VISIONS/VERSIONS OF THE MEDIEVAL

IN C.S. LEWIS'S THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English, Literature

Boise State University

Summer 2009

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS vii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

Lewis and the Middle Ages 6

The Discarded Image 8

A Medieval Atmosphere 10

CHAPTER TWO: THE HEAVENS OF NARNIA 13

The Stars above Narnia 15

The Narnian Planets 18

The Influence of the Planets 19

The Moon and Fortune in Narnia 22

An Inside-Out Universe 24

CHAPTER THREE: THE *LONGAEVI* OF NARNIA 28

A Place for Everything 31

A Welcome Wildness 33

The Imaginative Value of Other *Longaevi* 37

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TALKING BEASTS OF NARNIA 41

The Chain of Being in Narnia 44

The Lion in Medieval Literature and the Chronicles 46

Mice in Medieval Literature and the Chronicles 49

The Ape in Medieval Literature and the Chronicles 51

CHAPTER FIVE: MEDIEVAL WRITING PRACTICES IN THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA 53

Genre 55

Romance 56

Allegory 61

The Faerie Queen and the Chronicles 64

Respect for the Past 65

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS 68

WORKS CITED 73

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AL	*The Allegory of Love*
DI	*The Discarded Image*
ELSC	*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*
IT	"Imagination and Thought in the Middle Ages"
LB	*The Last Battle*
LWW	*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*
MN	*The Magician's Nephew*
PC	*Prince Caspian*
SC	*The Silver Chair*
VDT	*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Everything in the whole story should arise from the whole cast of the author's mind. We must write for children out of those elements in our own imagination which we share with children: differing from our child readers not by any less, or less serious, interest in the things we handle, but by the fact that we have other interests which children would not share with us. The matter of our story should be a part of the habitual furniture of our minds." —C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children"

The year 2010 will mark the sixtieth anniversary of C.S. Lewis's classic children's story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The years following its publication in 1950 would see the completion of six more stories about the fantastic world of Narnia and the British children who visit there. Decades after his death, Lewis's children's fiction continues to interest readers and attract a large audience. The Narnia series has been published in over forty-one languages, sold over 100,000,000 copies, and been made into stage adaptations, sound recordings, and television programs. Lewis's influence can be seen in the works of contemporary children's writers, including Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (Ezard, Hilliard). *Time Magazine* ranked *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* high on their list of the best English-language novels published since 1923 (Kelly), and Disney's 2005 release of a film based on the book grossed over a billion dollars worldwide (the-numbers.com).

C.S. Lewis is perhaps best known for his children's stories and for his other fiction, including *The Screwtape Letters*, *Till We Have Faces*, and his science-fiction trilogy. Among Christians, he is known for his apologetic works, particularly *Mere Christianity*, adapted from "soft-core sermons" broadcast over the BBC during World War II (Cantor 206). However, the book that first launched Lewis's publishing career

was *The Allegory of Love*, a work of literary criticism which appeared in 1936. This "one book established C.S. Lewis as a significant figure in the British intellectual world," opened up new audiences to him, and established his literary career (Jacobs 161). Norman Cantor calls *The Allegory*, along with Lewis's *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*, published in 1954, "bold, original seminal works that rocked the transatlantic Anglophone world of medieval studies" (Cantor 217). Lewis published numerous other works of literary criticism on medieval and Renaissance literature over the course of his lifetime at the same time he was publishing his more popularly-known works of apologetics and fiction.

Though many read *The Chronicles of Narnia* unaware that Lewis was a scholar of medieval literature, Lewis's scholarship profoundly shaped the world of Narnia he created. Lewis was a prolific reader from an early age, and medieval literature in particular was a large part of the "habitual furniture" of his mind. In his scholarship, Lewis set out to reconstruct, as much as he was able, a picture of the medieval world. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, he redirected this reconstruction by creating a world permeated by the atmosphere of the Middle Ages. Lewis invested his children's stories not only with the creativity of his imagination, but also with the seriousness of his scholarship. The Chronicles contain layers of meaning and partake of writing traditions that cannot be fully understood except in the context of Lewis's scholarship on medieval literature.

It is my purpose here to examine the ways in which Lewis's scholarship on medieval and Renaissance literature is of a piece with the world of Narnia he created in

his fiction, and how he infuses this imaginary world with a medieval atmosphere. By examining how Lewis participated in "the continuing process of creating the Middle Ages," my work here fits into the field of medievalism, defined by T. A. Shippey as:

> the study of responses to the Middle Ages at all periods since a sense of the mediaeval [sic] began to develop. Such responses include, but are not restricted to, the activities of scholars, historians and philologists in rediscovering medieval materials...and artistic creations, whether literary, visual or musical, based on whatever has been or is thought to have been recovered from the medieval centuries.

Thus, this paper will not focus primarily on whether Lewis recovered a true sense of the Middle Ages in his work, but on the ways that he sought to do so. The goal of this study is not to evaluate Lewis's scholarship and understanding of medieval literature; instead, I will focus on how that understanding and scholarship, with its strengths and flaws, flows into his fiction writing.

Lewis was a prodigious writer, publishing over forty books in his lifetime, in addition to writing journals, essays, and letters, and giving scholarly lectures and public talks. These, in turn, have inspired a vast corpus of biographies and criticism, including a number of books focusing on The Chronicles of Narnia. Several of these do mention connections between Lewis's scholarship, medieval literature, and Narnia. Paul F. Ford's *Companion to Narnia: A Complete Guide to the Magical World of C. S. Lewis's* The Chronicles of Narnia is written in an encyclopedia format, and includes entries such as "Astronomy, Narnian" where we read, "In the Chronicles, Lewis recovers a medieval

worldview of a Narnia-centered universe," and "Orders, Chivalric," which notes that the "code of chivalry is an especially important feature of Narnian life" (104, 323). While Ford's detailed entries highlight medieval literary conventions and allusions that appear in the Chronicles, his book does not treat the medievalism of the stories in any systematic manner. Peter Schakel has dedicated three books to exploring the world of Narnia, but the connections he makes between Lewis's scholarship and the Chronicles are only passing remarks. For example, he mentions that Lewis's work as a scholar "ended up contributing to the Chronicles" (*The Way* 10). He also records some similarities between Lewis's work and medieval literature, but these are passing remarks, as when in a note in the back of the book, he points out that the Chronicles "are constructed like medieval romances, with knights in armor (in this case, children) being sent out on missions and quests" (*The Way* 172). Though he acknowledges a connection between Lewis's scholarship and fiction, this connection is not explored in depth.

The most thorough treatment of Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia to appear thus far is Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia*. Ward argues that the seven Chronicles, for which many others have tried to find a pattern, are based on the seven planets of the medieval heavens. He shows how important astronomy and astrology are in all of Lewis's writings, and how Lewis repeatedly draws upon the symbolism of medieval astrology and the spiritually-rich conceptions of the heavens held in the Middle Ages. Each of the seven stories of Narnia, says Ward, has its own unique atmosphere expressing the characteristics of one of the seven "planets." Thus, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is permeated with references to Jupiter; its jovial characteristics include winter

turning to summer and the theme of kingliness. *Prince Caspian* exhibits "aspects of the Martial influence" (87), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* reflects the presence of the sun or Sol (108), and so on. To make his argument, Ward draws extensively from Lewis's scholarship on the Middle Ages and examines medieval attitudes about the cosmos. While Ward links the unique atmosphere of each story to one of the planets, my purpose here is to examine the medieval atmosphere of the world of Narnia as a whole, and consider the structure of the heavens as only part of what makes the Narnian world medieval.

Although scholars have explored influences upon Lewis other than medieval literature, the connection between medieval literature and Lewis's work (with the exception of Ward's book) has been left largely unexplored. Many books trace the theological implications and Biblical allusions in Lewis's work, but overlook allusions to medieval literature and the ways in which Christian allusions are often made in relation to medieval literature. For example, in Ford's entry on "Aslan's Breath," he says that the breath of Aslan is the symbol for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Chronicles, but he overlooks the tradition in medieval bestiaries that the roar of the lion was also supposed to bring his cubs to life (as we shall examine more closely later). Both allusions emphasize the life-giving power of Aslan's breath. The layering of both interpretations shows the depth of symbolism in Lewis's writing. Without a fuller understanding of Lewis's scholarship and the presence of the medieval in the Chronicles, we fail to grasp the breadth of meaning present in Lewis's stories.

Lewis and the Middle Ages

Lewis developed his own literary tastes early. From the moment that Lewis could choose what to read for himself, he read the stories of "elfland" (*Surprised by Joy* 3). Though neither of his parents read the Romantics, Lewis enjoyed them immensely, and his early exposure to the Middle Ages was through the literature of the Romantics. Lewis had full access to the numerous books filling his home, and he spent many childhood hours reading and writing. He and his older brother Warren made up stories about an imaginary "medieval Animal-land" for which they invented a history and drew maps (10). Lewis's childhood stories, though prosaic, are clearly imitations of books he was reading at the time. Though they lack the romance and charm of Narnia, they show that at around the age of seven, Lewis was already creating his own stories and worlds out of the material he was reading.

Later, when Lewis wrote his autobiography as an adult, he structured it around profound moments of joy he experienced in his life, and these moments of joy were often brought about through the literature he read. He recounts "delighting in fairy tales" around the age of thirteen and becoming so immersed in them that one day he thought he saw a dwarf in his garden (50-51). In his later teens, Lewis became obsessed with Wagner's music, delighting in its "Northernness" and "heroic drama." He listened to *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, both operas based on medieval romance. A shared love for a book led to his first close friendship; when Lewis saw a copy of *Myths of the Norsemen* on Arthur Greeve's bedside table the two became fast friends immediately and remained so the rest of Lewis's life. Lewis records the moment their friendship formed:

> On the table beside him lay a copy of *Myths of the Norsemen*.
>
> "Do you like that?" said I.
>
> "Do you like that?" said he.
>
> Next moment the book was in our hands, our heads were bent close together, we were pointing, quoting, talking—soon almost shouting—discovering in a torrent of questions that we liked not only the same thing, but the same parts of it and in the same way. (124-125)

While the two boys found many other things in common, their shared love of books and of nature drew them together. Throughout his life, Lewis continued to found close friendships on a mutual enjoyment of literature. Many key moments of emotional and intellectual development were brought on by the literature Lewis encountered.

After fighting in World War I, Lewis studied at Oxford from 1919 through 1923, taking Firsts in Classical Honour Moderations, Greats, and then English. He was elected a Fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1925, and continued there until 1954 when he accepted the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge (M. White 242-43). In 1936, Lewis published, as already mentioned, *The Allegory of Love*, a revolutionary study of allegory and chivalric love in medieval literature, bringing him to the attention of the intellectual world (Kerby-Fulton 257). Lewis published and taught extensively on medieval and Renaissance literature throughout his career, trying, in all of his scholarship to "open the workings of the medieval mind to us" (257).

The Discarded Image

Lewis spent a lifetime studying and writing about medieval literature. In *The Discarded Image*, a book based on lectures he gave at Oxford, Lewis outlines the medieval worldview as he found it manifested in literature from the Middle Ages. These lectures were meant to provide a "backcloth" for studying the arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance (DI 14). In the introduction to the book, Lewis writes that he hopes to provide "a tolerable (though very incomplete)" map to orient the reader to medieval literature (DI ix). He qualifies his endeavor in several ways, acknowledging that the Middle Ages were "full of change and controversy," and that he is describing a model that underlay works of literature, though scientists and philosophers of the time may not have fully agreed with the model (DI 13).

