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A Narnian “Allegory of Love”: The Pegasus in C.S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia*

Simon Burton

Planet Narnia

In a learned article on medieval poetry written in 1935, C. S. Lewis, the great Christian scholar and writer, wrote the following suggestive sentence:

[...] the characters of the planets, as conceived by medieval astrology, seem to me to have a permanent value as spiritual symbols – to provide a *Phänomenologie des Geistes* which is specially worth while in our own generation. (1980, 24)¹

As if to prove his point, Lewis appended to this article a poem he himself had written called “The Planets” (1980, 24-26). In this he offers a poetic voyage through the pre-Copernican cosmos that he was later to write of so charmingly in *The Discarded Image* (1971, 92–121). Beginning from Earth, which lies at the geographical centre but spiritual rim (1971, 58),² we ascend upwards through the spheres of the Moon, Mercury, and Venus to the Sun and then beyond to Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn before reaching what Lewis called “the rim of the round

¹ For extensive discussion of this work see Ward (2008, 23–41).

² For evidence of this theological inverting of the cosmological relation between centre and periphery Lewis pointed to Alan of Lille (1908) and Dante (*Paradiso*, 28.40–78).

welkin” (1980, 26) the gateway into the Empyrean itself, which in Dante’s *Paradiso* (28.40–78) is the dwelling of God and all the blessed, and the true centre of the universe.³

For readers of Lewis’ *Cosmic Trilogy*, his fascination with the “great dance” of the heavenly bodies hardly comes as a surprise. Indeed, the trilogy itself ends with the dramatic descent of the Planets – re-envisioned by Lewis as angelic rulers created by Maleldil the Most High God – to Earth (*That Hideous Strength*, 1989, 685–693).⁴ What may come as much more of a surprise is Michael Ward’s claim in his *Planet Narnia* that the seven medieval planets represent the “secret imaginative key” to Lewis’ most celebrated work – the seven volumes of the *Chronicles of Narnia*. While the Christian, allegorical dimension of the *Chronicles* is apparent to all but the youngest readers, Ward argues persuasively that readers and scholars alike have missed the crucial symbolic dimension. Drawing on the 1936 *Allegory of Love* (Lewis 2013, 56–58) he points to Lewis’ vital distinction between allegory as a transposing of the immaterial to the material realm and symbolism as a reading of the immaterial in the material. Understood symbolically each book of the *Chronicles* can be seen to evoke – and the word needs to be understood in the strongest possible sense – the atmosphere

³ For an engaging exploration of Dante’s metaphysical view of the Empyrean see Moevs (2005). For Lewis’ fascination with Dante see Daigle-Williamson (2015).

⁴ For Lewis’ favourite phrase “the great dance” see his *Perelandra*, the second book in *The Cosmic Trilogy* (1989, 340–344).

of one of the seven medieval planets, and in doing so point beyond them to God as the symbolic centre around which they all revolve (Ward 2008, 23–39).

Ward’s claim has found a near unanimous acceptance among Lewis scholars and resonates with thoughtful readers of the *Chronicles*.⁵ It has also opened up a completely new perspective on the rich mythological allusions within the *Chronicles*. Building on this, this chapter will consider the way in which Lewis entwines classical and Christian motifs in his reworking of the Pegasus myth in *The Magician’s Nephew*, published in 1955.

The Narnian Cosmogony

The Magician’s Nephew is the literary gate into Narnia. It tells of the origin of the land of Narnia itself and of its subsequent corruption, and hints at its ultimate redemption. It is thus the Narnian cosmogony, and the work in which Lewis – retrospectively, it must be said, for it was almost the last of the *Chronicles* to be written⁶ – begins to unfold the mythic and theological themes which bind the world of Narnia, and indeed all worlds, together.

The Magician’s Nephew is the Narnian book written under Venus and, as Ward has shown, is shot through with Venusian allusions. In this work the divine

⁵ For approbation of Ward’s work see, e.g., Peters (2008).

⁶ The best reading order of the *Chronicles* remains hotly disputed. *The Magician’s Nephew* (1997, first publ. 1955, 170–171) clearly recognises the existence of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and was obviously one of the last read by the original readers. However, in a letter written to an eleven-year-old boy in 1957 Lewis himself recommended starting with *The Magician’s Nephew* and then moving on to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and other books, following the order of the Narnian chronology, although he conceded that “perhaps it does not matter very much in which order anyone read them” (Lewis 1995, 68).

