

The Magician's Nephew

by C. S. Lewis

Overview

Plot

Uncle Andrew uses amateur magic to send Digory and Polly into the Wood Between the Worlds. From there they journey to the dying world of Charn, where they awaken an evil queen and set her loose in the newly created world of Narnia. To right this wrong, Digory must travel across Narnia in search of a magic fruit that will protect the land — and perhaps heal his ailing mother as well.

Conflict

Will Digory and Polly escape Jadis' clutches? Will Digory fulfill his quest for the magic fruit? (Man vs. Man, Man vs. Nature) Will Digory find a cure for his mother's illness? (Man vs. Nature, Man vs. God) Will Digory trust in Aslan and obey His instructions, or take matters into his own hands? (Man vs. Self)

Setting

Victorian London; the Wood Between the Worlds; the dying world of Charn; Narnia on the day of its creation. Chronologically speaking, this is the very first of the stories about Narnia.

Characters

Digory Kirke and Polly Plummer, two English children; Digory's uncle Andrew, an amateur magician; Jadis, queen of Charn; Aslan the Lion, creator of Narnia.

Theme

Loyalty and Friendship; Coming of age; Good vs. Evil; the Faithfulness of God

Questions About Structure: Setting

(1.a) Where does the story happen? (country or region)

This story begins in London, England. It is set in the age of hackney cabs and boarding schools in Victorian England...a decidedly dingy and dark atmosphere for children who are cooped up indoors and left to devise their own amusements. There are only foggy cobblestone streets lined with crooked old houses. Our characters dream wistfully of clean, country spaces in which to play.

(1.c) Does the story happen in one place or does the action unfold across a wide area? What is the atmosphere of this place (s)?

The story plays out between London, England, and the magical lands of Narnia, Charn, and the Wood Between the Worlds. While the atmosphere of England is rainy, dark and stifling, it is warm and sleepy in the Wood Between Worlds. The dying world of Charn, is cold, dead, and uninviting in the extreme.

(1.g) Is it set in a real or an imaginary place? If it is imaginary, is it subject to the same physical laws as our world?

There are elements of both the real and the imaginary in the tale, which change with the setting. The imaginary world is only subject to *some* of our physical laws. Though men don't fly, horses can! Animals talk, fruit heals, and witches are charged with magic!

(2.b) When does the story happen? How long a period of time does the story cover? A few minutes? A single day? A whole lifetime?

This story takes place within a single day in London. However, In Narnia, the time frame is much different; many Narnian days go by in the span of one London day.

(2.e) In what time of life for the main characters do the events occur? Are they children? Are they just passing into adulthood? Are they already grown-ups? Does setting the story in this particular time in the lives of the characters make the story better?

Digory and Polly are children. They are immature and self-centered at times, which flaws are essential to the development of

Questions About Structure: Characters

(3.a-i) Who is the story about?

Digory Kirke is a country boy who has been moved to the city for the sake of his ailing mother. He is very worried for his mother, whom he loves with all his heart. When we first meet our young hero, he is discouraged, defeated and “blubbing.” As the story progresses, however, Digory shows himself a sensible, rational, steadfast, faithful, loving boy with whom all the characters are proud to be associated.

Polly Plummer, Digory’s friend and companion, is a city girl through and through. Though polite and spunky, Polly is very lonely. When she meets Digory, adventures at last seem possible. As the adventures come far sooner than expected, Polly proves herself to be a sensitive, compassionate, and kind heroine (if sometimes a bit emotional). Together the characters encounter obstacles which grow them up into young adults.

(3.m) What does the character think is the most important thing in life?

Digory Kirke treasures his mother above all else. He will sacrifice anything to save her, but worries that nothing he can do will keep her alive.

(3.n) Do the character’s priorities change over the course of the story? In what way? What causes this change? Is it a change for the better, or for the worse?

Digory’s priorities never change. His mother’s health remains the thing for which he strives with all of his might. He learns throughout the course of the story, however, that the path to her well-being is not one he can travel without divine assistance. When he attempts to “take matters into his own hands,” Digory only brings destruction and chaos to the people that he loves. He learns that he must trust Aslan in Narnia. As he struggles to have faith in the king, he discovers the importance of friendship and realizes his own creaturehood. This change of heart is a change for the better.

