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METAFICTIONAL MAGIC: WHEN NARNIA SPEAKS TO ITS READERS.

Naimova A.M

Bukhara State University, English linguistics department teacher, a.m.naimova@buxdu.uz,
anaimova1991@gmail.com

Yuldoshova M.U

Bukhara State University, student, munisayuldoshova48@gmail.com

Annotation: C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is often classified as a work of fantasy, yet I argue that it also employs metafictional techniques. While some scholars dismiss this interpretation, elements such as the wardrobe as a gateway into fiction, the historical framing of World War II, and Lewis's direct engagement with readers suggest that the novel is more than just a self-contained fantasy world. This article examines these elements, engaging with scholarly perspectives that deny its metafictional nature and explaining why I contend that Lewis was consciously drawing attention to the act of storytelling itself, employing metafictional elements throughout narrative.

Keywords: Metafiction, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C. S. Lewis, wardrobe symbolism, narrative intrusion, World War II framing, self-referential fiction, children's literature, fantasy vs. metafiction, literary analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Metafiction is a postmodern technique in literature, which can captivate readers with its mysterious combination of truth and fiction. This technique has won the hearts of many writers and scholars due to its ability to encompass the experimental front in the direction of literature.

If we approach the issue in depth, metafiction can not only reflect a type of literary technique, but also differ from other variations in its ability to combine several postmodern literary movements. In the process of novel creating, the author can resort to such combinations as intertextuality, historical inversion, timelessness, multiple perspectives, subversion, retrospection and prospection. The main purpose of metafiction is to highlight the dichotomy between the real world and the fictional world of a novel.

Metafiction can be used to parody literary genre conventions, subvert expectations, reveal truths, or offer a view of the human condition.

Often used in postmodernist fiction to comment on the world that our character inhabits, metafiction helps give a work of text more significance by providing an outward, exploratory look of a self-contained world.

Metafiction is a style of prose narrative in which attention is directed to the process of fictive composition.

The most obvious example of a metafictional work is a novel about a novelist writing a novel, with the protagonist sharing the name of the creator and each book having the same title. William H. Gass actualized the term "metafiction" in 1970 in his book named by "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction".

Unlike the antinovel, or anti-fiction, metafiction is specifically fiction about fiction, i.e. fiction which self-consciously reflects upon itself. While defining the name of the term: meta means beyond and fiction is imaginary or invented ideas.

In the novel combining these two concepts together writer works on more difficult figure like after the imaginary. So invented or fictive work is itself tough but beyond this rigorous concept it means writer works on the nature and purpose of fiction, the novel can realize itself, the characters feel that they are inside the literary work.

This type of more than imaginative ideas can chain to each other. What if the world inside a book knew it was being read? What if stepping into a story was not just an act of imagination, but something the characters themselves could sense?

C. S. Lewis's "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe", the second book in The Chronicles of Narnia, is often viewed as a straightforward fantasy novel. However, I believe that Lewis intentionally infused metafictional elements into the narrative.

Metafiction, which occurs when a text acknowledges its own fictionality, is typically associated with postmodern literature, but Lewis's work shows early instances of this literary technique.

The Wardrobe as a Metafictional Device

The most obvious metafictional element in "The lion, the witch and the wardrobe" is the wardrobe itself. It is not just a plot device but a symbolic representation of entering fiction. When Lucy steps through it, she is not merely transported to another world—she is, in effect, stepping into a story.

"She immediately stepped into the wardrobe... A moment later she found that she was standing in the middle of a wood at night-time with snow under her feet and snowflakes falling through the air..."⁴ This aligns with metafictional techniques that make the reader aware of the text as a construct.

Lucy stepping through the wardrobe is a metafictional moment because it highlights the transition from reality to fiction. The wardrobe serves as both a literal and symbolic threshold, drawing attention to storytelling itself. This mirrors the reader's experience, as opening a book is like stepping into a new world. Lewis also plays with fairy tale conventions, making the portal an ordinary object, which invites readers to question how stories work. Lastly, the novel acknowledges its own fictionality, as Lucy's discovery is initially dismissed—just as readers must suspend disbelief when engaging with a story.

However, not all scholars agree with this interpretation. Michael Ward, in his book "Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis" (2008), argues that the wardrobe is a purely symbolic object meant to represent spiritual transformation rather than a metafictional device.⁵ He contends that Narnia operates as a parallel universe rather than a commentary on fiction itself.

However, Mervyn Nicholson, in his article "What C.S. Lewis Took From E. Nesbit",⁶ examines the influence of earlier literature on Lewis's work. He suggests that the

⁴ Lewis C.S. The chronicles of Narnia,- London: -Geoffrey Bless, 1950. -P.5.

⁵ Ward.M.D. Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis Oxford:-Oxford university press, 2008. -P.43.

⁶ Nicholson M. What C. S. Lewis Took From E. Nesbit. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 16(1). (1991). 16-22. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0823>.

wardrobe's function as a gateway to another world is a metafictional nod to storytelling traditions, acknowledging the constructed nature of fictional realms. I also disagree with Ward's perspective. If the wardrobe were merely a religious or allegorical symbol, then its connection to the Pevensies' world would be more defined. However, the fact that the wardrobe leads to a reality where time flows differently—yet remains tethered to the children's actual experiences—suggests that Lewis was deliberately playing with the nature of storytelling. The wardrobe is not just a means of escape; it forces the characters (and the readers) to navigate the boundaries between fiction and the real, a key feature of metafiction. These part in the book can give more plain explanation “Instead of feeling the hard, smooth wood of the floor of the wardrobe, she felt something soft and powdery and extremely cold”. This description draws attention to the artificiality of storytelling itself—Lucy expects a solid back to the wardrobe but instead finds an entire world, much like how a reader "steps into" a story through imagination. Lewis plays with the expectation that a wardrobe is just a piece of furniture, only to reveal that it defies ordinary logic, much like stories themselves. This aligns with metafiction, where a text makes the reader aware of its own fictionality. The wardrobe forces both Lucy and the audience to question what is “real” within the novel's world.

