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Reflections by C. S. Lewis on Biblical Narrative as a Literary Phenomenon: The Cathartic Example of the Youth Literary Cycle *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Abstract

This essay provides a detailed exploration of interest in the Bible as a literary phenomenon. We start with Frye's research in order to analyze academic perspectives that studied the Bible as a form of literary criticism. Among these perspectives, it is worth highlighting those that define biblical narrative as the principal element of the Western imaginative tradition. This phenomenon builds a set of interrelations that have shaped our specific literary tradition, imbuing it with this symbiosis between sacred and profane influences. Moving on to a second level of interpretation of the question at hand, we examine the encounter between secular and religious literatures as a consequence of the work initiated by Frye. The philological background of the writer C. S. Lewis is key and unprecedented in shedding light on the frontiers between reality and fantasy in the field of literary studies, as exemplified in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The Narnia books allow their readers to experience catharsis. This experience is foundational for the acquisition and cultivation of some character strengths, as the ancient Greek tradition held and put into practice centuries ago.

Keywords: literary studies, Western literary tradition, C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, catharsis, mimesis, character strengths

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Introduction

Interest in the Bible as a literary phenomenon grew with the publication of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code* in 1982. From an academic perspective that Frye (1988) called non-theological, his book sought to "study the Bible from the point of view of a literary critic" (p. 11). Taking the Bible as the main element of the Western imaginative tradition, he set out to analyze the structural relationship between the Bible and the conventions and genres of Western literature. To this end, the book explores the concepts of language, myth, metaphor, and typology in order to reach concrete conclusions about biblical rhetoric, its narrative aspects and the phases of revelation. Together with his other two works, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* and *Words with Power* – published in 1957 and 1990, respectively – Frye establishes a particular vision that will be of great importance for the reflection that concerns this work. Henceforth, and not necessarily in a specific order, since they feed and inform each other, we will distinguish between the two great blocks that underlie the research by scholars in the field of literary criticism: study of the Bible as a literary work,[1] constrained by the same criteria that apply to all studies of Western narrative, and the influence of the consequences of such studies on later works. It follows, then, that if we read the Bible as a literary creation, its motifs can be replicated and reformulated in other literary creations just as the latter are embedded in many others, forming a set of interrelationships that, in turn, build a concrete literary tradition.

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[1] In other words, "our position is that the Bible in some fundamental respects is not different from the works of, let us say, Shakespeare or Emily Dickinson or Henry Fielding or Ernest Hemingway. If we were actually studying the works of these authors, such a chapter as this would not be necessary – for who can imagine needing to read something called 'Shakespeare as Literature' or 'Emily Dickinson as Literature'? We assume that their work is literature; it needs no demonstration. But different assumptions have historically been applied to the Bible, and in many circles they are still in force. … As a prerequisite to further study, we must attempt to make it clear why and how the Bible, as literature, belongs in the same category with all these other pieces of writing" (Gabel et al., 1996, p. 4).

Frye (1988) states that "literally, the Bible is a gigantic myth, … unified by a body of recurring imagery that 'freezes' into a single metaphor cluster, the metaphors all being identified with the body of the Messiah" (p. 252), and goes on to consider that one of the most striking characteristics of the Bible is its capacity for self-recreation. This, which leads on from the prior consideration of the pre-eminent position of typologies[2] over allegories, is what allows writers to recreate those biblical motifs in their own works. Each of the types, which can also be identified according to the seven stages of the Bible – namely, creation, revolution or exodus, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse – is type to the one that follows and anti-type to the previous one, a configuration that facilitates subsequent literary recreation.

