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The National Identity of C.S. Lewis

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The National Identity of C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis was perhaps the 20th century's most influential Christian writer, and fifty years after his death, his works continue to top bestseller lists in their categories. His novels have spawned theatrical and cinematic adaptations; his books have been translated into over twenty languages, and his foremost apologetic work, *Mere Christianity*, was named by *Christianity Today* as one of the three most influential books amongst evangelicals since 1945. Furthermore, famous individuals such as Francis Collins, leader of the Human Genome Project, and British philosopher C.E.M. Joad have attributed in part their conversions to Christianity to Lewis's books.¹ Lewis's success as an author and Christian apologist was not the result of lengthy theological training—Lewis's credentials were in medieval literature—but of an unmatched ability to communicate with clarity, cleverness, and insightfulness. Today, children around the world continue to be enchanted by the lion Aslan in Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a staple of children's fantasy literature among Christians and non-Christian audiences alike.

In the eyes of the public, Lewis was “the quintessential Oxford don” so representative of the institution as to be a “manifestation of its spirit,” but although Lewis is largely seen as having been a classic, tweedy English professor, he would have vehemently objected to being referred to in any way as English. Unbeknownst to many, C.S. Lewis was born and raised not in England but in the hills of Northern Ireland, a land for him held a lifelong attraction. Were he still alive today, this would be obvious from the Belfast accent he was reputed to have had even at the end of his life, but as it is 21st century readers are left only with Lewis's books, which feature primarily English characters in English settings, like the Pevensie children in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis's Irish heritage has also remained something of a public

¹ C.E.M. Joad, *The Recovery of Belief, a Restatement of Christian Philosophy*, by C. E. M. Joad (Faber & Faber, 1952), 81; Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 21.

secret because of his general exclusion from the canon of twentieth century Irish literature. For example, there is no entry for C.S. Lewis in the supposedly definitive *Dictionary of Irish Literature* (1996).² One could almost apply to Lewis the adage that “no prophet is accepted in his hometown,” as his works have met with far greater success in Britain and the United States than in Ireland.

This paper will address the topic of Lewis’s Irish identity and what, exactly, is meant by that term. In what ways should Lewis be considered Irish or English? Should he be considered British? Specifically Northern Irish? What was C.S. Lewis in terms of his national identity? This paper will approach the question from a number of perspectives so as to provide a holistic view of Lewis’s identity. First his early life will be looked at through a biographical lens, tracing the development of his sense of identity through his birth and childhood in Ulster and into his school days, paying close attention to his family life and other key relationships that shaped him into the man he would later become. Second, this paper will examine the progress of Lewis’s career as a writer, as he transitioned from a life of poetry-writing to his eventual career as a world-renowned novelist and apologist. In this section the key question to be addressed will be that of whether Lewis underwent an “Irish phase” in his early life which he later outgrew during his time in England, or if his Irish heritage continued to play a major role in his writing throughout the entirety of his life. In the third section, the somewhat enigmatic subject of Lewis’s political views will be broached, looking for signs of Irishness or Englishness in his view of society. Finally the question of Lewis’s national identity will be looked at from the angle of his religious views. Into what religious tradition is Lewis best classified? Should Lewis, from a religious perspective, be

² Alister E. McGrath, *C.S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, (Tyndale House, 2013), 13

considered an Irish figure or an English one? By examining Lewis's national identity within this array of contexts, a clearer image of his national identity will hopefully emerge.

LEWIS'S EARLY YEARS

Clive Staples Lewis—known to family and close friends as Jack—was born in Belfast on November 29th, 1898 the second son of Albert Lewis, a local solicitor, and Florence Hamilton, daughter of Reverend Thomas Hamilton, rector of St. Mark's Dundela. Lewis's family was in many ways typical of Belfast's upper middle class; fairly wealthy, members of the Church of Ireland, conservative, and almost invariably against Home Rule.³ But to say that C.S. Lewis was of Ulster blood would be only partly true. His father's father, Richard Lewis, the son of a poor Welsh farmer, arrived in Northern Ireland to work for the Cork Steamship Company before moving to Dublin to pursue work there.⁴ Jack was conscious of his Welsh ancestry and on the subject once remarked, "I'm more Welsh than anything ... and for more than anything else in my ancestry I'm grateful that on my father's side I'm descended from a practical Welsh farmer. To that link with the soil I owe whatever measure of physical energy and stability I have. Without it I should have turned into a hopeless neurotic."⁵ Lewis described his Welsh family as "sentimental, passionate, rhetorical, easily moved both to anger and to tenderness; men who laughed and cried a great deal and who had not much of the talent for happiness."⁶ He considered his Welsh heritage to be partly the source of the more exuberant, "hot" side of his personality which certainly distinguished him from his more cool-headed English peers as an adult.

³ Ronald W. Bresland, *The Backward Glance: CS Lewis and Ireland* (The Institute of Irish Studies: The Queen's University of Belfast, 1999), 14

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6

⁵ George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 21

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1955), 7

Lewis's mother's family was more Irish in heritage, with Flora's own mother, Mary Hamilton being a Dubliner and ardent supporter of Home Rule. While Flora's father, along with the rest of the family, considered the woman's views to be eccentric, they would have an impact on the young Jack Lewis, who himself would announce his own support for Home Rule during his childhood.⁷ Flora's father, the respectable Church of Ireland clergyman, was very much the conservative and Northern Irish figure one would expect him to have been, and Albert Lewis was careful in winning the man's approval before marrying Flora. For Albert, coming from such humble roots, the marriage to Flora Hamilton, a college-educated member of the local elite, related in fact to one of the wealthiest families in Belfast, was a very fortunate development indeed.

The relative wealth of the Hamilton family should not be overstressed, however, when considering the impact money and class had on the childhood of young Jack Lewis. Albert was able to make a very comfortable living for his family, which allowed them in 1905 to move out of the city to the country house of Little Lea. He was also able to send both of his sons, Jack and Warnie (Warren Lewis) to school in England, and later to Oxford. But throughout Jack's childhood, Albert had the very bourgeois habit of loudly fretting over every financial difficulty and assuring his poor sons that they would all be in the poor house within a few weeks. From an outside perspective, this can be seen as at best a sense of ironic humor on Albert's part, or at worst a tendency of his to draw small troubles out of proportion. But for the young Jack Lewis and his brother Warnie, the constant threat of poverty was deeply troubling. Lewis later complained that his father's habit of threatening the family with the poor house had been a source of great distress.⁸ This impression of being on the brink of financial ruin, coupled with his distaste for politics, separated Jack from his father's friends

⁷ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 15.

⁸ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 23

and colleagues. According to his brother Warnie, Albert's awful habit of forcing them to endure his lengthy conversations about "politics and money" had the effect of crushing in Jack any nascent interest in business or politics well "before he was out of his teens."⁹

Jack's consciousness of the lives of ordinary Irish folk, those without his privileges of wealth and education, would be developed by two relationships in his life: one with his childhood Nurse, the other with his best friend Arthur Greeves. Jack's nurse, Lizzie Endicott, connected the Lewis boys' childhoods with the "peasantry of County Down." It was from her that Jack learned not to associate refinement with virtue.¹⁰ It was also from Ms. Endicott that Jack first learned that being a "Papist" was a bad thing, although he had no idea at the time what, in fact, a Papist—or for that matter, a Pope—was. The Nurse simply used the term "wee pope" to refer to anything dirty or distasteful.¹¹ Suspicion or even outright hatred of Catholicism was endemic in the Ulster of Jack's youth. In later years, his own experiences with Roman Catholic friends, as well as with the sectarian violence in his homeland would soften Lewis's views, leading him to focus his writings on "Mere Christianity," that set of beliefs that can be shared by Christians of all denominations.¹² Despite this later ecumenism, however, the anti-Catholic sentiment developed in Lewis's Ulster childhood occasionally shined through. For example, when a Dublin publishing house purchased the rights to his book *The Pilgrim's Regress* and attached to it a misleading blurb that implied that Ulster Protestants were puritanical, Lewis reacted with outrage, expressing in a letter to a friend, "I didn't much like having a book of mine, and specially a religious book, brought out by a Papist publisher" and referred to the blurb as a "damnable lie told to try and make Dublin

⁹ Warner H. Lewis, *Memoir of C.S. Lewis*, in *Lewis Letters*, 26.

¹⁰ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 5.

¹¹ A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 308.

¹² *Ibid.*, xi

riff-raff buy the book.”¹³ Lewis’s harsh language here and his continued, regular use elsewhere of the term “Papist” in reference to Catholics, should be considered the remnants of his experiences as a child in Northern Ireland, hearkening back to the stories and quips of Lizzie Endicott.

The relationship between C.S. Lewis and Arthur Greeves was another outgrowth of the early years in Ulster, and had a tremendous impact on the lives of both men in decades to come. Lewis wrote often of the values of friendship, referring to it once as the “chief source of my happiness,” and his first experience with friendship would begin with his encounter with the young Arthur Greeves, the boy who lived across the way from Little Lea.¹⁴ Lewis and Greeves were a perfect match, sharing very esoteric interests in Norse and Celtic mythology, poetry, and romantic music of the Wagnerian variety. Greeves was the only person Lewis knew who shared his own love of what he referred to only as “Northernness,” that quality in literature and music that evoked images of “huge, clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer, remoteness, severity...”¹⁵ It is a curious twist of fate that two boys so passionately interested in such a specific subject matter should have the fortune of meeting at such a young age. Lewis later recalled clearly his delight at encountering such a kindred spirit:

On the table beside him lay a copy of *Myths of the Norsemen*.

“Do *you* like that?” said I.

“Do *you* like that?” said he.

Next moment the book was in our hands, our heads were bent close together, we were pointing, quoting, talking—soon almost shouting—discovering in a

¹³ Walter Hooper, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis Volume 2* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 170.

¹⁴ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

torrent of questions that we liked not only the same thing but the same parts of it and in the same way...¹⁶

Regardless of the improbability of such an friendship, there is no doubt that Lewis's friendship with Arthur Greeves was indispensable in helping to shape Lewis's own poetic sensibilities and the very way in which Lewis looked at the world. The trait that Lewis most admired in Arthur Greeves was what Lewis called his love of the "Homely," his appreciation for the beauty in the mundane.¹⁷ "Often he recalled my eyes from the horizon just to look through a hole in a hedge, to see nothing more than a farmyard in its mid-morning solitude, and perhaps a gray cat squeezing its way under a barn door, or a bent old woman with a wrinkled, motherly face coming back with an empty bucket from the pigsty."¹⁸ These scenes at first offered to Jack no sort of attraction; their banality, their disorderliness was the very quality which least interested him. But Arthur Greeves was able to find beauty in the simple lifestyle of the Irish peasant folk, and was able to teach Lewis to see this beauty as well. This childhood friendship was the first influence in Lewis's life that later helped him to overcome his personal tendency to "priggery."¹⁹ It also played a significant role in the development of his nascent love of Ireland.

Lewis's lifelong love of the Irish countryside began when he was still a young boy, exploring the hills around Little Lea, going on vacations with his family. As a young man and adult, he went on hours-long walks through the countryside, rather daunting affairs to an outside observer, and carried his love of long walks with him to his years in Surrey and Oxford.²⁰ In later life the sight of the hills around Belfast, or indeed any part of the Irish

¹⁶ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 130.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁰ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 107-109.

landscape, was one of the chief triggers in Lewis of that intense, passionate pang of longing , which he refers to as “Joy” and defines as a spiritual sort of longing for the beatific. It is indeed hard to overstate Lewis’s obsession with the beauty of his native land. He wrote extensively of his love for this place.

There is nearly always a wind whistling through the grass. Where you see a man plowing there will be gulls following him and pecking at the furrow. There are no field paths or rights of way, but that does not matter for everyone knows you—or if they do not know you, they know your kind and understand that you will shut gates and not walk over crops. Mushrooms are still felt to be common property, like the air. The soil has none of the rich chocolate or ocher you find in parts of England: it is pale—what Dyson calls “the ancient, bitter earth.” But the grass is soft, rich, and sweet, and the cottages, always whitewashed and single storied and roofed with blue slate, light up the whole landscape.²¹

Out there, in the hills, surrounded by breathtaking scenes of cliffs, heather, farmland, and “translucent mountains,” Lewis was at touch with that which was so very “Northern,” the subject of all his favorite poems, the land that enamored Yeats, that was home to the great myths of Chu Chulain; the land of “Patsy Macan.”²² Terence Brown writes that “Lewis associated his sense of a ‘Northern’ quality in literature and myth with the Irish landscape and ... found the same inspiration in Celtic legend as he did in Nordic.”²³ It was a place for the young, aspiring poet, awash with magic and beauty that captured his heart with the enchantment of “Northernness.”

²¹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 153.

²² Walter Hooper, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis Volume 2* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 330.

²³ Terrence Brown, *Ireland’s Literature: Selected Essays* (Westmeath: The Lilliput Press Ltd. 1988), 157.

Arthur Greeves's love of the mundane, his attention to and compassion for "the ordinary" served to ground Lewis's developing love of "Northernness" in the homely, banal experiences of everyday experience. In later years Lewis expressed his gratitude for this grounding effect that Greeves had, and one has reason to suspect that it played a role in his later vernacular sensibilities. His fiction works are filled with scenes glorifying the simple virtue of ordinary people often set against the machinations of sophisticated villains, from Mr. Tumnus and the Beavers in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, to the humble lifestyle of the protagonists in *That Hideous Strength*. This sentiment was also reflected in his apologetic works, in which Lewis tended to sympathize with the lay faithful over the clergy or theologians, and described his vocation as an attempt to communicate Christianity to the "the great mass of storekeepers, lawyers, realtors, morticians, policemen and artisans," which he claimed the theologians had so far failed to do because of their reliance on esoteric terminology and arguments beyond the grasp of ordinary people. Lewis, therefore, considered himself a "translator" for whom a style "more guarded, more *nuancé*, fineliter shaded, more rich in fruitful ambiguities" as theologians tended to use "would have been worse than useless."

