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## Unearthing the Medieval Infrastructure of the Ransom Series (1) : Out of the Silent Planet

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# Unearthing the Medieval Infrastructure of the Ransom Series (1) — *Out of the Silent Planet*

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## Introduction

At first glance, the Ransom stories of C.S. Lewis impress the reader as a pleasant amalgam of G.K. Chesterton and H.G. Wells. While this may be true on the surface, a closer look reveals an infrastructure rooted deep in the imaginative soil of the Middle Ages. Yet his themes were modern, or possibly post-modern, with strong overtones of antidisestablishmentarianism. Lewis's moral message rang the bells of his times; his style resounded the tones of his predecessors; his foundations echoed his past.

How can one reconcile the seemingly disparate elements of such a complex of thoughts? The 1930s were fraught with political and social upheaval. G.K. Chesterton wrote detective stories. H.G. Wells wrote science fiction. The Middle Ages were steeped in allegory.

## A. Allegory

In *The Allegory of Love* (1933), Lewis traces the development of allegory from its humble beginnings as classical personification to its preeminent status in medieval literature. As examples, he examines the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, Claudian's *Consulship of Stilicho*, Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (the *Satyricon*), Isidore of Seville's *Etymologia*, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, *De Mundi Universitate* of Bernardus Silvestris, and the *Anticlaudianus* of Alanus de Insulis.

The *Psychomachia*, the first truly allegorical story in the history of European literature, describes the struggle of Faith and the Virtues against Idolatry and the Vices, with the soul of man as the prize.

For Claudian, allegorical conflict is the natural method of dealing with psychology. One passage from the *Epithalamium for Honorius* exemplifies the promise of the Middle Ages. The poet carries us to a mountain in Cyprus where a meadow is guarded by a hedge of gold. Lewis writes, "There are two fountains here, one sweet, the other bitter. *Juventas* (also) is there and he has shut *Senium* out from the garden.... The hedged garden or park already anticipates the scenery of the *Romance of the Rose*; and, as in the *Romance*, Youth is in the garden and Eld is outside. But it is not for this reason only that I have cited the passage. It is because I would willingly begin to show as soon as possible that the decline of the gods, from deity to hypostasis and from hypostasis to decoration, was not, for them or for us, a history of sheer loss. For decoration may let romance in. The poet is free to invent, beyond the limits of the possible, regions of strangeness and beauty for their own sake... I mean the 'other world' not of religion, but of imagination; the land of longing, the Earthly

Paradise, the garden east of the sun and west of the moon” (*Allegory of Love*, pp. 73-75).

“It is to the same class of mythological allegory that I would assign the work of another writer, if I felt sure that any classification could hold him; for this universe... has produced nothing stranger than Martianus Capella... Formally considered, his book *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, is a treatise on the seven liberal arts, set in the framework of an allegorical marriage between Eloquence (*Mercury*) and Learning (*Philologia*)” (*ibid.*, p. 79). Martianus Capella can best be understood in terms of the reputation of his book. The work was read, taught, and commented upon throughout the early Middle Ages. His was an elaborate didactic allegory. It shaped European education during the early medieval period.

Isidore, Bishop of Seville, was the first Christian writer to undertake a compilation of all useful knowledge of his time. His encyclopedic *Etymologiae* (also known as *Origines*), was a summary of all knowledge of his era. It was divided into twenty sections on the seven liberal arts, medicine, law, history, Church matters, theology, anthropology, zoology, cosmology, psychology, architecture, agriculture. In it, many fragments of classical learning, which would otherwise have been lost, are preserved. It was the most popular compendium in many medieval libraries. Though Isidore understood very little Greek, his was the source of classics remembered in western Europe, until Arabic translations revived Aristotle in the middle of the 12th century. He also wrote *De natura rerum* and *De ordine creaturarum*.

Boethius, Master of Offices in the Court of Ravenna during the reign of the first post-Roman Emperor Theodoric, was framed by his enemies and condemned to death by his emperor. Under house arrest, he wrote *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, a work that was widely admired, and translated by Alfred the Great, Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth I, among others. This work provided a summary, in alternating verse and prose, of classical philosophy. It also had a profound influence on the thought of C.S. Lewis.