Lion Aslan, who for Lewis is not just a Christ-character but is intended to be Christ himself, symbolises what Ward has called the “Venereal Logos” – the divine Word seen as refracted through Venus herself (Ward 2008, 164–189). Yet while Aslan is the primary evocation of Venus in *The Magician’s Nephew*, there is a good case to be made that Strawberry, the London cab-horse who becomes Fledge – the first Narnian Pegasus and the “father of all flying horses” (Lewis 1997a, 133) – was also intended by Lewis as a symbol of the Venusian spirit.⁷ For in his account of Strawberry’s transformation we see him using a rich array of biblical and mythological sources to present his own, Narnian, “allegory of love” in a manner which still remains intuitively accessible even to the youngest of his readers.⁸

For those not familiar with *The Magician’s Nephew* it will be necessary to give just the briefest overview of the story. It is set in late Victorian London and its hero and heroine are Digory, whose mother is dying, and his friend Polly. At the beginning of the story Digory and Polly discover magical rings created by Digory’s Uncle Andrew, the wicked magician of the title. Using them they travel to the “Wood between the Worlds” and through these to the realm of Charn. Here Digory defies a warning and inadvertently wakes up an evil Witch who journeys back with them to London. After a series of adventures Digory, Uncle Andrew,

⁷ Strawberry is introduced in Lewis (1997a, 82), and transforms into Fledge in Lewis (1997a, 133–135). Ward does not discuss Fledge as an incarnating of the Venusian spirit, although he does allude very briefly to his copper colour as an example of Venusian imagery (Ward 2008, 182).

⁸ Lewis (2013, 58), emphasised the “antithesis” between the modes of symbol and allegory. However, Ward rightly points out that this contrast should not be seen as absolute and that “Lewis’s allegorising intellect and symbolic imagination were mutually and fruitfully engaged” in the *Chronicles* (Ward 2008, 231–232).

the Witch, and Frank, a London cab driver, with his horse Strawberry end up arriving in Narnia as it is being created by the Great Lion Aslan.

Here they witness the creation of Narnia and Strawberry himself is chosen to become one of the first talking animals. On being told by Aslan that he has awoken an ancient evil, Digory is sent together with Polly and Strawberry, now Fledge the winged horse, to find a silver apple in a magical garden. After successfully resisting the Witch's temptation to steal it from Aslan and use it to heal his dying mother, Digory returns to Aslan where he is instructed to plant the apple which instantly becomes a tree for the protection of Narnia. Then, in a wonderful reversal, Digory is given an apple to heal his mother. Later this apple is planted in our world and from the tree that springs from it a magical wardrobe is produced which becomes a gateway back to Narnia. However, that, as they say, is a story for another time. For now let us return to our hero Strawberry.

From Strawberry to Fledge

We first meet Strawberry as a crazed horse. The Witch, who has turned the hansom cab into a chariot, is whipping and goading him into fury. Leaping astride the horse, she speaks words into his ear which enrage him even further (Lewis 1997a, 82). The dramatic picture not only recalls the "night-mare" of European witchlore but also the Lutheran picture of the sinner as a horse ridden by the Devil (cf. Luther 1873, VII, 157). As Ward points out, the Witch represents what Lewis understood as the "Venus Infernal" (Ward 2008, 179), the inverted image of

Aslan, the heavenly Venus.⁹ Where Aslan represents charity, that love which spends and gives itself, the Witch and Uncle Andrew represent a fallen love which has turned in upon itself (Ward 2008, 178–179, 189). The Witch, like her ancestress Lilith – the mythical first wife of Adam who joined forces with the evil Serpent and bore his demonic offspring – has become beguiled by her own beauty and wants to usurp Aslan’s place as goddess of her own world.¹⁰ In fact, as Lewis suggests, she is even willing to be damned rather than submit to Aslan’s love (Lewis 1997a, 162–163). In placing Strawberry under her literal sway, Lewis is therefore symbolically showing us sin as a state of bondage to corrupted love – and indeed it is significant that more than once in the later narrative Strawberry’s life before Narnia is described as one of slavery (Lewis 1997a, 114, 129).

It is when Strawberry is magically transported to the Wood between the Worlds that we begin to see his transformation. While the Wood is a terrible place for the Witch and Uncle Andrew, it calms and soothes Strawberry and returns him to his normal self. Freed from the Witch’s influence, the thirsty horse is drawn to drink from one of the world-pools (Lewis 1997a, 89–90). For Lewis the desire for God is a natural desire, a thirst shared by all humanity.¹¹ Strawberry’s

⁹ The idea of two Venuses, or Aphrodites, is found in Plato’s *Symposium* 180d, where the character Pausanias speaks of the heavenly Aphrodite, daughter of Ouranos, and the “common” Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus. The distinction between the goddesses is not, as for Lewis, between good and evil, but between noble and indiscriminate love.

