5-29-2014

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Cover Page Footnote
Undergraduate Student Essay

This essay is available in Inklings Forever: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol9/iss1/7
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Student paper award winner
The Artistry of C.S. Lewis:  
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Primarily recognized as an author, theologian, professor, and lecturer, C. S. Lewis is usually not known for his ability as an artist. He was a wildly popular writer whose fiction books (e.g., *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Space Trilogy*) and Christian non-fiction (e.g., *Mere Christianity* and "The Weight of Glory") are beloved by many, but he once remarked that he could “remember no time when we [he and his brother Warnie] were not incessantly drawing” (Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*; hereafter abbreviated as *SBJ* 6). Though C. S. Lewis loved to draw and admired art—especially the artist Aubrey Beardsley, he only illustrated a few of his own works (mainly *Boxen*), and he chose to hire popular illustrator Pauline Baynes to bring his cherished Chronicles to life.

Lewis became interested in drawing at an early age and thought himself the better artist between him and his brother Warnie. Different subjects interested them: Warnie drew “ships and trains and battles” while Lewis favored “dressed animals—the anthromorphized beasts of nursery literature.” Lewis remarks, “From them it appears to me that I had the better talent. From a very early age I could draw movement—figures that looked as if they were really running or fighting—and the perspective is good” (*SBJ* 6). His artistry gained momentum when he and his family moved to “The New House.” There Lewis discovered his father’s library of numerous books (*SBJ* 10) and he writes “I soon staked out a claim to one of the attics and made it my ‘study’” (*SBJ* 12). Lewis remarks, “Pictures, of my own making or cut from the brightly colored Christmas numbers of magazines, were nailed on the walls. There I kept my pen and inkpot and writing books and paintbox” (*SBJ* 12). It was in this room that his “first stories were written, and illustrated, with enormous satisfaction” (13). *Boxen* is one of these stories that Lewis wrote—with his brother Warnie, of course.

C.S. Lewis did most of the illustrating in *Boxen*, and in fact drew maps to complete his history of Animal-Land (see fig.1).

Figure 1. One of Lewis’s maps that he illustrated for *Boxen* (Boxen)  
(Photocourtesy: Kathryne Hall)
(This was mainly because Warnie insisted that “trains and steamships” were involved, and as a result, Lewis decided that a “full history” and geography were needed [SBJ/13]). Lewis was quite the cartographer because “soon a map of Animal-Land – several maps, all tolerably consistent” were produced (13-14). He remarks, “Soon there was a whole world and a map of that world which used every color in my paintbox” (14). Warnie and Lewis loved this world they created, and Lewis (affectionately nicknamed “Jack”) enjoyed illustrating the stories. Walter Hooper writes,

Warnie began a Boxonian newspaper […] [N]o issues have survived […] and with the newspapers came some of Jack’s most detailed drawings of such notables as Lord Big (see fig. 2), Viscount Puddiphat and James Bar. Excepting those pictures which were drawn in the ‘novels’, some of the best illustrations were drawn on loose sheets of paper and collected in 1926 into the two volumes of Leborough Studies. […] The pity is that we don’t have the stories the drawings were intended to illustrate. (Hooper 235)

Figure 2. Lord Big and General Quicksteppe on board the “Indian Star,” drawn by Lewis for Boxen (Boxen) (Photo Courtesy: Kathryne Hall)

Thus, C.S. Lewis developed his love for drawing through Boxen, and clearly his imagination was spurred on as well.

Lewis’s childhood friend Arthur Greeves was also an artist who enjoyed drawing. The two seemed to delight in discussing art, for in a letter remarking about some drawings that Greeves sent him, Lewis writes,

I finished my last letter in rather a hurry, and can’t remember whether I referred to your drawing in them: I am glad you are going on with it. The absence of models, as far as hands, limbs, folds of clothes, etc go could be helped by the looking-glass, which I imagine is an excellent teacher. How fine it will be when you can get me up in your room again and show me all your new work and all your new treasures. (Collected Letters 1:384; hereafter abbreviated as CL).

Although confident in his earlier remarks about his drawings compared to Warnie’s, Jack’s self-esteem must have diminished a little over the years. In another letter to Arthur Greeves, he writes:

You are quite wrong old man in saying I can draw “when I like.” On the contrary, if I ever can draw, it is exactly when I don’t like. If I sit down solemnly with the purpose of drawing, it is a sight to make me ‘ridiculous to the pedestrian population of the etc.’. The only decent things I do are scribbled in the margins of my dictionary […] or the backs of old envelopes, when I ought to be attending to something else. (CL 1: 211)

It is intriguing to picture Lewis and Greeves talking about and criticizing each other’s artistic works. Certainly, Lewis thought he was best at drawing when he wasn’t focusing on it.

