

A Review of *Planet Narnia*:
Finding the Hidden Gods

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Many critics have said that C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* seem to possess "little apparent coherence in design," no clear continuity of tone or characters, or even consistent level of Christian allegory. Yet somehow these seven stories, penned "by an unlikely novice," have gone on to "become some of the best-selling and most influential fables in the world."¹ In a book that started out as his doctoral dissertation, Michael Ward lays out what he believes is the underlying scheme present in *The Chronicles*: each of the seven short novels is an homage to one of the seven planets of the ancient cosmos, expressed through the atmosphere and tone of each book. Not only does this provide an account for the great variations between each of the stories, it also offers a much greater depth of insight to *The Chronicles* as a whole, and also to the author who dreamt them into being.

Upon completing this book, I was entirely convinced by Ward's argument, and as someone who seeks to keep my own archetypal eye open to the astrological manifestations in our world, I could clearly see how each of Lewis's books expressed the planetary aura in a subtle and implicit way. As Ward writes, this aura or atmosphere must "remain hidden, woven into the warp and woof of the story so that it comprises not an object for Contemplation but the whole field of vision within which the story is experienced."² Ward's methods for understanding the characteristics of each planet, as far as I could tell, were based entirely upon Lewis's own expression of the planetary

¹ Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

² Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 18.

qualities in his other works, from his literary scholarship, to his Ransom Trilogy comprised of *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*, to his poetry—particularly the poem entitled “The Planets,” which Ward was reading when the insight came to him about the underlying theme of *The Chronicles*. Ward did not draw on medieval sources of astrology, nor any contemporary works. Thus Ward’s depiction of the planetary archetypes was entirely through Lewis’s own perspective on them, which led to some interesting archetypal combinations that I will explore forthwith. Not only do each of *The Chronicles of Narnia* appear to subtly correlate to each of the ancient planets, as Lewis understood them from his breadth of knowledge about Medieval and Renaissance literature, but the expression of those planets is characterized by how they are each aspected in Lewis’s birth chart, which includes the archetypes of the three outer planets, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto.

The planetary correspondence to each novel (in the order Lewis wrote them) Ward has identified as follows:

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe – Jupiter

Prince Caspian – Mars

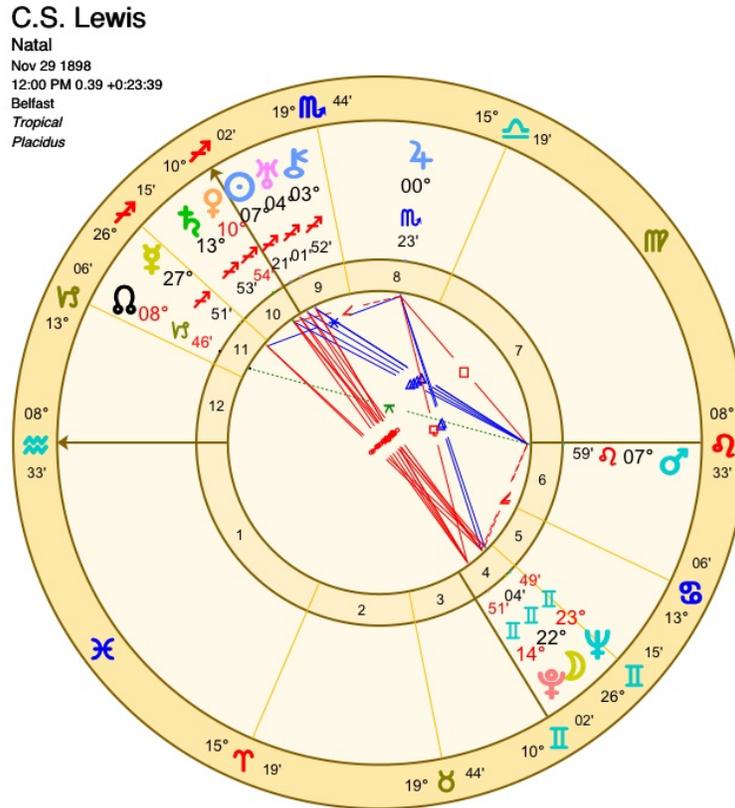
The Voyage of the Dawn Treader – Sun

The Silver Chair – Moon

The Horse and His Boy – Mercury

The Magician’s Nephew – Venus

The Last Battle – Saturn



C.S. LEWIS'S BIRTH CHART

The first book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, expresses the Jupiterian archetype through its Jovial turn from winter to summer, the kingliness of the divine lion Aslan, the crowning of the four children and their peaceful rulership of Narnia, and many other subtle expressions that Ward points out. Lewis particularly favored the planet Jupiter, and it is interesting to note that while he is not born with Sun-Jupiter, as one might expect from his feeling of its centrality to his personality, he does have five planets in Sagittarius (six if including Chiron) which is the zodiac sign ruled by Jupiter. But another aspect that is interesting to note is that Lewis is born with Jupiter square Mars, and the theme of triumphant and victorious battle plays a major role in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Furthermore, Lewis is also born with Jupiter trine Neptune, which can be seen not only in the explicit religious and spiritual themes expressed in the novel, particularly

in the self-sacrifice and resurrection of Aslan, but also in his choice of re-telling the Gospel story in the form of a fantasy novel. The story concludes by the shores of Narnia, by the great ocean ruled by Neptune, a symbol of the eternal realm. As Ward writes,

