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Dream Visions: A Stylistic Perspective of the Science Fiction of C.S. Lewis

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Abstract:

C.S. Lewis is a renowned British novelist and critic known for his scholarly writing. Popularly known for his Narnia Stories Lewis is a claimed for his didactic and imaginative fantasy writings. The Space Trilogy has also played a vital role in proclaiming him as a unique writer. An apocalyptic writer, he focusing on the battle between good and evil and Lewis uses his Science Fiction to express his views. His brilliant use of various literary techniques to drive forth his ideas is commendable. He employs various techniques like the use of similes and metaphors, symbols, repetitions, use of various points of view and dialogues. This paper attempts to highlight Lewis' unique style of the use of dream visions. Lewis employs dream visions in all the three novels. However, the use of dream visions used in the third novel that Hideous Strength is analysed.

Keywords: *C.S. Lewis, science fiction, SF writers, Space Trilogy, use of dream visions, technique as complimentary to the theme.*

1. Dream Visions: A Stylistic Perspective of the Science Fiction of C.S. Lewis

The Cosmic Trilogy of C.S. Lewis rises as a tower of evidence for his matchless imagination and splendid use of literary techniques to convey his strong convictions to a society that is lost in the mire of disillusion of science and technology. The advances of scientific discoveries and inventions have inspired novelists to stretch the limits of fiction beyond the traditional boundaries. A desire for fantasy and the need for new avenues are instrumental in bringing science into fiction. This innovative fiction has taken advantage of the emerging scientific trends thereby giving birth to an entirely new form of writing namely Science Fiction.

2. Science Fiction Writers Down the Ages

Mary Shelley is identified as the first science fiction writer with her novel *Frankenstein* in 1818. However, it had neither a name nor any recognition as a separate form of literature then. It slowly gained grounds with writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, Edward Bellamy and Edward Rice Burroughs. Jules Verne is called as the 'Father of Science Fiction'. H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell have contributed to the establishment of science fiction as a separate genre and has now found a profound place in literature. Today, it is a much sought of area by many contemporary writers owing to the liberty it offers to explore new frontiers and to create something more than what already exists.

In the twentieth century, the need for values and ethics beyond research and development becomes more apparent. Hence science fiction writers began using it as a medium to instruct people. Falling in line with them is Clive Staples Lewis who uses this brilliant art of fantasy as a vehicle for didactic and serious thinking. A twentieth century British writer he has an undisputed reputation as a scholar, teacher, popular author and a literary critic.

3. Life of C.S. Lewis

Clive Staples Lewis popularly known as 'Jack' was born on November 29, 1898 in Belfast, Ireland. Even as a child he was a voracious reader and started writing when he was just six years old. The death of his mother when he was ten shattered a happy and secured childhood. He buried himself into his books and discovered classical and Celtic mythology with delight. His skill in writing won him a classical scholarship to Melvern College in 1913. He was coached by a private tutor in Surrey for a scholarship to Oxford in 1916. Lewis served in the British army for a year during the First World War.

Lewis worked in University College and Magdalene College Oxford, where he was elected as fellow of language and literature. He was recognized as an excellent lecturer and an incomparable teacher. Lewis moved to Cambridge to occupy the first chair of medieval and renaissance literature. He married Joy Davidman in 1956. Lewis died due to cancer in 1960.

4. Lewis' Literary Career

Lewis began writing at the age of six and continued to scale great heights as a scholar. He has attained an inevitable reputation as a literary critic and novelist. He is also an apocalyptic and religious writer. He has authored thirteen volumes of literary criticism,

nineteen volumes of theology and philosophy and seventeen volumes of imaginative material including seven fantasy and seven Narnia stories. He is also popularly known for his Science Fiction, *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), *The Allegory of Love* (1936), *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), *Authurian Torso* (1948) *English Literature in the sixteenth Century* (1954) and *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961). *Surprised by Joy* talks about his own life and his experiences.

The Space Trilogy or *The Ransom Trilogy*, also called as *The Cosmic Trilogy* is a brilliant masterpiece of C.S. Lewis. The first book of the Trilogy, '*Out of the Silent Planet*' (1938) was written following a conversation with his friend J.R.R. Tolkien. Then follows his *Perelandra* (1942), the second book of the Space Trilogy and *That Hideous Strength* (1945) is the last book of the series. Each book is set in three different planets, the Mars, Venus and Earth. Lewis calls them Malacandra, Perelandra and Thulcandra respectively. Both Malacandra and Perelandra are uncorrupted by evil. Ransom the protagonist who visits the planets is instructed by the Oyarsas, the rulers of the planets about the battle between the good and evil. He is empowered and sent back to Thulcandra to save it from the evil forces.

