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C. S. Lewis and His Time: A Hermeneutic Inspiration to His Readers

路易斯和他的時代：對其讀者的詮釋啟示

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摘　　要

路易斯的宗教敘事文本不僅以容納傳統基督信仰內涵著稱，亦深入刻劃饒富現代性的尋信之旅——也就是個我獲得信德的過程，並非端賴神聖的恩寵，更強調依恃自身的理解力和選擇信或不信的自由意志。這種重視自我獨立思考的現代精神，在路易斯的文學著作中多有著墨。然而另一方面，路易斯的創作文本中，對於人的理性是否全然可靠，則表示了懷疑的態度，同時也某種程度反映了路易斯趨向傳統主義的主張，抱持著屬於前現代對於超自然的存在以及宇宙充滿神性的信仰。本論文試圖從上述「平衡」的觀點出發，深入探討路易斯混合看似矛盾的現代性和反現代性的立場，以及此種立場可對他的讀者帶來何種詮釋上的啟示或指引。這個問題將就兩個彼此相關的面向來探討：其一是路易斯和他所處的時代亦即亦離的關係；其二是此一關係如何能影響路易斯的讀者去發展和他的宗教敘事文本之間的互動關係。

關鍵字： 路易斯、宗教敘事文本、現代性、反現代性、詮釋

With all his scholarly expertise in the pre-modern period of literature, the Renaissance and the medieval age in particular, C. S. Lewis's literary works are, nonetheless, products of the modern time. Deeply concerned with the relationship between (human) being and (Christian) faith, Lewis's religious narratives, on the one hand, are distinctly marked by traditional Christian views, such as belief in the supernatural, the redemption of the human soul, and the transformation of the self via re-union and reconciliation with the divine other, i.e., God. On the other hand, they are also invested with symbols, dramas, and sometimes realistic portrayals of the pilgrimage that is typically "modern" in the sense of acquiring faith not simply through the acceptance of divine grace but even more importantly via the exercise of understanding as well as human freedom (i.e., the will to believe). Therefore, "traditionalist" as the religious import may be, Lewis's narratives are to a considerable extent reflective of and related to the modern spirit of thinking on one's own, although equally true is Lewis's suspicion of the reliability of the rational self of the human being, especially when it comes to religious truth or even to self-knowledge of the human subject him- or herself. How can this mixed and paradoxical posture of Lewis's, namely, both for and against modernity, inspire his readers hermeneutically, which means to acquire a certain mindset as they approach and attempt to interpret religious narratives, such as Lewis's apologetic literature? With this question in mind, the following discussion is oriented toward tackling two connected inquiries: firstly, how Lewis himself related with his time and then, how his readers can themselves relate to his literary texts.

I. A Mixed Kind of "Child of His Own Time"

The relationship between Lewis as a Christian writer and modernity is complicated. However, it can be a profound inspiration to his readers,

especially in their understanding of the possibility of reconciling the identity of the modern self/reader with Christian literature and / or with the Christian faith. Kant, the most prominent modern thinker of eighteenth century Europe, proclaims in his 1784 essay "What is Enlightenment?" that he who dares "to use [his] own understanding" (to "mature") is a true child of the age of Enlightenment.[1] Such a spirit of confidence in the human self as an independent thinker rather than on guidance from outside, whether tradition, political authority, church, or whatever, is described by Gadamer, the renowned twentieth-century German philosopher, as "the radicality of the Enlightenment which grew out of Christianity."[2] In addition, Gadamer makes the following statement, which gives pertinent expression to the modern mindset of abandoning religious belief for a new belief in the self: "For the first time in the history of mankind, religion itself is declared to be redundant and denounced as an act of betrayal or self-betrayal" (emphases added).[3] Gadamer's remark very keenly and subtly touches upon the existentialist trait of modernity. To put it another way, in the modern age, religion has broadly lost its status as the means of leading a fulfilling human life; thus, turning or returning to religious belief could mean contradiction to, or at least something incompatible with, the integrity and subjectivity of the human self. Basically, this modern revision of the meaning of religion to human life/self speaks to culture at large, specifically the intellectual and spiritual climate of the modern western world, in which

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[1] Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H. G. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 54.

[2] This description and the statement quoted below appear in the conclusion of Gadamer's article, "Aesthetic and Religious experience," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. with an introduction by Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 153. In this article, Gadamer argues that poetic speech can be a viable medium to communicate religious truth and that art and religion are compatible rather than oppositional, even if there are fundamental dissimilarities between them.

[3] Ibid., 153.

Lewis undertook his joint enterprise—imaginative writing and Christian apologetics.

To use the terms of T. S. Eliot, we may further hold that the age of modernity to which Lewis and his literary works are related is a world "corrupted by" a secular spirit which is cherished by the general reading public and modern literature as a whole. This spirit is deemed to be secular as it characteristically discards "the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life"[4] as nothing but archaic. In such a modern literary context, it is no surprise that Lewis's voice, spoken from a traditional Christian outlook, can be easily dismissed as out of tune with his time. Indeed, underlying his literary enterprise we can detect an apologetic vision that regards the integrity of the human self not as subjectively generated, but gained through (re-)union with the Ultimate Reality,[5] which means a re-embracing of the archaic belief in the supernatural and the ultimate power of salvation, as revealed and promised in Christian faith. To call this Christian vision and faith-related concern apologetic is not to say that Lewis's religious narratives are intended merely as means to his apologetic ends. Lewis himself, no doubt, would have absolutely objected to such an "unliterary" supposition about the reception of his literary works.[6]

[4] The words and the idea are derived from T. S. Eliot's 1935 essay, "Religion and Literature," in which Eliot observes that "the whole of modern literature is corrupted by . . . Secularism . . . [and] simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life." T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature," in *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 41–42.

[5] "The Ultimate Reality," in religious sense, means "the origin and end of all reality," as defined by the Catholic theologian David Tracy. In his book, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, Tracy expounds its religious and existential meaning as follows: "For believers, to be enlightened religiously is to be empowered to understand: to understand, above all, a power that is the ultimate power with which we all must deal." David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1988), 89.

