Introduction

Harbinger of Christian Postmodernism

C.S. Lewis (Clive Staples Lewis) (1898–1963) is best known as a writer of children's literature, but he writes not simply "for juveniles."[1] He writes to overcome the inhibitions not only in children's minds, but in the minds of readers of all ages. He insists that the taste of children should be considered "human taste"[2] and not of less value simply because the literary establishment does not appraise juvenile taste highly. By inhibitions, he means the imperfection of humanity and the limited construction of language. He writes to question the modern critics who confine the boundaries of literary genres by age, the marginalization of the perspectives of mythology and Christianity, and the sidelining of "science fiction" and "fantasy literature."[3] He is, however, a pioneering writer of "Christian postmodernism" who rehabilitates the values discarded by modernist thought.

Lewis critically discusses the spiritual crisis of the modern world in fantasy and science fiction through philosophically accepting both multiple views and ultimately what transcends the limitation of humanity, as well as through rhetorically expressing the clash and integration of both "word" (rational explanation) and "image" (imaginative expression).

The definition of word and image in this paper includes what Stanley J. Grenz expresses with the same terms, but is not limited to his definition.[4] He means the different communicative styles between modernism and postmodernism, while this paper covers not only communicative styles, but also divided world views including literary genres, literary approaches

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1. *Lewis, On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, 48.
2. Ibid., 51.
3. Ibid., 55–56.
4. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 2.

(fact and fiction), academic disciplines, gender, and philosophy (naturalism and supernaturalism, history and myth, observation and faith).

Christian postmodernism is a new term not yet used in other publications, but a seemingly unconventional rhetoric that Lewis must have employed to reach the mindset of the postmodern world. The terms "word" and "image" are used to mean language available not only rhetorically but also theologically.[5] Although the meaning of the term "postmodern" or "postmodernism" differs according to author, "postmodern world" is more often observed, while Carl Rascheke uses "theological postmodernism" and "religious postmodernism."[6] The term "postmodernism" is generally used to mean the anti-modernist movement in and after the 1960s that advocates a multiplicity of philosophical and cultural notions, focusing on the peripheral values undermined by modernist thinkers. Crystal L. Downing associates postmodernism with the cultural trends between the 1960s and 1980s.[7] Grenz explains the developing attention on postmodernism in the 1970s.[8]

As postmodernism does, Lewis deconstructs the modernist's single interpretation of the truth—elevating reason (word) over faith (image)—and instead advocates the multiple perspectives of the world as well as what they transcend. He deconstructs the interpretation commonly accepted by the previous generation, stating that human interpretation is influenced by our cultural models in each time period, which Lewis calls "the accepted Model of the universe."[9]

Lewis's concept of Christian postmodernism is based on his understanding of the Gospel as a story of reconciliation between two incompatible worldviews: Christianity and mythology. By the term "Gospel," he means a true story which really happened in "actual human history."[10] He claims that the mythological stories of gods dead and risen are historically incarnated in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.[11] He affirms that what is vaguely

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5. In an interview conducted by the author with Dr. Eijun Senaha, Professor at Hokkaido University (Nov. 2008), he suggested the term "Christian postmodernism."

6. Rascheke, *The Next Reformation*, 69.

7. C. Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, 86–87.

8. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 22.

9. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 222.

10. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis Volume I*, 18.

11. "Jesus of Nazareth" is a term used to mean the historical figure Jesus; "Nazareth" in Galilee was Jesus's childhood hometown.

seen through mythologies comes into focus in the Gospel. By the term "myth," he means not a fake story fabricated by human beings, but a tool for communicating truth. He distinguishes between a fake story and fiction: the former is fabricated to deceive others, but the latter (as well as story and myth) is a medium for conveying truth.

This concept of mythology may sound contradictory to modern theologians, but its uniqueness is based on Lewis's personal experience when he converted to Christianity in 1931. He explains this conversion as being the result of history and mythology in a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves (Oct 18, 1931): God reveals Himself "through the mind of poets."[12] As a natural consequence, Lewis doubts modernist thoughts which separate mythology from Christianity. He rejects the modernist theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1886–1978) who demythologizes Christianity by excluding the supernatural from the Bible. Lewis refers to modernized Christianity as "watered down" Christianity.[13] He similarly rejects the modernist critics who separate the poema (external frame) and logos (myth or meaning), affirming that poetry (language) exists but has no meaning. He, however, claims that a poem is both Logos (something said) and Poiema (something made).[14] As Lewis scholar Bruce Edwards states, a poem is both *Logos* and *Poiema*: "Lewis would respond that such theorists forget or ignore."[15]