Lewis was a great admirer of illustrations, for he remarked more than once
about Aubrey Beardsley’s drawings, the illustrator of Sir Thomas Malory’s works. First, Lewis asks Arthur Greeves if he “know[s] anything of the artist Beardsley (sic)?” (CL 1: 211). In a later letter he writes,

“I have also got the 1st 2 volumes of Malory in the Temple Classics. The frontispieces are from designs by Beardsley. They are v. good in the extremest style of mediaevalism [sic]—perhaps rather affected. One is of the finding of Excalibur [see fig. 3] & the other of someone giving Tristam a shield. In the Excalibur one, Merlin is shewn as a not very old clean-shaven but beautifully wizened man. Not what I’d have imagined him but good all the same” (CL 1: 340).

Lewis continues to remark about Beardsley’s art - calling the Malory edition “a beautiful book, with a handsome binding, good paper and a fair page: there are lovely chapter headings and decorations” (CL 1: 384). In the following letter to Greeves, he calls Beardsley’s art “a little decadent and ‘genre.’” In the same letter, he writes about the illustrations in another book by Corneille. He says, “[T]he plates of course as illustrations are idiotic but there is something solid and grand about them” (CL 1: 403).

Lewis also “loved the drawings of Arthur Rackham in Undine and The Ring, those of Charles Robinson in The Secret Garden [see fig. 4], those of Kemble in Huckleberry Finn, and, although he found them cramped, those of Arthur Hughes in George MacDonald’s books” (Sayer 314). Lewis had strong opinions regarding what he liked and disliked in illustrations: “He loathed illustrations in which the children had vapid, empty faces and hated even more the grotesque style that derived from Walt Disney’s cartoons” (Sayer 314). He obviously possessed a keenness for art as he paid close attention to the illustrations of the books that he enjoyed reading.

C.S. Lewis began to wonder if his Chronicles of Narnia needed illustrations. According to George Sayer, he “considered
illustrating the stories himself, but decided that even if he had the skill, he would not have the time” (314). Because of this, he decided to seek out a main illustrator for his works. It is unclear whether or not Lewis heard of Pauline Baynes through J.R.R. Tolkien, his close friend, or from a worker in a bookstore, for he once told Baynes that he visited a bookstore and inquired whether or not someone knew of an illustrator that he could use (CL 2: 1019). Even so, “[a]s Tolkien had read the manuscript of The Lion it is almost certain he showed Lewis the illustrations to The Farmer Giles of Ham” (1019).

Tolkien thought of Baynes’ work very highly, especially in The Farmer Giles of Ham (see fig. 5), and he did not care for the work by the previous artist commissioned for this book, Milein Cosman (Tolkien 130-131). He complains about the lack of regularity the pictures have with the text and remarks, “[T]he artist is a poor drawer of trees” (131). He continues his criticism by writing, “The dragon is absurd. Ridiculously coy, and quite incapable of performing any of the tasks laid on him by the author. [...] The Farmer, a large blusterer bigger than his fellows, is made to look like little Joad at the end of a third degree by railway officials” (131). However, of Baynes’ drawings he writes that he is “pleased with them beyond even the expectations aroused by the first examples. They are more than illustrations, they are a collateral theme. I showed them to my friends whose polite comment was that they reduced my text to a commentary on the drawings” (Tolkien 133). He expresses interest to use Baynes to illustrate a poem about Tom Bombadil (Tolkien 308), and in a letter to her, he writes that she can “produce wonderful pictures with a touch of ‘fantasy’, but primarily bright and clear visions of things that one might really see” (Tolkien 312)(see fig. 6). Baynes is responsible for notifying Tolkien about his inconsistency of describing Tom Bombadil’s hat as having a peacock feather in it sometimes and at other times detailed with a different kind of feather (318-319). He thanks her for addressing this and says, “Do not be put off by this sort of thing unless it affects the picture! The inwardly seen picture is to me the most important. I look forward to your interpretation” (319).

With Tolkien’s excitement over Baynes, it is certainly not surprising that Lewis hired her as well.

