

The year 1950 was significant in the life of C. S. Lewis for several reasons. First and foremost, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was published on Oct. 16, 1950 (although written in 1948), one of eight works to be published by Lewis in that year. Secondly, one of Lewis's most powerful statements on the importance of Jesus Christ was written in that year, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?" Given the preeminence of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, it seems to be more than a coincidence that both works were published at approximately the same time. Thirdly, in 1950 Lewis received his first letter from Joy Davidman Gresham.¹ This connection would eventually result in Lewis's marriage to Joy and shape much of his future writing, since she inspired some of his later works. Fourthly, Lewis's long poem *Dymer* was reprinted by Dent. And fifthly, Lewis's essay "Historicism" appeared in the same month in which he, as President of the Socratic Club, debated Michael Foster on the topic, "God and History." Given the historical nature of Christianity, Lewis was concerned that historians present their research objectively and not with the bias that is to prevalent among some academics.

Among Lewis's published works in 1950, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?" could have been written in almost any period of Lewis' life once he became a Christian. That it came in 1950, a few years after the end of the war (Lewis mentioned Hitler by name in the essay), in the midst of the meetings of the Socratic Club, and during his theological maturity is very appropriate. This message is good for anyone to read at any time. The essay first appeared in the book *Asking Them Questions*, edited by Ronald Selby Wright. What Jesus Christ is to make of us is far more important, Lewis wrote, than what we are to make of Him. Much of the argumentation in this essay appeared also in *Mere Christianity*, from the "poached egg" illustration to the outrageous claims Jesus made, especially the claim to be able to forgive sins. The essay also included a brief discussion of the attempt to call the Gospels legend,² something that Lewis did not have time for in his *Mere Christianity* chapter, "The Shocking Alternative," when it was originally given as a BBC talk. Insisting that the Gospels were not legends and that he was qualified to know, Lewis anticipated arguments he would later use in the essay "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" (1959). In this essay, Lewis may have been responding to the liberal World Council of Churches, which had held its opening conference in Amsterdam in August 1948.

This essay may have coincided intentionally with many of the topics at the Socratic Club during Hilary Term, 1950. Topics such as "The Nature of Faith," "Certainty," "Grounds for Disbelief in God," and "Freudian Psychology and Christian Faith" were debated during the spring, perhaps forming a theme related to faith. In the next term, on May 15, the famous atheist A. G. N. (Anthony) Flew and Bernard Williams debated "Theology and Verification."

Next in 1950, Lewis engaged C. E. M. Joad in a literary and theological exchange in an inquiry and a reply to Joad's article, "The Pains of Animals." Lewis's essay, "The Pains of Animals: A Problem in Theology," echoed his thoughts from *The Problem of Pain*, which had been published in 1940 and had included a chapter on animal pain. Joad, the Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of London, raised certain questions about Lewis' ninth chapter in *The Problem of Pain*. The inquiry by Joad and the reply by Lewis were first published in February 1950 in the British periodical *The Month* and reprinted in the *Atlantic Monthly* that April. Joad's critique rightly challenged the Lewisian idea that animals have sentience but not consciousness, that domestic animals will achieve immortality through the family to which they belonged, and that Satan might have tempted monkeys. Joad argued that an

¹ On Tuesday, January 10.

² On May 1, the topic "Can We Trust the Gospels?" was debated at the Oxford Socratic Club by the Form Critic D. E. Nineham and G. E. F. Chilver.

animal seems to remember pain when it cringes at the sight of the whip by which it had previously been beaten.

Lewis' responded that most of chapter nine contained his guesses. He conceded that Satan had not tempted monkeys, since that would assume a will, but he proposed a better word, "distortion." He also defended the argument that animals have a lack of consciousness, stating that the more coherently conscious the animal, the more pity its pains deserve. When animals act as if from memory, that does not prove memory in the conscious sense, especially since our blinking of the eyes at the approach of an object is due to reflex action rather than remembering. But all this is speculation, Lewis admitted, and should be taken only as an attempt to understand better. We lack the kind of data for animals that we have for humans, and Lewis was confident that the appearance of divine cruelty toward animals was a false appearance.

