

The Reception of C. S. Lewis in Britain and America

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I, Stephanie L. Derrick, declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work which it embodies is my work and has not been included in another thesis.

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Abstract

Since the publication of the book *The Screwtape Letters* in 1942, 'C. S. Lewis' has been a widely recognized name in both Britain and the United States. The significance of the writings of this scholar of medieval literature, Christian apologist and author of the children's books *The Chronicles of Narnia*, while widely recognized, has not previously been investigated. Using a wide range of sources, including archival material, book reviews, monographs, articles and interviews, this dissertation examines the reception of Lewis in Britain and America, comparatively, from within his lifetime until the recent past. To do so, the methodology borrows from the history of the book and history of reading fields, and writes the biography of Lewis's *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. By contextualizing the writing of these works in the 1940s and 1950s, the evolution of Lewis's respective platforms in Britain and America and these works' reception across the twentieth century, this project contributes to the growing body of work that interrogates the print culture of Christianity. Extensive secondary reading, moreover, permitted the investigation of cultural, intellectual, social and religious factors informing Lewis's reception, the existence of Lewis devotees in America and the lives of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* in particular. By paying close attention to the historical conditions of authorship, publication and reception, while highlighting similarities and contrasts between Britain and America, this dissertation provides a robust account of how and why Lewis became one of the most successful Christian authors of the twentieth century.

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List of Abbreviations

BBC WAC – British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archives Centre

Bodl. – The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

Bulletin – The New York C. S. Lewis Society *Bulletin*

Chronicles – *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Hooper Papers, UNC – Walter McGee Hooper Papers #04236, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Lewis -- C. S. Lewis

The Lion – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

Wade – Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois Archive

Chapter One

Introduction

The subject of this dissertation is the reception in Britain and America of the writings of the British scholar, author and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), from the period of his lifetime until the early years of the twenty-first century. A prolific writer, Lewis came to fame in the early 1940s through two roughly simultaneous events: the phenomenal success of his book *The Screwtape Letters*, an imagined dialogue between a senior and a novice devil on the art of temptation, published in 1941, and a series of radio broadcasts he delivered over the BBC from 1941 to 1944 on the subject of Christianity. From that time until the present, the name of C. S. Lewis has been one widely familiar to both the British and American publics, with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, his series of fantasy books for children, playing an important part. The puzzle of why this Oxford don and his writings have continued to fascinate American Christians, especially, is one that has been pondered by many over the years. Yet no one, until now, has researched the topic in depth. The subject promises to reveal much about the conjunction of historical, cultural and religious factors that have made Lewis's reception the phenomenon it is. This introduction will review the relevant secondary literature and explain the objectives and methodology of the project.

Review of the Literature

The appearance of articles in mainstream periodicals noting Lewis's popularity is a testament to the interest the subject has held for a wide public. In the States, Lewis's

appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine, in 1947, was accompanied by the assessment that his large following was 'the result of Lewis' special gift for dramatizing Christian dogma'.¹ *Time* followed up on Lewis's success in 1977 with 'C. S. Lewis Goes Marching On', describing Lewis as 'the only author in English whose Christian writings combine intellectual stature with bestselling status'.² In 1988 the subject was again in the American mainstream media when the *New York Times* published a piece called 'C. S. Lewis: Gone But Hardly Forgotten'.³ The 1990s and early 2000s saw more of the same in America, particularly accompanying the release of the Walt Disney movie version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 2005: *The New Yorker*,⁴ *U. S. News and World Report*,⁵ *CNN Belief Blog*⁶ and *The New York Times*⁷ all published articles highlighting Lewis's continuing popularity. The latest to date is 'C. S. Lewis, Evangelical Rock Star', in *New York Times* of 25 June 2013.⁸ Continued coverage of Lewis in mainstream outlets in the States, over so many decades, is evidence of his remarkable endurance as a cultural figure; but it also underscores the fact that that endurance itself has continued to

¹ Anon., 'Don v Devil', *Time Magazine* (8 September 1947), 65.

² Anon., 'C. S. Lewis Goes Marching On: The Apostle of "Mere Christianity" Converts a New Generation', *Time Magazine* (5 December 1977), 92.

³ Michael Nelson, 'C. S. Lewis: Gone But Hardly Forgotten', *New York Times* (22 November 1988), Y27.

⁴ Adam Gopnik, 'Prisoner of Narnia: How C. S. Lewis Escaped', *The New Yorker* (21 November 2005), http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/11/21/051121crat_atlarge, accessed 28 September 2013.

⁵ Jay Tolson, 'God's Storyteller', *U. S. News and World Report* (4 December 2005), http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/051212/12lewis_6.htm, accessed 20 June 2013.

⁶ John Blake, 'Surprised by C. S. Lewis: Why His Popularity Endures', *CNN Belief Blog* (17 December 2010), <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/12/17/surprised-by-c-s-lewis-why-his-popularity-endures/?hpt=C2%3E>, accessed 20 June 2013.

⁷ Mark Oppenheimer, 'C. S. Lewis's Legacy Lives On, and Not Just Through the Wardrobe', *New York Times* (4 March 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/05/us/05beliefs.html?_r=0, accessed 20 June 2013.

⁸ T. M. Luhrmann, 'C. S. Lewis, Evangelical Rock Star', *New York Times* (25 June 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/26/opinion/luhrmann-c-s-lewis-evangelical-rock-star.html?src=recg&_r=0, accessed 23 July 2013.

provoke curiosity among a broad populace. That fascination, however, has had a decidedly American stamp. In Britain, interestingly, it would be hard to find any full-length articles about Lewis's popularity in mainstream media outlets.

Mark Noll, a historian of Christianity at the University of Notre Dame, has said, 'Lewis's writing has constituted the single most important body of Christian thinking for American evangelicals in the twentieth century.'⁹ Yet despite recognition from scholars of the significance of Lewis's reception, work of scholarly merit addressing the topic have been confined to articles and single chapters. The majority of the serious analyses have been written by people for whom Lewis's person and work have been a long-standing interest. Observations began within the author's lifetime. Chad Walsh, an English professor at Beloit College in New York, was the first to write a biography of Lewis, in 1949, and to assess his posthumous reputation two years after his death in a chapter called 'Impact on America' in *Light on C. S. Lewis* (1965).¹⁰ In 1979 Donald Williams, a professor of English, noted that in the past three decades 'the experience of discovering Lewis has formed an almost archetypal pattern in the lives of countless evangelical students',¹¹ and Bruce Edwards, a professor of English and Africana Studies, worried whether the many secondary works about Lewis would actually diminish interest in the man¹²—both publishing their articles in the American Evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*. In the 1980s British and American Christians noticed Lewis's continued appeal and

⁹ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 218.

¹⁰ Chad Walsh, 'Impact on America', in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965), 107-116. See chapter four, note 62.

¹¹ Donald Williams, 'A Closer Look at the "Unorthodox" Lewis', *Christianity Today* (21 December 1979), 24.

¹² Bruce Edwards, 'Overdoing a Good Thing?' *Christianity Today* (1 November 1979), 40.

offered explanations. Writers Fr William Oddie (British) and Richard Purtill (American) addressed, respectively, the topic of 'Lewis's Increasing Relevance'¹³ and 'Some Reasons for Lewis's Success'.¹⁴ Michael Aeschliman,¹⁵ a Boston University professor, British author John Peters¹⁶, and Richard Harries,¹⁷ the Bishop of Oxford, did the same. The 1990s and early 2000s witnessed more of the same, with contributions like 'The Second Coming of C S Lewis' by professor of English, Alan Jacobs¹⁸, 'The Relevance and Challenge of C. S. Lewis' by chief executive officer of the Catholic publisher Ignatius Press, Mark Brumley,¹⁹ and religious studies professor Wesley Kort's book *C. S. Lewis Then and Now*,²⁰ adding new Christian voices to the mix.

In these short pieces about Lewis's reception there are few cross-references: this is a stream of independent speculations, not an ongoing discussion. There has been no consensus about the reasons for Lewis's enduring popularity—unless, that is, general marvelling about Lewis and his skills, ubiquitous in this literature, qualify. For example, statements like the following from John Peters are commonplace: 'In the twenty-odd years since his death nobody has shown a capacity to defend Christianity with such

¹³ Fr. William Oddie, 'Lewis's Increasing Relevance', address to Oxford C. S. Lewis Society, 1982. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. C. 777, Papers of C. S. Lewis Society, 1982-5, fol. 201.

¹⁴ Richard Purtill, 'Some Reasons for Lewis's Success', in *C. S. Lewis's Case for the Christian Faith* ed. Richard Purtill (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 13-26.

¹⁵ Michael Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 65.

¹⁶ John Peters, 'An Abiding Influence', in *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Achievements* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985), 7-15.

¹⁷ Richard Harries, 'The Continuing Appeal of C. S. Lewis', in *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His God* (London: Collins, 1987), 11-16.

¹⁸ Alan Jacobs, 'The Second Coming of C. S. Lewis', *First Things* (November 1994), 27-30.

¹⁹ Mark Brumley, 'The Relevance and Challenge of C. S. Lewis', *Ignatius Insight* (29 November 2005), http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2005/print2005/mbrumley_relclslewis_nov05.html, accessed 22 June 2013.

²⁰ Wesley A. Kort, *C. S. Lewis Then and Now* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

authority and power, devastating logic and complete conviction, nor with such grace and style.²¹ And Richard Purtill has observed, 'The explanation for Lewis' success is to be found in all the aspects of Lewis as a man and a writer, in his imaginative and moral qualities as well as his intellectual capacities.'²² That said, beyond hymns of praise, three specific reasons for Lewis's continuing appeal have been posited. These will be briefly reviewed here and discussed again in the conclusion in light of the evidence adduced in the thesis.

In the first place, many scholars have held that qualities about Lewis's *person* have had an important bearing upon the favourable hearing he received in America, though there has been no unanimity about *which* qualities. Chad Walsh believed that Lewis's 'amateur', rather than 'professional', standing toward religious subjects made Americans more receptive to his views,²³ an opinion later shared by Mary Michael²⁴ and Alan Jacobs.²⁵ Donald Williams thought Lewis's former atheism made it easier for American Evangelicals to accept Lewis, being attracted to one 'who started as an atheist and has come almost all the way to full orthodoxy than they are to people who are in the process of backing away from it'.²⁶ Then Alan Jacobs, Eugene McGovern, a founder of the New York C. S. Lewis Society, and Bruce Edwards have all connected Lewis's appeal to Americans with his being both a Christian and an intellectual. For Eugene McGovern a 'source' of Lewis's appeal was the 'simple reassurance that his readers obtain from

²¹ Peters, 'An Abiding Influence', in *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Achievements*, 133.

²² Purtill, *C. S. Lewis's Case for the Christian Faith*, 14.

²³ Walsh, 'Impact on America', in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, 110.

²⁴ Mary Michael, 'Our Love Affair with C. S. Lewis', *Christianity Today* (25 October 1993), 34-36.

²⁵ Jacobs, 'Second Coming of C. S. Lewis', in *First Things*, 28.

²⁶ Williams, 'A Closer Look at the "Unorthodox" Lewis', *Christianity Today*, 24.

knowing that a distinguished career in secular learning was comfortably combined with steadfast belief in orthodox Christianity',²⁷ and Bruce Edwards stated that 'Lewis effortlessly represents learning that transforms, erudition that cultivates sincerity and virtue, not deceit and arrogance'.²⁸

In the second place, commentators have pointed to Lewis's *articulation* of the doctrines Christians hold in common or of the universal qualities of the human condition to explain his continuing influence. Michael Aeschliman stressed the effect upon Lewis's endurance of his philosophical commitment to the universality of the experience of the common man and his efforts to communicate in such a way that dignified that commonality.²⁹ John Peters agreed with Aeschliman on this point,³⁰ while John Wilson argued in 1991 that Lewis's use of 'common language' and the fact of his arguments' appeal to commonsense were key to Lewis's influence.³¹ Others have tended to pay more attention to the relationship of Lewis's message to the doctrinal issues which have traditionally divided Christians along denominational lines, arguing that the non-sectarian nature of the Christianity he expounded has been pivotal. The famous evangelist Billy Graham, in a foreword to a British volume inspired by Lewis, recalled his experience of having lunch with Lewis in Cambridge and opined about his influence:

²⁷ Eugene McGovern, 'Our Need for Such a Guide', in *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table, and Other Reminiscences* ed. James T. Como (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 231.

²⁸ Bruce Edwards, 'The Christian Intellectual in the Public Square: C. S. Lewis's Enduring American Reception', in *C. S. Lewis: Life, Works and Legacy, Vol. 4*, ed. Bruce L. Edwards (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 16.

²⁹ Aeschliman Aeschliman, *Restitution of Man*, 65.

³⁰ Peters, 'An Abiding Influence', in *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Achievements*, 7-15.

³¹ John Wilson, 'An Appraisal of C. S. Lewis and His Influence on Modern Evangelicalism', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9 (1991), 35.

Lewis has become one of the truly ecumenical figures of our generation—a Christian for all Christians. Lewis refused to be pigeon-holed into any single denominational or traditional stereotype. Instead, his goal was to return to the core of the historic Christian faith—to God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ and in the pages of the Bible. As a result he has appealed increasingly to Christians who come from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, but who share his concern to defend the Christian faith, especially in the face of militant secularism and antisupernatural philosophies.³²

The importance of Lewis’s transcending of traditionally divisive issues was an explanation also given by Mary Michael, Allen Jacobs, Richard Harris and Stephen Tomkins.³³ Michael put the point this way: ‘Lewis’s intelligent, articulate defenses of the Christian faith made him an ideal spokesperson. His concentration on the main doctrines of the church coincided with evangelicals’ concern to avoid ecclesiastical separatism.’³⁴ Some scholars, therefore, have tended to identify Lewis’s having spoken to universal human qualities as pivotal, whereas others are inclined to credit Lewis’s lasting influence to his rising above issues specific to particular Christian traditions. Either way, importance has been placed upon Lewis’s emphasis upon what is widely shared.

And finally, the third claim among many of those who have observed Lewis’s popularity has been that Lewis, by moving against the grain of twentieth-century thought,

³² Billy Graham, ‘Foreword’, in *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies*, ed. Andrew Walker (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), xvi.

³³ Michael, ‘Our Love Affair with C. S. Lewis’, *Christianity Today*, 34; Jacobs, ‘Second Coming of C. S. Lewis,’ *First Things*, 29; Harries, *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His God*; Stephen Tomkins, ‘Jack of All Faiths: Lewis in the Canon’, *Church Times* (9 December 2005), 9.

³⁴ Michael, *ibid.*

paradoxically met the *needs* of latter-day readers. The British author A. N. Wilson made this point in his biography of Lewis. The continued interest in Lewis, he said, 'can only be explained by the fact that his writings, while being self-consciously and deliberately at variance with the twentieth century, are paradoxically in tune with the needs and concerns of our times'.³⁵ British philosopher Mary Midgley, when asked why she had said that Lewis 'doesn't get out of date' but 'improves with time' said that, 'surely', it was 'his neglect of fashion—his concentration on things that really mattered, both to him & to other people, instead of responding, as academic phil[osopher]s constantly do, to what somebody else has just written'.³⁶ For James Patrick, Lewis's 'freshness' was due to his 'ability to capture the very wisdom that first the Enlightenment, and then the new philosophy of his undergraduate days, had rendered obscure' and 'to make it the well-spring of his twentieth-century apology'.³⁷ The theme of wisdom lost and recovered for needy modern times by Lewis was one also echoed by John Peters. Lewis, he said, has 'something of real value to say to a world that is divided politically, socially, ethically and ideologically, and is even more cynical and hard-boiled than it was when Lewis was alive'.³⁸ Again, for John Wilson, Lewis's concentration on eternal qualities was what, in part, explained his enduring relevance, because that was what set him apart from those concentrating on the 'transient and ephemeral' and gave him prophetic insight.³⁹ The

³⁵ A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1990), ix.

³⁶ Mary Midgley to Arend Smilde, 16 February 1997, in 'I Still Find His Thought Terribly Helpful: Letters to and from Mary Midgley on C. S. Lewis, 1996-1998 and 2006-2007', *Lewisiana.nl*, <http://www.lewisiana.nl/marymidgley/>, accessed 20 June 2013.

³⁷ James Patrick, *A Christian For All Christians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 5.

³⁸ John Peters, 'An Abiding Influence', in *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Achievements*, 13.

³⁹ John Wilson, 'An Appraisal of C. S. Lewis and His Influence on Modern Evangelicalism', 36.

wisdom Lewis gained from study of the past and from spiritual sources are the attributes that, for many, resulted in his on-going significance.

These three common themes will be addressed again in the final chapter, in light of the evidence. They have not, however, set the agenda of the thesis primarily because the conclusions of these short pieces were based less on research than on personal impressions and observations, generated out of a general interest in Lewis himself. As will be discussed below, the wide ranging sources informing the present project go well beyond familiarity with the writings of Lewis and a superficial knowledge of the cultures and religious and social histories of Britain and America.

Methodology

In the introduction to *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), Laurence Rainey was unapologetic for failing to meet what he anticipated would be some readers' expectations of his history of a literary movement. Those, especially, with literary critical training, he said, would find 'far too little of the detailed examination of actual works that is sometimes held to be the only important or worthwhile form of critical activity'.⁴⁰ Rainey went on to argue that conditions other than the content or meaning of the texts in question had aided, and were even central to, modernism's history and eventual prominence. In a similar manner, this project will test the premise that there is much to be gained by not *beginning* with a ceding of explanatory ground to the qualities and claims of authors and texts. Indeed, the present dissertation departs from previous

⁴⁰ Laurence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 6.

scholarly work in that neither the biographical details of Lewis's life nor the *meanings* or literary value of his books occupy centre stage: there will be no close analysis of texts and the consideration of Lewis's personality and ideology will be intended to underscore context, not to provide an interpretative point of reference. The man and his meaning have already been addressed by—and in fact were the primary concern of—those who have addressed Lewis's reception in articles and chapters. It may well be true, as professor emeritus of Rhetoric and Public Communication James Como said, that 'C. S. Lewis is a far more complex and sophisticated figure than the ease of his style and the popularity of his work suggest.'⁴¹ Even so, this dissertation will take for granted that a variety of aspects about Lewis's person and his books' contents have been important factors in their reception—this, in order to allow more scope for exploring the non-authorial and non-textual conditions of Lewis's reception. Finally, while this dissertation does focus on Lewis's reception, it should be clarified that the study departs from the field of 'reception study' proper. The 2008 volume *New Directions in American Reception Study* explained that the basic premise of scholars working in the field of 'reception study' was 'that an audience's interpretive practices explain a work's meaning'.⁴² The roots of reception study are in literary studies, and the interpretation of texts remains at its core. Given that the meaning of texts is not a concern of the present project, this dissertation is distinguishable in fundamental ways from the formal 'reception study' branch of enquiry.

⁴¹ James Como, *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C. S. Lewis* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1998), x.

⁴² Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor, *New Directions in American Reception Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xii.

The objective of this project is to situate the reception of Lewis in its cultural, historical and religious landscape—the broader context which, until now, has not been analyzed. In order to elucidate that context, this dissertation will draw principally from two areas of historical inquiry: the related fields of the history of the book and history of reading on the one hand, and social history, especially of religion, on the other. The contribution, in the first place, of these two fields are simply the interests brought to the present subject. Key theorists and historians of reading and print culture such as Robert Darnton, Jonathan Rose, John Thompson and Janice Radway are concerned with the various actors and realities involved in the cultural exchange around books: everything from publishers, literary agents and marketing departments to social mores, reading communities and a book's font make a difference in the complex process involved in the creation, dissemination and consumption of books.⁴³ Such interests will be pronounced in the following dissertation. Attention will be paid to the history of the publishers of Lewis's books, as well as how his books were advertised and displayed, and read by individuals and communities, for example. Likewise concerns which shape the work of social, intellectual and religious historians, especially those which address Christianity in Britain and America, such as Stephen Prothero or Stefan Collini, will also be considered.⁴⁴

⁴³ Robert Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 9-26; Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste and Middle-class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁴⁴ Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003); Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

While the reception of Lewis might be studied through any number of lenses, the gender or socio-economic status of his readers, for example, in this project the religious element will be particularly in view along with the effect the British or American landscape has had. By giving attention to transatlantic differences of Christianity across the second half of the twentieth century or the challenges American Evangelicals have faced at universities, this dissertation will utilize the gains of social history to illuminate the forces impinging upon Lewis's reception.

Within the last few years there have been some projects which have blended the concerns of historians of the book and historians of religion. We might mention, for example, *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (2011) or Princeton University Press's launching in 2011 of its 'Lives of Great Religious Books' series; two 2013 titles are *Iconic Books and Texts*, which considers the way in which books have been used as objects, and Matthew S. Hedstrom's *The Rise of Liberal Religion. Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century*.⁴⁵ And yet these represent a relatively new sub-field within the book and reading history traditions. By bringing the concerns of these subfields together in a study of Lewis's reception it is anticipated that the particularities of the British and American historical contexts, as well as the way in which Lewis and the selected texts interacted with them, will be brought into focus.

⁴⁵ Michael Lieb, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); James W. Watts, ed., *Iconic Books and Texts* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013); Matthew S. Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion. Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

The second way in which the history of reading and social history of religion fields have informed this dissertation is in the way it has been structured. Much of the conception for this dissertation will be drawn from book and reading history fields, specifically in its being a biography, in part, of Lewis's *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Writing the biography of a book—describing a text's history from its genesis, to its publication, to its consumption, with many stages between—has proved a valuable technique. A history has been written of, for example, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (2004) as it was circulated and read in Africa.⁴⁶ Writing the biography of a book is an innovative and effective technique for telling a complex story. It is a methodology through which one may relate change across time and, in this case, two countries, because there is logic to tracing these books' origins, publishing histories and lives within specific contexts. The particular books *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* were selected because they are some of Lewis's most popular titles but also because through their contrasting qualities their histories illuminate well the phenomenon of Lewis's reception, broadly speaking. Lewis's series of fantasies for children, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, published from 1950 to 1956, includes the seven books *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) (hereafter referred to as *The Lion*), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), and *The Last Battle* (1956). The content of the book published in 1952 as *Mere Christianity* was originally a series of radio

⁴⁶ Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of 'The Pilgrim's Progress'* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

addresses Lewis gave over the BBC between 1941 and 1944; parts of the broadcasts were printed in a journal⁴⁷ before the whole of them were published as three pamphlets: *Broadcast Talks* (1942), *Christian Behaviour* (1943) and *Beyond Personality* (1944). Both 'books' (hereafter referred to in the singular for the sake of simplicity) have complex histories, the narratives of which may be described by writing their biographies.

The dissertation's chapter breakdown reflects the biography of these books. Chapters two, four and five, will explore the circumstances of the origins, publication and respective receptions of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* within specific contexts: *Mere Christianity* within Christian communities and *The Chronicles of Narnia's* within that of the professional and popular developments of children's literature. Chapters three and six, however, will address aspects of Lewis's reception that are integral to Lewis's reception but which—though closely related—do not fit neatly within the biography narrative. These chapters concern the establishment of Lewis's platform and brand—all that he represents—as well as to how that platform has been engaged by Christians in the context of higher education. In this manner evidence related to the broader religious and cultural history of Lewis's reception which has less to do with the history of texts is incorporated. For example, Lewis's person has been the object of intense attention, often adulation, from many devotees: as chapter six intends to show, these people share more in common than just their love of Lewis. The chapter structure and methodology is designed to account for a phenomenon with many working

⁴⁷ Ronald Selby Wright reprinted extracts of the broadcasts in *His Majesty's Scottish Forces* (Volumes 2 and 3). National Library of Scotland, Ronald Selby Wright Collection, RSW.63 and RSW.64.

components: a changing historical landscape in which intellectual and religious elements are prominent, and also one in which the interactions between author, books, context and readers is of central importance.

The choice to compare Lewis's reception in Britain and America stemmed in part from an interest in an irony often observed about Lewis's reception. A pupil of C. S. Lewis once recalled his tutor remarking, 'The so-called Renaissance produced three disasters: the invention of gun-powder, the invention of printing, and the discovery of America.'⁴⁸ As this comment might suggest, Lewis had no particular fondness for America and he never travelled to the United States. It is curious, then, that it has been Americans who have continued to buy his books (and make them into movies) at a rate rivalled by no other place, including his home country. Why has it been the case that a British scholar writing in the 1940s and 1950s has had such an enthusiastic following among Christians (especially) in the States? This is a question that may only be addressed through a transatlantic study. Yet the decision to make the transatlantic nature of Lewis's reception a central theme was also done to give the project the kind of breadth and clarity only achieved through contrast.

Sources

The primary sources informing this dissertation are extensive and varied. In order to discuss the context under which *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* were written, for example, an account has, naturally, been taken of Lewis's biography and

⁴⁸ Philip Ryken, 'Winsome Evangelist: The Influence of C. S. Lewis', in *C. S. Lewis: Lightbearer in the Shadowlands* ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 62.

corpus of his work, which includes the 36 books he published in his lifetime and the 21 edited collections published posthumously, which include volumes of poetry, science fiction, fiction, children's books, Christian apologetics and meditations on topics such as prayer and grief, as well as works of scholarship related to medieval and English literature. But these were just the beginning. In order to understand *context* visits were made to the BBC Written Archives Centre to see the literature available there about the circumstances surrounding the formation of Lewis's broadcasts and information the BBC had about their reception. Similarly, the Seven Stories Centre in Newcastle and the Penguin Archives in Bristol contained information about the broader context of children's literature, informative for understanding the writing of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Then again, one did not need travel beyond Edinburgh to realize, from the collection held at the National Library of Scotland, that many books besides *Mere Christianity* originated as BBC broadcasts from the Second World War years. Going well beyond Lewis's writing is a hallmark of this dissertation.

To consider Lewis's reception in much more recent times sources of a more anthropological nature were utilized. Over the past five years visits to churches in Britain and America, conversations with Lewis devotees, interviews with publishers and Christian leaders in a variety of places, as well as participation in Christian and Lewis-related gatherings have been crucial. Auditing a course on Lewis at an Evangelical seminary in Massachusetts or attending a book group discussion of *The Great Divorce* in Edinburgh⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The class was 'C. S. Lewis' Life, Works and Spirituality', taught by Gwenfair-Adams, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Audited by the author, Autumn 2009.

permitted the observation of details which would otherwise have been missed. It was telling, for example, that laughter broke out at an Oxford C. S. Lewis Society meeting at the suggestion made by Alistair McGrath, a British professor, that Lewis's popularity among American readers was owed to the fact that he was respected enough to correct their views;⁵⁰ equally revealing was the low, scoffing chuckle of an audience at a C. S. Lewis conference, in reaction to the mention of Virginia Woolf's disparagement of T. S. Eliot's conversion to Christianity.⁵¹

Indeed a study of people, past and present, who greatly admire Lewis is an important part of this dissertation. Fortunately for the present analysis, admirers of Lewis tend to be loquacious, and there are numerous places in which they have written explicitly about what Lewis has meant to them and why. For example, on three occasions Americans have answered queries which asked explicitly about the nature of Lewis's effect on people's lives.⁵² Then, there is a wealth of published materials about Lewis—reviews, books, articles, on-line forums—which also reveal much about the nature of the interest in Lewis. Discussion of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity* have not

⁵⁰ Alistair McGrath, 'C. S. Lewis as Apologist', Oxford C. S. Lewis Society meeting (2 March 2010).

⁵¹ The Speaker was Chris Mitchell. 'C. S. Lewis, His Friends and Associates: Questions of Identity' conference, Lille, France (2 and 3 June 2011).

⁵² The Marion E. Wade Center holds a file in its archives titled 'C. S. Lewis Testimonials.' Within are two collections. (1) One is a collection of a few dozen letters gathered by Lyle Dorsett, who in 1986 had placed an advertisement in *Christian Century*, *Christianity Today*, *Eternity*, and *The New York Times Book Review*. It read 'The Marion E. Wade Collection is seeking evidence of the impact of C. S. Lewis and his writing on people's lives. If you or others whom you know have been markedly influenced by Lewis, will you please write to us and share your reminiscences.' (2) The second is a collection of emails to Angus Menuge who had advertised on the web site 'Into the Wardrobe', <http://cslewis.drzeus.net>, in 1996 for testimonials and conversion experiences that were related to Lewis. (3) The third source is the book, *Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C. S. Lewis*, eds. Mary Anne Phemister and Andrew Lazo (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House Books, 2009). Phemister advertised at the Marion E. Wade Center for people whose encounter with Lewis's writings had constituted a 'life-altering experience.' The first two sources are quoted on an anonymous basis, by request of the Marion E. Wade Center.

been confined, however, to materials that are catalogued, even by a specialist collection like the Marion E. Wade Center in Wheaton, Illinois, as Lewis-related material. In order to appreciate the uses of the Narnia books among teachers, for example, one should look in material educationalists and children's book specialists publish such as *Horn Book Magazine*. And to see how religious leaders use *Mere Christianity* one must consult appropriate tools of the trade, such as guides for preparing a sermon or religious periodicals like *Clergy Review* or *Christianity Today*. The key to this project and any study of reception is the breadth and variety of primary sources.

Scope and Limitations

The methodology, scope of the project and range of source material are designed to provide the widest possible view upon Lewis's reception. That being said, it is inevitable that aspects of the phenomenon will not be addressed. This section will name some of these exceptions.

First, it should be said that the comparative size of the United States and Britain has surely made an important difference to Lewis's reception in these two countries: 227 million Americans as compared to 56 million citizens of the United Kingdom in 1980⁵³ (to pick a year) means that there have been more possibilities for people to come into contact with Lewis and his work in the States. But beyond that simple observation, the present project will not explore the implications of geography and political structure: regional, state, and country variations all might be closely examined, as could differences

⁵³The WorldBank, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?cid=DEC_SS_WBGDataEmail_EXT, accessed 29 September 2013.

that urban and rural factors may have made. Moreover in the following, Britain will be treated with little attention to variations between Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. The States, too, will remain largely an undifferentiated body of people. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that considerations such as the socio-economic status of readers will not be explored at any depth. This is due to the nature of the evidence. The place of residence of an author of a given quotation or sermon or article is rarely revealed. Information concerning readers' identities beyond their nationality is often not known, and therefore it would require extensive additional evidence collection to determine the impact of such factors. That said, similarities between Lewis's devotees will be addressed to some degree in the chapter on higher education, because these were generalities more clearly identifiable. Yet it will be left to others to build on the present project in such a way that illuminates the difference that class, gender, political, geographical and racial factors have made in Lewis's reception.

A review by Ian Randall of Roger E. Olson's *A-Z Evangelical Theology* pointed out a North American bias in Olson's section of key figures. It observed that of sixteen nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers, only two represented British Christianity and, moreover, one of these, C.S. Lewis, did not belong to the Evangelical movement.⁵⁴ Lewis, as Randall observed, was not an Evangelical, but it is nonetheless true that Evangelicals like Olson make up a large portion of Lewis devotees and have mistakenly described their favourite author as an Evangelical. Evangelicals, as David Bebbington defined them, are

⁵⁴ Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. 79 (January 2007), 7. Review of Roger E Olson, *The SCM Press A-Z of Evangelical Theology* (London: SCM, 2005).

Christians who place special emphasis upon the Bible, the conversion experience, the death of Jesus as a redemptive event and acts of mission in the name of Christianity.⁵⁵ Evangelicals have also been disposed, from the movement's beginnings in the eighteenth century, to coalesce around strong personalities⁵⁶—a characteristic amply evident in Lewis's reception. Lewis devotees have tended to be Evangelicals of various shades, including Catholics and, arguably, Mormons. Therefore the present dissertation will discuss Evangelicals more than other groups, especially in chapter six. The reception of Lewis among liberal Christians or African-American Christians, for example, will not be addressed. Nor, for that matter, will the way in which Lewis's reception breaks down along theological or denominational lines. It may be, as Richard Harris said, that Lewis is 'read equally by Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, Anglicans and Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans' and that 'Christians of all persuasions see in him the central tenets of historic Christianity'.⁵⁷ But the choice not to investigate this dimension further is a matter primarily of scope. Having decided to compare Lewis's reception in Britain and America, there is little space remaining to explore the differences between Christian traditions. National rather than denominational distinctions have been evaluated.

Some aspects concerning Lewis's personality and the content of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* will be taken for granted—namely, that they were of sufficient quality and interest to appeal to large numbers of people. It is acknowledged

⁵⁵ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2-17.

⁵⁶ Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 118.

⁵⁷ Harries, *C. S. Lewis*, 11.

here that the sheer volume and variety of Lewis's writings have probably contributed to the number of Lewis admirers. Much of this work was written with a wide readership in mind, thus accessibility is added to the variables of quantity and variety. Lewis's popularity was also undoubtedly increased by posthumous incarnations of his works and biography in television and film; while this development will be discussed in some detail, the nuances of reception attended upon non-textual media will not be explored. Indeed, the scope of Lewis's output certainly increased the likelihood of some number of these being successful.

It is also important to acknowledge that written sources may deceive, in a study of reception especially. For example, though *The Chronicles of Narnia* were written to be accessible to children, and though it is commonly acknowledged that children often read them, their responses to the books may be difficult to gauge because often provided at the prompting of adults who were then expected to judge them. There are dozens of letters at the Bodleian Library written by children to Lewis about the Narnia books, especially from the late 1980s;⁵⁸ but it is apparent from reading them that most were written at the prompting of teachers, and often one may detect the teachers' opinions about the book in the children's assessments. Other children's responses were written under less structured circumstances, are more reliable and, therefore, will be included. Furthermore, grander silences still may be imagined because a collection of written responses does not represent all encounters with Lewis and his work—not even remotely. Acknowledging such limitations and remaining sensitive to them, is a way this

⁵⁸ See chapter 4, note 103.

project aims to reflect what the sources do and do not reveal, thereby reflecting the historical record as accurately as possible.

In recent years historians of the book have studied what are referred to as 'para-textual' realities. These include the aesthetics of a book: accompanying visual aids such as illustrations, book covers, font, blurbs and how all of these have changed with the publication of new editions. Such a study could easily be made of the 304 editions of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the 77 editions of *Mere Christianity*.⁵⁹ Para-textual factors have certainly have played a key part in Lewis's books' receptions. For example, in an interview with the artist, Elaine Moss, a children's book critic, indicated the importance of Pauline Baynes's illustrations to the Narnia books. She said:

Looking at the pictures she drew for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* nearly twenty-five years ago, Pauline Baynes sighs and says how much she would like to redraw them now. But could she better the drawing of Mr. Tumnus in his armchair or the marvelous detail of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver's kitchen? For those of us to whom her vision and the Lewis text are one, she could not.⁶⁰

The packaging and marketing of books are part of readers' experience of a book.

Whether a book's aesthetics are appealing, seem dated or otherwise could influence an

⁵⁹ See the Goodreads website, <http://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/4790821-the-lion-the-witch-and-the-wardrobe?expanded=true> and http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/11138.Mere_Christianity, accessed 22 June 2013. To date, there have been no analytical bibliographers to catalogue editions of Lewis's works. However, Jeremy Grinnell, visiting assistant professor of systematic theology at Cornerstone University, is currently working on a publication history, which will include a catalogue of the number of editions of Lewis's books.

⁶⁰ Elaine Moss, 'Pauline Baynes: Mistress of the Margin', *Signal* 11 (May 1973), 93.

individual's likelihood to acquire the book, read it and form a favourable opinion of it.

However, such questions, again, will have to be left to others to pursue about *Mere*

Christianity and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. While the rise of the paperback will be

discussed, much will remain unexplored about the physical manifestations of the books.

Conclusion

By contextualizing the writing of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* in the 1940s and 1950s, the evolution of Lewis's respective platforms in Britain and America and these works' reception across the twentieth century, this project hopes to contribute to the growing body of work about the print culture of Christianity. Moreover, by paying close attention to the historical conditions of authorship, publication and reception, while highlighting similarities and contrasts between Britain and America, this dissertation hopes to provide a robust account of how and why Lewis became one of the most successful Christian authors of the twentieth century.

Chapter Two

The Context for the Writing of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity*

'The B's of one age have most often been the A's of another.' –C. S. Lewis¹

The beginning of the life of a famous book, like that of a famous person, inspires curiosity. We anticipate seeing there something of its destiny; we expect foreshadowing in the genesis. What follows is an account of what lay below, and behind, *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*: their pre-history in the person of C. S. Lewis and the context to which he was responding. Although any number of features might be discussed, what will be brought to the fore here are three key themes, chosen because they illuminate relevant aspects of Britain's intellectual and social history and are significant to the life that these books led long after Lewis laid down his pen. The first theme will be Lewis's development as a reader, thinker and critic and the ways in which he engaged with some intellectual and social changes underway in his lifetime. The second theme will be the origins of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the third theme will be the origins of *Mere Christianity*. All three themes will be considered in light of the broader national, intellectual and cultural context in which they were written.

Lewis, Edwardian

One of the most striking things about Lewis was the early age at which he cultivated his taste in and critical voice of literature. By the time he left Belfast in 1914 to study under his father's former tutor, W. T. Kirkpatrick, Lewis was exceedingly well-

¹ C. S. Lewis, 'High and Low Brows', in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 107.

read—enabled, as he was, by a childhood spent largely indoors with a house full of books and a temperament to suit. His letters to his friend Arthur Greeves (a critical source for understanding young Lewis) about his ‘real’ life—by which he meant the one he experienced through reading books, recording his thoughts about them and making plans for his own work—reveal that Lewis, by the age of seventeen, had a refined sense of what kinds of literature pleased him and why. Reviewing *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for his friend, he declared it ‘absolutely top-hole’:

It never wearies you from first to last, and considering the time when it was written, some things about it, the writer’s power of getting up atmosphere for instance, quite in the Brontë manner, are little short of marvellous: the descriptions of the winter landscapes around the old castle, and the contrast between them and the blazing hearth inside, are splendid. The last scene too, in the valley where the terrible knight comes to claim his wager, is very impressive.²

‘Getting up atmosphere’: Lewis’s enthusiasm for a work of literature was frequently in proportion to how effectively he felt it created a fictional universe, how fantastic and complete that other world was, and the degree to which it ‘invaded’ his imagination. The adolescent Lewis had resolved much not only about what kinds of subjects he liked—

² C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 16 May 1916, in *They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914-1963)*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1979), 99.

‘dragons, kelpies, axe & long-sword’³—but also about what made language and style satisfying to him in an imaginative work.

Yet as impressive as the maturity of his analysis was (and it is amply evidenced by Lewis’s letters to Greeves), it is also true that Lewis’s opinions were influenced by the historical moment of his maturation. Lewis was every bit the Edwardian reader and budding critic—from his literary sensibilities, to what he read, to his ideas about what constituted the ideal poet. To draw out the Edwardian influence on Lewis as a reader, each of these aspects will be considered briefly in turn.

Lewis’s literary sensibilities, while undoubtedly a reflection of his personal taste, were heavily influenced by the *l’art pour l’art* sensibility of the nineteenth century. There were two strands of aestheticism in Britain, and Lewis had intellectual links with both in his early adulthood. The earlier phase found expression in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of artists associated with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and with the thought of John Ruskin and William Morris.⁴ Lewis admired Rossetti and Ruskin, and Morris was a strong influence upon him.⁵ The second strand is dated from 1862 with the introduction into the British mainstream by Algernon Swinburne, whom Lewis praised,⁶ of the French poet Gautier, who stressed the nonutility of art,⁷ a philosophy Lewis echoed when he advocated a pleasure-seeking manner of reading, criticized what Matthew Arnold coined as ‘philistine’, meaning utilitarian, tendencies, and rejected any suggestion

³ Lewis to Greeves, 25 May 1915. *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴ Dennis Denisoff, ‘Decadence and Aestheticism’, in *Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35.

⁵ Lewis to Greeves, 20 June 1916, 24 July 1917, 11 May 1915 in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 113, 196, 71.

⁶ Lewis to Greeves, 5 October 1915, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 83.

⁷ Denisoff, ‘Decadence and Aestheticism’, 34.

of the pragmatic or social purposes of literature. The young Lewis was receptive to the style, as well as to the philosophy, of the *l'art pour l'art* movement. He admired the descriptions of scenery in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, the wander-lust by Catullus and the 'brooding magic' and 'voluptuousness' of Apuleius.⁸ He admired the rococo, the atmospheric and the other-worldly; he sought, like the Pre-Raphaelites, the fantastic escape that literature could provide.

Furthermore, in these early years Lewis was experimenting, like Decadent writers such as Walter Pater, with finding sensation in moments of intense experience of beauty, through a variety of means other than literature. Wagner was discussed in letters to Greeves because Lewis was trying to develop an ear for music, especially operas. In a self-conscious manner, he was attempting to draw, attending plays and striving to pay attention to physical beauty in his everyday environment—whether in women, his clothes or the quality of binding and paper of books.⁹ His letters to Greeves also document Lewis's penchant for sadism, something which he connected with his reading, for example to *Les Confessions* by Rousseau.¹⁰ When discussing such things between themselves, he said to Greeves that it would not be good to keep an 'artificial silence', continuing: 'Let us talk of these things when we want, but always keep them on the side that tends to beauty, to avoid everything that tends to sordid-ness and beastly police

⁸ Lewis to Greeves, 13 May 1917, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 183.

⁹ See, e.g., Lewis to Greeves, 8 June 1915 and 29 June 1915, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 76-79.

¹⁰ Lewis to Greeves, 20 February 1917, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 170. He also tells Greeves that a classmate had recommended, for reading on sadism, 'a Frenchman of the 17th century called the Visconte de sade'; they looked up M. Le Vicomte de Sade in a French 'Dictionnaire de la Bibliographie Nationale', *ibid.* 188, 191.

court sort of scandal out of grim real life like the O. Wilde story.’¹¹ Associating sex, especially illicit sex, with literature and beauty was a quintessentially Decadent propensity.¹² Seen collectively, the evidence is that during his early adulthood Lewis identified strongly with the taste and critical voices of the Decadent poets.

Lewis, sophisticated reader that he was, naturally had an individual taste in literature; but his preferences were nonetheless influenced by the *fin de siècle* moment, especially the art for art’s sake movement. Another important and interesting way in which he was shaped by his times was in *what* he read and esteemed. In this respect, Lewis was perfectly in keeping with his times: he read that which was commonly available and commonly appreciated by the mainstream of Edwardian readers, even if he read much more of it. His tutor Kirkpatrick said of him in 1916, ‘He has read more classics than any boy I ever had—or indeed I might add than any I ever heard of, unless it be an Addison or Landor or Macaulay. These are people we read of, but I have never met any.’¹³ ‘Classics’ is the key word here. Lewis’s letters to Greeves record that the authors upon whom Lewis exercised his critical skills were those considered canonical by the late Victorian period. Lewis wrote in 1917:

I have finished ‘Paradise Lost’ again, enjoying it even more than before.

Really you must read it sometime soon. In Milton is everything you get

everywhere else, only better. He is as voluptuous as Keats, as romantic as

¹¹ Lewis to Greeves, 6 March 1917, *ibid.*, 174.

¹² Marion Thain, ‘Poetry’, in Marshall, *Cambridge Guide to Fin de Siècle*, 227.

¹³ W. T. Kirkpatrick to Albert Lewis, 7 April 1916, quoted in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. I: Family Letters, 1905-1931*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2004), 178.

Morris, as grand as Wagner, as weird as Poe, and a better lover of nature than even the Brontës.¹⁴

Favourite authors were those in 'our line', and of 'our set', but all literature which had stood the test of time was worthy of attention. In this respect, Lewis was demonstrating that his critical acumen accorded with the mainstream of the literary criticism of his day; he was developing an individual voice, but it was one exercised within a recognized body of 'classic' literature.

This Edwardian influence on Lewis's literary sensibilities was partially a result of the way in which Lewis encountered books and how he decided upon what to read. In the autobiography he wrote much later in life, Lewis portrays his early reading habits as having been unimpeded, the result of happenstance and stumbling pleasure. No adult is mentioned as having guided his choices or having influenced what he liked or why. In his childhood home in Belfast there were 'endless' books:

books readable and unreadable, books suitable for a child and books most emphatically not. Nothing was forbidden me. In the seemingly endless rainy afternoons I took volume after volume from the shelves. I had always the same certainty of finding a book that was new to me as a man who walks into a field has of finding a new blade of grass.¹⁵

Regardless of this portrait's veracity it expressed an early twentieth century ideal about reading and the formation of literary taste. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in 1896, 'What

¹⁴ Lewis to Greeves, 6 March 1917, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 176.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), 8.

a boy turns out for himself, as he rummages the bookshelves, is the real test and pleasure'.¹⁶ And Lewis's contemporary Virginia Woolf echoed the same when she championed Samuel Johnson's 'common reader': a person of taste, whose reading could be unstructured, the antithesis of reading for professional reasons or in order to appear cultured.¹⁷ Indeed, elsewhere Lewis wrote that the true 'book-lover' 'wouldn't go and look up a text book to see what to buy, as if literature was a subject to be learned like algebra: one thing would lead him to another & he would go through the usual mistakes & gain experience.' He continued, 'I hate this idea of "forming a taste". If anyone like the feuilletons in the "Sketch" better than Spenser, for Heaven's sake let him read them: anything is better than to read things he doesn't really like because they are thought classical.'¹⁸

Guides like the one Lewis was reacting to in the last quotation¹⁹ were on the increase in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a response on the part of the educated elite to the growing literate population. Another response was the marking off of good and bad manners of reading, a schema which favoured those writing about the topic in the first place. Lewis depicted his own reading programme and taste—both as a

¹⁶ Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Rosa Quo Locorum', *Tusitala* XXX: 6, quoted in Glenda Norquay, *Robert Louis Stevenson and Theories of Reading* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1925), 11-12. Discussed in Carol Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority and the Possession of Literary Knowledge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 106-110. See also Helen Small, 'Dickens and a pathology of the mid-Victorian reading public', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 264-265.

¹⁸ Lewis to Greeves, 1 November 1916, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 146. In *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* Lewis published a 'defence of disinterested literary enjoyment in general against certain dangerous tendencies in modern education', (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), preface.

¹⁹ The guide was Arnold Bennett's *Literary Taste: How to Form It, with Detailed Instructions for Collecting a Complete Library of English Literature* (London: The New Age Press, 1909).

teenager and as a man in his 50s—as free from intermediating agents. But Lewis’s dismissal was no simple description of an author’s history with books; on the contrary, it was the expression of Lewis’s belief that he was at the top of a hierarchy of readers, which was in its heyday during the fin-de-siècle: the superior reader was free and disinterested. The way Lewis describes his encounter with books reflects the time in which he lived.

Lewis’s taste in literature was, arguably, also shaped more generally by book production and consumption patterns in the Edwardian period. Lewis accessed books the way many did in the early twentieth century. After he left home, Lewis relied on his tutor’s library and on local and school libraries. He also bought books that were easily available through the commercial sphere: whether at a railway bookstand, local bookstore or publishers’ catalogues.²⁰ Lewis was concerned as a teenager that his money should be stretched, and that the books he purchased should be of high quality. Fortunately for him, the early twentieth century abounded with cheap books, with many publishing houses producing affordable editions of classic works. The most successful of these was J. M. Dent, whose Everyman’s Library editions, established in 1906, Lewis frequently purchased and discussed with Greeves. In 1916 he said:

I wonder how people would laugh if they could hear us smacking our lips over our 7d’s and Everymans just as others gloat over rare folios and an Editio Princeps? But after all, we are surely right to get all the pleasure we

²⁰ See the following letters: Lewis to Greeves: 14 June 1916; 4 October 1916; 18 October 1916; 25 October 1916; 28 February 1917, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 109, 134, 138, 141-2, 172.

can, and even in the cheapest books there is a difference between coarse and nice get up.²¹

We see Lewis here seeking ‘pleasure’ and beauty in the physical book. He mentioned elsewhere purchasing or borrowing from like series, including World’s Classic, Muses’ Library, Home University Library, Temple Classic, Nelson’s French series, Bohn, and Longman’s Pocket Library.²² Especially from the 1880s, the publishers of these products took advantage of texts with expired copyrights, packaging them in their widely successful ‘classics’ series. This, in turn, contributed to the canonization of these literary texts.²³ Partly as a result of this culling and promotion of books as ‘classics’, the Edwardian period was a time when the canon of English literature seemed more set, more final.²⁴

Moreover, in an essay appended for years to every copy of an Everyman book, the Everyman reader was encouraged to know ‘himself’ as follows: ‘Everyman is distinctly proverbial in his tastes. He likes best of all an old author who has worn well, or a comparatively new author who has gained something like newspaper notoriety.’²⁵ In the essay, Everyman’s editor came near to affirming that comparatively new authors were

²¹ Lewis to Greeves, 18 July 1916, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 123.

²² Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 142.

²³ Mary Hammond, ‘“People Read So Much Now and Reflect So Little”: Oxford University Press and the Classics Series’, in *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 85–116; also, Eliot and Nash, ‘Mass Markets: Literature’, *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. VI 1830-1914*, ed. David McKitterick, 439.

²⁴ Kimberley Reynold, ‘Publishing Practices and the Practicalities of Publishing’, in *Children’s Book Publishing in Britain since 1945*, ed. Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1998), 20; Simon Eliot and Andrew Nash, ‘Mass Markets: Literature’, in *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. McKitterick, 442.

²⁵ Quoted in Hugh Kenner, *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1988), 34.

unlikely to outlast the attention of the *Daily Express*.²⁶ The person of learning was one who attended to the timeless (and purchased series of classics) exactly like Lewis did. Lewis's keen attendance to the classics was in all likelihood influenced by the book publishing and consuming culture of the Edwardian period.

Certainly, Lewis's preference for 'old books' began as a teenager and was life long, as was his suspicion that new literature was faddish. Where 'dreary' modern books about ancient authors were likely to be overly long, 'all about "isms" and influences'; the great author of the past, Lewis continued, 'just because of his greatness, is much more intelligible than his modern commentator'.²⁷ Lewis's distrust of the new was most clearly on display in his reaction to modernist writers. Lewis admitted to not having read anything by Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene²⁸ or James Joyce, saying that he, an avid trekker, would 'as soon choose a treadmill for my recreation' than read the latter.²⁹ He spoke categorically and dismissively about 'the Eliots and Audens',³⁰ 'the Steins and Pounds and *hoc genus Omne*'.³¹ Of T. S. Eliot he once wrote 'Oh Eliot! How can a man who is neither a knave nor a fool write so like both? Well, he can't complain that I haven't done my best to put him right—hardly ever write a book without showing him

²⁶ Ibid., 33-34.

²⁷ Lewis, introduction to *The Incarnation of the Word of God: Being the Treatise of St Athanasius*, trans. A Religious of C.S.M.V. S.Th. (London: Bles, 1944). It is perhaps suggestive that Romantic author William Hazlitt also wrote of his preference for 'old books', in 'On Reading Old Books', in *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*. (London: Milford, 1819).

²⁸ Christian Hardie, 'Three Letters from C. S. Lewis', *The Chesterton Review*, XVII, nos. 3 and 4 (August/November 1991), 393, quoted in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume III: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950-1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), n. 35, 96.

²⁹ Lewis to Paul Elmer More, 23 May 1935, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume II: Books, Broadcasts and the War, 1931-1949* ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 163.

³⁰ Lewis to James Matthew Thompson, 25 July 1940, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, 428-429.

³¹ Lewis to Paul Elmer More, 23 May 1935, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, 163-165.

one of his errors. And still he doesn't mend. I call it ungrateful.'³² Indeed, for years Lewis criticized Eliot in public and private, expressing his disapproval in ways ranging from the juvenile to the damning.³³ Lewis's antipathy for the new and modern, like much else in his life, had its roots in the principles of reading he learned as a young man.

Lewis's taste, reading habits, and critical voice were formed at a fundamental level by the Edwardian milieu. So, too was his identity. The culture of English letters in the early twentieth century included the Romantic and Victorian ideals of the 'Poet' and the Gentleman Critic. Lewis was very much influenced by these ideals. His friend David Cecil said of him, 'Lewis's taste in *light* literature was that of an imaginative Victorian schoolboy' and his '*serious* literary taste was also nineteenth century; but that of a mid-nineteenth century scholar and man of letters.'³⁴ Another friend, Owen Barfield, said of him:

The Lewis I first met late in 1920 or early 1921 was an extremely well-educated but hard-up undergraduate, twenty-one years of age, with a ruling ambition to become a great poet. At this time, if you thought of Lewis, you automatically thought of poetry.³⁵

³² Lewis to Dorothy Sayers, 23 October 1942, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, 533.

³³ Eliot, for his part, seems not to have recorded any reaction (if he had one) to Lewis's provocations, according to two scholars of T. S. Eliot. Jason Harding, Reader in the Department of English, Durham University, in correspondence with the author, 16 September 2011; Barry Spurr, Professor of Poetry and Poetics, University of Sydney, in correspondence with the author, 14 and 16 September 2011.

³⁴ David Cecil to Humphrey Carpenter, January 1978, quoted in *The Inklings* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), 219. Cecil's description of Lewis's taste as 'Victorian' is suggestive of Lewis's tendency to favour literature of the past, generally. In this sense, the statement is a reflection of Lewis's Edwardian esteeming of canonical texts, as discussed above.

³⁵ Owen Barfield, in *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, ed. G. B. Tennyson (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 6.

This was 'Poet' in the sense that the Romantic geniuses whom Lewis first read as a young man-- Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats—had meant the term.³⁶ Poetry, as conceptualized by many in the nineteenth century, had a sacrosanct quality; a nation's Wordsworth or Blake had prophetic potential. The critic most responsible for this persona, Matthew Arnold, said, 'It is not enough that the Poet should add to the knowledge of men...it is required that he should add to their happiness.'³⁷ It was the responsibility of the Poet to communicate things eternal, even divine, to the reading public. They were to be a channel of inspired life for the good of the many.

The Romantic ideal of prophet-poet remained an important part of Lewis's identity throughout his life. In his literary criticism Lewis not only offered interesting analysis, but he also claimed to possess that which all Romantics insisted is crucial for the poet: the ability to speak into present times from a more enlightened state of mind. And, like the Romantics, Lewis's choice vantage point was the past, especially the medieval period, which still retained a powerful hold on the British imagination in the early twentieth century.³⁸ Lewis referred to himself as an 'Old Western' man, a 'specimen' from a different age. Likening himself to one as alien as an ancient Athenian, he addressed a Cambridge University audience in 1954:

³⁶ In his letters to Greeves, Lewis discussed his reading of the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley (12 October 1916), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (24 July 1915) and John Keats (25 July 1916). Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 136, 80 and 125.

³⁷ Matthew Arnold, *Poems* (London: Longman, 1853), 592, quoted in Jerome McGann, *Victorian Connections* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 147.

³⁸ Robin Jarvis, *The Romantic Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1789-1830*, (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2004), esp. chapter 'The Sense of the Past'; and *ibid.*, 163.

Ladies and gentlemen, I stand before you somewhat as that Athenian might stand. I read as a native texts that you must read as foreigners. . . It is my settled conviction that in order to read Old Western literature aright you must suspend most of the responses and unlearn most of the habits you have acquired in reading modern literature. And because this is the judgment of a native, I claim that, even if the defence of my conviction is weak, the fact of my conviction is a historical *datum* to which you should give full weight. That way, where I fail as a critic, I may yet be useful as a specimen.³⁹

Lewis claimed no less than to read Western literature in a fundamentally different way from his mid-century contemporaries, because he spoke, as it were, from within it. Like Sir Walter Scott, he embodied the past. And from this old-world vantage point, Lewis imagined himself peering across *at* and speaking *into* twentieth-century Britain.

Lewis knew himself to be a Poet by another Romantic criterion: writing was integral to this type of person and emerged organically. He wrote to Greeves in 1930:

I am sure that some are born to write as trees are born to bear leaves: for these, writing is a necessary mode of their own development. If the impulse to write survives the hope of success, then one is among these.⁴⁰

His own creative process qualified him: 'In the Author's mind there bubbles up every now and then the material for a story. For me it invariably begins with mental pictures.'⁴¹ On

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, 'De Descriptione Temporum', in *They Asked For a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 25.

⁴⁰ Lewis to Greeves, 18 August 1930, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 385-386.

the writing of his narrative poem, *Dymer*, Lewis said, 'This story arrived, complete, in my mind somewhere about my seventeenth year. To the best of my knowledge I did not consciously or voluntarily invent it, nor was it, in the plain sense of that word, a dream. All I know about it is that there was a time when it was not there, and then presently a time when it was.'⁴² Clearly Lewis gave much thought to the mark of a true poet, and believed his experiences qualified him. The Romantic ideal of the born poet was fundamental to Lewis's self-understanding.

Lewis was very much shaped in his reading habits, taste, critical opinions and personal identity by the Edwardian milieu. However, Lewis's conversion to Christianity in 1930 was another essential ingredient in the making of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity*. The next section will consider its effect.

Christianity and a Philosophy of Literature

In 1930, less than a week after he became a Christian,⁴³ Lewis received a packet of old letters that he had written to Arthur Greeves, with whom he maintained a lifelong correspondence. After reading them over, he wrote to Greeves about their younger selves and the experiences they shared as teenagers. Lewis noted the posturing tone of his letters with embarrassment; he then discussed the elation he had felt over his early literary discoveries. He made a connection between those feelings and the Christianity he had just confessed:

⁴¹ C. S. Lewis, 'On Stories', in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2002), 45.

⁴² C. S. Lewis, *Dymer*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Press, 1950), ix-x.

⁴³ Alistair McGrath's new biography has corrected the date of Lewis's conversion, from 1929 to 1930. C. S. Lewis – *A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2013), 'The Date of Lewis's Conversion: A Reconsideration', 141-146.

The delights of those days were given to lure us into the world of the Spirit, as sexual rapture is there to lead to offspring and family life. They were nuptial ardours...All the 'homeliness' (wh. was your chief lesson to me) was the introduction to the Christian virtue of charity or love.⁴⁴

Lewis concluded that the longing that literature sometimes inspired was capable of being a pointer to spiritual truths. This proved to be a critical idea for Lewis, one which he elaborated again and again. It featured as the central point of his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, wherein he described how the pang of yearning he had felt at some moments while reading certain literature or looking at certain landscapes had played a role in awakening him to spiritual realities, even to his need of God.

In this sense, Lewis believed his earlier feelings for poetry had assisted him on his path to Christianity. For Lewis, the highest possible 'fruit' of literature was what it had been in his own experience—an evocation of a spiritual state powerful enough to inspire longing for the deity. In the days after his conversion, Lewis reread the authors he favoured in the 1910s and 1920s—William Morris, George MacDonald, Malory—now, in light of his faith; he reinterpreted his pleasures in 'homeliness' and atmosphere as necessary moments of spiritual awakening, inspired by literature. Lewis interpreted his conversion in light of these early experiences, and these experiences in light of his conversion. Literature, Lewis believed, had pointed the way to faith. To a Romantic foundation was added a Christian creed.

⁴⁴ Lewis to Greeves, 1 October 1931, in Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 424.

For Lewis, as for Coleridge, the natural world, poet and poetry, were derivative of one divine source.⁴⁵ Poetry was revelatory in so far as it evoked the true nature of reality, and to the degree that it helped the reader see that objective reality more clearly. The role of poet was for Lewis, as it was for Dante, that of sub-creator: to use art to point toward that which was larger than either artist or subject. Thus, the best of poetry was faithful to the inherent qualities of that order. According to Lewis's sardonic poem *A Confession*, T. S. Eliot transgressed this law in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* when he described a sunset as like a patient euthanized on a table, which was, Lewis implied, a metaphor incongruous with the intrinsic nature of a sunset.⁴⁶ By way of contrast, Lewis described the manner in which he believed the natural world inspires the poet:

I have seen landscapes (notably in the Mourne Mountains) which, under a particular light, made me feel that at any moment a giant might raise his head over the next ridge. Nature has that in her which compels us to invent giants: and only giants will do.⁴⁷

However, for Lewis a poet was only capable of *seeing* giants (the images suggested by nature) in so far as he or she was in communion with the reality behind the veil, as might be said of Wordsworth in *The Prelude*. In an essay about writing stories, Lewis articulated a philosophy of the artistic process that, for him, applied to any kind of literature: 'To construct plausible and moving "other worlds" you must draw on the only

⁴⁵ Martin Bidney, 'Fitful Motions, Fragile Forms: Elemental Conflict in Coleridge', in *Patterns of Epiphany: From Wordsworth to Tolstoy, Pater and Barrett Browning* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 101.

⁴⁶ Lewis, *A Confession* in *Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1992), 1.

⁴⁷ C. S. Lewis, *On Stories*, 8.

real “other world” we know, that of the spirit.’⁴⁸ For literature to suggest the divine, the poet must be connected to that higher order.

Lewis’s philosophy of art was clarified by his criticisms of modernist literature. In *The Personal Heresy*, among other places, Lewis accused Eliot and modern critics of breaking communion with the ultimate source of poetry—God and his handiwork—and grounding it in *themselves* instead. That modern poetry seemed to have broken the link between art and the natural world (for example, it was no longer always representational) disturbed Lewis before he became a Christian. After his conversion, he seemed to have found the reason why this was so. He said of reading the Bible: ‘I found a disquieting contrast between the whole circle of ideas used in modern criticism and certain ideas recurrent in the New Testament.’⁴⁹ Christianity, he went on to say, taught that life and art are an imitation of the divine, are derivative of an ultimate Being:

Applying this principle to literature, in its greatest generality, we should get as the basis of all critical theory the maxim that an author should never conceive himself as bringing into existence beauty or wisdom which did not exist before, but simply and solely as trying to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom. ...Our criticism would therefore....be opposed to the theory of genius as, perhaps,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis, ‘Christianity and Literature’, in *Rehabilitations*, 192.

generally understood; and above all it would be opposed to the idea that literature is self-expression.⁵⁰

Lewis's beliefs about the relationship between the divine, the poet, literature and the reader help make sense of his posture toward Eliot and modernism. He believed he was defending an older, more organic and morally superior relationship between poet, poem and reader. Moreover, the stakes were as high as the preservation of the potential of literature to point to God—unto salvation—or the breaking off of sources of wisdom outside ourselves, unto chaos.