¹⁰ Lewis informs us that the Witch is descended from Lilith, the first wife of Adam, who was “one of the Jinn” and that “there isn’t a drop of real human blood in the Witch” (1997b, 76). Lilith was also an important character in the eponymous 1895 novel *Lilith* written by George MacDonald, whom Lewis regarded as his literary and spiritual mentor. For the connection between Lewis and MacDonald see Marshall (1991).

¹¹ In this he shows important affinities with the theology of the High Middle Ages and especially Thomas Aquinas. See further Henri de Lubac (1998).

desire to drink, described significantly as “the most natural thing in the world” (Lewis 1997a, 90), symbolises this desire, and gestures towards other places in the *Chronicles* where Lewis uses the biblical imagery of water to the same end, most notably a famous scene in *The Silver Chair* which recalls the story of Jesus and the Woman at the Well (Lewis 1997d, 22–24; cf. John 4:1–45). In plunging into this pool, in abandoning himself to the desire welling up inside of him, Strawberry unwittingly, through the plot device of the magical rings, opens the gateway into Narnia. On hearing Aslan’s song – the song which proves so hateful to the Witch and Uncle Andrew – Strawberry is described as giving “the sort of whinney a horse would give if, after years of being a cab-horse, it found itself back in the old field where it had played as a foal, and saw someone whom it remembered and loved coming across the field to bring it a lump of sugar” (Lewis 1997a, 90). For Augustine in his *Confessions* (10.20.29–22.32), all humans have a kind of innate memory of happiness manifest in their shared desire for God. While he has never met him, Strawberry too remembers Aslan and knows him instinctively as his beloved Master.

Strawberry’s transformation from a “dumb beast” to a talking animal – mirrored in Lewis’ deliberate switch in pronoun from “it” to “him”¹² – comes when he first encounters Aslan face to face. Chosen by Aslan where others were passed by – an Augustinian reminder of the gratuity of grace – Strawberry joins

¹² See the passage concerning Strawberry’s transformation (Lewis 1997a, 133-134), although Lewis is not entirely consistent in his use of pronouns (e.g. 1997a, 87).

the other elect animals making a circle around him. As Aslan gazes upon them staring at them so hard “as if he was going to burn them up with his mere stare” (Lewis 1997a, 107), the animals begin to change. Not only do the small animals become bigger and the big animals smaller, but they begin to return his gaze “as if they were trying very hard to understand” (Lewis 1997a, 108). Then something remarkable happens:

The Lion opened his mouth, but no sound came from it; he was breathing out, a long, warm breath; it seemed to sway all the beasts as the wind sways a line of trees. Far overhead from beyond the veil of blue sky which hid them the stars sang again; a pure, cold difficult music. Then there came a swift flash like fire (but it burnt nobody) either from the sky or from the Lion itself, and every drop of blood tingled in the children’s bodies, and the deepest, wildest voice they had ever heard was saying: ‘Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters.’ (Lewis 1997a, 108)

As Ward argues, here Lewis fuses – even con-fuses – biblical imagery of creation and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit with the mythological descent of Venus. For we are purposely left in doubt whether the flash of Pentecostal fire came from Aslan or out of the heavens (Ward 2008, 180–181, 187). Yet such a melding of images makes perfect sense when we remember that charity, identified in the

early Middle Ages as the Holy Spirit itself, was the “translunary virtue” associated by Dante and the wider medieval tradition with the sphere of Venus (*Paradiso*, 9.103–111).¹³ In this way, Lewis’ planetary mythology has allowed him to use Strawberry and the other talking animals to paint a vivid Christological and Trinitarian picture of the awakening of love by the gaze of the God who is Love – an image recalling the opening of the *De visione Dei* of the fifteenth-century German theologian Nicholas of Cusa, one of Lewis’ favourite mystics.¹⁴

Of all the talking animals it is Strawberry who is the first to address Aslan on a personal level. When all the animals respond in a chorus of praise to Aslan saying: “Hail Aslan. We hear and obey. We are awake. We love. We think. We speak. We know”, it is Strawberry who adds, “in a nosey and snorty kind of voice”: “But please, we don’t know very much yet” (Lewis 1997a, 109). Strawberry’s dependence on Aslan is reiterated again later in the narrative. Knowing that Digory needs help to accomplish his great task, Aslan turns to Strawberry and asks him if he would like to be a winged horse. Strawberry is overjoyed but his response is one of pure humility: “If you wish Aslan – if you

¹³ Following Augustine, Peter Lombard in his famous *Sentences* argued for the identity of charity with the Holy Spirit. Later medieval theologians affirmed the intimate connection but denied the identity. Lewis in *That Hideous Strength* speaks of Venus as “the translunary virtue, fallen upon them direct from the Third Heaven, unmitigated” (1989, 689). The connection between Venus and charity is explored in Ward (2008, 180–189).

