New Horizons in English Studies 10/2025

LITERATURE

Camilo Peralta

Joliet Junior College, USA
camilo.peralta@jjc.edu
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7755-0364

Mars and Malacandra: The Mythopoeic Cosmologies of Ray Bradbury and C. S. Lewis

Abstract. For centuries, science fiction authors have tried to solve the logistics of a trip to Mars, and debated the wisdom of going there in the first place. This paper focuses on two fictional portrayals of Mars from the first half of the twentieth century. The first is by C. S. Lewis, who in *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) imagines an ancient and thriving world with three different species that have all attained rationality. The setting of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), by contrast, is a ghostly and dead planet, its former, telepathic inhabitants eradicated by a mysterious illness. Despite these narratological differences, the novels resemble each other in at least two significant ways. For one, both are distinguished by an essentially mythopoeic, or myth-making, approach to Mars, in which its history and relationship with human beings are fitted into a larger cosmology that reflects their respective authors' religious or philosophical views. In addition, both novels are pessimistic about the sort of grandiose schemes for planetary dominance envisioned by their contemporaries and modern-day successors including Elon Musk. The reckless scientism and anthropocentrism such individuals espouse, Lewis and Bradbury warn, may prove far more devastating to the human race than any disaster against which colonies in outer space might be employed as a defense.

Keywords: Ray Bradbury, C. S. Lewis, Mars, Space Trilogy, *The Martian Chronicles*, Elon Musk

Billionaire investor Elon Musk, one of the world's richest men, believes that his SpaceX rocket manufacturing company could someday play a role in the colonization of Mars. "We don't want to be one of those single planet species," he argues, "we want to be a multi-planet species … a spacefaring civilization" (Sheetz 2021). Over the years, Musk has spoken eagerly about the need for colonies on Mars and the Moon to protect against the possibility of the human race being wiped out by some catastrophic disaster. One can-

DOI: 10.17951/nh.2025.10.118-132

not help but admire the audacity and vision of such a plan, although it raises important questions about the legal, ethical, and even ontological implications of life on the Red Planet. Is the preservation of the species truly the greatest good, one that must be pursued at any cost? How can we maintain the right balance between autonomy and control to keep our colonists content enough so that they never feel the need to rebel? Then there is a question that countless scientists, industrialists and inventors before Musk failed to ask themselves, often with disastrous consequences: Just because we *can* do something, *should* we? Because these are not, strictly speaking, scientific questions, we should not seek answers to them only or primarily from scientists. On this issue, it is the philosophers, theologians and artists whose voices must be heard.

Indeed, writers of science fiction have been trying to solve the logistics of a trip to Mars, and pondering the wisdom of going there long before our technology had advanced enough for anyone in a lab coat to become seriously interested in the subject. Early pioneers in the genre such as Jules Verne and H. G. Wells blended folklore and science in their portrayals of the planet, setting a template that would be followed by most of their successors. This paper focuses on two authors whose work is not typically linked together but who both explored the subject of colonizing Mars in books written during the first half of the twentieth century. The first is C. S. Lewis, who in *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) depicts Mars as an ancient and thriving world with three different species that have all attained rationality. The setting of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), by contrast, is a ghostly and mostly dead world, its former, telepathic inhabitants eradicated by a mysterious illness. Despite these narratological differences, the two novels resemble each other in at least two significant ways. For one, both are distinguished by an essentially mythopoeic, or myth-making, approach to Mars, in which its history and its relationship with human beings are fitted into a larger cosmology that reflects their respective authors' worldviews. In addition, both are pessimistic about the sort of grandiose schemes for planetary dominance envisioned by mid-century industrialists who made many of the same arguments as Musk and his allies. The reckless scientism and anthropocentrism they espouse, Lewis and Bradbury warn, may prove far more devastating to the human race than any disaster against which colonies in outer space might be employed as a defense.

1. Visions of the Red Planet

Out of the Silent Planet (OSP) is the first book in Lewis's acclaimed "Space" or "Ransom" trilogy. *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength* followed in 1943 and 1945. The central character in each is Elwin Ransom, a philologist who at the start of OSP is abducted by two men: a former colleague, Dick Devine, and a scientist named Dr. Weston. They drag him aboard a spaceship bound for Mars; over the course of the journey it becomes clear that they intend to offer Ransom as a sacrifice to one of the species native to that planet. Once they arrive, he manages to escape, and soon discov-

ers that the natives are not only intelligent, but also serve an *eldil*, or angel, who is in charge of the planet. Earth, too, has its *Oyarsa*, or ruling angel, but after he rebelled against God, he was no longer permitted to circulate freely through the heavens—and Earth has been known ever since as the "silent planet," Thulcandra. A major influence on this book was H. G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon*, a science fiction adventure story written at the turn of the twentieth century. There are obvious parallels in plot and characterization, which Lewis never attempted to deny. However, as Doris T. Meyers points out, OSP is far more than a simple pastiche or homage:

> He was writing to refute people like J. B. S. Haldane and Olaf Stapledon, in addition to [Charles Kay] Ogden and [I. A.] Richards and Wells, who simply assumed that scientific knowledge frees us from delusion and narrow-mindedness, brings uncounted material benefits, and makes traditional ideas of God and the soul unnecessary. (Meyers 1994, 41)

Ransom's story continues in the sequels. In *Perelandra*, he travels to a prelapsarian Venus to help prevent the Fall of its inhabitants; in *That Hideous Strength*, he leads a small group of rebels against a nefarious organization that is rapidly seizing power throughout England.

