

which might have been dealt with more fruitfully at a single blow. This artificially dispersed material would have been better gathered into the more continuous and comprehensive discourse and novel-by-novel analysis of the conventional book chapter. The expository elements of the thesis—the repeated signposting, summary review, and tying of arguments back to premises—are too much in evidence here and a heavy price is exacted in the quality of the criticism, which is often pedestrian, descending at times to the lowest-common-denominator level of meteorological clichés. When Bader, mechanically ticking off national images in piecemeal fashion, repeatedly informs us that Richardson and Boyd make "only marginal use of images of Germany," which also "does not assume a prominent place" in Stead's work, and that there is "a scarcity of Italian references" in most of these writers, we seriously begin to wonder why our attention is being drawn to what is absent. And when White's complex, colossal achievements have been emptied of their national image-stereotypes, there remains a sense that very little has been said about the distinctive qualities or even the major themes of these books.

Secondly, there is the problem of language. Bader's English veers erratically from turgid, lugubrious academic jargon ("Comparative Imagology," "dialoguicity," "syncreticity") to barbaric media-cliché ("continuous dialogue situation"), and frequently collapses into tautology ("convincing credibility") and grotesque colloquialism ("everybody makes a big do about him"). One wearies, in an elephantine tract of over 300 pages, of hearing the jargon words "heterostereotypes" and "autostereotypes" over and over again.

Of course, reservations such as I have made call into question the whole business of thesis-publishing on the scale undertaken by some European publishers. Bader's study is no doubt a fine thesis but it makes a drab, dry book. It may prove to be of interest to other *Habilitation* thesis writers working in the same area, but, its laborious research and impressive scholarship notwithstanding, it is unlikely to appeal to either the general or the average academic reader.

David C. Downing

Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy

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Reviewed by Charles A. Huttar

One way of confronting a text is to inquire what went into its making: what raw materials, so to speak, in the author's cultural and psychological experiences, what nuances of idiolect, what attitudes and assumptions, what agendas both conscious and unconscious, what artistry. Lewis's Ransom trilogy has long needed such inquiry. Seven years in the making (published 1938-45), in the succeeding half-century it has drawn plenty of description and analysis, much of it from critics pro and con with nonliterary agendas of their own. Now Professor Downing, taking well into account the insights of prior scholars, adds much that is original and gives us a balanced and judicious study of this composite text.

On the theory that one ingredient in fiction is the author's own life experiences, Downing devotes Chapter 1 to biographical matters—inner biography: memories, traumas, mental images, associative connections—Lewis's "personal mythology" (14). Downing skillfully uses letters, diary entries, and, especially, Lewis's autobiography, *Surprised by Joy* (1955), not just its direct statements about his early mental and emotional life but, more, what it reveals about the mind of the mature author through Lewis's selection of material and the patterns imposed on that material by emphasis, comment, and key words and images such as "nurse" and "garden" (positive) or "boyhood" and "beetle" (negative). Downing traces the growing tension in Lewis's early life between imagination and intellect—each with its undeniable claim—and the resolving of that tension in a mature understanding of myth and belief that could embrace imagination and intellect together. Thus "*Surprised by Joy* illuminates the master motifs of the Ransom stories" (32-33).

The next five chapters follow a common pattern, discussing a given theme and how each book of the trilogy, in turn, relates to it. Chapters 2 through 4 take up the intellectual concepts found in the trilogy—first concepts which reflect a Christian worldview, next ones with roots in classical and medieval ideas, and last a particular theme, Lewis's portrayal of evil. These chapters are enriched with parallel ideas found in Lewis's nonfiction writings, especially those contemporaneous with the trilogy.

