

WALTER HOOPER

Walter Hooper died in Oxford on 7th December 2020 of Covid. Who was he, and what did he have to do with C.S. Lewis? Six months before he died in 1963, Lewis took on Walter as his literary secretary. After Lewis died Walter spent many years in editing and preparing Lewis's unpublished writings for publication.

I was fortunate to meet Walter in Oxford in 1965. I had come to love C.S. Lewis's books through his popular theology, such as *Mere Christianity* and *Screwtape Letters*. When I had exhausted all these I discovered his books on literary criticism, such as *The Allegory of Love* and *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama*. I love that title – it's the only book I know of whose title mentions what the book does **not** contain. It was only then that I discovered the Narnia books.

In 1963 I was planning a trip to London to do my PhD in mathematics and I dreamt of being able to meet C.S. Lewis. On 22nd November Lewis died – the same day President Kennedy was assassinated, so that put paid to that dream.

In October 1965, my wife and I sailed to England on the *Orcades* and we got to know Daryl Williams quite well. Daryl was a Rhodes scholar, on his way to Oxford. If his name sounds familiar it may be because he later became the Attorney General in the Howard government.

A couple of months after we all arrived in England, Daryl invited us up to Oxford for a weekend. Imagine my excitement to discover that Daryl was sharing a flat with Walter Hooper! That weekend became for me a C.S. Lewis pilgrimage. We met Warnie, Lewis's older brother, visited Lewis's grave, went to the Kilns where Lewis lived most of his adult life, and engaged in countless discussions about Lewis. Walter was a gentle, modest man who spoke with a deep southern accent, where he lovingly polished each word before moving on to the next.

I learnt many new things about Lewis, including the origin of his nickname, Jack. All his friends knew him as Jack. According to Walter, when Clive Staples Lewis was a boy he had a dog, called Jack, whom

he loved dearly. When the dog was run over and killed, Clive was distraught and insisted that thereafter he was to be called Jack.

Walter McGehee Hooper was born outside of Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1931, and went to study English and education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he obtained a B.A. in English and an M.A. in Education.

He first heard of Lewis at a campus ministry, where a football player, who had read *The Screwtape Letters*, recounted the narrative about the senior demon writing instructions to his nephew, a junior tempter named Wormwood. Hooper was fascinated by the story, but the university bookstore didn't carry *The Screwtape Letters* or any other works by Lewis. The store did sell J. B. Phillips's colloquial modern translation of the Biblical epistles, *Letters to Young Churches*, which had an introduction by Lewis. The introduction made an argument about how God entered into the world through the Incarnation and comes to us still. It changed Hooper's life.

"I'd never met anybody who believed that way," he said. "I was determined to have more words by this man." Hooper was drafted into the army in 1953, near the end of the Korean War. He took *Miracles* with him, keeping it inside his shirt during basic training so he could read it during cigarette breaks.

In June 1963, Hooper travelled to England to study at Exeter College's summer session. While there, he met C.S. Lewis in person: their first conversation continuing on in various meetings over several weeks. He also began helping Lewis informally with his correspondence and other related tasks. In time, Lewis asked Hooper if he would consider staying on in England and serving as his secretary. Sadly, during Hooper's return home to the U.S. to finish a teaching assignment and prepare for a more permanent move, C.S. Lewis died on November 22nd.

Walter Hooper returned to England in January 1964, and began to assist with matters related to C.S. Lewis's literary estate. Since then, Hooper edited numerous volumes of Lewis's writings, and also published three books of his own on Lewis and his writings and also the very helpful *Past Watchful Dragons* (on *The Chronicles of Narnia*).

As a result of these many years of faithful literary stewardship, readers of C.S. Lewis are indebted to Walter Hooper for his numerous, significant and irreplaceable contributions to Lewis studies. Hooper was awarded the Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime Achievement Award by the Marion E. Wade Center on October 21st, 2009.

Walter trained as an Episcopalian priest in America and became an Anglican priest when he went to England. For five years he was a college chaplain to two of the colleges in Oxford and he served as a sort of honorary curate at the Church of Saint Rumbach in Oxford, one of the Anglo-Catholic parishes.

In 1988 he became a Roman Catholic. When asked, five years later, whether Lewis might have become a Catholic if he had lived, Hooper said, “I think so. Those who pick up just any book of his and read what he says about, say, the Church, might not think so. But what you have to do is to look at what he said over a period of many years, during which his view of the Church became increasingly more Catholic. One of the last papers that he wrote was to Anglican seminarians in Cambridge. And in that well-known paper – called *Fern-seed and Elephants* – he points out that, if they continue to talk that sort of liberalism that they were then talking of – and increasingly more now – he said that their readers and hearers would leave the Anglican church and become either atheists or Roman Catholics. I think he would probably have had to include himself in that group. What do you do, when, in fact, the Anglican church becomes apostate – as it has truly become right now?”

It appeared that the apostacy that Hooper was talking about had to do with the Anglican church beginning to ordain women. Lewis, certainly, was against the move.

I’ll conclude by mentioning a rather interesting literary controversy that Hooper was involved in. He was accused of forgery – of passing off his own writing as Lewis’s. In 1977, Hooper published the unfinished science fiction novel *The Dark Tower*, a previously unknown work by C.S. Lewis. The novel resembles Lewis’s known works in some ways and departs from them in others. A school of critics headed by Kathryn Lindskoog accused Hooper of either forging the

work *in toto* or adding a lot of padding onto small fragments of an unknown work by Lewis to create the published work. Lindskoog also questioned the authenticity of other posthumously published works edited by Hooper.

Hooper rejected these accusations, and independent research exists to disprove them and confirm the authenticity of the posthumous Lewis works edited by Hooper. Professor Alastair Fowler of the University of Edinburgh had Lewis as his doctoral supervisor in 1952, and he recalls discussing *The Dark Tower* with his mentor. This is a firsthand account of the manuscript's existence during Lewis's lifetime. Lewis's stepson Douglas Gresham also disagrees with Lindskoog's forgery claims. "The whole controversy thing was engineered for very personal reasons. Her fanciful theories have been pretty thoroughly discredited."