

Utopian Transformation in C. S. Lewis' the Chronicles of Narnia: the Magician's Nephew

Ms.K.Priscilla Harshini¹, Ph. D., Research Scholar, Department of English, VELS Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Pallavaram, Chennai

Dr.M.Nagalakshmi², Associate Professor, Department of English, VELS Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Pallavaram, Chennai,

Article Received: 065/04/2022, Article Accepted: 14/05/2022, Published online: 13/05/2022,
DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.2.32

Abstract

The Chronicles of Narnia is a children's fiction written by C.S. Lewis, a literary scholar and well-acclaimed writer of many non-fiction books. The Chronicles of Narnia is a collection of seven fantasy novel series that are written specifically for children. The seven novels of these Narnian chronicles are *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), *The Horse and the Boy* (1954), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), and *The Last Battle* (1956). This novel series was published between 1950 and 1956. It has a deep and sophisticated imagination and has become the most famous and prestigious children's fiction dedicated to children, and adults have admired the writer's versatility through this novel series. The stories revolve around the fantastical world of Narnia, which is filled with mythical creatures and realistic animals that can talk. The entire world of Narnia is a heaven-like place (Utopia) which was exclusively created by C. S. Lewis to re-define the Biblical land "the Garden of Eden" that God created on Earth to set His first pair of

human beings (Adam and Eve) to live obediently and righteously in communion with Him and rule over every other living creature.

Keywords: Fantasy, Disobedience, Sin, Realisation, Fantastical World, Magic-Narnia, Utopia

The first book, *The Magician's Nephew*, describes how the magical world of Narnia is created through hymns and songs by the voice of the great lion, Aslan, the Christ-figure in the entire series of the Narnian Chronicles. He creates everything with his own voice, and even the living creatures are created by his voice. *The Magician's Nephew* is completely about the creation of the world of Narnia and how the main characters, Digory, a young boy, and his neighbour, Polly, use magical rings to travel to different worlds. They, along with Digory's uncle, Andrew, a magician, and a few others, are the eye witnesses of the

creation of the land of Narnia and they are responsible for letting the White Witch, named Queen Jadis, enter the border. The story goes about how Digory and Polly travel toward the mountains, lakes, deep forest, and garden to find out and get the apple seed so that Aslan can prevent the White Witch from entering into the land of Narnia. When their task that Aslan gave them is successfully completed, Aslan blesses them, and through the seed, an apple tree magically grows, and Aslan asks Digory to pluck an apple of life for his unwell mother so that she can recover from her illness. Then, soon after, through Aslan's command, Digory, Polly, and Uncle Andrew re-enter their house supernaturally. Digory gives his unwell bedridden mother an apple of life, and after eating it, she completely recovers from her illness and can walk and talk like a healthy normal woman. Then both Digory and Polly bury their magical rings along with Narnian seeds from the apple they gave to their unwell mother. A new apple tree grows from its seeds, and Digory uses it to build a wooden wardrobe which becomes transportation between the world of reality and the world of fantasy for the Pevensies—Lucy, Edmund, Peter, and Susan in the second book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

The term "Utopia" was coined by the Renaissance humanist, Sir Thomas More, in 1516. He had written the book *Utopia* (1516), which was originally written in Latin by him and was translated into English only until 1551. In this book, he creates his own classic, ideal, and

completely non-existent society which contains no political, social, economic, religious, or sexual calamities. This society is described as a heaven-like place where there is no hatred or violence between fellow beings. This word "Utopia" is derived from the combination of Greek words—"eutopia" means "a good place" and "outopia" means "no-place." This kind of imaginative idea was first created by Plato in his book *Republic*, where he sets an ideal society with a perfect commonwealth and political organisations in the actual world. Sir Thomas More uses the idea from his book to re-create an actual world, one that is peaceful and proper.

Through Sir Thomas More, the concept of Utopia became a genre, as well. He influenced this genre and many writers started exploring their own creative ideas of a non-existent imaginative place or society in their books. The books written by other writers create their stories in a different way under this genre. Take, for example, a high-spirited traveller who travels through a distant country which is far better and more unique in every way than that of his own native place. Some writers write them as Arcadian dreams, and others design this genre for the future social and technological improvements in the current world. Some of the books that represent the Utopian concept are: *City of the Sun* (1623) by Tommaso Campanella; *Looking Backward* (1888) by Edward Bellamy; *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; *News from Nowhere* (1891) by William Morris; and *Lost Horizon* (1934) by James Hilton.

