

**The Great Wars and the Paradigm Shift in the Even Tenor of Life –
An Analysis with Special reference to C. S. Lewis's
*The Chronicles of Narnia***

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Mankind has witnessed numerous wars during the countless years of its existence. And it can be noticed that major changes in the way of life after every war is inevitable. War is the state in which a whole country rises in armed conflict against one or more countries because of their opposing viewpoints. This leads to massive loss of lives along with intensive psychological trauma and torment. It changes the course of life and also brings in many varied art forms while altering the existing ones.

The first of the great wars was the World War I which lasted from 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918. It was one of the most catastrophic events in history resulting in the loss of millions of lives. This war which began in Europe was the first of its kind on a global platform. The people soon fell prey to the evils of war. Fear gripped the world and the course of life was greatly altered. After the war came to an end, many new forms of art came into existence attempting to recount and reflect upon the great many losses which occurred during the war. Then after a few years of peace came World War II.

World War II was a great war which took place on a global scale during 1939 to 1945. It began in Europe and gradually spread to other places, but its repercussions were felt throughout the world, in every aspect of life. Countless lives were lost during this period of blood-shed. World War II has turned out to be a major event in the history of mankind. The

effect of this major event continued to be felt long after the war came to an end. Major shifts were noticed in various art forms.

Along with the many other art forms, literature also underwent various changes after the war. Before World War I, literature presented a rosy and slow – paced way of life. Man was shown as living in one with nature. There was peace all around and the only troubles man knew were domestic ones. But all this changed after World War I. Mankind witnessed the gruesome realities of war. The writers of this period started incorporating these realities into their works.

Writers like Ernest Hemingway and Virginia Woolf wrote extensively about the horrors of war and its effect on the day-to-day life of man. T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" is a significant poem of this period. This poem captures in great detail the havoc wrecked upon humankind. Many other writers too captured in great detail the gruesome effects of war. It was evident that man no longer perceived life as calm and peaceful.

World War I and World War II gave rise to many new literary movements. Two of the most remarkable literary movements which arose after the two wars were modernism and postmodernism. Both of these movements were characterized by a shift away from the traditional way of thinking. Modernism and post – modernism both reached their peak during the post – war period. They were both immensely influenced by the war and the changes that followed.

Modernism had its origin during the late 19th century. In the years that followed, this movement gradually grew and influenced all forms of art. It was after World War I, during the mid – 20th century that modernism was at its height. The horrors of World War I were still green in the minds of the people even after the war had come to an end. The Victorian ideals of morality and hope were disregarded by the modernists. According to Peter Barry, "Modernism was that earthquake in the arts which brought down much of the structure of pre-twentieth-century practice in music, painting, literature, and architecture" (*Beginning Theory* 78).

The modernist artists felt a growing dissatisfaction with the romantic view of life presented in art, which was heavily influenced by the bourgeoisie. After the First World War came to an end, artists began to notice the reality of mankind's mundane existence and the illusions presented as reality. They began rejecting the traditional forms of art. The artists during this period represented the broken reality and nihilistic view of life through their works. To achieve this end, many new devices were introduced during this period.

In literature, the modernist movement brought about a great change from the earlier forms of writing. Post-World War I, writers began to write about the horrors that the war had inflicted on human life. They began to stray away from tradition. Many literary devices were introduced during this period to capture in great detail the condition of man after the war. The world was changing and writers sought to represent this through their works. After World War I, people began to drift away from religion and question the very foundations of the western society. Industrialization and urbanization were fast growing and this brought about rapid changes in the society. The modernist writers sought to give some meaning to life in a society which was largely turning nihilistic. Devices like the stream – of – consciousness technique and multiple points of view were used by writers to enable man to take greater part in reading the text and thus be part of the modernist movement. Writers like Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad and Henry James were some of the writers representing modernism in literature.

Post-modernism came into existence during the mid – 20th century. This movement originated as a response to modernism. Post-modernism is characterized by a rejection of the grand narratives and the use of such techniques as irony, parody, pastiche, intertextuality etc. Post – modernists deny the existence of a universal truth and believe that the personal experiences of a reader can alter the meaning of a text. Post-modernist thinkers question the existing systems of logic and reason and reject them as being socially and culturally conditioned according to the hierarchical prejudices prevalent in society. Theories like post-structuralism and deconstruction are associated with post-modernism.