(3.p) Is the character an archetype? Is he an “Everyman” with whom the reader is meant to identify? Are his struggles symbolic of human life generally in some way?

Digory is both a type and an everyman. His struggles mirror those of mankind. Faithless and worried, he tries to fix everything – to do the work of God. He brings sin into a sinless world in the form of Jadis. A type of Adam in the story, Digory is tempted by forbidden fruit in a special garden just like his first parents. Digory faces a choice between trusting Aslan and taking matters into his own hands, providing for himself as Jadis encourages him to do. His struggles are entirely sympathetic, and readers identify strongly with his strengths and weaknesses.

(4.a-c) Who else is the story about? Is there anyone who opposes the protagonist in the story? In other words, is there an antagonist?

Jadis, Queen of Charn, is the main antagonist in the story. Seven feet of pure muscular beauty, she is all cruelty and cunning. Her object is world domination, and when she follows the children through the Wood between the Worlds and into England, she threatens the safety of England. As Queen, she sees the world as a kingdom to be conquered and its inhabitants as slaves to her whims. She is pure evil in a lovely disguise.

Digory's Uncle Andrew is a minor antagonist. A weak, cowardly, sniveling excuse for a man, Uncle Andrew dabbles in magic in an attempt to prove his greatness to himself and the world. He sees himself as a "Great Magician", though he fears to take even the slightest risk himself, instead using his nephew Digory and the neighbor girl Polly as guinea pigs in his cowardly experiments.

(3.d) Is the antagonist out to do physical harm to the protagonist, violence to his reputation, his memory, his work, or his family? How do you know?

Jadis threatens everything in Digory's life. From the moment she sees him, she begins to control him by force. Whether through her mesmerizing beauty, fierce strength, or piercing logic, she manages to grasp at all things he holds dear. In Digory's London home, she throws his Aunt Letty physically across the room, threatens to frighten Digory's mother (which could be fatal in her weakened state), and even plans to take over London!

Uncle Andrew is a less serious threat to Digory, but he poses a threat all the same. In his inebriated state, he is a frightening force in an invalid's home. In addition, he threatens Digory and Polly's

lives by using them as test cases for extremely dangerous forms of magic.

(3.g-n) Is the antagonist reprehensible?...Are her qualities connected to her surroundings? Did the author put her there on purpose?

Jadis is reprehensible. Though men have trouble discerning her malevolence at first (as a result of her enticing beauty), they soon realize her malicious intent. Jadis's initial surroundings tell readers volumes about her character. In a silent, gray world beneath a dying sun, she sits at the end of a long line of Kings and Queens. While the faces of the Kings and Queens are kind and regal at first, they grow steadily nastier as the children view their descendants. Jadis sits at the furthest end, cruelest of them all.

Reprehensible is, perhaps, too strong a word to describe Uncle Andrew. While he certainly lacks the moral backbone which most respectable citizens possess, he is motivated more by petty greed, ambition, and curiosity than a lust for world domination and the suffering of all mankind. He is crooked, and selfish, and heartless, but not reprehensible.

(4) Who else is the story about?

Here are some details about the major characters in this story:

Digory Kirke

Digory Kirke is the only son of an English soldier who is currently serving in India. In her husband's absence, Digory's mother has taken ill and she and Digory have had to move from their home in the country to live with Digory's Aunt Letty and crazy Uncle Andrew. Miserable in the city and worried sick about his mother's health, Digory suffers intensely. When he strikes up a friendship with Polly, however, his spirits lift at the prospect of their adventures together. In the course of his adventures in each of three worlds, Digory proves himself a brave, steadfast, loyal, faithful, loving young man. He learns humility in his encounters with Aslan.

Polly Plummer

Polly Plummer is a spunky city girl who longs for adventure and friendship. When she meets young Digory Kirke, she can hardly contain her excitement at the prospect of companionship. In

their ensuing adventures in Charn, the Wood Between the Worlds, and Narnia, Polly repeatedly proves her common sense, frankness, bravery, loyalty, and warm-heartedness. She is a charming, trustworthy companion and a real comfort to Digory when he's worried about his mother.