The term "Utopia" is the basis of a symbolic or imaginative place for literary representations. There are writers who use this concept or genre to replicate disagreeable and complicated worlds to satirise their contemporary societal situation. The writers manifest some superior, pompous, and exaggerated versions to give the people an awareness of how bad and cruel the political, social, religious, cultural, and economic aspects of society have become. Take, for example, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift and *Erewhon* (1872) by Samuel Butler. *Rasselas* (1759) by Samuel Johnson is a gentle satire on the stubbornness of humanity who wish to have a happy and hopeless dream of Utopia in their current world but fail to recognise that the world cannot become what they imagine it to be. Utopia is seen as a heaven on earth concept and many writers have contributed their books to visualise their own imaginative diagram of the ideal world full of happiness, freedom, and peace. But readers who read their books dream of the ideal world that the writers imagine will happen, but they fail to understand that there is no hope and no one can give any assurance that the world in which they live will one day become a heaven-like place.

The Narnian Chronicles are full of lively beasts and talking animals. C.S. Lewis also mentioned mythical creatures in this series to make sure that the story is relevant to the creatures he put into this legendary story. In the Bible, The Book of Genesis is written by Moses and contains the creation, the rise and fall of mankind,

and then God's covenant with His chosen people and their life with faith and love towards God. C.S. Lewis' imaginative place, Narnia, is the Bible's Garden of Eden, where animals and all creeping creatures lurk on the ground. C.S. Lewis wants to magnify the living creatures to give a realistic view in the minds of the readers, but at the same time an imaginative view through the mythical creatures in his Narnian Chronicles. The story telling is so easy to understand and also so intimidating to every reader, of whatever sex and age they are.

C.S. Lewis describes his own imaginative and creative world as "*Narnia*" — *where the woods are thick and cold, where Talking Beasts are called to live... In a new world where the adventure begins.* In the first book of the Narnian Chronicles, *The Magician's Nephew*, C.S. Lewis paradoxically portrays the creation of the world or the land of Narnia. This can be compared to the Bible, the first book in the Old Testament, Genesis, where God creates the world in six days and rests on the seventh day, which he names "the Sabbath". The world is created in seven days, while Aslan also creates the world of Narnia in seven hours. Aslan in *the Magician's Nephew* exclaims, "*Before the new, clean world I gave you in seven hours, a force of evil has already entered it; waked and brought hither by this Son of Adam*" (P. 162). In *The Magician's Nephew*, the creation of the world of Narnia begins with voices,

"In the darkness, something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away, and Digory found it hard to decide from which direction it was coming. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once. Sometimes he almost thought it was coming out of the earth beneath them. Its slower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it "(P. 119, 120).

This happens to be connected to the Bible itself. According to C.S. Lewis' creation of the world of Narnia, a beautiful voice (where it comes from is unknown) makes the dark and void world light and breathable. In the Bible, it says that God can also sing... *He will rejoice over you with singing.* Zephaniah 3:17(P. 897). Moreover, the creation of the world starts like this.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. " Gen 1:1, 2 (P. 1).

It states that the world was in utter darkness and when the voice of the Lord came, the darkness and confusion transformed into light and full of clarity. Thus, C.S. Lewis writes in such a way that children who read his novel can understand clearly that in this cosmic world there is the

presence of God, and without God, nothing would have been created. In the 20th century after the Second World War, there seems to be a lack of talking about the matters that deal with God and Holy Scripture. Commoners and even aristocrats are so much involved in migration and escaping from great disasters. There is no peace in the country and the family is split apart due to the air raids and frequent bombing. People started to feel whether God was there or not. Science and invention also conquered the world, and there is a great talk on Darwin's *Theory of Evolution*. The contentious subject of God and Darwinism arose in the nineteenth century, precisely driving into war and disaster. C.S. Lewis' mindset is on these things, and his enthusiasm for defining the love of God for humanity is so high. So, through his books, he displays his artistic collaboration of Christianity and fantasy. These misconceptions about the confusion between science and God made him think uniquely on the subject of Christianity, and he wanted to exhibit the love and grace of God through his books.