Bernardus Silvestris wrote *De Mundi Universitate sive Megacosmus et Microcosmos*, using the alternating meters and prose of Boethius. Its subject is the creation of the world and of man. Lewis evaluates it thusly: “Bernardus, despite those faults of his style which he shares—though in a less degree—with his contemporaries, has real freshness and piquancy in some of his descriptions” (*ibid.*, p. 98).

Lewis writes, “The *Anticlaudianus* of Alanus de Insulis... may be described as a *Psychomachia* with a lengthy introduction... The importance of this work... is twofold. In the first place it conferred new prestige on the allegorical method... In the second place, it is significant by reason of its moral content: as a document of the ‘humanism’ of Chartres...” (*ibid.*, pp. 98-102).

## **B. From Allegory to Symbolism**

During his literary career, C.S. Lewis progressed from writing allegory to employing a form that has become known as symbolism. What is the difference?

In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis explains the two concepts. “On the one hand you can start with an immaterial fact, such as the passions which you actually experience, and can then invent *visibilia* to express

them... This is allegory... But there is another way of using equivalence, which is almost the opposite of allegory, and which I would call sacramentalism or symbolism. If our passions, being immaterial, can be copied by material inventions, then it is possible that our material world in its turn is the copy of an invisible world... The attempt to read that something else through its sensible imitations, to see the archetype in the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism” (*ibid.*, pp. 44-45).

Lewis points out that symbolism comes from Greece, that in Plato’s *Dialogues* the Sun is the Copy of the Good. In the Middle Ages, Neoplatonists (such as Augustine, Pseudo- Dionysius, Macrobius, Boethius) created an atmosphere of symbolism in medieval thought. Water, the symbol of grace in the sacrament of baptism, already had that symbolic quality before the sacrament of baptism was ordained. “On the literary side,” he writes, “the chief monuments of the symbolical idea, in the Middle Ages, are the *Bestiaries*” (*ibid.*, p. 46).

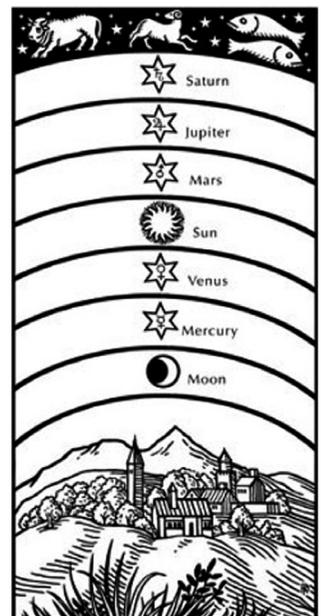
According to Angus Fletcher (*Allegory*, 1964), the main characteristics of allegory are the daemonic agent, symbolic action, magic and ritual causation, the sublime as providing thematic material, obsession and compulsion as psychoanalytic analogues, and the cosmic image. Lewis had a lifelong fascination with the medieval cosmic image.

### C. Medieval Cosmology

The pre-Copernican concept of the universe placed the Earth at the center, with all other heavenly bodies rotating around it. In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis details this model. “Starting from Earth, the order is the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; the ‘seven planets’. Beyond the sphere of Saturn is the *Stellatum*, to which belong all those stars that we still call ‘fixed’ because their positions relative to one another are, unlike those of the planets, invariable. Beyond the *Stellatum* there is a sphere called the First Movable or *Primum Mobile*. This, since it carries no luminous body, gives no evidence of itself to our senses; its existence was inferred to account for the motions of all the others” (*Discarded Image*, p. 96).

“I have made no serious effort to hide the fact that the old Model delights me as I believe it delighted our ancestors. Few constructions of the imagination seem to me to have combined splendour, sobriety, and coherence in the same degree. It is possible that some readers have long been itching to remind me that it had a serious defect; it was not true. I agree. It was not true” (*ibid.*, p. 216).

Why would Lewis adhere to a principle that we now know is so clearly wrong? He gives clues in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (pp. 3-4): “What proved important ... about the new [Copernican] astronomy was not the mere alteration in our map of space but the methodological



Medieval Model of the Cosmos

revolution which verified it... By reducing Nature to her mathematical elements it substituted a mechanical for a genial or animistic conception of the universe. The world was emptied, first of her indwelling spirits, then of her occult sympathies and antipathies, finally of her colours, smells, and tastes... This process, slowly working, ensured during the next century the loss of the old mythical imagination: the conceit, and later the personified abstraction, takes its place. Later still, as a desperate attempt to bridge a gulf which begins to be found intolerable, we have the Nature poetry of the Romantics.”

