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Real and Mythical in the Fantasy Fiction of C.S.Lewis: A Study of C.S.Lewis's novel

*The Magician's Nephew*

#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses C.S Lewis's novel *The Magician's Nephew* as a narrative of its hero's struggle to restore peace and balance in the fictional world of Narnia. This paper posits the view that since literature can never be divorced from the society, the fictional world of Narnia, therefore exists as a mythical counterpart of the contemporary world. In a postmodern world where virtues like truth, love, faith, valour, honesty etc. are rapidly dying under the pressure of materialism and increasing commoditization, the resurgence of myth and archetypes in literature serves a novel purpose. C.S Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew*, therefore, becomes a fictional mirror of comparative between antiquity and post modernity as its narrative allows the reader to compare the two worlds- the mythical and the real. In mythical Narnia, the hero fights evil with his virtue and valour whereas in today's postmodern world virtue and value are just the mythical terms and evil is central to the society. The postmodern society has lost its heroic ideals. It is totally de- energized. The narrative of *The Magician's Nephew* emanates a fresh energy which serves to heal the postmodern society of its social as well as existential maladies. These arguments of the paper will be developed in the light of the critical works of the critics like Carl Gustav Jung and Northrop Frye.

Keywords: mythical, heroic, postmodern, archetypes, fantasy, narrative.

## INTRODUCTION

Fantasy has always been hero-centric and the ideal of heroism has been the source of inspiration and motivation for the human race. Noble virtues such as courage, wisdom, patriotism, generosity, kindness and willingness for self-sacrifice are universally admired qualities in a hero. Heroes and heroic ideals also reflect the nature of cultures from which they spring. Digory, the hero of *The Magician's Nephew* displays all these qualities of a hero in children literature. C.S.Lewis deliberately chooses the mode of children literature as he follows the words of a great critic Northrop Frye. Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) when writing about the analogous world of romance says that among the human figures, children are prominent, since chastity as a virtue is associated with childhood (151).

The typical mission of the hero of a fantasy is to save the world, or at least the community to which he belongs, from the impact of evil, embodied in a satanic villain. The hero is often marked out from birth as a 'chosen one' by a prophecy which is revealed to him at the appropriate time. In the words of Burrows et al., "The hero is often seen in savior terms as one who conquers evil and thus frees his people from destruction and death." (*Myths and Motifs in literature* 225)

Digory does not fit into the conception of the hero as a God-like form of a man. He has human strengths and weaknesses, being created on the lines of Adam and Everyman. His struggle against Jadis in saving his world, his relationship with his friends, and his less-than-perfect home life at Uncle Andrews home, all contribute to Digory's everyman status. Digory undergoes transformation and eventually emerges out as a competent leader and future general who can oppose the villain and his cohorts. He is an archetypal 'innocent' who progresses towards, or rather falls into knowledge like Adam or everyman.

Writing about the archetypal interpretation of the phenomenon of the hidden hero, Marie-Louise Von Franz in *Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche*, says, "The new God of our time is always to be found in the ignored and deeply unconscious corner of the psyche" (viii). Digory is confined only to his childhood and is painted as a delinquent to the world outside. He is like any other ordinary child of England.

Queen Jadis describes the ordinariness of Digory and says, “But you are only a child, a common child. Anyone can see at a glance that you have no drop of royal or noble blood in your veins” (*The Magicians Nephew* 69).

Digory is a child of destiny, ‘The chosen one.’ Campbell writes, “Hero hood is predestined, rather than simply achieved” (35). In spite of his apparent ordinariness Digory is called upon to play the role of the ‘chosen one’. First he is chosen as a child to perform the heroic deeds and then after defeating the evil Jadis, he is entrusted to protect this newly created world of Narnia from further evil spirits. From an ordinary child, Digory is raised to the status of a king by the great lion, Aslan. Aslan says:

You will have done all that a king should do. Your coronation will be held presently. And you and your children and grandchildren shall be blessed, and some will be kings of Narnia, and others will be kings of Archeland which lies yonder over the southern mountains” (*The Magician’s Nephew* 167)

Aslan, while choosing Digory as the protector of newly created Narnia says: “you shall rule and name all these creatures, and do justice among them, and protect them from their enemies when enemies arise. And enemies will arise, for there is an evil Witch in this world” (*The Magician’s Nephew* 165).

Digory thus becomes an archetypal Christian hero with the mission of bringing about the end of evil. Digory’s reluctance in the beginning is not cowardice but humility, based on his realistic assessment of himself and his circumstances. Digory feels that his enemy is strong and terrible. Yet, he keeps on going with fortitude reminiscent in *The pilgrim’s progress*. Heroism of Digory is clearly evident throughout the book especially, when his uncle asks him to escape the wrath of Evil Jadis leaving behind his friends Polly and cabby to their own fate. Digory replies: “And if you think I’m such a mean pig as to go off and leave Polly – and the Cabby – and the horse – in a place like this, you’re well mistaken” (*The Magician’s Nephew* 119).