In an attempt to describe the historical path of the reception of the biblical text, as well as its multiple translations – translations that will be determined by the mindset of the moment, of which they are also a clear reflection – David Norton published in 1993 *A History of the Bible as Literature*, divided into two volumes. As the author admits in the foreword, his objective is not in any way to take the Bible as literature (Norton, 1993a, p. XV), the first of the two large blocks we referred to, but rather to demonstrate how and why interpretative variations have emerged from it, an objective that does coincide with the second of those blocks of study mentioned above. In doing so, he describes certain ideas from the history of literature and standards of language, which he believes the Bible has determined in a crucial way, which would again support the importance of biblical motifs in Western literature. It should be noted, moreover, that if the Bible's subject "is of real importance" (Norton, 1993a, p. XIV), any relationships that can be established between biblical literature and other literature are not futile in any sense of the word.

[2] Frye defined typology as "a figure of speech that moves through time: The type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future" (1988, p. 105). On the other hand, he also claimed that the three stages of the language he describes in his work – metaphorical, metonymic, and descriptive – are based on two types of unity, which exist simultaneously.

In the second volume of his work, Norton (1993b) devotes a chapter to presenting the conclusions of his research into the term "the Bible as literature" (262–285), attributing its creation to the English poet and critic Matthew Arnold. Subsequent use of the term, however, is not owed to Arnold, but to the conjunction of two situations: the cultural and social panorama of the time – which would have necessitated, sooner or later, this type of nomenclature – and the writings of Richard Green Moulton, whose title explained the object of study[3]. The works of Moulton, professor of literary theory and English literature at the University of Chicago, aided by his clear way of presenting and appreciating the biblical text, "would give him a fair claim to be considered the father of modern literary study of the Bible if such study needed a father, and indeed …, he is the most quoted of the period's literary critics of the Bible" (Norton, 1993b, p. 277).

Harold Bloom (1989) joined the emerging interest in the study of the Bible as literature and, as summarized by Salvador (2008), he took "a critical approach to the presence of the biblical tradition in Western literature, focusing on representative cases: Dante, Shakespeare, … Milton, Wordsworth, Blake, Freud, Kafka" (p. 28). Despite the title, his work *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* presupposes a clear focus on poetry rather than narrative and Bloom's approach also touches upon works of this second genre from the same critical perspective taken by Frye.

Another great example of the study of the Bible as an eminently literary text[4] is provided by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode. At the time, they

[3] Moulton, R. G. (1986). *The Literary Study of the Bible: An Account of the Leading Forms of Literature Represented in the Sacred Writings*. Ibister & Co; Moulton, R. G. (1901). *A Short Introduction to the Literature of the Bible*. D. C. Heat & Co.; Moulton, R. G. (1901). *Select Masterpieces of Biblical Literature:* The Macmillan Company; Moulton, R. G. (1907). *The Modern Reader's Bible Translation*. The Macmillan Company.

[4] We refer to the statements of Gabel et al. (1996) when they clarify the extent of the reach of the term *literature* when applied to the study of the Bible as it is, i.e., how it is understood as a whole: "We are using the term 'literature' in its broadest sense. There is a narrower sense of the term that encompasses only what it is known as *belles-lettres*: poetry, short stories, novels, plays, essays. Although the Bible does contain this kind of material, it also contains genealogies, laws, letters, royal decrees, instructions

were classified by Norton (1993b) as an "authoritative source" (p. 357) that presented the literary discussion of the Bible in modern times, although the examples they select are predominantly narrative. As Alter and Kermode (1987) make clear in their work, they attempted to offer, along the lines of their contemporaries,

> a new view of the Bible as a work of great literary force and authority, a work of which it is entirely credible that it should have shaped the minds and lives of intelligent men and women for two millennia and more. (p. 2)

This arose from the need to gain a new "accommodation with the Bible as it is, which is to say, as literature of high importance and power" (p. 4). Both authors, Alter and Kermode, produced research into the interpretation of the narrative in the Bible, which they reflected in their early writings, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* and *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*, respectively.

Norton's commentary (1993b) in view of the modern concern for narrative and unity, sets out the relative harmony between the main thesis that Northrop Frye[5] once held and the one[6] held by Kermode:

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for building, prayers … and other kinds of material more difficult to classify. We must acknowledge this remarkable diversity and be careful not to exclude any of it from the scope of our study" (p. 4).