One thing at least is sure. If the real Theologians had tackled this laborious work of translation about a hundred years ago, when they began to lose touch with the people (for whom Christ died), there would have been no place for me.²⁴

Lewis's friend, the Oxford philologist and author of *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien, once derisively referred to Lewis as the "everyman theologian" for his attempts to boil complex philosophical and theological arguments down into simple aphorisms and it seems that Tolkien may have resented Lewis for writing so extensively on apologetics without

²⁴ Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 183.

proper theological training.²⁵ But for Lewis (who often humbly acknowledged his own lack of training in his apologetic works).²⁶ theology needed to be available to the everyday person, not just the very educated. Quite probably this facet of Lewis's personality—which one cannot ignore if one hopes to understand Lewis as an author—was due in large part to the early influence of Arthur Greeves's love of the ordinary in Lewis's childhood. It would appear that by opening Lewis up to the beauty and virtue of simple life, Arthur Greeves played a major role in shaping Lewis's approach to writing in subsequent years.

At the same time that Jack Lewis and Arthur Greeves were discovering their mutual love of Northern literature and the Irish landscape, however, the lives of Jack and his brother Warnie would be turned upside down by major changes in their everyday lives. The first was the announcement that the boys would be attending school in England, an attempt on their parents' part to provide the boys with a quality education and to turn them into proper English gentlemen. Their early experiences with English schooling were intensely disagreeable for a number of reasons. The first of these reasons was the matter of culture shock. For a boy who had spent his entire childhood in the hills outside of Belfast, being uprooted and put down in a school in Northern England was a singularly unpleasant experience. Lewis describes the experience in his spiritual autobiography *Surprised by Joy*:

No Englishman will be able to understand my first impression of England. When we disembarked ... I found myself in a world to which I reacted with immediate hatred. The flats of Lancashire in the early morning are in reality a dismal sight; to me they were like the banks of Styx. The strange English accents with which I was surrounded seemed like the voices of demons ... Everything was wrong; wood fences instead of stone walls and hedges, red brick farmhouses instead of white cottages, the fields too big, haystacks the

²⁵ Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 181.

²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 113; C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), viii; Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 60.

wrong shape ... I have made up the quarrel since; but at that moment I conceived a hatred for England which took many years to heal.²⁷

The sheer foreignness of England had an immense impact on the young Lewis, both in fostering in him a temporary aversion to England, and in affirming his lifelong love of Ireland. As a young adult he often enjoyed chatting with Irish friends about the “invincible flippancy and dullness of the Anglo-Saxon race.” Although, as Lewis said, this aversion to England was to be ameliorated with time, it left in Lewis’s mind a sharp distinction between himself and the English people that surrounded him, a distinction which he would be conscious of for the rest of his life. “After all, there is no doubt ... that the Irish are the only people: with all their faults I would not gladly live or die among other folk.”²⁸

The second reason for the Lewis brothers’ misery during the early years of their schooling in England was the overbearing personality of their schoolmaster. Headmaster Robert Capron of the Wynyard School, Watford, Hertfordshire was unorthodox in style and short in temper. Even as an adult, Jack insisted that the man was insane, and certainly there is no doubt that the man’s teaching methods were very harsh.²⁹ Capron had no qualms with berating, provoking, or otherwise harassing his students, and often referred derisively to the boys as “Irishmen,” for example rebuking Warnie, “Please we don’t want any of your Irish wit here.”³⁰ While this was not indicative of any sort of egregious racist sentiment on the Headmaster’s part, Capron’s bullying did continue to cement the distinction of identity that was already taking place in the boys’ minds. It was during their early schooling that Jack and Warnie became aware of their identity as Irish *as opposed to* English. Although both would in many ways assimilate into English culture, going on to successful careers at Oxford,

²⁷ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 24.

²⁸ Hooper, *Collected Letters* vol. 1, 310.

²⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 27.

³⁰ Lewis, *Letters*, 97.

during their years at Wynyard and later Malvern College Jack and Warnie Lewis came to realize they were set apart from the other students by their nationality.

After two years under Capron's instruction at Wynyard, the boys moved onto Malvern College where their experiences with schooling diverged significantly. Warnie who arrived two years before Jack, soon fit right in and made many friends, an experience he was hopeful that his younger brother would share.³¹ Unfortunately, Jack proved far less socially adept. Writing of Malvern later in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis goes into great detail describing every perceived problem with the social stratification and organization of the establishment, despite there being no particularly clear connection between the topic of Malvern's social institutions and his own spiritual development. Likely the reason for this digression, as Edwards describes it, is that Lewis "seems to be reacting to all the British propaganda in favor of public school education—and in a very defensive manner."³² Lewis had no love for public school, citing his own painful experiences of isolation and ostracism, and had little patience for the unshakeable English faith in the public schooling system. In Lewis's only attempt at a realistic fiction novel, an unfinished and untitled fragment about an Englishman encountering his Irish relatives for the first time, the protagonist encounters on the ferry to Belfast a companion, Hughie McClinniehan, who complains loudly parents "sending boys from here to schools in England. It doesn't do at all. If I'd had my way I'd have sent my boy to Campbell College or the Institution and I'd have all that money in my pocket and far less trouble into the bargain."³³ Here and at seemingly every other opportunity, Lewis dispenses harsh criticism of English public schools for, among other things, their formation of coteries, small groups of individuals existing only to keep others out. At Malvern this exclusive ring was institutionalized in the form of the "Bloods," the eldest students, who were given "every kind

³¹ Lewis, *Letters*, 127.

³² Bruce L. Edwards, *C.S. Lewis: An Examined Life* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 62.

³³ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 68.

of power, privilege, and prestige.”³⁴ The theme of these coteries appears elsewhere in Lewis’s writings, such as among the villains at Belbury in *That Hideous Strength*, and in his explanation of the phenomenon in his sermon “The Inner Ring” in *The Weight of Glory*. For the young Lewis, the prospect of advancement in popularity among his peers at Malvern held no appeal and appeared to him to be an empty, hollow pursuit. Perhaps it is that Edwards refers to when he attributes Lewis’s “strife” at Malvern to “Jack’s perception of cultural differences between himself and the other students.”³⁵ Whereas most students seemed to have been focused on fitting in and being accepted into circles of friends, Lewis remained aloof.

Lewis’s alienation at Malvern during his schoolboy days would prove to be another decisive event in the shaping of his personality for years to come. For in rejecting the traditional social structure of his school, Lewis was not only establishing himself as an opponent of cliques and coteries, he was, as Edwards writes, “refusing to become the stereotypical Christian gentleman.” It is in this stage of Lewis’s life that one can distinguish the turning point at which Lewis definitively left behind the path of traditional English (or even Belfast) social advancement. Even at Oxford, Lewis was very much an outsider and pursued his career there not out of desire for prestige, but because Lewis—along with his father—knew that he would never excel at anything other than the scholarly pursuits.³⁶ To Edwards, this is the time in which Lewis “seems to have become Irish,” embarking upon a path divergent from the traditional, embracing a life apart from that of the English society around him.³⁷ While his lifestyle of studying and writing was not distinctly Irish, it was developed in contrast to the English society around him at Malvern, and contributed to his sense of being an outsider at school. In subsequent years Lewis found that despite all his sour

³⁴ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 85.

³⁵ Edwards, *C.S. Lewis*, 93.

³⁶ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 183

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 62

memories from Malvern, the bulk of his recollections were quite unrelated to the other students, to sports, or to the fagging system. “There were more Leprechauns than fags in that House. I have seen the victories of Cuchulain more often than those of the first eleven. Was Borage the Head of the College? Or was it Conachar MacNessa?”³⁸ He dove headlong into the mythology and poetry that had so enamored him as a young boy. Even his political views were pushed aside. Before Malvern, Lewis had already written about the Home Rule crisis in Ireland, staking out his position in favor of Home Rule. “You ask, ‘What would we do with Home Rule if we got it?’” he wrote in 1908, “What we would do is our business but we would do a good deal more than you would like.”³⁹ But at Malvern, Jack’s growing disenchantment with proper society, with his father’s one-sided political discussions, and with the juvenile politics of school life all led to his withdrawal from politics altogether. Bresland describes how Lewis experienced “...growing disillusionment with the political crisis that had dragged on since he penned his own thoughts on the matter in his youthful essay on home rule in 1908. Instead, while Ulster was on the brink of civil war, Jack returned to the stories of talking animals that he had originally begun in Dundela Villas when he was six years old.”⁴⁰ As the realms of politics and social life receded from Lewis’s focus, the world of mythology, of fantasy, and of poetry rose to the forefront.

While school life presented young Lewis with new challenges, life at home was becoming increasingly barren. Shortly before the Lewis boys departed for Wynyard in 1908, their mother Flora died of cancer, leaving the boys distraught and Albert Lewis uncertain of how best to cope with the loss. The most significant consequence of Flora’s death was the straining of already tense relations between Albert and his sons. Lewis describes this unfortunate series of events in *Surprised by Joy*:

³⁸ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 62.

³⁹ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 29.

“For us boys the real bereavement had happened before our mother died. We lost her gradually as she was gradually withdrawn from our life into the hands of nurses and delirium and morphia ... It divided us from our father as well as our mother. ... His nerves had never been of the steadiest and his emotions had always been uncontrolled. Under the pressure of anxiety his temper became incalculable; he spoke wildly and acted unjustly. Thus by a peculiar cruelty of fate, during those months the unfortunate man, had he but known it, was really losing his sons as well as his wife.”⁴¹

Both of the young boys felt ever more alienated from their father, and their father in turn struggled to communicate with them. For the vast majority of the day, whenever the boys were home from school, Albert was away at work, leaving the boys to their own devices. “Everything invited us to develop a life that had no connection with our father,” Jack wrote later, commenting on how he and Warnie withdrew from their father’s life.⁴² They in turn spent their time developing the stories of their own imaginary worlds, conceived of years before: Jack’s *Animal World* and Warnie’s *India*. One of the greatest sources of miscommunication between the boys and their father, according to Jack, was Albert’s tendency to launch into lengthy tirades over the slightest of offenses. “He had for many years been a public prosecutor. Words came to him and intoxicated him as they came... simile piled on simile, rhetorical question on rhetorical question, the flash of an orator’s eye and the thundercloud of an orator’s brow, the gestures, the cadences and the pauses.”⁴³ For years the boys reacted to Albert’s overbearing lectures with terror, but eventually the fear gave way to ridicule as Jack and Warnie recognized Albert’s verbosity as farcical. The replacement of dread with derision did nothing to heal the relationship. In 1912, Jack wrote a musical comedy “*The Jester’s Tale*” in which the main character was an obvious parody of Albert,

⁴¹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 40.

incapable of understanding a joke and showing thus contempt for humor of any sort. But so great was the gulf in understanding between Jack and his father by this point that when Albert read and reviewed the piece for “The Leeborough Review,” he remained completely oblivious of Jack’s insolence, describing the character in question as “a gloomy individual who under the cloak of pompous disregard for idle jestings conceals an inability to grasp the simplest witticisms” but ironically never suspecting that this character was in fact a thinly veiled caricature of himself.⁴⁴ Albert’s peculiar sense of humor and its incompatibility with Jacks’ only served to force the two further apart.

For Warnie the tension between father and son was equally felt. Many years after Albert’s death, Warnie discovered the novel *The Ulsterman: A Story of Today*, by Frank Frankfort Moore, an account of family life in Ulster circa 1914. For Warnie, this was an eye opening experience, an illumination of how the conflict between father and sons that had raged in the Lewis household was not an isolated phenomenon, but an experience shared by many Ulster families at the time. “After tea I began to read *The Ulsterman*,” he wrote in his diary after one reading of the book, “a burning, bitter, but lifelike picture of the Ulster of 1914. The most interesting thing is to find that the dominance, the ceaseless cross-examination, the unawareness that J and I were ‘individuals’ which we thought was a Lewisianism was in fact Ulsterism. True, we were never treated as bad as the Alexander family [in the novel] but in what follows there is enough of our own adolescent grievances to give more than a hint of Leeborough conditions.”⁴⁵ Moore described the patterns of interactions between fathers and sons in the Ulster of that time period, how local ideas of manhood and authority shaped family life, in this case for the worse:

⁴⁴ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 21.

⁴⁵ Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead (eds), *Brothers and Friends: The Diaries of Major Warren Hamilton Lewis*, (Harper and Row, 1982), 278.

You know the relative position of father and son in Ulster ... The son is in a worse position than the errand boy. You know the way we have to give an account of ourselves wherever we may go. If I go as far as Belfast for a day, I'm cross-examined as to how I spent every hour. If I get asked out anywhere here I have to ask leave to go. I'm not supposed to make an acquaintance without father's leave ... Well, is it any wonder when we're treated like this, we sons turn out liars and hypocrites? Is it any wonder that we try to get the better of our fathers and show them that we have souls of our own?⁴⁶

As Warnie noted, there are distinct parallels between the father in this novel and Albert Lewis. One can see on the one hand the exacting father and on the other hand the sons' trying to strike back through their own methods of insolence. Reconciliation would eventually take place between the Lewis sons and their father, during and after Albert's death, but they remained heavily influenced for the rest of their by his Ulster personality.

Jack's early life established his identity for years to come. The course of that early life saw him developing a keen sense of Irishness, first at home in the Belfast area and later at boarding school in England. This Irish identity was something recognized not only by Jack and Warnie but by those around them as well, such as their Headmaster at Wynyard and their classmates at Wyvern. From a young age, therefore, both of them came to a very conscious awareness and understanding of their Irish identity, an identity which in some ways set them apart from their English peers and precluded their feeling at home in England. Upon graduating from Malvern, both boys went on to further education in England where their identity as Irishmen in England would continue. As will be explained, the upcoming years would see C.S. Lewis's writing career begin in earnest and his experiences studying in England would have a tremendous effect on the nature of his work. This time period would

⁴⁶ Frank Frankfort Moore, *The Ulsterman: A Story of Today*, (Hutchinson, 1914), quoted in *Brothers and Friends*, 278.

also find Lewis setting off to the only place outside of Ireland that he would eventually come to consider home: Oxford.

