

*“A remarkably fine tribute to C.S. Lewis.”*

– **Walter Hooper**, literary advisor to the C.S. Lewis Estate, United Kingdom.

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*“A fine survey of the many aspects of this perennially interesting topic; any book that brings together the voices of Don W. King, Crystal L. Downing, Andrew Lazo, and Malcolm Guite is worth the read. I find myself with an even deeper appreciation for the roles Dorothy L. Sayers and Joy Davidman played in Lewis’ life and their influence on him as a writer and thinker.”*

– **Janet Brennan Croft**, Editor of *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*. Rutgers University, New Jersey.

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*“The stellar cast of thinkers assembled for this unique anthology delivers an astonishing array of insightful essays written with erudition and nuance. This is a substantial, original work of great merit; the editors, Curtis and Key, are to be commended for their inclusion of multiple viewpoints that grapple with Lewis’ stated beliefs, rendering them with clarity and diligence.”*

– **Dr Bruce L. Edwards**, Professor Emeritus, English and Africana Studies, Bowling Green State University (Ohio); Editor of *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, Legacy*; Online Editor of *The C.S. Lewis Review*, [www.cslewisreview.org](http://www.cslewisreview.org). Willow, Alaska.

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*“In Women and C.S. Lewis we do not meet ‘Jack’ Lewis the Feminist – there are no attempts to smooth over beliefs unacceptable today. Who we do meet is a Lewis who lived, corresponded, and collaborated with women, valuing, edifying, and enjoying their company. A remarkable melding of quick pace and ample information.”*

– **Dr Charlie W. Starr**, Professor, English and Humanities, and Program Chair, Humanities, Kentucky Christian University; author of *Light: C.S. Lewis’ First and Final Short Story*.

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*“Thought-provoking from the very first page, this collection brings together a wide variety of perspectives on a single, significant question: Was Lewis sexist? It’s a lively conversation, and there’s plenty to enjoy.”*

– **Dr Diana Pavlac Glycer**, Professor of English, Azusa Pacific University, California; author of *Bandersnatch: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Creative Collaboration of the Inklings* and *The Company They Keep*.

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*“Excellent for both fans of Lewis and for scholars. Rich in truth and wisdom for the twenty-first century. A most welcome contribution to closure on the vital question of Lewis’ views on gender.”*

– **Dr J. Stanley Mattson**, Founder and President, The C.S. Lewis Foundation, Redlands, California.

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*“Thanks! Someone needed to write this book.”*

– **Eric Metaxas**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Miracles*, *Bonhoeffer*, *7 Men*, and others.

*“In reading Women and C.S. Lewis we are invited to be part of an important conversation. Attitudes and resulting actions towards others matter greatly, and this is certainly no less so, when they are informed by understanding based on gender. In this book, we find a variety of voices ‘pursuing truth in the company of friends’ as they thoughtfully reflect upon Lewis’ response to women in both his life and in his writings. Not all contributors in this volume agree, but all take seriously the significance of the issue of gender, and we should as well. Women and C.S. Lewis is a very good place to begin to deepen our understanding, and to help us frame our own considered questions.”*

– **Marjorie Lamp Mead**, Interim Director, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Illinois.

*“This book brings new light, thought, and perception to the subject of women in C.S. Lewis’ life and writings. These essays are full of shared wisdom and cogent argument that will challenge your perceptions of Lewis and his world.”*

– **Brian Sibley**, writer and broadcaster known for his highly acclaimed BBC serializations of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

*“It’s about time! Many seem to think C.S. Lewis was a misogynist, who lived in a stuffy, male dominated, academic world, and we finally have a book that addresses this. The matter is far more complex than some have charged. The judgments against Lewis are generally made by people who have not read him deeply and certainly not for any great length of time. Curtis and Key have put together a cadre of some of the best Lewis thinkers who know the material and can write authoritatively on the matter. The judgments in this book are fair-minded, nuanced, and have no ax to grind. The editors simply desire to set the record straight, and, it’s about time.”*

– **Jerry Root**, Ph.D., Wheaton College, Illinois, co-editor (with Wayne Martindale) of *The Quotable C.S. Lewis* and co-author (with Mark Neal) of *The Surprising Imagination of C.S. Lewis*.

*“Controversy about the women in Jack’s life and literature has often left a cloud of controversy over his life and writings. Finally, here is a book that properly places Lewis in his socio-cultural setting for a thorough and positive examination of nearly every aspect in which women touched his life – from created literary characters, professional acquaintances, familial relationships, literary references, to the deep marital love that so blessed his life with Joy. This collective work of prominent Lewis scholars is an extraordinary and vital read for any Lewis enthusiast.”*

– **Deborah Higgins**, PhD, former Director of the C.S. Lewis Study Centre, Oxford; Professor of Medieval Literature, La Sierra University, California; author of *Anglo-Saxon Community in J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings*.

*“This collection of voices makes the point so solidly – that C.S. Lewis was emphatically not a woman-hater but ahead of his time in his attitudes toward them – with such variety of experience, eloquence of expression, and annotated proof, that I felt a sadness at turning the last page. Like saying goodbye to a motley collection of old friends after a long anticipated, stimulating, memory-making reunion and wondering if we would ever again gather in the same way.”*

– **Connie Cavanaugh**, Lewis admirer, speaker, author. Hear her speak and see her books at [www.conniecavanaugh.com](http://www.conniecavanaugh.com). Alberta, Canada.

*“What a great read! Women and C.S. Lewis takes readers on a carefully curated journey through his life and literature. Nimble editing by Curtis and Key weaves together a tapestry of voices that clearly depicts Lewis’ high regard and respect for women, refuting critics who try to discredit Lewis because of his effectiveness in explaining the life of Christian faith.”*

– **Carol Pipes**, Editor of *Facts & Trends* magazine, LifeWay, Nashville.