During that same year, Lewis' poem "As One Oldster to Another" was published in *Punch* magazine (March 15, 1950). The title suggests that he was feeling his age, even though he was only fifty-one. Don King calls this poem "Lewis at his best."³ Getting older brings about aching bones, sleepless moments, and disagreeable food. Comparing life to a train led him to ask if it was time to take one's suitcase down from the luggage rack. In spite of aging, one still experiences beauty and moments of unfulfilled desire, or joy. They surprise us, Lewis wrote, but they serve as one of life's reminders of the next life.

"The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version" was delivered as the Ethel M. Wood Lecture at the Senate House of King's College,⁴ University of London, on March 20, 1950. While arguing that the King James (Authorized Version) has had relatively little impact on the English language, Lewis wrote partially in response to a book by M. de Bruyne published in 1946, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale*, which contained much evidence for the literary appreciation of the Bible during the Middle Ages. He showed an awareness of the allegorical or semi-allegorical work of Kafka and Rex Warner, the preoccupation of his era with the symbolism of dreams, made negative observations on the Counter-Romantic movement of the twentieth century, and argued that those who read the Bible as literature do not really read the Bible.

Mrs. Ethel M. Wood was the daughter of Quintin Hogg, founder of the Regent Street Polytechnic, and a woman deeply interested in education. When she died in 1970, she left a bequest to the University to provide for an annual lecture on the English Bible. The bequest made possible the continuation of the series initiated in 1947 by a lecture on "The Bible and Modern Scholarship" by Sir Frederick Kenyon and directly supported by Mrs. Wood during her lifetime.⁵ Lewis' lecture was the third Wood lecture, following two lectures in 1947 and 1948.

Lewis' essay "A Cliché Came Out of its Cage" was published in *Nine: A Magazine of Poetry and Criticism* (May 1950). The essay mentioned both F. R. Leavis and Bertrand Russell in an attack on those modern thinkers who believed they were the leaders of a new movement. Lewis' dislike for the literary criticism of Leavis and the philosophy of Russell showed itself in his satire of these two, who knew far less about life and literature than they claimed, certainly not understanding the paganism to which they wanted to return.⁶

Russell, who won the Nobel prize for literature this year "in recognition of his varied and significant writings in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought,"⁷ was part of a group known as Apostles, a 1930s cluster of young intellectuals who formed a left-wing, anti-Christian, anti-capitalist group in Cambridge. This group also included the realist philosopher G. E. Moore

³ King, *C. S. Lewis, Poet*, 192.

⁴ Email on Jan. 21, 2010 from Rob Bradshaw of the BiblicalStudies website.

⁵ http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ethel_m_wood.php.

⁶ King, 180.

⁷ His recent works had been *Human Knowledge, its Scope and Limits* (1948), *Authority and the Individual* (1949), and *Unpopular Essays* (1950).

(although his influence was earlier, especially 1894–1904), E. M. Forster, philosopher J. M. E. McTaggart, Lowes Dickinson, economist John Maynard Keynes, A. W. Verrall, classicist John T. Sheppard, and Regius Professor of Modern History G. M. Trevelyan. They were mostly pacifists and agnostic, but also independent thinkers who learned from those of opposing views and whose influence carried on into the 1950s.⁸

