old boy put it more bluntly, saying, "What good is the Bible if you don't read it?"

The two older children's reflections speak on a very basic level to the insight that the potentialities of a text are realized by readers. Wolfgang Iser, in his book *The Implied Reader*, suggests that a literary work is brought into existence through the convergence of the potentialities of a text and the actualization of those potentialities by a reader outside of the text (Iser 1974, 274-275). As he puts it, "reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character." (Iser 1974, 275) As Louise M. Rosenblatt put it,

A novel or poem or play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms it into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text; the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings." (Rosenblatt 1976, 25)

The children's reflections opened up the opportunity to discuss the dynamic nature of the reading process and how readers can actualize potential meaning in a text. The children were more comfortable, however, using this aspect of the story to discuss the more basic and direct application that it was important to read the Bible and not just have it sit on a shelf.

### *B. Characters that Cross Over from Text to Life*

The image in the story of a character from a book who comes to life in the mind of a Reader and inspires them to do a great good thing seemed to be a helpful one, but it was not necessarily a clear one for the children. The eight-year-old offered that, "You want to follow Sophie because she's really good and you want to follow Jesus because he's really good." Further discussion of this concept, however, seemed difficult for her to grasp. The eleven-year-old, when prompted, said, "God is always there even if you can't see God. Like the characters were always there. The Reader had to find the book, but the characters were always there." She added, "Even when you're not listening to God or being really mean, God still cares about you." When I suggested that the more you read about them the more these characters might become alive for you, she said, "Yeah!" and became enthusiastic about that insight and went on to discuss the concept in a way that revealed a deeper understanding of it.

The eleven-year-old's thoughts allowed her to be introduced, in a very basic way, to the thoughts of Hans W. Frei in *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Basis of Dogmatic Theology*. Frei argues that the identity of Jesus Christ comes to readers through the text of Scripture and that Christ has influence on their lives through it. As Frei puts it, "The Word does indeed witness to that which it is not, the presence of God in Jesus Christ." (1975, 165) He adds, "The name and identity of Jesus Christ, set forth in the narrative of the New Testament, call upon the believer for nothing less than this discipleship." (1975, 165)

### *C. An Everlasting Story Passed on throughout the Generations*

The thirteen-year-old was struck by how the story in *The Great Good Thing* stayed with its readers for many years and was impressed with the importance of passing the story on to later generations. When comparing that to the Bible he suggested, "If you really get into the Bible it will stay with you the rest of your life." He also recognized a longer range view of the Bible. He said, "The Bible is everlasting. It goes from generation without losing its emotional power or spiritual power. It's like a classic; just as good as it was way back when." The story of *The Great Good Thing*, then, presented him the opportunity to recognize a historical perspective on Scripture that many children rarely think about.

### *D. For Advanced Study: The Bible and Hypertext*

*Into the Labyrinth*, Roderick Townley's sequel to *The Great Good Thing*, tells the story of what happens when the text of *The Great Good Thing* gets uploaded onto the internet. The characters must rush to their places whenever a new reader anywhere around the world calls up the story. The characters face other challenges in becoming part of the virtual world, including "wordpools" and viruses. The story offers adults and advanced teenagers the opportunity to reflect on what happens to the Bible when it is transmitted into hypertext, a concept explored by Robert M. Fowler in his article, "How the Secondary Orality of the Electronic Age Can Awaken Us to the Primary Orality of Antiquity or What Hypertext Can Teach Us About the Bible with Reflections on the Ethical and Political Issues of the Electronic Frontier" (Fowler 1994).<sup>1</sup> When the order and content of a biblical text can be suddenly shifted with the click of a mouse, the Bible is no longer a fixed printed text but becomes an open and vital reading experience. What threats and opportunities does this present for the way people read and experience the Bible?

