Geo-spatial Dynamics and Alternative Reality: Exploring the Convergence of Real and Virtual Worlds in A Song of Ice and Fire and the Chronicles of Narnia

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Abstract

George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire and C.S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia have carved a niche in the realm of fantasy fiction. Enduring popular success over the decades, they have become a part of modern day popular culture alongside Rowling's Harry Potter and Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. With the creation of alternative geo-spatial domains in the form of Westeros, Essos, and Narnia, Martin and Lewis succeeded in creating an alternative reality for their works. Readers are immediately thrust into the political intrigues affecting the continents of Westeros and Essos in A Song of Ice and Fire; on the other hand, they are treated to elements of fantasy, magic, and supernatural creatures in Narnia. Fictional geography is a discipline unto itself, a fantastic hybrid of real geography and literary fiction. Martin and Lewis have imagined vast worlds that bear some resemblance to the real world in which we live, but frequently colored with imaginary features found only in our dreams. With the inclusion of complex geographical features, fantastic birds and animals (including dragons), the worlds of Westeros and Narnia come across as strange, but not wholly alien; they bear striking similarities to the cities and geography known to us. A case to point is the Free City of Braavos which is the mirror image of Venice. Thus, the writings of George R.R. Martin and C.S. Lewis strike a balance between the fantastic and the familiar, while handling geo-spatial dynamics, succeeding in the creation of an alternative reality.

Keywords: Geo-spatial Dynamics, Alternative Reality, A Song of Ice and Fire, The Chronicles of Narnia, George R.R. Martin, C.S.Lewis

Introduction

There is much in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* that follow the conventions of the fantasy genre, sometimes quite narrowly. But Lewis and Martin also offer much that is novel, as well as some twists on familiar clichés, and their work stands head and shoulders above the mass of multi-volume fantasy series. The fantastic elements have, in the series so far, been relatively limited. Where many fantasy novels present an idealized Middle Ages, unrecognizable to the historian, Martin has clearly done some serious reading. He also understands the limitations of history as a source for fiction. His world is gritty, with rough edges, shades of grey and real world complexities. This research paper will explore the complex interplay between geography, space, and alternate realities

in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, shedding light on how these elements are used to convey profound thematic messages and reflections on our own world.

Literature Review

Fantasy Literature and World Building

This research paper will explore the complex interplay between geography, space, and alternate realities in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, shedding light on how these elements are used to convey profound thematic messages and reflections on our own world. Through keen analysis, it aims to contribute to our understanding of the power of geo-spatial dynamics in fantasy literature and its capacity to create immersive alternative realities.

A Song of Ice and Fire:

Realism and Complexity: George R.R. Martin's series is known for its gritty realism and complex characters. It is often categorized as low fantasy because it focuses on a world that is similar to medieval Europe but with added fantastical elements. Magic and mythical creatures exist but play a more subtle role compared to other high fantasy works.

Political Intrigue: The series is famous for its intricate political maneuvering and power struggles among noble families. The plot is driven by the ambitions and conflicts of various characters, and there is a lack of clear-cut heroes and villains. This subversion of traditional fantasy tropes adds depth and complexity to the narrative.

Moral Ambiguity: A Song of Ice and Fire explores moral ambiguity and the consequences of characters' choices. It delves into the gray areas of morality, where characters are often forced to make difficult decisions with far-reaching consequences.

World-Building: Martin's world-building is detailed and extensive, with a rich history, cultures, religions, and geography. The series showcases a vast and immersive setting that feels like a character in its own right.

The Chronicles of Narnia:

Allegorical Fantasy: C.S. Lewis's Narnia series is more traditional and often categorized as high fantasy. It features a magical land, Narnia, where talking animals, mythical creatures, and powerful magic are central elements. The series is known for its Christian allegorical themes, with Aslan the lion representing a Christ-like figure.

Morality and Virtue: The Narnia series emphasizes moral values, virtue, and the battle between good and evil. Each book typically presents a clear moral lesson or allegory, making it more didactic in nature compared to A Song of Ice and Fire.

Child Protagonists: The Narnia books often feature children as the main characters who stumble into the magical world and play pivotal roles in its fate. Their adventures are more straightforward and less morally complex than those in Martin's series.

