Fall 10-15-1970

An Introduction to Narnia: Part 1

J. R. Christopher

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore

Part of the Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol2/iss2/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to: http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm
An Introduction to Narnia: Part 1

Abstract
Reviews the chronology of the Narnia books, both the internal parts set in Narnia and those set on Earth, and the chronology of publication, with additional discussion of “The Narnian Suite” in Lewis's collected poems.

Additional Keywords
Lewis, C.S. Chronicles of Narnia—Chronology
AN INTRODUCTION TO NARNIA

by J.R. Christopher

PART I: THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE CHRONICLES

The Chronicles of Narnia consist of seven children's books and one non-chronological poem, all written by C.S. Lewis. They were published in the following order:

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (Geoffrey Bles, 1950)
Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia (Geoffrey Bles, 1951)
The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (Geoffrey Bles, 1952)
The Silver Chair (Geoffrey Bles, 1953)
"Narnian Suite" (Part 2 of the final poem; Punch, CCXCV, 4 November 1953, p. 553)
The Horse and his Boy (Geoffrey Bles, 1954)
The Magician's Nephew (Bodley Head, 1955)
The Last Battle (Bodley Head, 1956)
"Narnian Suite" (both parts, the second revised; Poems, ed. by Walter Hooper, Geoffrey Bles, 1964)

All of the novels, either as a subtitle on the title page or on the wrapper or both, have the words A Story for Children. The novels were printed in the United States in the same years as listed above by Macmillan; Poems appeared in America in 1965 from Harcourt, Brace and World.

Before considering other dating systems for the series, I should like to discuss briefly the non-chronological element in this chronology, the poem. The first section, "March for Strings, Kettledrums, and Sixty-three Dwarfs," begins this way:

We're trotting into battle mid a clatter of accoutrement; Our beards are big as periwigs and trickle with opopanax. (Poems, pp. 6-7)

The internal rhymes suggest several of the poems collected by J.R.R. Tolkien in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil — and, indeed, the mere appearance of a metrical supplement to the Chronicles of Narnia suggests an impulse in Lewis parallel to Tolkien's expanding mental universe. (Thomas Hardy showed the same impulse when, for example, he wrote six poems echoing his novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles; "Growth in May," "We Field-Women," "The Slow Nature," "Tess's Lament," "At Middle-Field Gate in February," and "Beyond the Last Lamp.") Moving from creativity to technique, I suggest that part of the effect in the above stanza is obtained by the use of high vowels, particularly the short i.

The second section, "March for Drum, Trumpet, and Twenty-One Giants," begins with this stanza:

With stumping stride in pomp and pride We come to thump and floor ye; We'll bump your lumpish heads to-day And tramp and romp and play Our trump'1l blow before us — Oh tramp it, tramp it, trumpet blow before us!

Here, in addition to the internal rhymes, one notices the use of low vowels — the short a and the u of bump which is close to a schwa in sound. (These low vowels are as appropriate for giants as the high vowels were for dwarfs.) But this second part of the "Narnian Suite" does not exist in isolation. First, the last stanza of this second part:

Ho! tremble town and tumble down And crumble shield and sabre! Your kings will rumble and look pale, Your horses stumble or turn tail, Your skimmle-scambles counsels fail, So rumble drum belaboured — Oh rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble drum belaboured!

Second, a passage from The Last Battle, describing Tirian, Eustace, Poggin the Dwarf, Jill, Puddleglum the Donkey, and Jewel the Unicorn going to meet Roonwit the Centaur and the aid he is bringing:

It was a little after two in the afternoon when they set out, and it was the first really warm day of that spring. The young leaves seemed to be much farther out than yesterday; the snowdrops were over, but they saw several primroses. The sunlight slanted through the trees, birds sang, and always (though usually out of sight) there was the noise of running water. It was hard to think of terrible things like Tash. The children felt, "This is really Narnia at last," Even Tirian's heart grew lighter as he waited ahead of them, humming an old Narnian marching song which had the refrain:

Ho, rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble, Rumble drum belaboured.

(Poems, p. 90)

Presumably, since the second part of the poem was first published in 1953 and the book in 1956, Tirian is right in thinking it "an old Narnian marching song."

But this last comment of mine raises the question of the dates of composition of the novels (I know nothing about the poem except its publication dates). There are two basic sources of information on the composition. One is Lewis' brief comment, entitled "It All Began with a Picture..." (collected in Of Other Worlds); the essential passage of this note for readers of the Junior Radio Times is this:

All my seven Narnian books... began with seeing pictures in my head. At first they were not a story, just pictures. The Lion all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a smowy wood. This picture has been in my mind since I was about sixteen. Then one day, when I was about forty, I said to myself: "Let's try to make a story about it."