Because *The Discarded Image* captures much of Lewis's knowledge and analysis of the Middle Ages, it will be helpful to have freshly laid out before us these views as we consider how they become the furnishings of the world of Narnia. In his opening chapter, Lewis describes the "overwhelmingly bookish" character of the Middle Ages when authority came not just from the Church, but from those who had written in the past. "New" medieval writers sought to ground their ideas in the authority of an earlier writer. "They find it hard to believe," writes Lewis, "that anything an old *auctour* has said is simply untrue" (11). Because they inherited such a heterogeneous mass of material from classical Greece and Rome, from Christianity, and from native legends and beliefs, the medieval tendency was to try to synthesize these conflicting writers into a "whole organisation." As Lewis explains, "At his most characteristic, medieval man was

not a dreamer or a wanderer. He was an organiser, a codifier, a builder of systems" (10). What Lewis calls "the Discarded Image" is the organization of "their theology, science, and history into a single, complex, harmonious mental Model of the Universe" (11). Chapters three and four of his book are devoted to tracing the evolution of this model from classical and Christian sources through its manifestations in Renaissance literature. Lewis then examines the Model itself, describing in detail its picture of the heavens, of the *longaevi* or faerie people, and of Earth and its inhabitants.

It is worth noting here that Lewis did not believe there was a clear break between medieval and Renaissance literature, but instead saw Renaissance literature as a late flowering of medieval thought. Thus, when discussing tendencies in medieval literature, he often as not turns to John Milton or Edmund Spenser because he believed they were "still functioning within the language and concept formations of medieval culture" (Cantor 217). Because of this, the discussion that follows will include literature usually labeled as Renaissance, but which Lewis grouped with medieval literature.

In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis candidly admits his love for the medieval idea of the universe. "I have made no serious effort to hide the fact that the old Model delights me as I believe it delighted our ancestors," he writes. "Few constructions of the imagination seem to me to have combined splendour, sobriety, and coherence in the same degree" (DI 216). Nearly all of Lewis's fiction, from his poetry, to his science fiction, to *Till We Have Faces* (1956) allude to the medieval model, demonstrating how powerfully evocative Lewis believed that model to be.

Lewis divided the medieval model into three parts—the heavens, *longaevi*, and the Earth and its inhabitants. The Narnian world, similarly, can be divided into these three parts. The heavens, the mythological creatures, and the animal and human inhabitants of Narnia each exhibit medieval characteristics. When Lewis constructed Narnia, he drew from what he later called the discarded image, creating a universe that re-envisioned the Middle Ages.

A Medieval Atmosphere

A medieval atmosphere pervades all of Narnia, but before examining this more closely, it is important to consider the particular meaning and importance Lewis attached to *atmosphere* in a story. Lewis coined the term "The Kappa Element," or the hidden element, to describe the unique atmosphere and world of otherness created within a story (*Of Other Worlds* viii, 3). We come back again and again to a romance, he writes, just as we "go back to a fruit for its taste; to an air for…what? For itself; to a region for its whole atmosphere…to London for its Londonness" (*Spenser's Images* 115).

For Lewis, it was this otherworldly flavor that delighted him most in the literature he read (Daniel 10-11). He read not to enjoy "the momentary suspense" of a story, but for "the whole world" created within a book ("On Stories" 4-5). For example, he was deeply disappointed by a film adaptation of *King Solomon's Mines* that substituted the heroes' entrapment in a tomb's chamber with a volcano and earthquake. "What I lose" in the film, writes Lewis, "is the whole sense of the deathly (quite a different thing from simple danger of death)—the cold, the silence, and the surrounding faces of the ancient,

the crowned and sceptered, dead" (5-6). The loss of this atmosphere was the loss of what most attracted Lewis to the story. A sense of place and of otherness is the essential ingredient of a good story for Lewis. The types of characters present in a story can contribute to this sense; stories about pirates, for example, have a particular flavor: the moment the Jolly Roger is run up, we find ourselves in the presence of not just dangerous men, but men "cut adrift from all human society…with a history which they know and we don't." They are an "utterly lawless enemy" (9). The surprisingness, the unique quality of a story, causes readers to return again and again to it because, though they know what will happen in the book, they want to experience again the otherness of the world they find there.

Lewis's focus on the atmosphere of a story is not limited to his personal reading; his literary criticism on authors ranging from St. Athanasius to T. S. Eliot focuses on the flavor of their works. "Lewis read the works of others with a view to the inherent quality of the work," writes Jerry L. Daniel. "Whether prose or verse, all works were 'poetry' to him in the sense that the 'feel' or 'taste' was primary…rather than, say…character drawing or…suspense" (11). Regardless of what Lewis was reading, he was always evaluating the atmosphere of the work. The atmosphere of otherness of the Middle Ages to a modern reader is perhaps what attracted him so strongly to study medieval literature.

The atmosphere of a story was what Lewis responded to as a reader and discussed as a critic, and it is likewise a central element of Lewis's stories. In Lewis's own fiction, we find a unique atmosphere that draws in and delights readers, just as Lewis was fascinated and delighted by the unique flavors of the stories he read. The distinctive

atmosphere of Narnia is created in part by the many allusions to medieval literature and Lewis's recreation of a Middle Ages of sorts in his imaginary world. To examine this re-envisioning of the discarded image, let us turn first to the Narnian sky.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HEAVENS OF NARNIA

The heavens as they are portrayed by medieval authors are animate, intricately ordered, and finite, writes Lewis in *The Discarded Image*. Medieval thinkers attributed intelligence to the stars. Each of the planets, including the Sun and Moon, was associated with a pagan god and thought to influence humans in a particular manner. Thus, according to Lewis, Saturn produces "the melancholy complexion" in people, Jupiter a jovial character, Sol wisdom and liberality, and so on (DI 105-06). It was also believed that the whole universe moved out of "sympathies, antipathies, and strivings inherent to matter itself," such that Chaucer wrote "The see desyreth" to follow the Moon (qtd. DI 92). It was thought that "intelligences" in each sphere of the Ptolomeic universe caused the sphere to move by "intellectual love" of God (115).

Not only did medieval writers speak of the universe as more "alive" than we do, they believed it was intricately ordered. Earth was in the center, with the spheres of the seven planets, including the sun and moon, successively surrounding the Earth. Then came the sphere of the stars, and finally the *Primum Mobile*. While earth was the center of the spheres, it was also the smallest and in some ways, most insignificant space in the universe. Since the spheres rotated out of love for God, the descending spheres circled less swiftly and therefore less perfectly as their distance from the light of God increased. This put Earth the farthest away from God and perfection. In this sense, the order of the universe is reversed. "The Earth is the rim, the outside edge where being fades away on the border of nonentity…The universe is thus…turned inside out" (DI 116).

The *Primum Mobile* was the border of the spatial universe. Beyond it, according to Dante, was "that Heaven which is pure light, intellectual light, full of love" (qtd. DI 97). Thus, the universe was bordered, not stretching on infinitely. Nor was it silent and dark, as we conceive of it, but alive with music and flooded with the light of the sun. "Night is merely the conical shadow cast by our Earth," and the darkness reaches as far as Venus. Beyond that, according to Milton, are "happie climes that lie where day never shuts his eye" (qtd. DI 112).

For Lewis, the emotional effect of this sort of universe is dramatically different than the effect of our universe. The universe had not "Pascal's terror at *le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis*," but was instead a place that was "lighted, warmed, and resonant with music" (DI 110, 112). Lewis encourages his readers to take a walk under the night sky and try to picture the universe in this way. It seems he himself did this, and the result "delighted" him. The animate, bright, singing, structured universe, with its gods and planets and living stars appealed strongly to Lewis's imagination, so much so that most of his fictional works are devoted to exploring the beauty and symbolism of the medieval cosmos. For example, in his Space Trilogy, published between 1938 and 1945, the main character, Ransom, travels to Mars and Venus, which are both described in terms of pagan symbolism, the first as a masculine planet of war and the second as a feminine planet of love.

Thus, when we come to the Chronicles, we are not surprised to find many references to the night sky in Narnia. Lewis never delineates the aspects of the Narnian cosmos to the extent that medieval writers described theirs, but the heavens of Narnia

echo the medieval cosmos, creating the impression of a medieval world. As a result, Narnia has at once a sense of familiarity and an atmosphere of otherness. We find the presence of medieval thought familiar because it is part of our own cultural heritage, yet the heavens of Narnia are strange to those of us living in a post-Einsteinian universe. Lewis does not exactly replicate the medieval image of the cosmos, but instead draws from it to create an imaginative effect, a distinct flavor, for Narnia. The heavens were animate and orderly to their medieval observers, and the heavens of Narnia are described in the same way. We can see this in particular in descriptions of the stars, the planets, the air, and the moon of Narnia.

The Stars above Narnia

In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis was primarily concerned with describing the "emotional effect" of the medieval conception of the universe. In the Chronicles of Narnia, he recreates that emotional effect in part by populating the night sky of Narnia with animate stars. Medieval thinkers, writes Lewis, "attributed life and even intelligence" to stars (DI 93). A person of the Middle Ages "did not think that the spaces he looked up at were silent, or dark or empty…they were perpetually filled with sweet, immeasurable sound" caused by the turning of the spheres (IT 52). We find similar characteristics in the night sky of Narnia. That the stars of Narnia are not merely great balls of gas becomes clear from the moment they are created. When the Narnian world is being made in *The Magician's Nephew*, Aslan sings the stars into existence and then is "suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. They

were…cold, tingling, silvery voices….the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars" (99). Lewis's first description of the stars is that they have voices; their appearance is secondary. The Narnian sky is not silent, but filled with music, like the medieval heavens.

Lewis's stories emphasize that the stars of the Narnian world are animate and intelligent. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the human children meet two "retired" stars—Ramandu and Coriakin. When Eustace interjects that in his world, stars are balls of gas, Ramandu replies, "Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of" (180). In *The Last Battle*, Lewis again points out: "Stars in that world are not the great flaming globes they are in ours. They are people" (151). In this story, at the end of Narnia, Aslan calls the stars home. The sky grows darker and darker, and the children "found showers of glittering people, all with long hair like burning silver and sparks like white-hot metal, rushing down to them out of the black air, swifter than falling stones. They made a hissing noise as they landed and burnt the grass" (151). Thus, we find that not only are the stars of Narnia sentient, but they can actually take human form. While medieval writers believed stars had intelligence, Lewis goes further and gives them humanity and souls and has them become characters in his story. Perhaps he is drawing here from medieval and Renaissance representations of the planets/gods in human form (IT 60). Just as artists such as Botticelli depicted in full human detail the planets Venus and Mars, among others, Lewis is depicting through fiction the stars as humans.

In *Prince Caspian*, Lucy lies awake gazing at the constellations she came to know when she was Queen of Narnia. "With a thrill of memory, she saw again, after all those years, the bright Narnian stars…'Dear old Leopard,' she murmured happily to herself" (PC 111). Like many of the references to the heavens in the Chronicles, this passage is brief and incidental to the plot, but important for the atmosphere of the story. First, it establishes a sense of place. To help us imagine the totality of this world, Lewis describes not only its streams and forest, but also its skies. This also draws attention to the contrasts between the Narnian sky and ours. Narnia is a different world because it has constellations we have never seen. It emphasizes that in Narnia, the children are away from the large population centers of Earth where most of us rarely note what is going on in the sky. Narnia, in contrast, is a place where people live closer to nature. Lucy's familiar address to the constellation—"Dear old Leopard"—communicates a sense of nostalgia for the Golden Age of Narnia, but also gives the impression that the constellation has intelligence, that it is part of a universe "filled with longings and endeavors" (IT 50). Lucy, as others in Narnia do, speaks of the stars as if they were animate, as if she were recognizing old friends. Her familiarity with and delight in the stars reflects Lewis's own knowledge and enjoyment of astronomy. Lucy has a view of the heavens similar to that of inhabitants of the Middle Ages; she sees the stars not only with awe, but with a sense of familiarity, as if the universe of Narnia, like that of the Middle Ages, were bounded and animate.