Elsewhere, he has more to say. “But the change of Models [Ptolemaic to Copernican] did not involve astronomy alone. It involved also, in biology, the change—arguably more important—from a devolutionary to an evolutionary scheme... I hope no one will think that I am recommending a return to the Medieval Model. I am only suggesting considerations that may induce us to regard all Models in the right way, respecting each and idolising none” (*Discarded Image*, pp. 220-223).

“Besides movement, the spheres transmit (to the Earth) what are called Influences – the subject-matter of Astrology... It was not against this that the Church fought. She fought against three of its offshoots: (1) the practice of predictions; (2) astrological determinism, which would possibly exclude free will; (3) the worship of the planets as pagan gods” (*ibid.*, p. 103). Lewis explains how these “influences” work. “When a medieval doctor could give no more particular cause for the patient’s condition he attributed it to ‘this influence which is at present in the air’. If he were an Italian doctor, he would doubtless say *questa influenza*... Nothing is more deeply impressed on the cosmic imaginings of a modern man than the idea that the heavenly bodies move in a pitch-black and dead-cold vacuity” (*ibid.*, pp. 110-111). Today, quantum physicists would agree.

#### **D. Inhabitants of the Heavens**

The question of how the Prime Movable rotates was asked and answered long before the Middle Ages. “It was obvious to Aristotle that most things which move do so because some other moving object impels them... [But] there must in the last resort be something which, motionless itself, initiates the motion of all other things. Such a Prime Mover he finds in the wholly transcendent and immaterial God who ‘occupies no place and is not affected by time’” (*ibid.*, p. 113).

But there was also something *animate* inherent in the structure of the medieval universe. “Each sphere, or something resident in each sphere, is a conscious and intellectual being, moved by ‘intellectual love’ of God. And so it is. These lofty creatures are called Intelligences. The relation between the Intelligence of a sphere and the sphere itself as a physical object was variously conceived. The older view was that the Intelligence is ‘in’ the sphere as the soul is ‘in’ the body, so that the planets are, as Plato would have agreed, ζῶα—celestial animals, animate bodies or incarnate minds” (*ibid.*, p. 115).

In his appendix to *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis details two types of “Genius” in ancient, medieval, and renaissance literature. One refers to the universal god of generation; the other to the daemon (δαίμων), a tutelary spirit, or external soul, of an individual man. As there is just one Genius (A), there are as many Genii

(B) as there are men. It is Genius A who dominates medieval poetry.”

Lewis cites examples in the *Cebetis Tabula*, Claudian, Martianus Capella, Isidore, and (most significantly) Bernardus Silvestris. “In *Cebetis Tabula* we find outside the περιβολος, or park of life (the origin, probably, of Spenser’s Garden of Adonis)—...ουτος Δαιμον καλειται προσταται λε σλοπορευομενοις. Here the name and the function are perfectly clear.”

“Martianus Capella, while ignoring the reproductive functions of Genius, stresses the singleness of Genius A as against the multitude of Genii BB (*De Nupt.* ii. 38). He is speaking of the duties performed by the subsolar gods to their superiors.”

“Isidore, a good witness to the accepted usage of a word, explains Genius in sense A exclusively:

*Genium dicunt quod quasi vim habeat omnium reum gignendarum seu a gignendis*

*liberis: unde et gentiales lecti dicebantur a gentibus qui novo marito sternebantur. (Etymol. viii. xi. 88)*

“In Bernardus Sylvestris, on reaching the *aplanon* or sphere of the fixed stars, we have the following:

*Illic Oyarses quidem erat et genius in artem et officium pictoris et figurantis addictus...*

*Oyarses igitur... formas rebus omnibus et associate et ascribit. (I Pros. iii. ad fin.)*

“This is the fullest description I have yet quoted of Genius A, and the second part of it is a comment (some centuries belated) on the scroll held by Δαιμον in the *Cebetis Tabula*. The name *Oyarses*, as Professor C.C.J. Webb has pointed out to me, must be a corruption of ουσιαρχης; and he has kindly drawn my attention to Pseudo-Apuleius *Asclepius* (xix), where the *ousiarch* of the fixed stars is certainly Genius A (though not so named) ‘qui diversis speciebus diversas formas facit’” (*Allegory of Love*, pp. 361-362).

