



**Tehran University**

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**A Structural, Mythological Study on *The Chronicles of Narnia***

**By C.S Lewis:**

**Seven Steps of Creation**

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Studies Office in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

English Language and Literature

February 2011

## **Abstract:**

By a close examination of *C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia*, this thesis suggests that creators of modern mythical tales are not simply the users of old templates to fabricate new pictures for old frames; rather they are creators of new myths and signs, fresh beginnings and unpredictable endings. The main focus stands on the narration and the combination of religious lessons with archetypal adventures that Lewis created through the medium of *Romance* to establish a unified mythological universe; suggesting that *The Chronicles* is not only rooted in personal fantasy or fairy tales' cliché elements, but in the realities created and lived by human kind throughout history.

Considering mythological, archetypal criticism theories and the application of the myth to create a system of meaning, this thesis aims to demonstrate that by mixing and updating Greek and Roman Mythological elements, Paganism, Christian allegories, and Oriental fables, Lewis succeeds to create his cross-breed mythological system that even attracts non-Christians, non-Europeans who can also be moved by the exciting adventures and the archetypal meanings, and not find the Christian elements obtrusive or offensive. Thus, to read *The Chronicle of Narnia* is to be carried by myth to a new range of experience and to have one's outlook dramatically enlarged.

## **Introduction:**

*My dear Lucy, I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But someday you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again...*

Sixty years ago in 1950, C. S. Lewis wrote this letter to dedicate *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first published volume of *The Chronicles of Narnia* to his goddaughter, Lucy Barfield. This short message gives valuable insight into the fact that this particular fairy tale was destined to transcend its age and time. No matter what your religion, nationality, culture or language is, you will be enchanted by the exquisite narration in which fantasy, different cultural pagan mythology, and various elements of diverse religious beliefs are combined to recreate a new system of mythology. In fact C. S. Lewis creates a magical fantasy which is still cherished by readers from different generations and languages, considered as one of the greatest classics of children's literature and sold over 120 million copies in 41 languages.

In addition to responding the need for more profound scientific research on contemporary mythical creations of the modern era, this thesis is also an attempt to fulfill a long time fascination which began in a far autumn day when I was 9 years old. My ever-increasing interest in these stories as a child was the result of a strong attraction for various, unusual and amazing creatures who kept the brilliant stories going on in the supernatural land of Narnia which was inhabited by talking beasts, dancing trees, dumb giants, wise centaurs, jovial fauns, pessimistic dwarfs, ruthless wicked

witches and the Almighty Aslan who creates and saves Narnia from time to time.

Like other fairy tales, *The Chronicles* is also calls for invincible heroes to add tension and thrill to the adventures and save the rest of the day. These adventurers are children. They are brought there by Aslan to quest for knowledge through facing trials, difficult tasks and all forms of adventure to improve their understanding of life and the realities beyond it.

At this point, what seems to be a collection of stories for children, (as mentioned on the cover of the first published collection) extends into a multifaceted depiction of an entire moral allegory. In fact, C. S Lewis remains true to his original intention to write stories for children alongside adjoining subtle and moral spiritual complexities. By keeping this at mind, again it seems that *The Chronicles* is more about feelings toward ideas rather than justifying them. As David Colbert mentions in his book, *The Magical Worlds of Narnia*, “nameless longing” is the phrase that sums up exactly what Lewis wants readers to experience. He intends to have a hold on his readers that lasts long even after their childhood (5).

*The Chronicles* doesn't only have roots in personal fantasy of its writer or his impression caused by cliché elements of fairy tales but, a close analysis shows it develops from the realities that human kind has created and lived over centuries. Actually the medium of fantasy offers Lewis the opportunity to convey his meaning in a more delighted way which is not generally available to other novelist in genres related to theology (Schakel *Imagination* 132). By combination and reformation of Greek and Roman Mythological elements, Paganism, Christian allegories and themes, and Oriental fables, he succeeds to form his cross-breed restructured mythological system that even attracts non-Christian non-European reader who can also be influenced by the thrilling adventures and the archetypal meanings, and not find the Christian elements unpleasant.