True to his archetype as Adam, Digory is not immune to temptations during his journey. But his heroism lies in that he resists all the temptations. This is evident

when queen Jadis is tempting Digory to take the forbidden fruit for her mother (as this is the only fruit that can cure his mother of her illness). Jadis says:

Do you not see, Fool, that one bite of that apple would heal her? You have it in your pocket. We are here by ourselves and the lion is far away. Use your magic and go back to your own world. A minute later you can be at your mother's beside, giving her the fruit. Five minutes later you will see the colour coming back to her face. She will tell you the pain is gone. Soon she will tell you she feels stronger. Then she will fall asleep – think of that; hours of sweet natural sleep, without pain, without drugs. Next day everyone will be saying how wonderfully she has recovered. Soon she will be quite well again. All will be well again. Your home will be happy again. You will be like other boys” (*The Magician's Nephew* 192,193).

All Digory replies: “Oh, shut up...do you think I don't see?” (*The Magician's Nephew* 193,194).

The quest is central to romantic fiction, and this is particularly true of the fantasy novel. The hero undertakes a long journey, which may either be literal or symbolic, in the course of which he learns more about the world and himself, and in the end attains true heroic stature. Northrop Frye considers the quest myth to be the central myth of all literature (“*Archetypes*” 431). Digory in *Magician's Nephew* also undertakes a long journey during which he learns more about the world and himself. It is only after his journey that he attains true heroic stature. It is during his journey that he learns about ‘Parmatma’, the supreme soul. It only through the perils of journey into Narnia, facing hurdles, fighting with the Evil queen Jadis that he realizes his true self and his meaning of existence. His journey through various odds and evens makes him realize that he has attained a Godly level and his life is set with a mission to accomplish. It is from Aslan that he gets his mission to be accomplished. Aslan says:

My son, my son, I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet. Let us be good to one another. But I have to think of hundreds of years in the life of Narnia. The Witch whom you have

brought into this world will come back to Narnia once again. But it need not be yet. It is my wish to plant in Narnia a tree that she will not dare to approach, and that tree will protect Narnia from her for many years. So this land shall have a long, bright morning before any clouds come over the sun. You must get me the seed from which that tree is to grow (*The Magician's Nephew* 169).

And Digory, very firmly, replies, "Yes, sir" (*The Magician's Nephew* 169).

Sacrifice of the self for the welfare of others runs like a golden thread through the *The Chronicles of Narnia* series and *The Magician's Nephew* is not different in this regard. This notion of sacrifice has deep and lasting significance in myth and religion. Frazer writes in *The Golden Bough* (2010) of the 'Scapegoat Archetype.' "Through the killing of the scapegoat, the tribe could achieve the cleansing and atonement necessary for natural and spiritual rebirth" (Guerin et al. 169). Digory exists because of the power of sacrifice. Digory's sacrifice of his life in *The Magician's Nephew* is not like the sacrifice of Harry Potter of *Harry Potter* series by J.K.Rowling. The sacrifice is in the worldly affairs. Even after the final battle against Evil, Digory continues to take responsibility of Narnia as its protector and savior.

The hero of fantasy, whether he is an everyman archetype, a knight or a combination of both in modern attire, wakes into awareness when the time is ripe and aligns him with the forces of good. Whether or not he is overtly religious, he follows the mode of sacrifice to restore his world to a state of peace and prosperity, achieving self-realization in the process. And Digory very well fits into this category of a great, self-less hero and the very embodiment of justice.

The archetypal hero is not alone and unaccompanied on his quest. He is surrounded by characters that fall under recognizable categories. Every hero has a friend or loyal companion. He comes under the influence of a mentor who shapes his character. He experiences the care of an 'Earth Mother,' is inspired by the divine love of 'Holy Mother' and is sometimes confronted by a 'Terrible' one. He encounters a 'Bully,' saves a 'Maiden,' is helped by a 'Wise Woman' and is often protected by a 'Gentle Giant.' Characters in fantasy fiction are generally portrayed as black or white, with hardly any shades of grey. Many of these archetypes have a negative or "dark"

(AC 195) counterpart, their “Moral opposites” (Frye). *The Chronicles of Narnia* in general and *The Magician’s Nephew*, in particular, presents the reader with a plethora of archetypal characters who add richness and variety to the narrative.

The first such character and in many ways, the most important is the ‘Wise Old Man’. The ‘Wise Old Man’ is one of the important archetypes named by Carl Jung. This character is generally visualized as having a long, white beard and wearing sweeping robes. Jung writes:

The archetypal image of the wise man, the savior or redeemer, lies buried and dormant in man’s unconscious since the dawn of culture; it is awakened whenever the times are out of joint and human society is committed to a serious error. When people go astray they feel the need for a guide or mentor or even the physician. (“*Psychology*” 187)

The ‘Wise Old Man’ archetype is especially prominent in literature for children and young adults. Frye, while describing the analogy of innocence says, “The divine or spiritual figures are usually parental, a wise old man, a friendly guardian spirit” (AC 151).

