

INTO THE WARDROBE  
C. S. LEWIS AND THE  
*NARNIA*  
C H R O N I C L E S

David C. Downing

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# INTO THE WARDROBE



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CHRONICLES

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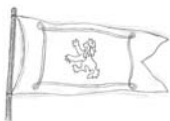
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For friends and fellow scholars  
who have gone into the Wardrobe before me:  
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and Peter J. Schakel

## A C. S. LEWIS TIME LINE

- 1894      Marriage of Albert Lewis and Florence (“Flora”) Hamilton.
- 1895      June 16: Birth of Warren Hamilton Lewis.
- 1898      November 29: Birth of Clive Staples Lewis.
- 1905      Lewis family moves into a new house, Little Lea.
- 1908      August 23: Death of Flora Lewis.  
September: Lewis travels to Wynyard School in Watford, England.
- 1910      Lewis spends the fall term at Campbell College in Belfast.
- 1911      Lewis enrolls at Cherbourg House in Malvern, England. He gives up his childhood faith.
- 1913      Lewis begins studies at Malvern College in Malvern.
- 1914      Lewis is privately tutored by William T. Kirkpatrick until March 1917.
- 1917      April: Lewis matriculates at University College, Oxford.  
June: Lewis enlists in the British army. He meets E.F.C. “Paddy” Moore; his mother, Janie Moore; and his sister Maureen.  
November: Lewis arrives in the trenches of France on his nineteenth birthday.

## VIII A C. S. Lewis Time Line

- 1918 April: Lewis wounded in action; Paddy Moore is reported missing in action in March and confirmed dead in August.
- 1919 January: Lewis returns to his studies in Oxford. Publication of *Spirits in Bondage*, a cycle of poems, under the name Clive Hamilton. Lewis moves in with Mrs. Moore and Maureen.
- 1920–1923 Lewis earns Firsts in classics, philosophy, and English.
- 1925 Lewis elected a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.
- 1926 *Dymer*, a narrative poem.  
Lewis first meets J.R.R. Tolkien.
- 1929 Lewis reluctantly embraces theism. Death of Albert Lewis.
- 1930 Lewis and the Moores move to the Kilns, just north of Oxford.
- 1931 Lewis re-embraces Christianity, soon after a late-night talk with J.R.R. Tolkien.
- 1932 Warren Lewis retires from the British army and moves to the Kilns.
- 1933 *The Pilgrim's Regress*, an allegorical account of Lewis's spiritual journey.  
Meetings of Lewis and his circle of friends are dubbed "the Inklings."
- 1936 *The Allegory of Love*, a scholarly study of allegorical love poetry.
- 1938 *Out of the Silent Planet*, first book of the Space Trilogy.

- 1939 World War II begins. Evacuated children arrive at the Kilns.  
*Rehabilitations and Other Essays*, a collection of literary appreciations.
- 1940 *The Problem of Pain*, a Christian meditation on suffering.
- 1941 Lewis gives his first series of radio talks for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).
- 1942 *A Preface to Paradise Lost*.  
*The Screwtape Letters*, fanciful correspondence between a senior devil and an apprentice tempter.  
Lewis gives two more series of BBC radio talks.
- 1943 *Perelandra*, the second book of the Space Trilogy.  
*The Abolition of Man*, a critique of contemporary culture.
- 1944 Lewis gives a fourth series of talks on BBC radio.
- 1945 *That Hideous Strength*, the final book of the Space Trilogy.
- 1946 *The Great Divorce*, a fantasy about denizens of hell who are allowed to visit heaven.
- 1947 *Miracles*, a philosophical defense of supernaturalism.
- 1948 Lewis elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.
- 1950 *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.
- 1951 *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia*.  
Mrs. Moore dies.

- 1952      *Mere Christianity*.  
*The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader."*  
Lewis first meets Joy Davidman Gresham in person, after a lively two-year correspondence.
- 1953      *The Silver Chair*.
- 1954      *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, volume 3 of the *Oxford History of English Literature*.  
Lewis accepts the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge University.  
*The Horse and His Boy*.
- 1955      *The Magician's Nephew*.  
*Surprised by Joy*, a memoir of Lewis's early life and his return to faith.
- 1956      Lewis marries Joy Davidman Gresham in a civil ceremony; later in the year, Joy is diagnosed with cancer.  
*The Last Battle*.  
*Till We Have Faces*, a novel based on the Cupid and Psyche myth.
- 1957      Lewis marries Joy in an Anglican ceremony.
- 1958      *Reflections on the Psalms*.
- 1960      *The Four Loves*.  
Joy Davidman Gresham Lewis dies.
- 1961      *A Grief Observed*, published originally under the pen name N. W. Clerk.  
*An Experiment in Criticism*.
- 1962      Lewis writes *The Discarded Image*, an exposition of the medieval worldview, which was published posthumously in 1964.

1963

Lewis writes *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, which was also published posthumously in 1964.

November 22: Death of C. S. Lewis, one week short of his sixty-fifth birthday.