[6] In An Experiment in Criticism, Lewis makes it very clear that "while we read, we must treat the reception of the work we are reading as an end in itself." Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 130. In other words, we must enjoy literature as literature, not as instruments for ultra-literary aims, such as "telling truth about

Yet, if Lewis's creative works are essentially literary rather than Christian apologetics per se, how, then, can scholars/theologians justify an apologetic reading of Lewis's texts of literature? Or, are scholars/theologians, by treating Lewis's religious narratives as literary apologetics, ultimately endorsing or reinforcing the unsympathetic critics' dismissal of Lewis's literature as nothing but propaganda or dogmatism? Yet, whatever our position, how can we respond to Harold Bloom's completely unfavorable and somewhat "prophetic" remark aimed at devaluing Lewis's literary authorship (e.g., in his creation of Aslan): "Dogma may always be in fashion, but even dogmas change. Time's revenges are absolute"?[7]

For all his dogmatic rejection of Lewis's literature, such as the Narnia books, which he takes in a clearly negative manner as the products of a "Christian apologist and allegorist,"[8] Bloom, however, is right in his view of the variable quality of "dogmas." Indeed, as C. N. Manlove's historical survey of the development of Christian fantasies up to the twentieth century has informed us, there are discernible changes in the writings of the modern Christian fantasists, Lewis being one of them, that are partly but significantly affected by the influences of modernized Christian theology. One such modern modification within fantasy writing as well as within theology is a "humanizing" trend—less "theocentric," and putting more emphasis on human experience of the immanent God. This trend of "immanentism" or a "humanist" approach to the meaning of God to humans or heaven to earth, according to Manlove's analysis, has much to do with "a general shift over the centuries, through the Renaissance via the Enlightenment to Romanticism, from a God-centred to a much more human-oriented

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life" or serving "as an aid to culture."

[7] Harold Bloom, introduction to *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C. S. Lewis (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006), 3.

[8] Ibid., 1.

Christian view of the universe."[9] In this regard, Manlove persuades when he makes a keen observation on the connection between Lewis's fantasies (in a broad sense, i.e., including different modes of writing, such as allegory) and the theological shift of concern from the transcendent God to human experience of the immanence of God. The central motif of "the dialectic of desire" in Lewis's allegory, The Pilgrim's Regress, is a good example of stressing the immanence of the divine within the subjective consciousness of a human self. Similarly, critic Corbin Scott Carnell rightly points out the remarkable parallel between Lewis's theological interpretation of man's existential experience of *Sehnsucht* and Paul Tillich's theology about God being "both immanent and transcendent."[10] There is, indeed, certain common ground between Lewis's understanding of the mystery of the human soul's transcendental longing as a message sent from God and Tillich's existentialist theology. Though not a systematic theologian himself, Lewis does share with Tillich the important idea that "the questions implied in human existence" are "correlated" with the theological answers given in Christian faith.[11]

As can be demonstrated in almost all of Lewis's narratives, Lewis's concern is primarily with representing the existential problem of faith, and undoubtedly this concern is not of the nihilistic and atheistic type but of a Christian kind.[12] In other words, to convey the ultimate, indeed

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[9] C. N. Manlove, *Christian Fantasy: From 1200 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 156–57.

[10] Corbin Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadows of Reality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 149.

[11] Cf. Paul Tillich's theological statement: "The Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence," in *Systematic Theology* (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1953), 1:72.

[12] The distinction of the two "roughly divided" groups of existentialists, i.e., nihilists / atheists and Christian thinkers, is based on David E. Roberts' exposition in his book, *Existentialism and Religious Belief*. According to Roberts, Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger are representatives of the first "self-sufficient, self-authenticating" group of

–for him– Christian, concern with the meeting rather than separation of the human self and the transcendent, Lewis's thematic focus is always upon the religious experiences or struggles that the human subject journeys through in reality. In addition to the transcendental longing that haunts a nonbeliever's soul, these existential experiences of religion emerge in other matters, too—everyday temptations by the devil, as treated in The Screwtape Letters; the eternal orientation toward heaven or hell in close relation with mundane affairs and relationships, in The Great Divorce; the protagonist's problematic personality entangled with a personal antagonism towards and a refusal to acknowledge the existence of the divine, in Till We Have Faces; and the trauma originating from love and death and the sense of God's absence, in A Grief Observed. From these thematic concerns, it is very clear that Lewis pays emphatic attention to the existential self when contemplating the relationship between the human and the divine. It is valid to claim with Manlove that Lewis's fantasy writing, marked by an "existentialist" touch, can definitely be associated with the modern trend of doing Christian theology with more human-oriented and down-to-earth considerations.[13] At the same time, this perspective invalidates some critics' casual comments about Lewis's overemphasis on "transcendence, eternity, objectivity, and the supernatural at the expense of immanence,

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proposing "human self-sufficiency" and "self-authentication," whereas Pascal and Kierkegaard belong to the "school" of practicing "penetrating forms of Christian faith." David E. Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 11.

[13] Actually, Manlove does not make a direct association between Lewis and "existentialism," which is, however, one of the main observations this study purports to highlight. Also, he seems to bypass the existentialist significance in the "theology" of some modern Christian thinkers, which can be found in the following remarks of his made in the chapter of "Modern Christian Fantasy": "The theocentric side of Christianity, represented by such figures as Kant, Jakob Fries, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Rudolf Otto and Karl Barth, became steadily more embattled and attenuated throughout this [Victorian] period." Manlove, *Christian Fantasy*, 157. In mentioning these thinkers on Christian theology and stressing their "theocentric" concern, Manlove overlooks the fact that there is actually certain "existentialist" aspect in their contemplations, perhaps more so in some of them, among whom Kierkegaard is perhaps the most conspicuous representative.

temporality, subjectivity, and the natural"[14] and about his disconnection with the contemporary "pattern of presuppositions"[15] of his time.

In the "Conclusion" of his book, Shadows of Heaven: Religion and Fantasy in the Writing of C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien (1971), Gunnar Urang comments on what he regards as the failure of those three Christian writers of fantasy that his book is intended to discuss about:

> They do not fail because they are true to an ancient pattern of presuppositions; they fail because—one must dare to say—in that allegiance they are less than true to themselves. A man who would be true to himself must come to terms in some manner with his culture, and thus, in turn, with his history. To set aside the reality of the present in any significant degree is to reject or distort some part of oneself.[16]

Despite his right acknowledgement of the kinship between Lewis, Williams and Tolkien, Urang's adverse comment about these authors' problematic relation with time, and more precisely, the present time to which they (are supposed to) belong, is, in some sense, controversial and deserves some careful rethinking. After all, in order to re-estimate the worth of what Urang calls didactic fantasies, allegories, and myths (particularly Lewis's) to modern or even "post-modern" readers, it is necessary to consider seriously the accusation of "anachronism" together with dogmatism heaped upon Lewis's Christian and traditionalist stance, which is sometimes thought of, in Urang's terms, as a self-distorting resistance to the modern modes of ideas and (literary) expression. Though apparently trying not to push his view to

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[14] Cited from Gunnar Urang's criticism of Lewis's fantasies, particularly his "space myth." Gunnar Urang, *Shadows of Heaven: Religion and Fantasy in the Writing of C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1971), 33.

