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Review Essay

SØRINA HIGGINS

Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis. By Michael Ward. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-53138701. Pp. xii + 347. \$29.95.

This past January witnessed the publication of Dr. Michael Ward's exciting synthesis of mystery story and literary scholarship: *Planet Narnia*. In his compelling debut work, Ward reveals the details of his astronomical discovery, a discovery that has been making the rounds of the blogosphere and informal discussions in Lewisian subculture since at least the summer of 2006. Ward's claim is startling: he believes that he has discovered a hidden pattern that informs and unites the tone, mood, character choices, ornamental details, plot development, and overarching structure of C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He claims that this secret code solves all the apparent problems that have plagued *Narnia*'s critical reception, including Lewis' unprecedented foray into children's literature, the apparent disorganization and discontinuity of the seven volumes, and the surprising popularity of such a gallimaufry of fairy tales. The putative secret is this: the seven *Narnia* chronicles correspond to the seven planets of the medieval "Model of the Universe."¹

While several scholars have noted Lewis' passion for the Ptolemaic cosmos,² none has previously observed the possible astrological correspondences of the

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, 1964), 11.

² Including Mary Frances Zambreno, "A Reconstructed Image: Medieval Time and Space in *The Chronicles of Narnia*," in *Revisiting Narnia: Fantasy, Myth and Religion in C. S. Lewis' Chronicles*, ed. Shanna Caughey (Dallas, 2005), 253–66; Paul F. Ford, *Companion to Narnia* (San Francisco, 1994), 68, 167–8 n. 1; and, most recently, Charles Connell, "Reading the Middle Ages:

Narniad.³ Ward's book does so with panache, marshalling pieces of evidence large and small for a convincing case. Ward is a master code-breaker. Like Lewis, he is blessed with a prodigious memory that enables him to move with considerable agility though fiction and nonfiction, poetry and prose, professional and avocational writings, published and unpublished works, primary and secondary sources (though less frequently the latter). He reveals previously overlooked connections by means of both broad brush-strokes and intricate details.

Ward begins his methodical book with contextual information that serves as a backdrop for his argument proper. He shows that there are precedents for secrecy in Lewis' personal life and refers to the work of previous scholars who have tried to find a hidden organizational theme in *Narnia*. He then arranges several elements of Lewis' thought as a foundation to support literary secrecy. These include the *kappa* element in literature (the "feeling" or "atmosphere" of a work of fantasy), the distinction between Enjoyment consciousness and Contemplation consciousness, and the medieval/Renaissance idea of transferred classicism. All three of these approaches to literature suggest that something hidden in a book's atmospheric details (the "adjectives," as it were) can be more important to reception than the obvious surface of the story.

Ward also includes insightful distinctions between allegory and symbol and between *poiema* and *logos*. To create an allegory, the poet chooses material objects to serve as representations of abstract realities; when employing symbolism, a writer seeks to reveal the immaterial realities that are intimated by their physical copies or shadows. When constructing a work of fiction, an author makes the story out of certain materials, fashioning it as a potter shapes clay, putting together selected elements to construct a poem—a "made-thing." When complete, this *poem* also communicates a message: its *logos*. Ward deftly orders these concepts to point towards the hidden reconstruction and communication of the "Discarded Image" in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

In chapter two, "The Planets," Ward reminds readers that Lewis was first and foremost a professional teacher of medieval and Renaissance literature. His popu-

The 'Post-Modern' Medievalism of C. S. Lewis," in *Sehnsucht: The C. S. Lewis Journal*, vol. 1, issue 1, 2007, 19–28; see especially 25. cf. Steven Yandell, "The Trans-cosmic Journeys in *The Chronicles of Narnia*," in *Mythlore*, 43, vol. 12, no. 1 (August 1985), 9–23; David C. Downing, *Planets in Peril* (Amherst, 1992); Michael Edwards, "C. S. Lewis: Imagining Heaven," in *Literature and Theology*, 6 (June 1992), 107–24; and James Alvini Hazlerig, "Recovering the Discarded Image: The Function of Medievalism in Two Cycles by C. S. Lewis," M.A. dissertation, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1992.

