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## CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN C.S.LEWIS' "THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA"

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### ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to substantiate the strong presence of Christian Symbols embedded in C.S.Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Symbol is used as a tool in literary texts to bring out the ideas, concepts, doctrines, opinions in a more effective way. Symbolism enables a different dimensional approach towards literary texts and facilitates the readers to imbibe the essence of the texts with a much better clarity. Symbolism is highly metaphorical and it conveys the absolute truth. The intended meanings are conveyed indirectly through signs and symbols. The aim of symbolism is to create a much deeper and significant insight. An author can use symbolism to convey his ideas rather saying it bluntly. Christian symbolism encompasses a variety of themes that include: usage of Christian archetypes, symbols, events, incidents and acts with an underlying meaning in a work of art to emanate the very nature of Christianity. Literature and religion are inextricably intertwined. Perhaps, Literature is all about entertainment and enlightenment. He vehemently believed that literature was the only tool to impart Christian Faith in people. The use of symbolism, personification, defamiliarization have been very well articulated through this paper.

**Key Words:** Christianity, Faith, Jesus Christ, Bible, Symbol

The novel *The Chronicles of Narnia* was particularly written for children from children's perspective. C.S.Lewis was a staunch follower of Christianity which was why he has infused his text with religious elements and framed it in such a way to entice the attention of children. He had an inner urge to invoke Christian faith and Christian values in order to open the spiritual eyes of the people. Many writers used different dimensions in their works. For instance, Shakespeare used three dimensions in his play *Hamlet* namely: Spiritual, Materialistic and Humanistic. C.S.Lewis went beyond his precursors and created his works with two different dimensions: superficial story on the surface level and a powerful Christian story behind it. His contemporary J.R.R.Tolkein's work *The Lord of The Rings* invigorated him to write his novel *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It has

seven books namely: *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Horse And His Boy* (1954), *The Silver Chair* (1953), and *The Last Battle* (1956). He wrote this novel with fantasy elements. Fantasy novel is a genre that dwells upon supernatural and imaginary elements that do not exist in real life. The plot basically revolves around witchcraft or magic, talking animals, mythical characters and it takes place in an imaginary realm beyond human's understanding. The theme and setting of the fantasy novel reflect European architecture, language, culture.

Personification acts as a catalyst in his novel. Personification is a literary device in which a non-human entity is given human characteristics. Animals

are personified throughout the novel. C.S.Lewis has portrayed non-human beings with human traits. He has given the following human qualities to animals such as sensations, emotions, desires, gestures etc. Human attributes and abstract quality have been given to animals in terms of speech capacity and thinking ability. The only difference between animals and humans is their physical appearance other than that, animals could speak, think, battle and behave like human beings. Children's attraction is drawn towards animals. They would be more attracted if they happen to encounter talking animals.

Symbolism is the blood-life of the novel. During 19th century, an artistic technique called 'Symbolism' emerged in France literally a reaction against nationalism and realism. It encircles spirituality, imagination, fantasy, dreams. Symbolism is a part and parcel of an artistic movement in which images, emotions, ideas are symbolically used and practiced to express an abstract idea in a concrete manner. Spirituality is of prime importance and symbolism does not mean allegory rather it means the purgation of the states of mind. The word 'Symbolism' has originated from the word 'symbol' which is further derived from the Latin word 'Symbolum' meaning 'token', 'watchword'. Symbolism signifies ideas, objectives, concepts, experiences. Ideas are conveyed through symbols in a different way but not their literal sense. Signs and symbols are generally used as code language in order to facilitate a better understanding, together it is called as 'Semiotics' which is a branch of linguistics that deals with signs, symbols and their interpretations. C.S.Lewis has used various symbols to emboss the novel such as animals, mythological characters, fruits, things, nature etc. His faith in Christianity urged him to convert ordinary symbols into extraordinary Christian symbols.