The Magician's Nephew is the first novel from this Narnia series which describes the outline of the creation and the rise and fall of mankind. In the Bible, God creates man in his own image and makes him live and lead all other living creatures in the Garden of Eden. Then he created a woman for Adam as a helper. While in *The Magician's Nephew*, a young boy and a young girl enter with others into the world of Narnia, and along with them, evil enters. Queen Jadis, or the White Witch, enters

into the dominion of Aslan. This can be compared to the Bible where Satan, full of evilness disguised as a serpent, tries to deceive Eve so that she and her husband Adam can disobey God by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. According to the Bible, Eve is the one who has been deceived by the serpent, while in this novel, Digory, the young boy, struck the cursed bell with a hammer out of rage, and through that, evil enters. He awakened Queen Jadis, or the White Witch, from her curse. This causes damage and confusion in the world of Narnia. As the Bible says, *sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin*. Romans 5:12 (P. 1080).

Digory might have brought evil into the world of Narnia, but he did not create it. Queen Jadis comes from another world which is far older than Narnia. The Bible says that Satan was once an angel who became ambitious and proud and who led a rebellion against God and was cast out of Heaven along with his disciples by God into the utter darkness called the Abyss or Hell. In the Bible, it says, *I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*. Luke 10:18 (P. 990). Finally, after meeting Aslan, Digory realises his mistake and gets forgiveness from him. In the Bible it says, *as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust*. Psalm 103:13–14 (P. 575).

Finally, Aslan forgives Digory in the same way that God forgives and sends his first pair of humans from the Garden of

Eden. There is a character called "Cabby" who also accidentally enters the world of Narnia, gets grace in the eyes of Aslan, and he makes him and his wife the first king and queen of Narnia. Aslan proclaims before everyone that they are the king and queen of Narnia. Aslan gives them authority. *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* (P. 165). In the Bible, in the book of Genesis, God gives both Adam and Eve the position of authority and blesses them, "... be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (P. 2).

Then Aslan instructs Digory to travel outside the land of Narnia, where he has to find a garden that is on the top of a mountain. He tells Digory to go and pluck an apple from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and bring it to him without eating it. So Digory and Polly travel on a unicorn named Strawberry and find the garden. The apple is to plant a tree from its seed in order to keep the Witch away from Narnia.

When Digory enters the garden gate, he meets Queen Jadis, also known as the White Witch. Digory's encounter with Queen Jadis can be compared to Eve's encounter with the Serpent in the Garden of Eden. The temptation is clearly portrayed in this novel in just the way Eve was tempted by the fruit of the forbidden tree of

knowledge of good and evil. Digory is also most tempted when he stops to have a glance at the fruit. The serpent in the Bible thoroughly deceives Eve... *you will not surely die. For God knows that on the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.* Gen 3:4-5 (P. 3).

Aslan was tempted, but he did not eat the fruit but plucked it to give it to Aslan as he had been instructed. While Queen Jadis and Eve have the same temptation, In the Bible it says, "*Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.*" Proverb 9:17 (P. 608). But they know little about the aftermath of the temptation, which is that *there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.* Proverbs 14:12 (P. 612).

Queen Jadis tried to deceive or tempt Digory just the way the Serpent did to Eve. There is another man named Jesus who is also tempted three times by Satan in the wilderness. But Jesus obeyed God and made Satan flee from him. The same thing Digory did when Queen Jadis tried to tempt him. As the Bible says, *therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.* James 4:7 (P. 1160). Although the apple could cure Digory's mother's illness, he did not allow the temptation to win and obeyed what Aslan said to him. He understands that obedience and self-control seem to be costlier than temptation and sin. According to the Bible, trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; acknowledge Him in

all your ways, and He will direct your paths. Proverb 3:5,6 (P. 602).