The heavens are also inhabited by beings closer to home, closer to Earth. “But it is time we descended below the Moon, from the aether into the air. This, as the reader already knows, is the ‘kindly stede’ of the aerial beings, the daemons. In Lazamon [author of *Brut*], who follows Apuleius, these creatures can be either good or bad. It is still so for Bernardus, who divides the air into two regions, locating the good daemons in the upper and more tranquil part, the bad in the lower and more turbulent. But as the Middle Ages went on the view gained ground that all daemons alike were bad; were in fact fallen angels or ‘demons’” (*Discarded Image*, pp. 117-118).

Bernardus Silvestris describes other earthly creatures — ‘Silvans, Pans, and Nerei’ — as having ‘a longer life’ (than ours), though they are not immortal. Lewis calls these different creatures *Longaevi*, or Long-livers. He stops short of calling them Fairies, because the word has been tarnished by “bad children’s books with worse illustrations” (*ibid.*, pp. 122-123). However, he considers the *Longaevi* important because they do not have an official status in the medieval Model. “They soften the classic severity of the huge design,” he writes. “They intrude a welcome hint of wildness and uncertainty into a universe that is in danger of being a little too self-explanatory, too luminous” (*ibid.*, p. 122).

Although Lewis dabbled in cosmology in several of his poems (he had aspired to become a great poet, but Alas!), notably “The Planets” (1935) and “Turn of the Tide” (1948), his so-called *Space Trilogy* represents his most plausible effort at materializing his overall concept of the issues at hand. The trilogy comprises *Out*

*of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945). In addition, a fragment (called *The Dark Tower* by Walter Hooper) was begun in 1939, set aside, possibly re-attempted in 1945, and again in 1956, but never finished.

In this paper, I shall examine the medieval infrastructure that underlies the science fiction surface structure of *Out of the Silent Planet* (henceforth abbreviated *OSP* — I refer to chapters instead of page numbers), the first in the series of Ransom stories.

## E. The Ransom Stories

The action begins with the Pedestrian, an academician on summer break, taking a walking tour of the Midlands of England. Lewis himself was no stranger to zebra zones — he took walking tours often with his brother Warren, with Owen Barfield, and with Tolkien once. But Elwin Ransom, the hero of *Out of the Silent Planet*, is walking alone, a fact that enables his abductors to drug him, hit him on the head and load him aboard their homemade space shuttle, affording him the greatest adventure man has ever taken. “He will not be missed for months,” asserts his abductor Weston. “He came alone. He left no address. He has no family. And finally he has poked his nose into the whole affair of his own accord” (*OSP*, Ch. 2).

This opening passage has distinct overtones of G.K. Chesterton, an author whom Lewis admired. In fact, the two authors have much in common. “One of the most often repeated charges against Chesterton,” says Stephen R.L. Clark, “was that he was a ‘medievalist’” (*G.K. Chesterton*, p. 104). In addition, Chesterton had a lifelong aversion to Darwinian theory. Lewis was also a confirmed medievalist, who shared Chesterton’s aversion to Darwinism. He undertook the Space Trilogy with the express intent of countering what he called “Evolutionism,” a science-based philosophy whose chief proponent was H.G. Wells. (It was further championed by John Burdon Sanderson Haldane, Olaf Stapledon, and George Bernard Shaw.) Evolutionism supposed that science would replace humanism. Lewis objected to Evolutionism, not so much for religious reasons, as many people presume, but because he worried it would find its way into the popular imagination, much as the post-Copernican model of the universe caused the Ptolemaic model to be “discarded.” The Pedestrian, walking in the rain, in many ways resembles Father Brown, one of Chesterton’s well-known characters.

