

Out of the silent planet essay



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26 September 2009 Documented Book Review I am reviewing the book Out of the Silent Planet, by C. S. Lewis. This is a science fiction story about intergalactic planetary travel and some alien-beings that a man meets out in space who ironically help him to realize the true intentions of human nature. What really made this story interesting to me is that a man on a walk about, named Ransom, did not want to travel into outer space to meet alien creatures; he was simply on a personal journey for something new, while touring the countryside of Britain.

When looking for a place to stay for the night, Ransom meets a woman who is searching for her retarded son. Ransom decides to help her, thinking that it will get him a bed for the night. Down the road, Ransom stumbles upon an old college mate at a house where the retarded boy was. The woman's son was held the captive of a megalomaniacal physicist. Ransom, who was only trying to help find the boy, ends up getting drugged, kidnapped, and then forced to go along with a diabolical plot to travel to another planet, and be traded as a slave for gold.

Weston and Devine are the two who take Ransom in the place of the woman's retarded son, mainly since it is apparent that no one will look for Ransom if he is missing, because he is alone on his tour. Weston and Devine have already traveled through space to Malacandra (a foreign planet), and they need a human being as an offering to the aliens who live there. After their arrival to the planet, Ransom escapes from the clutches of his captors and is on an adventure for survival. He is forced to eat the planet's vegetation to stay alive, and ends up meeting a Hross (one of the three types of creatures on the planet).

Ransom decides to learn the language of this alien and takes up the Hross's offer to live in his village. The Hross get directions from an Eldil (a spirit) to take Ransom to their leader Oyarsa (a Great Eldil leader) so that the aliens can understand the human's proposes for being on this planet. Along the way to Oyarsa, Ransom requires the help of a Sorn, a second of the three types of creatures that lives on Malacandra. Sorns are tall, which allows them to travel great distances in short amounts of time.

When they arrive at their destination (Meldilorn), the Great Spirit Oyarsa has a long conversation with Ransom and the other humans, about humankind, and wants to know why they are on his planet. The conversation leads Oyarsa to an understanding about humanity, and it also describes the peaceful intellect of the aliens to the humans, as well as the different connections to the same God. Oyarsa makes an agreement with the humans to let them travel back to their planet unharmed and requests that they never return to Malcandra because, " the hearts of man are wicked"(Lewis), and he does not want that wickedness on Maleldil's planet (their God).

This book ends with Ransom awakening in the spaceship on Thulcandra—the Silent Planet (Earth), Devine and Weston are long gone from the ship after Ransom awakes, which leaves an opportunity for this story to expand into a sequel. Ransom is a very flat heroic character. I believe that the author wants the reader to feel this character is wholesome and good. If Ransom's goodness were to change it would be a bad thing for the greater good of humanity, when it came to the out come Oyarsa could have decided for the human characters. Devine and Weston are the villains of the story.

They are looking to get rich off the innocence of an unsuspecting planet that does not value gold the way that earthlings do, mainly because there is an abundance of it. The flat characterization role falls on Weston. He does not budge at all when it comes to the magnificence of a higher being; he believes that humans are the ultimate authority of the universe and that humans should rule everything. Devine on the other hand decides that when he see how intelligent and all mighty this Oyarsa is, it is a good time to change sides.

Devine is the type to jump ship if it were sinking and better looking ship were on the horizon. Ransom met some interesting characters on the planet. They are covered with hair and very slender. Their hair is oily slick and they move like otters in and out of the water. They are called Hross. These Hross are able to communicate with Ransom only after teaching him their language. Ransom was interested in learning about these new creatures because they were the closest thing to a human that he had seen on this strange planet.

He learned that the Hross were warrior like hunters of a very distinct animal on Malcandra, a Hnakra. If the Hross kill the Hnakra it is a great honor and the Hross would then be known as a Hnakrapunti. The Hross are great singers and songwriters. They sing songs about their life; the songs are an expression of their hearts joy. These creatures have a way of enjoying life and actually look forward to death, as apposed to humans. Humans tend to fear death and want to stay alive as long as possible.

A Grey muzzled Hross named Hnohra was able to teach Ransom the differences in the creatures on the planet, like the Pffltriggi; a toad like

creature with a flute like nose. The Pffltriggi like to build things; Pffltriggi's have built mostly everything on Malcandra. Another type of creature was a Sorn, a tall creature with long arms, legs, and an elongated face. The Sorns, Pffltriggi, and Hross all lived in different places on the planet and in different environments but are all inter connected by Oyarsa.

Oyarsa lives at Medilorn, knows everything, rules everyone, and has always been there, but he is not one of the three creatures. Oyarsa is more of a spirit than a creature, but still he acknowledges a greater being than himself —GOD. The way that Oyarsa talks about his GOD Maleldil, seems like he is describing the same GOD of the heavens that planet Earth knows. The creatures of Malcandra are not bent; bent is a way to describe the creatures that are not obedient to GOD'S good behavior, unlike the human race of Earth. A main theme in this story is how good and peaceful life can be if one maintains their innocence.

Oyarsa does not want the villains to go and come back to this planet because their value of life will bring destruction to the values in his world that he is upholding. After Oyarsa quizzed the humans about their intentions, pertaining to what humankind wanted, he decides that Ransom is not bent and that he is a good person, unlike the rest of the humans. Therefore, Oyarsa is not worried about Ransom. Out of compassion, Oyarsa offers Ransom, Devine, and Weston an opportunity to stay on Malcandra or go back to their home and never return.