Post-modernism in literature is marked by a deviation from the traditional form of writing and the reliance on literary conventions such as fragmentation, dark humour, paradox etc. Post-modern writers parody the modernist's quest to find meaning in everything man

does. Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is an example of a post-modern novel in which the protagonist's quest for knowledge results in confusion. The plots in a post-modernist's works are often downright outlandish or they lack in reliable narrators. Post-modernist writers reject any distinction between high and low forms of art and merge together different forms of art and genres.

After World War II came to an end, there was disillusion all around. The people were recovering from the horrors of war and began to question the very foundations of the society. They began to drift away from the set notions of rationality and longed for an escape from the terrors of the day-to-day life. The writers of this period gave voice to this dissatisfaction in the

society. Post-modern works depict this longing for an escape and the downright rejection of the norms of a cultured society.

Clive Staples Lewis (29 November 1898 – 22 November 1963) was a celebrated British writer and theologian who specialized in children's fiction. Though his tales often seem simple in nature when initially read, they abound in thought-provoking meanings when read closely. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a series originally intended for children. But a closer reading of the series shows that it holds far more meaning than what meets the eye. The series follows the adventures of a couple of children who travel into an imaginary land called Narnia.

C. S. Lewis lived through both the first and second World Wars. He was thus familiar with the horrors that the wars had inflicted on society. Lewis also witnessed the evolution of both the modernist and post-modernist movements. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the escaping of the children into an imaginary world can be compared to man's longing to escape the horrors in society post both the World Wars.

War had inflicted much pain on man that he was ever longing for an escape. Much like that, the Pevensie children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* too escape a boring day immersing themselves in an adventurous environment. Lucy Pevensie finds an escape into an unknown land and later along with her siblings they create a whole new world of reality for themselves.

Lucy felt a little frightened, but she felt very inquisitive and excited as well. She looked back over her shoulder and there, between the dark tree-trunks, she could still see the open doorway of the wardrobe and even catch a glimpse of the empty room from which she had set out. (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* 15)

The children find and create for themselves a new world and a new reality. This new world called Narnia stands for peace and happiness. All the living beings live in peace and are content with themselves. But evil and discontent soon creep into the land in various forms. Good, eventually, triumphs over evil in Narnia, but Lewis issues a warning about the harm evil can cause in the world.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, Lewis talks about how man's pride can bring about his downfall. Jadis is the powerful ruler of Charn, a land at the height of development. But Jadis reveals that due to the greed and ambition of the people of Charn, the land is destroyed. Jadis can

be seen as the personification of man's greed and pride. Charn represents the aftermath of a land ravaged by war and terror.

Lewis was also against the destruction of the land in the name of industrialization and urbanization. After World War II there was a gradual increase in industrialization. People left their homes in search of jobs. There was chaos all around. Straight after the horrors of the war, the chaotic world of industrialization and urbanization soon began to show its evil side. Man became disillusioned and longed for escape from the trials of life. Lewis talks about this evil rearing its head in society through *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Kathryn Ann Lindskoog writes,

The destruction of Narnia began with the invasion of commerce and the plunder of nature by greedy men. The idyllic forest was ruthlessly destroyed in a sacrilegious turmoil by crowds of imported workers, before the rightful owners realized what was happening. (*Viva Modern Critical Interpretations* 14)

After World War II, people began to drift away from religion and church. The horrors that they had witnessed in war made them question the validity of God and religion. But Lewis was a staunch Christian and through his works preached about the coming of Christ. Like a true post-modern Lewis sought to bring meaning into the life of man, and preached the word of God through his works. Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia* can be seen as the representation of Christ, who will eventually save man from the trials and tribulations of life.

Wars are a bane of human kind and they are sure to result in huge loss and complete destruction. Both the World Wars made an enormous impact on the literature of the time, which can be felt till this day. C. S. Lewis who was a witness to both these wars has captured the changing environment and the effects of war through *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He has shown the paradigm shift in literature that was brought about by the bloody wars, through his works.

Works Cited

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