CHAPTER ONE

The Life of C. S. Lewis

The Chronicles of Narnia were published at the rate of one per year, beginning in 1950 and ending in 1956. Writing seven books in seven years sounds like a remarkable accomplishment, but actually, Lewis was far more productive than that. The Narnia stories were released one per year to maximize sales, the way big-budget film series are released nowadays. But Lewis managed to complete all seven books between 1948 and 1954, while fulfilling his responsibilities as an Oxford don and working steadily on his scholarly tome *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (1954), and his memoir *Surprised by Joy* (1955).

Of course, to say the books were created in the late 1940s and early 1950s is to speak of the writing process, not the creative process as a whole. While the Narnia chronicles were written at a pace of one per year, they were most of Lewis's lifetime in the making. Virtually every year of his life from early childhood on contributed major strands or minute threads to the complex tapestry that would become the Narnia stories.

Childhood in the North of Ireland

C. S. Lewis is widely recognized for his careful observation and his careful selection of words. Both these traits emerged early in his career—by the age of four. When he was about three, his mother bought him a toy train engine, and the store clerk offered to tie a string on the front. Young Lewis, then called simply "Baby," strenuously objected: "Baby doesn't see any string on the engines Baby sees in the station." Not long after this incident, the little boy decided he didn't want to be called Baby anymore, nor any of its variations such as Babs, Babsie, or Babbins. He marched up to his mother, pointed to himself, and declared, "He is Jacksie," refusing to answer to any other name. And so Jacksie, later shortened to Jack, he became to his friends and family for the rest of his life.

Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast in 1898, the second son of Albert Lewis, a successful Belfast attorney, and Florence Hamilton Lewis. Descended from Welsh farmers and mechanics, Albert was one of the first of his family to complete a college education and enter a profession. He was known for his eloquence as a speaker and debater, a man with a phenomenal memory who loved to quote freely from his favorite works of literature.

Florence Hamilton, who preferred to be called Flora, was descended from more aristocratic stock. Her father was a rector in the Church of Ireland (Anglican), and his forebears included a number of high officials in the Church. Flora's mother's family, the Warrens, could trace their ancestry to a Norman knight buried in Battle Abbey in Sussex. Flora was one of the first women to graduate from Queen's College in Belfast,

taking a first-class degree in logic and a second-class degree in mathematics.

Both Albert and Flora were avid readers, and both tried their hand at creative writing. Albert wrote adventure yarns with titles such as "James's Adventure," "The Runaway Boy," and "Frank Fearless." None of these stories ever found their way into print. Flora was more successful; her tale called "The Princess Rosetta" was published in 1889 by a magazine in London called *The Household Journal*.

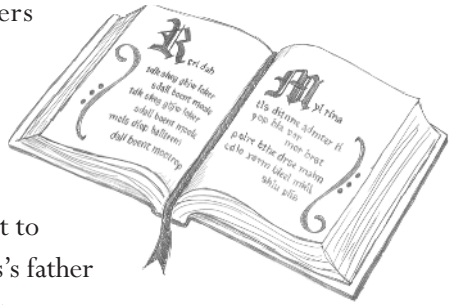
Albert Lewis and Flora Hamilton were married in 1894. Their first son, Warren Hamilton Lewis, was born the following year, christened with the surnames of his mother's parents. Clive Staples was born three years later, on November 29, 1898. Though Clive and Staples were also respected names from Flora's side of the family, her second son went straight from Baby to Jack, seldom using his given names.

In 1905, the Lewis family moved from a modest semi-detached villa to their new house, called Little Lea, in a fashionable suburb overlooking the Belfast Lough. In later years, Lewis would describe this big rambling structure as "almost a major character" in his life story, a place "of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences [and] attics explored in solitude." His brother Warren recalled that these attics often consisted of long tunnel-like spaces that children could use as secret passageways, entering through a small door in one room and coming out another. Though this space was largely wasted in Little Lea, it certainly was not wasted in Lewis's imagination, for he used such an attic in *The Magician's Nephew* to send Digory and Polly not just into new rooms but into new worlds.

One of the Lewis cousins, Claire Clapperton, also recalled a large, ornately carved oak wardrobe, which had been built by Albert's father, at Little Lea. Claire remembered that sometimes as children they would climb into the wardrobe and sit in the dark, listening to "Jacks" tell adventure stories. (This wardrobe is now on display at the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois.)