He leaves them with this decision and just enough air in their ship to return to Earth. Another theme in the story is about doing unto others, as you would

have them do unto you—the Golden Rule. Ransom obeys this rule and receives great care by the aliens. However, the villains who are trying to take over the planet and steal all the suns-blood (gold), end up receiving bad treatment. At one point, Oyarsa ordered Weston's hotheaded temper to be cooled off, commanding a group of Hross to dunk his head in cold-water several times.

Weston's character proves a Karma theme to be true; no matter where one goes, there one is. For example, if someone is a mean greedy person on Earth, no matter how great the next world is or how much it has to offer him or her, they will be a mean greedy person there as well. The desires of our hearts are what manifest into reality. " Written in the dark hours before and during the Second World War C. S. Lewis's Space Trilogy, of which *Out of the Silent Planet* is the first volume, stands alongside such works, as Albert Camus's *The Plague* and George Orwell's *1984*, as a timely parable that has become timeless.

Beloved by succeeding generations as much for the sheer wonder of its story telling as for the significance of the moral concerns. " (Chu) " For the trilogy's central figure, C. S. Lewis created perhaps the most memorable character of his career, the brilliant, clear-eyed, and fiercely brave philologist Dr. Elwin Ransom. Appropriately, Lewis modeled Dr. Ransom after his dear friend J. R. R. Tolkien. For in the scope of its imaginative achievement and the totality of its vision of not one but two imaginary worlds, the Space Trilogy is rivaled in this century only by Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. (Chu) " Readers who fall in love with Lewis's fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia* as children unfailingly cherish his Space Trilogy as

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adults; it, too, brings to life strange and magical realms in which epic battles are fought between the forces of light and those of darkness. Nevertheless, in the many layers of its allegory and the sophistication of the piercing brilliance of its insights into the human condition, it occupies a place among the English language's most extraordinary works for any age, and for all time. " (Chu)

Sometimes, literary works exist in a traditional framework. Each genre has its own set of expectations. " A literary work can be understood only by reference to its intrinsic literary features, that is, those elements found in the text itself. To analyze a poem or story, therefore, the formalist critic focus on the words of the text (close reading) rather than facts about the author's life or the historical milieu in which it was written. The critic pays special attention to the formal features of the text—the style, structure, imagery, tone, and genre". (Goulet) The way that C.

S. Lewis creates a completely new language in this science fiction story caused me to approach this story with a formalist criticism. I understood what the alien language because these new words were translated into English. For example, the narration was omnipresent in Ransoms thoughts and compared foreign words like Thulcandra to the Silent Planet, which also means Earth or where Ransom had come from. Something else that was interesting and had a funny tone was the style of language that Weston and Devine use when they are communicating with Oyarsa in Malcandrian language.

It is comparable to how the Cowboys talked to the Native Americans in old westerns. Then Weston turned in the direction of the voice. “ I know you kill us,” he said. “ Me no afraid. Other come, make it our world—“ But Devine had jumped to his feet, and interrupted him. “ No, no Oyarsa,” he shouted. ‘ You no listen him. He very foolish man. He have dreams. We little people, only want pretty sun-bloods. You give us plenty sun-bloods, we go back into sky, you never see us no more. All done, see? ” (Lewis 133, 134) Another critical approach to this story is the Sociological Criticism.

This approach explores the relationships between the artist and society by examining “ literature in the cultural, economics, and political context in which it is written or received. ” A branch of Sociological criticism, Marxist criticism, was based on the ideology of Karl Marx, and “ focuses on the economic and political elements of art. ” Another aspect of Sociological criticism is the ideological content of literature, advanced by George Lucas, maintaining that content determines form and therefore, all art is political. Even if a work of art ignores political issues, it makes a political statement. ” Our editors caution that such focus may lead to reductive judgment, and the critic may impose his personal politics on a work in question. (Goulet) The Author represented this approach nicely by having a physicist be the character to not only build a personal working spaceship to go out and collect things of value from other planets, but he was the one who represented a human desire to conquer a new world for the betterment of his society and not the others.

This sort of relates to how the American government is run for the people but not by the people; American government is ran by the government for the

government. Somehow Americans are duped into believing that their best interests are being served. To Weston this seemed like a selfless act, but in reality the calm fellow named Ransom, whose selfless act contained that of not wanting to take over this new world but to have peace with the inhabitants and understand them better.

Ironically Ransoms actions proved to be a more generous act of humanity. This humanitarian act came from a man who was not greedy, had a peaceful nature, and decided to take some time off work from the hustle and bustle, just to enjoy a peaceful walk about of his countryside home. In conclusion, this story was interesting to me because a man on personal journey, who was out on a walking tour in search for something new, got just what he was looking for. Ransom would have never chosen the path that he was forced to take, but in the end he was left aving an epiphany about humankind, and their intention for themselves, others, and God in general. Works Sited: Lewis, Clive Staples. Out of the Silent Planet; Scribner Press New York, NY 1996. Chu, Calvin. Cover and flap off Out of the Silent Planet by C. S. Lewis; Printed in the U. S. A. , Copyright 1996. Simon and Schuster Inc. Goulet, Ron. A Summary of the Critical Approaches to Literature; Handout summarized from the Tenth Edition Literature book by X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia; copyright 2007