[15] The phrase is borrowed from Urang's commentary again, of which the context is quoted below.

[16] Urang, *Shadows of Heaven*, 169.

an extreme, Urang, nevertheless, goes too far in holding that adherence to the "ancient" truth-claim and literary tropes signifies not simply "disloyalty" to modernity but even "untruthful" self-identity. However, the truth may be that Lewis, anachronistic freak as he is often counted, is really truer to his modern self when he persists in moving against the modern tide of thought, especially against some ideas that he believes to be disputable and untruthful.

In fact, some of his critics, such as Doris T. Myers, recognize Lewis as "very much a child of his own time" despite his staunch devotion to "preserv[ing] the ancient verities of classicism and traditional Christianity."[17] Lewis himself in his middle age, already a noted Christian author and literary scholar, once proclaimed that "[a]ll contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook—even those, like myself, who seem most opposed to it."[18] Noticeably, conversion to Christianity in his early thirties definitely divided his life into two separate stages insofar as his engagement with modern thinking was concerned. Before returning to Christian belief, the orthodox rather than the modern liberalized version of course, Lewis was deeply affected by what can be roughly called "modern culture." As he reported in his autobiography, Surprised by Joy, in the atheist period while he "was still very much modern" and also addicted to what he called "chronological snobbery" of his own age, he was so uncritically immersed in the modern enlightenment that he not only became a believer or at least a student of the most fashionable patterns of thinking, including materialism, evolutionism, "new Psychology," realism, and so forth,

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[17] Doris T. Myers, preface to *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), xi. Myers's treatise is to explore Lewis's involvement, in literary practice as well as criticism, with the context of the twentieth-century philosophy of language and literary criticism, which according to Myers evidences Lewis's connection with the modern context.

[18] C. S. Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," (first published in 1944) in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 31.

but also tended to discredit "whatever has gone out of date." At this period, any conceptions relating to the supernatural or spiritual, like "gods, spirits, after-life," were taken by Lewis as "terms of abuse;" as for Christianity, it was nothing but mythology.[19] To put it another way, at this stage of life, Lewis's modern self was well-developed—with a typically modern look of "secularism." In the allegorical text of *The Pilgrim's Regress*, his first post-conversion narrative, we are given a comprehensive account of how his personal, basically intellectual development from journeying within the modern world paralleled his search for the real object of the desire named Joy and finally turned into an individualized adventure of faith. Ultimately, it is Lewis's personal experience of undergoing a modern self's pilgrimage into conversion that changes not only his secular outlook but also his loyalty to the modern time and spirit.

Or, is it Lewis's betrayal of his old modern self that should instead be regarded as an irony? After his conversion, the renewed and resolutely un-secular personality of Lewis's is shown explicitly in his Christian apologetic and implicitly in his literary enterprise. This new voice is, in some sense, articulated in a self-negating sort of way. As to examples for supporting the assumption of his self-negation, there are many indeed. For one thing, once a follower of the Theory of Evolution, Lewis later disclaims vehemently against it as a "myth" specifically when it is no longer a theory of purely scientific hypotheses but transformed into what Lewis calls the "popular Evolutionism or Developmentalism," i.e., a "theory of improvement" of all existence from "the status of 'almost zero' to the status of 'almost infinity.'"[20] To deal with such a modern yet essentially un-scientific myth, Lewis proposes a "funeral"

[19] Cf. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 201, 236, 239–41, 247–49.

[20] C. S. Lewis, "The Funeral of a Great Myth," in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, 22–32.

for it. For another example, in contrast with his old assumption of "the Christianity mythology," after being a Christian and even Christian apologist, his manifesto becomes: the "heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact."[21] Based on this paradoxical reception of the miracle of the Incarnation, which Lewis holds as the core message of any "true Christian's" belief,[22] Lewis, therefore, voices rather defiantly his layman's dispute against the demythologizing appeal made by some modern Christian theologians, for example, Bultmann, Tillich, and Alec Vidler. It is basically an apologetic fight against the unorthodox and presumably misleading theology of a few modern New Testament critics,[23] whose attempt to disavow the historicity and the miraculous Lewis vigorously repudiated.[24]

II. A Fighter against Modern Demythologizing Hermeneutics

Though this paper does not focus on comparison between Lewis's "layman theology" and the demythologizing theology which was being popularized influentially at Lewis's time, the theological

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21 C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, 141.

22 In the same essay, "Myth Became Fact," Lewis proclaims: "By becoming fact it [the Incarnation] does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle. . . . To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths." 141.

23 The names that are mentioned in Lewis's essay, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," (originally a speech addressed at Westcott House, Cambridge, in 1959), include "Loisy, Schweitzer, Bultmann, Tillich, and Alec Vidler."

24 See Lewis's essay, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism." The essay is collected in C. S. Lewis Essay Collection, with a new title "Fern-seed and Elephants," a phrase taken from Lewis's "caricature" of the modern theologians who "claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight," on account of the fact that their de-mythologizing theology "either denies the miraculous altogether or, more strangely, after swallowing the camel of the Resurrection strains at such gnats as the feeding of the multitudes." Lewis, *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, 243, 246.

controversy over "demythology" still deserves a closer look. In fact, thinking carefully about this theological confrontation may shed light on Lewis's relationship with his time and help us interpret his religious narratives. For all his mediaevalist taste and traditionalist leaning, Lewis actively engages his own age—eloquently defending "mere Christianity." Undoubtedly, this balanced view of Lewis's disengagement and engagement with modern thinking is essential to understanding both his apologetic and literary works.

In spite of his disagreement with the "demythology" of modern theology for various reasons, we should, however, remember that Lewis himself once makes very clear, in the essay entitled "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," his critical posture, namely, a non-fundamentalist one. In other words, he has no intention to repudiate totally "this sort of theology" as he thinks it still has some "different elements [that] have different degrees of strength,"[25] though he does not specify what they are. Yet, we may wonder: perhaps what Lewis leaves out, consciously or not, when articulating his encounter and confrontation with the thoughts of those modern, unorthodox theologians, might be certain "commonalities" shared between his contemporary Christian thinkers and Lewis himself. Take the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) for example, who is the most important figure of the "de-mythologizing" movement in the first half of the twentieth century. It is intriguing to see, on the one hand, the differences between Lewis and Bultmann in reading the Gospels and yet at the same time their similarity in putting emphatic concern on the relationship between the existential self and religious faith, or in Bultmann's own words, "the existential relation between God and man."[26] Of course, unlike Bultmann, Lewis,

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[25] Ibid., 252.