Lewis also objected to the tendency of modern poets to create literature that was *difficult*, or less than immediately intelligible to the uninitiated in the precepts of modernist art. Lewis accused Eliot of having made poetry into a fad for the elite, of not caring about his fellow man and of having been disingenuous in his poetry.⁵¹ Lewis wrote, with a note of sarcasm, about difficulty in literature in an essay called 'Lilies that Fester':

Mr. J. W. Saunders has set it all out in an excellent article entitled 'Poetry in the Managerial Age' (*Essays in Criticism*, iv, 3, July 1954). He there faces the fact that modern poets are read almost exclusively by one another. He looks about for a remedy. Naturally he does not suggest that the poets should do anything about it. For it is taken as basic by all the *culture* of our age that whenever artists and audience lose touch, the fault must be

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy [Concerning the Relation of a Poet to His Work]* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 63-64.

wholly on the side of the audience. (I have never come across the great work in which this important doctrine is proved.)⁵²

For literature to become a conversation among a small group of initiates, for art to become incomprehensible to a wider audience, was a matter of ethical failure to Lewis. Following from his philosophy of literature, he believed poets have a moral responsibility to create literature which communicates something beyond their own, individual voice; they are obliged to concern themselves with that which is universally experienced because by doing so they serve a divine purpose: their art becomes an avenue to truth.

Lewis's conviction that art should be directed at, and accessible to, a general audience was rooted in his Edwardian, literary experiences—as they stood on their own and as they formed a part of his journey to faith. The image of a boy engrossed in reading was, for him, an image of the pure, unmitigated experience of literature on the imagination. In one essay he contrasted a party brimming with the accoutrements of 'culture' but no true affection for art, with a schoolboy on a bus reading the popular periodical, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 'rapt and oblivious of all the world beside... something real and live and unfabricated; genuine literary experience, spontaneous and compulsive, disinterested'.⁵³ For poets to cease to cultivate literature that inculcated this kind of appreciation—the kind a child can relish, the kind *he* relished—was, again, to

⁵² C. S. Lewis, 'Lilies That Fester', in *They Asked For a Paper*, 116.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 111. Lewis also used the image of a child's experience of learning or reading in his essays 'Hamlet: The Prince or The Poem?' in *They Asked for a Paper*, 71; 'The Weight of Glory', in *They Asked for a Paper*, 202; and 'Different Tastes in Literature', in *On Stories*, 123.

hinder the possibility of art enriching the lives of a wider audience. For Lewis, it was to lose literature's highest purpose and greatest beauty.

To Lewis's first principles about art, Christianity was added. After his conversion Lewis understood his role as one of communicating Christianity to a general audience. He did this in more or less explicit ways, depending on whether the work was fiction or non-fiction. In 1958 the American theologian, Norman Pittenger, criticized Lewis for oversimplifying in his explanation of the Trinity.⁵⁴ In response Lewis explained his purpose in writing non-specialized, non-fiction books about Christianity:

Most of my books are evangelistic, addressed to *tous exo* [those outside]. . . . When I began, Christianity came before the great mass of my unbelieving fellow-countrymen either in the highly emotional form offered by revivalists or in the unintelligible language of highly cultured clergymen. Most men were reached by neither. My task was therefore simply that of a *translator*—one turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand.⁵⁵

So books like *The Problem of Pain* (1940) and *Miracles* (1947) were Lewis's contribution to making Christianity intelligible. But his fiction, too, had an evangelistic aim. As he explained to a friend in 1940, he sought to do with fiction what it had done for him in his early life:

⁵⁴ See Chapter 6, note 61.

⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis, 'Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger', in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 181, 183.

Isn't *Phantastes* good? It did a lot for me years before I became a Christian, when I had no idea what was behind it. This has always made it easier for me to understand how the better elements in mythology can be a real *praeparatio evangelica* for people who do not yet know whether they are being led.⁵⁶

Therefore, it is evident that almost everything Lewis set his hand to, which was aimed at a general audience, whether fiction or non-fiction, was intended to persuade for the truth of Christianity.

Mere Christianity and The Chronicles of Narnia

The foregoing section has provided a portrait of the intellectual context from which both *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* emerged. Lewis's Edwardian adolescence and reading experiences contributed to his Romantically inflected conception of the ideal author, as one whose allegiance was to a general reading audience, and to what art could and should do for its readers. Lewis's Christian convictions provided an evangelistic purpose to the prolific amount of writing he did which was aimed at the general reader. But *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* reflect more than an authorial intention or self-understanding. These works will now be considered in light of the broader historical, social and intellectual context in which Lewis wrote. We shall see that both of these efforts were contributions to larger conversations taking place in 1940s and 1950s Britain.

Mere Christianity

⁵⁶ Lewis to Sister Penelope, 4 November 1940, in *Collected Letters, Volume II*, 453.

During the Second World War the BBC was at the height of its influence,⁵⁷ and it used its considerable power to steer the nation toward a rekindling, as its leaders saw it, of Christian belief and practice.⁵⁸ There was an enchantment on the part of many with the potential of wireless technology—a belief that radio could do what local parishes could not do by reaching people previously untouched by institutional means. The assistant director of Religious Broadcasting, Eric Fenn, praised the lately deceased Catholic Bernard Clements for ‘never doubting’ the ‘opportunities offered by the microphone’, and for thus ‘exercise[ing] a ministry which overrode space’.⁵⁹ As Welch and Fenn saw it, radio presented a means of evangelism that could overcome both the physical and social barriers that prevented a large portion of the British public from attending worship services at a local church. An audience whose lives, under war conditions, were scheduled around their radio and more receptive to serious subjects might, it was hoped, listen anew to a familiar story.

In fact *Mere Christianity* was only one of many broadcasts on religious subjects commissioned by the BBC. In 1943 another book of broadcast talks was published, which, the preface explained, were ‘convictions expressed...in plain language’.⁶⁰ The talks addressed what the author perceived to be an obstacle to Christian belief in Britain: learned people’s discussions of ‘secondary issues’ had had the effect of giving these a ‘prominence they never deserved’ among the general public. The author explained

⁵⁷ Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 10.

⁵⁸ Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1922-1956: The Politics of Broadcast Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 146.

⁵⁹ Eric Fenn, Foreword to Bernard Clements, *Speaking in Parables. Last Broadcasts*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1943), 6-7.

⁶⁰ W. A. L. Elmslie, *Five Great Subjects. Broadcast Talks, etc.* (London: SCM Press, 1943), preface.

further: 'It is a few simple, yet profound, beliefs concerning human life which alone matter supremely to us all. Of those Christ spoke; and what He said received in Himself full meaning and convincing power. With those central affirmations the Talks are concerned.'⁶¹ This book was *Five Great Subjects* by the Presbyterian minister W. A. L. Elmslie. It included an introduction by Dorothy Sayers, the writer of detective fiction who had achieved eminence in religious broadcasting with her highly successful radio play *The Man Born to Be King*, which was commissioned in 1940 by the BBC's director of Religious Broadcasting, James Welch.

From the 1920s, when wireless technology first became widely available in Britain, the social elite had articulated a paternalistic vision for this new medium's educational and religious potential. The most influential of the BBC's early leaders, including John Reith and Frederick Iremonger, were devoutly religious men who understood their charge to be one of promoting the national good which included upholding Christianity; they used their monopoly of the airwaves to circumscribe the sabbath and develop Christian programmes such as *The Daily Service*.⁶² The circumstances of the Second World War gave a new urgency and a specific shape to the BBC's efforts toward religious instruction. The war was widely understood as a confrontation between a Christian people with Christian principles, on the one hand, and totalitarian evil on the other. Prominent members of state including Lord Halifax, Anthony Eden and Clement Attlee described the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Wolfe, 'Part One: Experiments and Preparations, 1922-1933'. In *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, 3-49.

war as being fought for Christian civilization;⁶³ in a letter to *The Times*, signed by Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, it was asserted: 'The present evils in the world are due to the failure of nations and peoples to carry out the laws of God. No permanent peace is possible in Europe unless the principles of the Christian religion are made the foundation of national policy and of all social life.'⁶⁴ The BBC was expected, by the Ministry of Information particularly, to clarify for the British public the connection between Christianity and the war. Therefore, from 1939 religious broadcasting, in a variety of forms, was increased, and the members of the British public, as never before or after, were the recipients of a flood of preaching and teaching about Christian dogma.⁶⁵ Despite the paper rationing restrictions of the war years which limited book publishers, first to 60 per cent, then to 37.5 per cent of the amount they had used during the last twelve months before the war,⁶⁶ many of these, like *Mere Christianity*, were published in pamphlet or book form.

Director Welch and Assistant Director Fenn determined which ministers, professors, public figures and laymen were hired to speak on the radio. Furthermore, they often selected the topics and laboriously revised the content of each talk with the

⁶³ Tom Lawson, *The Church of England and the Holocaust: Christianity, Memory and Nazism* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 12.

⁶⁴ 'A Christian Basis — Agreement Among the Churches', Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, 21 Dec 1940. Printed in J. H. Oldham, ed., *The Church Looks Ahead: Broadcast Talks* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), appendix.

⁶⁵ Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, 148.

⁶⁶ Katie Halsey, "'Something light to take my mind off the war': Reading on the Home Front during the Second World War', in *History of Reading, Vol. II: Evidence from the British Isles, c. 1750-1950*, ed. Katie Halsey and W. R. Owens (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 86.

author. For example, Fenn suggested to Lewis that the script for a talk in his 'Beyond Personality' series gave 'an impression of a purely individualistic approach' and suggested he say 'a bit more about the Christian community'.⁶⁷ There was a specific vision of communicating Christianity afresh to the British people over radio in the context of war. Apologetic efforts like *Mere Christianity* were expected to conform to the objectives of Welch and Fenn's agenda, and were subject to their editing. As a result, in addition to the fact that the speakers all shared, broadly, a common intellectual culture and the experience of the Second World War, there were also themes uniting their broadcasts, the result of the influence of the BBC's wartime religious agenda.⁶⁸

One shared assumption of the religious broadcasters was that the audience which *ought* to be addressed and which *was* addressed by radio was the 'man in the street'. For example, Ronald Selby Wright—a Church of Scotland minister, commonly known as the 'Radio Padre', who was so popular that it was said by a contemporary that he was, 'easily the finest thing religious broadcasting has ever done for us',⁶⁹ drawing 7 million listeners to Lewis's 600,000⁷⁰—opened a talk in his 'Average Man' series as follows:

To-night I'm going to speak to the ordinary, average fellow who gives his religion as Church of England, or Roman Catholic, or Presbyterian, or whatever it is, but who doesn't definitely belong to any strange sect or body—just the ordinary chap who has his own, perhaps rather vague,

⁶⁷ Eric Fenn to Lewis, 29 December 1943. BBC Written Archives Centre, 910/Talks file 1a, 1941-1943, 2.

⁶⁸ Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, 198-204.

⁶⁹ A. C. F. Beales in *The Universe*, cited by Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1999), 80. Quoted originally, without a reference, by R. S. Wright in *Another Home* (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1980), 49-80.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 80.

beliefs and gets along somehow; who goes to church when he has to or to please the folk at home, or from time to time when the spirit moves him.⁷¹

As this greeting suggests, the 'common man' was assumed to be sensible, if ill-informed on religious matters, and amenable to Christianity, though perhaps not enthusiastic.

Another religious broadcaster, Dean of St. Paul's, W. R. Matthews, provided a very similar portrait: '[T]he kind of person who, I imagine, is listening to me' he said was 'not a philosopher in the technical sense' nor 'an expert in the history of thought or of modern science', but nonetheless, 'interested in religion and have begun to think about it.'⁷²

Fenn's introduction to a collection of talks on Christian worship corroborated this understanding of the radio listener. The talks on worship, he said, had a double aim:

First, to answer this question of the man-in-the-street, why do Christians go to church? And, second, to help Christians of different traditions to understand one another better by comparing notes on what they do when they get there. The talks are, for the most part, straightforward descriptions of the ways in which Christians worship.⁷³

This indicates the manner in which the imagined listener was to be addressed in order to engage that innate curiosity. As with *Five Great Subjects*, mentioned above, the antidote to the common man's ignorance was 'plain language', 'straightforward descriptions' of the basics of Christianity. Indeed, when Welch first wrote to Lewis in 1941 to ask for his

⁷¹ Ronald Selby Wright, 'Two Questions', in *The Average Man. Broadcast Talks* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1942), 58.

⁷² W. R. Matthews, *Signposts to God* (London: SCM Press, 1938), 11.

⁷³ Eric Fenn, *How Christians Worship*, ed. Eric Fenn (London: SCM Press, 1942), 8.

assistance in the BBC's 'work of religious broadcasting', he suggested two possible themes. One was 'something like "The Christian Faith As I See It—by a Layman"... a positive restatement of Christian doctrine in lay language'.⁷⁴ Instructing the 'common man' on religious subjects, it would appear, meant, for the BBC, clearing away of anything lofty or technical; 'plain language' was the key to reaching the 'ordinary chap'.

Secondly, it was important to Welch and Fenn that the content of the religious programming should have the effect of building unity within the nation and between Christians. They believed it was important in wartime conditions to do everything in their power to avoid contentious issues, such as doctrinal or denominational issues dividing Christians.⁷⁵ So, when Fenn suggested to Lewis that he say more about the 'Christian community', Lewis acknowledged this BBC restriction in his reply: 'And the Church—it's difficult to go on long about that without raising the denominational question.'⁷⁶ However, this was a dictum with which Lewis felt in personal accord. As he said in the preface he wrote for *Mere Christianity* in 1952, 'Ever since I became a Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbours was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times.'⁷⁷

The importance of stressing what Christians shared in common was an idea that had wide resonance under wartime circumstances, within and outside the BBC For

⁷⁴ James W. Welch to Lewis, 7 February 1941, in *Collected Letters, Volume II*, 469. The other topic proposed was the 'lack of Christian assumptions underlying modern literature'.

⁷⁵ Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, 149.

⁷⁶ Lewis to Fenn, 31 January 1943. BBC WAC, 910/Talks file 1a, 1941-1943.

⁷⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), viii.

example, the prominent Catholic scholar, Father M. C. D’Arcy (who worked closely with BBC staff to find other talented Catholic broadcasters⁷⁸) in *The Unity Behind Our Differences*, eloquently echoed the theme and the reason for its timeliness in his broadcast:

Our common humanity is a fact. . . In the Christian philosophy which forms the background of the Creeds, we have a majestic and complete outline of man, his relations with God, with himself, and his neighbour. Our Western civilization was nursed on this philosophy, and though we have now forsaken it for strange beliefs, the habits of mind and customs which it inculcated still remain with us and have proved our salvation. The trouble is that even these habits will vanish if we do not support them with intellectual convictions.⁷⁹

D’Arcy reminded his listeners of the reason behind the urgency that accompanied this attention to what Christians held in common: nothing short of the future of Western civilization was at stake in the war. The clergy and others were doing their part to bolster the religion being defended by Britain. Dorothy Sayers and William Temple were involved in an attempt to write a statement of ecumenical values during the war years.⁸⁰ An international ecumenical conference held in Oxford in 1937, together with another in Edinburgh shortly thereafter, were critical steps toward the foundation of the World Council of Churches. A group called the Moot was also begun following these

⁷⁸ Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, 152.

⁷⁹ M. C. D’Arcy, ‘The Unity Behind Our Differences’, *The Church Looks Ahead*, 91.

⁸⁰ Giles Watson, ‘The Oecumenical Penguin’, *Seven*, Vol. 14 (1997): 17-32.

proceedings, led by J. H. Oldham. Its members (including Eric Fenn) were a group of Christian intellectuals, of different backgrounds, who met from 1938 to 1947 to discuss political and social problems within a Christian context, sharing, as they did, the conviction that the churches should play a critical part in guiding a nation in crisis.⁸¹

Indeed, there was a degree of consensus among Britain's religious leadership about the nature of the obstacles which, by the early 1940s, had had the effect of obstructing the common man's path to faith. The Honorary Canon of Birmingham R. D. Richardson stated the matter succinctly in *Christian Belief and Practice* (1940): 'National anxiety concerning the need for more thorough and systematic instruction in Christian belief and practice has been awakened under war conditions.'⁸² Works such as *A Plain Man's Guide to Christianity* (1936) by the Anglican theologian Alec Vidler and *A.B.C. of the Christian Religion* (1941) by the Anglican Chaplain Walter Carey responded to this need, and particularly to the perceived negative effect of the technical and religious language which was said to be frequently used by the clergy and which, they held, contributed to the pervasive lack of understanding about Christianity.⁸³ Carey opened his book with a telling justification. Many people, he said, had written him with requests:

'Can't you tell us in plain language what it all means for us simple people: what are the few plain things we must believe, and what sort of life we should try to live in order to square with our belief? Cut out most of the

⁸¹ Keith W. Clements, ed. *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society, 1938-1947* (London: T and T Clark, 2010), 6-10.

⁸² R. D. Richardson, *Christian Belief and Practice: Lessons for the Guidance of Clergy and Teachers* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1940), vii.

⁸³ A. R. Vidler, *A Plain Man's Guide to Christianity: Essays in Liberal Catholicism* (London: W. Heinemann, 1936); Walter Carey, *A.B.C. of the Christian Religion* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1941).

meat and give us the bones, and then we'll know where we are.' Well, I'm going to try, but I warn all highbrows and all learned people that this is not for them. I'm thinking of Bill Smith in the Marines or John Miller in the fore-castle, and Eliza Higgins who works by the day and has a husband out of work and a sick child.⁸⁴

There was, apparently, a demand for simpler instructions. Moreover, the caveat suggests that the reason for this was that professional theologians were not in the habit of distilling their learning in a way that was accessible to working-class people. Indeed, Lewis also explained that much of his writing on Christian themes was a response to the obscuring of the basic tenets of Christianity by professional theologians. He recommended to 'amateurs' that they prioritize the reading of old Christian authors rather than new ones, including himself, on the grounds that by doing so they would be better equipped to see the blindspots of the latter. 'The only safety', against misunderstanding modern theology, Lewis said, was 'a standard of plain, central Christianity ("mere Christianity" as Baxter called it) which puts the controversies of the moment in their proper perspective.'⁸⁵ Lewis's response to the perceived lack of lay-accessible literature about Christianity was to encourage the reading of 'classics'—not surprising, given his own predilections, discussed above—and to contribute to a larger effort, undertaken by the BBC and others, to make religion intelligible to the 'unscholarly'. The result was evident in the broadcasts later published as *Mere Christianity*.

⁸⁴ Carey, *A.B.C. of the Christian Religion*, 3.

⁸⁵ Lewis, Introduction to *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, by A Religious of C.S.M.V. S.Th. (London: Bles, 1944), 6.

Yet other people pointed to a deeper affliction which prevented Christianity from reaching the masses: an attack from (again) elitist circles on the belief in the very possibility of religious faith. Some blamed the new social sciences for this assault. In his broadcast series *Man's Religion*, the Baptist minister Fred Townley Lord observed: 'And even God himself, worshipped so long in a million shrines, is now reduced by some people to a mere projection of our own ideas.'⁸⁶ J. B. Priestley, one of the best-known writers of the day, provided some background in making the same point in one of his broadcasts:

For the last fifty years or so, [human] dignity has been most savagely dive-bombed, first by the physical sciences and then more recently by psychology and psycho-analysis. First, faith was riddled by reason, and then reason itself was riddled by a kind of super-reason, apparently only to be found among psycho-analysts. You were a fool, if you imagined yourself a rational man, to pray to God, then afterwards it turned out you were a fool even to imagine yourself a rational man.⁸⁷

Dorothy Sayers concurred with the assessment that belief in the possibility of belief was threatened, but she faulted what she referred to as 'humanist philosophies'. These, she said, had this effect upon the 'common man': he had not been convinced that there were no questions to ask but had 'acquired an uneasy suspicion that it is both silly and naughty

⁸⁶ Fred Townley Lord, *Man's Religion. Series of Four Broadcast Talks on the BBC Forces Programme* (London: National Sunday School Union, 1940), 21.

⁸⁷ J. B. Priestley, *Out of the People* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 51.

to ask them or to expect an answer'.⁸⁸ The rector of Moor Monkton and canon of York, A. E. Baker, slightly earlier, in 1937, had observed in a 'popular essay' that, unlike the First World War generation, those then coming into their own expressed an interest in Christianity. But, he continued, the problem of satisfying that interest lay in a whole host of issues which first needed to be explained before one could address 'specifically Christian affirmations': these were 'a whole background of metaphysical assumptions, of intellectual method, and of judgments as to the value of history and science'.⁸⁹ The foundations for belief in the possibility of belief needed to be addressed first.

To address such a profound problem in terms the man-in-the-street would understand, a strategy was needed with more grip and appeal than that provided by a flat repetition of Christian dogma. The efforts of Christian apologists to popularize theology reveal a couple of common threads, which are also evident in the broadcast talks of the Second World War as a whole. One was methodological. In his earliest correspondence with Welch, Lewis identified an approach his talks would share with many others:

It seems to me that the New Testament, by preaching repentance and forgiveness, always *assumes* an audience who already believe in the law of nature and know they have disobeyed it. In modern England we cannot at present assume this, and therefore most apologetic begins a stage too far on. The first step is to create, or recover, the sense of guilt. Hence if I gave

⁸⁸ *Five Great Subjects*, Dorothy Sayers preface, 7-8.

⁸⁹ A. E. Baker, *The Divine Christ* (London: Centenary Press, 1937), 7.

a series of talks, I shd [sic] mention Christianity only at the end, and would prefer not to unmask my battery till then.⁹⁰

To persuade his countrymen of the ‘law of nature’ and ‘recover’ a ‘sense of guilt’, Lewis employed a tactic that would have been very familiar to him through his wide reading, especially in philosophy and medieval literature: an appeal to natural theology.⁹¹

Natural theology, in the sense that Lewis was using the term, meant ‘the body of commandments which express the will of God with regard to the conduct of His intelligent creatures, as implanted by Nature in the human mind, or as capable of being demonstrated by reason’.⁹² In other words, what Lewis and others turned to was a way of talking about the divine that did not have recourse to supernaturally-revealed authorities such as the Bible. For example, a natural theology argument that turned up time and again in these apologetics was that on the evidence of conscience—an innate, internal knowledge of moral duty—people may know there is a God. Lewis took his time building this argument over the first series of his talks, as was implied by their title ‘Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe’. The canon of Hartlepool F. T. Salter had a similarly suggestive talk, ‘The Voice of Conscience is the Voice of God’, for his broadcast series *How Religion Works* (1944).⁹³ W. R. Matthews said in his broadcasts,

⁹⁰ Lewis to Welch, 10 February 1941, in Justin Phillips, *C.S. Lewis in a Time of War: The World War II Broadcasts That Riveted a Nation and Became the Classic Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 82.

⁹¹ See Russell Re Manning, *Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹² *New English Dictionary*, quoted in *Natural Law: A Christian Reconsideration*, ed. A. R. Vidler and W. A. Whitehouse (London: SCM Press, 1946), 15.

⁹³ Frederick Thomas Salt, *How Religion Works. Series of Six Talks* (London: Frederick Muller, 1944), 8.

'The conscience is our most valuable signpost to God.'⁹⁴ Interestingly, in his talks Walter Carey took this line to prove the existence of the soul: 'Well, that's exactly what I mean by your soul—there's something in you which is able to know right from wrong, good from evil, love from hatred, and that's the *real* you, your true self, your soul.'⁹⁵ But Carey also used the proof of the existence of God, with reference to Aristotle, in his *ABC of Christian Religion*, adding, 'I tried this argument on the toughest scholar I could find at Oxford, and he replied, "You can put any weight on it you like."⁹⁶ Lewis, Salter, Matthews, Carey and others built their cases for Christianity with evidence gathered by the observation of the natural world, human behaviour and human conscience. Natural theology was the cornerstone of many of the religious broadcasts of the Second World War; *Mere Christianity* was no exception in this respect.⁹⁷

The methodology was often similar in the broadcasts; so too, even, were the analogies and rhetorical strategies that were used. Like Lewis, J. B. Phillips argued in *Plain Christianity* (1954) that many people's conception of God is like a child's, much too simple and small;⁹⁸ like Lewis, A. E. Baker in *Science, Christianity and Truth* (1943) discussed why 'the presence and activity of God' is not a matter about which science can give an answer.⁹⁹ Another rhetorical device was one which appeared in *Mere Christianity* and in

⁹⁴ Matthews, *Signposts to God*, 45.

⁹⁵ Walter Carey, *As Man to Man. Broadcast Talks to the Forces* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1940), 15-16.

⁹⁶ Carey, *A.B.C. of the Christian Religion*, 5.

⁹⁷ For a more in-depth analysis of Lewis's use of natural theology, see George Marsden's forthcoming *C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

⁹⁸ J. B. Phillips, 'A God Big Enough', in *Plain Christianity and Other Broadcast Talks* (London: Epworth Press, 1954), *passim*; Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 40-42.

⁹⁹ A. E. Baker, *Science, Christianity and Truth*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1943), 149-50 and *passim*; Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 22-23.

other apologetics with some frequency. It was the *Aut Deus, aut malus* argument.

Lewis's use of it read as follows:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.¹⁰⁰

An identical argument was made by Walter Carey, who wrote of Jesus:

If you read His life in the New Testament you'll have to judge sooner or later 'What was He?' Was He true or false? He said He was God's Son come to save a lost world. If He wasn't, He was lunatic or liar. Read, and judge for yourself. Was He true or false? Does He *ring* true or false? Read and see.¹⁰¹

And, again, the same rhetorical strategy was employed by the canon of St Paul's, Frederic Arthur Cockin, in his broadcast series, *Religion and the Modern Mood* (1942), this time for the existence of God:

I'll put it as bluntly as I can. There are, as far as I can see, only two alternatives. Either the whole idea of God is a delusion, a mistake, a legacy of error from ages of ignorance and superstition, which we ought by this

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52. For further discussion of this argument see chapter five, 233-235

¹⁰¹ Carey, *A.B.C. of the Christian Religion*, 16.

time of day to have discarded and put in the dustbin...Or it is not. It is a truth—the truth.¹⁰²

In all three cases a stark choice was put before the listener or reader, and the great consequence of the choice made was stressed. Lewis's use of metaphors and rhetorical devices in *Mere Christianity*, often so striking, may be said to have drawn from the common currents of apologetic short-cuts in his day.

When *Mere Christianity* is set in the context of the BBC's religious programming agenda and the state of Christianity in Britain during the Second World War, and *beside* the apologetic efforts of his contemporaries, it becomes evident that the book was a composite of broader themes. *Mere Christianity* addressed some formidable objections to Christianity, in plain language, and in such a way as to unite Christians around a set of core beliefs: each of these features may be traced to the BBC's objectives for religious broadcasting. Moreover, some of the broadcasts' content also reflected popular arguments for Christianity; and its methodology was to appeal to natural theology, a common evangelistic approach in Britain during the Second World War.¹⁰³ Indeed, consideration of the early 1940s has clarified the extent to which *Mere Christianity's* origins were owed to this broader context.

The Chronicles of Narnia

¹⁰² Frederic Arthur Cockin, 'This "God Business" is Just Irrelevant', *Religion and the Modern Mood. Six Broadcasts* (London: SCM, 1942), 28.

¹⁰³ Manning, *Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*. Especially, Matthew D. Eddy, 'Nineteenth-Century Natural Theology' and Rodney D. Holder, 'Natural Theology in the Twentieth Century'.

In a letter written to The Milton Society of America in 1956 Lewis explained the connection between that which had inspired his broadcasts about Christianity and that which, a decade later, had moved him to write books for children. It is worth quoting at length, as we transition into a discussion of the context of the origins of the Narnia books:

The imaginative man in me is older, more continuously operative, and in that sense more basic than either the religious writer or the critic. It was he who made me first attempt (with little success) to be a poet. It was he who, in response to the poetry of others, made me a critic, and, in defence of that response, sometimes a critical controversialist. It was he who, after my conversion led me to embody my religious belief in symbolical or mythopoeic forms, ranging from *Screwtape* to a kind of theologized science-fiction. And it was, of course, he who has brought me, in the last few years to write the series of Narnia stories for children; not asking what children want and then endeavouring to adapt myself (this was not needed) but because the fairy-tale was the genre best fitted for what I wanted to say.¹⁰⁴

There were composite parts to Lewis, he tells us, and his religious writing moved out of a different impulse to that which inspired much of his fiction. Yet, like *Mere Christianity*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* were also a response by Lewis to the period in which they were written. To understand their beginning we should keep in mind Lewis's childhood reading, his authorial identity as poet, his evangelistic agenda (all discussed above), but

¹⁰⁴ C. S. Lewis to The Milton Society of America, undated, 1954, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 516-7.

there should also be a consideration of what Lewis *said* about why he wrote stories for children, especially in light of the broader context of children's literature.

Lewis publicly addressed the matter of his writing children's literature on at least four occasions between 1952 and his death in 1963. These included: 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children', a talk given in 1952 to the Library Association; 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said', printed in *The New York Times Book Review* in 1956; 'It All Began with a Picture', published in *Radio Times* in 1960; and an interview on the BBC entitled 'Writing for Children' in 1962.¹⁰⁵ His repeated return to the topic suggests, for one thing, that Lewis felt compelled to *explain* his writing of books for children, as he did to The Milton Society in the quotation above; this will be discussed below. Notably, within these addresses to the general public Lewis referred to what he perceived to be the misconceptions of two groups: writers of children's literature whose aim was educational, moral or commercial, on the one hand, and 'the modern critical world' on the other.¹⁰⁶ As Lewis saw it, critics and many writers of children's books had judged the genre wrongly. It was Lewis's intention to contribute a corrective.

His message turned out to be a repetition of the same themes of criticism Lewis had addressed in the 1930s. In fact what Lewis was responding to when discussing children's literature or fantasy literature was the same set of issues that gripped him in

¹⁰⁵ All three essays are in *On Stories*. Alan Blaikley interviewed Lewis about how he came to write fiction, as well as children's books; 'Writing for Children' was broadcast 7 October 1962 on Home Service (BBC WAC, Professor C. S. Lewis, Folder 910-Talks file 1b, 1944-1962, memo 'Talks Booking Requisition').

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, 'Three Ways of Writing for Children', *On Stories*, 33, 41.

his youth. Lewis's defence of children's literature and the Narnia series itself, it will be argued, should be understood in light of his deep-seated opposition to modernist trends.

First, there was the matter of literature's purpose. In March 1921 Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot shared a taxi on their way to the theatre. Woolf later recorded their conversation in her diary: "We're not as good as Keats" I said. "Yes we are" he replied. "No; we don't write classics straight off as magnanimous people do." "We're trying something harder" he said.¹⁰⁷ This brief exchange points to what was at the heart of the modernists' concern: a uneasy relationship with an overbearing past and an attempt to make language and literature communicate a confused present. Literary theorist Harold Bloom argued in *The Anxiety of Influence*, that all, and especially successful, poets maintain a vexed relationship with the prose or poetry that came before.¹⁰⁸ The pioneering generation of modernists, their roots in continental symbolism, experimented with form, language and genres in order to challenge the limitations placed on, especially, imaginative literature. The familiar felt provincial; the wide, connected world opening up to them seemed to demand a new expressiveness, something more universal than the established canon could provide.

The literature and art produced by high modernism in the early twentieth century was something new. *Ulysses* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* had no equivalents and no obvious precedents. These and other works provided the template for the modernists' calling card: self-conscious works of technical achievement, the content of

¹⁰⁷ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Random House, 1996), 442.

¹⁰⁸ Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence; A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

which often dwelt on mundane or ordinary images or topics, which often flouted moral sensibilities, and whose audience, it was assumed, consisted of other like-minded artists. Modernist literature was united no less by what it challenged or rejected: narrative, the constraints of traditional forms, nationalist sentiment and a hierarchy of subject matter. Art, Eliot taught the world in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, was self-referential; and artists, Pound added, need pay no heed to the tastes of the masses.¹⁰⁹

Lewis, as discussed earlier, was driven to distraction by modernist literature and criticism. He wrote to a friend in 1945:

There were years of my own life during wh. the literary situation, the ascendancy of the Eliotics, the dominance of the *Criterion & Scrutiny* was the daily subject of my thoughts and nagged me like a nagging tooth: but thank God I got out of it. It's no subject for a man to spend his life on. 'Noble rage' is an *ignis fatuus* and always turns in the end to shrill peevishness.¹¹⁰

Lewis mellowed with age, and came to regret some of what he had said in the 1930s. At the reprint in 1963 of *The Personal Heresy*—a series of essays exchanged between Lewis and scholar E. M. W. Tillyard about the relationship of an author to his or her own work—Lewis told the publisher, 'please delete entirely the old preface: one of my silliest

¹⁰⁹ Chris Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present* (London: Longman, 1996); Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: a Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid, eds, *High and Low Moderns Literature and Culture, 1889-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹¹⁰ Lewis to Herbert Palmer, 15 December 1945, in *Collected Letters, Vol. II*, 683.

juvenilia'.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, Lewis's objections to modernist precepts remained unchanged; he continued to engage the debates from the interwar years into the early 1960s.

But Lewis, in the late 1940s and 1950s, was less disposed to write polemical essays; rather, he was inclined towards projects of restoration, reclaiming ground which had been ceded to modernism. For example, he wrote a work of introduction called *Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), which may be read both as a response to the loss of reputation Milton suffered due to modernist criticism,¹¹² as well as an extension of the work of his friend, Charles Williams. A letter of dedication in this book praised Williams's *The Poetical Works of Milton* for, 'the recovery of a true critical tradition after more than a hundred years of laborious misunderstanding'. Lewis believed Williams's illuminating corrective was attained by beginning his critical evaluation of Milton with a proper understanding of mediaeval poetic form, and not, as he believed contemporary critics had, with modern ideas about poetry. Lewis remarked on his friend's accomplishment: 'Apparently, the door of the prison was really unlocked all the time; but it was only you who thought of trying the handle. Now we can all come out.'¹¹³

Lewis's essays about children's literature made it clear that the Narnia books were equally a project of recovery. He explained that his reason for choosing to write fantasy

¹¹¹ Lewis to 'Mr. Brown', 17 January 1963, Oxford University Press Archives, Folder of Correspondence on *The Personal Heresy*.

¹¹² Baldick, *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, 69.

¹¹³ Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: London, 1942), v-vi.

books for children was that the form appealed to him. He said he ‘fell in love’ with the form itself:

Its brevity, its severe restraints on description, its flexible traditionalism, its inflexible hostility to all analysis, digression, reflections and ‘gas’. I was now enamoured of it. Its very limitations of vocabulary became an attraction; as the hardness of the stone pleases the sculptor or the difficulty of the sonnet delights the sonneteer.¹¹⁴

As with some of his non-fiction, Lewis was again commenting on the validity of traditional understanding and uses of literary form, this time by utilizing the neglected genre of fantasy stories for children. Quite the inverse of the high modernist tenet of stretching or bulking traditional literary restrictions, Lewis welcomed restrictors as a freedom. Interestingly, it was precisely on technical grounds that Lewis explained his choosing to write books for children.

There is more evidence that the writing of the Narnia books amounted to fighting a new front of an old battle for Lewis. For example, in a 1956 essay called ‘Juvenile Tastes’ Lewis repeated points that he had made at least sixteen years earlier in ‘High and Low Brows’. In both he argued that the qualities that made any imaginative literature good, whether considered high or low, were tied to universal, unchanging truths. Of a Rider Haggard novel, Lewis wrote, ‘The goodness of *She* is grounded, as firmly as that of any book whatever, on the fundamental laws of the imagination’ and ‘it is more in touch with

¹¹⁴ Lewis, ‘Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to Be Said’, *On Stories*, 47.

the permanent nature of our imagination'.¹¹⁵ In 'Juvenile Tastes' Lewis applies the same point to children's literature: the 'right sort' of person writing literature for children will 'work from the common, universally human, ground they share with the children, and indeed with countless adults'.¹¹⁶ Judging or writing literature on any other ground, Lewis argued, was faddish—exactly the charge he had levelled against 'the Eliotics'.

Again, Lewis argued in both a lecture on *Hamlet* in 1942 and 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' that 'moderns' have a false conception of growth in literary taste. What one appreciates in childhood is no different from what one appreciates in adulthood. In the former he said, 'To hear some critics, one would suppose that a man had to lose his nursery appreciation of *Gulliver* before he acquired his mature appreciation of it. It is not so.'¹¹⁷ In the latter, he wrote, 'I now enjoy the fairy tales better than I did in childhood: being now able to put more in, of course I get more out.'¹¹⁸ What Lewis had had to say about children's literature, he had said before when speaking in response to modernist criticism. With Lewis the seemingly disparate subjects of writing for children and the errors of modernism were linked.

Throughout his life, Lewis looked back and defended his looking back. He—who described himself as being 'by temperament, an extreme anarchist'¹¹⁹—did so despite (or was it because of?) his early professional life's overlapping with a time when some of the most highly acclaimed art attempted to shed the past. Lewis, in his 50s, responded again

¹¹⁵ Lewis, 'High and Low Brows', *Rehabilitations*, 101-2.

¹¹⁶ Lewis, 'Juvenile Tastes', *On Stories*, 51.

¹¹⁷ Lewis, 'Hamlet: The Prince or The Poem?', *They Asked For a Paper*, 71.

¹¹⁸ Lewis, 'Three Ways of Writing for Children', *On Stories*, 35.

¹¹⁹ Lewis, *Dymer*, x.

to the pre-eminence that modern literature and criticism had achieved in his lifetime, this time by utilizing another traditional form, children's literature. Acting from his poetic identity, inspired by his childhood reading, the writing of *The Chronicles of Narnia* may be seen as one among many attempts by Lewis to recover ground for traditional and Romantic modes of literary composition and reading. In writing *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis was exercising a critical opinion about the grounds upon which fine literature was to be judged; but his choice to write books for children was also a response to what he perceived to be the unjust disparaging and neglect of a *type* of literature by talented writers and a failure of his contemporaries to appreciate, for themselves, the form of story.

Lewis was not alone in believing that the development of modernism and the subsequent demotion of myth and narrative were connected. Soon after writing *The Hobbit* (1937) J. R. R. Tolkien gave a lecture defending fairy stories and articulated why, in his opinion, these had been demoted to the category, now pejorative, of 'children's literature'.¹²⁰ (Lewis repeated points Tolkien made in his writings about the genre.¹²¹) Tolkien believed that the modern age had been misled about fairy stories and felt a corrective was in order. He also, like Lewis, described the creative process behind his stories in romantically inflected terms: his short-story, 'Leaf by Niggle', he said, reached manuscript form 'very swiftly, one day when I awoke with it already in mind.'¹²² Lewis

¹²⁰ J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', *Tree and Leaf* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975), 35.

¹²¹ Lewis, 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' and 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said', *On Stories*, 35 and 47.

¹²² Tolkien, Introductory note to *Tree and Leaf*, 5.

and Tolkien both contemplated how one might ‘carry on feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood’ (as Coleridge defined genius).¹²³

Historians of children’s literature have confirmed Lewis and Tolkien’s assessment of the standing of children’s book in the period. The interwar and Second World War years have been described as a time when few established authors were writing child-friendly books because, from the fin de siècle, there was a broadly shared sentiment that those who wrote for children did so because they were not gifted enough to write for adults. Moreover, a seminal scholarly article in 1978 made a connection between the neglect of children’s literature and the rise of modernism; it argued that a consequence of the effort by Henry James and others to turn the novel into a ‘serious’ art form was that books whose audience were likely to be women and children were taken out of the mainstream and turned into low-status, popular literature.¹²⁴ In the nineteenth century much of the new, popular literature—Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Alfred Tennyson—had been written for and enjoyed by a wide spectrum of people; but the early twentieth century had witnessed a hierarchical demarcation of literature according to the intended audience.¹²⁵ Likewise, Lewis’s decision to write books for children was a push against the dismissal of the literary quality of books based on what were presumed to be the poor appreciative faculties of their young readers. *The Chronicles of Narnia* were Lewis’s attempt to use his name for the cause of children’s books.

¹²³ S. T. Coleridge, *Poems and Prose*, ed. Kathleen Raine (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 182. Cited by Gary Day, *Literary Criticism: A New History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 219.

¹²⁴ Felicity Hughes, 1978. Discussed by Nicholas Tucker, *Children’s Book Publishing in Britain since 1945*, 21.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

One children's book editor wrote that in 1927 she attended a meeting at which an argument broke out as to whether the young members of the new public libraries would be 'up' to reading the novels of Arthur Ransome, author of the *Swallows and Amazons* series. Ransome, who was present, she recalled, 'got very red as he listened and finally he got up, and stumped out, muttering, "Don't write for children; write for myself."¹²⁶ Lewis, as we have seen, also insisted that he wrote what he himself enjoyed. Tolkien recalled Lewis saying to him, 'Tollers, there is too little of what we really like in stories. I am afraid we shall have to write some ourselves.'¹²⁷ Tolkien, Lewis and Ransome all *enjoyed* the stories that they wrote, even if they felt compelled to justify their child-friendly books to their peers.

Undoubtedly, there were many others who wrote stories for children in the interwar period. Among Tolkien's and Lewis's friends there was Owen Barfield, a fellow Inklings, who wrote a fantasy called *The Silver Trumpet* (1925);¹²⁸ Roger Lancelyn Green, a later biographer of Lewis who re-wrote Arthurian legends;¹²⁹ and E. R. Eddison, who corresponded with Lewis and attended a meeting of the Inklings—he wrote a word of explanation in the dedication of his best-known children's book *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922), which would have found approval in that company: 'It is neither allegory nor fable but a Story to be read for its own sake.'¹³⁰ Other well-known names, unaffiliated with Lewis, who wrote books for children include Catholic novelist Graham Greene, who began

¹²⁶ Eleanor Graham 'The Bumpus years', *Signal* v. 11 (1972), 107.

¹²⁷ Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, And Their Friends* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), ch. 4 (Carpenter quoted letter of Tolkien)

¹²⁸ Owen Barfield, *The Silver Trumpet* (Faber & Gwyer: London, 1925).

¹²⁹ Roger Lancelyn Green. *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* (London: Puffin Books, 1953).

¹³⁰ E. R. Eddison, *The Worm Ouroboros* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1922), ix.

a work called *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* by saying, ‘Perhaps it is only in childhood that books have any deep influence on our lives’¹³¹ and published four children’s books between 1946 and 1968.¹³² The poet Cecil Day Lewis wrote boys’ adventure stories, including *Dick Willoughby* (1933) and *The Otterbury Incident* (1948)¹³³ and the scientist J. B. S. Haldane contributed *My Friend Mr. Leakey* (1936).¹³⁴

All the same, the interwar years were a time when the writing of stories for children was not as valued among scholars or acclaimed authors as it had been in the past. Children’s book writer Geoffrey Trease wrote in 1948, in the preface to his survey of children’s books, ‘Adults do not normally read children’s books. It would be unnatural if they did. Years ago, if a friend mentioned one to me, assuming that I should know all about it, I felt mildly irritated. “My dear chap,” I would say, “I *write* children’s books—I don’t read them.” This was not arrogance, but a normal adult reaction’.¹³⁵ Indeed, Lewis was among only a few talents who, having established credentials in other fields, also wrote books for children and defended adult appreciation of them in the second third of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The beginning of the lives of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* may be traced to Lewis’s Edwardian reading, his decadent sensibilities, his romantically-

¹³¹ Graham Greene, *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951), prologue.

¹³² These were *The Little Train* (1946), *The Little Fire-Engine* (1950), *The Little Horse-Bus* (1952) and *The Little Steam-Roller* (1953). ‘Graham Greene’, in *Who’s Who of Children’s Literature*, ed. Brian Doyle (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1968), 123.

¹³³ ‘Cecil Day Lewis,’ in *Who’s Who of Children’s Literature*, 178.

¹³⁴ J. B. S. Haldane, *My Friend Mr Leakey* (London: Cresset Press, 1937), xxx.

¹³⁵ Geoffrey Trease, *Tales Out of School* (London: William Heinemann, 1948), 13.

colored identity as poet, and his intention to speak from the past into his present; to these fundamentals were added Christian belief and an evangelistic mission. Both books were also contributions to issues of great importance to Lewis's contemporaries, whether that was the renewing of Christian essentials in a time of war, as with *Mere Christianity*, or the rehabilitation of a form and genre of literature, in the case of the Narnia books. Lewis's broadcasts were conceived and composed in collaboration and as a result the content of *Mere Christianity* was, to a degree, derivative of the popular apologetics of his day. With *The Chronicles of Narnia* Lewis lent his name to the cause of story and the value of children's books. Behind the origins of both of these books, by the man J. R. R. Tolkien described as 'Everyman's theologian',¹³⁶ was Lewis's concern with the diminishment of writing for a general audience: *Mere Christianity* was a response to the specialized language and concerns of theologians; the Narnia books were a reply to the technical, inward-looking turn within much of literature in the first decades of the century. Indeed, in both theology and literature there had been, as Lewis saw it, a diminishment in efforts to communicate with a broader public. *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* are products of their time as much as they are Lewis's own efforts—toward Christian obedience, toward sub-creation, toward a return to the enjoyment of books he experienced in his own childhood and the communication of that pleasure with British readers.

¹³⁶ Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1977), 151.

Chapter Three

The Platform of C. S. Lewis in Britain and America

*'In the days before radio, Mr. Lewis' little volume would have been reviewed politely in the well bred magazines and no harm would have been done.'*¹

Lewis, as seen in chapter two, was a person very much shaped by the times in which he lived. *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* were, likewise, products of a localized environment, written in answer to times of great complexity and change. Nonetheless, these books were fated to become some of the most well-known and beloved books of the twentieth century, even in places distant from and decidedly unlike Oxford of the 1940s and 50s. In order to understand how and why these books of Lewis succeeded so phenomenally it is necessary to relate another story altogether, one concerning C. S. Lewis's name. As the English writer Penelope Fitzgerald observed, 'Lewis has another life, far apart from his biography, in the minds of three generations of children and in the religious experience of millions.'² The lives of Lewis's books are inextricably linked with how Lewis is imagined by the public, which is what historians of books and publishers describe as his 'platform'.³ Therefore, the present chapter will chart some of the most critical events, circumstances and people that contributed to the cachet that the name 'C. S. Lewis' gained with the public, to its becoming mainstream in Britain and America. We begin by describing Lewis's platform in Britain and America

¹ Alistair Cooke, 'Mr. Anthony at Oxford', *New Republic*, 110 (24 April 1944): 579.

² Penelope Fitzgerald, review of *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* by A. N. Wilson, *New York Times Book Review*, 1990, reproduced in *House of Air: Selected Writings of Penelope Fitzgerald*, ed. Terence Dooley, with Mandy Kirkby and Chris Carduff (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 357.

³ John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 86.

during his lifetime. This will be followed by an examination of some of the factors that enabled the success of Lewis's platform and a final comparison between Lewis's posthumous reputation in Britain and America.

Lewis's Platform During His Lifetime

A: Of a Kind

Lewis, as we have seen, objected on philosophical and ethical grounds to some of the most prominent literary trends of the early twentieth century, as well as to what he perceived to be professional theologians' failure to communicate the Christian faith so the 'man-in-the-street' could understand. The writing of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* and, indeed, much of Lewis's *oeuvre* may therefore be understood as his critical responses to the propensities to the age in which he lived, and as his attempt to restore avenues to the divine. Much of Lewis's work was rooted within his romantically-inflected identity—as one embodying a previous time, speaking prophetically to the present age. As mentioned in chapter two, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* was a restoration of Milton. Likewise, his 1943 title *The Abolition of Man* was a critique of the philosophical presumptions behind textbooks used in primary schools.⁴ Frequently, Lewis enacted the role of critical controversialist, from within his self-conscious deference to the past.

From the 1930s, Lewis's platform in Britain was coloured by his contrarian persona, especially with respect to trends in the academy. In 1939 *The Times* reported on

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man; Or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 1.

the ‘provocative’ address Lewis delivered at a conference on Shakespeare which, it quoted him as saying, if parodied might be titled ‘How the Renaissance didn’t happen and why Shakespeare was not affected by it!’.⁵ In 1941 Lewis’s comments that *The Faerie Queene* should be read in a heavy volume, at a table, were fodder for a sardonic column, whose purpose, it stated sarcastically, was not to contradict but ‘rather to call attention to the admission in high quarters that the physical means and methods of reading are worth the notice’ of ‘eminent literary critic[s]’.⁶ And in 1958 *The Times* called attention to a speech Lewis gave in Cambridge. The column opened: ‘In spite of the unlikely hour (immediately after breakfast) the hilarity of Professor C. S. Lewis, in his most mischievous mood, proved irresistible this morning when he delivered to the conference of classical teachers here a withering attack on modern translations of the classics.’⁷ As this report indicated, Lewis gained a reputation from his habit of ‘acid asides’⁸ and unfashionable criticism, and British journalists did not miss their cue.

Yet if Lewis presented himself as a contrarian, many of his contemporaries realized that this included a degree of showmanship. Scholars and critics, some of whom knew the man personally and some of whom did not, made clear that Lewis was taken by many to be *performing*, to some degree. F. W. Bateson, professor of English at Cambridge University, wrote the following in the *New Statesman* shortly after Lewis’s death:

⁵ Anon., ‘The Renaissance And Shakespeare: Imaginary Influences’, *The Times* (1 September 1939), 8.

⁶ Anon., ‘Happy Through Reading’, *The Times* (17 February 1941), 5.

⁷ Anon., ‘Translations From Hatred: Classics in Modern Dress Condemned’, *The Times* (8 August 1958), 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*

C. S. Lewis liked his friends to call him Jack. It was part of the apparatus of Anglo-Saxon joviality--like the connoisseur interest in beer, the comic logic-chopping, the inability to pronounce foreign languages, and the dark hints of heterosexual excess--with which he surrounded protectively a private Irish fire. The showmanship was what you noticed first; he had learnt it from G. K. Chesterton, and like Chesterton's it was often put to splendid polemic purpose.⁹

Likewise, Bernard Bergonzi, professor of English at the University of Warwick, took note in the *Spectator* of these 'more irritating aspects' of Lewis's 'literary persona':

the avuncular chattiness, the arch references to books that everyone has heard of but only Professor Lewis has read, the implication that not only is literature fun but that it should, ideally, be accompanied by the cracking of nuts and the imbibing of port wine, while the firelight flickers cosily upon the finely tooled backs of rows of well-loved volumes¹⁰

A colleague at Cambridge also commented, as Bergonzi did, on Lewis's style of conversation: 'Talk to him was play, a play in which he excelled.'¹¹ The co-founder, with F. R. Leavis, of *Scrutiny*, said in that literary journal that, upon reading Lewis's *Rehabilitations*, he registered 'the suspicion that Mr. Lewis is less interested in his topic than in finding excuses for an attitude.'¹² Another, in a review of Lewis's autobiography

⁹ F. W. Bateson 'C. S. Lewis', *New Statesman* (6 December 1963), 835.

¹⁰ Bernard Bergonzi, review of *Experiment in Criticism*, *Spectator* (17 November 1961), 718.

¹¹ Anon., 'In Memoriam: C. S. Lewis', *Cambridge Review* (30 November 1963), 178.

¹² L. C. Knights, 'Mr. C. S. Lewis and the Status Quo', *Scrutiny* (June 1939): 92.

entitled 'C. S. Lewis: The Author and the Hero', stressed that there was a difference between the *man* Lewis and the principal character he projected in *Surprised by Joy* (1955), there being in the latter 'a manner of production and persona involved'.¹³ Quintin Hogg, the Baron Hailsham of St Marylebone, reviewing the same book, observed that Lewis's 'biggest difficulty' was 'his habit of sneering repeatedly' and 'always cheaply', at public life. Hogg continued noting, 'This characteristic, which I can only describe as a pose, recurs in this book, but not for the first time in his writing.'¹⁴ Reginald Mutter, professor of English Literature at the University of Sussex, also noticed an affectation on the part of Lewis. In a lengthy review of *An Experiment in Criticism*, Mutter wrote that Lewis's 'short and pungent book' was:

[W]ritten with all Professor Lewis's verve, and with an apparent geniality which cloaks a serious intent. There are times, indeed, when the heartiness becomes a little over-bearing--when one is reminded of [Gerard Manley] Hopkins' description of Browning as talking "with the air and spirit of a man bouncing up from table with a mouth full of bread and cheese and saying that he meant to stand no blasted nonsense."¹⁵

Time after time, reviewers—often fellow scholars—commented on the 'production' or artifice or posturing they sensed in Lewis's person and works.

¹³ Margaret Masterman, 'C. S. Lewis: The Author and the Hero', *Twentieth Century* (December 1955), 539-548.

¹⁴ Quintin Hogg, 'Dr. Lewis's Pilgrimage', *Spectator* (9 December 1955), 805-6.

¹⁵ Reginald P. C. Mutter, 'The Function of Criticism', *Times Literary Supplement* (3 November 1961), 790.

Whether positive, negative or neutral, Lewis's contemporaries' perception of the 'apparatus' Lewis put forth was often taken in kind, as a *kind*. Evidence is provided in the association of Lewis with other polemical figures. In the above quotation, Chesterton was mentioned, as he was also in a *Times Literary Supplement* review of *Beyond Personality*.¹⁶ Charles Gillett thought Lewis comparable to Chesterton but noted that his 'ironic tradition' was rather more 'that of Swift and Butler'.¹⁷ John Wain, a British novelist, wrote in 1954 of Lewis, 'This author is of course well known as a controversialist--indeed my view is that the death of George Orwell left Mr. Lewis standing alone as our major controversial author.'¹⁸ Hilaire Belloc was another Catholic popular writer with whom Lewis's name was associated. When in 1951 British *Vogue* featured Lewis (alongside other 'Oxford Personalities'), it was said, 'As with those other Christian *littérateurs*, Chesterton and Belloc, neither his Christianity nor his literary taste has destroyed the healthy, earthy, gusto of his pleasure in walking, talking, eating, argument and beer.'¹⁹ A review of *The Magician's Nephew* opened with the following: 'Mr. C. S. Lewis reminds me of the Clerihew about Belloc: *Mr. Hilaire Belloc / Is a case for legislation ad hoc. / He seems to think nobody minds / His books being all of different / kinds.*'²⁰ Both Chesterton (1877-1936) and Belloc (1870-1953) were figures associated with bravado and pundits for orthodox Christianity. The mentioning of these figures with Lewis indicates that the

¹⁶ Harold Anson, 'Theology as Discovery: Mr. C. S. Lewis's Talks', Review of *Beyond Personality* by Lewis, *Times Literary Supplement* (21 October 1944), 513.

¹⁷ Charles Gillett, Review of *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis, *Theology* XLIV, no. 263 (May 1942), 7.

¹⁸ John Wain, 'Pleasure, Controversy, Scholarship', a review of *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, by C. S. Lewis, *Spectator* (1 October 1954), 403.

¹⁹ Anon, 'Oxford Personalities', *Vogue* (London), (November 1951), 100.

²⁰ Ariel, 'Children's Delight', *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner* (2 July 1955). DM 1107/PS 192, 'Magician's Nephew', Penguin Archive.

persona he evoked had resonance as a cultural *type* among British scholars and critics writing in periodicals from the 1930s through the 1960s.

Penelope Fitzgerald, who studied at Oxford in the 1940s, said that all of what was known about Lewis as a person among students at the time was that he ‘was pipe- and beer-loving, lived outside Oxford, and made a “thing” of disliking the twentieth century’. She gave as an example Lewis’s failure to attend when T. S. Eliot came to read ‘The Waste Land’ to the Poetry Society.²¹ That ‘thing’ was a literary persona which was identified in various ways by Lewis’s colleagues and peers. Reviews of Lewis’s work in the mainstream periodicals of his day make clear that (at least most) of the literary critical establishment of the period shared a common cultural point of reference and through it they interpreted Lewis’s person and works. By the subjects he chose to address, the tone and style of his writing, as well as the way he presented himself to colleagues in person, Lewis was understood to be recalling the contrarian figure. His platform was shaped by his self-understanding, but the persona he projected was reinforced when British critics war and post-war years, mirrored to the world Lewis’s contrarian image. We turn now to consider the steps that took Lewis down a path of splendid popular fame, before contrasting this reception of Lewis in Britain to that in America during his lifetime.

B: War and Fame

The examples above demonstrate that Lewis’s platform as a scholar and critic was established from the 1930s, largely by means of Britain’s thriving network of periodicals. In fact, Lewis’s achievement of his platform was coterminous with the height of the

²¹ Fitzgerald, *House of Air*, 354.

influence of the British journal.²² It is no coincidence that both *Screwtape* and *Mere Christianity* first appeared in periodical form, or that Lewis was approached about founding a 'Christian literary periodical' called 'Portico' (the project did not materialize);²³ or that, when Lewis wanted to reach the 'periodical public' with his criticisms of modernism in 1931, he wrote to T. S. Eliot expressing his wish to be published in the *Criterion* (the request was denied).²⁴ Periodicals were the heartbeat of literary, religious and political discussion, as well as being a primary source of news and entertainment in interwar and Second World War Britain. Following one of Lewis's broadcasts, a BBC producer wrote to him saying, 'I have had very appreciative comments from people inside the Corporation about them; and to have risen to the level of a *cause célèbre* in the columns of the *Free Thinker*, to say nothing of the *Daily Mirror*, must give you peculiar satisfaction!'²⁵ Whether small specialist (in this case, atheist) journals like the *Free Thinker*, disseminators and declarers of new literary movements like the *Criterion* or widely circulated tabloids like the *Daily Mirror*, periodicals and newspapers of a variety of sorts comprised a robust print culture in Lewis's lifetime. Indeed, the world of Oxbridge *littérateurs* was very small in early twentieth century, but this universe-in-a-tea-cup was more visible to the reading public than the modern-day equivalent largely *because* journals like *Time and Tide*, the *New Statesman* and the *Spectator* often paid regular

²² Neil Berry, *Articles of Faith: The Story of British Intellectual Journalism* (Surrey: Waywiser Press, 2002), 17; See also Alvin Sullivan, eds., *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914-1984*. Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers (Westport, Connecticut: 1986), introduction; See also Jason Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²³ Bodl. MS. Eng. Let.c. 861.

²⁴ Lewis to T. S. Eliot, 2 June 1931. Bodl. MS. Eng. Let.c. 220/2, fol. 179.

²⁵ Fenn to Lewis, 10 November, 42. BBC WAC, 910/Talks file 1a, 1941-1943

attention to notable developments in the academy. At the outbreak of the Second World War only radio could reach a wider audience than the country's journals.

In 1940, the quality of Lewis's early books, plus the attention he had received for his more heterodox views, amounted to the baseline of a successful, if relatively limited, platform. Then a series of roughly simultaneous events suddenly made the name of 'C. S. Lewis' recognizable to a much wider public on both sides of the Atlantic. These were the phenomenal success of his book *The Screwtape Letters*, an imagined dialogue between a senior and a novice devil on the art of temptation, published in 1941, and a series of radio broadcasts and appearances he presented through the BBC from 1941 to 1944 on the subject of Christianity. From the time of these events until the end of his life, Lewis was in high demand as a broadcaster, speaker, teacher, correspondent and author. The descriptor 'writer of popular apologetics'²⁶ had been added to his platform.

The pace and scale at which Lewis achieved recognition in his lifetime was remarkable. L. W. Grensted, a theologian, speaking about Lewis's *Miracles* on the BBC's programme 'Recent Important Religious Books', opened his broadcast by saying, 'Mr. C. S. Lewis is one of the best-known writers of the English speaking world. Most of you will have heard of him, and many will have read one or more of his books.'²⁷ That so much was said in 1947, is an indication of Lewis's fame. A weightier estimation comes from the BBC's record of interest in Lewis. From the time of the broadcasts eventually published

²⁶ Frederick Athelwold Iremonger, 'Broadcast Apologetics', *Times Literary Supplement* (19 September 1942), 460. The descriptor 'popular Christian apologist' was used in 'Joy and Conversion', review of *Surprised by Joy*

by C. S. Lewis, *Times Literary Supplement* (7 October 1955), 583.

²⁷ L. W. Grensted, Radio Address, 'Talk No.1: Miracles: A Preliminary Study,' review of *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, by C. S. Lewis. Recorded 16 July 1947. BBC WAC, Transcript, 1.

as *Mere Christianity*—and despite one heavily criticized performance on the popular debate programme *Brains Trust*, wherein Lewis was, according to one BBC staff member, ‘eaten alive’ by Julian Huxley²⁸ —the Corporation hounded Lewis to do more work for it.²⁹ Before *Screwtape* had moved from serial to book form, Lewis had occasion to say to the BBC, ‘I’m talking already to the R.A.F., to the general public, to nuns, to undergraduates, to societies. The gramophone will wear out if I don’t take care!’³⁰ In fact, Lewis did take care, but the stream of invitations never ran dry. This was partially because the Corporation itself was barraged with demands for more from Lewis. The Director of Religious Programming wrote to Lewis in 1947, ‘We are continually getting requests from Overseas, as well of course as from this country, to have you on the air again, which we should very much like to do.’³¹ Lewis declined the job. In fact, the frequency of BBC invitations and Lewis’s rejections was such that, one year later, when the North American Service’s branch asked the home station if Lewis would speak for the Federal Council of Churches, it was told that ‘in spite of repeated requests, [Lewis] has informed us that he has no intention of broadcasting for some time to come as he is very much preoccupied with his academic career’.³² Judging from the variety of the requests made of Lewis and the frequency with which they came, together with the number of programmes *about* Lewis or his work, or adaptations of his work (including *Pilgrim’s Regress*, *The Great*

²⁸ James Welch, BBC WAC, File 910-Talks file 1b, 1944-1962. See also a summary of this *Brains Trust* broadcast in Thomas Howard, *Britain’s Brain Trust* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1944), 100 and 195. The discussion participants were Mary Agnes Hamilton, C. E. M. Joad, A. B. Cambell and Lewis.

²⁹ BBC WAC, File R51/23/3, ‘Any Questions’, 2A, 1942.

³⁰ Lewis to Mr. Williams, 30 September 1941. BBC WAC, 910/Talks file 1a, 1941-1943.

³¹ R. S. Lee to Lewis, 28 May 1947. BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C. S. File 910-Talks, file 1b, 1944-62.

³² Lillian Lang to Mr. MacAlpine (BBC to North American Service), 16 June 1948; Ivor E. Thomas to Lillian Lang, 21 June 1948. BBC WAC, Lewis, Professor C. S. File 910-Talks file 1b, 1944-62.

Divorce, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) that *did* air, it is certain that the BBC prized any broadcast associated with the C. S. Lewis name. By the end of his life, Lewis had been featured many times on the BBC—from the airing of his inaugural address at Cambridge in 1955 to an interview called ‘Writing for Children’ in 1962—and declined many more. The option to be an even bigger radio star was passed by.