The existing mythology in *The Chronicles*, moves its readers by casting actual elements and feelings of real everyday life into a more universal perspective, and while challenging readers' imagination, grants them a fresh understanding of the old fixities of religious themes. This new perspective seems more plausible and pleasurable at the same time. In fact what C. S Lewis has done with the effective excellence of mythology and employing it in the medium of *Romance* to establish a well united mythological verbal universe is close to the ideas of French anthropologist *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (1908-2009) who coined the phrase "Structural Mythology" for the first time.

Lévi-Strauss believes that *Myth* is not just fairy tale, it contains a message. It is not clear who is sending the message, but it is clear who is receiving it. But still Myth is an ill defined category. Some people use the word as if it meant fallacious history; to say that an event is "mythical" is equivalent to saying that it didn't happen. The theological usage is rather different: myth is a formulation of religious mystery; "the expression of unobservable realities in terms of observable phenomena. This comes close to the anthropologist's usual view that "myth is a sacred tale" (Leach 54).

The chief theorist, whose theories and ideas on the cyclic nature of Fictive universe are going to play a key role in this thesis, is the Canadian literary critic, *Northrop Frye* (1912-1991), who defines the specific similar patterns in different cultures as universal *Archetypes*. In his remarkable and influential book *Anatomy of Criticism* (1975) Frye developed the archetypal approach by proposing that the totality of literary work constitute a "self-contained literary universe" which has been created over the ages by the human imagination so as to assimilate the alien and indifferent world of nature into archetypal forms that serves to satisfy enduring human desires and needs (Abrams 14). Considering theories about mythological and archetypal criticism and the application of the myth to create a system of meaning, this research tries to demonstrate that C. S

Lewis, By playing around the concept of Romance and Archetypal elements of Christian religion besides pagan mythology and creating new signs, differentiates his Narnian stories from other stories that only follow the same old rules and patterns without creativity.

To fulfill this aim, 4 separate chapters have been presented on the relevant issues that will cover my main argument. The first chapter plays the role of a tour leader which let us to move into the life of C. S Lewis and his magical world of Narnia. The second chapter is wholly dedicated to his theories about mythology, allegory, symbolism, and his influence on the theories of Frye which are required to ground the argument. A through revision on the pattern of narration, religious themes, mythological patterns, signs and imageries entangled in the theme of the four first books of *The Chronicles*, is the content of chapter 3 which is followed in chapter 4 by a similar elaboration on the story of creation and the fall of Narnia and, the way the patterns and the messages are attached together in a coherent manner. The final chapter is the concluding part of my research which aims to state that even non-Christian readers can be moved by the exciting adventures and the archetypal meanings of the stories.

In fact, this thesis tries to explain that, *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a resurrection of life instead of recreation of its events. The innovative-upgraded mythological system of *The Chronicles*, confirms that although C. S Lewis impose mythical forms and religious themes to his contents, but he shows new aspects of them to lead both his characters and readers to undiscovered realms of life and thoughts.

## Chapter One

### Narnia and Its Story-Maker

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

In the late 1904, a 50 year old Oxford professor named Clive Staples Lewis, who was also a famous Christian theologian, began to write a story for children. His friends especially J.R.R Tolkien, were so doubtful about the outcome of this decision. At the time of writing this story, the Professor was unmarried, had no children and faced a lot of domestic problems in his household. This all may seem a recipe for failure as his friends warned, but in opposition to all their anticipations, the book turned out to be a great success and raised the question of why a bachelor professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature convinced to write a fairy tale for children in his fifties. One of Lewis biographers, A. N. Wilson, answers this question by saying Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia* for “the child who was within himself”(Wilson 221). After all, it was Lewis who wrote in a letter to a child that, “I don’t think age matters so much as people think. Parts of me are still 12 and I think other parts were already 50 when I was 12” (*Letters* 34).