After being “drugged and slugged,” Ransom dreams he is in a garden with Weston and Devine (the other abductor). The garden is enclosed by a wall. Inside the garden it is bright; outside there is only darkness. Weston and Devine try to climb over the wall, but Ransom advises against it. They insist, and he follows, sitting atop the wall (on his coat, because of the broken bottles), with one foot dangling down on either side. A door opens, and some queer people bring Weston and Devine back. The queer people leave, locking the door behind them. Ransom asks the queer people who they are; they respond, “Hoo-hoo-hoo,” like owls. (*OSP*, Ch. 2) The dream is an integral part of the allegorical formula (recall the garden in Claudian’s *Epithalamium* and the scenery in the *Romance of the Rose*). Ransom’s dream also serves as a curious preview of what is to

come throughout the novel.

Ransom awakes, an unwilling passenger in a spacecraft piloted by Weston and Devine. When he looks out the window, he sees a large disc, too large to be the moon. He is shocked when Weston tells him it is the Earth. Lewis proceeds to describe the heavens, from Ransom's point of view: "He found it night by night more difficult to disbelieve in the old astrology: almost he felt, wholly he imagined, 'sweet influence' pouring or even stabbing into his surrendered body" (*OSP*, Ch. 5). The "sweet influence" is used here in the medieval sense, the "influenza," the un-void, the un-vacuum, the splendor of space.

Among his many musings en route to Malacandra (Mars), Ransom quotes Milton:

'happy climes that ly /  
Where day never shuts his eye /  
Up in the broad fields of the sky.'

— *Comus* 976-978

This quote is significant. Like Ransom in his dream, Milton straddled the old and new views of the cosmos: he represented a transition from the traditional model of the universe to the new one.

When Ransom arrives on Malacandra, he meets its inhabitants, one by one. Fear overtakes him when he first sees a *sorn*. His fears are reawakened on sighting the *hnakra*, a lake monster, but then he escapes his captors, who pose a more immediate threat. He bends down to drink from a river, when suddenly a black, otter-like, penguin-like, stoat-like creature wallows onto the shore and begins to speak! It is a scene out of a philologist's dream. The creature (a *hross*) is intelligent, and not unfriendly. During his sojourn with the *hrossa*, Ransom learns a smattering of their language (he naturally sets about writing an "Old High Solar Grammar," or a dictionary). Then he learns of the presence (though he cannot see them) of spirit-beings called *eldila*. Later, on his pilgrimage to Meldilorn, a small island in the middle of a lake, he learns that the *sornis* (*séroni*) are not hostile. Next he encounters a *pffltrigg*, a small, frog-like creature who is fond of crafting things. Finally, he comes face-to-"face" with the *Oyarsa*, the ruling spirit of the planet, though (as with the *eldila*) he cannot actually see its "face."

An essential part of the medieval mind-set was that degrees of value are objectively present throughout the universe. Lewis calls this the Hierarchical conception. For Lewis, it does not suffice merely to acknowledge the inhabitants of the medieval heavens and the Earth. He insists that these beings adhere to a strict hierarchy, which comprises, from greatest to least, the Creator, the Ruling Spirit of a planet, Angels/Daemons, *Longaevi*, and material Creatures. "This thought... belongs to the ancient orthodox tradition of European ethics from Aristotle to Johnson himself, and a failure to understand it entails a false criticism... of nearly all literature before the revolutionary period" (*Preface to Paradise Lost*, p. 73).

This says nothing of man's relation to animals. In *Miscellany of Men* (1912), G.K. Chesterton wrote, regarding the keeping of pets, that a dog belongs to a man, but in another sense, the man belongs to his dog. There are bonds of obedience and responsibility. There is a difference between pets and wild animals, however. "At that moment when a man really knows he is a man he will feel, however faintly, a kind of fairy-

tale pleasure in the fact that a crocodile is a crocodile.” In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Ransom is made strikingly aware of his man-ness when he encounters the *hnakra*, a lake monster with gashing teeth. “A line of foam like the track of a torpedo was streaking towards them — and in the midst of it some large, shining beast” (Ch. 7). Ransom uses the diversion to escape his captors. Later, in Chapter 13, he is invited to prove his man-hood when his hosts, the *hrossa*, prepare to hunt the *hnakra*.