The BBC’s response was fervent but not misleading. Americans, too, wanted more from Lewis than he was willing to give. Carl Henry, an influential evangelical theologian, recommended Lewis to the editors of what was to become one of the most influential Christian periodicals of the twentieth century, *Christianity Today*, ‘for spice and a good name’.³³ Henry wrote to Lewis himself, asking him to contribute. Lewis declined, saying:

I wish your project heartily well but can't write articles. My thought and talent (such as they are) now flow in different, though I think not less Christian, channels, and I do not think I am at all likely to write more *directly* theological pieces. The last work of that sort which I attempted had to be abandoned. If I am now good for anything it is for catching the reader unawares--thro' fiction and symbol. I have done what I could in the way of frontal attacks, but I now feel quite sure those days are over.³⁴

³³ Mary Michael. ‘C.S. Lewis’ Influence on American Evangelicalism’. Paper for ‘British Christianity’ course, Wheaton College, 3 December 1992, p 12.

³⁴ C. S. Lewis to Carl F. Henry, 9 September 1955, in Walter Hooper, ed., *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume III: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950-1963* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 651.

In the 1940s, *Screwtape* was taken up by the largest distributor of books in America at the time, the *Book-of-the-Month Club*,³⁵ and in 1954, in its thirteenth year, the book had sold at a rate of five hundred a month and another edition was being planned.³⁶ By 1955, 413,000 copies had been sold in the English language editions,³⁷ and by 1961 six books by Lewis each had sales of at least half a million copies.³⁸

The C. S. Lewis platform was strong enough, in fact, to facilitate other people's careers too, as it did for J. B. Phillips who was known initially as a translator of the Bible. 'Moved by admiration for [Lewis's] Christian insight', Phillips wrote to Lewis about the translation work he was doing on Paul's epistles.³⁹ Lewis encouraged him and recommended his work to his own publisher, after which several of his books became best-sellers, supported by Lewis's endorsement.⁴⁰ Lewis was requested to endorse books so often that he complained to novelist and fellow broadcaster J. B. Priestley about the 'detestable practice by which, once a man has a selling-name, he is never allowed to read a new book without being roped in as an unpaid blurb-writer'.⁴¹ Demand was high for Lewis.

There was a sense on both sides of the Atlantic that Lewis would not be persuaded to do more of what his wide readership wanted, that he could not be drawn out into fuller view. Partly this was because Lewis was occupied with his responsibilities

³⁵ Blurb by Christopher Morley for *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis in the *Book-of-the-Month-Club News*, quoted by Macmillan Publishers in advertisement, *New York Times* (10 October 1943), BR 12.

³⁶ Jocelyn Gibb to Lewis, 11 May 1954. Bodl. Dep. C. 771-5, Box 771, fol. 40-75.

³⁷ Jocelyn Gibb to Lewis, 17 June 1955. Bodl. Dep. C. 771-5, Box 771, fol. 76-127.

³⁸ Collins Advert, 'Supplement on the Bible in English', *The Times* (27 March 1961).

³⁹ J. B. Phillips, 'Translating the New Testament', *Fifty-Two* 1 (Autumn 1957), 9.

⁴⁰ Jocelyn Gibb, 'Looking Back: A History of the House of Bles', *Fifty-Two* 1 (Autumn 1957): 5.

⁴¹ C. S. Lewis to J. B. Priestley, 18 September 1962, in Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 1371.

as fellow and tutor of English Literature at Magdalen College, Oxford (1925-1954) and then as a professor at Magdalene College, Cambridge (1954-1963). Indeed, the ample opportunities and honours given him indicate that Lewis was and continued to be valued for his academic contributions. In 1939 he was offered the post of professor of English at the University of Birmingham:⁴² in 1945 at the height of his war-time fame as a lay apologist for Christianity, University College London encouraged Lewis to put his name forward for its Quain Chair of English Language and Literature;⁴³ in 1951 he was a candidate for the Poetry Chair at Oxford (he lost it to poet C. Day Lewis); and in 1954 Lewis was invited to be the first Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University. In 1946 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity by St Andrews University (the first time the university gave the title to a layman); in 1955 he was made a Fellow of the British Academy; and in 1959 University College, Oxford gave Lewis an Honorary Fellowship. Indeed, on at least one occasion Lewis's wide recognition as an influential critic were the grounds for taking him to task. Cambridge's literary

⁴² Raymond Priestly to Lewis, 19 May 1939. Bodl. MS. Eng.c.6825, fol. 94-5, 97. The appointment was to succeed Professor A. M. D. Hughes. Helen Fisher, archivist of special collections at Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, confirms that the minutes of Senate of the University Council record that the Chair Professor Hughes had retired from was being advertised and that candidates were approached. The minutes of 17 May 1939 report that after an initial round had failed four more inquiries were to be sent. Minutes of 14 June 1939 state that, of those four additional candidates, two had not been able to accept, and a third had been withdrawn by the Faculty of Arts. It was agreed to offer the position to the fourth person, who is the only individual named as Davis of Cornell University. Fisher reports, furthermore, that the Minutes of Senate and the personal diaries of Vice-Chancellor Raymond Priestly, whose letter to Lewis is in the Bodl. Collection, confirm that Davis was to be offered the post. However, there is no further reference to his decision, and by the autumn it had obviously been decided to fill the vacant post on a temporary basis using existing staff. Helen Fisher, in email correspondence with author, 24 September 2013.

⁴³ David Randall Pye to Lewis, 18 June 1945. University College London, Records Office, Quain Folder, 45, (Duplicated at Bodl. MS. Eng. c. 6825, fol. 103.); Lewis to Mr. Provost, 21 June 1945. University College London, Records Office, Quain Folder, 47. The appointment was to succeed the late Professor R. W. Chambers.

magazine *Delta* reacted to views Lewis expressed about the value of undergraduate criticism, saying:

In normal circumstances it would hardly be worthwhile to subject such an occasional piece of writing to examination, but after all Professor Lewis *is* a well-known figure in the English Faculty at Cambridge, and any address given by him directly to the undergraduates is bound to be significant, possibly even representative.⁴⁴

As attested to both by the grounds of *Delta's* quarrel with Lewis and the many opportunities and accolades Lewis received in his capacity as a scholar, a widely shared recognition of Lewis's achievements as a scholar remained well after he received fame as a writer of fiction, popular works of theology and children's books.

Lewis's platform in Britain during his lifetime was shaped by the contrarian persona he adopted, and to this was added renown as a Christian apologist and writer of religious fiction and children's books. Shortly after Lewis's death, an editor at one of Lewis's principal publishers said, 'I think there is no doubt that the world knows Lewis as a Christian Apologist for the layman.'⁴⁵ Actually, a caption under a pencil drawing of Lewis in *The Illustrated London News* came closer to the mark when, in 1963, it described Lewis as 'one of the most influential of modern dons', *and* 'perhaps the liveliest and most incisive of modern religious writers'.⁴⁶ In Britain Lewis's reputation was indeed

⁴⁴ Simon James Holliday Gray and Howard Burns, 'Professor C. S. Lewis and the English Faculty', *Delta* (Cambridge), No. 22 (October 1960) 6-17. The article was in response to article by C. S. Lewis in Cambridge University's *Broadsheet*, 9 March 1960.

⁴⁵ Jocelyn Gibb to Roger Lloyd, 9 July 1964. Bodl. Dep. C. Box 771, fol. 248-304.

⁴⁶ Anon., Pencil Drawing and Caption, *Illustrated London News*, 27 July 1963, 120.

multifaceted. It was true that the greater part of those familiar with the name of 'C. S. Lewis' did know him as a Christian populizer, and although the latter may have overshadowed the former from the 1940s onward, Lewis continued to make his name known in both a scholarly and a popular capacity throughout his life.

C: Comparisons with America

Lewis's platform in the States, though retaining basic similarities to his British reception, differed in key respects. These distinctions were rooted in the fact that American critics in the 1930s, 40s and 50s lacked a robust understanding of British cultural and the religious milieu, which might otherwise have provided a frame of reference for interpreting Lewis's person and works. Most Americans simply knew little about the society that had shaped Lewis's identity and persona, and to which he communicated. Nuances therefore were missed. Many interpretive cues and, thus, meaning was lost in the jump across the Atlantic.

Before his 'meteoric' rise to fame with *The Screwtape Letters*, little was known about Lewis in the States, though his name did appear a few times in the 1930s in mainstream American periodicals. Occasions in *The New York Times* are illuminating: in 1935 there was a substantive article about Lewis's *Pilgrim's Regress*, in which the author was not described at all.⁴⁷ The following year Stanton A. Coblentz, an author and poet, reviewed Lewis's *The Allegory of Love*, and, again, Lewis was not introduced;⁴⁸ then, in 1939 Catholic author Thomas Merton published an article about the debate over poetic

⁴⁷ Jane Spence Southron, 'The *Pilgrim's Regress* and Other Works', *New York Times* (8 December 1935), 7.

⁴⁸ Stanton A. Coblentz, 'The Songs of Love in the Middle Ages', *New York Times* (5 July 1936), 12.

theory in *The Personal Heresy*, in which Lewis—who, it was said, ‘dominates the whole subject, maintaining an intensity of conviction and a forcefulness of dialectic that his opponent cannot overcome’—was indicated only as a ‘front rank’ English scholar for his contribution of *The Allegory of Love*.⁴⁹

What one notices in these early American reviews is that even before Lewis became known as an author of religious works there was little sense of a broader, especially *literary* British landscape. After the publication of *Screwtape* this remained the situation; there was hardly any recognition that Lewis was playing off of a community of *littérateurs*. In fact, there was very little acknowledgment of *play* at all, or a sense that Lewis was of a type. Comparisons to other figures tended to be based on a conception of Lewis as a religious figure. Henry James Forman said Lewis was ‘neither a [Benjamin] Jowett nor [John Henry] Newman’ but was ‘not lacking in some of the gifts’ of those well-known nineteenth-century, British theologians.⁵⁰ When Chesterton was mentioned it was not to highlight style or bravado, but to provide an example of another well-known, British apologist. One reviewer said Lewis was a ‘more thoroughgoing theologian’ than Chesterton;⁵¹ another concluded a synopsis of *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, by saying: ‘With this book coming on the heels of *The Screwtape Letters*, there is no longer any reason for failing to recognize that the defense of Christian culture did not end when Chesterton fell to the earth.’⁵² Lacking an understanding of the British literary and

⁴⁹ Thomas Merton, ‘A Spirited Debate on Poetry’, review of *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy*, by C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard, *New York Times* (9 July 1939), 77.

⁵⁰ Henry James Forman, ‘Common-Sense Humanist’, *New York Times*, (23 April 1944), 12.

⁵¹ Marjorie Farber, ‘Imperfect Paradise’, *New York Times* (26 March 1944), 4.

⁵² Edward Wagenknecht, ‘The Crucial Years of Milton’s Life’, *New York Times* (23 May 1943), 10.

cultural context, American critics failed to grasp Lewis's showmanship, artifice, and literary persona.

Without the broader context of the British intelligentsia's rhetoric and high-mindedness, Lewis's person and writings were taken in an unmitigated, straightforward manner: his fiction was often understood quite literally and his non-fiction as a direct manifestation of the man's mind. For example, a 1959 analysis of Lewis's reception entitled 'C. S. Lewis: Sputnik or Dinosaur?', took Lewis at his word that he was out-of-step with the *zeitgeist* of his times—that he was an outsider—and concluded that his true genius would not be appreciated until times had changed.⁵³ And Victor Hamm, Associate professor of English at Marquette University, Wisconsin, identified the main character in Lewis's science-fiction novel *Perelandra*, as indistinguishable from the author: 'a Cambridge professor of philology, that is, Mr. Lewis himself...'.⁵⁴ Taken, as it were, outside the community of his literary and scholarly peers, Lewis's platform in America became noticeably prosaic.

Moreover, in lieu of an understanding of Lewis's persona as a type, American critics were inclined to fill in the knowledge gap with something close to their own cultural experience and history. When Lewis became a best-selling author in America, with *Screwtape*, his identity was fleshed out more fully in newspapers than had been the case in the 1930s; and that meant, at minimum, acknowledgement of his post at Oxford. The result was that three main ingredients comprised Lewis's platform from the early

⁵³ Helen Fowler, 'C. S. Lewis: Sputnik or Dinosaur?', *Approach*, n. 32 (Summer 1959), 8-14.

⁵⁴ Victor M. Hamm, 'Mr. Lewis in *Perelandra*', *Thought: Fordam University Quarterly*, Vol. 20, n. 77 (June 1945), 271.

1940s: bravado, Christianity and Oxford. Lewis's introduction to Americans happened less than twenty years after the nationally covered Dayton, Tennessee Scopes Trial of 1925—in which tensions latent in American culture between faith-based understandings of creation had clashed, in sensational fashion, with the theories of evolution, standing in for Science—which meant that these ingredients were an especially charged combination at that particular moment. *Together* they spelled confrontation. The Scopes Trial had made transparent a cultural reality of early twentieth-century America: Christianity and intellectual pursuits were assumed by many to be mutually exclusive affairs: universities were the domain of Science, to which Christianity was anathema.⁵⁵ Therefore, when higher learning, Christianity and bravado were brought together, as they were in Lewis, a quarrel was the expected result. And conflict, under entirely different circumstances, was exactly what Lewis had built his name around. Transported to America in the early 1940s, Lewis's platform suddenly reflected the cultural expectations of foreign people.

Indeed, American reviewers assumed that the British circumstances to which Lewis was responding were very similar to their own, at least in terms of the *religious* landscape. The tone of Lewis's reception in the 1940s and 50s was set by people like P. W. Wilson, author of *The Church We Forget* (1919), who wrote: 'Sedate old Oxford with its accent, its dons and its gowns sometimes has its moments' and concluded that *Screwtape* had 'suited the well-bombed British who regard it as a backhanded volley that wins the point for religion.'⁵⁶ Lewis, Wilson said in a review of the broadcasts, was 'the

⁵⁵ Peter J. Bowler, *Monkey Trials and Gorilla Sermons* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 180-186.

⁵⁶ P. W. Wilson, 'A Devil's Disciple at Oxford', *New York Times* (28 March 1943), 3.

layman of Oxford' and 'the major apostle of Christian faith for the man in the street', within whose 'pleasantries lies an evangelical eagerness as definite and persistent as Dominican or Fundamentalist preaching.'⁵⁷ A principal reviewer for *The New York Times*, Orville Prescott, named Lewis as, 'The most eloquent, witty, learned and altogether brilliant literary champion of the Christian religion now writing... the Oxford lecturer on English literature who wrote *The Screwtape Letters* and awoke to find himself famous.'⁵⁸ For Prescott, Lewis was one who 'sounds a militant call to battle' and whose books were 'all of them desperately serious in their championship of the side of the angels in the eternal war between good and evil'.⁵⁹ Battle themes appeared again in reviews by writer George R. Stephenson, who spoke of Lewis's 'war against skepticism'⁶⁰ in an article entitled, 'C. S. Lewis: A Crusading Intellect,' in *Southern Churchman*⁶¹ and in Chad Walsh's many reviews of Lewis's work.⁶² *Miracles*, Walsh declared, was Lewis 'fighting on a

⁵⁷ P. W. Wilson, 'Prophecy via BBC', *New York Times* (22 July 1945), 8.

⁵⁸ Orville Prescott, 'Books of the Times', *New York Times* (21 May 1946), 21.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ George R. Stephenson, 'Of Faith and Reason', *New York Times* (18 May 1947), 21.

⁶¹ Ashley Simpson, 'C. S. Lewis: A Crusading Intellect', *Southern Churchman* (14 December 1946), 5-6.

⁶² Walsh wrote the first biography of Lewis entitled *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York: Macmillan, 1949) (an article of the same name was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in September 1946 [178: 115-119]) and another monograph called *Literary Legacy of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979). He was one of the first to analyze Lewis's impact in America in 'Impact on America' (in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965). Walsh was also a consistent writer for mainstream and religious periodicals in the decades around mid-century. He was responsible for eleven of the thirty-two citations of Lewis in the *New York Times Book Review* before 1970, according to that paper's 'Author' index for 1896-1970, including reviews of all the Narnia books. In addition, he wrote about Lewis or his books for the *New York Herald Tribune*, *The New York Post*, *The Washington Post*, *Saturday Review of Literature* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and to religious periodicals including *Good Work*, *Renascence*, *Catholic World*, *Living Church, A.D.*, *Christian Century* and *Eternity*. He collected his reviews into a volume entitled *Chad Walsh Reviews C. S. Lewis* (Altadena, Cal.: Mythopoeic Press, 1998). There are striking similarities between he and Walter Hooper (discussed below): both were Episcopalian priests who were introduced to Lewis's writings through an associate; and both wrote to Lewis, decided to write a book about him (despite Lewis's discouragement) and traveled to Oxford to meet Lewis. Walsh said he wrote to Lewis because 'I felt the kind of understanding and rapport with him, as so many other people did'; Hooper

broader front', the author's continuation of a 'war' 'against this picture of a self-sufficient, deterministic universe'.⁶³ A dualistic antagonism—the kind Lewis could foster but the British critical establishment rarely warmed to—was readily taken up by American reviewers.

In this perceived 'battle', Lewis was taken to be a lone soldier, bravely evangelizing in the hostile territory of the university. This image of a hero Christian at Oxford was further cemented when, in 1947, there appeared a drawing of a more debonair version of Lewis on the cover of *Time* magazine, captioned 'Oxford's C. S. Lewis, His heresy: Christianity'. The accompanying article, 'Don v. Devil', was about a popularizer in the academy; a fresh imaginative writer; a Christian risking his reputation amongst cynical peers for the sake of his faith.⁶⁴ Lewis, it said, '(like T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, *et al.*) is one of a growing band of heretics among modern intellectuals: an intellectual who believes in God.'⁶⁵ Oxford, in this case, functioned as a foil to Lewis in a drama Americans imagined to be playing out overseas. A sense of Lewis's showmanship lost, his platform was understood through journalists' sensationalism and the lens of 1940s American culture. As a consequence, Lewis's platform in America became decidedly simple and religiously tintured. Shallow knowledge of British intellectual and cultural life frequently meant that Lewis's person and works were less critically engaged,

said concerning the first thing he read by Lewis, 'it's not so much what he said as the way he said it and the confidence with which he said it.' (Oral history interview excerpts with Chad Walsh, 27 November 1984, 5. Wade; Oral history interview excerpts with Walter Hooper, 28 September 2005, 4. Wade. Both used by permission.)

⁶³ Chad Walsh, 'A Convincing Brief for Miracles', *New York Times* (28 September 1947), 5.

⁶⁴ Anon., 'Don v Devil', *Time Magazine* (8 September 1947): 65.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

and the categories for interpreting his person and work made to fit American expectations. The distinguished American historian, Henry May, addressing a European audience in 1959, spoke of the tendency of his compatriots toward 'a most intense and even painful seriousness about oneself, one's country, and its mission', locating the roots of this trait in the country's Protestant past.⁶⁶ Lewis in the 1940s was understood to *be* the contrarian persona he presented, and his embattled self-presentation was taken up with gusto by American critics. No sense of irony was to be found.

The Mechanics of a Platform in the Making

A: Publishers

When it came to the business side of literature, Lewis habitually feigned ignorance, but, in fact, he participated in the creation and management of his platform in a direct way. Speaking to a friend about having a book published, Lewis said of his own experience that he 'never hit upon any subtler plan than flinging the MS. at one publisher after another, and was always too ignorant to select the publishers except by fancy and rumour.'⁶⁷ Yet it would be a mistake to take such a statement at face value. In the same letter, he recommended trying to publish in a magazine but said that he could say no more as he had 'never read one'; yet, to another friend he wrote that 'the best intentioned weekly now (but no v. brilliant talents write for it regularly) is *Time and Tide*'.⁶⁸ Again, Neville Coghill, a friend of many years wrote that, with respect to reviews,

⁶⁶ Henry F. May, *Ideas, Faiths, and Feelings: Essays on American Intellectual and Religious History, 1952-1982* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 62.

⁶⁷ Lewis to Sister Penelope Lawson, 31 January 1949, in Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, 911.

⁶⁸ Lewis to John Gilfedder, 27 September 1955, in Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 650.

Lewis 'always said he never read them'.⁶⁹ However, upon receiving some reviews from his publisher in America, Lewis wrote back, 'Thanks for the cuttings—none v. sour, as you say, but some v. silly. Yes, thanks; continue sending, I'd better see them than not.'⁷⁰

Indeed, despite his denial of interest in or knowledge of business matters (undoubtedly part of his literary persona), it is clear from his correspondence with his publishers that Lewis had opinions to share and, indeed, actively shaped his image through them. He was known to write a blurb for his own book,⁷¹ provide a personality sketch for the use of publishers,⁷² opine about the best photo of himself⁷³ and discuss publicity strategies.⁷⁴

Much more important to the posthumous success of the Lewis brand (arguably present by the 1940s) were Lewis's publishers. However little or much thought Lewis put into choosing his publishers, the fact remains that he landed auspicious choices. The publishers of the Narnia series, *Broadcast Talks*, *Christian Behaviour*, *Beyond Personality* and *Mere Christianity* were also the most important publishers of Lewis's titles during his lifetime. These were Geoffrey Bles Ltd, publishers of London, which until 1956 handled much of his work in Britain, and the Macmillan Publishing Company of New York, which brought out editions for the American market. Macmillan published the Narnia series for Lewis in America; in Britain, Geoffrey Bles brought out the first five, and the last two were

⁶⁹ Neville Coghill to Jocelyn Gibb, 5 February 1964. Bodl. Dep. C. 773, fol. 82-139.

⁷⁰ Lewis to John McCallum, 24 February 1956. Publisher Correspondence: Harcourt Brace (June 1952-Dec 1964), file 194, The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

⁷¹ Lewis to Gibb, 14 October 1959, in Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 1091-2.

⁷² Lewis, 'Biographical Note'. Wade, Publisher Correspondence: Macmillan, (1944-1955), Index No. 244-272.

⁷³ Lewis to John McCallum, 2 June 1960. Wade, Publisher Correspondence: Harcourt Brace (June 1952-Dec 1964), file 205.

⁷⁴ Lewis to Jeanette Hopkins, 12 October 1963. Wade, Publisher Correspondence: Harcourt Brace (June 1952-Dec 1964), file 215.

given to The Bodley Head.⁷⁵ Geoffrey Bles was a younger house (1923), but it was successful with its selection of detective fiction, travel books, books on the fine arts, translations and, beginning in the 1930s, books about theology and religious works.⁷⁶ It was a growing company when Ashley Sampson, the editor of its Christian Challenge series, commissioned Lewis to write *The Problem of Pain* in 1940.⁷⁷ In contrast, when Lewis first contracted with them in 1943, the larger Macmillan Company of New York was an American branch of a well-established London publisher of the same name. By the time the London and New York branches became independent of one another in 1951, the American Macmillan Company was fast outpacing its parent company, with particular success in fiction titles, including *Gone with the Wind* (1936).⁷⁸ Both Bles and Macmillan were solid publishing houses by the time Lewis signed with them.

For these publishers, Lewis was, in several respects, a dream-author. First, it helped that he reached fame quickly and without an exorbitant effort on their part. *The Screwtape Letters* first gained popularity as a serial in the Church of England newspaper *The Guardian* and was published by Bles *after* it proved successful; Lewis's radio broadcasts were such that Bles needed only to convert them into print and sell them to a ready-made audience who may or may not have otherwise bought his books. In America, the situation was slightly different because publishers and their audiences were

⁷⁵ Other important houses included Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, The Bodley Head and Harcourt Brace & World. As publishers of those books which are the subject of this dissertation, and critical publishers of Lewis in general, Geoffrey Bles and Macmillan are central to this chapter.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Rose and Patricia J. Anderson, eds., *British Literary Publishing Houses, 1881-1965* (Gale Research: Detroit, 1991), 37.

⁷⁷ Gibb, 'Looking Back: A History of the House of Bles', 5.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth James, 'Letters from America: The Bretts and the Macmillan Company of New York', in *Macmillan: A Publishing Tradition*, ed. Elizabeth James (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 177-187.

not always aware of successes in Britain. In fact, after the book had been released in Britain, 'quite a number' of publishers in America were approached by Bles with *Screwtape*, to no avail.⁷⁹ Macmillan was among these, initially judging the book too clever and difficult for the market.⁸⁰ It was not until a director at Bles personally took the book to the president of Macmillan and 'put up a very strong case' to him that it decided to publish it.⁸¹ However, there too, as we have seen, Lewis's platform was quickly established.

Second, Lewis was a publisher's author in that he continued to be prolific after his name became known, and he wrote in a variety of genres. It is a publishing truism that new books sell old books; and better still is the new book that taps into different kinds of readers. The books Bles brought out for Lewis after *Beyond Personality*, for example, included books for children; two more works of general fiction, *The Great Divorce* (1946) and *Till We Have Faces* (1956); four works of Christian thought *Miracles* (1947), *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958), *The Four Loves* (1960), and *Letters to Malcolm* (1964); a biography, *Surprised by Joy* (1955); a lecture series, *The Abolition of Man* (1946); and two collections of essays, *Transposition* (1949) and *They Asked for a Paper* (1962). Both Macmillan and Bles profited from Lewis's fecundity.

Nevertheless, for the publishing houses, plenty of work was involved capitalizing on the momentum of the War years. As the first publishers of many of Lewis's books,

⁷⁹ Jocelyn Gibb to Lewis, 21 February 1955. Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 76-127.

⁸⁰ Brett to Daniel Macmillan, 16 April 1942. BL Macmillan Archive, Second Part. Cited by James, *Macmillan*, 183.

⁸¹ John Gilbert Lockhart took the book to George Platt Brett, Jr. Jocelyn Gibb to Lewis, 21 February 1955. Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 76-127.

Geoffrey Bles not only worked with Lewis to turn many of his manuscripts into final products, but then marketed each new book in a way that let readers know how it fitted into the corpus of Lewis's established titles and similar titles from other authors. Most of the correspondence and files of Geoffrey Bles, the animating spirit of the firm, have been destroyed,⁸² but it is evident that under his leadership, which lasted until 1954, Lewis's books were advertised regularly in *The Times*, among other places, and that other marketing measures were used: for example, the distribution of 'many thousand(s)' of leaflets for *Mere Christianity*.⁸³ Bles's advertisements typically featured several snippets of reviews, alongside a brief description of the new book—which was standard practice for the period. Interesting touches included the reproduction of Lewis's signature, first featured in 1943,⁸⁴ and the catch-phrase, 'these books are being read everywhere', which was used for years.⁸⁵ Notably, Bles's branding of Lewis was primarily as a religious writer for the layman. This angle is evident in its choice of blurbs (which were often taken from religious periodicals), the books they advertised alongside his (frequently J. B. Philips) and the descriptions it provided, such as the following for *Mere Christianity*: 'The above reviews indicate the enthusiastic welcome this book has received from all denominations. It should find a place in every Christian home and school.'⁸⁶ The marketing practices of the Bles company demonstrate that they understood and branded Lewis as a religious writer, with an appeal to a broad readership.

⁸² Walter Hooper, email correspondence with author, 30 May 2011.

⁸³ Geoffrey Bles to Lewis, 5 February 1953. Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 14-39.

⁸⁴ Advert, *Times*, multiple books, (16 June 1943) (Issue 49573).

⁸⁵ Advert, *Times*, *Broadcast Talks*, (11 September 1942) (Issue 49338), 6.

⁸⁶ Advert, *Times* (11 March 1954), 8.

Macmillan, too, had the responsibility of expanding the readership for Lewis's books, but in its case in America. Its marketing, however, indicates a broader conception of Lewis's platform than Bles's. As discussed above, Lewis was first reviewed in *The New York Times* as 'author', then, after his 'meteoric rise to fame'⁸⁷ with *Screwtape*, his platform became 'defender of Christianity, with bravado, at Oxford'. The fact that this collection of associations was not critically dissected in America, as it was in Britain, resulted in a situation in which, whereas Bles understood its corner of the Lewis market to be 'religious titles', as opposed to academic titles, Macmillan understood its goal to be to sell 'one of the most talented and versatile writers of our times'.⁸⁸ The evidence of this is in the adverts. Macmillan's adverts in the 1940s and 1950s tended to be large and often to market a whole collection of Lewis's books, on the occasion of publishing a new book. Moreover, the entertainment and literary value of Lewis's writings were stressed perhaps even more than his identity as a champion of Christianity: a 1947 advert for Lewis's George Macdonald anthology reads, 'In a world that rivals ancient Rome for skepticism, the growing popularity of C. S. Lewis is a significant literary phenomenon. True, Lewis is a polished, witty writer. This accounts for some of the enthusiasm of his readers—but there is a much deeper appeal. Beneath the wit there is a calm, reasoned faith.'⁸⁹ This description indicates that Macmillan expected that the primary appeal of Lewis would be the quality of his writing, and it pitched the religious features as an additional benefit. The books Macmillan advertised alongside Lewis's—*The Captain's*

⁸⁷ Advert, *New York Times*, Book Review Section (19 March 1944), 23.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Advert, *New York Times*, Book Review Section (18 May 1947), 9.

Wife, a novel about a Welsh woman, or *Exiled Pilgrim*, an immigrant tale⁹⁰—indicate an emphasis on literary associations as well as religious ones. Neither Macmillan nor Bles advertised the Narnia books prominently. As will be discussed in chapter four, books for children in the 1950s were not yet the large capital generators that they would very soon become. Nonetheless, the contrast between Macmillan and Bles’s marketing is revealing of how the respective companies conceived of Lewis’s platform.

Through the 1940s and early 1950s, as was typical of the period, decisions that required the author’s input concerning the publishing and marketing of his or her books (with respect to both Macmillan and Bles) were conducted personally, in this case between C. S. Lewis and Geoffrey Bles.⁹¹ Theirs was a congenial partnership, which developed over many years as they worked together to bring creative projects to fruition. It was a relationship between social equals, between gentlemen. Lewis’s letters began ‘My dear Bles’, and he addressed a fellow Oxford, Merton College, ‘Greats’ man twelve years his senior, with whom he bantered in Latin. Lewis seemed content with the arrangement and continued sending manuscripts Bles’s way until 1953, when Bles announced his retirement. The changes within the publishing company which followed its founder’s retirement amounted to one of the most pivotal moments in Lewis’s publishing history.

Several important changes ensued: Bles’s partner Jocelyn Gibb became managing director of the company and Geoffrey Bles’s majority shares were sold to William Collins,

⁹⁰ Advert, *New York Times*, Book Review Section (10 October 1943), 12.

⁹¹ This applied to Macmillan Co. affairs as well because Bles represented Lewis’s interest to Macmillan.

Sons & Co. Ltd, which meant that Geoffrey Bles became an imprint of Collins Publishers. At this juncture Lewis hired the established literary agent Curtis Brown to represent his authorial interest in the new publishing environment. Brown found that not only were the royalty rates Lewis had been receiving too low, but that Geoffrey Bles had been taking a cut of the payments Macmillan had sent to Lewis for his American shares.⁹² After having rectified this situation, Brown negotiated a new contract with Bles concerning future Lewis titles. However, this was not before shopping around the last two of Lewis's Narnia books in Britain and finding more favourable conditions for them at The Bodley Head.⁹³ Brown also separated the American and British rights to Lewis's works, which meant that when Macmillan's contract ran out after the last of the Narnia books were published, Brown renegotiated the American rights to Lewis's books. As Gibb put it to Lewis in 1956, 'I hear Harcourt-Brace has won the Battle of the Atlantic over your live body!'⁹⁴ Indeed, after 1956 new titles by Lewis were published by Harcourt World & Brace in America, where he was given better terms.⁹⁵ All of these changes were indications that the publishing of Lewis's books had transitioned with the times, from the gentleman's profession which predominated in the first half of the twentieth century to the larger, star-author centred and managerial model that became increasingly common in the second half.

⁹² Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 454 and 957, n. 100; Editorial Notes.

⁹³ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 563-4, Editorial Note.

⁹⁴ Jocelyn Gibb to Lewis, 24 June 1955. Bodl. Dep. C. 773, fol. 76-127.

⁹⁵ Walter Hooper to James Como, 14 July 1979. Box 5, Folder 25b, in the Walter McGee Hooper Papers #04236, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The new culture of the Bles firm, with Collins on the board, had its downsides for Lewis—the most significant of which was the personal impact of the change of editors. Gibb, who had a background in print production, was an editor for a managerial age: where Bles tended to share too little of the financial details with Lewis (and profited under a cloak of trust), Gibb shared too much, writing frequently to Lewis about the ins and outs of the publishing process, to a tedium; where Bles was widely-read, Gibb missed allusions. Gibb also wanted Lewis to produce more and better material—books he could sell with ease. He wrote to a fellow editor who came on staff from Collins, ‘You see, I have had a great deal of trouble to get Jack to start writing religious books again. I was counting up the other day and I have had 5 or 6 goes at him in his rooms at different times and I am not making myself particularly popular.’⁹⁶ Gibb not only pestered Lewis to write religious books, it was his private opinion that what Lewis was producing in the late 1950s was not his highest quality. He continued to his fellow editor:

I don’t think we shall ever see from [Lewis] again such books as the *Allegory of Love* or the *Problem of Pain*. . . What is one to do as a publisher? Is one to say, This fellow has gone off in his writing so we will forbid him to publish any more? Because one just can’t do it and one just has to be satisfied with the not-so-good on the one hand or nothing at all on the other. And that is why I am a bit cautious because I still think the not-so-good from Lewis is worth having.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Jocelyn Gibb to Milton Waldman, 5 November 1959, in Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 360-465.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

The personal loss of a trusted adviser, whose replacement was an annoyance, was significant for Lewis.

However, the changes after Bles's retirement also incurred benefits. First, there were the obvious and immediate financial benefits that Curtis Brown secured through the renegotiation of Lewis's contracts. Second, the buy-out by Collins gave its imprint Bles the resources needed for fresh marketing. For example, an 'occasional journal' was launched to promote new titles and engage readers with developments of the Bles imprint. *Fifty-Two*, which was a magazine produced biannually from 1957 to 1968, promoted Lewis's works in nearly every single issue, which provides an indication of how important the C. S. Lewis name continued to be to his primary publisher in the UK. Of greater significance, however, was the fact that *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mere Christianity* were brought out in 1955 under Collins's Fontana Religious Books series, a project on which Collins was expending substantive resources. Fontana became one of the leading British religious lists and brought its titles to previously unreached markets.⁹⁸ The event was billed in *The Times* as '*An event in religious book publishing*', and indeed it was. (Bles used the opportunity to advertise thirteen of Lewis's books on the billing.)⁹⁹

The most important consequence for Lewis's mainstream visibility, however, was one decision made by his new editor, Jocelyn Gibb. In 1954 Sir Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin Books, approached Gibb about publishing one of Lewis's books as a Penguin

⁹⁸ Robin Denniston, 'Lady Collins', *The Bookseller* (4 May 1990): 1438. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, eds. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. 'Collins Family'.

⁹⁹ Advert, *The Times* (6 May 1955).

paperback, proposing a lease of the copyright to *The Screwtape Letters*.¹⁰⁰ This initial discussion did not produce an agreement; however, in 1958 Penguin contacted Gibb again about bringing out a Lewis title in paperback, this time *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in a Puffin edition.¹⁰¹ Gibb relayed the message to Lewis, saying Lane was 'really very excited which means in commercial parlance that he really does hope to sell a lot of them'. Gibb continued:

My experience over these paperbacks, and this is not confined to Penguins and Puffins (Lane's lot), is that they go to a public which does not read hardboard books, or very little. I think there is some kind of subtle distinction between a magazine, which of course always has a paper cover, and a book. There seem to be thousands of people who go for the magazines and not hardboard books and these are the ones who buy the paperbacks and, we hope, read them. And perhaps they may then slowly, via a public library, take to the hardboards as well. Proof of all this? When we publish books here in paperbacks, such as yours in Fontana, the sales of the hardboard editions are unaffected. In some cases they are increased.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Jocelyn Gibb to Lewis, 23 June 1954, in Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 40-75.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Clark to Jocelyn Gibb, 12 February 1958. There had apparently been earlier discussions, for Clark says, 'I am sorry that we have taken so long to get in touch with you again about a possible Puffin edition of C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. We should very much like to have this book in our programme of Puffins for 1959'. Penguin Archive, DM 1107/PS 132, 'L. W. & W. Editorial correspondence file relating to the pub of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1959)'.

¹⁰² Jocelyn Gibb to Lewis, 14 March 1958, in Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 241-359. Lane eventually published all seven Narnia books in Puffin editions.

This was a pivotal decision, resulting in expansion of the reach of the *Chronicles* through the Puffin series in 1959. Puffin paperbacks were hugely successful, and in 1974 the Narnia books were still the imprint's best sellers.¹⁰³ Gibb understood that the paperback represented the future of publishing, and he was willing to give Lane the opportunity to take Lewis's children's books to a much wider public than they had known to date. Although he lacked Geoffrey Bles's charm, Gibb's instincts about the changing publishing and reading climate were instrumental to the continued success of the C. S. Lewis brand.

Across the Atlantic, meanwhile, the Americans had not been idle. Although Macmillan contracted no new Lewis titles after 1956, it retained his most popular ones, including the complete Narnia series, and it made efforts to capitalize on them. It sent the popular periodical *Reader's Digest* a copy of *Screwtape Letters* with the suggestion that the paper publish some extracts from it, saying, 'It is one of the most quotable books that I have ever read'.¹⁰⁴ And, a few months before Lane proposed to publish *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in a Puffin edition, Macmillan was making its own paperback plans. Gibb wrote to Lewis, 'There is great excitement at the moment because the Macmillan Company are contemplating a paperback edition of *Screwtape* in the States. They have asked us to let them have prices for printing 50,000 copies so obviously they are going to launch it in a big way.'¹⁰⁵ *Mere Christianity* was brought out as a Macmillan Paperback at about the same time, in 1960. It also contracted *Screwtape Letters* to be

¹⁰³ Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1974), 255.

¹⁰⁴ R. L. DeWilton to Ralph Henderson, 26 January 1943. Wade, Publisher Correspondence: Macmillan (1944-1955), file 244.

¹⁰⁵ Jocelyn Gibb to Lewis, 4 November 1958, in Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 241-359.

included in a paperback mailorder club, the 'Time Reading Program', operated by *Time* magazine.¹⁰⁶ After *Screwtape* was released, however, Macmillan lagged in the publishing of paperbacks. There was discussion in 1963 about bringing out *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in a soft cover, but the company waited until 1970 to publish the complete Narnia series in paperback.¹⁰⁷

We have now gone behind the scene, so to speak, and glimpsed the situation of Lewis's publishers as it was in the late 1950s. This was a moment of cultural importance: it revealed the transition from the gentleman-publisher age to something more efficient, and with the benefits and trappings of a larger, more profit-orientated operation. The developments of this moment were the most important factors in Lewis's visibility to mainstream Britain and America in the second half of the twentieth century, for two main reasons.

The first reason concerns the fate of these publishing houses in both Britain and America. In the second half of the twentieth century, there was a tendency toward consolidation, mergers, take-overs and the creation of global multi-media empires (for those publishing houses fortunate enough to survive the competition). The histories of Bles and Macmillan are illustrative of how quickly houses changed hands and became part of larger and larger business structures. Geoffrey Bles was bought by Collins in 1953; the family of Collins, which had run William Collins & Sons Publishers since its beginning in Glasgow in 1819, then sold its shares to media mogul Rupert Murdoch in 1981, who

¹⁰⁶ Clement Alexandre to Jocelyn Gibb, 12 July 1962 in Bodl. Dep. C. 772, fol. 232-312.

¹⁰⁷ Clement Alexandre to Jocelyn Gibb, October 1963 in Bodl. Dep. C. 772, fol. 354-454.

sold William Collins & Sons to global media giant, The News Corporation in 1989. Under The News Corporation, Harper & Row, another of its publishing assets, was merged with William Collins & Sons to become HarperCollins. Meanwhile, in America, the Macmillan Publishing Company merged with the larger Crowell-Collier publishing house in 1960, and this mega-company bought and sold its share of smaller companies for the next twenty years, until it was itself bought for nearly \$2.6 billion dollars in 1988 by the British media mogul Robert Maxwell. In 1991, following the death of Maxwell, the Maxwell Communication Corp. filed for bankruptcy and Macmillan was sold again, this time to Paramount Publishing, America's largest book publisher. Paramount Publishing was bought the next year, in 1994, by Viacom.¹⁰⁸ After Macmillan's assets were sold off, The News Corporation, which owned HarperCollins, acquired the American rights previously owned by Macmillan to many of Lewis's books—probably from Paramount Publishing, which dissolved its children's division.¹⁰⁹ The result of this complicated web of exchanges was that the copyrights of many of Lewis's best-sellers were finally consolidated under one publishing house, in 1994, under the HarperCollins imprint.

As this synopsis of the history of Macmillan and Collins demonstrates, over the twentieth century increasingly fewer and increasingly larger publishers came to dominate the market in both America and Britain. Their size meant that these publishers were capable of negotiating for cheaper materials, bulk distribution, and prime display space at retail outlets. Indeed, in 1994 HarperCollins re-issued the Narnia books in new hardbacks,

¹⁰⁸ Jim Milliot, *Publishers Weekly* (15 November 1993): 19. \$552.8 million was paid for the five divisions that comprised Macmillan Publishing: college, children's books, adult trade, reference and The Free Press.

¹⁰⁹ Shannon Maughan, *Publishers Weekly* (16 January 1995), Vol. 242 Issue 3.

trade paperback, and mass market HarperTrophy paperbacks. The sum of it is, thus, that Lewis's titles succeeded in the second half of the twentieth century in part because the publishing companies he worked with from the 1940s ultimately were perpetuated as part of larger conglomerates.

The second reason why the key developments of Lewis's publishers in the late 1950s were pivotal to the long-term success of Lewis's books was the success of the paperback—cheaper versions of popular titles with visually distinctive covers. Collins, especially, was successful because they were pioneers of the mass market book industry. At mid-century, publishing was undergoing rapid changes that precipitated a dramatic remaking of the industry as a whole. Pressures such as the rising price of paper pushed publishers to rethink their techniques, priorities and culture. The more financially successful companies embraced technical innovations, controlled their prices and, at the same time, reached new audiences. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was brought out by the pioneer paperback publisher, Sir Allen Lane, at the time the mass-market phenomenon was coming to dominate the market; meanwhile, Collins was bringing out other Lewis works in its Fontana paperback series. Macmillan issued a paperback version of *Screwtape* in 1958, then other Lewis titles in 1970, after its merger with Collier-Crozer. The mass-market paperback format was increasingly sold in unconventional outlets, such as drugstores and mail order book clubs, then, later, in malls (in America) and, much later, in mega-chains such as Waterstones (in Britain). The result was the power to reach new readers as never-before—to create a mainstream phenomenon. Literature or authors formerly considered 'high-brow' were brought to the middle classes. Moreover, by the

time that Maxwell was bidding for Macmillan in 1988, the communications giants that owned the publishing companies were realizing that by cross-fertilization within their assets, they could double-down on their winning titles: a movie version would boost the sales of a book, and both could be merchandized through the giant retail outlets serving the public. The timing of these changes could not have been more fortuitous for the long-term success of the C. S. Lewis brand. Lewis's books were brought to the middle classes in Britain and America on the tailcoats of their publisher's success and the birth of a re-vamped and re-structured book industry which was driven by its mass-market sector.

B: The C. S. Lewis Estate

Although the fate of the publishers of Lewis's titles was critical to the posthumous success of the Lewis name, there were other people with an interest in facilitating that success. The matter of Lewis's literary estate is an important piece of Lewis's mainstream visibility, so we turn now to explaining its key persons and events.

Lewis was survived by his brother, Major Warren (Warnie) Lewis, with whom he had shared a home from 1930, and two teenage sons of his late wife Joy Davidman Lewis from a previous marriage, David and Douglas Gresham. Warnie was the closest to Lewis, both in personal and professional terms. He had helped Lewis with responding to the voluminous correspondence he received, beginning in the early 1940s from British and American admirers, and other matters of business. However Warnie had health problems during the months of illness which led to his brother's death. Under these circumstances, one of the many ardent American devotees of Lewis was asked to assist with some of the administrative tasks Warnie normally did. Walter Hooper, a 32-year-old English teacher

from a small town in North Carolina, had contacted Lewis about writing a biography of him (which Lewis had discouraged), and had travelled to Britain to meet him in June 1963.¹¹⁰ Hooper had stayed in Oxford through the month of August, met Lewis regularly and then returned to the States that autumn.¹¹¹ The January after Lewis's death in November, however, Hooper returned to Oxford and took upon himself the task of organizing Lewis's papers. Warnie, devastated by the loss of his brother, did not immediately express objection to Hooper's intervention in the family's affairs.

Hooper was in the right place at the right time to gain proximity to his late idol. He was an Anglophile, young and unattached, with enough of an obsession to devote years—a lifetime, in fact—to proselytizing all things Lewis. After moving to Oxford he became intimately involved in the business of Lewis: ingratiating himself with people who had known Lewis and looking for Lewis-related projects to do. As one might imagine, Hooper's enthusiastic presence was not always warmly received. Warnie, though generally on cordial terms with Hooper, told him off for bringing Lewis-fans to his home—'This is positively the last time I shall be on show to tourists!'¹¹²—and for exaggerating the extent of Hooper's relationship with his brother to, among other people, the editor of the *Times Diary*.¹¹³ Gibb, who was editing a collection of essays on Lewis and trying to

¹¹⁰ Lewis to Walter Hooper, 7 February 1962. Box 1, Fol. 77, Hooper Papers, UNC; Oral history interview excerpts with Walter Hooper, 28 September 2005. Wade, Oral History Project. Used by permission.

¹¹¹ Warren Lewis to Walter Hooper, 12 May 1969. Box 1, Fol. 79, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹¹² Warren Lewis to Walter Hooper, 3 June 1966. Box 1, Fol. 78, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹¹³ The *Times Diary* reported in 1968 that Hooper had been 'Lewis's amanuensis for the last year of Lewis's life'. When someone who knew Lewis wrote to the paper about the inaccuracy of this statement the editor responded that they had checked the fact with Hooper again and that he had confirmed to them that he had "'lived in" with C. S. and W. H. Lewis while working as C. S. Lewis's secretary'. Warnie confronted Hooper about the inaccuracy of this statement in a letter dated 12 May 1969 (Box 1, Fol. 79, Hooper

commission a biography, expressed dislike for Hooper and worried that he would go around ‘hawking’ something he had written as an official biography.¹¹⁴ Yet despite his image as an American interloper, Hooper succeeded in making himself indispensable to those who shared his ambition to see Lewis’s titles continue to be bought and read. Indeed, Hooper gained this indispensable status by becoming an expert on Lewis’s biography and corpus of writing, working to collect and organize everything Lewis wrote and corresponding with publishers about new projects.

Over the next fifteen years, in fact, Hooper’s primary accomplishment was editing a number of compendiums of Lewis’s works, two published by Cambridge University Press and eight by Collins, under either the Bles or Fontana imprint. These were composed primarily of reprints: essays in volumes, pieces Lewis did for various periodicals or papers he had delivered at societies, mixed with previously unpublished lecture notes or chapters to works Lewis did not finish—the manuscripts of which Hooper had acquired from Warnie. Two were volumes of poetry, others were organized by theme: literary essays, fantasy, writing about Christianity, medieval and renaissance essays.¹¹⁵ Hooper’s efforts put him in contact with the staff of Collins, a position of (whatever) influence, he relished. He related with thrill to a friend: ‘Lady Collins is about

Papers, UNC); Warnie later mailed Hooper a clipping for an advert for *God in the Dock*, which Hooper edited, which also described Hooper as ‘Lewis’s secretary for the last two years of his life’. The sentence is underlined and Warnie wrote ‘Seems impossible to eradicate this error!’ and signed the clipping. (30 October 1970. Box 1, Fol. 79, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹¹⁴ Jocelyn Gibb to Curtis Brown, 28 January 1964, in Bodl. Dep. C. 772, fol. 1-81.

¹¹⁵ Volumes edited by Hooper in the 1960s and 1970s were: *Poems* (London: Bles, 1964), *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), *Of Other Worlds* (London: Bles, 1966), *Christian Reflections* (London: Bles, 1967), *Narrative Poems* (London: Bles, 1969), *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), *Undeceptions* (London: Bles, 1971), *Fern-Seed and Elephants* (London: Collins, Fontana Paperbacks, 1975), *The Dark Tower and Other Stories* (London: Collins, 1977), *They Stand Together* (London: Collins, 1979).

the most powerful publisher in Britain, is often seen popping into Buckingham Palace-- and I have her 'in my pocket'!¹¹⁶ Certainly, for Collins, Hooper was a resource for more Lewis titles. Even Lewis's friends were surprised by how many publications he could put together. In 1967 one wrote to him: 'I look forward to *Christian Reflections*. I didn't know there was yet another Lewis in the offing. This, I feel sure, should be the last--unless you and I, on that archaeological dig in Belfast turn up his juvenilia!'¹¹⁷ In fact, Hooper waited to publish *Boxen*, Lewis's juvenilia, until 1985; *Christian Reflections* (1967) proved to be only the beginning of what this expatriate would go on to publish of Lewis's work.

Hooper's presence in Oxford and his passion for seeing to Lewis's continued relevance made him a natural resource for the trustees of Lewis's estate. The initial two trustees were Owen Barfield and Cecil Harwood, both of whom had been friends of Lewis since his undergraduate days. As trustees, they were responsible for administering and capitalizing upon Lewis's literary assets, including matters related to existing and new copyrights, on behalf of the beneficiaries of the estate: Warnie, then Lewis's stepsons. Harwood was less involved than Barfield, who had been Lewis's solicitor for as long as he had had need of one; but both men were in their sixties and had less energy than Hooper for the minutia of the business affairs concerning their late friend's work. Harwood and Barfield, therefore, appointed Hooper to be a fellow trustee of the estate in 1969 (against

¹¹⁶ Walter Hooper to James Como, 24 October 1977. Box 5, Fol. 25a, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹¹⁷ John Lawler to Walter Hooper, 10 November 1966. Box 1, Fol. 71, Hooper Papers, UNC.

Warnie's wishes).¹¹⁸ After Harwood died in 1975, Barfield and Hooper co-administered the estate until 14 December 1981.

From Lewis's death until 1981, therefore, Hooper proved an essential aid to those involved with Lewis's estate—both through the collection, organization and publication of additional Lewis works, which aided the viability of Lewis's name with respect to both the public and his publishers, and by doing many tasks which were the responsibility of the trustees: whether answering requests for rights to issue a Russian translation of *Mere Christianity* or negotiating audio rights to *The Four Loves*.¹¹⁹ Warnie noted his appreciation to Gibb, 'Yes, you and Walter between you are doing a great job of work in keeping the name of C. S. L. before the public, and long may you continue to do so'.¹²⁰ But Hooper's efforts were most valued by Barfield, who wrote in 1971:

The extent to which Jack's posthumous works have kept on appearing and his name has thus been kept well on the literary, theological and academic map both here and in America, is almost entirely due to his arduous efforts. Without them I hardly like to think what the Royalties might have dropped to by now; whereas in fact they have kept up very well and in some years have been higher than in Jack's lifetime.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 11 March 1969. Box 1, Fol. 122, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹¹⁹ Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 28 March 1980. Box 1, Fol. 127, Hooper Papers, UNC; Owen Barfield to Warren Lewis, 16 December 1971. Box 1, Fol. 123, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹²⁰ Warren Lewis to Jocelyn Gibb, 23 June 1966. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 96.

¹²¹ Owen Barfield to Warren Lewis, 16 December 1971. Box 1, Fol. 123, Hooper Papers, UNC.

On this occasion, Barfield was making an argument to Warnie that Hooper was deserving of pay, out of the royalties, for his efforts.¹²² It was not the last time that Barfield vouched for Hooper's value to the estate. After Warnie died in 1973, the continuation of Hooper's involvement with the estate depended upon the Gresham brothers' estimation of the worth of his contribution. Hooper wrote to Barfield, expressing his anxiety over the circumstances and asking Barfield to speak well of him to the Greshams. He wrote, 'What it comes down to is that I'm fighting very hard to keep a job which I really believe I am qualified for, and which job, if I am allowed to keep, I will put every ounce of my energy into doing well.'¹²³ Barfield did recommend Hooper to the Greshams and they kept him on as a trustee.¹²⁴ This arrangement stood until 1981.

To understand what happened in 1981, a few more details are needed. After Warnie's death in 1973, David and Douglas Gresham became the *beneficiaries* of the copyrights; however, they were not granted *ownership* of the copyrights until 1981, the time at which Barfield, as executor of the will, decided to relinquish them. The Gresham brothers, upon receiving ownership of the copyrights, assigned them to a holding company, Trident—so they became (and indeed continue to be) owned by a company in Singapore, C. S. Lewis Pte Ltd, who in turn granted the right to exploit the copyrights and the benefit of the existing contracts to a Dutch company, UITGEVERSMAATSCHAPPIJ

¹²² *Ibid.* Barfield suggested making up to Hooper any deficiency, if his annual income fell below 600 pounds. Hooper records elsewhere that he was paid 3,068.66 pounds in royalties from Lewis's estate from 1963 to 1973 and received 10% of the royalties after Warnie died. Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 9 November 1974. Box 1, Fol. 125, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹²³ Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 16 May 1974. Box 1, Fol. 125, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹²⁴ Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 31 January 1974. *Ibid.*

EKSTER B.V.¹²⁵ Curtis Brown was retained as this company's literary agent until 1999, after which point the job was handled in-house. Hooper was also contracted as an adviser of C. S. Lewis (Pte) Limited, a position he has continued to hold until the present day.¹²⁶ As an adviser of the C. S. Lewis Company, his contract of 1984 stipulated that he receive three percent of the 'annual net receipts' of the earnings of the Lewis estate for his serving as a consultant to the estate and for relinquishing all claims of ownership of any works he edited of Lewis's volumes, in the past or future.¹²⁷ Hooper has therefore had a healthy incentive for continuing to promote Lewis's platform, which he has done through speaking events and through endorsing new works about Lewis. He has been rewarded with retaining his privileged position for producing more Lewis-related materials, such as the three-volume collection of Lewis's letters published by HarperCollins.¹²⁸ This appears to have remained the business relationships between the Gresham brothers, Hooper and the company managing the C. S. Lewis assets, from 1981 until the present.¹²⁹

While circumstances involving Lewis's estate are complex, their implications for the mainstream visibility of Lewis's titles are straightforward. From the time Lewis died until

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Stevens to Mr. Attwoll (Curtis Brown Group Ltd. to Oxford University Press), 11 August 1982, Folder 'English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama', Oxford University Press Archive, Oxford.

¹²⁶ Deed of Assignment Between Walter Hooper and C. S. Lewis (Pte.) Limited, Signed 2 December 1984. Owen Barfield Family Collection, Special Collections, Azusa Pacific University Library, California.

¹²⁷ Deed of Assignment Between Walter Hooper and C. S. Lewis (Pte.) Limited, Signed 2 December 1984, Barfield Papers, Azusa.

¹²⁸ *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. I: Family Letters, 1905-1931* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. II: Books, Broadcast and the War, 1931-1949* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), and *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. III: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950-1963* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

¹²⁹ The company's papers are not available at present to researchers.

the Gresham brothers assumed ownership in 1981, Hooper tirelessly promoted Lewis's platform, under the oversight of Barfield. Though he had no previous experience working with publishers or literary agents, Hooper learned what he needed to know to direct attention to Lewis's name. After 1981 Lewis's platform was entirely in the hands of people whose interest was to profit from the brand.

From shortly after they began to make their opinions known about the management of the estate, the Gresham brothers gained a reputation for aggressively protecting their interests. In 1974 Hooper expressed regret about what he anticipated would be a more financially-driven management of the estate. After a meeting with David Gresham and Gresham's solicitor, he wrote to Barfield:

Though I am immensely pleased that I still have a job, I know it will not be an easy thing to be in the employment of David. As far as I can judge, he is only interested in money and he is anxious to get away from this country as quickly as he can in order to save as much as possible. In so far as he can be said to have given me any encouragement, it is that I try to ensure that the royalties get bigger and bigger every year. As happy as I am to go on working with Jack's books, can anyone really envy me having such a money-hungry taskmaster?¹³⁰

It is true that when the Gresham brothers assumed control, the legal and corporate arrangements they made were to ensure that their property would be professionally managed for maximum financial benefit. The Gresham brothers, who are now estranged,

¹³⁰ Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 19 April 1974. Box 1, Fol. 125, Hooper Papers, UNC.

have differed in their public relationship to the C. S. Lewis name and Company. David has had no association with it, while Douglas has been a frequent speaker at Lewis events, wrote a book about his life with his step-father and has been very involved in the operation of the C. S. Lewis Co.¹³¹ The C. S. Lewis Company itself, though generally very guarded about its business, has nevertheless left some evidence of how its policies have impacted the mainstream visibility of Lewis. Douglas, who describes himself as a paid ‘adviser’ of the C. S. Lewis Company, said in an interview in 1996 that his ‘work’, involved, among other things, monitoring what is said on the internet regarding Lewis. This was, he explained, ‘so that when someone tells a lie, I can call them up on it’ and:

[S]o I can monitor it for people who, quite innocently, infringe trademarks and copyrights. Because, the C. S. Lewis Company is obliged to defend or protect its licensees. People don’t understand this. They think the C. S. Lewis [?] [sic] Limited as being—oh, I don’t know, money grubbing or something, by telling them not to do this, not to break their trademark, when in fact, it is because they are liable to be sued by the people they have licensed the trademark to, if they don’t protect it....So I spend, I suppose, between two and five or six hours a day at the internet computer, and then all of my fax mail usually is to do with artistic and creative quality, and quality control.¹³²

¹³¹ Douglas Gresham, *Lenten Lands: My Childhood with Joy Davidman and C. S. Lewis* (London: Collins, 1988).

¹³² Oral/Visual history interview excerpts with Douglas and Merrie Gresham, 16 July 1996. Wade, Oral History Project. Used by permission.

Gresham, in effect, admitted to spending much time and effort looking for copyright infringements of the assets that he and his brother controlled.

It is no surprise that Lewis's estate has been concerned to enhance the profitability of the assets associated with Lewis's platform. What is more unusual is that there have been moments at which motivations other than financial have critically impacted its success—such as in the 1960s and 1970s when Hooper's efforts, along with Owen Barfield, contributed to Lewis's name remaining before the public. As publishing became a larger, more international affair, dominated by multi-media empires, the arrangement that the Gresham brothers made to secure the financial success of their assets meant professionals (e.g., Ekster B.V.) handled the legal and corporate complexities involved. This fact has had its place alongside other business realities which contributed to the C. S. Lewis name's continued viability into the twenty-first century.

C: The Silver Screen (and Television and Theatre)

The history of Lewis's titles on the silver screen and television is the next most important development in Lewis's mainstream visibility, after the importance of Lewis's publishers and the evolutions within book publishing as a whole. In 1971 Barfield wrote to Warnie, 'In the natural course of events Royalties must diminish as time goes on, but I am not without hopes that income from film rights will begin to take their place.'¹³³ After all, film and television rights certainly did take their place—both in the income secured for Lewis's heirs and the story of his mainstream visibility in Britain and America. However this was, as we have seen, congruous with the rise in book sales. New books sell

¹³³ Owen Barfield to Warren Lewis, 16 December 1971. Box 1, Fol. 123, Hooper Papers, UNC.

old books; film and television renditions sell even more old books. The growth of the entertainment industry, in America especially, was simultaneous with the birth of multi-media conglomerations, which made it that much easier for the C. S. Lewis Co. to negotiate high-paying film and television contracts for Lewis's books.

The climax of this synergy was a moment which created the most concentrated attention on Lewis's name and books within mainstream society since 1942: the release of the blockbuster movie version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in December 2005. The film broke box office records at its opening weekend, as did sales of its DVD in 2006.¹³⁴ Its success was due in large part to a massive budget (\$150 million in production costs) and an impressive marketing campaign, led by Walt Disney. Disney organized promotional partnerships with McDonalds and General Mills to reach mainstream audiences,¹³⁵ and to target the American Christian subculture, they also hired marketing companies that specialized in church-based promotion, like Grace Hill Media.¹³⁶ An indication of the degree to which the movie achieved cultural visibility is the fact that the popular American comedy show *Saturday Night Live* aired a digital short called 'Lazy Sunday' parodying it—a hip-hop song in which two twenty-somethings rap about cupcakes and going to see *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* movie; 'Lazy Sunday'

¹³⁴ Anon., *Business Wire*, 'A Walt Disney Pictures and Walden Media Presentation *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Becomes the Number 1 DVD of 2006', 16 May 2006: retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/445229941>, accessed 1 March 2012.

¹³⁵ Lorne Manly, 'The Stepson, the Billionaire, and the Walt Disney Co.', *New York Times* (6 November 2005): 8.

¹³⁶ "On Target: Disney's 'Narnia' Seeks a Faith-based Audience", *Chicago Tribune* (9 October, 2005) 31.

was one of the most widely circulated videos on the internet in 2006.¹³⁷ As might be expected, in conjunction with the movie release HarperCollins published an illustrated companion book and tie-in editions of the Narnia books. However, they were not the only ones to capitalize on the moment. *Publisher's Weekly* reported: 'There are 45 to 50 books trying to ride the coattails of the movie opening. In sheer numbers, that is unmatched.'¹³⁸ The scale of visibility—of Lewis and his books—was an opportunity too good to ignore for many.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe movie was followed by big-budget versions of *Prince Caspian* (2008) and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (2010). These were also massive in scale, but their impact on Lewis's visibility, though significant, was not as momentous as that of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first, most loved and most famous of the Narnia series.¹³⁹ Second to the Disney movies for putting Lewis before a broad public was the 1993 movie *Shadowlands*, which dramatized Lewis's late-in-life marriage to Joy Davidman Gresham.¹⁴⁰ *The Oxford Times* said in anticipation of this movie's release, 'The likely effect is not difficult to predict. *Shadowlands*, starring

¹³⁷ The digital short titled 'Lazy Sunday' was very widely circulated on the internet and was regarded as one of the best *Saturday Night Live* skits in years. Josh Levin, 'The Chronicles of Narnia Rap: It Won't Save Saturday Night Live but It Could Save Hip Hop', *Slate* (23 December 2005), <http://www.slate.com/id/2133316/>, accessed 1 May 2008.

¹³⁸ Lynn Garrett, as cited by Mark J. Pinsky, 'The Reader, the Evangelist, and the Wardrobe', *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Winter 2006), 90.

¹³⁹ *The Magician's Nephew* is planned for 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Written by William Nicholson, there was a TV version of *Shadowlands* that aired on the BBC on 22 December 1985, then a stage play version at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, and The Queen's Theatre, London, in October 1989 and a radio version was broadcast over BBC Radio 4 on 4 October 1997.

Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger, is set to catapult the 'Lewisiana' industry through the stratosphere.¹⁴¹

While the aforementioned movies were the principal cinematic productions that contributed to Lewis's mainstream visibility, there had been prior, unsuccessful attempts. It is noteworthy that interest in adapting Lewis's work for the screen began with his 'meteoric' rise to fame in America—and has remained a theme since. In 1943 Edward Golden of New York approached Macmillan about making a movie version of *The Screwtape Letters*, and secured a lease to the rights for \$5,000. R. L. De Wilton at Macmillan, encouraged by sales of the book and his associates' enthusiasm over the idea of a film adaptation, wrote to him: 'It seems to me that we should be striking while the iron is hot in the interest both of the movie and the book.' Yet, in the end Golden was unsuccessful.¹⁴² Another attempt, in 1947, went so far as to be announced in *The New York Times*. In this case Clare Booth Luce, the wife of the American media mogul Henry Luce, suggested to Twentieth Century Fox that they should film a version of *Screwtape*; the project was, again, abandoned, but Twentieth Century Fox retained its rights until 1974, when the estate re-purchased them.¹⁴³ In 1971 a contract was taken out for 18 months for film rights for *That Hideous Strength*, for which \$45,000 was paid; but again,

¹⁴¹ 'Casting Shadows on Film', *Oxford Times* (25 February 1994), 15. ('Printed ephemera relating to the film *Shadowlands*, 1994', Bodl. MS.Eng.c. 4791).

¹⁴² Edward A. Golden to Macmillan Publishers, 4 June 1943. Wade, Publisher Correspondence: Macmillan (1944-1955), file 246; R. L. De Wilton to Edward A. Golden, 3 December 1943. Wade, Publisher Correspondence: Macmillan, (1944-1955), file 251.

¹⁴³ A. H. Weiler, *New York Times*, 'Short "Takes" on the Film Scene' Section (19 October 1947); see also letter from Christopher Morley to Macmillan Publishers, 5 March 1948. Wade, Publisher Correspondence: Macmillan (1944-1955), file 262; See also Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation contract for *Screwtape Letters* film, 3 October 1947. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 271. The repurchase of the film rights to *Screwtape Letters* was noted by Walter Hooper in a letter to James Como, 4 January 1974. Box 5, Fol. 25b, Hooper Papers, UNC.

no movie was made.¹⁴⁴ The first time interest was expressed in making a television version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was in 1954, by another New Yorker, Jane Douglass.¹⁴⁵ Nothing came of this correspondence, and, though there were stage and radio versions of the books, the first visual adaptation was delayed until 1967.¹⁴⁶

Other early attempts at making films of Lewis's books had been denied, with the reason given that Lewis did not approve of creating animated versions of his characters. A lawyer from New York who wanted to purchase film rights to the first five Narnia books in 1964 was told, 'I am sorry to have to say that there is no prospect of film rights in C. S. Lewis' children's books being available. The late C. S. Lewis was opposed to any attempt to film or televise these stories and his executors have decided to observe his wishes.'¹⁴⁷ In actuality Lewis was inconsistent on the matter. When Jane Douglass made her proposal he was willing to consider the possibility, saying to Gibb, 'I feel we shd. Allow it only under safeguards which the T.V. people will almost certainly not give us: i.e. specimen photos of the characters and a full script with a right of *veto* on our part.' Furthermore, he said to Douglass, 'I am sure you understand that Aslan is a divine figure,

¹⁴⁴ Owen Barfield to Warren Lewis, 16 December 1971. Box 1, Fol. 123, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹⁴⁵ Jane Douglass to Geoffrey Bles publishers, 27 May 1954. Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 40-75.

¹⁴⁶ The first radio dramatization of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was on the BBC. It was produced by Lance Sieveking and broadcast during the BBC Home Service's 'Children's Hour' in six 40 minute parts between 5.15 and 5.55 p.m. on successive Friday evenings from 18 September to 23 October 1959. From 1988 to 1997 the BBC broadcast radio dramatizations, directed by Brian Sibley. Sometime before 1966 Bles had released dramatic rights to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to Curtis Brown. Brown wrote to Gibb that he had 'arranged for a dramatization to be published by a firm who are, to my mind, the best know and most successful purveyor of amateur rights in America... I am hoping that the Lewis Estate will pick up quite a few dollars from the amateur rights in America'. (Curtis Brown to Jocelyn Gibb, 22 November 1966. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 285). Brown entertained contracting at least one other screenplay of 'one of the Narnia books' by a 'fairly well known writer for the films', in 1971, though nothing came of it. Owen Barfield to Warren Lewis, 16 December 1971. Box 1, Fol. 123, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹⁴⁷ Law Offices of Jerome I. Meyers to Geoffrey Bles publishers, 4 June 1964. Bodl. Dep. C. 773, fol. 264; Vivienne Gill of Collins to Jerome Meyers, 22 June 1964. *ibid.*

and anything remotely approaching the comic (above all anything in the Disney line) would be to me simple blasphemy. But how are you going to manage *any* of the animals? I would welcome a fuller account'.¹⁴⁸ However, when the matter was broached a few years later, Lewis said to another potential producer:

I am absolutely opposed--adamant isn't in it!--to a TV. version. Anthropomorphic animals, when taken out of narrative into actual visibility, always turn into buffoonery or nightmare. At least, with photography. Cartoons (if only Disney did not combine so much vulgarity with his genius!) wd. be another matter. A human, pantomime, Aslan wd. be to me blasphemy.¹⁴⁹

Collins was opportunistic with Lewis's inconsistency, using the excuse that Lewis did not approve of such projects whenever the company deemed a proposal unworthy, only to relinquish the rights when the price and project were right. So an internal memo in response to yet another request for film rights to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* read:

People are always wanting to do this and we have seen some quite good efforts. Our standard response is that they are free to perform them privately but commercial dramatization would not be allowed as CSL would

¹⁴⁸ C. S. Lewis to Jocelyn Gibb, 22 June 1954, in Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 492; From C. S. Lewis to Jane Douglas, 19 June 1954, in Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 491.

¹⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis to Lance Sieveking, 18 December 1959, in Hooper, *Collected Letters*, Vol. 3, 1111.

not have liked it. Are we going to stick to this? If we do change our policy how would we choose the people to make a dramatic rendering?¹⁵⁰

Yet one year later the proposal that succeeded in changing minds aired: a black and white live-action ABC Television Network Production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in nine twenty-minute parts. After this, The Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, whose director had worked with Lewis in the 1950s, paid around \$100,000 for the film rights to the Narnia books in 1975. The Foundation produced an animated film version in co-operation with the Children's Television Workshop (producers of Sesame Street) and with Kraft Food sponsorship. It aired in 1976 and 1979 in America and in Britain in 1980, winning an Emmy for Best Animated Film.¹⁵¹ The Foundation then collaborated with the BBC on a dramatized version of the first five Narnia books for television, which aired between 1988 and 1990.¹⁵² When the Foundation's option expired proposals again came in for Narnia movies.¹⁵³ Paramount Pictures had rights in the late 1990s but the proposal of the producers of *Jurassic Park*—which moved the setting of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to modern Los Angeles—was turned down by 'every major studio in

¹⁵⁰ 'Internal Memorandum' from Jocelyn Gibb to Veronica, 3 June 1966. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 90. In response to a query from Rosemary and Alec Linstead of Kent as to whether rights 'are available for dramatization, in particular *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. We would aim to produce a script that was adaptable to the stage and for serialization on television'. This, because the books were so 'favourably received by a class of nine year olds'. Linsteads to Geoffrey Bles publishers, 22 May 1966. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 86.

¹⁵¹ The Foundation made a substantial profit renting the film to churches in the 1980s. Phone conversation with Rev. Louis Schueddig, Alliance President and Executive Directory, 9 March 2012.

¹⁵² The Foundation had commissioned radio broadcasts from Lewis in 1957, and its director, Caroline Rakestraw, met Lewis when these were recorded in 1958. The recordings, which aired over American radio stations on The Episcopal Series of The Protestant Hour, and the book upon which they were based are called *The Four Loves*; The price paid is recorded in a letter from Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 22 February 1974. Box 1, Fol. 124, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹⁵³ Wade, Glenray Productions, Proposal for Filming *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 1984.

town...some even twice'.¹⁵⁴ However, after the success of *The Passion of the Christ*, *The Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter movies, the C. S. Lewis Co. attracted the interest of major studios, investors and talent. The resulting film was the 2005 movie by Walden Media and Walt Disney.¹⁵⁵

Americans, especially, have wanted to turn Lewis's books into movies. As the fortunes of these books and Lewis's estate grew, there were multiple opportunities for creating television and movie renditions of Lewis's work, especially *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Management of the estate was choosy, however, and there were many projects which were either rejected at the outset or failed to produce a final product for this or other reasons. Americans' enthusiasm and their domination of the entertainment industry in the twentieth century forms a significant piece of Lewis's visibility. Certainly, the rise of the entertainment industry, coinciding with the success of his publishers, contributed to his name becoming familiar to a broad public, including (presumably) the non-readers among it.

Creative Tensions

Thus far this chapter has considered Lewis's platform as it was established within his lifetime in Britain and America, comparatively. It has examined the mechanics of his posthumous fame, which included the publishing of his books; the management of his estate; and the theatre, television and movie ventures which he or his work inspired. After Lewis's death Lewis's platform evolved not only on account of those deliberately

¹⁵⁴ Manly, 'The Stepson', 6.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

shaping his image or changes in publishing and communications history. Fans and readers, too, contributed to Lewis's posthumous platform. Their expectations of Lewis's person and their desires as readers worked in tangent with those managing Lewis's image in a more formal way.

Lewis, as demonstrated above, was famous in Britain from the time of the Second World War until the end of his life. His platform was multifaceted—as contrarian, scholar, Christian apologist, fiction and children's book writer—but a common theme was his own insistence on referring *back* to the past as a model for life and literature. Even in his own lifetime, the posture could be tiring to his contemporaries; but the sentiment was to grow stronger from the early 1960s, with Britain in the throes of great cultural change. This was the period of the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) and the 1960 trial of Penguin Books which resulted in the lifting of the ban against D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The year Lewis died, 1963, witnessed the Profumo affair, the Robbins Report and Bishop John Robinson's *Honest to God*. It was believed, at the time and since, to be a year *between* what was past and the change of days to come. Political, cultural, intellectual and religious events were felt, especially by the young, to be shaking the epistemological foundations of the West. Looking *back* was, at that moment, for seeing what needed to be changed, not for resurrecting familiar ideologies like the Christianity with which Lewis had come to be associated.

Indeed, the restlessness of the mid-century mood in Britain took its toll on Lewis's prestige as a Christian thinker. Valerie Pitt, an Anglo-Catholic journalist, wrote in 1964:

The day Professor Lewis died I lunched with a man who told me that he distrusted clarity in belief. This is, surely, the clue to a certain decline in Lewis's reputation as an apologist. He understood scepticism, especially the rationalist scepticism of his youth. He was compassionate, deeply compassionate, with the moods of doubt, of *wanhope*--but he was never at home with indecision, ambiguity, the self harassment of the modern Christian intellectual. He was too clear, too certain.¹⁵⁶

Lewis's tone seemed uncongenial to the *zeitgeist* of these changing times. When, in 1966, Graham Hough revisited *The Screwtape Letters* for the *Times* he suggested that the worldview Lewis had fought for had already shifted dramatically, that his apologetic was no longer so helpful.¹⁵⁷ Paul Welsby, vice-dean of Rochester Cathedral, writing in 1984, identified the change. He said that the famous Christians of the War years—Lewis, Charles Williams, Dorothy Sayers and T. S. Eliot—had, in their time, 'formed an impressive group' and what they wrote 'carried weight at a time when the professional theologians had ceased to communicate with the public'. 'Today' however, he said, 'much of what they wrote appears too dogmatic and over-confident'.¹⁵⁸ In Britain, though, Lewis would continue to have currency with Evangelicals, his wide appeal as a spokesperson of 'mere' Christianity faded significantly, in Britain, after his death.

However, that is not to say that Lewis was forgotten by the British public. *The Chronicles of Narnia* were boosted to great success in Britain in the 1960s through the Puffin Club, and it was primarily the continued popularity of these books which kept alive

¹⁵⁶ Valerie Pitt, untitled, *Prism* (January 1964), reprinted in *Fifty-Two*, (Spring 1965), 16.

¹⁵⁷ Graham Hough, 'The Screwtape Letters', *The Times* (10 February 1966), 15.

¹⁵⁸ Paul Welsby, *History of the Church of England, 1945-1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 66-7.

a broad familiarity with Lewis's name. Other factors helped as well, including the success of *Shadowlands*, originally a British play, and then a made for television movie. Richard Harries, the Bishop of Oxford, said of that event, 'interest in Lewis, always high, became intense with the television showing of *Shadowlands*'.¹⁵⁹ Lewis's personal life was again catapulted into public notice when A. N. Wilson wrote his 1990 biography.¹⁶⁰ And the children's book author Philip Pullman has drawn to Lewis in the early 2000s with his criticisms of the Narnia series,¹⁶¹ which were voiced on the centenary of Lewis's birth in *The Guardian*, at the release of the Disney movie version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in *The Observer* and nearly any other time Pullman has been compared to his predecessor.¹⁶² (Both are Oxford educated, famous children's fantasy writers, whose books won the Carnegie Medal and have religious themes.) Indeed, Lewis's significance to national life at the end of the twentieth century was indicated by the Royal Mail's issuing of stamps with images of Lewis and from the Narnia books, as part of a series on children's books and in honour of the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth, in 1998.¹⁶³

And, still, the reality is that the American interest in Lewis must be credited for much of his posthumous success. American devotees have been more numerous and,

¹⁵⁹ Richard Harries, *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His God*, 14.

¹⁶⁰ See chapter six, 263-264.

¹⁶¹ See chapter four, 164-165.

¹⁶² Philip Pullman, 'The Dark Side of Narnia', *Guardian* (1 October 1998): 6; Anon., 'Pullman Attacks Narnia Film Plans', *BBC News* (16 October 2005), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4347226.stm>, accessed 15 May 2012; See also e.g.: Christopher Hitchens, 'Oxford's Rebel Angel', *Vogue* (London), (October 2002), <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2002/10/hitchens200210>, accessed 23 September 2013; Andrew Marr, 'Pullman Does for Atheism What C. S. Lewis Did for God', *Telegraph* (24 January 2002), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3572210/Pullman-does-for-atheism-what-C-S-Lewis-did-for-God.html>, accessed 15 May 2012.

¹⁶³ Susan Elkin, 'On the Trail of Narnia's Lion Education Notebook', *Daily Mail* (24 November 1998): retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/320979442>, accessed 1 March 2012.

thus, financially important to publishers and the beneficiaries of Lewis's estate. In contrast to the situation in Britain, Lewis's reputation in the States as a religious writer in the 1960s and 1970s was gaining strides. Thirty-three years after Lewis appeared on the cover of *Time* in 1947, the same magazine reported that Lewis was the twentieth century's 'most-read apologist for God'.¹⁶⁴ The stronghold of this growing reputation was in American institutions of higher education. Americans' understanding of Lewis, as we have seen, was as a defender of the Christian cause, especially as *against* secular philosophies within universities. This was the primary reason Lewis became increasingly better known at universities, where Christian academics proselytized for the Lewis name.¹⁶⁵

American evangelical Christians, especially, were, for the most part, more socially conservative than the British populace. For Lewis to be the champion of American Evangelicalism, a few wrinkles needed to be ironed out. One letter Lewis wrote in 1946 provides an indication of the required adjustments. 'Dear Ladies', it began, 'Who told you that Christians must not go to the theatre, dance, play cards, drink, or smoke?...a list of general prohibitions such as you suggest is not in the spirit of Christianity at all: it is more like the old Jewish law, from which, as St. Paul says, we are "set free".'¹⁶⁶ The expectation, on the part of Evangelicals, that Lewis's personal morality should meet with their scruples has been at the root of some interesting conundrums for those trying to make a profit from the man's name. More to the present point, two moments in

¹⁶⁴ Anon., 'C. S. Lewis Goes Marching On', *Time* (7 April 1980), 66.

¹⁶⁵ See chapter six.

¹⁶⁶ Lewis to 'Ladies', 17 May 1946, in BL, RP 8117.

particular provide an elegant demonstration of the mechanics of Lewis's platform working to accommodate the changing landscape of Lewis's readership: first was a shift to America; then came a divergence between conservative Christians, on the one hand, and a growing number of people familiar with Lewis only as the author of the Narnia books, on the other.

When Walter Hooper arrived in Britain in the early 1960s, Lewis's publishers still had hopes that they could secure a prestigious name for Lewis's biography,¹⁶⁷ and were disparaging of Lewis's American devotees (including Hooper) writing to them with various proposals for books about Lewis or collections of his works.¹⁶⁸ As they came to realize that Lewis's platform was (at the moment) waning in Britain and waxing in the States, it became clear that standards would have to change to accommodate the American market. For example, when Clyde Kilby, an English professor at Wheaton College who had corresponded with Lewis, proposed an anthology to Bles called *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis*—which an internal memo described as 'just the sort of thing Americans would be keen on'—the project was rejected on the grounds that 'an attempt to take bits of [Lewis's work] here and there would end up by completely misrepresenting him'.¹⁶⁹ Having roundly decided that Kilby was not to be 'encouraged', Bles would go on to publish multiple volumes of Lewis odds and ends edited by Walter Hooper, presumably

¹⁶⁷ Jocelyn Gibb to Roger Lloyd, 9 July 1964. Bodl. Dep. C. 773, fol. 248-304.

¹⁶⁸ Jocelyn Gibb to Curtis Brown, 28 January 1964. Gibb wrote to Brown about his worries that Hooper would 'go around hawking' a project of his as an official biography. 'I should explain that I have nothing against Hooper and indeed my relations with him are most friendly. I just think he is a dull dog and I don't suppose for one moment that Jack gave him authority to write a biography, although I suppose no-one can stop him.' Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Internal memo, 3 May 1966, written by Christopher Derrick, a reader for Bles. Bodl. Dep. C. 771-5, Box 775, fol 246.

for the American market, which was growing stronger in the 1970s.¹⁷⁰ What 'Americans would be keen on' quickly evolved from a slight to a recommendation.

Lewis's estate and publishers were also careful to manage information about Lewis's relationships with women, in view of American prurience. In 1965 Bles published a collection of essays written by people who had known Lewis.¹⁷¹ In that volume Hooper described the circumstances of Lewis's first civil and then ecclesiastic marriage to Joy Davidman. When Christopher Derrick, who advised Bles on Lewis-related matters, noticed an error by Hooper on the subject, he investigated the matter further. Derrick found that between Lewis and Joy's civil ceremony on 23 April 1956 (the ostensible purpose of which was to secure a British visa for Joy) and the marriage of 21 March 1957, Lewis began to speak of himself in letters (on 6 and 16 March 1957) as a married man. Yet Derrick instructed Bles that correcting Hooper's error would only serve to 'draw attention to the apparent fact that for many months Jack wasn't quite sure whether he was married or not.' He therefore advised the publishers to leave the error in place because 'As things are, that fact lies harmlessly concealed except from those inquisitive enough to go ferreting at Somerset House.'¹⁷²

Eight years later, documentation of Lewis's personal life again posed a problem. In the 1920s Lewis had what was in all likelihood a romantic relationship with Janie Moore, a married woman and the mother of a man Lewis knew from his service in the First World

¹⁷⁰ See above, note 115.

¹⁷¹ Jocelyn Gibb. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965).

¹⁷² Christopher Derrick to Jocelyn Gibb, 3 May 1966. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 62. Somerset House is a reference to where the marriage record was kept.

War. It is a fact Hooper acknowledged in the introduction to Lewis's diary, published in 1991.¹⁷³ In the 1970s, however, at Owen Barfield's suggestion, a ten-year 'seal' restricting scholars' access was placed on eleven volumes of family papers in order to delay knowledge of the relationship becoming more widely known.¹⁷⁴ Hooper, who was writing Lewis's biography at the time with Roger Lancelyn Green, wrote a friend in 1975:

[T]he *Lewis Papers* contain much that makes it sound as though Mrs. M. were L's mistress. Knowing that people would soon be reading the *Lewis Papers* (we didn't know they would be put under seal) we thought future scholars would charge us with withholding evidence unless we at least *acted* as though we thought there could have been something between Mrs. M. and L.¹⁷⁵

In other words, Hooper and Green, finding evidence that Lewis's relationship with Moore likely had been sexual, decided that it was best not to acknowledge or to deny as much. (The claim of ignorance over the seal was untrue.) In the 1960s and 1970s, therefore, details about Lewis's sexual life were considered a liability to his platform with conservative American readers and concealed.

A second occasion on which Lewis's platform was managed in light of readers' expectations occurred decades later. In the years after his death, the popularity of Lewis had increased along two lines in the States: as a Christian author, on the terms largely set in the 1940s, *and* as author of fiction, specifically *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Capitalizing on

¹⁷³ Lewis, *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C.S. Lewis, 1922-1927*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Harper Collins, 1991), preface.

¹⁷⁴ Barfield to Walter Hooper, 28 June 1974. Box 1, Fol. 125, Hooper Papers, UNC. 'About the Lewis papers, what do you say to keeping them under seal for 10 years from W. H. L.'s death, and then no *quotation* without *your* comment? If you agree, I will so advise his Executors.'

¹⁷⁵ Walter Hooper to James Como, 10 March 1975. Box 5, Fol. 22, Hooper Papers, UNC.

both of these platforms simultaneously has not always been easy for Lewis's publishers and estate. In 2001 a *New York Times* front-page article revealed that, in the midst of a campaign by HarperCollins and the C. S. Lewis Company to extend the Lewis brand, a book deal in conjunction with a public television station documentary about Lewis had been cancelled. As a leaked HarperCollins internal memo explained, the documentary had associated the content of the Narnia books with Christian themes too closely for the Estate or HarperCollins's taste. An executive from Harper San Francisco wrote, 'Obviously this [i.e., *The Chronicles of Narnia*] is the biggie as far as the estate and our publishing interests are concerned. . . We'll need to be able to give emphatic assurances that no attempt will be made to correlate the stories to Christian imagery/theology.'¹⁷⁶ In retrospect, it was clear that the estate was looking forward to the release, beginning 2005, of the movie renditions of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the book in question did not align with their marketing plan to expand its mainstream audience. But at the time the estate and HarperCollins received criticism from Lewis fans for attempting to 'de-Christianize' Lewis and his works. So much so, in fact, that HarperCollins responded with a statement that said, 'The goal of HarperCollins Publishers and the C. S. Lewis Estate is to publish the works of C. S. Lewis to the broadest possible audience, and to leave any interpretation of the works to the reader.'¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Doreen Carvajal, *New York Times* 'Marketing "Narnia" Without a Christian Lion', (3 June 2001) <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/03/national/03NARN.html>, accessed 13 May 2012.

¹⁷⁷ Corrie Cutrer, 'Mere Marketing?', *Christianity Today* (6 August 2001): 19-21; Doreen Carvajal, 'Marketing "Narnia" without a Christian Lion', *New York Times* (3 June 2001): 1, 16.

For Lewis's estate and publishers, ensuring the mainstream marketability of Lewis's platform in the last decades of the twentieth century has meant, on the one hand, walking a line between those who know and love Lewis for his Christianity, on the one hand, and, on the other, recruiting a new generation of Narnia book fans attracted by the appeal of the stories alone. Their quandary is a testament to the fact that Lewis's platform in America had expanded to include a more mainstream audience based on the success of the *Chronicles*.

Summary

Around the close of the twentieth century, the name of a man born in 1898 was known to many more people than had been the case in his own lifetime. Lewis's platform had been strengthened and expanded, most significantly through the acquisition in 2000 by HarperCollins of most of his titles¹⁷⁸ and the Walt Disney adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 2005. These global ventures bolstered Lewis's mainstream visibility and diminished transatlantic distinctions. It is likely that today the majority of people, in both Britain and America, who have heard of 'C. S. Lewis' know the name to belong to the author of the Narnia books, not to a Christian apologist.¹⁷⁹ But growing familiarity with the Narnia books has undoubtedly also contributed to acknowledgement of his achievements as a writer of religious books, including by those living in Britain. In 2008 the *Times*, London, ranked Lewis eleventh on their list of 'the 50 greatest British

¹⁷⁸ Lynn Garrett, 'Religion Stays Strong', *Publisher's Weekly* (8 July 2005): <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20050711/38962-religion-stays-strong.html>, accessed 28 September 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Anecdotal evidence suggests this to be the case. In the course of explaining my dissertation topic, from 2009-2013, I have found that most people know Lewis as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

writers since 1945';¹⁸⁰ in November 2013 he will be honoured with a memorial stone in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey;¹⁸¹ and a 'dedicated C. S. Lewis Centre' is scheduled to open in Belfast, summer 2014.¹⁸²

In the States, Lewis's popularity began as a religious writer and this dimension of his platform has gone from strength to strength, largely as a result of his appeal among Christians at university. His reputation as a children's book author was added to this Christian identity, and has since outpaced it. In Britain Lewis's platform during his lifetime was multi-faceted, and he was understood as a *type* of literary critic. His persona added a depth of play in Britain but was like a wink that was missed by his American reviewers. After his death, however, Lewis's style of confidence fell out of favour in Britain and the Narnia books' popularity soon reshaped how he was known to the British public, now principally as the author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the man from *Shadowlands*.

This chapter has demonstrated that many factors contributed to the establishment of Lewis's platform in his lifetime, how it changed after he died and why there were differences between his reception in Britain and America. At any given time, Lewis's platform was the result of a marriage between readers' expectations and a carefully choreographed image—acted out and to a small degree managed by Lewis, but

¹⁸⁰ Anon., 'The 50 Greatest British Writers Since 1945', *The Times* (5 January 2008): <http://www.listsofbests.com/list/93594-the-times-50-greatest-british-writers-since-1945>, accessed 28 September 2013.

¹⁸¹ 'CS Lewis to Be Honoured in Poets' Corner'. *BBC News*, 22 November 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-20426778>, accessed 28 September 2013.

¹⁸² Lesley-Anne McKeown, 'Belfast C. S. Lewis Centre Turns the Page', *Belfast Telegraph* (3 August 2013), <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/belfast-cs-lewis-centre-turns-the-page-28777332.html>, accessed 5 August 2013.

cultivated, branded and marketed by the people with a financial interest in seeing his books published, commoditized and made the basis of entertainment ventures.

Furthermore, social changes were paramount to Lewis's success. Primary among these was the evolution of communication in the twentieth century: Lewis's name became known in Britain by means of periodicals, at the height of their influence in the interwar period; his platform was then launched to new heights through the wireless at the pinnacle of *its* influence, along with the BBC's, during the Second World War; having been so established, the 'C. S. Lewis' name and books became bankable commodities to the television and film industries, and to the multimedia communications conglomerates that in the second half of the century replaced the gentleman culture of publishing and superseded the radio and periodical medias. Moreover, over the decades a harmonious relationship grew between the management of Lewis's estate and these communications developments: Lewis's estate acted decisively in response to opportunities these changes posed, *as well as* to what was wanted (and not wanted) by Lewis readers, especially American Evangelicals. As a result, Lewis's platform was known by a greater number of people in Britain and America at the close of the twentieth century than it ever was in his lifetime.

Chapter Four

A Tale of Two Canons: *The Chronicles of Narnia* in Britain and America

*'In short, do we not live in an age of kiddylit renaissance so that if Milton were living at this hour he'd be writing about C. S. Lewis rather than the other way round?'*¹

In the nearly sixty years since their publication, *The Chronicles of Narnia* have been publicly celebrated and privately treasured; they have also been scrutinized, exploited, criticized and defended. That so much ink has been spilled over these books is a matter of yet further dismay, delight and discussion. Undoubtedly, the Narnia books have enchanted and entertained countless children and adults since their publication in the 1950s. Yet, as mentioned in the introduction, the present biography of Lewis's books sets aside the question of literary value—important as it is—in order to demonstrate that the life of the Narnia books, like their origins, is firmly grounded in historical, cultural and social changes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It will attend, especially, to two fields of cultural production (as Pierre Bourdieu called them): the commercial and educational interests that drove the development of children's literature in Britain and America. By doing so, a portrait in miniature will be painted of various social forces affecting change in Britain and America.

Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien were among a few established scholars to write high quality children's books and to publish professional articles addressing children's literature in the 1940s and early 1950s. As chapter three demonstrated, by the time the Geoffrey Bles and Macmillan companies published *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

¹ Peter Smith, 'Puffinology', *Children's Choice - A Teacher's World Supplement* (30 April 1976), S5.

in 1950, C. S. Lewis's name was widely known in Britain and America. And, as was shown in chapter two, Lewis had used his name to draw attention to the literary value of children's books both by writing *The Chronicles of Narnia* and by contributing critical essays that defended the genre against what he saw as its unjust disparagement by the literary establishment. The timing of these contributions had important implications for the reception of the Narnia books, both with respect to the professionals working with children's books as well as the popular and educational environments generally. The present chapter will first address the reception of the Narnia books among critics, academics and librarians, before turning to a consideration of more popular responses to the books.

A. Canon-Makers: Children's Book Specialists at Mid-Century and Beyond

At mid-century, in both Britain and America, those working in children's books observed that the literary establishment did not deem literature written for children worthy of serious attention. A writer for the *New York Herald Tribune* in the 1950s reported that the biannual supplement devoted to children's books was generally known around the office as Operation Itsy Bitsy.² There was something of this patronizing tone in a letter that Guy Brown, Religious Book Editor at Macmillan, wrote to Lewis in 1954, asking for a word about future publications: 'Now I realize that you have been doing a number of successful juveniles which have undoubtedly brought you as much joy as those on the adult level and in addition inspire the imagination and bring pleasure to thousands

² Isabelle Holland, 'On Being a Children's Book Writer and Accompanying Dangers', *Horn Book Magazine* (February 1980), 34.

of children. However, the grown-up children are becoming anxious for your return to their field of interest.³ Brown here assumed a division between adult and juvenile reading and interests—the same Lewis had rejected—and implied that Lewis could not be *serious* about his books for children, even possibly indicating that he had an obligation to ‘return’ to writing for adults. This attitude was ubiquitous.

In Britain and America alike, those working in the industry often perceived children’s books to be invisible in a publishing company’s hierarchy, even when quite profitable. In Britain, Kaye Webb, editor of Puffin, recalled that during the 1960s she ran her department with little interest from senior Penguin staff: ‘As long as I was making money, nobody was going to interfere with me...I didn't have any interference.’⁴ The apathy, Webb explained, was because, ‘People didn't think much of children’s’ books; it was just a thing women could do’.⁵ Similarly, the American children’s book author Mary Elting recalled: ‘It’s a curious thing that our trade was so looked down upon that nobody bothered with us.’⁶ These observations echo those made by Lewis and Tolkien about the state of disrepute suffered by children’s books and their authors at mid-century—observations confirmed by later scholars.⁷

Although children’s literature lacked prestige in both Britain and America in the 1950s, from both an institutional and a critical perspective it was much more developed

³ Guy Brown to Lewis, 11 June 1954. Wade, *Publisher Correspondence: Macmillan (1944-1955)*, file 270.

⁴ Kaye Webb, interviewed and quoted by Reynold, ‘Publishing Practices and the Practicalities of Publishing’, 29.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Mary Elting, interviewed 25 January 2002 and quoted by Julia L. Mickenberg in *Learning from the Left: Children’s Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15.

⁷ See chapter two, 67-68.

in the States. Several seminal developments occurred in America: the first children's publishing department was begun at Macmillan in 1919; the first award devoted to children's books, the Newbery Medal, was established in 1922; and *The Horn Book Magazine*, the first journal devoted to the critical evaluation of children's books and to scholarship on the subject, was created in 1924. By comparison, it was not until 1936 that Britain's Carnegie Medal was established, along with the reviewing journal, *The Junior Bookshelf*. Moreover, a comparably academic journal to *The Horn Book Magazine* was created as late as 1970 in the *Signal*. The first Children's Book Section in the *Times Literary Supplement* (1949) explained that it was hoped that this special supplement would be 'a means of breaking the almost total silence which greets the appearance of a new book for children.'⁸ This silence is attributable in part to the fact that British publishing houses waited until the 1950s to establish juvenile divisions. By contrast, there were thirty-two special departments and forty-six publishers specializing in this field by 1945 in the States⁹—though this was not accomplished without some resistance. The first juvenile editor at Oxford University Press, New York, Winifred Howard, recalled of the establishment of its children's book department in 1928: 'Some thought it beneath the dignity of Oxford University Press to deal in anything so trivial as children's books!'¹⁰ This sentiment prevailed for much longer in Britain.

⁸ Alan Pryce-Jones, 'Children's Reading', *Times Literary Supplement* (15 July 1949), 459.

⁹ Louise Seaman Bechtel, *Books in Search of Children: Speeches and Essays*, ed. Virginia Haviland (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 188.

¹⁰ Winifred Howard, 'Preparing to Make Children's Books', *The Horn Book Magazine* (February 1930), 44, quoted in Leonard S. Marcus, *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 104.

Probably without exception, the women behind early American initiatives to improve children's books believed that the reading of 'good' literature was critical to the development of a child's morality and imagination. Bess Porter Adams, associate professor of English at the University of Redlands, in California, summarized this tenet in 1953, 'Good literature, whether for old or young readers, bears the mark of truth and integrity; it carries the reader along into genuine, if vicarious, experience; it stirs his emotions, arouses his curiosity, stimulates his mind, and gives him a measuring stick for living.'¹¹ Whether working in libraries or publishing companies, children's literature specialists were committed to the tasks of improving writing for children, providing recognition for the importance of books in the lives of young people and developing critical standards to guide the growing industry of children's books. Pioneers such as Anne Carroll Moore, first children's librarian at the New York Public Library, Louise Seaman Bechtel, editor at the first children's book department at Macmillan, and Virginia Haviland, first librarian at the Library of Congress's Children's Literature Center, strove for the legitimization of children's books within the mainstream establishment. Anne Lundin has stated children's book advocates attempted to cultivate a new perspective on children's books as *literature* through generating guidebooks, journals, booklists and other critical writings.¹² Establishing a canon of children's literature was an essential step

¹¹ Bess Porter Adams, *About Books and Children; Historical Survey of Children's Literature* (New York: Holt, 1952), viii. This book mentions but does not discuss *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 181.

¹² Anne H. Lundin, *Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature: Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 14.

to securing the political, critical and public support needed to provide as many of America's children as possible with the 'best' books possible.

Stateside, Lewis's essays outlining the value of children's books and arguing for the employment of standards of assessment identical to those to judge literature read by adults was precisely what was needed at a moment when librarians and critics were promoting children's books *as literature*. From the 1950s, in light of the success of the Narnia books and Lewis's scholastic, British and moral credentials, the 'C. S. Lewis' name and the *Chronicles* were firmly established as canonical in America. In 1962 *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* won the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education's Lewis Carroll Shelf award. In a speech given to the California Library Association in 1965, Francis Clarke Sayers, the chief organizer of the Library of Congress's Children's Literature Center Library, used Lewis's account of his childhood experience of reading books in *Surprised by Joy*, as an example of the power of books upon the mind.¹³ *The Horn Book* magazine reproduced Lewis's 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' in 1963; Virginia Haviland later referenced that essay in the same journal, in 1971, in the context of celebrating the 1950s as a 'golden age' of children's books.¹⁴ And in 1966, *Horn Book Magazine* re-printed 'Three Ways of Writing for Children' along with a letter from Lewis to an American doctoral student in education, James E. Higgins, in which Lewis had

¹³ Francis Clarke Sayers, *Summoned by Books: Essays and Speeches by Frances Clarke Sayers* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 18.

¹⁴ Lewis, 'Three Ways of Writing for Children', *Horn Book Magazine* (October 1963), 425-27; see also in that issue Lillian H. Smith, 'News from Narnia', 470-73; and Virginia Haviland, 'A Second Golden Age? In a Time of Flood?' *Horn Book Magazine* (August 1971), 412-419.

answered some questions about his method of writing the Narnia books.¹⁵ The editor of *Horn Book* in 1966 was Ruth Hill Viguers who, in *Margin for Surprise* (1964), cited Lewis's *Experiment in Criticism* in support of her argument that, 'Grownups though we are, we must remember that an excellent children's book is a work of art, and we should put aside any eagerness for the child to *use* it and respect his right to *receive* it.'¹⁶ Finally, when children's book enthusiast Irvin Kerlan established the Kerlan Collection at the University of Minnesota, in 1967, staff members wrote to Lewis (apparently having not heard of his death) with a request for the manuscripts of the Narnia books for their 'permanent preservation' at the Center.¹⁷ Certainly, by the 1960s Lewis was widely accepted by librarians and educators as having made an important contribution to their burgeoning field of children's literature.

As he had intended, Lewis's name had been put to the defence of children's books—though by librarians in America, hardly the protagonists he had imagined. But it is important to note that there was an essential philosophical agreement between Lewis and key American children's book advocates *before* Lewis's name became part of the canon of critical thought. A poignant case of this philosophical agreement was Louise Seaman Bechtel, editor of children's books at Macmillan until 1934, the company that later published all seven of Lewis's *Chronicles*. Bechtel anticipated some of Lewis's critical

¹⁵ James E. Higgins, 'A Letter from C. S. Lewis', *Horn Book Magazine* (October 1966), 533-9. Higgins discussed Lewis as a children's author in *Beyond Words: Mystical Fancy in Children's Literature* (New York: College Press, 1970), 33-47.

¹⁶ Ruth Hill Viguers, *Margin for Surprise: About Books, Children, and Librarians* (London: Constable Young Books, 1966), 34. See also 20, 21-2, 27, 149.

¹⁷ The Kerlan Collection of University of Minnesota Library to Lewis, 27 December 1967. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 188-223.

thought about children's literature. In 1927, twenty-five years before Lewis's 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children', she wrote in an *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled 'The Giant in Children' that there should be no 'childish' books, 'nothing which will have to be outgrown'.¹⁸ Furthermore, in 1950, quoting Walter de la Mare's preface to *The Insect Man*, she also declared that the power of literature for a child was to 'wake' the imagination. Lewis would echo this in 'On Stories'.¹⁹ Bechtel had been an admirer of British fantasy books and thought of the Narnia books as a sequel in that tradition, asking off-handedly in one essay, 'Has C. S. Lewis taken the place, in the more literate homes, of George Macdonald?'²⁰ Of the 250 titles listed in the first catalogue she produced for Macmillan in 1920, about half were from Britain.²¹ In her role as editor and critic, Bechtel advocated bringing Europe's literature into the homes of American children, saying:

America can be proud of such books, and also of editors who offered our children books from abroad like C. S. Lewis's Narnia series, *The Caves of the Great Hunters*, *The Defender*, *Treasure Trove of the Sun*. All those books have something special to say in a new way; whether fact or fiction, they lift both the mind and the heart.²²

Bechtel not only wrote about Lewis in her essays on children's books, she also helped publicize Lewis in mainstream journals. She was serving on the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* committee when Lewis's 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To

¹⁸ Bechtel, 'The Giant in Children', reprinted in *Books in Search of Children*, 144; 'The Children's Librarian', 234; Lewis, 'On Stories', *On Stories*, 12-16.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bechtel, 'Thinking About Children's Classics', in *ibid.*, 173.

²¹ Haviland, *ibid.*, ixix.

²² Bechtel, 'Books on the Ladder of Time', in *ibid.*, 251.

Be Said' was published there in 1956, and when she reviewed six of the *Chronicles* for that periodical.²³ (Her reviews are discussed below.) Lewis's writings about children's literature must have been welcome to Bechtel who, by the time of their publication, had been enthusing for years over the same books by which Lewis was charmed and making similar arguments for their critical importance and value.

Anne Carroll Moore and Francis Clarke Sayers were two other key children's literature specialists in America who anticipated Lewis's philosophy concerning children's books and appropriated British and American writers in support of their cause. The influential Anne Carroll Moore (1871-1961) praised quintessential British man-of-letters Sir Arthur Quiller Couch's lecture on 'Children's Reading' (1917), affirming his assessment that childhood was 'a veritable part of life' and its books have an 'imperishable claim to literature'.²⁴ Of this essay Moore said, 'I have marked a dozen pages for quotation', because what set it apart from other treatments of children's books was Couch's 'deep understanding of childhood and that attitude toward literature and the age to which it belongs'.²⁵ Drawing from a source closer to home, Francis Clarke Sayers said of American critic John Livingston Lowes' *On Reading Books*:

I opened it, and found there the expression of what I needed to say, and could not. The passage was marked! He is speaking of the need to read

²³ Haviland, *ibid.*, xiii. Bechtel served from 1949-1957. Bechtel's reviews in *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*: 'The World in the Wardrobe' (12 November 1950), 7; 'Come Hither! Hear the Magic Horn! A Dragon Waits!' (11 November 1951), 5; 'All Ages Will Enjoy Together Fun, Magic Facts in New Books' (16 November 1952), 3; review of *The Silver Chair*, (15 November 1953); review of *The Horse and His Boy* (14 November 1954); review of *The Last Battle* (18 November 1956).

²⁴ Anne Carroll Moore, *My Roads to Childhood; Views and Reviews of Children's Books*, ed. Frances Clarke Sayers (Boston: Horn Book, 1961), 170.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

for sheer delight, as opposed to reading consciously for definite good or benefit in a narrow or specific sense; to read, as he says 'for our soul's sake or our spirit's sake.'²⁶

A love of children's books for the joy they could impart was at the heart of the critical mission of these early advocates, a stance to which Lewis would also lend voice. Likewise, American children's book specialists' desired end for their critical writings was a wider appreciation of children's books as literature, equal in their capacity to be life-transforming as any other genre. Lewis was one among several appropriated for the cause.

While Britain's children's book scene at mid-century was not as critically evolved or institutionally organized as its American counterpart, some developments across the Atlantic were imported to London. For example, Robin Denniston, editor at Collins during the 1950s, recalled that editors who moved to London were helpful 'since their experience of publishing in New York, where children's books had a far higher profile than in London, gave them an authority that helped us all.'²⁷ One of these editors was Grace Hogarth. In 1962 she founded the Children's Book Circle in London, with British editors Judy Taylor and Kaye Webb,²⁸ 'knowing how valuable had been the exchange of ideas among the publishers of New York who were members of the Children's Book Council there.'²⁹

²⁶ Sayers, *Summoned by Books*, 172.

²⁷ Robin Denniston, 'A Children's Book Publisher of the Fifties', *Signal* v. 70 (1993), 46. Denniston did not mention the *Chronicles* in this article.

²⁸ Valerie Grove, *So Much to Tell* (London: Viking, 2010), 136.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

American print materials providing guidance for the development of critical standards for children's books were also imported, therefore influence was felt second-hand. A British librarian buying children's books for libraries in the 1950s recalled that there were two texts which were often used by those in her occupation 'as a guide to selection standards': *About Books for Children* (1946) by Dorothy Neal White, a New Zealand children's librarian, and *The Unreluctant Years* by Lillian H. Smith (1953), a Canadian children's librarian.³⁰ Both White and Smith, the librarian reported, had been influenced by American children's librarians and their books were supplemented with two standard American works: *A Critical History of Children's Literature* edited by Cornelia Meigs (1953) and May Hill Arbuthnot's *Children and Books* (1947).³¹

Moreover, when specialists in Britain did begin producing their own children's literature criticism, an American influence was apparent—and with it Lewis's place in the American critical canon. In fact, the first article in the inaugural issue of Britain's first academic journal devoted to children's literature was written by an American writer of children's books, Jay Williams. Williams used Lewis's record of his childhood reading to argue for the importance of early exposure to books (as Francis Clarke Sayers had done before him) and noted the similarity between the Narnia books and E. Nesbit's stories.³² The Library Association produced a guidebook in 1957 called *Chosen for Children* which

³⁰ Canadian Lillian H. Smith contributed an article to *Horn Book Magazine* ('News from Narnia', 34 (October 1963), 470-73), praising Lewis's skill as a storyteller.

³¹ Sheila G. Ray, *The Blyton Phenomenon: The Controversy Surrounding the World's Most Successful Children's Writer* (London: Deutsch, 1982), 54-55.

³² Jay Williams, 'Children's Books and the Humanities', *Signal*, v. 1 (1 January 1970), 4.

reproduced an article on Lewis originally written for an American magazine.³³

Additionally, the edited collection *The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading* (1977) reprinted 'On Stories' and the letter Lewis wrote to an American (mentioned above) that had been published in *Horn Book Magazine*.³⁴ Lewis's standing among American children's book critics in the 1950s meant that when the British children's book field began to be impacted by developments in the States, the author born in Belfast was re-imported as it were through that transatlantic influence.

Yet despite this, Lewis has not been referred to as a children's book advocate as often in Britain. In 1959 the *New Statesman* published a piece reporting interviews with four authors about their experiences of writing for children; Lewis was not among them.³⁵ There have been occasional references to his thoughts about writing for children, and especially one particular statement, which, her collection of papers revealed, Puffin editor Kaye Webb scribbled at the top of a work entitled 'Axioms About Reading': 'A children's book which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's book'.³⁶ Margery Fisher, one of the best known British children's book experts in the 1960s and the founder of the reading guide periodical *Growing Point*, cited Lewis on this point, saying in *Intent Upon Reading* (1961) that he had been 'almost inclined to set it up as a canon that

³³ Untitled article on C. S. Lewis in *Chosen for Children: An Account of the Books which have Been Awarded the Library Association Carnegie Medal, 1936-1957*, ed. Marcus Crouch (London: Library Association, 1957), 83-87. M. Hutton recorded that the aforementioned article was written for an American magazine, in 'Writers for Children 3: C.S. Lewis', *School Librarian and School Library Review*, 12 (July 1964), 125.

³⁴ Margaret Meek Spencer, Aidan Warlow, and Griselda Barton, eds., *The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading* (London: Bodley Head, 1977), 76-90, 158.

³⁵ Anon., 'Writing for Children', *New Statesman* (9 May 1959), 649. The four authors interviewed were Enid Blyton, William Mayne, James Reeves and Geoffrey Trease.

³⁶ 'Axioms About Reading' (Seven Stories, KW/07/04/08/28, The Centre for Children's Books, Kaye Webb Collection, Newcastle, UK.)

a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's book'.³⁷ And another influential critic Elaine Moss repeated the dictum in an article in *Signal* ten years later.³⁸ The deputy head of a school in Yorkshire, writing in *Children's Literature in Education* also cited Lewis on the point in 1973.³⁹ That said, Lewis's critical influence seemed not to extend far beyond this one dictum; on the whole, Lewis did not become for British children's librarians the touchstone authority that he was in the States.

The primary reason for this discrepancy was that children's literature as a distinct genre of criticism did not come of age in Britain until the 1960s, at which point it was taken up as a subject by academics who were—many of them—quite critical of Lewis. By then Britain was in the throes of a dramatic period of cultural change, and literary fashion, in all genres, was reflecting the social and political landscape. Lewis's popularity as a religious writer suffered from the 1960s because the tone of his writing—the surety, the authority—was out of step with the open and questioning mood. For similar reasons, the self-styled 'dinosaur' and author of socially conservative, pious fantasies, was not the man of the hour as far as the new generation of British children's book specialists were concerned. The consequences of the 1960s for children's literature included an increased interest in non-traditional themes and subjects, a determination that books for the young should begin to break old barriers and truthfully depict post-war Britain's multicultural

³⁷ Margery Fisher, *Intent Upon Reading: A Critical Appraisal of Modern Fiction for Children*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Brockhampton Press, 1964), 11. She also cites him on pages 14 and 123.

³⁸ Elaine Moss, 'Ursula Moray Williams and *Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse*', *Signal*, v. 5 (May 1971), 61. Interestingly, Moss did not list any of the Narnia books in her compendium *Paperbacks for Children two to eleven* (London: National Book League, 1973).

³⁹ Myles McDowell, 'Fiction for Children and Adults: Some Essential Difference', *Children's Literature in Education*, no. 10 (March 1973). McDowell was a teacher of English and deputy head of J. H. Whitley School, Halifax, in Yorkshire.

reality, and a growing concern about sexism, racism and escapist tendencies in popular children's books.⁴⁰ Lewis's platform as a backward looking, contrarian personality did not recommend him to those who were re-thinking the moral order depicted in many classic children's books. By the late 1960s, Lewis's legacy, his Christianity and his children's books were felt to be dated by many in scholarly and critical circles.

As was demonstrated in chapter two, Lewis's writing about children's literature, as well as his writing of the *Chronicles* themselves, was a response to the low esteem in which children's books were held by the literary establishment, especially from the 1920s to the early 1950s. It is fitting, therefore, to have elaborated on how his efforts were received on both sides of the Atlantic among those most interested in children's literature during his lifetime. It has been suggested that the associations with Lewis's name were important to this reception in both Britain and America, but to contrary effects. In the States, librarians and publishers cheerfully used Lewis's authorial success and Oxbridge credentials to aid their cause, which was ideologically aligned to Lewis's. By contrast, the British children's literature scene, when it came into its own, had little use for the nostalgia and morality of the Lewis brand. By the time children's literature became the focus of sustained attention in Britain, the late 1960s mood meant Lewis's name no longer recommended his opinions. An understanding of the comparative development of the professional criticism of children's literature in these two countries provides the necessary context for the reception, among children's book specialists, of the Narnia books themselves.

⁴⁰ Reynolds and Tucker, *Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945*, *passim*.

In America, the first responses to the Narnia books were recorded, in many cases, by people who were either fans of Lewis's previous works or by children's librarians or publishers. Examples of the former include Chad Walsh, the first biographer of Lewis, who reviewed all seven *Chronicles* for *The New York Times Book Review*,⁴¹ Charles Brady, who reviewed the Narnia books on three occasions in various periodicals,⁴² and Edmund Fuller, who wrote two reviews for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.⁴³ Fuller described the series as 'the finest group of stories for children, Christian in theme, written in our times.'⁴⁴ Brady was thrilled to etch out the many literary allusions he saw in the *Chronicles* and to offer verbose, hyperbolic praise: 'The 1950s may one day be remembered, by recorders of literary anniversaries, not as the decade which saw the death of Mann and the Nobel award to Faulkner, but as the span of time which saw the successive appearances, one each year for seven years, of the seven tales of Narnia.'⁴⁵ Walsh purported to find the *Chronicles* charming, but, like Macmillan's religious book editor, he registered some impatience at Lewis's writing so *many* children's books. He was anticipating the series'

⁴¹ Chad Walsh, 'Earthbound Fairyland', *New York Times Book Review* (12 November 1950), 20; 'Fairyland Revisited', (11 November 1951), 26; 'Caspian and Reepicheep' (16 November 1952), 37; 'Mythical Land' (27 December 1953); 'Back to Narnia', (17 October 1954), 44; 'For Younger Readers' (1955), 40; 'War in Narnia' (30 September 1956), 46.

⁴² Charles A. Brady, 'Works of Playfully Serious Minds,' *Buffalo Evening News* (9 December 1950), 8; 'Book Reviews', *Renascence* (Spring 1952), 182-4; 'Finding God in Narnia', *America* (27 October 1956), 103-4; Brady had earlier reviewed Lewis's *George MacDonald: An Anthology* in 'Between Allegory and Myth', *The New York Times Book Review* (27 July 1947), 27.

⁴³ Edmund Fuller, review of *The Magician's Nephew*, *Chicago Daily Tribune* (13 November 1955), 36; Fuller, 'Last Story of Narnia', *Chicago Daily Tribune* (11 November 1956), 34; Fuller also wrote *Books With Men Behind Them* (New York: Random House, 1962); he mentioned 'On Fairy Stories' and the Narnia series in 'Speaking of Books,' *New York Times Book Review* (12 January 1964), 2; and co-wrote with Alan Jones, 'An Affectionate and Muted Exchange Anent Lewis', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 14, no 2 (Autumn 1981): 3-11.

⁴⁴ Fuller, 'Last Story of Narnia', *Chicago Daily Tribune* (11 November 1956), 34.

⁴⁵ Brady, 'Finding God in Narnia', *America* (27 October 1956), 103.

end in his third review, and in the fifth explained to readers that the Narnia books were the reason Lewis ‘has not published recently any works of the sort that first made him famous’, and that ‘[J]ust possibly the Narnia fields are suffering from overcropping, and could stand lying fallow while other fields are put back into cultivation.’⁴⁶ (He recanted this wish in his sixth review.) On the whole, however, Lewis’s early fans were pleased to have more from Lewis.

Of the children’s book librarians and editors, Bechtel was mentioned above for having reviewed the *Chronicles* in the *New York Herald Tribune*. She had a relaxed attitude to the books (or was it to her reviews?) and could be sloppy, referring to Lewis as the author of ‘The Screwtape Papers’⁴⁷ and ‘The Great Divide’⁴⁸—books her employer published! She summarized the plots of the Narnia books, admired their style and called the series ‘a unique contribution to children’s literature’.⁴⁹ Another critic was equally nonchalant: Virginia Haviland’s initials (although one cannot be sure it was she) appeared on reviews of two *Narnia* books in *The Horn Book Magazine*, for which she served as associate editor,⁵⁰ and, again, the response was simple admiration. ‘Adults reading it aloud’, she said of *The Silver Chair*, ‘will appreciate its distinction of style—the deft characterizations, colorful descriptions and playful bits of satire.’ Bechtel and Haviland

⁴⁶ Chad Walsh, ‘Back to Narnia’, *New York Times*.

⁴⁷ Louise S. Bechtel, ‘The World in the Wardrobe’, *New York Herald Tribune* (12 November 1950), 7.

⁴⁸ Louise S. Bechtel, ‘Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia’, *New York Herald Tribune* (11 November 1951) 5; and in her untitled review of *The Last Battle*, *New York Herald Tribune*, (18 November 1956).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Virginia Haviland, review of *The Silver Chair*, *The Horn Book Magazine*, (19 October 1953), 177; and untitled review of *The Magician’s Nephew*, *The Horn Book Magazine* (October 1955), 377.

were just as content to enjoy and recommend Lewis's children's books as his devotees were.

In Britain, a very different situation emerged. Reviewers were not Lewis devotees, but a mix of librarians; the rare children's book editor; and, more often, general critics of the arts and literature, freelancing for notable periodicals. In their hands the Narnia books received a far more engaged treatment. For these British critics, the *Chronicles* were quite disentangle-able from Lewis's platform as a scholar and writer of religious 'tracts.' For example, among the public's first introductions to the books was the November 1950 review of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in the *Times Literary Supplement's Children's Book Section*, which opened, 'It should be said at once that Mr. Lewis's vigorous and fascinating book does not contain a word about religion as such.'⁵¹ Clearly, Lewis's polemical public persona and the expectation of religiously inflected writings was from the first inescapable for the critics who assessed these books for children. In contrast, American reviews from the 1950s reveal that they expected their audience to know Lewis only as 'the author of *The Screwtape Letters*.'⁵² The situation

⁵¹ Renee Haynes, 'Theme and Variations', *Times Literary Supplement Children's Book Section* (17 November 1950), 736.

⁵² Lewis is described as the author of *The Screwtape Letters* in the blurb accompanying 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said', *The New York Times Book Review Children's Book Section* (18 November 1956), 3; and in the following reviews of the *Chronicles*: Paul Brown, review of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Kirkus* (1 September 1950), 514; Chad Walsh, 'Earthbound Fairyland', *New York Times Book Review* (12 November 1950), 20; Miriam Mason, review of *The Last Battle*, *Kirkus Reviews* (1 August 1956), 520; Louise S. Bechtel, review of *The Last Battle*, *New York Herald Tribune* (18 November 1956).

reflected the fact that Lewis's platform in Britain was more multifaceted during his lifetime than it was in America.⁵³

The results of the close tie in British reviewers' minds between Lewis's person and the Narnia books played out in different ways. Some saw in the *Chronicles* the qualities they admired in Lewis as a writer. One reviewer in *The Junior Bookshelf* described *Prince Caspian* as 'a picturesque, romantic story, with hints here and there of Dr. Lewis's erudition and deeper facts of his talents.'⁵⁴ In *The School Librarian and School Library Review* another reviewer wrote that *The Last Battle* was 'written with the skill of storytelling expected from the author'.⁵⁵ Daniel Counihan, a BBC foreign correspondent with a lifetime interest in children's literature, remarked in the *Times Literary Supplement* that *The Silver Chair* was 'about a series of adventures that are well up to the author's high standard of fancy and contrivance'.⁵⁶

Other reviewers evaluated whether or not the religious themes in the texts detracted from the stories. Mary Crozier, longtime reviewer for *The Manchester Guardian*, assessed *The Horse and His Boy* in 1954 and wondered 'if the spell is not wearing a little thin', with Aslan being 'a thought priggish'.⁵⁷ However, a year later she judged that the quality of the books in the series as a whole did not suffer on account of religion:

⁵³ See chapter 3.

⁵⁴ Anon., review of *Prince Caspian*, *The Junior Bookshelf* (December 1951), 276.

⁵⁵ Betty Brazier, review of *The Last Battle* in *The School Librarian and school library review* (July 1956), 155.

⁵⁶ Daniel Counihan, 'Travellers in Fairyland', *Times Literary Supplement* (27 November 1953), 4.

⁵⁷ Mary Crozier, 'Fantasies and Feasts', *Manchester Guardian* (8 October 1954), 11.

Mr. Lewis keeps up with great consistency the allegory which has run through all the stories; it is never explicit but always there. His beautifully limpid style and rather donnish humour enliven what might otherwise become a too complicated business....Mr. Lewis may well find that the seven stories have made a minor children's classic.⁵⁸

In a substantive appraisal of the *Chronicles for The Junior Bookshelf*, up-and-coming children's literature critic Marcus Crouch concurred with Crozier. He noted that Lewis's various works 'have a common starting-point' in that Lewis was a 'Christian apologist'.⁵⁹ And though, for Crouch, 'Lewis's 'opinions and his faith come out in every page', he was nevertheless a writer 'in the main stream of English fantasy, and he contributes to it his own clear and original spring'.⁶⁰ When, in 1956, *The Last Battle* received the Carnegie Medal Award, Frank M. Gardner wrote that, although he thought that the series 'may not become classics', nevertheless, 'In both conception and execution, the "Narnia" books make most contemporary children's literature look trivial and pedestrian.'⁶¹ For these critics and award committees, due recognition was owed to Lewis's accomplishment.

Yet *despite* Lewis's person or with significant qualifications, other reviewers offered praise more begrudgingly. One wrote for the *Times Literary Supplement*:

⁵⁸ Mary Crozier, review of *The Magician's Nephew: 'Chance, Kings, and Desperate Men'*, *Manchester Guardian* (8 July 1955), 8.

⁵⁹ Marcus Crouch, 'Chronicles of Narnia', *Junior Bookshelf* (November 1956), 246. Crouch later included a brief analysis of the series in *Treasure Seekers and Borrowers: Children's books in Britain, 1900-1960* (London: Library Association, 1962), 116.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶¹ Frank M. Gardner, 'Carnegie Medal Award for 1956', *Library Association Record* (May 1957), 168-9.

Professor C. S. Lewis is now well established as a successful explorer of the magic world. It is true that he has an axe to grind, which is usually disqualifying, but he is such a good storyteller that the religious message of his Narnia stories is on the whole successfully subordinated to the tale....what one may call the super-supernatural is kept in its place.⁶²

Another, Amabel Williams-Ellis, wrote in the *Spectator* (a paper owned by her father) that *The Magician's Nephew* had:

Mr. C. S. Lewis's usual virtues—admirable English, movement, moral, and enough but not too much description. But the present reviewer still cannot swallow Aslan, the *deus ex machin* of all his fairy tales. This personage is a highly moral and decorative lion who not only talks, admonishes and prophesies, but also sings. Surely Mr. Lewis should, all along, have had the courage of his convictions, and given Aslan the shape as well as the nature and functions of an archangel.⁶³

(Two weeks later a letter appeared from Dorothy Sayers in the same paper correcting Williams-Ellis: Aslan was, of course, Jesus.⁶⁴) For still another critic, high expectations of Lewis had resulted in disappointment. Writing in *The Junior Bookshelf*, an anonymous reviewer judged a lack of coherence between the books, from which 'the suspicion grows

⁶² Marie Hannah, review of *The Horse and His Boy*: 'The World of Magic', *Times Literary Supplement* (19 November 1954), 748.

⁶³ Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Traditional Tales', *Spectator* (8 July 1955), 51-2. Review of *The Magician's Nephew*.

⁶⁴ Dorothy Sayers, 'Chronicles of Narnia', *Spectator* (22 July 1955): 123.

that Narnia has been created largely to allow the author to include all his pet theories'.⁶⁵

Though 'probably more worth reading than three-quarters of other books for children written today', the Narnia books, they continued, 'cannot be numbered amongst the best of our time':

This is particularly sad since the author would seem so admirably qualified for writing something really special, comparable to his work in other fields. As one of the few surviving specimens of Old Western Man he should be able to leave a better legacy to the children of our age. It does seem likely that some of the Narnia imagery will endure for a time, the Wood between the Worlds, perhaps, and maybe the memory of a land under a lion's governance, but probably not the nature of that lion, which is, after all, the whole reason for the books.

Lewis's previous accomplishments and all the associations the British literary community attributed to his name were front and centre, for good or ill, when it came to the critical assessment of this new and unexpected venture into fantasy books for children.

Lewis's platform had still other reviewers finding what they perceived as Lewis's person *expressed* in the *Chronicles* intolerable. The rising critic and anthologist, translator and author of children's books, Naomi Lewis, who later produced an annual list of 'best

⁶⁵ Anon., review of *The Magician's Nephew*, 'Chronicles of Narnia Review', *Junior Bookshelf* (July 1955), 147-49.

children's books',⁶⁶ bluntly suggested that it was a flaw in Lewis's character that resulted in the failings of the Narnia books. 'Careless and commonplace writing', she said, 'even in children's books, is always a matter for astonishment.'⁶⁷ Her conclusion: 'Mr. C. S. Lewis, at least, cannot be accused of not knowing how to write surpassingly well. But his fairy tales have had to serve as a platform for so many small irritabilities, that one could hardly discover his skill as a storyteller for the noise.'⁶⁸ Writing anonymously for *The Times Literary Supplement Children's Book Section* less than a year later, she made clear that Lewis's presence in, and presumed purpose for, the Narnia books was, to her, morally repulsive:

In his children's stories Mr. Lewis has restored the moral purpose on which the etiquette of contemporary fiction frowns....His interest in violence seems sensual rather than angry. In anger—and pulpit-writing leads to irascibility—he recalls not the best of Macdonald but the worst of Kingsley. . . The didactic tale is a mirror of its teller; for good or ill he cannot separate his sermon from himself. Where the personality of Mr. Lewis appears, it suggests a kind of arrogance, even a complacency, that we do not find, say, in Bunyan or in Spenser. He enjoys the role of Aslan, as he enjoys receiving Aslan's admonition. Too often we find him bewitching

⁶⁶ Grove, *So Much to Tell*, 148.