THE IRISH PHASE

Sometime after his arrival at Oxford, in a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves, Jack Lewis broached the topic of becoming a published author. A comment made during his treatment of the topic is somewhat insightful into the debate over where Lewis should be classified on the spectrum of Englishness versus Irishness. “If I ever do send my stuff to a publisher, I think I shall try Maunsel, those Dublin people, and so tack myself definitely onto the Irish school.”⁴⁷ It seemed only sensible at the time that he consider himself a part of the “Irish school.” His poetry was primarily concerned with mythological figures, with the beauty of the Irish landscape, and with anything associated with “Northernness.” His favorite author, far and away, was Yeats for whom Lewis had high praise. “Among all the poets I was reading at this time ... there was one who stood apart from the others. Yeats was this poet.”⁴⁸ The man exerted a powerful influence on Lewis’s poetry at the time and some have even suggested that Lewis may have partly based the character of Merlin in *That Hideous Strength* on him as well.⁴⁹ Upon first encountering Yeats’s work, Lewis was so enthralled that he couldn’t understand why Yeats was, at the time, not very popular in the mainstream and began to hypothesize about this, “I am often surprised to find how utterly ignored Yeats is among the men I have met: perhaps his appeal is purely Irish – if so, then thank the gods that I am Irish.”⁵⁰ Indeed, Yeats was a quintessentially Irish poet and Lewis, Irish by birth and now conscious of his Irish identity after having lived in England for many years, was coming to consider his fascination with Yeats to be an outgrowth of his own Irish identity.

⁴⁷ Walter Hooper, *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 1914-1963* (Collins, 1979), 195.

⁴⁸ Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 140

⁴⁹ Brown, *Ireland’s Literature*, 160.

⁵⁰ Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 202.

It is curious, then, that only a couple of years after writing to Arthur Greeves about getting published by a Dublin publishing house, that Lewis wrote another letter to Greeves urging the exact opposite, that Greeves stay away from the Irish school.

So you are inclining to the New Ireland school are you? I remember you used to laugh at my Irish enthusiasm in the old days when you were an orthodox Ulsterman. I am glad you begin to think otherwise ... [but] here I must indulge my love of preaching by warning you not to get too much bound up in a cult. Between your other penchant [Arthur's homosexuality] ... and the Irish school you might get into a sort of little by-way of the intellectual world, off the main track and lose yourself there. Remember that the great minds, Milton, Scott, Mozart and so on, are always sane before all and keep in the broad highway of thought and feel what can be felt by all men, not only a few ... it is partly through this feeling that I have not begun by sending my M.S. to Maunsel.⁵¹

What transpired in the intervening years between these letters that produced such a change in Lewis's literary ambitions? How did the young C.S. Lewis come to abandon his aspirations of joining the "Irish school" and instead focus on staying with the "broad highway of thought"? One theory for explaining this change, put forth by Terrence Brown, claims that the transition had something to do, in fact, with Yeats, and most importantly with a traumatic experience during Lewis's time at Oxford. The incident involved a friend of Lewis's, Dr. John Askins, who came to suffer from a form of insanity in the weeks leading up to his death in April, 1923. Lewis, being a friend of the man, stayed alone with him in those final days and witnessed—horrified—the man's descent into madness.⁵² "He was a man whom I had dearly loved, and well he deserved love. And now I helped to hold him while he kicked and wallowed on the floor, screaming out that devils were tearing him and that he was at the

⁵¹ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 394.

⁵² Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 64-65.

moment falling down into Hell.”⁵³ It was a nightmarish experience for Lewis, who struggled to understand what had happened to his friend to induce such a terrifying change.

Lewis’s own religious and philosophical beliefs were somewhat muddled at the time, although his keen mind was certainly actively engaged in studying the topics. As Lewis described later in *Surprised by Joy*, his time at Oxford prior to his conversion was characterized by a conflict between two parts of his own mind: the rationalist side which provided the core of his atheism and asserted that there was nothing more in the world than that which could be empirically verified, and his romantic side which was fascinated by myths and fairy tales and, in fact, wanted very much to believe in them:

The two hemispheres of my mind were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow “rationalism.” Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless. The exceptions were certain people (whom I loved and believed to be real) and nature herself. That is, nature as she appeared to the senses. I chewed endlessly on the problem: “How can it be so beautiful and also so cruel, wasteful and futile?” Hence at this time I could almost have said with Santayana, “All that is good is imaginary; all that is real is evil.”⁵⁴

This led to the awkward situation of Lewis’s reading ancient myths and heroic tales and assuring himself that they could never have happened, but wishing very much that they had. Such contradiction also characterized Jack’s spirituality at the time. He summed up his paradoxical religious views, saying, “I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing.”⁵⁵ Torn as he was between these warring impulses and ideas, Lewis struggled for stability or some sort of resolution.

⁵³ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 202.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 115.

The romantic side of Lewis in particular was growing restless during this phase of conflict and soon the young author found himself beginning to take an interest in the occult and the shock felt by his rationalist side only seemed to intensify this interest. “There is a kind of gravitation in the mind whereby good rushes to good and evil to evil. This mingled repulsion and desire drew towards them everything else in me that was bad,” leading him on, so to speak, into the realm of magic. Part of the appeal was to Lewis’s tendency to characterize himself—or the heroes in his stories—as members of a small group who “stand together against something stronger and larger.” Britain’s lone stand against Germany in 1940 was “no surprise” to Lewis: “it was the sort of thing that I always expect” (SBJ 32). This facet of his personality was especially drawn by the occult. “The idea that if there were occult knowledge it was known to the very few and scorned by the many became an added attraction.”⁵⁶ This newfound interest in magic did not happen spontaneously, however, but was brought about at least in part by Lewis’s reading of Yeats.⁵⁷ As Lewis continued to read the works of the great Irish poet, he began to realize that there was something peculiar about the man. “I had been reading him for quite a long time before I discovered the difference, and perhaps should never have discovered it if I had not read his prose as well (things like *Rosa Alchemica* and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* ... to put it quite plainly, he seriously believed in magic.”⁵⁸ For Lewis this appeal would ultimately remain a strictly academic one, but he would have studied magic, had he the chance. “If there had been in the neighbourhood some elder person who dabbled in dirt of the magical (such have a good nose for potential disciples) I might now be a Satanist or a maniac.”⁵⁹ As it was, there was no such mentor, and Lewis’s rationalist side rebelled against any attempt at taking magic seriously. And, just as Lewis’s rationalist sensibilities—and possibly nascent religiosity—warned him against

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 176.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Ireland’s Literature*, 159.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 140-141

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 176.

delving deeper into the study of magic and the occult, so too they tried to push him away from Yeats, the source of his fascination with the subject.

Brown believes that Lewis's experience with his friend's insanity, and for that matter the topic of Lewis's national identity, can best be understood only when considered in light of this conflict. As Lewis watched his friend's sanity slip, he formulated his own explanation for the madness.

[This] man, as I well knew, had not kept the beaten track. Had he not flirted with Theosophy, Yoga, Spiritualism, Psychoanalysis, what not? Probably these things had in fact no connection with his insanity, for which (I believe) there were physical causes. But it did not seem so to me at the time. I thought that I had seen a warning; it was to this, this raving on the floor that all romantic longings led a man in the end. ... Safety first, thought I: the beaten track, the approved road, the centre of the road, the lights on.⁶⁰

From that point forward the conflict between Lewis's warring halves intensified. He began to fear losing his mind and warned Arthur Greeves to avoid at all costs anything that could lead to insanity. "Arthur, whatever you do never allow yourself to get a neurosis. You and I are both qualified for it, because we were both afraid of our fathers as children. The Doctor who came to see the poor Doc (a psychoanalyst and neurological specialist) said that every neurotic case went back to the childish fear of the father. But it can be avoided. Keep clear of introspection, of brooding, of spiritualism, of everything eccentric."⁶¹ As he later warned Arthur: "We hold our mental health by a thread and nothing is worth risking it for."⁶² These metaphors, "the beaten track, the approved road, the centre of the road" are the very same language that Lewis went on to use in discouraging Arthur Greeves from joining the Irish

⁶⁰ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 202-203.

⁶¹ Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 292-293.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 286-287.

school. According to Brown this similarity is no coincidence. Just as this pivotal experience marked a turning point in the conflict between Lewis's warring rationalism and romanticism, Brown suggests that it was also a critical moment in terms of his developing national identity. "One suspects that much in Lewis's imaginative life was repressed following this dreadful incident" as can be seen from Lewis's own words and his subsequent fear of insanity, "and his youthful flirtation with "romantic Ireland" was probably only one of the aspects of his personality which were sacrificed to safety at this time."⁶³ Brown clearly believes that Lewis's identity as an Irish author was associated with his romantic side while his rationalist side urged him to remain more of a mainstream author. It is to this that Brown attributes Lewis's transition from the Irish school to the mainstream and subsequently from poetry to novel-writing. Lewis was, according to Brown, not merely changing his writing style, but readjusting his own sense of identity. "His poetic ambitions, seriously nurtured in his young manhood, went underground in the same way as one might be tempted to see his nationality being suppressed in an adulthood in which he seemed to many the quintessential English don of his generation, so at home in Oxford as to seem a manifestation of its spirit."⁶⁴ By rejecting Yeats, the occult, and the romantic—Brown suggests—Lewis was also rejecting much of what had previously constituted his Irish identity, thus allowing himself to later come to seem so much like an Englishman.

This account of the conclusion of Lewis's "Irish phase," however, does not take into account some key factors in Lewis's later life such as the resolution of the conflict between his rationalism and romanticism following his conversion to Christianity. Lewis's journey to the Christian faith was one taken by both facets of his personality. On the rational side, Lewis's continued studying of philosophy had taken him very quickly away from the

⁶³ Brown, *Ireland's Literature*, 161.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

empiricists and into the school of German idealism where he adopted a sort of “watered Hegelianism.” Lewis found Hegel’s concept of the Absolute, however, to be perfectly opaque. This murkiness “wouldn’t serve” for Lewis, who felt that as an Oxford it was his duty to “make things clear.” This led him back to a predecessor of the Idealists. “After all, did Hegel and Bradley and all the rest of them ever do more than add mystifications to the simple, workable, theistic idealism of Berkeley? I thought not.”⁶⁵ George Berkeley—an Irish philosopher—ultimately played a major role in Lewis’s conversion. His work provided Lewis with a “philosophical framework for the existence of God.” As Bresland says, “Berkeley forwarded the bold doctrine of a wholly non-material, theistic universe, whose *esse* was *percipi*—that is ‘to be is to be perceived’—and in which human ‘spirits’ were conceived of as conversing directly with the mind of God.”⁶⁶ Although Lewis at first was careful to distinguish this “God” from “the God of popular religion,” he nonetheless found himself wandering, completely unintentionally, toward the very religion that he had long ago rejected.

Jack’s romantic side, however, remained unconvinced of Christianity’s relevance. Part of the reason for his initial departure from Christianity had been the way his religion seemed to pale in certain ways next to his relationship with “Northernness.” “Northernness” was to Lewis’s romantic life more compelling than his religion because “it contained elements which my religion ought to have contained and did not.” This element Lewis called “something very like adoration,” a sort of “disinterested self-abandonment to an object which securely claimed this by simply being the object it was.” While the tales of the Norse gods could evoke such a passion in Lewis’s heart with ease, the Christian God did not. Despite his professed atheism, he wanted very much to believe in something supernatural (or

⁶⁵ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 222.

⁶⁶ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 84.

supranatural) but “came far nearer to feeling this about the Norse gods”—whom he did not believe in—than the God he had believed in as a boy.⁶⁷ This all changed, however, following a series of discussions between Lewis and two of his friends, J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. These two provided Lewis with a way of placing his love of mythology in a Christian context, of understanding the discrepancy between his experiences with the pagan gods and the Christian one:

Now what Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn’t mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a God sacrificing himself to himself I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it ... Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with the tremendous difference that *it really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God’s myth where the others are men’s myths: i.e. the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call ‘real things’.⁶⁸

This explanation finally reconciled Lewis’s imaginative life with the Christianity that he was beginning to embrace in his contemplative life. It also helped him move beyond the objection to Christianity that he had held for so long, namely that Christians believed that theirs happened to be the one true faith that they were fortunate enough to pick out of a sea of “endemic nonsense” and lies.⁶⁹ Try as he might, the young Christian Lewis had been unable to accept the profound images and tales of the Norse, Greek, and Celtic myths he had read as mere lies. By understanding Christianity as the “true myth,” however, Lewis could simultaneously affirm the power of the myths that had captured his heart since his youth, and

⁶⁷ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 77.

⁶⁸ Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 427-428.

⁶⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 63.

at the same time believe in something that could appeal to his rational faculties as well. Thus as a Christian, Lewis's imagination was able to run free in works of fiction such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Space Trilogy* while his rational faculties were put to work in writing his apologetics. In his conversion to Christianity Lewis finally was able to end the war between reason and romanticism and move on to a fulfilling literary and academic career.

In light of this resolution, it would appear difficult to hold onto the assertion that Lewis's sublimation of his Irish identity came as a result of the suppression of his imaginative side. After all, following his conversion in 1931 Lewis no longer felt any need to suppress his love of the magical and mythical but was instead able to embrace it in a new way. So why is it that Lewis, after his conversion, did not return to the Irish school but continued to write works more specifically appealing to an English audience? Among Lewis's works of fiction written after his conversion there is not a single one that takes place, in whole or in part, in Ireland. In the *Space Trilogy*, all events on Earth occur in England. Likewise in *The Chronicles of Narnia* all of the children are English schoolchildren and in *The Screwtape Letters*, the human patient of Wormwood is an unnamed English man who dies during World War II. Furthermore as Brown points out, Lewis's poetry-writing trails off at this point in his life as well, no small change for the man who had written poetry through his entire life and entertained serious hopes of becoming a great poet in the future.