[26] Quoted from one of the chapters entitled "The Meaning of God as Acting," in the text of Jesus Christ and Mythology (1958) originally the text of many lectures given in the universities and divinity schools in the United States in 1951 on the subject of "demythologizing." The abridged text of Jesus Christ and Mythology is collected in the sixth chapter of *Rudolf*

who read Pascal and some Kierkegaard while referring to either rarely, never used the term "existentialist" to describe his theological or apologetic or even literary work.

Regarding the existentialist nature of de-mythologizing theology, Bultmann states very clearly that de-mythologizing is "an existentialist interpretation"[27] of the Bible, for it undertakes to "translate" the ancient, mythical (i.e., unscientific) narratives of biblical texts for the understanding of modern readers, each of whom can thus be facilitated to have an "encounter with God in His word" here and now. A student of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy, Bultmann profoundly appropriated the philosophical analysis of the reality of "being in time," which involves full responsibility of making moment-to-moment free decisions without any existential self's intrinsic source of security, to elucidate the reality of faith and respond to the demand of reading the Bible existentially:

> Faith is . . . the readiness to find security only in the unseen beyond, in God . . . who has power over time and eternity . . . the Word of God . . . calls [me] into freedom, freedom in obedience. . . . [C]onfined to man's temporal life with its series of here and now, [the analysis of existence] unveils a sphere which faith alone can understand as the sphere of the relation between man and God. . . . In the fact that existentialist philosophy does not take into account the relation between man and God, the confession is implied that I cannot speak of God as my God by looking into myself. My personal relation with God can be made real by God only, by the acting God who meets me in his Word.[28]

Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era, ed. by Roger A. Johnson (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1987), 319.

[27] Ibid., 305. In the beginning of the chapter entitled "Modern Biblical Interpretation and Existentialist Philosophy," Bultmann remarks: "I call de-mythologizing an interpretation, an existentialist interpretation, and that I make use of conceptions developed especially by Martin Heidegger in existentialist philosophy."

[28] Ibid., 303, 313.

Insofar as Bultmann's demythologizing hermeneutics is concerned with the truth of existence and the relation between existence and faith implied in existentialist philosophy, it is noticeable that Bultmann's hermeneutical project to some extent parallels Lewis's tendency to draw associations between the eternal reality of the self and the individual human's everyday act of choosing.

In Mere Christianity, for example, Lewis gives the following account of the relationship between existence and God, which is ultimately determined by the making of each individual being's "central self" out of every temporal choice he or she makes:

> [E]very time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that choose, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God.[29]

In this simple, not so philosophically rigorous yet still penetrating explanation of the practical and authentic life of faith, we could indeed read the existentialist touch of Lewis's layman theology. This tendency of thinking like an existentialist is a style of Lewis's not just detectable in his "evangelizing" talks but also discernible in his literary practice. It could be evidenced that Lewis's writing of the problem of faith from a predominantly subjective standpoint marks him out as a substantially existentialist Christian writer. In other words, he writes like a typically existentialist thinker who, according to David E. Roberts, the author of Existentialism and Religious Belief, tends to focus on the individual human being on account of the fact that "in the search for the ultimate truth [or reality] the whole man, and not only his intellect or reason [but

[29] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 92.

also "his emotions and his will"], is caught up and involved."[30] Such an existentialist approach is arguably the most distinctive trait of Lewis's literary apologetics. That is to say, in his literary writing to manifest an apologetic response to the macro-predicament of the modern man's alienation from God, Lewis's concern is primarily with the micro-situatedness, or, the lived experience of the individual self. This way of doing literary apologetics is shown not just in his allegory, The Pilgrim's Regress, which is directly concerned with the modern self's pursuit of the divine reality, but also in the fantastical texts about the impact of evil temptation upon a convert (The Screwtape Letters) and about the divorce between heavenly and hellish states of being (The Great Divorce), in the mythic novel focused on an individual being's lifelong struggle with the religious truth, hostile and unwilling to believe (Till We Have Faces), and finally in the self-scrutinizing text about a grieving man's psychological and spiritual breakthrough (A Grief Observed). Unquestionably, all these textual instances of the intermingling of an existentialist perspective with the joint practice of literary writing and apologetic treatment of the entangled problem of faith and self serve to testify to Lewis's implicit but real "kinship" with other modern existentialist thinkers, even with Bultmann, against whose biblical criticism Lewis openly expresses his antagonism.

As regards Lewis's quarrel with Bultmann, or, more precisely, with the de-mythologizing criticisms of the Gospels in modern theology, there is, in fact, some subtle and also ironical truth about Lewis's disengagement from the modern trend of thinking. What can be regarded ironical in Lewis's argumentation against Bultmann's demythologizing is the simple fact that the latter is originally devised to aid the faith of modern Protestant readers to whom the "mythology" of the New Testament[31] may be a crucial "stumbling block" to the

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[30] David E. Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief*, 7.

[31] According to Bultmann, the "mythology" is referred to the "conception of the world"

happening of their conversion. Yet this theory significantly misses out or misses the point to Lewis, who happens to be a modern convert after a personal journey of struggling to sort out the incompatibility between Christian faith and modern ways of thinking. What exactly makes Lewis react unsympathetically against Bultmann's "scientific" interpretation of the Bible, even if it purports to fit in with modern man's patterns of thinking and "make clear the true meaning of God's mystery" via "freeing the Word of God from a by-gone world of view"[32]? Is there any hermeneutical principle that moves Lewis to dispute the latest movement of theology and stick to the traditional way of reading the Bible?

If one could name any governing principle underlying Lewis's allegiance to the traditional as well as his suspicion of the modern, whether it is about worldview, values, religion or even books, it would be definitely veritable to say that his principle is to keep the mind from being muddled by what he calls "chronological snobbery," or (historical) "provincialism," namely, the narrowness of perspective indiscreetly restricted to the age that one was born into. To put in another word, it is the principle of "broad-mindedness." As mentioned above, Lewis's own conversion from a modern unbelieving frame of thinking to belief in (traditional) Christianity is to a great extent initiated by the awareness of his own "chronological snobbery" and by the attempt to open his mind to such "obsolete" and "mythological" ideas as traditional Christian belief. In fact, it can be inferred that at the heart of Lewis's disputation against the "demythology" of modern theology is this changed habit of mind that Lewis himself has held on to since his conversion and also keeps urging others to acquire. For example, in the essay entitled "Is English Doomed?" Lewis remarks on the "true aim" of English literary

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presupposed in the New Testament. It is called "mythological" "because it is different from the conception of the world which has been formed and developed by science . . . [and] accepted by all modern men." Ibid., 291.