[Lewis] tells us that the waves break “for ever and ever,” as if they belong to an eternal realm; and this is indeed what he is wanting to evoke, what the whole book has been intended to evoke: a glimpse of supernatural reality, a window onto an aspect of the divine nature.³

We see Lewis’s Jupiter-Neptune expressed here in the depiction of an eternal realm, the supernatural reality, and the divine nature, all within the Jupiterian context of the novel that Ward has already laid forth.

Interestingly, in the summer of 1948 when Lewis began to write *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, he happened to be undergoing a long transit of Jupiter conjoining his natal Mercury—perfect for writing a novel with a strong Jupiterian theme.

The second book written in the series, *Prince Caspian*, is an expression of the planet Mars, run through with martial themes of war and violence. The entire story centers on the War of Deliverance that liberates Narnia from the tyrannical rule of the usurper King Miraz, with the Old Narnians and Prince Caspian aided by the four Pevensie children who first appeared in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Yet many of the themes Ward draws forward that illustrate the Martian atmosphere of the story actually have a more complex Mars-Saturn quality: discipline and obedience in the chain of military command, the necessity of war, steadfast strength in battle, the integrity of the true warrior. And it naturally follows to mention that C.S. Lewis is born with Mars

³ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 76.

trine Saturn in his natal chart. As Ward concludes the chapter on Mars he writes the primary themes present in *Prince Caspian*: “Discipline—obedience—faithfulness—strength—growth.”⁴ All of these qualities are manifestations of the planetary archetype of Saturn, but they are expressed through the Martian realm of the warrior in battle as portrayed in *Prince Caspian*. Thus, while the book is indeed an homage to Mars, it is Mars as seen through Lewis’s own Mars-Saturn complex.

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader is clearly an expression of the Solar journey, as the heroes embark upon a sea voyage into the utter East, the land of the rising Sun. However, while much of the imagery in the tale is actually Neptunian—the atmosphere of the eternal ocean, the spiritual quest—many of the episodes within the story are Plutonic, which resonates with Lewis’s natal Sun-Pluto opposition (he does also have a very wide Sun-Neptune opposition). Much of the Solar imagery is alchemical, focusing on the transmutational and transformative power of the Solar gold. Ward writes about the “connection in [Lewis’s] imagination between Solar influence (improperly received) and the will to power;”⁵ the will to power is a clear manifestation of Pluto. Much of the story is about the transformation of one’s personal greed, ambition, and desire for power, all qualities associated with Pluto, into service for a higher good. Furthermore, a central piece of the story is Eustace’s journey of being turned into a dragon—an expression of the Plutonic underworld demon—and being transformed into a better person for the experience. The Solar ego with which Eustace enters the story constellates the Plutonic dragon energy within himself, transforming his very being into a monster, and when he is

⁴ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 99.

⁵ *Ibid*, 107.

reborn from the discarded scales of the dragon, like a snake shedding its skin, he is reborn as a new Solar hero, humble and able to be in service to the whole.

The Moon is the underlying theme of *The Silver Chair*, yet much of the imagery present in the story has little in common with an archetypal understanding of the Moon as an expression of emotion, feeling, caretaking, relationality, family, and nourishment. Indeed, the story is far more expressive of the two planets Lewis has in conjunction with the Moon: Neptune and Pluto. The story is darker than the previous three, and much of it is set in a dangerous land inhabited by vicious giants, and in Underland, the underworld realm of the witch reborn. The Neptunian theme is also carried throughout in the form of water and wetness, from rain and fog, to marshes, tears, and an underground lake. Prince Rilian, who the heroes are attempting to rescue, is under an evil (Pluto) enchantment (Neptune) cast by the vile (Pluto) sorcery (Neptune) of the witch-queen, who transforms (Pluto) into a giant, terrifying serpent (Pluto) through her magical (Neptune) powers (Pluto). Most of the Lunar imagery is distorted through the Plutonic lens with which Lewis perceived it, and Ward spends much of the chapter on *The Silver Chair* defining the Moon by its relational submission to the Sun—a repression of the Lunar that is not only evident in Lewis's chart but in the patriarchal culture that shaped his views, a culture that has elevated the Solar at the expense of the denied and relegated Lunar. Interestingly, one way in which the Lunar is able to shine through in this story is when the young girl Jill asks if she may return home at the end of the narrative, the only character to make such a request in the entirety of the Narniad. Lewis's own struggle integrating the Lunar archetype in his life is clearly present in its expression in *The Silver Chair*.