Critics believe what caused this feeling of age-displacement in Lewis and positively led to the creation of one of the greatest children’s classics, is the real emotional ups and downs in his life. As a youth, Lewis experienced a lot of emotional and religious difficulties particularly in his gloomy childhood which went along with his mother’s

death. Most of these unhappy events in his early life have been echoed in *The Chronicles*. In fact, his preparation to be a story maker and to create imaginary worlds began in his childhood. Lewis is among those writers whose personal lives have a close and powerful influence on their writings. Generally considering Lewis's life event is one of the important parts of performing any critical reading of his various works.

### **C. S Lewis: A Biography**

Clive Staples Lewis, who is still acknowledged as one of the leading literary scholars of his generation, was born in 29 November 1898 in Belfast, Ireland as the second son to Albert Lewis, a successful Belfast attorney, and Florence Hamilton Lewis a well educated woman. In his auto biography *Surprised by Joy: the Shape of My Early Life* (1955), Lewis described his parents as “bookish or clever people”:

My mother had been a promising mathematician in her youth and a B.A. of Queen's College, Belfast, and before her death was able to start me both in French and Latin. She was a voracious reader of good novels ... My father's tastes were quite different. He was fond of oratory and had himself spoken on political platforms in England as a young man; if he had had independent means he would certainly have aimed at a political career (4).

Both flora and Albert tried their hands at creative writing but Flora was more successful and one of her tales published by a magazine in London. They had another son, Warren who was 3 years younger than Lewis. Lewis mentioned in his autobiography that “he never seemed to be an elder brother and they were so different from each other... but Warren was one of the great blessings of his childhood” (6). From his early age 4, Lewis showed a strange talent in selection as well as usage of words and as a result of this talent, changed his name to “Jacksie” refusing to answer to any other name. Jasksie, later shortened to Jack and became his name to his friends and family for the



rest of his life.

In 1905, 7 year old Jacksie and his family moved from a modest semidetached villa to their new house, called “Little Lea”, in a fashionable suburb overlooking the Belfast Lough. In later years, Lewis would describe this big rambling structure as “almost a major character” in his life story, a place “of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences and attics explored in solitude.” His brother Warren recalled that these attics often consisted of long tunnel-like spaces that children could use as secret passageways, entering through a small door in one room and coming out another. Though this space was largely wasted in Little Lea, it certainly was not wasted in Lewis’s imagination, for he used such an attic in *The Magician’s Nephew* to send Digory and Polly not just into new rooms but into new worlds (Downing 3).

As a young boy, Lewis had a fascination with anthropomorphic animals, falling in love with Beatrix Potter's stories and Edith Nesbit’s as well as tales about knights and talking animals. The persisting presence of talking beasts as the residents of Narnia has roots in this childhood fascination.

In one of his latest books, *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961) he says: “the delight of my childhood.... The idea of humanized animals fascinated me perhaps even more than it fascinates most children” (14). Therefore at age 6 Jack created “Animal-Land” later named the imaginary world of *Boxen*, where what he and Warnie called “dressed animals” could have plenty of room for adventure. Lewis was from the first, a systematizer: a characteristic that caused him eventually to become a historiographer of his invented world of Animal-Land (Jacobs 12).

He wrote in small notebook, with ink or ink and water color illustrations. The settings were medieval, with castles, heroes and battles. The characters were dressed animals like King Benjamin VII, (a rabbit); Lord John Big (a frog); ... The plots were about

politics and wars which shows the influence of political troubles of his era on his young mind. Actually the Lewis brothers grew up during the time of “the troubles” in Ireland, tension between Catholics and Protestants that have yet to be fully resolved (Schakel *Way* 4).