*“Written for laypeople and academics alike, this collection of essays would likely have pleased Lewis himself. Rather than respond to the charge that Lewis was sexist by merely assigning its own pejorative label to those responsible for the accusation, which occurs all too frequently in what passes for intellectual exchange these days, it rejects mere shibboleth for honest engagement with the issues themselves, drawing on a diverse array of authors who consider the evidence from both Lewis’ writings and life. Curtis and Key are to be commended for this valuable contribution to a crucial discussion.”*

– **Dr Stephen Dunning**, Associate Professor of English, Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia; author of *The Crisis and the Quest: A Kierkegaardian Reading of Charles Williams*; co-founder and co-director of the Inklings Institute of Canada, housed at TWU.

*“How refreshing and encouraging to be reminded that Lewis’ fictional heroines were brave, feisty, and thoughtful. I love that they could be anything their male counterparts could be, both good or bad.”*

– **Gayle Roper**, award-winning, Pennsylvania-based novelist of a wide range of fiction from *Allah’s Fire* to *Lost and Found*.

*“I am indeed very supportive of Women and C.S. Lewis, a worthwhile contribution that a wide range of readers will enjoy and find most helpful.”*

– **Mark A. Pike**, BA (Hons), PGCE, MA (Ed), PhD, Professor of Education and Head of the School of Education, University of Leeds, England. Author of *C.S. Lewis as Teacher for our Time* (Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 2013).

*“Curtis and Key have assembled wonderfully varied voices yielding high scholarship that is yet readily accessible to address the question of C.S. Lewis’ attitude toward women. Does misogyny exist in Lewis’ writings, or in the eye of the beholder? No contributor to this fine volume shies away from that question. What an engaging, delightful read!”*

– **D. Joy Riley**, MD, MA (Bioethics), Executive Director of The Tennessee Center for Bioethics & Culture. Co-author (with C. Ben Mitchell) of *Christian Bioethics: A Guide for Pastors, Health Care Professionals, and Families* (B&H Academic, 2014).

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*“In this work you will find a thorough and honest exploration into the role of women in the life of C.S. Lewis. Its great strength is found in the diversity, depth, and breadth of perspectives, the range of which offers valuable insight into the nuances of his writing and his growth as a person. Given the frequent criticism directed toward Lewis in regard to women, this book is a much-needed voice and essential resource: an excellent read.”*

– **Lisa Coutras**, author of the forthcoming *Tolkien’s Theology of Beauty*; PhD Candidate, Kings College London.

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*“This balanced, irenic collection takes up a vital issue in the study of C.S. Lewis; lovers of Lewis will want to join the conversation.”*

– **Louis Markos**, Ph.D., Professor in English and Scholar in Residence, Houston Baptist University, Texas; author of *Restoring Beauty: The Good, the True, and the Beautiful in the Writings of C.S. Lewis*.

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*“I am convinced that C.S. Lewis well understood women because he took seriously the theology that before God we are all feminine.”*

– **Dr Paul F. Ford**, author of *Companion to Narnia*; Professor of Theology and Liturgy, St. John Seminary, Camarillo, California.

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*“Are you a woman who loves to think and create? You will find in these pages a brilliant scholar who honors your depth and complexity, who engages women like you in his personal correspondence and writes women of reason and imagination into his strong, winsome, female characters. Are you a man who wants to encourage women? You will learn from a man who not only engages women but learns from them. The book offers depth of scholarship and breadth of analysis of Lewis’ life and writings – all in an accessible style that will change the way you think about thinking women.”*

– **Lael Arrington**, author of *Faith and Culture: The Guide to a Culture Shaped by Faith* (Zondervan, 2011). Columbia, South Carolina.

# Women and C.S. Lewis

What his life and literature reveal for today’s culture

Edited by

Carolyn Curtis and Mary Pomroy Key



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A note on style: we have kept the appropriate usage – American, British, or Canadian English – based on nationalities of our contributors, to whom we are extremely grateful for their energetic discussions and enthusiasm for the project. We think our readers will be pleased by the variety of insights, approaches, and – often – engaging wit.

Special thanks to Doug Gresham, son of Joy and stepson of Jack, for his gracious loan of our cover photo, which he snapped at the age of eleven with his trusty Kodak. And thanks to our brilliant cover designer, Jonathan, for converting it to color.

**Carolyn Curtis**, in Texas

**Mary Pomroy Key**, in California

# Was C.S. Lewis sexist? Is he relevant today?

*Carolyn Curtis*

Why read a book on *Women and C.S. Lewis*? The hottest question on Lewis today is whether or not he was sexist, says a contributor to this book, Monika Hilder, who has written three volumes examining this accusation. What do other respected thinkers, such as Alister McGrath and Randy Alcorn, plus more than two dozen others we have gathered, say about Lewis' treatment of women in his life and literature and, thus, his relevance in the twenty-first century?

Whether you are new to C.S. Lewis or already among the millions of readers of his books – *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *Surprised by Joy*, *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain*, *The Allegory of Love*, *The Great Divorce*, *A Grief Observed*, *Till We Have Faces*, his Space Trilogy, and, of course, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, to name a few – accusations of personal or literary ill-treatment of women by such a famous, well-regarded British scholar and author may come as a shock. You may wonder why some critics even call Lewis a misogynist, a harsher term suggesting a man is a woman-hater, has no respect for women in general, or holds little if any regard for intelligent, successful women.

Excellent books analyze these claims, mostly written by scholars – and, frankly, *for* scholars. We wanted a book that's valuable to scholars yet accessible to a wider range of people, thoughtful readers who might want to dog-ear pages yet can't because the book belongs to a library.

### Who are our readers?

C.S. Lewis and his friend, J.R.R. Tolkien, resolved to write books *they* would enjoy reading, confirmation that even prominent academics like those two beloved authors actively sought to find pleasure in their work.

For *Women and C.S. Lewis: What his life and literature reveal for today's culture*, we chose to include contributors who range from noted Lewis scholars to newer Lewis thinkers, a blend we hope accomplishes several goals: 1) bringing to new and long-time readers many of the authoritative voices on Lewis; 2) allowing those authorities to debate the sexism charges within the pages of one volume; 3) mirroring Lewis' admirable efforts to support and give light to many newer, up-and-coming thinkers; 4) providing answers to readers who consider themselves fans of Lewis but who are mystified when they stumble across words like "sexist" in the same sentence as his name; 5) giving direction to people who are new to Lewis or who have avoided reading him because they were put off by critics who cried "misogynist."