C. S. Lewis described his brother Warren as one of the great blessings of his childhood, someone who helped shape the way Lewis defined himself in relation to the world. "Warnie," or "Badger," and Jack spent many a rainy afternoon poring over the books in their parents' overflowing library, delighting especially in children's stories by Edith Nesbit and Beatrix Potter, as well as tales about "knights-in-armor" and "dressed animals." They also created their own imaginary worlds of "India" and "Animal-Land," which they later combined into the kingdom of Boxen.

Young Lewis sometimes wrote about chivalrous mice or rabbits who rode out in full armor to do battle with cats. But most of the Boxen tales focus on parliamentarian maneuvers and polite small talk among members of the privileged classes. Lewis would later pronounce his childhood creations to be "astonishingly prosaic" because they contained so much routine grown-up conversation, with hardly a trace of mystery or magic. It seems one of those quirks of human nature that Albert Lewis, whose life revolved around politics and practical legal matters, should write exotic stories of far-flung adventure. But when his young son Jack, who steeped himself in works of fantasy and imagination, turned to fiction, he wrote about political wrangles and humdrum civic affairs.



The Lewis brothers grew up during the time of "the troubles" in Ireland, tensions between Catholics and Protestants that have yet to be fully resolved. Lewis's father Albert was a stout Ulsterman, vigorously defending the rights of the Protestants in the north of Ireland. His mother, though also Protestant, tried to stress cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Despite these background tensions, Lewis generally recalled his early childhood as a time of loving parents, good food, and plenty of room for outdoor play, as well as the special blessing of a beloved nurse, Lizzie Endicott.

Lizzie was warm and effervescent, entertaining the boys with Irish folktales of leprechauns, lost pots of gold, and voyages to mystic isles. In *Surprised by Joy,* Lewis described Lizzie Endicott with unabashed nostalgia and affection, saying that "even the exacting memory of childhood can discover no flaw—nothing but kindness, gaiety, and good sense," concluding that she was "as nearly as a human can be, simply good." Lewis's fond recollection of his childhood nurse reveals how many of his lifelong attitudes were shaped in these early years. Throughout his many books, the words *nurse* and *nursery* virtually always connote that which is simple but also that which is true and good. For example, he warns in his essay "The Poison of Subjectivism," "Unless we return to the crude and nursery-like belief in objective values, we perish." In *Prince Caspian,* the young

prince learns about Aslan and the true history of Narnia from "the person he loved best," his nurse. And in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* the intrepid mouse Reepicheep discovers that the nursery rhyme about the "utter East" he learned in his cradle turns out to be quite an accurate prophecy of what to expect as one approaches Aslan's country by sea.

One of the highlights of the year for the Lewis brothers was their summer holiday on the Irish shore with their mother. Among the sites Lewis remembered visiting as a boy was Dunluce Castle on the north coast, an impressive ruin overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. When he was about eight years old, Lewis drew a charming and surprisingly sure-handed picture of a castle by the sea, which resembles Dunluce both in its shape and its position on a rocky promontory. The same castle may have contributed something many years later to Lewis's mental image of Cair Paravel, the seat of the kings and queens of Narnia.

Throughout the years, Lewis always associated his childhood with a happy and secure home, the simple goodness of a beloved nurse, and the freedom to roam through empires of imagination with his brother Warren. And in Lewis's books, the words *child* and *childhood,* sometimes even *childish,* tend to carry the same connotations—simplicity, self-forgetfulness, imagination, and wonder. In discussing classical literature, Lewis quotes approvingly a scholar who says that a child reading Homer in translation for love of the story may be "nearer by twenty centuries to the old Greeks" than a trained scholar because he is "not grubbing for beauties but pressing the siege." In *The Problem of Pain,* Lewis comments that in spiritual matters, "the learned and the adult have no advantage at all over the simple and the child," explaining that "from our own childhood we remember that

before our elders thought us capable of understanding anything, we already had spiritual experiences as pure and as momentous as any we have undergone since."