Leavis was co-founder and editor of *Scrutiny*, a quarterly journal of literature and cultural criticism published between 1932 and 1953, where he (1) described literature as a moral resource to address the problems of everyday life, (2) provided a canon of worthwhile English literature, (3) criticized mass culture, especially politics, commercialism, technology, and science, (4) described the university as a place where human responsibility and courage should be developed, and (5) warned against turning the university into a business enterprise.⁹ Leavis emphasized “the imperative need to create a critical readership able to maintain standards, to preserve and protect the values of the tradition.”¹⁰ For him the standards were egalitarian, anti-capitalistic, and moral though not Christian. He viewed English as the new classics, using English literature to become critical of the culture and its media environment and thereby bring about change.¹¹ For Leavis and others, English was not just the new classics, but also a religion, with Leavis even claiming to be able to reveal both the meaning of literature and the meaning of life.¹²

Lewis’ essay, “Historicism” (October 1950), addressed the philosophy of history. In 1950, Father Paul Henry, S.J., who held the Sir Philip Deneke Chair at Oxford, gave the Deneke lecture. He was trained in theology and classical studies, and he included in his lecture a distinction between Judeo-Christian thought, on the one hand, and pagan and pantheistic thought, on the other hand, in the significance they attributed to history. Lewis challenged that distinction as illusory. He described Carlyle, Novalis, Hegel, evolutionism, Keats, and Oceanus as Historicists when they spoke or wrote about an inner meaning to history which they discovered apart from true historical sources. When Hitler or Mussolini spoke about a superior race, Lewis considered it “drivel.” When writers such as Freud became what Lewis called “amateur philosophers,” speaking about their view of life rather than speaking within their area of expertise,¹³ he rejected it. He once wrote, “Keep clear of psychiatrists unless you know that they are also Christians. Otherwise they start with the assumption that your religion is an illusion and try to ‘cure’ it: and this assumption they make not as professional psychologists but as amateur philosophers.”¹⁴ When Lewis debated Michael Foster at the Socratic Club on Oct. 16 on the topic, “God and History,” he probably marshaled some of the same arguments as in this essay “Historicism.”

During the end of his tenure at Oxford and the first years of his time in Cambridge, Lewis wrote (1948–1954) and published (1950–1956) the *Chronicles of Narnia*. The first of them, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, was published in 1950. These books about another world contain Lewis’ view of humanity by showing four children who develop as thinking beings, able to function in an orderly, medieval universe. As Martha Sammons has pointed out, Lewis presented a medieval picture of the universe in both the *Chronicles of Narnia* and the *Space Trilogy*.¹⁵ With their presentation of traditional virtues, such as friendship, chastity, humility, servanthood, self-sacrifice, chivalry, courtesy, faithfulness, the four cardinal virtues—justice, prudence, temperance, and courage—and others, they

⁸ Brooke, Christopher N. L. *A History of the University of Cambridge*. Vol. IV: 1870–1990, 127.

⁹ Dean, “The last critic? The importance of F. R. Leavis.” <http://www.newcriterion.com/archive/14/jan96/dean.htm>.

¹⁰ Mason, *Cambridge Minds*, 30f.

¹¹ Mason, *Cambridge Minds*, 29-31.

¹² Annan, *The Dons*, 58.

¹³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 88f.

¹⁴ Lewis, *Collected Letters*, II, (Feb. 23, 1947), 765.

¹⁵ Sammons, Martha C. *A Guide Through C. S. Lewis’ Space Trilogy*, Westchester, IL: Cornerstone Books, 1980, Chapter 3: “Medieval Perspectives and the Trilogy,” pp. 41-57.

strengthen the chests of those who read them.¹⁶ The experiences of all of the children in the Chronicles of Narnia train their emotions so that they are no longer boys and girls without chests.¹⁷

Some of the features of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* were anticipated by previous works of Lewis, such as “The Satyr,” a poem from Lewis’ *Spirits in Bondage* that shows similarities to Tumnus the Faun of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. From the same cycle of poems “The Witch” is later embodied in the White Witch of Narnia. Various Chronicles also addressed current issues. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis ridiculed the modern school and King and Ketley’s book, *The Control of Language*, through the words of Professor Kirke: “I wonder what they do teach them at these schools.”