So, in addition to scholar friends, we anticipate that our readers will be people raised on Narnia but who find themselves conflicted or puzzled over claims that Lewis did not write his female characters with the strong, courageous characteristics of his males. Other readers may love fantasy/science fiction but have avoided Lewis because of a nagging feeling that a "religious author" might have made his sci fi lame with gender stereotypes. Some readers may wonder if his poetry insults half the population. Others might be suspicious of an Oxford scholar known for his radical turn from atheism to Christianity and wonder if it meant he had abandoned his intellect. (Yet Cambridge created a prominent position for Lewis *after* he became known for his faith and his ability to explain it. He did this so effectively that both laypeople and theologians still quote him fifty years after his death.)

### What are today's issues?

As for Lewis' relevance, what are today's women's issues? And do they affect only women? (Quick answer to the latter: No.) I'll share from my personal perspective.

My coming of age was after Lewis' death. The late 1960s through the next decades were times of great change for women. I earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in journalism, entered the workforce and enjoyed a fulfilling career which moved me from Arizona to New Hampshire and found me in settings ranging from Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. to communications management in three Fortune 50 companies, plus the corporate offices of two of America's most influential church denominations. I taught journalism at a college. I covered top newsmakers; wrote speeches for corporate executives; managed groups of employees; spoke at conferences; wrote for, edited, even launched publications; authored books and assisted other authors with theirs; helped newer writers develop their skills and find their voices. I also travelled, eventually to twenty-five countries – the ultimate adventure for a culture watcher.

In most ways, it's been a wonderful ride, but I'd be lying if I claimed I never observed or experienced some sexism along the way. However, when I consider attitudes that deny basic rights to girls and women or force them into unspeakable situations of degradation, my experiences as a student and a career woman seem minor. No one shot me for going to school. No one whisked me away to be their sex slave. However, the underlying attitudes of such outrageous actions occasionally showed their ugly faces, even in civilized corporate cultures – a lack of respect, a desire to humiliate, inflated (or fragile) egos denying professional opportunities to qualified women.

To be fair, many fine men provided me with a generous hand-up, especially men with the intelligence and integrity I saw in C.S. Lewis, whose non-fiction books I began reading in my twenties. As an older adult, I discovered Narnia, then realized



I wouldn't have understood Lewis' deeper meanings as a child, making me appreciate his opinion that any book worth reading only in childhood is not worth reading even then. I required more life experiences and maturity to benefit from the deep truths revealed in the land of Narnia. Maybe that's just me.

As a thinker, Lewis was God's powerful instrument in my life's journey. I read him voraciously, learning and growing with each book as he dealt so effectively with themes such as sin, humanity's fall from grace, and redemption. His observation in "The Weight of Glory" that God finds our desires too weak rather than too strong resonated in me. Even with my heady professional opportunities, I recognized myself in his description of the half-hearted creature "fooling about with... ambition" when God's grace was offered to me. I remained content to make "mud pies in a slum," because, before experiencing God's redemption, I could not envision "the infinite joy of a seaside holiday." Now I saw myself as having the dignity of a free moral agent made in God's image to live a life worthy of my creator. And I began the journey of understanding what that meant.

In short, Lewis baptized my intellect. Before reading Lewis, I did not seem to know many intellectual Christians. Then I discovered they were all around me, and I began outgrowing my childish understanding of how God works in the world and in my life. Also, Lewis made me laugh. His wit was so original and fun to discover that I found myself laughing out loud while I was alone reading him. So now I had two new points of view: faith could be intellectual, and faith could be fun. Plus, the more I read, the more I discovered about Lewis himself. His life story became as fascinating to me as his literature.

And so, with my personal and professional perspective, imagine how startled I was to discover that some critics have called Lewis "sexist." I was spending a week at The Kilns, the author's home in Oxford, England, when I heard a conversation exploring this claim. The idea shook my world. I was acutely aware

of what I'd seen as Lewis' high view of women – in his books and personal life choices. My "antenna" for sexist attitudes was well developed, so I resolved to check out the theory that a thinker whose ability to communicate effectively such truths would have intended them for (or been influenced by) only the male half of the population. I braced myself for disappointment.

The publisher for my first book, back in the 1980s, had described me in marketing literature as a research journalist. At the time, I thought with amusement, *Is there any other kind?* In retrospect, the description fits my personality. So, armed with this new and disturbing claim about Lewis, I read and met more Lewis thinkers, picking their mighty brains for answers. Eventually, I realized the idea of Lewis as sexist or misogynist needed to be addressed in a book (result: *Women and C.S. Lewis*). Lewis' influence is even more widespread than during his lifetime and attitudes about women continue to be relevant. It's not a stretch to say such attitudes provide fuel for wars being fought. When I was younger, I thought the wars were in corporate boardrooms; now I see they're on actual battlefields. Cultures are fighting one another – with ideas, bombs, and bullets. We are influenced by what we read, even by a thinker/writer dead for more than half a century.

### **Should today's readers care?**

Cultural attitudes, "women's issues," what are they? Today's female college graduates still might say lack of leadership opportunities or disparity in pay. Women in some cultures might refer to a denial of education or forced prostitution. Readers may wonder if a writer of C.S. Lewis' stature wove messages into his literature that disrespect women and girls and are therefore "out of touch" (even embarrassing or dangerous) for twenty-first century readers. And that's a fair and relevant concern, given what some critics have said about Lewis, including claims we quote in this book. Today's generation, after all, is redefining many cultural values, such as marriage – and we can't be too careful of our reading.