⁶⁷ Naomi Lewis, review of *The Horse and His Boy*, 'The Young Supernaturalist', *The New Statesman and Nation* (2 October 1954), 404. Her appraisal was not so negative in a review of *The Last Battle*, 'The End of a Saga', *Times Literary Supplement* (11 May 1956), 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

himself with his own spells—above all with the spell of symbolic theology.⁶⁹

For Naomi Lewis, then, Lewis's 'pulpit-writing', delivered now through children's books, was a very distasteful kind of proselytizing.

Another notable critic was Eleanor Graham, the first editor of Penguin's Puffin series, begun in 1941. Graham suggested that people familiar with Lewis's writings would be 'prepared for the powerful quality of the imagination, the good writing, and the allegory' such as were found in *The Silver Chair* but that they also would have come to expect 'that strange lack of tenderness which to my mind, weakens the effect and the value of the work'.⁷⁰ Lewis's 'descriptions of human character and behaviour', to Graham, revealed a 'great contempt for the human race'. And as if this was not scathing enough, she closed her review with a quotation from St Paul, which, she said, the reading of Lewis's book had brought to mind, '*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels...though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not charity, I am nothing.*'⁷¹ Although she had reservations about Lewis, she did pursue attaining *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* for her Puffin list (possibly at Allen Lane's direction).⁷²

Graham was one about whom Margaret Clark, editorial director of Bodley Head children's books, once said that without her work 'we should not now almost take for granted the

⁶⁹ Naomi Lewis, 'The Myth Makers', *The Times Literary Supplement*, Children's Book Section (July 1955), i-ii.

⁷⁰ Eleanor Graham, review of *The Silver Chair* in *The Junior Bookshelf* 17 (October 1953), 199.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Eleanor Graham to Margaret Clark, 11 February 1958. Graham wrote, 'I should like us to have it in Puffins, and hope that the publishers will be willing.' However, there is evidence of conversations before this date and conversations between Gibb and Allen Lane. Penguin Archive, Bristol.

maxim, “Nothing but the best is good enough when publishing books for children.”⁷³ She shared, in other words, a similar philosophy to her counterparts in children’s book publishing in America. However, their respective reactions to Lewis’s fantasies for children could hardly have been more different.

The first wave of reviews to the *Chronicles* demonstrated that the kinds of associations with Lewis’s name in both Britain and America played an important role in their respective responses. These reviews also showed that the manner in which children’s literature was received at the time had a role in determining *who* was likely to be reviewing new books. In Britain, Lewis’s Narnia books were given close attention by non-specialists as well as specialists, who apparently expected from Lewis’s venture into children’s books something that reflected his polemical platform and religious convictions. The results were not all negative, but British reviewers certainly took a more critically engaged line. In America, by contrast, admirers of Lewis’s religious writings and children’s book specialists alike were simply pleased to have fantasies for children from him: criticism were minor, the tone was often breezy. Lewis’s platform in America paved the way for a smooth reception of the Narnia books.

These early differences of reception to the *Chronicles* were an indication of what was to come from future critics in Britain and America. In the decades that followed, children’s literature gradually received more attention from critics, academics, librarians

⁷³ Margaret Clark, ‘Eleanor Graham’, *Signal*, n. 9 (1972), 91. Graham, it is interesting to note, would not have *The Hobbit* as a Puffin paperback because she felt it was too violent: Kaye Webb to Gill Johnson, 14 May 1982. (Seven Stories, KW/01/02/30/04) *The Hobbit* was published as a Puffin under Margaret Clark, who replaced Graham for a brief period, in 1961; the rights were then reverted. Phil Baines, *Puffin by Design: 70 Years of Imagination, 1940-2010* (London: Puffin, 2010), 96.

and educators. Partly because the Narnia books had so much commercial success, media tie-ins and a canonical status in the trade sphere, they continued to come under scrutiny in a formal manner long after they ceased to be new. Some wrote about the *Chronicles* out of an interest in parsing out what was valuable (or harmful) in children's reading; others evaluated the books by literary or other measures. Whatever the motivation, from the overflow of writings about the books, one stark contrast emerges. In Britain, there continued a strain of repulsion in response to the Narnia books and Lewis's person that did not exist to any comparable degree in America among academics, children's book writers and literary critics. The negative reaction was not universal, but its presence represents a key difference between American and British professionals' reception, from the books' publication into the early twenty-first century.

As with Naomi Lewis and Eleanor Graham before them, British critics writing after Lewis's death often associated what they judged to be expressions of Lewis's arrogant personality or religious beliefs with what was perceived as gratuitous violence in the *Chronicles*. Following a brief discussion of the figure of Aslan, children's book author Penelope Lively wrote in 1968:

For this is the Christianity of the Old Testament, the awful warning of an unrelenting and all-powerful God. It is the Christianity of violence, the Christianity of the middle ages, the Christianity of the Crusades, a theology in which the only good Infidel is a dead Infidel and the sooner battle is joined the better, the theology of a world in which Good and Evil are

locked in an eternal struggle which can only be resolved by violence. And violence pervades the books.⁷⁴

Peter Hollindale, reader in English and Educational Studies at the University of York, made a similar association with the character of Aslan, who 'suddenly becomes in *The Horse and His Boy* a version of the Old Testament God of anger and retribution instead of the God of forgiveness and love', a typical example, he continued, of the 'moral uncertainties inherent' in the books.⁷⁵ For Anne Swinfen, lecturer and tutor at The Open University, the expression of an outmoded and harsh Christian ethic was made most clear in Lewis's treatment of animals, especially the 'non-talking beasts'. That some animals were capable of receiving salvation and others were not, but rather were preyed upon by their 'more fortunate cousins', suggested 'the most bigoted doctrine of predestination'.⁷⁶ Swinfen (who also had positive things to say about the *Chronicles*) felt violence was endemic, with 'much vengeance and little mercy' in the book and 'a good deal which is vicious and blood-thirsty: Peter's slaying of the wolf in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the many battle scenes are described with relish. There is an almost masochistic delight in Eustace's shedding of the dragon skin.'⁷⁷ British novelist, poet and critic, David Holbrook believed violence and conflict were central ingredients of the

⁷⁴ Penelope Lively, 'The Wrath of God: An Opinion of the Narnia Books', *Use of English*, 20, no. 2 (Winter 1968): 128.

⁷⁵ Peter Hollindale, *Choosing Books for Children* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 64. This view was repeated in Hollindale's article, 'The Image of the Beast: C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*', *Use of English* (1977), 17.

⁷⁶ Anne Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature Since 1945* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 91 and 154.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 156, 90-91.

Narnia books and, after first writing about them in 1973,⁷⁸ devoted a whole volume, *The Skeleton in the Wardrobe* (1991), to exploring why, on first reading the *Chronicles* he ‘felt there was something seriously “wrong” with them’. His conclusion was that the *Chronicles* were the expression of a man with deep psychological insecurities who created in his fantasies ‘stern and even cruel authority’ as solutions to his self-hate.⁷⁹

British critics of the 1960s and beyond were also perturbed by the tone in which Lewis addressed his child audience. Swinfen spoke of the failings of the ‘intrusive narrator in C. S. Lewis’s Narnia books’.⁸⁰ Lively remarked that it was a ‘cardinal error of condescension’ on Lewis’s part, that he wrote ‘with a “message” for children, as though he ‘doubted his readers’ capacity to appreciate truly thoughtful description’.⁸¹ And in Hollindale’s estimation, the ‘conspicuous authorial presence and nudging, conspiratorial address to the reader, the cumbersome, distracting explanation, the final coy disclaimer of the writer’s ability—all are evidence either of narrative incompetence or a patronising collusion with the child’.⁸² A 1968 collaborative work by two novelists and an art historian, which declared its intention of contributing to a de-throning of many unworthy ‘classics’ of literature, named *The Silver Chair* between *The Sound and the Fury* and *A Farewell to Arms*. Articulated polemically among their justifications was: ‘You will not buy your child readers’ confidence, if you are writing, as C. S. Lewis was, in 1953, by making your narrative address them with a facetiousness and in a slang their fathers

⁷⁸ David Holbrook, ‘The Problem of C. S. Lewis’, *Children’s Literature in Education* (March 1973), 3-25.

⁷⁹ David Holbrook, *Skeleton in the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis’s Fantasies: A Phenomenological Study* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1991), 78.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸¹ Lively, ‘The Wrath of God’, 127.

⁸² Hollindale, *Choosing Books for Children*, 65.

would have found old-fashioned.⁸³ For these British observers, the manner in which Lewis addressed children was irksome and, again, revelatory of his conceit.

A third area of discontent for British critics was the belief that the Narnia books displayed an acute discomfort or even hatred of the physical world on the part of their author, a desire to escape rather than engage with reality. For Hollindale, the ‘world-view’ expressed in the Narnia books ‘cannot endure the realities and complications of modern life, which the child is encouraged to detest’.⁸⁴ This was the same argument Phillip Pullman made in an article he contributed to *Horn Book Magazine*. The Narnia books were ‘an invaluable guide to what is wrong and cruel and selfish’ because the high aim of Lewis for his characters was escape from this world into another.⁸⁵ In order to be true and good, Pullman went on, ‘the fantasy and the realism must connect;’ and they do not in Lewis’s *Chronicles*, where the ‘paranoid bigot’ side of the author was seen in full. For Pullman, this hatred of the physical world made the Narnia books the model of what a writer ought *not* to do:

Using Narnia as our moral compass, we can take it as axiomatic that in the republic of Heaven, people do not regard life in this world as so worthless and contemptible that they leave it with pleasure and relief, and a railway accident is not an end-of-term treat.⁸⁶

⁸³ Brigid Brophy, Michael Levey and Charles Osborne Brophy, *Fifty Works in English (and American) Literature We Could Do Without* (London: Stein and Day, 1968), 147-8.

⁸⁴ Hollindale, ‘Image of the Beast’, 21.

⁸⁵ Philip Pullman, ‘The Republic of Heaven’, *The Horn Book Magazine* (November/December 2001), 661.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 660.

Likewise, for the children's book critic Bob Dixon, writing in 1977, Lewis's refusal to engage reality was a critical flaw, and one reflecting a self-centred personality. Lewis's religion caused escapism: the Narnia books should be read 'with this strange, medieval outlook' of the author in mind.⁸⁷ Lewis's ideology as depicted in the books portrayed 'the old, old story—religion as a retreat from great moral and political problems, if not a distraction from them'.⁸⁸

To the concerns about violence, tone and escapism, some of the above authors added accusations of racism and sexism to their critiques of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The denial of paradise to the character of Susan indicated to Swinfen a 'submerged, but very clear, dislike of women',⁸⁹ and both Pullman and Holbrook denounced the Narnia books as racist in their depiction of the Calormens and misogynist.⁹⁰

In America there have been far fewer critics to express criticism of the *Chronicles*⁹¹, especially with any depth of analysis.⁹² One who has was children's book

⁸⁷ Bob Dixon, *Catching Them Young 2: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 155-161.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁹ Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy*, 155-6.

⁹⁰ Philip Pullman, 'The Dark Side of Narnia', *Guardian* (1 October 1998), 4; David Holbrook, *The Skeleton in the Wardrobe: C.S. Lewis's Fantasies: A Phenomenological Study* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press/The Associated University Presses, 1991), 200.

⁹¹ American fans of Lewis defending against the critiques reviewed include: David Downing 'Lewis's Literary Artistry'. In *Into the Wardrobe: C.S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 159 and 'Are the Chronicles Politically Incorrect?', 153; Leland Ryken and Marjorie Lamp Mead, 'Reception History of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*', in *A Reader's Guide Through the Wardrobe: Exploring C. S. Lewis's Classic Story* (Downing Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 141-155; Peter J. Schakel, *Reading with the Heart: The Way into Narnia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), ix, 13-15. British defences include Roger Lancelyn Green, *C. S. Lewis* (London: Bodley Head, 1963), 49 and Michael Ward, 'Philip Pullman's Attack on Narnia: A Defense', *Mars Hill Review*, no. 21 (2003), 127-135.

⁹² Roger Sale, American children's book critic and professor of English, said 'the Narnia books, popular though they are with latter-day audiences, are brittle, mechanical, and naggingly preachy in ways older fairy tales never are', but did not expound any further. *Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E. B. White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 25.

author John Goldthwaite, who, in his *Natural History of Make-Believe* (1996), repeated many of the accusations of British detractors, though he cited none of them. The *Chronicles*, he said, were sexist, racist and a place in which nature 'is generally viewed as a crawly, fallen state to be avoided whenever possible'.⁹³ Furthermore, Goldthwaite claimed that Lewis, a 'Protestant fundamentalist', created Narnia in order to 'leave out everything about the world that he disliked or to summon up what he disliked in such a way that he could knock it about however he wished. Making the way straight for Jesus was his warrant.'⁹⁴ Yet Goldthwaite is the exception in the States. While his reaction may have been an autonomous response to the Narnia books themselves, it may also be that his harsh tone and specific critiques, dating as they did from the mid-1990s, were echoing British criticisms.

Another take was offered in 2008 by Laura Miller, writer and co-founder of Salon.com, who examined the Narnia books in *The Magician's Book: A Skeptic's Adventure in Narnia*.⁹⁵ The *Chronicles* were some of Miller's favourite reading as a child, but when, as a teenager she learned (through reading a book of literary criticism⁹⁶) that there were Christian themes which she had not identified as a child she felt betrayed as the unwitting recipient of Lewis's proselytizing. *The Magician's Book* was her attempt to understand her relationship with Narnia, 'as rocky as any love affair, a story of

⁹³ John Goldthwaite, *Natural History of Make-Believe: A Guide to the Principle Works of Britain, Europe and America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 224, 223 and 227.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 223-4.

⁹⁵ Laura Miller, *The Magician's Book: A Skeptic's Adventures in Narnia* (New York: Back By Books, 2008).

⁹⁶ The book was Lin Carter's *Imaginary Worlds: The Art of Fantasy* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1973). Miller, *Magician's Book*, 98 and 101.

enchantment, betrayal, estrangement, and reunion'.⁹⁷ She wanted to reconcile that which had elated her in the Narnia books with the knowledge she later acquired about the author's Christian intentions. Miller's goal was to understand, as a critic, the accomplishment of the Narnia books, *despite* what she took to be its author's failings. Thus, Miller's objective and tone differed from the British critics above and from Goldthwaites', whose purposes were to critique or debunk a 'classic'.

In the States, there have been no responses comparable to the misgivings such as are represented by not a few British children's book critics' responses to the Narnia books, from their first publication until the early twenty first century. And, interestingly, this is despite the fact that by recent years, at least, there has been a similar rejection on the part of children's book writers of didactic purposes in children's literature. American author M. T. Anderson wrote in 2012:

Recently I was on a panel with several other children's book writers, and we were asked what lesson we hoped to pass on to children. Almost universally, the answer was that we're not trying to pass on any lesson at all, just trying to tell a good story. If there is any accusation we fear as writers for children, it is that our books have been somehow instructive, that they have had a *message*. Our own heritage of primers and abecedaria embarrasses us. We all fear Dick and Jane. We cringe at their

⁹⁷ Ibid., 3.

knee-socks and the plasticine sheen of their cheeks. Confronted with their image, we want to disavow the vacuous sweetness of their moral world.⁹⁸

Anderson's observations convey a repulsion to didacticism in children's books that could very well be compared to British criticism of the Narnia books, described above.

However, within his description is a pointer to a key transatlantic difference and a possible explanation for the contrasting receptions: the culturally specific nature of aesthetics. Anderson's reference to *cringing* and *embarrassment* indicate an emotive rejection of that which is associated with 'sweetness', 'knee-socks' and shiny cheeks: it was not *any* morality or *any* aesthetic that was distasteful to children's book critics—but those which evoked familiar, now cloying cultural heritage. What Anderson suggested that he and his fellow authors found repugnant was the sentimental flavour of 'Dick and Jane', American readers used from the 1930s until the 1960s featuring smiley, neat children. These books represent the ethos, the aesthetics of America at mid-century. This is an equivalent, but *not* the identical, situation to that found in Britain when critics winced at Lewis's pastiche of Edwardian slang. Both American and British children's book specialists were remaking their field in the post-war period in light of rapidly changing societies; but to do so they each pushed-off from their *own*, distinctive national cultural predecessors. American critics were not likely to cringe at Lewis's homely fantasies or even to subject them to a rigorous critique because their aesthetics inspired different emotions.

⁹⁸ M. T. Anderson, 'Point of Departure', *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 372.

In *Minders of Make-Believe* x y observed that In the States, the *Chronicles'* Edwardian ethos, combined with Lewis's platform as an Oxford-affiliated defender of Christianity, likely insulated the books from criticism—recommended them, in fact. One American opened his 1999 article in *Horn Book*:

"You can't get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me," said C. S. Lewis. 'Hear, hear!' say I. Lewis was a most assiduous scholar, teacher, writer, and correspondent, and yet in the statement above he summons up a man--or perhaps only a time--of seemingly endless leisure. One pictures him in a wing chair by a fire with the fullness of an evening before him. No pager buzzing, no computer blinking to let him know he has e-mail....Lewis invokes a biblioholic dream of a simpler time, or, at least, a time in which one's primary amusements did not require batteries.⁹⁹

In the States, as much as in Britain, the reception of the Narnia books were tied to Lewis's respective platforms: a multifaceted, literary and religious contrarian in the one, a Christian writer at Oxford in the other. In America, the aesthetics, real or imagined, of the *Chronicles*, Lewis, Britain and 'a simpler time' paved the way for a much more favourable reception. Perhaps for this reason Narnia was described by another scholar as 'an innocent world', one in which 'the values learned by the children who visit it are the values most worthy of emulation in this much less innocent world of the twentieth

⁹⁹ Tim Wynne-Jones, 'Short Tempered' *The Horn Book Magazine* (May/June 1999), 293.

century--and the values most often in danger of being lost.’¹⁰⁰ In the States the *Chronicles* continued through the early twenty-first century to be associated with tradition, an endangered morality and the nearly unassailable name of ‘C. S. Lewis’.

B. Another Canon Altogether: The Chronicles for Non-specialist Readers, Publishers and Educationalists

‘I think you are one of the best children’s authors,’ a girl, 11, wrote posthumously to Lewis from Kent in 1965.¹⁰¹ Another girl, age ‘10.25’, from Middlesex wrote to Lewis in 1966, enthusing about the *Chronicles*, asking Lewis to write more books ‘about the wonderful Land of, NARNIA!’ (squiggle lines were drawn around ‘NARNIA!’). ‘The nicest book’, she expounded, was “‘The Magician’s Nephew,” because *ASLAN* is in it and to me he is the God of everything.’¹⁰² Lewis received many letters from children like these both within his lifetime and posthumously,¹⁰³ demonstrating that estimations of the Narnia books do not (of course) belong only to professionals or to adults. Children, parents, teachers and adult readers have weighed in with their opinion of the *Chronicles*: their canon of the ‘best’ has been composed with little or no reference to—or reverence for—

¹⁰⁰ Mary Lou Colbath (graduate student University of Maine) "Worlds as They Should Be: Middle Earth, Narnia, and Prydain" *Elementary English* 48 (December 1971), 942.

¹⁰¹ Girl to Lewis, 2 May 1965. Bodl. Dep. C. 774, fol. 114-170.

¹⁰² Alison Rose to Lewis, 27 July 1966. Bodl. Dep. C. 777, fol. 108.

¹⁰³ See *C. S. Lewis's Letters to Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1985) and letters acquired by Bles and Macmillan, then by Walter Hooper, who then deposited them at the Bodleian Library in 1988, 2007 and 2008, and perhaps at other times: MS. Eng. Let.c. 853 ‘Children’s Letters to C. S. Lewis, 1986-8, A-H’; MS. Eng. Let. C. 855, ‘Children’s letters to C. S. Lewis, 1986-8. S-Z, & misc’. (153 leaves); MSS. Eng.c.2073-6, ‘Letters concerning him from American schoolchildren, 1986-90’; MS. Eng.c.2073, ‘C. S. Lewis Estate Letters from Children, 1-H, 1988-9’ (153 leaves); MSS. Eng.c.2074 ‘C. S. Lewis Estate’ Letters from children I-P, 1988-9 (111 leaves); MSS. Eng.c.2715. ‘Letters from children, 1990-1’ A-L (153 leaves); MSS. Eng.c.2715-16. ‘Letters from children, 1990-1 M-Z’ (164 leaves); MSS. Eng.c.3270. ‘Letters from American schoolchildren concerning Lewis, 1990-1’, (190 leaves); MSS. Eng.c.3271. ‘Letters from American schoolchildren concerning Lewis, 1992-3’ (302 leaves); MS. Eng. C. 5369. ‘Letters from American school-children, 1994-5’ (110 leaves); MS.Eng.c.6859, fol. 91 ‘letter from an Oxford schoolchild’.

the opinions of critics. The second half of this chapter will consider how well the Narnia books have fared with popular audiences, and how their reception has evolved with the passing of the decades. First, some more-or-less empirical measures of popularity will be given; then, that data will be set within a wider historical context.

Finding evidence of popular consumption is a rather hodgepodge affair. The measure most often turned to is sales. However because Lewis's estate has not published sales statistics, this information is difficult to assemble. There are a number of sources which, nonetheless, when used comparatively and set within the broader commercial and publishing contexts of children's books in Britain and America, do provide a rough outline of the general sales trajectory of the Narnia books. The figures do not, unfortunately, reveal whether sales were to bookstores, libraries or schools. And the information is too incomplete to conclusively indicate how sales compared at any given point between Britain and America, except in later years. First, the bits of sales data will follow, most of which are from American sources.

A file from Kaye Webb's papers records that the 'average sales' of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 1959 were 75,000 per year.¹⁰⁴ An internal memo from Lewis's British publisher (who had five out of seven *Chronicles*) recorded that the 'total sales' for Lewis's books in 1968 were 11,545 pounds, of which 6,628 were his 'Children's' titles (compared to 4,586 for 'Religion' titles).¹⁰⁵ Five years later we find Walter Hooper, the posthumous editor of Lewis's works, saying, 'Of the million copies of the *Chronicles*

¹⁰⁴ 'Red Letter Day for Children: Some notable puffins'. Seven Stories, KW/07/01/05/09/03.

¹⁰⁵ Geoffrey Bles Internal Memorandum, 28 January 1969. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 262.

sold in England and the United States last year (1973), about half were bought by college students.¹⁰⁶ Writing to a friend in 1977, Hooper says that he could never get Macmillan to answer any of his letters until ‘recently’, at which point the senior editor wrote to him. Hooper quotes the Macmillan editor as saying: ‘You may be interested to know that, as of May 1, 1977, Macmillan has sold more than 12 million copies of C. S. Lewis works. By the end of 1977 that number may well have risen to 14 million.’¹⁰⁷ The American *Christian Bookstore Journal* reported that the Narnia books had sold 2.3 million in 1978 and 10 million since their first publication.¹⁰⁸ For the 1970s and early 1980s we have two sales charts provided by Macmillan to Glenray Productions Company, which included them in a pitch to make a film version of the Narnia books. These showed the total number of books by Lewis that were sold in 1984 to be 50 million, and the Narnia books’ having sold 27 million copies in the US by 1982, with the annual number of copies of the *Chronicles* at 1.5 million.¹⁰⁹ The *Bookstore Journal* reported that in 1986-87 the number of the *Chronicles* books sold combined to 491,540.¹¹⁰ By 1995 sales statistics provided by HarperCollins to the Marion E. Wade Center show that the number had jumped to \$4,030,598 for that year, with little change in 1996.¹¹¹ And, finally, when Walden Media produced *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a movie in 2005, news articles gave a

¹⁰⁶ Walter Hooper, ‘Narnia: The Author, the Critics, and the Tale’, in *Children’s Literature: The Great Excluded*, Vol. III (Storrs, Conn: The Children’s Literature Association, 1974), 12-22, reprinted in *The Longing for a Form: Essays on the Fiction of C.S. Lewis*, ed. Peter Schakel (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1977), 105.

¹⁰⁷ Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 30 May 1977. Box 1, Fol. 126, Hooper Papers, UNC.

¹⁰⁸ *Christian Bookstore Journal* (February 1979), reported by *The New York C. S. Lewis Society Bulletin*, Vol. 10, no. 112 (February 1979): 10.

¹⁰⁹ Wade, Glenray Productions, Proposal for Filming *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 1984.

¹¹⁰ Anon., ‘One to Grow On’, *Bookstore Journal* (November 1987), 19-23, 119.

¹¹¹ Wade, Lorna Creveling (sales information), HarperCollins, January 1998.

range of between 85 and 100 million books sold since publication.¹¹² A 2013 report by *Publisher's Weekly* ranked *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* at 45 of popular backlist paperbacks, and 102nd on its ebay list, with approximate sales per year being 148,777 paperbacks, 30,987 eBooks.¹¹³

For easier comparison, the above numbers, are presented again in list form, with the bolded text representing all Lewis-works sold and the un-bolded text referring to only Narnia books:

1959: 75,000 average books sold of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* for Puffin

1968: 6,628 pounds in England

1973: 1 million copies annually in England and US, half to college students

1976: Total 12 million copies in US since publication

1978: 2.3 million books in US

1984: 1.5 million books annually, about 27 million since publication in US

1986: about 0.5 million books sold in US

1995-7: \$4,030,598 for that year

2005: 85 to 100 million books sold since publication

These figures suggest that the Narnia books have tracked with general trends in sales of children's books. *Publisher's Weekly* charted sales of children's books from mid-century

¹¹² E.g. Barry Koltnow, 'True to the Spirit of "the Chronicles of Narnia": The Makers of "The Chronicles of Narnia" Felt an Obligation to the More than 85 Million Readers of the C. S. Lewis Books', *Orange County Register*, 9 December 2005.

¹¹³ Diane Roback, 'The Bestselling Children's Books of 2012', *Publishers Weekly* (17 March 2013), <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/56411-hunger-games-still-rules-in-children-s-facts-figures-2012.html>, accessed 30 March 2013.

down to 1990, showing that they have increased steadily over that period, but that very large increases were seen from 1980 to 1985, when sales doubled, and from 1985 to 1990, when they doubled again. The overall growth was spectacular in America: in 1955 children's books sold \$42.7 million; by 1990, the figure was \$991.7.¹¹⁴ As seen above, Lewis's books as backlist sellers in America, seemed to have done very well when they were first published, only to have experienced a boost in the 1970s, remained solid sellers in the 1980s, and gained even more ground in the 1990s and early 2000s. It is more difficult to judge the British situation from sales because there are fewer numbers available.

However other measures of the books' popular appeal include polls and studies of reading habits. From the States, a *Huffington Post* survey of primary teachers' favourite authors found Lewis and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* were among the top ten in 2012.¹¹⁵ More surveys, however, have been undertaken in Britain. In the 1950s there were three surveys of children's reading preferences. One which received 2,040 returns to a questionnaire asking children in the Merseyside area about the books they had read or ones that had been read to them in the previous month, in 1954, did not list any of the Narnia books.¹¹⁶ A second, in 1956, was done by the Hackney Libraries Committee, which reported in *The Times* that *The Chronicles of Narnia* was often discovered by children on

¹¹⁴ Diane Roback, 'Children's Book Sales: Past and Future', *Publishers Weekly* (31 August 1990), 30.

¹¹⁵ 'Roald Dahl Voted Primary School Teachers' Favourite Author', *Huffington Post* (12 March 2012), http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/03/12/roald-dahl-voted-primary-teachers-favourite-author_n_1338494.html, accessed 27 March 2013.

¹¹⁶ J. D. Carsley, 'The Interests of Children (Aged 10-11) in Books', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, v. 27 n. 1 (1957): 13- 23.

their own and would 'join the realm of the classics'.¹¹⁷ In 1980 a survey of boys reading in two secondary schools in the London area found that two out of 23 first-year boys at one of the schools reported reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and two out of 37 third-year boys had read *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The study noted that in the latter case the book had been provided by the school.¹¹⁸ In 1977 a survey of 8,000 English children's reading habits led by Frank Whitehead returned 7,557 book titles mentioned in the answers to the questionnaire; only 246 of these were listed by ten or more children as having been read during the previous month. These 246 titles accounted for a little under 31% of the total book mentions by the sample, and included in this list were *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Magician's Nephew*, *Prince Caspian*, *The Silver Chair*, and *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.¹¹⁹ The study noted the predominance of nineteenth-century titles in the 10+ age group, commenting: 'Indeed among twentieth century children's writers the only two to achieve the distinction of having written a book which is read by one per cent or more of this age group are C. S. Lewis with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Enid Blyton with *The Secret Seven* and *Five on a Treasure Island*.'¹²⁰ Lewis was listed by 54 children as their 'favourite author'.¹²¹ Twenty years later, another group replicated the Whitehead study, with interesting results for present purposes. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was listed in the 'most frequently mentioned titles and series', being named 66 times, with 21

¹¹⁷ Anon., 'Children Tiring Of Science Fiction', *The Times* (6 November 1956), 6.

¹¹⁸ John Richmond, 'What do 170 Boys Read?', *English Magazine* (1980), 25-28.

¹¹⁹ Frank Whitehead et al., *Children and their Books: The Final Report of the Schools Council Project on Children's Reading Habits, 10-16* (Basingstoke: Evans/Methuen Educational, 1977), 125-6.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 131-2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

titles being mentioned more often.¹²² Lewis was also listed by 53 children as a ‘favourite author’ in the 1990s, only one fewer than the 1977 survey (0.66% of the sample).¹²³ The authors observed, ‘C. S. Lewis maintains a remarkably consistent place over the two decades.’¹²⁴ Several polls of adults were conducted in the early twenty-first century. In the BBC’s ‘The Big Read’ survey over three-quarters of a million votes were collected in an attempt to determine ‘Britain’s best-loved book’. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* appeared at the number nine slot among 200 favourite novels, roughly twenty percent of which were children’s books.¹²⁵ A survey reported in *The Church Times* of 3500 adults named *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as ‘the book that most inspired them in childhood to get into the habit of reading’.¹²⁶ In rough terms, then, available sales figures suggest that the *Chronicles* have had wide popular appeal in America, while surveys reveal the same for Britain.

There have been other indicators that support the finding that the *Chronicles* have had wide popular appeal in Britain and America. One such indicator is the number of radio, television, and movie versions of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, especially, which have been produced over the years (as discussed in chapter three). Furthermore, there is the fact that a set of first edition *Chronicles* sold (at auction) in 1993 for 2,100

¹²² C. Hall and M. Coles, *Children’s Reading Choices* (London: Routledge, 1999), 18.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹²⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation, ‘The Big Read’, www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/, accessed 6 April 2013.

¹²⁶ *The Church Times*, ‘C. S. Lewis Tops Poll for Inspiration’ (8 October 2004), http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/search_archive_results.asp?id=200&day=0&month=0&year=0&issue=0&filter=&searchterm=c%20s%20lewis, accessed 27 March 2013.

pounds¹²⁷ and signed copies of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle* sold at Sotheby's in 2008 for 10,625 pounds, 10,000 pounds and 9,375 pounds, respectively.¹²⁸ Although any one of these pieces of information reveals little, collectively they provide ample evidence that the books have had widespread cultural appeal.

Statistics are, of course, a one-dimensional kind of data. They cannot reveal what millions of readers liked about the *Chronicles*, or why sales have increased over time. Nevertheless, they do demonstrate that enough readers have enjoyed the books to pass them down to the next generation. One historian of children's literature has observed that ex-children are the most powerful actors in the popular canonization of a children's book.¹²⁹

Even the young can feel the comfort or nostalgia of sharing books that hold special meanings for them. One child wrote to Lewis with questions about the Lucy to whom *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was dedicated: 'Do you know how old Lucy is...? Is she married; does she have any children or grandchildren, so she can take the latter book down from some upper shelf, dust it, and read it to them? Is she still alive?'¹³⁰ In

¹²⁷ Wade, *Mallams Book Sales*, 1994, file CSL—MISC.

¹²⁸ Sotheby's Auction Sale, 'English Literature, History, Children's Books & Illustrations', L08405 (17 July 2008). <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/english-literature-history-childrens-books-illustrations-l08405/lots.list.10.30.lotnum.asc.html>, accessed 26 March 2013. See also announcement of the sale in *Oxford Mail*, Andrew Ffrench, 'Narnia Books Boost Appeal' (26 June 2008) <http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/biog/30074/>, accessed 26 March 2013.

¹²⁹ Deborah Stevenson, 'Classics and Canons', in *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. M. O. Grenby and Andrea Immel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 108-113.

¹³⁰ This child was Canadian but the sentiment was exceptionally fitting so her questions were included here. Jane to Lewis, 29 February 1962. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 245.

choosing books for children, adults were most often sharing something they had enjoyed when children as an expression of love.

There are many examples from the *Chronicles*' reception suggesting that reading the Narnia books as a child has often resulted in a life-long affection for Lewis and these stories. The *Chronicles* were the source of an especially powerful imaginary experience for British author Francis Spufford, who gave them pride of place in his autobiography about reading, *The Child that Books Built*. From their first discovery until the time he was eleven or twelve, the *Chronicles*, he explained:

[R]epresented essence-of-book to me. They were the Platonic Book of which other books were more or less imperfect shadows. For four or five years, I essentially read other books because I could not always be re-reading the Narnia books. I had a book-a-day habit to support, and there were only seven of them after all. But in other books, I was always seeking for partial or diluted reminders of Narnia, always hoping for a gleam of the sensation of Narnia. Once felt, never forgotten.¹³¹

A similarly ardent response was offered by Kathy Keller of New York—who described herself as a 'bookish' child and was recommended the Narnia books by the librarian of a mobile library in Pittsburgh. Believing herself to be one of few who knew the books, she wrote to their author with the thought of 'encouraging' him. His reply to her letter is now a prized possession, hung in the hall of her Queens, New York apartment in 2010; she said

¹³¹ Francis Spufford, *The Child That Books Built* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 87.

she still experiences a flutter of excitement when she sees Lewis's name in print.¹³² How many people would relate to her story? And how many, perhaps less exuberant, child readers have, as adults, given their own children the Narnia books as a way of sharing an experience with them?

It does not detract from the enjoyment readers like Keller have had to say that it is also true that the *Chronicles* achieved phenomenal success in large part because they were published at a propitious moment. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed dramatic change with respect to children's literature, and both from a publishing and educational—the two go hand-in-hand—standpoint, critical developments favoured the Narnia books' success. These trends were, very broadly speaking, similar in Britain and America. In the 1950s, children's literature was struggling for attention in the corporate environment of publishers, though much more progress had been made in America on this front. In the 1960s, money from the national government in both countries spurred an expansion of children's book buying in schools, thereby contributing to the rising prominence of the paperback. Fortuitously for the *Chronicles*, the 1970s witnessed, in both countries, a general reversal of the 1960s windfall as the political and financial situation changed; then, the 1980s and 1990s were notable for an unprecedented expansion of the children's book market, with more titles being produced annually than ever before. The competition facing new children's authors and new titles was ever fiercer and the chances of success ever more slim. We shall now consider these changes and why they were auspicious for the *Chronicles* in greater detail.

¹³² Kathy Keller, interviewed by author, 12 November 2010.

For years after the end of the Second World War, the British people were in the process of regaining some semblance of normality. Amid ongoing shortages there was solace in images of a peaceful and prosperous pre-war life. The children's literature of the period, understandably, reflected this conservative mood.¹³³ Lewis's Narnia books fitted the temper of the 1950s in that they appeased this need for traditional, patriotic, nostalgic literary expressions (though, as we have seen, they were not to everyone's taste). From a publishing perspective also, the *Chronicles* were timely. As an observer of the period remarked, a children's book was most likely to win an award like the Caldecott Medal if the book had been 'dressed up'—like the Narnia books were with Pauline Bayne's drawings—and the author had already established a solid publishing record.¹³⁴ Amidst continuing paper rationing, publishers favoured low-risk children's books, which meant that those written by an established name, like Lewis's, took up a disproportionate percentage of sales.¹³⁵ Lewis offered Geoffrey Bles and The Bodley Head his Narnia books at a time when there was little else being published by established names and at a moment when established names had a distinct upper hand in the market. Social, intellectual and market conditions gave the *Chronicles* a distinct competitive advantage in both Britain and America.

When they were first published in Britain, Bles advertised the *Chronicles* in mainstream newspapers like the *Times* with small announcements, often accompanied by

¹³³ Nicholas Tucker, 'Setting the Scene', *Children's Book Publishing in Britain since 1945*, eds. Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998), 1-6.

¹³⁴ Jean Poindexter Colby, *The Children's Book Field* (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1952) 209.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

a drawing from the books' illustrator, Pauline Bayne. The adverts appear unduly modest in hindsight, but were typical for the 1950s:¹³⁶ a reminder that children's books were not the revenue generators they later became. But it was not long before the Narnia books were profiting from what was in Britain a very important step in the direction of big business.

In 1961 Allen Lane replaced the editor of Puffin's paperbacks for children, Eleanor Graham, with Kaye Webb, a charismatic personality with a background in journalism. Under Webb's leadership, and with more money around for schools, libraries and individuals to spend on books, Puffin grew exponentially. When Webb joined Puffin, sales were at 630,000 pounds a year, but seven years later they had grown to four million.¹³⁷ At a time of enormous expansion of the book trade generally, Puffins were synonymous with high-quality, affordable children's books, and the brand dominated the growing paperback market until the late 1960s, when Knight Books of Brockhampton Press, in 1967,— followed by Oxford University Press, Collins and others – began their own paperback lines for children.¹³⁸ One parent wrote to Webb about what the line signified to him. He said,

Obviously one is grateful in the first place to the authors and artists, and yet the Puffin imprint does seem to add something special, something friendly. Perhaps this derives from the recurrent quality, perhaps from The Puffin Club, perhaps from having seen you (since which time the littlest

¹³⁶ Lucy Pearson, in conversation with author, 2 October 2012.

¹³⁷ Gladys Williams, 'Queen of the Puffins: Kaye Webb', *Books & Bookman*. Referenced at Seven Stories.

¹³⁸ Brian Alderson, 'Puff Puff Puffin Along', *The Times Educational Supplement* (10 March 1978), 56.

one has formed a comfortable notion that you write the lot: as evidence, your name in each book). But we all knew that with a selection of Puffins we would at least not be disappointed, and of course the realisation was far higher than that.¹³⁹

As this letter suggests, Webb not only expanded the titles on the Puffin list, but she also developed a brand that felt accessible to many children and parents across Britain. She founded a Puffin Club for children in 1967; began a *Puffin Post* with news about new books, quizzes and competitions; and even took groups of children on book-themed trips. The Puffin brand was synonymous with quality books for children at mid-century, gaining strides in the 1960s and 1970s.

The expansion of the Puffin brand resulted in a sales boost for titles the company leased, including the *Chronicles*, the first of which was published as a Puffin in 1959. Children's literature historian Brian Alderson has suggested that the Puffin Club was 'arguably the chief motive force behind the popularity of C. S. Lewis' Narnia'.¹⁴⁰ The Puffin Club had 200,814 members in 1979,¹⁴¹ and certainly Puffin advertisements launched the *Chronicles* to a new level of success in Britain in the 1960s.

For example, the second issue of the *Puffin Post*, in the summer of 1967, issued a competition for children, which corresponded with the television version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* airing that July. Explaining that 'the producer of the programme would like to know how well you think she has succeeded in turning the strange

¹³⁹ Dennis Cartledge to Kaye Webb, 20 August 1970. 'Letters from Parents', Seven Stories, KW/07/04/01/06.

¹⁴⁰ Brian Alderson, 'The Making of Children's Books', *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, 50.

¹⁴¹ S. R. S., 'Chief Puffin Retires', *The Bookseller* (20 Oct 1979), 1895.

happening in the dreamland of Narnia into a television reality', it then challenged Puffin members to read or reread the book, answer two questions about the content, watch the first two episodes of the play and write a 200 word review. First prize was the model of the witch's castle used for the show.¹⁴² A lengthy summary of the results that included many quotations from children's replies was published in the next issue. It read in part:

This was a very close competition as most of you knew the answers to the questions and you all had very definite opinions about the play. You all could see that the book would be very difficult to adapt for television since many ideas in the book are really shadows of real things and you can't make shadows solid.... Your reviews were interesting because by the time anyone is old enough to do things "for children," like make a television play or write a book, he may have forgotten what it feels like to be your age. On the other hand it can be hard to sort out what most of you like, since very often the one thing that one of you liked very much, the other hated-- see next column!¹⁴³

Efforts such as this were representative of Puffin in the 1960s and claimed the loyalty of many child (and parent) readers across the country.

In 1969 Puffin ran another competition in order to appraise which books were members' favourites. Both *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Swallows and Amazons* appeared on the lists of seven, eight, eleven and twelve-year-olds, from 2,700

¹⁴² Anon., *Puffin Post*, Vol. 1, n 2. (Summer 1967), 24.

¹⁴³ Anon., *Puffin Post*, Vol. 1, n. 3, (Autumn, 1967), 21.

child entries.¹⁴⁴ In a 1975 interview, Webb said that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was the first big success that Puffin had achieved and that the Narnia series was its 'one consistent best seller'.¹⁴⁵

Webb said of the intended audience of Puffin books, 'We've always wanted to sell directly to children.'¹⁴⁶ But as she well knew, the institutional market—libraries and schools—was the driver of the children's book industry. She elaborated on this point:

Oh, I *care* about the institutional market, but I don't want the books to become institutionalized. I want children to think that Puffins are fun and to want them for themselves. Teachers write to me very often and ask which Puffins they should read in class. But it's still on the pleasure side of learning, you know.¹⁴⁷

By alluding to the 'pleasure side of learning', Webb was conveying the message that she did not sacrifice her high standards of quality and enjoyment in order to please the big buyers. It was, in retrospect, a fleeting moment in which children's book editors' decisions about the worthiness of a title continued to shape an increasingly prosperous industry. The 1964 Labour government provided funds to expand libraries and schools, and the Puffin brand's reputation for quality books helped to break down resistance to paperbacks from these institutional buyers, who previously had insisted on hardbacks.¹⁴⁸

Thus, though Webb was guided in her editorial policy by her assessment of what children

¹⁴⁴ Kaye Webb, 'The Classroom Library', *Teacher's World* (2 Oct 1970), 6s.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Higgins, 'Publishing Children's Paperbacks: A Talk with Puffin's Kaye Webb', *Publisher's Weekly* (24 Feb 1975), 67.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Sally Gritten, *The Story of Puffin Books* (London: Penguin, 1991), 17-18.

enjoyed, it was those whose aims were didactic – namely, teachers and librarians – who sought Webb’s guidance and bought Puffin titles on a large scale.

Children’s book specialists, too, recommended to librarians and teachers that they avail themselves of the Puffin list. Author and critic John Rowe Townsend in *Written for Children* (1965) suggested Puffin titles, among other things, as a guide because they ‘maintain a high standard’.¹⁴⁹ And we find Elaine Moss, in 1969, suggesting teachers ‘give paperbacks a try’ and:

If you are faced with the task of building up a fiction library for top primary or lower secondary level from scratch, the best method I can think of (and this is cheating on a grand, but effective, scale) is to acquire a copy of the current Puffin list and select your titles...from that....The reason I suggest this is that Puffins editors spend a vast amount of time selecting the best (not only the highbrow but the readable) fiction from all the hardback publishers' lists so in a sense they are doing your job for you.¹⁵⁰

With specialists’ backing and the additional incentive of stretching budgets while stocking new libraries, teachers and librarians must have turned frequently to Puffins for supply. To the extent that they did, the Narnia books appeared on British school and public library shelves.

Copyrights to the Narnia books and many other titles had been gained by Webb, because shortly after her appointment as editor she had approached Billy Collins of

¹⁴⁹ J. R. Townsend, *Written for Children: An Outline of English Children's Literature* (London: Miller, 1965), 1.

¹⁵⁰ Elaine Moss, ‘Your Choice’, *Teacher's World* (3 Oct 1969); and ‘Children's Books’, Supplement, XIII.

Collins Publishing and convinced him that she knew the ‘tricks of paperback publishing’ better than he and could do well for him if he guaranteed her a number of his titles each year. She then made the same deal with Oxford University Press and Faber Press, thereby eliminating the possibility, for a time, that these companies would launch their own paperback children’s books to compete with the Puffin list.¹⁵¹ The Narnia books, therefore, prospered from Webb’s ingenuity and from the Puffin name at a moment when it was achieving great gains, in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, by 1979, the publishing situation in Britain was changing. Collins Publishing acquired rights from The Bodley Head to the only two Narnia titles they had not previously possessed, cancelled Puffin’s rights to the *Chronicles* and then released the complete set in their own paperback line, Fontana Lions.¹⁵² Webb, though retiring, wrote to Walter Hooper with a last attempt to retain the *Chronicles* as Puffins. This, she said, would make her ‘enormously happy’, continuing:

and I think perhaps your friend, C. S. Lewis, would be as well--the tragic thing is that I can't produce the letters that he wrote to me, but he did write to me more than once saying how happy he was to be with Puffins, and I think that's where he felt it spiritually belonged, so to speak. It seems funny my bothering to write to you at this stage when I shall shortly

¹⁵¹ Gritten, *The Story of Puffin Books*, 19.

¹⁵² Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Complete Guide to His Life and Works*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 453.

be retiring from the editorship, but having him as a Puffin was one of the very proudest things I ever did.¹⁵³

Webb's last-ditch tactics may not have availed, but evidence suggests that there were long-lasting benefits for the Narnia books from the success that she had had with her paperbacks. Indeed, despite the shifting publishing trends in Britain, a *Times* interview of its columnists in 2008 about their favourite childhood reading revealed that Puffins predominated, including *The Horse and His Boy*, named by journalist Caitlin Moran.¹⁵⁴

In America, meanwhile, the growth of children's literature was attended by similar circumstances to those in Britain, but the specifics of how these related to the Narnia books differed. In the 1950s, a conservative mood with respect to the content of books for children predominated. Many parents, preoccupied with building a prosperous life for their young families, were contented with nostalgic and traditional themes in books believed to impart morality and reflect the 'best' of children's literature; in these respects, the Narnia books suited the times. As one observer remarked 'We are a nation that wants our children to *learn* things when they read.'¹⁵⁵ Moreover, there was large expansion of schools and libraries in the early 1950s:¹⁵⁶ the trend had begun earlier than in Britain due to comparative prosperity.

This period was followed by greater expansion of the children's book trade generally in America, aided by large increases in federal funding to schools and libraries in

¹⁵³ Kaye Webb to Walter Hooper, 8 October 1979. (Seven Stories Centre, KW/01/02/36) Hooper wrote back to say that there was nothing he could do. Walter Hooper to Kaye Webb, 12 December 1979. Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ *Times* launched its Books for Schools campaign in November 2008, cited in Grove, *So Much to Tell*, 266.

¹⁵⁵ Colby, *The Children's Book Field*, 194.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 193.

the 1960s.¹⁵⁷ One of the policies of President Johnson's administration (within a broader set of initiatives collectively referred to as the Great Society) was Title 2 of the Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965. Until 1969 (when the Nixon administration began dismantling it), this legislation provided a windfall of funding to schools for the purchase of approved trade books; as in Britain, publishers in America expanded their efforts to meet the demand, and resistance to the use of paperbacks in schools was overcome.¹⁵⁸

The head of Dell Publishing's children's book division described the situation:

Government funding resulted in massive, often indiscriminate buying [by institutions] because the money always had to be spent by a certain deadline. ...Paperbacks were one of the best ways you could spend your money because you could get so much more for your dollar.¹⁵⁹

Again, the *Chronicles* were perfectly placed to ascend with the growing prominence of trade paperbacks. An article by a language arts teacher titled 'Paperbacks in the Classroom' in *Horn Book Magazine*, for example, recommended Lewis as an author to keep on the classroom shelf.¹⁶⁰ Legislative and publishing trends, generally, were key to the wide dissemination of the *Chronicles* in America.

However, whereas in Britain the books benefited from Kaye Webb's achievement with the Puffin brand, in the States, the Macmillan publishing company's achievements in the 1950s and 1960s were less impressive. The company had been the first to create a

¹⁵⁷ Marcus, *Minders of Make-believe*, 234-238.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 238-241.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 241-2

¹⁶⁰ Joy F. Moss, 'Paperbacks in the Classroom', *The Horn Book Magazine* (Feb 1981), 322-3.

separate department devoted to children's books, and was, in the 1930s and 1940s, one of the premier children's book publishers. Yet, by mid-century, when the *Chronicles* were first published with them, Macmillan had slipped from their previous position as a leader in children's books.¹⁶¹ Less than stellar results were partly the outcome of frequent turnover within management of the children's book department. Bechtel was replaced by Doris Patee, editor until 1959, who was followed by her assistant Lee Anna Deadrick, who after five years was dismissed and replaced briefly by someone with no experience, Francis Keene, who was replaced in 1964 by Susan Hirschman, who stayed until 1974, at which point she resigned as part of a major upset at Macmillan over the company's discrimination against women. Hirschman was followed by editor Phyllis Larkin, who was replaced by Judith Whipple in 1982.¹⁶² The characteristics of individual editors are less important than the fact of their quick succession, suggesting, as it does, that there was neither stability nor exceptional foresight at Macmillan from the 1950s to the 1970s—the house did not produce a paperback version of the *Chronicles* until 1970, as 'Collier Books'.¹⁶³ This situation proved a sharp contrast to the contemporaneous prosperity and decisive, visionary leadership that the Puffin team enjoyed under Kaye Webb in Britain.

Furthermore, Macmillan was weakened both by its becoming a public company in 1950 and by the take-over by Crowell-Collier. By the end of the 1960s, businessman Raymond Hagel had replaced George Brett Jr and Macmillan had a corporate ambience

¹⁶¹ Janet Schulman, 'Looking Back: The 1974 Macmillan Massacre', *Publisher's Weekly* (10 April 2008), <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/15635-looking-back-the-1974-macmillan-massacre.html>, accessed 3 April 2013.

¹⁶² Barbara Bader, 'Macmillan Children's Books, 1919-1995', *The Horn Book Magazine* (September/October 1995), 548-62.

¹⁶³ Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: Complete Guide*, 455.

and style of management. It created, for example, the company's first children's marketing director in 1966 in order to manage an increasingly complex and profitable business.¹⁶⁴ Janet Shulman, who was the first to occupy that post, was drawn to working in the children's book department of Macmillan on account of the Narnia books: 'I was asked to help rewrite the jacket copies for the Narnia books', she later recalled. 'I'd never even known that C.S. Lewis wrote children's books. I read them and was bowled over that children's literature could be like this! From then on, I volunteered to work on all of the children's books and became more and more involved in them as the years went by.'¹⁶⁵ As with the early years, the American children's book publishing scene preempted the British one.

By 1980, the industry on both sides of the Atlantic was changing in critical respects, which in effect eroded the relational and ideologically-driven foundation upon which the children's book sector had been built. Webb reflected on the condition of the trade at the time of her retirement:

The future for children's publishing is a little tougher than it was 19 years ago. The financial constraints are tightening, and there is a demand for titles with large sales, which, as on other paperback lists, often means film or television tie-ins. These crowd out other titles, crying for a place on the list....If you find a good author, you keep him going--authors have to write

¹⁶⁴ Marcus, *Minders of Make-believe*, 248.

¹⁶⁵ Sally Lodge, 'Making the Transition: Six Children's Publishers on Stepping Down', *Publisher's Weekly* (1 October 2001), <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/25927-making-the-transition-six-children-s-publishers-on-stepping-down.html>, accessed 3 April 2013.

a book a year now to support themselves--and that, too, leaves less for the new people.¹⁶⁶

From about 1980 onward, in other words, a children's book author's name meant more than ever to the likelihood of a book's success; and a publisher's backlist became even more important to the department's financial viability.

This evolution was a consequence of the scale of operation demanded by the large expansion of the institutional markets, together with higher production costs. Before the 1980s publishers printed large print-runs of children's books in order to meet the long-term demand and to keep the unit price low, and the books were stored in warehouses. Thereafter, warehousing costs increased, and it was no longer financially prudent to keep large stocks of titles which had not proved their viability. The consequence was a change in the industry; many more children's book titles were produced with a much more rapid turnover and less time in the market to become established.¹⁶⁷

These changing conditions had the effect of constricting the amount of risk publishers were willing to take. Choices had to be made in light of factors which had always been influential, but which increasingly dictated the entire operation of publishing. In light of high stakes and fierce competition, publishers could not afford to be as ideologically driven as they had been in the more comfortable, smaller-scale days of the 1950s and 1960s. Philippa Dickinson, who was trained by Kaye Webb at Puffin,

¹⁶⁶ S. R. S., 'Chief Puffin Retires', 1895.

¹⁶⁷ Information about the changing publishing conditions is from Reynolds, 'Publishing Practices and the Practicalities of Publishing', *Children's Book Publishing in Britain since 1945*, 24-26.

explained: 'That's the thing that's changed...in the old days I would not have worried about who a book was for; I would just have published it because I loved it...now I have to put my personal selection in terms of money...I don't suppose Kaye ever had to do that.'¹⁶⁸ Now there was pressure to produce 'quick, cheap sellers' for the mass-media market in order to stay competitive.¹⁶⁹ The implication of these developments for the Narnia books was that they had made their name and reputation at the perfect moment—a step before tremendous growth, just before the stakes became too high to be high-minded about children's books.

Children's books were the source of sizeable capital for publishers by 1980 and, as the sales information provided above demonstrates, they would only become more lucrative over the next three decades. With respect to the Narnia books, the history of much of the 1980s and 1990s was identical to that which was traced in chapter three: an increasingly critical authorial platform was thoroughly established in Britain during Lewis's lifetime, and by the 1970s in America; it went from strength to strength with the rise of publishing conglomerations, media tie-ins and the expansion of higher education.

However, there is more to be said here about the implications for the Narnia books of the growth in the educational market in both Britain and America, specifically for primary schools. In America, textbook publication was a critical component of Macmillan. In fact Macmillan was one of the three largest textbook producers in America by 1988,

¹⁶⁸ Philippa Dickinson interview, 7 March 1995, quoted by Reynolds, *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶⁹ Grove, *So Much to Tell*, 219.

owning, along with Harcourt and Simon and Schuster, nearly half the business.¹⁷⁰ Seen in light of the development of the children's book industry in the second half of the twentieth century, there was a logic to why the *Chronicles* became the solid, backlist sellers they did in Britain and America. Moreover, evidence from a variety of sources in both Britain and America suggests that the consequence of the role that schools and libraries played in the children's book market as a whole, for the reception of the *Chronicles*, was that of securing these books a sustained presence in the education environment.

In the first place, anecdotal references point to the *Chronicles* being used in elementary or primary school classrooms. Early on, Geoffrey Bles wrote to Lewis to tell him that the Holborn educational authorities had had their schoolchildren read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*. Finding the children 'wildly delighted' with them, the Holborn chief librarian asked if Lewis would speak to their school during their 'Children's Book Week' in November 1953.¹⁷¹ There are several instances of classes writing to Lewis or his publishers asking for permission to put on plays based on the Narnia books.¹⁷² And there are casual references to the books being read aloud in the classroom. For example, an American children's book specialist prefaced a 2012 edited volume about the Narnia series by saying that his mother had given him a copy of *The*

¹⁷⁰ Judy Taylor, 'Children's Paperback Explosion', *Publisher's Weekly*, 41-2.

¹⁷¹ Geoffrey Bles to Lewis, 1 July 1952. Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 1-13.

¹⁷² See chapter 3, note 150.

Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe: 'As a lifelong educator, my mother was known for reading through the entire Narnia series out loud to her students.'¹⁷³

Reprint requests in the archived papers of Bles and Macmillan also make clear that extracts of the Narnia books were included in texts for use in schools. Basil Blackwell asked Bles for permission to include 'a story by C. S. Lewis' in their collection 'SIX OF THE BEST!', in one trade and one school edition;¹⁷⁴ Macmillan granted permission to a professor of Education in Kentucky for the printing of a passage from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in her book, *Teaching the Reading of Fiction: A Manual for Elementary School Teachers*;¹⁷⁵ Macmillan granted the same to the Science Research Associates for their Pilot Library for the eighth grade, which they said they expected to distribute 'throughout the world, with exception of the British empire'.¹⁷⁶ The records for these reprints are incomplete, but photo usage records from the repository of Lewis materials at the Marion E. Wade Center suggest that the trend continued. For example, Lewis-material was used by Macmillan/McGraw Hill School Publishing Company for an anthology called *Reading and Write Idea* sometime in the 1990s.¹⁷⁷

The deposit at the Bodleian Library of hundreds of letters written to Macmillan by schoolchildren also reveals that the Narnia books were often read as part of a 'Favourite Author' or 'Write to an Author' programme in the States, especially from the late 1980s onward. Jeb Bush, governor of Florida, made *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the

¹⁷³ Michelle Ann Abate and Lance Weldy, eds., *C. S. Lewis: The Chronicles of Narnia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), ix.

¹⁷⁴ John Cutforth to Geoffrey Bles publishers, 31 December 1956. Bodl. Dep. C. 771, fol. 128-213.

¹⁷⁵ Elizabeth Parker to Geoffrey Bles publishers, 21 March 1968. Bodl. Dept. C. 775, fol. 250 and 269.

¹⁷⁶ Macmillan Company to Gibb, 27 August 1963. Bodl. Dep. C. 772, fol. 354-454.

¹⁷⁷ 'Wade Center photo usage', copy of records provided author in March 2012.

centre of a statewide reading programme in 2005.¹⁷⁸ Such programmes were begun about this period as part of a general move among educationalists towards a more literature-based curriculum.¹⁷⁹ For example, one librarian wrote to Lewis on behalf of a class of fifth graders at Indian Hill Elementary School in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1988, because the children had selected *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as part of their 'Our Favourite Book' contest. Also, Lewis's publishers received letters in conjunction with R.E.A.D. Week, a library-sponsored event of writing to favourite authors, from children in Illinois.¹⁸⁰ These letters corroborate that the Narnia books were very much part of the popular canon of American children, teachers and (likely) parents in the 1980s and 1990s.

Furthermore, inclusions of the *Chronicles* in reading and teaching guides written for the educational context span the second half of the twentieth century, in Britain and America. For the sake of brevity, samplings of what is an enormous amount of literature is listed here in two tables:

¹⁷⁸ Alison Lurie, 'The Passion of C. S. Lewis', *New York Review of Books* (9 February 2006), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2006/feb/09/the-passion-of-cs-lewis/?pagination=false>, accessed 6 April 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Kathy G. Short, 'Reading literature in Elementary classrooms', in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Shelby Anne Wolf, et al., (New York: Routledge, 2011), 49.

¹⁸⁰ John Welsh to Lewis, 14 June 1988; Cynthia Wepking to 'Author', undated. Bodl. MS. Eng. Let. C. 855, 'Children's letters to C. S. Lewis, 1986-8. S-Z, & misc'.

British

- *Four to Fourteen: A Library of Books for Children* (1950)¹⁸¹
- *Books for Young People Eleven to Thirteen Plus* (1960)¹⁸²
- *Children's Fiction: A Handbook for Librarians* (1972)¹⁸³
- *Fiction 9-13* (1973)¹⁸⁴
- *Reading for Enjoyment* (1984)¹⁸⁵
- *Margery Fisher Recommends Classics for Children & Young* (1986)¹⁸⁶
- *Bright Ideas: Using Books in the Classroom* (1989)¹⁸⁷

American

- *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* (1961)¹⁸⁸
- *Books for Elementary School Libraries: An Initial Collection* (1969)¹⁸⁹
- *Choosing Books for Children: A Commonsense Guide* (1981)¹⁹⁰
- *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults: An Annotated Bibliography* (1983)¹⁹¹
- *Children's Literature: Resource for the Classroom* (1989)¹⁹²
- *What Else Should I Read: Guiding Kids to Good Books* (1995)¹⁹³
- *Book Talk and Beyond: Children and Teachers Respond to Literature* (1995)¹⁹⁴

These, too, suggest that the Narnia books were commonly used in school settings.

C. The 'Classics' and the Critics

¹⁸¹ Kathleen Lines, *Four to Fourteen: A Library of Books for Children* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 254.

¹⁸² North Midland Branch of the Library Association, *Books for Young People Eleven to Thirteen Plus* (London: Library Association, 1960).

¹⁸³ Sheila Ray, *Children's Fiction: A Handbook for Librarians* (Leicester: Brockhampton Press, 1972), 25-26.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Barton, *Fiction 9-13* (London: National Book League, 1973), 19.

¹⁸⁵ Elaine Moss, ed., *Reading for Enjoyment* (London: Children's Booknews Ltd., 1984), 22.

¹⁸⁶ Margery Fisher, *Margery Fisher Recommends Classics for Children & Young People* (South Woodchester: Thimble Press, 1986), 88, 95.

¹⁸⁷ Hazel Short, *Bright Ideas: Using Books in the Classroom* (Leamington Spa: Scholastic, 1989), 125.

¹⁸⁸ Charlotte S. Huck, and Doris A. Young, *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 305.

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth D Hodges, ed., *Books for Elementary School Libraries: An Initial Collection* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 295.

¹⁹⁰ Betsy Hearne, *Choosing Books for Children: A Commonsense Guide* (New York: Laurel Book, 1981), 137.

¹⁹¹ Ruth Nadelman Lynn, *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1983).

¹⁹² Masha Kabakow Rudman, ed., *Children's Literature: Resource for the Classroom* (Needham Heights, MA: Christopher-Gordon Pub., 1989), 78-79.

¹⁹³ Matt Berman, ed., *What Else Should I Read?: Guiding Kids to Good Books*. Vol. 1 (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1995), 74, 149 161 136-137.

¹⁹⁴ Nancy Roser, and Miriam G Martinez, eds., *Book Talk and Beyond: Children and Teachers Respond to Literature* (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1995), 39.

There is ample evidence, then, that the Narnia books were frequently used in the education systems of Britain and America from their publication onward. There appears, therefore, to be a discrepancy between British critics' responses to Lewis, as considered above, and the response of many British educators, whose charge it was to teach children.¹⁹⁵ What could explain such a difference? After all, many of the hostile critics held that the Narnia books were *harmful* to children. So why was it that the *Chronicles* continued to be used in the educational environment?

In a chapter addressing 'Gender Roles in Children's Fiction', Judy Simons stated the following:

The deliberate disordering of gender identities in modern children's literature has not, of course, rendered more traditional representations of gender obsolete. C. S. Lewis' Narnia books, for instance, remain popular at the start of the twenty-first-century despite the very conservative gender roles that they endorse. It might in fact be argued that some of their popularity comes precisely from this social conservatism.

