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Abstract

compares the geography of Middle-earth, Narnia, and Oz, their inhabitants' contrasting isolationist or exploratory attitudes, and the accessibility of these worlds to outsiders. Concludes by listing several factors that make Narnia unique among fantasy worlds, including the passage of time, the importance of humans from our own world in its history and prophecy, and the centrality of Aslan in all his implications.

Keywords

Baum, L. Frank—Settings—Oz; Lewis, C.S.—Settings—Narnia; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Settings—Middle-earth

What is Narnia?

by Laura A. Ruskin



What is Narnia? For LOTR fans, it is C.S. Lewis' version of Middle-Earth. For readers of L. Frank Baum, Narnia superficially resembles Oz, although the Lion of Narnia is not cowardly. For thoughtful Christians, Narnia is an allegory of God's Kingdom. For people who know ever so little of its author, Narnia is C.S. Lewis' personal affirmation of faith.

Narnia, like Middle-Earth and also Oz, has a definite geography, history and population. Middle-Earth reaches from the Ice Bay of Forochel southward to the hot sands of Harad. Narnia itself is much smaller than Middle-Earth, perhaps no larger than Eriador as far as to the eastern edge of Mirkwood. Oz is no bigger than Narnia, and possibly smaller. Also, whereas Middle-Earth and Narnia have seacoasts, Oz is landlocked, cut off from the Nonestic Ocean by deadly, poisonous deserts on all sides. As Oz maps are rare, one is printed here. As the compass-points show, East is West and West is East. To study an Oz map properly, therefore, one has to hold it overhead pointing north as if it were a star-chart, and read upside-down and backward.

Mountains crisscross the terrain of Middle-Earth. highlands on her outskirts protect Oz from the deadly, blowing sands, but there are no real mountains in Narnia proper. Narnia's terrain slopes down gently southward and eastward to the sea. The Ocean Sea lies west of Middle-Earth, west of Oz but in the opposite sense, and east of Narnia. Beyond the sea of Middle-Earth lies Valamar; beyond the seas of Narnia lies Aslan's Country; beyond the Nonestic Ocean lies our world.

Narnia's people are outward-turning; a legacy, perhaps, of their Telmarine pirate heritage. Cair Paravel, the royal palace of Narnia, fronts the sea like King Rinkitink's palace of Gilgad. Of their western hinterlands, however, the people of Narnia know very little.

The Speaking Peoples of Middle-Earth, by contrast, know a great deal about their interior regions, and almost nothing about the lands beyond the sea; the ruins of sunken Numenor (Atlantis, to us) still block the seas to westward traffic. Only the Elven-folk remember the way to their home in the Undying Lands.

The Ozites are seldom concerned in the slightest with affairs beyond their borders. Says Mr. Baum in The Magic of Oz, "There are no other people so happy and contented and prosperous as the Oz people. They have all they desire; they love and admire their beautiful girl Ruler, Ozma of Oz, and they mix work and play so justly that both are delightful and satisfying and no one has any reason to complain...Life in the world's nicest fairyland was one round of joyous, happy days." The insularity of Oz prevents commerce between Oz and lands outside it; so, too, does Oz' invisibility to external eyes---a defensive precaution devised by the Good Sorceress, Glinda of the Quadlings. Also, the urge to go elsewhere is regarded as certainly perverse, and possibly wicked. "Kiki Aru... was not famous at all. He was noted as being cross and disagreeable because he was not happy, and he was not happy because he wanted to go down (Mount Munch) and visit the big world below and his father would not let him. No one paid any attention to Kiki Aru, because he didn't amount to anything, anyway." (Magic of Oz)

When King Caspian the Tenth set out to visit the big world, and reached Aslan's Country (in Voyage of the Dawn Treader) his voyage became famous in Narnian legend, much like Earendil's voyage to the Undying Lands.

Oz and Narnia are both accessible, through magic, to travelers from our world. Just as Lucy is the first to set foot in Narnia in the first book about it, so is Dorothy Gale the first child from our world to step out into Oz. (As everybody knows, a cyclone blew her, house and all, from Kansas to the Munchkin Country, which is tinted blue. The Winkies, Gillikins and Quadlings are yellow, purple and red, respectively, while of course the Emerald City and its environs are shaded green.) As Mr. Baum wrote fourteen Oz books to C.S. Lewis' seven Narnian Chronicles, we find many more people from our world visiting Oz than Narnia. However, just as the cabby and his wife are rewarded for their virtue by being received in Narnia as its first king and queen, so are Dorothy's Uncle Henry and Aunt Em welcomed to Oz, after lifetimes of poverty and hard work, as honored citizens. (To discover what "citizen" meant to Mr. Baum, one ought to read of Tititi-Hoochoo, the Private Citizen in Tik-Tok of Oz.) Also, just as Bree, the cabhorse is taken to Narnia and made a Talking Beast, so Jim, the cabhorse gains the power of speech as soon as he falls into the Vegetable Kingdom of the Mangaboos,

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actually gets to Oz, and on the way flies for a short time, using wooden wings unhinged from gargoyles (Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz.) Digory's uncle and the wizard of Oz are both humbugs, with the single difference that the Great Oz admits it. (The Great Oz has an impossibly long name which abbreviated is O.Z.P.I.N.H.E.A.D. He shortened the initials to "O.Z." because the others spelled out a reflection on his intelligence.) For his dishonesty, Digory's uncle was cast out of Narnia, while the Wonderful Wizard was allowed to live in Oz as a palace guest of Ozma herself, for "Ozma had been quite curious to meet the famous man who had built the Emerald City and united the Munchkins, Gillikins, Quadlings and Winkies into one people." (Dorothy and the Wizard.)