Did the change in the scope and style of Lewis's writing reflect a sort of suppression, a going underground of his Irish identity in exchange for his newfound identity as an Oxford don? Lewis himself probably would not have thought so; he considered himself to be Irish until the end of his life and continued his love affair with the stunning Irish landscape. Even after establishing himself at Oxford and later Cambridge, Lewis continued to cross the Irish

Sea no fewer than six times a year for holiday trips to his beloved native land.⁷⁰ After his father's death from cancer in September of 1924, he strongly considered renting a sort of summer house in Cloghy, Co. Down because of the regularity of his trips to the area.⁷¹ He also never really lost his Irish accent, according to those who knew him in later years. Friends fondly recall how his voice continued to betray the "slight remains of a Belfast accent"⁷² in such characteristics as his strong *r*'s, his pronunciation of "*Lat'n*," his aspiration of the beginnings of words like "whippersnapper"—pronounced "*hwippwersnapper*"⁷³—and other "characteristic Ulster touches."⁷⁴ Ulster slang continued to make appearances in his letters and works, fictional and otherwise, throughout the rest of his life. In letters to friends Lewis used such phrases as "it beats Banagher" (referring to something that excels or exceeds the norm), "a holy terror," "good crack" (from the Irish *craic*, meaning "entertaining conversation" or "high-spirited entertainment"), and "as long as a Lurgan spade" (usually referring to a "gloomy countenance" or long face). Particularly interesting is his regular use of the word "cod" not just in the normal Irish senses of "a joke" or "deception, deceit or stupidity" but also in the Ulster sense of "humorous and insincere self-deprecation."⁷⁵ In fact, the original title of Lewis's first poetry collection, *Spirits in Bondage from 1919* was going to be *Metrical Meditations of a Cod*. He also frequently used a variation on 'cod' that he invented himself: "codetta."⁷⁶ Its meaning and use were similar to the contemporary

⁷⁰ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 114.

⁷¹ Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 871-2.

⁷² Leo Baker, *Near the Beginning*, in *Remembering C.S. Lewis: Recollections of Those Who Knew Him*, (Ignatius Press, 2005), 70.

⁷³ Derek Brewer, *The Tutor: A Portrait*, in *Remembering C.S. Lewis: Recollections of Those Who Knew Him*, (Ignatius Press, 2005), 128.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷⁵ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 32; Share, *Slanguage: A Dictionary of Irish Slang and Colloquial English in Ireland* (Gill & MacMillan, 2008), 56; C.S. Lewis, *Poems*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), x.

⁷⁶ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 32, 48, 70, 79, 94, 110, 111, 148)

Hiberno-English word “codology.”⁷⁷ His vocabulary for personal communication certainly revealed his Irish identity throughout the entirety of his life. It was not only in letters that Lewis freely and consciously made use of his homeland’s slang. His greatest published works, ostensibly written for English audiences, also feature such Ulsterisms. In *The Screwtape Letters*, the senior tempter makes use of the phrases “looks as if butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth” and “I might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb.”⁷⁸ In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis’s guide and literary hero George MacDonald, despite being Scottish, uses occasional bits of Hiberno-english such as “make a poor mouth” (from the Irish *an be’al bocht* and meaning “a persistent complaint of poverty”); and “Whisht, now!” (from the Irish *tostwith* the initial aspiration – i.e. *bí’i do thost* – and meaning “Silence!”).⁷⁹ In the last chapter of *Mere Christianity*, considered by many his greatest theological work, Lewis announces that he is going to make an “Irish bull,” revealing his Irish background and asking to be excused for his “unusual” jargon.⁸⁰ Even toward the end of his literary career in *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis reveals his Irish heritage by referring to one character as a “mountainy man.”⁸¹ These and countless other tidbits of Irish slang dotted throughout Lewis’s works help to emphasize how externally apparent his nationality remained to himself and others during his years at Oxford and Cambridge. To those just meeting Lewis in person and those who had known him for years, there was no mistaking him for an Englishman. During one of his recording sessions with the BBC, Lewis was informed that his heavy breathing was ruining the quality of the recording to which he promptly replied, “I’m Irish, Not English.

⁷⁷ ‘Codology’ means ‘nonsense’, according to Share, *Slanguage*, 56.

⁷⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters: With Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 82,124.

⁷⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1946), 35; Share, *Slanguage*, 220; Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 78; Share, *Slanguage*, 309.

⁸⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 186.

⁸¹ C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (New York: HarperCollins, 1956), 92.

Did you ever know an Irishman who didn't puff and blow?"⁸² Certainly there was no doubt in Lewis's mind that he remained an Irishman even at the peak of his fame in England.

In his choice of friends and family life, Lewis's Irish roots revealed themselves as well. During army training, Jack Lewis shared a room with another cadet, Edward Courtney Francis "Paddy" Moore, a fellow Irishman with whom he would become good friends. Upon meeting Paddy's widowed mother Jane Moore, Lewis was "infatuated" with Jane and subsequently made a pact with Paddy that should either of the two boys die in the war, the survivor would take care of the other's family. During Lewis's recovery from his wounds in 1918, his father Albert ever "cautious and methodical" could not bring himself to break his routine and visit Jack in the hospital. Realizing the effect such news would have on Jack, Albert decided not to answer any of his son's letters so as to avoid a conflict. Jane Moore and her daughter Maureen, however, regularly visited Jack, providing crucial support for the young man throughout his recovery.⁸³ When Paddy died that same year, Lewis kept his promise and invited Jane and Maureen Moore to join him and his brother Warnie at Oxford—where she would stay with them for more than a decade—a development which Jack kept secret from his father, out of both shame and fear of losing his father's financial support. Rumors abound regarding the exact nature of Lewis's relationship with Moore, and most biographers of Lewis including George Sayer and A.N. Wilson have asserted that the two were lovers, despite the fact that Lewis frequently referred to Moore and introduced her as "my mother."⁸⁴ Warnie was also perplexed by the "freakishness" of this relationship but was rebuffed by Jack in his inquiries.⁸⁵ Regardless of the nature of their relationship, their mutual

⁸² Robert Kee, *Ireland: A History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), 166.

⁸³ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 53.

⁸⁴ George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis* (Crossway: 1997), 154.

⁸⁵ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 54.

living arrangements put great financial strain on Lewis, a student now tasked with supporting three people on a budget for designed for one.

Despite the difficulties of providing for his new ersatz family, however, Lewis seemed to enjoy this period of his life. This time was an especially “Irish” period for Lewis, whose daily interactions centered on Jane and Maureen Moore, Warnie, and writing letters to Arthur Greeves. Even one of their neighbors just down the road was Jack and Warnie’s quarrelsome aunt Lillian Hamilton, another Irish character in the neighborhood.⁸⁶ During this period Lewis also became friends or acquaintances with a number of Irish individuals who, in addition to Paddy, included Theobald Butler, John Bryson, Eric Dodds, and Nevill Henry Kendal Almayr Coghill.⁸⁷ Lewis was also acquainted with famous Ulster authors Louis MacNeice and Forrest Reid—an acquaintance through Arthur Greeves.⁸⁸ MacNeice, like Lewis it should be noted, had conflicting feelings about his native land of Ulster.⁸⁹ Lewis read the works of these and many other Ulster authors during his time at Oxford. At the meetings of his group of friends the Inklings, for example, one of the group’s chief pastimes was a competition of who could read longest from the works of Ulster author Amanda McKittrick Ros—whose prose the friends found delightfully clumsy—while maintaining a straight face.⁹⁰ Not only in his accent and demeanor, but in his friendships and acquaintanceships at Oxford, Lewis was constantly reminded of and aware of his Irish identity. While it is easy to imagine that at Oxford Lewis was completely immersed in English culture and society, cut off from his Ulster roots, the truth is simply that even during his years at the university Lewis was surrounded by a host of friends and family from Ireland who reinforced and preserved his sense of identity as an Irishman in England.

⁸⁶ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 103.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 95.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 99, 101.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 100.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 98.

In light of this environment full of Irish friends which Lewis found himself in during his years at Oxford and also taking into account his conscious self-identification as Irish, how then is one to account for the shift in his writing from poetry to novels and apologetics, and from a focus on the esoteric poetry of mythology and magic to the more popular works and even children's books for which he later became so famous? If a sublimation of Lewis's Irish identity was not responsible for this transition, how is it to be explained? One reason Lewis moved on from the Irish school after a short period could have been that he was unlikely to succeed in it. As Northern Irish priest and apologist Alister McGrath notes, Lewis was "the wrong kind of Irishman" for the Irish school.⁹¹

Lewis ... came to understand that his own voice would not count as "Irish." He was an atheist—more accurately, an Ulster Protestant atheist. This did not fit in with the strongly Catholic associations of being "Irish." And he had in any case left Ireland for England as a young boy, selling his birthright (so his critics would say) for an English education. And finally, Lewis did not write on specifically Irish themes. Lewis's inclination was clearly towards classical and universal themes, not those traditionally embraced by confessedly Irish poets."⁹²

Lewis simply didn't fit the mold of an Irish author in the traditional sense. He had been raised in Ulster as a Protestant, educated in England, and then drifted into atheism; these placed him outside of the Dublin Irish literary tradition. And as will be mentioned later, Lewis had not the slightest desire to be associated in any way with the Orange movement, a group with which he would repeatedly express disgust over the course of his life. Caught in this way between the North and the South of Ireland, Lewis was unlikely to appeal to either school, despite his love for Ireland as a whole.

⁹¹ McGrath, *C.S. Lewis—A Life*, 13.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 107.

Instead of embracing what McGrath calls the “provinciality of Irish literature,” Lewis’s later writings were designed to appeal to a broad audience, not just to members of the Irish school.⁹³ Although at first this desire to stay on the “broad highways of thought” may have been rooted in a fear of madness, just before and during his conversion to Christianity Lewis’s devotion to universal appeal took on a new purpose; to help him become more extroverted. In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis expresses the difficulties he had experienced as a result of being very introspective throughout his life. A key factor leading up to his conversion experience, he says, was being “taken out of myself,”⁹⁴ focusing not on the world inside him, but on the world around him: “...to attend to your own love or fear is to cease attending to the loved or dreaded object. In other words the enjoyment and the contemplation of our inner activities are incompatible.”⁹⁵ This change of attitude—which soon led him to ridicule, among other things, the practice of keeping a diary—completely transformed Lewis.⁹⁶ As a Christian, this extroversion would be for Lewis the fulfillment of Christ’s command to “love thy neighbor as thyself” and Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* that one can recognize a truly humble man as the one who takes “a real interest in what *you* said to *him*.”⁹⁷ Likewise in *The Great Divorce*, one of the ghosts encountered in Hell is that of a young poet who is too busy trying to tell the narrator about his own troubles or trying to shove his latest piece of poetry off on him to actually listen or respond to the narrator’s basic questions about what is going.⁹⁸ It is possible that the figure of the poet’s ghost could be a representation of how Lewis saw his former introverted self in later years. One can imagine Lewis giving that ghost the same advice that he once gave Arthur Greeves about staying to the “broad highways of thought” and “avoiding introversion,” only this time not as a means of avoiding a nervous

⁹³ McGrath, *C.S. Lewis—A Life*, 14.

⁹⁴ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 233.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁹⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 128.

⁹⁸ Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 5.

breakdown, but as a way of learning to live and love more fully as well as to avoid damnation.

The newfound focus on mass appeal in Lewis's writings was also part of an effort of his to present Christian theology in an easy-to-understand format to ordinary people. As an adolescent, Lewis had drifted away from Christianity not because of a carefully-reasoned apologetic argument on the part of a non-Christian acquaintance, but because of simple ignorance and dissatisfying spiritual experiences. He attributed this sort of unintentional "drift" in fact to the vast majority of departures from the Christian faith⁹⁹ and the mission of his later apologetic and fiction works was to prevent this phenomenon by dispelling common misunderstandings or misconceptions about Christianity and through providing ordinary people with simple yet sturdy theological training. As has already been mentioned, Lewis blamed Christian theologians for doing a poor job of presenting the faith to laypeople and took it upon himself to become a sort of "everyman theologian." Mass appeal was then crucial to his new apologetic and fiction writings.¹⁰⁰ For this reason Lewis decided early on to write not simply about Christianity from an Anglican perspective but to write about what Richard Baxter called "Mere Christianity," the set of beliefs with which all Christians could more or less agree.¹⁰¹ Alternatively it could be said that Lewis's concentration on "Mere Christianity" may have been in response to his homeland's legacy of sectarian violence, a theory which makes a great deal of sense.¹⁰² According to both rationales, it was imperative to Lewis from a spiritual perspective that he reach as broad an audience as possible so as to help the Christian Church through his writings as much as possible.

⁹⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 141.

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 181.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, xi.

Even though Lewis's writing style shifted as he left what might be called his early "Irish phase," moving towards extroversion and common human experiences, Lewis's passionate love of the Irish landscape continued unabated and played a part in his later stories. Almost every holiday of Lewis's adult life was passed in Ireland—with friends or family if possible—going on his characteristically long walks through the countryside.¹⁰³ Before one such trip he wrote to a friend of his, Catholic priest Blessed Giovanni Calabria, "I am crossing over ... to Ireland: my birthplace and dearest refuge so far as charm of landscape goes, and temperate climate," praise which Lewis continued to pay to his homeland despite "the strife, hatred and often civil war between dissenting faiths." In light of his ecumenical work and friendships with numerous Roman Catholics including Fr. Calabria and Tolkien, the conflict in Ireland was especially painful. "There indeed," he goes on, "both yours and ours 'know not by what Spirit they are led.' They take lack of charity for zeal and mutual ignorance for orthodoxy."¹⁰⁴ Yet Lewis continued his regular visits to Ireland, drawing great pleasure from them until the end of his life.