The apple tree in Aslan's garden has a life-giving power. Heaven has such trees. The Bible says,...*Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.* Ezekiel 47:12 (P. 837). And the Tree of Life is also situated in Heaven. *Blessed are those who do his commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city.* P.1195) Rev 22:14

At last, Digory and Polly reach Narnia and return the apple that Aslan told them to bring. Aslan greets him 'well done' the same way in the Bible. In the Parable of Talents, Jesus also describes the obedience to the master. Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful in a few things, but I will make you ruler in many. *Enter into the joy of your lord.* Matthew 25:21 (p. 944).

Finally, the seed of the apple is planted, and the tree swiftly grows, and they are all astonished to see it. The tree is joy, light, and life to the Narnians, while it is dangerous, despair, and death to the White Witch, or Queen Jadis. Before leaving, Aslan gives Digory an apple of life so that he can make his mother eat and regain her health. The aroma of happiness and peace comes from God, and those who are not obedient and faithful to God will perish by seeing it. *For we are, thank God, the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.* 2 Corinthians 2:15 (P. 1106).

Digory, Polly, and Uncle Andrew return back to their house in London magically through Aslan. When Digory realises that he is in his house, he goes up and gives the apple to his bedridden mother. When she eats it, she recovers from her illness, and in a month, she starts her work like a normal woman. C.S. Lewis experienced this sad moment. His mother was sick and died of cancer when he was just nine years old. He is extremely devastated, but later when he finds out about the love of God, he is comforted. The character Digory in this novel is more about young Lewis. His personality and his exploration inside the tunnel are similar to that of C.S. Lewis.

Digory and Polly then planted the core of the apple in the back garden of their house, and it soon grew into a fine tree. Then, when Digory is in his middle age, he gets his parents' house and settles there. The apple tree, which he planted at a young age, was blown out by the heavy storm. So, he made the wood from the apple tree into a wardrobe in one of the rooms of his massive house. This wardrobe is the connection and transportation from the world of reality to the world of fantasy (Narnia). This is the end of the story and the beginning of the other stories from the Chronicles of Narnia.

This novel depicts all the sincerity and faithfulness to God that can result in a successful and eternal life. Obedience and fear of God can make anyone see God's goodness in their life. As King David declares in his song, *I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see*

the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Psalm 27:13 (P. 530). The current world is full of wickedness and corruption, but even though the world is so cruel, people who are holy and faithful to God and who are innocent like children will find grace and love from God and can live peacefully in communion with God. The world will never become a Utopia unless and until the world realises God's true love and how sincere and fervent He is towards humanity. The Bible says, ... *let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 19:14 (P. 931). A man or woman cannot inherit Heaven until he or she becomes like a child. God loves the pure innocence of a child, and He wishes for everyone to be like that. If someone believes in Him and lives His example, he or she will inherit Heaven. This novel beautifully shows the Utopian world and how it has been created, and how wickedness enters, and at last salvation comes to the world. Utopia is the best word to define the world of Narnia.

References

- Lewis, C.S. *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Magician's Nephew*. Vol. 1. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books, 1955.
- The Holy Bible: New King James Version* London, 1982.
- Ditchfield, Christin. "A Family Guide to Narnia: Biblical Truths in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*." Illinois, US: Crossway, 2003.

Jennie, R. (n.d.). "The story behind the Potter legend: JK Rowling talks about how she created the Harry Potter books and the magic of Harry Potter's world," Sydney Morning Herald, October 28, 2001.

<http://www.accioquote.org/articles/2001/1001-Sydney-Renton.htm>.

"A Comparative Analysis of the Bible and The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe." Kibin, 2022.

www.kibin.com/essay-examples/a-comparative-analysis-of-the-bible-and-the-lion-the-witch-and-the-wardrobe-1c5BJXfy

Toynbee, Polly "Narnia represents everything that is most hateful about religion." December 2005

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/dec/05/cslewis.booksforchildrenandteenagers>

How to cite this article?

Ms.K.Priscilla Harshini, Dr.M.Nagalakshmi“ Utopian Transformation in C. S. Lewis’ the Chronicles of Narnia: the Magician’s Nephew”, Research Journal Of English(RJOE)7 (2), PP: 231-238,2022, DOI:
<http://doi.org/10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.2.32>