ABSTRACT

The dissertation entitled ‘The Craftsmanship of C.S. Lewis’ Science Fiction’ deals with the unique craftsmanship of Lewis as reflected in his science fiction. ‘Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength.’ It delves into the exemplary skill of Lewis and proves his artistic and imaginative power in his thrilling Space Trilogy. It delineates Lewis’ splendid use of the various literary techniques to drive forth the theme of the trilogy.

Chapter I which is the Introduction traces the development of science fiction as a literary genre and highlights its characteristic features. It gives a glimpse of the various science fiction writers down the ages. It further focuses on the life and works of C.S. Lewis and gives the scope of this dissertation.

Chapter II entitled ‘The Design’ focuses on the design of the trilogy to expound the theme, the use of postscript and preface to link the novels, the use of repetitions to promote unity in the different novels, use of science as a prominent technique and Lewis’ design of various points of view to drive home his ideas.

The craftsmanship of Lewis and his brilliant design of making the science fiction a trilogy is discussed. The uniqueness of this masterpiece lies in the fact that though the novels exist together as a trilogy they can also be read as individual novels. The technique of postscript and preface links the novels together giving it a holistic view. The postscript of Out of the Silent Planet which is in the form of a letter helps the reader to recapitulate the plot and gives a personal touch to the novel. The atmosphere of Malacandra that is aromatic, an account of the Malacandrian creatures and the heavenly beings are a few of the details in the
postscript. This device is also instrumental in initiating the readers into a new line of thought from space travel to time travel. Lewis uses the Preface in the novels Perelandra and That Hideous Strength. They forecast the plot of the novels besides providing a glimpse of the previous novels. The Preface in Perelandra, is a brief introduction to the novel. This preface consisting of five lines is just enough to introduce Perelandra to the readers. In the preface of That Hideous Strength Lewis justifies the aspects of the novel with regard to the characterisation, setting and theme.

The use of repetitions which is employed in different ways is significant as it runs complimentary to the theme of the trilogy. It helps the readers to recollect the various incidents of the plot since it repeats characters, places and philosophies throughout the trilogy. It is also instrumental in enabling the readers to respond emotionally and intellectually to the novels.

The use of science is an evidence of the trilogy as a twentieth century novel. The journey in space, the alien creatures and the strange worlds, the war with the supernatural elements, conversations with the rulers of the other worlds are some of the science fictional elements in the novels. The science fiction involves the application of new scientific principles, time travel, use of latest technology and scientific equipments as its principle features. The design of the spaceship, the adventures of the astronauts and the space voyage in Out of the Silent Planet scientific vocabulary, biological terms and scientific facts are some of the features in the novel That Hideous Strength. Lewis’ novels thus gain strength as science fiction due to his brilliant use of science.
Lewis’ design of the methodical use of point of view that presents the novels in a logical sequence is also dealt with in this chapter. Lewis employs various viewpoints to give variety and authenticity to the novels. It also helps him to retain full and complete control over the narratives. He employs them to interpret, speculate and moralize effectively. Besides employing the third person limited omniscient point of view and the third person omniscient point of view, Lewis also uses the first person point of view. He employs the more personal first person narrator and also tries to be more objective by employing the third person for important actions, scenes and philosophies in the trilogy.

Lewis uses the first person point of view at the end of the novel Out of Silent Planet and at the beginning of the next novel Perelandra. This serves as an aid to build up a sense of immediacy, intimacy and compelling credibility. The important themes in the novels are brought out through the different characters. In the third novel That Hideous Strength, Lewis presents the story from the viewpoint of the two different groups namely, the Logres and the NICE which is significant for the thematic study.

Chapter III entitled The Artistry deals with the use of dream visions, allegory, symbolism and the use of Old Solar Language.

The uniqueness of the technique of Lewis’ artistry in combining the technique of dream vision, with the apocalyptic method to drive forth his views is discussed. It is significant to note that it is a medieval technique. The many dream visions act as a guide to the unfolding of the plot and assists in maintaining the
suspense in the novel. It also sustains the interest and curiosity of the readers through out the trilogy.

The technique of dream vision forecasts the plot in the novel Out of the Silent Planet. In Perelandra they are used to highlight the profound meaning of the novel in depth. The dream visions in That Hideous Strength are didactic and prophetic. Lewis also emphasizes through the dream visions that science can subtly be manoeured as an agent of the devil if not used in the right direction.