At first I had very little idea how the story would go. But then suddenly Aslan came bounding into it. I think I had been having a good many dreams of lions about that time. Apart from that, I don't know where the Lion came from or why He came. But once He was there He pulled the whole story together, and soon He pulled the six other Narnian stories into it.

(Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. by Walter Hooper; Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966, p. 42)

Since Lewis was born in 1898, the image of the Faun came to him about 1914 and he began to write the story about 1938 — the latter date being far earlier than that of publication, 1950. The second source of information is in Roger Lancelyn Green's C.S. Lewis (A Bodley Head Monograph, 1963). In one passage, based on Lewis' authority, he reaffirms the early date: "The earliest sketch for the first book was made in 1938; it was very different from the final version, and Aslan did not appear in it" (p. 48). But a fuller passage appears earlier in Green's booklet: In his book on Lewis as a theological writer, published (in America only) in 1949, Chad Walsh says, when dealing with possible books...
to come, "He talks vaguely on completing a children's book which he has begun in the tradition of E. Nesbit."

This referred to the first few chapters of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, a story which had been forming in his mind for some time, but of which only a little had been written down, but then set aside owing to criticism from one of his older friends by then out of touch with children and their books, and wedded to different modes of thought where fairy-tale and fantasy were concerned. However, the story was not to be kept down; by March 1949 he was working on it again, reading the early chapters to another friend, who proved more encouraging — and perhaps saw more clearly that here was the beginning of a really new and exciting development in children's literature.

(pp. 36-37)

Of course, it would be interesting to identify these friends. One might guess that the second friend would be someone who was more interested in children's books and had a more open mind. This our second friend was Green himself, who is the author of both children's books. But who was the first friend? Surely it was neither of his closest friends, Owen Barfield, whose children's book The Silver Trumpet appeared in 1925, nor J. R. Tolkien, whose like contribution The Hobbit appeared in 1937. Green continues about the writing of the books:

The sequel, Prince Caspian, was written by the end of the year (i.e., 1949), and 1950 must have been spent by Lewis largely in exploring and living in the new world which had, as it were, been shown to him: for by the time The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was published that autumn, The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader" and The Horse and his Boy were finished, and The Silver Chair nearing completion. After this there was a pause, much longer being spent on The Magician's Nephew, which was not completed until the end of 1951, to be followed by the final installment, The Last Battle, written two years later.

Thus we have this chronology of writing:

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1938 and 1949)
Prince Caspian (1948)
The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader" (1950)
The Horse and his Boy (1950)
The Silver Chair (1950 and perhaps 1951)
The Magician's Nephew (1951)
The Last Battle (1953)

This list involves one reversal of sequence from the publication: The Silver Chair was published before The Horse and his Boy, not after. Interestingly enough, this inverted publication also involves an allusion of one work to the other: in The Silver Chair, while Eustace and Jace are at Cair Paravel, before their journey, they have a dinner—

And when all the serious eating and drinking was over, a blind poet comes forward, and says, "By Jove, we do," said Edmund. "And first, about time."

"Meanwhile," said Caspian, "we want to talk."

"By Jove, we do," said Edmund. "And first, about time."

The Narnian time is stated to be post-War in this volume, for reference is made to the "wonderful adventures (which the Pevensies had) long ago in the war years." Probably the Date is about the time of the writing in 1949, for the baby boy was still too young to lecture "in America for sixteen weeks that summer" (p. 10) does not suggest the period of austerity immediately after the war.

The Narnian time is stated, precisely, but unfortunately the passage raises some questions about earth time; this conversation is on page 23:

"By Jove, we do," said Edmund. "And first, about time."

"It's a year by our time since we left you just your coronation. How long has it been in Narnia?"

"Exactly three years," said Caspian.

The earth time is stated to be post-War in this volume, for reference is made to the "wonderful adventures (which the Pevensies had) long ago in the war years." Probably the Date is about the time of the writing in 1949, for the baby boy was still too young to lecture "in America for sixteen weeks that summer" (p. 10) does not suggest the period of austerity immediately after the war.

The Narnian time is stated, precisely, but unfortunately the passage raises some questions about earth time; this conversation is on page 23:

"By Jove, we do," said Edmund. "And first, about time."