[5] "The linguistic idiom of the Bible does not really coincide with any of our three phases of language, important as those phases have been in the history of its influence. It is not metaphorical like poetry, though it is full of metaphor, and is as poetic as it can well be without actually being a work of literature. It does not use the transcendental language of abstraction and analogy, and its use of objective and descriptive language is incidental throughout. It is really a fourth form of expression, for which I adopt the now well-established term *kerygma*, proclamation. In general usage this term is largely restricted to the Gospels, but there is not enough difference between the Gospels and the rest of the Bible in the use of language to avoid extending it to the entire book" (Frye, 1988, pp. 54–55).

[6] Kermode (1980) translates *kerygma* into a mystery that we understand because we have been taught to understand it, though this learning does not prevent confusion in the face of the impossibility of achieving a definitive intelligible form: "We are

> the Gospels are – not history – but *kerygma*, proclamation. … This religious declaration of faith is also a literary declaration of faith. The voice *is* there, in the light: narrative, this narrative at least, contains meaning. … The Gospels have come to stand for all texts, Jesus for meaning. (p. 370)

This issue radically changes the interpretation of the Bible as an object of literary study: We now have a foreground in which tools and strategies are recognized in the Bible. Gabel et al. (1996) described point by point these literary[7] strategies, justifying their use by means of a historical/cultural argument:

> the means for getting the effects, however, are the means that authors have used ever since the dawn of literary culture, and we can approach the literature of the Bible with the full confidence that biblical authors drew their weapons from the same armory that supplies us today. (p. 23)

On the other hand, citing more examples of this type of interpretation, Alter (1981, pp. 179–184) produces a list of the four motives that warrant observation when reading biblical narrative and which coincide with the four great blocks into which his work is divided: words, actions, dialogue, and narration. Because the biblical narrative is so laconic in comparison with other types of narratives and because of this tendency to repeat certain words or expressions, it follows that something is being particularly hid-den and must be unraveled, both in words and in actions[8] and

most unwilling to accept mystery, what cannot be reduced to other and more intelligible forms. Yet that is what we find here: something irreducible, therefore perpetually to be interpreted; not secrets to be found one by one, but Secrecy" (p. 143).

[7] They refer to hyperbole, metaphor, symbolism, allegory, personification, irony, word games, and poetry (Gabel et al., 1996, pp. 23–42).

[8] On the other hand, some are of the opinion that the Bible cannot be categorized as "literature" because it is something else. Josipovici (1995) exemplifies this when he says, "It is undeniable that modern specialists, for example Barr and Kugel,

dialogue. The most particular of these four characteristics will be narrative, mainly because of the way in which the omniscience of the narrator, whose knowledge extends from the beginning of things to their end, envelops us – "He's all-knowing and also perfectly reliable" (Alter, 1981, p. 184).

However, the next level of interpretation that has been pursued in recent times in certain academic contexts is one that promotes the encounter between secular and religious literature, an encounter that contains two distinct levels simultaneously: the level of coincidence in narrative tools – a level that we have outlined – and the level of coincidence in meaning, or rather, in understanding or formation at a more personal, inspirational level. Though it is subject to various interpretations, the latter level has no less strong and evocative an influence on human beings, which led Lanero (2004) to state that

> Scripture is important to Lewis because it conveys to us the essence of the person. … The status of the Bible, dependence on its authority and on a concrete, unitary and verbal inspiration, only impresses Lewis' literary and spiritual sense in a tangential way. (p. 114)

It is worth examining, then, the role of C. S. Lewis in such studies.

C. S. Lewis's Perspectives on Literary Criticism: Imagination, Fiction, and Myth

We can add the efforts of C. S. Lewis to Frye's aspiration to judge the Bible from a critical perspective. The former, with a clear philological background, tackled the question of literary criticism in some of his scholarly works – known less widely than his fiction – and tried, in a way, to present

are right to be concerned with the assimilation of the Bible into 'literature.' They are right because the Bible is not 'literature'; however, what distinguishes it from 'literature' is not what they claim. … On the other hand, I have tried to defend that it is not 'literature' as it has no time for 'literature'" (p. 475).