According to Bresland, "the Irish landscape provided a concrete link with [Lewis's] past and an endless source of imaginative inspiration"¹⁰⁵ which would help his famous novels take shape in later years. Many scholars have pointed out the remarkable similarities between Lewis's descriptions of Narnia and the landscape surrounding Belfast. One even goes so far as to say that there is no description of the hills of the Belfast region so accurate and engaging as the description of Narnia found in *The Magician's Nephew*! Below is an excerpt from the novel with insertions in parentheses in which Professor F.S. Kastor points out the real-world parallels to the described Narnian features:

¹⁰³ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 109.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis and Calabria, *C.S. Lewis's Latin Letters*, 83.

¹⁰⁵ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 107.

All Narnia, many-coloured with lawns and rocks and heather and different sorts of trees, lay spread out below them, the river winding through it like a ribbon of quicksilver (the Lagan). They could already see over the tops of the low hills which lay northward on their right (hills of Antrim); beyond those hills a great moorland sloped gently up and up to the horizon. On their left (southward) the mountains were much higher (Mts. Of Mourne) but every now and then there was a gap when you could see, between steep pine woods, a glimpse of the southern lands that lay beyond them (now the Republic of Ireland) looking blue and far away. Their destination is the garden and magic apple tree which lie west of Narnia at the end of the blue lake (Lough Neagh) in the mountains of the Western Wild (north-western Ireland—possibly the Sperrin Mts.)¹⁰⁶



¹⁰⁶ FS Kastor, 'C.S. Lewis and Holy Ireland' in *Search* (vol. 21, No 1, Spring 1998), 179.



Image 1: *General map of Northern Ireland*, from “Wikimedia Commons Atlas of the World,” http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Northern_Ireland_relief.svg

Image 2: *Narnia and Surrounding Kingdoms*, from “Into the Wardrobe – a C.S. Lewis web site,” <http://cslewis.drzeus.net/multimedia/>

The Irish landscape seems to make another appearance elsewhere in Lewis's fiction, according to some observers. Just as in *The Chronicles of Narnia* Lewis goes to great lengths to describe in detail the landscape, so too in *The Great Divorce* Lewis provides the reader with detailed descriptions of both Heaven and Hell. The Heaven of Lewis's imagination is "emerald green"; a land with "translucent mountains" covered in heather, moss, and "soft wet turf" (this despite the fact that the spirits visiting that land are too immaterial to bend even a blade of grass.)¹⁰⁷ Compare these descriptions to an excerpt from one of Lewis's letters in which he describes Ireland as having "perfectly transparent mountains, so extraordinarily spiritualised that they absolutely realised the old idea of Ireland as the 'isle of the saints.'"¹⁰⁸ It is hardly surprising that Lewis's imaginings of heaven should bear such a remarkable resemblance to Ireland. David Bleakley, a Belfast student studying under him at Oxford in the late 1940s, recalls a humorous exchange with Lewis. "David," asked Lewis, "could you define Heaven for me?" Realizing he was speaking to the greatest lay theologian of the twentieth century, Bleakley began to spout a series of "theological meanderings." Lewis stopped him, saying, "My friend, you're far too complicated ... Heaven is Oxford lifted and placed in the middle of the County Down."¹⁰⁹ Another interesting parallel in Lewis's tour of the afterlife, pointed out by Irish social historian David Clare, is found in the opening lines of the book during Lewis's description of Hell:

I seemed to be standing in a bus queue by the side of a long, mean street.
Evening was just closing in and it was raining. I had been wandering for hours
in similar mean streets, always in the rain and always in evening twilight.
Time seemed to have paused on that dismal moment when only a few shops
have lit up and it is not yet dark enough for their windows to look cheering.
And just as the evening never advanced to night, so my walking had never

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 27, 30, 62, 64, 76.

¹⁰⁸ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 116.

¹⁰⁹ Bleakley, *C.S. Lewis at home in Ireland: a centenary biography* (Strandtown Press, 1998), 53.

brought me to the better parts of the town. However far I went I found only dingy lodging houses, small tobacconists, hoardings from which the posters hung in rags, windowless warehouses, goods stations without trains, and bookshops of the sort that sell *The Works of Aristotle*.”¹¹⁰

Clare points out that this excerpt describes a scene one might have encountered in an economically depressed English city.¹¹¹ And he is not the only one to make this observation. Jack’s brother Warnie was also not terribly fond of English cities and wrote in his diary during a trip to Liverpool that Birkenhead “is exactly Hell as described by [Jack] in the opening chapter of *The Great Divorce*. How can any government expect content from the inhabitants of such a place?”¹¹² This is not to say that Lewis found England to be entirely hellish. Although he held the cities in contempt, he described Surrey as “a pleasant land / though it be not the land where I would dwell”¹¹³, and even said that Devon reminded him of Co. Down.¹¹⁴ Oxford held such a dear place in his heart, according to one of his poems, because it was a city “that was not built for gross, material gains / Sharp, wolfish power or empire’s gluttoned feast.”¹¹⁵ Walks around the English countryside were a staple of his free time at Oxford and Cambridge, and although the landscape never quite captured him as did that of Co. Down he did enjoy the sights and sounds nonetheless (Como 354). But until very late in his life, after his marriage to Joy Davidman, Lewis did not quite feel at home in England. In one of his last letters to Arthur Greeves he describes how, in the twilight years of his life, this slowly began to change:

¹¹⁰ Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 13.

¹¹¹ David Clare, ‘C.S. Lewis: an Irish writer’ in *Irish Studies Review* (vol. 18 Issue 1, p17-38, 2010), 29.

¹¹² Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and Their Friends* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 211.

¹¹³ Lewis, *Poems*, 190.

¹¹⁴ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 724-726.

¹¹⁵ Lewis, *Poems*, 211.

I envy you your stay at Ballycastle: even the name gives me a faint pleasant twinge. But there is one odd thing I have been noticing since we came to our new house, which is much more in the country, and it is this. Hitherto there has always been something not so much in the landscape as in every single visual impression (say a cloud, a robin, or a ditch) in Ireland, which I lacked in England: something for which homeliness is an inadequate word. This something I find I am now getting in England—the feeling of connectedness, of being part of it. I suppose I have been growing into the soil here much more since the move ... My afternoon hours of exercise have been almost wholly occupied with sawing and axing for firewood ... There is something in country work of this sort that you can't get out of walks.¹¹⁶

Is it at all fair to describe as English such a man, who until his latest years never felt connected to England as he did to Ireland? Lewis considered himself, through most of his time in England to be “the romantic Irishman in exile in Oxford,” and identity which allowed him to adopt what Ronald Bresland—former Cultural Traditions Fellow of the Institute of Irish Studies and C.S. Lewis expert—calls “a highly coloured sense of Irishness.” The change in Jack’s writing style at the end of his so-called “Irish phase” was not the result of Lewis’s sacrificing of his Irish identity to the mainstream elements he wished to embrace, but of a redefining of that identity. “England, and Oxford in particular, afforded Jack the intellectual freedom to explore and reinvent himself in a way he could not in Belfast,” becoming the “Irishman in exile” and leaving behind “the repressive reality of being an Irishman at home in Belfast.”¹¹⁷ At Oxford, Lewis’s Irishness could take on new tones and connotations. It did not dissolve into the mainstream of Oxford’s English culture; Lewis was surrounded by Irish friends and family every day for the first decade of his time at the university and both he and those around him remained conscious of his Irish identity throughout his entire life. Much

¹¹⁶ Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 397.

¹¹⁷ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 58.

like Swift, Berkeley, Sterne, Stoneswift, and Shaw, who spent most of their own lives in England¹¹⁸, Lewis was the “Irishman in exile”; writing to the broad, mainstream English audience, but always holding the love of his homeland deep in his heart. Although *The Chronicles of Narnia* were written for a wide audience, the fantastic kingdom in which the stories are set is an obvious homage to his beloved Co. Down. Likewise in *The Great Divorce* Lewis’s connection to the land of Ireland expresses itself once more. Although he may not have been accepted by the Irish school—and indeed he did not want his appeal be limited to such a narrow and specific audience—his writings, before and after his conversion, were clearly shaped nonetheless by his Irish heritage.

C.S. LEWIS’S POLITICS

At first one would expect any chapter on the political views of C.S. Lewis to be a short one. The first thing that one must understand about the relationship between C.S. Lewis and politics is that Lewis had a powerful distaste for the subject. His most definitive statement on the matter would probably be his declaration that “the Devil claims politics for his own, as almost the citadel of his power.”¹¹⁹ Politics was to Lewis rife with treachery and deception, and he was careful to avoid what he considered to be an unhealthy interest in the subject. Lewis’s devotion to the apolitical life is rather astounding, actually. Of all his collected writings, there are only a handful of times in which he mentions, directly or indirectly, the turmoil in his native Ireland. During the Easter Rising and the violence of the early 1920s there is not a word of comment on the spreading bloodshed and only many years afterwards does Lewis make even passing references to the Black and Tans and the Ulster Volunteer Force.¹²⁰ Through World War I, before, during, and after his time serving in the British Army, Lewis’s letters are shockingly devoid of talk about the war. He complains once about

¹¹⁸ Clare, *C.S. Lewis: an Irish writer*, 31.

¹¹⁹ Lewis and Calabria, *C.S. Lewis’s Latin Letters*, 83.

¹²⁰ Brown, *Ireland’s Literature*, 162.

the havoc being wreaked on postal shipping by the “submarine nonsense”¹²¹ and reacts with excitement when he hears that the draft will be coming to Ireland, if only to see some of his more cowardly neighbors be forced to show some courage for once.¹²² Other than these incidents, however, Lewis’s letters remained peculiarly aloof from the chaos going on in Europe at the time.

Lewis’s difference from his more politically-minded contemporaries is nowhere as apparent as in his passing treatment of his time in the war. Whereas many twentieth-century authors, such as Wilfred Owens and Siegfried Sassoon, were profoundly shaped by their experiences in the war, Lewis does not appear to have been heavily influenced by his time in the trenches. Jack Lewis served a little under a year as an officer in the trenches of the Western Front before being wounded by a British shell and sent home. Of his experiences he has relatively little to say, and most of his recollections are found in *Surprised by Joy*, where Lewis recounts how he came to be a member of the officer corps—“they gave commissions too easily then”—noting his own ineptitude and reliance on his sergeant to actually get anything done.¹²³ Fondly he recalls how a number of officers took him under their wings shortly after arrival and helped him to cope with his vast inexperience.¹²⁴ And although his account features references to the difficulties of trench warfare—the wet, the cold, enemy shelling, the horrors dismembered bodies, etc.—it does not contain even a trace of the despair and feelings of absurdity that the war induced in so many of the twentieth century’s authors, or any of the nationalism that sustained the optimism of others. Quite to the contrary, Lewis distinctly remembered that his first thought upon hearing a bullet “whine” by was, “This is

¹²¹ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 104.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 250.

¹²³ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 196.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

War. This is what Homer wrote about.”¹²⁵ Reading his letters during the war and his account of his experiences afterwards, one almost gets the impression that Jack was bored with the war and would much rather be at home studying.

For Lewis, fighting in the war was a duty he accepted voluntarily, enlisting although conscription had not been introduced in Ireland.¹²⁶ This is not to say that Lewis was especially patriotic. Lewis clarified his feelings on the matter in a letter in which he explained that he had no feeling of patriotism for anything in England, “except for Oxford for which I would live and die.”¹²⁷ It was not love of England or hatred of Germany that compelled Jack to fight in the war, but an Edwardian sense of duty. One attitude toward war that he strongly disagreed with was the feeling that if one was to fight in a war “you ought to do it with a long face and as if you were ashamed of it.”¹²⁸ Lewis did not like war but he felt that it should be approached, like anything else in life, in a level-headed manner. “I have often thought to myself how it would have been if, when I served in the First World War, I and some young German had killed each other simultaneously and found ourselves together a moment after death. I cannot imagine that either of us would have felt any resentment or even any embarrassment. I think we might have laughed over it.”¹²⁹ Through it all he remained unfazed by the spectacle of warfare, and even during his convalescence, Lewis was far more interested in his poetry than news from the front.

Lewis of course had no use for newspapers and frequently expressed this sentiment in his writings. Expressly in *Surprised by Joy* he criticized newspapers for offering people only passing glances at sensational stories, and fostering in young readers an “incurable taste for vulgarity and sensationalism and the fatal habit of fluttering from paragraph to paragraph to

¹²⁵ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 196.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 158.

¹²⁷ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 330.

¹²⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 119.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 119.

learn how an actress has been divorced in California, a train derailed in France, and quadruplets born in New Zealand.”¹³⁰ In *That Hideous Strength*, for example, the villainous organization known as The National Institute for Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.) plans on hiring the protagonist Mark Studdock, a sociologist, to write newspaper articles—which they assure Mark will meet with inexplicable success—defending the N.I.C.E.’s questionable new policies such as experimentation on prisoners under the pretext of “rehabilitation.” In short, Mark is hired not to write his beliefs but to act as a sort of propaganda minister for the N.I.C.E., and it is clear that Lewis considered newspapers—and sociologists—to be good for nothing more.¹³¹

That Hideous Strength is perhaps the most blatantly moralistic of Lewis’s works in that despite the author’s insistence that the Space Trilogy was not meant to be a form of preaching¹³², the book takes pot shots at all of Lewis’s misgivings with the twentieth century. All of the societal changes and policy measures that Lewis considered misguided or even diabolical make appearances, including prisoner rehabilitation (as opposed to punishment), the erosion of traditional gender roles, disregard for the well-being of animals, the effects of industry on the environment, the expanding role of the national government in society and, of course, sociology. Readers of the novel might be tempted to simply classify Lewis as reactionary, a man caught in the Edwardian world of his childhood. But although Lewis indeed referred to himself often as a dinosaur, his heart did not belong to the Edwardian period. American writer and literary critic Jared Lobdell did a keen job of describing Lewis’s values when he wrote that Lewis was “an eighteenth century man”¹³³, and even more accurate would have been dubbing Lewis a medieval. Although Lobdell was referring at the

¹³⁰ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 159.

¹³¹ C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: HarperCollins, 1945), 96.

