

A Psychoanalytical Study of Character Development in C.S. Lewis' The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe

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Abstract

Children's literature provides insight into human nature and personality development. As such it has been analyzed through several perspectives, one of which is psychoanalysis. This research paper is a qualitative analysis of C.S. Lewis' novel The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe through a psychoanalytical angle. The paper aims to explore the character development of the Pevensie children using the psychoanalytical theory of object relations by Donald Winnicott. It is argued that Winnicott's theoretical concepts stated in his theory of object relations provide an understanding of changes within characters and maturity attained by them. This paper employs Winnicott's psychoanalytical approach to offer fresh insights and knowledge about the selected novel. The textual analysis reveals that the children's perceptions, thoughts and personalities, which constitute their inner world, undergo development by interacting with the dual outer worlds presented in the narrative. The outer reality of their uncle's home and the alternate outer reality of Narnia significantly impact their character development through interaction with key objects in both the worlds, resulting in transformations in the children's psyche and behaviors. Each world has its own potential to impact and transform the characters' inner reality, psyche, and actions

because of the presence of different objects or environments. Two key conclusions can be drawn from the application of theoretical insights to the novel: one, variation in the environment can cause changes in character development as observed in all Pevensie children, and secondly, a constant state of environment can also have different effects on different characters as depicted in the contrasting behavior of Edmund from the other Pevensie children.

Keywords: Children's literature, C.S. Lewis, psychoanalysis, Winnicott, object relations.

A Psychoanalytical Study of C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*

In the introduction to his book *Understanding Children's Literature*, Peter Hunt (2002) mentions the amorphous nature of children's literature as a genre that has traditionally been neglected by intellectuals and relegated to the sidelines because it is the province of women, a genre considered "overtly" educational and commercial (p. 1) as well as "complex" and the "liveliest and most original" art form (p. 2). It is a paradoxical genre as "children's literature is important- and yet it is not" (Hunt, 2002, p. 2). Just as it is difficult to define children's literature, it is also difficult to define the state of childhood as it can vary for different places and times (p. 4). The latest term applied to books classified as children's literature is crossover fiction which is heralded as "the prominent genre of the new millennium" (Sandra L. Beckett, 2008, p. 1). Crossover literature is considered as "a new trend" and "an invention of the twenty- first century" (ibid.). Fiction can cross over from adults to children and vice versa and "readers of all ages: children, adolescents and adults" are the audience (p. 3). The current research is a study of children's literature, focusing on Clive Staples Lewis's novel *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (1950). The novel is the first in a series of novels called *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The present study interprets the novel through Donald Winnicott's psychoanalytical theory known as the object relations theory.

The research article aims to understand the character development of Pevensie children through an engagement with the world in which they live and the world of Narnia to which they are transported. The paper attempts to answer this research question: How can the character development of Pevensie children be understood through Winnicott's object relations theory? The paper argues that the character development of Pevensie children can be understood through their experiences and interactions in the two worlds of their uncle's home and Narnia. The limited means and resources used in conducting this research and collecting the literature review have shown that

this psychoanalytical approach by Winnicott has not been used previously in the analysis of the selected novel. The current research is limited to the analysis of only this selected novel from the angle of Winnicott's object relations theory.

The research paper is organized in the following way: First, it gives a brief overview of children's literature, states the research aim and research question, research gap and delimitation. The second section of literature review briefly explains various psychoanalytic theories used in the interpretation of children's literature and previous psychoanalytic studies of the selected novel. Thirdly, the paper explains the theoretical framework used in the present research. Fourthly, the selected novel is analyzed using the stated theoretical basis, that is, the theory of object relations. The last section offers a conclusive discussion on the textual analysis.

Literature Review

Psychoanalytical Analysis of Children's Literature

Due to the vast range of children's literature, it has been argued that a variety of critical techniques should be used for its analysis (Hunt, 2002). One of the various perspectives from which children's literature has been analyzed is psychological analysis of children's fiction. In the book chapter *Reading the Unconscious: Psychoanalytic Criticism*, Hamida Bosmajian describes some psychoanalytic theories which have impacted children's literature (2002, p. 101). These are the Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian, ego psychological, object relations theories and feminist responses to these theories.