The pure and momentous experiences Lewis has in mind here are the recurrences of *Joy,* his word for *Sehnsucht,* the longing for some lost paradise that is itself a kind of paradise to feel. In *Surprised by Joy,* Lewis recalls one summer day when he was only six that there arose in him a memory of an earlier time when his brother had made a toy garden, bits of twigs and moss arranged in a biscuit tin. Lewis compares the momentary sensation that came with this memory to John Milton's "enormous bliss" of Eden, saying that this was his first experience of beauty.

Later, in reading Beatrix Potter's *Squirrel Nutkin,* the young Lewis again experienced a nameless longing, an "unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." There was always something elusive in this desire. In looking at pictures of autumn leaves in *Squirrel Nutkin,* he longed for the real trees outside his house, for the robust aromas and the crisp leaves crackling under his feet. But then walking among the actual trees in autumn made him long for the pictures he had seen in the book.

Lewis reports a third visitation of Joy when he was reading a Longfellow translation of Nordic myths and legends and came across these lines:

I heard a voice that cried,
Balder the beautiful
Is dead, is dead—

Although he had no idea at the time who Balder was, these lines filled him with the particular kind of Joy he called *Northernness,*

a solemn vision of things "cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote."

Of course, nature itself could also be a direct source of Joy for the young Lewis. From the front door of Little Lea, Jack and Warren could look out beyond bustling Belfast and see a low line of distant hills across the lough, seeming to float in cool serenity above the dust and noise of the city. Looking back, Lewis would say that gazing at those hills created in him a life-long yearning for unreachable horizons.

From an Idyllic Childhood to a Traumatic Boyhood

For Lewis, childhood came to an abrupt end at the age of nine when his mother died. She was diagnosed with cancer early in 1908 and passed away within six months, at the age of forty-six. That was a harrowing time for the whole Lewis family, and for Warren and Jack, the period of decline was no less traumatic than the death itself. For the boys, the bereavement began several months before the death, as their mother was withdrawn from them into the hands of doctors and nurses, while the house became a place of alien medicinal smells, late-night footsteps in the hallway, and whispered conversations.

Besides losing his mother, Jack in a very real sense lost his father and his home as well. Even before the onset of Flora's illness, young Jack had described his father in a little daybook as a man with a "bad temper, very sensible, nice when not in a bad temper." Lewis felt that his father never fully recovered from the loss of his wife. He had always been a highly emotional man, and

this great sorrow made him behave unpredictably, sometimes lashing out at his sons for no good reason. Lewis would later conclude that during these months, Albert unfortunately lost his sons nearly as completely as he lost his wife. The anguished time of Flora's decline and death set a pattern of strained relations between Jack and his father that would persist for over two decades, until 1929, when Albert fell into his own last illness.

Less than a month after the death of their mother, Jack and Warren were sent to Wynyard, a boarding school in Watford, England. As if the two brothers weren't already miserable, this turned out to be a wretched place, an ugly building of pale yellow brick with poor facilities. Wynyard had only one classroom and one dormitory and no library, laboratory, or athletic fields. The sickroom doubled as a storage room, and the odor from the outdoor toilets often permeated the whole campus.

As bad as the school facility was, its master was even worse. Robert Capron, called "Oldie" by the boys, was a volatile and unbalanced man who seemed to positively take pleasure in caning the boys and abusing them verbally. He was much more keen on discipline than on learning, and his class sessions consisted of little more than rote memorization of dry facts and figures. In one case, Capron's disciplinary measures were so harsh that a student's family filed a suit against him, which was settled out of court in favor of the plaintiff. A few years after the Lewis brothers departed, Capron was certified as insane and the school was closed down.

Though both Warren and Jack wrote their father about the abject conditions at Wynyard, Albert Lewis seemed to dismiss this as the usual friction between a schoolmaster and the boys under his charge. In later years, Lewis accepted some of the

blame for his father's never understanding just how unhappy he was at the school he called "Belsen," after the Nazi prison camp. In *Surprised by Joy,* Lewis explained that he may not have conveyed forcefully enough how much he hated life at Wynyard because he didn't want to be thought a coward or a crybaby. About Robert Capron himself, Lewis said it was easier to depict his tormentor to his father "as a buffoon than an ogre." (As discussed in the next chapter, Lewis would later depict that ogre, Robert Capron, as a buffoon, Uncle Andrew, in *The Magician's Nephew.*)

Part of the regimen at Wynyard was mandatory attendance at a nearby church with high Anglican services. Lewis later said he first came to serious faith at that time in his life. Unfortunately, this newfound belief did not provide him with assurance or comfort, but created self-condemnation. He fell into an internalized legalism, such that his private prayers never seemed good enough. He felt his lips were saying the right things, but his mind and heart were not in the words. In those boyhood years at Wynyard, he was trapped in a religion of guilt, not grace. More and more, he came to associate Christianity with condemnation of others, as in the north of Ireland, or condemnation of oneself, for not living up to God's standards. When he was in his early teens, Lewis decided to put away childish things, including his Christian faith.