¹⁴ Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* 5.10.14 (1932–2005, VI.17–18). Lewis wrote a poem about Nicholas of Cusa entitled “On a Theme from Nicolas of Cusa” (Lewis, 1964, 70). In book two of *De docta ignorantia* 2.12.162 (1932–2005, I.103–104), his most famous work, Cusa offered an important theological exploration of cosmology. Cusa’s understanding here of God as an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere, itself stemming from the Neo-Platonic *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* (Anon. 2006), and his intriguing anticipation of Copernican cosmology, resonate with Lewis’ own geocentric cosmology. In particular, Lewis’, *Perelandra*, climaxes with a hymn of praise to God with clear Cusan affinities (see Lewis 1989, 340–346). The link between Lewis and Cusa is one deserving of much more exploration.

really mean – I don't know why it should be me – I'm not a very clever horse” (Lewis 1997a, 133). In submitting to Aslan's will Strawberry thus opens the way for his final transformation:

‘Be winged. Be the father of all flying horses,’ roared Aslan in a voice that shook the ground. ‘Your name is Fledge.’ The horse shied, just as it might have shied in the old, miserable days when it pulled a hansom. Then it roared. It strained its neck back as if there were a fly biting its shoulders and it wanted to scratch them. And then, just as the beasts had burst out of the earth, there burst out from the shoulders of Fledge wings that spread and grew, larger than eagles’, larger than swans’, larger than angels’ wings in church windows. The feathers shone chestnut colour and copper colour. He gave a great sweep with them and leaped into the air. (Lewis 1997a, 133–134)

When asked by Aslan whether it is good, Strawberry responds “it is very good Aslan” (Lewis 1997a, 134). Here the counterpoint between “good” and “very good” irresistibly reminds us of Genesis (1:1–31), and is a literary signal that Fledge – who like all God's chosen has also been given a new name – has now become a divine-image bearer himself.

Such an impression is reinforced by another subtle planetary allusion. When Fledge gains his wings they are copper coloured, and copper, as Lewis’

Discarded Image informs us (Lewis 1971, 107), was the metal of Venus herself.¹⁵ As a line in “The Planets” expresses this: “the metal of copper in the mine reddens / With muffled brightness, like muted gold, / By her finger form’d” (Lewis 1980, 25). Metallurgical transformations were an important symbol of divine grace in medieval and Renaissance thought and are made use of elsewhere in the *Chronicles*.¹⁶ In making himself a self-offering to Aslan – recalling the strawberries supposedly offered in the Roman Temple of Venus (cf. Roth 1997, 441) – Strawberry becomes in-formed by Aslan himself. Recalling the late medieval pattern of the “imitation of Christ”, and even more Nicolas of Cusa’s paradigm of *Christiformitas*, Strawberry’s transformation symbolises the believer’s conversion by faithful humility and charity into the living form of Christ.¹⁷ Indeed, it is significant that when we meet him again, at the very end of the *Chronicles*, Fledge can address even the Kings and Queens of Narnia as his “cousins” (Lewis 1997e, 167).

Fledge’s transformation also serves as a dramatic counterpoint to the narrative of Uncle Andrew, who all his life remains under the spell of the Witch, the infernal Venus. For although he is given a chance to change his ways when he first hears Aslan’s song and recognises it for what it is, his repulsion means that it eventually loses all meaning for him. As Aslan himself says, “he has made

¹⁵ Copper (*cuprum*) is associated with Cyprus, the island of Aphrodite, see Cyrino (2010, 66).

¹⁶ See throughout Ward (2008, 42–213). Lewis in *The Discarded Image* refers to the importance of metallurgical transformation in medieval and Renaissance literature (1971, 105–109). A striking example of the fusion between alchemy and grace can be seen in Nicholas of Cusa, “Sermo”, 241.1–20 (2008, 342–351).

