

**Interview**

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF  
MR WALTER HOOPER, SECRETARY TO C. S. LEWIS<sup>1</sup>**

by

J. C. LOTZ

(November 2013 at Oxford)

JL: *Lewis wrote many books that we know of. Off the top of your head how many did he write, as it were, for the popular market and how many specifically academic?*

WH: I think about a third of them are for the academic market, works such as “The Preface to *Paradise Lost*”, an experiment in criticism. Many are marvellous works of literary criticism and literary history. But most his works have turned out to be for the popular market, like *Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain*, *The Screwtape Letters*. And then there are those works which are certainly Christian, which are stories, like the Narnia stories. Probably these are the most popular stories of his, of all of his works.

JL: *Unusually so!*

WH: And certainly some of the most profound. But I always encourage Christians who only know Lewis’ Christian writings to read his literary criticism because they would benefit from that too. What I would like for them to have is the world-view, which I think was expressed so well by Owen Barfield when he said that “What Lewis believed about everything was secretly present in anything that he said” and to get all that, what he believes about everything, includes literature too.

JL: *Absolutely.*

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Hooper was Secretary to C. S. Lewis and has also undertaken to edit and publish many of his writings. He was video-interviewed at his home in Oxford on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2013, for the Symposium in Iasi, “C. S. Lewis, the Romantic Rationalist”, in November of that year. The intention was to explore Lewis, the Academic, the Writer and the Man. Time pressure meant that only a short part at the end of the interview could be edited. This was presented at the Symposium Opening and has been transcribed here. The bulk of the video-material is soon to be edited, for presentation.

WH: So not just Christianity, but they will learn something about Christianity through his other writings, because they all together make up that world-view of C.S. Lewis the Inklings admired here, I think particularly Tolkien. It's often thought that they drifted apart when they got older, I don't think that at all! In the ten years that I knew Tolkien he nearly always was talking about Lewis, how much he missed him and how much he admired him. I think this was important too. When I was editing some of Lewis' letters, Lewis mentioned to his best friend Arthur Greaves the fact that Tolkien was coming to his Magdalen College rooms in 1929 to read together the things that they were writing, but particularly these evening in were spent in Magdalen with Tolkien reading from his Middle Earth writings. So I asked Professor Tolkien "Were you really actually reading then, part of *The Lord of the Rings*?" He said "Oh No, no! This was *The Silmarillion* at that time." He said "You see I wasn't interested in stories. I didn't want to write stories. What I was interested in are the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings*, genealogies, languages, things like that"! But you know what a boy Jack Lewis was, he had to have a story! And that story, *The Lord of the Rings*, was written to keep him quiet!

JL: *I like it, yes! What about the Inklings as a whole when they, as it were, convened at whichever the pub it was at the time? What did they actually do; was it largely a social event, was it an intellectual event? What did they do?*

WH: They talked about whatever anybody had to bring up, they did and sometimes they brought things that they were writing, but generally, it was just talk because it wasn't always easy with writings present and beer mats and all that.

Lewis was very good at bringing other people out, so they talked about many things. I remember that John Tolkien, the eldest son of Professor Tolkien, told me that he took his father to see C.S. Lewis near the end of his life up at "The Kilns". And I said "Do you remember what they talked about?" Because I thought it might have been that Inklings-type of talk. He said, "I do remember it very well, they talked about? Mallory's 'Mort d'Arthur', and whether trees ever die!" And I thought God, only Lewis and Tolkien would discuss whether trees ever, actually, die! Are they immortal? But what a wonderful thing to talk about. But I think this is the sort of thing that they would have talked about in the Inklings meetings.

JL: *How often did they meet?*

WH: They met every week, every Tuesday from the time that Lewis and Tolkien, in the 30's. But then when Lewis went to Cambridge, he had to go back on a Monday afternoon by the train, so they changed the meetings, the pub meetings, from Tuesday to Monday.

JL: *Finally is there anything that you would like to tell the conference in Romania?*

WH: I would tell the conference, don't be content with just one or two favourite books of Lewis! I find it hard to believe, with all of this work out there, of Lewis' work, at least 40 books available to them, and they might be content with just "Mere Christianity"! Enjoy that by all means, and keep reading it, but read his other books as well! Read the Narnia stories, read *Screwtape Letters*, read please read the great science fiction novels, the Trilogy, beginning with *Out of the Silent Planet*, and *Perelandra*, *That Hideous Strength*. I mean, I would be ashamed of them if these people said they were content with just one or two of Lewis' books, because to have that world-view of Lewis' you really need to read more! And they might like to know that Lewis hasn't quit writing yet because he's got coming out from Cambridge University Press a new book called *Image and Imagination*, which contains all of his book reviews, which have never been collected and published before. And this will be some completely new writings of his, and I hope that they will read that book.

JL: *Good! Thanks very much for your comments; I've enjoyed them enormously and I'm sure that others will as well!*

WH: I wish I could get to know all the people at the conference, you know. I'm sure they have many interesting things to say about Lewis, which would probably top anything that I've said!

JL: *A lot of them will be pretty new to him, they have excitement in store!*

WH: Well, they have so much excitement, they have whole life time of reading ahead of them!

JL: *Good, thank you very much!*

WH: My pleasure!



## REVIEWS AND BOOK NOTES

A TRANSLATOR REVIEWS ALISTER MCGRATH'S *C. S. LEWIS. A LIFE. ECCENTRIC GENIUS, RELUCTANT PROPHET*

Alister McGrath. *C. S. Lewis. A Life. Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*. London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton. 2013. xvi + 431 pages. ISBN 978-1-444-74552-8. £16.99

Reviewed by Natan Mladin  
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Let us begin with a confession. The present reviewer has not read the complete works of C. S. Lewis. He has not ploughed through the secondary literature. He has not pored over the thousands of letters annotated and published in the last few years by Walter Hooper—all these being important feats of Alister E. McGrath, the author of the most recent biography of Clive Staples Lewis. Still, the reviewer is called to fair-mindedly appraise the author's finished work. According to which criteria and based on what standards, we may ask? In virtue of which qualifications or personal merits, we may ponder? All such questions have, of course, some satisfactory answers that can be given, pertaining either to the reviewer's credentials or to the nature of the task of reviewing books, but questions remain. If we add to this the burden (and privilege) of being both the book's translator into Romanian and its reviewer, the task at hand seems onerous indeed. A successful translation may result only if the translator has internalized his text. What he will deliver is at one and the same time *his* text and the author's. He is both a servant of someone else's creation, and a creator in his own right. The absorption of the text and the *enfleshing* of its ideas in a new idiom make fair-mindedness a quality even more difficult to display. But enough with the patting-oneself-on-the-back-lamentations.

From the outset, McGrath's declared, an ambitious purpose is to present a coherent narrative that integrates the many dimensions of C. S. Lewis: most famously, as author of the Chronicles of Narnia and other works of fiction (the imaginative dimension), as brother, friend, and spouse (the relational dimension), as accomplished academic (the academic dimension), and as Christian apologist (the apologetic dimension). McGrath prefers narrative coherence to a precise, but dry presentation of facts. His intention is to tell the story of C. S. Lewis, focusing on some of the most important dimensions of his life and work, particularly on the development of his thought, rather than 'documenting every aspect of Lewis' life.'

What recommends McGrath as a biographer of the famous author, academic and apologist? McGrath highlights some points of biographical