## INTRODUCTION

### The Child as Father of the Man

One of C. S. Lewis's closest friends in later years, the poet Ruth Pitter, observed that his response to daily life reflected "an almost uniquely persisting *child's* sense of glory and nightmare." At first glance, this seems an unlikely description of one of the most distinguished and widely known professors of English at Oxford during the 1930s and 1940s. Apart from his fame as a lecturer, Lewis was the author of the dauntingly erudite *Allegory of Love*, the "diabolically clever" *Screwtape Letters*, and the penetrating cultural critique *The Abolition of Man*. Yet Pitter's impression is confirmed by many others who knew Lewis at the time. He loved Milton's *Paradise Lost* (and could quote it from memory), but he also cherished the stories of Beatrix Potter. In his books, he might illustrate a point by citing a medieval theologian who wrote in Latin, or he might quote instead from *The Wind in the Willows*.

Source materials are listed in the Notes at the end of this volume, arranged by page number and key words.

Some of his contemporaries were shocked when the eminent C. S. Lewis started writing children's stories. Even before he became known as the author of the now-classic *Chronicles of Narnia*, he had already put together one of the most remarkable writing careers of the twentieth century. He is still acknowledged as one of leading literary scholars of his generation, having composed a volume for the prestigious *Oxford History of English Literature* and written books on medieval literature, Milton, and Spenser, all of which continue to be highly regarded by specialists in English. He has also garnered worldwide recognition for his writings on Christian faith and practice. *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) became an international best-seller and landed his face on the cover of *Time* magazine (Sept. 8, 1947). Lewis's "Broadcast Talks" on Christianity for the British Broadcasting Corporation during World War II, later published as *Mere Christianity*, made his voice (after Churchill's) the most recognized in Britain.

Clearly, Lewis had already built a formidable reputation as a critic, scholar, and Christian apologist before he ever turned his hand to children's stories. He wrote his Narnia books in his leisure hours after his "serious" work of the day, usually composing only one draft and making minor revisions. Yet the Narnia chronicles have been hailed in *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* as "the most sustained achievement in fantasy for children by a 20th-century author." And they have been perennial best-sellers as well; they are currently purchased at a rate of more than a million copies a year.

Lewis once commented that "humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything

behind. Whatever we have been, in some sort we still are.” This is nowhere more true than in his own *Chronicles of Narnia*. When Lewis took up children’s fiction, he did not cease to be Lewis the Christian, Lewis the medieval and Renaissance scholar, or Lewis the literary artist. Perhaps less consciously, he also did not leave behind a number of his own childhood experiences, particularly the untimely death of his mother and his traumatic years in English boarding schools.

Unlike his good friend J.R.R. Tolkien, Lewis did not publish children’s stories that had started out as tales he spun for his own sons and daughters. Lewis was a bachelor when he wrote the *Narnia* chronicles and had no children of his own. He confessed that he was generally uncomfortable around children, a trait he considered a character flaw. This makes it all the more intriguing how Lewis could capture so unforgettably the mindset of young people and how he could conjure up the kind of adventures in which they take such delight.

One of Lewis’s biographers, A. N. Wilson, answers this question by saying Lewis wrote the *Narnia* chronicles for “the child who was within himself.” Though references to one’s inner child have become tiresome in recent years, Lewis would probably have agreed. After all, it was Lewis who wrote to a child with the delightful name of Phyllida, “I don’t think age matters so much as people think. Parts of me are still 12 and I think other parts were already 50 when I was 12.” This simple comment may explain the unique narrating voice in the chronicles: it sounds like the part of Lewis who is fifty writing for the part of him who is still twelve.

In a similar vein, Lewis commented that “youth and age only touch the surface of our lives.” Whether or not this is true

in most cases, it was certainly true of him. Echoing what Ruth Pitter said about Lewis's childlike sense of glory and nightmare, another friend, Kathleen Raines, said he had about him an aura of "boyish greatness." Lewis would not have been offended by such a remark. He considered the willingness to become like a child a mark of maturity. "When I became a man," he explained, "I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up."

Paradoxically, Lewis's stories for children are also the products of his maturity. The mellow spirituality of the chronicles makes some of Lewis's earlier fiction, such as *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), seem rather shrill and heavy-handed by comparison. And the effortless, musical prose of the Narnia stories easily surpasses in literary artistry the poems Lewis labored over so diligently in his youth.