The chapter explains the allegory of Lewis’ trilogy. He uses the technique of allegory to powerfully drive forth the spiritual truths of the Bible. The episodes of the novels and the allegorical names are a vivid portrayal of the genius of Lewis. The various characters of the novel like the eldila, Oyarsa, Maleldil, Tor, Tinidril, Ransom and Un-man or the Bent One allegorically refer to the angels, the arch-angel, God, Adam, Eve, Christ and Satan respectively.

Perelandra is an allegory of temptation, the fall of man, his redemption and the triumph at Calvary. It also alludes to the spiritual conflict that the soul faces to overcome self and execute God’s mission on earth. That Hideous Strength contrasts a God centered and a self centered society. The destruction of NICE and the triumph of the Logres through the allegory of the Fall of Babel and God’s final victory over the evil force is brought to light in the chapter. Finally the triumph of good over evil is highlighted.

Lewis’ effective use of thought provoking symbols with relation to the thematic study of the trilogy is interesting. A study of the various symbols that feature through out the novels at different levels is attempted. The trilogy is
loaded with a variety of Christian symbols that deals with the final conflict between God and the Devil. The significance of the various symbols like Ransom’s ‘walking tour’, ‘the wall’, ‘floating land’, ‘the bubble trees’, ‘wounded frog’, ‘the torch’, ‘fire’, ‘the wooden cross’, and the ‘Tower of Babel’ are discussed.

A brilliant and innovative creation of the Old Solar Language is an important weapon for the success of the trilogy. The words of the Old Solar language is studied at different levels as brought forth in the three volumes of the science fiction. In Out of the Silent Planet the Old Solar Language is studied from the linguistic point of view and as the language of Malacandra. Lewis develops it further, as the common language of the Gods and planets in Perelandra. In That Hideous Strength the Old Solar Language is used as a universal language of victory and power.

Chapter IV entitled The Strategy is a study of the figurative language, the descriptive style, use of flashback, dialogues and story within story. Lewis’ choice of figurative language becomes the medium for the graphic portrayal of the strange places, the alien creatures, the characters of the novel, outer space, and the heavenly beings. The use of similes are instrumental in explaining the unfamiliar words. And use of metaphorical language alerts the reader to the possibility of larger thematic meaning.

The brilliantly imagined description of the spaceship, the alien landscape and the alien creatures add to the variety and beauty of the novels. Lewis employs
the descriptive technique to expound the psychological conflicts, the combat between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of the good over evil.

The use of the technique of flash back in the trilogy is noteworthy as it helps to sustain the interest of the readers throughout the novels. It functions as a device to interconnect the three novels and to review the events of the previous novels. It further highlights the importance of flash back as 'time-shift' is an integral feature of a science fiction. The flash back serves to maintain the suspense of the novel, expound theological truths and to provide psychological insights into the characters of the novel.

Lewis' craftsmanship is seen in the interweaving of different stories with the main plot. The stories that occur within the trilogy besides making the novels more readable and enjoyable also serve to highlight the themes. They blend and incorporate within the main plot of the trilogy. The stories of the war in heaven, the story of Adam and Eve, the story of Ransom, the story of Merlin and the episode of Mr. Bultitude are all instrumental in making the trilogy very interesting. Lewis also employs them to expound the serious theological concepts in a light and easy note.

The carefully constructed dialogues of the trilogy stand as evidence for Lewis' expertise. His method of juxtaposing the conversational passages with the descriptive passages is yet another strategical device. The important themes in the trilogy are brought out through the dialogues between the various characters of the novels. The use of dialogues is significant as it is instrumental in kindling the interest of the readers and for keeping the trilogy lively. The dramatic continuity of
the theme gives its credit to the impressive dialogues. Lewis not only narrates the story, but also gives clues to the unnarrated information through the use of dialogues.

The timely use of dialogues are instrumental in breaking the monotony of the long descriptive passages of space and the Malacandrian landscape. Lewis displays his craft as a writer by alternating the dialogue with light and serious topics. They are also humorous. His mastery as a novelist is revealed in the adequate spacing of the conversational passages. The long descriptive passages are always followed by simple conversations. These meticulously written dialogues also bring out the important themes of the novels.

Chapter V which is the Conclusion is a recapitulation of the findings of the previous chapters. It further comments on the universal value and relevance of the trilogy to the modern times. It justifies the claim of C.S. Lewis among the great writers and proves that his science fiction will challenge consideration in the name of the best audience.