The Martian Chronicles (TMC) was also influenced by Wells, though in *Zen and the Art of Writing*, Bradbury cites Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) as a stronger influence on its conception and writing. "Finishing the book, I said to myself, 'Someday I would like to write a novel laid on the planet Mars, with somewhat similar people'" (Bradbury 1989, 25). Further inspiration, according to Bradbury's biography by Jonathan R. Eller, was provided by John Steinbeck, especially his 1933 collection of stories *The Red Pony* with its "modernist lament for the lost spirit of the pioneer" (Eller 2011, 206). Reflecting such influences and the book's compositional history, Bradbury's cast of characters is expansive, with many of the stories focusing on a different protagonist. Most feature humans, but several are narrated from the point of view of the Martians. TMC was originally set between the years 1999 and 2030, but the dates were advanced by thirty-one years in the 1997 edition. In sum, the novel relates various attempts to establish peaceful relations between humans and Martians, all of which end in failure. After the former accidentally introduce chicken pox to the planet, most of the latter are killed, leading to the end of their civilization. Humans begin colonizing Mars in earnest, until the outbreak of war destroys much of the Earth. As in *Fahrenheit 451*, another of Bradbury's major works from the 1950s, TMC reflects anxieties felt by many Americans during the post-war years, including fears of "government oppression of the individual, the hazards of an atomic age, recivilization of society, and the divided nature of the 'Cold War Man'" (Hoskinson 1995, 346). Other themes include xenophobia, environmentalism and religion. After reading it, Lewis praised Bradbury's prose and flair for "real invention" (Bradbury 2023, xvii).

One notable difference between OSP and TMC is the amount of attention to depicting futuristic technologies in a realistic, or scientifically accurate manner. Scholars

often distinguish between "hard" science fiction, which is grounded in sound mathematical or physical principles, and the "soft" kind, in which "everything technical is more or less taken for granted," and the author or creator does not worry too much about explaining how things are supposed to "work" (Wenskus 2017, 450). For a novel written by a lay theologian with no scientific training, OSP is surprisingly attentive to some of the technical details a journey through space might entail. Ransom and his abductors travel in a spherical vessel with a hollow center. While subject to the Earth's gravitational pull, the planet remains their center of gravity, or their "downward" orientation. As they leave, however, that center shifts to the core of their own vessel, and they are forced to wear special girdles carrying weights to make their bodies heavier. They must also don tinted glasses and remain naked because the side of the ship facing the sun is intolerably bright and hot. Talking is discouraged due to limited supplies of oxygen. As they approach Malacandra, the whole process is reversed: their center of gravity reverts to the planet, the temperature drops precipitously, and their bodies become unbearably heavy: "They had the experiences of a pregnant woman, but magnified almost beyond endurance" (Lewis 2003a, 39). During the final descent, they become so sick and disorientated they can do little but crawl about the ship on all fours, waiting for the nightmare to end.

TMC features plenty of robots and rockets, but Bradbury is less interested in how they work. Characters simply board a rocket on Earth and disembark on Mars weeks later, without having to worry much about excessive heat or gravitational forces. As depicted in "Usher II," they even use rockets like taxis, or a convenient means of transport on the planet. Martian technology includes bee-shooting rifles and "flame birds" that soar over the landscape, but none of it is described in much detail. Bradbury was sensitive to the critique that he did not write realistic science fiction, and often claimed not to understand why his work was criticized for failing to live up to that standard, since he never planned to meet it in the first place. In a new introduction to TMC written in 1997, for example, he argues that "[t]here is only one story in the entire book that obeys the laws of technological physics," adding that "it would have long since fallen to rust by the road" if he had written it as "practical technologically efficient science fiction" (Bradbury 2011, xi). His claim to have written TMC as myth instead of science fiction deserves to be taken at face value, and its implications are considered further. For now, it is worth noting that Bradbury only emphasizes his lack of interest in "technological physics," or realistic depictions of futuristic technology. Other subjects, such as the effects of a thin atmosphere on the human body, are treated with tolerable realism. In "—And The Moon Be Still As Bright," for instance, Captain Wilder and his men are forced to rest frequently while chasing Spender through high hills because of the thin atmosphere (Bradbury 2011, 95).