Defamiliarization has been employed by C.S.Lewis in his novel. Defamiliarization or estrangement also called as 'ostranenie' is a pivotal concept in Russian Formalism widely used to determine the nature of literariness. In 1917, a Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in his essay *Art as Technique* coined this term 'Defamiliarization' through which he distinguished poetic language from practical language. Defamiliarization technique

introduces the readers to familiar things in an unfamiliar way in order to enhance the understanding of the familiar things in a strange manner. It is clearly described in *M.H.Abrams' A Glossary of Literary Terms*, "as Viktor Shklovsky put it in an influential formulation, is to estrange or defamiliarize; that is, by disrupting the modes of ordinary linguistic discourse" (142). It reveals that the defamiliarization technique detaches the values of a familiar thing, "the world of everyday perception and renews the reader's lost capacity for fresh sensation" (142). Fredric Jameson talks about three advantages of Defamiliarization: Firstly, it distinguishes the poetic language from practical language. Secondly, it establishes a hierarchy within works and between works. Thirdly, it creates history in terms of rupture. The concept of Defamiliarization can be found in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in which he had not used human beings but animals to criticize the political situation of his time. Joseph Chandra puts it in simple words in his book *Classical to Contemporary Literary Theory: a Demystified Approach*, "It is to make us see the strange aspects in the familiar and the unusual in the usual in the ordinary things of life" (29). C.S.Lewis has deliberately used animals to teach values to human beings and forced the readers to experience the common things (animals that do not talk) in an unusual way (animals that talk).

C.S.Lewis has used various symbols throughout his novel. The following symbols Wardrobe, Lamp-post, Seven Lords, Lion, Narnia and the Witch have been discussed in this article.

### **Wardrobe**

Wardrobe is mentioned in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Wardrobe is a closet in Digory's house made up of wood taken from the kingdom of Narnia particularly designed to hang and keep clothes inside it. Wardrobe is used as a symbol of gateway to heaven. The significance of wardrobe is first brought to light by Lucy. While she was hiding inside the wardrobe, she discovers a new world that is later called as Narnia. Paul.F.Ford writes about wardrobe in his book *Companion to Narnia: a Complete Guide to the Magical World of C.S.Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia*, "It is fashioned from the wood of the APPLE TREE that grew from the core of

the APPLE OF THE TREE OF PROTECTION, planted by the young Digory, and it apparently maintains an affinity with the land of its parent" (450). Wardrobe serves a portal between worlds. Wardrobe denotes the journey of finding inner self. In other words it means a metaphysical journey from exterior self to inner realm.

The Bible says, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matt. 7.13). The gateway to heaven is narrow and it takes patience, self-control, faith and sacrifice to reach the gateway. In order to reach the gateway, Christians believe that one has to surrender himself completely to God and should stick on to his commandments. Christian life is not a life on a bed of roses rather it goes through stern moralistic path to attain salvation. Life on earth is ephemeral and people forget the fact that there is life after death. Not everyone can taste the fruit of eternal life. Jesus insists on this fact that only a very few people are chosen out of those who were invited. Here, Peter, Susan, Edmund, Lucy are chosen ones. They adhere to the commandments of Aslan and reign. Digory got a chance to see Aslan but he couldn't enter into Narnia through the Wardrobe as he was very much obsessed with worldly life.

#### Lamp-post

In *The Magician's Nephew*, Jadis breaks a Lamp-post during her stay in London and carries a part of an iron bar with her which is being planted as Lamp-post in Narnia. Lucy is the first person to witness Lamp-post in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* followed by Edmund, Peter and Susan. Lamp-post shows way to the children and guides them into Narnia. Paul.F.Ford describes Lamp-post in his book *Companion to Narnia: a Complete Guide to the Magical World of C.S.Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia*, "Marks the westernmost boundary of Narnia. It grows from a crossbar of the lamp-post outside the Ketterleys' London residence, which is damaged in the crush" (281). Firstly, Lamp-post is a symbol of Holy Spirit. In Christianity, Holy Spirit is acknowledged as a guide for the people who are tangled in darkness. It is evident in the Bible, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you