[32] Ibid., 304.

education, namely, "to lift the student out of his provincialism by mal
him 'the spectator,' if not of all, yet of much, 'time and existence
That is to say, students of English are to be guided "to meet the p
where alone the past still lives, [to be] taken out of the narrowness of
own age and class into a more public world" where he can find out "w
varieties there are in Man."[34]

Lewis's opinion about what literary education can and ought
achieve actually speaks for the very principle Lewis himself adhe
to in cultivating his own literary taste, which is liberally formed inde
through meeting with varieties of great minds across centuries inste
of focusing on authors of merely the here and now. In some sense
can explain Lewis's scholarly dedication to mediaeval literature, althou
it by no means endorses some simple-minded critics' deprecatory vi
that Lewis "achieve[s] a Christian mind by living in a prescientific worl
which in the words of Austin Farrer "is the easiest way of writi
him off as a thinker."[35] Concerning Lewis's allegiance to mediaev
times, Farrer pertinently cites Lewis's posthumous scholarly book, T
Discarded Image (1967), to exemplify how Lewis can present the la
mediaeval mindset and worldview as engagingly as if he were livi
then and yet also recognize in a detached way its beauties as part of

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[33] C. S. Lewis, "Is English Doomed?" in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection: Literatu Philosophy and Short Stories*, 27.

[34] Ibid. 28. Lewis's opinion about the purpose and value of literary education can l found clearly echoed by another distinguished scholar in English literature, Helen Gardn who in a lecture-article entitled "The Relevance of Literature" makes a similar claim: "Literatu of all the arts has the power to take us back into what is felt like to live in past ages, and discover, certain constancies in human experience surviving through changes in ideals, belie manners, customs, . . . "and thus "enabl[es] us to discover standards and values by which curre shibboleths can be tested, knowledge and understanding of the past as it survives . . . pr eminently in literature, enriches our sense of our own identity." See Helen Gardner, *In Defen of the Imagination: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1979–1980* (Oxford: Clarendon Pres 1982), 44–45.

[35] Austin Farrer, "The Christian Apologist," in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gib (London: Bles, 1965), 27.

myth. Moreover, Farrer observes persuasively that what Lewis really achieves in this book is to enable his readers or students not merely to get acquainted with the mediaeval point of view but also to "be better placed for viewing with a reasonable detachment the scientific myths of [the modern] age."[36] Actually, Lewis also applies such a principle of distancing oneself from one's own time to his recommendation of choosing old Christian books to read. Why choosing old books for either doctrinal or devotional purpose? According to Lewis's own explication, we need old books to "correct the characteristic mistakes [and "blindness"] of our own period" and to acquire "a standard of plain, central Christianity . . . which puts the controversies of the moment in their proper perspective."[37] Without doubt, this advice is grounded on the imperative of gaining such a standard and also comprehensive perspective that Lewis always propagandizes the value of "mere Christianity," which in the words of Lewis stands for "something positive, self-consistent and inexhaustible" after having been "measured against the ages."[38]

Now, what does this principle of broadening the mind, or healing one's provincialism, via reading old books, have to do with Lewis's disagreement with the "de-mythologizing" interpretation of the Bible? Is the negative reaction nothing but a narrow-minded repulsion because of his religious conservatism or dogmatism? Definitely not. On the contrary, we might even say that what moves Lewis to deprecate the demythology of modern theology is basically the broad mind he both possesses and preaches. That Lewis is really comprehensive as a believer or a reader of the Bible (and other books) can be well evidenced by his remark as well as confession made in the conclusion of his paper entitled "Is Theology Poetry?": "Christian theology can fit in science,

36 Ibid. 28.

37 Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," 31.

38 Ibid. 32.

art, morality, and the sub-Christian religions. . . . I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."[39] Here, Lewis makes very clear two important suppositions. Firstly, theology is essentially a comprehensive field of knowledge, that is, neither exclusive of nor necessarily conflicting with other cultural areas, be it modern scientific development, artistic activity, even paganism. Based on this wide-scoped understanding of the nature of Christian theology, it then follows that Christian faith is supposed to open rather than delimit the believer's, "seeing eye." In other words, for Lewis, it is perfectly possible and also sensible for a modern believer to be of a mind that is theological, scientific, poetic or mythological in orientation all at the same time. Therefore, he can preach eloquently as well as believe deeply in the twofold truth about the Incarnation—which is simultaneously mythical and factual / historical. Obviously, this view of theology afforded by a "liberal" mindset, as exemplified by the readiness to embrace simultaneously the mythology and the factuality of the Gospels, substantially contradicts the theological demand for the de-mythologizing the Bible, as proposed by Bultmann and other theologians of Lewis's time.

According to Bultmann, the whole de-mythologizing project is prompted by the conflict between the mythology of the Bible and modern scientific thinking. To de-mythologize, therefore, is, in a technical sense, to help remove the stumbling-blocks within the biblical texts for modern man, including all the obsolete ideas no longer believed by modern science. Regarding what these mythological and thus problematic ideas to modern, scientific mind are referred to, Bultmann expounds them clearly as follows:

> The whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the preaching of Jesus as in the New Testament generally is

[39] C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, 21.

> mythological; i.e., the conception of the world as being structured in three stories, heaven, earth, and hell; the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the course of events; and the conception of miracles, especially the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the inner life of the soul, the conception that men can be tempted and corrupted by the devil and possessed by evil spirits. This conception of the world we call mythological because it is different from the conception of the world which has been formed and developed by science since its inception in ancient Greece and which has been accepted by all modern men. . . . In any case, modern science does not believe that the course of nature can be interrupted or, so to speak, perforated, by supernatural powers.[40]

Evidently, in terms of Bultmann, the "problem of mythology" within the New Testament is judged by the criteria of modern science. For any de-mythologizing theologians, this "problem of mythology" needs to be tackled, that is, got rid of, so that it won't cause a problem to the faith of modern man. At this point, Lewis's viewpoint about the compatibility of Christian theology and science would to some extent suffice to undermine the initial impulse which gives rise to the whole business of de-mythologizing the Bible, that is, the conflict between (mythological) theology and modern science.