"It's a year by our time since we left you just your coronation. How long has it been in Narnia?"

"Exactly three years," said Caspian.

This adventure is one year in earth time after Prince Caspian, and that is one year after The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, how can the latter (and possibly Prince Caspian too) have happened "long ago in the war years"? No doubt other scholars will return to this topic in other papers — certainly a complete study would include a discussion of the school careers of the Pevensies: it is clearly stated, for example, that Lucy is attending boarding school for the first time in Prince Caspian (p. 6), but I do not know enough about English schools to know whether this indicates her age is then six (as it would for the first grade in America).

The Silver Chair (1953).

The earth time is about the end of the second week of a thirteen-week school term (p. 13) in the autumn (p. 11) following the summer adventure of the previous volume (p. 13). Nothing which I can see in the source (it is from the "The Chronicles of Narnia Experiment House"

The earth time is about the end of the second week of a thirteen-week school term (p. 13) in the autumn (p. 11) following the summer adventure of the previous volume (p. 13). Nothing which I can see in the source (it is from the "The Chronicles of Narnia Experiment House"

The earth time is stated to be post-War in this volume, for reference is made to the "wonderful adventures (which the Pevensies had) long ago in the war years." Probably the Date is about the time of the writing in 1949, for the baby boy was still too young to lecture "in America for sixteen weeks that summer" (p. 10) does not suggest the period of austerity immediately after the war.

The Narnian time is stated, precisely, but unfortunately the passage raises some questions about earth time; this conversation is on page 23:

"By Jove, we do," said Edmund. "And first, about time."

"It's a year by our time since we left you just your coronation. How long has it been in Narnia?"

"Exactly three years," said Caspian.

This adventure is one year in earth time after Prince Caspian, and that is one year after The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, how can the latter (and possibly Prince Caspian too) have happened "long ago in the war years"? No doubt other scholars will return to this topic in other papers — certainly a complete study would include a discussion of the school careers of the Pevensies: it is clearly stated, for example, that Lucy is attending boarding school for the first time in Prince Caspian (p. 6), but I do not know enough about English schools to know whether this indicates her age is then six (as it would for the first grade in America).
The drums of the deep speak again, and their voice sounds the end of the old and the beginning of the new. The tumult is ended, the order has begun. The throne is filled again, the elf-stone shines forth brilliantly between sun and moon, and mantle white flows upon the wind.

Sing and be glad, all ye children of the West, for your King shall come again, and he shall dwell among you all the days of your life.

In the way of the lofty eagle and beneath the track of the lowly ant echoes song; it is chanted by the mighty choirs of great and small, and is taken up by all creatures. The stars and the planets and the winds of the vastness of the heavens spin and reel with the mighty rhythm of the great dance. The trees grow and the grass aways and death is transformed to life.

And the tree that is withered shall be renewed, and he shall plant it in high places, and the city shall be blessed.

With single mighty voice the great rise to praise the small, and the small to praise the great. The earth and the sky become as one and all things are illuminated and bright. O gift of joyous song, leave the earth never, until all things are passed away, sound from this day unto the dawn of eternity!

Sing all ye people!

And the people sang in all the ways of the City.

SONG of JOY

Composed by Bruce McMenomy

Based on the Eagle’s song, from J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Return of the King, Houghton Mifflin, p. 241

Here is the poem in full, that was printed only two-thirds finished in Mythlore 4. My apologies to Bruce McMenomy. The full page illustration done by George Barr for this poem can be found in the fourth issue. — GG.

Down from the hills it rings; ever glorious and triumphant it ascends to the highest summits of the earth. Like a golden note from a silver trumpet it mounts up into the western sky upon the wings of eagles and wraps the world in its commanding cloak of joy.

Sing now, ye people of the Tower of Anor, for your King shall come again, and he shall dwell among you all the days of your life.

In the way of the lofty eagle and beneath the track of the lowly ant echoes song; it is chanted by the mighty choirs of great and small, and is taken up by all creatures. The stars and the planets and the winds of the vastness of the heavens spin and reel with the mighty rhythm of the great dance. The trees grow and the grass aways and death is transformed to life.

And the tree that is withered shall be renewed, and he shall plant it in high places, and the city shall be blessed.

With single mighty voice the great rise to praise the small, and the small to praise the great. The earth and the sky become as one and all things are illuminated and bright. O gift of joyous song, leave the earth never, until all things are passed away, sound from this day unto the dawn of eternity!

Sing all ye people!

And the people sang in all the ways of the City.