The chase is a peculiarly traditional institution, only recently outlawed in England. Its roots lie deep in the recesses of classical antiquity, when heroes and kings hunted dangerous animals such as lions and boars. Hercules, for example, killed the Nemean Lion. “Alexander Hunting the Lion” was a well-known frieze from Delphi, though the hunt depicted took place in Syria or Persia. Cyrus the Persian was well known for hunting lions. Meleager killed the Calydonian Boar. Odysseus was recognized by his scar (inflicted by a boar) when he returned home from Troy. In the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius (Book 8), Thrasyllus and Tlepolemus hunted “savage” goats, but they mistakenly flushed out a boar.

In medieval literature the chase developed Christian symbolism. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ca. 1360), for example, there are three hunts: one for a deer, one for a boar, and one for a fox, symbolizing the Flesh, the Devil, and the World, respectively. The literary hunt was used as a metaphor for personal discovery, for spiritual cleansing, for mortal conflict, and for courtly love. Sir Gawain finds himself involved in a game of exchange when his Host Sir Bertilak offers to exchange his take in the field for whatever illicit love Sir Gawain takes in the castle. It is a game of Love and Death. Sir Gawain narrowly averts the latter, but after the third temptation, he takes a token, causing the Green Knight to chastise him. “Medieval writers found that... the stags and indeed the whole procedure of the stag chase lent themselves to fictional ends... Even in its simplest form the hunt meant movement toward conflict” (*The Stag of Love*, p. 47).

In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis uses the hunt as a literary device, leading to mortality through disobedience (his unfallen hosts on Malacandra would have had no occasion to consider the Christian symbolism of the Flesh, the Devil, and the World). In Chapter 13, Ransom is ordered by an *eldil* to go to Meldilorn to visit the *Oyarsa*. This he does not do because his hosts, the *hrossa*, suddenly sight the *hnakra*. Ransom joins in the hunt and kills the *hnakra* himself (which makes him an instant hero among the *hrossa*). Immediately he is devastated when a shot rings out. Weston and Devine have killed his friend Hyoui with their “puff-bangs.” The wages of sin is death. Yet here the hero’s name comes into play, informing the reader of Elwin Ransom’s mission in this as well as in the remaining episodes of the trilogy: the ultimate Ransom offers an exchange of genuine Love for spiritual Death.

Realizing his error, Ransom immediately sets out on the perilous trip to Meldilorn to find and pay obeisance to the *Oyarsa*. It is a strange journey, but one that illustrates even further Lewis’s commitment to a medieval world-view. “The erroneous notion that the medievals were Flat-earthers was common enough till recently. It might have two sources. One is that medieval maps, such as the great thirteenth-century *mappemounde* in the Hereford cathedral, represent the Earth as a circle, which is what men would do if they believed it to be a disc. But what would men do if, knowing it was a globe and wishing to represent it in two

dimensions, they had not yet mastered the late and difficult art of projection? ... The second reason for the error might be that we find in medieval literature references to the world's [geographical] end... But the same explanation might cover both this and the Hereford map. The 'world' of man, the only world that can ever concern us, may end where our hemisphere ends" (*Discarded Image*, pp. 142-3).\*

In medieval times, the T and O map was frequently used to depict the known regions of the earth. It is so called because the main parts of the map take the shape of a T and an O. The stem of the "T" is the Mediterranean; the left side of its cross is the Don (then known as the Tamais); the right side is the Nile. Paradise (in the east) is usually placed at the top of the map, with Jerusalem at its center. The "O" represents the encircling ocean.



Figure 1. Map on the first page of Ch. XIV in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*.



Figure 2. Simplified T-O Map, showing north at the top.

In the map shown above (Figure 1), one can see the three races of man, that is, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their respective habitats, Asia, Africa and Europe, with "Oriens" (the East) at the top. Figure 2 shows Jerusalem at the center. Lewis describes three races of *hnau* on Malacandra: the *hrossa*, the *seroni*, and the *pfifltriggi*. Each race has a particular specialty. The *hrossa* have a talent for poetry, the *seroni* are thinkers, inventors, or scientists, and the *pfifltriggi* are craftsmen. It takes little imagination to link these three to the three races of men on Earth.