³ Zambreno comes very close, dancing around the actual implications of astronomy with her insightful discussions of medieval time, geography, and creatures; see especially the passage regarding the seven spheres on 258–60.

lar works of fiction and apologetics have largely obscured this fact in the public mind. His daily study of such writers as Aquinas, the Beowulf poet, Boethius, Chaucer, Dante, Malory, and Spenser influenced not only his works of literary criticism (such as *The Allegory of Love* and *The Discarded Image*) and his professional *magnum opus* (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*), but also his poetry and fiction. Lewis' life-long, dedicated scholarship enabled him both to hold the medieval cosmos at arm's length in order to contemplate it and to live inside it, enjoying it as a medieval poet might have done.

Nearly thirty-five years of immersion in Lewis' *oeuvre* provide Ward with the similar ability to think inside of Lewis' theological imagination and to make sweeping statements about what Lewis thought on any given subject. Yet, unlike many Lewis scholars, Ward does not stoop to the clumsy mistake of simply paraphrasing what Lewis said better in the first place. Rather, he interprets every quotation or reference in light of his cosmological concerns. This procedure results in a grand literary adventure through the cosmos and through a great writer's mind.

The stated purpose of *Planet Narnia* is "three-fold: to track each of the seven planets as it appears throughout the course of Lewis' writings, to analyze the deployment of the relevant planet's imagery in each Chronicle, and then to assess the theological messages embodied in and expressed by that deployment."⁴ In chapters three through nine, Ward takes the reader on an astronomical journey of discovery through Lewis' scholarship, the Ransom Trilogy, and poetry, pointing out planetary landmarks. This scenic method unobtrusively transmits a panoramic backdrop to the reader's mind so that by the time individual details of Narnian interpretation are introduced, they fit beautifully and naturally into place in Lewis' pre-Copernican conception of spiritual symbols.

A rereading of *The Discarded Image* is highly recommended as a reminder or confirmation of the ubiquity of planetary symbolism in Lewis' thought; however, his doctrinal works are as relevant as his scholarship. Ward originally planned to entitle this book *The Theological Imagination of C. S. Lewis*.⁵ The adjective "Theological" demonstrates that Lewis' deployment of planetary imagery was never an idle pastime or esoteric literary game. Lewis believed that "The characters of the planets, as conceived by medieval astrology, seem to me to have a permanent value as spiritual symbols."⁶ Ward asserts that in the Narniad "Lewis is using the sun and moon and wandering stars to represent Christ under seven veils,

⁴ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 42.

⁵ According to an outline distributed during a lecture by Ward in the summer of 2006 at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, 'The Alliterative Metre' (1935), in *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge, 1980), 24.

seven kinds of iconography.”⁷ In expounding the symbolism of this iconography, Ward utilizes his training as an Anglican clergyman. He is particularly adept at translating literary symbols into Biblical theology. He quotes Scripture as confirmation of a Christian reading of medieval astrology: “Christ himself is shown in the Book of Revelation (1:16, 20; 2:1) holding the seven stars—that is, the seven wandering stars, the planets—in his right hand.”⁸ Ward explicates Lewis’ baptized astrology doctrinally in relation to each planet: sacramental transposition symbolized by the Sun’s alchemical force, for example; Trinitarian hierarchy as expressed by Luna’s subordination to Jove; and the Mercurial curse of Babel as a satire of nominalism.⁹ These sermonettes guide the reader in the direction of Lewis’ own fictional and factual *telos*: Christ Himself.

Ward’s comprehensive interpretation of Lewis serves a necessary purpose in contemporary Lewisian scholarship: it reminds readers that there was only one Lewis. It has become fashionable to talk blithely about three, four, or even five Lewises: the professional academic, the Christian apologist, the would-be poet, the popular novelist, and the children’s author.¹⁰ However, viewing Lewis’ entire corpus through the lens of an imaginative planetary theology provides continuity. This great man offered professional lectures at Oxford on the medieval Model. He wrote about the enduring spiritual value of synthesizing pagan/Classical mythology with a Christianized astrology. He defended the historical and rational truth of the Gospels by means of applying the doctrine of “truth myth” and the universal witness of all creation—including the planets—to the personality of their Creator. He crafted complex poetry in which his ideas of literary atmosphere and cosmological significance were embodied. He created works of fiction personifying the redemptive planetary attributes in the semi-divine *Oyarsa* and in the person of Ransom. And, if Ward is right, he rounded off his cosmological exploration with a set of seven children’s books written “under the influence” of the seven planets.