III. An Interdisciplinary, Open-minded Reader: Lewis's Hermeneutic Principle

Furthermore, as far as the question of reading the Bible is concerned, Lewis's interest is less in whether the biblical messages, e.g., the Gospels, can be digested by a scientific mind or not. His real

[40] Bultmann, *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 291.

confrontation with the "demythology" of modern theology actually lies in his awareness of the value, rather than the "problem," of mythology in the Bible. Against Bultmann's hermeneutic proposition of de-mythologizing biblical texts, Lewis makes a kind of opposing appeal, also hermeneutics-concerned, to read the Bible "mythopathetically." Lewis's hermeneutic appeal is rendered in the following passage quoted from his essay, "Myth Became Fact," in which Lewis makes such a reversing suggestion that not the "mythology" but "demythology" would be the true "stumbling block" for the biblical readers, e.g., when encountering the revealed truth about the Incarnation:

> God is more than a god, not less . . . . We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology. We must not be nervous about "parallels" and "Pagan Christs": they ought to be there—it would be a stumbling block if they weren't. We must not, in false spirituality, withhold our imaginative welcome. If God chooses to be mythopoeic—and is not the sky itself a myth?—shall we refuse to be mythopathetic? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.[41]

Lewis here elucidates the significance of the mythological in the biblical narrative, which is based on the mythopoeic nature of the divine reality. Therefore, when we approach the biblical text, it is unavoidable and indeed good for us to engage ourselves imaginatively with the mythically imported enchantment of the supernatural, the miraculous and the transcendental—all that is objectively true in the divine reality but also truly beyond either expression or human understanding. Noticeably, this way of reading the Bible suggested by Lewis is opposite to Bultmann's de-mythologizing approach. For Bultmann, only via de-

[41] Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," 142.

mythologizing can the biblical reader meet existentially and subjectively with the real and spiritual meaning of the words of God behind their mythological screen. For Lewis, contrarily, our existential encounter with the words of God, or God Himself, will not be obstructed by but, instead, must rest on the whole mythic experience contained in the mythological and also truthful expression of the divine reality—which is perhaps the best means of transporting both the tangible body of the historical fact, e.g., the event of the Incarnation, and the intangible "soul" within the myth, i.e., the inexpressible reality of the divine.[42] In other words, to Lewis, the mythic experience or the presence of the mythological in the biblical text is an indispensable part of the genuine textual experience of the Bible for the human readers.

Certainly, Lewis's defence of the mythological element of the Bible is not targeted at the readers' textual experience only. In fact, his counter-demythologizing stance has indeed some "dogmatic" import. As mentioned above, what makes the de-mythologizing movement essentially problematic to Lewis is its tendency to doubt or even deny the authenticity and historicity of the supernatural and the miraculous happenings recounted in the stories of the Gospels. It is suggested sagaciously in Lewis's paper, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," that underlying the whole "demythology" of the modern theology is this kind of "scepticism," which, Lewis argues, deserves our "scepticism" in response because these sceptical theologians' de-mythologizing work ultimately dilutes and distorts the spiritual reality conveyed by the biblical narratives. If we return to Lewis's critics' questioning of his dogmatic mindset, we might ask whether this "scepticism" suggested by Lewis against the scepticism insidious in modern theology is no

[42] The idea about the "body" and the "soul" of the myth is based on Lewis's remark on the myth made in his "Preface" to the book he edits, *George MacDonald: An Anthology 365 Readings*: "In poetry the words are the body and the 'theme' or 'content' is the soul. But in myth the imagined events are the body and something inexpressible is the soul." *George MacDonald: An Anthology 365 Readings* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, [1946] 2001), xxxi.

more than the expression of Lewis's dogmatism in a different form. For example, consider his mythic reading of the biblical narrative about the Incarnation as "the marriage of heaven and earth." Should we regard this biblical interpretation as nothing other than evidence of Lewis's dogmatic adherence to the traditional orthodoxy of Christianity?

For those who believe in "the marriage of heaven and hell," like Harold Bloom, who claims to be a disciple of William Blake in regard to this conception, the answers to these questions are probably and unsurprisingly positive. However, following Austin Farrer's opinion, we could say that this criticism of Lewis's dogmatism is actually "the easiest way of writing him off" not only as a thinker but also as a (biblical) reader. Although Lewis never made any counter-arguments against such a criticism in his fight against the de-supernaturalizing trend of modern theology, it is discernible that his theological or hermeneutic posture has nothing to do with so-called dogmatism. Rather, as Lewis proclaims in his address to an audience of theological students, what he really purports to preach is "a due agnosticism,"[43] which means in the context of biblical studies to remain "agnostic" is sometimes more judicious and legitimate than the sceptical and un-dogmatic interpretation of the Gospels—reading only the symbolic meaning while dismissing anything incomprehensible to the modern and scientific mind. To illustrate how to put this "due agnosticism" into hermeneutical practice, Lewis in the end of the same paper, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," recommends that we suspend our disbelief in the connection of the story of Ascension with any physical meaning of "space," for we simply do not know yet whether "the transcendent reality . . . excludes and repels locality" or "assimilates and loads it with significance." Adopting neither an exclusively symbolical nor a completely literal approach to the Ascension story, Lewis urges us to "take our ignorance seriously." Thus,

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43 Lewis, "Fern-seed and Elephants" (originally entitled "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,") in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, 253.

instead of giving any answer to the possible meaning of how "the union of God with God and of man with God-man" could really happen, Lewis inquires only and wisely: "Had we not better wait?"[44] Compared with the scepticism underlying modern demythologizing theology, Lewis's proposal of "due agnosticism" for those who cannot really understand the Gospels as both historically truthful and mythically significant is, in my opinion, far more open-minded in the hermeneutical sense.

Furthermore, the characteristic of open-mindedness in Lewis's hermeneutic principle as well as in his thinking mind demonstrates the quality of Lewis as a truly interdisciplinary reader of the Bible. Though he strongly objects to the secularist theory about the biblical texts that regards them as mere literature, Lewis, nevertheless, approaches the sacred text, i.e., the Bible, without totally disregarding or devaluating the significant part the literary element plays in either the conveying or the reception of the messages about the divine reality. In other words, he reads the Bible both from the perspective of Christian faith and in literary terms. This trait of "interdisciplinarity" is actually not ascribable solely to his hermeneutic. It also speaks to the essential nature of his literary output. Although not all the readers or critics of Lewis's literature pay serious attention to its literary aspect, yet none of them would fail to recognize its religious bearing, whether they liked it or not. Thus, literary categories that are varied in name while similarly pointing to the combination of the literary and the religious, such as "religious literature," "theological fantasy," and "apologetic allegory," are easily and perceptively associated with the texts of Lewis's literature.

