

The Christian Elements in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

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Abstract—This paper mainly dedicates to analyze the Christian elements in *The lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the novel, both the settings and characters have their archetypes in the Bible. By analyzing the archetypes, the author tries to probe into its Christian themes.

Keywords—Christian elements; archetype; theme

I. INTRODUCTION

C. S. Lewis, a well-known author and apologist, is best known by people of all ages for his seven volume series entitled *The Chronicles of Narnia*. *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe* is a fantasy novel for children, written in 1950 and set in approximately 1940. It is the first book of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and is the best known book of the series. C.S. Lewis insisted that “the best children’s books are not loved only by children.” So his purpose of writing cannot be only to entertain the children readers. Though he did not plan to write a fictional book that succeeded in using apologetics, Lewis admitted that *The Chronicles of Narnia* had some Christian elements. So, this paper mainly dedicates to analyzing the Christian elements of *the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* from the aspect of setting and characters and tries to probe into its Christian themes.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe told the story of four ordinary children: Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie. It happened during the Second World War. They were sent away from London to the house of an old Professor because of the air-raids. They discovered that the wardrobe in the professor’s house led to the magical land of Narnia. The inhabitants are fauns, beavers, dwarves, tree elves etc. But while Aslan, the great Lion, was away from Narnia, the country was occupied by an evil white witch. She oppressed the inhabitants and subjected them to the eternal winter. “It’s she that makes it always winter. Always winter and never Christmas.” The four children fulfilled an ancient, mysterious prophecy as they helped Aslan save Narnia from the evil white witch. Then Narnia came back to its normal seasons. The four children became the two kings and two queens respectively in the end. Years later, they accidentally crossed the wardrobe while hunting and returned to the real world.

Religion and literature have been intertwined with each other and they are one of the important fields of human spiritual life. Both of them embody human’s pursuit and

exploration of ideal life. Christian culture has become an important expression of human culture, which has exerted a profound influence on western literature and their writers. Lewis was one of them who were deeply influenced by Christian culture and he even had been called the unofficial spokesperson for Christianity. Most part of his life was dedicated to his Christian belief. There is no doubt that his works are under the influence of Christianity or have some biblical elements. In the archetypal criticism theory, Canadian famous scholar Northrop Frye has made it clear that literature is not the mere imitation and representation of nature and society, but the embodiment of myth and ritual. He believes that literature is the prototype form of myth and he thinks that literature is the “displaced myth”. The ancient religion and myth are displaced in modern times. In the novel, the displacements are expressed by the images of the characters, the plots of the story such as the plot of birth, death and victory etc., which finally contribute to the building of the holy themes. According to Frye, the myth is archetype. In the western literature, the biblical stories, characters, plots and even some Christian themes are the archetypes. In this thesis, we mainly discuss about the character archetypes in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. And then we try to analyze the theme of “sin and salvation”.

II. NARNIA’S ARCHETYPE — EDEN

Northrop Frye said in his *Great Code* that man lives, not directly or nakedly in nature like animals, but within a mythological universe, a body of assumptions and beliefs developed from his existential concerns. Most of this is held unconsciously, which means that our imaginations may recognize elements of it, when presented in arts or literature, without consciously understanding what it is that we recognize. The story of the Garden of Eden has long been accumulated as the collective unconsciousness in people’s hearts. Therefore, it is natural that Louis should imitate the Garden of Eden in his description of Narnia in his novel. And the Garden of Eden is Narnia’s archetype.

First, the birth of Narnia is similar to the birth of Eden. God whose spirit moved upon the face of the waters is the governor of the world. He created everything. The whole world was formed under God’s will. There was light and darkness, day and night, heaven and land, seas and rivers and all kinds of plants and animals. While the world of Narnia

was created by Aslan who was the king of all animals, “the son of the Emperor over the sea”. In the beginning of the birth of Narnia, Digory went to a place he had never been before. At first there was darkness everywhere, but soon there was a noise in the darkness. In the distance Aslan, the lion, walked back and forth and began to sing, and then all at once the darkness overhead was full of stars, and in that glorious moment thousands of stars and planets sprang up. The valley was green with grass and spread like a pool of water from the lion’s side. The creatures of Narnia were born with the thought of Aslan and the wild song of the lion made people want to run, jump or climb, and make people want to shout. In two similar powerful ways, God created Eden and Aslan created Narnia.