¹⁷ See Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (2004, ch. 1) and Nicholas of Cusa, “De docta ignorantia,” 3.11.252 (1932, I, 156). For Cusa’s understanding of *Christiformitas* see Miller (2012) and Izbicki (2011).

himself unable to hear my voice” (Lewis 1997a, 158). As a result he descends into the bestial. In the episode of the talking animals mistaking him for a “dumb beast”, the process of dehumanisation that Lewis presented in a chilling way in *Perelandra* (first publ. 1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (first publ. 1945) is here given a comic twist (Lewis 1997a, 116–124).¹⁸ Yet, in rejecting love and Aslan, the reader is made to see that a dumb beast is precisely what Uncle Andrew has become. By contrast, Strawberry has come under the spell of that heavenly Venus who bewitches the worlds, to allude to another line of “The Planets” (“Venus ... / Whose breasts and brow, and her breath’s sweetness / Bewitch the worlds”: Lewis 1980, 24), and as a result ascends with Aslan on wings of speech and love.

The Flight of Pegasus

Unlike Pegasus, the son of the horse god Poseidon, Strawberry is not born divine, but rather, as we have seen, becomes a divine image-bearer. Yet while Strawberry is not captured by a golden bridle – but is rather set free by being captured by Aslan – there is a real sense in which he needs to be tamed before he can be ridden by Digory. For it is in “bridling” his will to that of Aslan himself, something he does willingly and joyfully that he becomes the means to accomplish Digory’s quest and safeguard all of Narnia. Indeed, it is precisely here that we begin to see

¹⁸ Lewis in *Perelandra* presents the scientist Weston, an anti-Christ figure, as the “Un-Man” (1989, 292–309). In *That Hideous Strength* there is a tragi-comic parallel to the scene in *The Magician’s Nephew* when the animals from the experimental zoo at Belbury escape and kill their captors (1989, 710–720). Lewis (2001) reflected on the themes of scientism and dehumanisation.

the vital difference with the myth of Pegasus and Bellerophon. For while Bellerophon rides the subdued Pegasus proudly up to Olympus against the will of Zeus, thinking it is his divine birthright to live among the gods, Digory rides the liberated Fledge to Paradise at Aslan's command and with his blessing. In fact, Aslan specifically warns Fledge not to "fly too high" or to go over the top of the mountains, but rather to fly through the valleys – a symbol of humility in the writings of the Christian mystics (cf., e.g., Ruusbroec 1916, I, ch. 6 add pages) – and to keep to the path that he has laid out for them (Lewis 1997a, 135). Finally, while we find no gad-fly in this story, we do see Strawberry in his transformation behaving like a fly has bitten his shoulders. This is not the sting of Zeus' anger, but is rather the "divine sting" of Aslan's charity (cf. Atsma 2000–2017).

The veiled allusion to the gad-fly reminds us not only of Plato's Socrates, the Athenian gad-fly, but more especially of the Platonic notion of Eros. Indeed, it is Plato, in a celebrated passage of his *Phaedrus*, who provides not only Lewis but the whole of the Christian tradition with the vital link between the Pegasus myth and the mystical ascent of love. Here he speaks, "in a figure", of the soul as a charioteer driving two winged horses. In the divine soul of the gods both winged horses are noble allowing them to "soar upwards" beyond the heavens to the transcendent realm of the Ideas. By contrast, the human soul, whose two steeds are unequally yoked, faces a continual struggle between the noble horse which desires to ascend and the ignoble horse pulling the whole team back down to earth. As Plato explains:

The wing is the corporeal element which is most akin to the divine, and which by nature tends to soar aloft and carry that which gravitates downwards into the upper region, which is the habitation of the gods. The divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness, and the like; and by these the wing of the soul is nourished, and grows apace; but when fed upon evil and foulness and the opposite of good, wastes and falls away. (Plato, *Phaedrus* 246d-e; Plato n.d.)

As he goes on to describe, the soul's wings sprout as it gazes on its lover. As it receives the "effluence of his beauty", it experiences an "unusual heat and perspiration" and a "feeling of uneasiness and tickling" which, in the absence of the beloved, pricks and pierces and even maddens the soul (*Phaedrus* 251b-c; Plato n.d.).

