

Chancellor's Lectures 2009

God's Storytellers – from Milton to C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman

Lecture Three, Tuesday 12 May 2009

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the third of four in my series of Chancellor's lectures for 2009: *God's Storytellers – from Milton to C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman*.

Last week we explored Milton's epic masterpiece *Paradise Lost*, and heard how many have seen Satan not as the villain, but the *hero* of Milton's poem. This is the view of the subject of next week's lecture, Philip Pullman. I ended with a reference to Pullman's nemesis C.S. Lewis, whose very different view of Satan can be discovered not only in his published lectures on *Paradise Lost*, but also in a fictional work entitled *Perelandra*.

If last week's lecture ended up focussing on opposed interpretations of Satan, tonight's will consider the extraordinarily polarised way in which C.S. Lewis and his literary legacy are regarded. For example the calendar of the Episcopal Church in the United States remembers C.S. Lewis each 22nd November, the date of his death in 1963. That's about as close to canonisation as a non-Roman Catholic Church can get. On the other hand the children's author and literary critic John Goldthwaite describes Lewis as a 'misanthrope, misogynist, xenophobe, and classroom bully', and the Narnia stories as deeply blasphemous.

One aspect of *Paradise Lost* I skated over last week is the implicit and explicit view of women. It seems clear from Milton's portrayal of Eve, that for all his concern for liberty and equality, he considered women to be intellectually inferior to men. C.S. Lewis, although writing nearly 300 years later, sometimes betrayed similar views. Ironically, then, an intellectual confrontation with the young Catholic philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe had a far reaching impact on his life and writing career. This is my starting point, as a way in to what I plan to cover in this lecture.

Lewis's encounter with Anscombe took place early in 1948 at the Socratic Club in Oxford. Started by a student as a vehicle for Christian apologetics, Lewis had been persuaded to become its President. A typical meeting consisted of two speakers, often one of them an atheist, contesting an agreed subject. Lewis was brilliant at finding the slightest flaw in other people's arguments, and then demolishing them with visible relish.

Seven years into the history of the Socratic Club, Elizabeth Anscombe was one of the speakers. She was a feisty character, as can be seen in an incident much

later in her career when she was being inaugurated as Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge. She was told that wearing trousers was unacceptable, and so was duly sworn in wearing a long black skirt. The moment her oath had been accepted, she removed the skirt with a flourish, revealing trousers underneath.

Anscombe chose to address, or more accurately dispute, part of the argument in Lewis' recent book, *Miracles*. For Lewis, this was his most carefully argued exposition of the case for the Christian faith. Anscombe was well qualified to engage with his arguments; she was a pupil and friend of Wittgenstein and schooled in the subtle thought of Thomas Aquinas. More than this, she could cope with the kind of verbal fisticuffs at which Lewis excelled, and give at least as good as she got. Lewis was unprepared for the critical analysis with which she scrutinised his arguments. And since she was a Christian, Lewis looked not so much like a defender of the faith (his usual role) but someone who had simply not kept up with contemporary philosophical thinking.

His confidence was badly shaken. Two days later, he dined with a group of friends, one of whom wrote in his diary: 'Lewis was obviously deeply disturbed by his encounter... with Miss Anscombe, who had disproved some of the central theory of his philosophy about Christianity. I felt quite painfully for him.'¹

No-one enjoys feeling they have been made to look foolish in public. At one level, though, it was hardly unexpected that Lewis, an English don, should struggle in a philosophical debate with a professional philosopher. Anscombe herself remembers the occasion as a sober discussion, and was impressed that Lewis subsequently rewrote the relevant section in *Miracles*. She wondered if Lewis's friends overdid the effect the occasion had on him.