During World War Two, “it was government policy to disperse people and institutions from London, a prime target for German bombing, to reception areas in the provinces,”¹⁸ particularly after the London blitzes of 1940 and 1941. In July 1940, Hitler gave Reichsmarshall Hermann Goering the task of destroying British air power as a prelude to the invasion of Britain. In August the Battle of Britain began,¹⁹ and on September 7 German bombers struck London. The Blitz struck London for fifty-seven consecutive days and did not end until May 10 and 11, 1941, the worst part of the Blitz, just a few days after Lewis had his microphone test in preparation for his first series of BBC broadcasts.²⁰ As the political intelligence department of the Foreign Office occupied most of Balliol College and the map-making section of intelligence took up quarters in the Bodleian Library, Lewis harbored children in his home at the Kilns. “Apart from the swarm of officials, thousands of working-class mothers and children, evacuees from the East End of London, were temporarily accommodated in colleges or cinemas before dispersing to homes in and around Oxford.”²¹ Jill Flewett, later Jill Freud, was one of those, staying with the Lewis family from 1943 until the end of the war in 1945. That practice provided the setting for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (published on October 16, 1950), which begins, “Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy. This story is about something that happened to them when they were sent away from London during the war because of the air raids.”²²

The proofs of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* had been passed around at an Inklings meeting at the Eagle & Child on June 22, as the book was nearing publication. Roger Green, always a strong supporter of the writings of Lewis, was present, probably speaking of the book to the other Inklings in glowing terms. Meetings between Lewis and Green earlier in the year undoubtedly included discussion of the tail end of the publishing process. Roger dined with Jack at Magdalene College on Wednesday, March 8, and the two of them also met at the King’s Arm pub on Wednesday morning, April 5, the day before Maundy Thursday.

At approximately this time, around 1950, Lewis published a poem on the shallowness of modern life, “Finchley Avenue.” Lonely people living in the large cities like London get so wrapped up in their daily activities, rushing to work and back, carrying out their business at a feverish pace, and missing out on the important things. Lewis lamented the former, simpler days of “vanished time.” Only the garden lawn and the trees take us back to the way it was, but other things, such as old books, remind us of the sweet past when we first wondered about time. While this poem is not one of his well known poems, it

¹⁶ Myers, C. S. *Lewis in Context*, 119. Myers goes on to argue that the first three Chronicles deal with the nature of Joy and the search for it, while *The Silver Chair* and *The Horse and His Boy* deal with the spiritual landscape of both intellect and emotions, and *The Magician’s Nephew* and *The Last Battle* deal with creation and the last judgment, as well as a number of other issues.

¹⁷ The phrase “without chests” appears several times in *The Abolition of Man* to mean people without trained emotions, people whose emotions rule their reason rather than the other way around.

¹⁸ Addison, Paul. “Oxford and the Second World War.” Chapter 7 in *The History of the University of Oxford*. Vol. VIII: The Twentieth Century, 170.