Second, both Eden and Narnia had rich and lush scene. According to Liang Gong, the myth of Eden itself contains the utopian spirit that the primitive people yearn for an ideal life. It is a picture depicting the harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature with simple lines and the original expression of the idealized relationship between human beings and nature. In the Bible, God made Adam out of the clay and he planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he put the man whom he had made. In the garden of Eden, every tree grow out of the ground, which “is pleasant to the sight, and good for food”. There are four rivers around the garden and “a river went out of Eden to water the garden...where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.” The scene in Eden is rich and lush. While in the Chronicles of Narnia, the forests of the kingdom of Narnia are also lush and flowery. There are also rivers and mountains, all kinds of plants and animals. The people of Narnia are part of nature and live in harmony with everything. All living things have the spirit. The Faun and Lucy hit it off immediately; Birds have spirits. They have the human nature and guide the four children to find the beaver. Trees have ears that can understand human’s speech, and petals that can be anthropomorphic. They have the power to move with the wind and change into human forms. No matter in the process of the creation or the creatures, the author has always used the garden of Eden as the model to create Narnia.

III. ASLAN’S ARCHETYPE — JESUS CHRIST

Clearly, Lewis had this in mind when writing the Narnia series. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* Aslan says that he is known in our world by another name. Hila, an 11 year-old, wrote to Lewis, asking Aslan’s name in this world. Lewis wrote back:

“As to Aslan’s other name, well I want you to guess. Has there been anyone in this world who: (1) arrived at the same time as Father Christmas; (2) said he was the son of a great emperor; (3) gave himself up for someone else’s fault to be jeered and killed by wicked people; (4) came to life again; (5) is sometimes spoken of as a Lamb... Don’t you really know His name in this world? Think it over and let me know your answer!”

Obviously, Aslan is the embodiment of Christ. In the novel, “He is the King. He is the lord of the whole wood, but

not often here, you understand. Never in my time or my father’s time.” And Aslan is called “the son of the Emperor over the sea” who can be compared to this world’s Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is the son of God whose spirit “moved upon the face of the waters.” Aslan seemed to have some mysterious power and something that beyond the nature just like Jesus Christ who is also the King of the Jew. When the Jew was in trouble, He would turn up to help them. When the four children heard that “They say Aslan is on the move—perhaps has already landed”, “Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror”, but the other three had a very comfortable just like they were in spring. When Father Christmas came to meet the Beavers and the three, the spring was coming. The cold winter was over. Jesus Christ arrived at the same time as Father Christmas. So Aslan is the Jesus Christ of Narnia. His coming will put all to rights and all evil things will vanish.

Aslan played the role of Jesus Christ in Narnia, especially when he sacrificed himself. Aslan took Edmund to his siblings and told Peter, Susan, and Lucy that: “there is no need to talk to him about what is past”. Here the author tried to publicize the biblical belief that human’s sin could be remitted by God’s forgiveness. In the novel, the white witch wanted to kill Edmund after he was rescued. She came to Aslan and wanted to have a talk with him. She said Edmund was hers and Edmund’s life was forfeit to her. Then Aslan had made up his mind to sacrifice himself for Edmund. At that night, Aslan went to the Stone Table by himself. The white witch had waited him. At first, Aslan was humiliated and shaved. He didn’t even resist. Instead, he chose death. He had decided to use his blood to save Edmund. The scene was similar with the time when Jesus was nailed to the Cross. The next day the rising of the sun had made everything look so different. “The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that runs down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan.” Aslan came back to life again because of the deep magic. “When a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the table was crack and Death itself would start working backwards.” There was a new Aslan who was full of power.

IV. EDMUND’S AND JADIS’ ARCHETYPE

Edmund was lured by the white witch and ate the Turkish delight which were full of the witch’s magic. He wanted to be the king and control the others, especially his brother Peter. And then he betrayed his brother and his sisters. In the Holy Bible, there are two archetypes of Edmund. One is Eve, the other is Judas. The serpent told Eve: “you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Then Eve ate the fruit, violating God’s will. So her people were punished by God. The second archetype is Judas. In John, the thirteenth chapter, it was said that Jesus Christ gave a piece of cake to Judas, who ate it and then “the devil having now put into the heart of Judas”. Because Edmund cannot resist the seduction of Turkish Delight and being the king. For a long time, Narnia was in a poorer state. In order to save Edmund, Aslan had to sacrifice himself.