Downing begins Chapter 2 with an important distinction: the trilogy is full of Christian theology but it does not preach. Indeed, most early reviewers of the first book, *Out of the Silent Planet*, missed its ideological implications. This did not worry Lewis, who aimed not at conversion to an ideology but at broadening readers' imaginative receptivity beyond the materialism of the prevailing culture. Especially dangerous, in his view, was a philosophy he found in H.G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, G.B. Shaw, and others, a metaphysical projection of evolutionary theory to the deification of Man. He attacked, in *Out of the Silent Planet* and the next book, *Perelandra*, the interplanetary imperialism entailed in this philosophy; in the final work, *That Hideous Strength*, its totalitarian political implications. He believed that the naive materialism of this outlook blinded its proponents to the possibility that their program was only an instrument in an agelong spiritual warfare of evil against good. This conflict, which underlies the plots of all three books, accounts for two main theological themes running through the trilogy: the reality of spiritual beings—eldils (angels), both those who are obedient to Maledil (God) and those in rebellion (the "Bent Eldil")—and the crucial importance, for the outcome of the conflict, of moral choices made by individual human beings.

Christianity was not, for Lewis, the only victim of the cultural imperialism of post-Enlightenment thought. The intellectual achievements of the ancient and so-called "medieval" world (the latter label itself question-begging) also, he believed, have become greatly undervalued. This was a recurrent motif in both his scholarship and his fiction. His reminder that many of the assumptions undergirding modern attitudes are not so much science as "the mythology that follows in the wake of science" (*Out of the Silent Planet*; quoted p. 65) helps older mythologies compete on a more nearly level field. But his concern in the fiction was not so much to argue intellectually for them as to demonstrate their imaginative vitality. Those which

Downing focuses on in Chapter 3 include the light- and life-filled "heavens" of medieval cosmology; the idea of "hierarchy"—not a simple power pyramid, as it is sometimes caricatured, but a complex "dance" of well-defined but interchanging roles; the imagery of paradisaical gardens; and the Arthurian myth, especially the figure of Merlin who eludes modern binary categories.

In considering Lewis's villains and, more broadly, the theme of temptation (Chapter 4), Downing identifies several themes that recur in the trilogy. These include the abuse of language, the rejection of tradition (especially in the moral realm), the craving for security and control rather than risk and trust, and the loss of selfhood as an ironic result of self-exaltation. One of the most original parts of Downing's book is his detailed exposition of *That Hideous Strength* in terms of Dante's *Inferno* as a subtext.

The next two chapters consider the trilogy in terms of more personal connections. Chapter 5 looks especially at the figure of Ransom in the first two books and traces parallels with Lewis's own spiritual pilgrimage. On Malacandra, Ransom learns to overcome fears that are characterized as essentially childish; on Perelandra, to overcome doubts. The latter means resolving his own inner divisions: ". . . in defeating the Un-man, Ransom has defeated as well that side of himself" (118)—namely, an "antiself" (Weston) which voices "ideas [Lewis] himself had entertained in his youth" (115, 116). Similar parallels are traced between Lewis and both Jane and Mark Studdock of *That Hideous Strength*. In Chapter 6, "Models, Influences, and Echoes," Downing aims at understanding the trilogy through consideration of what it owes to such literary precursors as Wells, Swift, Milton, and Spenser, and such friends and acquaintances of Lewis as J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield, and others.

Chapter 7 seeks to assess Lewis's achievement in the trilogy. Defining Lewis's genre as fantasy, Downing argues that it is unfair to expect the excellences of science fiction (technical expertise) or of the novel (complex characterization). Attacks leveled at Lewis's attitudes toward science and toward women—the commonest targets for critics—tend to grossly oversimplify the ideas he actually expresses. Flaws can be detected, to be sure, in Lewis's artistry, but a balanced assessment, Downing concludes, must also note his strengths: in description, in effect, in intellectual energy and breadth, and in mythic depth.

A brief appendix treats the posthumously published Ransom fragment, "The Dark Tower," apparently an abandoned sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet*. Without alluding to recent widely publicized charges that the work is a forgery, Downing cites numerous details consistent with accepting it as genuine—enough to stand as a warning to any scholars tempted too readily to mount the opposite bandwagon.