IV. Lewis's Readers' Hermeneutical Exercise: Its Challenges and Hope

With the recognition that underlying Lewis's engagement and

[44] Ibid., 254.

disengagement with his time is the principle of "open-mindedness," which really defines the fundamental nature of Lewis's apologetic enterprise, Lewis's literary readers too have their own responsibility to take. Aside from the imperative of undertaking an interdisciplinary reading, namely, considering not simply the Logos of the texts, the religious meaning, but also their Poiema, the textual interweaving of the content and the form, wherein lies the literariness of the texts, the readers of Lewis's religious narratives need also to equip themselves with a mindset similar to Lewis's own. Needless to say, the mindset for the sake of a proper reception of Lewis's apologetic literature is not necessarily aligned with Lewis's own faith or taste—whether his religious traditionalism or his mediaevalist leaning. It is, instead, correspondent with the critical principle Lewis himself follows and also consistently "propagandizes," that is, avoiding "provincialism" by being open to different traditions, modern or old-fashioned, to varied forms of communicating the divine reality, such as history and mythology, and above all to the text itself, be it literary or biblical.

Such an open mindset is clearly propounded in Lewis's masterly treatise on literary criticism, An Experiment in Criticism: "We must empty our minds and lay ourselves open. There is no work in which holes can't be picked; no work that can succeed without a preliminary act of good will on the part of the reader."[45] In line with his theoretical claim in the centre of the proposed critical "experiment" (of shifting literary evaluation from the author to the reader) that good literature cannot exist without good reading, Lewis here is succinctly reiterating the importance of reader response. No doubt, this calling for the participation of the reader's willing self can find many echoes in modern literary criticism or hermeneutic theories. As discussed previously, it is an often ignored but irrefutable fact that Lewis's thinking is involved in significant ways with the modern fashion of thoughts, although as

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[45] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 116.

a thinker and reader, he is avowedly unwilling to be committed to any trends of idea or taste on the sole grounds that they are modern and fashionable. Indeed, we may apply the idea of "sure taste," coined by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, to Lewis's thinking and reading. According to Gadamer, a man of taste "observes measure even in fashion, not following blindly its changing demands, but using one's own judgment." As for someone of "sure taste," he or she keeps up "a specific freedom and superiority" "against the tyranny exercised by fashion."[46] In light of Gadamer's definition, Lewis is definitely a modern man who cherishes "sure taste." This stance can be conspicuously evidenced by both his tendency to remain attuned to the pre-modern literary tradition and his unfashionable yet unfaltering voice from the position of a traditionalist Christian apologist spoken to an age in which the traditional orthodoxy or Christian dogma had long been in great discredit.[47] Yet, as readers of Lewis's literary texts, our task is surely not to be informed by the nature of Lewis's taste or mind only. In fact, if we really keep our mind open in order to encounter or confront with Lewis's texts, we must to some extent be challenged by the taste emerging from them, if not directly with the mind of their author.

In what sense would Lewis's readers be challenged by his works of religious, or apologetic, literature? Is it because they are the kind of "religious literature" T. S. Eliot once denounces as "deliberately and defiantly Christian"[48] but scant of literary merit? Or, ought they to be taken as nothing but "an apologetics that pretends to lead reflection, without a break, from knowledge toward belief," as phrased by

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[46] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 35–36.

[47] The idea is borrowed from Austin Farrer's essay "The Christian Apologist," that he wrote to commemorate C. S. Lewis specifically as a Christian apologist. In the essay, Austin remarks: "the day in which apologetic flourishes is the day of orthodoxy in discredit . . . ," in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, 24.

[48] Eliot, "Religion and Literature," 36.

Ricoeur[49]? Certainly not. Instead of making such an easy and unliterary judgment of Lewis's literature, the readers ought to approach Lewis's apologetic literature in interdisciplinary terms, that is, to consider seriously the inter-mixture of the literary structure and the religious import within Lewis's texts. Actually, the question about the confrontation between the reader and the text is basically a hermeneutical question. After all, as we can learn from modern hermeneutics as well as from Lewis's critical outlook, the practice of reading as interpretation or understanding is fundamentally "an intersubjective process" of "conversation," a process Ricoeur associates with textual criticism to mean "the connection between two discourses, the discourses of the text and the discourses of interpretation."[50]In Gadamer's terms, this intersubjective conversation within the text can be designated as a "dialogical event."[51] Moreover, these hermeneutic ideas about "dialogicity" or intersubjectivity or intercourse between the reader and the text are echoed by Wayne C. Booth's conception of the reader as the author's "second self," as lucidly expounded in the following quotation from Booth's book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Noticeably, Booth's theory of literary reception is of even closer relevance to the reception of Lewis's apologetic literature, for it serves to illuminate the interplay between two selves, the author and the reader, which is regarded by him as necessarily involving the

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[49] Ricoeur, "Conclusion: The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought," in *Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 319, 357.

[50] Ibid., 322.

[51] This conception of Gadamer is based on Hans Robert Jauss's exposition. In the chapter on the "dialogic character [of] literary communication," Jauss explicates Gadamer's theory of understanding as follows: "Gadamer designated dialogicity as the prerequisite for all understanding. . . . According to Gadamer, the Platonic dialogue provides the hermeneutic model in which understanding is constituted not as a monologic interpretation of, but as a dialogic inquiry into, meaning," See Hans Robert Jauss, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 213.

coincidence of the beliefs of the two parties:

> It is only as I read that I become the self whose beliefs must coincide with the author's. Regardless of my real beliefs and practices, I must subordinate my mind and heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full. The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement.[52]

Applying all these theoretical viewpoints on the interaction between reader and text / author to Lewis's readers, particularly Booth's idea cited above of the "agreement" between the two "created selves (author and reader)" accommodated by the text, their meeting space, we can thereby be certain of the credibility of the assertion that the "self" of Lewis's reader must undergo a certain challenge in the whole process of being created as Lewis's second self via his texts. To put it another way, when confronting Lewis's literary works with their texture underpinned by the Christian ideas associable with Lewis's religious belief and even apologetic enterprise, the willing readers will be hermeneutically provoked by the "challenge" of venturing on the apologetic discourse rendered by Lewis's texts.

More specifically, in the very exercise of probing into the textual discourses of Lewis's religious narratives, we probably will be faced with a series of self-inquiries: Do we share, for example, with the modern pilgrim in the allegory of *The Pilgrim's Regress* the ultimate answer to the puzzle of the subjective experience of some mysteriously insatiable desire which cannot be satisfied until the existential self can turn away from all the misleading (intellectual) routes of the (modern) world to the main road that leads to the "reunion" with God? And, can we really attune ourselves to the sense of irony regarding the existence of the

[52] Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (London: Penguin Book, 1991), 138.

devil-tempter in the context of infernal admonition on tempting "human animals" in *The Screwtape Letters*, or to the promise of the restorability of the hellish human souls, who can if they will be transposed from Hell to Heaven to enjoy the new life bestowed by the divine Redeemer, as envisioned in *The Great Divorce*? Also, to what extent do we feel related to the mythical figure's struggle in the conflict between primitive cults of religion and her disintegrated selfhood in the Greek myth-refashioned novel of *Till We Have Faces*? Finally, do we find ourselves able or comfortable to digest the obstinate belief manifested by the grieving and doubting journal-writer's conclusion about theodicy, i.e., the incontestable goodness of God even in the reality of human pain, such as the suffering of bereavement narrated "autobiographically" in *A Grief Observed*?