It is possible (though evidence would be difficult to come by), that teachers and librarians have tended to be, themselves more socially conservative than the critics writing articles in *Horn Book* or *Signal*. Or perhaps teachers chose books for the classroom that they believe parents would not object to; and because the Narnia books are widely familiar

¹⁹⁵ An exception is a record of the Howard County, Maryland school system challenging the use of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 1990 because it depicted 'graphic violence, mysticism, and gore'. Robert P. Doyle, *Banned Books: Challenging Our Freedom to Read* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010), 252.

and loved, if they *did* have qualms about the morals of the books, they might include them anyway. It is difficult to know. Perhaps the implication of the discrepancy is that critics' opinions and even widespread changes in educational philosophy are less influential in the day to day teaching of children than might be supposed.

Studies of how teachers choose books for the classroom do, in fact, suggest a disconnect between the critical literature about children's books, as discussed above, and the primary factors determining teacher's book choices. In 1980 an in-depth study of the subject in Sheffield and Rotherham concluded that those in educational leadership chose books after consulting a range of information sources (publishers' catalogues, other teachers' experiences, book exhibitions). However, it noted that the factors most likely to influence book choice were whether it was recommended by a colleague, was from a known series, or was by a known author.¹⁹⁶ The study stated that 67% of the 136 teachers questioned claimed to be affected to some extent by the name of the author of a book, and 20% said they were very affected by this when selecting books for school. Moreover, this was particularly important in book selection of fiction.¹⁹⁷ The authors of a larger, 2008 study of 1200 teachers in England, half in Key Stage 1 (children 5-7) and half in Key Stage 2 (7-11), demonstrated that in deciding which books to use in the classroom, the most influential factor was a teacher's own interest and knowledge of children's books, at 86%; the second most influential factor was children's recommendations, cited

¹⁹⁶ Kate Vincent, *A Survey of the Methods by which Teachers Select Books*, Crus Occasional Paper (Sheffield: Center for Research on User Studies, University of Sheffield, 1980), 128, 153-5.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

by 64%.¹⁹⁸ The authors suggested that teachers' 'repertoires represent a primary canon of significant children's authors, most of whom are likely to be well known to parents as well as grandparents'.¹⁹⁹ They expressed concern over their conclusion that teachers were overly dependent on a 'relatively narrow range of very well known writers'.²⁰⁰ And in fact Lewis was among these, having been named by 122 teachers who were asked to list six 'good' children's writers; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* had over 50 mentions in response to a question about 'favourite childhood reading'.²⁰¹ Clearly, then, one cannot assume that literary theory *about* children's books or even criticism of a given series, such as the *Chronicles*, has had any bearing on that books being used or excluded from the classroom—at least not in Britain.

There have not been many instances of teachers speaking directly about why they have used the *Chronicles* in schools. However, where they are found, these statements corroborate the studies of teachers' choices just mentioned. Use of the Narnia books has been determined by educators' personal history with a book and the perceived usefulness of the books in the teaching environment. M. Hutton, Senior English Mistress at King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls in Birmingham, observed that the *Chronicles* were recommendable for their offering to children 'a unified morality, from his

¹⁹⁸ Teresa Cremin et al., 'Teachers as Readers in the 21st Century' (United Kingdom Literacy Associations' Children's Literature Special Interest Group, 2008) in *Acts of Reading: Teachers, Texts and Childhood* ed. Morag Styles and Evelyn Arizpe (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham, 2009), 212.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 205-6.

person',²⁰² or, in other words, the books were trustworthy because Lewis was a Christian.

Then again, we have an example of the 'entertain to teach' motivation articulated in 1966 by a lay reader in Cheltenham, who wrote to Bles:

I have cause to read a fair proportion of children's literature to find out what the modern child reads and see things from his point of view. The Narnia series is one of the best examples of 'entertain to teach' literature for young people I have ever come across. The author amuses and holds the interest of his readers, telling them a most intriguing story, and at the same time weaves in the Bible story and the basic teachings of the Christian faith in a most fascinating way, possibly equalling Anderson in his mastery of the technique.²⁰³

Cheltenham proposed that a children's club be formed on a 'friends of Narnia' basis, adding, 'There is enough material in the series for any number of quizzes, competitions, prizes, etc, and the ideas started in the books could branch out into every field of literature.' This, it should be noted, was the time that the Puffin Club was giving the *Chronicles* a boost in popularity.

In the States, although there were not as many critics voicing objections to the Narnia books, the British criticisms did not go unnoticed. An American freelance writer Holly Bigelow Martin observed in the early 1990s that 'educational critics panned Lewis for his violence' and asked teachers for their response to this. She wrote in the New York

²⁰² M. Hutton, 'Writers for Children 3: C. S. Lewis', *School Librarian and School Library Review* 12 (July 1964), 124.

²⁰³ M. W. Broom to Geoffrey Bles publishers, 5 February 1966. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 1-98.

C. S. Lewis Society's *Bulletin*, 'teachers I spoke to don't seem to mind the kind or amount of violence they find in the *Chronicles*' and cited several educators' responses to support her claim.²⁰⁴ Two justified the use of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* despite its violence by comparing it to other works that also depicted violence. A third grade teacher replied, 'I don't think the classics are without violence...even *Heidi* has child abuse in it';²⁰⁵ another, a first grade teacher, said 'Kids in my class have even seen things like *Nightmare on Elm Street*—the amount of R-rated movies they've seen is alarming to me. I can't imagine *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* being any more violent than anything that the children see on TV.'²⁰⁶ In these instances the use of the *Chronicles* in the educational environment was undertaken by some *despite* recognized violence, with a faith apparently having been placed in the books' 'classic' status and a belief in the comparative innocence of Lewis's work in the context of modern children's entertainment and reading habits.

There have been other occasions when the books were used more circumspectly, yet, again, despite concern about violence and the representation of gender roles. One teacher in New Jersey described her experience of teaching from the Narnia books:

After reading the seven volumes and becoming an ardent convert, I read the first book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* serially to my fifth

²⁰⁴ Holly Bigelow Martin, 'C. S. Lewis in the Secular Classroom', *Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* (February 1991), 1-7. She records that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was one of five books to be featured in a four-week summer teachers' institute in 1989 at East Tennessee State University, in which teachers were 'encouraged to "use fantasy literature as a basis for teaching science, geography, math and other subjects."' Ibid., 5.

²⁰⁵ Kathy Reilly, Ibid., 2.

²⁰⁶ Lisa Fulton, Ibid., 2.

grade class and soon had an entire cadre of devoted Narnians in my company. During the third week of readings, one boy came to school hugging his full set of Chronicles which he had bought with his entire life savings. He carried the collection back and forth from home to school for several days, not trusting them anywhere without his constant guard. Another boy discovered a poster map of the lands of Narnia and words like Aslan, Telmarines, fauns, and dryads became everyday expressive vocabulary words in class. Lucy, Peter, Su, [*sic*] and Edmund, the four children protagonists who go on magnificent adventures through enchanted lands, became old friends.²⁰⁷

The enthusiasm of her class made her wonder, 'Just how is Clive Staples Lewis converting us all into devoted Narnians? What devices does he employ to make his fantasies so successful?' Moreover, this teacher's use of the books was despite reservations she had about the violence in the books and her observation that: 'unfortunately Narnia itself is not a province of equal rights. Lewis protects girls from the most violent fights and revolting scenes. The children are all royalty yet Peter is the high ruler, and sadly, only the girls are allowed to be very tender with Aslan.'²⁰⁸ However, the success of Lewis's techniques in other respects, she explained, resulted in 'a wonderfully rich set of fantasies that can be a powerful vehicle in any language arts program'.²⁰⁹ Personal affection for

²⁰⁷ Susan Cornell Poskanzer, 'Thoughts on C. S. Lewis and the Chronicles of Narnia', *Language Arts* (May 1976), 523-26.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 525.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 526.

the book, children's love of the books, and a perception that the *Chronicles* were well-suited to an educational need overcame reservations.

A final example from the States depicts the use of the *Chronicles* in the classroom wherein there is no reference to worries about the content. A teacher, writing in the 1970s, named *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as an 'old favorite' in the course of making the argument in the journal *Children's Literature in Education* that books used in the classroom should only be those which the teacher finds him or herself engaged. This teacher made an experiment over a year of introducing only books he liked into the curriculum and by the end was 'convinced that a teacher's love and interest in literature cannot be replaced, and children begin to trust your judgement when they like what they read.'²¹⁰

It is evident, therefore, that violence in the Narnia books has not gone completely unnoticed by educators but that, in the States at least, the books have continued to be used on account of their 'classic' status, or their utility in the classroom, or because children's enthusiasm or a teacher's own personal attachment to the books overrode such concerns. Indeed, this examination of the use of the *Chronicles* in the classroom further supports the findings of the studies mentioned above, which revealed that teachers' choices of books have largely been determined by a small number of factors, and especially an author and book's canonical status.

One teacher articulated what this, more enigmatic, value can mean:

²¹⁰ David Sansom, 'Read This: You'll Love It', *Children's Literature in Education* (March 1971), 58.

As teachers, we know the value of having children interact with the classics. We know that these fine books provide a common link between the generations. They are a part of our cultural heritage and are a part of our childhood education. We know that they provide an identification with the timelessness of basic issues and problems.²¹¹

The Narnia books' appearance in 'Write to an Author' programmes in America, reading guides for teachers and parents, and surveys of teachers' favourite books demonstrate their canonical status in educational and popular contexts. What has been remarkable about these books' history was that they achieved this canonical status so completely, despite some serious accusations about the ethics they depicted. This corroborates Deborah Stevenson's observation that the rise of multicultural literature has not, in fact, been reflected by the 'pantheon of classics,' and that 'the classics section may now be the whitest spot in the bookstore.'²¹² The history of the *Chronicles* is testament to the reality that the popular canonization of a text is unlikely to be solely in the hands of a few.

The lesson, so to speak, for the present study may be that those writing children's books or those invested in the critical discourse *about* children's books have been engaging with cultural, aesthetic and authorial issues which for educationalists, who may also be aware of them, are trumped by a given book's canonical status, experience of children's enjoyment, their own affection for a book, a perceived didactic value—or all four factors at once.

²¹¹ Dewey W. Chambers, *Children's Literature in the Curriculum* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1971), 202.

²¹² Stevenson, 'Classics and Canons', in *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, 116.

Summary

Twenty-five years after her biting reviews of the *Chronicles* in *New Statesman and Nation* and *Times Literary Supplement*, Naomi Lewis, now an established critic, found herself writing the entry for 'C. S. Lewis' in a 1978 anthology of children's book authors. The tension between the popular and the critical receptions of the *Chronicles* is poignantly expressed, as Lewis seemingly attempts to write her way into an understanding of the books' success. It opens:

Ever since the first of the seven Narnia books appeared in 1950, C. S. Lewis has been perhaps the best-liked post-war "quality" writer for children in Britain. This success is all the more interesting because, at the time of publishing, these books ran directly across a number of attitudes and taboos in children's fiction—and in certain ways do so still. They contain violence, pain, and death. Their tone is often admonitory: they are morally and theologically didactic. It would be wrong, of course, to think these all disadvantages. Indeed, it could be said that C. S. Lewis won his readers not only by his stunning scenes and plot situations and by his manner—a well-gauged air of intimate authority—but by a deliberate *using* of large taboos, religion and death in particular.²¹³

With particular respect to the Narnia books, Lewis did deliberately counter literary trends of his day, namely, the neglect of story as an art form. And, arguably, it would not have

²¹³ Naomi Lewis, 'C. S. Lewis', *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, ed. D. L. Kirkpatrick (London: Macmillan, 1978), 769.

been out of character for him to have acted from the same impulse in his depiction of violence and death. But is taboo shattering to be credited for the books' popular success? There is hardly evidence that the inclusion of violence and death *itself* recommended the books to children or non-critics. Indeed, Naomi Lewis did not sound, herself, convinced of the notion. But, after all, a definite answer cannot be given. Sales of the *Chronicles* point to countless readers' delight in these stories, their silence all the more salient for their quantity. Unquestionably, pleasure played *the* central part in these books' success; but, unfortunately, the *nature* of that pleasure has not often been recorded.

What this chapter has conclusively demonstrated is that credit for the Narnia books' popular canonization as 'classics' of children's literature must be given to the timing of their publication. Moreover, from shortly after publication, monumental social and national changes helped secure the books' visibility and popular success. Children's book publishing expanded rapidly to meet the growing demand from parents, educators and children themselves. Puffin and Collins in Britain and Macmillan Publishers in the States extended the reach of the *Chronicles*. Then, so too, did television and movie renditions of the Narnia books. Having become cultural icons, the books gained firmer ground than ever. If, indeed, the books were distasteful to many, the aesthetics associated with Lewis's platform and fantasies nevertheless insulated the series from any widespread popular detraction. Sixty years after their publication, the *Chronicles* are more likely than ever before to be read aloud in classrooms and in homes, to be passed down from one generation to the next, of being a connecting thread in cultural memory.

Chapter Five

Idea, Teaching Tool and Something Shared: The Life of *Mere Christianity* in Religious Communities

'Next to the Word of God and the unction of the Holy Spirit, books are the life-blood of effective preachers.'—P. M. Masters, *Crusade* magazine¹

On entering a local bookshop the other day I found in the theological section, among other authors who were represented at most by two or three volumes, one who had a score or so to his credit. Evidently here was a best-seller, the kind of book which was not likely to remain on the shelves for long. The author in question was Mr. C. S. Lewis, a dozen or more of whose *Beyond Personality* accompanied a similar number of *Broadcast Talks*. What better evidence of his popularity could one wish for? The fact that he has been brought to the microphone so many times as an exponent of the Christian faith shows what a hearing he can command. A friend of mine remarked the other day that he had bought a number of copies of *Broadcast Talks* to present to lay-preachers; but when I asked him whether he had read the book himself, he replied that he had not. The name, it would seem, was guarantee enough of the soundness of the contents.²

We begin with this reflection, written in 1945, because, despite its brevity, it anticipates most of the major themes of the present chapter. Lewis's successful platform

¹ P. M. Masters, Advertisement, *Crusade*, March 1979, 49.

² E. L. Allen, 'The Theology of C. S. Lewis', *Modern Churchman* (January-March 1945), 317.

was vital to his being adopted by Christians in Britain and America; it was a condition that, indeed, recommended the 'soundness' of the 'C. S. Lewis' name. But, as this observer went on to say, it was those already convinced of the truth of the message—not those sceptical or indifferent to Christianity, for whom Lewis wrote³—who most enthusiastically endorsed *Mere Christianity*. And enthusiasm spread. In the decades since the Second World War, bookshops and individuals continued to be the conduit (among others) for *Mere Christianity*, which traded hands over and over again within the vast network of institutions and grassroots initiatives that supported Christian faith and practice. But, as the early commentator suspected, whether the book was read or not was another question entirely.

Mere Christianity has often been encountered within the spheres of Christian institutional life; therefore this is the context which will be in focus in this chapter. (Examples of more individual experiences of the book, which are many, will be addressed in the chapter on higher education.) Although such categories are never mutually exclusive, the stress presently is on the corporate uses of and communications about the book. The task is complicated because so many variables are in play at any given moment in the life of this book: time, place and denominational affiliation are only some of the factors that impinge upon the book's reception; intellectual, cultural, social and theological nuances also have their bearing. In order to speak broadly in spite of so many variables, the categories and terms employed will be assumed to be more flexible than is often supposed. This chapter will open with a brief review of the context provided thus

³ C. S. Lewis *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins 2001 Edition), viii, xv.

far, and it will close with a brief consideration of some transatlantic contrasts. The main body consists of three sections, categorized by the kind of audience that is expected for the material cited: first, there are Christian leaders speaking to other leaders (especially in Christian periodicals); second, there are Christian leaders talking to the laity (Sunday school materials, sermons, and the like); then, there are lay people talking amongst themselves. The third group includes that which is said (through fan clubs, personal accounts, and so on), and evidence of what our first anecdote points to: the silence of so many copies bought and sold, though perhaps not read or read only in part.

I. *Contexts*

As discussed in chapter two, the content of the book published in 1952 as *Mere Christianity* was originally a series of radio addresses Lewis gave over the BBC between 1941 and 1944. The broadcasts were composed at the request and in collaboration with BBC staff, and the subject, intended audience, style and ultimate goal of the addresses were very much in keeping with other projects undertaken by British Christians of the educated class during the Second World War. As mentioned in chapter three, before taking book form parts of the broadcasts were printed in a journal.⁴ Then the whole of them were published as three pamphlets: *Broadcast Talks* (1942), *Christian Behaviour* (1943) and *Beyond Personality* (1944). Therefore British audiences experienced the content of *Mere Christianity* first as war-time radio addresses, then in periodical form, then as pamphlets, and finally as the book known as *Mere Christianity*. Americans, on the other hand, encountered the content only in the form of a written text. The respective

⁴ See chapter one, note 47.

pamphlets were published in America within a year after they were published in Britain, and, one of these, *Broadcast Talks* was published under the title *The Case for Christianity* in America. Here '*Mere Christianity*' will serve as a designation for the broadcasts, the pamphlets and the monograph, unless the distinction of form is relevant to the discussion.

Seventy years have passed since Lewis addressed the 'man-in-the-street' in the early 1940s. In the decades since, in key respects Christianity in America and Britain has followed divergent trajectories. Although the degree and nature of secularization of both countries is much debated, it may be stated, in broad terms, that whereas the States remains one of the most religious countries in the world, Britain has been experiencing a sharp decline in religious participation.⁵ The implications of this differentiation upon Lewis's reception has been critical, and therefore it has been discussed in chapter three and will be addressed again in chapter six. However, that said, it is important to recognize that American and British Christian communities did not become so radically dissimilar in the second half of the twentieth century as to lose all resemblance to one another. In their corporate expression and identity, in their shared creeds and in the way they expressed those most central of beliefs, in the manner in which they have functioned with other Christians and in local and national environments, in the challenges they faced and how they faced them—in all these ways and many more, Christians in Britain have shared much in common with those in America. As was demonstrated in chapter three, Lewis has been a widely recognized name in both countries from the time

⁵ See chapter six, 287-292.

of the Second World War, so they share him too. Presently, the focus will be on the family resemblance of *Mere Christianity's* history within these cousin communities.

Christian Leaders Speaking to Christian Leaders: The Life of a Book As An Idea

At the centenary of Lewis's birth, in 1998, the distinguished historian of American Christianity, Mark Noll, speculated that the legacy of *Mere Christianity* was in its contribution to the shaping of the ecumenical strain of Western Christianity over the course of the twentieth century, especially in the popularization of the phrase 'mere Christianity'. This phrase, he suggested, became a short-hand way of describing what Lewis defined as 'the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times'; and its frequent usage, he argued, is indicative of the resonance many Christians have felt with the ideals that inspired it.⁶ By tying the book to the strength of ecumenical sympathies, Noll thus provided a more measured assessment of the impact of *Mere Christianity* than is often the case among Christian observers (which Noll is). In fact, the text is often claimed to have exerted influence, but what is meant by this assertion has often been left to the imagination. In 2000 *Christianity Today* ranked the book third on its list of '100 books that had a significant effect on Christians' in the twentieth century in 2000⁷; The *Christian Reader* listed it in its poll of the 'best 10 devotional books of all time,

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins Edition, 2002), viii; Mark Noll, 'C. S. Lewis's "Mere Christianity" (the Book and the Ideal) at the Start of the Twenty-first Century', *Seven, An Anglo-American Literary Review* (2002), 31-44.

⁷ *Christianity Today*, 'Books of the Century' (24 April 2000), 92-93; *Christianity Today* also listed it number three on their list of 'The Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals' in an article of that name (6 October 2006), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/october/23.51.html?start=1>, accessed 9 July 2012. The latter was subtitled: 'Landmark titles that changed the way we think, talk, witness, worship and live.'

part 2' in 1997⁸ and Harper-Collins listed it in its 'Top 100 Spiritual Books' (along with *The Chronicles of Narnia*).⁹ However, attempts to explain the popularity of the book that these rankings presumably reflect have frequently been limited to applause for the merits of the text itself and to the capabilities of Lewis, as was discussed in the introduction.¹⁰ Therefore, for example, the popular Christian author Philip Yancey said that the reason why Lewis's work was cited more than any other as an influence upon the authors that contributed to *Indelible Ink: 22 International Christian Writers Discuss the Books That Shape Their Faith* (2005) (and *Mere Christianity* is mentioned repeatedly) was that, 'By focusing on 'mere Christianity', the kernel of faith that transcends culture and denomination, [Lewis] reminds us of the permanent things with a felicitous prose style that has never been duplicated.'¹¹ Without dismissing these explanations outright, we may say that Noll, in contrast, went a step further than similar observations by contextualizing the book's success in some way.

Where previous commentators have been vague, a present objective is to clarify the nature of the influence that *Mere Christianity* has exerted within a corporate context. It should be stated that what is not in mind here are the debates within literary criticism around the term 'influence,' generated, especially, by Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (1973). Bloom argued that the creative process was located within the anxieties that

⁸ *Christian Reader*, 'The Best 10 Devotional Books of All Time, Part 2' (September-October 1997).

⁹ Philip Zaleski, 'The 100 Best Spiritual Books of the Century', HarperCollins, 4 November 1999, <http://www.librarything.com/bookaward/HarperCollins+100+Best+Spiritual+Books+of+the+Century>, accessed 13 June 2012.

¹⁰ See chapter one, 1-9.

¹¹ Scott Larsen, *Indelible Ink: 22 International Christian Writers Discuss the Books That Shape Their Faith* (Farnham: CWR, 2005) 9.

artists experience as they wrestle with the long shadow of past great poets. ‘Influence’ in this formal critical discourse has been centrally concerned with the canon making process, the nature of new readings of old texts and the relationship of new poetry to established works. For example, Christopher Ricks’ later visitation of the subject, *Allusion to the Poets* (2002) portrayed the connection between authors and previous writers as much less vexed—poets ‘inherit’ from past writers, whose presence may be comforting and a joy.¹² Although links could be made, the present discussion of *Mere Christianity*’s influence bypasses this discourse because the principle question in view is not about individuals’ interpretation of the content of *Mere Christianity* as a creative work but rather about what happened to the book, how the text *functioned* within a specific context, namely religious communities.

We begin with simpler fare. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines ‘influence’ as ‘the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself.’¹³ For the sake of argument, we might take this to convey that ‘influence’ constitutes a degree of *change*. *Change*, as it is meant in the following analogy, could be in view: ‘David Bowie is a great musician. *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* had a great influence on rock music in the twentieth century.’ This, we might understand, means that the nature of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy*

¹² See Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); David H. Wittenberg, ‘Misreading as Canon Formation: Remembering Harold Bloom’s Theory of Revision’, *Qui Parle*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 1996), 21-42.

¹³ Oxford Dictionary of English, revised 2nd ed., edited by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford: OUP 2005), 888.

Stardust and the Spiders from Mars's influence has been to inform much of subsequent rock music—that rock music will have been altered in some way in response to the ingenuity of the album. Therefore, we will assume for the time being that an element of change is implied in the claims that *Mere Christianity* has had significant ‘influence’.

It is clear that *Mere Christianity* has enjoyed (and continues to enjoy) a great deal of commercial success.¹⁴ However, what is not evident is that this *also* means that there has been a consistent and sustained depth of engagement with the content of the book within Christian corporate life in Britain and America. To be clear, the assertion here is not that the book has not been significant to Christianity in the twentieth century, but that the *kind* of influence spoken of in these polls is not evident among Christian leaders in community with one another (as opposed to their individual capacity). If such evidence were to exist, it should be found in the places Christian leaders communicate with one another in print: the periodicals written and read by priests, pastors, and Christian education specialists. These sources reveal that the profession is inclined to talk a great deal about the issues that matter to them most—whether about leading worship, current debates within their denomination, trends in the larger society or whatever. And they often do so in the myriad of journals they maintain for this purpose. There are, naturally, some articles which address *Mere Christianity*, for example the Mennonite *The Christian*

¹⁴ As late as 1994 *Mere Christianity* ranked number four on *Publisher's Weekly's* ‘Religion Bestseller’ list: ‘Religion Bestsellers,’ *Publisher's Weekly* (10 October 1994), 31. It appeared on the BookScan Religion Bestseller’s list for a record 513 weeks from 2001 to 2010: John Blake, ‘Surprised by C. S. Lewis: Why His Popularity Endures’, CNN (17 December 2010), <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/12/17/surprised-by-c-s-lewis-why-his-popularity-endures/?hpt=C2%3E>, accessed 30 December 2010.

Ministry discussed the book under the title 'C. S. Lewis: An Apostle of Reason' in 1952.¹⁵ (Others will be mentioned in what follows.) However, the articles which address *Mere Christianity*—published from the time of the broadcast and onwards in Britain and America—do not reflect the claims that are often made about the text's influence, either by their overall numbers or in the depth of discussion of the text. If influence is taken here to mean a thorough-going acceptance of the arguments of this apologetic work and a lasting and far-reaching impact of its premises, then periodicals recording the analyses of Christian leaders do not reflect the claimed degree of influence.

In light of the popularity of *Mere Christianity* there are surprisingly few articles addressing its content in depth. It is reasonable to assume from the lack of thoughtful, rigorous engagement with the book that the nature of its influence has not been to *change* Christian belief. For example, reviews, citations and references to *Mere Christianity* abound, where more in-depth analysis is absent. *Westminster Theological Journal*, an important journal for the Reformed branch of Christianity in America, reviewed *Christian Behaviour* in 1943 and mentioned *Mere Christianity* in an article in 1960, although there have been no more substantive discussions of the book after Lewis's death.¹⁶ The case was similar for *Catholic World*, an important journal from the nineteenth century down to the 1990s: it featured (sometimes multiple) reviews of all three pamphlets in the 1940s but thereafter there were no major discussions of the

¹⁵ Anna Frey, 'C. S. Lewis: An Apostle of Reason', *The Christian Ministry*, 1952, (Vol. 1): 48-56.

¹⁶ Paul Woolley, review of *Christian Behaviour*, *Westminster Theological Journal* (1943): 210-14; Harvie M. Conn, 'Literature and Criticism', *Westminster Theological Journal* (November 1960): 16-32.

book.¹⁷ *Christian Century*, a prominent American Protestant journal, devoted an entire issue to Lewis (the only other person to have lived in the twentieth century to receive that honour was Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹⁸) and therein the contributors spoke of the importance of *Mere Christianity*; however, again, after its initial reviews and a couple of articles in the 1940s, the book received no article-length treatment.¹⁹ Indeed, after the first wave of chatter about the broadcasts had passed, there were far fewer in-depth treatments of *Mere Christianity*.

Yet, if the terms of influence were altered to weigh not change but *presence*, then that is another matter altogether. On both sides of the Atlantic there was a flurry of attention given to *Mere Christianity* by Christian leaders at the time of the broadcasts and at the pamphlets' initial publication in the 1940s. The Anglican periodical *Modern Churchman* in Britain and the decidedly evangelical *Moody Monthly* in America both did their due diligence to the latest popular religious work of the War period.²⁰ As will be attested through the course of this chapter, this initial recognition was followed by a stream of further *references* to *Mere Christianity* in both Britain and America. The nature

¹⁷ Joseph McSorley, 'Review of *Case for Christianity*', *Catholic World* (November 1943), 215-16; Anon., review of *Christian Behaviour* and *The Problem of Pain*, *Catholic World* (March 1944), 604; Anon., review of *Beyond Personality*, *Catholic World* (August 1945), 444. Anon., 'Our Real Selves', Review of *Beyond Personality*, *Catholic World* (January 1946), 267.

¹⁸ Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (SCM Press: London, 2004), 84.

¹⁹ Anon., review of *Christian Behaviour*, *Christian Century* (26 January 1944) 114; Anon., review of *Beyond Personality*, Vol. 62 (20 June 1945), 73; George Anderson, 'C. S. Lewis: Foe of Humanism', *Christian Century*, Vol. 63, (25 December 1946), 1562-1563.; Chad Walsh, 'C. S. Lewis: Champion of Reason', *Christian Century*, Vol. 66 (19 January 1949), 76-77.

²⁰ Anon., Review of *Case for Christianity*, *Moody Monthly* (December 1943), 239; E. L. Allen, 'The Theology of C. S. Lewis', *Modern Churchman* (January - March 1945), 317-24; R. C. Churchill, 'Mr. C. S. Lewis As An Evangelist', *Modern Churchman* (January - March 1946), 334-42.

of this kind of influence among Christian leaders is clarified by an analysis of their citations and reviews.

Christian leaders reviewing *Mere Christianity* wove a few common themes through their observations. Fr Thomas Corbishley, a Catholic who knew Lewis personally, articulated several when he said,

In the clarity of their language and the simplicity and even homeliness of their illustrations they must have brought reassurance and comfort to many who had been dismayed by the superficial cleverness of so much anti-Christian polemic. [T]hey remain invaluable because they demonstrate that a man can be both a convinced Christian and a highly intelligent and imaginative writer.²¹

In the first place, Lewis's use of language, how the text *sounded*, was a quality frequently commented upon in periodical sources. Indeed, as another British reviewer put it, 'Mr. Lewis' gift of illustration and of phrase is often to be observed.'²² A writer for America's Catholic *Commonweal* said 'There is no doubt Mr. Lewis writes brilliantly. He has the gift of conveying precise thought on complicated matters to the ordinary, non-technical reader, and this is a rare gift.'²³ A reviewer for Princeton Seminary's *Theology Today* said of a quoted passage: 'This is clear, it is simple, it is eminently Christian, and it is typical of the ease with which Mr. Lewis puts great matters into plain language.'²⁴ The British

²¹ Thomas Corbishley, 'C. S. Lewis', *The Month* (January 1956), 9-13; Corbishley was Master of Campion Hall, Oxford, 1945-1958.

²² H. C. L. Heywood, review of *Beyond Personality*, *Theology* (March 1945), 66-67.

²³ Edward Skillin, Jr., 'Smart Writing', *Commonweal* (22 October 1943), 17-18.

²⁴ Edward D. Myers, 'The Religious Works of C. S. Lewis', *Theology Today* (Jan 1945), 547.

Catholic *Clergy Review* reported that with *Christian Behaviour* Lewis added ‘yet one more example of his unique power of expression, simple yet replete with meaning, intimate yet without the offensive and repellent[?] vulgarity of some popular speakers sponsored by the British Broadcasting Corporation’.²⁵ *Catholic World* appreciated Lewis’s quality of being ‘clear, frank, reverent’ and his ‘almost unique ability to make abstractions intelligible and interesting and to put fundamental teachings into plain English’.²⁶ Reviewers who were critical of *Mere Christianity* still commented upon Lewis’s use of language. The reviewer for the American *United Evangelical Action* opened his negative review with, ‘Lewis’s book is, of course, well written; nothing else could be expected.’²⁷ It is apparent, therefore, that *how* the text read was consistently noticed and commented upon by its reviewers.

The second theme that Corbishley spoke to is *Mere Christianity*’s role in restoring a sense of order and security to an embattled sub-culture. Evidence for this is in the ‘win’ that *Mere Christianity* is often perceived to achieve. As mentioned in chapter three, in the States particularly battle themes emerged, alluded to by many exponents of the text, between those on the side of Christianity and those persons or influences that would undermine it. The enemy was varied—ranging from the more aggressive (‘liberals’ and ‘atheists’) to the endemic (‘ignorance’ and ‘consumerist culture’)—but the descriptions of it were frequently revelatory of the sense of embattlement felt on the

²⁵ E. J. M., review of *Christian Behaviour*, *Clergy Review* (July 1943), 330-331. Word in question was blurry in scan.

²⁶ Anon., review of *Beyond Personality*, *Catholic World* (August 1945), 444.

²⁷ Cornelius Van Til, Review of *Beyond Personality*, *United Evangelical Action* (15 May 1946), 21.

part of Christian leaders recommending the book. America's *Catholic Bestsellers* observed: 'Never preachy or pedantic, [Lewis] takes pains to expose the fallacy of the popular ideas of Christianity, [x] a religion that rests on feeling and not on conviction.'²⁸

Catholic World recorded of Lewis in a review of *Case for Christianity*:

He expresses his new-found faith with his customary clarity and incisiveness, and with proofs that the average man will find convincing. It is a delight to see him demolish in a paragraph many of the heresies which have contributed to our present ghastly condition.²⁹

Moody Monthly said that though Lewis's 'inexorable logic' in *Case for Christianity* could not be expected to convince the unbeliever about the existence of God (citing I Corinthians 2:14) but only confirm the believer in faith, 'Nevertheless, trenchant blows are delivered against materialism and pantheism.'³⁰ An American reviewer of *Beyond Personality* concluded that 'The significant thing is that [blurry] Mr. Lewis definitely allies himself with the foes of creedless Christianity.'³¹ The theme was more pronounced in American reviews, but British reviewers, too, observed Lewis to be engaging in conflict on their behalf. The Church of England's *Guardian* estimated that Lewis succeeded in 'facing squarely many of the commonest modern criticisms of the Christian system: and that with a candour and a sympathy....natural to one who has been, not so long ago, a critic

²⁸ Charles Denecke, S. J., Review of *Beyond Personality*, *Bestsellers* (15 March 1945). Word referred to by 'x' was unclear in scanned image.

²⁹ Joseph McSorley, 'Review of *Case for Christianity*', *Catholic World* (November 1943), 215-16.

³⁰ Anon., *Moody Monthly*, 239.

³¹ John F. Dwyer, review of *Beyond Personality*, *Thought* (March 44), 170-171.

himself.³² And the *Tablet* said, 'He finds an arresting way of speaking of the old, hammered truths, and he faces up very well to the unpopular aspects of Christian morality.'³³

The editors for Christian periodicals also testified to the text's role in undergirding faith. Senior Associate Editor of the American Evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* Stan Guthrie said in 2005, 'The first book I read by Lewis was *Mere Christianity*. I had already made a decision for Christ as a teenager coming out of a secular worldview, but I was looking for intellectual reasons to bolster my faith. Lewis amply provided them.'³⁴ The staff of the conservative *American Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, said in an editorial of 2001 that they had often been asked what they meant by their subtitle. Part of their answer was that, because modern Christians experience 'various forms of unseen cultural accommodation that compromise our Christian integrity and obscure our sight', there was more reason now than ever to 'hold tightly to mere Christianity as that which has been understood by everyone before us, even when our modern peers disagree.' 'For', the editorial continued, 'only by walking by the sight of those gone before us can we escape the myopia of both modern, liberal Christianity and the secular consumerist culture in which we all live.'³⁵ The theme of preserving stalwart truths, of faith believed, against modern threats runs through many of the reviews and articles addressing *Mere Christianity* and is indicative of a perception on the part of many that the

³² Anon., review of *Christian Behaviour*, *Guardian* (21 May 1943), 170.

³³ Robert Speaight, 'To Mixed Congregations' (review of *Christian Behaviour*), *Tablet* (26 June 1943), 308.

³⁴ Quoted by Mark Galli, 'We know Jack', *Christianity Today* (12 December 2005), 10.

³⁵ James M. Kushiner, speaking 'for the editors', 'Mere Christianity Today', *Touchstone* (July / August 2001), editorial.

book was an important ally in their own defence of Christianity against secularizing and hostile forces.

These two themes, the *sound* of the text and its *utility* in service of a larger purpose, as demonstrated by Christian leaders writing in Christian periodicals, move us closer to an understanding of the actual nature of the influence of *Mere Christianity* among Christian leaders in community. Sound and utility are references to the text, *in relation* to the reader: the sound of the text as described by these responses is a reference to how the language and images made the reader feel. And the utility of the text is a reference to a greater cause with which the reader is engaged. In either case, the nature of the influence is suggestive of a satisfying affirmation—or perhaps a soothing presence—but, critically, not of a push toward an engagement with that which changes or challenges. The effect of *Mere Christianity* upon the community of Christian leaders as a whole as evidenced in Christian periodicals was not that the community took the book up in order to change their thoughts, but rather because of its value for affirming what was already believed. Does this qualify *Mere Christianity* for having held influence? If an affirmation of belief constitutes an ‘effect’ rendered, then *Mere Christianity* qualifies. A step, therefore, has been taken to clarify that which has been hazily described by those who have commented on the significance of the book. The American Catholic *The Word Among Us* was insightful when it said: ‘The reason *Mere Christianity* has remained popular for so many years is the clarity with which it explains

many aspects of our faith which we may have accepted without understanding.’³⁶ But the same article also said, ‘*Mere Christianity* will be a ray of light to anyone who reads it.’³⁷ Confirmation of beliefs, quite possibly vaguely understood, is indeed a critical reason for *Mere Christianity’s* popularity; but whether it was ‘a ray of light’ in the sense of adding something new, or changing the course of thought of a group of people is not evidenced. *Mere Christianity* has had influence, but not in the sense that the term is (arguably) most often used.

In addition to the value of the language and the utility of the text, moreover, there is a consideration to be made of the reassurance the book provided. As Corbishley understood, the ‘reassurance’ of the text is in part derivative of an understanding of the identity of the author: the record of the broadcasts, he said, ‘remain invaluable because they demonstrate that a man can be both a convinced Christian and a highly intelligent and imaginative writer.’³⁸ In other words, the text served to validate the identity of the readers by the cultural affirmation already achieved by the author. Many, especially conservative, Christian leaders classify themselves as members of the same group as the author—but he also appears to *represent* them. In many of the above quotations, Lewis’s person is referred to in equal (if not greater) measure as the book itself. To provide another instance, *The Catholic World* said that:

³⁶ Anthon Bosnik, ‘The Enlightened Imagination, Part III: The Adventure of Christianity’, *Word Among Us* (August 1994), 59.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Corbishley, ‘C. S. Lewis’, 10.

[T]he author displays characteristics which have made his previous contributions so exceptionally welcome. His unmistakably Christian viewpoint, his instinct for what is timely, his well-balanced judgement, his outspokenness render his judgements on moral—particularly on sexual—problems as persuasive as they are sound.³⁹

This particular statement was made in 1944, and demonstrates that even by then it was trust in the competence, the orthodoxy and the prestige of Lewis, as demonstrated across the corpus of his work and not only in *Mere Christianity*, that recommended this book. Lewis, as we have seen in chapter three, wrote many works in a variety of genres after the publication of the broadcasts. The success of these books served to increase the prestige and visibility of his name, which in turn contributed to the esteem with which *Mere Christianity* was held. The conflation of the identity of text and author was apparent, for example, when a minister in the Evangelical Free Church of America wrote a piece defending the legitimacy of the argument from *Mere Christianity*, wherein Lewis claimed that it was irrational for a person to hold Jesus, who claimed to be God, to be a good moral teacher and yet not divine: someone who claims as much must be either delusional, devious, or who he said he was.⁴⁰ When the soundness of this ‘staple of Christian apologetics’ was questioned, the pastor said, ‘[A]t stake is not only the validity of a much used argument but also the competence of arguably the greatest apologist of

³⁹ Anon., review of *Christian Behaviour* and *The Problem of Pain*, *Catholic World* (March 1944), 604.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 51-52.

the twentieth century.⁴¹ Having made his points in defence of the argument, he concluded: 'Lewis's Trilemma is still a strong argument and can be used with confidence, especially if we allow it to be nuanced and strengthened by its context in Lewis's body of writings as a whole....Lewis's position as the dean of Christian apologists remains secure.'⁴² Such statements reveal that for this pastor, as for many others, confidence was gained by the knowledge of Lewis's authority as 'dean' of Christian apologetics.

The nature of *Mere Christianity's* influence in the context of the community of Christian leaders, then, is in the feeling it imparts, by its use of language, that a victory has been won for the 'side' of the faith community, by a man whose credentials represent conservative Christian leaders well. These factors explain something about why the book has been ranked as so influential, because some of the polls mentioned above were conducted by conservative Christian magazines within their constituency. The survey in 2000 by *Christianity Today* of the century's 'most influential books' reported results from asking 'more than 100 of its contributors and church leaders to nominate the ten best religious books of the twentieth century.'⁴³ *Christianity Today* continued: 'By best books, we meant those that not only were important when first published, but also have enduring significance for the Christian faith and church.' The results were that 'By far, C.

⁴¹ Donald T. Williams, 'Identity Check: Are C. S. Lewis's critics Right, or Is His 'Trilemma' Valid?', *Touchstone* (May/June 2010), 25-29. Williams is author of *Mere Humanity: G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien on the Human Condition* (Nashville, TN, Broadman and Holman, 2006).

⁴² Oddly, this article defending 'Lewis's Trilemma' includes insets of quotes evidencing earlier use of this argument: by John Duncan (1796-1870), quoted in William Knight, *Colloquia Peripatetica* 1870; Mark Hopkins (1802-1887), from *Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity* (1846), Lecture VIII; and Reuben Archer Torrey (1856-1928), from the sermon 'Some Reasons Why I Believe the Bible to be the Word of God'. Perhaps the quotation insets were added by the Editor.

⁴³ *Christianity Today*, 'Books of the Century', 92-93.

S. Lewis was the most popular author and *Mere Christianity* the book nominated most often.⁴⁴ This poll reflects something of Lewis's standing among conservative Christian leaders.

Nonetheless, the impression that *Mere Christianity* is a book of 'influence' in the sense of being a force for change has extended beyond Christian sub-cultures. In 2004 the American *Free Inquiry*, published by the Council for Secular Humanism, featured an article exploring the merits of *Mere Christianity*, a text that, they said, 'has been tremendously influential and has gathered a reputation as a successful conversion tool'. The author continued:

I approached the book with (metaphorical) fear and trembling, both from the warnings of my fellow atheists and from the fact that I respected Lewis as a writer and as an intellectual—would this be the climactic end of my long period of godlessness? Would I put the book down, stunned by its sheer persuasiveness, and immediately fall to my knees in abject prayer?⁴⁵

It is telling that this writer's experience of reading *Mere Christianity* was situated in the book's reputation for persuasion and that he comments on the tie-in of his expectations of the book with the prestige of Lewis's name.⁴⁶ Other non-Christians have responded in similar manner. An article in the American *The Humanist* observed the commercial success of *Mere Christianity*, and asked whether 'its argument [is] as convincing as it is

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jeremy Patrick, 'Sixty Years of Mere Christianity', *Free Inquiry* (February / March 2004), 46.

⁴⁶ Patrick answers these questions in the negative, commenting on his disappointment with the 'lack of philosophical rigor' and 'Lewis's seeming satisfaction that he had conclusively proved both God's existence and the essentials of Christianity in just the first third of the book.' Ibid.

popular?’⁴⁷ These testimonies from outside Christian communities attest to the fact that the prestige associated with Lewis’s name and the numbers of copies sold of *Mere Christianity* have correlated the book with ‘influence,’ whether one is inclined to agree with Lewis’s representation of Christianity or not. The former example also indicates that claims for the ‘influence’ of the text may have in their meaning an understanding of the term as one of change. As this section has demonstrated, however, the evidence is that *Mere Christianity* has been widely valued by Christian leaders for a quality akin to an antipathy for change: for its perceived stalwart defence of conservative beliefs.

We have considered points around the language, the utility, and the reassurance that the text provides. There is a fourth aspect of *Mere Christianity*’s life as revealed by Christian leaders to note. There is weight in Noll’s argument that the importance of the book lies in something quite specific—the *idea* denoted by the phrase ‘mere Christianity’. Chapter two discussed the historical circumstances related to the stress that many British Christians in places of influence, including the BBC’s religious broadcasting department, placed upon the beliefs which all Christians share in common. There was a perceived need during the Second World War for the ‘essentials’ of Christianity to be distilled to the ‘man-in-the-street’ in the clearest way possible. It was also believed important, at a time of war, to affirm unity by avoiding discussion of denominational differences. In the States, as well, churches were seeking to heal splits and seek commonality.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁷ Andrew Johnson, ‘Is Christianity Rational?’, *The Humanist* (November / December 2003), 6; See also Bob Johnson, *An Answer to C.S. Lewis’ Mere Christianity* (Escondido, CA.: Truth Seeker, 2010). Johnson is the founder and Director of the World Union of Deists.

⁴⁸ Edwin Gaustad, ‘The Pulpit and the Pews’, in Hutchinson, ed. *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23.

ecumenical movement, as was mentioned, played a part in shaping these concerns. This was the context for the genesis and early reception of Lewis's famous book, but in many respects the Second World War was only the beginning of a growing knowledge on the part of Christians in both Britain and America of the wider world and a corresponding response of ecumenicism. The expansion of the numbers of people attending universities and travelling outside their home countries, as well as advances in communication, contributed to Christians' increased contact with people outside their own faith communities. One outcome of more international contact, for example, was that in the post-war period there was an increased sensitivity to the way in which other religions were spoken about and a determination to avoid prejudicial terminology.⁴⁹ In light of the knowledge of world religions and the differences between denominations, there was, for many Christians, an increased appeal (possibly comfort, too) in the knowledge of their shared, common identity within the 'body of Christ'. It is, therefore, not difficult to see why the demise of insularity ran parallel to the growing stress upon the long-standing creed of the 'church universal': that it was an entity that was essentially spiritual and unified.

The rapidly increasing contact of Christians with other kinds of Christians, other faiths and ways of life, generally, sheds light on the attraction of the idea of 'mere Christianity'. One may see in descriptions of Lewis and the Christianity with which he became associated a portrait of the writers themselves:

⁴⁹ Grant Wacker, 'A Plural World: The Protestant Awakening to World Religions', in Hutchinson, ed. *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 269.

His theology is always migrant; the mere Christianity he defended consists of those doctrines he shared with most of the men who met in the [pub in Oxford called the] Eagle and the Child on Tuesdays. It had no home; it was in its way as idealistic as the philosophy of Bradley, but the vagabond has been a welcomed and comfortable guest almost everywhere.⁵⁰

This is what many educated Christian clergymen and women wanted for themselves: to be welcome and comfortable everywhere, and to extend friendship to people across denominational divides. Having ‘discovered’ the ‘logic and clear insight’ of Lewis’s apologetics, a student at Wheaton College said, ‘I wanted what Lewis called *Mere Christianity*; it cut across denominational and partisan lines, and clearly honored Christ. So I was learning to be a mere Christian too’.⁵¹ It is the power of the idea that the book embodies which explains the prevalence of titles that pay tribute to Lewis’s text; these include *Mere Christians*, *Mere Catholicism*, *Mere Theology*, ‘Mere Mormonism’ and *Spirituality for Mere Christians*.⁵² And it is why, when a group of Christians in Britain wanted to establish the C. S. Lewis Centre (1985), *Mere Christianity* as an idea came to the fore again. The inspirational vision that ‘captured the imagination of many of the advisers’ to the Centre was Lewis’s insistence:

⁵⁰ James Patrick, *The Magdalen Metaphysicals* (Mercer, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), 132

⁵¹ Isabel Anders, Untitled, in Part II: Six Pilgrims Share Their Stories, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 140.

⁵² Mary Anne Phemister and Andrew Lazo, eds. *Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House Books, 2009); Ian Ker, *Mere Catholicism* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2006); Will Vaus, *Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C.S. Lewis* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2004); Richard Ostling, ‘Mere Mormonism’. *Christianity Today* 44, no. 2 (7 February 2000): 72–73; William Griffin, *C.S. Lewis: Spirituality for Mere Christians* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1998).

[T]hat there is a common path of Christianity that pilgrims down the ages have trod in the certainty that they were on firm ground. This ground was for Lewis the high road of basic orthodoxy, the great viaduct of Christendom that proudly and surely has spanned the changes and uncertainties of the centuries. Christians--mere Christians--can recognize each other on the way, and while they may argue and fail to agree on many matters, they are nevertheless travellers together on 'the main road'.⁵³

The idea of 'mere Christianity' continued to find relevance among Christian leaders in Britain and America well after the contingencies of war, central to its original articulation, had passed.

The language of *Mere Christianity*, the identity of its author, the central tenet the book represented—these attributes confirmed the Christian identity and mission of Christian ministers. Lewis's convictions, as expressed in *Mere Christianity*, undergirded the clergy's own faith. This is influence not as the creator of change but as a confirming authority. If this has been *Mere Christianity's* legacy, then a continual stream of chatter on the part of Christian leaders is more telling than in-depth analyses of the full text. But, as will be demonstrated shortly, the history of *Mere Christianity* as an idea was just one dimension of the book's life.

Christian Leaders Speaking to Non-clergy: Mere Christianity as Teaching Tool

⁵³ Andrew Walker, ed. *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 7.

Britain's Catholic *The Tablet* anticipated the second key theme in the life of *Mere Christianity* in a review of *Christian Behaviour* in 1943. It read:

We have never read arguments better marshalled and handled so that they can be remembered, or any book more useful to the Christian, in the Army or elsewhere, who finds himself called upon to argue briefly from first premises, to say why morality is not herd-instinct, why there is a special and unique character attaching to the sense of obligation, why the conviction that there is a law of right and wrong and a transcendent morality is only intelligible if there is a God....The many modern pagans whose reason for rejecting the revelation is that they do not understand how, e.g., the sacraments like baptism act, will see their attitude in a new light if they will read this little book.⁵⁴

Few of us are called upon to explain succinctly our most fundamental beliefs with a frequency faced by religious leaders. For Christian clergy encountering secularizing conditions in Britain and America in the twentieth century, *Mere Christianity* proved to be useful on such occasions; they therefore encouraged laymen and women to use the book in an apologetic capacity. In a section of his 1963 book entitled 'A Time of Difficulties', in the chapter 'Christian Literature Confirms the Gospel', hymn writer and parish priest Timothy Dudley-Smith described the 'number of great advantages' that books provided a minister, especially one faced with the doubts of (particularly) young people:

⁵⁴ Anon., *The Tablet* 'Clear Reasoning', review of *Broadcast Talks*, vol 180, no 5332, 32.

First, a simple but attractive statement of theism, for example, *Broadcast Talks* by C. S. Lewis (Bles, 1942), discourages endless ill-informed wrangling and speculation, and keeps the attention of the patient (as Screwtape would call him) on the right things. Secondly...a book speaks with an authority that a young pastor cannot always claim in talking to schoolboys who may only be five years his junior, and already specialists in a different field. A book is a great time-saver, and there is no loss of face in being swayed by the author's printed argument; the note of personal contest has disappeared. In the normal stages of this sort of doubting (which is not so much a conviction that Christianity is false as a desire for some real evidence that it is true) books such as *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis (Bles, 1952) or *Basic Christianity* by J. R. W. Stott (IVF, 1958) will carry the discussion a long way in the right direction.⁵⁵

Indeed, having judged Lewis's apologetic valuable for this purpose, Christian leaders often encouraged lay participants to read the book individually and in their religious communities so that it could serve them in the same way. Alistair McGrath, someone well-known to Evangelicals in both Britain and America, described *Mere Christianity* in 1989 as 'probably one of the best, and certainly one of the most famous and readable, introductions to Christianity'; this, in addition to the book being 'always available in print' and there being 'plenty of other works by C. S. Lewis to try next' made the work,

⁵⁵ Timothy Dudley-Smith, *Christian Literature and the Church Bookstall* (London: Church Pastoral-Aid Society, 1963) 54-55.

according to McGrath, ‘ideal to give to a friend to start them thinking’.⁵⁶ Thus an important aspect of *Mere Christianity’s* life has been its use as a tool to equip lay Christians in the defence of the faith. Lewis’s radio addresses provided answers—memorable, timely, sufficiently serviceable answers—that Christians, both clerical and lay, could use in the context of their relationships with non-Christians.

Often, as the *Tablet* quotation above suggests, this involved a rehashing of Lewis’s apologetics. The best known of these was Lewis’s argument, based on an ancient one, that Jesus’ claim of being God meant that he was either a ‘liar, a lunatic or Lord’. As demonstrated in chapter two, the argument was one with currency during the Second World War, and was used in the popular apologetics of Lewis’s contemporaries, including Walter Carey in 1941,⁵⁷ Frederick Arthur Cockin in 1942⁵⁸ and by the Catholic British priest Thomas Corbishley (quoted above) in *Religion is Reasonable* (1960)⁵⁹. Yet, even so, the broadcaster with more listeners than Lewis, Ronald Selby Wright, preferred Lewis’s version and printed it in his *Scottish Forces* journal in 1946.⁶⁰ It was one of the first of many replications of ‘Lewis’s trilemma’ which occurred in the decades to come. Indeed, some of the most prominent Christian leaders of the twentieth century have reproduced this argument, citing Lewis as the source. The American author of top-selling apologetic

⁵⁶ Alistair McGrath, *Explaining Your Faith Without Losing Your Friends* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic Books, 1989).

⁵⁷ See chapter two, 53.

⁵⁸ See chapter two, 59.

⁵⁹ Thomas Corbishley, *Religion is Reasonable* (London: 1960), 83.

⁶⁰ Lewis, ‘What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?’, *Scottish Forces* (November 1946): 165-169. National Library of Scotland, Ronald Selby Wright Collection, RSW.67.

books Josh McDowell, included it in his *More Than a Carpenter* (1977).⁶¹ In Britain, theologian and Anglican priest Michael Green repeated it in *You Must Be Joking?* (1976)⁶² and a vicar at Holy Trinity, Brompton, the *Guardian* described as ‘probably the most charismatic figure in the Church of England today’, Nicky Gumbel, used the argument in *Alpha* materials in 1993, an evangelistic curriculum that has become a staple in many churches in Britain and 169 other countries.⁶³ The argument is also found in a collection of essays by Harvard University affiliates, in the testimony of a medical student who was converted.⁶⁴ The author of *Bad, Mad or God?*, a monograph that investigates the force of the argument, wrote in his acknowledgements that, ‘as a teenager I was first convinced by the Bad, Mad or God apologetic so ably expressed by C. S. Lewis.’⁶⁵ Finally, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, which discussed Lewis in its ‘Classical Apologetics’ section, indicated widespread use of the argument when it said the following: ‘Classical apologists know that if they can reduce the options to these three—liar, lunatic, or Lord—they will have a convincing case for all but the most jaundiced, hostile opponent of Christianity.’⁶⁶ The

⁶¹ Josh McDowell, *More Than A Carpenter* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1977), 26-27.

⁶² Michael Green, *You Must Be Joking: Popular Excuses for Avoiding Jesus Christ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), chapter 3.

⁶³ Jon Ronson, ‘Catch Me If You Can, Part 2’, *Guardian* (21 October 2000), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2000/oct/21/weekend7.weekend>, accessed 26 June 2012; ‘Liar, lunatic, Lord’ bit is quoted by Gumbel in *Questions of Life* (Eastborne: Kingsway Publications, 1993), 32. It also forms the close of the pamphlet *Questions of Life: Who is Jesus?* (London: Alpha International, 2011), 26. Statistic on the number of countries Alpha is taught from via the UK’s Alpha website, Alpha.org, <http://uk-england.alpha.org/biographies>, accessed 10 July 2012.

⁶⁴ Michael Yang, ‘He Sent His Word and Healed Them,’ in Kelly Monroe, ed., *Finding God at Harvard* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan: 1997), 123.

⁶⁵ John Redford, *Bad, Mad or God: Proving the Divinity of Christ from St. John’s Gospel* (St. Pauls Press: London, 2004), 19.

⁶⁶ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons* (NavPress Publishing, 2002), 129-130. The authors also said: ‘C. S. Lewis was typical of many classical apologists in that he understood the task of apologetics to be defending the basic message of “mere Christianity” and not arguing for one theological or denominational tradition within Christianity.’ Ibid.

imitation of arguments from *Mere Christianity*, especially in material in the apologetic vein, is one way the text has lived on in Christian communities.

Another use of the book has been as a devotional or educational guide in a corporate religious context. *The Church Times* was quoted on the dust jacket of *Mere Christianity* in 1952 as saying, 'The new preface enhances the value of the book, which is most warmly commended for use in the sixth forms of schools, for all kinds of discussion groups and for the private reading of those who are willing to seek but have not yet found.'⁶⁷ Christian leaders seemingly heeded this advice and have often organized small groups for study and discussion of the text. In some circles, the frequency of *Mere Christianity's* use in Christian education is remarkable. One Church of Scotland minister in Edinburgh said that if *Mere Christianity* was *not* included on a reading list of a study series on Christianity provided in the churches he knew that its absence would be conspicuous.⁶⁸ Further evidence on this point is found in the physical presence of the book in church and para-church spaces. At the aforementioned minister's church, for example, the book was placed prominently on a book table on the day of the interview, as is not uncommon in many churches across Britain and America in recent years.⁶⁹ The Orthodox Christian Andrew Walker observed that at the bookshop of the Russian Orthodox cathedral at Ennismore Gardens in London there 'are basically two types of books on sale: Orthodox books, and a huge array of the writings of C. S. Lewis'.⁷⁰ A visit in

⁶⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952), First Edition, dust jacket.

⁶⁸ Interview with Rev. Jonathan DeGroot, 21 June 2012, St Stephen's Comely Bank Church, Edinburgh.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Andrew Walker, *A Christian for All Christians*, 63.

2011 to the evangelical Anglican Holy Trinity, Brompton, in London found an entire table set aside for a special sale of Lewis's books, including *Mere Christianity*; as of March 2012 the bookstore of the American mega-church Willow Creek, outside Chicago, filed *Mere Christianity* under their 'Spiritual Formation' section.⁷¹ Moreover, the physical presence of the book in communal religious settings is not a new phenomenon. The vestry of the Evangelical Anglican St Helen's, Bishopsgate, London, wrote to Lewis's publisher Geoffrey Bles in 1966 informing it of a plan for 'a special C. S. Lewis month on our bookstall in January'.⁷² And in 1977 an advertisement was placed in the American evangelist Billy Graham-associated *Crusade Magazine* (UK) for 'A special evening for all interested in the life and writings of C. S. Lewis' at Church House Bookshop, London, wherein *Mere Christianity* was, in all likelihood, present.⁷³ Indeed, the physical presence of the book (discussed again below) and Christian leaders' recommendation of it for reading is testament to its frequent use in the Christian educational context. It is also a sign of its continuing importance in the intellectual and material life of the community.

Literature produced for the support of the educational and pastoral mission of the church also attests to *Mere Christianity's* use as a tool in the context of religious corporate life. Because such materials are frequently the result of an individual's or denominational body's labour, they often go un-catalogued by, for example, the United States Library of Congress system; therefore it is difficult to research in this area.

⁷¹ Author's personal visit to these respective churches.

⁷² St Helen's Vestry to Geoffrey Bles publishers (undated, between July and December 1966). Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 162.

⁷³ Anon., advert for event, *Crusade Magazine*, February 1977, 40.

Testimonies from publishers themselves provide some compensation for this methodological challenge. The editor for adult Sunday school resources at David C. Cook, one of the largest publishers in America of Christian educational resources, estimated that the company quotes from C. S. Lewis ‘maybe twice a year’, adding ‘Usually it is a one or two sentence quote, though there was one time we had a class activity relating to the story of the death of his wife.’ The design manager of the company also offered the following:

C. S. Lewis as a former atheist set out to prove the logical and true legitimacy of Christianity over and above any other world religion/cult, and therefore is an apologist first. There seem to be few apologists in the world today that are authoring books as succinct as the simple (not simplistic) *Mere Christianity*, and the allegorical and fantastical *Chronicles of Narnia*.⁷⁴

Yet, despite the opacity of Christian didactic materials, evidence still may be found that Christian leaders have used *Mere Christianity* for the benefit of their congregations. Examples run the gambit of Christian educational tools. Books for use in sermon preparation (often not indexed), for example, sometimes cite the text. The topically organized *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (1989), the contents of which ‘have been carefully selected, developed, and edited for use by pastors, para-church workers, Bible-study leaders, and others who preach or teach the Word of God’⁷⁵, suggests the use of bits from *Mere Christianity* four times: under the themes ‘Adversity’, ‘Atheism’s

⁷⁴ Catherine DeVries (editorial manager, David C. Cook) email correspondence with author (14 March 2012).

⁷⁵ Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1989), Preface, 9.

Oversimplification', 'Christ, Divinity of' and 'Pride.'⁷⁶ RBC Ministries, the American publishers of popular devotional materials like *Our Daily Bread*, included a short introduction to Lewis and his 'liar, lunatic, Lord' argument in their publication *Campus Journal*. The one-page piece closed with two 'reflections', bullet points the reader was encouraged to think about, one of which read: 'What would my life be like if I spent more time in the Bible and read the great Christian writers of the past? Would my faith be stronger and would my ability to witness be greater?'⁷⁷ Apparently the quotability of *Mere Christianity* inspired many similar uses. As the *Guardian* commented in its review of *Christian Behaviour*, 'We wish we could quote from every other page.'⁷⁸ Indeed, the memorable quality of the text has resulted in citations of it commonly appearing on the pages of periodicals like Norman Vincent Peal's, American author and progenitor of 'positive thinking', *Guideposts* and Billy Graham's *Decision* magazine.⁷⁹

There have also been aids for the development of Bible studies and book clubs which included or were based upon *Mere Christianity*. These provided important clues for the way in which communities have encountered the book. Some represented smaller ventures. Produced for use in Britain by the charismatic community, *The Growing Church*, 'a book for individual or group study' cited *Mere Christianity* under 'Further

⁷⁶ Ibid. 17, 25, 47, 287, respectively.

⁷⁷ Anon., 'Jesus: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?', *Campus Journal*, RBC Ministries (13 September 1998), 1.

⁷⁸ Anon., review of *Christian Behaviour*, *Guardian* (21 May 1943), 170.

⁷⁹ Anon., review of *The Case for Christianity*, *Guideposts*, Section 3 (September 1947), 6; *Decision* magazine (America) feature the 'liar, lunatic or Lord' argument and also uses it on their website, <http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?articleid=1095>. Bob Shuster, [Billy Graham Center Archives] in email to author, 15 March 2012; See also *The Quotable Lewis*. ed. Jerry Root and Wayne Martindale (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1989).

Reading' in its first section.⁸⁰ *A Retreat with C. S. Lewis* was part of a series published by St Anthony Messenger Press, a Catholic Franciscan publisher, and included a chapter called 'More than Mere Christianity: Conversion' and quoted the book four times.⁸¹ *C. S. Lewis, A Study Guide*: Both the C. S. Lewis Institute of Washington D. C. (est. 1976) and the C. S. Lewis Foundation of Redlands, California (est. 1986), offered curriculum for use by individuals, small groups and churches based on *Mere Christianity*.⁸² There have also been guides which were more professionally produced. 'C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*', advertised on the cover as 'The most concise and accurate way to grasp the essentials', was published in the series 'Shepherd's Notes'. It instructed readers to use the guide 'alongside the classic itself—either in individual study or in a study group', and stated that the goal was to 'give you a quick, step-by-step overview of some of the enduring treasures of the Christian faith'.⁸³ The American Christian publishers Zondervan and Cokesbury offered free, downloadable guides to the book from their websites.⁸⁴ A more commercial version was achieved by HarperCollins' leather-bound *Mere Christianity*

⁸⁰ Jeanne Hinton and Freda Kimmey, Series Eds., *The Growing Church (Personal Renewal): Bases For Christian Renewal and Growth, Book Three*. Post Green Leadership Training Course materials (Dorset, UK: Post Green Press, 1981), 26. Also recommended in this section were John Stott's *Basic Christianity* and A. Skevington Wood's *I Want to Know What the Bible Says About God*.