In the light of Freudian criticism, the literary work is seen as an expression of the author's "therapeutic release" (Bosmajian, 2002, p. 101). Freud proposed the triad of "unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious" in which the unconscious refers to infantile and instinctual pleasures,

the pre-conscious refers to conflicted desires and conflicts of an individual which are reflected in the conscious (p. 102). Carl Jung considers a literary work as the product of an author's intentionality as well as overpowering thoughts (p. 103). Jung's theory of the self and ego moves from a stage of wholeness to the loss of wholeness or ego- alienation to life- long growth and quest through "symbols and archetypes" (ibid.). Another psychoanalytic criticism is based on Jacques Lacan's theoretical views. He proposed the three stages of infant development as the imaginary or the mirror, the symbolic and the real (p. 107). The literary text is perceived as a reflection of the unconscious which is structured like language (108). Another concept of ego psychology by Karen Horney and Abraham Maslow proposed that self- realization occurs through social acceptance, formation of good relations, creativity and constructive forces called the "Third Force" (p. 105). When applied to literature, the theory analyzes the protagonist as reconciling with social norms (ibid.). Yet another theory of object relations by Melanie Klein focuses on the fragmentation of ego and its projection of feelings to an object. The feminist criticism responds to psychoanalytic theories in several ways by focusing on female development through social construction, the "body-self relations" specific to the female experience, the mother- daughter relations etc. (p. 109).

Donald W. Winnicott's Object Relations Theory

In addition to these psychoanalytical theories, Donald W. Winnicott's object relations theory is also a key concept in psychoanalytical study. Winnicott's concept of "transitional object", refers to an external object. This object is distinct from a hidden desire. It plays an important role in the distinction between "me / not me" and in interpreting the text and its images (Bosmajian, 2002, p. 107). Thus, Winnicott's theory focuses on relationships with objects as major factors in personality development.

Psychoanalytical Studies on Lewis' 'The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe'

A lot of research has interpreted the novel *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* from psychoanalytic perspectives. The novel has been analyzed from Freudian psychoanalytic viewpoint by Suwastini et al. The researchers study the characterization of the youngest of the four Pevensie siblings, Lucy Pevensie, the effect of her characterization on other characters and its impact on plot development using Freudian concepts of id, ego and superego. The id or the unconscious desire for pleasure is reflected in Lucy's curiosity to enter the wardrobe (Suwastini et al., 2020, p. 51). Her ego or rational mind is evident in her decision to re-enter the wardrobe on the next rainy day to confirm the validity of her previous experience of journeying into Narnia (p. 52). Her ego affects Edmund's id as he follows her into the wardrobe to satisfy his desire to tease her (p. 53). Lucy's superego is exhibited in the way she convinces her siblings to save Mr. Tumnus (ibid.). All these and other instances pointed out by the researchers also impact the novel's plot development.

A study by Hanna Ottoson also investigates the character of Lucy, her psychological development and the "realization of her repressed desires" through her journey into Narnia (2010, p. 1). The study finds Lucy to be a complex and realistic character with positive and negative traits who develops through her experiences in Narnia (p. 21). Suryadi and Dariyana analyze Lucy's character to understand her extent of empowerment (2022). The study finds that she has all three kinds of empowerment namely thought, feeling and action empowerment (Suryadi & Dariyana, p. 213).

Another study by Sluti Halder (2022) investigates Edmund Pevensie's character to answer the problem statement whether he is an anti-hero due to his betrayal, or just another character suffering from Freudian imbalance (p. 792). Halder uses the Freudian concepts of id, ego and superego to

analyze Edmund's character and find that he suffers from an excess of id which is why he behaves in a self-centric way to gratify his desires of power over all Narnia, pleasure at the Turkish delight, betrayal of his family to the White Witch (p. 795). His "moral conscience" (superego) and realistic mind (ego) are suppressed because of excessive id (ibid.). On the other hand, Peter's character signifies a balance of id, ego and superego which makes him a natural leader, mature and brave boy (ibid.). R. Jeba Prina (2021) also analyzes Edmund's character according to Freudian theories and compares him with three parables from the Bible Luke Chapter 15. Edmund is called the "prodigal son" who returns home after disobeying the father (Prina, 2021, p. 77). His character undergoes transformation during his time with the evil queen, which prepares him to be a better person in future (ibid.).