Internal evidence suggests that Lewis used the O-T map in his conception of Malacandrian geography, or at the very least, he had it in the back of his mind. After Hyoi is killed, the *hross* Whin tells Ransom how to get to Meldilorn (Chapter 13). He tells Ransom to go five days south and two days to the northwest. "But there is a shorter way." Retracing (and reversing) these directions on Earth, that is, going two days southwest from Jerusalem and five days north, leads to Athens. Granted, this reversal requires a stretch of the imagination, but wasn't Lewis a master at stretching the imagination? Sending his character overland (riding on the shoulders of the *sorn* Augray) was a convenient way of saying that Meldilorn was the Malacandrian equivalent of Jerusalem. The *sorn*'s residence was the equivalent of Athens, the birthplace of classical thinking.

\*Aristotle had divided the world into five zones, believing that no one could cross the uninhabitable "torrid" zone. Depicting the southern temperate climate was unnecessary. Isidore, in his *Etymologiae*, taught that the earth was round. In other places, this meant spherical.

On the way, Ransom describes the Malacandrian landscape. “The remote horizon seemed but an arm’s length away. The fissures and moulding of distant slopes were clear as the background of a picture made before men learned perspective” (*OSP*, Ch 16). When Ransom looks through a Martian telescope, he sees the earth. “He saw perfect blackness and, floating in the centre of it, seemingly an arm’s length away, a bright disk about the size of a half-crown. Most of its surface was featureless, shining silver” (*OSP*, Ch. 15). Here we have a heraldic vision of the earth as a disc, argent, on a field, sable. Heraldry is a kind of symbolism, a type of sacramentalism, an essential part of the medieval infrastructure of *Out of the Silent Planet*.

Ransom’s journey culminates in a medieval pageant — his meeting the Oyarsa on Meldilorn. Assembled there are representatives of all the tribes of Malacandra. Ransom, thinking that he is going to be sacrificed to this Oyarsa, naturally worries, but the interview is merely informational. Ransom has been called to bring news from the “silent planet.” He must explain to the ruler of this un-fallen planet how it is to live on the fallen Earth. During the interview, Weston and Devine are delivered to the Oyarsa to answer for their crime. This is pageant, having its medieval origins in the morality plays or miracle plays; it represents a progress from the quotidian to the miraculous, the exciting, the gilded, the heraldic, the wonderful, with a touch of comic relief along the way, and of course, a moral at the end.

Ransom again assumes his role as philologist. He has studied the local language, so now he is able to translate Weston’s speech into pidgin Malacandrian (as if the Oyarsa needs it!). The “Evolutionistic” contents of Weston’s speech are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that this speech could aptly be entitled “The Manifest Destiny of the Species.” The Oyarsa has heard enough. He offers Ransom the choice of staying or going home. When he chooses to go home, the spirit has the spacecraft rigged to self-destruct after ninety days, sufficient time, the scientist Weston says, for the three of them to make the journey back to Earth.

Ransom’s final approach is made in his sleep, mirroring his state of unconscious when he left his home planet. He wakes to the sound of rain on metal, just in time to escape the spacecraft before it evaporates. His captors Weston and Devine have left him to evaporate with it. Stunned by his fantastic journey, Ransom wanders into a nearby pub, shoeless (and presumably penniless). There, he utters the phrase that would become a C.S. Lewis classic, instantly catapulting Lewis into the limelight, a phrase again reminiscent of the tone of G.K. Chesterton’s Father Brown series: “A pint of bitter, please.”

The story does not end there. Instead, Lewis adds an epilogue and a postscript to explain this strange story. “It is time... to acquaint the reader with the real and practical purpose for which this book has been written...,” he writes (*OSP*, Ch. 22). (At this point Lewis inserts himself into the story, claiming he has known Dr. Ransom for some time. He then details a ‘letter’ his own fictional character had written to Ransom some months previously. It was enough, at the time of publication, to cause many readers to believe the story was true!)

“I am now working at the Platonists of the twelfth century... In one of them, Bernardus Silvestris, there is a word I should particularly like your views on—the word *Oyarses*. It occurs in the description of a voyage through the heavens, and as *Oyarses* seems to be the “intelligence” or tutelary spirit of a heavenly sphere, i.e.

in our language of a planet, I asked C.J. [Prof. C.J.J. Webb] about it and he says it ought to be *Ousiarches*” (*OSP*, Ch. 22). Ransom replies, inviting “Lewis” to spend the weekend.

