

Anne-Frédérique Caballero

"Unless a Grain of Wheat Falls into the Earth": Death and Rebirth in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Long before becoming a Christian, C. S. Lewis was fascinated by the "myth of the dying god" which draws inspiration from the natural process of a seed being put into the earth and reappearing in the form of a plant. He loved the stories of gods like Balder Adonis and Osiris dying and being re-born in Norse, Greek and Egyptian mythology. Eventually, Lewis was convinced by his friend Tolkien who argued that Christianity was actually Myth become Fact, in that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were the historical events foreshadowed in the world's mythologies. From that moment on, Lewis never ceased to be inspired by the agricultural metaphor of the dying seed referred to by Jesus in the Gospel of John. He mentioned it in one form or another in almost all his works, his essays, his books on apologetics and his fiction, including *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The metaphor of the dying seed had multiple meanings for Lewis. He saw a moral dimension in it, as it made him reflect on the dangers of clinging to something that you absolutely do not want to give up. He illustrated it in Narnia both in a positive and negative way with the examples of Edmund and Turkish delight and Lucy and her healing cordial in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Another example can be found in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* when Lucy is tempted by the Book of Spells.

Lewis associated the fact that the plant which comes out after sowing is much more accomplished than the seed from which it originated with the Christian concept of *felix culpa*, which largely inspired his fiction. As coming-of-age stories, *The Chronicles of Narnia* fit the archetypal structure found in most mythological narratives and referred to by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In this structure, a period of trials and ordeals is a necessary stage of the journey and participates in the learning process.

Lewis saw this metaphor as a "key principle", a downward and upward movement present in Nature, but also in human systems thought and in the Biblical narrative. He viewed the plot of the cosmic story as having the movement of a comedy. Tolkien used the term "eucatastrophe" while Northrop Frye referred to the "U-shaped" narrative structure of the Bible. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which are modelled on the Biblical narrative, the downward and upward movement appears very clearly, both when taking the 7 volumes as a whole and when considering each narrative individually (425).

Anne-Frédérique Mochel-Caballero is a lecturer in English literature at the University of Picardie Jules Verne in Amiens, France and a member of the CORPUS research team. Her PhD, published in 2011, explores gender relations in the works of C.S. Lewis. Her research focuses on fantasy literature, gender issues and the interface between literature and theology. She has published articles on authors including C.S. Lewis, George MacDonald, Madeleine L'Engle, Patrick Ness and J.K. Rowling.