That something deeper really was going on, is indicated by the fact that Lewis never wrote another work of straightforward Christian apologetics, such as *Miracles*, *Mere Christianity* or *The Problem of Pain*, all of which had proved immensely popular and still sell well today. Rather he turned almost immediately to the writing of a children's fantasy – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

It intrigues me that both Milton and Lewis wrote their most famous works after experiences of defeat. But what should we make of the fact that Lewis decides to write a story for *children*? A.N. Wilson, not the most sympathetic of Lewis' biographers, sees this as a regression, and that Lewis had been so shaken by his encounter with Anscombe that 'cut down to size, he became a child, a little boy who was being degraded and shaken by a figure who, in his imagination, took

¹ Derek Brewer, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter's *The Inklings – C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and their Friends* (London: HarperCollins, 2006) p217

on witch-like dimensions.’² Michael Ward, however, author of the recent book *Planet Narnia*, considers his turn to story-telling more positively, seeing it as ‘[Lewis’] imaginative engagement with and response to, rather than retreat from, Anscombe’s critique of *Miracles*.’³

Whether you see Lewis’ move from adult apologist to children’s storyteller as a regressive or positive step will partly depend on your assessment of the value of children’s literature, an issue I’ll come back to. But in order to understand Lewis’s sea-change, we need to learn more about his life up to that point. A lengthy biography is beyond the scope of this lecture, so instead I’m going to focus on some of the key people who shaped and influenced him, and some of his key publications, including *Perelandra*.

Clive Staples Lewis, known for most of his life as ‘Jack’, was born in Belfast in 1898, the son of a solicitor specialising in police court work. So what of his father and mother? Albert Lewis was dedicated to his work, and of changeable moods and bad temper. When Lewis was twenty and convalescing after being wounded in the 1918 German spring offensive, his Father could not bring himself to leave his practice to visit him. On the other hand Albert was responsible for the vast number of books that surrounded Lewis as he grew up, and which he investigated one by one. Here, for example, he stumbled across the Norse myths that meant so much to him.

Young Jack was more comfortable with his mother Flora, who was calmly and consistently affectionate. At the age of nine he was devastated when she died of cancer after four months of illness. Young Lewis, up to that point educated at home by a governess, was sent away to boarding school within a fortnight of his mother’s death. Hardly what a child psychologist would recommend, particularly as he hated the school he was sent to, describing it as a ‘concentration camp’, and ‘Belsen.’ The headmaster was the Revd Robert Capron, who had created a culture of arbitrary beatings and perpetual fear. On the plus side, Lewis credits him as the first person to teach him ‘undiluted Christianity’ as opposed to ‘general uplift’.

W.T. Kirkpatrick had been Albert Lewis’s headmaster. He had retired to Surrey, but still saw private pupils. When Lewis begged to be taken out of Malvern College, to which he had won a scholarship, he became one such pupil. Kirkpatrick was an atheist who ran his life according to strictly rational principles, apart from putting on his best suit to dig the garden on Sundays. Studying with Kirkpatrick (‘The Great Knock’, as Lewis afterwards called him) instilled in him a love of Greek literature and mythology, and sharpened his

² A.N. Wilson *C.S. Lewis – A Biography* (London: Collins, 1990) p214

³ Michael Ward *Planet Narnia – The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) p216

skills in debate and clear reasoning. This was a happy period, at the end of which he won a scholarship to University College, Oxford.

While being tutored by ‘The Great Knock’, Lewis picked up a copy of George Macdonald’s novel *Phantastes* on a station platform. It was a significant moment. MacDonald was a nineteenth century Scottish writer who spent three years as minister of a dissenting chapel in Arundel. Dismissed for views considered heretical, he spent the rest of his life struggling to support his family through lecturing, tutoring and writing. Although MacDonald died when Lewis was seven, his writing was a major influence. Here is what Lewis wrote about the impact of his station platform discovery:

A few hours later I knew that I had crossed a great frontier... What it actually did to me was to convert, even to baptise... my imagination. It did nothing to my intellect nor (at that time) to my conscience. Their turn came far later and with the help of many other books and men... [by then I was] at last ready to hear from him much that he could not have told me at that first meeting... I should have been shocked in my ‘teens if anyone had told me that what I learned to love in *Phantastes* was goodness.’⁴

In the same year Lewis wrote these words, 1946, he also published a short fable *The Great Divorce*, in which the semi-autobiographical main character finds himself on bus travelling between Heaven and Hell. He meets a man with a ‘strong Scotch accent’ who turns out to be George MacDonald:

...I tried, trembling, to tell this man... how slowly and reluctantly I had come to admit that his Christendom had more than an accidental connection with [his writings], how hard I had tried not to see the true name of the quality which first met me in his books is Holiness.