The topography of Malacandra and Mars is another point on which the two authors diverge considerably. Lewis and Bradbury wrote long before the first satellites ever visited the planet. Its surface could be viewed through powerful telescopes, but the popular impression of Mars was still influenced by the Italian astronomer Giovanni

Schiaparelli, who in 1878 published a map depicting its surface dotted with *canali*, or "channels." This was mistranslated into English as "canals," which inadvertently led to a "canal" craze during which the question of intelligent life on Mars was hotly debated (Lane 2011, 3–4). Lewis probably based the *handramit* of Malacandra on this old belief in artificial canals. He describes it as a "low, watered country, the gorge or canyon" cutting across the surface of the planet, which is distinct from the *harandra*, or highlands (Lewis 2003a, 62). In the novel's postscript, presented as a letter written by Ransom to Lewis, he offers directions for locating the specific *handramit* through which Ransom had traveled: "a roughly north-east and south-west 'canal' cutting a north and south 'canal' not more than twenty miles from the equator." Perhaps reflecting the lack of scientific consensus on the actual existence of such canals, he cautions that "astronomers differ very much as to what they can see" (Lewis 2003a, 155). In TMC, canals are referred to in many stories as one of the most recognizable features of Martian landscape. In a delightfully Bradburian touch, they brim not with water, but wine. Once, he writes, the married couple in "Ylla" had enjoyed "swimming in the canals in the seasons when the wine trees filled them with green liquors" (Bradbury 2011, 3). Unlike Lewis, Bradbury reveals little concern for the possibility that the existence of canals on Mars will ever prove mistaken. Indeed, today it is clear that they were probably just an optical illusion.

In any case, the lack of scientific consensus regarding the appearance of Mars offers both authors an opportunity to portray the planet in a manner that is faithful only to their imaginations and mythopoeic intentions. Malacandra is gorgeous and lush, with rushing rivers of effervescent water, purple masses of vegetation tall as trees, and towering walls of pale-green mountains. Overhanging it all is a strange, "rose-coloured cloud-like mass … exquisitely beautiful in tint and shape" (Lewis 2003a, 44–45). Most of the "trees" and "mountains" are oddly-proportioned, narrower at the bottom and widening as they soar higher and higher. Lewis provides a plausible explanation for these bizarre images, explaining that the lighter gravity of Malacandra allows its flora to grow much higher than on the Earth. Ransom travels through the low-lying *handramit* to the rocky wastes of the *harandra*, which is so high above the surface that he nearly reaches the end of its breathable atmosphere. There, he discovers that the rose-colored clouds are actually the fossilized remains of the planet's old forests, once home to a flying species of *hnau*, a rational creature. On Meldilorn, the island home of Oyarsa, he learns more about how the planet came to assume its present appearance. It is, in fact, far older than Earth, and was already flourishing when Lucifer (the Oyarsa assigned to our world) rebelled against God. As part of his plan to corrupt the whole of creation, the "bent" or evil being tempted some of the *hnau* to join his side and destroyed the ecological balance of Malacandra, resulting in the extinction of the flying species and the forced evacuation of the *harandra*. "Soon now, very soon," concludes Oyarsa, "I will end my world and give my people back to Maleldil," or God (Lewis 2003a, 138). Still, the potential loss of their world does not dismay the *hnau* who remained faithful, for, unlike fallen humans, they do not fear death.

Despite being in decline, parts of Malacandra are still rich and fertile. This reflects the prudent stewardship of Oyarsa and his subjects, which contrasts sharply with that of Bradbury's rapacious human colonists. Yet, even before their arrival, he depicts Mars as a grim and dying world. In one of the earliest stories, "Ylla," Mr. and Mrs. K live in a house by an empty, dead sea. While flying through the air in their flame birds, they do not look down to watch "the dead, ancient bone-chess cities slide under, or the old canals filled with emptiness and dreams" and move over "dry rivers and dry lakes" (Bradbury 2011, 8–9). In these last days of peace, the blue hills of Mars are full of pretty towns and villas, and the wine trees sway over silver pools and glittering canals. Nevertheless, for every thriving Martian city, there are just as many that have been dead or abandoned for ages, a testament to the incredible venerability of their civilization, but also a hint that it might have already entered decline. Members of the Fourth Expedition, who are the first to survive landing on Mars, discover a planet that has already been transformed into a tomb. Four out of every five towns they visit have been empty for millennia, the fate of their inhabitants unknown, but in every fifth town they discover piles of bodies, the unfortunate victims of a chicken pox epidemic introduced by members of the previous expeditions. Bradbury thus condemns the immorality of colonizing already-inhabited planets by comparing it to first contact between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the New World. In TMC, he presents humanity "as seemingly intractable and uncompromising in their colonizing intent, disavowing any kind of cultural symbiosis with the external ecosystem and choosing instead to impose their habits to transform and assimilate it" (Ylagan 2015, 34). Their complicity in the ruination of Mars is further emphasized by the paucity of their supposed reward: a lifeless planet, which they are forced to abandon entirely after atomic war breaks out back on Earth.

The landscapes of Malacandra and Mars do not differ so much as their respective inhabitants, however. Lewis populates the former with three distinct species of *hnau*, each with its own appearance, habitat and characteristics. The first of these encountered by Ransom are the *hrossa*, which have thick dark fur and resemble penguins, otters and seals simultaneously. One *hross*, Hyoi, teaches him his first words in their language, which (as revealed in *Perelandra*) conveniently turns out to be the same Old Solar spoken throughout the galaxy, though long forgotten on Earth. The *hrossa* live in the *handramit*, or lowlands, sailing along the rivers and occasionally embarking upon ritualistic hunts of the fearsome *hnéraki*. Sarah Larratt Keefer points to strong "etymological, linguistic, [and] lexical associations" between the *hrossa* and the Houyhnhnms, a race of talking horses in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (Keefer 1994, 211). Still, she acknowledges, the *hrossa* do not rule over the other *hnau* of Malacandra, as the Houyhnhnms do over the hapless Yahoos of their world; instead, all serve equally under the benevolent sovereignty of Oyarsa. Ransom initially dismisses their society as primitive, comparing it to Earth's "old stone age," but soon discovers that they are sophisticated poets, the only species on the planet with any sort of interest or proficiency in the arts (Lewis 2003a, 67). In the postscript, Ransom reveals that there

are other types of *hrossa*, including silver and white-colored ones, and the ten-foot tall crested *hrossa*, a graceful dancer.

