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21H.931 Response Paper 5
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Just as I complained about the wording of the title of Bynum's work last week, I will open my response with a grumbling about C.S. Lewis' choice of title for his book. This book is hardly "an introduction to Medieval and Renaissance literature." I must admit that I only skimmed the "evidence" chapters of the book, but even those do not seem to provide a solid foundation regarding the works he cites in his explanation of the Medieval Model. This is not to say that the reader cannot understand his later arguments without this knowledge, as he elucidates them in great detail. However, Lewis assumes certain knowledge of the reader of this work. This is exemplified by his use of phrases such as "the reader should already be familiar with..." that assume the reader can put some of the evidence into context without Lewis' help. For a reader such as myself whose only exposure to the works that Lewis cites the most is having read five or six of *The Canterbury Tales*, this was rather unsatisfactory. Yes, I understood his arguments, but felt that it would have been more rewarding had I been able to better appreciate his literary examples and been able to see his connections and arguments more clearly. Of course this book was compiled from many lectures he gave at Oxford where his audience would be expected to have some familiarity with the field, much like scientific lectures at our institution assume certain knowledge of physics, math and chemistry.

For that reason I feel this book is no introduction to the *literature*, but to the Model argued for by Lewis. My above complaint aside, I felt this was a wonderful work that clearly explained the origins of the Medieval Model of the universe and how they applied to certain writings of the period. In fact I think that the usefulness of such a work is the exact opposite of what I stated above. While frustrated by not understanding many of his references, Lewis gives

me the confidence to dive into a Medieval work in the future and better understand and appreciate it. He does this by explaining both the structure of a typical Medieval work (including the structure and reasoning behind *Descriptio*, *Apostropha* and *Exemplum* which are typically not seen in modern writing) as well as the meaning of many of the typical metaphors invoked by Medieval authors. The best example I remember is his discussion of the planets and the types of people who are associated with each due to the planet's characteristics.

Of course, though, we are in a history class, so the question that struck my mind was what does Lewis' work tell us about medieval history? As a historical reader who has mainly focused on post-Renaissance history, this book helped to debunk some of the stereotypes about the Middle Ages that I had inherited from my general education. For example, we are taught in a general, middle school level history course that the Middle Ages are the *Dark Ages*; that the genius of the ancients (such as Herodotus, Aristotle and Pliny to name a few) was lost upon these people. Naturally, the rediscovery of these great works lead to a cultural explosion that would be called the Renaissance. I was lead to believe that the Middle Ages were a time of Catholicism; the age of the Crusades and Inquisition. Lewis has elegantly demonstrated that the Medieval Model was a fusion of both Christian and Classical ideals. There was a place for both the Catholic God and for old man Saturn. One was not a heretic for calling upon Venus for inspiration. Thus to the relatively uninformed reader (me, at least in regards to the Middle Ages), Lewis' work provides a different and more complete view of medieval society than I could have obtained from my traditional sources. And so, though I struggled with this material more than the previously assigned works, I am grateful for Lewis for an introduction into medieval society through his Medieval Model, even if I may have missed a few of his points regarding the literature of the era.