

The Great Rival: The Loves in Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew* (1955)

"Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit."—*Mere Christianity*

"The Rivalry between all natural loves and the loves of God is something a Christian dare not forget. God is the great Rival, the ultimate object of human jealousy; that beauty, terrible as the Gorgon's, which may at any moment steal from me—or it seems like stealing to me—my wife's or husband's or daughter's heart."—*The Four Loves*

The Magician's Nephew is a tale which explores different kinds of love: friendship, affection, familial love, sexual desire, and sacrificial love. It also explores the dangers of curiosity, temptation, and power. While the novel sets out the Narnian creation, it also brings together aspects of the pagan and Christian fall: the Garden of Hesperides, the Garden of Eden, Pandora's box, and so on.

Jadis the Witch Queen is based on both the witch Circe from Greek mythology and the demon Lilith from medieval Jewish mythology. Both figures are temptresses of an erotic and materialist nature, and this nature of Jadis, too, enters into the novel's exploration of love and temptation. (Lewis in particular based her on the character Lilith in George Macdonald's novel of the same name.)

Lewis on Love

Lewis' classic book on the nature of love, *The Four Loves* (1960), began as a series of radio broadcasts in 1958. The book brings together much of Lewis' gathered wisdom on the topic, examples of which can be seen in earlier works, such as *The Great Divorce* (1945) and *Till We Have Faces* (1956). It is not, therefore, anachronistic to see in *The Four Loves* some help in understanding the theme in *The Magician's Nephew*. Lewis holds that there are three broad elements in love:

1. *Need-love*, those aspects of love, such as that of a child for a mother, that recognize a necessity for something or someone. Need-loves may be temporary, long-lasting, or permanent, and can be either distorted or genuinely healthy.
2. *Gift-love*, those aspects of love that involve genuine giving or sacrifice for another without any expectation of reciprocity. Gift-loves can be distorted by being treated idolatrously.
3. *Appreciation-love* involves those aspects of the praise, glorification, even worship of the one loved.

He recognizes that only need-love tends to exist by itself; more often the three exist together in the same love. Lewis also uses four Greek words to delineate different kinds of love, including exploring both their values and temptations.

- Affection (*storge*): The most basic of loves, affection (i.e. fondness) can be developed for almost anyone or anything and often grows out of familiarity. "Change is a threat to Affection," so jealousy has as much to do with it as eros, and affection can be used to excuse a lack of courtesy in either public or private settings; it can also be abused in terms that masquerade as self-sacrifice. At its heart, affection is built on civility and self-abdication.

- Friendship (philia): Unlike affection and eros, which have a basis in human biology, friendship is based around something two or more people have in common, some common interest or commitment. “What? You too? I thought I was the only one.” This makes it strictly different from companionship, which has a social necessity. Friendship can be abused when it proudly closes itself off in smug superiority, consciously or unconsciously ignoring others, yet as likely friendship is abused when it becomes a school for vice.
- (Romance) Eros: Strictly speaking, eros is not reducible or even equivalent to sexual experience. For this later aspect, Lewis adopts the moniker Venus. Venus wants sex; eros wants the beloved. Venus is a deity that we should not take too seriously in marriage, for she is an elf mocking us and our bodies’ vulnerability to everything from the weather to health and digestion. Lovers enact the universal Masculine and Feminine. Eros, too, is a playful, even comic deity, and it is in this spirit that husbands should wear the “paper crown” of marriage. Eros can become an idol and a demon when it is exalted over any other consideration or morality. Thus, it must be subject to the authority of God and good sense in a marriage.
- Charity (agape): The Divine gift-love, which wholly without self-interest, desires what is best for the other, even those that would be considered unlovable. This love is the work of grace and not of human origin or effort, though it may be cooperated with. Lewis also holds that grace bestows on us a supernatural need-love for God and for others. We are loved by God not because we in anyway deserve it; we are creatures in complete dependence, and the love we may offer does not originate in ourselves, but is the gift of God. Thus, all the other loves must be subordinated to, at times even renounced for charity.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the novel explore the differences between adventure, as well as danger and courage, and curiosity and forbidden things and places?
2. How does the possibility of other worlds shape these twin themes of adventure and the forbidden?
3. How would you characterize the (a)moral reasoning of Uncle Andrew and Jadis?
4. Does the deplorable word have an analogy in our own world? Why or why not?
5. How does Frank the Cabby embody good authority and leadership?
6. Using Lewis’ reflections on the three aspects and the four loves, how do the major characters embody different notions and experiences of love?
7. How does Aslan’s creation of Narnia and of the talking animals exhibit Lewis’ stress on the solemnity and civility of ritual in his *A Preface to Paradise Lost*?
8. What place do confession and penitence hold in reversing Digory’s role in bringing evil to Narnia?
9. What makes Digory’s task similar to yet different from Ransom’s in *Perelandra*?