Fantasy Tropes: The Chronicles of Narnia incorporates traditional fantasy tropes, such as epic battles, quests, and magical objects. It is a more fantastical and whimsical series compared to the grounded and gritty world of Westeros in A Song of Ice and Fire. Geography plays a significant role in the creation of fantasy worlds and settings. It is a fundamental aspect of world-building that authors and creators use to

establish the physical and cultural backdrop for their stories. Here are some ways in which geography is used in the realm of fantasy:

Creating Unique Worlds: Fantasy authors often start by developing a map of their fictional world. This map can include diverse landscapes such as mountains, forests, deserts, oceans, and more. These landscapes help define the physical boundaries and natural features of the world.

Setting the Stage: Geography helps establish the atmosphere and mood of the story. A dark and foreboding forest or a majestic mountain range can set the tone for the narrative. The physical surroundings can also be used to foreshadow events or symbolize themes.

Influencing Cultures: The geography of a fantasy world can influence the cultures and societies that inhabit it. For example, a civilization living in a vast desert may have a nomadic lifestyle and worship desert deities, while those in a coastal region might have a strong maritime tradition.

Creating Obstacles and Challenges: Geography can be used to create obstacles and challenges for characters to overcome. For instance, a river might need to be crossed, a mountain scaled, or a dense forest navigated. These challenges can drive the plot and character development.

Fostering Exploration: Vast and varied landscapes can encourage exploration within the narrative. Characters may embark on epic journeys across continents or delve into uncharted territories, uncovering hidden secrets and encountering diverse cultures along the way.

Magic and Mythology: Fantasy geography often incorporates elements of magic and mythology. Mysterious and magical locations, such as enchanted forests, ancient ruins, or mystical islands, can add depth and wonder to the world.

Political and Economic Systems: The distribution of resources and the accessibility of different regions can influence the political and economic systems in a fantasy world. Kingdoms might vie for control over fertile lands, trade routes, or powerful magical sites.

Symbolism and Allegory: Fantasy geography can be used symbolically or allegorically to represent real-world issues or themes. For example, an impassable chasm might represent a deep divide in society, while a pristine forest might symbolize the need for environmental conservation.

Climate and Weather: Climate and weather patterns can be crucial in shaping the world and influencing the daily lives of its inhabitants. Harsh winters, frequent storms, or magical phenomena can add complexity to the setting.

Interconnectedness: Geography can demonstrate how different regions and cultures are interconnected within the world. Trade routes, alliances, and conflicts can all be influenced by the physical layout of the world.

In conclusion, geography in fantasy serves as a foundation for world-building, enabling authors and creators to craft rich, immersive, and unique settings that enhance the storytelling experience. By carefully designing the geography of their fantasy worlds, authors can create a backdrop that not only supports the plot but also adds depth, meaning, and wonder to their narratives.

Alternative reality in fantasy refers to the creation of fictional worlds or settings that exist outside the constraints of our own reality. This concept is a fundamental element of the fantasy genre and allows authors, filmmakers, and creators to craft imaginative and fantastical settings, often with their own unique rules, laws of physics, and magical elements.

A Song of Ice and Fire:

Westeros: The primary setting of the series, Westeros is a continent filled with various kingdoms, cultures, and political intrigues. The alternative reality in Westeros is characterized by a medieval-like society, where noble houses vie for power and control over the Iron Throne. Magic, dragons, and White Walkers are also part of this world, adding fantastical elements to the otherwise realistic setting.

Essos: Across the Narrow Sea lies the continent of Essos, which offers a diverse range of alternative realities. From the Free Cities like Braavos and Pentos to the Dothraki Sea and Slaver's Bay, each region has its own unique culture, politics, and magical elements. The existence of dragons and the emergence of Daenerys Targaryen's storyline add an additional layer of fantasy to Essos.

Beyond the Wall: The lands north of the Wall are inhabited by the Free Folk (Wildlings) and various supernatural threats, including White Walkers and wights. This area presents an alternative reality where survival is a constant struggle against the elements and the supernatural.

The Lands of Always Winter: This is the most mysterious and inhospitable region beyond the Wall, where the White Walkers are believed to originate. It's a desolate and frozen wasteland, shrouded in eerie mystery.