The Narnian Planets

The Narnian planets, too, have intelligence, and like their medieval counterparts, participate in an orderly and harmonious universe. In "Imagination and Thought in the Middle Ages," a lecture delivered to an audience of scientists at the Zoological Laboratory in Cambridge, Lewis emphasizes the harmonious nature of the medieval cosmos. It was a structure of immensity, but at the same time, of minute detail; every part moved and worked in concord. "It is…a unity articulated through a great and harmonious plurality," writes Lewis, evoking "wonder" and "admiration" and satisfying our "aesthetic nature" (49). This regularity and order is not that of a machine, but of "a dance, a festival, a symphony, a ritual, a carnival, or all these in one" (60).

We have already seen how the singing stars make the Narnian heavens like a symphony. Lewis also describes the Narnian planets as participating in a great dance. In *Prince Caspian*, Cornelius takes his young student Caspian up the tallest tower of the castle for an astronomy lesson:

> There was no difficulty in picking out the two stars they had come to see. They hung rather low in the southern sky, almost as bright as two little moons and very close together.
>
> "Are they going to have a collision?" [Caspian] asked in an awe-struck voice.
>
> "Nay, dear Prince," said the Doctor (and he too spoke in a whisper). "The great lords of the upper sky know the steps of their dance too well for that. Look well upon them. Their meeting is fortunate and means some great good for the

> sad realm of Narnia. Tarva the Lord of Victory salutes Alambil the Lady of Peace." (45-46)

This exchange between Caspian and his tutor has a distinctly medieval character. For one thing, Caspian, as part of his education, is studying astronomy, and an astronomy not separate from astrology, for Cornelius informs Caspian that the coming together of the two planets presages good fortune in Narnia. Secondly, both Caspian and Cornelius speak in whispers, in awe of what is happening in the heavens above them. In these two characters, we find expressed Lewis's own "wonder" and "admiration" of the medieval cosmos. Also, this conversation, though brief, emphasizes the order and elegance of the movement of the planets. The planets will not collide, not because they are in reality millions of miles apart, but because they "know the steps of their dance." They are compared to a lord and lady moving across the floor of the heavens. Again, though the passage is short and almost incidental, if we consider what is said here, we realize that the Narnian sky corresponds almost exactly with Lewis's depiction of the medieval cosmos.

The Influence of the Planets

In the Middle Ages, the planets were more than distant intelligences treading their dance across the sky. "Each of them is doing things to us at every moment," writes Lewis (IT 54). They influence events and they influence human psychology. "Born under Saturn, you were disposed to melancholy; born under Venus, to amorousness" (IT 54). The ability to predict human affairs from the planets was not, Lewis emphasizes, a

matter of the "quasi-mystical side of the mind" (55). Rather, it was an accepted way of understanding nature, "a hard-headed, stern, anti-idealistic affair" (56).

In Narnia, this role of understanding the movements of the planets and stars and how they influence human actions is filled by the centaurs. When Prince Caspian meets the Centaur Glenstorm, a prophet and star-gazer, he counsels Caspian to plan for war. "The time is ripe," he declares. "I watch the skies…Tarva and Alambil have met in the halls of high heaven…The hour has struck" (73-74). Doctor Cornelius, Glenstorm, and later Caspian, believe that the actions of the planets are intertwined with the actions of human beings. Until Glenstorm says this, there is no plan for war in *Prince Caspian*. His reading of the heavens directs the course of the story, leading eventually to the return of Aslan and the liberation of Narnia. The effect of Glenstorm's declaration is to create a sense that Caspian and the creatures of Narnia are participating in an event larger than themselves, in a plan that is directed.

In medieval cosmology, the planets influenced individuals by first influencing the air, "the medium through which all the influences from above reached [an inhabitant of the Middle Ages]. The whole air could become healthy or unhealthy as a result of certain conjunctions in the upper sky. Hence, a medieval doctor could explain widespread illness by saying 'It's due to this influence'" (IT 56). The air of Narnia is mentioned in nearly all of the seven Chronicles as having special properties. In *Prince Caspian*, Edmund has returned to Narnia and challenges Trumpkin to a fight with broadswords. Lewis writes:

> I don't think Edmund would have had a chance if he had fought Trumpkin twenty-four hours earlier. But the air of Narnia had been working upon him ever since they arrived on the island, and all his old battles came back to him, and his arms remembered their old skill. (PC 100)

Similarly, when Eustace returns to Narnia in *The Silver Chair*, he is alert and awake because "the Narnian air was bringing back to him a strength he had won when he sailed the Eastern Seas" (SC 55). The Cabby in *The Magician's Nephew* loses the "sharpness and cunning and quarrelsomeness which he had picked up as a London cabby" and instead looks kind and courageous. "Perhaps," writes Lewis, "it was the air of the young world that had done it, or talking with Aslan, or both" (167).

This change brought about by the air of Narnia could be explained several ways. It could simply mean that it is healthier air than the children had been breathing in England. They arrive in Narnia and spend time in the woods and outdoors of the country instead of breathing in the air of industrialized England. But the air seems to have a more immediate effect and have more significance than could be explained simply by unpolluted or pleasant-smelling air. In six of the seven Chronicles, Lewis draws attention to the fact that someone receives strength, courage, or renewal through the air. It seems that the air of Narnia carries influences just as medieval thinkers believed the air of earth did. But while the air for a medieval thinker might carry bad influences—disease and ill luck, in Narnia, it is the opposite: it carries health and good fortune.

There is no explicit link between the planetary arrangements of the skies and the air that the children breathe in Narnia. However, it seems that each time the children

appear in Narnia, the stars are arranged for good. In *The Last Battle*, the centaur Roonwit declares: "If Aslan were really coming to Narnia, the sky would have foretold it. If he were really come, all the most gracious stars would be assembled in his honor" (15). Thus, we can assume that each time the children appear in Narnia, which is usually accompanied by an appearance of Aslan, the stars are arranged for their good fortune. The one exception to this is in *The Last Battle*. In this book is the only time we read of the stars foretelling a disaster (etymologically, a bad event brought about by the stars), which happens when Narnia is destroyed by the end of the book. In any case, the air of Narnia is another of its characteristics that creates a unique atmosphere. Those who visit Narnia are transformed by the experience simply by breathing the air there. In a very literal sense, then, Narnia has a medieval atmosphere—that is, the air its visitors breathe influences and changes them.

The Moon and Fortune in Narnia

In medieval cosmology, the part of the universe below the sphere of the moon was subject to change and to the turns of fortune, while the universe above it was permanent and unchangeable. Luna, writes Lewis, marks the divide between unchanging heaven to mutable nature, from ether to air, from "the incorruptible to the corruptible" (DI 108). Life on earth means suffering "weer (doubt, uncertainty)" and the turn of Fortune's wheel. The uncertainty of life preoccupies Boethius in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, a book about which Lewis writes, "to acquire a taste for it is almost to become naturalised in the Middle Ages" (DI 75). In Book II, "that great apologia for

Fortune," Boethius argues that turns of fortune are the lot of humans and not the punishments or rewards of God (DI 81).

In Narnia, we find the philosophy of Boethius in the mouth of Reepicheep. When Eustace is transformed into a dragon in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and often spends nights alone lamenting his condition, Reepicheep visits him as a "constant comforter," explaining to Eustace that his situation is "a striking illustration of the turn of Fortune's wheel," and telling him of "a hundred examples of emperors, kings, dukes, knights, poets, lovers, astronomers, philosophers, and magicians, who had fallen from prosperity into the most distressing circumstances, and of whom many had recovered and lived happily ever afterwards" (85). Reepicheep's counsel to Eustace echoes what Philosophy tells Boethius when Boethius describes his loss of reputation, money, and the king's favor. Philosophy says to Boethius that Fortune's "very mutability gives you just cause to hope for better things" (Boethius 26). Philosophy also says of Fortune:

> With domineering hand she moves the turning wheel,
> Like currents in a treacherous bay swept to and fro…
> Of mighty power she makes parade when one short hour
> Sees happiness from utter desolation grow. (24)

Just as Philosophy encourages Boethius, Reepicheep encourages Eustace to be patient and reminds him of the nature of Fortune. He does not tell him that Aslan will come rescue him, but only that, due to the changes of life, something good may yet happen to change him back into a human. Though Boethius was a Christian, he also turned to Philosophy for consolation in times of ill-fortune. This was not because Boethius

disbelieved either Christianity or philosophy, says Lewis; rather, he believed the realm of philosophy offered certain consolations and answers to human sorrows, while Christianity offered others. Thus, we find Reepicheep, the most valiant character of the Chronicles, the most loyal to Aslan, the most desirous to reach the land of the Emperor-Over-the-Sea, giving advice from medieval philosophy to Eustace in his time of misfortune. This "medieval moment," like countless others throughout the Chronicles, shows how permeated Lewis's thinking was with medieval thought and conventions.

An Inside-Out Universe

In both *The Discarded Image* and "Imagination and Thought in the Middle Ages," Lewis explains how the earth is "outside the wall." Many believe, writes Lewis, that "The Earth, both by her supposed size and by her central position, had, for medieval thinkers, an importance to which we now know that she is by no means entitled" (IT 46). In contrast, medieval cosmology actually portrayed earth as the most insignificant part of the universe. In comparison to the vast expanse of the universe, it was seen as having no magnitude at all. It is "a nothing if considered as part of the whole," says Aristotle (IT 46). Unlike the perfect realms above the moon, the earth is cut off from the light that fills the universe and is subject to change, evil, and imperfection. Descending from the *Primum Mobile*, each sphere becomes smaller and increasingly imperfect until the "bottom"—the earth. In this sense, "the medieval man felt he was looking in. Here is the outside. The Moon's orbit is the city wall. Night opens the gates for a moment and we catch a glimpse of the high pomps which are going on inside; staring as animals stare at

the fires of the encampment they cannot enter, as rustics stare at a city" (IT 59). Again in *The Discarded Image,* Lewis writes:

> All this time we are describing the universe spread out in space; dignity, power and speed progressively diminishing as we descend from its circumference to its centre, the Earth…the intelligible universe reverses it all; there the Earth is the rim, the outside edge where being fades away on the border of nonentity. A few astonishing lines from the *Paradiso* (xxviii, 25 sq.) stamp this on the mind forever. There Dante sees God as a point of light. Seven concentric rings of light revolve about that point, and that which is smallest and nearest to it has the swiftest movement. This is the Intelligence of the *Primum Mobile*, superior to all the rest in love and knowledge. The universe is thus, when our minds are sufficiently freed from the senses, turned inside out. Dante, with incomparably greater power is, however saying no more than Alanus says when he locates us and our Earth 'outside the city wall.' (116)

This imagery of Dante's clearly impressed itself on Lewis's imagination. The universe in Dante's portrayal is turned inside out so that the earth becomes not the center but the periphery.

In *The Last Battle*, Lewis incorporates Dante's imagery into his own stories. After being turned out from what they believe is the real Narnia, the children move "further up and further in" to the new country in which they find themselves (LB 171).

While they move into what appear to be smaller and smaller areas of space, each place turns out to be larger than the space from which they just came.

First, they enter the stable. From the door of the stable, it is difficult to say which is inside and which is outside—the old Narnia that is destroyed, or the new "real" Narnia where the children see Aslan. It seems that the "real" Narnia is within the stable. As Lord Digory says, "Its inside is bigger than its outside" (LB 140). The children go "further in" until they reach a walled garden. The world of Narnia had been outside that wall, and yet, once inside, "Lucy looked hard at the garden and saw that it was not really a garden at all but a whole world, with its own rivers and woods and sea and mountains. But they were not strange: she knew them all" (180). They were Narnia, "more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below." We can see here Lewis's Platonic thought coming through, with the old Narnian world being only a shadow of the "real" Narnia. Yet, this picture of layers of Narnia, each larger than the last, though the children are going further in, is also Dantean and medieval.

In the first six Chronicles, Aslan's country, which parallels the medieval heavens, rings the world of Narnia. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Reepicheep sails to the end of the world to enter Aslan's country. But in *The Last Battle*, the children find Reepicheep in the garden, in the center of the Narnian world. In this way the heavens, or land of eternity, rings the Narnian world, but then Lewis turns the universe inside out, and they become the middle. The children, after their death in England and Narnia, move further in, layer after layer. The heavens have become the center. The structure of the

Narnian universe comes to reflect the “true nature” of the universe—with the world of mortality on the outside and the world of Aslan in the center (IT 62).