The *hrossa* are but one of three rational and sentient species on Malicandra. The others are called *sorns* and *pfifltriggi*. The former are solitary creatures, white or cream-colored, with elongated limbs, two or three times taller than a human. They are the wisest of the *hnau*, the ones most interested in natural philosophy and history, to whom the other races defer on complicated matters. Ransom is relieved to discover that, like humans, the *sorns* keep flocks of sheep-like animals that produce milk, cheese, and other dairy-like products. A *sorn* named Augray teaches him about the true nature of Malacandra and provides him with a breathing apparatus so that he can survive on the surface of the planet, which coincides with the top of the *harandra*. Though planned or envisioned by the *sorn*, the device was actually constructed by the *pfifltriggi*, who are the planet's builders and artisans. They are shaped like frogs, but more closely resemble insects or reptiles, with strong arms and hands. Ransom meets only one, Kanakaberaka, who tells him that his people live in constructed homes in a different part of Malacandra, which is filled with great forests and deep mines. Guillaume Bogiaris argues that the three *hnau* are meant to represent the different levels of society in Plato's ideal city, as described in the *Republic*: Malacandra, too, is arranged "in three castes with the gold-souled philosopher-rulers [the *sorns*] at the top, the silver-souled honor-loving military class [the *hrossa*] in the middle, and the bronze-souled labor class [the *pfifltriggi*] at the bottom" (Bogiaris 2018, 28). Given his long-time friendship with fellow Inkling J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis's *hnau* also invite comparisons with the races of Middle-earth: the *sorns* as elves, the *hrossa* as hobbits, and the *pfifltriggi* as dwarves.

Like humans on Earth, Bradbury's Martians are the only species to achieve sentience on their planet. They appear quite similar to humans, too, with brown skin and yellow eyes that are often described as coin-like. They have six fingers instead of five, though. Before it was destroyed, Martian culture had developed to a sophisticated level: they enjoyed attending carnivals and concerts as well as reading beautifully bound books of ancient philosophy that dated back ten thousand years. The Second Expedition, led by Captain Williams in 2030, discovers a unique and highly suggestive aspect of Martian society: their penchant for mask-wearing. He and his crewmen arrive at a town "full of people drifting in and out of doors, saying hello to one another, wearing golden masks and blue masks and crimson masks for pleasant variety, masks with silver lips and bronze eyebrows, masks that smiled or masks that frowned" (Bradbury 2011, 28). Six years later, in "The Off Season," Sam Parkhill is confronted by a group of some of the last surviving Martians, all of whom are masked. In his 1997 introduction to the novel, Bradbury explains that the idea must have been suggested to him by the funerary masks of Egyptian pharaohs such as Tutankhamen (Bradbury 2011, x). Another probable influence was a trip to Mexico he made in the fall of 1945, which supplied him with story ideas for several years (Eller and Touponce 2004, 657–58). Like the colorful *calacas*, or stylized skulls worn during "Day of the Dead" festivities, the Martians' masks are ominous and otherworldly.

Through prolonged and intense study, Bradbury's Martians are able to shed their corporeal forms and attain a state of perfect, unchanging, and eternal virtue in which their outward appearance resembles floating blue spheres or orbs. These ethereal beings appear only in "The Fire Balloons," a story that Bradbury decided to leave out of the first edition of TMC, but which is usually included in British editions published since then. In most versions of this often-revised story, it is stated unequivocally that there are two races or species of Martians (Bradbury 2011, 125). The claim is made by a human, however, and it is not clear that Bradbury actually intended for the two types of Martians to be regarded as distinct races. Instead, it seems likely that the blue orbs are meant to represent the next and perhaps final stage in the evolution of the brown-skinned, golden-eyed characters who appear in other stories. The blue orbs live high in the hills, and their repeated efforts to save the lives of Fathers Peregrine and Stone convince the priests that they are not only intelligent, but capable of moral action. Peregrine desires to preach the Gospel to them, but they tell him there is no need for them to hear it, because they do not sin and have no need of being saved from death. Despite featuring Christian priests as main characters, the story is perhaps more interested in Buddhism, as is evident from the orbs' description of how they first learned to achieve this new mode of existence:

The legend has it that one of us, a good man, discovered a way to free man's soul and intellect, to free him of bodily ills and melancholies, of deaths and transfigurations, of ill humors and senilities, and so we took on the look of lightning and blue fire and have lived in the winds and skies and hills forever after that, neither prideful nor arrogant, neither rich nor poor, passionate nor cold. (Bradbury 2011, 141)

His portrayal of the Martians as Buddhists is but one example of Bradbury's myth-making approach to Mars. He invents a mythology for the planet that allows him to comment or reflect on actual events in the Earth's history. Lewis does this, too, though his myth largely conforms to the teachings of Christianity. The next section compares the mythopoeic cosmologies devised by Lewis and Bradbury.