The Chronicles of Narnia (The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe):

Narnia: Narnia is a magical world hidden behind the back of a wardrobe in a seemingly ordinary English countryside home. In Narnia, animals talk, mythical creatures exist, and magic is real. The alternative reality in Narnia is a realm of wonder, adventure, and moral lessons, where children are often called upon to help shape the destiny of the world.

Cair Paravel: This is the grand castle of Narnia, where the four Pevensie siblings eventually rule as kings and queens. It represents a majestic and regal alternative reality within Narnia.

The White Witch's Reign: At the beginning of "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," Narnia is under the oppressive rule of the White Witch, who has plunged the land into an eternal winter devoid of Christmas or hope. This represents a dark and chilling alternative reality within Narnia.

The Talking Beasts: Throughout Narnia, various talking animals and mythical creatures like fauns and centaurs coexist with humans, creating a unique alternative reality where the boundaries between the natural and supernatural worlds are blurred.

Both of these series create intricate and captivating alternative realities that serve as the backdrop for their respective stories, offering readers and viewers the opportunity to escape into worlds filled with magic, intrigue, and adventure.

Geospatial dynamics and alternative reality are intriguing concepts that be explored in both *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin and *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. In *A Song of Ice and Fire* the geospatial dynamics are central to the story as the shifting landscapes and power struggles and intricate maps of Westeros play a significant role in the narrative. Additionally, the alternative realities in Martin's work are reflected in the complex web of characters and their differing perspectives on the world. *The Chronicles of Narnia* primarily focuses on the concept of alternative realities. Narnia itself is an alternative world accessible through various means, such as wardrobe or magical portals. Each book in the series explores different facets of Narnia, its magical creatures and its connection to our world.

The world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is high medieval, with mounted knights wearing plate armour, tourneys, feudal relations, and so forth. The convergence of real and virtual world is primarily seen through elements of magic and mysticism. The presence of dragons, direwolves and Whitewalkers in the

otherwise grounded world of Westeros blurs the lines between reality and fantasy. Magic is a force that becomes increasingly influential as the series progresses, with characters like Bran Stark and the Three-eyed Raven navigating the boundaries between different planes of existence. It has morally ambiguous world where characters are not simply good or evil but exhibit shades of gray. It even has a vague geographical resemblance to Europe — Westeros is an island in the north-west with a Wall resembling Hadrian's, there's a river 'Rhoyne', and so forth. There are no simple correspondences, however, and other parts of the world draw more on the ancient Mediterranean and Asia — we have a butcher named Cleon who rises to a position of power, nomads sweeping across the plains, and so forth. Readers are challenged to consider the consequences of characters' actions and the blurred lines between right and wrong. The harsh and unpredictable environment forces characters to adapt, survive, and sometimes thrive in the face of adversity. Characters often demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of daunting challenges.

As in many fantasy novels, much of the interest comes from the battles and campaigns. Here, Martin conveys something of the messiness and unpleasantness of medieval warfare: large battles are a hideous mess, with little control by leaders, while small-scale raids and skirmishes are continuous. Feuds, rapes, mutilations, betrayals, and casual slaughter are normal. (Anyone who thinks this is unrealistic should read something about the career of Simon de Montfort, or some of the less savory popes.) While almost all his central characters are from the ruling elite, Martin conveys something of the effects of war on ordinary people and certainly does nothing to glamorize it. Here, the political machinations are similarly compelling.

Not everything is so convincing, however. Westeros sports a hodge-podge of different religions, the mix of which doesn't seem sociologically plausible. And the religious beliefs and practices of individuals aren't always psychologically convincing. But this is a common problem faced by fantasists using medieval settings from which the Catholic Church has been excised. The presence of magic and prophecy is well handled: Martin avoids pointless explanations of the unexplainable, but there is an internal logic to the forces at work, which aren't just arbitrary. These are, however, inevitably less coherent than those elements with a medieval reality to draw on, and here the very convincingness of the rest of Martin's creation makes them stand out. Some of the fantastic elements are potentially awkward, while the events outside Westeros seem more fantastic (though this perhaps reflects the perception of the Orient in Britain in the Medieval Period).