CHAPTER THREE: THE *LONGAEVI* OF NARNIA

The heavens provide the backdrop of Narnia, but what strikes the reader upon first reading The Chronicles of Narnia are its fantastic creatures. They, more than any other single element, are what make Narnia Narnia. After all, Narnia "is not the land of men. It is the country of Aslan, the country of the Waking Trees and Visible Naiads, of Fauns and Satyrs, of Dwarfs and Giants, of the gods and the Centaurs, of Talking Beasts" (PC 47). These creatures constitute part of that "Kappa element" in Lewis's stories, giving them a unique and other-worldly flavor. In the chapters that follow, I turn first to the faerie creatures of Narnia and secondly to its Talking Beasts to explore how Lewis's imaginary creatures were influenced by his study of medieval literature.

One of the most memorable scenes from the Chronicles takes place just after young Lucy has first walked through the door of a wardrobe and into wintery Narnia:

> She heard a pitter-patter of feet coming towards her. And soon after that a very strange person stepped out from among the trees…He was only a little taller than Lucy herself and he carried over his head an umbrella, white with snow. From the waist upwards he was like a man, but his legs were shaped like a goat's…and instead of feet he had goat's hoofs. He also had a tail, but Lucy did not notice this at first because it was neatly caught up over the arm that held the umbrella so as to keep it from trailing in the snow. He had a red woollen muffler round his neck and his skin was rather reddish too. He had a strange, but pleasant little face with

> a short pointed beard and curly hair, and out of the hair there stuck two horns, one on each side of his forehead…He was a Faun. (LWW 7-8)

Tumnus the Faun, and many other inhabitants of Narnia, are neither human nor divine. They are Lewis's adaptation of *longaevi*, or long-livers, from classical and medieval literature. We learn from *The Discarded Image*, and other criticism Lewis wrote, how he understands the faeries of medieval literature and how deeply they appeal to his imagination. Lewis prefers the term *longaevi* to faeries because our idea of faeries is shaped more by Victorian literature, and later by Disney, than by medieval literature. He borrows the word *longaevi* from Martianus Capella, who, writing in the early fifth century, describes them in this manner:

> Where the earth is inaccessible to men it is crowded with the ancient beings who inhabit the woods and forests, the groves, lakes, springs and rivers—the beings called Pans, Fauns, Fones, Satyrs, Silvani, Nymphs…All these beings die…after an extended lifespan, but they have extraordinary powers of foreknowledge, assault, and injury. (55)

Bernardus Silvestrus in the twelfth century describes them as "earthly beings who inhabit the world. Wherever earth is most delightful, rejoicing in green hill, flowery mountainside, and river, or clothed in woodland greenery, there Silvans, Pans, and Nerei, who know only innocence, draw out the term of their long life" (108). In just these two accounts, we see that *longaevi* can be both innocent and harmful in medieval cosmology. Lewis attempts to classify the many different types of *longaevi*; he gives examples of evil faeries, faeries that are tiny, and faerie damsels. He notes that in some medieval

literature, they are a distinct species; elsewhere they are lesser angels or even fallen angels; and in still other writings, manifestations of the dead. Ultimately, Lewis is unable to classify the many different *longaevi* found in medieval literature. Lewis believes that each type of creature appeals to the imagination differently and can be used to create different emotional effects in a piece of literature (DI 124, 126). When writing the Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis drew upon the heterogeneous collection of beings found in medieval literature and upon their varied emotional effects on the reader.

These *longaevi* are Lewis's re-envisioning of characters from classical and medieval sources and reflect Lewis's adaptation of medieval literary techniques. Tumnus, the faun introduced above, illustrates Lewis's unique re-envisioning. Fauns are creatures of classical mythology. Tumnus, however, is unlike any faun one would find in classical literature, what with his red woollen muffler, his anxious attention to keeping his tail dry, and his brown paper parcels looking like Christmas gifts. Tumnus is a decidedly British faun. Like actors in a medieval mystery play, where biblical characters are dressed in contemporary garb with contemporary habits of speech and action, Lewis's characters are a mixture of ancient and present. They are familiar and other, twentieth century British and mythological at the same time. This is what allows readers to walk "arm in arm" with Lewis's characters, like Lucy walked with Tumnus. Readers return to the Chronicles to meet again the creatures there, not only because they have become old friends, but also because they are used by Lewis to create layers of richness, symbolism, and allusion that continue to fascinate readers.

A Place for Everything

Also fascinating is the heterogeneity of these creatures. A brief listing includes fauns, centaurs, satyrs, dryads and naiads, merepeople, and Bacchus and his Maenads; dragons, giants, dwarfs, werewolves; witches, wraiths, specters, ghouls, boogles, horrors, incubi; gnomes, orknies; Father Time and Father Christmas. If the *longaevi* of the medieval world were difficult to classify, this is certainly so of Lewis's own creatures.

J.R.R. Tolkien and others have criticized the eclectic and riotous mixture of creatures in Lewis's Narnian world. George Sayers reported that Tolkien "strongly detested" how Lewis put together characters from so many different mythologies (189). As Michael Ward notes in *Planet Narnia*, "Tolkien was the first to voice the view that the Chronicles are a hodge-podge, and his opinion has rumbled on in critical assessments of the series ever since. To Tolkien, the wide range of literary traditions upon which Lewis drew was not an acceptable heterogeneity" (8).

Yet, Lewis's assemblage of characters from diverse sources seems, instead, to reflect the medieval penchant to find a place for everything. Medieval thinkers, wrote Lewis, found "it hard to believe that anything an old *auctour* has said is simply untrue." They inherited "a very heterogeneous collection of books," and sought to find a place in their intricately-structured cosmos for the many conflicting views passed down to them in those books (DI 11). That Lewis delighted in the syncretism of medieval writers is reflected in a letter he wrote to his close friend Arthur Greeves about his study of Chaucer:

> What a glory-hole is the commentary of an old author. One minute you are puzzling out a quotation from a French Medieval romance: the next, you are being carried back to Plato: then a scrap of medieval law: then…manuscripts, and the signs of the Zodiac…the origins of the doctrine of immaculate conception, and why St. Cecilia is the patroness of organists. So one is swept from East to West, and from century to century, equally immersed in each oddity as it comes up. (*They Stand* 330)

Not only in Chaucer, but in numerous medieval authors, we find this principle at work. A brief glance into Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, and we find characters from the Bible, mythology, pagan religion, Islam, Greek and Roman history, and Dante's own Italy. There are beasts and insects, the Furies, Medusa, angels, centaurs, a winged monster, devils, giants, and so on. Lewis was a student of the classics and of medieval and Renaissance literature, and just as the "medieval English poet…tells us about the aerial daemons…because he has read about them in a book" (IT 42), so Lewis tells us of satyrs and Father Christmas and werewolves because he has read about them in books. Lewis, like medieval writers, was syncretistic in his inclusion of mythological creatures, combining Greek with Norse mythology, English legends with Christian imagery. The array of creatures was not evidence of imaginative confusion, but of imaginative inclusion. It seems that Lewis could not resist trying to find a place for as many types of creatures as possible in the Narnian world.

A Welcome Wildness

While Tolkien outlined a detailed history for each race of Middle Earth, Narnia is filled with whole classes of creatures that Lewis mentions only once. The imaginative effect of each world is different because of this. The flavor of Lewis's story is more like that of *Sir Orfeo*, where the faerie world exists on the fringe, parallel to our world, but one we can access only rarely. The whole of the Chronicles is in this sense very much a faerie story, for it is a story about an entire world that exists on the periphery of ours. As Martianus Capella wrote, *longaevi* live "Where the earth is inaccessible to men" (55). Medieval writers believed many different kinds of creatures inhabited this realm, but could give no all-inclusive catalogue of them. The creatures there were guessed at and glimpsed only briefly. In the same way, the Chronicles give not an ordered, comprehensive view of the Narnian faerie world, but only a few stories from it. We are left with the impression that much of what goes on among the inhabitants of Narnia is unavailable to us readers, and that the seven stories we have are but a small part of all that happens in that world. Yet, in these brief glimpses into the faerie world of Narnia, Lewis is able to give a taste of the wildness of faerie. He allows his reader to pass into the forbidden world of the *longaevi* and to experience briefly an existence beyond human limitations.

Faeries, or *longaevi*, writes Lewis, "introduce a welcome hint of wildness and uncertainty" into the strict, hierarchical system of the medieval cosmos (DI 122). The high faeries of medieval literature, such as those in *Sir Orfeo*, are:

> very palpable flesh and blood…vital, energetic, willful, passionate beings…Their life is in one sense, more 'natural'—stronger, more reckless, less inhibited, more triumphantly and impenitently passionate—than ours. They are liberated both from the beast's perpetual slavery to nutrition, self-protection and procreation, and also from the responsibilities, shames, scruples, and melancholy of Man. (DI 132-34)

These creatures are usually separated from humans, living in a realm we can rarely access, but through the characters of Bacchus and Silenus in the Chronicles, we enter into the wildness of the faerie world.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Tumnus speaks longingly "about summer when the woods were green and old Silenus on his fat donkey would come to visit them, and sometimes Bacchus himself, and then the streams would run with wine instead of water and the whole forest would give itself up to jollification for weeks on end" (13). This actually takes place in *Prince Caspian* when Aslan returns to Narnia and awakens the trees to join battle against the Telemarines:

> The crowd and the dance round Aslan...grew so thick and rapid that Lucy was confused. She never saw where certain other people came from…One was a youth…His face would have been almost too pretty for boy's, if it had not looked so extremely wild. You felt, as Edmund said when he saw him a few days later, "There's a chap who might do anything—absolutely anything…" There were a lot of girls with him, as wild as he. There was even, unexpectedly, someone on a donkey. And everybody was laughing: and everybody was shouting out... (152)

Later, they start towards the battle, "Aslan leading, Bacchus and his Maenads leaping, rushing, and turning somersaults, the beasts frisking round them, and Silenus and his donkey bringing up the rear" (192). The whole troop Lewis calls "divine revellers" (196). After the battle is over, Bacchus and Silenus and the Maenads dance a dance "far wilder than the dance of the trees," a "dance of plenty" where food appears wherever their hands or feet touch, so that the trees and people and animals feast all night long (205).

Lewis, in casting about for a way to capture celebration, life, the return of Aslan to Narnia, the rebirth of the trees, uses Bacchus. He takes one of the wildest creatures of mythology—and introduces him into a children's story. Bacchus is the god of fertility, revelry, harvest and sap and wine, of death and rebirth, and of mystic ecstasy. In the Middle Ages, he also became a symbol of Jesus Christ, of the hope for resurrection and of fervent worship (Brumble 48-52). The Bacchus who appears here takes on all of these symbolic meanings. In Lewis's story, he is still the god of wine, of joy and revelry, of fertility and new growth, but he is a Bacchus "tamed" by the "wild" Aslan. The orgies of the classical Bacchus are changed into a celebration that is still wild and ecstatic, but also purified in the presence of Aslan. Both Susan and Lucy agree that if they had not met him with Aslan, they would not have felt safe with Bacchus.

In many medieval stories of faerie, faeries are elusive. They are part of a realm that humans may enter only rarely, and even then, we do not belong there. Faeries are, as Lewis says, more *natural* than we, close to nature when humans will always be alienated from and other to it. But in these scenes from *Prince Caspian*, humans are able to enter

into that wildness of faerie life and of nature. The woods, the animals, and humans revel together, their celebration and harmony presided over by Bacchus.

These moments in *Prince Caspian* are fascinating because Lewis describes a scene of physical celebration—of romping and dancing and yelling and running and drinking and eating—without any inhibitions. He tells of bodies and physicality without mention of sexuality, without shame or guilt, without gluttony or regret. These creatures are free from shame, fear of death, and human temptations, like the high faeries Lewis described. The humans in the story are children, and in their innocence, they are able to enter uninhibited into the faeries' wildness and celebration of life, drawing readers with them into the same celebration.

