

C.S. LEWIS'S WRITING STYLE AND HIS CAREER

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Abstract:The famous writer, Clive Staples Lewis was a British theologian and academic instructor. He had a strong lifelong career in English literature in both Cambridge and Oxford Universities. He also made a shining writing career with some of the best fiction works of his life.

Key words:literature,poetry,books, writing,career,works,pen name,prose,fiction

The well-known writer, Clive Staples Lewis was a British theologian and academic instructor. He had a strong lifelong career in English literature in both Cambridge and Oxford Universities. He also made a shining writing career with some of the best fiction works of his life. For example, Lewis created “The Screwtape Letters”, “The Space Trilogy”, and “The Chronicles of Narnia”. The series, “The Chronicles of Narnia” became Lewis’s most famous work, which is a collection of children’s fantasy comprising seven books. The series earned the status of a classic in fantasy literature.

He was also an active member of an informal literary group of Oxford, the *Inklings*. Likewise, he was friends with a fellow novelist R.R. Tolkien who was also a faculty member at Oxford University. With Tolkien’s influence, Lewis became an active member of the Church although he had long ago become an agnostic. Anglicanism was reinstalled in his mind in 1932 by Tolkien and other influential friends. Lewis’s religiosity can be seen in his works that he broadcasted in wartime on the radio. He popularized Christianity as the main subject of his works. These literary works include a compilation “Mere Christianity”, and the book “The Problem of Pain”, Lewis left a bulky volume of works containing about 40 books. These books have been translated into more than 30 languages and many TV and film adaptations came. Moreover, Lewis’s philosophical works became the point of interest for theologians around the globe. He died in 1963 and is buried in Westminster Abbey in the Poet’s Corner. From a very young age, Lewis was motivated towards poetry and wanted to earn the title of a great poet. However, the publication of his two poems with the pen name Clive Hamilton, a lyric collection “Spirits in Bondage” in 1919, and a narrative work “Dymer” in 1926 failed his poetic career. These poems did not gain enough attention, therefore, Lewis turned towards prose fiction.

In prose, he first published *The Pilgrim’s Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism* in 1933. It came after the issuing of some scholarly articles but it was the major prose work. In this work, he explained his early

life longings and regaining of Christian faith with the help of a devoted Catholic friend R.R. Tolkien. He also expressed this spiritual journey in his autobiographical book “Surprised by Joy” in 1955. Lewis got true success with a novel in 1938 “Out of the Silent Planet”. It contains many Christian themes and allusions. It was one of his books that was discussed and read aloud in the *Inklings* meetings. After some years, another successful novel, “Perelandra” was published in 1943. His next novel “That Hideous Strength” came 2 years later in 1945.

In these novels, Lewis represented the voyages of an English Linguist, Elwin Ransom, to space and planets. He gets involved in the cosmic dilemma between right and wrong forces in the solar system. In “That Hideous Strength”, Lewis presents the significance of his belief regarding traditional Christian values for humans. These three fiction works created one of the best science-fiction trilogies. He had also expressed his Christian views in non-fiction “The Abolition of Man” in 1943. During this early time, Lewis was becoming popular among the great literary circles. His work, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* appeared in 1936 that became his first scholarly work and gained the attention of most scholars. This work was hugely appreciated and made him a leading personality in British circles. During his high time, Lewis also published other significant works like “A Preface to *Paradise Lost*”, “English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama”, and “An Experiment in Criticism ” etc. In 1940, C.S. Lewis’s “The Problem of Pain” and his four radio broadcasts were compiled as “Mere Christianity” in 1955. This distinguished him as a promoter of Christian values. However, in 1942, “The Screwtape Letters”, an epistolary fiction, gained wide recognition in which the Screwtape, a devil, instructs the junior one how to seduce young Christians.

He published the first work of the series “Chronicles of Narnia” in 1950 i.e. “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe”. This book became the most well-known fantasy book for children. It also depicts a clash between good and evil in the Narnia Kingdom. His last fiction piece, “Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold” appeared in 1952. To elaborate, the story recounts the tale of Cupid and Psyche through the words of Psyche’s sister. For Lewis, it was his most perfect book, although it did not gain wide popularity among his other novels. Contrastively, it was appreciated by literary critics. Later Lewis met Joy Gresham in 1950. At that time she was married to the writer, William Gresham. However, they separated in 1954 and she got married to Lewis in 1956. She was diagnosed with cancer and died in 1960. In his wife’s grief, Lewis wrote “A Grief Observed” in 1961. In this work, he unfolded the stages of grief through which he went and depicted his sorrows.