This background is never dumped on the reader in expository passages, however, but appears naturally out of the story. And, world-building concerns aside, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is a rattling good yarn, with a complex interwoven plot sporting some elements of mystery and plenty of surprises. It also has an involving and appealing set of characters. Many of Martin's central protagonists are children or teenagers, some of whom seem almost designed to appeal to different groups of readers. In an early scene the Stark family, from the northern lordship closest to the Wall, comes across a dead direwolf, whose six wolf pups are adopted by the children. These children provide four of the (so far) enduring points of view of the series. They include a warrior leader, a bastard son who becomes a fighter and a leader, a cripple who acquires shaman-like powers, a young tomboy who finds herself in the underworld of assassins and mercenaries, and a princess who has to understand the power struggles of marriages and alliances to survive.

A Song of Ice and Fire is written for adults, not children. Martin moves the point of view around between over a dozen characters, introducing new ones as the series progresses, and there are some real

surprises. Switches in perspective make figures that had previously seemed highly unpleasant appear in a new light. And several times a character is introduced and given enough flesh and form that we feel we know them, only to die suddenly, often brutally. There's no shying away from the presence of death. Some critics have criticized about the explicit sex in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, but infact it's fairly tame and never gratuitous. Many of the characters are shaped by confusions over their sexuality and sex plays a central role in the plot: one young king marries unwisely, bringing ruin upon his family; another is a misogynistic sadist; an otherwise calculating schemer nurses a passion from his youth; and so forth.

The Chronicles of Narnia are undoubtedly the most popular works of writer C. S. Lewis and although they are recognized as children's fantasy novels, they are also popular with students and adults, including many Christian theologians. It explores the convergence of real and virtual worlds through the use of portals. The children in the series enter the magical world of Narnia through various means such as wardrobe or a painting, demonstrating how the ordinary and extraordinary can intersect. Narnia itself represents parallel world that coexists with our own, with time passing differently and fantastical creatures roaming its landscapes.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis typifies the Biblical character of Jesus Christ as the character of Aslan the lion, retelling certain events in the life of Jesus to children in this new context in a way that is easy for them to understand; most importantly, however, children can both relate to and enjoy the fantasy of Narnia. This essay will to analyze The Magician's Nephew and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe to demonstrate that the Narnia Chronicles are not so much didactic allegories, but rather are well-crafted children's fantasies that incorporate Biblical themes in a way that young readers can appreciate.

Although it was the sixth book to be written in the seven book series, the story of The Magician's Nephew takes place several decades before that of The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe. It describes the creation of the land of Narnia, and how humans came to be associated with this other world. The narrative draws heavily from the creation story in Genesis, but Lewis' account of Narnian creation is clearly geared to appeal to a younger audience.

One of the literary techniques Lewis uses to appeal to a younger audience is his use of children as the main characters; in The Magician's Nephew, for instance, Polly & Digory are present throughout the entire narrative. Lewis describes Aslan's creation of the world of Narnia as seen by these two children, immediately establishing a rapport between his young audience and the narrative. As they enter a lightless Narnia at the beginning of its creation, Lewis uses the children to describe their surroundings: "We do seem to be somewhere," said Digory. "At least I'm standing on something solid." (Lewis, 1988, p.91). Digory's first description of this new environment not only establishes a connection between the young readers and the narrative, but is also a representative of a trend in Lewis' retelling of the creation story: Lewis draws on the Biblical creation story, but does not attempt to directly parallel the story of Genesis. In Genesis, after creating the heavens and earth, the first thing he does is to create light: "And God said, 'Let there be light.'" (Gen 2:4). It is not, in fact, until the second day that God creates dry land (Gen 1:9-10). The reader of The Magician's Nephew, however, learns from a child's description that even while the world of Narnia is still dark, the earth (or "something solid") has already been created. Obviously, Lewis' primary goal in writing the story of Narnia's creation was not to make an exact allegory to Genesis, but perhaps to draw from select Biblical creation images, and patterning a children's story from them.