Lewis’ psychology and imagination thrived on the creation of totalizing systems. Like his medieval forebears, Lewis was obsessed with categorizing, arranging into hierarchies, defending with logic, and connecting everything with grand leaps of reason and imagination.¹¹ This orderliness constitutes the aesthetic appeal

⁷ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 238.

⁸ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 29.

⁹ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 105; 135–6; 145.

¹⁰ See, for instance: Stephen Medcalf, “Language and Self-Consciousness: The Making and Breaking of C. S. Lewis’s Personae” in Peter J. Schakel and Charles A. Huttar, eds., *Word and Story in C. S. Lewis* (Columbia, 1991), 109–44; James T. Como, *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C. S. Lewis* (Dallas, 1998); and Bruce L. Edwards, *The Taste of the Pineapple: Essays on C. S. Lewis as Reader, Critic and Imaginative Writer* (Bowling Green, 1988).

¹¹ Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 10.

of the Ptolemaic universe (at least as perfected by Dante): in it, everything has its appointed place higher or lower than its superiors or subordinates and all are connected by means of an intricate relationship with their Creator, Whose spirit infuses all things with motion and velocity. As a work of art and theology, Dante's universe was far superior to that of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo; an understanding of its multifaceted applicability may enable scholars to reassess Lewis' own work through his appropriation and reinterpretation of the Model.

Sensitive readers suspected all along that these superficially arbitrary "children's stories" were actually timeless works of theological mythopoeia, built on a deep and carefully crafted unity. Ward makes a very compelling case that the hidden unity is astrological. As any totalizing interpretation should, Ward's works itself out on the large scale and by means of countless details. Indeed, it is perhaps the ponderous accumulation of indisputable details that makes his case convincing. Ward's skill dazzles and enchants by means of a veritable army of ingenious connections. He musters colors, names, objects, etymologies, word-counts, and images influenced by the proper planet in each volume of the Narniad, leaving skeptics—or at least this skeptic—breathless and bewildered. More technical observations cram the endnotes, adding to the intellectual weight.

In his discussion of Sol and *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, for example, Ward makes the following insightful connections. Gold, which is both the color and the metal of the Sun, features prominently throughout *Dawn Treader*, whose very title implies a journey with a solar *telos*. The pool on Deathwater/Goldwater Island is only the most obvious example, representing in miniature the theological implications of Aslan as a solar deity. The gray heather, over which Aslan walks after Caspian and Edmund begin quarreling over the Midas-pool, has alchemical overtones: the sun has power to make gray lead golden, just as Aslan walks in shadow but shines as if illuminated by sunlight.¹² Caspian himself (the casting of the latest film adaptation notwithstanding!) has golden hair—as did Apollo.¹³ Characters and their names have solar significance. Clipsie, daughter of the chief Dufflepud, may have been named from *clipsi*, which means "under eclipse, dark," because until her people are made visible, they are occulted from the sun's revealing power.¹⁴ Lewis once wrote that *Dawn Treader* is representative of "the spiritual life (specially in Reepicheep)"¹⁵—that valiant mouse who is drawn east by a prophecy, then disappears forever into the mystery beyond the sun—and

¹² Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 110–11. cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London, 1952), 107.

¹³ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 112; cf. Lewis, *Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, 9.

¹⁴ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 112.

¹⁵ Letter of 5 March 1961, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco, 2007), 3:1245.

Apollo the sun-god sometimes appears in mythology as “Apollo the Mouse-catcher.”¹⁶ In addition to catching mice, Apollo was also known for slaying dragons.¹⁷ Ward points out that four dragons are overcome throughout the course of *Dawn Treader’s* voyage: an old dragon dies in chapter six (Eustace later eats it); Eustace himself is dragoned and then undragoned personally by Aslan in chapters six and seven; Caspian’s crew fights and escapes from a sea-dragon in chapter eight; and the ship herself is shaped like a dragon, which Ward reads as an expression of Caspian’s greed and lust for glory that are vanquished by the end of the story.¹⁸

These are only a few examples of how Ward deploys his planetary reading of the Narniad to reveal new, rich, thrilling subtleties of meaning. He is a great puzzle-master, fitting together apparently dissimilar pieces. He finds (or makes) a reason for everything through long and sinuous chains of connection. For example, consider the following passage on *Prince Caspian*:

The burgeoning vegetation in the story reminds us that Mars was the god of March, the only one of the seven planets whose name was linked to a month of the year. In ancient Rome, the festival of Mars (the *Feriae Marti*) began on the first day of March and Bacchanalian festivities followed on the sixteenth and seventeenth. . . . Given the Bacchanalian revelry recorded in this story . . . and given the fact that the only named Narnian month in the entire septet is ‘Greenroof,’ during which all the events of *Prince Caspian* take place, the connections with Mars grow ever more evident.¹⁹

The above quotation might be read as a microcosm for some of Ward’s remarkable strengths of association and persuasion, but also for some of his minor weaknesses.

