MODERN FANTASY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE (ON THE BASIS OF C. S. LEWIS' LITERARY WORKS)

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The major aim of C. S. Lewis's fiction, personal writings, and scholarly criticism is to open readers' eyes to the glory of God and to invite them to enter into a willingness and capacity to pay the price of addressing that glory. Lewis took the forms and idioms of fantasy, science fiction, and children's literature as an invitation to engage readers' imagination in a crucial partnership with faith, and he put wonder into the hands of his readers like an exploratory key that opens door after door throughout a solely created world—an exploration that Lewis concluded demands maturity, wisdom, courage, and humility to map into a literary allegory.

Lewis can thus be seen as the greatest—if not the sole—mythopoeic writer of the second half of the twentieth century. His impact on modern fantasy is both firsthand and secondhand. He influenced many human and contemporary writers, including eminent editors for leading publishing houses' children's imprints [5, 58]. The term "mythopoeia" derives from the Greek for "myth-making," and is commonly understood as fictional narratives, usually using a nonrealistic form, whose foundation clearly lies within the traditional story worlds created by a culture and its literature. Lewis regularly and self-consciously engaged myth as a central element of its quest to foster and cultivate an imaginative readiness for the Christian faith. Key stylistic and thematic characteristics of Lewis's mythopoeia can be traced within Lewis's most overtly mythopoeic works—mainly The Chronicles of Narnia and The Space Trilogy—and a disciplined exploration of key scenes and moments in these key texts, supplemented by attention to Lewis's more informal mythopoeic myth-making in his letters, essays, and incorporated conversations.

Chronicling the early 20th-century fantasy milieu helps establish Lewis's contributions within broader literary movements and intertextual networks. In the course of Lewis's literary endeavors, a consistent purpose recurs: that of mythmaking. His fiction and essays employ a method historically known as mythopoeia or mythopoeic fantasy. Mythopoeia derives from the Greek τέχνη ποιεῖν, meaning crafting or fable-making art, a practice found throughout human history, resembling a wooded grove through which people walk on different paths, but arriving at the same grove [4,98].

Tolkien, Williams, MacDonald, and Lewis inhabited a corner of Oxford and sought to create their own paths through these woods on dull days, days when they were not hiding, or praying, or dressed in 19th-century style imagining things. While MacDonald's fantasy has frequently been labelled mythopoeic, and Lewis is particularly associated with mythopoeic imagination, mythopoeia itself has not generally defined contemporary criticism of MacDonald

and Lewis [4,76]. Rather, for the former, it is a talisman used to diagnose faults in others. So what?

Defining and delimiting components of mythopoeic fantasy comes less from MacDonald and Lewis than from its later practitioner, Tolkien. And for the latter, the term opens up Lewis to an odd query: Can the same test be applied to Lewis, too? A broad historical perspective of the development of fantasy from the early twentieth century onwards lays the contextual fabric for Lewis's contribution and influence. Judith Flanders once classified that period as "interspecies flash-flooding": a time when "virtually all the writers living in the English-speaking world for so short a stretch seemed to be writing . . . in some apparently-tangentally-connected, if-colloquially-incommensurable, genre . . . fantasy." Such characteristics, undeniably valid, echo throughout the development of fantasy during that period and have proven a persistent source of fruitfulness within contemporary fantasy [7, 125].

The foundational texts of Lewis's modern fantasy—The Chronicles of Narnia and The Space Trilogy—invite concentrated consideration, alongside Olympics and Till We Have Faces. Such survey yields essential narrative techniques and devices, while revealing the scope and degree of sophistication across Lewis's oeuvre[5, 765]. The essential, definitional quality of mythopoeia for Lewis—a term he applies predominantly to the works of J. R. R. Tolkien—emerges through this comparative framework, as does the tradition of pilgrimage in which Lewis's protagonists invariably embark, facing varied and uneven landscapes of wonder, danger, and ethical decisionmaking. The chronology of The Chronicles of Narnia encapsulates the dynamics of intellect, heart, emotion, and belief in Lewis's mythopoeia. Young children counsel their elders to resist resigning from wonder and awe; and those adults indeed persist in another language, it speaks of companionship and support, while danger and difficulty press the heroes' conscious-bearing skills. Aslan's instruction at the Stone Table implicates sacrifice and belief, yet faith alone does not ensure survival; it also requires understanding and courage—from both sexes. In the final volume, Lewis confronts an adult audience with stakes raised beyond survival to one of choice and rejection.

The distinct virtues of Lewis's mythopoeia, combined with the enduring appeal of his range of subjects and styles, nurtured Western fantasy into a crucial domain of literature and culture for generations of readers and writers. The very qualities of his works that inspired many of their contemporaries later prompted dedicated subcreation in the same world, while also initiating modes and methods that became hallmarks of an entire genre[5, 656]. Equally evident are the Lewisian visions that inform much of modern secular fantasy, revealing Lewis's mythopoeia to be not a single finger pointing to the heavens, but a whole hand with gesturing appendages, accommodating summit, and basis in Christian truth. Like the Whys of Handley-Nichols's adventures, such perspectives seem impossible until tentatively discovered at a greater remove from Lewis's fingerprints. Among contemporary authors of children's literature, the transparency of Lewis's Christian witness, which repels certain readers and critics, draws the admiring lenses of those nearer to the faith. Imogens and recommended sequences, collections,

and series blur biblical boundaries by mingling Lewis's dreams with those of other devout authors [5, 765].