For Lewis, as will be clear by now, George MacDonald, was one of ‘God’s storytellers’, and through him he discovered the converting influence a storyteller could have.

Amongst the ‘other men’ who influenced Lewis in the direction of Christianity were J. R. R. Tolkien, who arrived in Oxford as Professor of Anglo-Saxon in 1925, the same year Lewis became a fellow of Magdalen College and lecturer in the English faculty. I should also mention Charles Williams, who moved to Oxford from London at the beginning of the Second World War. Williams seems to be one of those people whose main influence has to do with personal charisma, his impact on other people through friendship and teaching, rather than through published work. He was a self-taught enthusiast, and despite his lack of a degree, Lewis arranged for him to lecture in the English faculty on

⁴ *George MacDonald – An Anthology* with an introduction by C.S. Lewis (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946) p21

Milton. The *Preface to Paradise Lost* cited in my last lecture is dedicated to Williams, whom Lewis credits as having ‘partly anticipated, partly confirmed, and most of all clarified and matured, what I had long been thinking about Milton.’

Williams became a member of the so-called ‘Inklings’, a weekly and often twice weekly gathering of Lewis’ friends. On Tuesdays they drank beer in the ‘Bird and Baby’ and on Thursdays they met in Lewis’ rooms at Magdalen College, for conversation, debate and readings from books in progress.

This was an entirely male gathering, but my roll-call of significant influences in Lewis’ life would not be complete without two women. The first is Janie Moore, the mother of a Paddy Moore, a soldier Lewis had shared a room with during their military service in the First World War. Paddy was killed in 1918, but had earlier introduced Lewis to his mother. Although Jane was twenty seven years older than Lewis, they formed a relationship that lasted until her death in 1951. For most of that time they lived in the same house, known as ‘The Kilns’, outside Oxford. The precise nature of their relationship remains mysterious, even to his friends, although it was certainly not one of intellectual kinship, and involved Lewis in what at times sounds like domestic enslavement. That Janie Moore is not even mentioned in Lewis’ autobiography *Surprised by Joy* led one friend to rename it ‘Suppressed by Jack.’

The second woman is Joy Davidman, an American divorcee who had corresponded with Lewis before moving to England with her two sons in 1953. Lewis was bowled over by her: ‘Her mind was light and quick and muscular as a leopard,’ he wrote. They were married at Oxford Registry Office in 1956, ostensibly to prevent Joy being forced to return to America. Later that year Joy was diagnosed with cancer, and they were determined to be married in the eyes of the Church. In those days the Church of England would not sanction remarriage. A priest was found to take the ceremony, however, a certain Peter Bide who will be known to many of you as a former member of his congregation. His widow still worships here, and tells me Peter put his job on the line by travelling from Sussex to Oxford on a moped to do the deed. Joy’s cancer went into remission, and Lewis briefly enjoyed what for most of his life would have seemed most unlikely – a married relationship based on mutual love. After Joy’s death in 1960 he wrote *A Grief Observed*, arguably a profounder meditation on suffering than the much earlier *The Problem of Pain*.

While not a ‘character’ in the same sense as the others, I must conclude this part of the lecture with God himself, whom Lewis felt to be pursuing him for much of his early life. In 1929 he had a mystical experience on a bus going up Headington Hill, in which he felt he was keeping God at bay, but was now free to remove the barriers. He describes the culmination of this in *Surprised by Joy*:

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.

Some people have had such experiences and never acted on them. This was not Lewis' way, however. He worked at and struggled with his faith, as can be seen in the voluminous correspondence with Arthur Greeves, a childhood friend who embraced Christianity long before Lewis did. Lewis now believed in God, but not yet the God of Christianity. This further step came two years later. During a trip to the zoo, unlikely as this may sound, Lewis realised he now accepted the divinity of Christ, and that the night-time conversation with Tolkien, of which I made so much of in my first lecture, had had much to do with this.

Throughout his life, whatever Lewis cared about, he wrote about. He is rare amongst writers in having ability in a number of different styles, from academic studies on medieval and renaissance literature, to popular theology, to novels and children's books. It is unsurprising, then, that his newfound faith would eventually find its way into print. What is perhaps more surprising, is the extraordinary success this writing would have.