Here the language of gazing certainly reminds us of the reciprocal gaze between Aslan and the elect beasts, the language of heat of their transformation into talking animals and the language of prickling and madness of the sprouting of Strawberry's wings. Yet how are we to make sense of the ascent to a Garden? From the text it is clear that the Garden is inspired by both biblical and classical sources. From the Christian tradition it clearly references the Garden of Eden, although here Lewis is recapitulating and in a sense reversing the Fall narrative of the Bible. It is also clearly inspired by Dante's account in the *Purgatorio* (28–

33) of the Earthly Paradise at the top of Mount Purgatory. From the classical tradition, as many commentators have recognised, it is a clear reference to the Garden of Hesperides. For like the Garden of Hesperides it is located in the Utmost West, contains apples which grant immortality, and has a watchful guardian. While in Lewis' Garden the apples are silver and the guardian is a Phoenix not a Drakon – he perhaps did not want to be too obvious about his mythical sources! – Ward has pointed out that Lewis' description of the slit-eyed watchfulness of the Phoenix recalls Milton's dragon of his *Comus* (lines 393-395; Milton 2003, 99) who with "unenchanted eye" guards the "fair Hesperian tree" (Ward 2008, 183). Moreover, the Christological symbolism of the Phoenix reminds us of God's watchful presence in the Garden of Eden and heightens the drama of the "terrible choice" that Digory faces there, and which Lewis held in some way confronts us all.¹⁹

Indeed, on recalling a line from Pindar's *Isthmian Odes* (7.44) – "Pegasos winged high threw down to earth his lord Bellerophon, who thought to reach the abodes of heaven, and share the company of Zeus. Sweets gained unrightly await an end most bitter"²⁰ – the connection must have seemed nigh irresistible for him. For in the *Magician's Nephew* it is the Witch who defies the warning on the Gate of the Garden and climbs over a wall to steal an apple of unimaginable sweetness

¹⁹ The intense spiritual drama of personal choice can be best illustrated from a striking passage in Lewis (1982, 60–64).

²⁰ Trans. Diane Arson Svarlien in Pindar (1990). In 1949 Lewis wrote a poem on Pindar called "Pindar Sang" (Lewis 1994, 29–31).

and gain the prize of immortality. Yet, as Aslan tells us at the end of the book, she has gained her heart's desire only at the cost of despair and damnation. The same would have been true if Digory had stolen an apple to heal his mother. She would have recovered but only at the cost of both their happiness, and indeed the happiness of Narnia itself. As Aslan expresses it, in what could almost be a paraphrase of Pindar, "that is what happens to those who pluck and eat fruits at the wrong time and in the wrong way. The fruit is good, but they loathe it ever after" (Lewis 1997a, 162). By contrast, Digory in placing Aslan's desire above his own discovers the true fulfilment of his own will. Indeed, he truly gains his heart's desire, for in a wonderful reversal he gains not only his mother's healing but Aslan himself (Lewis 1997a, 162–165).

Let us also remember that Lewis had good classical precedent for linking Pegasus to the Garden of Hesperides specifically. For Hesiod in his *Theogony* (270–290) had spoken of the dwelling place of Medusa, Pegasus' mother, and the other Gorgons as being "in the utmost place toward night, by the singing Hesperides".²¹ This hint had most likely led the much later Scholiast of Apollonius of Rhodes to suggest that Phorcys and Ceto, in Hesiod the parents of both Medusa and the Hesperidean Drakon, were also the parents of the Hesperides themselves, the beautiful nymphs of sunset. Finally, the early medieval poet Fulgentius, who as Lewis writes in the *Allegory of Love* (2013,

²¹ Trans. Richmond Lattimore in Hesiod (1959, 139–140).

105–106), was famous (or notorious) for his Christian allegorical renderings of Virgil and other classical writers, had boldly identified Medusa herself as the fourth nymph of the Hesperides. While to a purist this might seem a dubious link in the mythological chain, to Lewis, who lived his life immersed in late classical and medieval sources, it gave Pegasus himself a lineage back to the nymphs of Hespera, who in some late sources became regarded as the offspring of Venus-Hespera herself.²²

If there could be any doubt about all these connections, let us remember that in *Perelandra* when the hero Ransom awakes on the planet Venus to see a fruit tree with a dragon-like serpent coiled round it, he thinks himself to be in the Garden of the Hesperides. This leads him to wonder if all our myths are just realities scattered through other worlds (Lewis 1989, 182–183).²³ This is dramatically confirmed at the end of the book when, after having averted the fall of Tor and Tinidril, the Venusian Adam and Eve, he climbs up to a sacred garden and meets Venus herself (Lewis 1989, 322–329). The description of this garden immediately recalls the Western Garden of *The Magician's Nephew*. Indeed, as Ward has suggested, Lewis' account of the journey to the Western Garden deliberately evokes a Venusian atmosphere, and indeed does so quite literally in the unbearably sweet air which Lewis associated with Venus' realm (Ward 2008,

²² For a detailed discussion of the classical sources for the Garden of the Hesperides and its nymphs see the online encyclopaedia of myth, <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/Hesperides.html> (accessed Jan. 3, 2018).