Ransom then tells the fictional Lewis his story, including the true identity of the fictional Weston (an allusion to Haldane, Stapledon, and Shaw). His conclusion: “We have found reason to believe that the medieval Platonists were living in the same celestial year as ourselves—in fact, that it began in the twelfth century of our era—and that the occurrence of the name Oyarsa (Latinized of *oyarses*) in Bernardus Silvestris is not an accident. And we have also evidence—increasing almost daily—that ‘Weston’, or the force or forces behind ‘Weston’, will play a very important part in the events of the next few centuries, and, unless we prevent them, a very disastrous one... The dangers to be feared are not planetary but cosmic, or at least solar, and they are not temporal but eternal. More than this would be unwise to say” (*OSP*, Ch. 22).

## Conclusion

I began this paper with a brief look at allegory, which Lewis claimed was the dominant literary form during the Middle Ages. Symbolism (or sacramentalism), by contrast, would depict *us* (human beings) as the allegorical form of some abstract concept. Hence, the archetypes of Carl Jung, or the hero with a thousand faces of Joseph Campbell. An author puts into allegory only what he already knows. It is a story with a single meaning. In symbolic writing, the author asserts what he does not yet know. A myth, for example, is a story that can have many meanings for different readers or for different generations. Lewis began his literary career with *A Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933), an allegory that retraced his intellectual path to Christianity. His last book, *Till We Have Faces* (1956), is a myth. The works in between, including the Ransom stories, he prefers to call “supposals.” *Out of the Silent Planet* supposes that Mars is not subject to the Fall (“bent,” by the daemonic agent), as Earth is.

I also noted a connection between C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton. Implicit in Chesterton’s philosophy is a distinction between “non-rational” and “rational animals.” In the Ransom stories, Lewis emphasizes this hierarchy: *hnau* must be ruled by *eldila*, *eldila* by *Oyarsa*, *Oyarsa* by Maleldil. The *hnakra* may be killed, but *hnau* may not.

H.G. Wells provided neither a philosophical model nor a moral model for the Ransom Series, yet *Out of the Silent Planet* distinctly resembles *The First Men in the Moon*. The genre of science fiction arose out of the literary tradition of the English novel, which grew out of the interaction of satire and pageant (before the novel and romance became separated). The medieval pageant grew out of the morality plays. As a genre, the Ransom stories bridge the gap between the science fiction of H.G. Wells and modern fantasy, exemplified by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.

In any space travel book, the author must have in mind a clearly defined model of the universe, whether Ptolemaic, Copernican, or Hawkinsian. In this paper, I have shown that Lewis admired the pre-Copernican model, which placed earth at the center, with the other heavenly bodies rotating around it. The medieval

model did not *assume* a flat earth, but rather, *represented* the earth as such on two-dimensional maps. This “O-I” configuration served as the model for Lewis’s perilous realm, Malacandra. The three races of “people” who lived there were clearly modeled after the three races of men on Earth, in Biblical terms, descendants of the three sons of Noah, complete with their respective attributes.

Three elements of medieval literature lend their style to Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet*. The chase scene clearly leads to mortal conflict, though not in the way the reader would expect. In this case, it is not the hero that dies, but the hero’s friend, and upon this hinge, the plot turns gravely, sending Ransom on a pilgrimage to Paradise. En route, heraldic images strengthen the medieval infrastructure; it is a passion play, with Ransom fully believing he is to be sacrificed to (or by) Oyarsa. On Meldilorn, we see the medieval pageant in full splendor, the tribes assembled before their king. There the trial takes place, the interrogation, the diatribe (complete with a dunking, a punishment which traces its roots to ancient England), and the judgment. The sentence is passed immediately: the travelers have ninety days to find their way back home.

*Out of the Silent Planet* is only the first episode in a series of Ransom stories, a series of supposals. It contrasts a planet under the influence of a spiritual being that has rebelled against his Creator with one that has not. The second episode supposes that a Miltonian temptation took place on Venus, but unlike that on Earth, the temptation was successfully rebuffed. The third episode supposes that the forces of evil on Earth can be turned back. The implications, as Lewis stated in his Postscript to *Out of the Silent Planet*, are nothing short of... profound.

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