2. Mars as Myth

Lewis's interest in the appropriation and remaking of myth is evident in many books he wrote, including his best-known work of fiction, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, one of the most acclaimed fantasy series in the world and a classic of Christian literature. Readers and scholars have long recognized that the Narnian universe, which is home to witches, giants, fauns, and other creatures, borrowed from European legends and folklore but was not intended as a simple allegory of the Earth or Christianity. Instead, it mythologizes certain aspects of both. "Lewis," P. H. Brazier observes, "went beyond an academic Christological speculation about intimations, echoes, or refractions of the Gospel in the world's religions and mythologies; he wrote his own Christian myth" (Brazier 2007, 764). In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis refers to certain pagan myths as "good dreams": "those

queer stories scattered all through the heathen religions about a god who dies and comes to life again and, by his death, has somehow given new life to men" (Lewis 2001, 50). Both Christian and pagan myths, he believed, point to the transcendent truth of the Gospels: the one true myth that also doubles as real history. In a lecture delivered in 1955, Lewis highlighted the mythopoeic potential of the kind of science fiction he wrote and preferred to read, which represents "an imaginative impulse as old as the human race working under the special conditions of our own time" (Lewis 1955). Science fiction, he reminds us, can serve as a potent means for exploring metaphysical or even theological issues, despite the fact that most of the foundational figures in the genre, including H. G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, and Robert Heinlein, were agnostics or atheists.

In any case, it is difficult to overlook either his mythopoeic intentions in OSP or the central role of Malacandra in the associated cosmology. Ransom is a Christian but has no idea that the entire solar system is more dependent on the central tenets of his faith than contemporary science would lead him to believe. Such is its nature, in fact, that it cannot fully be described or understood through scientific means alone, as he dimly perceives while traveling on the ship with Devine and Weston. "He had read of 'Space': at the back of his thinking for years had lurked the dismal fancy of the black, cold vacuity, the utter deadness, which was supposed to separate the worlds." Instead, he finds himself sailing through an "empyrean ocean of radiance," a "womb of worlds," full of life and beautiful beyond description (Lewis 2003a, 34). Hence, even before his adventures begin on Malacandra, Ransom is made to feel "more alive and spiritual than ever … buoyed up away from gravity as if on a wave" (Eddings 2016, 34). Later, Oyarsa teaches him that, for *eldila*, and in actuality, outer space, or "heaven" as it is properly called, exists everywhere. They do not have to leave it to visit a planet, because those are only places within the "empyreum." One result of Lewis's mythical cosmology, therefore, is to restore some of the medieval appreciation for space as "a world lighted, warmed, and resonant with music," which modern science has replaced with the now-familiar image of a dark, cold, and terrifyingly quiet vacuum (Lewis 2015, 112). Of course, those who are determined to reject the former mindset will always see it that way, even if they were to assume Ransom's place in the spaceship: "Those who do not find [God] on earth are unlikely to find Him in space," Lewis concludes (Lewis 1995, 171). Like all of the science fiction he wrote, OSP is primarily a work of mythopoeia rather than apologetics.

In truth, Lewis not so much rejects the contemporary model of the solar system as seeks to reconcile it with one that had endured from the classical period to the end of the Middle Ages. This Ptolemaic model was, of course, geocentric, or predicated upon the central position of the Earth: everything else, including the sun, was believed to revolve around it. If Lewis could not replicate the model wholesale in his mythology, he could, at least, borrow certain metaphysical and religious ideas from it, which science had not, and could not, disprove empirically. One of these ideas is the "Great Chain of Being," a hierarchical conception of all living things and matter that dates back to the ancient Greeks. "The natural world was cast in the image of a ladder, ranking all created forms from the brightest angel to the humblest worm in a descending order. The Almighty embodied the

highest form of perfection. Each creature occupied a rung on this hierarchical ladder" (Weinert 2009, 97). Christians believed that humans had been endowed with some of the attributes of the beings above and below them, and therefore enjoyed a privileged place in creation. Still, the overall impression was still of a wide universe willed into existence and ruled by God. This is the cosmology offered by Lewis in his Space Trilogy, which Ransom first learns about on Malacandra. Like all of the planets in the solar system, it was created long ago by Maleldil the Young, companion to, and coequal with the Old One: that is, Christ and God the Father, respectively. The Oyarsa who governs the planet does so by their leave; other *elidila* were put in place on other worlds. Ransom is a stranger there, as he would be on any planet not named Earth. Still, he is not completely alien to it or its inhabitants, as Oyarsa explains. "But do not think we are utterly unlike. We are both copies of Maleldil" (Lewis 2003a, 119). There is something of the *imago Dei* in both of them. This likeness or image of God, which is denied to the *hnau*, stands as a reminder of the special place of humanity in creation.