⁸¹ Robert F. Morneau, *A Retreat with C. S. Lewis: Yielding to a Pursuing God* (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1999).

⁸² C. S. Lewis Foundation, 'Study Guide to *Mere Christianity*', <http://www.cslewis.org/resources/studyguides.html>, accessed 3 July 2012; Christopher W. Mitchell, Kerry Knott and Stephen D. Eyre, *The C. S. Lewis Study Program: Mere Christianity* (Springfield, VA: C. S. Lewis Institute, 2010).

⁸³ Terry L. Miethe, *C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity*, Shepherd's Notes series (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999), back cover.

⁸⁴ Anon., '*Reading Group Guide: Mere Christianity and The Screwtape Letters*' (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing / Harper San Francisco); '*Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis: Discussion Guide' (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001). http://www.cokesbury.com/pdf/teachablebooks/63_merechristianity.pdf, accessed 11 July 2012.

Journal, which features quotations by Benjamin Franklin, Homer and William Blake decorating the mostly blank, lined pages.⁸⁵ If all these were not enough, there was a monograph devoted to the didactic function of Lewis, with a chapter devoted to *Mere Christianity: Teaching C. S. Lewis: A Handbook for Professors, Church Leaders, and Lewis Enthusiasts*.⁸⁶ That there has been an abundance of such ‘aids’ is further demonstration that *Mere Christianity* has been frequently used by leaders in the corporate religious life of Christians.

There are, too, first-hand accounts of Christian leaders using *Mere Christianity* as a teaching tool and devotional aid from the 1950s into the twenty-first century. Some cite *Mere Christianity* specifically; others refer to a sustained engagement with the body of Lewis’s work, which nevertheless show that *Mere Christianity* has been used in a variety of ways. The well-known preacher of Redeemer Church in Manhattan, Tim Keller, when asked in 2010 how often he used Lewis’s material in his sermons, answered that it was about half the time, though Lewis was not always named as the source.⁸⁷ Similarly, David Wesley Soper, an American who interviewed Lewis, wrote that he told him at the time of his ‘own indebtedness for innumerable Lewis ideas and pictures used in classroom and pulpit’.⁸⁸ And yet another pastor wrote, ‘I have rarely preached a sermon in which I did

⁸⁵ Molly Detweiler, *Mere Christianity Journal* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004), passim.

⁸⁶ Richard A. Hill and Lyle Smith, *Teaching C. S. Lewis: A Handbook for Professors, Church Leaders, and Lewis Enthusiasts* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

⁸⁷ Tim Keller, in discussion with the author, 12 November 2010.

⁸⁸ David Wesley Soper, *Exploring the Christian World Mind* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1964), 69.

not quote from [Lewis].⁸⁹ Bible studies are another occasion for teaching from *Mere Christianity*. One minister from Austin, Texas, reported:

We have a Lewis study group which meets regularly and is now in its third year... We are fortunate to have a group of about 20... We gather every other Wednesday night, have a covered-dish supper in the home of one of the members, and then spend about an hour in study.⁹⁰

A participant in another church study group wrote:

About twenty years ago, each of us was ‘transplanted’ to Uniontown from other states and we met at the Episcopal church. The rector there had been a U. S. Navy captain, then an attorney in Houston, then, after reading *Mere Christianity*, he was converted to Christianity and entered the priesthood. We were in a discussion group studying the book (it was jibberish to us) for many months before the Truths came home to us—the resulting explosion was tremendous and we will be forever grateful for C. S. Lewis.⁹¹

Whether a ‘seminar on the theology of Lewis’ at a Presbyterian Church (USA) church in New Mexico, or a ‘A Day with C. S. Lewis’ at an Episcopal Church in California; whether a ‘C. S. Lewis Book Club’ organized by the Library Board of a Lutheran Church with 1,750 members, or a course on Lewis at a Baptist Church’s Adult Bible School in which ‘Twelve busy people who have little time for reading new books’ participated—Christian leaders

⁸⁹ C. S. Lewis Testimonials, Wade Center, csl-MISC.

⁹⁰ Rev. H. Mabry, Jr., ‘Excerpts from Letters’, *Bulletin* (December 1980), 8.

⁹¹ Mrs. John Laughton, ‘Excerpts from Letters’, *Bulletin* (October 1975), 8.

have found creative ways for discussing Lewis's books, which would have often included *Mere Christianity*, in their communities.⁹²

Mere Christianity was frequently encountered in the corporate religious life of Christians in America. Whether in their sermons, organized Bible studies or book groups, the curriculum of Sunday schools or by personal recommendation, Christian leaders used *Mere Christianity* to instruct those in their spheres of influence. There must be many more instances, of which we have only indications, at best: when the New York C. S. Lewis Society received a syllabus from a church in California, 'outlining their course of study built around Lewis's works', they noted in their *Bulletin*: 'We have received similar materials from numerous churches and colleges in the past few years.'⁹³ Such cases represent *Mere Christianity* as it has been used by Christian leaders in the context of their communities.

Non-Clerical Voices and Silences: Mere Christianity as Protestant Relic

Thus far the voices of many who orchestrate, to one degree or another, the community life of Christians in Britain and America have been heard. They witness to the fact that *Mere Christianity* has been a valuable resource as they attempt to guide faith and practice. But what have been the experiences of those who have not been inclined to take up any leadership roles but who have had contact with *Mere Christianity*? And what of those who, for one reason or another, left no written account of their encounter

⁹² Advertisement placed by James W. Hall, *Bulletin*, (March 1986), 6; Advertisement, *Bulletin* (June 1984), 8; John D. Haynes, *Bulletin* 'Excerpt from Letters' (December 1973), 7.

⁹³ Dorothy Slocum of Modesto, California sent the New York C. S. Lewis Society the syllabus from St. James' Episcopal Church in Sonora, California. 'Excerpts from Letters', *Bulletin* (November 1989), 7-8.

with this particular book? What have their experiences been? Although the written record of the life of *Mere Christianity* among the non-clergy is sparser, a variety of kinds of evidence may still provide a glimpse into how the book may have been received by the many millions whose thoughts and experiences were not recorded by texts.

It is clear, for example, that there has been an impulse by lay participants to gather together *around* the book, as it were. The sheer number of initiatives indicated above by Christian leaders is an indication, but there have also been many grassroots communities that have been formed for this express purpose. Although there have been only two in Britain,⁹⁴ C. S. Lewis clubs have proliferated in America. Their presence suggests that many Americans felt a need to share in the experience of reading Lewis's books.⁹⁵ Some of these societies have their own publications, which provide windows on their value to their members. One woman wrote to the New York C. S. Lewis Society expressing her thoughts on its *Bulletin*:

Let me say that the *Bulletin* has increased my appreciation for C. S. Lewis's teaching, which in turn has strengthened my spiritual growth. And thank you, one and all, who labor in making the Society what it is. I enjoyed so much reading the accounts of what the Society had meant to three long-time members (November). I joined in '78 and have loved every Bulletin.⁹⁶

As with this South Carolinian, many thousands of people have had contact with the book in the context of a community of fellow Christians or fellow readers, through their church

⁹⁴ See chapter six, 253-54.

⁹⁵ See chapter six, 258-259.

⁹⁶ Ellis Loring, 'Excerpts from Letters', *Bulletin* (1990).

or local Lewis club, and enjoyed a feeling of connection as a result. Edward Dell was a 'student-pastor' when he wrote to Lewis in 1949 to express his 'very deep gratitude' for his writings. He continued, 'Your work is quite often the subject of our discussions and sometimes an evening is spent reading you together.'⁹⁷ For many the book was an object to meet over, to discuss, to be together in the presence of. The sharing component of the book—as a physical and intellectual presence—is highlighted by this activity, though it may not have been expressly articulated very frequently.

This *relational* component—a sense indicating comfort and affirmation in the presence of like-minded people—which was expressed by Christian leaders in the periodical literature, appears also to be present in lay responses to the book. One result of this impulse to share *Mere Christianity* has been to give the book as a gift. The sources suggest that the practice has spanned the life of the book and that gift-ers have been from many walks of life in Britain and America. One mistress at the Sherborne School for Girls in England said that she had heard Lewis's broadcast talks during the war and 'then read most of his religious books as they came out.' She continued, 'For many years I used to give *Mere Christianity* as a Confirmation present to girls in my House.'⁹⁸ Across the Atlantic, in undoubtedly different circumstances, John F. Kennedy's sister, Eunice Kennedy Shriver gave actress Tatum O'Neal a copy of *The Case for Christianity*.⁹⁹ Sometimes the clues are suggestive of a proselytizing impulse, as when a review in *Theology of Beyond Personality* closed with: 'Most of us know quite a number of people

⁹⁷ Edward T. Dell to Lewis, 1 February 1949. Bodl. MS. Eng. Let.c.220/4, fol. 65-68.

⁹⁸ Bice Miller to Walter Hooper, 27 April 1983. Bodl. MS. Eng. Let.c. 220/7, fol. 8.

⁹⁹ Anon., 'Notes', *Bulletin* (26 April 1982): 8.

who ought to read this book.’¹⁰⁰ Other times this is more explicitly the case. A member of the New York C. S. Lewis Society wrote about befriending a ‘Hindu acquaintance’ through the gifting of *Mere Christianity*.¹⁰¹ Charles Colson, who was Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal and imprisoned for his involvement, converted to Christianity after reading *Mere Christianity* in 1973.¹⁰² He has said that from the time of his conversion, ‘I have given out hundreds of copies of *Mere Christianity* and have met thousands whose lives have been transformed by it.’¹⁰³ A woman who was introduced to *Mere Christianity* through one of Colson’s books, followed the politician-evangelist’s lead. She said, ‘I’ve taken to buying *Mere Christianity* and *Screwtape Letters* five at a time, because I never know when I’ll run across someone who’d be a perfect recipient of one or both.’¹⁰⁴ Henry Schafer, a professor of chemistry at the University of Georgia, wrote:

C. S. Lewis is considered the most widely read and influential serious Christian writer of the 20th century. While not agreeing with him on a few minor points, I find Lewis's writing to be very insightful and am happy to be

¹⁰⁰ H. C. L. Heywood, review of *Beyond Personality, Theology*, March 1945, (Vol. XLVIII): 66-67.

¹⁰¹ Anon., ‘Notes’, *Bulletin* (1986).

¹⁰² This occurred at the height of the trial and press coverage in 1973 and the timing provoked skepticism: an Oliphant cartoon from the time shows Colson in priestly robes parading in front of the White House with a sign reading, ‘REPENT! For lo, I am out to lay it on the House Judiciary Committee.’ (Molly Ivins, book review of *Born Again* by Charles Colson, *New York Times* (28 March 1976). After his incarceration of seven months, Colson was released and he published a book about his experience, *Born Again* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Chosen Books, 1976). He also began a non-profit to evangelize and provide support for prisoners, Prison Fellowship, which has become the largest prison ministry in the world.

¹⁰³ Charles Colson in Mary Anne Phemister and Andrew Lazo, eds., *Mere Christians: Inspiring stories of encounters with C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Lore E. Pike, ‘Excerpts from Letters’, *Bulletin* (September 1989), 7; Colson’s book was *Born Again* (London, Hodder and Stoughton Religious, 1979).

a member of his fan club. I have given his classic book *Mere Christianity* to many friends over the years.¹⁰⁵

Gifting *Mere Christianity* out of a desire to share an individual's experience of the book or to convert a neighbour is an important part of the biography of a book which has been experienced largely in the context of religious communities.

Yet the fact that the book was gifted is not a guarantee that it was read by either the gifter or the recipient. Sometimes it was. An editorial staff writer for Dallas, Texas's *Morning News* wrote that, having decided it good practice to read books written by people whose philosophies he disagreed with, he 'might start with two C. S. Lewis books someone sent me six months ago.'¹⁰⁶ An editor for *Focus on the Family* Robert Velarde was also the recipient of a book by Lewis and read it. He said, 'I first became acquainted with C.S. Lewis when a Christian friend of mine gave me a copy of *Mere Christianity*. As I read it, I encountered a paradox. Here was an obviously intelligent, witty and articulate person who was also a Christian. How could this be?'¹⁰⁷ The latter is an example of an individual who was significantly affected by *Mere Christianity* and, thus, wrote about it. However, if the book was received and not read, partially read, disliked or ignored, the chances of recording (and thus learning about) the incident are far less. Two more examples will suffice. It is impossible to say how representative these are, and noteworthy that, again, the accounts have been printed because the author eventually

¹⁰⁵ Henry F. Shaefer, 'Dr. Henry F. Schaefer III', in 'The Impact of *Mere Christianity* and Other Lewis Works', published by C. S. Lewis Institute (13 September 2006), http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Impact_of_Mere_Christianity, accessed 27 August 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Bradley Miller, 'Excerpts from Letters', *Bulletin*.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Velarde, 'In Their Own Words', Published on C.S. Lewis Institute (date – cp ftnt 683), <http://www.cslewisinstitute.org>, accessed 27 August 2009.

did read the book and the text made an impression. Yet within these anecdotes are occasions when a non-reading response, in the context of a gift-exchange, was in play. Author Rebecca Manley Pippert describes her introduction to *Mere Christianity* as a young adult:

Looking through my parents' library, I stumbled across a clearly unread book called *Mere Christianity* that someone had given my mother. In Lewis I found myself face-to-face with an intellect so disciplined, so lucid, so relentlessly logical, that all my intellectual pride at not being a 'mindless believer' was quickly squelched. Lewis made the Christian faith comprehensible.¹⁰⁸

Pippert's story has its own logic: an individual with a proclivity toward reading picks up a family member's book. Slightly more complicated is another individual's story, posted on a blog about Lewis-related topics. It merits quoting at length:

A fellow teacher whom I'd gotten to know quite well about 7 years ago told me he'd been searching for God for 10 years and had read up on all sorts of religions, but had found nothing satisfying. A 'random' meeting during a morning commute had brought him in contact with a missionary friend of mine who introduced him to *Mere Christianity*. The missionary friend hadn't read the book himself. Neither had I, but after reading a commentary on google that the book was for Christians and was not

¹⁰⁸ Rebecca Manley Pippert in Larsen, *Indelible Ink*, (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Waterbrook Press, 2003), 242.

written to convince non-believers to become Christian, I wondered if it would do my colleague any good.¹⁰⁹

Being thus misinformed by an on-line source, this person goes on to say that the colleague read the book, was converted, and that this inspired the teller of the story to 'run to get my own copy of Lewis' book and read it for myself.' Therefore, in this case, neither the gift-giver nor the Christian friend had read *Mere Christianity* at the time the book was given.

The above examples demonstrate that the gifting of *Mere Christianity* may be considered an act distinct from the reading of it. Faith was invested in the book on the part of the giver, but trust was not necessarily based on that individual's experience with the content. As E. L. Allen observed in 1945 (quoted at the beginning of the chapter) Lewis's name was sometimes 'guarantee enough' of the soundness of the contents. And, yet, it is evident, too, that there is significance in the *possession* of *Mere Christianity*. When Lewis's broadcasts were first printed in 1942, Selby introduced them by saying, 'We feel sure that everyone will read them and derive lasting benefit from them, and no doubt wish to possess them later in their more permanent form.'¹¹⁰ And, again, it was observed in 1963, 'No one who has come to know C. S. Lewis through an evening spent with *Broadcast Talks* or *Screwtape Letters* is likely to be content until he has had a good

¹⁰⁹ MoogieCha, 'Your First Encounter With Lewis' (7 January 2009), <http://cslewis.drzeus.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=8&t=9080&sid=50c4df9b24959e0e4debb7990bfb20c4&start=15#p192291>, accessed 30 September, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Ronald Selby Wright, short introduction to 'What Christians Believe', *For His Majesty's Scottish Forces*, Vol. 2 (June 1942), 69. NLS, Ronald Selby Wright Collection, RSW 63.

many more volumes from the same source.¹¹¹ What is the nature of the possession of books, particularly of Lewis's books, in the life of religious communities? Why *possess*?

Perhaps owning *Mere Christianity* was appealing for reasons similar to the paratextual reasons that the book has been important to Christian leaders. After all, it was shown above that the book's significance was, in part, unrelated to the *meaning* of the content. We saw that the book was valued for the way it *sounded*, for the idea represented by the phrase 'mere Christianity' and, perhaps most of all, for the authority attached to the name of C. S. Lewis. It was shown to be important for how it *felt* to use Lewis's arguments and that confidence was gained by the knowledge of the author's authority as 'dean' of Christian apologetics. Perhaps the books' physical presence reminded those who possessed it of these attributes, attributes which, we have seen, served to confirm the Christian identity and mission of Christian believers. For Christian leaders, the text served to validate the identity of the readers by the cultural affirmation already achieved by the author, for Lewis appeared to *represent* them. Now, it is suggested that it is possible that the physical book itself served these same functions simply by being associated, through ownership, with an individual.

It is not surprising that the book should function as a religious object in Christian communities. Lewis has been represented tangibly by other means. There are stained glass windows with representations of Lewis at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, in Monrovia,

¹¹¹ Dudley-Smith, *Christian Literature and the Church Bookstall*, 88.

California¹¹² and the Episcopal church of St. David's at Denton, Texas, and ones with images from *The Chronicles of Narnia* at All Saints Episcopal Church in Kansas City, MO¹¹³ and at Holy Trinity Church, in Headington, England.¹¹⁴ Physical locations associated with Lewis, including Belfast, Oxford, Cambridge and Wheaton, Illinois have served as places of pilgrimage. Having given 'so many "C. S. Lewis seminars" to churches', Perry Bramlett described what he hoped for in his pilgrimage to Oxford:

I wanted to somehow experience the life and times and places of C. S. Lewis in a spiritual sense, something I could not put into words. I wanted to walk where he had walked. I wanted to worship where he had worshiped. I wanted to eat and drink where he had eaten and drank. I wanted to study where he had studied. And I did.¹¹⁵

At the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton there are on display a number of physical objects, including a wardrobe and a pipe, that are affiliated with him. It is more than plausible, therefore, that the book *Mere Christianity* has, like Lewis's person, been incorporated into Christian communities as a religious object.

Comparisons

Christian communities *qua* communities in Britain and America have shared many features in the post Second World War period. Taken on their own, and irrespective of how their numbers compared to those of their predecessors, these communities were

¹¹² Adam Gopnik, 'Prisoner of Narnia: How C. S. Lewis Escaped', *The New Yorker* (21 November 2005), http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/11/21/051121crat_atlarge, accessed 28 September 2013.

¹¹³ Harry Warren Firth, 'Excerpts from Letters', *Bulletin*, Vol. 18 (1986), 7.

¹¹⁴ (Author's personal visit to the church.

¹¹⁵ Perry Bramlett, *C. Lewis: Life at the Center* (Macon, Georgia: Peake Road, 1996), 69-71.

vibrant, each a force of activity, shared feelings and proclivities. Christian leaders worked to transmit the knowledge and practice of their religion to their members, to the next generation and to non-Christians alike. And lay people gathered on a regular basis to express and confirm their faith. Relationships have an equal (if not greater) part in the fabric of Christian life as the doctrines that are believed, the accoutrements of worship and the acts of service to the local community which are so often the expression of faith. In these fundamentals of the week-in and week-out practice shared by American and British faith communities *Mere Christianity* has played many roles. It proved a useful tool for pastors fulfilling their charge to explain the basics of Christian beliefs, both to congregants and non-members. And the idea of 'mere Christianity', the notion of a common thread uniting Christians across the centuries and denominational identities, proved salient in times of diminishing national and local insularity. For many, too, *Mere Christianity* was an object, an idea and a text to gather round, to teach and discuss, to gift and to possess. The books' biography within Christian institutional life is demonstration that there is much shared, common ground between transatlantic Christian communities.

The reader will note that in chapter three it was demonstrated that Lewis's platform, from the 1940s, was more multifaceted in Britain than it was in America. It was also shown that Lewis's reputation as an apologist declined, within some quarters at least, after the cultural changes of the 1960s in Britain; while in the States, on the other hand, his platform went from strength to strength, helped in no small part by Christians who had encountered him in universities. Did these discrepancies have any bearing upon *Mere Christianity's* life in Christian communities?

The C. S. Lewis Foundation, of California, claimed in a *Study Guide to Mere Christianity* that the book was ‘possibly Lewis’ most frequently read work’.¹¹⁶ And in a 1984 survey of ‘Evangelical Bible scholars’ undertaken by Mark Noll, *Mere Christianity* was listed by 14 of 388 people when asked to list the ‘five academic books which have had the greatest impact on your own scholarship or the direction of your academic work’.¹¹⁷ This chapter has delved deeper into what manner of ‘impact’ Lewis’s famous book has had and why. It has demonstrated that the book has certainly been an important part of religious life, whether read or not, as an idea, a teaching tool, a physical object to gather around, to share, to draw comfort from. C. S. Lewis’s name, indeed, was ‘guarantee enough’.

¹¹⁶ C. S. Lewis Foundation, ‘Study Guide to *Mere Christianity*’.

¹¹⁷ Mark A. Noll, ‘Survey of Evangelical Bible Scholars, VI. Personal Influence on Scholars, E. Individual Books Cited as Most Influential, All ETS (Evangelical Theological Society), IBR (Institute for Biblical Research), WTS (Wesleyan Theological Society) Members’, in *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 221-225.

Chapter Six

C. S. Lewis Devotees

*'But Screwtape seems to have been convinced by Chesterton—too easily it may seem to a later generation.'*¹

In 1982 an American studying at Oxford University, Gregory Wolfe, wrote to the British journalist Humphrey Carpenter, concerning a club he had just founded, to which the latter was invited to speak. Of the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society, Wolfe said:

Very naturally, thanks to the embarrassingly huge and fervid Lewis 'movement', especially in the U.S., many people assume that a Lewis Society by definition must be filled with fundamentalists and other unthinking hagiographers. And such critics have good reason to feel disgusted (I am one of them). So *just in case* you thought we were such a group, and needed to be disabused of our simplistic notions, let me assure you that we are no such thing.²

Wolfe was clearly sensitive to the British contempt for what was by then a visible and well-established fact—Americans loved C. S. Lewis, and they came to Oxford in enthusiastic pursuit of their idol. The exchange, like much about the topic of the present chapter, is ironic: despite Wolfe's attempts to distinguish the new club from its overseas relatives, the fact remained that he, its founder, was an American, and its first speaker, Walter Hooper, was *the* American who had done most to encourage his compatriot's

¹ Graham Hough, 'The Screwtape Letters', *Times* [London] (10 February 1966), 15.

² Gregory Wolfe to Humphrey Carpenter, 29 September 1982. Bodl. Dep. C. 777, Papers of C. S. Lewis Society, 1982-85, fol. 40. The comment was made in response to the following description Carpenter had given of his talk: 'It will be a very informal, unscripted talk, and I shall probably be rather rude about poor old Lewis!!' Humphrey Carpenter to Ms. Pierce, 19 September 1982, *ibid.*, fol. 35.

enthusiasms.³ However, the snapshot is particularly apt on account of its wider context. For reasons it is hoped this chapter will illuminate, it is often when American Christians have been involved with institutions of higher education that Lewis has played an especially formative role in individuals' lives.

In the States clubs abound, books abound, university courses abound on C. S. Lewis.⁴ For example, whereas the only society devoted to Lewis to endure in Britain was begun and has largely been sustained by Americans, in the States, we might mention the C. S. Lewis Society of Princeton University, the New York C. S. Lewis Society, the Cleveland C. S. Lewis Society, the Arizona C. S. Lewis Society, the C. S. Lewis Society of Chattanooga, the C. S. Lewis Institute, the C. S. Lewis Reading Group, and on and on. The present chapter will explore the nature and reasons behind this fascination and why it is that it has been, generally speaking, American conservative Christians who gravitate toward Lewis. To do so, for reasons discussed in the introduction, this chapter breaks from the narrative of texts that has been central to this dissertation. Instead, people will be the guiding lights through this important aspect of Lewis's reception. The chapter begins with an introduction to Lewis's American devotees and a comparison with writings about Lewis from Britain, through the mid-1990s. It will then proceed to an analysis of religious and cultural factors that have contributed to the discrepancy between Lewis's reception in Britain and America, as well as a consideration of the significance that the context of

³ Wolfe's efforts ultimately succeeded. The Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society continues today, arguably because Americans remained a strong presence. It is the only surviving club of its kind in Britain, compared to the dozens of comparable ventures in the United States.

⁴ See below.

higher education has for these different receptions. Finally, the chapter will consider evidence of a renewal of interest in Lewis in Britain since the turn of the twenty first century.

I. Lewis Devotees, an Introduction

C. S. Lewis devotees point to the meaningful influence of Lewis over their lives, often in an emotive tone. As discussed in the introduction, most Lewis devotees have been evangelicals of various shades, including Catholics, *and* they have tended to be accomplished, usually university educated men and women (men are in the majority). Some have been stars in their spheres. Philip Yancey, a highly successful author of Christian books in the twentieth century (two, of over twenty, won the Evangelical Christian Publishers' Association's Christian Book of the Year Award⁵) first encountered Lewis's books at a Bible College in the late 1960s. Regarding the influence of Lewis, Yancey noted, 'Before writing any book, first I laboriously go through all of Lewis's to see what he said about the topic.' He continued:

As one who was changed—literally, dramatically, permanently—by an Oxford don who spent most of his life as a bachelor, rarely traveled, and felt more at home with books than people, I have learned to trust that God can use my own feeble efforts to connect with readers out there somewhere, most of whom I will never meet.⁶

⁵ One of these cites Lewis's 'liar, lunatic or Lord' argument: *The Jesus I Never Knew* (London, Marshall Pickering, 1995), 261. The other is *What's So Amazing About Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

⁶ Philip Yancey, 'Shadow Mentor', *Mere Christians*, 211-214.

Like Charles Colson, special counsel to President Nixon,⁷ Yancey's is a familiar name in many Christian communities and has influenced Lewis's reception with his frequent references to Lewis's importance on his life and profession. Another Lewis admirer is Francis S. Collins, director of the National Human Genome Research Institute from 1993-2008, whose work contributed substantially to the mapping of human DNA and the genetic identification of many diseases. Collins received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civil award, for his achievements. While in medical school in the early 1980s, Collins began to take an interest in religious matters and asked a Methodist minister for guidance. This minister lent him a copy of *Mere Christianity*. Collins wrote about the effect that reading the book had on him in *The Language of God*:

In the next few days, as I turned [*Mere Christianity's*] pages, struggling to absorb the breadth and depth of the intellectual arguments laid down by this legendary Oxford scholar, I realized that all of my own constructs against the plausibility of faith were those of a schoolboy.⁸

Collins describes how in the first year of belief in Christianity, he was 'besieged by doubts' but that many sources helped provide 'compelling answers to these dilemmas'. For the writing of *The Language of God*, he said, 'Many of the most accessible analyses came from the writings of my now familiar Oxford adviser, C. S. Lewis.'⁹ Other luminaries who might be mentioned include George Gallup Jr of the polling and research centre, the

⁷ See chapter five, 245.

⁸ Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

Gallup Organization, who first read *Mere Christianity* as a sophomore at Princeton University in 1950;¹⁰ Senator Mark O. Hatfield;¹¹ Senator Dan Coats, a Wheaton College alumnus, who said, ‘No writer or single book, however, has had more influence on my life or drawn me closer to Christ than the C. S. Lewis masterpiece *Mere Christianity*’;¹² or Mickey Maudlin, an executive editor at HarperOne, who was converted after reading Lewis in college.¹³ Lewis has inspired influential persons in fields close to and far from his own, including scientists and politicians.

Yet those who have written about Lewis who have not been famous still tend to be accomplished in their own domains. Many have been professors, serving a variety of types of higher education institutions in America. The former Yale professor of philosophical theology Paul Holmer wrote to Lewis in the early 1940s as a ‘frustrated and distraught student’; he later authored *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* and taught a course on Lewis at Yale in the early 1970s (which he reported drew about seventy-five students).¹⁴ In the 1990s, a Harvard professor of psychiatry Armand Nicholi taught a course for undergraduates that also proved popular. He published a book based on it called *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex and*

¹⁰ William Griffin, *Mere Christians*, (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1998), 114-5.

¹¹ Anon., ‘Mark Hatfield Taps into the Real Power on Capitol Hill’, *Christianity Today* (22 October 1982). <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1982/october22/markhatfield.html>, accessed 21 December 2012.

¹² Dan Coats, ‘An Eternal Debt to C. S. Lewis’, *Christianity Today* (6 April 1984), 38.

¹³ Mark Oppenheimer, ‘C. S. Lewis’s Legacy Lives On, and Not Just Through the Wardrobe’, *New York Times* (4 March 2011), 18.

¹⁴ Paul L. Holmer, *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (London: Sheldon Press, 1977), ix. The course was mentioned by Walter Hooper to Owen Barfield, 22 February 1974. Box 1, Fol. 124, Hooper Papers, UNC.

the Meaning of Life, which became the basis for a four hour television programme produced by the Public Broadcasting Station in 2004.¹⁵

The tendency of American admirers of Lewis to be successful people whose encounter with the author happened within the context of higher education is remarkably common. The pattern has been corroborated by the findings of sociologist D. Michael Lindsey, who surveyed 157 influential American evangelicals for his book *Faith in the Halls of Power*. He found that about two dozen of the evangelicals he interviewed for the book referred to themselves as 'mere Christians' and nearly one in four mentioned the influence of Lewis on their spiritual lives.¹⁶ The frequency with which higher education is associated with Lewis devotees suggests that this context is a significant part of the relationship between reader and author. The peculiarities of that relationship are brought into sharper relief when compared to the British who have written about Lewis.

II. Comparison with Britain

Certainly, as was shown in the previous three chapters, many British people have written about Lewis and been influenced by his books. And there have been a few in Britain, like Alistair McGrath, professor of theology, ministry and education at King's College London,¹⁷ who have written about Lewis before the turn of the twenty-first century with a frequency that may be compared to American devotees. But these individuals are the exception. There has not been an identifiably similar group of British

¹⁵ Armand Nicholi, *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Free Press, 2002); *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis & Sigmund Freud*, produced by Sirena Film, Distributed by Public Broadcasting Service (2004).

¹⁶ D. Michael Lindsey, *Faith in the Halls of Power* (Oxford Press: Oxford, 2007), 97, 90.

¹⁷ See chapter six, page 301 and note 131.

devotees comparable to what one finds in the States. For example, there have been ten journals published at various times in America devoted to Lewis and none in Britain. But it is not quantity alone that distinguishes American devotees' writings about Lewis from the closest British equivalents. As will be demonstrated throughout the present chapter there is an emotive quality to American devotees' writings about Lewis which is not replicated in Britain.

The British who have written about Lewis in an autobiographical or personally reflective way tend to have been those who knew Lewis personally. For example, after Lewis's death his publisher, Jocelyn Gibb, edited a volume of reflections by Lewis's friends and colleagues, such as theologian and poet Austin Farrar and Jack Arthur Walter Bennett, the man who succeeded Lewis at Cambridge.¹⁸ (J. R. R. Tolkien—who did not make a habit of writing or speaking publicly about Lewis—said of this volume that it revealed more about the contributors than its subject.¹⁹) Fifteen years later an American associated with the New York C. S. Lewis Society pursued a similar project in which many of Lewis's friends and colleagues participated.²⁰ This was followed by yet another collection in 1983, edited by a Canadian journalist, and two more similar, American-produced volumes in 2001 and 2006, to which Lewis's British associates contributed.²¹ Besides these, two of Lewis's friends, Roger Lancelyn Green and George Sayer, have

¹⁸ Jocelyn Gibb, ed. *Light on C. S. Lewis* (London: Bles, 1965).

¹⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien to Jocelyn Gibb, 28 October 1965. Bodl. Dep. C. 774, fol. 312.

²⁰ James Como, ed., *Lewis at the Breakfast Table, and Other Reminiscences* (London: Collins, 1980).

²¹ These were Stephen Schofield, ed., *In Search of C. S. Lewis* (South Plainfield: Bridge Publishing, Inc., 1983), David Graham, ed., *We Remember C. S. Lewis, Essays and Memoirs*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2001), and Harry Lee Poe and Rebecca Whitten Poe, eds. *C. S. Lewis Remembered: Collected Reflections of Students, Friends and Colleagues* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2006).

written biographies of Lewis.²² Other friends of Lewis, such as British philosopher Owen Barfield and Lewis's godson Laurence Harwood, not only offered their assessments in the first collection by Bles, but have continued to speak and publish for (mostly) American audiences about their famous friend, long after his death.²³

In Britain the generations born too late to have heard Lewis on the wireless, however, have not sustained a fascination with Lewis's person or attributed an especially emotive, spiritual influence over their lives, as has been the case with most American devotees. Naturally, Lewis's works have been discussed by the British—scholars, especially—on numerous occasions when Lewis's thoughts or writings were pertinent to a topic at hand, or were in line with an author's more general interests. Literary critic Colin Manlove wrote about the contribution of Lewis's fantasy; Gordon Mursell, dean of Birmingham Cathedral, included Lewis briefly in his discussion of *English Spirituality: From 1700 to the Present Day*; Professor N. H. Keeble, a specialist in Puritan literature, has written on Richard Baxter as a source for *Mere Christianity* and also taught a course which included Lewis's works at the University of Stirling.²⁴ Mary Warnock, a philosopher who

²² These were Roger Lancelyn Green, *C. S. Lewis* (London: C. Tinsling and Company Ltd, 1963) and George Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). Other volumes by Green include: *Into Other Worlds: Space-Flight in Fiction, From Lucian to Lewis* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950) and Margery T. Fisher, Roger L. Green and Marcus Crouch, *Three Bodley Head Monographs* (London: Bodley Head, 1969).

²³ For example: Owen Barfield, *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, ed., G. B. Tennyson (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); John Lawlor, *C. S. Lewis: Memories and Reflections* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1998); Laurence Harwood, *C. S. Lewis, My Godfather: Letters, Photos and Recollections* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007).

²⁴ E.g., Colin Manlove's *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Patterning of a Fantastic World* (Oxford: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993) and *Modern Fantasy, Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From 1700 to the Present Day* (London: SPCK, 2001); N. H. Keeble, 'C. S. Lewis, Richard Baxter, and "Mere Christianity"' *Christianity and Literature* (Spring 1981), 27-44; author in conversation with Professor Keeble, October 2010.

was working in Oxford in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, praised Lewis's depiction of *sensucht*, saying 'of all critics he perhaps had the greatest and simplest understanding of the aesthetic imagination, as far as it may be exercised on literature'; yet Lewis is not mentioned in other works by her, including her autobiography, despite their sharing mutual acquaintances.²⁵ British commentary about Lewis through the 1990s has appeared to originate from an interest in the scholarly topic at hand, not in Lewis himself. Unlike many American devotees, the British who have written about Lewis have not incorporated Lewis into *much* of what they publish. These individuals are interested in Lewis, but they do not convey a similar sense of being especially interested in Lewis as a personality, as Americans do.

Throughout the twentieth century British writers have rarely expressed an emotionally charged reverence for Lewis. Rather, a different theme emerges from the literature on Lewis which was written by British people who did not know him personally or were writing because of a natural affinity to their own scholarly interests. These people have written with a qualitatively different tone from their American counterparts. A British theologian well-known to American Protestants, J. I. Packer, who taught at Regent College, Vancouver (1979-97), opened an article for one of the most popular Christian American periodicals, *Christianity Today*, with the following: 'Americans, hearing that I am an Oxford man, often ask me if I knew C. S. Lewis, and their faces fall when I say

²⁵ Mary Warnock, 'Religious Imagination' in *Religious Imagination*, ed by James P. Mackey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986), 153; e.g. *Ethics Since 1900* (London: Home University Library of Modern Knowledge, 1960) and *Mary Warnock: A Memoir: People and Places* (London: Duckbacks, 2003). Mary Warnock and her husband were friends of David Cecil, a member of the Inklings.

no. American interest in Lewis, who died 25 years ago never having visited America, staggers me.²⁶ Ten years later, Packer repeated himself for another article on Lewis, for the same magazine. It began, 'Yes I was at Oxford in Lewis's day (I went up in 1944); but *no*, I never met him.'—apparently, he had continued to encounter the same (tiresome) question in the intervening years.²⁷ A similar note opens an article about the endurance of *Mere Christianity* by a New Testament scholar who has himself been compared to Lewis.²⁸ N. T. Wright, former bishop of Durham and professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St Andrews, comparing his feelings while re-reading the book to the 'nightmare' of working with a self-made businessman on a fundraising campaign, said that his final analysis of *Mere Christianity* had been essentially, 'Well, it must work, or he wouldn't be where he is.'²⁹ After acknowledgements about Lewis's importance to his own life as a young man and since, Wright proceeded to analyze the flaws and strengths of the book and suggest some reasons for its endurance. His stance, like Packer's, kept a critical distance, with due assurances—one suspects to make the unfavourable comments more palatable to his readers—of the respect in which he holds Lewis. Thus, while paying due homage to Lewis—an author whom many of these Christians' own readers held to be the gold standard of British Christians —Packer and Wright put a degree of distance between themselves and their subject.

²⁶ J. I. Packer, 'What Lewis Was and Wasn't', *Christianity Today* (15 January 1988), 11.

²⁷ J. I. Packer, 'Still Surprised by Lewis', *Christianity Today* (7 September 1998), 54-60.

²⁸ Ostling, Richard N. 'Wright: 21st Century C.S. Lewis?', *Decatur Daily* (March 27, 2006) <http://www.decaturdaily.com>, 3pp. csl-ARTICLE.

²⁹ N. T. Wright, 'Simply Lewis: Reflections on a Master Apologist After 60 Years', *Touchstone* (March 2007) 28-33; Wright says 'I paid homage to Lewis when I wrote *Simply Christian* by beginning with a similar, though not identical, argument about justice, and then extending it to the puzzles we find today about spirituality, relationships, and beauty,' *ibid.*, 31.

One notices that Packer and Wright, in the articles just quoted, are reacting to Lewis's enduring reception, rather than more organically to the man himself, as many Americans have done. There have been other occasions when Britons have written on Lewis in light of the author's enduring popularity. John Wilson, who wrote an article on Lewis's influence on evangelicalism for the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* in 1991, admitted an initial wariness of his subject, saying:

When asked to prepare this paper, I was lukewarm about Lewis. In past years I have concentrated on his literary criticism which has influenced my thinking; I thought I had outgrown his apologetics. But recently, in re-reading his Christian books and essays, I found I had forgotten how good he was: he had had many exciting and new things to say to me. I rediscovered how he could approach old questions from new angles. Almost in spite of myself, I was impressed.³⁰

Another British Wilson (A. N.), a writer and newspaper columnist, undertook a project on Lewis at the suggestion of others (Lewis's publishers at Collins and Walter Hooper) and in reaction to the enduring enthusiasm for the man. Wilson's 1990 biography of Lewis opens and closes with an assessment of Lewis's legacy, especially the fervour with which devotees defended their own imaginings of Lewis. The nature and endurance of the appeal of Lewis captivated Wilson and inspired him for the project. As he said, 'A writer

³⁰ John Wilson, 'An Appraisal of C. S. Lewis and His Influence on Modern Evangelicalism'.

who can evoke such reactions is worthy of scrutiny, and scrutiny of a particular kind.’³¹

Again, like Packer and Wright, Wilson and Wilson responded to the presence of Lewis devotees; in the latter two cases it was not even due to the authors’ own initiatives.

A copy of A. N. Wilson’s biography is kept on a bookshelf in the house that was Lewis’s home outside Oxford. In the 1980s the home was bought by the California-based C. S. Lewis Society, the decorative scheme restored to something resembling the 1940s, and made the base for a ‘scholars-in-residence’ programme. The copy of Wilson’s biography has been marked throughout in pencil, with corrective annotations and scribbles in the margins such as ‘Wrong!’. Wilson’s treatment of Lewis did, in fact, upset Lewis devotees in part because of the way in which Wilson psychoanalyzed Lewis and speculated about his sex life.³² In fact Wilson was not the first of his compatriots to do so. The journalist and Christian apologist Malcolm Muggeridge hinted at something similar in 1974 in a review of Walter Hooper and Roger Lancelyn Green’s biography, wherein he concluded that the authors were ‘perhaps too conscientious, too careful, too respectful, to get under Lewis’s guard and penetrate his defences’.³³ When later asked to elaborate, Muggeridge said he thought there was some mystery in Lewis: ‘Something hasn’t come out. I think it has to do with his attitude toward women and sex, some

³¹ A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1990). Wilson wrote his biography ‘at the suggestion of Sarah Baird-Smith...and of Walter Hooper’, *ibid.*, 311; see Preface, chapter ‘Further Up and Further In’, and xvii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, preface; chapter ‘Further Up and Further In’; and xvii (check).

³² Bruce Edwards referred to Wilson’s ‘notoriously psychoanalytically biased biography of Lewis’ in ‘The Christian Intellectual in the Public Square: C. S. Lewis’s Enduring American Reception’ in *C. S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy, Volume 4*, ed. Bruce Edwards (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2007), 14. See also Gilbert Meilaender ‘Psychoanalyzing C. S. Lewis’. *Christian Century* (16 May 1990): 525–529.

³³ Malcolm Muggeridge, review of *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1974) in *The Observer*, 7 July 1974, quoted by Stephen Shofield, *In Search of C. S. Lewis*, 128.

evasion he is hiding from us. I think he was probably a very deeply sensual man; and he fought to put it away from him.’³⁴ The then bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, took a similar line in a series of talks over the BBC’s Radio Four, shortly after the airing of the television version of *Shadowlands*, in 1985. Harries compared Lewis’s sensuality to that of Oscar Wilde and speculated that the authoritarian God he portrayed in his writings and the impatience he at times demonstrated with those who thought differently from him, was a result of Lewis’s own early emotional experiences: the traumatic death of his mother, the extreme instability of his father and cruel schoolmasters. Like others, Harries prefaced his critique with ‘a tribute to how much I have, over many years, derived from his thinking’, and identified the importance of his topic as lying with Lewis’s influence. He remarked, ‘we all to some extent create God in our own image’. ‘With most of us,’ he continued, ‘this does not matter too much. With Lewis it is a matter of the greatest importance, for he, almost more than anyone else, has been responsible for shaping our understanding of God.’ Yet having granted that Lewis had admirable qualities, the sum of Harries’ reaction was, as he said, ‘I never met C. S. Lewis but I don’t think I would have felt at ease with him; nor am I entirely at ease with his God.’³⁵ Wariness was Harries’s response to Lewis. In sum, here are three very different people—an (at the time) atheist biographer, a Catholic journalist, and a bishop in the Church of England—who took Lewis quite seriously but felt there was, as Muggeridge put it, ‘something mysterious’ about the man. Each wondered (apparently) independently about Lewis’s relationship to sex and

³⁴ Malcolm Muggeridge, interviewed by Shofield, *ibid.*

³⁵ Richard Harries, *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His God*, 27, 30 and 65.

women, and how that might have affected his life and work.³⁶ This is Lewis as subject, not idol.

Indeed, in Britain, as in America, many influential and accomplished persons have written about Lewis; authors from a variety of perspectives, Christians and non-Christians, have referenced Lewis in scholarly works or written more topically about him. And yet, in the twentieth century, there has often been a self-consciousness, even reticence, about taking up Lewis as a topic. It may also be said that many of the British treatments were prompted by other's interest in Lewis—whether the enduring popularity in America, or, closer to home, the opportunism of a publisher or the public's transient attention inspired by a television drama. In these examples one finds that in Britain the tone often projected has been that of a disinterested, critical commentator rather than someone emotionally invested in the promotion and praise of a hero.

The critical point is what is absent: what is *not* seen is a large number of people who have maintained a decades-long interest in Lewis's person and works, who have emulated him and expressed a feeling of spiritual connection with him. Expressions of emotional attachment to Lewis are infrequent. In short, in the second half of the twentieth century the British may have had interest in or admiration for Lewis, but they are rarely devotees. The following section will examine some cultural and religious reasons contributing to this difference.

³⁶ Another, a Christian psychiatrist writing shortly after Wilson's well-known biography, repeated these themes. 'Like so many, I owe a great deal to his writings: but I deplore the C. S. Lewis *cult*, with its in-fighting and unbalanced views.' Gaius Davies, *Genius and Grace: Sketches from a Psychiatrist's Notebook* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 233.

III. Assessment

The examples above indicate that to the British who have written about him, Lewis was a mediated figure, seen through the lens of intersecting interests or circumstances—whether that was his influence on Christianity, the values of his children’s literature, his being the centre of an American cult, his sexual repression or an authoritarianism overthrown by the cultural revolutions of the 1960s. But, of course, to Americans Lewis has been a mediated and representative figure as well. The difference is that what Lewis has represented to Americans, especially evangelicals, is favourable; it is cherished. The relationship to *this* mediated Lewis was direct and personal. At times one can hardly distinguish between the writings about Lewis by those who corresponded with Lewis or travelled to England to meet him, and the statements by those who only wished they had. One pastor in New York wrote to Lewis’s brother shortly after Lewis died saying, ‘I had always dreamed of meeting him and I cannot tell you how much his passing has touched me with a certain loneliness, knowing that I shall never, in this life, see his face.’³⁷ Another, a writer, said ‘When I meet Clive Staples Lewis in Heaven, I shall certainly shake his hand, for he saved my soul.’³⁸ The former had corresponded with Lewis; the latter’s enthusiasm had been inspired by reading the Narnia books. Such statements reveal that whatever the mediating factors were for American Christians, they endeared Lewis to them, permitting a feeling of intimate connection to his person.

³⁷ F. Morgan Roberts to Warren (“Warnie”) Lewis, 7 May 1964. Roberts, a Presbyterian pastor, was responding to Warnie’s advertisement in *The Saturday Review* for copies of letters people had received from Lewis for his edited volume of Lewis’s correspondence. Roberts had written Lewis in praise of *Perelandra* and had asked a question about his views on the devotional life. Bodl. Dep. C. 775, fol. 224-261.

³⁸ John C. Wright, ‘Lewis Was the Joshua Flattening the Walls of My Disbelief’ in *Mere Christians*, 208.

So what are the mediating factors for (the largely) evangelical devotees? How has Lewis been imagined? An indication is provided by those who have made a business of reading such things. Crosswalk Publishers advertised one of their 'Leaders in Action Series Books', *Not a Tame Lion: The Spiritual Legacy of C.S. Lewis*, like so:

Get to know the mind behind the stories! C.S. Lewis transcended all literary, philosophical and religious boundaries. A world-renowned scholar of medieval literature at Oxford and Cambridge universities, he wrote and lectured in such clear, direct language that ordinary people were able to fully comprehend the truths he extolled. The prolific author of many classic masterpieces, he also lived a life as compelling as his work.³⁹

Such an advertisement suggests that the Lewis-narrative has been, for many readers, a gateway to the sequestered domain of genius and its knowledge: Lewis, the plainspoken don, providing exceptionally clear views from Mount Nebo. But while the man and the knowledge were lofty, other advertisements accentuate a pressing pertinence. For example, in 1998 Eerdmans Publishers headed a full-page advertisement for twelve new books about Lewis with '*C. S. Lewis—as relevant and popular as ever*'.⁴⁰ As judged by publishers, the stature of Lewis as timeless luminary has been a key component of mediation.

³⁹ 'Books to Help You Go Beyond Narnia', Crosswalk Publishers (28 November 2005), <http://www.crosswalk.com/1365580/>, accessed 21 December 2012. Terry W. Glaspey, *Not a Tame Lion: The Spiritual Legacy of C.S. Lewis* (Elkton, MD: Cumberland House Publishing, 2005).

⁴⁰ Anon., 'C. S. Lewis — as relevant and popular as ever', Eerdmans Catalogue, (Fall 1998). Advert for *Christian Reflections* by C. S. Lewis and other books. Wade, csl.-MISC.

Indeed, there has been a poignant accessible-inaccessible tension in the evangelical imaginings of Lewis. One British commentator, wondering at the appeal of Lewis to so many during the war, concluded, 'The main factor in it is perhaps that he is a layman and was formerly an atheist. The latter consideration lends spice to what he has to say now as a believer, while the former seems to guarantee him against professionalism.'⁴¹ It has certainly been the case that, for evangelicals, Lewis's lay and former-atheist status has been a draw; but there is more there than spice: these qualities give an authority to what Lewis says because the knowledge it produces is perceived to be based upon personal experience, rather than (or in addition to) learned or academic knowledge. This is clear from the way Lewis's atheist and lay status is described. For example, David Downing, professor of English at Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania said of Lewis:

Lewis spent most of his teens and twenties as a militant atheist, so when he returned to Christianity, he knew only too well what the hard questions are and how they can best be addressed. And he was not afraid to say 'I don't know' about great questions that still contain a profound element of mystery.⁴²

Conversionist, experiential knowledge is something American Protestants, especially, can relate to; and an accessible and dramatic biography is especially potent. Likewise, Lewis's non-clerical status provided a level of permeability to his genius. One admirer writing in

⁴¹ E. L. Allen, 'The Theology of C. S. Lewis', *Modern Churchman* (1945), 317.

⁴² David Downing, 'When the Science is Fiction but the Faith Is Real', *Mere Christians*, 101.

the 1950s closed his article about ‘one of the most feared and most respected lay-apologists in Britain’ by saying that he had heard it suggested that Lewis should succeed the Archbishop of Canterbury and that, ‘It might be done if some detour around canon law could be constructed’; yet concluded simply, ‘it were far better for him to remain non-ecclesiastic—just Clive Staples Lewis, lay-apologist for the faith’.⁴³ Indeed Lewis’s individual authority was elevated, trumping any ecclesiastical or institutional power he may have possessed. Lewis’s authority was admired in so much as it was imagined to be *outside* church and university—not bound by these nor subject to them.

Authority based on individual conscience and experience is replicable. The physicist Constance Walker and the psychiatrist Allen Josephson were both impressed with *Mere Christianity* and with the man who wrote it, in part due to countered expectations—expectations that had previously made religious belief inaccessible or unappealing. For Walker, Lewis’s non-professional status was striking: ‘I was attracted by Lewis’s cogent logic couched in relaxed, everyday language. Apparently one could be a serious Christian without either shutting off one’s brain or becoming a theologian!’ Likewise, for Josephson Lewis was a gateway to Christianity, which circumvented familiar evangelistic tropes. He said:

Years ago, I discovered C.S. Lewis by reading his brief, yet profound, *Mere Christianity*. Like so many others of its readers, I was asking questions, lots of them, about God, purpose and meaning in life. I became exposed to an intellect so cleansing, thought so clear and purposeful, that I read and re-

⁴³ Claude H. Thompson, ‘The Unmaking of an Atheist’, *Emory University Quarterly* (October 1956), 156.

read his compelling logic. Lewis made no pretense about his intent - it was a Christian apologetic - yet he did it so winsomely and creatively, without preaching, that it was as if I didn't know what hit me.⁴⁴

One notes that *Mere Christianity* is described as an introduction to a person and an 'intellect'. The character of Lewis's person is deduced, by this psychiatrist and, as he says, so many others, from a book. Moreover, the Lewis 'met' or 'discovered' is someone who defies conventions that these Americans had previously found to hinder faith, especially the religious jargon or style typical of the academy or churches. Lewis is seen to be acting outside these boundaries and, unpleasant associations removed, felt to be communicating in a more personal, accessible way.

On the other hand, Lewis has also been associated with that which many evangelicals correlate with foreign, superior knowledge and thus is himself something beyond reach. There is a long history of American deference to and fascination with the 'British intellectual', generally. And it has been argued that after the Second World War educated Americans were particularly receptive to European culture, which was seen after the Allied victory to be part of America's past.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the city of Oxford has been shown to have exercised a particularly strong sway over the American imagination,

⁴⁴ Allen M. Josephson and Constance Kalbach Walker testimonies, collected by Rgeel [sic] and published under 'The Impact of Mere Christianity & Other Lewis Works' (13 September 2006), C. S. Lewis Institute, <http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/cslewis/Testimonials/constanceWalker.htm>, accessed 29 January 2010.

⁴⁵ Thomas Bender and Carl E Schorske. *American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 35; Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 'Greener Grass: Letters from America', 221-247 *passim*; See also Noam Chomsky and R. C. Lewontin, *The Cold War and the University: Toward An Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York: New Press, 1998).

as a place of unparalleled mystique and prestige.⁴⁶ Perry Bramlett, pastor and founder of a speaking ministry on Lewis, said that he travelled ‘to Lewis’s Oxford and Cambridge’ in order to ‘experience C. S. Lewis and his cities and his times’.⁴⁷ The draw of Oxford, articulated by Bramlett, has been described as primarily an aesthetic nostalgia for Englishness and an English past. Creative works on the part of Lewis devotees also support this assertion. One woman sent Lewis a poem she had written in 1958 about Lewis and the moment of his conversion. It begins: ‘When Magdalen, lily flower of Oxford/stone,/ Unfolded slender over Cherwell/stream,/ Nor architect nor craftsman then/could deem/ What in her secret chambers would/be known’.⁴⁸ Another devotee wrote what was bulleted as ‘An Inklings Novel’ about an American ‘aspiring doctoral candidate’ studying in Oxford, who takes up a quest to locate the ‘Spear of Destiny’, which pierced Jesus’ side, in England, aided by the Inklings.⁴⁹ In these works Oxford is the setting of sacred and ancient knowledge. In part to access that power, one science fiction writer, James Blish (who dedicated a novel to Lewis) moved from America to Oxford in 1969.⁵⁰ One of the earliest publications about Lewis was a book of photographs of Lewis

⁴⁶ Mortimer R. Proctor, *The English University Novel* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), especially ‘The Cult of Oxford’.

⁴⁷ Perry Bramlett, *C. S. Lewis’s Life at the Center* (Macon, Georgia: Peake Road), 69-71.

⁴⁸ ‘Sonnet: To C. S. Lewis’, Carrol Jenkins. Bodl. MS. Eng. Let. C. 220/6, fol. 98-99.

⁴⁹ David C. Downing, *Looking for the King: An Inklings Novel* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010). http://oxfordinklins.blogspot.com/2011_01_01_archive.html. Accessed 22 January 2011.

⁵⁰ D. Ketterer, *Imprisoned in a Tesseract: The Life and Work of James Blish* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1987). The novel was *Black Easter*. According to his biographer, Blish ‘must have viewed life in the vicinity of Oxford as equivalent to a resurrection into a new ideal life—including British pale ale, which he loved.’ (22) And his friend, Josephine Saxton, said Blish ‘adulated Oxford and all that it stands for, to him it was the centre of the educational universe’, *ibid.*, 324, note 57.

in Belfast and Oxford, Clyde Kilby's *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (1964).⁵¹ Finally, after the California based C. S. Lewis Society bought Lewis's home, The Kilns, outside Oxford, they 'restored' it to the aesthetic of Second World War England, complete with black-out curtains and (unused) freestanding ashtrays.⁵² Oxford, then, has been an important aspect of how Lewis has been imagined by Americans, associating him with an English past, prestige and spiritually and creatively charged places.

Both the accessible and inaccessible aspects of Lewis, as imagined by his devotees, were conducive to the American evangelical milieu. It is no surprise that this Lewis has appealed to the individualistic, often anti-clerical and anti-intellectual bent of American religiosity, that what we find is genius revered, in definitively Romantic terms. Written accounts of Lewis's impact by these devotees describe a religious epiphany, experienced at a time of faith crisis, prompted through the act of reading and resembling a conversion. Having recently returned from a pilgrimage to 'many of the places in Great Britain where Lewis actually lived and taught', one devotee wrote:

[A]s a college student I was facing some serious doubts about my faith and a friend suggested that I read a book called *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. Who would have thought that that advice, given some thirty-seven years ago, would have left such an indelible influence upon my life? Second only

⁵¹ Clyde Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1965). See also Charles Moorman, *The Precincts of Felicity: The Augustinian City of the Oxford Christians* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1966).

⁵² Author's stay in the home, February 2011.

to the New Testament, Lewis' works and life have touched my life, and, as a result, have helped direct me to a closer walk with Jesus Christ.⁵³

One could hardly come closer to the classic, evangelical born-again formula. But the crucial point is that the Lewis that Americans imagined is one ultimately charged with special insight of a *traditional* nature: revivalist religion seeks to re-awaken that which is faint and under threat of being lost. Lewis has been sought again and again because he was believed to possess that which is trustworthy—faith which rests on conscience, conversion and common-sense reasoning—and to be associated with places and people of orthodox genius. Lewis represents the past and the expressions of longing for him are also longings for a lost past.

In Britain, on the other hand, cultural factors fostering a romantic image of Lewis—geographical distance, Anglophilia—were absent. Consider the following description by Hugh Trevor-Roper, historian at Christ Church, Oxford at the time. Trevor-Roper's hyperbolic language and sarcasm turn on these very associations. He wrote:

Do you know C. S. Lewis? In case you don't, let me offer a brief character-sketch. Envisage (if you can) a man who combines the face and figure of a hog-reeve or earth-stopper with the mind and thought of a Desert Father of the fifth century, preoccupied with meditations of inelegant theological obscenity: a powerful mind warped by erudite philistinism, blackened by systematic bigotry, and directed by a positive detestation of such profane

⁵³ Richard James, 'Footprints Of An Old Friend', *Cumberland County News*, 'Pastor's Paragraph' (2 August 2000), <http://www.crlamppost.org/footprn4.htm>, accessed 22 May 2012.

frivolities as art, literature and (of course) poetry: a purple-faced bachelor and misogynist, living alone in rooms of inconceivable hideousness, secretly consuming vast quantities of his favourite dish--beefsteak-and-kidney-pudding; periodically trembling at the mere apprehension of a feminine footfall; and all the while distilling his morbid and illiberal thoughts into volumes of best-selling prurient religiosity and such reactionary nihilism as is indicated by the gleeful title, *The Abolition of Man*. Such is C. S. Lewis, whom Magdalen College have now put up to recapture their lost monopoly of the chair of Poetry.⁵⁴

Trevor-Roper's own prejudices are on display here—he said elsewhere 'I reject all religious systems and positively hate the arrogance of theological claims on which they are ultimately based'.⁵⁵ Still, the flair of the portrait hinges on the image of a man whose mind, able as it was, was *nonetheless* animated by the past, was inward looking and immobilized by fear. Lewis's association with the past and the religiosity of a by-gone age was also shown to be distasteful to many critics of the *The Chronicles of Narnia*⁵⁶ and, above, in comments by Harries. This suggests that some of the attributes comprising Lewis's platform which many Americans, especially evangelicals, found endearing, many British found irritating or even invidious. Lewis's affiliation with an earlier time, with

⁵⁴ Hugh Trevor-Roper to Wallace Notestein, 28 January 1951, in *Letters from Oxford: Hugh Trevor-Roper to Bernard Berenson*, ed. Richard Davenport-Hines (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 287.

⁵⁵ Trevor-Roper, 'Autopsy'. Ibid, xx.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Oxford and the aesthetics of 1940s England, for Americans evoked a sense of authority; but for many British they smacked of dogmatism.

Indeed Lewis's respective platforms in Britain and America contributed to there being a large number of devotees in the States for a combination of religious and cultural reasons. It was mentioned in chapter three that Britain was less receptive to the assuredness Lewis projected than America, partly for reasons related to the trajectory of Christianity in these respective countries. In America Lewis's platform as a brazen Christian at Oxford was to an extent a reflection of many Christians' own disputatious history with higher education, especially science. Lewis therefore appealed to evangelicals, especially, as a figure defending faith against hostile forces. The crusader image of Lewis was one that never dissipated, continuing to inspire titles like *Lewis Agonistes: How C. S. Lewis Can Train Us to Wrestle with the Modern and Postmodern World*.⁵⁷ In this conflict, decisive victory was wanted—evidence that Christianity was an intellectually credible religion. Surety in faith still mattered greatly to the majority of evangelical America. Lewis's confident tone and appeals to reason and evidence were important to his American reception—explaining why *In Search of Certainty* was co-authored by men who had both written about Lewis, and Art Lindsley, who worked for the C. S. Lewis Institute in Washington, D.C., wrote *True Truth, Defending Absolute Truth in a Relativistic World*.⁵⁸ For many American evangelicals, especially those attending

⁵⁷ Louis Markos, *Lewis Agonistes: How C.S. Lewis Can Train Us to Wrestle With the Modern and Postmodern World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003).

⁵⁸ Arthur William Lindsley, *True truth: Defending absolute truth in a relativistic world* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

university, being able to feel confidence in the soundness of the evidence of their faith continued to be critically important.

Not all American Christians have cared for Lewis's tone of certitude. The opinion of Chad Walsh, the first American to write a monograph on Lewis, altered on this point. Upon first encountering Lewis, he felt he had 'found in Lewis an uncompromising exponent of no-nonsense theology, expressed with a rigor of mind and a graciousness of style, plus a soaring imagination'; rereading Lewis twenty-five years later he was struck by 'something shrill and sharp-edged about his writings at times, the treatment of morality in particular. Too much rule-book advice, too many either/or legalisms', continuing, 'I also began to be troubled at what seemed a willful disregard of the present and its main thinkers in favor of the past.'⁵⁹

In Britain many more people voiced opinions resembling the latter-day Walsh's. While dining at Magdalen College, Oxford some twenty years after publishing a critique of Lewis in *Christian Century*, the well-known American liberal theologian Norman Pittenger, who had published a critique of Lewis in 1958,⁶⁰ was asked by the Vice-President for his thoughts about the college's famed Christian writer. He records, 'When I replied that I thought that Lewis was not satisfactory as an apologist because of this excessive dogmatism, I was told that exactly this feeling prevailed in his old college and that that he had put a great many people "off" because of this attitude.'⁶¹ Indeed, it was a widely

⁵⁹ Chad Walsh, foreword to *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis* by William L White (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1969).

⁶⁰ Norman W. Pittenger, 'Apologist Versus Apologist', *Christian Century* (1 October 1958), 1104–1107.