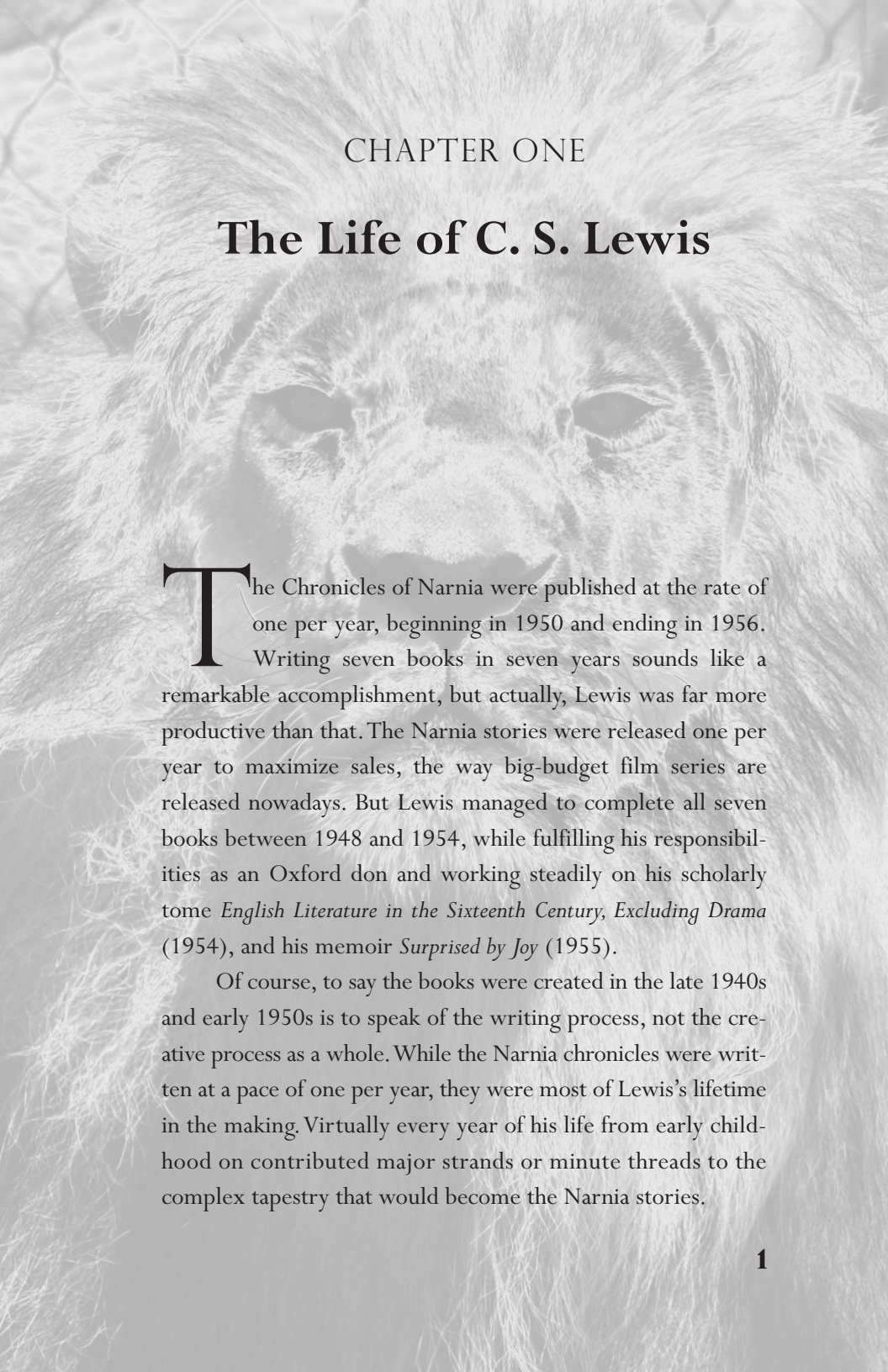
In accepting the constraints of writing children's fiction, Lewis was actually able to pour more of his whole self into his writing, including his love of wonder and enchantment, his affection for animals and homespun things, his shrewd observations about human nature, his vast reading, and his robust humor, not to mention theological speculations, medieval scholarship, and arcane linguistic jokes.

The thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas articulated his entire worldview and philosophy of life in his weighty and laborious *Summa Theologica*. It can be argued that Lewis offered his *Summa* in the sprightly and spontaneous chronicles. Of his more than fifty books, these stories are widely considered the ones that will most ensure for Lewis an enduring literary legacy. The Narnia stories are well-paced and engaging, a reliable source of refreshment and delight. But beneath their

deceptively simple surface, the chronicles also provide richly textured narratives of unexpected depth.

Each Narnia book is like a little wardrobe. It contains a looking glass in which readers will see themselves in surprising new ways. And when they turn the pages, they enter a place of wonder, a visionary world of bustling vitality, sparkling beauty, and spiritual clarity.





## CHAPTER ONE

# The Life of C. S. Lewis

**T**he 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.

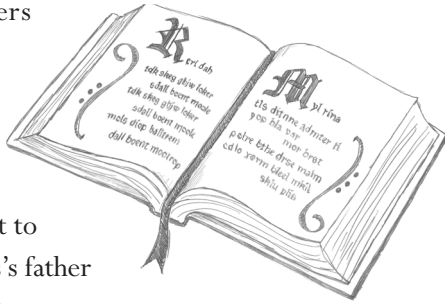
In 1905, the Lewis family moved from a modest semi-detached villa to their new house, called Little Lea, in a fashionable suburb overlooking the Belfast Lough. In later years, Lewis would describe this big rambling structure as “almost a major character” in his life story, a place “of long corridors, 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 parliamentary 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