5. Dream Visions as Employed by Lewis

M.H. Abrams defines a dream vision as, 'a conventional narrative form widely employed by medieval poets where the narrator falls asleep, usually in a spring landscape and dreams the events that he goes on to relate.' (46) Adopting the conventional narrative form widely employed by the medieval writers, Lewis excels in his artistic incorporation of dream visions into his modern science fiction. He employs this technique sparingly in the first two novels and in the third novel, dream visions become the vital technique in the unfolding of the plot. He also focuses on the stand point that science if not properly used can become a destructive force instead of serving as an aid to mankind.

The plot of the third novel, *That Hideous Strength* revolves around two conflicting forces namely, The Logres and The NICE, a scientific institute. The former strives hard to establish a City of God, based on love and moral values whereas the latter tries to build a City of Man using the knowledge of science. Ransom who is rejuvenated and empowered after his life in *Perelandra* is the Director of the Logres. The Logres is guided by Jane who has the unique capacity to foresee the future through dream visions.

The dream visions of *That Hideous Strength* can be classified and studied in three different aspects. The dream visions of Jane, the seer, guides her in her personal life, the visions that direct the Logres in their battle against the evil forces and the visions that reveal the functioning of the NICE, the representation of Evil.

The dream vision in which Mrs. Dimble and the dwarfs feature, Lewis highlights his views on the institution of marriage. It is a call to the current generation who have lost the joy of harmonious living in their pursuit of materialism. Mark's ambition to attain high merits in his profession and his desire to make more money drives him away from his spouse. Jane is forced to take a relook into her own life as a result of the dream. She is lead into a self-realization that in the name of modern thinking, being courageous and independent she has lost her love and comradeship of her own husband. Ransom while interpreting the dream says that she has been repressing something. He later identifies this as pride. Jane accepts her mistake and begins to look at life in a new perspective. To quote the words of Lewis, "In this height and depth and breadth the little ides of herself which she has hitherto called 'me' dropped down and vanished, unfluttering, into the bottomless distance, like a bird in space with air." (*That Hideous Strength*, 353). The dream vision enables her to shed the qualities attached to self and puts her on the path of goodness. Jane realises that she is no ordinary person and that she has been call for a great purpose. She is empowered to equip herself and to lead others in the battle against Evil. William G. Johnson and Marcia K. Houtman writes, "what Lewis succeeds in doing so well is creating in fiction a reality that draws readers into worlds seemingly more real than those in which the readers live." (75)

The next set of dream visions relates to the technological super-agency, The National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (NICE) which believe that it is empowered to solve all sorts of social and genetic problems. But it turns out to be a destructive agent and intends to impulse a regime of ruthless social engineering. The 'Head of Alcasan', 'the murder of William Hinges' and 'the Saracen's Head' are the three dream visions of Jane which predicts the functioning of the NICE.

The Head of NICE at its Headquarters at Belbury is the head of Alcasan, an Arab radiologist, who is murdered. The head screwed off and preserved from decay through advanced life supporting systems. This head that remains alive is later projected as the Saracen's Head the mastermind that aims at the destruction of the Earth called as Thulcandra in the novel. The murder of William Hinges is a revelation of the functioning of the NICE. Hinges who decides to withdraw his employment from NICE is ruthlessly murdered. The NICE mercilessly destroys anyone who refuses to surrender to their ideologies. As typical of a science thriller, Lewis presents a frightening and unimaginable world that is controlled by scientific principles and gadgets.

The third classification of dream visions relate to the Logres, a small group with an enlightenment that science can be misused as an evil agent to destroy the world. 'The head of an old man', 'the corpse in the dark, cold room', 'the empty tomb', 'the man in the tunnel' and 'Merlin's end' are the five dream visions that Lewis employs to help the Logres in their mission. 'The head of an old man' refers to the head of Merlinus Ambrosius, the magician of the Arthurian Legend. Lewis' technique of using legendary characters adds credit to his science fiction as using alternative time line is a salient feature of science fiction. The Logres are directed to meet Merlin through the dream visions. The dream of Merlin's end foretells how Merlin will die as a martyr in the battle between the good and evil.

The novel concludes with the Logres' brave encounter against the NICE under the leadership of Merlin. The gruesome battle that follows sees the ultimate defeat of the NICE and the total destruction of their Headquarters. Lewis' artistry in blending the two conflicting forces of good and evil is remarkable. The Head that is screwed off and the head that comes to life are the representations of good and evil.

6. A Book for All Times

The trilogy is a rich storehouse of collective themes based on science, social, theological, ethical and moral values. His use of various literary techniques runs complimentary to the themes. The craftsmanship of C.S. Lewis indeed deserves high praise. To conclude, the technique of dream vision employed by Lewis is a powerful strategy to drive forth the themes of the novel. Witnessing the role of science in the Second World War, Lewis warns the world that science is likely to become a treat to the world if not used in the right direction. He also presents the beauty of peaceful living in accordance with Nature. Thus, as Downing comments, "the Ransom series gave Lewis the opportunity to ... offer his own reflections on the nature of good and evil" (100). His unique craftsmanship, imagination and splendid use of various techniques to expound the various themes make it a book of all times.

7. References

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