



## **Exploring Myth In The Chronicles Of Narnia**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a study based on the Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis. The Chronicles delve into a world of mythology that Lewis created, drawing strongly from various classical mythologies, focussing on the different characteristics of the myths that he had employed to frame the magical land of Narnia. With every Narnian tale, he weaves an intricate story that revolves around characters who have either been transported to Narnia or those who live there already. This study details the distinct aspects of Mythology that Lewis has used to bring the Chronicles to life.

**Keywords:** *Folklore, Mythology, Personification, Aspects of Myths.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Myths are legends that have the main characters like the fairies and angels. Therefore, the participants in the plot should adhere to their values and observances of faith that are widely observed. The wonder of picking up a book is similar to the experience of opening a wardrobe and discovering oneself in a whole different world. Myths and legends told to children as bedtime stories always serve the special purpose of transporting imagination. Once the story begins, the journey starts. As C.S. Lewis wrote his seven-part children's series, **The Chronicles of Narnia**, Lewis constructed a well-crafted mythology for the world of Narnia in his novels, and he also created an anthology in his novels.

## **2. Lewis and Myth**

*“The things that happen in myth are things that happen only in stories; they are in a self-contained literary world. Hence myth would naturally have the same kind of appeal for the fiction writer that folk tales have”.*

-Northrop Frye

C.S. Lewis was fascinated with all aspects of classical mythology. Several reviews of Lewis' life focus on the numerous parallels in the Chronicles of Narnia related to Greek, Norse, Arthurian, Roman, and many other mythologies. David Downing argues in his book, **Into the Wardrobe** that

"for Lewis, a well-constructed story is based on... common images and meanings. Much of the literary beauty of the chronicles originates from Lewis' skill in drawing on mythic patterns" (34). C.S. Lewis did a great deal of scholarly work on folklore to create the world of Narnia and had a clear understanding of what a legendary tale entails.

In evaluating the concept of myth and reality, in his sermon **Myth Became Fact**, Lewis believed that "myth is the isthmus that links the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent to which we really belong" (141) and later, mainly talks in relation to Christianity, "The old myth of the Dying God, without halting to be a myth, descends from the heaven of mythology and imagination to the brain. It happens "(141). Knowing this factor defines precisely what Lewis claimed to have defined a "myth." Lewis believed, according to his writing, that even facts fall into the "myth" classification, while society generally equates "myth" to falsity.

He provides a checklist in his work **An Experiment in Criticism** to decide if stories match the enigmatic "myth" classification. However, in deciding that Lewis has written complete and functional mythology that exists within Narnia and influences its inhabitants, all of these particular traits must relate to the Narnian stories and be intended to blend with the tales and their context. Although, Lewis has published these elements in **An Experiment in Criticism**, Leland Ryken and Marjorie Mead improve the terminology in their book **A Reader's Guide through the Wardrobe** and summarize the descriptions where Lewis' wording may mislead the reader. Sometimes the implementation of the shorter definitions is better described in their Guide.

### 3. Different Aspects of Myth in the Chronicles of Narnia

One of reciprocal reliance is the correlation between literature and myth. Although literature cannot be lowered to myth and myth can never be curtailed to literature, neither of them can exist on its own: myth has always been an "integral element of literature". Not only will it grant an archive of multidimensional stories for fantasy world-making literature that broadens, alters, or rewrites mythological facets in the research phase. It also presents the storytelling techniques from which literature progresses to a coherent structure of essential and possible acts as shown in Aristotle's *Poetics* (VI.1450a), where *mythos* corresponds to the story. In fact, as indicated by myth's etymology ("word"), myth epitomizes the very source of literature grounded in oral history and the quality of literary texts.

Folklore may include religious or mythical elements; it is equally concerned with the mundane traditions of everyday life. It's so often synonymous with mythology, or vice versa, as it has been believed that any allegorical tale that does not pertain to the prevailing beliefs of the period is not of the same rank as those dominant convictions. Thus, for all figurative narratives, both myth and folklore have become catch-all terms that do not correlate to the dominant structure of belief. C.S. Lewis has incorporated the aspects of myth in his Narnian tales at different levels which can be perceived in the lines of his tales.