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his view on the apologetic aspect that underlay his writing. In some of these lesser-known works, such as the apologetic ones and the film adaptations of his young adult literature cycle, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it is possible to rediscover in him a true passion for literary criticism, someone who has reflected deeply and profusely on the implications that underlie the fact that the Bible is no longer taken as a book of revelation. He uses the term "realistic fiction" to resolve the way in which, in his opinion, biblical narrative can enter into dialogue with secular narrative. Here one can intuit the relevance of the arguments in favor of humans as poetic beings and therefore as beings that beautify everything they touch, a discussion that once again takes us back to the starting point, that is, the dichotomy between religious and secular language. Lanero (2004) argues that though he was critical, Lewis was a reader of the Bible rather than a preacher, and he wonders to what extent Lewis would have agreed with the books on the Bible by Northrop Frye, Robert Alter, Frank Kermode, Gabriel Josipovici, and David Norton, among others. The reason for this doubt is where the focus of these works lies: All of them are devoted to analyzing the influence of the Bible as literary or even therapeutic material. The assumption that follows from such an analysis is that the Bible is no longer considered a book of revelation; "the most important theological change in modern times has been the consideration of God as immanent rather than transcendent" (Lanero, 2004, p. 103). Whether or not the Bible was considered to be a revealed divine truth, literary criticism has adopted this specific view and methodology in order to study it further.

In examining the writings of C. S. Lewis, it is clear that the discussion about whether the Holy Scriptures should be taken as a divine utterance is something that concerned him, although there is not a very considerable amount on the subject in his writings. In the controversy over fidelity to the biblical text, he analyses it according to the same criteria that he would have applied to any other type of literary text. Here one can highlight his essays on "the meanings of 'fantasy'" and "on realisms," which are included in *An Experiment in Criticism* in order to assess the extent to which he undertook an allegorical, metaphorical, or symbolic interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

As his evolution continued, despite our author publishing both science fiction and Christian apologetic books, as Edwards (2007) points out, "his heart was always centered in myth and fairy tale" (pp. 3–4). Furthermore, Lewis answered the question of what inspired his books with the following: "Does anyone know where exactly an idea comes from? With me all fiction begins with pictures in my head" (Dorsett & Mead, 1985, pp. 68–69). This leads us to set forth the definition of imagination. It is said that "imagination is the power to create or form images in the mind. Or, with a slight modification: It is the power to create or form mental images" (Taliaferro & Evans, 2011, p. 12). Additionally, the action of imagining is included within the umbrella of other speculative mental states, such as conceiving and supposing (Kind, 2016, p. 214), and it occupies a major place in our lives for its instructive role in the pursuit of scientific understanding (Kind, 2016, p. 9), as well as in the lives of our youngsters for the game of make-believe it provides them with (Kind, 2016, p. 7).

We have described how the term "the Bible as literature" has evolved, leaving open the reflection on new types of interpretations that challenge the reader beyond the initial narrative level. We should, therefore, move on to distinguishing between fantasy and reality and the question of whether there is a relevant distinction between these elements in the relationship between secular and religious literature.[9]

The dialogue between fiction (in this case fantasy[10]) and realism (religious literature?) necessitates, first of all, a definition of the terms. C. S. Lewis differentiates between selfish fiction and disinterested fiction:

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[9] In other words, this leads us to ask ourselves how biblical writings should be taken. Are they real or pure fantasy? Would fantasy be a more *effective* resource than reality? And if so, what would they be better suited for? If, according to Redfield (2012, p. 84), "the appearances of things act upon us because we take the appearances for the things themselves," then the fantasy that results from these myths is not then futile when it comes to understanding the appearance of the things we receive.