Mercury, particularly in the form of Gemini (which is ruled by Mercury), is the god present in *The Horse and His Boy*. Ward shows this clearly in the multiplicity of twin imagery, and that the whole story orients around the delivering of a vital message. Yet Ward also points out that the ongoing patterning of the story is about two merging into one, whether it is the separated twins reconnecting, or the mistaken belief that the main characters were being chased by two lions when really it was but one. This theme of merging within the Mercurial context can be seen in Lewis's natal Mercury-Neptune opposition, as Neptune has the capacity to dissolve boundaries and to unite all things into oneness. Furthermore, the Mercury-Neptune theme can be seen in Shasta's encounter with Aslan, who is named simply "the Voice" in the text—a clear expression of Mercury within the divine Neptunian context.

The Magician's Nephew, now placed as first in the series but published sixth, is an expression of Venus, but in a way complexified by the many aspects Lewis has to Venus in his natal chart, and the ways those aspects manifested in his life. Two of the major themes in the story are the near-fatal illness of the main character's mother, and the birth of a new world, Narnia itself, sung into being by Aslan. Lewis is born with a Venus-Saturn conjunction and lost the first primary love relationship of his life at a young age, for his mother died when he was but nine years old. The shadow of this lost love is present throughout the story, as the character Diggory hopes to find some way of curing his mother's illness. On the other hand, the creation of an entirely new world, sung into existence by the musical artistry of Aslan, is a reflection of Lewis's natal Venus-Uranus conjunction, with the generative creativity of Uranus birthing through song (Venus) a

verdant and vibrant world ringing with “newness” and “vitality.”⁶ Sweetness also plays a role, whether in the sweet taste of the healing apple Diggory brings to his mother, or the “sweet natural sleep”⁷ she enters into after eating it—a reflection of Lewis’s Venus-Moon opposition. This aspect is also present in Lewis’s seeming conflation of the Venusian and Lunar archetypes, describing Venus as motherly, fecund, fertile, and nourishing—qualities usually attributable to the Moon. (Because we do not know Lewis’s exact birth time, his Moon may be in tighter opposition to both Venus and Saturn if he was born earlier in the day—this would correlate to the death of his mother at an early age, a clear expression of the Moon-Saturn combination.)

Yet the Venusian imagery is complexified further in the character of Jadis, the beautiful yet terrible queen of the dying world of Charn, a world destroyed by her own hand, who becomes the first evil present in Narnia. Jadis is the witch we meet later in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Here one can witness Lewis’s Venus-Pluto opposition in the evil and destructive power (Pluto) of this beautiful queen (Venus).

Ward brings up an issue in this chapter that shows the clear influence of patriarchy on Lewis’s creative imagination. Each story expresses the planetary archetype most clearly through the character of Aslan, so Ward asks why in *The Magician’s Nephew*, as an homage to Venus, Aslan is not portrayed as female. He is taking the gendered imagery of the planets as gods and goddesses in the Hellenic pantheon quite literally in this question, ignoring the fact that the archetypes all express themselves in male and female form through each one of us. Ward writes, “Lewis was of the belief that major imaginative difficulties arose when one attempted to depict God in feminine

⁶ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 181.

⁷ *Ibid*, 183.

terms.”⁸ Besides the inherent sexism in this statement, an interesting point is being addressed: when the Divine is depicted as feminine, or as both masculine and feminine, the imaginative implications ripple through all levels of reality. Ward quotes Lewis as saying, “a child who had been taught to pray to a Mother in Heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child.”⁹ I actually agree with this statement, but not in the way that Lewis meant it. What a different world we might live in if the feminine aspect of the Divine had been given equal devotion as the male, or if the female, male, and non-gendered aspects of each planetary archetype were given equal recognition. Ward concludes by saying that the feminine aspect of Venus is still expressed through Aslan, but not by changing the lion’s gender.

. . . Aslan *is* feminized, but not to the complete expulsion of the masculine.

And this is a fair representation of Venus, for Venus may be properly understood as containing a masculine element alongside her feminine ones.¹⁰

If only Lewis, and Ward, could have seen the way each archetype contains feminine and masculine elements, as they both recognized in relation to Venus.