The white witch, Jadis, believed that she was human. “It’s on that that she bases her claim to be Queen.” “She was one of the Jinn. That’s what she comes from on one side. And on the other she comes of the giants.” Jadis tried to control all the souls of Narnia. Whoever disobeyed, she would turn it into statue. At that time, she had ruled Narnia for hundred years and there were no Christmas which was used to celebrate the birth of Christ. She went against Aslan and wanted to rule Narnia forever. She seduced Edmund by some magical Turkish Delight and made him betrayed his siblings. Through Edmund’s betrayal, she could capture the four children. And she could defeat Aslan and control Narnia. She was the same serpent of the ancient times. The ancient serpent wanted to revenge God. So he lured Eve. The white witch and Satan had many in common.

V. THE ARCHETYPE OF THEME

Most of English literature works are about sin and the results of the sin. Evidently it has a close relation with religion. Sin and redemption are the most important themes in Christianity. The reason that God should do the work of redemption is that there is sin. According to the Gospel, there should be death and resurrection.

“Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”(Luke 24:7) After the crucifixion of Christ Jesus, the body was put into the tomb. After the Sabbath, at daybreak on the first morning of the week, the tomb was found empty and the large stones at the entrance were rolled away. A young man in a white suit was found sitting on the right. “He is not here, but is raised: remember how he spoke unto you when he was yet in Galilee”. (Luke 24:6) Go and tell his disciples say, “He has risen from the dead”. So they went and told people. Many people who had a close relationship with Jesus did not believe what they were saying. Then, Jesus appeared to his disciples, and they saw the risen Jesus as if he were alive. Later the disciples began to teach that Jesus was the risen Lord and that Jesus was the Christ Governor, the son of God. This shows people the miracle and power of the rebirth of life and is to enhance the believers’ faith of eternal life. The event of Jesus’ “resurrection” was the most direct and obvious motif of “resurrection” archetype, which is also full of religious meanings.

The “resurrection” archetype in the Bible is presented through the original sin and redemption. Therefore, the construction of the archetypal theme of resurrection is also inevitable in these two aspects: original sin and redemption. In *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*, Edmund is the second youngest of the four children. He is in the charge of Peter and Susan. But he wants to be out of the control of his brother and sister. He always did something evil to go against them. Once he entered the land of Narnia, he was lured by the turkish delight given by the white witch. That was his sin. He was told if he could bring his other siblings to the white witch, he would be the King of Narnia. When the four children were all in Narnia, they met with the beavers. In the beavers’, Edmund slipped away. He went to the witch’s castle. Then he told the witch about his brother

and sisters, even about Aslan. He betrayed them. Fortunately, Aslan stepped forward and exchanged his life for Edmund’s freedom, inspiring and encouraging all the creatures of Narnia with love, courage and responsibility. This reflects the original sin in the Bible. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”(Romans 5:19) According to the Christian belief, because Adam and eve were against the will of god and ate the forbidden fruit, the sin was passed on to the future generations, which was the root of all evils. Similarly, because of Jesus Christ’s salvation, all things are to be saved in order to restore its original state. This is the ultimate desire of God. It is because of the redemption and resurrection of the lion that brings hope to people, people began to follow Jesus Christ sincerely. Finally in the war Edmund was wounded. When he was dying, his sister’s Christmas present saved his life. And that was his resurrection. He was not only saved physically, but also mentally.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Chronicles of Narnia is a classic work of legendary literature, in which children read strange and vivid stories, older children decipher the codes of legends and myths from their adventures, while adults retrieve lost memories and interpret the sacred religious spirit. According to Frye, “the Bible is the chief source of undisplaced myth in our tradition.” That is to say, the Bible does not change myths or metaphors, the archetype is the original form. As a classical work that influences the culture and daily life of the western world, its profound influence on western literature can be imagined. The charm of the Chronicles of Narnia is to draw nourishment from the traditional Bible and interpret the traditional mythological archetypes. The environment, characters, and themes in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are both from the Bible. The influence of Holy Bible and its Christianity belief towards English literature was very great. Since C. S. Lewis had been called the unofficial spoke-person for Christianity, the Chronicles of Narnia can be regarded as the adventurous fairy tale edition of the Holy Bible.

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