[10] It is not the objective of this article to delve into the existing and obvious distinctions between the terms *fiction*, *fantasy*, and *imagination*. We will consider, with certain licenses, that fiction and fantasy are similar concepts in which the element of imagination is present, and thus leave the description of their differences for other future investigations.

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in short, fiction that provokes in the reader the capacity to taste the ambrosia without having tried it is disinterested, while fiction that the reader only reads because they recognize in it the food they already eat is selfish. It is not, therefore, a true fantasy in the strict sense of the term if it reproduces exactly what one can see in one's world; that literature that sticks to the known universe will be the one that has the greatest appearance of realism, while nevertheless lacking it (Lewis, 2000, p. 60). Fiction "permeates contemporary life, via the novels we read, the stories we tell, the series we watch, and – as philosophers – the thought experiments we use. Many think it should be characterized in terms of a relationship to the imagination" (Kind, 2016, p. 204). Fiction is thus rooted in imagination because the latter enables us to escape from the world as well as learn from it; we tend to switch from transcendent uses of imagination – such as pretending, dreaming, or engaging with the arts – to instructive ones (Kind, 2016, p. 8). Lewis's thoughts on imagination are clear: We should care about imagination because although an undisciplined and unused one might offer trouble, it is a spiritual force within the domain of every human being and it helps us to shape our real world, to live our lives fully, and to involve us in the "imaginative enterprise that determines whether we live lives of 'quiet desperation' or meaningful engagement with the world He is redeeming, including our imagination" (Edwards, 2007, p. 7). For this reason, continues Edwards (2007, p. 5), fairy tales are said to be the most suitable vehicles for expressing a transcendent truth, from which Lewis will benefit when using them as a canvas to paint the pictures in his head;

> in engaging his fiction, Lewis would have us come to see "imagination" as the divinely given human faculty of comprehending reality through the use of images, pictures, shapes, patterns: seeing what is, seeing what was, and seeing what could be, through artistic "representation." It is the counterpart and complement to reason. (Edwards, 2007, p. 8)

To define what realisms are, it will also be necessary to distinguish between "realism of content" and "realism of presentation" (Lewis, 2000).

In realism of content, the appearance of things is barely described; no information is usually given about how the characters dress and we do not even necessarily know which character is speaking, since they all follow the same pattern. They are "stories that are not themselves at all 'realistic' in the sense of being probable or even possible" (Lewis, 2000, p. 62). This does not mean that there is only one way to proceed with realistic literature or that one type of realism is better or worse than the other. Instead, realism of presentation is the one that presupposes that everything should be true, that is, it can lead us to say "this is lifelike." Considering both options, and apart from this typical realism known as "realism of content," stories of exceptional, incredible, and atypical things could also be called realistic (Lewis, 2000, p. 66). It would be a mistake, Lewis (2000) continues, for all literature to conform with perfect accuracy to reality; it is "not that all books should be realistic in content, but that every book should have as much of this realism as it pretends to have" (p. 69). Odero and Odero (1992) agree that "good literary fantasy can convey a much deeper vision of the world than some so-called *realistic* stories" (p. 384), which is why we find ourselves judging *The Chronicles of Narnia* in relation to the Bible, both of which have their own implications as specific literary works independent of one another. In dialogue with the religious narrative, we can corroborate from this that "realistic fiction" is possible[11] because, firstly, theology is not poetry. And if it is, it is not very good poetry, as Lewis (2000) states. However, theology has an esthetic value even if one does not believe in it – a value that increases the more one learns about it. As "man is a poetical animal that touches nothing that he does not adorn" (Lewis, 2002, p. 70), it is logical that theology is necessarily poetical; this does not make it more fictitious, but quite the opposite. Secondly, Lewis does not see a specific religious language such as science has; when theologians use scientific language (or rather pseudoscientific),

[11] We call this "realistic fiction" because it is a fiction that does not deceive us, but rather the opposite: "Admitted fantasy is precisely the kind of literature which never deceives at all. Children are not deceived by fairy tales; they are often and gravely deceived by school-stories. Adults are not deceived by science fiction; they can be deceived by the stories in the women's magazines" (Lewis, 2000, p. 70).

they disconnect from the very literature on which they depend and do not gain a true understanding of Scripture (Lanero, 2004, p. 106). Therefore, we work on biblical texts using our own words.