A study by Sarah Geil (2016) throws light on the significance of birth order in the novel. Birth order theories are based on Sigmund Freud's work to explain the importance of family (p. 3). Alfred Adler, a neo-Freudian researcher based his theory of birth order on his own experiences and social structure to define how choices made by people are determined by these factors (as cited in Geil, 2016, p. 3). In the novel, Peter, by virtue of his birth order as the firstborn, has an adult role and an authoritative position compelling for the "High King" of Narnia (Geil, 2016, p. 4). Susan represents the practical, sensible, peacekeeping, and motherly middle child, whereas Edmund represents another type of middle child who must overcome a feeling of inferiority to become mature (p. 5). Lucy is the youngest or the lastborn who is caring, innocent and loving, but also full of curiosity and creativity (p. 6).

Susan Rowland (2009) analyzes the novel from the Jungian perspective of the imaginary and creative other space in contrast to Freudian ideas on sexuality as she finds Jung's ideas can provide a meaningful "cultural, historical and political" context and autonomy to texts (p. 2). She considers

the novel as “shamanistic” or a “borderland” narrative (p. 9) capable of providing healing power and multiple stories, that is, “a trauma story and a new origin story” (p. 11). Loss of their home due to the war and fighting the war against the White Witch are trauma stories, whereas discovering their new identities as monarchs in Narnia is an example of an origin story (ibid.). Hence, Narnia is the real embodiment of the Pevensie children’s creativity and unconscious (p. 12). Rowland thinks that Narnia is neither a secondary or derivative world nor an expression of adult psychology, rather it is a “real and necessary” albeit impermanent world (ibid.). The characters undergo psychic experiences and learn to talk to animals in Narnia juxtaposed to the war and their physical selves in England (ibid.). The readers are also a part of this imaginative process through reading which is “real” and becomes the source of transferring Jungian “archetypal energy” (ibid.).

The novel has also been read from an allegorical perspective. Rowland thinks that the novel is only partly allegorical as it offers a much “more participatory and transformative” experience to the reader than simply offering a Christian allegory which is there in the form of Aslan’s death and resurrection (p. 4). Another critic reads the novel from the WWII historical perspective and equates Narnia with Europe, the White Witch with Hitler and the four siblings with the four Allied powers, that is, Britain, France, the US and the Soviet (Nikolajeva, 2002, as cited in Ottoson, 2010, p. 8).

In short, these studies indicate that the novel has been analyzed from Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytical viewpoints. The current research analyzes the novel from another psychoanalytical theory which has not been employed so far in re- reading Lewis’ novel *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*.

Theoretical Framework

The present research is a qualitative study that analyzes C. S. Lewis' novel *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* using the psychoanalytical theory of object relations proposed by Donald Winnicott. The key concepts of Winnicott's object relations theory are transitional objects, transitional phenomenon, and an intermediate area of experience.

Transitional Object

According to Winnicott, an infant develops a sense of his own personality as distinct from the outside world using an object. The 'me/ not me' distinction depends on the infant's engagement with this object. This is the transitional object which can be the mother herself, her breast, or any toy or blanket.

Transitional Phenomenon

First, the transitional object is perceived by the infant as part of himself. This is the stage of illusion. The infant has subjective experiences related to this object. The subjective thoughts, feelings, and actions of the infant help in enhanced engagement with that transitional object. These subjective experiences are called transitional phenomenon (Winnicott, 1971, p. 3).

Intermediate Area of Experiencing

This in-between area between the self and reality is called the "intermediate area of experiencing" (Winnicott, 1970, p. 2). This is a "resting place" where "inner and outer reality" are "separate yet interrelated" (p. 2). At a later stage, the infant is disillusioned and considers the object as separate from himself, signifying that the child has developed an objective perception of reality. Thus, the focus of the theory is on the inner and outer realities and the roles of the transitional object,

transitional phenomena, and intermediate area of experience in making a distinction between the inner world and outer world, between subjectivity and objectivity. In a literary text, a character passes through these stages to attain change and maturity.

Textual Analysis

C.S. Lewis' novel *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* offers an interesting insight from the object relations theoretical perspective. There exists an outer reality, an inner world or reality, and another outer reality in the narrative. Both the outer worlds are inhabited by various objects which function as transitional objects. The children interact with these objects in different ways; hence they experience transitional phenomena. The passageway between the two outer realities can be classified as the intermediate area of experience.