into all the truth" (John 16.13). The purpose of Holy Spirit is to redeem the people from darkness and guide them towards truth. Secondly, Lamp-post can be compared to the Word of God. The Bible says that the Word of God is a lamp that provides light for people. Thirdly, Lamp-post is a symbol of Light. In Exodus, God himself asks Moses to set up a lampstand inside the tabernacle and instructs him to keep seven lamps on it. The tabernacle is bright due to the presence of seven lamps on the lampstand. Likewise, Lamp-post in Narnia brightens the path.

#### Narnia

Narnia is a symbolic representation of the world created by Aslan with non-human residents that can be compared to the world created by God with human residents. Although Aslan comes from a heavenly kingdom, Narnia is close to his heart. He gives authority to human beings over non-human beings just like God gave authority to human residents over non-human beings. Aslan destroys the Old Narnia as he is not happy with the deeds of both human beings and non-human beings. This incident is closely associated with the destruction of the world during the days of Noah. God regrets for having created man on the earth and destroys the world by flood. After the annihilation of Old Narnia, Aslan creates New Narnia and rules it. This is compared to the New Earth mentioned. Apostle John writes in his book of Revelation that after the destruction of the Old heaven and earth he witnessed a newly created heaven and earth. The New World is created after the destruction of the Old World in which Jesus Christ reigns forever. The New Narnia represents the Aslan's country whereas the New Earth represents the city of New Jerusalem as mentioned in the Bible, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Rev. 21.2).

#### Seven Lords

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Prince Caspian after he becomes the King of Narnia sails towards the Lone Islands in a pursuit of the lost Seven Lords of Telmarine noble council namely: Lord Bern, Lord Octesian, Lord Restimar, Lord Rhoop, Lord Mavramorn, Lord Revilian and Lord Argoz. These Seven Lords are sent on a voyage by Miraz to find out

the lands situated near Eastern Ocean but they never return. Paul.F.Ford in his book *Companion to Narnia: a Complete Guide to the Magical World of C.S.Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia* mentions the Seven Lords, "They are REVILIAN, ARGOZ and MAVRAMORN (the THREE SLEEPERS); OCTESIAN, who met his end on DRAGON ISLAND; RESTIMAR, transformed into a golden statue on DEATHWATER ISLAND; RHOOP, the victim of the DARK ISLAND; BERN, who is made duke of the LONE ISLANDS" (386). Lord Bern is spotted in Narrowhaven and he is married. Lord Octesian is presumably killed by the dragon. Lord Restimar is believed to have died in the pool that changes any material into gold situated in Deathwater Island. Lord Revilian, Lord Mavramorn and Lord Argoz are likely to be engrossed into a slumber spotted near Aslan's Table. Lord Rhoop is spotted in Dark Island in a traumatized state.

Number Seven is a symbol of perfection. Christians believe that God has created this world in six days and made the seventh day holy. In the book of Isaiah, Seven Spirits of God is mentioned. Jesus Christ utters seven words before he dies on the cross. There is a special mention of Seven Lamps on the lampstand in the presence of God. Here, the Seven Lords represent the Seven Churches mentioned in the book of Revelations namely: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Ephesus loses its early love towards god and runs behind the worldly pleasures. It can be compared to Lord Bern who completely forgot his purpose and got married. Smyrna is known for its sufferings. It can be compared to Lord Rhoop who lost his sanity due to the ordeal he had gone through. Pergamum is known for its selfishness and supposed to repent for having allowed false preachers to corrupt the church and becoming a seat for Satan. This Pergamum church can be compared to the three Lords: Lord Revilian, Lord Mavramorn and Lord Argoz who were selfish and indulged in a feud for the power. Thyatira is known for its charity but it is overwhelmed by the false prophecy. Thyatira can be compared to Lord Restimar who was caught hold of desire and went behind gold and died in the pool of gold. The Church of Laodicea is stagnated in a lukewarm state. It can be associated with Lord

Octesian who wanted gold and at the same time wanted to complete his purpose.