After leaving Wynyard School, Lewis spent a term at Campbell College, near his home in Belfast, but dropped out after only one term due to illness. The next year, he traveled to Cherbourg House, a private boarding school in the town of Malvern in Worcestershire. Jack was much happier at Cherbourg, largely, it seems, because of the matron there, who acted

as a surrogate mother for the boys. In *Surprised by Joy,* Lewis described her with the same affection he had expressed in his earlier depiction of his childhood nurse. He concluded his portrait of the matron at Cherbourg House with a revelatory summation: "We all loved her; I, the orphan, especially."

One of the striking features of the Narnia stories is the absence of parents. In every case, Lewis creates some device—a father in India, a sick mother, children removed from home because of air raids over London—so that the children are required to face grave dangers and resolve difficulties on their own. Of course, this is a narrative device one often finds in children's stories, for an excursion into enchanted worlds accompanied by one's parents would be a much tamer sort of adventure. But the persistent motif of missing parents in the chronicles seems more than just a storyteller's convention; it appears to be linked to Lewis's loss of his mother and his sense of isolation during his years in English schools. In *Surprised by Joy,* he notes that after his mother's death, everything that makes a house a home failed him, and he and Warren became "two frightened urchins huddled for warmth in a bleak world."

After Cherbourg House, Lewis moved on to Malvern College, a preparatory school in the same town. He was intensely unhappy there, loathing the required sports and the clique of boys who formed a self-appointed elite. After Lewis spent two years of misery there, his father eventually arranged to have him study with a private tutor in Great Bookham, Surrey. Living with this outspokenly atheistic tutor, William Kirkpatrick, Lewis found his unbelief reinforced by his reading in the natural sciences and the social sciences. From the former, he gained a sense that life on earth is just a random occurrence in a vast, empty

universe, that all of human history is no more than a teardrop in the vast ocean of eternity. From the latter, he concluded that all the world's religions, including Christianity, could best be explained not as claims to truth but as expressions of psychological needs and cultural values.

Throughout his middle teens, Lewis found his intellect and his imagination increasingly at odds. His rational side told him that life on earth is essentially without meaning or purpose. But his imagination continued to soar into worlds unknown and possibilities unseen. During his adolescence, Lewis lived daily with what he described later as a painful paradox: "Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless."

"A Great Literary Experience"

Despite his intellectual skepticism during those years, Lewis never lost his sense of wonder or his love of enchantment. If his reason had truly reigned, he would have quickly dismissed anything written by George MacDonald, the nineteenth-century Scottish preacher, poet, and fantasy writer. But when Lewis, at age seventeen, discovered MacDonald's *Phantastes,* it was an emotional and spiritual watershed. Reading the story for the first time in the spring of 1916, Lewis wrote enthusiastically to a friend that he'd had a "great literary experience" that week, and the book became one of his lifelong favorites. Over a decade later, Lewis wrote that nothing gave him a sense of "spiritual healing, of being washed" as much as reading George MacDonald.

Phantastes (1858) is an episodic, dreamlike book, rich with spiritual overtones. It tells the story of a young man named Anodos, literally "one who has lost his way," whose mother died when he was a child. Reading a fairy tale one night, Anodos wishes he could travel to an enchanted wood, and his wish comes true the next day. He finds that he has come into fuller harmony with the world of nature, understanding the conversation of trees and animals and discovering in himself a "capacity for simple happiness" that he had never felt before. Anodos meets a beautiful young woman, pale and cold like marble (rather like the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*), who tries to lure him to his destruction. He escapes her clutches and undergoes a series of further adventures, including an encounter with an evil ash tree and a battle with a giant wolf. In the end, Anodos undergoes a symbolic death in the world of Fairy and returns to this world with "a power of calm endurance" he had not known before.