## **III. The Neverending Story**

Michael Ende's novel *The Neverending Story* tells the tale of Bastian Bux, a boy who reads a book. In order to escape a group of bullies who are chasing him while he is

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<sup>1</sup> A longer version of the article is not available at <http://homepages.bw.edu/~rfowler/pubs/secondoral/index.html>

on his way to school, daydreamer Bastian ducks into a mysterious bookstore and ends up stealing a mysterious book titled *The Neverending Story*. When he gets to school he shuts himself into the school attic and reads the book all day and throughout the night. As he reads, he is drawn into the story of the hero Atreyu who is on a quest to save the magical world of Fantastica (called Fantasia in the film version of the story) from the threat of The Nothing. Bastian soon begins to experience the story along with Atreyu. When Atreyu is hungry and eats, Bastian feels hunger and eats his packed lunch. When Atreyu is frightened by a storm, Bastian is frightened by a storm outside of the school attic. And when Bastian is tempted to give up on his quest to finish the book, he keeps going because he knows that Atreyu would not give up. Eventually, when Atreyu looks into a mirror that reveals his true nature, his description of what he sees is an exact description of Bastian. Bastian becomes alarmed when it becomes increasingly clear that the characters in the story are talking about him and say that it is up to him to save Fantastica. The Childlike Empress of Fantastica says, "Whether he knows it or not, he is already a part of the Neverending Story." (Ende 1979, 161) It is up to Bastian to acknowledge that he is a part of the Neverending Story and to take the responsibility of playing his part in the story in order to save Fantastica. He must enter into the world of the book, and then return to his own world and live out the lessons he has learned there.

*A. Experiencing the Story and Being Drawn into its Narrative World:*

Of the stories discussed in this paper, *The Neverending Story* has arguably the most complex images of the reading process, including the image of a reader literally being drawn into a narrative world. While the children did not use the language of narrative worlds, the two older ones did talk how the reader, Bastian, identified with the character of Atreyu and as a result was drawn into the story.

When asked about how Bastian's reading of *The Neverending Story* might be like their reading of the Bible, the eight-year-old simply replied, "No thoughts." The eleven-year-old, however, had several reflections. She was struck by the way Bastian became connected to Atreyu.

If you, like, are reading the Bible, you sort of like get into it. And then you can start to act like Jesus and stuff, sort of like Bastian got more confident and stuff while reading about Atreyu. They were able to relate to each other even though they had very different lives.

Her thirteen-year-old brother had similar thoughts, pointing out how the more Bastian could relate to Atreyu the more he "got into" the story.

The children's reflections call to mind narrative critics' descriptions of the way that biblical narratives can entice readers into their narrative worlds, in this case through identification with a character. As Bible scholar David Gunn writes, "words make worlds, where words lead us and tease us and plunge us into multiple possibilities of meaning" (Gunn 1999, 225). Phyllis Tribble provides a description of this dynamic at



work at the end of the book of Jonah, where the reader is confronted with a text that suddenly ends with God's question to Jonah:

Abruptly the story of Jonah stops, but it does not end. The divine question awaits an answer. In pondering the matter, the reader who journeyed with Jonah begins to get the point. The reader is Jonah; Jonah is the reader. So the open-endedness of the last verse invites self-understanding and self-transcendence. The story subverts the reader. (1996, 525-526)

Likewise, theologian Serene Jones talks about how Scripture is "pulling us into" its world (2007, 78) and the "*pulling-in* authority that Scripture holds for me" (2007, 76). Sarah Heaner Lancaster writes, "As we enter the narrative world of the Bible to understand it and find our place in it, we come to share this perspective and these commitments." (2007, 85)

Though they did not initially use the language of narrative worlds, the children were able to engage in a conversation about the way that they can experience the Bible and it can, through its characters, story and discourse, draw readers into its world. For some religious educators this understanding has significant ramifications for how the Bible is presented to learners. Roger and Gertrude Gobbel, for example, encourage religious educators to resist efforts to get the Bible "into" people (1986, 42), and instead promote offering the Bible as an experience, or an event to be engaged. They write, "The Bible invites us to participate in and with it, to act upon it, and to interact with it." (1986, 43) Thomas Groome similarly calls for worship leaders to read the Scriptures in ways that "invite people to actively engage the text – in a sense, to step into its symbolic world of meaning, ethic, and value." (Groome 1991, 366)

### *B. Readers Responding to the Biblical World in Their Own Worlds*

*The Neverending Story* includes the profound image of the reader, Bastian, taking responsibility for the narrative world by recreating Fantastica before returning to his own world. The children I spoke with were very struck by these images, though perhaps predictably they took a more concrete perspective on responding to narratives through concrete action. The eleven-year-old offered the following thoughts:

You learn that to follow in Jesus' footsteps you can't just listen and say, "Yes, this is what you have to do" You have to do it. Like, even if it's embarrassing to help an old lady you have to do it, or to help the poor. He had to be the one to do it – to complete the story. You want to try to do what the Bible says, just like Bastian had to do what the book said, not just think about it and read it. Sometimes it's hard to do what the Bible says, but you have to ask What Would Jesus Do just like Bastian said what Atreyu would do.