This, Ward’s debut publication, suffers from some stylistic flaws. There are frequent and awkward pronoun shifts from “I” to “we” to “one,” referring to either/both himself and/or the reader. There are moments of occasionally clumsy prose in spite of manifest care, such as this response to previous attempts at unifying the Narniad: “It would, in any case, be all but impossible to disprove some of them, so unspecified are they.”²⁰ There are a few more critical blunders for such a serious work of scholarship. First, Ward commits a crime of which his great subject is also guilty: he does not always translate Greek and Latin quotations,

¹⁶ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 108.

¹⁷ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 113.

¹⁸ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 113–14.

¹⁹ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 91–2.

²⁰ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 11.

highlighting his own education at the expense of the reader's ignorance. Second, Ward used searchable digital texts for the *Chronicles* and many other Lewisian works; consequently, many quotations and references lack citation. This makes crosschecking and validating his points troublesome and time-consuming for the curious reader.

However, these technical flaws are more than compensated for by the strengths of Ward's writing. *Planet Narnia* is a Martial masterpiece of "ranked and patterned orderliness."²¹ Its complexities are made manageable by clear organizational tactics: thesis statements galore, smooth transitional sentences, sign-posted digressions. There is so much material here that these classroom strategies are necessary, and they are dexterously employed. Wedded to his systematizing skill is Ward's mastery of suspense. He has an excellent sense of timing and refuses to give the punch line too soon, teasing the reader with hints and suggestions of "the secret imaginative key,"²² and then doling out the evidence in carefully regulated and effective increments. Furthermore, his moments of maladroit syntax are more than compensated for by jewel-like masterpieces of prose, worthy of his master in their alliterative beauty or their succinct parallelism: "Lewis's 'dynasts seven' are a planetary pantheon deployed in order to symbolize the paradoxical existence of a God who is simultaneously both near and far, both speaking and silent"²³ or "the kappa element is more like seeing than it is like something seen."²⁴ Those, and other well-constructed sentences, are well worth the price of the book.

But what of the argument itself? In other words, does *Planet Narnia* convince the reader that Ward has, indeed, found "the hidden inner meaning of the *Chronicles*"²⁵ and that Lewis intended the Narnia Chronicles to "communicate seven ancient archetypes in a manner which is artistically and theologically suggestive"?²⁶ Ward's argument is extremely convincing. Since the publication of his book, Ward has been traveling the United States and the United Kingdom, meeting with great acclaim. He has spoken at Lewis societies, Christian intellectual groups, churches, notable universities, and a private screening of the *Prince Caspian* film. Everywhere he speaks, audiences of fans and scholars respond with enthusiasm and accord. The present writer believes that the planetary reading is likely to be correct, and at the very least is profoundly useful and enlightening.

²¹ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 92.

²² Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 5.

²³ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 238.

²⁴ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 18.

²⁵ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 21.

²⁶ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 4.

There are, however, several queries necessary to clarify the integrity and accuracy of *Planet Narnia*'s assertions. First: Is not the argument complicated by the reader's need to follow too many threads and by the introduction of an anti-naturalist interpretation? Second: Is not the available evidence suspiciously self-validating? Third: Ward introduces a new literary critical term, "donegality"; is it really necessary? And finally: Does Dr. Ward commit "the personal heresy" about which Lewis warned? An investigation of these questions reveals the consistency and probability of Ward's thesis as well as fertile ground for further investigation into new aspects of Lewis' work.

First, then: Does Dr. Ward weaken the impact of his case by trying to tie together too many threads? *Planet Narnia* is ostensibly organized (like all good essays or, for that matter, sermons) around three main points: answering the three primary problems the Narniad presents to "an enquiring mind."²⁷ These are the problem of occasion (why did Lewis suddenly turn to children's stories), of composition (why do they seem like such a hotchpotch?), and reception (why are they so popular?). This organization seems a little forced, as if Ward were a student told by his teacher that he had to have three points—*Planet Narnia* did, after all, originate as a doctoral dissertation. In fact, the main point that *Planet Narnia* makes, and makes well, is the argument that solves the problem of composition. The problem of reception is answered as a by-product of the solution to the first, and the problem of occasion seems to this reader to confuse the matter.