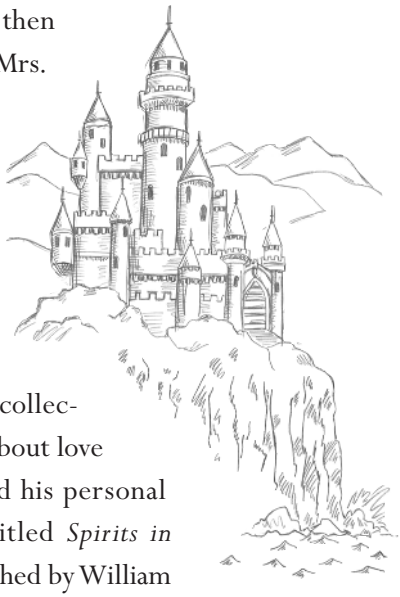
MacDonald's story is a singular and peculiar tale, sometimes disjointed in plot and uneven in style. Its evil tree spirits make it seem like a children's story, while its temptresses give it an air of adolescent romance. But there are spiritual meditations throughout the story that are clearly the work of a mature philosophic mind. Whatever its oddities, *Phantastes* was for Lewis a great balm to the soul, not only in his youth but throughout his lifetime. In his twenties, Lewis said that reading MacDonald served for him almost like devotional meditation. He also explained what he found so compelling in the Scotsman's fantasies: "The quality which enchanted me in his imaginative works turned out to be a quality of the real universe, the divine, magical, terrifying, and ecstatic reality in which we all live."

The Spires of Oxford and the Trenches of France

After finishing his preparatory work with William Kirkpatrick, Lewis entered University College, Oxford, in April 1917. But he had barely arrived in the famous university town when his education was interrupted by World War I and a two-year stint in the British army. In June 1917, he joined a cadet battalion billeted in Oxford, where his roommate was Edward F. C. "Paddy" Moore. The two soon became friends, and Paddy introduced Jack to his mother, Mrs. Janie King Moore, then forty-five, and his eleven-year-old sister Maureen.

Before they were shipped off to France, Jack and Paddy pledged to each other that if one of them did not return from the fighting, the other would do his best to look after the parent left behind. Jack arrived at the front lines on his nineteenth birthday, November 29, 1917. In February of the following year, he developed a case of trench fever and spent a month in a French hospital. In April, he was wounded in three places by an English shell that fell short. He had to be evacuated first to a mobile hospital in France, then back to England.

In that same spring of 1918, Paddy was reported missing in action and confirmed dead by the end of the summer. During his convalescence, Jack was never able to convince his father Albert, still in Belfast, to visit him in an English hospital. Yet Mrs. Moore came often; the bereaved mother and the abandoned son turned to each other for strength and consolation. During that time, Lewis in effect exchanged parents, gaining a new mother and all but losing a father. When Jack returned to Oxford in 1919 to resume his studies, he finished out his last



year of required residence, then moved in with Maureen and Mrs. Moore. Before long, he began introducing her as his mother, and the two stayed together for over thirty years, until her death in 1951.

While he was convalescing, Jack put together a collection of poems he'd written about love and war that also expressed his personal philosophy at that time. Titled *Spirits in Bondage,* the book was published by William Heinemann in March 1919 under the pseudonym Clive Hamilton, in honor of his deceased mother. The poems in this volume are often bleak, cursing an absent god and suggesting that human love and art are all that keep life from being utterly futile. In one poem, "Satan Speaks," the young Lewis compares Nature to an evil spirit, one who causes humans and other creatures to breed and to seek survival but offers them no larger purpose for existence. In the closing stanza of the poem, Nature, personified as Satan, concludes,

> *I am the wolf that follows the sun*
> *And I will catch him ere day is done.*

This is an allusion to Fenris the Wolf in Norse mythology, a great beast who symbolizes destruction and chaos. In some versions, Fenris swallows the sun on Ragnarok, the day of doom, killing even Odin himself, chieftain of the gods, bringing about the end

of the world and the twilight of the gods. In this poem, the wolf image suggests that ultimately all human aspirations and dreams will come to nothing as the forces of Nature eventually bring an end to our world, its sun, and the human race itself. This wolf reappears as Fenris Ulf, the head of the White Witch's secret police in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.* He is slain by Peter the High King in the climactic battle at the end of the book. Within the Christian worldview that informs the Narnia chronicles, it is not death and chaos, but Aslan and his followers who ultimately prevail. (In the original English editions, this character's name is Maugrim. The name Fenris appears in all American editions until 1994, when the publisher, HarperCollins, decided to revert to the original English texts.)