The first aspect of a myth asserts that "mythical stories are so striking in themselves that their power over the human psyche is inherent in the stories, quite apart from or lack of the literary ability with which the story has been told by a given storyteller" (Ryken and Mead 107). Similar to this idea there is an incident in the fourth book of the Narnian tale, **Silver Chair** (SC), where Aslan saves the weeping schoolgirl's sick aunt. This incident is an example of the Narnian myth which deeply impacts the human psyche. The aunt who was cured of a grave illness, turns her head to Aslan, exclaiming, "Oh, Aslan! I knew it was true. I have been waiting for this my whole life. Have you come to take me away?"(219). That quotation carries significance because when the aunt opens her eyes and sees the face of a lion before her, the aunt simply realizes that he is Aslan though he doesn't identify himself as Aslan.

Lewis hadn't told readers if the aunt ever saw a lion, with the exception that her niece never saw a lion (219). Then the aunt says, "I've been waiting for this my whole life," implying that Aslan had

never visited her before, so she depends on evidence to believe the myths. This woman takes the myths she learned a long time ago and insists ardently, even to the level of hoping her entire life for it and asking instantly, without doubt, if Aslan would take her away, she's likely to go with him. Aslan's personification, which reflects the core concept in the Narnian myth, means that when characters respond to the existence of Aslan, they react to the myth itself, and the character's belief in them comes to the forefront.

Myth's second aspect where C.S. Lewis isn't acquainted with Criticism as one in his lists, but as Ryken and Mead have observed, he states that "mythical stories have a very simple narrative shape—a satisfactory and inevitable shape, like a good vase or a tulip" (107). Almost all the time, when the humans and animals hear Aslan or Peter the High King or King Caspian the Seafarer's tale as kids, the narrators speak plainly, but good mythology always contains endless layers of meaning to discover in later life i.e. adulthood. Perhaps this idea explains why Lewis wanted to have the young Pevensie children when they first came to Narnia and in fact almost all the characters of the novel, to support Narnia while still as children and young adults. The tales of brave kids intend to encourage the children listening to the stories through faith and confidence in Aslan and his mission.

Peter Schakel addresses this child-like innocence when dealing with the concept of Deep Magic in his book **Reading With the Heart: The Way Into Narnia**: he says, "Lewis is depicting in a form which appeals to imagination and emotion, in a form children can relate to, what he described conceptually in the opening chapters of **Mere Christianity**" (23). Therefore, it is important to explain the myth and the facets of the myth in a plain, clear way that children can understand. If the myth's ambiguity puzzles the children, only a few people would believe in Aslan; due to the various obstacles one usually accump as adults, such as scepticism, belief system, and adverse qualities of Narnian adults, and would stop Aslan's acceptance as well as other narratives.

The third aspect of a myth notes that the myth "even at first hearing...is felt to be inevitable" (Ryken and Mead 107) and "the pleasure of myth depends hardly at all on such usual narrative attractions as suspense or surprise" (**An Experiment in Criticism** 43). In **Prince Caspian**, the young Caspian, speaking to his Uncle Miraz about Old Narnia, or otherwise, Narnia prior to the actual Telmarine invasion (Duriez 136), says he wishes he lived in Old Narnia mainly because "the animals could talk and there were nice people living in the rivers and trees.... And there were Dwarfs. And in all the forests there were cute little fauns. They had their feet like goats." (43).

Only when his Uncle Miraz suggests, "At your age, you ought to be thinking of battles and adventures" (43), Caspian invokes elements of mystery and suspense. After which Caspian illustrates Old Narnia's elements and tells Miraz about the significant events of **The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe** (LWW). While the myth of Lewis includes many aspects of suspense and surprise, they are quickly forgotten by the story and the hearers enjoy a peaceful Narnia instead. To Lewis and Narnia, the wars provide a way for a final resolution for Aslan always brings peace and harmony abundantly to people who reign on Narnia's throne in his name or in compliance with his will. Schakel states that the "victory for the Narnians comes only through Aslan: that is, perhaps, the central theme of the series" (15). Hence, the Narnians will have to get to this state, because they savour peace and not battles.

King Tirian in **The Last Battle** (LB) thinks about the adventures of his great-grandfather King Rilian with the "two mysterious children" and decides that "it's not like that with me" (51) because the tales seem so mystical that Tirian can't relate to the characters in the story. So, he speaks of the things reported in **Prince Caspian** (PC) and says again, "that sort of thing doesn't happen now" (51). King Tirian maintains the stories that are highly respected, and there are numerous magical elements in the stories to convince him to think they function greater purpose transcending regular life, asserting the fourth characteristic of myth.