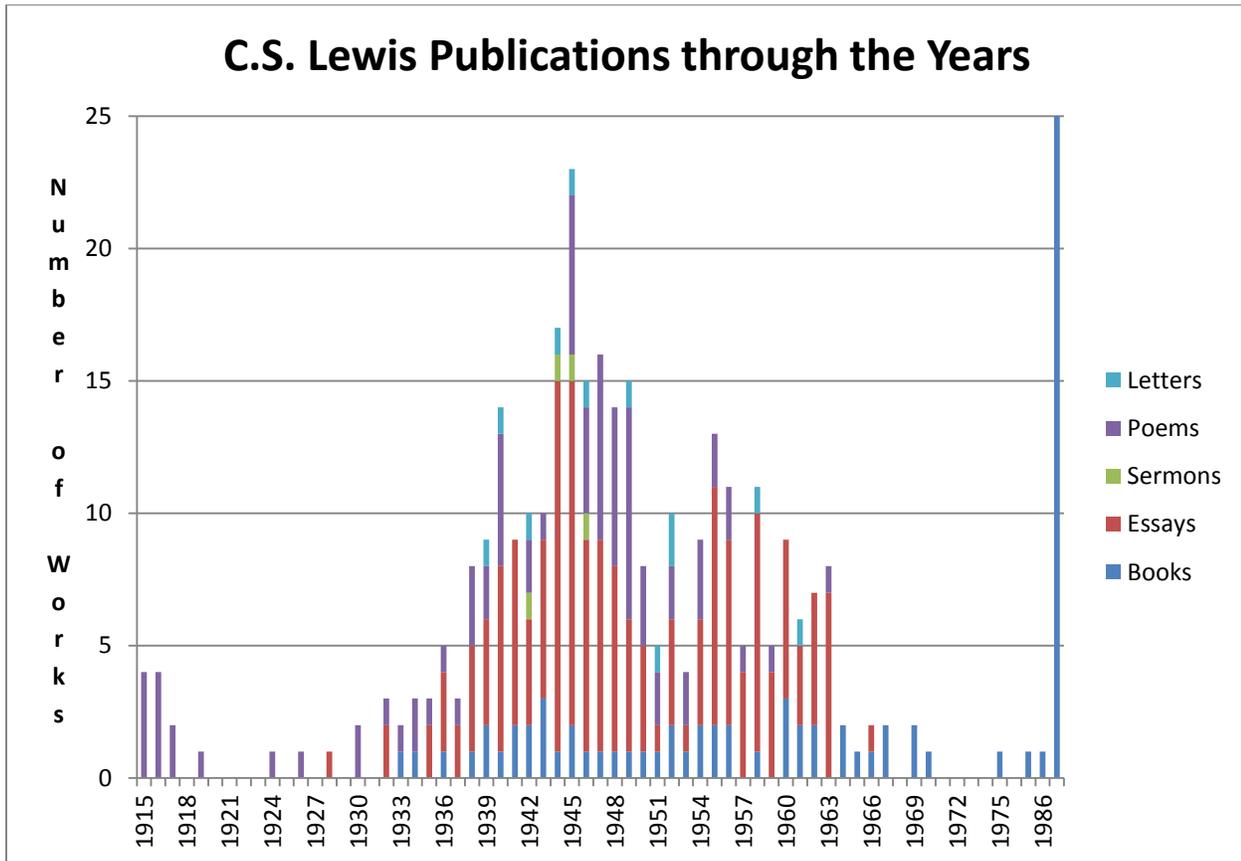
¹⁹ Phillips, Justin. *C. S. Lewis at the BBC*, 62.

²⁰ Phillips, 86.

²¹ Addison, 171.

²² Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 1.

serves as a fitting conclusion to an article that describes one of Lewis' more significant years, the year that the first Chronicle of Narnia was published.



Appendix I: Lewis Publications: 1950

1. "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?" from the book *Asking Them Questions* by Ronald Selby Wright, editor (1950) (*God in the Dock*, 156)
2. "The Pains of Animals: A Problem in Theology" from *The Month*, Vol. CLXXXIX (February 1950) (*God in the Dock*, 166)
3. Poem "As One Oldster to Another" in *Punch* (March 15, 1950) (*Poems*, 41)
4. "The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version" was the Ethel M. Wood Lecture, delivered at the University of London on March 20, 1950 (*Selected Literary Essays*, xviii).
5. Poem "A Cliché Came Out of its Cage" in *Nine: A Magazine of Poetry and Criticism* (May 1950) (*Poems*, 3)
6. "Historicism" from *The Month*, Vol. IV (October 1950) (*Fern-Seed and Elephants*, 44)
7. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Oct. 16, 1950)
8. Poem "Finchley Avenue" (later published in *Occasional Poets: An Anthology*, edited by Richard Adams, 1986) (*Collected Poems*)