When Lewis returned to University College after the war, he resumed his studies in the humanities. That autumn, he met Owen Barfield, and the two became lifelong friends. Barfield was born in November 1898, the same month and year as Lewis, and like Lewis, he was educated in private schools and served in World War I before beginning his studies at Oxford. Lewis and Barfield had the kind of friendship that thrives on incessant debate, honing each other's minds like steel sharpens steel. It was Barfield who first critiqued Lewis's materialistic point of view, arguing that if human thoughts are merely an evolutionary survival tool, they should not be trusted as accurate reflections of reality. For Barfield, the mind is to reality as the eye is to light; it perceives what is actually out there, however partial or distorted those perceptions may be. Lewis would eventually dedicate his magisterial *The Allegory of Love* (1936) to Barfield, "wisest and best of my unofficial teachers."

Lewis completed his Oxford studies with great distinction, earning first-class degrees in classics (1920), ancient philosophy (1922), and English literature (1923). In the academic year 1924–25, Lewis accepted a one-year appointment as a lecturer and tutor in philosophy, a position that afforded him the opportunity for broad and careful reading in philosophy, from ancient to modern. In 1925, he was elected a Fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, a position in English language and literature.

Having lived with a "divided mind" in his teens and early twenties, Lewis's intellect, imagination, and spiritual intuitions began to coalesce in his mid- to late twenties. For a brief period in his late teens, he took a keen interest in the occult and the paranormal, thinking that perhaps an empirical approach to spirituality might be more fruitful than the Christianity he had learned as a child. But gradually his interest waned as he found the new "scientific" approach was just as inconclusive as the older religious ones and that it required just as much faith. He was also disappointed in the Spiritualists he met at Oxford, who seemed to him egocentric, obscurantist, and essentially unspiritual. When Mrs. Moore's brother, John Askins, suffered a complete psychic collapse after dabbling for many years in occultism, Lewis decided to avoid what he called "Magic" and stick to "the beaten track, the approved road."

The Journey Back to Faith

As he studied formal philosophy in his twenties, Lewis moved away from his adolescent atheism and became interested in various forms of idealism. Whether it was described as the Absolute

by a philosopher such as F. H. Bradley or as the Life Force by Henri Bergson, the idealists stressed an impersonal but godlike power behind the mask of the material world. Lewis was willing to grant that the material world might be an illusion, that deeper realities might lie in the world of the spirit. But more and more, he wanted to know if the Absolute, or Life Force, had a mind or not. If it was not Mind, then it had no more spiritual significance than gravity or solar radiation. But it if was Mind, then he wondered if it had a will, if it was on a higher moral plane than human minds. Gradually, in his late twenties, Lewis began to feel that the sophisticated idealism of the philosophers was leading him back to the simple faith of his childhood. He sensed, perhaps more by intuition than intellect, that he was grappling with something—or Someone—concrete and personal. As he wrote to Owen Barfield in a tone of humorous panic, "Terrible things are happening to me. The 'Spirit' or 'Real I' is showing an alarming tendency to become much more personal and is taking the offensive, and behaving just like God. You'd better come on Monday at the latest or I may have entered a monastery."

In the summer of 1929, at age thirty, Lewis converted to theism, believing in a personal God but not quite sure how to define his newfound faith. He found himself increasingly attracted to Christian writers such as Samuel Johnson, George MacDonald, and G. K. Chesterton. He also found kindred spirits in the Christians he met at Oxford, especially J.R.R. Tolkien, then a professor of Anglo-Saxon language and literature at Exeter College. Tolkien began meeting with Lewis in the late 1920s to read and talk about his earliest Middle Earth stories, which were later published as *The Silmarillion* (1977), the prequel to his epic *Lord of the Rings* fantasy.