After having argued persuasively for the planetary correspondences, Ward affixes another speculation about *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*'s origin as a response to Lewis' defeat in a debate at the Oxford Socratic Club, then attempts to show how the many strands he has already woven (medieval astrology, cosmological traditions, planetary imagery, atmospheric moods, detailed ornamentation, *poemia* vs. *logos*, seven-fold commentary on Christology) each relate to this new thread of anti-naturalism. The tapestry begins to look a little tangled.

However, each of these threads is ultimately necessary for a full explanation of the planetary reading. One of the most common objections Ward faces is the well-substantiated fact that Lewis never intended to write seven books. Lewis wrote: "When I wrote *The Lion* I did not know I was going to write any more. Then I wrote *P. Caspian* as a sequel and still didn't think there would be any more, and when I had done the *Voyage* I felt quite sure it would be the last. But I found I was wrong."²⁸ Chapter ten of *Planet Narnia* answers this objection, showing that indeed Lewis only intended to write the "Jovial" volume in response to his

²⁷ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 3.

²⁸ Letter of 21 April 1957, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 3:848.

encounter with Elizabeth Anscombe. Later (again under the totalizing impulse), Lewis went on to write books under the influence of the other six planets.

Without chapter ten (“Primum Mobile”), Ward would constantly need to defend himself against the “only one book planned” charge. His answer is compelling, but ignores Lewis’ own advice: “Remember this if you ever become a critic: say what the work is like, but if you start explaining *how it came* to be like that (in other words, inventing the history of the composition) you will nearly always be wrong.”²⁹ The anti-naturalism explanation of the composition of *The Lion* is plausible, but impossible to substantiate except via the subjective interpretation of internal evidence and reading between the lines. For those readers who find the many threads of *Planet Narnia* too confusing, then, the solution would be to read only chapters three through nine, in which the cosmological correspondences of the Narnian septet are neatly arranged.

The second query that *Planet Narnia* raises is this: Is not the evidence self-validating, and therefore is not the entire line of reasoning open to suspicion? It contains two circles of reasoning that conveniently close themselves off to disproof—but that do not *necessarily* constitute proof. The first runs something like this: Lewis wanted to keep these planetary associations secret because he thought that some influences were “all the more potent for being secret,”³⁰ so he worked very hard to deflect conversations that would have forced him to give away the secret and he was very careful to leave no written evidence of the planetary scheme. There are only, according to Ward, two hints that suggest this Ptolemaic reading.³¹ We should not expect to find more, since Lewis assiduously hid the evidence. *Videlicet*, not finding any evidence is itself evidence!

The second circle may be summarized thus: Lewis claims in *The Discarded Image* that such-and-such a planet had certain characteristics and in “The Planets” poem he associates certain phrases with these cosmic deities; in one of *The Chronicles of Narnia* he uses those characteristics, those phrases, and their associ-

²⁹ Letter of 3 January 1959, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 3:1009.

³⁰ Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 8.

³¹ One was to Charles Wrong, when Lewis wrote he “happened to have an idea he wanted to try out, and by now, having worked it out to the full [after 7 books], he did not plan to write any more” (See Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 13, quoting Charles Wrong, “A Chance Meeting,” in James T. Como, ed. *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences* (London, 1980), 113. The other was to William Kinter, who had suggested that Lewis’ books could be arranged like a cathedral. Lewis wrote back, “I’d make *Miracles* and the other ‘treatises’ the cathedral school: my children’s stories are the real side-chapels, each with its own little altar” (see Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 236, quoting Letter of 28 March 1953, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 3:314). Ward takes these hints to mean, first, that Lewis’ secret idea needed seven books for full expression, and, second, that each is in service of its own god (as it were) and then those gods “serve” Christ by representing Him.

ated images; *ergo*, Lewis must be modeling this Chronicle after that planet. Now, this circle is more like the tidy completion of a rounded argument than an example of faulty “circular reasoning.”