The ‘Wise Old Man’ is a repository of the wisdom and power of the ages, one to whom the hero turns when confronted with a difficult and dangerous task, seeking knowledge and guidance. Help to the confused hero comes in this form. Ira Pragoff, voicing the psychological approach to the archetype, writes that it is the “personification of the voice of the age-old past in man as expressed in the deep unconscious” (236).

*The Magician’s Nephew* is unique in painting Aslan who not only plays the role of a mentor to the protagonist or the hero Digory but also seen as the God himself in character. This paper treats Aslan as a guiding force to Digory in his journey and as a combating force against Evil queen Jadis. Aslan plays the archetypal role of a ‘Wise Old Mentor’ in all the parts of *The Chronicles of Narnia* including *The Magician’s Nephew*.

It is Aslan who chooses Digory for the role he will play throughout the story. Aslan fixes his task and sets Digory on a mission against the Evil force. When a reader comes across a very tough situation for Digory, he will immediately see the

appearance of Aslan with help and further guidance. The omnipotence of Aslan makes a reader optimistic for the fate of the hero. It is Aslan who has established Narnia and is the first one in the book to smell the entry of evil into it. This is clearly evident when Aslan says:

And now, Narnia is established. We must next take thought for keeping it safe. I will call some of you to my council. Come hither to me, and you the chief Dwarf, and you the river-god, and Oak and the He-Owl, and both the Ravens and the Bull-Elephant. We must talk together. For though the world is not five hours old an evil has already entered it (*The Magician's Nephew* 143).

Fantasy writers are attracted to the archetypal pattern of the conflict between good and evil. In accordance with this pattern, every archetypal hero is provided with an archetypal villain. Without the presence of an indomitable opponent, the hero's greatness fails to come to the fore. Though he may be an obstacle to the attainment of the hero's goal, the villain helps focus the hero's energies on it.

The villains of literature are seen as alternate targets to reality. In children's fiction, the villain may represent parental oppression or undervaluation. The fight with the villain becomes the struggle for freedom and self-assertion. Luthi opines that even the villains of fairy tales are useful because they are symbols of evil, through which the child can learn that evil can be conquered or perhaps even transformed.

Frye says that conflict is the archetypal theme of romance. He is of the opinion that the closer the story is to myth, greater is the possibility that the enemy will take on demonic mythical qualities. Frye further clarifies: "the enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor and youth" (AC 192,187).

*The Chronicles of Narnia* is also rich in these demonic and evil characters. In *The Magician's Nephew* the evil side represented by wicked witch queen Jadis. She represents the darker side of humanity. She is portrayed as a very powerful character. Who doesn't fit to her wishes, she has the power to turn him into stone. She can even "hear men's thoughts" (*The Magician's Nephew* 119). Her power is also evident in her threatening uncle Andrew, her slave. She says:

Do not dream of treachery. My eyes can see through walls and into the minds of men. They will be on you wherever you go. At the first sign of disobedience I will lay such spells on you that anything you sit down on will feel like red hot iron and whenever you lie on a bed there will be invisible blocks of ice at your feet. (*The Magician's Nephew* 90).

## FINDINGS

After analyzing the story of C.S.Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew* in the light of archetypal criticism, the following are the findings of this research paper.

1. The hero, Digory plays the role usually assigned to an archetypal hero in any Fantasy Fiction. He is painted as an epitome of humanity. He suffers for others, tries to restore justice and order in a confused world. In this journey he gets transformed from an idle, ignored child to a responsible leader and a symbol of justice.
2. In any Fantasy Fiction the hero is always guided and instructed throughout his journey. He is always realised that he has taken birth for a special, selfless task to perform. And in the above studied book of C.S.Lewis, this role of a 'Guru' is performed by the great lion, Aslan. Aslan represents the 'wise old Man' archetype in the story.
3. The greatness and heroism of an archetypal hero is never realized without a strong opponent. Any Fantasy Fiction takes good care in painting a strong opposite of heroism. The above studied book of C.S.Lewis sketches this opposite of heroism in the name of Evil queen Jadis. She represents the Evil archetype in the story and poses threat and hurdle in the journey of hero, Digory.

## CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that the villain of fantasy is endowed with demonic qualities. He is the destroyer of peace and environment. His is the force that has to be overcome by the hero and sometimes his destruction is the very purpose of the heroic quest. *The Magician's Nephew* clearly fits in this projection of evil force. The hero of a fantasy fiction is differentiated from others by certain conditions. Digory fulfills all the

conditions for being the hero of the *The Magician's Nephew*. He fulfills the various characteristics of an archetypal hero. He is the chosen one by the 'parmatama' and is entrusted with a task to perform. *The magician's Nephew* is ranked among the top fantasy or children literature. In it one can find a hero of humble origin who is born for a special task to perform. He undergoes a journey to accomplish the set task, faces many obstacles, fights for others, defeats evil and restores a balance in society.

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