It was Tolkien, as well as another Christian friend, Hugo Dyson, who initiated a major change in Lewis's thinking in September 1931. In his Great Bookham days, Lewis had read Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough,* a massive study in comparative religion that traces the myth of the dying god in many times and cultures. As a teenager, Lewis concluded that there was nothing particularly unique about Christian narratives of a God who came to earth, died, and rose again. But Tolkien offered a different interpretation. He argued that all those dying god myths revealed a universal intuition that humans cannot save themselves, that they need redemption as a gift from some higher plane. Tolkien explained Christ's incarnation as the historical embodiment of the dying god myth, the universal story of one who gives himself for the sake of his people.

Tolkien's paradigm of Christ's incarnation as "true myth" was indeed good news for Lewis, providing him with the grand synthesis he had been seeking since he'd lost his faith in his early teens. He had been trapped between an imagination that gloried in nature, myth, and romance and an intellect that dismissed it all as a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. Besides giving weight and value to myth, this view affirmed the functions of imagination and the intellect as complementary, not competitive. Lewis would later call imagination "the organ of meaning" and intellect "the organ of truth." The first generates pictures, metaphors, and myths by which we understand the world. The second weighs, sifts, and analyzes, discerning which products of the imagination correspond most closely with reality. This view afforded Lewis a tremendous sense of recovery, a method for re-embracing what seemed to him his core identity since childhood—wonder, imagination, mythology, faith.

When Lewis experienced what he called a "re-conversion" to Christian faith in his early thirties, he decided that since his early teens, he had been moving in the wrong direction; his boyhood at English schools had been a kind of "fall" from childhood. If that were true, becoming a grown-up would be a further step in the wrong direction. Just as terms such as *nurse, child,* and *fairy tale* are nearly always positive in Lewis's books, including the chronicles, there is an opposite set of terms—*boy, school, grown-up,* and *practical*—that are usually negative, connoting dreary utility, false sophistication, a preoccupation with politics and profits over those things that truly nourish the spirit.

"The Towering Grandeur of Lewis" in His Middle Years

In bringing together intellect and imagination, a lifelong love of fantasy with a newfound confidence in faith, Lewis laid the foundations for one of the most remarkable writing careers of the twentieth century. In his teens, Lewis had warned a Christian friend about the danger of "intellectual stagnation" for those who embrace traditional religious beliefs, but this would not prove to be a problem for Lewis himself. In the first half of his life, his reputation as a writer rested on two slim volumes of poetry, both of which went out of print nearly as soon as they were issued. But in the second half of his life, he wrote more than forty books, including many acknowledged classics of their kind. As a literary scholar and critic, he is well known for *The Allegory of Love* (1936), *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (1954), and *The*

Discarded Image (published posthumously in 1964). His classic works of Christian apologetics and meditation include *The Problem of Pain* (1940), *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), *Miracles* (1947), and *Mere Christianity* (1952). Besides the chronicles, Lewis's fiction also includes the award-winning Space Trilogy—*Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945)—as well as a highly regarded late novel, *Till We Have Faces* (1956).

Apart from his accomplishments as an author, Lewis was easily one of the most popular and respected lecturers in Oxford during the 1930s and 1940s. His lectures were often delivered to standing room–only crowds, even for Saturday morning sessions on obscure seventeenth-century poems that few students had ever read. Dame Helen Gardner called Lewis "by far the most impressive and exciting person in the faculty of English" at the Oxford of her student years. Another commentator, George Bailey, noted that it is "almost impossible to exaggerate Lewis's prestige in post-war Oxford." Bailey added that scholars in English at the time, some of them well-known names, were "only foothills in the shadow of the towering grandeur of Lewis."

While Lewis's intellectual life was extremely active during his middle years, his external life was more settled. In 1930, he moved with Mrs. Moore and her daughter Maureen into a house north of Oxford called the Kilns, named after the brick kilns on the property. Soon afterward, they hired a local country fellow, Fred Paxford, as a gardener and general handyman. Paxford was one of those endearing eccentrics who tried to plan for the worst so painstakingly that it seemed he never expected anything but the worst. He was devoted to Mrs. Moore and to

Lewis, whom he called "Mr. Jack." Lewis returned the favor by immortalizing Paxford as the lovable pessimist Puddleglum in *The Silver Chair.*

In 1932, Warren Lewis retired from the army and joined the others in the Oxford household. Both Lewis brothers felt a strong attachment to the Kilns and its surrounding property. Architecturally, it was a smaller version of their childhood home, Little Lea, an unusual design with two gables of equal height set off to one side. Perhaps this otherwise unremarkable house reminded them of the settled happiness of their childhood before their mother's death.