Rather than poking a hole in Ward’s apologia, this descriptive circle suggests an open field for further research: supposing Lewis was creating a seven-fold mood based on seven medieval archetypes, how well did he present them? For example: Jupiter traditionally was a god of thunderbolts and irrational rages, the perpetrator of violent rapes, as well as a tranquil and beneficent king. Was Lewis reinterpreting the deities for his own theological purposes—or had the Middle Ages already completed the process of theological selective amnesia? This question is raised tangentially by Ward’s work because he refers infrequently to primary sources for planetary traditions, whether medieval, Greek, Roman, Norse, Celtic or so on. Often, Ward will point to a Miltonic, Spenserian, or Dantean precedent with great success. Yet at other times he makes claims such as “of the creatures particularly associated with Mars (the wolf, the woodpecker, and the horse), all three appear in *Prince Caspian*,”³² without giving any literary or traditional source for the correlation between the woodpecker and the god of war.³³

If Lewis appropriated only the spiritual symbols he liked from the pre-Copernican system and left out or ignored the inharmonious elements, those omissions could damage the kappa element he wanted to convey if a reader carried the absent aspects in his imagination. If Lewis was creating a new closed system (his own reinterpretation of the Ptolemaic cosmology), well and good; if he was attempting to appropriate the old system but failed to do so, his attempt needs to be subjected to close scrutiny and scholarly critique. A fascinating study (or seven studies) would trace the source of planetary imagery and then analyze the efficacy of each Chronicle in recreating the related kappa element.

The creation of a kappa element leads to the third question to which *Planet Narnia* ought to be subjected: Is Ward’s related neologism, “donegality,” a useful addition to the literary lexis? Lewis coined “donegality” in order to describe the kappa element as that which drives us back “to a region for its whole atmosphere—to Donegal for its Donegality and London for its Londonness.”³⁴ Ward then goes on to use “donegality” as a new literary critical term for a story-telling

³² Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 93.

³³ He does mention the source for the wolf’s association: “The Norse Ares, Tyr, whose hand was bitten off by a wolf” (see Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 79). It is easy to see the association between horses and knights—but then again, horses feature far more prominently in *The Horse and His Boy* than in *Prince Caspian*.

³⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Spenser’s Images of Life*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Cambridge, 1967), 115.

technique that is “deliberately designed to communicate” a particular atmosphere or kappa element.³⁵

In other words, the kappa element is the atmosphere that is communicated; donegality is the collective means (plot, specific ornamental details, and other literary techniques) chosen to convey that atmosphere. The difference is subtle and effective; it enables Ward to argue that Lewis invented and employed “a new phenomenon in imaginative literature”³⁶ and that “there seems to be no precise literary precedent for what Lewis was trying to achieve.”³⁷ Ward goes on to offer [a] more extensive definition[s] of donegality:

. . . the deliberate encapsulation . . . of a *pre-existing* quality along with the presentation of an individual, Christological incarnation of that quality. . . .
By donegality we mean to denote the spiritual essence or quiddity of a work of art as intended by the artist and inhabited unconsciously by the reader.³⁸

While this definition is fascinating and perfectly applicable to the Narniad as interpreted cosmologically, it gives rise to two questions. First: How exactly is donegality a new phenomenon? Does not every good writer of fiction intentionally choose elements of plot, detail, and character to create a specific atmosphere, and does not every good spiritual writer attempt to communicate his or her message in a subtle, unconscious manner? Lewis had argued something similar for *The Faerie Queene*; in Spenser’s brand of Neoplatonic thought, at least, “it was fundamental that all great truths should be veiled”³⁹ and “the first thing we notice about the Spenserian images of good is their veiled, mysterious, even hidden, character.”⁴⁰ Even the Christological element is present in Lewis’ interpretation of Spenser, for “Both Spenser’s veiled Venus and his veiled Nature . . . are to be regarded as symbols of God.”⁴¹ Was not Spenser, then, by Lewis’ description and Ward’s definition[s], employing donegality?

On the other hand, if “donegality” (in the sense of communicating spiritual qualities as Christological incarnations) applies exclusively to the Narniad, does not every work of imaginative literature deserve its own technical term? Ought we to coin a word for the salvific role of the little people in *Lord of the Rings* (a spirit of “heroling”?), the timeless preservation and restoration of a bride-figure in *The*

³⁵ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 42.

³⁶ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 42.

³⁷ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 75.

³⁸ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 74–75.

³⁹ Lewis, *Spenser’s Images of Life*, 43.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Spenser’s Images of Life*, 79.

⁴¹ Lewis, *Spenser’s Images of Life*, 16.