Regarding discussions of what kind of fantasy *The Chronicles of Narnia* is and how its similarities to the Bible should be understood, we must note down that Lewis in the first place did not write the books with any allegorical intent, as Wagner (2005) determines categorically. He refers, instead, to a term that J. R. R. Tolkien coined, "applicability," and which he applied to his own work in *The Lord of the Rings*, in an attempt to clarify that he had not written it with the intention of representing an alleged allegorical character. *Applicability* is therefore defined as follows: "the idea of giving a reader the freedom to extract meaning from an author's work rather than an author forcing a particular idea onto the reader" (Wagner, 2005, p. 102). However, Tolkien himself did not approve of cataloguing *Chronicles* using that term, because, as he understood some Lewis's comments, they should be categorized as yet another allegorical manifestation, that could be described as "supposal," according to Wagner (2005, p. 99). It is worth mentioning in this context that the notion of "eucatastrophe," also shared by Tolkien, is a neologism for the death and resurrection of Christ that means, oxymoronically, a "tragedy with a happy ending." It marks Lewis's new belief in the way a myth works in understanding the incarnation of Jesus Christ as a historical event (Edwards, 2007, p. 5).

In a letter that Lewis wrote to Sophia Storr in 1959, he explained to her what he meant by supposal: "I don't say: 'Let us represent Christ as Aslan.' I say: 'Supposing there was a world like Narnia, and supposing, like ours, it needed redemption, let us imagine what sort of Incarnation and Passion and Resurrection Christ would have there'" (Dorsett & Mead, 1985, p. 52). If the concepts in an allegory are real but the characters refer to something that is not themselves, then in the supposal, the fictional characters are real within the imaginary world. Following this theory, *Chronicles* is not an allegory either, but a kind of comparison in that, supposing that that imaginary world was real and the characters were to find themselves in the same dilemmas faced by Jesus Christ (in the case of Aslan)

and the apostles (in the case of the children who are the protagonists), they would have done[12] this or that.

Thus, having set aside allegory, it is possible to assume that "Lewis views *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a myth. He explains that an allegory is a story with a single meaning, but a myth is a story that can have many meanings for different readers[13] in different generations" (Wagner, 2005, p. 100). Hartley (2012) tries to explain it as follows: "when Lewis reproduces the same situation [the same situation as a given biblical miracle] in *Prince Caspian*, in essence he constructs a Narnian 'miracle' that adheres to the same criteria to which Biblical miracles adhere" (p. 8). Consequently, we can argue that as a myth,[14] *Chronicles* presents a world independent of any other, with its own meaning, origin, and end and whose particular mythology meets and dialogues with the myth that embodies the biblical story,[15] while the images and literary motifs that they both develop are embedded in the same language and are part of the same literary tradition. When Lanero (2004, p. 110) tries to determine what C. S. Lewis was set on pointing out, he proposed that the answer was that which

[12] It should be noted here that it is the actions that prevail over the characters.

[13] That is why it would not be appropriate to compare *Chronicles* with *The Lord of the Rings*, in terms of the simplicity of the former in comparison with the mature complexity of the latter, since the two are written in different styles and aimed at different audiences. It is worth reading the dedication of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, in which Lewis (1974) explicitly refers to the books as a fairy tale, giving the whole saga a complete profile: "My dear Lucy, I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But someday you will be older enough to start reading fairy tales again."

[14] "Lewis, Tolkien, and the other Inklings took to be foundational to what they called mythopoeia – or the act of new myth-making. Myth for them was not defined as a legendary tale told with dubious authority; but instead it was the grand overarching narrative that created the reason to be, and to become, for members of the village, the polis, and the nation, touched by its encompassing themes, images, characters, and plot lines" (Edwards, 2007, p. 9).