The thirteen-year-old boy had many of the same thoughts, and added, "To be a Christian you have to live the Bible, not just read it. The main character lived through the book."<sup>2</sup>

The image that the children recognized goes beyond simply reading a Bible passage and drawing a life application from it. Instead, the reader's goal is to enter the Bible's narrative world and return to live out the story in her or his own world. This is the sort of engagement that religious educators John M. Bracke and Karen B. Tye call for in their book *Teaching the Bible in the Church*. They write, "Truly encountering scripture is to stand before the God whom Moses served when he dared to say to Pharaoh, 'Let my people go!' and having stood before this God to ask how the God of oppressed slaves may be asking us to serve today." (2003, 4)

*C. For Advanced Study: The Agency of Readers in Making Meaning of Texts*

One vivid image in *The Neverending Story* comes when Bastian becomes responsible for recreating Fantastica based on his own wishes and imagination. This makes up only a short scene in the film version of the story, but it comprises approximately half of Ende's novel. While these images and concepts may not be the ones that my children initially responded to in the novel, they could be used to prompt older readers to reflect on several aspects of the role and agency of the reader in creating the meaning of a text.

Groups interested in delving into reader-response criticism could use the novel or the film as the starting point for a discussion of the dialectic reader-response theory of Wolfgang Iser, for example, which sees meaning created through a dialogue between a text and a reader (Iser 1974). The later work of Stanley Fish, on the other hand, privileges the reader and the reader's community as the sole agents in the creation of a text's meaning (Fish 1980).

A discussion of reader-response theory could lead to a conversation about the ways in which it is the responsibility of the reader and the faith community to make meaning out of biblical texts. Bible scholar Robert M. Fowler, for example, describes how the ambiguity of Jesus' parables and the open ending of the Gospel of Mark in particular function in ways that call readers to take "response-ability" to complete the narrative and make meaning from it (Fowler 1991, 183, 250).

Those more interested in how the Bible is read for religious formation purposes may talk about the contexts and experiences from which we read the Bible. As Anne Streaty Wimberly writes in *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*,

We link with the Bible by bringing our everyday stories as African Americans with us. We enter the Bible with our joys. We also enter with our

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<sup>2</sup> The thirteen-year-old, in the throes of formal operational thinking, was with this book and others very interested in drawing analogies to specific stories in the Bible, such as the fact that the Bastian being saved from the wolf in the story by the luckdragon was like God's grace saving Daniel from the lions.

struggles related to experiences of oppression in this country and other everyday life struggles that block and bind us. We view and respond to the Bible through the lens of all that makes up our identities, social contexts, interpersonal relationships, life events, life meanings, and story plots." (2005, 107)

The Bible, then, is read and applied through a group's own contexts and experiences.

## **Conclusion**

The fantasy novels discussed in this paper offer images that can prompt reflection on the nature and power of reading. While the task of drawing analogies between the reading in the fantasy stories and reading the Bible may not be a helpful task for younger elementary children, children in upper elementary school and middle school may find that the narratives prompt rich reflection.

There are, of course, more stories about miraculous readings. Cornelia Funke's novel *Inkheart*, for example, which is being adapted into a major motion picture starring Brendan Fraser, Helen Mirren and Jim Broadbent, presents the story of a father and daughter who have the power to read people and things out of books and into books. The sequel *Inkspell* tells the story of the daughter reading herself into the world of a book. These images offer their own opportunities for reflection on the reading process. The books tend to be filled with a sense of menace, however, which may make them less helpful for religious education than some other books. Of course all metaphors and analogies break down at some point, and religious educators need to weigh whether certain narratives offer readers more liabilities than benefits.

Fantasy novels about reading may not serve as a primer for advanced reading theory and they may not work well for younger elementary age children. For older children, teenagers and adults, however, they offer helpful images of the reading process and may offer religious educators the opportunity to reflect with them on the nature of reading and the potential power of reading sacred texts.

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