

C.S. LEWIS
THROUGH THE
LENS OF J.R.R.
TOLKIEN'S ON
“FAIRY STORIES”

Influence of Novels

- In J.R.R Tolkien's "On Fairy Stories" he writes that these stories are "wide and deep and filled with many things." According to Tolkien, these stories have four elements: fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation. The purpose of this paper will be to examine how these elements function in C.S. Lewis' children's novels The Chronicles of Narnia. Lewis' novels have a loyal group of followers in the religious community. The elements of the fairy story function as a framework for revealing why these novels are so influential in this religious community as well as outside that community.

Fairy Story/Function in Imagination

- *The elements of the fairy story function as a framework for revealing why these novels are so influential in this religious community as well as outside that community. For example, Tolkien explains that one element of the fantasy novel is that it contains an internally consistent secondary world. This internal consistency of the secondary world is important psychologically in order to gain the readers' trust of the story.*

Religious Issues

- *Power of stories, getting past “watchful dragons” which are people who believe because they’re told they should*
- *It is important to not describe The Chronicles of Narnia as an allegory, an "extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative . . . are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself ", but instead to describe them as "pure story"*
- *When the audience begins by interpreting the symbolism evident in The Chronicles, they destroy Lewis' primary intention: to entertain. It is especially important to respond in this manner when reading the stories to children (Schakel 134). Although Schakel suggests that adults should begin by reading about Narnia imaginatively and later to reflect intellectually, he warns that it would be harmful to "explicate the 'meanings' of the books"*

Recovery, escape, consolation

The idea that the novel contains a “recovery” means that the reader is able to learn something from the story, to see something in the real world in a different light after experiencing the fantasy world. In the “escape” elements of the real world are suspended and the “consolation” is the ending of the novel in which good overcomes evil.

Escape

- *I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which “Escape” is now so often used: a tone for which the uses of the word outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be the worse the better it succeeds. Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also by a confusion of thought.*

- *Next moment she found that what was rubbing against her face and hands was no longer soft fur but something hard and rough and even prickly. “Why, it is just like branches of a tree!” exclaimed Lucy. And then she saw that there was a light ahead of her; not a few inches away where the back of the wardrobe ought to have been, but a long way off. Something cold and soft was falling on her. A moment later she found that she was standing in the middle of a wood at night-time with snow under her feet and snowflakes falling through the air (113).*

Tolkien in on “recovery”

- *Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say “seeing things as they are” and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say “seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them”—as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness.*

- Works Cited

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