[15] We can call it a myth from the literary consideration of the concept of "the Bible as literature" set forth above, a term that allows us to take these *licenses* – as it evinces narrative aspects, as well as any of the other literary aspects – of the story being told in the Bible.

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Christians obtain by reading the Bible, and not what they might obtain. And what is obtained, distilled from the fantasies, brings us closer to the real version of events.

> The reading of the Gospels takes us away from our fantasies, contrasting them with the reality of Jesus …. The Bible is a book that offers us reality. And the essence of that reality is that the reader's response to the Bible is a matter of the utmost consequence. (Lanero, 2004, pp. 110–111)

The following statement by C. S. Lewis (2000) precisely summarizes what he thinks a book does for the reader: "Ideally, we should like to define a good book as one which 'permits, invites, or compels' good reading. But we shall have to make do with 'permits and invites'" (p. 115). That is, a literary work invites – or rather, we would add, provokes – a powerful affective experience whose fictional mechanisms evoke certain types of connections with the reality in which one participates, both the reality in which one is inserted and the one in which the work resides. The *logos*, what is said, is the factor that evokes these connections, and these connections will be stronger the more they use our language,[16] language that is understandable. An approximation to that *logos*, though, is not possible without *poiema*, deeds on which the reactions that the *logos* provokes in the reader are built; as has been pointed out, the more fictional this is, the stronger the reactions will be.

One of the most prominent and influential scholars of his time, who suggested connections between the secular and religious literary traditions that encompass much of the Western tradition is Erich Auerbach (1950). He followed the Greek concept of mimesis as an imitative/representative paradigm of reality, opposing the literary tradition that favored

[16] Schökel (1966) presents three different levels of language, and concludes – as does the thesis presented here – that "if Sacred Scripture were to employ exclusively technical language, it would be far more precise and far less rich" (p. 147). Furthermore, this richness helps to create the stylistic force that permeates the whole Bible and makes *effective* receptive experience in the reader possible.

the separation of styles over that which rejects them, in order to conclude that the literature of the Western world is an imitative configuration that can help explain how our representation of reality is shaped. By reading the Bible as a literary creation, as he argues, we see how its motifs can be and are replicated in other literary creations. One could deduce, then, that Auerbach's mimetic representation of reality is a kind of reformulation of the self-referencing[17] of which Frye spoke: having a base model on which to construct subsequent references allows imitation according to that same model and the consequent symbolic understanding of the original concept. Alter and Kermode (1987) stated that Auerbach's contribution in attempting to point out the possibility of a figurative interpretation of the Bible allowed for new perspectives in the analysis of the Bible, as well as connections between the works of biblical writers and the Western literary tradition. They also take the work of the German philologist as "the point of departure for the modern literary understanding of the Bible" (Alter & Kermode, 1987, p. 23). Norton (1993b) said something similar of Auerbach:

> by placing a biblical narrative at the head of one of these traditions, Auerbach ensures that it will be treated not only on the same terms as other narrative, whether fictional or historical, but as a primary element in a literary study that is not confined to the Bible as literature. (p. 359)

Conclusions

According to Ricoeur (2000), we must "search in the *mythos* not for a fable, but for its coherence" (p. 96). What is interesting about the narrative, the *mythos*, is the thing itself, a true, credible, and recognizable action that can be extrapolated to our own actions. A fable is not a fable

[17] This self-referencing was also referred to by Bruns (1987) when he stated that "the Bible always addresses itself to the time of interpretation" (p. 627).

until it shows us its verisimilitude, thanks to which we can judge to what extent we see ourselves reflected in it. Up to now, we have understood that the evolution of the concept of "the Bible as literature" responds to the need to demonstrate that not only is it possible to reformulate the biblical narrative by taking it as a literary object, but that this is necessary and happens. A superficial observation of this situation reveals that this application – or rather replication – of biblical literary motifs generally occurs in works of fiction, of which *The Chronicles of Narnia* is one example.