²³ See also Lewis (1989, 328) where he says: “our mythology is based on a solid reality than we dream: but is also at an almost infinite distance from that base”.

183; Lewis 1997a, 144). It is worth noting, however, that Lewis is here also at pains to convey a Hesperan mood. For Fledge's journey takes him straight into the setting sun and into the western sky become "like one great furnace full of melted gold" (Lewis 1997a, 138). The valley in which they first land is in the heart of the mountains, one of which "looking rose-red in the reflections of the sunset, towered above them" (Lewis 1997a, 139). As he described evening coming over them and the children gazing up at "the bright young stars of that new world" (Lewis 1997a, 141), Lewis must have really had to resist the temptation to include the evening star herself among them. Yet in a very real sense he did not have to. For the children, safe and snug under the protection of Fledge's wings, Venus is not far away.

Conclusion

In Petrus Berchorius' *Ovidius moralizatus* of the fourteenth century, the myth of Pegasus is given a distinctively Christian rendering. In it, Berchorius, who sees the whole of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as an allegory of the soul's ascent to God, takes up the Ovidian tradition of the two riders of Pegasus: Bellerophon and Perseus. For him, Bellerophon unsurprisingly represents the pride and arrogance of man in seeking to make himself God. The pride which leads to the mighty fall. By contrast, he reads Perseus mounted on Pegasus as an allegory of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension to heaven (Steadman 1958, 407–410). For Lewis there are also two riders of Fledge. His Bellerophon is the Witch, the charioteer

who nearly drives Strawberry to his destruction and the one whose pride leads to a bitter end. His Perseus is Digory, the one who conquers the ancient serpent in the garden – the Witch as Medusa – and having slain his old self – the self that awakened the sleeping Witch – wings his way back to Aslan himself, borne upwards by “the weight of love” (Lewis 1997a, 146–153, 161–163).²⁴

We must remember, however, that Digory, unlike Lucy and Susan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, rides Fledge and not Aslan (Lewis 1997b, 149–150).²⁵ Yet there is undoubtedly a sense in which Lewis viewed Aslan himself as the Divine Pegasus. We may see this from *The Horse and His Boy* in a scene which Ward has described as “the most explicitly Trinitarian moment in the whole Narniad” and one of the theological “high points” of all of Lewis’ writings (Ward 2008, 158). Riding through a mountain pass to the rescue of Narnia, the hero Shasta enters into a thick cloud where, unknowingly, he meets Aslan himself. Aslan tells him that the many lions he has met on his journey are the One Lion. When Shasta asks him who he is Aslan replies:

‘Myself,’ said the voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook: and again ‘Myself,’ loud and clear and gay: and then the third time ‘Myself,’

²⁴ For the concept of the weight of love, used by Augustinians, see, most famously, Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.9.10.

²⁵ The award-winning 1988 BBC television serial of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* aptly, but almost certainly unwittingly, expressed this picture of Aslan as the Divine Pegasus by making Aslan fly with Lucy and Susan on his back. Interestingly, they also included a Pegasus in his royal court.

whispered so softly that you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all around you as if the leaves rustled with it. (Lewis 1997c, 130)

Here the threefold repetition – the Narnian Trisagion – echoes not only the divine name – “I am who I am” – of Exodus 3:14 but also the three persons of the one name of the Trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:19. Yet what is particularly fascinating for us is that when the mist clears from around Shasta, after Aslan departs, he sees in the ground the Lion’s paw-print out of which a spring of fresh water is flowing (Lewis 1997c, 130–132).

The Horse and His Boy is the Narnian book written under Mercury and it therefore comes as no surprise to find Pegasus, whom Shakespeare had called that “feathered Mercury” (*Henry IV, part I, act 4, scene 1*) making an incognito appearance. For, as Lewis well knew, in classical mythology Pegasus was not only the horse of Venus but was also the horse of the Muses, and thus by extension of Mercury himself, the god of all language and poetry.²⁶ Indeed, his account of the spring flowing from Aslan’s pawprint, while it certainly echoes accounts of the miracles of Exodus, has its closest precedent in the legend of the Muses and the Hippocrene spring. This tells the story of a singing contest between the Muses and the daughters of Pierus. When the Muses sang, heaven, the sea, and all the rivers stopped to listen and Mount Helicon itself began to rise up to