Unfortunately Lewis’s delightful childhood came to an abrupt end at the age of 9 when his mother died from cancer tragically. After his mother’s death, his disastrous childhood in boarding schools began. Many years later, Lewis as a writer continually criticized boarding schools and educational system in his works, especially in *The Chronicles*, in which the absence of parents is a recurrent motif. During his education period, he was sent to the Wynyard School in Watford, Hertfordshire, in 1908. After Wynyard closed, Lewis attended Campbell College in the east of Belfast about a mile from his home, but he left after a few months due to respiratory problems. As a result of his illness, Lewis was sent to the health-resort town of Malvern, where he attended the preparatory school Cherbourg House.

As a teenager, he was wonderstruck by the songs and legends of what he called *Northernness*, the ancient literature of Scandinavia preserved in the Icelandic sagas. These legends fulfilled a longing he had within, a deep desire he would later call “joy”. He also grew to love nature; the beauty of nature reminded him of the stories of the North and the beauties of nature. Not surprisingly that the imaginary land of Narnia is permanently called as wild land of North in *The Chronicles*. His writing in his teenage years moved away from the tales of *Boxen*, and he began to use different art forms (epic poetry and opera) to try to capture his new-found interest in Norse mythology and the natural world (Lewis *Surprised* 118).

In September 1913, Lewis enrolled at Malvern College, where he would remain until the following June. He was intensely unhappy there. After leaving Malvern he moved

to study privately with William T. Kirkpatrick, his father's old tutor and former headmaster of Lurgan College. Studying with Kirkpatrick (“The Great Knock”, as Lewis afterwards called him) instilled in him a love of Greek literature and mythology, and sharpened his skills in debate and sound reasoning. It was during this time that Lewis abandoned his childhood Christian faith and became an atheist, interested in mythology and the occult. From the latter, he concluded that the entire world’s religions, including Christianity, could best be explained not as claims to truth but as expressions of psychological needs and cultural values (163).

### **The Oxford Professor**

In 1916, Lewis was awarded a scholarship at Oxford University and began his university studies. In 1917, he temporarily left his studies to volunteer in the British Army. On 15 April 1918 Lewis was wounded by an English shell falling short of its target and was discharged in December 1918, and soon returned to his studies (Downing 14).

Lewis completed his Oxford studies with great distinction, earning first-class degrees in classics (1920), ancient philosophy (1922), and English literature (1923). In the academic year 1924–25, Lewis accepted a one-year appointment as a lecturer and tutor in philosophy, a position that afforded him the opportunity for broad and careful reading in philosophy, from ancient to modern. In 1925, he was elected a Fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, a position in English language and literature (Jacobs 98).

As he studied formal philosophy in his twenties, Lewis moved away from his adolescent atheism and became interested in various forms of idealism, whether it was described as the “Absolute” by a philosopher such as F. H. Bradley or as the “Life Force” by Henri Bergson. In the summer of 1929, at age thirty, Lewis converted to

theism, believing in a personal God but not quite sure how to define his newfound faith. He found himself increasingly attracted to Christian writers such as Samuel Johnson, George MacDonald, and G. K. Chesterton. He also found kindred spirits in the Christians he met at Oxford, especially J. R. R. Tolkien, a professor of Anglo-Saxon language and literature at Exeter College. Tolkien began meeting with Lewis in the late 1920s to read and talk about his earliest Middle Earth stories, which were later published as *The Silmarillion* (1977), the prequel to his epic *Lord of the Rings* fantasy (Downing 18-19).

In 1930, Lewis and his brother Warnie moved, with Mrs. Moore and her daughter Maureen, into “The Kilns”, a house in the district of Headington Quarry on the outskirts of Oxford. Architecturally, it was a smaller version of his childhood home. Perhaps this otherwise unremarkable house reminded him of the settled happiness of his childhood before his mother’s death. In the early 1930s, the two Lewis brothers began meeting with Tolkien and other like-minded friends to read and discuss their works in progress or just to revel in one another’s company. This informal group became something of a literary circle, which Lewis humorously dubbed the “Inklings”, taking the name from a defunct undergraduate club. In the 1930s and 1940s, an Inklings meeting might include, on any given week, the Lewis brothers and Tolkien, as well as the novelist Charles Williams, the physician Humphrey Havard, the attorney Owen Barfield, and a number of other friends who lived in and around Oxford. In short, the Inklings was Lewis’s club: he was the heart of it, and the members gathered primarily because of him, and when he could no longer be regularly involved the Inklings faded away (Jacobs 195).