Leland Ryken and Marjorie Lamp Mead analyzed “The Magician's nephew”, the first book in the chronological order, in a book called “A readers guide through the wardrobe”⁷ The origin of the wardrobe is explored in depth in this book. It revealed that the wardrobe was made from the apple tree, which ultimately becomes the portal to Narnia. This is exactly referring the one aspect of the metafiction: metafiction often explores how past narratives shape new ones, making readers aware of the continuity of stories. Linda Hutcheon, in “A Poetics of Postmodernism:History,Theory,Fiction”⁸(1988), argues that metafiction, especially historiographic metafiction, explores how past narratives shape new ones. She emphasizes that such works make readers aware of the constructed nature of history and fiction, highlighting their continuity and intertextuality.

World War II as a Framing Device

The historical context of World War II is another crucial element that supports the metafictional reading of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The Pevensie children are not transported from an entirely neutral setting; they come from a world affected by real historical events, which provides a dual reality that influences their perception of Narnia.

Some scholars, such as Kathryn Hume in “Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature”(1984), argue that the novel's war setting is incidental rather than integral to its narrative structure. She claims that the war merely serves as a convenient backdrop to explain why the children are sent away, rather than functioning as a metafictional framing device. I find this interpretation reductive. The war is not just a setting—it shapes the way the Pevensies experience Narnia. A world where they can make a difference, where they can grow in courage, and where they are directly involved in a battle against evil. This reflects a hope that, despite the horrors of the war. Their transition from war-torn England to a land in conflict with the White Witch mirrors the reader's own

⁷ Ryken L. and Mead M.L. *A readers guide through the wardrobe*, -Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005 -P.37.

⁸ Hutcheon L.F. *A Poetics of Postmodernism:History,Theory,Fiction*, -New York: Routledge, 1988 -P.69.

transition into fiction. The presence of historical reality at the beginning and end of the book constantly reminds the reader that Narnia is a constructed world. Lewis does not allow complete immersion because the war remains an inescapable point of reference, forcing the audience to engage with the book as a layered narrative rather than a purely fantastical escape. In metafiction, this often leads to a sense of self-awareness, as the narrative draws attention to the “artifice” of the story and the ways in which characters are transported between realms. In Chapter 1 of “The lion the wutch and the wardrobe”, C.S. Lewis describes how the Pevensie children—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy—are evacuated from London to the countryside due to the air raids. This historical context is crucial because it sets up the novel’s themes of displacement, survival, and the contrast between war-torn reality and the magical escape into Narnia. “This story is about something that happened to four children who were sent away from London during the war because of the air raids”. In this case, the move from a real historical situation (the war) to a fictional one (Narnia) creates an interplay between the real world and the fantasy world, reflecting on the role of storytelling and escape in times of crisis.

Narrative Intrusions and Breaking the Fourth Wall

Lewis frequently addresses the reader directly, a technique that prevents total immersion and draws attention to the story as a constructed narrative. These narrative intrusions serve as reminders that the book is not just telling a story—it is commenting on the nature of storytelling itself.

Tzvetan Todorov, in “The fantastic: structural approach to a literary genre”(1975)⁹ argues that Lewis’s use of direct narration is a simple stylistic choice rather than an example of metafiction. He suggests that addressing the reader is a common convention in children’s literature and does not necessarily indicate self-awareness of fictionality. While it is true that many children’s books employ direct narration, I do not believe that Lewis’s approach is merely a stylistic feature. The way he engages with the reader often disrupts the illusion of a fully immersive world. For instance, when he writes: “I hope no one who reads this book has been quite as miserable as Susan and Lucy were that night; but if you have been—if you’ve been up all night and cried till you have no more tears left in you—you will know that there comes, in the end, a sort of quietness”¹⁰(it is a moment when Aslan, the king lion died) Lewis is not just guiding the reader’s emotions—he is directly acknowledging the act of reading itself. This breaks the boundary between narrator and audience, making the reader conscious of their position outside the narrative. Such moments reinforce my argument that Lewis was engaging with metafictional techniques, even if he did not do so in the overtly experimental way seen in later postmodern works.

Conclusion. Despite scholarly claims that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is purely a work of fantasy, I argue that it contains significant metafictional elements. The wardrobe serves as more than a magical portal—it is a representation of stepping into fiction. The framing of World War II does not merely provide a background; it reinforces the novel’s dual-layered reality. Furthermore, Lewis’s direct engagement with readers

⁹ Todorov T.T. *The fantastic: structural approach to a literary genre*, -New York: Cornell university press,- 1973. – P.40.

¹⁰ Lewis C.S *The chronicles of Narnia*, - London: -Geoffrey Bless, 1950. -P.69.

prevents full immersion, subtly drawing attention to the act of storytelling itself. While scholars such as Ward, Hume, and Todorov dismiss these aspects as symbolic, incidental, or conventional, I see them as evidence of Lewis's metafictional intent. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe does not just tell a fantasy story—it plays with the nature of fiction, challenging the reader's perception of reality and narrative. For these reasons, I firmly believe that the novel is not just a work of fantasy but an early example of metafiction in children's literature.

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