One so-called women's issue is abortion, back in the news. My writing partner, **Mary Pomroy Key**, reminds me that abortion has been newsworthy throughout her lifetime. Is abortion a cultural issue? Perhaps. Is it strictly a women's issue? No, it affects both women and men. Is this book about abortion? No, although an insightful thinker, **Mary Poplin**, addresses it in these pages from personal experience. Do we know the views of C.S. Lewis on this topic and others regarding sexual practices and results (degradation of women individually and as a group through pornography; sex trafficking)? Perhaps not for certain, although writers on both sides of the pond, **Holly Ordway** and **Michael Ward**, provide their thoughts based on Lewis' works, specifically on sexual intercourse (Ordway) and contraception (Ward), topics that may sound quaint – and yet these terrific writers plumb Lewis' thinking and ponder: is Lewis relevant in the twenty-first century?

To tackle that question, we invited contributors from beyond the halls of academia, though many in *Women and C.S. Lewis* do teach, research, and write. We wanted thinkers and writers you might not know, but should. So we have **Crystal Hurd**, who writes on the very first woman who loved Jack Lewis; **Brett McCracken**, a young blogger and book author with a growing following and impressive journalism credits; **Kelly Belmonte**, a newer poet winning awards; and **Kasey Macsenti**, who imagines Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers meeting for a pint of beer and their trademark deep but witty conversation.

If you want people *known* as scholars, you'll find them too, and we've asked them to share from their hearts as well as their minds. They include **Randy Alcorn**, who tells how Lewis inspires him to stand up for women; **Alister McGrath**, who writes in this book on the Inklings; **Devin Brown**, on sexism in Narnia; Canadian author **Monika Hilder**, who discusses masculine and feminine, or classical and spiritual, principles in history and culture as guides to heroism. (She "names the names" of several

who accuse Lewis of sexism or misogyny such as J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, and Kath Filmer. Brown and others do that too, refuting their claims.)

Did we shy away from controversy? We invited writers with views that differ in certain ways including **Jeanette Sears** in the United Kingdom and **Kathy Keller** in the United States of America with contributions on Lewis' views about women in the pulpit and other leadership issues, based on their personal experiences.

We invited writers to use their own delightful voices: beloved British expert on all-things-Lewis, **Colin Duriez**; award-winning novelist, **Joy Jordan-Lake**; author and playwright **Paul McCusker**, who takes you into the Jack Lewis/Janie Moore household; **Andrew Lazo**, on *Till We Have Faces*; **Steven Elmore**, who breaks down Lewis' sci fi as it relates to the author's view of women; **Brad Davis**, a poet with a refreshing take on Lewis; and **John Stonestreet**, who looks to Lewis for advice as a father to his daughters.

*Women and C.S. Lewis* also includes deep, insightful, satisfying contributions from well-established Lewis experts and authors **Lyle Dorsett**, **Don W. King**, **Crystal Downing**, **Malcolm Guite**, **Christin Ditchfield**, and **David C. Downing**, people with wisdom whose books are cherished.

### Read, learn, enjoy.

Make up your own mind. In our book's Conclusion, we provide applications from people inspired by Lewis whose life examples are worth remembering, even emulating: **Carol W. Swain**, **Randy Singer**, **Lancia E. Smith**, **David Holland**, and **Lisa Ledri-Aguilar**. That's because we are serious about our book's subtitle: *What his life and literature reveal for today's culture*. Would C.S. Lewis write or speak on issues in today's headlines (throughout history, if we are honest), atrocities including brutality to women, and humiliation (or even death) for speaking up? Jack would call such a question a "supposal."

We invite readers to look at Lewis’ values, the principles which undergirded his life and work, and the choices he made as a man and as an author. Perhaps Lewis would remind us of his opinion from an essay, “Christian Apologetics,” that readers don’t need more books about Christianity but more written by people applying their faith to the characters they develop, the words they write, the ideas they share. Perhaps you will come to the conclusion I did during my work on this book that people trying to discredit Lewis with charges like sexism are really attacking him for his effectiveness in explaining the life of faith.

Throughout the contributors’ chapters and in our Conclusion, you will meet people whom Lewis inspired to take action. At the end we provide Questions for Reflection and Discussion for group or personal study.



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**Carolyn Curtis** is the author or collaborator of seven books, and a veteran journalist with awards from The Wall Street Journal, Evangelical Press Association, Society of Professional Journalists, etc. She has been published in On Mission, Christianity Today, By Faith, Sports Illustrated, The Saturday Evening Post and many others. She worked in communications management for three Fortune 50 companies and at corporate headquarters for two major church denominations. She has reported from daily newsrooms and from Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. She has taught journalism at a college and been a speaker at numerous conferences. She has a BA in journalism from The University of Texas at Austin and an MA in communication from Stephen F. Austin State University. She lives in Fort Worth, Texas.

## Not mere mortals

*Dr Mary Pomroy Key*

*“Child,” said the Lion, “I am telling you your story, not hers. No one is told any story but their own.”*

*– C.S. Lewis, The Horse and His Boy*

Each of us has our own unique story of discovery and surprise, challenge and indebtedness to one of the most insightful and creative, intelligent and sometimes puzzling thinkers of the twentieth century, Clive Staples Lewis. As a college student in the 1970s, Lewis opened up for me a precise language for relationships and friendship in *The Four Loves*. The command to trust, resting only on the floating islands in *Perelandra*, gave me comfort and courage in the 1980s as I drifted through advanced degrees and new career opportunities. Reading Narnia for the first time as a young mother and lecturer in Children’s Literature in the 1990s challenged my concepts of education, imagination and reality. And so it was, entering the twenty-first century, I set aside for a season the roles expected of a professional counselor, college professor and licensed minister for the privilege of raising and schooling our children at home. Once again, Lewis, both in *The Great Divorce* and in the complex character of Jane Studdock, offered perspective in giving up the things that once seemed so important. With that, a door opened into a new world.

I became involved with the C.S. Lewis Foundation; “Living the Legacy,” as our tagline proclaims. Spirited discussions revolve around just that. What exactly is Lewis’ legacy? Is it the specific, timeless topics he addressed – love and friendship, faith and truth, life and death, and what it is to be human, male and female?

Is it the genres he used in conveying simple, yet profound, truths – through essay and poetry, fantasy and science fiction, myth and apologetics? Is it the very life he lived – truth-telling through lectures and correspondence, grace-giving through sponsoring refugees and caring for family?