Jadis

Jadis is the queen of Charn. Tall, cruel, and mesmerizingly beautiful, she hypnotizes all men into obeying her. She proves her malice, ambition, and terrifying strength time and again throughout the story. Even when her magical skills have faded in England, her physical fighting prowess makes her a fearful force.

Uncle Andrew

Uncle Andrew is a spineless, greedy, shallow, crooked old man who dabbles in magic out of morbid curiosity. He is an obsequious coward as seen in his behavior towards Jadis when she appears in his study. He thinks only of material gain, disregarding the consequences which his actions may have in the lives of the others around him.

Aslan

As in all of the other chronicles, Aslan is the Christ figure of the story. In this particular installment, Lewis highlights Aslan's role as the creator and father of Narnia. While the biblical God spoke the world into being, Aslan sings forth creation. While God made man from the earth and set him to take dominion over the animals and trees and waters, Aslan brings man from England to live in Narnia and watch over the new born creatures. These correlations are unmistakable. Through the events of the story, Aslan demonstrates other Christ-like qualities such as forgiveness, mercy, patience, justice, and compassion.

Aunt Letty

Aunt Letty is Digory's aunt on his father's side. She is a very capable, no-nonsense, English spinster who not only supports her good-for-nothing brother, Andrew, but now looks after Digory and his sick mother as well. She never complains, but she clearly resents her lunatic of a sibling and she badly needs a rest from the stresses of the workplace.

Cabby and Nellie

These two warm-hearted country folks are the future king and queen of Narnia. Sucked into Narnia quite by accident it seems, the London cabby is enamored with the glorious, excitement of the new born world. He has been brought up on a farm and as a result he has a deep love for living things. When Aslan asks him if he'd like to live in Narnia forever, his only qualm is leaving his beloved wife, Nellie back in England. Aslan soon solves that quandary though. In the blink of an eye, Nellie appears, fresh from her soapy dishes and the two agree to take on the dominion of Narnia. They are sweet, good, open, loyal, trusting people. They are the perfect two to start the human line in Narnia.

Mother

Digory's mother plays an interesting part in this story. She is not a character in the story herself, but she is an integral part of Digory. His love for her and his concern for her welfare is what drives the story along in large part. As a result, she is a crucial figure in the story despite the fact that she doesn't play an active role in the plot. From Digory's whole-hearted adoration and concern, we can deduce that Mrs. Kirke is a lovely, spirited woman and a dear, fond mother.

Strawberry the Horse

Strawberry plays a very small, but very important role in the story as well. The cabby's trusted steed in the dark streets of London, Strawberry is faithful, stalwart, and strong. He is selected by Aslan as one of the Talking Animals of Narnia. Soon after his transformation from dumb beast to intelligent animal, Strawberry is honored by yet another promotion. Aslan turns him into a Pegasus, or a flying horse. Aslan charges Strawberry (or Fledge as he is now called) to carry Digory and Polly safely on their way to the mountaintop garden and home again with the precious fruit which will save Narnia.

NOTES:

Questions About Structure: Plot

(8) What happens in the story?

Digory and his young friend, Polly Plummer, accidentally interrupt Uncle Andrew, the amateur magician, attempting to bridge the gap between two worlds. Before the children can escape, Uncle Andrew uses them as test cases in his most recent experiment, sending them off into a magical “in-between” world full of pools which serve as portals to thousands of mysterious civilizations. Curious, the children step into one of the pools and find themselves in Charn, a dying realm currently crumbling into dust. There, they discover and wake the wicked queen of Charn, Jadis. Once awakened, she forcibly escorts them back to England where she plans to dominate their world with magic.

When the children try to take Jadis back to the “in-between” place, the Wood Between Worlds, and leave her in a different pool, they land in Narnia quite by chance. They watch as a giant lion, Aslan, paces the landscape, singing the world into being. No sooner have they witnessed the birth of this world, however, when Jadis escapes them and disappears into the mountains. As penance for bringing evil into an untainted world, Digory must travel to a far off mountaintop garden, pluck a piece of magic fruit, and plant it back in Narnia to ward off Jadis and her evil.