In the early 1930s, the two Lewis brothers began meeting with Tolkien and other like-minded friends to read and discuss their works in progress or just to revel in one another's company. This informal group became something of a literary circle, which Lewis humorously dubbed the Inklings, taking the name from a defunct undergraduate club. Meeting on Thursday evenings in Lewis's rooms at Magdalen College, they read their compositions aloud and offered one another frank, if friendly critiques. Soon, Tuesday morning meetings in a local pub were added. In the 1930s and 1940s, an Inklings meeting might include, on any given week, the Lewis brothers and Tolkien, as well as the novelist Charles Williams, the physician Humphrey Havard, the attorney Owen Barfield, and a number of other friends who lived in and around Oxford.

Lewis's public visibility continued to grow throughout the 1940s. During World War II, he was invited to lecture on Christianity to members of the Royal Air Force, and he spent most weekends during the war years traveling to bases all over Great Britain. He also gave four series of radio talks on the BBC, which

were later collected as *Mere Christianity* (1952). As Lewis's books became more and more popular, he created a charitable fund in which he deposited two-thirds of his book royalties, even though his salary as an Oxford don was by no means extravagant.

Apart from the increased attention that Lewis began to receive as the Narnia chronicles were published, the early 1950s brought other changes into his life as well. In January 1951, Mrs. Moore died, after several years of physical and mental decline. In 1954, he accepted a position that had been created just for him, professor of medieval and Renaissance studies at Magdalene College, Cambridge University. Though he retained this prestigious post until he retired in 1963, Lewis took the train home to the Kilns most weekends to be with his brother and his Oxford friends.

Late Love and Loss

In September 1952, Lewis met Joy Davidman for the first time. An atheist and a communist in her youth, Joy had become a Christian, partly through reading Lewis's books, and she began writing to him in 1950. Her letters to Lewis stood out from mountains of other fan letters as unusually witty and lively, so she was established as one of his more notable pen friends by the time they met face to face.

When Lewis first met Joy, she was Joy Davidman Gresham, the wife of American novelist Bill Gresham and mother of two sons, David and Douglas. The marriage was under severe strain, and when a breakup came, Joy and her two sons moved to England permanently in 1953. Joy was divorced from

Gresham in 1954, and gradually, her friendship with Lewis deepened into something more than friendship. When the English Office refused to extend Joy's visa, Lewis agreed to marry her in a civil ceremony in 1956 in order to give her English citizenship. Some of those closest to Lewis objected to this, but he felt, perhaps naively, that a civil ceremony was a mere formality that would not affect their actual relationship.

In October 1956, Joy was diagnosed with bone cancer. The news seems to have changed her relationship with Lewis; within a few months, it was clear their companionship had ripened into love. The two were married in an Anglican ceremony in her hospital room in March 1957. By then, Joy's cancer was in an advanced stage; she was confined to bed in a great deal of pain. When she was released from the hospital in April, it was assumed she had only weeks to live.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis had a temporary reprieve in her last years, as she became strong enough to walk and to accompany Jack on a visit to Ireland in the summer of 1958. By the autumn of 1959, however, the bone cancer had returned. Despite her deteriorating condition, the Lewises traveled to Greece with friends in the spring of 1960. Joy Davidman Lewis died in July 1960 at forty-five years of age—nearly the same age at which Lewis's mother had died.

Jack's own health was not good in the years following Joy's death. He suffered from heart and kidney disease and began receiving blood transfusions in 1961. He had a heart attack in July 1963 and went into a coma. After receiving last rites, he

surprised everyone by waking up from his coma and asking for a cup of tea. Though he was comfortable and cheerful, Lewis never fully recovered from this condition. He died quietly on November 22, 1963.

Lewis assumed his books would go out of print not long after his death, and he worried about how well his brother Warren could support himself on his army pension. Lewis was always weak with numbers but strong on humility. He would have been astonished to learn that most of his forty books would still be in print a generation after his death, his popular books perennial best-sellers and his scholarly books required texts in graduate schools and seminaries. Nor could he have guessed that his literary estate, like that of his friend Tolkien, would later be valued in the millions of dollars. Though both men were distinguished scholars, the two might have had a good laugh if they had known it was their "holiday fiction" that ensured for both of them a lasting literary legacy.