In order to demonstrate the complexity of the topic and to foster some reflections over the many aspects of the reception of the Biblical text, as well as the subsequent texts that heavily rely on it, we justify this analysis under one hypothesis. The connection between the two objects, the Bible and *Chronicles*, offers a significant understanding of certain literary motifs, the latter of which (the motifs of *Chronicles*) will revert directly to the former (the motifs of the Bible). It is worth highlighting Redfield's statement (2012) about Aristotle, as he is certain that the philosopher meant that "we take pleasure in imitating these things because through imitation we learn something. So perhaps learning itself purifies" (p. 119), which eventually raises the educative issue of the learning of those character strengths exhibited by the main characters of any narration (Carreira Zafra, 2020). We would therefore conclude that through the number of references and connections in *Chronicles*, these literary motifs, which come under the structure of fantasy sagas, are of the utmost significance when compared to the influence that other types of literary motifs may have had on *Chronicles*. This learning or understanding occurs through the mimetic process of representation and the shaping of reality. We take this mimesis as an essential foundation for new interpretations of the biblical narrative, those which offer an integrative vision that compares secular and religious narratives and in which it is no longer the analysis of the purely narrative that prevails, but rather the perspective that the reader acquires from them. The reader, then, is responsible for putting them together and allowing the evocation of interpretations that they recognize as belonging to another place but which are the basis of a common tradition that they know because they have been taught to know.

It would be logical, however, to argue that any reading of specific biblical passages we might undertake is approached in accordance with a certain interpretation with which a reader outside our particular perspective cannot identify. However, even though we accept that the interpretation of a text does not have to be unique, we also reject the kind of contemporary agnosticism about the meaning of texts to which Alter refers (1981, p. 179). In order to correct a hypothetical *sui generis* view that judges the content of possible and hypothetical comparative studies of reductionists, it would be wise to provide sufficient examples to create a range of authoritative references on which to base the reasons behind one's own interpretations when observing these biblical motives narrated in fictional literature.

Finally, the following reflection should be made: If the analysis of what we receive from a work is to be only literal or, worse, if it does not provide any possibility of being interpreted from different angles, then no comparative or other literary study would have any reason to exist, and therefore, one might dare to suggest that there would not be a literary tradition on which to base ourselves, an assertion that today we know to be false. We reaffirm this attitude of openness with regard to textual interpretation under the auspices of C. S. Lewis (2000): Apart from telling a story, the work has its own entity, and can be considered an *objet d'art* in itself. Regarding the role artists may have when creating their *objet d'art* and its link to the Christian notion of creation, Taliaferro and Evans (2011) note that "artistic activity can be used to fill out the image of God as creator. Aquinas commended the thesis that the God of Christian theism is analogous to an artist" (p. 182). On the other hand, it would not be appropriate, perhaps, to look for the value of a literary work in the commentaries on life that it provides us, but rather we should look for the effect it has on us when we read it, what we recognize and feel. As mentioned above, in ancient Greece the goal of mimesis was catharsis, that is, purification. It was this purification that, according to Aristotle's view, gave rise to a possible, though not explicit, pedagogical use of his mimetic theory. Again, Redfield (2012) was enlightening in saying that "I suspect that Aristotle meant by katharsis exactly this combination

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of emotion and learning [sic]" (p. 119). Learning, then, is of the utmost importance when it comes to putting into practice the literary phenomenon described, which might be the same as Aristotle planned when thinking about mimesis and catharsis. Apart from that, we must not forget that

> the emphasis in Lewis's fiction (and nonfiction) is always "seeing with the heart," of apprehending images and tracing metaphors that instill faith and inspire journeys into the never-never land of the spirit. For the heart reveals our true character, and, ultimately, where our treasure is. (Edwards, 2007, p. 4)

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