The trajectory of his ideas and writings is, in fact, the legacy that is being lived out – through this collection of essays and the other myriad of works of literature, music and art inspired by Lewis. James Como, Professor Emeritus of Rhetoric and Public Communication at York College, New York, and a founding member of the New York C.S. Lewis Society in 1969, in his *Remembering C.S. Lewis*, notes that the key to Lewis' enduring literary and spiritual achievement rests in his adherence to the vibrant, living faith. As poet, philosopher and apologist, Lewis wrestled with and sought to articulate his faith, offering hope in an ever-changing post-Christian world. It was precisely the honest wrestling with the significant, and sometimes very dark, issues of life and death and after-life that gave Lewis' work its peculiar power to penetrate the reader's deepest questions. "As a concept, personhood, I think, interested him as much as God... [and] more than ever, (I believe) we should be paying attention to his views of the masculine and feminine, which (he reminds us) are not quite the same as male and female."<sup>1</sup>

We, too, struggle with deep questions and longings, with the tensions of tradition, modernism and post-modernism, with questions that strike at the very core of our being... What does it mean to be an immortal, a woman or a man, feminine or masculine, in this age, and how do we reconcile these struggles with a living faith? How can we hope to honor and live out so rich a legacy as Lewis inspires? In *Women and C.S. Lewis*, we seek to participate in the conversation – with an informed, yet informal voice – to encourage lively and respectful debate, and to consider new perspectives as we join together in "pursuing truth in the company of friends."<sup>2</sup> Along this journey, we hear scholarly

voices speaking, cup of tea in hand, from their easy chair for all to enjoy; we see children, wide-eyed and incredulous, pouring out their woes to attentive ears; we are surprised by a turn of phrase that unlocks a new world of ideas; we are alarmed by the pain and suffering inflicted by our darkened world; we are quickened, made hopeful by a roar.

We delight in the merriment which exists, as Lewis points out, "between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously – no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption."<sup>3</sup> Our collection of essays and personal reflections is the result of a community, a "Sprinkling"<sup>4</sup> of sincere, thoughtful and inquisitive scholars, artists, writers, parents, business executives, poets, actors, webmasters, ministers, musicians, high school mentors and college professors, a fencer and a change-ringer – all of whom seek truth and its creative expression, and all of whom Lewis would have welcomed as "everlasting splendors." Does everyone agree? No. Is there room (or perhaps a hallway?) for debate and interpretation? Of course.

This mosaic, composed of both seasoned thinkers and young millennials, reflects Lewis' own practice of encouraging and mentoring the next generation, not all of whom were on a rigorous academic track. Lewis often took an interest in the up-and-coming, offering financial assistance, letters of recommendation and words of encouragement. Colin Duriez, recollecting Lewis' breadth of friendships, includes in his essay June Flewett (later "Jill Freud"), a young wartime refugee turned actress, who billeted at The Kilns and was later provided with a scholarship by Lewis to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Laurence Harwood, who sheepishly admitted to his godfather/Oxford don his failure of university preliminary exams, found a remarkable source of encouragement in Lewis. "The world is full of capable and useful people who began life by ploughing in exams... so don't think either that you are no good or that you are a victim. Write the whole thing off and get on."<sup>5</sup> And so Laurence did "get on" – with

Lewis’ financial backing and whole-hearted support – to a very fulfilling career with the National Trust.

In keeping with the legacy of mentoring, Carolyn Curtis, an accomplished journalist, author, and speaker, generously offered to me the opportunity of not only co-editing this collection as my entrance into the world of publication, but also allowing me to glean from her own personal and professional life the wisdom of experience. For that, I am truly grateful. We met as a result of my responsibilities with the C.S. Lewis Foundation, assisting with the writers track at the C.S. Lewis Conference at Camp Allen, Texas. Two years later, we are handing in a manuscript. One of the strengths of the C.S. Lewis Foundation over the past twenty-seven years has been its emphasis on *making connections* – offering a variety of venues at which creative and imaginative artists and other professionals may be inspired, as Lewis was, to be in company with those creating new, meaningful presentations of the incarnate Christ, thereby building bridges with the secular world. A living faith, connection, inspiration, respect, joy – these are the heart of the Foundation; this book is a result of living Lewis’ legacy.

But that is my story, and not another’s, as will be evident throughout this particular collection of essays highlighting the women, both real and fictional, in Lewis’ life. Are his writings still relevant today? The fact is that Lewis continues to fascinate. He continues to matter. Readers continue to look at the details of his life and the meanings behind his body of work. Lewis’ ability to enthrall, woo, and captivate the keen imaginations of both the intellect and the heart will draw you in, no matter if you’ve lived with Lewis for decades, or are a new friend of Narnia. These essayists are pursuing truth in the company of friends – and contributing to building modern bridges through media and social networking venues. The “radio broadcasts” of the 1940s have morphed into podcasts and YouTube videos; letter writing has been transformed into emails, Instagrams, and tweets. You’ll

find evidence of these new realms coexisting with the timeless truths of the old tales. Aslan is on the move. Hold on tight!

*“Aslan,” said Lucy, “you’re bigger.”*

*“That is because you are older, little one,” answered he.*

*“Not because you are?”*

*“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”*

**– C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian***



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## SECTION ONE

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### Lewis, the man – and the women in his life

In *Lenten Lands, My Childhood with Joy Davidman and C.S. Lewis*, Douglas Gresham describes the time leading up to the marriage of his mother and stepfather. As her British visa expired, Jack did not want to part with Joy and her “two small, active satellites who hurtled around her in wildly divergent, though equally eccentric orbits,” referencing himself and David, his older brother. With pride, Gresham describes the date of their civil ceremony, 23 April 1956, as the day “I became a British Citizen.” He sensed the deep love between Jack and Joy, affection that spilled over to include the boys. In admiration, Gresham describes Warnie as a wise fox, sensing that this kind, gentle brother of his new stepfather considered moving from The Kilns but decided first to “try out the new regime.” The author reminds *Lenten Lands* readers that Warnie later would write, “What Jack’s marriage meant to me was that our home was enriched and enlivened.”