The fifth aspect states that "myth is a kind of fantasy story about 'impossible and preternatural'—in other expressions, it transcends our natural world and moves into the realm of the

‘supernatural’” (Ryken and Mead 07). Aslan represents a character existing above the laws of physics and time in **the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (LWW)**, subject only to the Deep Magic regulations. Aslan has the ability to vanish, recur, possess invincibility, and selective disappearance and many activities that cannot be accomplished by humans and animals. Aslan does not have to adhere to human habits, and human will since "he is not a tame lion" after all (LB 19).

The sixth aspect of a myth explains that “the experience may be sad or joyful but it is always grave. Comic myth... is impossible” (An Experiment in Criticism 44). It is important to focus on the ends to consider this aspect in the Narnian plot. Children frequently depart when their work is done in Narnia in the books **The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, the Magician Nephew, Prince Caspian, Voyage of the Dawn Treader, and the Silver Chair** at the end, except in **the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, where they grow into Kings and Queens of Narnia and then leave suddenly, leaving a very content and prosperous childhood to return to life as British school-age children after World War II. In a horrific train accident, all except Susan die at the end of **Last Battle**, Narnia ends, and any New Narnian Myth falls short to be possible. Looking specifically at **the Magician’s Nephew (MN)**, the reader listens to an entertaining, sometimes amusing tale, such as when the animals ruthlessly torment Uncle Andrew (154-158) which made the story sounding bittersweet at the end, as King Frank and Queen Helen stay back to rule Narnia, the kids have to go back to live as children in England, with dramatic change in their lives.

The seventh and final aspect of myth notes that “myth is not only grave but awe-inspiring. In myth there is a sense of awe and of the wholly transcendent ‘other’” (Ryken and Mead 107). The hearers of stories like **The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe (LWW)** are most likely amazed at the four children's sudden appearance from another world. No one born in the Narnian world has ever travelled to earth (Jadis comes from a completely different world) Tumnus, unfamiliar with his home planet, calls Lucy's home "the far country of Spare Oom where the eternal summer reigns around the bright Wardrobe city" (LWW 13).

That's why **The Chronicles of Narnia** appear to be a true theory founded on C.S. Lewis' signature guide to myth since they occurred, the only question that remains is that what happens next in these tales? The tale as it unfolds just shows half the story. The second half of the story reveals how the tales go down: whether verbally, naturally or prophetically.

The myth often works its way naturally. By influencing the intuition of the hearer or by establishing itself through purely metaphysical methods, a hypothesis may convey itself naturally. The myth continues to use natural means in **Prince Caspian** as Edmund presents the one-on-one combat plan from Peter to Miraz. Sopespian, an awful person in the Telmarine administration, tells his confidant Glozelle when Edmund pulls up, "he's a kinglier man than Miraz ever was" (192). Sopespian doesn't understand the Old Narnian legend like a real Telmarine, or if he's learned it privately, he doesn't accept it, nor does he recognize the man's true existence before him.

The myth often incorporates a natural element that is more expressed as an "instinct" growing within a person. Shasta in **Horse and His Boy** provides an instinctual variable as the prime example. Raised by a fisherman on the eastern coast of Calormen, Shasta appears miserable and has no sense of belonging. He "had never been able to love [his dad] and understood that a child would respect his uncle" (8) and happiness washes over him when he finds out the truth about his father rather than being depressed. Shasta is constantly looking to the north and thinking deeply over the mountains. While his body resides in Calormen, his soul lives in the mountains. He doesn't learn about the princely blood that runs over the mountains from his veins, blood from the Archenland frontier, situated just north of Calormen's eastern coast. The original truth of Shasta is embodied in his intuition.

## 2. Conclusion

When for the first time Lucy Pevensie stepped on Narnia's snow, she landed in a country where it had its own culture, history, and myth. Using C.S. Lewis' concepts of myth, the narratives of Narnia's Chronicles establish a true and living narrative, conveyed using verbal, natural or prophetic means. Although children on Earth have learned in their books for over fifty years, listening to the stories read by their mothers and teachers, Narnia's children too have loved the story for many thousand years, so both sets of children stay similarly amused by Narnia's strong narrative myth.

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