The revelers, while not vital to the plot of *Prince Caspian*, are central to its atmosphere. The book is a fascinating combination of war and death with freedom and new life. The Telemarines, the foreign people who had conquered and oppressed Narnia, fear nature—they avoid the seas and the woods and have tried to eradicate the creatures of Narnia. Their defeat is brought about by Aslan, the King of Beasts, by the trees that he awakens, and by the revelers, lead by Bacchus the god of fertility, who sweep through the villages and restore freedom to the peoples living there. Narnia is brought into harmony, for people are again brought to live in unity with nature.

It is this unity, enjoyed by the faeries, but elusive to humans, that also draws readers back to Narnia. In Narnia, Lewis re-envisions the wildness and magic that he found in the medieval faerie stories he read, and fills the world again with "her indwelling spirits" (ELSC 3).

The Imaginative Value of Other *Longaevi*

Lewis was keenly sensitive to the "imaginative effect" of each different type of faerie creature. In a review of Tolkien's work, Lewis says that the different species of Middle Earth "would have been worth creating for their mere flavor even if they had been irrelevant" to the story (qtd. in Daniel 12). "Different kinds of danger strike different chords from the imagination," writes Lewis. A story in which a giant appears has a "heaviness" and "uncouthness" over the whole story ("On Stories" 8). Jerry L. Daniel has noted Lewis's "tendency to 'irrelevant description.' He constantly throws in small details which have nothing whatever to do with the point he is making, but which contribute handsomely to the effect of the passage" (23). If we consider all these together, we find a further explanation for the many different creatures found in Lewis's writings—in writing a particular story or passage, he chose the faerie that best contributed to the overall effect he was trying to create.

Thus, in *The Silver Chair*, when Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum cross over the River Shribble and climb to the top of the moor, passing from the land of Narnia into the northern waste, the first event that occurs is their encounter with giants. Though they quickly pass by the giants, who pay no attention and do no harm to them, the event is important for its imaginative effect. Their encounter with the giants marks their passage from civilization to wilderness. The giants, who look like the craggy rocks of the earth from which they were born according to classical mythology, personify the wildness of the northern waste and signal the children's movement into a realm different than any the

reader has yet encountered in the Chronicles, a realm of "uncouthness," where the "heaviness" of the dangers that lurk there hangs over them.

Also in *The Silver Chair*, Lewis revives the character of the evil faerie mistress. In his essay titled "Tasso," Lewis discusses "the beautiful but evil fay." "The old poets," says Lewis, "believed that a thing might be perfectly beautiful, might be of a beauty to break the heart, and yet be evil" ("Tasso" 116). In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis tells of "Fairy Damsels" come to meet men with amorous intentions (130). Lewis creates a seductive but evil faerie in the green witch of the *The Silver Chair*. Prince Rilian encounters her while riding in the forest. He describes her as "the most beautiful thing that was ever made" (PC 50) and falls under her influence, going about with a "look in his eyes as of a man who has seen visions" (50). After several encounters with her in the forest, Rilian disappears, captured by the fay he has seen. She puts him under a spell so that he forgets who he is, except for several hours at night, during which time he is bound to a silver chair. She carries him away and keeps him enthralled in her underworld, like the lady who enchants Lybeaus with her beauty and music. Rilian serves the fay, who promises to become his wife once he overthrows the land of Narnia. Lewis is both drawing upon and trying to revitalize the imaginative value of the evil fay, the creature of beauty who is not what she seems. As Tolkien wrote, "We find it difficult to conceive of evil and beauty together" (qtd. in Hooper 185), corresponding to a theme throughout *The Silver Chair* that appearances can deceive, and that many things are different on the inside than they appear on the surface. The imaginative effect of Lewis's fay who "seduces" Rilian is two-fold. She is mysterious and wild, seducing Rilian in the forest

nearly to his doom, and she embodies the moral principle that what is beautiful may yet not be good.

Father Christmas's appearance in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* seems to stand out from the rest of Lewis's characters, most of which originate from medieval and classical literature. Yet, if we consider Father Christmas in the light of his imaginative value, he is consistent with the other creatures of Lewis's world. Father Christmas, perhaps more than any other creature in the Chronicles has a powerful imaginative pull for children. Just as Lewis draws upon the creatures of classical mythology and medieval romances for their imaginative value, he uses Father Christmas. Instead of leaving him out, Lewis includes him, like medieval compilers who did not exclude an author because he was inconsistent with another author, but instead found room for him. He embodies, in a very tangible way for child readers in particular, the festal mood in Narnia as the hundred-year winter ends and Aslan returns. He is jolly; he brings gifts; he is a magical figure. Again, in this one character, we find embodied many of the themes of the book—the themes of joy, celebration, generosity, and the magic of the world of Narnia.

There is no need to exhaustively catalogue the effect and purpose of each type of creature in Lewis's world; these examples are meant to show that Lewis seemed less concerned with the logical consistency of the creatures he created and more interested in crafting passages and stories that give the reader a certain sensation and imaginative experience. The presence of the *longaevi* as a whole creates Narnia's sense of magic and wildness; the particular faerie creatures Lewis uses at certain moments contribute to the

flavor and effect of that passage. Along with the Talking Beasts, the *longaevi* are essential to Lewis's creation of a unique and magical world.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TALKING BEASTS OF NARNIA

Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, the great warhorse Bree, Reepicheep, Shift the Ape, Fledge the father of all flying horses in Narnia, Aslan—these memorable characters in Lewis's stories are central to the unique otherness of the Narnia world. The Talking Beasts and *longaevi* of Narnia are its primary inhabitants; Narnia is not a land of men, and its ruler is not a human, but Aslan, the King of Beasts. In the talking animals of Narnia, we see the influence of stories such as *Through the Looking Glass* and *The Wind in the Willows*, a book that delighted Lewis though he did not discover it until his twenties ("On Three Ways" 24). Tales of talking animals had fascinated Lewis since childhood and he began writing stories about his own animal land when he was a young child. However, in the Chronicles we see that Lewis drew not only from childhood stories but also from medieval literature to create the Talking Beasts of Narnia. An examination of medieval beast fables or epics and of medieval bestiaries shows that Lewis was drawing on a long literary tradition in creating his animal world. The medieval beast epics became popular in the 1100's and had their origins in Aesop's fables. They depict a society of animals that reflects medieval human society and are used satirically and to provide moral instruction (Kuehnel). In the late 1400's, Scottish Robert Henryson wrote *The Morall Fabillis of Esope the Phrycian*, a complex reworking of Aesop's fables and previous medieval versions of them.

Medieval bestiaries contained descriptions of different animals often accompanied by pictures and by moralizing that drew a spiritual lesson from the characteristics of the

animal. Medieval bestiaries were many and descended from the 2nd century work *Physiologus*, which means "the naturalist" (Clark and McMunn 2). This work, in turn, descended from ancient Greek, Roman, and Biblical sources. E.P. Evans wrote:

> Perhaps no book, excepted the Bible, has ever been so widely diffused among so many people and for so many centuries as the Physiologus. It has been translated into Latin, Ethiopic, Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, Anglo-Saxon, Icelandic, Spanish, Italian, Provençal, and all the principal dialects of Germanic and Romanic languages. (qtd. in T. White 232)

Translators made free to add their own knowledge of beasts, or combine the *Physiologus* with other ancient sources on animals.

In both beast fables and bestiaries, animals serve as moral exempla for the reader. To the medieval mind, "Every possible article in the world, and its name also, concealed a hidden message for the eye of faith," including animals and their behavior (T. White 244). Animals have been used for telling stories with morals since ancient times in western and eastern literature. As a great reader of medieval literature, Lewis was aware of this manner of looking at animals and using them in literature. He found particularly delightful Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* because the animals become caricatures of certain human traits and so teach us to recognize and either imitate or avoid those traits ("On Stories" 13-14).

Each animal in the medieval cosmology, like humans and all parts of the universe, were linked hierarchically:

> An object's "place" depended on the relative proportion of "spirit" and "matter" it contained--the less "spirit" and the more "matter," the lower down it stood. At the bottom, for example, stood various types of inanimate objects, such as metals, stones, and the four elements (earth, water, air, fire). Higher up were various members of the vegetative class, like trees and flowers. Then came animals; then humans; and then angels. At the very top was God. Then within each of these large groups, there were other hierarchies. (“Renaissance”)

Each animal had a place in this hierarchy, with the lion at the top. Also important in the great chain was “universal interdependence.” “When things were properly ordered, reason ruled the emotions, just as a king ruled his subjects, the parent ruled the child, and the sun governed the planets. But when disorder was present in one realm, it was correspondingly reflected in other realms” (“Renaissance”). Each spirit, person, animal, and plant had its place in the chain, with a purpose and function to perform there. Disruption of this hierarchy was harmful to everyone in the Chain, an idea vividly represented in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* where, when the rightful king Duncan is unnaturally killed by his kinsman, host, and vassal Macbeth, all of nature becomes disrupted. The sun is darkened, horses eat one another, and a “falcon, towering in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed” (2.4.11-12). Though Shakespeare is a later author, these lines illustrate the medieval belief that what occurs in one level of the chain is reflected in others: just as the king is killed by one of his vassals, so the noble falcon is killed by the dirty and blind owl.

The Chain of Being in Narnia

If we turn to the land of Narnia, we find present similar ideas about animals and hierarchy. First, we see in Narnia a modified Chain of Being. We learn in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* that nature has been disordered by the illegitimate rule of the White Witch: she has made it winter in Narnia for one hundred years. Only right rulership will restore nature to its proper order. The Beavers cite two prophecies that have been known "from time out of mind," first that, "Wrong shall be right, when Aslan comes in sight…And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again" (74-75, 78), and second, "When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone/ Sits at Cair Paravel in throne/ The evil time will be over and done" (76). The disruptions in the natural order of things will end only when the proper rulers return to Narnia. Thus, when Aslan, King of the Beasts, returns to Narnia, his coming is marked by the return of spring. When he and the human children lead the beasts and *longaevi* of Narnia to defeat the Witch and the children are put on the throne, Narnia experiences a Golden Age under their reign. What occurs in this story is the exact opposite of what happened in *Macbeth*. The creatures of Narnia are able to live in their natural and proper manner and the seasons return to their right ordering only under the rule of the King of Beasts and of humans over the beasts. In each of the Chronicles, wrong rule brings disorder to the natural state of Narnia. In *Prince Caspian*, the Talking Beasts of Narnia are in hiding, the trees are asleep, and many Talking Beasts have become wild because cruel Miraz has usurped the throne. When Caspian becomes king, even though his people had conquered Narnia, he rules justly and under the authority of Aslan, so the beasts, trees, and *longaevi* in Narnia return to their

natural manner of living. Throughout the stories, it is always a human that rules the creatures of Narnia.

The reason for and nature of this rule is clarified in *The Magician's Nephew*, which was written after *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Here, we learn that humans must rule Narnia because it is humans who brought the evil Jadis into the pristine world Aslan has just created. "As Adam's race has done the harm, Adam's race shall help to heal it," declares Aslan (136). He chooses the cabdriver and his wife to be the first king and queen of Narnia. "You shall rule and name all these creatures, and do justice among them, and protect them from their enemies when enemies arise," Aslan instructs them. They are to "rule these creatures kindly and fairly, remembering that they are not slaves," and are to be "the first in the charge and the last in the retreat" during battles (138-139). We notice several things about legitimate rule in Narnia. First, power and authority to rule come from Aslan in all of the Chronicles. As lord of Narnia, his authority defines legitimate rule, just as rulers were instituted by God in the Great Chain of Being. Secondly, the ruler has certain obligations toward his people, similar to the obligations between a lord and a vassal. He is to protect them and lead them in war, and he is to provide justice. Third, any disturbance in the hierarchy of Aslan as ruler of the humans who in turn rule over the beasts and *longaevi* results in harm. When Shift the Ape usurps Aslan's place in Narnia, chaos and oppression ensue, and Shift's tyrannical rule helps usher in the final destruction of Narnia.