As time passed and Joy’s cancer surfaced, the civil marriage was supplemented by an ecclesiastical ceremony, and Joy was brought home to The Kilns from the hospital. Meantime, Jack had accepted a position at Cambridge created for him. Doug, full of schoolboy loyalty to Oxford blue, plucked up his courage to ask why Jack had moved from one university to the other. Jack’s answer taught young Doug an early lesson about the responsibility a loving father, even a stepfather, takes toward marriage “and acquiring two children into the bargain.” Gresham’s memoir also describes the timeline he understands of when friendship blossomed into romance and romance into commitment – a credible and

revealing explanation by one who knew. Readers of this book and others, even blogs, might conclude that Jack's love for Joy was the culmination of his growing appreciation for women as equals. It was a comfort level honed by life lessons Jack learned from other relationships, some healthier than others.

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Section One examines key women in C.S. Lewis' life, beginning with his mother, the brilliant Flora Hamilton Lewis, whose intellect, influence, and untimely death set the stage for his relationships with women for the rest of his life. Chapter one is "The enduring influence of Flora Lewis" by Dr Crystal Hurd. It also provides glimpses into Lewis' sometimes misunderstood father Albert, acknowledging that parenting is a joint effort that's difficult to accomplish even in a Christ-focused home and finding new insights about Lewis' complicated relationship with his father. Jack, as he became known, and brother Warnie responded to regrets about their treatment of Albert after his passing and as they embraced Christianity with its emphasis on grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Chapter two introduces Mrs Jane King Moore, a complex woman and a controversial influence in Jack's life. "What do we make of Lewis' relationship with Mrs Moore?" by Paul McCusker will provoke new thoughts about Lewis and his life with her.

Dr Lyle W. Dorsett provides our third chapter's portrait of Lewis' wife Joy Davidman Gresham, whom Jack described as having "a mind like a leopard... lithe and quick and muscular," and tells their great love story. To fully appreciate and understand Lewis' attitudes toward women, readers must know Joy, who was his soulmate, his writing partner and, for too short a time, the romantic love of his life.

Chapter four is "Fire and Ice," by Dr Don W. King, a fascinating examination of Lewis' close friendship with acclaimed poet Ruth Pitter, contrasting her with Joy, whom he eventually married,

by looking at the women's poetry for clues to their methods of drawing him to themselves, not just as poets but as women desiring his love.

One of Lewis' closest friendships was with his author friend, Dorothy L. Sayers, whose influence on him was so complex and interesting we have devoted two chapters to her. In the first, Dr Crystal L. Downing, an expert on *The Divine Comedy*, compares Sayers to Dante's Beatrice as the one who directed Lewis' eyes to the Light through whom both male and female were created in the image of God.

If Lewis maintained close friendships with literary women, why did he not make a point to include them in the Inklings? Dr Alister McGrath describes this lively group and provides satisfying answers in chapter six, "On Tolkien, the Inklings – and Lewis' blindness to gender."

Section One ends with chapter seven, the delightfully titled "C.S. Lewis and the friends who apparently couldn't really have been his friends, but actually were" by Colin Duriez, who summarizes several key women in Lewis' life and their influences on him. It explores women chronologically from Janie Moore to Joy Davidman, and provides an initial glimpse of the trajectory of his life – the direction or path his relationships, his attitudes, his work, and his influence would take – which we explore deeper in our Conclusion, "What do Lewis' life and literature reveal for today's culture?"

# The enduring influence of Flora Lewis

*Dr Crystal Hurd*

The dining room of the sprawling house known as Little Lea on the edge of Belfast is abuzz with activity. Stretched limply upon the family's table is a surgical patient, beloved mother of two, Flora Lewis, undergoing exploratory surgery for what will be diagnosed as abdominal cancer. She is young – only forty-six.

As the murmur of discussion drifts ominously through the house, the patient's nine-year-old son listens intently, hearing endless footsteps as nurses and surgeon circle the table in a stoic march. Clive Staples "Jack" Lewis prays fervently for healing. Although Flora will survive the surgery, she will succumb to cancer six months later, creating an unrelenting wound in her sons. The younger – Jack, as he will be known – suffers silently but will use the emotion derived from these memories in his great apologetic and fiction classics such as *The Problem of Pain*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and more than thirty other titles read by millions.

Florence Augusta Hamilton was born to a third-generation clergyman, Thomas Hamilton, and wife, Mary Warren, on 18 May 1862. Although Flora, as she was called, was the fourth and youngest, she was not the most adored. In fact, Flora and her brother Augustus acknowledged that they were not their parents' favorites and formed a lifelong alliance. Perhaps this encouraged Flora's desire to achieve academic success, apart from the traditional expectations of motherhood.



The Hamiltons were not extremely wealthy, but they descended from Scottish royalty. Thomas Hamilton's ancestor was the daughter of King James II, himself descended from other Scottish kings, dating back to Robert the Bruce.<sup>1</sup> Also, Flora's mother traced her lineage to William de Warenne, first Earl of Surrey and one of the loyal soldiers who accompanied William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings in 1066.<sup>2</sup>

For some time, Flora's parents and siblings resided in County Cork, but in 1870 moved to Rome when Revd Thomas Hamilton became Curate at Holy Trinity Church. Revd Hamilton had previously studied in Italy, and some suggest that's where the idea of naming a daughter "Florence" originated.<sup>3</sup> After four years in Italy, the family returned to Ireland, but this time they migrated to the influential city of Belfast, in the north. Flora, a bright and impressionable twelve-year-old, had been greatly influenced by her time in Italy, gaining a knowledge of languages and an appreciation for history and other cultural interests which she eventually passed along to her sons.