¹³² Jared Lobdell, *The Scientifiction Novels of C.S. Lewis: Space and Time in the Ransom Stories* (McFarland, 2004), 15.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

time to Lewis's literary style, the quotation holds true with Lewis's view of society as well. Lewis's conservative values, his rejection of an omniscient state and emphasis on the importance of social roles and individual initiative are all manifestations of a worldview reminiscent of the eighteenth century. To understand this, one must consider the examples of healthy and unhealthy societies in Lewis's fiction, especially in *That Hideous Strength* and *Out of the Silent Planet*. If *That Hideous Strength* offers a glimpse of Lewis's dystopian world, then *Out of the Silent Planet* shows what Lewis would have considered to be a utopian one.

In the first installment of the Space Trilogy, the protagonist Elwin Ransom, a Cambridge philologist—a nod to Lewis's philologist friend Tolkien—is abducted by evil astrophysicist named Weston and taken in a space ship to the planet Mars, to be sacrificed by Weston to the planet's strange inhabitants as a peace offering. After escaping from Weston, however, Ransom discovers that the inhabitants of Mars—who refer to their home world as Malacandra—are actually very friendly, and after several months spent living in their company comes to realize that they are not fallen. They do not know sin or deliberate evil of any sort, and in fact have no word in any of their languages for "evil," referring to evil people or things instead as "bent." Later, Ransom learns that in addition to the corporeal races of Malacandra there are also *eldila*, angels whose presence the Malacandrans seem very conscious of. It is one of these *eldila*, the *oyarsa*, who rules over Malacandra as king. It is also revealed that each of the other planets of the Solar System is ruled by an *oyarsa* as well, Earth's being Thulcandril: Satan. Malacandran society does not feature a government in any traditional sense of the word, although the *oyarsa* acts as king over the planet's three races: the *hrossa*, the *séroni*, and the *pfifltriggi*. The three species live separately but harmoniously and each practices the arts at which it is naturally most skilled. The *hrossa*, a furry mammalian race, are gifted at hunting, and poetry, especially oral poetry. The *séroni*, tall and

avian, are good at “finding out things about the stars and understanding the dark utterances of Oyarsa and telling what happened in Malacandra long ago,” and the *pfifltriggi*, curious frog-like creatures, mine the earth for minerals and are skilled at crafting ornate objects. Each has a different role to play in Malacandra and contributes their part to the good of all, the *pfifltriggi* supplying all with complex tools, the *séroni* serving as the intellectuals, and the *hrossa* as poets.¹³⁴

In the harmonious world of Malacandra, one can see glimpses of what Lewis believed to be a healthy society. Malacandran society is above all a society of orders. Each race has its own place in which it is naturally gifted and finds fulfillment in filling that place. The ruler, the *oyarsa*, benevolently protects the Malacandrans in a paternal manner, ruling them not because of any sort of popular mandate but because it is natural that he rule. This is all very reminiscent of the social values of medieval Europe in which different orders of society each plays its unique role and the king rules over all. It is no secret that Lewis, an expert in criticism of medieval literature, was enamored with the medieval worldview, the subject to which he devoted his book *The Discarded Image*. The entirety of the Space Trilogy, in fact, takes place more or less inside the medieval cosmological framework as put forth in *The Discarded Image*. Earth’s atmosphere is home to demons, the fallen *eldila* of Thulcandril, whose authority stops at the moon’s orbit. Beyond that boundary lies space, the realm of the angels or *eldila*, which Ransom finds to be a magnificent and radiant place more filled with life than Earth.¹³⁵ Just as in medieval cosmology each planet was both an object and a supernatural being—not unlike an angel—so in the Space Trilogy each planet is ruled by an *oyarsa* whose name the planet bears. In the conclusion of *That Hideous Strength* all of these figures make appearances and their personalities are exactly as medieval thought

¹³⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: HarperCollins, 1938), 170.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35, 150, 203, 206; C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge University Press, 1964), 3, 41-42, 96, 118.

characterized them, Mercury ruling over speech and language, Venus over love, etc.¹³⁶

British cultural historian Meredith Veldman, in fact, classifies the Space Trilogy novels as fantasy rather than science fiction.¹³⁷ Indeed, science fiction elements in the books are few and far between and the allegorical and supernatural are far more prominent than the few instances of fictional technologies.

The Space Trilogy is a sort of homage to the medieval worldview, the “Discarded Image” of which Lewis was so fond, and that image included not only medieval cosmology but medieval views of society as well. Lewis, however, warns at the end of *The Discarded Image* that although he admired the Medieval Model he in no way meant to advocate a return to it, only to convince readers of its beauty and open their minds to potential flaws in the present Model: “I am only suggesting consideration that may induce us to regard all Models in the right way, respecting each and idolizing none.”¹³⁸ It was his hope that by learning about the medieval Model, modern readers could better learn to recognize faulty reasoning or flaws in the modern Model which they may otherwise have taken for granted, and that perhaps by showing modern readers the sophistication and beauty of the medieval worldview, a blow might be struck against the “chronological snobbery” that Lewis so detested.¹³⁹

Despite this careful qualification, however, it is clear from the Space Trilogy that Lewis had little love for the modern Model, the flaws of which he attempted to outline in *The Abolition of Man*. In *That Hideous Strength* Lewis pits his perception of the modern Model against the medieval one in the conflict between the N.I.C.E. and the protagonists led by Ransom. The villains are characterized by their scientism—their belief that the natural sciences provide the only authoritative, objective, or in any other way credible sources of knowledge—their

¹³⁶ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 430-462; Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 102-115.

¹³⁷ Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 63.

¹³⁸ Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 222.

¹³⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 206.

positivism, and ultimately a sort of reductionism in which man, being classified as nothing more than matter, is devalued in the name “mankind.”

The evil in *That Hideous Strength* is always a sort of divergence from the medieval Model. Instead of kings ruling by natural or divine authority, the N.I.C.E. advocates a sort of indirect rule by experts or scientists. It is this threat of a potential oligarchy of the intellectuals or “conditioners” that Lewis expresses his fears of both in *The Abolition of Man* and in *God in the Dock*.¹⁴⁰ Take, for example, the question of whether the treatment of criminals should be best characterized as punishment or rehabilitation. Lewis, despite elsewhere writing against the death penalty in most circumstances,¹⁴¹ insists that it is imperative that punishment be the central focus of prisons, with rehabilitation at most a secondary element, to stress that prison is only warranted by crime. If the state is not punishing criminals but merely “rehabilitating” their deviant behavior, then the state in effect has license to “rehabilitate” anyone whose behavior they consider deviant.¹⁴² One of the N.I.C.E.’s many evil schemes, naturally, is to practice experimentation on prison inmates by disguising it as “rehabilitation.”¹⁴³ Likewise in *That Hideous Strength* and elsewhere in Lewis’s fiction, disaster is always at hand when the idea of certain orders of society is scrapped. Lewis considered the idea of human equality to be a fiction necessary for the defense of the weak in a political system.¹⁴⁴ To Lewis it was patently obvious that no two men are created equal and that to attempt to make all men equal or to believe to take this benevolent lie too seriously would only lead to disappointment. For this reason that he expresses, both directly in his sermons and indirectly in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, his

¹⁴⁰ Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 287; C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1944), 57-79.

¹⁴¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperCollins, 1949), 77.

¹⁴² Lewis, *God in the Dock* 287-294.

¹⁴³ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 170-177.

¹⁴⁴ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 294.

opposition to children referring to their parents by their first names.¹⁴⁵ He considered it to be an undermining of natural parental authority and thus unhealthy.

In keeping with his ideas of inherent human inequality, Lewis's views on women were by today's standards archaic. He took seriously the Bible verse in Ephesians 5:22 in which Paul urges wives to submit to their husbands, explaining in *Mere Christianity* that "in a council of two there can be no majority." He then explains that women are less suited to this role of leadership because of their more powerful natural protectiveness toward their children and household.¹⁴⁶ Likewise in *That Hideous Strength* the main characters, married couple Mark and Jane Studdock experience serious marital difficulties because of Jane's attempts to circumvent traditional female gender roles and Mark's failure to adequately empathize with or attempt to understand Jane. Among the other protagonists at the differences between the sexes are further emphasized when Mother Dimble explains to Jane that the men and women will have to alternate doing various chores because "men and women can't do housework together without quarrelling."¹⁴⁷ This quote calls to mind Lewis's discussion of the differences between male and female friendship in *The Four Loves* in which he makes the same observation. There he explains that one of the worst things women can do if they wish to spend more time with their husbands is to try to force his male friends and her female friends to interact. This, more often than not he says, will only destroy all friendships in the equation.¹⁴⁸ Lewis's conception of the differences between the sexes is made most clear, however, at the end of *Perelandra* in which the Adam and Eve of the nascent world of Perelandra—Venus—successfully pass the trials of Satan's temptation and are glorified and given dominion over the entirety of their world. Ransom, listening to Adam, "the King"

¹⁴⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 6.

¹⁴⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 114.

¹⁴⁷ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 222.

¹⁴⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1960), 100.

explain many things which the Queen does not understand, takes a moment to ask why the Queen, who endured the trial of temptation while the King slept, should be left ignorant of so many things while the King is granted knowledge of many things. The King's response is illuminating of Lewis's conception of justice:

I know what they say in your world about justice. And perhaps they say well, for in that world things always fall below justice. But Maleldil [Christ] always goes above it. All is gift. I am Oyarsa not by His gift alone but by our foster mother's [Venus], not by hers alone but by yours, not by yours alone but my wife's—nay, in some sort, by gift of the very beasts and birds. Through many hands, enriched with many different kinds of love and labor, the gift comes to me. It is the Law. The best fruits are plucked for each by some hand that is not his own.¹⁴⁹

Likewise during the Great Dance following this in which Ransom, the *eldila*, and the King and Queen participate in a sort of glimpse of the fabric of eternity, we see the idea of beautiful inequality presented once more:

[Creation] is loaded with Justice as a tree bows down with fruit. All is righteousness and there is no equality. Not as when stones lie side by side, but as when stones support one and are supported in an arch, such is His order; rule and obedience, begetting and bearing, heat glancing down, life growing up. Blessed be He!¹⁵⁰

This is the central concept behind Lewis's view of human society. All people are inherently different and inherently unequal; each possesses unique abilities and capacities in greater or lesser degrees than others. Some are naturally meant to rule while others are naturally meant to serve and this system is not to be predatory or competitive; there is no place at all for

¹⁴⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: HarperCollins, 1943), 257.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

competition in this sort of thinking. All service, all leadership, “all is gift.” But of course, this ideal cannot be realized on Earth among humans who strive to gain advantage over one another, where “things always fall below justice.” Here Lewis admits that society must pretend that all are equal in dignity so as to prevent the tyranny of the strong over the weak. But everywhere possible, Lewis seems to be hoping for small steps toward the ideal; wives submitting to their husbands, children showing obedience to their parents, subjects showing deference to their kings. Whenever and wherever human inequality can be embraced with benevolence, Lewis believes, human beings find greater fulfillment.

Conversely, whenever and wherever humans attempt to make the necessary lie of human equality a reality, suffering ensues. In *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, the senior devil Screwtape advises a new class of young tempters to convince their victims to use the word “Democracy” to tempt and deceive men saying that “it is a name they venerate. And of course it is connected with the political ideal that men should be equally treated.” From there, he instructs them, it is easy to convince the victim “that all men *are* equal.” Screwtape then guides the tempters through the next steps. Convince the victim—or patient, as the devils refer to their humans—to put this ideal of equality at the center of his life, even though the patient knows it is not true. “No man who says *I’m as good as you* believes it. He would not say it if he did ... The claim to equality, outside the strictly political field, is made only by those who feel themselves to be in some way inferior.” This in turn produces envy, resentment of superiority in others that leads societies to try to restrict the superior and convince the inferior of their equality. “Children who are fit to proceed to a higher class may be artificially kept back, because the others would get a *trauma* ... by being left behind. The bright pupil thus remains undemocratically fettered to his own age-group throughout his

school career.”¹⁵¹ Screwtape goes on to explain that this is all made easier by state control of education, the abolition of private schools, and the destruction of the middle class through “penal taxes.” Lewis’s logic and argumentation as Screwtape would appear to belie a sort of libertarian viewpoint. This seems fairly accurate when one considers that earlier in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, the titular devil bemoans the “liberalizing movement” and the emergence of Christian Socialism with which “the rich were increasingly giving up their powers not in the face of revolution or compulsion, but in obedience to their own consciences.”¹⁵² This sort of emphasis on individual volition in achieving a healthy society is distinctly libertarian and found throughout Lewis’s works.

The classification of Lewis as essentially libertarian, however, should be qualified by stressing also his belief in the necessity of differentiated hierarchy. The liberal lies of human rights and equality on which modern society is based were useful to Lewis only as a means toward the end of giving people the opportunity to voluntarily embrace and find fulfillment in human inequality. Lewis seemed to long for a very stratified society, similar in a way to medieval society, in which inequality was woven into the structure of society. In this way he would be more at home among the Tories of the late-eighteenth century than among the disciples of Ayn Rand or the modern Tea Party movement. Whereas Rand’s objectivism glorified the ethic of self-interest, Lewis’s entire philosophy was based on the opposite principle, the idea of self-sacrifice, of giving of oneself voluntarily. Furthermore Lewis’ devotion to personal liberty can and must be differentiated from that of the classical liberal tradition. The divide between Lewis and classical liberalism is rooted in a difference that Lewis notes between the Modern Model and the Medieval one. In the context of modern science, in which the classical liberal tradition developed, matter and energy were said to

¹⁵¹ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 263.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 294.