Middle-Earth has no visitors from our world, only the four Speaking Peoples of Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits and Men (all native to Middle-Earth.) Narnia's native population lacks people at all, for the Telmarines are only immigrants from our world. Narnia is the wonder of the Talking Beasts, the fauns, the unicorns, the centaurs and the wood-nymphs. In Oz, absolutely everything talks, from glass cats to hot muffins to meat-cleavers--except trees. "Said Kiki, 'I can transform myself into anything that can talk. However, if I transformed myself into a tree, I would always remain a tree, because then I could not utter the magic word to change the transformation.'" (Magic of Oz.)

Middle-Earth place-names ring with vastness: the Iron Hills, the Sea of Raun, Esgaroth and the Westmarch. Oz names never take themselves quite seriously: Bunbury and Bunnybury, Fuddlecumjig, Oogaboo and the Yips. Narnian names, by comparison, fit snugly as baby mice in the palm of the hand: Ettinsmuir, Beaversdam, the Waterfall, Lantern Waste, the Stone Table. Still, compared to the convoluted bestiary of Oz, Narnia offers a fairly sensible and familiar world, a world much like England should have been during the Middle Ages.

In Oz, no one grows any older than he chooses to, no one ever dies, and destroying anything living is an extremely difficult and puzzling proposition. Old age and death do come to Narnia as they never touch the Ozites. Sorrow, mourning, despair and death--and also hope, rebirth and fresh-plucked joy--are all found in Narnia. Oz has no tragedy; Middle-Earth cares have tenuous solutions; but the apotheosis of Narnia in The Last Battle is so clear that it proves Narnia to be, at its heart, religious. The Lion of Narnia is not cowardly.

What gives Narnia its uniquely satisfying glory?

First, time in Narnia has no relationship at all to time in our world. A month spent in Middle-Earth would equal a month here. In Oz, time seems to stop, for the days pass so swiftly that nothing seems to change. But a Narnian month could equal ten minutes, or a year, or no time at all. Moreover, however long one stays in Narnia, one always returns to our world in the exact instant one left it. Therefore, Narnia always looks different, even to people from our world who have been there before; one never knows when (in Narnian time) the last trip happened.

Example: Mythcon Proceedings, Vol. 1, Iss. 1, 1970, Part 2
In Prince Caspian, Eustace Scrubb (who first visited Narnia in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader) finds that in the year since he had returned to our world, seventy years have passed in Narnia, and his youthful acquaintance King Caspian the Tenth is now an old man. Also, in The Last Battle, the desperate King Tirian summons the Protectors of Narnia from our world, to save Narnia from Calormen. In ten minutes, two of them arrive--ten minutes of Narnian time. In our world, the arrangements took them a full week.

Second, the Protectors of Narnia are all people from our world--Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve--who form an unbroken chain from Narnia's creation to its fall. Each passes the secret of Narnia along to another. Digory Kirke and Polly Plummer watched Aslan, the Great Lion, sing forth the creation of Narnia. Digory's four nieces and nephews, Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy, discovered Narnia by way of their uncle's wardrobe (The Magician's Nephew; The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.) Peter became High King in Narnia, with his co-rulers, Queen Susan the Gentle, King Edmund the Just, and Queen Lucy the Valiant. In Prince Caspian, the four brothers and sisters helped the young Telmarine prince get his crown. But Peter and Susan grew too old to return to Narnia. Eustace Clarence Scrubb, whose character was so horrible that it improved when he turned into a dragon, came to Narnia with Edmund and Lucy, and made the voyage with King Caspian to Aslan's Country. Then Edmund and Lucy grew too old, and Eustace was left alone with a newcomer, Jill Pole, to rescue Caspian's son Prince Rilian in The Silver Chair. When Aslan led his folk to the True Narnia, in The Last Battle, all the Protectors joined the procession--all but Susan, who had "grown up" so far that she had forgotten ever having been to Narnia.

Third is the Great Lion, Aslan, Narnia's image of our Christ. Aslan, Creator of Narnia, is all-powerful and everywhere, taking as many forms within his leonine nature as sunbeams take on a rippled sea. Aslan guides everything in Narnia according to his foreknowledge. Nothing is ever coincidental; Aslan has planned for it. No error of falsehood or pride goes unrebuked; Aslan speaks. No defeat is final; Aslan gives the ultimate triumph. More than deus ex machina, Aslan is Deus in omnia.

Why should a place as wonderful as Narnia fall? Perhaps it was Susan's loss of belief; they say that the Emerald City will crumble to ruins when the last Oz book burns. Perhaps the Ape's stupid greed brought Narnia down. Perhaps Narnia's fate was sealed when King Tirian and Jewel committed murder. "'But I do not wish to fight (the invading Nomes),' declared Ozma firmly. 'No one has the right to destroy any living creatures, however evil they may be, or to hurt them or make them unhappy. I will not fight--even to save my kingdom. Because the Nome King intends to do evil is no excuse for my doing the same.'" (Emerald City of Oz) Perhaps Narnia was doomed when the Narnians lost faith in Aslan--or in the very song with Aslan created Narnia. Perhaps it fell simply because it was time for it to fall. But beyond its written history, we find that Narnia is Eternal. NC