Adventure gateways, hints, and landscapes that echo Lewis's enchantment lie behind volumes published in Hartley's Imagination Dream series, Timothy G. Savage's The Stone of Telling, and John O. S. Hughes's The Aririto. Lewis's insistence on all stories being true has equally inspired Telgemeir's dialogues as well as R. M. L. de Haan's tales of the Rainbow Road. The darker tones of tales within the Alliance and Lunatic Fringe series testify, moreover, that a Lewis influence is not confined to tale-telling. Nor is Lewis's impact limited to children's literature; as speculative fiction has developed from the grim realism of the 1940s to the moral standard-setting of the 1980s, Clear-Minded's notion of lost dreams—that is, dreams which are not true for certain but should be and which can be made true through courage and self-sacrifice—has become increasingly relevant as a means of assessing, and hopeful for, the underlying vision of contemporary adventure fantasy [4, 654].

In the decades that followed his death, Lewis's writings endured a rich yet contentious critical exploration. Critics have routinely asserted that Lewis's fiction promoted overtly didactic or religious agendas. Indeed, the overtly Christian themes and motifs he employed can repulse—and even alienate—readers. But these readings self-destruct when they presume to map Lewis's personal belief onto the beliefs of his characters. As other readers have recognized, the drama of Lewis's plots and key character arcs achieves resonance precisely through the exploration of belief as an experience both dangerous and wondrous—an exploration realized within a framework shaped by the playwright Kenneth Grahame and the poet William Blake.

Lewis's oeuvre betrays much of the scholarly attention lavished upon it. Critical consensus on his fiction remains as elusive as plot summaries that reconcile Lewis's different explorations of faith. Given the textual features that invite confusion, it is thus all the more surprising that interpreters seldom acknowledge his didactic subtexts. Even James Blish—whose review of Lewis's early stories stands as a landmark of Lewis criticism—fails to credit the first two Narnia chronicles, The Magician's Nephew and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, for their celebratory portrayals of magic in a world governed by a good creator. Instead, the fantasies register as cautionary tales against magic, revealing the irredeemable dangers of Edmund's betrayal and circumscribing the possibility of further magic through Aslan's warning never to use the "Deeper Magic" again [8, 65]. Such dangerous undertones and warnings against wizardry do not obviate the constructive potential of fantasy in Lewis's primary works. The danger lies in obliviousness to danger itself.

C. S. Lewis's fiction, essays, letters, and biography resonate with readers across generations, time periods, and age brackets. His works offer profound moral wisdom tempered with ethical ambivalence and mnemonic stimulus for the exploration of complex issues. Many educators value the apparent simplicity of the individual texts, particularly the Central Narnia Sequence and The Chronicles of Narnia's structural cousins, The Space Trilogy.

Adult familiarization prepares students for Lewis's comprehensive and multifaceted views, refines and augments their perception of moral conduct, provides the apparatus for immersion

into associated – yet esoteric – fields and replete frameworks, and engenders and guides ethical discussions in a context which softens exposure to the intricacies and interrelations of the issues being examined. Lewis's pre-Narnia fiction is seldom included in school curricula and is often underappreciated for its mythopoeic resonance, imaginative splendour, and multivalent significances. At exactly that age when real life has grown tedious and explorations of possibilties seem ineffective, the more advanced student longs for escape and wonders what Craig or Tolkien may have written about something other than travel to Middle-earth [1, 234].

Lewis is well positioned to answer: both vacuous but precise, fantastic yet didactic, full of wonder, beauty, peril and import. Lewis's Narnia fills this desire for a new dream, and at the same time provides a tool to examine and come to terms with its ambiguous pleasures and dangers. But far from being an escape from life it provides a means for preparation and acceptance, for back in the real world the reader is faced with choices overriding even the wonder of Narnia, and the vile temptation of trust in self is painfully evident. Can one trust parents who used such moral weapons and used them, no less, to further their own projection into Narnia? Should one flee from everything faced as an apparently wrong decision? Should one risk blindly and totally denying the hope of rescue? In this twilight between the fires of childhood and manhood Lewis has the age-long resources to nourish a mind delicately poised between wonder and Gethsemane [2, 32].

Lewis's distinctive deployment of mythopoeia within an intertextual, optative approach has established him as a central influence in modern fantasy literature. The term "mythopoeia" is understood broadly: Lewis draws on mythic archetypes, Christian imagery, and a moral conception of human nature, yet does so within a deploying a world-building style that serves to increase wonder, tension, and ethical complexity [4, 54].

The Chornicles of Narnia display an uncanny balance between childlike wonder, danger and decision-making, a feat more emphatically realized in the more mature Space Trilogy; yet it is perhaps especially in the Space Trilogy that Lewis's artistry becomes apparent: there, alongside the biography of Ransom and the Church's struggle against the Dark One, the story itself changes both in narrative voice and its arrangement of large sections [3, 43]. That Lewis may be seen as an undeclared locatee of the English School of Fantasy is logical, since he holds a permanent third place in the trilogy of the School. There is a wealth of evidence supporting the claim that Lewis is a genuine mythopoeist, and that he has influenced generative fantasy writers whose work is not natal* but permeated by his thought and stylistic eye. It has become a commonplace for writers and critics to use some part of Narnia—often the magic and childlike wonder—as a covert test of the mass of images created in the English-speaking tradition since 1939: those who violate its spirit and transgress its limits may well rue the day!

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