Outer World and Transitional Objects in the Novel

At the outset of the novel, the Pevensie children have been sent to their uncle's home due to war. Their uncle's home is the outer world which they explore and understand. Their inner selves are dependent on the uncle himself, the housekeeper, and their explored areas to bridge that gap between their subjective experiences of reality and objective reality. Their subjective perceptions of reality constitute the transitional phenomenon in the narrative. In this outer world of their uncle's home, the uncle, and the housekeeper, all these explored areas function as transitional objects.

When the children first come to the Professor's house, they like the independence it offers as Peter declares: "This is the sort of house where no one's going to mind what we do" (C.S. Lewis, 1950, p. 2). The large house with its "long passages", "rows of doors" and "empty rooms" both fascinated and intimidated the children (ibid.). Peter calls it a "wonderful place" and expresses his desire and aim to "go and explore tomorrow" (ibid.). The siblings expect to find eagles, badgers, foxes, and

rabbits in the surroundings (ibid.). During their first round of exploration of the house, Lucy stays behind in the room with the wardrobe and unexpectedly discovers the land of Narnia. Though she was “frightened”, she was also “inquisitive” and “excited” (p. 4). This subjectivity of feeling and the action of exploring on Lucy’s part refers to the transitional phenomena.

Intermediate Area of Experience and Another Outer World in the Novel

When the children discover the wardrobe, it becomes the intermediate area between this outer world and another outer world, that is, Narnia. The children move between the two worlds and gain rich experience and knowledge from this engagement with the other outer world and its transitional objects. The wardrobe becomes a symbol of transition, an other-worldly portal and “an intermediate area of experiencing” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 2) that signifies a gap between the children and their external worlds. Lucy thinks to herself: “I can always get back if anything goes wrong” (Lewis, 1950, p. 4). It is up to the children to come to terms with the parallel reality of Narnia. One by one, they discover the truth of Lucy’s statement and realize the existence of a separate world. Once they have accepted the reality of Narnia and gained wisdom through their adventures, they are transported back to this world. By the end of the story, the wardrobe again transports them back to the world on this side signifying the maturity of their inner selves. The Professor tells them: “Once a King in Narnia, always a King in Narnia” (p. 100).

The transitional objects in the other outer world are numerous: the lamp- post, the fawn, the beavers, Turkish Delight, Father Christmas, the gifts given to the children by him, Aslan, the White Witch, the thrones at Cair Paravel, the stone statues in the Witch’s house, the stone table, and the White Stag. The children’s thoughts and feelings about these objects constitute the transitional

phenomena. The engagement with these transitional objects leads to their eventual maturation and personality development.

Mr. Tumnus, the fawn, is the first source of introduction to the new outer world. Hence, he is the transitional object that helps Lucy's inner self to realize the outer world of Narnia. For Edmund, the first transitional object is the character of the cruel White Witch. Hence, there is a sharp difference in the thoughts and behaviours Lucy and Edmund have. The role of Mr. Tumnus as a transitional object is supportive and defensive as if Lucy and the fawn "had known one another all their lives" (p. 6). On the other hand, the White Witch's role as a transitional object is unhealthy and malnourishing. This is obvious from the fact that Edmund feels "uncomfortable" when Lucy tells him she's a "terrible person" (p. 20). He tells lies to his siblings from the very first time he discovered the wardrobe's secret. The Turkish Delight serves as another transitional object that shapes Edmund's sense of the outer Narnian world. He is bewitched by the queen's false promises of power and riches. He entertains thoughts of his own grandeur and supremacy over Peter, which constitute the transitional phenomena in his case. In Lucy's case, the thought of saving Mr. Tumnus shapes her behaviours. Hence, the contrasting transitional phenomena and transitional objects impact the actions and character development of Lucy and Edmund.