“obey” the “laws” of nature. But while the modern natural world was characterized by laws and principles, in the Medieval Model objects moved according to their inherent desires, a “kindly enclyning.” Modern language implies that an inanimate object “is aware of a directive issued to it by some legislator and feels either a moral or a prudential obligation to conform” but in medieval terms such an object is said to have “a homing instinct” like migrating birds or fish. To Lewis such a difference was not without consequence; it colored the ways people perceived the very nature of the world around them:

On the imaginative and emotional level it makes a great difference whether, with the medieval, we project upon the universe our strivings and desires, or with the moderns, our police-system and our traffic regulations. The old language continually suggests a sort of continuity between merely physical events and our most spiritual aspirations. If (in whatever sense) the soul comes from heaven, our appetite for beatitude is itself an instance of ‘kindly enclyning’ for the ‘kindly stede’.¹⁵³

The Modern Model’s illustrations make as if to say that all objects act as they do *because they must*. There is an element of compulsion in this legal phrasing of things, and if one considers this in the Hobbesian context, in which man only obeys law out of fear of death, then it follows that all the universe behaves as it does out of either compulsion or fear. However in the Medieval Model, with which Lewis identifies, objects move not in response to the universe’s commands or in fear of retribution, but of their own inclination. For Lewis then, the ideal society is not one defined by negative rights but by positive ones. Lewis’s writings simultaneously affirm both a “hierarchical universe”—unlike the libertarian perspective—and “the significance of each creature’s choices, beliefs, and actions”—unlike

¹⁵³ Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 92-94.

the mass societies of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁴ The relationships of king and subject, husband and wife, parent and child, in which men and women find their fulfillment, according to Lewis, do not achieve their fullness through compulsion but through individual volition, when “all is gift.” This paradoxical mixture of the authoritarian and the individualistic did not endear Attlee’s Labour government to Lewis but would not have left him pleased with Thatcher’s neoliberal Conservative one either.¹⁵⁵ Lewis had a very clear image of what a healthy society looked like—this paradox—but had little faith in the power of a human government to achieve this lofty goal, hence his disengagement from the political world.

So what insights do Lewis’s political views offer into the question of his national identity? That question can best be answered when rephrased as, “Into what political tradition does Lewis seem to fit best?” That question, in turn, is a bit difficult to answer, having already touched on the very medieval character of his worldview and on his very apolitical nature. Already the Labour and neoliberal Conservative traditions have been ruled out. His libertarian leanings and fondness for Christian Socialism certainly do seem to associate him with the British Liberal tradition of the nineteenth century, but his emphasis on the need for hierarchical inequality distance him from a tradition so devoted to the protection of rights. His conservative views on family matters and association with the Anglican Church are conservative indicators, although his lack of patriotic setniment definitely serves to qualify such a classification.

It is perhaps easier, in fact, to list the British and Irish political factions with which Lewis should *not* be associated. For example, like many upper-class Ulstermen he was anything but a supporter of the Orange movement. Repeatedly in his adult life, he expressed,

¹⁵⁴ Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain*, 73.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

in his own words, his “natural repulsion to noisy, drum-beating, bullying Orangemen”¹⁵⁶ comparing them to the Klu Klux Klan and McCarthyites.¹⁵⁷ His love of Ulster did not extend to the region’s notorious politics as he once quipped, “The country is very beautiful and if only I could deport the Ulstermen and fill their land with a populace of my own choosing, I should ask for no better place to live in.”¹⁵⁸ Perhaps this is why the agents of the N.I.C.E. in *That Hideous Strength* bear such a strong resemblance to the Black and Tans. Lewis, however, still identified himself as an Ulsterman and insisted that this was the very reason for his hatred of the Orange movement’s extremists. As he said to a friend in later years, “You see, I’m an Irishman. Yes, Northern Irish, but that makes it worse; the offenders you can’t forgive are the ones on your own side ... ‘Forgiveness to the injured doth belong.’”¹⁵⁹ Could Lewis be considered a supporter of the Republic of Ireland? His silence on the conflict in Northern Ireland makes this also hard to determine. As has already been mentioned, he was in favor of Home Rule as a boy and contemplated becoming a “Nationalist”¹⁶⁰ during his adolescence although he stopped discussing the topic only a few years after establishing this position. After the mentioning of the topic during childhood, Lewis abandoned the topic of Irish independence for the rest of his life.

Regardless of Lewis’s identity, be it as Irish, Northern Irish, British, or English, that identity will be for the most part an apolitical one. It is possible to use Lewis’s political views to draw connections between him and the British Conservatives, but he does not quite fit their mold and certainly would have objected to being associated with any twentieth-century political party. As Veldman points out, Lewis resembles more closely the Tories of the old

¹⁵⁶ Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 330.

¹⁵⁷ Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1961), 127.

¹⁵⁸ C.S. Lewis, *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C.S. Lewis, 1922-1927* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), 105.

¹⁵⁹ Charles Wrong, ‘A Chance Meeting’ in, *Remembering C.S. Lewis: Recollections of Those Who Knew Him*, (Ignatius Press 2005), 208-209.

¹⁶⁰ Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 187.

school more than anything else; “paternalistic, hierarchical, wedded to an ideal of community woven tightly together by mutually reinforcing threads of obligation and deference.”¹⁶¹ Lewis was a dinosaur, a man with political views so far from the mainstream that he felt there was no better option for him than to withdraw from the political world almost entirely. In being apolitical, it could be said that Lewis was in a way distancing himself from an Irish identity. He was opposed outright to the Orange movement that held such sway in his homeland, yet lacked the revolutionary fervor or devotion to Irish independence that characterized the Nationalists. His political isolationism, for lack of a better term, put distance between him and the two models of Irish identity—Northern and Southern—that existed at the time, and thus lent more credence to the impression of Lewis as a primarily English or British figure.

THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF C.S. LEWIS

C.S. Lewis was arguably the most influential Christian author and apologist of the twentieth century and his writings, from his children’s books to his apologetic works have provided inspiration to countless Christian readers over the past several decades. Even today, Lewis’s works continue to remain relevant with the cinematic adaptations of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian*, and *The Voyage of The Dawn Treader*, and the stage adaptations of *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*.¹⁶² Although Lewis was a member of the Anglican Communion, his books have met with incredible success among Christians of all denominations, particularly in the United States including such diverse groups as Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, both of whom seem eager to lay claim to him in some manner.¹⁶³ Lewis was able to reach such a broad audience with his works through his

¹⁶¹ Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain*, 92.

¹⁶² (Hampton, W. (2010, June 12). Lewis’s Tempters, Meticulously Paving the Road to Hell, Evans, B. (2014, February 14). Big crowds welcome C. S. Lewis’ play, ‘The Great Divorce,’ to Kansas City.)

¹⁶³ 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->

concentration on “Mere Christianity,” the set of beliefs that all Christian denominations can more or less agree on, as opposed to any one individual denomination’s creed. His adoption of this generic brand of Christianity could have been at least in part the result of his firsthand experience of the violence between Catholics and Protestants in his native Ulster. Therefore it is only sensible that he spent his later years as a Christian working to foster greater cooperation between denominations, sending copies of Book II from his bestseller *Mere Christianity* to pastors of four different denominations (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic) for their comments before publication.¹⁶⁴

In any discussion of C.S. Lewis’s national identity, then, the topic of the man’s religious beliefs must be broached as there are a number of questions pertaining to his faith which could provide cogent information on how best to classify him as an author or as a historical figure. There is a religious element to the questions of Irish, Northern Irish, English, and British identity, each having their own religious tradition with which Lewis’s beliefs should be compared. There is also the question of how Lewis came to adopt the specific brand of Christianity—a sort of moderate Anglicanism—which he accepted when he returned to the Church. What factors played a role in his decision to become an Anglican and not, for example, a Roman Catholic or nonconformist Protestant? Was his sense of national identity at all relevant to this decision? Finally, how might Lewis’s behavior and writing style as a Christian apologist offer insights into the nature of his national identity? The answers to all of these questions can help provide a clearer picture of where C.S. Lewis fits in the framework of national identity in the British Isles.

star.html?_r=0; John Blake, (2010, December 17). “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/>
¹⁶⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 10.

The Northern Ireland of C.S. Lewis's youth was and remains today a place starkly divided along religious lines. Centuries of English rule in Ireland and a legacy of English oppression of Irish Catholics had produced a deep-seated hatred between Ulster's Protestants—primarily ethnic Ulster Scots—and Roman Catholics. During Lewis's childhood, Roman Catholics in Ulster faced serious economic and political disadvantages. Ulster Protestants, on the other hand, being in the minority among Ireland's population were deeply afraid of being oppressed by their Catholic neighbors should Ireland win any sort of independence from the British Empire.¹⁶⁵ This fear of retribution was the driving force behind the Orange movement as well as the other branches of the Unionist movement, with which Lewis's family sympathized. The typical member of the Orange movement was lower-middle-class, perhaps educated, and very much a low-church Protestant.¹⁶⁶ Lewis was born into a family of the latter variety. His grandfather, Reverend Thomas Hamilton was a Church of Ireland clergyman "whose view of the Catholic minority in Belfast was coloured by the theology of bigotry." He used his pulpit for deprecating the Catholic Church, referring to Catholics as "the devil's own children." According to Jack, his father was not quite as "low" as his grandfather, although Joseph Pearce, an English Roman Catholic Professor of Humanities at Thomas More College, notes that this comparison was made in the context of the Church of Ireland, which was on the whole much lower than the Church of England. Jack's father Albert did not, however, seem to take much interest in passing the faith along to his children. Jack learned to say prayers and attend church but his family did not take much more interest than this in developing his faith.¹⁶⁷

During the early years of his school at Wynyard School in England, Jack experienced something of a religious culture shock when he discovered that the chapel students were

¹⁶⁵ Kee, *Ireland: A History*, 137-138.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Pearce, *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church* (Ignatius Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁶⁷ Pearce, *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church*, 2.

required to attend on Sundays was Anglo-Catholic. The elaborate ritual and style of the Anglo-Catholic Mass produced powerful feelings of alarm in the young Jack, whose Ulster sensibilities found the ceremony very off-putting. “On the conscious level I reacted strongly against its peculiarities—was I not an Ulster Protestant, and were not these unfamiliar rituals an essential part of the hated English atmosphere?” Nonetheless, Lewis’s first religious experiences took place during his time attending that Anglo-Catholic chapel. It was there that he first claimed to have first encountered “the doctrines of Christianity (as distinct from general ‘uplift’) taught by men who obviously believed them.”¹⁶⁸ Regardless of his initial misgivings, the Anglo-Catholicism of his Wynyard days was instrumental in Jack’s early Christianity. After his departure from the school, however, Jack’s faith floundered. Increasingly Lewis came to believe that in order for his faith to be genuine he needed to deliberately and consciously mean every word of his prayers as he said them, a naïve feat he later referred to as “realization.” Trying to meet this demanding and infeasible goal drained his energy and engendered in the young Lewis a resentment of Christianity which would eventually contribute to his abandonment of the faith. Other key factors in Jack’s switch to atheism were his interest in Greek, Nordic, and Celtic paganism, his grief over the death of his mother, and his difficulty understanding how a loving God could permit so much suffering to exist in the world.¹⁶⁹

As an atheist, Lewis retained his ascetic sensibilities, adopting what Pearce refers to as a sort of “puritan atheism” in which he rigorously battled the passions of the flesh, passions which he considered to be “diabolical.”¹⁷⁰ He also held onto his anti-Catholic prejudices, which revealed themselves shortly after his admission to University College at Oxford. In a letter to Arthur Greeves, Lewis noted with delight that the College boasted

¹⁶⁸ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 168-170.

¹⁷⁰ Pearce, *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church*, 2.

Shelley among its members but mentioned with opprobrium that its alumni also included Obadiah Walker. In his denigration of Obadiah Walker, the Master of University College from 1676 to 1688—a man who was imprisoned for being a Roman Catholic—contrasted sharply with his praise of Shelley, who was expelled from University College in 1811 for circulating an atheist pamphlet. During this phase Lewis was “nailing his colours to the atheist mast,” and at the same “clinging to the anti-popery of his youth.”¹⁷¹ After some time at Oxford, however, Lewis began to set aside his more puritanical prejudices and soon wrote to Arthur Greeves expressing his love for “the real Ireland of Patsy Macan etc, not so much our protestant north.”¹⁷² It was at this time he first expressed interest in the occult, inspired by the magic-filled poetry of Yeats, but eventually rejected this path after his traumatic experience with a man suffering from insanity. Lewis’s rejection of the occult is best illustrated in the epic poem he wrote during this experience, *Dymer*. In the climax of the poem, its titular hero is drugged, causing him to experience dreams and visions that at first fascinate but then disgust him as he discovers that they are not real. Just as Lewis’s friend Dr. Askins had descended into delusional madness after studying the occult, so hapless Dymer—with sudden impotent clarity—finds himself descending into seizures and delusion as well:

And after this night comes another night
 - Night after night until the worst of all.
 And now too even the noonday and the light
 Let through the horrors. Oh, he could recall
 The deep sleep and the dreams that used to fall
 Around him for the asking! But, somehow,
 Something’s amiss ... sleep comes so rarely now.

... Old Theomagia, Demonology,
 Cabbala, Chemic Magic, Book of the Dead,

¹⁷¹ Pearce, *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church*, 5.

¹⁷² Hooper, *The Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 330.

Damning Hermetic rolls that none may see
 Save the already damned – such grubs are bred
 From minds that lose the spirit and seek instead
 For spirits in the dust of dead men's error,
 Buying the joys of dream with dreamland error.

This lost soul looked them over one and all,
 Now sickening at the heart's root; for he knew
 This night was one of those when he would fall
 And scream alone (such things they made him do)
 And roll upon the floor. This madness grew
 Wild at his breast, but still his brain was clear
 That he could watch the moment coming near.¹⁷³

The poem's conclusion sees Dymor rejecting his delusions and confronting his enemy, the "monster of the night"—the offspring of Dymor and one of the immortals—who represents all of his false desires for the delusional. In this confrontation Dymor is slain but rises from the dead and is transformed into a god. Although Lewis was not a Christian at the time of his writing *Dymor*, Bresland suggests that the Christian symbolism of this conclusion hints at the Christian influences already beginning to take root in Lewis's own mind at the time.¹⁷⁴ The poem's conclusion sees Dymor rejoicing in his freedom from all manner of madness and illusions and embracing the life of reality:

... He was whole.
 No veils should hide the truth, no truth should cow
 The dear self-pitying heart. 'I'll babble now
 No longer,' Dymor said. 'I'm broken in. Pack up the dreams and let the

¹⁷³ C.S. Lewis and Andrew Lewis, *Narrative Poems* (Harvest Books, 2002), Canto VII, v. 6, 8, 9, 64-65.