Let's take *The Screwtape Letters* as an example. As part of his commitment to Christian practice, Lewis began to go to confession. You may know that the Anglican position on confession is, 'All may, some should, none must.' Lewis felt that he should, and what the experience gave him was the sense that it is in the present, in the row we had with a colleague, the nasty bit of gossip, that our salvation is being worked out. So how to capture this in writing? Lewis came up with the idea of letters from a senior to a junior devil. Into this book Lewis poured his moral wisdom and developing religious vision, all flavoured with the realities of domestic life. Here's an example of Screwtape's advice to his nephew Wormwood:

When two humans have lived together for many years it usually happens that each has tones of voice and expressions of face which are almost unendurably irritating to the other. Work on that. Let him assume that she knows how annoying [a particular expression] is and does it to annoy – if you know your job he will not notice the immense improbability of the assumption.

The *Screwtape Letters* were originally published in weekly instalments, and then published in February 1942. By March they'd been reprinted three times. Never out of print, *The Screwtape Letters* have sold well over a million copies.

This was a fertile period for Lewis, in which he was also invited to broadcast talks originally designed for members of the RAF. During the war he gave three series of these, which were eventually brought together and published as *Mere Christianity*. Both the broadcasts and the published talks were immensely popular with the general public, to the disgruntlement of many of his academic colleagues. Even fellow Christians, who might have been delighted by the post-war religious revival Lewis helped to inspire, preferred to sneer. So, for example, the Oxford biblical scholar R.H. Lightfoot: ‘His defection to the area of theology is a sad loss to the English Faculty. I wish it could be said to be a gain to the Faculty of Theology.’

His colleagues may have looked down their noses, and the talks were uneven and occasionally a little shaky in argument, but one might challenge the academic theologians to point to even one of their number able to connect with the public in the way Lewis was doing. Where were the Christian books that showed half his imagination and popular success? By speaking firmly, respecting the intellectual hunger of ordinary people, and drawing on his own experience, Lewis quickly won a large audience at home and abroad, especially in America.

Astonishingly, while all this was going on Lewis was also working both on the lectures that became *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, and *Perelandra*. How many academics, one wonders, have the ability to turn their engagement with a topic, in this case Milton, into both a respectable academic work, *and* a novel?

Perelandra is a science fiction book that works out a ‘supposition’. As Lewis put it in a letter: ‘Suppose, even now, in some other planet there were a first couple undergoing the same that Adam and Eve underwent here, but successfully.’ It was the second volume in a trilogy, and was set on the planet Venus, which he imagined covered in floating islands. It’s a brilliant evocation of a paradisaical land, and has been accurately described as ‘partly prose poem, partly philosophical dialogue and... partly opera.’⁵ Several times Lewis presents the idea that ‘what was myth in one world might always be fact in another.’ At one point his hero, Ransom, has the following reflection:

...since he came to Perelandra, Ransom had been perceiving that the triple distinction of truth from myth and of both from fact was purely terrestrial – was part of that unhappy division between soul and body which resulted from the Fall...

⁵ William Gray *Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing) p122

Perelandra is an ambitious story, with a clear theological aim – an imagined temptation-scene between Satan and Eve in which she does not succumb. The Satan figure is not a snake this time, but a scientist named Weston. Like the tempter in *Paradise Lost*, Weston is subtle and manipulative. No matter what the Green Lady of *Perelandra* says about obedience to God, he has an answer:

There might be a commanding which He wished you to break... He longs to see His creature become fully itself, to stand up in its own reason and its own courage even against Him. But how can He tell it to do this?

Weston never sleeps, and keeps up this kind of unrelenting argument. Ransom wonders why God does not intervene, and then realises he must take responsibility and allow God to work through him. In the end Ransom wrestles with Weston, defeats him and so the Fall is averted.

This brief summary is enough to show that *Perelandra* is not a straightforward reworking of *Paradise Lost* and Genesis 1-3; for it refers not only to the Fall but also to the Incarnation. As is clear from his name, ‘Ransom’ is a Christ-like character who struggles and suffers on behalf of the Green Lady, who although she resists Weston for all that she is worth, needs his help.