Also residing in Belfast was the prominent Lewis family. Like the Hamiltons, the Lewises had moved from County Cork in the south to the northern city of Belfast, location of the final residences of the two families and their long-lasting roots. For the Hamiltons this meant Flora's father becoming rector of a prominent church, St Mark's. For Albert's father, the move meant establishing a successful shipbuilding business. Richard Lewis and his partner John H. MacIlwaine operated the engineering and iron shipbuilding firm which built, among other ships, a freight named the *SS Titanic*. MacIlwaine and Lewis was located near another shipbuilder operated by Harland and Wolff which eventually constructed the luxurious *RMS Titanic*, whose maiden voyage ended in tragedy. Unlike the passenger ship, the freight ship *SS Titanic* had a long, successful career.<sup>4</sup>

### Flora marries Albert Lewis

Had Flora met Albert, her future husband, years earlier in County Cork? In a letter to Albert shortly after their engagement, Flora wrote that his affection since "childhood" convinced her to accept his proposal. Records indicate that Flora and Albert lived in County Cork at roughly the same time.<sup>5</sup> Once both families settled in the north of Ireland, Flora's brother Augustus accepted an apprenticeship in engineering with Richard Lewis' company in the shipyards of Belfast.<sup>6</sup> Educated in the law, Albert became a court solicitor in 1885 while Flora earned a college degree.

Albert, in his early courtship letters, poured out his heart to Flora, claiming deep love and devotion. Flora, however, initially rejected his advances. (Five years earlier, Flora had a courtship with Albert's brother, William, who ended the relationship, yet Flora struggled with residual feelings.) In letter after letter, Flora admitted that she did not reciprocate Albert's love. She included self-effacing comments, criticizing what she considered her lack of beauty and absence of connections.<sup>7</sup>

However, Albert was not one to be deterred; he simply changed his approach. After reading a copy of Flora's short story "The Princess Rosetta" in *Home Journal*, he extolled her writing capabilities, requesting more stories. Flora hesitated, feeling that Albert would find her writing too simple for one of his vast intellect. Reluctantly, she sent him other work which, to her surprise and delight, he highly praised. In exchange, Albert shared his short stories with Flora. Not only did he provide assurance for her writing, Albert lovingly improved Flora's self-confidence. She disposed of the negative self-talk in her correspondence and began exuding optimism. Despite Flora's initial disinclination, a romance blossomed.

Flora and Albert married in 1894 and welcomed sons Warren Hamilton (Warnie) on 16 June 1895 and Clive Staples (Jack) on 29 November 1898. How appropriate that a couple united by a passion for writing and an appetite for good literature should

produce two exceedingly talented authors. Jack's scholarly works are still respected and used as texts. His many popular works both in fiction and non-fiction genres, ranging from *Mere Christianity* to *The Screwtape Letters*, continue to sell in the millions. Warnie, after retiring as a major in the British Army, became a scholar and book author on the history of seventeenth-century France.

### Who was Flora's husband?

With his resonant voice, quick wit, and towering intellect, Albert quickly rose to popularity in Belfast, even before his marriage to Flora when both were in their thirties. His stirring speeches provided evidence of his power of persuasion. According to George Sayer's biography, *Jack*, and documents at the Marion E. Wade Center of Wheaton College, Illinois, Albert spoke passionately about the complexities of Irish independence, urging his fellow citizens to remain loyal to the United Kingdom. He was a promising talent, a rising star among the movers and shakers but too humble to consider himself among the elite. Albert's warm countenance and sense of humor made him easy to admire. Newspapers often showcased his persuasive talent, capturing images and impressions of him in cartoons and editorials.

Albert's law career as a court solicitor often prevented his accompanying Flora and the boys on seaside holidays, a disappointment that caused bitterness, even laying the groundwork for ridicule by the boys and worsening the grief which followed their mother's death. Jack and Warnie later experienced remorse for portraying their father as a boring workaholic (especially after each – independently and in different parts of the world but at nearly the same time – made their strong and lasting returns to faith in Christ).

A careful reading of family correspondence paints a nuanced picture of Albert. He adored his family, as illustrated through his correspondence, compiled after Albert's death by Warnie into *The Lewis Papers* and now housed at the Wade Center. Both

sons remembered their family home of Little Lea as filled with political chatter but also with whimsy and laughter provided by both parents. Their adolescent and young adult impressions seem overshadowed by their experiences after Flora's death, among them Albert's decision to send Jack to boarding school in England only weeks after she passed away. The decision appeared to be Albert's way of escaping parental duties, but as his correspondence demonstrates, Albert was, surprisingly, an attentive, loving, and generous father.<sup>8</sup> We must remember that Albert lost his father, wife, and brother all within the span of a few weeks during 1908, a catastrophic pattern of loss. Most feel that Albert never recovered from his grief.

After Albert's death and while Warnie was posted overseas, Jack took responsibility for commissioning a stained-glass window honoring Albert and Flora in St Mark's Church, Dundela (their grandfather Hamilton's parish). The window features intricate and symbolic designs which capture the essence of both parents and serve as a reminder of the love and gratitude the Lewis brothers felt in adulthood, particularly toward their father. They came to appreciate him more as they matured into men, especially after they returned to Christianity with its emphasis on grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.<sup>9</sup>

### Flora's intellectual and imaginative influence

Flora was not a "conventional" nineteenth-century woman. While others were marrying and establishing families, she attended college, enduring intense criticism for her untraditional choice.<sup>10</sup> However, her aspirations were not diminished by this censure. Flora's superior knowledge of mathematics earned her top honors at the prestigious Queen's University (then known as the Royal University of Ireland), first class honors in Geometry and Algebra in 1881, and first class honors in Logic with second class honors in Mathematics in 1885. She graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in 1886, one of a few women to receive a degree. Scholars call Flora

a pioneer among women for thriving in co-educational higher education institutions.<sup>11</sup>

Flora's academic background richly profited her sons. Before her final illness, she trained them in Latin, French, and mathematics. Ironically, mathematics proved a difficult subject for Jack when he sought admittance to Oxford. She aimed to nurture her sons personally, spiritually, and intellectually.

Fond of seaside locations, Flora traveled often with the boys, spending time in Ballycastle, County Antrim, in 1900, and Castlerock, County Londonderry, during the summers of 1901, 1903, 1904, and 1906. Other favorite destinations included Killough, County Down, on the Irish Sea, and Berneval, on the coast of northern France.