The answers to these questions will probably vary from person to person as every individual reader, while meeting existentially with the texts concerned, has his or her personal response to make. But, he or she must be a genuine reader in the first place via opening the mind so as to receive, that is, to enter into and converse with, the text. No doubt, the receptive mindset of the reader, in Lewis's words, "a certain good will, a certain readiness to find meaning,"[53] is absolutely indispensable if Wayne Booth's formula for the success in both writing and reading—the readers becoming created "peers" of the author—is to be fulfilled. According to Booth, "[t]he author makes his readers" which means a successful author makes his readers his peers by "mak[ing] them see what they have never seen before . . . mov[ing] them into a new order of perception and experience altogether."[54] For the reader of Lewis's religious narratives, what can this "new order of perception and experience" be existentially about?

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53 Lewis, "The Language of Religion," in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, 266.

54 Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 397–98.

Through probing into the existential and apologetic meaning of Lewis's texts, the vision that Lewis's readers would encounter in them is ultimately a sign of hopefulness. To be more specific, it is about the hope of the restoration of human self to the faith and promised redemption in God on the premise that the existential and willing self (re-)orients its heart, mind, spirit, and even body to an integrated relationship with reality of what is subjectively and ultimately true, i.e., the reality of human selfhood and that of the transcendent yet also immanent existence of God. Of course, this vision of the re-integration between self and faith, or existence and reality, is not directly indicated by Lewis's texts. Rather, it is through interpretation that the texts are seen as, in the words of Ricoeur, "manifestation of the bond between man and the sacred."[55] Moreover, insofar as it is concerned with the redemption of the self, as promised by religious, indeed Christian, faith, the hope suggestively manifested in Lewis's texts must be viewed at the same time as a sign—in the religious and hermeneutic sense. The association of "a sign" with the textual vision of religious promise and also with the reader's response to this implied vision is based upon Gadamer's ideas about the analogy between "the concept of faith" and "the concept of a sign." According to Gadamer's pertinent observation, either "a sign" or the "good news" proclaimed by gospel messages is "something only given to one who is ready to accept it as such."[56] Moreover, Gadamer furthers his discussion about religious signs in the Biblical context by highlighting the reception of signs as a universal hermeneutic question, rather than simply a question about religious faith. Most sagaciously, Gadamer points out the "universal challenge implied by the acceptance of the Christian message, something that Luther expressed in the formula pro me."[57] In terms of Gadamer's "hermeneutic conclusion"

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[55] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

[56] Gadamer, "The Aesthetic and Religious Experience," 152.

[57] Ibid., 151.

about the activity of "receiving a sign," we may confirm that the "sign" (to be) encountered in the literary context of Lewis's religious narratives must have very little to do with any dogmatism pertaining either to the texts or perhaps even to their author. In other words, proffered by Lewis's literary texts, the sign concerned, however strongly it may connote the importance of religious faith for human being's self-integrity, must await a responsive reading to become something incontestably meaningful.

In view of this, it is, therefore, inevitable to conclude that to finalize any "(apologetic) answer" of Lewis underlying his religious narratives about the problem of the existential self's alienation from the Ultimate Reality is naught but a mission impossible. In other words, in the process or at the end of the experience of reading, it is by no means likely that there will be any absolute answer that is in line with the author's preoccupation, even if the author, who happens to be a traditionalist Christian apologist, is preoccupied with an obstinate or anachronistic belief in Christian dogma. In fact, no criticism of Lewis's texts should claim to offer and impose any exact or final answer particularly to the apologetic meaning embedded within them, seeing that the task of discovering any answer or meaning is a challenge falling upon every individual reader in his or her own existential meeting with the text. After all, as Lewis judiciously advocates, the "sole function" of "literary scholarship and criticism" is "to multiply, prolong, and safeguard experiences of good reading."[58] Therefore, we readers of Lewis are keenly advised to open our mind to make certain response to the sign of hope and promise emerging from Lewis's literary works, as if made by the "second self" of Lewis.

Thus, it can be shown that ultimately a genuinely hermeneutical exercise can be a self-transforming and self-integrating process. In the case of Lewis's readers, at the post-critical, or post-interpretative, stage,

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[58] The quotation is part of a passage in which Lewis remarks: "If literary scholarship and criticism are regarded as activities ancillary to literature, then their sole function is to multiply, prolong, and safeguard experiences of good reading." Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 104.

i.e., after meeting and interacting with the texts created by the intermingling of literary art and religious meaning and also invested with the Lewisian existentialist-apologetic vision, they may gain hermeneutic inspiration from the very act of reading Lewis, the modern and also anti-modern literary man and believer / apologist. Furthermore, they may grow into a broadened and deepened awareness of what ironic or disintegrated subjectivity and redemptive supernaturality mean and how they can possibly become reunited —existentially. In light of this, it is definitely sensible to revise the Kant's modern claim and reinstate the pre-modern value that being dependent on the Christian faith in God does not really cause any betrayal or loss of subjectivity to the self, whether a thinker or a reader. Rather, it may actually bring about a heavenly, substantial, and eternal gain of the integrity of the self.

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Abstract

C. S. Lewis's religious narratives paradoxically typify both the traditional Christian views and "modern" versions of pilgrimage. In other words, alongside his allegiance to the Christian faith as well as his notably "traditionalist" leaning toward a pre-modern belief in the supernatural, Lewis's literary works also show a distinctive relation to the modern spirit of thinking on one's own, although not without suspicion of the reliability of human beings' rational selves. This paper addresses the question arising from Lewis's atypical perspective: How can Lewis's mixed and paradoxical posture, namely, both engaging and disengaging himself with modernity, inspire and inform his readers hermeneutically, e.g., to acquire a certain mindset as they approach and attempt to interpret Lewis's apologetic literature? To grapple with this question, this discussion aims to investigate, first, how C. S. Lewis himself related with his time, and thereafter, how his readers can relate to his literary texts.

Key-words: C. S. Lewis, religious narratives, modernity, anti-modernity, hermeneutic