Perelandra was published in 1943, five years before Lewis’ fateful encounter with Elizabeth Anscombe at the Socratic Club. The recently published *Miracles* was his eighteenth book. In the light of all this, we are in a better position than earlier to judge Lewis’ response to his experience of defeat. His willingness to revise sections of *Miracles* indicates that writing theology was not entirely to be laid aside. But it’s plausible to suggest that the Socratic Club experience helped to show him the idiom into which he might most fruitfully pour his creative energies.

For A.N. Wilson to see a turn to children’s literature as ‘regression’ betrays, as I suggested earlier, a rather lowly view of such writing. Philip Pullman, on the other hand, has a much higher view, as he made plain after one of his books won the Carnegie Prize: ‘There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children’s book.’ Pullman goes on to accuse contemporary adult fiction of lacking moral seriousness, and of putting style, technique and knowingness before the story. ‘In a children’s book, you can’t put the plot on hold while you cut artistic capers for the amusement of your sophisticated readers. They’ve got more important things in mind than your dazzling skill with wordplay, they want to know what happens next.’

Although this speech was given thirty years after Lewis’ death, he would have agreed with every word.

And so it was that in the spring of 1949 Lewis began to read aloud to Tolkien a new book he was writing: ‘Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy. This story is about something that happened to them when they were sent away from London because of air raids...’ Tolkien disliked *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* intensely, considering it too hastily written and inconsistent in its details. Lewis, however, was inspired. Six of the seven Narnian stories were written by the autumn of 1951 – that’s a book every five months, although they were published at a rather slower pace.

If hasty composition might lend substance to Tolkien’s view that Lewis was not taking the role of ‘sub-creator’ seriously enough, consider another example of speedy artistic creation. In 1878, during a libel case, the artist James Whistler was questioned on the time it took to complete a painting. When Whistler replied, ‘a couple of days’, the defense asked if two days work was worth the 200-guinea price tag. Whistler replied, ‘No. I ask it for the knowledge I have gained in the work of a lifetime.’

Lewis could say something similar. Into the Narnian tales he could draw on a lifetime’s reading, writing and study. He could draw freely from the many mythologies and narratives he knew so well, on images and ideas he’d been mulling over for years, and on the literary technique learnt through his earlier fictional works such as *Perelandra*.

So what did Lewis think he was doing in these works? And what are the main criticisms to which they’ve been subjected?

Lewis said that all his fictional books ‘began with seeing pictures in my head. At first they are not a story, just pictures. *The Lion* all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood...’. As Lewis made a story by linking together various images and pictures, his Christianity started to feed into the process. He always insisted the Narnia stories are not allegorical, but ‘supposals’, like *Perelandra* (‘suppose... in some other planet... a first couple undergoing the same [as] Adam and Eve’).

The distinction between ‘allegory’ and ‘supposal’ is a subtle one. The only character who appears in all seven Narnia stories is Aslan the Lion, often taken to *represent* Christ in allegorical fashion. For Lewis it is not quite as simple as that. Rather, as he explained in writing to a schoolgirl, ‘Supposing there was a world like Narnia, and supposing, like ours, it needed redemption, let us imagine what sort of Incarnation and Passion and Resurrection Christ would have there.’

Lewis wanted to write stories that entertained, but he hadn’t abandoned the Christian apologetics of *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles*. Rather the apologetics

was now expressed in a different idiom, that of story. Lewis explained what he was trying to achieve in a passage that reads like a personal manifesto:

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to... But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.

In a letter written in 1818, John Keats expressed the potential danger in this kind of approach: ‘We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us.’ The same thing goes for other literary forms – most readers hate stories with a ‘palpable design’ on them, particularly when the agenda becomes explicit and disrupts the flow of the story. This is a danger both for Lewis the Christian writer, and as we shall see next time, for the non-believer Philip Pullman.

The most vocal of Lewis’s critics have objected to his ‘design’, particularly when it is most palpable. These objections can be divided into three types, two of which were included in my quote from John Goldthwaite at the beginning of his lecture – that Lewis is a ‘misanthrope, misogynist, [and] xenophobe’, and that the Narnia stories are blasphemous.