Though Digory encounters Jadis at the garden and she attempts to distract and tempt him with the fruit, Digory trusts Aslan and resists her lies. After he has planted the tree, Digory’s faith is rewarded as Aslan gives him a piece of fruit which later saves his mother’s life.

(9) How is the main problem solved?

Aslan plants the fruit in the center of Narnia. The resulting tree protects this fresh new world from Jadis. Digory has faithfully completed the atonement for his sin. However, there remains a promise of everlasting conflict between man and evil...for someday the tree will fall.

(10) How does the story end?

Aslan satisfies Digory’s deepest yearning, sending him home with a magical apple in his pocket and new peace in his heart. Digory matures as a result of his struggle in the garden and returns

Questions About Structure: Theme

(11.a) What does the protagonist learn? Is the protagonist changed in his mind or heart by the events of the story?

Digory wants desperately to be happy. He wants his mother to be well and his family to return to their house in the country. He is helpless to make any of this come about however, until he comes into Narnia and meets Aslan. In a land where a lion sings life into darkness, surely there is healing power enough to help him! He learns to hope.

(b) Does he begin to act differently? In what way?

Whereas in the beginning Digory acts like a petulant child (as evidenced by the scene with the bell in Charn), the events of the story mature him. He becomes a brave young man, capable of cleaning up the mess that he made when he brought the witch to the brand new world.

(d) Is he sacrificed in some way? (Was this part of the climax or resolution?)

Digory's greatest weakness is his anxiety about his mother. He allows his love for his mother and his hope for her recovery to cloud his judgment in the garden on the mountaintop and to threaten not only Narnia, but Polly and himself as well. When Jadis offers him the world in a single golden apple, Digory is forced to choose between saving himself or trusting Aslan. He chooses to trust Aslan on the basis of moral strength ("I promised.") and the memory of the tears of compassion in Aslan's eyes. He learns that Aslan is good and can be trusted utterly.

(12) What do the other characters learn?

Polly finds Digory a good young man and a loyal friend. They remain friends for the rest of their days. Uncle Andrew learns that magic is not to be trifled with, and becomes a nicer, less selfish old man.

(13) What is the main idea of the story?

This story is overflowing with universal themes. Loyalty and Friendship, Good vs. Evil, and Coming of Age represent a few. Additionally, Digory's encounter with Aslan suggests the power and faithfulness of God.

Lewis discusses Loyalty, Friendship, and Coming of Age in the characters of Polly and Digory. These two have a rather fractious and temperamental relationship as we see in their first meeting:

“Hullo,” said Polly.

“Hullo,” said the boy. “What’s your name?”

“Polly,” said Polly. “What’s yours?”

“Digory,” said the boy.

“I say, what a funny name!” said Polly.

“It isn’t half so funny as Polly,” said Digory.

“Yes it is,” said Polly.

“No, it isn’t,” said Digory.

*“At any rate, I do wash my face,” said Polly,
“which is what you need to do; especially after --
.” (p. 2)*

Always waffling between annoyance and patience, arrogance and humility, the two are evenly matched companions. Despite their rough edges and constant, low-level bickering, the two really do love and respect one another. Digory follows Polly into the Wood Between Worlds to rescue Polly and she in turn looks out for him in their last adventure to find the magic fruit in Narnia. Two lonely children in a huge, smoky city, they appreciate one another’s friendship. They learn, through the events in the story, the true meaning of loyalty and friendship. In addition, as they learn to love one another and bear one another’s burdens, they mature into the young man and young woman they were meant to be.

Lewis addresses the Good vs. Evil conflict in his treatment of the evil queen, Jadis. Though undeniably wicked and cruel, the queen uses her mesmerizing beauty to deceive men into trusting her. Remarkably, this hypnosis has no hold over the women in the story. Polly and Aunt Letty sense the queen’s evil even before she demonstrates her power and fear and loathe her from the start. In contrast, Aslan inspires universal awe and adoration. This conflict

between the forces of Good and Evil in the story adds thematic depth to the tale.