Lewis deconstructs the previous interpretations of the text influenced by the cultures of the time in order to invite the reader's participation in interpreting the meaning of the text. He does not emphasize the reader's single interpretation, but rather their collaboration with the author to reach an understanding beyond human interpretation. He asserts that the single viewpoint of a reader is not perfect for reading literature because humanity is not perfect. In his last work, *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), written two years before his death, He compares the modernist way of reading to being imprisoned—as if the reader is in a prison of his/her own value.[16] However, he proposes the transcendence of limited human construction in order to rehabilitate the joy of reading damaged by modernist thought: "I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do."[17] As Bruce

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12. Lewis, *The Collected Letters I*, 977.

13. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 24.

14. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 132.

15. Edwards, *A Rhetoric of Reading*, 61.

16. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 36.

17. Ibid., 141.

Edwards states, Lewis's reading lies in seeking "an enlargement of our being"[18]

Other Lewis scholars also contribute to the dialogue. David Downing discusses an echo between Lewis and Jacques Derrida: they both deconstruct modernist interpretation which is embedded by culturally generated languages.[19] James K.A. Smith similarly re-interprets the slogans of Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault in the context of Christianity.[20] Crystal Downing also opposes the general interpretation of taking the French philosopher's famous slogan, "nothing outside the text" as the abolition of meaning, and instead claims that Derrida resisted the modernist values along with other post-structural thinkers.[21]

Lewis's understanding of Christianity through the Gospel is creatively reflected in his approach to writing novels. This is especially true in descriptions of the identities of his characters moving between the ambiguous borders of fact (history) and fiction (mythology). This analysis of his works which challenge modern thought will reveal that he is a novelist of Christian postmodernism who advocates literary techniques not only of word and image but also beyond: supernatural understanding beyond human interpretation.

The first two chapters deal with his non-fiction, mainly selected to highlight his conviction of anti-modernism and his postmodern sensibilities. The other chapters deal with a discussion of three of his fictional works: *That Hideous Strength* (*THS*) (1945), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (*VDT*) (1952), and *Till We Have Faces* (*TWHF*) (1956), demonstrating his philosophical strategy as a novelist of Christian postmodernism. The selected works cover roughly his entire writing career as a novelist, and each work commonly features a female protagonist who is in a search of self-recognition. His Christian postmodernism is most vividly reflected in his female characters' activities of writing, reading, and speaking.

In chapter 1, a comparison of Lewis's thoughts with the generally reviewed opinions of modernism and postmodernism will reveal that he is an anti-modernist philosopher who welcomes postmodern sensibility as a contributor to multiple interpretations of the text among readers, and that he is a promoter of peripheral cultures. He respects the postmodernist

18. Edwards, *A Rhetoric of Reading*, 64.

19. D. C. Downing, "C.S. Lewis Among the Postmodernists," n.p.

20. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 23.

21. C. Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, 135.

process of exchanging arguments within the community in order to reach an understanding of meaning. He enjoys story-telling and discussions with his friends: when meeting regularly with his scholar-friends in the Inklings at Oxford; all through his life with close friend Arthur Greeves in Ireland; and in his later life with American poet Joy Davidman as his shadow-editor.

Lewis revived the forgotten genre of fantasy literature within the literary group named "the Inklings" who held an informal gathering twice a week (at Lewis's office in Magdalen College, Oxford, and the local pub, "Bird and Baby"). Colin Durietz evaluates the literary contribution of the Inklings' friendship, especially that of Lewis and Tolkien, to the birth of two works: *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.[22]

A discussion of modernism and postmodernism reveals that each thinker presents an individual definition. The difficulties of defining both thoughts are expressed by a number of critics, including Matei Calinescu, Brian McHale, Michael Bell, and Louis Markos, but modernism is commonly assumed by them as a background against which to define postmodernism, even though each specifies a different emphasis. Philosophers of Christian postmodernism, such as A.E. McGrath and Crystal Downing, similarly express the complexities of Christian postmodernism, but within the chosen terms, commonly express the value of multiple ideas situated in the context of community.