So do the Narnia stories betray sexist and xenophobic views in an explicit way? And does an additional charge stick – that there is an excessive dependence on violence? And do they fundamentally misrepresent the Christian faith? Such are our first two objections. The third comes particularly from Pullman – that Lewis is guilty of hostility to the process of growing up, puberty and becoming adult. In particular he is critical of Lewis’ using a train crash to ‘kill off’ the four original children in the seventh story, *The Last Battle*. In the same book Susan, one of the four, appears to lose her place in paradise because she is ‘too keen on being grown up’ and ‘interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations.’ This is not a healthy message, for children to pick up, Pullman alleges.

I will come back to Pullman, but let’s begin with the accusations of misogyny, xenophobia, and violence. It is certainly true that Lewis could never be classed as socially progressive. On the whole he disliked many of the developing trends in English society, including most contemporary literature and poetry. Apart from his time in the trenches, for most of his adult life he lived in a cloistered male world. His view of women was undoubtedly influenced by this, and by the devastating early loss of his mother. The Narnia stories, however,

are full of resourceful female characters as well as male, and the villains are not all witches! I suppose the fact that the villainous Calormenes of the final story have dark skins could be interpreted as racist, but this strikes me as finding fault because one is determined to do so.

As to the charge of dependence on violence, I have a little more sympathy. The first time I read *Perelandra*, I was disturbed by way in which Ransom kills Weston, invoking the Trinitarian names of God as he does so. On my reading, however, there is no equivalent moment in the Narnian stories, and it is hardly unusual for children's stories (or adult novels for that matter) to involve fighting and conflict.

So what of the charge of blasphemy; of actively misrepresenting the Christian story? John Goldthwaite argues that in creating a secondary world such as Narnia, Lewis is implying that God's actual creation is deficient. And in populating his secondary world with witches and werewolves, he is guilty of dualism, of setting up evil as an independent entity or force. Others have considered the portrayal of Aslan as a type of Christ to be an inadequate in its picture of the incarnation.

All these suggestions have to do with theology and metaphysics, and they could each be discussed in detail. I haven't the time to do this, but even if I did it might not be time well spent. It's worth repeating once again that the stories are not intended to be allegories, but 'supposals' – and so we shouldn't expect to find a point by point coherence between the Christian story and what happens in Narnia. An insight from George MacDonald is also relevant here: he argues that the moral laws of all fictional universes are the same, and, where the moral base is secure, the metaphysics can look after themselves. The key question then becomes not so much whether or not the metaphysics of creation are the same in Narnia as in the real world, but rather, are the moral parameters securely drawn? This is where Pullman's critique comes in. It is immoral, he argues, to give children the message that puberty and growing up are sinful and lead you away from God.

What Pullman does with this insight in his own fiction, we will examine next week. But is his charge accurate? Of course it is impossible to say what 'message' a child will take from reading a story, but we do know something of Lewis' attitude to childhood and growing up. In his literary criticism Lewis often adopted an apparently childlike position. Giving a British Academy lecture, he told his audience he would 'bestow all my childishness upon you' and that to a child, Hamlet was an 'exciting play', not something to be dissected academically. This was, of course, a ploy – leaving aside the matter of how many children would consider Hamlet exciting, once Lewis had got going he delivered a serious, scholarly, and very adult argument.

His opening remarks, however, reveal Lewis considered it important to retain something of the child's response to the world; to remain spiritually a child. 'When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret,' he wrote, 'Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.'

At the end of this lecture, my conclusion is straightforward. To English eyes there is something slightly comic about Lewis, a bluff, beer drinking chain-smoker, becoming an American saint. None the less, through all his faults, he is one of those people in whose life the impact of the Christian vision and imagination can be clearly seen. But even if semi-canonisation is stretching credibility too far one way, the hostility and caricatures of both Christian and anti-Christian critics goes too far the other. *The Blackwell's Guide to Children's Literature* says C.S. Lewis and his Narnian stories are the most striking example there is of 'the divergence of popular and critical taste.' The time has come, in my view, to close that gap and give him proper critical recognition, not just as literary critic, but as a storyteller.

Next week, I will finally explain why I have included the atheist Philip Pullman in my trilogy of God's storytellers. I will also revisit the themes identified in my opening lecture, and draw some conclusions from the series as a whole.