Each Talking Beast in Narnia has its place and role in society, based on its nature. Moles are useful to everyone by digging in both *Prince Caspian* and *The Silver Chair*.

The centaurs are the wise men of society, prophesying the future and providing guidance for the other creatures. The dogs in *The Last Battle* track the Calormen that has gone ahead of the party. Each animal takes its place according to its nature.

The Lion in Medieval Literature and the Chronicles

While the descriptions of animals in medieval bestiaries differ significantly from our modern scientific view of animals, we find rich layers of symbolism and association are attached to many different animals in the Middle Ages. Let us first consider the lion. "The lion is the most ubiquitous of the bestiary animals," writes Margaret Haist. He is "often positioned first and described in the bestiaries as the 'king of beasts'" (3). The lore that developed around lions became increasingly complex (3). Over time, the lion came to have three primary behavioral characteristics all of which linked the lion to Christ. The lion covers its tracks with its tail (associated with the mystery of Christ's incarnation); the lion sleeps with its eyes open (compared to the "ever-vigilance of Christ"); and the lion's cubs are born dead and on the third day, the lion licks, roars, or breathes them to life again (symbolizing God's raising up of Christ after three days) (Clark and McMunn 135; Haist 6; T. White 8).

The lion Aslan exhibits all of these characteristics in the Chronicles. Throughout the stories, no one knows when Aslan will come or where he comes from. He appears and disappears without leaving tracks. At the close of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when the four children have just been crowned and all of Narnia is celebrating at Cair Paravel, "Aslan himself quietly slipped away" (179). Mr. Beaver had told the

children to expect this: "He'll be coming and going…One day you'll see him and another you won't" (180). *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is the tale where Aslan is most present. In the rest of the stories, Aslan is more elusive, appearing and disappearing when he sees best, not when the characters of the stories find it most convenient for him to be there. It is not possible to track Aslan, or to know how or when he comes and goes.

Secondly, in The Chronicles of Narnia, Aslan never sleeps. We rarely see him at night, but when we do, he is always alert and awake. Even after the Battle of Beruna in *Prince Caspian*, when everyone falls asleep after the feast of celebration, "till at last there was silence all round," Aslan remains wide awake, gazing at the moon "with joyful and unblinking eyes" (207). Like the lions represented in medieval bestiaries, and like Christ, Aslan is "ever-vigilant."

Third, the bestiary lion was said to bring back to life or revive his cubs by licking them, roaring at them, or breathing life into them. Aslan's breath, too, brings life and revival to those in his care. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the countless stone statues imprisoned in the White Witch's castle are brought back to life, or resurrected, when Aslan breathes on them. Aslan's breath has salvific and life-giving properties throughout the stories. In *The Silver Chair*, his breath saves Eustace from falling to his death from the cliffs of the Mountain of Aslan. At the end of the story, Aslan breathes upon Jill and Eustace and licks them, giving them strength to overcome the bullies from Experiment House (214-15). He also breathes on Edmund before his battle with King Miraz so that the boys at Edmund's school would not "have recognized him if they could have seen him at that moment. For…a kind of greatness hung about him" (PC 174). He

breathes on Lucy before she is to lead the others, telling her, "'Now you are a lioness…And now all Narnia will be renewed" (PC 138). In the same story, Aslan's roar brings to life the long-asleep woods of Narnia so that they can do battle with the Telemarines. In the lion Aslan, Lewis brings to life the characteristics associated with lions in medieval bestiaries. He adapts these characteristics to become key aspects of Aslan's character and to explore in new ways how a lion can represent Christ-like and regal characteristics.

Not only did the lion have significance in the bestiaries, he also was one of the few bestiary animals who carried "strong associations beyond the bestiary" (Haist 3). In her essay "The Lion, Bloodline, and Kingship," Haist traces how lions came to be associated with kingship. They were not only king of the beasts, but also were used to symbolize human regal power and authority. This association comes from Jacob's blessing of his son Judah in Genesis 49:9-10. In that passage, Jacob says, "Judah is a lion's whelp…the scepter shall not depart from Judah…until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (*The Scofield Reference Bible*). Not only did this refer to the kingly line of David that ruled Israel and later Judah, but also to the coming Christ (Haist 4). Christ is also referred to in the New Testament as "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (*The Scofield Reference Bible*, Rev. 5:5). Thus, the image of the lion is linked to the kingly line of Israel and to Christ the King of Kings. This imagery is continued in the Chronicles. Aslan is "the King. He's the Lord of the whole wood…and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea…the King of Beasts…*the* Lion, the great Lion"

(LWW 74-75). The Lion of Narnia, like the lion in *Physiologus*, is king of the beasts, represents royalty and legitimate kingship, and is a Christ-figure in the Chronicles.

We can also see the influence of the beast fable on the structure of Narnian society. In Robert Henryson's fifteenth-century fable "The Trial of the Fox," there is a memorable scene when all the animals gather around the lion, the king of beasts, and bow down to him (lines 850-928). This picture of a lion holding court is replicated in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The context of the gathering of beasts in Narnia differs significantly from this situation in Henryson's poem, yet the image is similar. The lion holds court on a hill, summoning the beasts to him. In Lewis's story, the lion is meeting for judgment, not of any of the beasts, but of the White Witch. While Henryson's beast fable is satirical, Lewis's is a romantic version of the lion's court, where instead of parodying unjust rulership, the lion's rule restores justice.

Mice in Medieval Literature and the Chronicles

Lewis also includes his own version of the fable of the lion and the mouse. In Robert Henryson's retelling of the fable, the lion calls the mouse "Maister Mouse." Lewis uses this title for Reepicheep in *Prince Caspian*. As Ford notes, "No doubt Lewis was tickled by the expression and amused by the new currency he was giving it" (288). In Henryson's fable, the mice scamper over the body of the sleeping lion thinking he is dead, until he awakes and captures one of them. He has mercy on the mouse, letting it go, and later, the same mouse, seeing the lion helplessly entangled in a hunter's net, calls the rest of the mice to aid the lion: "…thay ran amang the rapis tewch/ Befoir, behind,

sum yeid abone, sum under/ And schuir the raipis off the net in schunder…" (1561-63). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the mice first have mercy on the lion. Aslan lies truly dead; Lucy and Susan try to untie the thick cords that bind him to the Stone Table, but cannot. All of a sudden, swarming through the grass and up the table, dozens of field mice cover the lion's dead body, chewing away at the knots and ropes binding him. In turn, the lion exercises mercy on the mice: they become talking animals because of their act of generosity towards Aslan (PC 203).

Reepicheep, one of the most memorable Talking Animals in the Chronicles is a Talking Mouse. He is the paragon of honor in the Chronicles, a symbol of the ideal knight. Throughout *Prince Caspian* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, he challenges to a duel anyone who questions his honor. For him, the only question to be answered in any situation is what is the honorable course of action. Reepicheep is the embodiment of the ideal knight and gentleman. According to Doris T. Myers, he is the "model of a gentleman as set forth in Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*," demonstrating "courage at every opportunity" (480). He also shares characteristics with the most chivalrous of all knights, Galahad, son of Lancelot. Like Galahad, Reepicheep's birth is accompanied by a prophecy that he would go on a quest and find what he sought. Both Reepicheep and Galahad are the ideal knights in the stories told about them. Neither dies but instead, both are taken into "heaven" at the end of their quests.

Certainly, Lewis must have gotten some amusement out of making a mouse into a warrior and the most gallant knight in Narnia. Lewis seems to be giving us a humorous and witty moral tale of his own by doing this. First, transforming Galahad into a mouse

teaches that what is small and undervalued can none-the-less be valiant and large-hearted. Secondly, Lewis is gently mocking the excesses of the chivalric tradition. When Reepicheep's tail is cut off in battle, he very earnestly begs Aslan to restore his tail, for, "a tail is the honor and glory of a mouse." Aslan hesitates to fulfill Reepicheep's request. "I have sometimes wondered, friend," says Aslan, "whether you do not think too much about your honor" (202). Reepicheep explains that mice are often teased and endure slights to their dignity because of their small size, and so they must guard their honor fiercely. Eventually, Aslan does restore Reepicheep's tail, not in response to Reepicheep's argument, but because his followers swear to cut off their tails if their leader must go without one. By having a mouse act chivalrously and be on the constant guard of his honor, Lewis exposes the folly of being over-zealous about one's honor. At the same time, Reepicheep is clearly one of the most companionable, thoughtful, and brave characters of the stories, an example of courage and kindness.

The Ape in Medieval Literature and the Chronicles

While the lion was regarded as the king of beasts and the highest animal in the Great Chain of Being, his opposite was the ape, the worst of beasts and lowest ranked in the animal kingdom (Miyazaki 35). In medieval bestiaries, the Devil is said to resemble monkeys which are "disgraceful" creatures (T. White 34). They are also associated with uncleanness and sin (Miyazaki 36).

The most evil Talking Beast to appear in the Chronicles is the ape. When apes are mentioned in the stories, they alone, of all the Talking Beasts, are always portrayed as

evil; even the wolves have both good and bad manifestations. Apes are mentioned only a few times in the Chronicles. They are among the creatures gathered around the Stone Table with the White Witch, waiting to sacrifice Aslan. Apes, along with the hags and evil dwarfs, tie Aslan to the stone table (LWW 149).

The most wicked Talking Animal in the Chronicles is Shift the Ape whose usurpation of power brings about the fall of Narnia. Shift is "so old that no one could remember when he had first come to live in those parts" (LB 1). He finds a lion's skin, dresses his pliable friend Puzzle in it, and uses it to deceive the other animals and make them think he is carrying out Aslan's orders as he oppresses them. Eventually, Shift claims to be a human; he dresses like a king and wears a paper crown on his head. He thus subverts the two principles for right rule in Narnia, claiming Aslan's authority for his rule, and pretending to be a human. As a deceiver, he is linked closely to the Devil; and as one who claims to be Aslan's mouthpiece, he appears as an anti-Christ figure, both beings associated with the ape in medieval literature.

This is not the place to examine every link between Narnia's Talking Beasts and bestiaries, and there are many animals in Lewis's stories that appear to have no precedent in medieval literature. But when it came to several of the key animal creatures in Lewis's world, he drew upon the symbolism and associations that had developed around those animals over the centuries.

CHAPTER FIVE: MEDIEVAL WRITING PRACTICES IN THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

Thus far, we have stayed mostly *within* the Chronicles to consider how Lewis recreates a medieval atmosphere in his stories and how medieval literature influences the way that Narnia looks and feels to readers. But these are not the only ways medieval thought influenced Lewis's work. Ward asks: "Might Lewis have wished to draw not only upon the matter, but also on the compositional conventions, of medieval and Renaissance times in his construction of the Narniad?" (19). Indeed, when we turn from considering the content of the Chronicles to the conventions Lewis used in writing them, we see that Lewis's writing habits, literary theory and employment of genre are also intertwined with his study of medieval literature.

A few examples will be helpful to demonstrate the dialectic between the literature Lewis read and his own theory and writing practices. In the chapter "Sidney and Spenser" in Lewis's *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, we find that Sir Philip Sidney's ideas of the poet and poetry coincide remarkably with Lewis's and Tolkien's own views about the author. "His central doctrine," writes Lewis of Sidney, "[is] that the poet is a second Creator producing a second Nature" (343). Tolkien uses very similar language to explain a theory of writing that he and Lewis shared to a large extent: "What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator.' He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world" (60). Lewis greatly admired the works and ideas of

writers who created their own secondary worlds—from Sidney and Spenser to Kenneth Grahame and H. G. Wells. Like Sidney, Lewis took seriously the role of being a sub-creator made in the image of the Creator.