Late in his life, in 1956, Lewis married Joy Gresham, an American writer. After a four year fight with bone cancer, she died in 1960, after which Lewis continued to care for her two sons, Douglas and David Gresham while expressing his deep anguish over his

wife's death in his late works (Downing 23). Finally, one week before his 65th birthday, on Friday, November 22, 1963, Lewis died at The Kilns. He is buried a short walk from his beloved home in the churchyard of Holy Trinity Church in Headington Quarry, Oxford (24).

### **The Story-Maker and the Christian Apologist**

Long-time Lewis friend and former literary executor of the Lewis estate before his death, Owen Barfield has suggested that there were, in fact, three different "C. S. Lewises". That is to say, during his lifetime Lewis fulfilled three very different vocations—and fulfilled them successfully. There was first, Lewis, the distinguished Oxford and Cambridge literary scholar and critic; second, Lewis, the highly acclaimed author of science fiction, myth, and children's fantasy literature; and third, Lewis, the popular writer and broadcaster of Christian apologetics. The amazing thing, Barfield noted, is that those who may have known of Lewis in any single role may not have known that he performed in the other two. In a varied and comprehensive writing career, Lewis carved out a sterling reputation as a scholar, a novelist, and a theologian for three very different audiences (Edwards 2).

Even in Lewis's own autobiography, *Surprised by joy*, the reader gets the impression of two lives—the "utter" and the "inner", the life of the intellect and the life of the imagination—being lived over against each other, albeit at the same time. The outer life is chiefly concerned with those things which he spoke and wrote about openly: namely, Animal-Land. The inner life—this is what surprised by joy is mainly about—is essentially the story of joy (intense longing) working on his imagination. Narnia would never have come into existence had Lewis not come to understand the meaning and purpose of Joy (Hooper *Past 2*).

In answer to this feeling of joy and longing Lewis began his long journey in writing various literary pieces. No brief summary can thus do justice to the many and varied works Lewis produced in his lifetime between the years 1919-1961. Indeed, more Lewis collection of essays, chiefly have appeared after his death than during his lifetime. A sampling of the range and depth of his achievements in criticism, fiction, and apologetics might begin, however, with the first books Lewis published, two volumes of poetry, both of which went out of print nearly as soon as they were issued. But in the second half of his life, he wrote more than forty books, including many acknowledged classics of their kind (Edwards 2).

In 1933, Lewis published his first theological work, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, not a parody but a respectful tribute to John Bunyan's familiar *The Pilgrim's Progress* that details Lewis's flight from skepticism to faith in a lively if sometimes obscure allegory.

In 1936, Lewis had published the breakthrough work that earned him his reputation as a scholar, *The Allegory of Love*, a work of high-caliber, original scholarship that revolutionized contemporary literary understanding of the function of allegory in medieval literature, particularly Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Between 1939 and 1954, Lewis continued to publish well-received works of literary history and a few volumes of what we would now call "critical theory". For instance, Lewis debated critic E. M. W. Tillyard on the functional objectivity of poetry and poesis in *The Personal Heresy*, published in 1939, and in that same year published a collection of essays under the title *Rehabilitations*, a work whose title thematically characterized much of Lewis's work, as he often found himself attempting to bring the fading critical reputation of authors or genres he reverted back into balanced perspective among the literati of his time. Indeed, his 1942 work, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, attempted to rehabilitate the reputation of seventeenth century poet, John Milton; while in 1954, he offered a

comprehensive overview of sixteenth century British poetry and narrative in his exhaustive *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (3).