Lewis continues to draw from Biblical creation images as he describes the introduction of light into Narnia. The singing stars are the first things to the children see in Narnia, and Lewis again uses the character of Digory to establish a connection between the text and a youthful reader: "If you had seen and heard it, as Digory did, you have felt quite certain that it was the stars themselves which were singing," (Lewis, 1988, p.93-94). Genesis, on the other hand, automatically appeals to adult sensibilities when describing the stars, relating them to such 'grown-up' concerns as the calendar: "Let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and them be lights in the expanse of the sky..." (Gen 1:14-15). The singing stars image that Lewis draws from here is located in Job 38:7. Comparing these two passages, it is evident that Lewis chose to convey his creation story using the Biblical images that are not only easier for children to understand, but also easier for children to appreciate and enjoy.

Another device Lewis uses in the Narnia Chronicles is the personification of animals. Narnia is a land of talking animals, and as children usually find the concept of animals and magical creatures more interesting than that of a historical reality of long ago (i.e. the reality of Jerusalem 2000 years ago). Narnia proves to be the perfect vehicle for a captivating work of children's literature. Upon comparing the creation stories in The Magician's Nephew and the book of Genesis, Lewis' technique of making animals a central part of his narrative is readily noticeable. In Genesis, God creates animals that inhabit land on the fifth day: "God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.' And it was so." (Gen 1:24-25). The interesting choice of words in this verse may well have been the inspiration for Lewis to write his creative description of the creation of animals in Narnia, where the animals are literally produced by the land, out of the ground: "In all directions it [the land] was swelling into humps. They were of very different sizes some no bigger than mole-hills, some as big as wheel-barrows, two the size of cottages. And the humps move and swelled until they burst, and the crumbled earth poured out of them, and from each hump there came out an animal." (Lewis, 1988, p.105) Lewis' emphasis on the animals in his creation story is especially apparent with his use of Aslan the lion as a God figure: "The Lion opened his mouth...he was breathing out a long, warm breath; it seemed to sway all the beasts as the wind sways a line of trees." (Lewis, 1988, p.108). This image of life-giving breath directly correlates to a passage in Genesis: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Gen 2:7). Lewis equates the significance of the creation of man in Genesis with the creation of the animals in Narnia, and thereby appeals to a child's natural attraction to animals by making them the central part of the Narnian creation story.

Since animals have taken, at least to some extent, the role of man in the creation story, the human characters of Polly and Digory (and their team) must obviously assume a slightly different role in the creation. At this point, Lewis introduces the concept of evil entering Narnia, and the concept of the introduction of sin into a new world. "Before the new, clean world I gave you is seven hours old, a force of evil has already entered it; waked and brought hither by this son of Adam," says Aslan (Lewis, 1988, p.126). Lewis has cleverly associated Digory with the Biblical Adam in two ways. The obvious connection is that Digory is a male human being, and therefore a "son of Adam". But the deeper connection that Lewis implies is that just as Adam first brought sin into the world in Genesis, Digory is charged with bringing the first evil into the new world of Narnia.

Narnia has a charm all its own–its specific flavor of wordbuilding, the way it's a little too heavy on the Hero's Journey, the quintessential Britishness of the human characters, its romantic whimsy, and Aslan.

(Until I'd read the books, I'd had no idea that Aslan was, in fact, actually Jesus instead of allegorically Jesus.) Just like the Hero's Journey, the Christian allegory can be a bit thick, but I think that can be beneficial for a child. Indeed, part of the good of *The Chronicles of Narnia* is that it presents theological problems (sin, betrayal, lack of faith, and death) in a way that a child can understand and work through–albeit, of course, this is in a Christian context that rejects non-Christian contexts. Here, Lewis can create wonderful characters, all of whom grow in some way (save Lucy, whose flatness is by no means an insult); Edmund and Eustace's transformations, especially, are touching, and Reepicheep, who is destined for great things, is a fantastic romantic hero–in the body of a Mouse.

Conclusion

The Geo-spatial dynamics represented in the writings of Martin and Lewis underscore an important theme that has been integral to fantasy fiction- the creation of alternate realities and histories that drive the narratives. The reader is immediately captured by the vistas of an unfamiliar world that is the figment of the imagination, but has abundant resemblance to the real world to appear every bit plausible. Both series ultimately serve as powerful vehicle for commentary on our own world, addressing issues such as power, morality and the nature of good and evil. By weaving together elements of real and virtual, these authors invite readers to contemplate the parallels between their fictional universes and our own, leaving us with deeper understanding of complexities of human existence.

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