However, there is more to Lewis's universe than the attempt to harmonize modern science and Christianity. It also incorporates elements from Greco-Roman mythology, medieval superstitions and folklore, along with all the literary and religious traditions of the world that influenced him and were deemed worthy of preservation in his mythopoeic cosmology. While looking at stone carvings on Meldilorn, Ransom sees a picture of the Oyarsa of Venus, who is depicted with bulging shapes that he assumes to be breasts. "And what an extraordinary coincidence … that their mythology, like ours, associates some idea of the female with Venus," he thinks (Lewis 2003a, 111). The mythology shared by the *hnau* and humans is also that of the ancient Greeks and Romans, whose gods provided the names for most of the planets in our solar system. Somehow, on both Earth and Malacandra, the planet Mars came to be associated with war and masculinity, just as Venus was linked to love and femininity. In *Perelandra*, Lewis confirms that these similarities or apparent coincidences are due to the providential nature of creation: that Greeks, Romans, Christians and *hnau* all believe in some of the same things because they live in the same universe, which was created and is ruled by God. "There is an environment of minds as well as of space," the Oyarsa of Malacandra and Perelandra (known by those same names) tell him:

> The universe is one—a spider's web wherein each mind lives along every line, a vast whispering gallery where … though no news travels unchanged yet no secret can be rigorously kept. In the mind of the fallen Archon under whom our planet groans, the memory of Deep Heaven and the gods with whom he once consorted is still alive. (Lewis 2003b, 172)

As Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, even the beliefs of those who lived before Christ and never had a chance to hear the good news of his death and resurrection may contain "at least some hint of the truth" (Lewis 2001, 35). Unlike Dr. Weston, who represents an unimaginative and positivistic mindset, Lewis has little interest in debunking or disparaging earlier beliefs.

Folklore, fairy tales, and legends also reveal aspects of the transcendent truth that Lewis believed to be possessed in full only by the Christian faith. His *eldila* are not just angels or spirits, after all, but exhibit some of the characteristics traditionally attributed to entities like elves or fairies. Ransom learns from Augray that they have bodies, and are not, therefore, purely spiritual beings as angels are said to be. He cannot see them clearly because they move so quickly that they are capable of being in multiple places simultaneously. Ransom realizes that, although he had previously denied the existence of *eldila* on his own planet, he is no longer sure that is really the case: "It had dawned on him that the recurrent human tradition of bright, elusive people sometimes appearing on the Earth … might after all have another explanation than the anthropologists had yet given" (Lewis 2003a, 95). The point is emphasized in a later scene on Meldilorn. As Ransom walks around the island, he is suddenly struck by the suspicion that he is being watched by unseen eyes. The air was subject to "tiny variations of light and shade which no change in the sky accounted for," while "footsteps of light" hovered on the peripheral edges of his vision, dissipating into nothingness the moment he tried to focus his attention on them (Lewis 2003a, 108–109). Finally, he caught a glimpse of the mysterious and elusive *elida* that are native to the Field of Arbol, or Deep Heaven. As much as the scene may call to mind the solemn meetings between humans and angels in the Bible or Milton, it also resembles those chance encounters with fairies found in English and Celtic folklore. Just as he did with the myths of ancient Greece and Rome, Lewis incorporates such traditions into his overarching myth, confirming and thereby sanctifying them.

Bradbury's cosmology is as inventive as Lewis's but its main wellsprings lie in history rather than religion or myth. On Mars, he is able to mythologize one of the most important and tragic events in human history: the European colonization of the New World, which had a devastating impact on both the indigenous tribes who already lived there and the natural environment. During the colonial period, which started at the end of the fifteenth century, millions of Native Americans perished through a combination of war, overwork, starvation, and disease. By 1610, shortly after the English founded their first colony at Jamestown, "Indians in the many tens of millions had died horribly from the blades and germs of their Iberian invaders" (Stannard 1992, 101). Bradbury recreates this cycle of intolerance and death on Mars, but declines to absolve the Martians from blame. The first explorers arrive on Mars with peaceful intentions but are easily destroyed by the rabidly xenophobic natives who have telepathic powers. If it had not been for the Martians' lack of exposure to certain human diseases, they very well might have succeeded in holding off countless rocket expeditions. However, the introduction of chicken pox to Mars proves just as deadly as smallpox had in the crowded cities of the Aztec and Mayan Empires. Fittingly, Bradbury does not portray much physical interaction between humans and Martians: by the time colonists from the Earth begin arriving in significant numbers, most of the Martians are already dead or in hiding. In TMC, Lorenzo Veracini argues, Bradbury captures how "the indigenous Other ultimately does not exist: it is either a being that, literally, cannot be touched, or a life form whose identity and appearance invariably assumes the shape that the coloniser is willing to project" (Veracini 2010, 84). Rather

than having them linger on as slaves, like their real-life counterparts, Bradbury grants the Martians a kind of quiet dignity by allowing them to simply disappear.

His mythopoeic cosmology is not meant to challenge his readers' fundamental understanding of the universe, but to offer them a pointed reminder of past mistakes, as well as a warning about the future. Many of the European settlers who flocked to the New World sought to escape religious and political repression back home. They had noble enough intentions, but showed little concern for their adopted homeland, cutting down vast swaths of virgin forest and hunting countless species to the point of extinction. The same process plays out again on Bradbury's Mars. "The Taxpayer," one of the bridge passages used to connect the separate narratives of TMC, concerns an ordinary person desperate to land a coveted spot on one of the Mars-bound rockets. Their motivation was "[t]o get away from wars and censorship and statism and conscription and government control of this and that, of art and science!" (Bradbury 2011, 42). Unfortunately, whatever their reasons for wanting to leave Earth in the first place, human colonists prove no more responsible as stewards of Mars than their predecessors had centuries ago. They dump buildings for target practice, obliterate the local wildlife with DDT, and erect hot dog stands in the middle of the wilderness. Few are willing to stand with Spender, a member of the fourth expedition who respects the myriad accomplishments of the Martians, or "the way in which they had made the planet their own through their material activities, their culture and their language" (Jancovich 1996, 103).