As we have already noted, Lewis is syncretistic like the medieval authors he studied. In the same chapter mentioned above, Lewis comments on Edmund Spenser:

> We feel that the man who could weld together, or think that he had welded together, so many diverse elements, Protestant, chivalric, Platonic, Ovidian, Lucretian, and pastoral, must have been very vague and shallow in each. But here we need to remember the difference between his basic assumption and ours. It is skepticism, despair of objective truth, which has trained us to regard diverse philosophies as historical phenomena, 'period pieces,' not to be pitted against one another but each to be taken in its purest form and savoured on this historical palate. Thinking thus, we despise syncretism…Spenser could not feel thus, because he assumed from the outset that the truth about the universe was knowable and in fact known. If that were so, then of course you would expect agreements between the great teachers of all ages. (ELSC 386-387)

It would be an overstatement to say that Lewis shared Spenser's view on truth exactly, yet in both authors we find a conscious syncretism and a belief that authors from different periods and views still express eternal truths. Also like Spenser, Lewis "welded together…diverse elements" to create his stories; we could trace not only the influence of medieval literature on Lewis's writing but that of pagan and Norse mythology, of Platonism, of Christianity, of the Romantics, and so on.

These examples from Renaissance literature demonstrate that the ideas of the writers Lewis read were adopted in part by Lewis himself. It is impossible to say whether Lewis first gleaned these ideas from the authors he read, or whether he highlights these aspects of their thinking because he had already formed similar ideas. The reality is probably that both were going on throughout Lewis's career. His ideas about literature and the shape of his own writings were in dialectic with the authors he studied.

Genre

Like medieval authors, Lewis drew from a variety of literary conventions and genres in composing the Chronicles. Just as a medieval writer might draw from the "very heterogeneous collection of books" he inherited, including "chronicles, poems, sermons, visions, philosophical treatises, satires" (DI 11), Lewis drew from a diverse body of literary conventions as he wrote the Chronicles. Lewis called them both children's stories and fairy tales, but these are children's stories influenced heavily by medieval modes of writing, in particular romance and allegory.

It is helpful to consider Lewis's work in relation to the medieval romances and allegories that Lewis studied and admired. As contemporary readers, we may be less familiar with these ways of writing. As John D. Haigh notes:

> For too long the criticism of fiction, in all its variety, has been dominated by a realist outlook adapted to, and in large measure derived from, the modern novel born in the eighteenth century. Lewis's theory and practice of fiction can only be

> understood and appreciated when they are disentangled from the modern novel and realist criticism which accompanies it. (182)

And, I might add, they can be understood and appreciated better by looking, not at the modern novel, but at medieval writing practices that influenced Lewis. As John Frow writes in his 2006 book *Genre*, "if we are to read well, we cannot but attend to those embedded assumptions and understandings which are structured by the frameworks of genre and from which we work inferentially to the full range of textual meaning" (101). To become more aware of some of the frameworks within which Lewis was working, let us turn to romance and allegory. Though allegory is more often a mode of writing, for simplicity's sake, I will refer to both romance and allegory as two types of genres. While I consider each of these genres separately, the two are often exhibited in a single piece of medieval literature, such as Dante's *The Divine Comedy* or Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*. It is impossible to draw clear boundaries between the two genres; instead, they each partake of overlapping characteristics.

Romance

Of medieval romances, Lewis writes, "Of the things they have left us these have proved the most widely and permanently pleasurable…They are, in their total effect, unique and irreplaceable" (DI 9). He praises "the mystery, the sense of the illimitable, the elusive reticence of the best romances" (DI 9). Lewis's pleasure in romance can be seen not only in these words, but also throughout the Chronicles as Lewis draws from the romance tradition in composing his children's stories.

Northrop Frye, though not dealing with medieval romance exclusively, finds a similar structural pattern present in most romance stories, patterns we can see in the stories of The Chronicles of Narnia as well. He lists seven characteristics of the romance genre, each of which are readily found in the Chronicles (4). The first is a mysterious birth. If we turn to The Chronicles, we find that this characterizes Shasta in *The Horse and His Boy* who does not know his lineage or that he was actually born a prince of Narnia. Secondly, Northrop lists oracular prophecies about the future contortions of the plot (4). We find such prophesies in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when the beavers tell of Aslan's return and the children's reign; and in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* when Reepicheep's destiny is chanted over his cradle. Third, foster parents figure into most romance stories (Frye 4). In *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta is raised by a cruel foster father, and Caspian in *Prince Caspian* is raised by his uncle and aunt. Fourth are adventures which involve capture by pirates (Frye 4). In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the main characters are all captured by pirates and sold as slaves on Lone Island. Fifth are narrow escapes from death (Frye 4), which occur in each of the books. In particular, Caspian, Eustace, Lucy and Edmund barely escape being turned to gold on Deathwater Island in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; and in *The Silver Chair*, Jill and Eustace are nearly baked into pies for the giants of the north. Sixth, in romances, there is an eventual recognition of the true identity of the hero (Frye 4). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the four Pevensie children are recognized as the long-awaited heirs to the thrones at Cair Paravel; in *Prince Caspian,* Caspian is crowned as rightful heir after his uncle tries to usurp the throne; and at the end of *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta learns

he is a prince of Archenland. Finally, most romances end with the hero's eventual marriage to the heroine (Frye 4). In *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta and Aravis marry, and in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Caspian is united with Ramandu's daughter after he sails to the end of the world.

Additional characteristics of romance that Frye lists include "enchanted islands" (15); that romance is "antirepresentational" (38); that it is episodic, moving "from one discontinuous episode to another, describing things that happen to characters for the most part, externally" (47); and the presence of "outright heroism and villainy" (50). Lewis is keenly aware of these conventions and employs them throughout the Chronicles.

The entirety of the Chronicles partakes of the genre of romance in that they are serious and fantastic stories of adventure. In nearly all of the stories, the adventurers (usually human children accompanied by Talking Beasts or other creatures) set off on a quest. In *Prince Caspian*, the quest is to free Narnia from the Telemarines. In *The Horse and His Bo*y, Shasta, Aravis, Bree, and Hwin seek a home in Narnia and to warn the Narnians about the invasion by the Calormen army. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Digory seeks healing for his dying mother. In *The Silver Chair*, Puddleglum, Jill, and Eustace travel into the lands north of Narnia, following signs given them by Aslan, to find Prince Rilian, captured many years ago by an evil witch. Perhaps the most characteristically romantic is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in which Edmund, Lucy, and Eustace, along with Prince Caspian and his crew, sail to the edge of the world, seeking the seven lost lords of Narnia.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* we find many aspects of romance formulas. This book, more than the other six, is episodic, with the "heroes" moving from one adventure to another. They set out on their quest to find the seven lost lords of Narnia because of an oath Caspian had sworn at his coronation. At the same time, Reepicheep is on a quest to sail to the "utter East," to Aslan's country, because of a prophecy spoken over him at his birth. They venture into unknown waters, into territory that no one rules, like knights in many medieval romance stories.

On this quest, Caspian and his companions are subjected to a series of tests, both physical and moral. While the company is seeking the lost lords, they are also sailing closer and closer to the sun, with all its moral and symbolic overtones. As they near the end of their journey to the east, the sun appears larger and larger to them. "Every day and every hour the light became more brilliant and still they could bear it. No one slept and no one wanted to, but they drew buckets of dazzling water from the sea, stronger than wine and somehow wetter, more liquid than ordinary water" (VDT 203-204). Here, as throughout the story, the physical situation in which the adventurers find themselves is a telling not only of a physical journey, but also of a moral and spiritual one, as the travelers draw closer to the sun and grow more and more able to bear its great light.

Different characters face different tests in the places to which the voyagers come. Eustace, for example, is frightfully selfish and ungenerous until he is changed into a dragon by means of a magic spell; he is transformed so that his outward appearance corresponds with his inward self. It is not until this happens that Eustace is able to see himself as others see him. He is released from the dragon spell only after Aslan peels

away the dragon skin, tearing "right into [his] heart" (VDT 90). Eustace's situation poses not only a physical obstacle for the adventurers (they have no way to carry a dragon on their ship), but also a moral and spiritual test for Eustace where he is separated from his fellow humans until he is transformed and able to join them again, reminiscent of romance characters such as Yvain in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes.

On the island of the Dufflepuds, Lucy is chosen to break the spell of invisibility that is on the creatures of the island. To do this Lucy must overcome her fear of the wizard and find the spell that will help the Dufflepuds. But before she accomplishes her goal, she must also face two temptations—the first is her desire to be beautiful, more beautiful than her sister Susan who was considered much prettier than Lucy; and secondly, her desire to know what her friends say about her behind her back. She is able to overcome the first only because she sees a picture of a lion in the book, a picture that brings Aslan to her mind. Like the knights in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* who invoke the image and memory of their mistresses in combat, Lucy is able to overcome this temptation or challenge only upon seeing Aslan in her mind's eye. She partially gives into the second temptation, and while it does not ultimately keep her from fulfilling the quest, it does bring her sorrow.

Many other romance conventions appear in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Caspian must sail to the world's end before he can ask for the hand of Ramandu's daughter. Together, Caspian, Lucy, Edmund and Eustace must overcome the vice of avarice on Deathwater Island. Characters have visions, encounter magical spells, and come across a fantastic sea creature which they mistake for an island but which nearly

crushes their ship. We could go through each of the seven stories highlighting romance conventions that Lewis draws upon and the many allusions in his stories to other romances, but these examples show that Lewis is working within a romance tradition in general, and that there are many similarities between his stories and those of medieval romance.

Allegory

"Allegory, in some sense," writes Lewis, "belongs not to medieval man but to man, or even to mind, in general. It is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms" (AL 44). However, in the medieval period, allegorical ways of thinking developed into elaborate poems and enjoyed "an unusual popularity" (AL 44). Further, the allegorical writing of the Middle Ages was often explicitly Christian; it drew upon Scripture for its symbolism and the immaterial ideas it sought to represent were spiritual truths of Christian belief. Indeed, that allegory flourished during the spread and establishment of Christianity is no coincidence. As Colin Duriez notes, "The Bible encourages what might be called a symbolic perception of reality—looking at reality through narrative, story, image, and other symbolic elements" (99).

Lewis valued allegory, so much so that he wrote his first major piece of literary criticism in an effort to draw attention to medieval allegory and increase his readers' understanding of it. "The art of reading allegory," writes Lewis, "is as dead as the art of writing it, and more urgently in need of revival if we wish to do justice to the Middle

Ages" (AL 116). Lewis read a great deal of allegory and spent much of his career trying to revive a greater understanding of the allegories of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Thus, we should not be surprised to find allegory, and explicitly Christian allegory, present in Lewis's own writing.

Lewis specifically stated that the Chronicles are *not* allegory. Yet Lewis had a very strict definition for allegory: "Start with an immaterial fact, such as the passions which you actually experience, and…then invent *visibilia* to express them…This is allegory" (AL 44-45). This is what happens in the *Romance of the Rose* and in Lewis's own work *The Pilgrim's Regress*, but is not true of The Chronicles of Narnia. Figures and places in the Chronicles are not abstract concepts embodied in fictional characters. Lewis's work is not strict allegory, but is allegorical in the sense mentioned in the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines allegory as, "Description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance" ("Allegory"). We find Lewis exploring ideas of morality, redemption, divinity, etc., in the Chronicles. In this way, his stories are describing one subject "under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance."