A discussion of Lewis in the context of postmodernism is not necessarily welcomed by many Lewis scholars. Some conclude that he is neither modernist nor postmodernist. The reason for their antipathy is a fear of both thoughts, based on their conclusion that both modernism and postmodernism are the dethroning of God. They negatively interpret these ideas, especially "postmodernism," according to two proposals by French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, as: "incredulity towards meta-narratives"[23] and "micro-narratives."[24] Louis Markos is one who interprets both as the abolishers of meaning in language, who alienate logos from poiema, word from image, and the natural from the supernatural.[25] Teruo Kuribayashi analyzes how modernist philosophy de-Christianized Western

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22. Durietz, *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis*, 141.
23. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii.
24. Ibid., xxiv.
25. Markos, *From Achilles to Christ*, 112.

society and was adopted for Christian ministry and mission around the turn of the twentieth century.[26]

The positive voices for Christian postmodernism do not deny the complicated nature of Lewis's writings. In his *A Rhetoric of Reading* (1986), Bruce L. Edwards discusses Lewis's rhetoric of reading as the "antidote" to help the modern reader resist imposing their own consciousness upon the text. In his essay "The Lion Still Roars" (2010), he observes two different counter-reactions to Lewis and postmodernism in academic circles, stating that he is both a rationalist and a romantic. More sharply than Edwards, David Downing views Lewis as a postmodernist, discussing him in the context of postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida: "Like Derrida, Lewis emphasizes that all analysis is situated, that there is no position of utter objectivity from which one may think about thinking itself."[27]

Crystal Downing positively categorizes Lewis within Christian postmodernism, as she welcomes the ethos as a possibility to have her rejected story accepted. She states that postmodernism allows her to more often present her Christian views in an academic platform.[28] Harry Lee Poe also favorably estimates postmodernity as a good opportunity for Christians to define the new culture.[29]

In chapter 2, the discussion firstly analyzes Christian postmodernism in comparison with modernist and postmodernist novels, and secondly, explores the reason behind Lewis as a traditional thinker choosing the seemingly unconventional rhetoric of Christian postmodernism. The novels of Christian postmodernism will be defined through two comparisons: firstly, between his anti-modernist notion and his first novel *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1935), and secondly, between the postmodern literary techniques of four selected British postmodern works and the source material for his literary approaches.

The study of sources for Lewis's literary approaches will reveal that his reading experience, especially medieval literature, produces his literary approaches which happen to fit the mind in a postmodern world. The medieval writers use word and image in order to seek not only spiritual discovery but also self-recognition—the approaches echoing contemporary style.

26. Kuribayashi, "Kindai-go O Saguru Posutomodan Shingaku: Gendai Amerika No Shingaku Jijou," 11–55.

27. D. C. Downing, "C.S. Lewis among the Postmodernists," n.p.

28. C. Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, 104.

29. Poe, *Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*, 21.

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Through reading classical literature, including the Bible, Lewis is possibly inspired by such postmodern approaches as: the Apostle Paul's method of speaking within the discourse of the reader, the dialogic potential of language, the joy of reading in any genre, and the reader's participation. Many of the characters of his novels are described as moving between the borders of genres, fact and fiction, and the time-zones between the contemporary and the mythological (Greco-Roman, Irish, and Nordic). Further, the ambiguous identity of a persona can change between narrator, writer, and reader.

Reviving the joy of reading fiction is what Lewis wishes to rehabilitate in every genre, including those of science fiction and fantasy. He denounces the modern critics' dogmatic attitudes that exclude the works of William Morris and George MacDonald simply because they are "popular works"[30] and that ignore fantasy literature as the anti-canon in the history of literature.[31] As Bruce Edwards states, the joy of reading beyond genre is Lewis's strategy for "revitalizing and reintroducing forgotten works and authors."[32]

Lewis speaks within the discourse of the reader, in a similar way to the Apostle Paul—the writer of the epistles in the New Testament. When Paul talks to the Athenians, the Hebrew speaker not only switches languages (between Hebrew and Greek) according to the audience, but also recites a Greek poem familiar to the Greeks in order to make his message more accessible to the local citizen (Acts 17:29). He re-interprets Greek poems within the context of his worldview—the Gospel—and recounts a retold story of the poems to the Greeks. Lewis adapts this strategy of story-telling into his novels: the author enters Greek, Irish, and Icelandic mythologies, reinterpreting the old stories within the context of the Gospel and regenerating a retold myth for his contemporary reader in the form of word, image, and beyond.