His last book “Letters to Malcolm” appeared in 1963, the same year he retired from Cambridge University. A few months later, Lewis died in November because of end-stage kidney failure. Lewis’s writing style and thoughts impart a lasting influence

on the Christian traditional system and Western Culture. Therefore, he remains one of the most influential writers in English history. He lives through his fiction and scholarly writings that he weaves in a remarkable manner of style. C.S. Lewis, in his writings, looks at the world through a Christian lens. His works satisfy both spiritual and intellectual thirst. As Farrer had noticed “There lived in his writings a Christian universe that could be both thought and felt”. He justifies the faith of believers through intellectual logic and reasoning and makes the readers feel as if they have found the truth of life. To elaborate, most of Lewis’s writings have a style that fulfills spiritual thirst and imparts a tone of faith and belief. His most famous Christian works are “Mere Christianity” and “The Screwtape Letters”.

One of the major features of Lewis’ works is his promptness in completing a work of art and publishing it. Whenever he would write a work within hours and complete it in a single go, it would turn out to be the most coherent and unified work. In a way, he was made for rapid writing and spontaneity. On the other hand, his longer works of several hundred pages lacked Lewis’s coherence and connection of thoughts. Therefore, he revised his works very little and the best work came ‘right first time’, otherwise, there would be very little harmony in his words. For example, in “Chronicles of Narnia”, those stories that were written in continuity turned out to be the most coherent ones, while “Prince Caspian and The Magician’s Nephew”, which gave him some tough time, was not interestingly spontaneous. Also, “That Hideous Strength” does not seem to be in a unified harmony but is only ‘cobbled-together’.

On the contrary, his friend, Tolkien would write best in weeks and months and that work would turn out to be the most unified. In his fiction and non-fiction writing, Lewis uses a very logical and organized manner and words. His words are clear and his point is understandable because Lewis’s prime goal is to communicate his thoughts to the audience. In “Mere Christianity”, Lewis explains his point of Christian beliefs by giving enough reasons and logical arguments. For example, in the work, he talks about the strength of the universe that is not visible to us. Further, he illustrates the idea by giving certain examples. For instance, he gives the example of an architect who is not present in the constructed form of a house but he is the one who has built it. Similar is God’s concept in the universe. Likewise in “The Problem of Pain”, Lewis approaches pain logically like a complex problem that can be solved through certain solutions. Similarly, in “The Screwtape Letters”, Lewis adopts the style of a very cunning demon who tactfully expresses the way of trapping and deceiving ‘the Patient’.

Lewis uses a fairly conversational style to give words to his thoughts. For instance, he talks casually and creates an argument then addresses the critical objections and defends his ideas. He also develops a simple tone to project a conversational style to his works. For example, in the notable work “Mere Christianity” and “The Screwtape Letters”, he expresses the facts in a simple and expressive but wise

way. Lewis explains the difficult religious concepts just as a friend explains a confusing topic. In his writing, Lewis gets into the characters to impose his thoughts on the minds of readers more effectively. His dialogues and style adapt to the mental level of his characters thus making the idea more vivid and well-expressed. For example, when he draws the character of Screwtape devil, his style and expression become that of a cunning devil. As on one occasion in the story, the devil, Screwtape, celebrates the wrongdoings of sinners but in turn, he also expresses grief on the small number of sins that the men commit. This ironic representation of sins highlights their evil nature thus proving Lewis's point.

C.S. Lewis wrote several works in which he mainly focused on his Christian faith. He also composed logical and rational fiction and non-fiction literary pieces. In most of his works, certain common themes unify Lewis's literary pieces in a single whole. In his writings like "The Great Divorce", and "The Problem of Pain", Lewis expresses his idea of the afterlife. For instance, he perceived that if we think of gaining heaven, we will not see hell or even the pains of purgatory. On the other hand, if we think of hell, we will not be able to go to heaven. For Lewis, the idea of hell is that it is a place for those people who love themselves. There the people are "self-enslaved" and they live in horrible freedom. He condemns the self-centered nature of the people and makes it one among the features of the damned people. On the contrary, in Heaven, those people who are blessed, obedient, and eternal people exist. In "Perelandra" there is an 'Eternal Dance' or harmony and union between the far away ones in heaven. It is written keeping the model of the Holy Trinity in mind. Therefore, one way or the other, Lewis describes heaven as a place of obedience, goodness, and selflessness, while hell is a horrible shadowy place.

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