The story in which Spender appears, "—And The Moon Be Still As Bright," highlights the political and social dimensions of Bradbury's imagination. It begins with Spender gathering wood to set a fire on Mars. Bradbury would end *Fahrenheit 451* with a similar scene, but whereas the fire in that book is meant to serve as a potent symbol of human strength and resilience, its significance in TMC is much more ominous, especially after Hathaway returns from a trip to nearby cities and reports seeing houses filled with dead Martian bodies, "like sticks and pieces of burnt newspaper" (Bradbury 2011, 69). The news barely registers with Spender's comrades, instead precipitating a kind of mental breakdown that leads him to commit increasingly violent acts, including murder. He attempts to justify himself to his sympathetic but pragmatic captain by arguing that humanity has much to learn from Martians about the proper balance between religion, art, science and nature. They "discovered the secret of life among animals," he insists. "The animal does not question life. It lives. Its very reason for living is life; it enjoys and relishes life" (Bradbury 2011, 91). He plans to settle down on the planet and kill any colonists who arrive from the Earth, to delay or prevent for as long as possible the widespread colonization of Mars. Eller regards "—And The Moon Be Still As Bright," as key to Bradbury's "larger mythology for living": "Through Spender and other character masks of the period, [he] was beginning to pinpoint his own focus for realism: the fundamental truths that help us live meaningfully rather than die in despair" (Eller 2011, 174–75). All the same, Spender is no Ransom, and can only serve as an imperfect guide to those truths. However much one may sympathize with his goals, the means of achieving them are not only doomed to failure but also remain morally abhorrent.

Unlike Lewis, Bradbury is less interested in the reality or truth of his mythology. He claims to have written TMC as myth, in fact, because the realism or empirical truth demanded of genuine science fiction would endanger its longevity. After all, someday we really may send rockets to Mars, and it is likely that we shall not find there any wine-filled canals or books dating back ten thousand years. "And because I wrote myths, perhaps my Mars has a few more years of impossible life," he writes (Bradbury 2011, xii). Nor does Bradbury feel any need to confirm the validity of the sources that inspired him to write the book, which include "King Tut out of the tomb when I was three, Norse Eddas when I was six, and Roman / Greek gods that romanced me when I was ten" (Bradbury 2011, xi). These are "pure myth," not true for him in the sense that Lewis believes Christianity to be fully true, and the Greco-Roman myths partially so. Even so, it would be unfair, not to mention inaccurate, to suggest that Bradbury had no interest in the critical debate between science and myth (or reason and imagination) in which Lewis so readily engages. "Usher II" is one of the more unusual stories in TMC; it describes the efforts of a man to build a house based on the one described by Edgar Allen Poe in "The Fall of the House of Usher." Inside are various torture and execution chambers representing different stories by that author. His unfortunate victims are the same "eminent sociologists," "clever psychologists," and "politicians, bacteriologists, and neurologists" who were responsible for the burning of books by authors such as Poe (Bradbury 2011, 172). Poe himself actually features in a different story set on Mars (though not included in any of the published editions of TMC), "The Exiles," along with the witches from *Macbeth* and *The Emerald City of Oz*. All these mythical beings were forced to seek refuge on the Red Planet after the books that featured them were banned on Earth. One of the advantages of Bradbury's approach to myth is that it allows him to address pressing social issues such as censorship and education. Lewis, of course, was also interested in such matters, but in OSP, at least, they yield to his theological concerns.

Certainly, Lewis does not have the opportunity to explore something like the racial prejudice of his day with as much sensitivity as is shown by Bradbury in two related stories set on Mars: "Way in the Middle of the Air" and "The Other Foot." The former is included in some editions of TMC, including the first one, and the latter was first published in 1951 and reprinted in *The Illustrated Man*. What is truly remarkable about these stories, as Juan David Cruz-Duarte observes, is Bradbury's refusal to treat the subject of racism allegorically, using aliens instead of blacks, as was typical of much contemporary science fiction. In doing so, "the author does not hide or disguise the [prejudice and oppression] suffered by African Americans," but deals with it in an honest and direct manner (Cruz-Duarte 2020, 22). "Way in the Middle" describes an exodus of African-Americans from an unnamed southern town, and the pathetic efforts of some of the white inhabitants to prevent them from leaving. In "The Other Foot," the black residents of a peaceful utopia on Mars must decide what to do with white refugees fleeing war and starvation back on Earth. At first, they imagine setting up a Martian version of apartheid, but with whites as the subjugated class. As the rockets arrive from Earth, the blacks plan a welcoming party of lynchings, segregated seat-

ing on buses and in restaurants, and other discriminatory laws, matching those faced by African Americans in the Jim Crow South during the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, after listening to the refugees' stories about the destruction of Earth, the blacks decide to show them the compassion their own ancestors had been denied, and welcome the whites with open arms. "The Lord's let us come through, a few here and a few there," their leader declares. "And what happens next is up to all of us. The time for being fools is over. We got to be something else except fools. … Now everything's even. We can start all over again, on the same level" (Bradbury 2011, 56). Whatever mistakes were made in the past, Bradbury reminds us, need not be repeated in the future. Such is the power of a myth grounded in history.

