

The Hermeneutic of Supposal in Understanding C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand the 'Hermeneutic of Supposal' in determining how 'subcreations' and 'eucatastrophe' work towards building worlds, creating characters, and understanding how Narnia functions in relation to earth, man and God. Supposal, meaning, 'the process of supposing' helps us understand how something works, given a set of assumptions, beginning with the hypothesis of how supposal works both in definitive and progressive terms where the result cannot be ascertained. Much like how 'Imaginative supposal' works or in the world of 'what ifs?', Narnia is surely a place created by C. S. Lewis to understand God through the eyes of a child. ---The premise of the hypothesis is established into this work, taking into consideration two tools (Sub-creation and Eucatastrophe) of creative writing that C. S. Lewis employed to help us understand *The Chronicles of Narnia*. C. S. Lewis helps us see God in his true greatness by taking a world like earth and creating something new out of it, and similarly taking Jesus of Nazareth and placing him as the Aslan of Narnia. To do this, he uses tools like 'sub-creation and 'eucatastrophe' to build a world around our imagination, and in doing so, creates enough disasters in it to eventually bring out the reality of human character even if it was another world called Narnia. Along a similar vein, Lewis portrays that 'Jesus of Nazareth' as 'Aslan of Narnia' would do the very same thing he did on earth if it was required of him in a world called Narnia. In effect, he offers himself as a sacrifice to redeem fallen mankind.

Keywords: hermeneutics, supposal, subcreation, eucatastrophe, Narnia

The 'Hermeneutic of Supposal' functions with a set of assumptions to understand a given concept much like how we assume 'x' in a mathematical problem and then find a way to solve it using a formula. As the title reads "The 'Hermeneutic of Supposal' in understanding C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*", 'given x' — 'hermeneutic of supposal' is chosen to assume how 'Jesus of Nazareth' would function within creative limitations in a world called Narnia (formula being, 'subcreations and eucatastrophe').

C. S. Lewis in his letter to Sophia Storr stated that if he assumed a world like 'Narnia' much like earth, how would the incarnation, the passion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ be translated in the life of Aslan of Narnia. In stating this, he also established the difference between supposal and moral story. Although moral story functions

with an end in mind, it is determined to give the readers an understanding of how good and evil work to either result in a fitting comedy or tragedy. Lewis takes 'Supposal' and uses it to showcase characteristics of God and man as it were on Earth in a world called Narnia.

Assuming the world Narnia functioned like the Earth, Lewis uses themes both abstract and relevant to bring out the understanding of how God could relate with us as human beings and yet be transcendent as God. This is quite vividly seen in the following 'supposals,' as is the idea of supposal being the underlying element of understanding *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

For instance:

- Suppose Christ appeared on Narnia as Aslan. How would He look like?

- Suppose Aslan created Narnia from nothing and hundreds of years had passed. How might these accounts play out?
- Suppose evil came into Narnia. What might it look like?
- Suppose a human being or a talking creature could obey or resist Aslan. What might life in Narnia resemble?

To conform the idea of supposal in determining how worlds function, and characters play out, it is also important for us to know what 'supposal' is not; supposal is not allegory, supposal is not a means to an end and supposal is not a method to obtain conclusive results.

Supposal is simply letting your imagination flow — wild and free and allowing both the reader and writer to explain the story for themselves. Lewis wears his creative hat on and writes the story without any particular ending in mind, without the burden of making the story carry any moral implications but rather letting the reader in on important implications that might help the reader understand God in ways never known before. And for achieving this task, Lewis, like Tolkien, creates a world (sub-creation), and after his work with 'Boxen' (the world of animals), Narnia emerges again as a world filled with animals. Aslan's song creates Narnia — plants, birds, animals and everything inhabitable. Importantly, the entire creation event transpires before Digory the Protagonist, unlike Adam on earth, being created after the world was created. Creatures in Narnia talked like human beings, reasoned among themselves and exhibited human emotions (fear, anger, sadness, betrayal, happiness and joy).

Eucatastrophe is the art of creating events in a story that eventually bring the best out of the worst both in character and setting to establish important truths for the reader to understand. However, Lewis does this without

trying to impose his ideas and values upon the reader but rather letting the reader know for himself how supposal helps the reader understand God in a better light, especially when Jesus of Nazareth has become Aslan of Narnia. Following on, Edmund's betrayal eventually sets the stage for Aslan's death at the hands of the White Witch, turning the tables upside down for Narnia.

Aslan — the hope of Narnia (after having created Narnia) — Subcreation, now lies defeated and must arise to bring back hope to Narnia (Eucatastrophe). After rising from the dead, Aslan defeats the White Witch and takes back Narnia to himself and then hands it over to Susan, Peter, Edmund and Lucy. It is interesting to note that the Creator had to die at the hands of one of his created beings but Narnia had to be different — the White Witch was from another world and knew nothing about Aslan and the world he created out of the song from his mouth.

Now to taking the tool of Subcreation and turning it into Eucatastrophe will help take the plot forward and Lewis turns the magic on by creating events in Narnia that eventually prove Aslan as not only the creator but also the protector and the redeemer of Narnia. Effectually, themes like incarnation, redemption, love and passion blend in effortlessly and Lewis spins an exciting tale in which both Subcreation and Eucatastrophe play an important role in understanding the 'Hermeneutic of Supposal' in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

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