²⁶ Most likely drawing on medieval and Renaissance sources Lewis appears to have fused – or confused – Mercury with Apollo, the master of the Muses. This may bear some analogy with the treatment of Jupiter and Saturn in *The Last Battle*.

heaven in delight. Pegasus kicked it to stop it rising and where his hoof left its print, the inspiring waters of the Hippocrene spring began to flow (cf. *Ov. Met.* 5.256–264 and Liberalis 1992, 60 [tale 9]). For Shasta too “it took one’s breath away to think of the weight that could make a footprint like that” – the “weight of glory” pressing down on the whole world itself (Lewis 1997c, 132). Likewise, Aslan’s spring becomes for him a source of refreshment and inspiration in his journey towards the salvation of Narnia (Lewis 1997c, 131–132; cf. 2 Cor. 4:17).²⁷ Here Lewis has clearly taken up the kind of Christological reading of Pegasus found in the *Ovidius moralizatus* and other medieval works²⁸ and made it his very own.

We meet Fledge only once more in the *Chronicles*, at the very end of *The Last Battle*. Appropriately he is waiting for Digory and the other Kings and Queens of Narnia within the Western Garden itself – a place he was never allowed to enter in his lifetime. It is Jewel the Unicorn who first spies him, “a horse so mighty and noble that even a Unicorn might feel shy in its presence: a great winged horse” (Lewis 1997e, 167). As Chad Wriglesworth has convincingly argued, Jewel serves as an important Christological symbol in the *Chronicles* (Wriglesworth 2006).²⁹ Yet Lewis’ choice of the Pegasus to eclipse even the

²⁷ The phrase “weight of glory” is not used explicitly by Lewis but “glory” and “weight” appear within a paragraph of each other here.

²⁸ For more on this see Steadman (1958) and Javitch (1978) who mention in this regard, among others, a French prose *Ovide Moralisé* of the fifteenth century.

²⁹ This is well illustrated by Lewis’ poem “The Late Passenger” which tells of the unicorn being shut out of the Ark by Noah’s thoughtless sons. As Wriglesworth (2006) insightfully points out, the unicorn here is clearly understood as a type of Christ.

Unicorn demonstrates the importance of Fledge as a mirror of Aslan himself. Let us remember that for Lewis Aslan is not only a symbol of Christ but rather Aslan is Christ as he would have become incarnate in a world of talking beasts. In the same way the Christiform Fledge represents that humility which opens the gates of heaven itself.

The very last chapter of *The Last Battle*, and the one in which Fledge makes his final appearance, is called “Farewell to Shadowlands”. The title is an appropriate one, for it reminds us again of the connection between Pegasus, Platonic Eros, and the planetary symbolism which frames the *Chronicles*. Having passed through the Stable Door – the door which represents death – the children with the grown-up Digory and Polly discover that the world they are in is like Narnia but strangely unlike it at the same time. Puzzling over this, Digory suddenly realises that the Narnia they had known – just like the England they had known – was not the real Narnia but its “shadow or copy” (Lewis 1997e, 159). Having entered into Aslan’s country, into heaven itself, they have now, for the first time, encountered the real. On realising this he exclaims: “It’s all in Plato” (Lewis 1997e, 160).

We have emerged with Pegasus into the realm of the divine Ideas, which for Lewis, good Christian Platonist as he was, means we have entered into the divine mind itself.³⁰ In *The Magician’s Nephew* Aslan was described as being “a

³⁰ The understanding that the ideas could be located in the divine mind was adapted by Christians such as Augustine from Middle Platonism and was a commonplace of high medieval scholasticism. For discussion of Lewis as a Christian Platonist see Fisher (2010); Blanch (2006); and Grace Tiffany (2014).

sea of tossing gold in which they [Digory and Polly] were floating” (Lewis 1997a, 165). Here in *The Last Battle* he is a “living cataract of power and beauty” (Lewis 1997e, 171) engulfing them and drawing them ever deeper into himself. Lewis is picking up the language of the mystics and the understanding of the Trinity as an infinite sea of love ever flowing out into his creation and flowing back.³¹ It is this which gives them wings, so that like Fledge they can soar over the landscape of glory, borne aloft by the tide of his love. We leave them there riding Aslan the divine Pegasus on a journey upwards and inwards that never ends.³²

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³¹ For van Ruusbroec’s famous account of the Trinity as a “flowing, ebbing sea” see Niuewenhove (2003).

³² “Further Up and Further In” is the title of the penultimate chapter of *The Last Battle*.

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