As a writer, Lewis sought to restore the reader's participation in the process of interpreting, rehabilitating, and harmonizing the roles of both the author and reader as interpreters. Through his war experience on French battlefields during World War I, he finds modern minds numbed because of an inability to interpret meaning. His autobiographical book, *Surprised by Joy* (1955), recounts his memory of an increasing fright at the impending experience of the fight, rather than the experience of the fight

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30. Lewis, *On Stories*, 90.
31. Ibid., 51.
32. Edwards, *A Rhetoric of Reading*, 84.

itself. Young Lewis arrives at the front line trenches on his nineteenth birthday in November 1917.[33] On the actual battlefield, he is devoid of emotion due to the deprivation of his interpretive power. Through his war experience, he comes to realize that his contemporary readers are troubled by the changing values of language.[34]

For an analysis of postmodern literature, four British novels will be under discussion, in the chronological order of their publications: Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* (1954), Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). These British novelists, selected from Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction*, started writing around the 1960s—a time approximately corresponding to Lewis's death—and composed metafictional works to reflect language in the dialogic process, as insisted by Mikhail Bakhtin. Waugh introduces the novels which Bakhtin refers to as dialogue-oriented and which opposes the determination.[35] Although the conflict of voices is rectified in realistic fiction through their subjection to the supreme voice, she affirms that meta-fiction reveals the impossibility of such a resolution.[36]

Lewis enjoys literary encounters with female writers, both real and imaginary, including two contemporary writers, Dorothy L. Sayers and Joy Davidman, as well as one medieval philosopher, Julian of Norwich (Julian). In addition to Sayers and Davidman, Lewis exchanges ideas with a number of female pen pals, including an American woman (name unspecified, but later revealed as Mary Willis Shelburne)[37] and Sister Penelope.[38]

Very little has been critically discussed concerning Lewis and women writers, but Sayers, Davidman, and Julian all affect his literary styles. Although the male-oriented world of Oxford was strictly cautious about female writers in the mid-twentieth century, Sayers encourages Lewis to think of a new image for a novel featuring a female character, while Davidman inspires Lewis with the complete image of Psyche for his last novel *TWHF* (1956). Julian's mystic words lead him to approaches echoing contemporary

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33. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 217–19.

34. Edwards, *An Examined Life*, 79–101.

35. Waugh, *Metafiction*, 6.

36. Ibid., 6.

37. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady*.

38. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis Volume II,* 264, 452, and 495. Lewis, Walter Hooper's *C.S. Lewis: A Complete Guide to His Life & Works*, 719.

style. She writes of her mystic experience with both word and image, and beyond, in order to seek spiritual pursuit as well as self-recognition. The contemporary reader will be impressed by an echo between Christian postmodernism and the medieval female writer.

Chapters 3 through 5 chronologically review Lewis's selected novels and cover his entire writing career. An analysis of his concept of language, philosophy, and literature in chapters 3, 4, and 5, illuminates him as a novelist of Christian postmodernism who writes not only to access postmodernist readers through the clash and harmony of word and image, but also to claim supernatural understanding beyond human interpretation.

Also in chapter 3, the last book of his space trilogy, *THS*, invites readers to respond to the interpretation of the sleeping magician, Merlin, and to rehabilitate language beyond the limited image of self-identity. In chapter 4, the multiple directions of the major characters in *VDT* demonstrate Lewis's notions of directions, not only of the ship, but also the other main characters, which are a reflection of the postmodernist sensibility in *VDT*. Just like the medieval Irish imram—a literature genre about adventurous voyages—the modern imram *VDT* sails eastward to find paradise not just in and beyond the east, but also to the west and beyond. In chapter 5, the tremors, or radiating influences, of four characters (three women and one man) in Lewis's last novel, *TWHF*, reveal that he presents a drama of death and resurrection through his retelling of both Greco-Roman and Norse myths.

The new century saw a rise in academic discussions of Lewis's writings. The year 2005, in particular, saw an increased number of academic publications on Lewis, in the run up to the release of a cinematic production of part of the Narnia series.[39] Lewis scholars have been editing more books and papers, which is adding significantly to the total number of academic papers about him. This discussion of Lewis as a harbinger of Christian postmodernism will contribute to illuminating him as a novelist still relevant in the twenty-first century.

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39. The academic responses to Lewis literature in and around 2005 are analyzed in the introduction of my annotated bibliography written in 2007, "An Annotated Bibliography 1989–2007: C.S. Lewis's Thoughts on Mythology, Paganism and Christianity in *The Horse and His Boy* and *Till We Have Faces*," *Eijun Senaha's Torch*. http://rose.hucc.hokudai.ac.jp/~p16571/libraries/bibliographies/pdf/yuasa.pdf.