¹⁷⁴ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 78.

Life begin.¹⁷⁵

Lewis's conversion to Christianity was a gradual process that took place over the course of more than a decade and was the culmination of a number of influences in Jack's life, among which were the inspiration provided to him by Christian writers such as G.K. Chesterton and George MacDonald, the philosophy of Berkeley, and relationships with some key Christian friends. Tolkien in particular was instrumental in Lewis's conversion experience and Lewis attributed his change of faith in large part to Tolkien's description of Christianity as the "true myth."¹⁷⁶ Tolkien, a Roman Catholic, expected that Lewis would choose to be baptized as a Catholic, but was shocked when he learned that Lewis had instead opted to return to the Anglican Communion. In a later essay, Tolkien attributed this decision to an "ulterior motive," claiming that Lewis's Ulster roots, including some deep-set prejudices against Catholicism, were primarily responsible for his choosing the Church of England over the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁷⁷ Lewis, for his part, maintained theological reasons for his remaining outside of what he referred to as "the Church of Rome." For example while he personally confessed his sins to a priest frequently, he thought it imprudent to make the practice mandatory, and he took object with the Catholic conception of Christianity as being designed by Christ to have one denomination, not many, as Lewis described the religion in his comparison of Christianity to a hall opening up to many different rooms.¹⁷⁸ It would be unfair to a man of Lewis's intellectual honesty to assert, as Tolkien did, that his conversion to Protestantism was a result of his Ulster upbringing. Nonetheless, it would be fair to say, as Pearce does, that the Puritanical beliefs of his childhood "cast a shadow across the rest of his

¹⁷⁵ Lewis and Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, Canto VI, v. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 427-428.

¹⁷⁷ Brendan N. Wolfe, "C.S. Lewis on Relations between the Churches," in *C.S. Lewis and the Church: Essays in Honour of Walter Hooper* (A&C Black, 2013), 119.

¹⁷⁸ Grayson Carter, *Sehnsucht: The C.S. Lewis Journal: Volumes 5 and 6* (Wipf and Stock, 2012), 194; Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3 p. 320.

life,”¹⁷⁹ coloring his later religious experiences from his ascetic agnosticism to his description of Puritania in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*.

Lewis’s style of Christianity certainly differed very much from the low-church style of his upbringing and the signs of Catholic and Anglo-Catholic influence abounded in the way in which he practiced his faith. Lewis, for example, frequently confessed his sins to a priest in the Catholic style, had no problem crossing himself, fasted and ate fish on Fridays, referred to saints by their titles (i.e. “St. Paul,” not simply “Paul” as an Evangelical would), and was opposed to Priestesses in the Church.¹⁸⁰ Discussing the topic of faith and works in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis wrote that asking which was more important was “like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary.”¹⁸¹ Lewis’s views on the Eucharist seemed to imply a belief in a sort of transubstantiation when he wrote that “Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour, he is holy in almost the same way.”¹⁸² Perhaps most shocking of all, given his low-church upbringing, however, was his belief in purgatory as described by Henry Newman and his practice of praying for the dead.¹⁸³ Despite all of these very Anglo-Catholic habits and rituals, Lewis considered himself to be “not especially ‘high’, nor especially ‘low’, nor especially anything else.”¹⁸⁴ He disliked what he considered to be a sort of exclusivity on the part of many Anglo-Catholics, but he noted that most of the opposition

¹⁷⁹ Pearce, *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church*, 1.

¹⁸⁰ Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 238; Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 40; Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, 938; C.S. Lewis, *C.S. Lewis: essay collection and other short pieces* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 398-402.

¹⁸¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 131.

¹⁸² Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 40.

¹⁸³ Pearce, *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church*, 10.

¹⁸⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, viii.

to *Mere Christianity* had come from “borderline people” whom he called “not exactly obedient to any communion.”¹⁸⁵

Lewis traveled a long way from the Christianity of his Church of Ireland grandfather, but to what religious tradition did this journey bring him? As has already been established, Lewis did not consider himself an Anglo-Catholic but simply a middle-of-the-road Anglican, and he certainly was not the Ulster protestant that Tolkien took him for. Perhaps, then, it is safest to classify Lewis as existing within simply within the mainstream Anglican religious tradition. Lewis was invited by the leadership of the Church of England to assist in the revision of the psalter as well as other conferences on the faith¹⁸⁶ so it would seem that he would consider himself to be most affiliated with the Anglican Communion. Lewis did not spare the Anglican clergy in his writings, however, and was critical of both them and theologians for watering down the faith.¹⁸⁷ In his works of fiction, from *The Screwtape Letters*, to *That Hideous Strength*, to *The Great Divorce* almost all the clergymen and theologians one encounters are equivocators, non-believers, heretics, or even madmen!¹⁸⁸ Especially comical is the ghost of the theologian in *The Great Divorce* who chooses to attend a theological seminar on heaven rather than enter heaven.¹⁸⁹ In his sermons Lewis showed no pity for clergymen who suffered from crises of faith or held unorthodox views but did not want to step down from their positions. “We always knew that a man who makes his living as a paid agent of the Conservative Party may honestly change his views and honestly become a Communist. What we deny is that he can honestly continue to be a Conservative agent and to

¹⁸⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xii.

¹⁸⁶ Francis Warner, “Lewis’s Involvement in the Revision of the Psalter,” in *C.S. Lewis and the Church: Recollections of Those Who Knew Him*, (A&C Black, 2013), 52.

¹⁸⁷ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 95.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 95; Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 196-199.

¹⁸⁹ Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 33-44.

receive money from one party while he supports the policy of another.”¹⁹⁰ Nonetheless, Lewis’s criticism of what he considered to be failure on the part of the clergy and theologians was most likely made in a spirit of concern for the Church, not dissatisfaction with it. He rejected anticlericalism and on one occasion even suggested that laypeople often expect too much from the Church’s leadership. “The job is really on us, on the laymen. The application of Christian principles, say, to trade unionism or education, must come from Christian trade unionists and Christian schoolmasters: just as Christian literature comes from Christian novelists and dramatists—not from the bench of bishops getting together and trying to write plays and novels in their spare time.”¹⁹¹ Despite his criticism of the clergy and teachers of the Church of England, there is no doubt that his faith was decidedly Anglican, marked with some traces of both the Anglo-Catholicism of his days at Wynyard and the asceticism of his days in the world of “Puritania.” In this sense Lewis lies very much outside of the religious traditions of northern and southern Ireland. It is the Church of England that embraces Lewis most closely. In light of recent controversies and internal debates over the future of Anglicanism, many younger Anglicans are looking to C.S. Lewis as the “benchmark of Anglican identity.”¹⁹² Perhaps this was Lewis’s way of escaping the Irish religious divisions that so disturbed him, a middle road between the Christianity of “the real Ireland” and the “protestant north”—of which he had written in his atheist days—in which he could most safely preach a message of ecumenical “Mere Christianity.” For whatever reason, Lewis chose the Church of England and it is his association with that communion that constitutes one of the greatest reasons behind common perception of Lewis as an English—as opposed to an Irish—author.

CONCLUSION

¹⁹⁰ Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 90.

¹⁹¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 84.

¹⁹² McGrath, *C.S. Lewis—A Life*, 158.

This paper has examined C.S. Lewis's Irish identity from different perspectives over the course of his life. In his early years it is possible to see how he gradually became aware of his Irishness, first in the context of Ireland and later in that of his school days in England. His family life, including the dysfunctional relationship with his father and his years attending the parish church of his fiercely anti-Catholic grandfather, was distinctly Irish. Later, this paper considered how Lewis's Irish identity evolved over the course of his adolescence and young adulthood, how it factored into his departure from and eventual return to Christianity, and how it expressed itself in his writings. Contrary to Terence Brown's thesis that Lewis suppressed much of his Irish identity from the 1920s on following his experience with the insanity and death of Dr. Askins, it is clear that Ireland continued to play a large role in Lewis's writings, such as in the clear correlations between Ireland and Narnia or even between Ireland and Lewis's Heaven in *The Great Divorce*. Even at Oxford, Lewis was "no rootless colonist"¹⁹³ and through the years was always accompanied by Irish friends in the form of his brother Warnie, his best friend and pen-pal Arthur Greeves, and for a time such characters as Jane and Maureen Moore and Hugo Dyson, to name a few.

In answering the question, "Should C.S. Lewis be considered an Irish author?" it must first be established that Lewis emphatically identified himself as an Irishman in a host of contexts over the course of his entire life. Those close to him would have affirmed this as well, and even those with only passing relationships with Lewis would have noticed his distinct Belfast accent (never totally lost) and frequent use of Irish slang terms. Nonetheless Lewis has not been considered a traditional member of the Irish literary canon. McGrath gets to the heart of this conundrum:

The real issue is that Lewis does not fit—and, indeed, must be said partly to have *chosen* not to fit—the template of Irish identity that has dominated the

¹⁹³ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 95.

late twentieth century. In some ways, Lewis represents precisely the forces and influences which the advocates of a stereotypical Irish literary identity wished to reject. ... [Lewis] was the wrong kind of Irishman.¹⁹⁴

Lewis failed to fit the mold of either of Ireland's typical identities: those of the North and the South. He was apolitical in a time of intense political conflict in Ireland. While blood was being shed in the Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War, Lewis said nothing. His political views were neither especially Nationalist nor especially Unionist, nor, for that matter, especially modern. He longed for a return to a much older, more community-centered society like that of pre-industrial England and hence despaired of any good ever coming from politics. He urged ecumenical cooperation in a time of intense religious division. But the most obvious reason for his exclusion from the Irish literary tradition is probably the fact that Lewis's writings, during his adulthood, did not center on Ireland. By the time Lewis had achieved fame, something more important had established itself at the center of Jack's life: his faith.

For a time during his adolescence, when he was most keen on the possibility of joining the Irish school, his deepest passion was for the beauty of "Northernness" which he found embodied in the Irish landscape as well as in Celtic and Norse mythology. But his internal conflict between this romantic part of his life, which longed for beauty, and the rationalist side, which longed for simple truth, prevented him from proceeding down the road of the Irish poet. Unlike his favorite poet and fellow Irishman Yeats, Lewis's mind did not believe what his heart loved so dearly, and his "ascetic atheism" rooted in his puritan upbringing, raged against any attraction to the occult. In fact Lewis during this pivotal time stage of his life was much like Ireland; divided between Northern Ireland (his puritanical

¹⁹⁴ McGrath, *C.S. Lewis—A Life*, 13.

rationalism) and Southern Ireland (romantic impulse). Lewis was unable to choose a side in this conflict just as he did not take a side in the Irish conflict. Instead, he achieved in his conversion to Christianity a type of synthesis between these warring poles. His Christian faith was philosophically sound enough to please his rationalism and at the same time spiritually fulfilling enough for his romanticism. But while Lewis's internal war ended in peaceful reunion, the conflict in Ireland simmered on and Lewis, having reconciled his Southern and Northern sensibilities, found himself alienated from those in the North and the South who defined themselves by their opposition to the other. Whereas the chief focus of the Irish school was to Ireland, Lewis's heart was fixed on his newfound religion.

This is not to say that Lewis's love of Ireland or the ancient mythologies diminished in any way as a result of his return to Christianity. On the contrary they bleed through into his works of fiction, from the appearance of Bacchus in *The Chronicles of Narnia*¹⁹⁵ to that of Merlin in *That Hideous Strength*. Lewis's passion for the land of his youth was not banished from his heart but rather was integrated into the Christian faith which now came to dominate his focus. It is little wonder, then, that in his imaginative tour of the afterlife, *The Great Divorce*, Heaven resembles Ireland so very closely. Lewis's Irish roots became "simply part of who he was, not his defining feature." Although not a single year of his life passed in which he did not return to Ireland's shores, he did not directly make Ireland the subject of his work. As McGrath puts it, "Lewis never made his Irish roots into a fetish."¹⁹⁶ The center of his adult life and writing career was Christ.

Lewis's focus on religion in his writings was especially alienating for Irish readers because of his identity as being solidly within the Anglican religious tradition. He was neither the characteristic low-church Protestant of his Ulster upbringing, nor the Roman Catholic of

¹⁹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (New York: HarperCollins, 1951), 101.

¹⁹⁶ McGrath, *C.S. Lewis—A Life*, 9.

traditional Irish identity and because his faith constituted the center of his literature, this was painfully obvious in his writings. Although he did his best to avoid bringing up points of contention between the major Christian denominations—part of the legacy of his Irish experience—in some ways this ecumenism simply served to alienate him from Ireland further. Whereas traditional Irish identity was characterized by an experience of persecution at the hands of the other side in the religious conflict, Lewis pushed for cooperation between denominations. It is his religious position then, both as the champion of “Mere Christianity” and as a devoted layman of the Anglican Church, that probably most distinguishes C.S. Lewis from the Irish literary tradition and most contributes to his classification as an English author.

Still it would be inaccurate to call an English author this man who was born and raised in Ireland, considered himself Irish, wrote extensively of his love for Ireland, was known as Irish by all around him, and found in Ireland an immense source of inspiration for his work. Jack may not have been the typical Irishman; his identity as the “romantic Irishman in exile in Oxford”¹⁹⁷ was unique to his own experience. Nonetheless he was an Irishman and would not have been the same without the influence of his Irish heritage. Therefore C.S. Lewis, despite his Anglican faith and English reputation, should be considered an Irish author. His Irish identity, though nuanced, is beyond doubt.

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¹⁹⁷ Bresland, *The Backward Glance*, 58.

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