In 1938, Lewis published the first book in a science fiction space trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* which introduced his hero, Edwin Ransom, a philologist modeled roughly on Lewis's friend, J. R. R. Tolkien. *Perelandra*, a retelling of the Garden of Eden story that results in a *Paradise Not Lost* scenario, set on Venus, followed in 1943. Finally, *That Hideous Strength* completed the trilogy in 1945, a novel Lewis called as "a fairy tale for adults," treating novelistically a host of the themes Lewis had developed in his critique of modern education in *The Abolition of Man* that had been published two years earlier (Ibid).

Between the years 1949 to 1954, Lewis began to write *The Chronicles*, his most notable critical and commercial success. He published *The Chronicles* in single volumes from 1950 to 1956. These popular children's fantasies began with the 1950 volume *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, a tale centered around "Aslan the Lion", a Christ-figure who creates and rules the supernatural land of Narnia. But interestingly Lewis's own favorite fictional work was his last imaginative work, *Till We Have Faces*, published in 1956, retelling the Cupid/Psyche myth which has rarely achieved the critical recognition or popularity he had hoped (Schakel *Way* 10).

Lewis's reputation as a winsome, articulate proponent of Christianity had begun with the publication of two important theological works: *The Problem of Pain*, a defense of pain—and the doctrine of hell—as evidence of an ordered and meaningful universe, published in 1940, and *The Screwtape Letters*, an "interception" of a senior devil's correspondence with a junior devil fighting with "the Enemy," Christ, over the soul of an unsuspecting believer, published in 1942. Lewis emerged improbably during the war years as a religious broadcaster who became famous as "apostle to the skeptics" in

C. S. Lewis, a well-known author and apologist, is best known by people of all ages for his seven volume series entitled The Chronicles of Narnia. As Lewis wrote about the land of Narnia, an imaginary world visited by children of this world, he had two obvious purposes: to entertain the readers and to suggest analogies of the Christian faith. Although some feel that his stories are violent, Lewis is successful at using fiction to open peoples' hearts to accepting Christ as their Savior because he first entertains the audience with a wonderful story. Lewis talked about how he came to write View Narnia Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. The whole series works out like this. \* The Magician's Nephew tells the Creation and how evil entered Narnia. \* The Lion, the Witch and the wardrobe, the Crucifixion and Resurrection. \* Prince Caspian, restoration of the true religion after corruption. C.s. Lewis & the chronicles of narnia BBC rewriting and adaptations radio and tv. Love as a feeling of total gift of yourself to the other and of the other to yourself, with the tremendous responsibility that goes along with it. And death then becomes an unacceptable step away from this reality. Death comes and love more. But Lewis did not stop there. Six more books followed, and together they became known as The Chronicles of Narnia. For the past Journeys to the end of the world, fantastic creatures, and epic battles between good and evil what more could any reader ask for in one book? This edition presents all seven books unabridged in one impressive volume. The books are presented here in chronological order, each chapter graced with an illustration by the original artist, Pauline Baynes. Deceptively simple and direct, The Chronicles of Narnia continue to captivate fans with adventures, characters, and truths that speak to readers of all ages, even fifty years after they were first published. ...more. CS Lewis Narnia Mythology Fairytale C.s. Lewis The Chronicles Of Narnia Narnian Myth Myth The Lion the Witch And the Wardrobe Lewis Narnia. Featured Article In the seven books that make up The Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis creates a viable mythology that stands alone according to his standards, passed down through oral, prophetic, and natural means. C.S. Lewis delighted in all forms of Earth's mythology. Many studies of Lewis's life comments upon the different references to Greek, Norse, Arthurian, Christian, and many other mythologies in the Narnia books. David Downing asserts in his book Into the Wardrobe that "for Lewis, a well-constructed story draws upon universal images and meanings. The official home of The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis. Find the complete list of Narnia books, Narnia news, and Narnia movie announcements. Listen to The Chronicles of Narnia performed by the most celebrated actors of our time. Narnia gift & companion editions. Bring home the complete Chronicles of Narnia as a keepsake collection. Narnia audio downloads. Download and listen to The Chronicles of Narnia performed by the most celebrated actors of our time. Join Us