### Lion

Paul.F.Ford in his book *Companion to Narnia: a Complete Guide to the Magical World of C.S.Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia* beautifully describes Aslan, "The Lion King of the land of Narnia and of all its creatures, the son of the EMPEROR-BEYOND-THE-SEA, true beast and the KING of beasts, the highest king over all high kings," (54). Aslan, the Lion is an apparent manifestation of Jesus Christ. Lion is a symbol of bravery and strength and it is vividly known for its majestic appearance. Jesus Christ has been considered as the Lion of Judah. The Bible identifies Jesus Christ as the root of David and depicts him as the Lion of Judah. 'The King of Jungle' is an accolade that has been given to the Lion. It is an embodiment of ferocity and kinship. Likewise, Jesus Christ has been identified as 'The King of Kings'. The book of Revelation argues that the titles 'King of Kings' and 'Lord of Lords' are inscribed on the apparel and the thighs of Jesus Christ. Aslan is a son of the Emperor beyond the sea and he belongs to a heavenly kingdom and promptly helps his followers. Likewise, Jesus Christ is a son of God beyond the earth and he speaks about things pertinent to heaven. Aslan and Jesus Christ possess similar characteristics features that include compassion, loyalty, righteousness and upright living. Both Aslan and Jesus Christ focus in educating their followers with moral values through questions and parables by making them to introspect themselves for their better understanding and their unconditional love towards their followers strengthen their hearts to accept the death happily.

A parallel is drawn between Aslan's sacrifice on the stone bench and Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Aslan accepts death penalty instead of Edmund whereas Jesus Christ accepts death penalty in place of the people who were sinners. The Bible says, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2.2). Narnians strongly believe that the sacrifice of Aslan has saved them from the clutches of the Witch whereas Christians strongly believe that the selfless sacrifice of Jesus Christ has saved them from the yoke

of their sins. Aslan and Jesus Christ win over their death and resurrect. On the other hand, Lion belongs to cat family and exhibits its playful nature. Aslan merrily plays with Susan and Lucy after his resurrection in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Similarly, Jesus Christ when he was alive he preferred to be in the vicinity of the children. In *The Last Battle*, Aslan sits on the throne for judgement whereas Christians believe that Jesus Christ will sit on the throne for last judgement.

### **The Witch**

Empress Jadis has been depicted as the White Witch. The White Witch is a paradox. Generally, witches are associated with black magic and darkness. The portrayal of Empress Jadis as White Witch denotes that she considers Aslan as her equal. Her obsession with power makes her to think Aslan as her only eligible rival. She eats the forbidden apple of life in order to retain her youth for thousand years so as to conquer Narnia and she tempts Digory to taste the apple of life. Jadis is known for her hubris and she wants to take control over the City of Charn. She is cursed and sent to a different world. Empress Jadis is a symbol of fallen Satan. Satan is considered as bright as lighting. Jesus talks about Satan that he saw Satan falling from heaven like a lightning. The qualities of Jadis have been inspired by the qualities of Satan. Satan wants to prove his authority over the God and the world. His glory has been taken from him the moment he considers himself superior to God. Ever since he is thrown out of the heaven he is surrounded by darkness but he pretends to be a bright angel as mentioned in the Bible that Satan disguises himself as a light bearing angel. Jadis has been portrayed as the White Witch who has been camouflaging as an agent of light. According to the Bible, in the Garden of Eden, Satan attempts to tempt Eve with his deceiving words by asking her to eat the forbidden fruit from tree of life. Jadis tries to deceive Digory and Satan tries to deceive Eve. Satan is defeated and chained by Jesus Christ through his resurrection for thousand years. Jadis is defeated by Aslan through his resurrection and imprisoned for many years.

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