When Peter and Susan discover Narnia, they apologize to Lucy for not believing her before (p. 28). Their behaviours are also determined by the transitional objects they encounter, which are the beavers. Lucy, Peter and Susan interact with the beavers to get an update on the current political turmoil and restlessness in Narnia. Their succeeding thoughts and actions are formulated by these interactions. But Edmund does not interact with these transitional objects as he slips away quietly while the others are listening to the beavers. The same transitional object can have a different impact on characters. For instance, when the children begin to follow the robin, Edmund questions

Peter about the authenticity of the robin as a trustworthy guide: “How do we know which side that bird is on?” (p. 32). He goes on to add: “Which is the right side? How do we know that the fauns are in the right and the Queen is in the wrong?” (ibid.). This statement helps in understanding the different trajectories that Edmund and his siblings go on. It also helps in understanding why the Narnians are divided into two pro- Witch and anti- Witch groups. This is also a general commentary by Lewis on the nature of war and relative morality of people. People’s actions and personalities are determined by their subjective experiences and engagements with transitional objects.

Likewise, the characters of Aslan and Father Christmas function as transitional objects that inspire the children and the anti- Witch Narnians to rebel against her evil regime, whereas the evil power mongers feel threatened by the arrival of Christmas and Aslan. Even hearing the name “Aslan” created different emotions within each sibling as Edmund felt “horror”; Peter felt “brave”; Susan felt delightful, and Lucy felt the sensation of new beginnings (p. 35). Peter’s sword, Susan’s bow and arrow and her ivory horn and Lucy’s cordial are gifts that bring out the best traits of each character. These serve as objects that inspire moral courage, bravery, and perseverance. So, before receiving these gifts, the siblings were on their way to meet Aslan, but when they use these gifts during war, they make that transition from their old self to their new self and emerge as mature, stronger and wiser humans. Edmund also realizes the error of his dependence on the Witch and learns renewed engagement with Aslan and his siblings before and during the war. Aslan shows Peter the thrones of Cair Paravel and later takes Lucy and Susan to the Witch’s castle to transform the stone statues back to life. Here, the thrones serve as objects inspiring responsibility and the statues are symbolic of the witch’s arbitrary power. The stone- table at which Aslan sacrifices his life becomes symbolic of re- birth, regeneration, and miracles. Since Lucy and Susan witness the

whole episode of Aslan being killed and rejuvenated, their characters are the most transformed due to this engagement with the transitional objects of Aslan and the stone- table. They undergo fear, sorrow, incredulity and finally happiness and feel empowered to take on the witch.

Besides, the lamp-post serves as a symbol or a transitional object that marks the entry into a different land. Lucy and Edmund discover it on their first arrival in Narnia. Years later, as the adult queens and kings of Narnia the grown- up children find the lamp- post and go beyond in search of the white stag. Hence, the lamp- post is a transitional object signifying change, whereas the white stag is a transitional object inspiring curiosity and quest.

On their arrival back into the world of their uncle's home, the Professor believes their story which is an affirmation of the children's experiences and their renewed identity and sense of self. They are known as "King Peter the Magnificent", "Edmund the Just", "Susan the Gentle" and "Queen Lucy the Valiant" (p. 98). The Professor himself, being a transitional object, lends credence to the children's experiences and helps in the attainment of wisdom and maturity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper contends that there are two kinds of outer worlds or outer realities in the novel. The children's psyche and feelings constitute their inner reality. Their experiences in both the worlds constitute their transitional phenomena which help them to interact with transitional objects and gain a better understanding of the distinction between self and reality. The wardrobe works as the intermediate area of experience that transports the characters from one reality to the other and back again. This proves to be an important step in their character growth, personality development and psychological maturity. Various textual references support this argument.

An alternate application of the theory also comes to mind, but it is rejected on further probing. It may be possible to consider the uncle's home as constituting an objective reality. The wardrobe functions as an intermediate area. The children discover an alternate reality in the form of Narnia which can be considered a part of their inner reality. While all the rest of the objects in Narnia remain transitional objects, Narnia loses its reality as an objective outer world in this explanation as it is only considered a part of the children's psyche without having its own existence as a separate world. So, the former illustration of the Narnian world as another outer reality according to the theory of object relations is propounded.

In short, the object relations theory satisfactorily explains the character development and the presence of dual worlds (inner world and outer world) and the dual outer worlds (uncle's home and Narnia) present in the novel. The characters engage with various elements in both the outer worlds to reach a heightened sense of self and enlightenment which contributes to better understanding of their inner selves as well as the dual outer worlds. Winnicott's theory of object relations can be applied to children's literature and other genres to explore character development through a psychoanalytical angle.

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