⁶¹ Norman Pittenger, 'C. S. Lewis: Combative in Defense', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* (Fall 1981), 14.

shared sentiment. Alec Vidler, dean of King's College, Cambridge, a theologian and, in general, an admirer of Lewis, said, 'For all its resourcefulness, Lewis' mind was hard and unreceptive to what was not congenial to it.'⁶² A. C. Deane, canon of Worcester Cathedral, in a review of *The Great Divorce*, was critical of what he perceived to come through in the book: the 'metallic hardness of its tone, its air of disdain, untouched by sympathy, for the various weaknesses of human nature'.⁶³ In 1970 the tellingly entitled *Times Literary Supplement* article 'Hard, polemical, black-or-white, them or us' wondered *if* Lewis had been content to live more in 'doubts and uncertainties', and been less 'hot for certainties in this our life', whether he would have been a better writer, answering, 'It is perhaps a futile question, for he would have been another man.' Having noted the 'special coterie cult that has gathered round [Lewis'] memory', the author concluded:

As a religious apologist, [Lewis's] striking and often brutal surface effectiveness means, in the end, that he does not quite speak to the condition of our time; and his clarity is that of the debater, and of the man scoring points against others, it is not a self-piercing clarity like that, for instance, of Pascal, Kierkegaard or Newman.⁶⁴

Lewis's lack of receptivity to the 'moods of doubt' was commented upon, indeed, repeatedly. A. Powell Davies, a British Unitarian writing in the American periodical *New Republic*, responded to Lewis's claim to speak for a 'great common faith', one which was

⁶² Alec Vidler, 'Unapologetic Apologist', *Book Week* (July 26, 1964), 3.

⁶³ A. C. Deane, 'A Nightmare', *Spectator* (25 January 1946): 96.

⁶⁴ Anon., 'Hard, polemical, black-or-white, them or us' *Times Literary Supplement* (31 July 1970), 853-4. Nominally in response to Walter Hooper's *Selected Literary Essays and Narrative Poems* (see chapter three, note 115).

‘palpable, immediate and unavoidable’: ‘Actually’, Davies said, ‘he is an apologist for the entire dogmatic system of traditional Christianity, which even an orthodox theologian would scarcely describe as “palpable,” and which some of the rest of us have found not very immediate nor even unavoidable.’⁶⁵ Lewis’s reputation as an apologist was undeniably hampered for many British people by his platform as a contrarian and his dogmatic tone.

In chapter four it was demonstrated that many British critics found the morality depicted in the *Chronicles* repugnant because of a perceived dogmatism. This was an opinion also maintained by some British Christians.⁶⁶ Giles Fraser, team rector of Putney and lecturer in philosophy at Wadham College, Oxford, wrote in the *Church Times* in 2005 that he objected to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*’s ‘offensively right-wing politics and warmongering—all sugar-coated for camouflage’. But, he continued, what he hated above all about the books was the:

[U]nremitting Manichaeism—that dualistic philosophy that proposes the eternal battle between good and evil. Like the cosmology of the heretical Manichees, the world of Narnia is divided into the nice and the nasty, the warm and the frozen, the light and the dark. The goodies are recognizably good, and the baddies bad.⁶⁷

The presentation of morality within the *Chronicles* has been questioned by British Christians. More telling has been another striking contrast: the *absence* in Britain of a

⁶⁵ A. Powell Davies, ‘Breezy Orthodoxy’, *New Republic* (1 May 1953), 26.

⁶⁶ See chapter four, 156-166.

⁶⁷ Giles Fraser, ‘Potter Can Beat Aslan Every Time’, *Church Times* (9 December 2005), 9.

phenomenon that has been pronounced in the States: conservative Christians publishing books advocating the use of the Narnia books as Christian teaching aids.⁶⁸ Many of these were timed to take advantage of the publicity the *Chronicles* gained with the release of the 2005 Disney movie version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.⁶⁹ Kurt Bruner, a pastor and executive director of the Center for Strong Families, and Olivia Bruner, a speaker and author co-wrote *Finding God in the Land of Narnia* (2005)⁷⁰; Christian Ditchfield, host of the nationally syndicated radio program, *Take It To Heart*, published *A Family Guide to Narnia: Biblical Truths In C.S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia* (2003)⁷¹; and Robert Velarde, an editor with Focus on the Family, a non-profit promoting evangelical family values, published *The Heart of Narnia: Wisdom, Virtue, and Life Lessons from the Classic Chronicles* (2008)⁷². As their titles suggest, these 'study guides' and 'companions' aimed to make explicit the perceived didactic purpose and 'message' of the Narnia books. In Britain it is fair to say the *Chronicles* have been popular among children, parents and teachers *despite* so many objections to their morality. Indeed, not many British Christians have responded enthusiastically to the didactic element of the Narnia books *as such* in the way that many in the States did. In America it was *precisely* the dogma perceived to be enshrined in the Narnia books which appealed so powerfully to

⁶⁸ Mark J. Pinsky acknowledged the abundance of 'study guides' and 'companions' in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Winter 2006), 90.

⁶⁹ See chapter 3, note 138.

⁷⁰ Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware, *Finding God in the Land of Narnia*, (Wheaton, IL.: SaltRiver, 2005).

⁷¹ Christian Ditchfield, *A Family Guide to Narnia: Biblical Truths in C. S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia* (Crossway Books: Wheaton, 2003).

⁷² Robert Velarde, *The Heart of Narnia: Wisdom, Virtue and Life Lessons From the Classic Chronicles*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008).

many conservative Christians. Again, the reception of Lewis's hard lines and 'good or bad' morality pointed to a contrast between British and American receptions of Lewis.

Lewis's person, his apologetics and his Narnia books all were criticized by British Christians for being 'hard' and uncongenial to the temper of the age. A Christianity that recognized nuance and shades of gray—qualities perceived to be conspicuously absent from Lewis's writings—was felt by many to be more fitted to twentieth-century life. In a second respect, too, many British Christians felt that Lewis had fallen short.

Dissatisfaction was expressed with the apologist's seemingly indiscriminate disparagement of all things modern, on the grounds of their modernity. Lewis's perceived dismissal of political engagement and contemporary religious writers, in particular, was disconcerting. Lord Hailsham, referenced in chapter three, thought the 'biggest difficulty' of *Surprised by Joy* was Lewis's 'habit of sneering repeatedly, and, at least in my opinion, always cheaply, at public life'.⁷³ A. W. Watts likewise felt that Lewis's 'ill-concealed glee in adopting an old-fashioned and unpopular position, and in making witty thrusts at characteristically modern positions which are held as not just partially but absolutely off the right track' blinded the apologist, giving him 'little or no conception of the part which modern criticisms of the Church play in developing a more profound and mature understanding of the Faith'.⁷⁴

⁷³ Quintin Hogg Hailsham, 'Dr. Lewis's Pilgrimage', *Spectator* (9 December 1955): 2.

⁷⁴ A. W. Watts, *Behold The Spirit, A Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion* (New York: Pantheon, 1947), 185, footnote 1. Watts added, 'A similar attitude is to be noted in many of the champions of Protestant neo-Orthodoxy, and it is significant that all steer clear of the whole subject of mysticism'.

There has been an incongruity between Lewis's approach to Christianity and that of many British people, especially with respect to his tendency towards presenting dichotomies and the disparaging attitude he expressed toward modern, especially public, life. As demonstrated in chapter two, Lewis was impervious to modernist literature and poetry; and his priority with his Christian writings was largely to recover the wisdom of past perspectives, not to engage seriously with the work of his age's most influential religious thinkers. When an American woman wrote to him and asked what modern theologians he recommended reading, Lewis replied 'I am v. [sic] ill acquainted with modern theological literature, having seldom found it helpful', and he suggested G. K. Chesterton's *Everlasting Man*.⁷⁵ And when Lewis was asked for his thoughts about one of the most influential religious books to be published in his lifetime, John Robinson's *Honest to God* (1963), he replied curtly, 'I prefer being honest to being "honest to God."' ⁷⁶ Indeed, Lewis's tone toward Robinson's book, as expressed in a critique he submitted to *The Observer*, was sufficiently condescending that Bishop Richard Harries described the review as written with 'a lordly disdain and academic "put down" that was almost breathtaking'.⁷⁷ Lewis dismissed the content as unoriginal and argued that where it might have been offering something novel one could not be sure for the obscurity of

⁷⁵ Lewis to Janet Wise, (5th October 1955), in *C.S. Lewis: Collected Letters, Volume 3: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy (1950-1963)*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 652.

⁷⁶ Sherwood E. Wirt, 'I Was Decided Upon: An Interview with C. S. Lewis', *Decision* 4 (September 1963): 3.

⁷⁷ Lewis and Robinson were compared by Adrian Hastings in *A History of English Christianity, 1920-2000*. (London: SCM Press, 2001), 537; Farrer also discussed the difference between them in *Light on Lewis*.

the writing; Lewis was, in conclusion, 'not shocked'.⁷⁸ On another occasion, having expressed distaste for the 'sort of theology' a book by Alec Vidler contained, Lewis was asked to share his views at Westcott House, Cambridge, an Anglican theological college.⁷⁹ In the paper he delivered before ordinands entitled 'Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism', Lewis expressed his skepticism about the critical capabilities and methodologies of modern, liberal Biblical scholars, qualifying his remarks with the declaration that he spoke only as one ignorant of theology and with the aim of providing his audience with a view from the 'outside'.⁸⁰ Whether in private or public, Lewis, whilst claiming ignorance, did not hesitate to express criticism of modern theologians—or, as he categorized them, 'views like Loisy's or Schweitzer's or Bultmann's or Tillich's or even Alec Vidler's'.⁸¹

Lewis chose to play the part of the 'outsider' and therefore offered little in the way of constructive engagement with some of the key intellectual developments of his time. In this respect he was, whether in matters of theology or literary criticism or whatever, meeting early twentieth-century Oxbridge expectations of an Ulsterman. Indeed, several of Lewis's contemporaries commented on Lewis's Irish roots, often in the context of his being unconventional, confrontational or difficult. A don at Magdalen

⁷⁸ Interview in 1963 by Sherwood E. Wirt called "I was decided upon: An Interview with C.S. Lewis, *Decision* (September 1963), 3. On Honest to God see McLeod's comments in *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 84.

⁷⁹ Interestingly, this is despite the fact that in the late 1930s Lewis had agreed to Vidler's request to be a 'collaborator' on *Theology* magazine, part of Vidler's effort to shape the journal into 'an organ of Anglican theological thought as a whole and not only of Cambridge liberal Catholicism', Alec Vidler, *Scenes from a Clerical Life: An Autobiography* (London: Collins, 1977), 111-12.

⁸⁰ Lewis, 'Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism', *Christian Reflections*, 152-166.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

College, Bruce McFarlane, wrote that the college's fellowship was almost unanimous in its rejection of the Munich agreement in 1938 (wherein, in a bid to avoid war, representatives from Britain [Neville Chamberlain], Italy and France signed an agreement with Adolf Hitler conceding to Germany an area of Czechoslovakia in exchange for the promise that in the future all land disputes would be decided by an international commission⁸²):

The unanimity of dons is quite unprecedented. Even the President is sound. There's only one Chamberlain supporter in Magdalen—Lewis who is so otherworldly that he thinks the Munich settlement a victory for self-determination. I suggested the same treatment for Ulster & [sic] he was quite shocked.⁸³

The politics of the Munich settlement are less relevant here than the fact that the comment reveals that Lewis was thought of, at Magdalen, as an Ulsterman, and his opinions were understood in that light. Many years later, in 1990, Kingsley Amis, the English novelist, said of Lewis:

He was prone to an excessively bluff and breezy way with obstinate opponents or thorny points that can amount to loud-mouthed arrogance, reminding one uncomfortably that he was an Ulsterman, an Orangeman,

⁸² 'Munich Agreement', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/397522/Munich-Agreement>, accessed 10 September 2013.

⁸³ Bruce McFarlane, MC:P27/Ci/341, 8 October 1938. Quoted in L. W. B. Brockliss (ed.), *Magdalen College, Oxford: A History* (Oxford: Magdalen College, 2008), 606.

suggesting now and then a miraculously learned and intelligent Ian Paisley.⁸⁴

But it was not only those who were, perhaps, less than receptive to Lewis's views or personality who perceived an Ulster influence. Lewis's friend J. R. R. Tolkien wrote in 1964, 'C. S. Lewis of course had some oddities and could sometimes be irritating. He was after all and remained an Irishman of Ulster.'⁸⁵ Another friend and member of the Inklings group, John Walsh, also noted Lewis's tendency to be combative, adding 'maybe it was the Irish in him'.⁸⁶ These observations demonstrate that Lewis's Belfast roots were perceived by people, including those close to him, to have shaped his point of view and the often confrontational way in which he interacted with others, whether friends, colleagues or 'enemies'.

Sheridan Gilley, emeritus reader in Catholic History at Durham University and from Northern Ireland, has said, 'I am not sure how many readers outside Ulster would know [Lewis] was an Ulsterman, and I cannot see that the Province had much direct influence on his work or did anything to make him a Christian.'⁸⁷ It is true that many (notably Americans) have not been aware of Lewis's Ulster roots (much less understood what being an Ulsterman signified culturally). And yet it seems quite clear that Lewis's upbringing was formative to his identity⁸⁸ and, thus, his work. More to the point, Lewis's

⁸⁴ Kingsley Amis, review of Wilson's biography *The Sunday Telegraph* (18 February 1990), 51.

⁸⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien to Anne Barrett, Houghton Mifflin Co. (30 August 1964), in Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 350.

⁸⁶ John Walsh, in interview with the author, 4 March 2010.

⁸⁷ Sheridan Gilley, 'A Prophet Neither in Ireland Nor in England', The Third C. S. Lewis Memorial Lecture, *Journal of the Irish Christian Study Centre* Vol. 3 (25 October 1985), 1.

⁸⁸ See chapter two, 25-38.

showmanship and his resistance to modernity in its many expressions were *perceived* to be related to his Ulster background. David Hempton, an historian of evangelical Protestant Christianity and an Irishman, and Myrtle Hill, another Irish historian have observed that the common perception of the area is that of an ‘eccentricity of its people in refusing to come to terms with the modern world by holding onto its divisive religious heritage’.⁸⁹ Being an Ulster Irishman has historically had connotations of a people set against change and holding tight to traditional Protestant identities. Therefore Lewis’s often dismissive attitude toward theologians who were working to understand how established beliefs fit within modern scholarship and the changing political and social landscape was in keeping with the Ulster manner. Lewis, more than many in Oxbridge, stood outside—and was perceived to stand outside—the changing tides shaping Britain and, especially, British Christianity.

Lewis was deliberately out of step with modern life. It was something that stemmed in part from his Edwardian reading, his philosophy of literature and his Christianity, as seen in chapter two; but it was also part of his contrarian persona—an artifice that may be traced, as well, to what it meant for Lewis to be an Ulsterman in Oxbridge. The significance of Lewis’s Ulster roots to the question of why there have been devotees in America and not in Britain is related to the contrasting trajectories of Christianity in these respective countries. Simply put, much of British evangelicalism has measured itself against the standard of honest, active engagement with the complex

⁸⁹ David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society 1740-1890* (London: Routledge, 1992), xi.

issues facing Christian theology, their neighbors and the world at large. Therefore for many British Christians, conservative and liberal, this meant that the confident, defensive and reasoned Christianity Lewis *represented* had to be left behind. Resisting change put Lewis at cross-purposes with some key ways in which the mainstream of British Christianity, and especially its leadership, was responding to the dramatic social and theological developments of the twentieth century.

The first evolution of modern thought with implications for Lewis's reception was the popularization and legitimization of doubt as a valid epistemological stance. Sociologist Hugh McLeod has identified 1869 as a turning point in the history of secularization because T. H. Huxley coined the term 'agnostic', thereby providing doubters with a 'socially acceptable and intellectually plausible means of defining their religious position'.⁹⁰ The moment was an important one in the gradual development, from at least the eighteenth century, within the educated classes of scepticism as an *a priori* intellectual position. The decline of belief in the possibility of belief was a product of an increasingly widespread questioning of traditional belief systems, historical narratives and authority structures. Developments in the natural and social sciences, especially Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Sigmund Freud's explorations of human psychology, as well as increased knowledge of foreign cultures, resulted in the undermining of long-held epistemologies built upon Christian beliefs and traditions. It was not only *what* people believed but their belief in the *defensibility* of what they believed that slowly changed. The complexity of life was always becoming more apparent

⁹⁰ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 179.

to the nineteenth and twentieth century British intelligentsia; comprehensible explanatory systems of any and all kinds, for many, appeared more intellectually dubious.⁹¹

Such scepticism became more common in the closing decades of the nineteenth century and popularized further in the twentieth,⁹² with important implications for British Christianity and also, therefore, Lewis's reception. It was a period in which traditional religious practices overlapped with sceptical worldviews. We saw, for example, from the examination of war-time radio addresses over the BBC that the 1940s was a time in which Christianity was still commonly defended on the grounds of reason and natural theology but that it was also acknowledged by Christian leaders that faith in belief itself was being challenged.⁹³ It was argued in 1963 that the preceding decades had witnessed an evolution in preaching style to meet the 'radical shaping of the defence and exposition of the Christian faith and life' — a more 'confidential tone' had evolved from 'oratorical certitude'.⁹⁴ Then, Hugh McLeod and Callum Brown, also a sociologists of religion, have shown, the 1960s saw acceleration in the 'repudiation of self-evident "truths"', in Brown's words.⁹⁵ Evidence from Lewis's reception suggests the same. A 1966 article by Graham Hough, Professor of English at Cambridge University, asked how Lewis's famous fictional

⁹¹ Drawing here from, especially: Peter J Bowler and Iwan Rhys Morus, *Making Modern Science: a Historical Survey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Frank M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Harvie Ferguson, *The Lure of Dreams: Sigmund Freud and the Construction of Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 1996); Peter B. Hinchliff, *God and History: Aspects of British Theology, 1875-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ See chapter two, 57.

⁹⁴ Horton Davies, *Varieties of English Preaching: 1900-1960* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 20-23.

⁹⁵ Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2000).

devil Screwtape from *The Screwtape Letters* would have provoked doubt within a reader of the post-war generation, answering:

If Screwtape had read a later theology he would hardly have been afraid of humanity's *reasoning* itself into faith. An existentialist devil would have attacked not his victim's rationality, but his power of choice, his capacity for taking the leap. Or have persuaded his prey into a systematic, rational belief only to subvert it with the terrifying actuality of the absurd. But Screwtape seems to have been convinced by Chesterton—too easily it may seem to a later generation.⁹⁶

The evolution of mores between the days of Christian popularizer G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) and 1966 were, indeed, great. The intellectual war that Lewis and many of his generation fought seemed to many of the post 1960s generation to be over—or, at least, to have shifted to other ground.

This brings us to the second development to consider. In 1967 the National Evangelical Anglican Congress marked a resurgence of evangelicalism in Britain. The 1960s and post-1960s evangelicals voiced their intention, in that important convention and afterwards, of shaping the Anglican community, participating in ecumenical ventures and becoming key players in addressing the social ills of the nation.⁹⁷ In other words, evangelicalism in Britain was marked for its interest in *engagement*. The attitude was a repudiation of sectarian tendencies which, though never as pronounced in Britain as in

⁹⁶ Graham Hough, 'The Screwtape Letters', *The Times* (10 February 1966), 15.

⁹⁷ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 249-251.

America,⁹⁸ nonetheless were present to the degree that Christian leaders felt that a concerted effort was required during the Second World War in order to stress the beliefs held in common by all Christians.⁹⁹ The attitude of engagement extended to social action meant that evangelicals could be numbered among those addressing issues like global poverty, for example, by creating The Evangelical Alliance Relief (TEAR) Fund.¹⁰⁰

Ecumenicism, it has been argued, has been *the* defining ethos of post-war British evangelicalism.¹⁰¹

Generally speaking, globalization, the ecumenical movement and Britain's national ethos has inspired evangelicalism to move away from a more inward-looking to a more outward-looking perspective. Conservative Christianity in Britain was not untouched by what Callum Brown has described as a post-1960s stress in Britain upon new ethical concerns, especially 'environmentalism, gender and racial equality, nuclear weapons and power, vegetarianism, the well-being of body and mind'.¹⁰² For example, in a 2013 discussion, Kris Kandiah, executive director of England/Churches in Mission at Evangelical Alliance, Britain's largest coalition of evangelicals, expressed a clear concern with the same attributes which distinguished the 1967 National Evangelical Anglican Congress: ecumenicism and social action.¹⁰³ Increasing liberalism on social issues has been an important part of conservative Christianity since the Second World War, especially. These same areas are ones in which Lewis has been criticized by British writers: his inflexible or

⁹⁸ Bebbington, 'Baptists and Fundamentalism', *Protestant Evangelicalism*, 323.

⁹⁹ See chapter two, 51-55.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 264-267.

¹⁰¹ Steve Bruce *Firm in the Faith* 1984, 34.

¹⁰² Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 2009 edition, 190.

¹⁰³ Kandiah, interview with author, 4 July 2013.

colluding tone; his depiction of gender roles and non-white races, and of a ‘black and white’ morality; his lack of engagement with contemporary, especially theological, thought; and his tendency to disparage public life. Such criticisms were reflections precisely of ways in which Christianity was changing in response to the pressures of secularization occurring within Lewis’s lifetime and even more so from the 1960s.

In the States a very different situation emerged. In 1965 Austin Farrer, the British theologian and friend of Lewis, credited America’s being ‘a far less de-Christianized country than England’ for the enthusiasm with which Americans embraced Lewis, a phenomenon which ‘astonish[ed] his most enthusiastic English friends’.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, due in part to the larger population and size of the States a far greater number of American Christians responded with resistance to modernity than was the case in Britain. Scholars working on the recent Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism in Britain project have argued that Fundamentalism—that portion of Christianity most resistant to change—in Britain was, in contrast to the situation in America, neither a large nor a forceful movement.¹⁰⁵ A Christian fundamentalist understands the world through a *theological* lens: knowledge, for them, is governed by the primary facts of importance, namely, the nature of God and his relationship to the natural and human world. Reality is understood through an *a priori* system of Christian thought, ultimately based on the Bible and denominational

¹⁰⁴ Austin Farrer, ‘The Christian Apologist’, *Light on Lewis*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ See David Bebbington’s summary of the findings of the project, ‘Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in Britain’ in *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in Britain*, forthcoming, . George Marsden also compared Britain and American Fundamentalism in ‘Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon’ in *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Second Edition), 221-28.

traditions.¹⁰⁶ The greater number of fundamentalists in the States, of varying shades, has meant that more American Christians have been inclined to fight to retain beliefs and practices, unchanged, rather than to accommodate shifting cultural and intellectual ethos. Many more Christians in the States remained much more conservative on social and theological issues—and more in keeping with Lewis’s anti-modern stance.

The occasion that evangelicals faced intellectual challenges most frequently was at university, a topic taken up by Edward Dutton in *Meeting Jesus at University*¹⁰⁷ and by George Marsden in *The Soul of the American University*.¹⁰⁸ In the expansion of universities in the post Second World War era, conservative Christians have participated in the striving of the American middle classes for upward mobility through education. From 1977 to 2007, the percentage of evangelicals in the States earning at least a college degree increased 133%—more than any other religious tradition.¹⁰⁹ And yet in keeping with the conservative inclination, what was often wanted was a system in which new knowledge agreed seamlessly with what was already held true and verified by experience. Christian beliefs were the frame of a house in which, many hoped, additions of new knowledge would be smoothly incorporated: the making of a complete structure. Lewis provided both expansion and constancy for Christians in the university context. One seminary professor wrote that reading *Mere Christianity* left a strong impression on him

¹⁰⁶ David W. Bebbington and David Ceri Jones, eds. *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom During the Twentieth Century*. Corby: Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Dutton, *Meeting Jesus at University: Rites of Passage and Student Evangelicals* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁹ Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power*, 75-79.

because there was a 'sense that I had come into contact with "truth"'. He said of his reading experience:

That afternoon I felt my world shift and creak and start to open up. I was a Christian to be sure. I was committed. I was serious. But my world view was narrow. Through the eyes of C. S. Lewis I began to get glimpses of a wider world out there. A world filled with love and joy and longing. A world I had hardly imagined could exist. A world in which God was alive.¹¹⁰

On their path of upward mobility, Lewis was a nonthreatening way to broaden evangelicals' intellectual and religious knowledge, disrupting insularity but also inspiring. One devotee, James Como, wrote that Lewis was a 'sort of author--a "discovery" of the first order--that compels a reader to spread the word, so strikingly direct and familiar is his voice, so bracing his thought'.¹¹¹ Others, like Peter Shakel wrote whole monographs on the subject, like the 2008 title *Is your Lord Large Enough: How C. S. Lewis Expands Our View of God*. A member of the New York C. S. Lewis society wrote, 'I owe to Lewis an "enormous extension" of my being. As he himself said of reading, "I transcend myself, and am never more myself than when I do."' ¹¹² As this woman demonstrated, Lewis devotees have tended to quote Lewis in their own descriptions of his influence on their lives.

¹¹⁰ C. S. Lewis testimonials file, Wade, csl-MISC.

¹¹¹ James Como, *Branches to Heaven*, ix.

¹¹² Ruthe T. Spinnanger, 'Excerpts from Letters', *Bulletin*, Vol. 18 (1987), 8.

Indeed much of the literature published about Lewis in the United States was by people who found Lewis's person and writings to be an anchoring and, simultaneously, an expanding force while at university. Desiring to share the experience they had through reading Lewis, they have perpetuated his influence by talking about him, teaching classes about him and publishing books and articles about him. Tom Morris, an American philosopher, wrote about the many students of philosophy, including himself, who were inspired by Lewis. Crediting the 'clarity of [Lewis's] thought and the scintillating crispness of what he wrote', Morris spoke of Lewis's books having 'launched into the world a nearly steady stream of new Christian philosophers and intellectuals' and 'stimulated generations of readers to aspire to some measure of that intellectual power and to at least a small fraction of the positive impact that Lewis has had in people's lives'.¹¹³ Morris continued, 'I for one became a philosopher in part because of the influence of C. S. Lewis. He was a vivid role model and a potent stimulus that set me out on the very first steps of a great adventure, initially on the path of academic philosophy and then later on to a broader cultural calling as a philosopher.'¹¹⁴ Similarly, Eugene McGovern, one of the founders of the New York C. S. Lewis Society, expressed dependence on Lewis bluntly:

I am one of those who were fascinated by *Screwtape*, were soon pestering people with quotations from *The Problem of Pain*, and then were pressing *Perelandra* on those who would still patiently hear about the author we had found....I have gone on to become one of those readers to whom

¹¹³ Tom Morris, *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness and Beauty*, eds. Baggett, David, Gary R Habermas, and Jerry L Walls, (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 10.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Lewis's publishers are grateful: readers who have read very little Milton but have read *A Preface to Paradise Lost*; whose knowledge of English literature in the sixteenth century, whether including or excluding drama, is limited to Lewis's *Oxford History* volume; and who will die without having read Spenser, though they have read *The Allegory of Love*.¹¹⁵

Devotees like Morris and McGovern often have been inspired by Lewis's writing to launch their own academic careers and talk about the man for many years to come in the church, college and university environments in which they establish themselves.

Naturally there was a diversity of backgrounds, expectations and experiences within conservative Christians' interaction with institutions of higher education in the post-war decades. Some would have felt no tension whatsoever between the faith and knowledge they came to university with and that which they encountered away from home. And C. S. Lewis was nothing like a universally familiar and admired name. Furthermore, evangelicals' experiences at university would have also depended on the years they attended, the region of the country in which they lived, what kind of institution they chose, what field of study they pursued and the specific individuals with whom they interacted. For example, implications could be inferred from Thomas Bender's and Carl E. Schorske's argument that the cultural revolution of the 1960s led to

¹¹⁵ Eugene McGovern, 'Our Need for Such a Guide', *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table*, 227-8.

a radical loss of confidence in systems and ideologies of all kinds: political, social and religious traditions were challenged with breathtaking verve.¹¹⁶

Evidence from Lewis's reception suggests that for many Christians attending universities, Lewis was a trusted, representative figure, who served as a bridge to new possibilities. Oxford credentials and his platform as a proponent of Christian orthodoxy meant he was safe; but it was also attractive that he was outside the Christian worlds familiar to many Christian young people. Lewis's platform was almost uniquely suited to evangelicals' fortunes in post-Second World War America, wherein, having been shaped by fundamentalist tendencies they often experienced the higher education environment as one of crisis or liberation. Having been designated the champion of orthodoxy at Oxford, Lewis was the antidote for just such a situation as evangelicals now faced. Thus the higher education context, it may be said, was critical to Lewis's reception in the States and especially in their having been so many people who were enamored by his person.

One American Lewis admirer wrote in 1973:

During college were [sic] all sorts of things I wanted to know about Christianity and I bought *Mere Christianity* from an [Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship] book table. I found not only answers but a glistening personality and world view expressed in irresistible terms. So I read on—as I do now.¹¹⁷

Answers, personality and a world-view are a good summary of what many American conservative Christians sought. Lewis was uniquely helpful to people turning, perhaps for

¹¹⁶ Thomas Bender and Carl E Schorske, *American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 7.

¹¹⁷ James Bean, 'Excerpt from Letters', *Bulletin*, Vol. 5, no. 50 (December 1973).

the first time, to first things. Lewis's platform, however, did not have the equivalent suggestion of expansion and safety to Christians in Britain. In fact, Lewis represented the antithesis of many increasingly important developments within British Christianity: ecumenicism, engagement and social activism. These differences between British and American Christians' reactions to modernity, broadly defined, made the difference to Lewis's posthumous reception.

Lewis himself was aware of the difference between Christianity in Britain and the States and, to a degree, the role it played in his being courted by Americans. His friend Neville Coghill wrote that upon one of his last visits to Lewis at his home he found him writing an article for a 'popular American weekly'. Coghill recalled:

I asked him how he came to be writing for the popular American weekly. How did he know what to write about or what to say? 'Oh,' he said, 'they have somehow got the idea that I am an unaccountably paradoxical dog, and they name the subject on which they want me to write; and they pay generously.' 'And so you set to work and invent a few paradoxes?' [Lewis said:] 'Not a bit of it. What I do is to recall, as well as I can, what my mother used to say on the subject, eke it out with a few similar thoughts of my own, and so produce what would have been strict orthodoxy in about 1900. And this seems to them outrageously paradoxical, *avant garde* stuff.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Neville Coghill, *Light on Lewis*, 64.

Lewis was paradoxical in the most satisfying of ways for many American Christians. His self-conscious resistance to change, his reformulation of what was, in Britain, becoming a *passé* worldview was sought out by American evangelicals. For them, Lewis continued to be relevant because he was still fighting the right battles, indeed, still *perceived* and spoke about Christian life in embattled terms. The transatlantic divide meant little because this Ulsterman remained on a battlefield the British had largely abandoned (or, more precisely, now denied was there), but one in which Americans continued to set up camp. However, as will be seen in the final section, this transatlantic difference is not necessarily the final say in Lewis's British and American reception.

Lewis's Reception in Britain since 2000

Christopher Hitchens, the late British atheist popularizer, wrote in his 2007 book *God Is Not Great* that Lewis had 'recently reemerged as the most popular Christian apologist' and described him as the 'main chosen propaganda vehicle for Christianity in our time' (emphasis added).¹¹⁹ Why 'recently'? This final section will consider some evidence that suggests that an increased American influence upon British Christianity, and especially evangelicals, has occurred within the last decade or so, which, in turn, has had a bearing on Lewis's reception. By means of prominent individuals, especially, Lewis appears to have been re-imported back into prominence within British Christian life.

A key difference between Lewis's reception in Britain and America, as was stressed earlier in the chapter, has been one of scale, in the *number* of Lewis devotees. Indeed important evangelical leaders in Britain, when asked to speak about Lewis's

¹¹⁹ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 118.

reception, have tended to stress the comparative size of British and American evangelical communities. Kris Kandiah of Evangelical Alliance said of his experience working with evangelicals on a national and international level, 'We don't really have the same platform in the UK that the States have. If you go and speak at university, there'll be a couple of hundred students, rather than in the States you could fill a large auditorium.'¹²⁰ Another very well known evangelical leader interviewed about Lewis's reception, Michael Green, executive director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, likewise stressed the importance of keeping in mind evangelicals' relative size and influence when it came to comparing Lewis's reception in Britain and America.¹²¹ The scale of Britain's evangelical scene was suggested in yet another interview with the curriculum coordinator of the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics (OCCA) in that it was revealed that the programme of 2011 had the relatively small number of 19 students, with 25-30 expected for 2012.¹²² The OCCA was begun in 2005 as a partnership between Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and Zacharias Trust of the American foundation Ravi International Ministries. The curriculum coordinator said that an American ethos prevailed in the institute and that many American students participate in its summer school.¹²³

Within this relatively small community key individuals have a big influence. It was mentioned above that there have been very few Lewis devotees in Britain. That is true, but these individuals have tended to have an effect upon the British evangelical scene out

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Michael Green, phone interview with author, 10 July 2013.

¹²² Alanna McLeod, interview with author, 28 February 2011.

¹²³ Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics website, <http://theoCCA.org/occa>, accessed 29 September 2013; and Alanna McLeod, in interview with author, 28 February 2011.

of proportion to their numbers. Interestingly, two such admirers of Lewis share in common a Northern Ireland background, degrees in the sciences and theology, and have been professors at Oxford University. Alistair McGrath and John Lennox both, moreover, have both held public debates and published works in response to renowned atheists Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking and Christopher Hitchens.¹²⁴ McGrath has been particularly enthusiastic about Lewis and is also a person whose presence is encountered in many of the principle institutions devoted to Christian apologetics. For example, he helped develop curriculum for the OCCA¹²⁵ and is quoted on its web site as saying:

The OCCA has set out to raise up a new generation of Christian leaders, in church and society at large, who can carry on the succession of great apologists of the past and present. Who will carry on the work of C.S. Lewis? Or a Ravi Zacharias? It could be you - and the OCCA could help you to do it.¹²⁶

McGrath also helped organize a 'Developing a Christian Mind' conference put on by Christian faculty in Oxford for students at the university and, speaking there in 2011, cited Lewis multiple times.¹²⁷ The apologist has spoken about Lewis's influence at the Oxford

¹²⁴ For example, 'Has science buried God?', debate between Richard Dawkins and John Lennox, The Natural History Museum, Oxford 21st October 2008; John Lennox, 'The God Delusion Debate' Richard Dawkins and John Lennox, Birmingham, Alabama, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeQ6LWyKunY>, accessed 30 September 2013; Alister E. McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, 83.

¹²⁵ Alanna McLeod, interview with author, 28 February 2011.

¹²⁶ Alistair McGrath, Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, <http://www.theocca.org/endorsement-alister-mcgrath>, accessed 18 February 2011.

¹²⁷ Alistair McGrath, 'Developing a Christian Mind' conference, 19 February 2011.

C. S. Lewis Society in 2010 and published two books about Lewis in 2013.¹²⁸ All of this is in addition to his many other monographs citing Lewis.¹²⁹ So closely has McGrath aligned himself with Lewis's platform, in fact, that a blurb on the back of one of his books reads: 'Keep an eye on McGrath: he may be on the way to becoming the C. S. Lewis of the last years of the twentieth century.'¹³⁰

McGrath's interest in Lewis, while unique for its profusion and visibility, is suggestive of a closer alignment with American evangelicalism because he has been involved in the North American Evangelical higher education environment, serving from 1993-1997 as research professor of theology at Regent College, Vancouver. That said, influential Christians leaders in Britain have tended of late to be Americans. Kandiah described the situation:

America is hugely significant in the cultural life of the church wherever you are. The most listened to podcast is about Driscoll.... Rob Bell on the other side of the equation would have a similar huge following. Tim Keller is a

¹²⁸ Alistair McGrath, 'C. S. Lewis as Apologist', Oxford C. S. Lewis Society, 2 March 2010.

¹²⁹ McGrath books citing Lewis include: *Understanding the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 108; *Explaining Your Faith Without Losing Your Friends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1989), 14, 29-30, 34, 91, 98; *Understanding Doctrine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 48-49; *The Renewal of Anglicanism* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1993), 90-92, 95; *The Christian Theology Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 611; *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 82-87, *passim*, 139, 143; *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 208; *The Journey: A Pilgrim in the Lands of the Spirit* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 143-145; *Scientific Theology: Theory*. Vol. 3 (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 29, 101-102; *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 83; *Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 146-147; *The Dawkins Delusion?: Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007), xiii; *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 158, 250-251, 257, 287; *Theology: The Basic Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 20-22.

¹³⁰ *ADRIS Newsletter*, blurb for Alistair McGrath, *Explaining Your Faith Without Losing Your Friends* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books, 1989), back cover.

very influential figure. You name it. If it happens in the States, we hear about it over here. When we invite speakers, we tend to invite from America, Australia. Our best-selling books are normally American authors. It does have a huge significance, and yet, we've got this kind of love-hate relationship with the States as well. You've probably experienced it. Things will be criticized for being too American and yet we still look to America for a lot.¹³¹

Mark Driscoll, Rob Bell and Tim Keller are American pastors. As we have seen, many influential and well-known American evangelicals have been exceptionally dependent on Lewis's writing and frequently quote him in sermons or in their published writings. British evangelicals appear to have become increasingly conversant with such pastors, perhaps especially in the last fifteen years or so. Keller, Bell and Driscoll—preachers who command the attention of large audiences in America every week, using a variety of media—tend to be mentioned in conversations with British evangelicals about Lewis. For example both Keller and Bell were mentioned as having influence in Britain in interviews with Kris Kandiah, Alanna McLeod of the OCCA and Nathalie Watson, senior editor of the Christian publisher SCM Press.¹³²

Kandiah expressed how such individuals have been conduits for Lewis's reintroduction into Britain: 'I think, weirdly, the reception in the UK was mediated through the States, so I think he became acceptable in America and all our favorite

¹³¹ Kandiah, interview with author, 4 July 2013.

¹³² Ibid; Alanna McLeod, interview with author, 28 February 2011; Nathalie Watson, interview with author, 4 July 2013.

American preachers are using him, and that's how we thought, "Oh, maybe he is pretty good after all."¹³³ A student staff worker for University and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF), the largest ministry to university students in Britain, also suggested that Lewis was re-imported by American pastors, specifically by Keller.¹³⁴ Keller, whom Kandiah described as 'probably the most universally liked preacher in the UK', when asked about the frequency with which he quotes Lewis, answered that about '50 per cent' of his sermons used Lewis, whether Lewis was named or not.¹³⁵ On a book table at the entrance of a church in Edinburgh, Keller's *New York Times* bestseller *Reason for God*¹³⁶ was placed beside *Mere Christianity*.¹³⁷ And a comparison between the same two books was volunteered by the UCCF student worker just mentioned.¹³⁸

As a result of the prominent influence of American pastors in Britain recently, there appears to be a resurgence of interest in Lewis. For example, Christian educational materials commissioned for use by the University and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF) in 2011 cite Lewis: *Uncover*, which is the Gospel of Luke (notably the gospel to most frequently address issues of social justice) in modern, notebook-style format

¹³³ Kris Kandiah, interview with author, 4 July 2013.

¹³⁴ Ali Reid, interview with author 4 July 2013.

¹³⁵ Tim Keller, interview with author, 12 November 2010.

¹³⁶ Tim Keller's *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Dutton, Penguin Group: New York, Feb 2008) is a book that is 240 pages long, in which Keller cites Lewis fourteen times. The only other index entries that had comparable number of citations to Lewis were the Bible and Jesus. When asked about Lewis's influence on the book, Keller said, 'First of all, I'm inspired by Lewis, and my book is inspired by his book, but I'm a preacher first of all, not a writer, and I don't even deserve to be mentioned in the same sentence as a writer like C.S. Lewis. And yet everybody's doing that, and I take it as a compliment, but it's pretty unjustified. However, he's the benchmark, so everybody's going to be compared.' Anthony Sacramone, 'An Interview with Timothy Keller', *First Things* (25 February 2008), <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/?p=981> (accessed 1 May 2008).

¹³⁷ Jonathan de Groot, interview with author, 21 June 2012.

¹³⁸ MJ Axelson, interview with author, 4 July 2013.

(complete with QR codes linking to webpages that may be scanned by a reader with a smartphone) includes a citation by Lewis and description of him as 'an Oxford don and Christian writer, once a fervent atheist'.¹³⁹

In recent years, Lewis is receiving more attention in the academic sphere as well. For instance, a tutor for the OCCA said that he was considering doing a PhD on a Lewis related topic.¹⁴⁰ And a Presbyterian pastor in Edinburgh had attended a comparative religion class at the University of Aberdeen in which three weeks had been spent examining *Mere Christianity*.¹⁴¹ The former archbishop Rowan Williams, who has twice addressed the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society,¹⁴² recently published a book about the Narnian books entitled *The Lion's World* (2013).¹⁴³ In the introduction he observed:

[Lewis] was, when I was first being educated as a theologian, a slightly embarrassing phenomenon (this at least is a thing of the past; we now have an excellent *Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, with contributions from some very formidable professional theologians): someone who was read and circulated enthusiastically--if pretty selectively--by the sort of people who

¹³⁹ Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Uncover: See for Yourself* (UCCF: The Christian Unions, 2011), 7.

¹⁴⁰ Tom Price, interview with author, 28 February 2011.

¹⁴¹ Jonathan de Groot, interview with author, 21 June 2012. The class was taught by Henry R. Sefton, professor emeritus of Church History.

¹⁴² Rowan Williams, *The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia* (London: SPCK, 2012); Williams spoke at the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society on 5 October 1988 and 9 November 1999, on the subjects of *That Hideous Strength* and 'A Theologian in Narnia', respectively.

¹⁴³ Rowan Williams. *The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

would be regarded as very unsophisticated by a proper theologian.¹⁴⁴

As discussed above, in the early 1970s (when Williams was a student) Lewis's anti-modern platform seemed ill-suited by many for a culture witnessing rapid religious and cultural change. And yet the volume *Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* (2010) does point to more engagement with Lewis by British academic Christians in recent years. Contributors of chapters to that volume include Joseph P. Cassidy, principal of St Chad's College, Durham University; Mark Edwards, tutor in Theology at Christ Church and lecturer in patristics for the Theology Faculty in the University of Oxford; Paul S. Fiddes, professor of systematic theology in the University of Oxford; Malcolm Guite, chaplain of Girton College, Cambridge University; Ann Loades, professor of Divinity Emerita, Durham University; Stephen Logan, lecturer in the Faculty of English, Cambridge; and Judith Wolfe, research fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford.¹⁴⁵ Michael Ward, an editor of the volume and chaplain of St Peter's College, Oxford, also wrote a PhD thesis on the Narnia books, which was the basis of the monograph *Planet Narnia* (2007).¹⁴⁶

Kris Kandiah observed: 'The danger of Lewis is that he is one of our all-time celebrity advocates, isn't he? There's been developed this idea that you can just bring in this giant crushing hero that will come and do the work of apologetics for you.'¹⁴⁷

Perhaps one of the results of new communications medias and the increased exportation

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., x.

¹⁴⁵ *Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Ed. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and in interview with the author, 5 February 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Kris Kandiah, interview with the author, 4 July 2013.

of American influences, including religious ones, has been the beginning of a change in Lewis's platform in Britain. It remains to be seen whether Lewis could inspire future generations of British evangelicals.

Conclusion

What, in conclusion, may be said for why there were so many American devotees of Lewis, while the British, on the whole, have had a cooler response to one of their own? An explanation begins from the difference in what Lewis has represented to the British and the Americans, and especially evangelicals. Lewis's platform in the States was mediated through the appeal of his identity as a British 'Oxford don', and conservative Christians' expectations of what a genius layman with traditional values confronted in a higher education environment behaved. In Britain, on the other hand, Lewis's platform was understood through no such assumption about the university context; his stance of confrontation rankled many because it indicated a commitment to the past and an uncompromising personality. American evangelicals, often with fundamentalist tendencies, felt an emotive connection with a person with whom they could both identify and aspire to; Lewis was both an insider and an outsider. In Britain the aesthetics associated with Lewis, too, did not hold an identical or as potent an appeal. Differences may also be attributed to the respective course that Christianity followed in the twentieth century. Lewis was less than a satisfying model to British Christians because of the way their Christianity has changed in emphasis, especially after the 1960s: a truer sign of religiosity for many was the seeking posture, the holding out of possibilities; American Christians, on the other hand, could more closely identify with the embattled terms in

which Lewis presented himself and Christianity, especially in the context of higher education. Higher education in Britain and America developed in similar ways after the Second World War, but the States' network of private Christian liberal arts colleges permitted a degree of insularity not common in Britain. The social and epistemological circumstances which made American Christians reach for Lewis during their time at university were simply not present in the same way for most of the post-war British context. The cumulative effect of all of these differences was that a pattern emerged in America, wherein Lewis was often encountered in university courses by people who then, went on to write about and discuss Lewis on a frequent basis in their communities, perpetuating his influence. Not so in Britain, where up until very recently, Lewis was more often discussed with a slight wariness. Perhaps, though, one of the results of new communications media and the increased exportation of American influences, including religious ones, will change Lewis's platform in Britain. Indications are that these already have.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This dissertation has considered the lives of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as well as the evolution of C. S. Lewis's platform and the existence of Lewis devotees in America. A variety of primary sources including printed materials, interviews, have been utilized in order to provide a portrait of what C. S. Lewis and his books have meant to people living in twentieth and twenty-first century Britain and America, as well as how they have been used, where and why. As a way of fleshing out the findings, this conclusion will begin with a reconsideration of how previous scholars have explained Lewis's continued popularity, now, in light of the evidence.

Reconsiderations

As the introduction demonstrated, commentary on Lewis's reception has been written largely by those personally affected by Lewis's writings. As a result, those judgments have often been filtered through the commentators' own personal experiences. Sometimes observations have been occasioned by scepticism about the task itself—'To write about Lewis's impact on America is a presumptuous undertaking for any lone individual'¹—or, on the other hand, a self-conscious defence of the validity of the subjective explanation. Lewis scholar Eugene McGovern said in 1979:

Is there an "explanation" for the continued interest in Lewis's work and for the existence of such a thing as the New York C. S. Lewis Society? If a sociologist were to write a monograph with the title "Literary Enthusiasm

¹ Chad Walsh, 'Impact on America', in *Light on Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965), 106.

among the Nonliterary: Etiology and Symptomatology in Admirers of C. S. Lewis", might there be someone, somewhere, who would be interested in reading it? Perhaps, but any such explanation would be one obtained by looking at the phenomenon and so could not be as revealing as one obtained by looking *along* it. And it is by looking along the continued interest in Lewis that I will try to provide some reasons why so many of us have reported that we owe far more to Lewis than we do to any teacher or to any other author whom we have ever known.²

Devotees like McGovern have pondered the question of why Lewis's writings and person have been successful largely by combining observations from their own experience with a rehash of facts about Lewis's person and writing. It is anti-intellectual to suggest one has to be a fan of Lewis to understand his appeal and the phenomenon of his reception. The point is not that subjective explanations have been incorrect or invalid but that much has been missed in the absence of a more comprehensive study of both the conditions under which, for example, *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, have succeeded and the variety of responses the written record affords. The living presence of a few has not accounted for receptions that went beyond their own context and experiences, nor have the circumstances of Lewis's reception been adequately acknowledged.

Three Points of Consensus among Observers Concerning Lewis's Enduring Popularity

² Eugene McGovern, 'Our Need for Such a Guide', in *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences*, Third Edition, ed. James T. Como (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 229.

As was discussed in the introduction, three factors in particular were identified as contributing factors to Lewis's reception by a number of scholars. These were the bearing of Lewis's person on the hearing he received in America, the non-sectarian quality of his Christianity and the timeliness of his message. We'll consider these briefly in light of the dissertation's findings.

Many Lewis scholars have connected Lewis's personal identity with the success of his communication and enduring appeal. Specifically, his British identity, Oxford credentials, atheism and subsequent conversion and his non-clerical status have been identified as having contributed to Lewis having been favourably received in America. These observations were resolutely confirmed by this dissertation. If anything, the importance of Lewis's platform to his reception in America has been underestimated. Chapter three demonstrated that from the publication of *The Screwtape Letters* Americans' perception of Lewis was largely as a Christian defender of orthodoxy in the face of hostile, powerful intellectual forces in Oxbridge enclaves. The popularity of the Narnia books and the growing association in the second half of the twentieth century of Lewis with fantasies for children only added layers to this perception. Chapter Six showed the uses to which this crusading Lewis and his books were put in the context of evangelicals' increased interaction with America's institutions of higher education: the mini-drama of cosmic forces (good and evil battling it out in the life of the mind) which were imagined to have played out in Lewis's life were, for many in the second half of the twentieth century, understood to be happening in their own experiences. Lewis's person, authority and perceived success in the conflict came to the aid of the faithful attending

universities. In these circumstances, especially, associations with Lewis of Britain, Oxford, intellectual conversion, and outsider status bolstered his appeal and authority. And, of course, Lewis himself saw the world in binary categories with which Evangelicals, especially, could identify—as chapter two demonstrated, the origins of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity* were rooted in Lewis's opposition to modern and anti-Christian voices. Chapter Five, furthermore, evidenced the fact that Lewis's platform as authoritative defender of Christianity was also useful to those unaffiliated with institutions of higher education, those participating in religious communities. The extent of *Mere Christianity's* reach as an apologetic model and educational tool for Christian leaders and as an object to gather round, in community, among the laity was, at every point, bound to the associations of prestige with which Lewis's name was affiliated. He was thought of as high enough to teach and to trust implicitly, and low enough to connect with personally. Lewis's appeal as popular apologist had everything to do with his layman status, narrated conversion experience and the accessible and inaccessible dynamics of his platform.

Much, however, has previously been unexplored about the relationship between Lewis's persona and his reception. First, the fact that there *was* a platform has been missed. Perhaps out of a desire to connect in a psychological way to the person of Lewis, intervening factors such as the role played by the imagination of readers, the part publishers, marketers, and space, place and time have all played in the perception of his person have gone, for the most part, overlooked. Missed, too, was the possibility that Lewis was capable of cultivating such a thing as an adversarial public persona, least of all

for personal gain, or of his reputation being married to commercial interests. It has largely been an ahistorical Lewis and ahistorical texts which have been imagined to have appealed to Americans. Following on from that, the contextual reasons for the appeal of the lay, plain-spoken don were, where acknowledged, underestimated. The middle-class aspirations and upward mobility of American Evangelicals, especially, have had everything to do with their uses of Lewis and his texts. That much of context might have been inferred by Evangelicals writing about their own devotion to Lewis. However, others' uses for Lewis's platform would not have been known to them without research: for example, mid-century librarians' appropriation of Lewis's credentials in the aid of their own cause to promote the literary value of children's books. Nor would evangelical commentators been likely to appreciate, without more study, how Lewis's platform in Britain contrasted with that of America. More complex in his own lifetime, more contentious in Britain after the 1960s: the contrast between British and American relations with Lewis, as he was imagined, together with the bearing of this upon his reception generally has been another contribution of this dissertation.

The second consensus among many of those who speculated about Lewis's reception was that he was careful to stress the tenets of Christianity which believers held in common and that this fact ensured lasting appeal. It has been suggested that because his message was broad and inclusive he remained relevant. This was fundamentally true, and has been evidenced by the variety and number of people who have engaged with *Mere Christianity*, as seen in chapters four and six. For many, many Christians Lewis's writings about the essentials of belief and practice were congenial to their own faith

tradition and also helpful when they encountered—as they increasingly did in America—traditions outside that of their own. Lewis’s particular brand of orthodoxy and his avoidance of traditionally-divisive issues did contribute to his lasting influence among conservatives.

Yet it should be observed that on this point the general trajectory of Evangelicals in America and Britain differed. Lewis’s platform and the circumstances of his reception among Christians had the consequence of making his stance as an ecumenical figure much more convincing in the States where those of fundamentalist background, more numerous than in Britain, found him useful, especially while attending university. In Britain, on the other hand, Lewis’s platform as a ‘mere Christian’ was less convincing in a country in which Christianity was best felt spoken about in softer tones than Lewis was wont to use.

Attributing Lewis’s stress on ‘mere Christianity’ with his continued popularity has perhaps led to the neglect of the book’s life as a teaching tool and shared object. Evidence from Christian leaders speaking about the book to other leaders and to non-clergy demonstrated that less theologically-orientated qualities promoted the book: Lewis’s use of language and metaphor, how the text sounded, how it *felt*, especially to the embattled, meant more. And, when considered as an object, it was probably less the content of *Mere Christianity* than its author’s canonical status that ensured that Christians gathered to read it in the first place. It was not only theological factors that extended the life of the book in Christian communities. The fact that Lewis avoided the doctrinal issues dividing the Christian communities of 1940s Britain was just a first step to

Mere Christianity's longevity. After all, as chapter two demonstrated, there were many others preaching the same message during the Second World War.

Indeed, it is a temptation when looking back on the life of a text which has had the kind of popular success that *Mere Christianity* has enjoyed to neglect to search laterally for evidence that might inform its origins—to see it, in other words, as autonomous. Many have missed the fact that there were quite a few authors and broadcasters who attempted what Lewis aimed to achieve with his first project, while working collaboratively with BBC staff. It is a striking component of the text's origins that its ecumenical nature, *especially*, was the product of the war-time British culture-shaper that was the BBC, then at the height of its power. Evidence from so many coterminous broadcast projects—similar to Lewis's, also, in the language and rhetorical strategies they used and their addressing of the 'man-in-the-streets'—demonstrated the collaborative nature of the texts' origins.

The third common claim among those who have observed Lewis's popularity was that Lewis, by moving against the grain of the twentieth-century milieu, paradoxically met the needs of latter-day readers. Chapter two made clear that, indeed, Lewis formed his very identity in opposition to intellectual trends in the Britain of his day, especially literary modernism and that in his role as Poet he used sources and perspectives from the past to speak prophetically to his times. That chapter also demonstrated that the context for the origins of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* may be seen to be Lewis's reaction against naturalistic world-views and modernism, and that these books were his effort to restore the connection between his audiences' faculties—of reason (in the case

of *Mere Christianity*) and imagination (in the case of the Narnia books)—for accessing metaphysical truths, and thus the divine. Lewis was self-consciously attempting to evangelize twentieth-century audiences by reestablishing that which he believed had been handicapped by the philosophical assumptions of naturalism and by the denial by literary elites of the power of art to point to God and their failure to act as conduits of divine light.

Lewis was attempting what several scholars claim that he achieved. And there is no reason to doubt that Lewis's effectiveness and attractiveness as a communicator, as well as his powers of persuasion in both fictional and non-fictional forms, was due in part to his being so thoroughly rooted and widely read in the literature and philosophical outlook of, especially, the medieval period. However, taken cumulatively, responses to the Narnia books and to *Mere Christianity* do not provide evidence that Lewis's defection from twentieth-century mores was a *primary* reason for these texts' wide and enduring success. It was rarely said in response to these books, 'I like this because it connects me to some older, primordial truth and way of seeing the world.' This was not said by educationalists, children's librarians, church leaders or other non-scholarly readers of these books. Rather, chapters four and five demonstrated that often people admired these books for how they engaged their imaginations, clarified Christian belief or how the language struck them: a memorable image or metaphor. For most the books were, above all, *useful* to a job at hand—whether in a primary school classroom, Christian discussion group or pulpit. In other words, more important to these texts' endurance, as far as the content was concerned, were reasons that were less metaphysical and more

practical than the claim that Lewis was accessing lost, older knowledge for modern times would suggest.

It was actually for those who noted the alleged irony that the claim was most apt—though not on account of some unique insight on the part of Lewis. Lewis's most devoted fans, chapter six suggested, were those who found the corpus of his work and imagined person to be a lifeline in the context of engagement with new ideas, people and places. Lewis felt relevant to them because, essentially, they were in agreement with his pessimistic analysis of culture, and they identified with the confrontational role he adopted with respect to the issues he addressed. Lewis was felt to be on the side of tradition—on Evangelicals' side—preserving that which was felt to be sliding out from underneath them, namely, power: influence over American culture and institutions and the security of an unchallenged faith. Conservative Christians have gathered around *Mere Christianity* and his person as something to share, they against the secularizing forces in their culture. Lewis's platform and texts suited Evangelicals, and it was partially by their action (so many books, societies, lectures to undergraduates) that Lewis's influence has been perpetuated. There is less evidence that his connecting to pre-modern perspectives provided access to truths sorely needed in a disenchanted world; more evidence that Lewis gave answers that those already committed to those views liked. In crudest terms, Lewis merely articulated afresh in pleasingly embattled tones what conservatives wanted to hear: that there is a battle, there are sides, that reality is essentially rational, whole and knowable, and there remain among *us* people with sufficient prestige and intellectual prowess to fight on our behalf. Lewis's stance against

culture and his adoption and resourcing of older views and literature did not mean lasting appeal. It meant lasting appeal among some.

The evidence for this is in the contrast with Britain because the other occasions when Lewis's platform as a self-consciously counter-cultural figure (of a sort) have been commented upon is when British commentators responded to it in a hostile way to it. Throughout the dissertation we have seen the British—whether a colleague like F. W. Bateson, Bernard Bergonzi writing in the *Spectator*, children's book critic like Eleanor Graham, or a later fan like Michael Ward—display awareness of the showmanship within Lewis's public persona and writings. More often than in America, British audiences have felt Lewis's posturing was a sign of arrogance, an insecurity on display: so it was with many reviews of the Narnia books and other recordings of impressions of Lewis's personal and public life. And, in fact, for many, it was precisely on the point that Lewis upbraided his present culture with the example of years past, or was resistant to change, that the most strident criticisms have been sounded. Resolutely negative reactions by Pullman, Naomi Lewis and Hugh Trevor-Roper—were partially in response to this cultivation on Lewis's part of a Romantically-inflected Prophet-Poet figure with two feet in an older or other world. Criticisms of Lewis's social views—about women, especially, as portrayed in *Shadowlands*, or racism or the use of violence in the Narnia books—were a composite part of the perception that Lewis pitted himself against change of any kind; and he was castigated by a small choir of British critics on account of it.

Contributions

American sociologist C. Wright Mills argued that ‘between the intellectual and his potential public stand technical, economic, and social structures which are owned and operated by others’.³ An important contribution of this dissertation has been to demonstrate that Lewis’s platform, *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* endured on account of those technical, economic, and social structures—underestimated by other commentators, as we have seen—as well as for reasons pertaining to the nature of religious belief and practice in the twentieth century. The second, equally important contribution has been to shed light on the contrasting receptions of Lewis in Britain and America: again, as the above engagement with other scholars’ suppositions show, pulling this aspect to the fore accentuated the complexity and tenuous nature of the phenomenon. The wide range of primary materials brought together demonstrated that the transatlantic trajectories harbored substantive differences.

Pivotal to Lewis’s continued visibility to a broad public were the commercial and publishing developments reviewed. Chapter two and three addressed how Lewis’s platform was formed and historically situated, shaped by Lewis himself but also by the BBC and the Macmillan and Bles publishing houses. This history clarified how, from the author’s lifetime, the fate of the Lewis brand and the life of his texts was closely aligned with that of his respective publishers in Britain and America. Each of these companies was bought and grew with successive publishing take-overs, until they came under the control of one house, HarperCollins, in 1995. Within this span of time it became more

³ C. Wright Mills, ‘The Social Role of the Intellectual’ in *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. By Irving Louis Horowitz (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), 296.

difficult to become a brand-name author because from the 1960s, especially, an author's name was required to sell books at a fantastic rate in order to stay in print and readily available to customers. Lewis's name succeeded within this radically changing market because it was established before there was a dramatic constriction on the amount of risk publishers were willing to take and because Lewis's biography and *The Chronicles of Narnia* were suitable for adaptation to the increasingly important television and movie media. Lewis's name was sufficiently established from the 1940s to have continued as a marketable brand in the second half of the century.

Furthermore, the chapters on *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* revealed that within this larger picture, there were analogous sub-stories to tell about the print culture of the genres to which these books belonged. Children's literature was in a relatively impoverished state when Lewis offered *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to Bles in 1949; by the end of the decade, Allen Lane had published a paperback version; in the 1960s Kaye Webb worked her magic at Puffin; and the booming educational and trade-paperback market in children's books, together with television and movie tie-ins, did much of the rest of the work through the end of the century in both the States and Britain. From a communications and publishing history perspective the timing of Lewis's work was critical to their continued visibility to a broad public.

A final contribution of this dissertation concerns its methodology. The chapters were organized around the themes of contexts: the authorial and British origins of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia's*, the mainstream context of Lewis's platform, critical and popular children's book contexts, Christian communities' contexts and the

context of higher education. Each of these was a context with institutional, cultural, commercial, religious and intellectual dimensions. The thesis was a biography of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which gave the work a chronological shape across the various contexts. Blending traditional historical methods with history of the book and reading concepts and tools allowed a great deal of flexibility: the wide variety of circumstances in which these books and Lewis's name appeared were addressed. The advantage of chronicling books' lives within intellectual, social, institutional and religious history—rather than being committed to textual history alone, for example—resulted in a more nuanced portrait of the relationships between all of these factors. There was room for the agency of many realities: institutional, intellectual and cultural actors did not preclude recognition of the part individual people—for example, Chad Walsh, Walter Hooper, Kaye Webb and Alistair McGrath—played, whether their relationship to Lewis was opportunistic or that of a fan. Nor was it overlooked that there were contributions by periodicals like *Horn Book Magazine*, organizations like InterVarsity, or clubs like The New York C. S. Lewis Society. All these agencies and circumstances of time, it has been demonstrated, were mutually interdependent. Using this part-themed, part-textual narrative methodology brought together a great variety of materials, the better to enforce the argument that the life of books, reputations and even the nature of reception itself depend upon a host of conditions. To have limited oneself to platform alone or to neglect the importance of Lewis's image, for example, would be to lose a connecting piece of the story.

Lewis lived in social, intellectual, institutional and religious conditions that were, in many respects, a world away from the Britain or America of twenty first century. Yet, both within his lifetime and after, Lewis's personality, *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* were controversial among some, and useful, enchanting or deeply formative for others: the difference depended on the person in question, where they were, and the year—assuming, that is, an individual had heard of Lewis, bought, borrowed or had been given his books, and had actually read them. Doubtless, the written record does not reveal how many millions more had some encounter with Lewis's person or books and little impression was made, either way. However, the evidence that does exist, when set against such a multi-faced historical context, demonstrates that it was a conflation of social, institutional, national and religious circumstances, changes over time, and various corporate and individuals' agencies that resulted in Lewis's platform and *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* continuing to have a prominent, if differentiated, place in the cultural and religious life of Britain and America, over the course of the twentieth century.

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