During these extended holidays, Flora continued to shape her sons to become great men of intellect and character. She encouraged her boys to explore the surrounding territory and its history, cultivating an interest in historical narratives. These experiences would echo throughout her sons' works, including their fictional worlds of Animal-Land and India (known as Boxen) and the books of both as scholars and authors in adulthood. (In addition to Jack's prolific writing, Warnie was one of the Inklings, sharing his writings on French history and contributing his ideas on works in progress by the others, in that storied literary group who today are household names.)

It was perhaps on such an excursion – or at home in Belfast – that Flora recalled a small Italian village from her childhood named Narni, located fifty miles north of Rome. The name is thought to be the inspiration for “Narnia.”<sup>12</sup> Surely the stories of her family's adventures in Italy were a subject of fascination to the boys.

Albert Lewis also contributed to his sons' intellectual development. He was a connoisseur of literature, appreciating and discussing great books with Flora and the boys. It was at his insistence that Little Lea was overflowing with books. Albert was

a prominent member of several literary societies, and his political speeches often alluded to influential literary works.<sup>13</sup> C.S. Lewis writes in *Surprised by Joy* that he matured in an environment surrounded by endless books – his family exhibited a perpetual thirst for knowledge. No doubt Flora and Albert, who both dabbled in writing, led their sons to continue a family tradition of appreciating and practicing the written word. In short, Jack and Warnie had “good literary genes.”

### Flora's spiritual inspiration

As a clergyman's daughter, faith was an important aspect of Flora Lewis' life. Her childhood was saturated by truths and Christian stories, by the enduring archetypes of the church, by the swelling hymns echoing through vast sanctuaries. When Flora's illness worsened, she was determined to provide one last gift to her children. Too weak to leave Little Lea, she asked Albert's brother Joseph to purchase two Bibles, one for each son.<sup>14</sup> The Bibles were presented to Warnie and Jack as Flora's final gifts, lasting reminders of the significance of faith.

This legacy, coupled with her final words, created a lasting impression. According to Albert's copious notes recorded during his diligent, loving vigil at Flora's deathbed, her final words, in response to his comment on the goodness of God, were, “What have we done for Him?”<sup>15</sup>

Flora's question, perhaps rhetorical yet substantial, echoes throughout Lewis' post-conversion work, prompting him to address faith and spirituality through fiction and non-fiction. Lewis desired to untangle the spiritual mysteries which plagued his generation, devoting some of his best work to Christian fiction and apologetics. His influential book, *The Problem of Pain*, earned him a weekly spot on BBC radio during World War II, where he gave insightful talks which eventually became his best-selling book *Mere Christianity*. Soon after these popular broadcasts, Lewis was invited to give talks and sermons to captivated

audiences, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Revd Thomas Hamilton.

By his death on 22 November 1963, what had C.S. Lewis done for Christ? The answer: much indeed.

### **Flora's impact on Lewis' perspective of women**

Flora was the first woman in C.S. Lewis' life to successfully model a domestic yet intellectual female. Over the years, Lewis endured criticism for being misogynistic, mainly stemming from what some perceived as his unflattering depictions of women, such as Susan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Yet, Lewis' earliest encounters with females, including aunts, nurses and governesses, were positive experiences; his grandmothers were both strong-willed and accomplished women.

Flora was determined to be an intellectual influence by tutoring her boys in scholarly subjects and exposing them to travel. In fact, it was during travel that the nickname "Jack" originated. Flora often took her sons to seaside locations. She suffered from headaches and little Jack from a "weak chest." Both parents felt that the northern coast was more medically beneficial than the climate in Belfast. On an excursion when Flora and the boys were accompanied by their nurse Lizzie Endicott – Lewis speaks fondly of Endicott in *Surprised by Joy* – Lizzie took a fancy to a train conductor named "Jack." (As a boy, C.S. Lewis was fascinated by trains. Flora even bought a wooden train for him while on holiday.) Soon after this summer journey little Clive declared that he would now be called "Jacksie," later shortened to Jack.<sup>16</sup>

Flora had been a nurturing and encouraging presence. Perhaps it was the absence of a mother which set an unrealistic expectation for the Lewis brothers concerning relationships with females. (It is noteworthy that his brother Warnie never married.) It is conceivable that Jack possessed a lingering sense of inadequacy that fueled his reluctance to engage in romantic

relationships. Ironically, Flora experienced similar emotions before marriage. Her premature death may have encouraged an "arrested development" in Jack's understanding of and interactions with women, perhaps one explanation for his later attachment to Mrs Janie Moore. A hospitable but spiritually ambivalent woman, she became a mother figure for the young Lewis during his years as a self-declared atheist. However, as Lewis matured, he seemed more attracted to women modeled like his mother – loving, intelligent, sensitive, observant.

Flora's death contributed to Lewis' sense of longing, of *sehnsucht*, a German term Lewis used in reference to thoughts and feelings which describe an intense "yearning." Lewis mentions that his mother's death extracted all joy from his early life; he refers to it as "the sinking of Atlantis." Lewis often recalled his search for what he termed "Joy," a lifelong attempt to retrace steps into Eden, into unfiltered glory. Until his conversion, he discovered shadows of this Joy in a toy garden, in the poignant lines of Beatrix Potter's *Squirrel Nutkin* and Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*, and in the pale figures of Wagner's *Ring* as depicted by prolific illustrator Arthur Rackham. After he committed himself to Christ, Lewis realized that these encounters and their subsequent emotions were shallow substitutes for something greater, of a truth expounded from his grandfather's pulpit and recorded in the beloved Bible his mother left him.

Although Flora Lewis was physically present for just a few years, the impact on her sons, especially the youngest, Jack, is continually evident. Flora's intellectual achievements and literary instincts helped shape her sons' creative dispositions, nurturing them into lifelong learners, thinkers, and writers. Early adventures by the Irish coast had a formidable impact on Jack's imaginative development, while her warm temperament and faithful obedience left a strong spiritual legacy. He wrote years later to Phyllis Elinor Sandeman on 31 December 1953 that his first encounter with lingering insecurity occurred with the death