Winter's Tale ("proserpinity"?), and the brilliant inversion of the universe in Dante's *Divine Comedy* ("circumcentricity")? Perhaps we ought to do just that.

While "donegality" at first appears too broad—or too specific—a term to enter the lexicon, on closer inspection it is charming, apt, and perhaps even indispensable. For if Ward is right, it can no longer be said that "this cosmology . . . is not fused with high religious ardour in any writer I know except Dante himself."⁴² Lewis took the heavens and the arrangement of the planets and turned them into a paean to the Christian God, inverting the Ptolemaic orbits so that Christ is circumference and center, goal and starting point; the planetary gods are allegory and symbol, signifier and signified. If no one else has ever done just this, then Lewis is using "circumcentricity" as one feature of his unique Narnian "donegality."

The fourth and final question raised by *Planet Narnia* is this: Does Michael Ward commit "the personal heresy"? From 1934 until 1935, Lewis and Dr. E. M. W. Tillyard engaged in a lively debate, published under the title *The Personal Heresy*, concerning "the proposition that all poetry is *about* the poet's state of mind"⁴³—which Lewis thought was nonsense. Since Lewis defines poetry as "imaginative literature whether in prose or verse,"⁴⁴ his theory of poetry applies equally well to his own Narniad. Throughout these six essays, Lewis and Tillyard argue whether or not one ought to read poetry in order to get to know the poet's personality and/or state of mind, "to become acquainted with the poet, as we become acquainted with a man in intimate conversation."⁴⁵ Lewis thinks one ought not; rather, he suggests "putting the poet out of sight while we read."⁴⁶ Focusing on the writer rather than on what the writer shows us, he maintains, is "the personal heresy".

Now, Dr. Ward spends much of *Planet Narnia* showing his readers what Lewis thought, ascribing certain states of mind to Lewis during the process of composition, and even revealing hitherto overlooked aspects of Lewis' personality. Ward contends that Lewis was a secretive man, even stooping to dishonesty before his conversion. He describes what Lewis' emotional and intellectual responses might have been to his debate with Elizabeth Anscombe. He reveals the contents of Lewis' mental wardrobe with convincing confidence. Is this what Lewis himself condemned in *The Personal Heresy*?

No, it is not. For Lewis himself concluded his first essay on the topic with a memorable summary of his position: "I must make of [the writer] not a spectacle

⁴² Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 120.

⁴³ E. M. W. Tillyard and C. S. Lewis, *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* (Oxford, 1939), 2. Italics Lewis'.

⁴⁴ Tillyard and Lewis, *The Personal Heresy*, 107.

⁴⁵ Tillyard and Lewis, *The Personal Heresy*, 1.

⁴⁶ Tillyard and Lewis, *The Personal Heresy*, 61.

but a pair of spectacles.”⁴⁷ In other words, a reader must enjoy the writer’s personality, not contemplate it: “I do approach the poet; at least I do it by sharing his consciousness, not by studying it.”⁴⁸ And this is, ultimately, what Ward enables his readers to do: to inhabit Lewis’ perspective on astrology, theology, and imagination; not to look at Lewis the way Ward does, but to look at the Narnia chronicles (and, consequently, at many other spheres of thought) the way Lewis did.

While it seems clear that Ward does not offend against Lewis by espousing “the personal heresy,” this cursory investigation does not entirely close the question. A comparison could be made between Ward’s approach and Lewis’ seminal reader-response theory outlined in *An Experiment in Criticism*. Scholars versed in current literary critical trends might examine whether Ward commits “The Intentional Fallacy,”⁴⁹ ignores “The Death of the Author,”⁵⁰ or treads on the toes of more recent brands of academic relativism. For Ward’s authoritarian stance disregards both a deconstructionist distrust of singular meaning and the legacy of new historicism, which interprets the author (as well as the text) as a product of his/her socio-political context. Or perhaps *Planet Narnia* answers these charges obliquely, by its confident subtext of authorial intent and discoverable meaning. Such rare conviction is refreshing.

In conclusion, Ward’s discovery—whether or not it is “correct,” an ultimately unverifiable proposition in any case—is profoundly useful and likely to enjoy a positive reception. Ward’s reading of the Narniad can be adapted for either popular or scholarly use. First, it is an extremely valuable tool for pedagogy; the present writer has presented the theory to several classes of students from elementary through high school and has seen an enthusiastic response.