Lastly, Lewis examines the faithfulness and power of God in Digory's encounter with Aslan at the end of the story. Devoted to protecting his people, the Narnians, Aslan requires Digory to travel to the mountain for the fruit that will ward off evil from Aslan's fledgling nation. This devotion demonstrates unfailing faithfulness and love for his people. In addition, Aslan's behavior towards Digory himself illustrates the lion's power, mercy, and trustworthiness. Though Digory has endangered Aslan's world by introducing evil to a spotless nation, Aslan forgives him and even cares for his personal troubles and worries, healing his ailing mother. Lewis's portrait of Aslan alludes heavily to Jesus in the New Testament. His discussion of Aslan can be construed as a subtle commentary on the nature of God.

(13.e) What aspect of the human condition is brought to light and wondered at in this story?

The fall of man is paramount. Digory, a type of Adam, brought sin into a pure, untouched world and must try and fix it. This is an allusion to man's original sin. By extension, the events of the story remind readers of God's mercy. Though Digory doomed Narnia to constant conflict, Aslan loved him, forgave him, and granted him his heart's desire. In the same way, our heavenly Father loves us despite our sins.

In Lewis's portrayal, however, the type of Adam (Digory) avoids making any crucial mistakes on his journey to amend his sins. He resists temptation in the Garden and trusts Aslan's plan for his life and his mother's. Digory succeeds in righting his wrong while Adam repeatedly fails. This contrast between Adam and Digory provides ample opportunity for parents to discuss the nature of allegory with their young ones. An allegory is a story which correlates exactly, part for part, with the message of the Bible. While Narnian chronicles contain some allegorical qualities, they are not pure allegories. Not every event which transpires within a Narnian plot corresponds to a similar event in the Bible. This being said, this discrepancy between Adam's behavior and Digory's provides ample fodder for discussion. Did Lewis intend to insinuate that God is like Aslan in that He expects man to correct his mistake in Eden? Or is this event in the chronicles merely fictional, not allegorical in the slightest? Such a discussion could

Questions About Style: Literary Devices

(15.a) Understatement -- Does the author intentionally represent things in language that is less strong than the situation or thing would necessarily warrant for purely rhetorical effect?

At the climactic moment of the story, as Aslan has just granted Digory's wildest wish, Lewis downplays the excitement by writing Digory's response as follows: "Can we go home now?" He had forgotten to say, "Thank you," but he meant it, and Aslan understood." This response reveals more of Digory than would otherwise be evident. He is overcome with excitement and relief. In such an emotional time, his curt question reveals the height of his joy in a way which effusive thanks cannot.

(16) Does the author use descriptions and comparisons to create pictures in the reader's mind? (16.e) Personification – Does the author represent inanimate objects as lifelike or human?

Lewis leans heavily on personification once again for the strength of his setting. When Aslan is singing Narnia into being, he endows trees, waters, and animals with human forms and faculties.

"Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine Waters"... Out of the trees wild people stepped forth, gods and goddesses of the wood; with them came Fauns and Satyrs and Dwarfs. Out of the river rose the river god with his Naiad daughters. And all these and all the beasts and birds in their different voices, low or high or thick or clear, replied: "Hail, Aslan. We hear and obey. We are awake. We love. We think. We speak. We know." (p. 139)

As these trees, waters, and animals adopt human qualities, Lewis alludes to God's creation of Adam from the dust and also to the selection of God's people – the clean from the unclean. As Aslan speaks to his new children he warns them against reverting to their old, dumb beast ways. He says:

"The Dumb Beasts whom I have not chosen are yours also. Treat them gently and cherish them

but do not go back to their ways lest you cease to be Talking Beasts. For out of them you were taken and into them you can return. Do not so.” (p. 140)

This cautionary speech seems to allude to God’s separation of his children from the world and his hope that they will be “in the world, but not of it.” This personification adds depth to the story.