The Narniad concludes with *The Last Battle*, a tragic homage to the final planet of the ancient cosmos, Saturn. Lewis’s natal Saturn-Pluto opposition is deeply apparent in his depiction of Saturn’s domain. Ward writes that for Lewis “evil was perceived as a merciless power in his younger days; as weakness, sorrow, and death in his later years.”¹¹

The Last Battle is indeed tragic and filled with death (Saturn) and the destructive (Pluto)

⁸ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 183.

⁹ C.S. Lewis, qtd. in Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 184.

¹⁰ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 185.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 192.

ending (Saturn) of the Narnian world. “Under the planet who is responsible for ‘fatal accidents,’” Ward writes, “everyone who is alive at the beginning of this story is dead by the end of it.”¹² Yet Lewis, and also Ward, seem unable to recognize the gifts and nobility of the Saturnian archetype, desiring rather to return to the Jupiterian themes that began *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This depiction of only the negative side of Saturn is also a reflection of how Saturn was understood by Medieval and Renaissance sources, which naturally shaped Lewis’s understanding of the archetype. The ending of *The Last Battle* begins to shift toward images of spring and rebirth, an awakening into a radically different world—the true Narnia where all the characters from previous ages are reborn and living in peace. Ward sees this as Saturn deferring to Jupiter, writing “the spirit of the sixth sphere [Jupiter] is also the spirit which dominates the universe beyond the seventh [Saturn].”¹³ He goes on to say later in the chapter, “Indeed, it is only by virtue of his deferral to Jove that Saturn can exert his true influence, making his patients into contemplatives who see beyond sorrow.”¹⁴ I would argue rather that this is not Saturn deferring to Jupiter, but rather Saturn being seen all the way through in the entirety of its archetypal spectrum, moving from sorrow and death to the contemplative wisdom granted by sitting with the inherent grief of such challenges and obstacles. Saturn’s medicine can be found still within the seventh sphere, without having to turn elsewhere for its gifts.

Although *The Chronicles of Narnia*, from Ward’s perspective, are an expression of the ancient Ptolemaic cosmos, the archetypes of the three outer planets are still present

¹² Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 201.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

implicitly throughout the series. This is most apparent at the end of *The Last Battle* when there are clear intimations that there is a world beyond the threshold of Saturn. Ward writes, “Sorrow comes, but it is not total, not ‘full,’ there is something ‘beyond;’ Saturn does not have the last word.”¹⁵ Indeed, Saturn does not have the last word, but not because there is a deferral to Jupiter; rather the threshold is at last crossed and we are able to enter the transpersonal realm of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. These three archetypes are all present and interwoven in the final pages of *The Last Battle*, as all of the characters enter into a radically new world, a true paradigm shift (Uranus) in a transcendent, heavenly, ideal realm (Neptune), because each character, indeed all of Narnia, has gone through a powerful cycle of death and rebirth (Pluto).

To conclude, I would want to both critique and compliment Ward for the insight of the project he undertook, searching for a hidden underlying theme that unifies the entirety of Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*. As I have hopefully made clear here, I feel he has really hit the mark with his analysis, perceiving the archetypal qualities of the ancient planets as expressed by each of the seven tales—although those archetypal qualities are complexified by their expression through the lens of Lewis’s own natal chart aspects. Yet my critique of Ward’s book is of the way in which he expressed his profound insight. For he opens the book by stating his assurance that the planetary theme was one clearly devised by Lewis but intentionally kept secret for the rest of his life. Before laying out any of his evidence Ward writes, “I believe that I also have discovered a genuine literary secret, one that has lain open to view since the *Chronicles* were first published, but that,

¹⁵ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 197.

remarkably, no-one has previously perceived.”¹⁶ His self-assurance, which echoes throughout the book, actually has the opposite effect upon the reader, casting into doubt his argument before the evidence has even been presented. Ward asserts again and again that the theme was intentionally created by Lewis and then kept as a guarded secret for decades. While it is clear from the evidence that *The Chronicles* do indeed express the planetary archetypes, I feel that the evidence would have stood more confidently on its own, without the investigations into Lewis’s reasons for keeping the theme a deeply hidden secret. The secrecy may indeed be so, but the pure literary evidence Ward puts forth actually speaks louder than his arguments—and there is a humility in the simple expression of the evidence when not overlaid by assertions of correct discovery. But perhaps that is my own stylistic preference.

As can be seen in the above analysis, even if Lewis consciously chose to offer each one of *The Chronicles* to the altar of its own planetary god, the other gods are still intermingled throughout the novels. For even when we try to contain the gods in their archetypal purity, our own biased lenses, influenced by our particular birth charts, will naturally shape how the gods choose to express themselves. As was carved above the doorway of C.G. Jung’s home: “*Vocatus atque non vocatus deus aderit.*” Called or not called, the god is present.

Work Cited

Ward, Michael. *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008.

¹⁶ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 5.