Some readers have felt cheated upon learning that there are more meanings to be found in Lewis's stories than the plot itself and that the stories contain Christian symbolism. Yet, if we consider the sorts of works that Lewis admired and studied, the presence of Christian allegory is not surprising. Further, the allegorical reading practices of the Middle Ages did not discount the importance of the literal meaning of the story. The Chronicles are and were meant to be pleasurable as stories, apart from the symbolism

that is present. As Dante explained in a letter to a friend, allegory can be appreciated on a number of different levels:

> You must know that the sense of this work is not simple, rather it may be called polysemantic, that is, of many senses; the first sense is that which comes from the letter, the second is that of that which is signified by the letter. And the first is called the literal, the second allegorical or moral or anagogical. Which method of treatment, that it may be clearer, can be considered through these words: `When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a barbarous people, Judea was made his sanctuary, Israel his dominion' (Douay-Rheims, Ps. 113.1-2). If we look at it from the letter alone it means to us the exit of the Children of Israel from Egypt at the time of Moses; if from allegory, it means for us our redemption done by Christ; if from the moral sense, it means to us the conversion of the soul from the struggle and misery of sin to the status of grace; if from the anagogical, it means the leave taking of the blessed soul from the slavery of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory.

This manner of interpreting was used for reading Scripture throughout the Middle Ages, and Dante applies it to his own writing as well. He is consciously writing in such a manner that readers will get several levels of meaning, including instruction on morality and the spiritual life. Lewis studied, taught, and wrote criticism on Dante, Spenser, Sidney, *The Romance of the Rose*, and many other authors and pieces of literature that were allegories. This manner of writing and reading appealed to him, as evidenced by his own explicit allegory *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Though Lewis felt that his attempt at strict

allegory in that work was unsuccessful, he continued to write allegorically in his science fiction trilogy, The Chronicles of Narnia, and *Till We Have Faces*. In these fictions, Lewis takes advantage of all three worlds available to the writer: "the actual world…the world of his own religion [and] a third world of myth and fancy…Such were the three worlds Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton were born to. London and Warwick, Heaven and Hell, Fairyland and Prospero's Island…" (AL 82). Lewis, too, has this "triple heritage" available to him, a heritage that realist writers have turned away from, but which for Lewis was the only way to try to express the fullness of our experiences as human beings.

The Faerie Queen **and the Chronicles**

Perhaps more than any other allegory or romance from the medieval period, Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia were influenced by Spenser's *The Faerie Queen.* (Again, it is helpful to note here that though Spenser is often considered an early modern writer, Lewis did not see a clear break between the literature of the medieval and early modern periods. He believed authors such as Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare were still to a deeply influenced by the medieval worldview.) In her book, *C.S. Lewis in Context*, Doris T. Myers even argues that the Chronicles were modeled on *The Faerie Queen*. Myers points out many parallels between the two stories. Like in *The Faerie Queen*, people from our world enter into a fictional tale to "have adventure and receive moral training" (121). Spenser's goal in writing was "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline" (qtd. Myers *Context* 121); similarly Lewis's stories teach bravery,

faithfulness, and honesty. Both stories draw heavily on classical literature in telling a Christian story (Myers *Context* 121).

Lewis wrote extensively on Spenser, and when we look at the aspects of Spenser's writing that Lewis admired, we find those same characteristics modeled in Lewis's own faerie tale. Lewis admired Spenser's "speaking in pictures," his didacticism, his archetypal imagery, and his syncretism—all characteristics of Lewis's Chronicles (Myers *Context* 121-122). Lewis also notes that there are different degrees of allegory in *The Faerie Queen;* Spenser, like Lewis, is often, but not always allegorical. Myer's discussion of the similarities between *The Faerie Queen* and the Chronicles is part of her overall argument that Lewis's work should be understood in the context of Christian humanism. To understand Lewis, we need to consider his work not only in the context of his time period, but as consciously participating in a much longer tradition of literary work that includes both allegorical elements and romance.

Respect for the Past

Lewis sought to revive those writing and thinking habits of the past that he thought were still valuable. Allegory and romance, though less fashionable in Lewis's time, were still, in Lewis's view, important and relevant literary forms. While the literary modernists writing at the same time as Lewis also borrowed from the past, Lewis's view of his literary heritage differed sharply from theirs. While Ezra Pound proclaimed, "Make it new," Lewis advocated understanding and respecting the past as much as possible.

Lewis had not always had this attitude toward the past. In *Surprised by Joy*, he writes of his "'chronological snobbery,' the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited" (199). His friend Owen Barfield "destroyed" this way of thinking for Lewis. Barfield insisted that one must find out why an idea "went out of date. Was it ever refuted…or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood" (199). Upon understanding this, Lewis passed "into the realization that our own age is also 'a period,' and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions" (199). This was an important shift in Lewis's thinking, and indeed is a foundational assumption for the rest of his work. Even when Lewis is criticizing or judging the literature and ideas of the past, his work is marked by a serious and real respect for its literature, ideas, and worldview, which he sees as legitimate sources for ideas and truth. He would return again and again to the past for ideas and models of thought, including to medieval genre and writing practices.

Lewis did this not because he thought the ideas of the past were true simply because they were from the past, but because he did not think current ideas were true just because they are current. The past provided him a place to stand in evaluating his present age, and vice versa. Lewis's turn to his literary heritage as a source for his own writings has caused some to label him as "reactionary" (Rossi 2). "Tolkien and Lewis…constitute a cultural rearguard of the Middle Ages," writes Lee D. Rossi. "They exhibit a tremendous nostalgia for the political stability and cultural cohesion of the Middle Ages" (2). Yet Lewis was not advocating a return to an idealized past. In fact, he believed that

romance is and has always been about a non-existent past. Speaking of Chrétien de Troyes, Lewis writes:

> It is interesting to notice that he places his ideal in the past. For him already 'the age of chivalry is dead.' It always was: let no one think the worse of it on that account. These phantom periods for which the historian searches in vain—the Rome and Greece that the Middle Ages believed in, the British past of Malory and Spenser, the Middle Age itself as it was conceived by the romantic revival—all these have their place in a history more momentous than that which commonly bears the name. (AL 24)

Lewis, like many contemporary scholars, realized that the chivalric ideal, the paradigms of the romance, the Middle Ages themselves, are constructions. Though constructions they have none-the-less profoundly shaped how we understand ourselves. Lewis is trying not to revive the past or return to it, but to understand it, to consider how it has shaped our view of ourselves, and to explore how it can transform our future. "Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we have been, in some sort we are still" (AL 1). Lewis's fiction and scholarship explore both what we have been and what we can be through knowing the past better.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

Much of what makes Narnia Narnia is Lewis's unique re-envisioning of medieval literature and use of medieval writing practices. He creates a world and characters that are both other and familiar to us, in part because they are drawn from the literature of our own medieval past. Further, the Chronicles, while written for children, also contain layers of symbolism and many allusions to medieval literature that enrich the stories.

Lewis's Chronicles are of a piece with the rest of his writing, speaking, and scholarship about the Middle Ages. In his preface to *The Discarded Image*, Lewis says he hopes his book "might lead *in*" to the literature of the Middle Ages. This was always Lewis's hope for his readers, that they might "go beyond" a "purely modern sensibility and modern conceptions" in their approach to that literature, and the purpose of much of his scholarship is to enable others to do this (ix-x). He pays careful attention to language, and often draws the reader's attention to words that meant something quite different in the medieval or Renaissance context. *The Discarded Image* is his attempt to describe what a pre-Newtonian view of the universe was like. *The Allegory of Love* is Lewis's effort to acquaint his readers with the unfamiliar genre of allegory. These and Lewis's other works of both scholarship and fiction are meant to deepen our understanding of our past and ourselves.

But other scholars have done these things also. Perhaps what sets Lewis apart is his appeal to our historical imagination. He asks us to try to enter into the mindset, as much as we can, of previous generations, and aids us in doing so by his lucid writing

style and his stance of honest and direct appeal to his reader. While he often moves into fairly technical explanations of words and ideas in his academic writing, he does so with clarity and with examples from his contemporary life. He seeks both to delight his reader and to bridge across the otherness of medieval literature. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton writes, "Lewis's contribution to Middle English studies consists of a life-long endeavor to reconstruct 'by an effort of historical imagination' the medieval Weltanschauung" (257-258). For Lewis, this bridge is through the imagination. He asks readers to imagine what it would be like to look up into the night sky and see the stars as animate and the distance to the edge of the universe finite. He is doing something similar in the Chronicles. While his primary purpose in the Chronicles is not to instruct students about the medieval model, the stories include Lewis's own imagining about what it would be like to live in a medieval romance and in a world of kings and queens where the secular and the spiritual, the physical and the divine, are not as divided as we consider them today.

Lewis said, "it would seem to me a waste of the past if we were content to see in the literature of every bygone age only the reflexion of our own faces" ("*De Audiendis Poetis*" 4). Lewis faced the same challenge that we all do in approaching the literature from another time period—the tension between trying to understand the culture and literature in its own terms, and the knowledge that we will never be able to entirely wipe away the reflection of our own faces when we look into the past.

In tracing how interpretations of medieval literature have changed over the past century, Derek Pearsall quotes Lewis's statement, "I read as a native texts that you must read as foreigners" as an example of Lewis's claim to "an absolute objectivity of

knowledge of the past, of which he was the guarantor, an absolute standpointlessness" (xxxii). As a result of German scholarship, says Pearsall, "things began to change" when it was recognized that "the point of view of the observer must be acknowledged in the description of what is observed," and that "there is no such things as standpointlessness" (xxxii). Though the scholarship of Lewis's time was certainly more given to a claim of "standpointlessness," Pearsall overlooks the tension in Lewis's work between trying to provide his students and readers with a "way in" to the literature he taught, and the knowledge that he could never do this fully. Lewis considers this tension at length in his conclusion to *The Discarded Image*:

> It would therefore be subtly misleading to say "The medievals thought the universe to be like that, but we know it to be like this.'" Part of what we now know is that we cannot, in the old sense, 'know what the universe is like…" We can no longer dismiss the change of Models as a simple progress from error to truth. No Model is a catalogue of ultimate realities, and none is a mere fantasy…Each reflects the prevalent psychology of an age almost as much as it reflects the state of that age's knowledge. (218, 222)

Even though Lewis is talking here about scientific paradigms, he could just as well be speaking of his own views about literature. He acknowledges that all of us, including himself, are affected by the "psychology" of our own time period. Part of Lewis's fascination with the medieval model of the universe was that it was so complete and so clearly and beautifully true to many medieval authors, yet was deeply flawed. Lewis thinks this could teach us about being careful how closely we hold our own axioms.

Lewis encourages readers to leave behind their chronological snobbery, idolizing neither the present nor the past. "I hope no one will think that I am recommending a return to the Medieval Model," he says. "I am only suggesting considerations that may induce us to regard all Models [including our own] in the right way, respecting each and idolizing none" (DI 222). He writes about medieval literature because he believes it still has something to offer us, that just because it is from the past does not mean it is irrelevant nor that all its ideas have been discredited. Rather, it is a source for perspective on our own ideas and the "psychology" of our own age.

Lewis was a very opinionated teacher and writer, and his scholarship and literature do reflect many of the concerns of his time. Though he was aware that this was a part of what it means to be human and finite, this did not prevent him from trying to understand and communicate what he understood about medieval literature.

In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge in 1954, Lewis expressed his hope that the creation of his chair meant that scholars were recognizing the continuity between medieval and Renaissance literature. He says he was:

> ready to welcome any increased flexibility in our conception of history. All lines of demarcation between what we call "periods" should be subject to constant revision…The actual temporal process, as we meet it in our lives…has no divisions, except perhaps those "blessed barriers between day and day," our sleeps. Change is never complete, and change never ceases. Nothing is ever

> quite finished with; it may begin over again…And nothing is quite new; it was anticipated and prepared for. ("*De Descriptione Temporum*" 2)

While scholars in the generations before Lewis had drawn a dark, definite line between the Dark Ages and the Renaissance, Lewis knew this was an historically-situated view of history. Our ideas and views of history change. "Nothing is ever quite finished with," he says. The field of medievalism is a reflection of that idea. We do not come to a place where we have "finished" understanding the Middle Ages. Lewis saw the ways in which the medieval world was not just something of the past, but also something still with us, and still being shaped by us. His work is part of that shaping, as he drew from his scholarship and imaginatively recreated a medieval world in The Chronicles of Narnia.

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