Second, *Planet Narnia* is an extremely visual book—each chapter lists images, colors, animals, and objects associated with the planets—and its premises would apply brilliantly to the film versions of the *Chronicles*. A theatrical application of his reading would add depth and subtlety and would greatly aid in the unconscious communication of timeless spiritual archetypes. Prince Caspian, as the sun-king, should have had blond hair; the dryads should have been tree-like persons under Mars’s sylvan aspect. Let us hope that in the next film the ship *Dawn Treader* is dragon-shaped, Aslan walks as if in a solitary sunbeam on Goldwater/Deathwater Island, the Albatross appears after “a broad beam of light fell from it upon the ship,”⁵¹ and “Aslan appears seven times in the course of the

⁴⁷ Tillyard and Lewis, *The Personal Heresy*, 12.

⁴⁸ Tillyard and Lewis, *The Personal Heresy*, 11.

⁴⁹ See a 1946 article by William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley that begins by commending Lewis and Tillyard for their notable debate.

⁵⁰ See a 1968 essay by Roland Barthes.

⁵¹ Lewis, *Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’*, 159.

story. Each time he becomes a little more solar."⁵² In each of the subsequent films, too, there ought to be images Ward has observed, deployed for maximum visual and donegalitarian effect: water, obvious insanity, black and white horses, and sickly green dresses in *The Silver Chair*; several sets of identical twins, cross-roads, educational settings and implements, thefts, storytelling and poetry recitation, journeys in haste, a Narnian lord wearing a cap "with little wings on each side of it,"⁵³ and many lions in One Trinitarian Lion⁵⁴ in *The Horse and His Boy*; and so on. Let us hope that Douglas Gresham and members of the Disney/Walden Media production team sit down to study *Planet Narnia* before creating the rest of the films.

Finally, as discussed above, *Planet Narnia* lays the groundwork for further scholarly work and encourages reexamination of the rest of Lewis' *oeuvre*. There will be (and have already been) reviews and responses in profusion, but there ought also to be an increase in studies of Lewis' medievalism and his interest in astronomy, cosmology, and mythopoeia. The making of myths was arguably Lewis' greatest genius, uniting all aspects of his polymorphous thought. If Ward is right, *The Chronicles of Narnia* are mythopoetic achievements far above what has yet been suspected, and ought to be analyzed as such. Since we have been forcibly reminded that there is only one Lewis, his entire corpus might be brought into sharper focus by means of interrelation. His scholarly works, such as *The Discarded Image* and the "OHEL" volume may now be culled for their astrological references with purpose and direction. The Ransom Trilogy becomes a glorious prototype for the developing donegalitarian technique. Finally, what might a planetary reading reveal in Lewis' masterpiece, *Till We Have Faces?* Maia, the mother of Mercury lord of language, rejects Cupid, son of the goddess of love, while Psyche's longing finds its consummation in the mythical land of the West (Island of the Hesperides, locus of *sehnsucht*, Perelandrian home of Venus herself). Biographical studies might yield new perspectives, as Lewis became increasingly fascinated by Helen-Venus throughout his life. Ward's references to these topics could rightly—and likely will—serve as foundations for full-length studies.

If more scholars wrote such enchanting prose and discovered such compelling secrets, we would take volumes of literary criticism to the beach for summer reading. But not everyone will produce so persuasive a secret reading, and scholars should beware of Lewis' warning about fools who make meaning where there

⁵² Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 116.

⁵³ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 155; Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 55.

⁵⁴ In response to Shasta's "Who are you?", Aslan replies "Myself" three times. See Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 159.

is none. Lewis once wrote to Mervyn Peake about the *Gormenghast* trilogy: “fools . . . tried to ‘interpret’ it as an allegory. They see one of the innumerable ‘meanings’ which are always *coming out of it* (because it is alive and fertile) and conclude that you began and ended by *putting in* that.”⁵⁵ Is Ward a “fool,” seeing meanings in the Narnia Chronicles that Lewis never put there in the first place? If so, he may resemble Charles Williams’s magical, ubiquitous Fool in *The Greater Trumps*. Like that character from a pack of Tarot cards, Ward pulls together disparate elements to make meaning where there was chaos, to reveal unity where previously disorder reigned. He draws Narnia into the Great Dance, deploying each character gracefully in a divine choreography. If Ward is that Fool, let him lead the dance.

⁵⁵ Letter of 10 February 1958, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 3:919. Italics Lewis’.

