

The Hermeneutic of the Man Behind 'The Chronicles of Narnia'

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the man behind *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Interpreting C. S. Lewis's children's fiction is as important as getting into the world of Narnia only to find out the world the author lived in —his childhood. Lewis's early childhood was marked by several transitions. Witnessing grief and realizing his own struggles with life were forcing him into a world of his own. Boxen was his first world, filled with all sorts of animals. Lewis enjoyed playing with stuffed animals, and eventually grew up living in a world created in his head. Lewis never intended to write Narnia as a series but found himself at crossroads, looking for answers, following his conversion to Christianity. His association with Tolkien gives us a glimpse into the man who created Narnia, knowing well Tolkien himself was building Middle-earth, dedicating enormous time to world building, inventing new languages, creating queer people and myths. Lewis shared a bond with Tolkien despite their differences of opinions regarding story structure and plot development. Personally, Tolkien disliked Narnia as opposed to Lewis's liking for Middle-earth. However, fantasy fiction in the genre of children's literature helped secure a place for C. S. Lewis as a master craftsman in engaging both children and adults in his stories. Not many writers can engage children at their level although J. K. Rowling and a few other authors carved a niche for themselves in children's fiction. C. S. Lewis stands apart in being able to take readers into his world and then show them truths hidden in the Scriptures. Secular opinion mattered a lot and C. S. Lewis definitely found a place among them unlike sceptical Christians who went ranting about Lewis's antagonism towards Christianity or in other words, accusing him of misrepresenting the Christian Scriptures.

Keywords: C. S. Lewis, Hermeneutic, Narnia, Boxen, Middle-earth.

Lewis's way of telling a story has more than a few ways of interpretation and that is precisely why studying Lewis is important in interpreting *The Chronicles of Narnia*. His series falls into more than one category. Debating where precisely his works fall into, studies have deliberated that his writings meet more than one specific genre of writing and this helps us understand why Lewis is still considered a master craftsman in telling a story and retelling it seven times in seven different ways. The entire Narnian series is effectually based on the Scriptures, although unintentionally. Lewis wanted his readers to know that he was a Christian but rather following his conversion to Christianity, his faith had become an integral part of all his writings.

The aim of this paper is to highlight why C. S. Lewis meets more than one genre of writing and how it serves to help us understand the mystery of the man behind *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The Chronicles of Narnia as Children's Literature

Lewis's entry into the children's segment was his debut work on his world of 'Boxen'. Testing his creative ability to spin a tale based on a world of animals in which he literally lived to escape all his grievances growing up as an Irish kid, Lewis found out that writing for children like him had become his passion. This can be seen in all the stories of his younger days when he literally took to life outside of reality. Undoubtedly, after Narnia, Lewis created a space for himself as a writer in the children's segment. It is hard to ignore the fact that Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* had nothing to do with his growing up in Ireland. Lewis had lived enough in the Irish backyard, resenting everything about real life, only to understand his childhood dreams were his only escape from the world he was living in.

The Chronicles of Narnia as Fantasy Literature

Lewis's writings also fall into the category of 'Fantasy Literature'. He was known to have said, "Fantasy stories are a better way to get your thoughts across." And turning a new page in fantasy literature with the Narnia series, Lewis gripped the world by its shoulders, shook it free of its moral obligation to remain hooked to religion, and in doing so, weaned the common man from moral convenience. Lewis stooped to bring Christ out of an imaginary world into the real world just as he was forced to escape into an imaginary world from the world where Christ had stepped in to save fallen humanity. His interrogations with truth taught him to see beyond earthly biases and to find God in the world he was escaping into — 'The World of Narnia.'

The Chronicles of Narnia as Anti-Feminist Literature

Lewis's powerful imagination against the subjective reasoning of the English people brought him to terms with some of his own contemporaries in the field of creative writing. Fredrick (2001), McBride (2005), Zettle (2005), Graham (2004), and Hancock (2005) are some writers who contend *The Chronicles of Narnia* was published as an anti-feminist literature. Arguing about the negative portrayal of women in power, the viewing of sexuality and the

understanding of witches and their role in English society as a perverted and distorted version of the female gender forced anti-Lewis campaigns. It is no surprise to see Lewis make a mark on feminists with his Narnia series — the White Witch definitely drew everyone's attention.

The Chronicles of Narnia as Religious Allegory

Lewis presents Narnia as a world to be explored not merely for its sea of glass or the thundering horses or the river gods and goddesses but for a world in which its creator was willing to offer himself for its redemption. *The Chronicles of Narnia* depict Biblical themes unlike any other writing in children's fiction. It supersedes one's expectations, helping the reader to understand that *The Chronicles of Narnia* is more than a story. It is definitely a letter to Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy about the truth of Kingship, beyond which their worlds matter less except help prepare them to meet 'the-emperor-beyond-the-sea.'

Works Cited

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