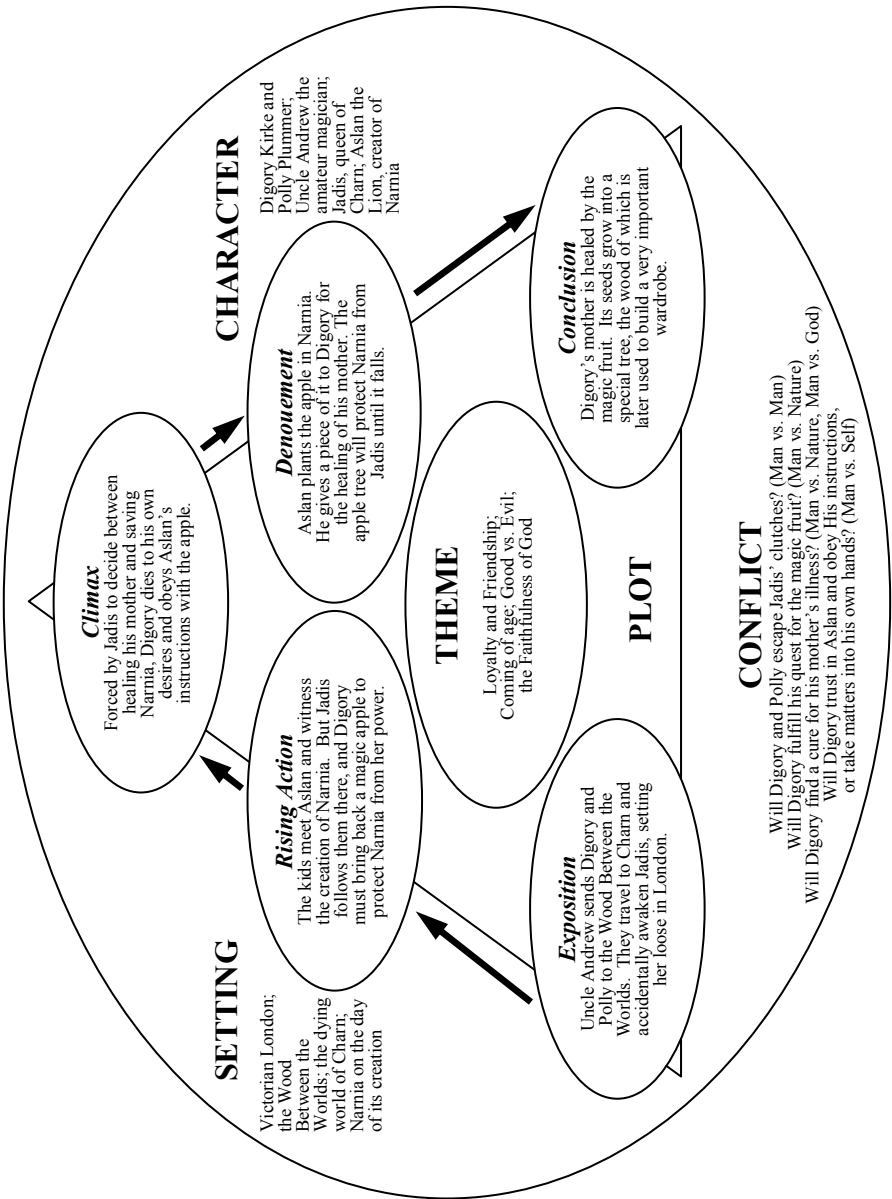
Allegory

While allegory remains an essential concept for all the Narnian chronicles, it is especially prevalent in this particular story. So many scenes in the plot bear striking resemblances to scenes from the Bible that it is easy to assume that Lewis intended to construct a pure allegory – in other words, a correlating biblical scenario for every situation in the story. Lewis intentionally refuted this assumption, however. He professedly intended to write a simple, fictional children’s story to amuse a young audience, and incidentally allude to biblical themes and situations.

Examples of these allusions abound, especially in *The Magician’s Nephew*. When Digory brings Jadis into a pure, untainted Narnia, Lewis’s allusion to Adam bringing sin into a sinless world is clear. When Jadis tempts Digory with an apple which can grant him eternal life and heal his ailing mother, Lewis’s allusion to the serpent tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden is clear. Yet other scenes and characters in the story are simply fictional fun. Polly and Uncle Andrew and Strawberry the cab horse are not allegorical representations of biblical figures. They are themselves, pure and simple. Though Lewis does allude to certain aspects of the Bible in his work, the Narnia chronicles are not pure allegory by any means.

NOTES:

The Magician's Nephew by C.S. Lewis Story Chart



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