3. Conclusion

In naming Musk their 2021 "Person of the Year," *Time* magazine noted that "few individuals have had more influence than Musk on life on Earth, and potentially life off Earth too" (Felsenthal 2021). If he is not careful, he may end up proving them right, but not necessarily in a good way. For however fanciful science fiction novels of the present and recent past may seem, the technology needed to travel to Mars and establish colonies there is probably not all that far away. Our future colonists may prove successful in taming and settling that world, but it remains questionable whether they can prevent themselves from introducing to it the same problems they sought to leave behind on the Earth. It is also debatable if colonies on Mars or elsewhere will not, in time, become problems in their own right, perhaps someday trying to revolt against the authority of the Earth, attacking or hurling asteroids like the lunar revolutionaries in Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. These and other dangers have been weighed by science fiction writers including Lewis and Bradbury, whose mythopoeic cosmologies, though centered on Mars, ask how we might live happily on Earth. Indeed, before seeking to colonize other worlds, it may be prudent to learn how to take better care of this one.

References

Bogiaris, Guillaume. 2018. "'Love of Knowledge is a Kind of Madness': Competing Platonisms in the Universes of C. S. Lewis and H. P. Lovecraft." *Mythlore*, 36 (2): 23–41.

Bradbury, Ray. 1989. *Zen in the Art of Writing*. Capra Press.

Bradbury, Ray. 2011. *The Martian Chronicles*. Harper Perennial.

Bradbury, Ray. 2012. *The Illustrated Man*. Simon & Schuster.

Bradbury, Ray. 2023. *Remembrance: Selected Correspondence of Ray Bradbury*, edited by Jonathan R. Eller. Simon & Schuster.

Brazier, P. H. 2007. "C. S. Lewis & Christological Prefigurement." *Heythrop Journal*, 48 (5): 742–775. https://www.dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2007.00341.x.

Cruz-Duarte, Juan David. 2020. “Ray Bradbury on Race and Segregation: The Case of ‘Way in the Middle of the Air’ and ‘The Other Foot.’” *Fafnir*, 7 (2): 18–31. http://journal.finfar.org/articles/2098.pdf.

Eddings, Sarah. 2016. “The Use of the Vertical Plane to Indicate Holiness in C. S. Lewis’s Space Trilogy.” *Mythlore*, 34 (2): 33–45.

Eller, Jonathan R. 2011. *Becoming Ray Bradbury*. University of Illinois Press.

Eller, Jonathan R., and William F. Touponce. 2004. *Ray Bradbury: The Life in Fiction*. The Kent State University Press.

Hoskinson, Kevin. 1995. “*The Martian Chronicles* and *Fahrenheit 451*: Ray Bradbury’s Cold War Novels.” *Extrapolation*, 36 (4): 345–359. https://www.doi.org/10.3828/extr.1995.36.4.345.

Jancovich, Mark. 1996. *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*. Manchester University Press.

Keefer, Sarah Larratt. 1994. “Houyhnhnms on Malacandra: C. S. Lewis and Jonathan Swift.” *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, 7 (4): 210–215.

Lane, K. Maria D. 2011. *Geographies of Mars: Seeing and Knowing the Red Planet*. The University of Chicago Press.

Lewis, C. S. 1955. “On Science Fiction.” *Catholic Culture*. Accessed 3 July 2025. https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=9116.

Lewis, C. S. 1995. *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper. Eerdmans.

Lewis, C. S. 2001. *Mere Christianity*. HarperCollins.

Lewis, C. S. 2003a. *Out of the Silent Planet*. Scribner.

Lewis, C. S. 2003b. *Perelandra*. Scribner.

Lewis, C. S. 2015. *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge University Press.

Meyers, Doris T. 1994. *C. S. Lewis in Context*. The Kent State UP.

Sheetz, Michael. 2021. “Elon Musk wants SpaceX to reach Mars so humanity is not a ‘single-planet species.’” *CNBC*. Accessed 6 January 2024. http://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/23/elon-musk-aiming-for-mars-so-humanity-is-not-a-single-planet-species.html.

Stannard, David E. 1992. *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*. Oxford University Press.

Veracini, Lorenzo. 2010. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Weinert, Friedel. 2009. *Copernicus, Darwin, & Freud: Revolutions in the History and Philosophy of Science*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Wenskus, Otta. 2017. “‘Soft’ Science Fiction and Technical Fantasy: The Ancient World in Star Trek, Babylon 5, Battlestar Galactica and Dr Who.” In *A Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen*, edited by Arthur J. Pomeroy. Wiley Blackwell.

Ylagan, Christian. 2015. “Why Do the Heavens Beckon Us? Revisiting Constructions of Home and Identity in Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*.” *Fafnir*, 2 (4): 29–41. http://journal.finfar.org/articles/473.pdf.