Like Tolkien, Lewis also thought Baynes’ illustrations for The Farmer Giles of Ham “exquisite and in quite a different genre”
After “Lewis signed a contract with Geoffrey Bles Ltd for The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe [...] Mr. Bles formally commissioned Baynes to do the illustrations. They were completed and ready for Lewis to see when he met Bles.” Lewis “was so impressed by her traditional style of drawing that he asked her to illustrate all the Narnian stories.” In a letter to Pauline Baynes, he writes, “I was with Mr. Bles last week and wd. like to congratulate [you] on your drawings for my story, which I thought really excellent. I love (and I think children will love too) the wealth of vigorous detail—if only there were going to be more room for it when they are reduced in size. I wish we were doing a folio!” He goes on to set up their first meeting at “a little lunch party” in Oxford. At this luncheon Baynes “recalls watching C.S. Lewis pass round the food and, when nobody wanted any more sprouts, gleefully picking out the remaining walnuts” (Cory). She remarked that she is “often asked about that lunch, but the reality is [...] my chief memory of Lewis was seeing him picking out those walnuts” (qtd. in Cory).

Lewis and Baynes met one other time face to face “when they had tea at Waterloo station.” According to Baynes, “he spent the whole time looking at his watch.” She must not have been impressed for she wrote in her diary, “Met C.S. Lewis. Came home. Made rock cakes” (qtd. in Cory). Baynes must have addressed Lewis about his attention to the time for in a letter to her later, Lewis writes about this meeting and how “hurried” he was: “You didn’t keep me a bit too long and I shd. have been v. glad if you’d stayed longer. I was hurried (I hope, not rudely so) only because I didn’t want to be left with a long vacancy between your departure and the next train” (CL 3: 84). These meetings between Lewis and Baynes give the idea of a curious relationship between the two. It is surprising that they only saw each other face-to-face two times (Cory) – especially since Lewis first wrote that he hoped they would “have several meetings as the work goes on” (CL 2: 1009).

Lewis did not only have Baynes illustrate the characters in his books, but also had her draw maps. She had experience drawing maps in World War II, which helped her draw the maps of Narnia (“Pauline Baynes”). Lewis “sent Pauline a map of Narnia to illustrate not only the first two stories, but those he was yet to write” (CL 2: 1019). He included a note with this map that read “My idea was that the map should be more like a medieval map than an Ordnance Survey—mountains and castles drawn—perhaps winds blowing at the corners—and a few heraldic-looking ships, whales and dolphins in the sea” (CL 3: 83). Hooper writes, “When we compare these simple instructions with the map in the end pages of Prince Caspian [see fig. 7], and Baynes’s post-sized map of Narnia [...] we realize how much our picture of Lewis’s imaginary world owes to the skill and imagination of Pauline Baynes” (CL 2: 1020). Perhaps Lewis was inspired to include maps from his earlier drawings for Animal-Land in Boxen, though regardless of the reason for including the maps, they certainly add a character and whimsy to Lewis’s world that would have been missed.
would come out all right” for *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in the Puffin set and “it would [not] matter very much if they lacked perfection” (*CL* 3: 921-922n27). It is interesting to point out that, contrary to Gibb’s comments, Dorothy Sayers wrote to Lewis and called Baynes’ picture a “bad drawing – of what is commonly called an ‘effeminate kind, because it is boneless and shallow.” Sayers goes on to write, “I cannot ‘take’ (for instance) the frontispiece to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It makes me uncomfortable, and if anybody were to call it blasphemous I couldn’t honestly disagree” (qtd. in *CL* 3: 638n245). The American edition published by Macmillan reduces the size of the frontispiece picture to only half of the cover as well as printing the cover images in black and white, much like the first editions in the fifties. The covers printed by All Collins (British edition) take on more of a cartoonish look (see fig. 10) with the different colors that are used—especially on *The Magician’s Nephew* (“Some Narnian Book Covers”). Lewis must certainly have had some say in Baynes’ designs, for he wrote in a letter to her that “Aslan gazing at the moon would make an excellent cover design (to be repeated somewhere in the book; but do as you please about that)” (*CL* 3: 83-84).

Baynes first illustrated *The Chronicles* in black and white but was “kept busy providing more illustrations,” many of which are in color (*CL* 2: 1021). Some of these new publications include a special edition of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* that “contains her original illustrations as well as seventeen additional full-page illustrations in...
colour. For the centenary of Lewis’s birth in 1998 Baynes was commissioned to colour the original black and white illustrations in all seven books” (CL 2: 1021). Her progression from using ink to paint adds to the depth of the illustrations, as adding color brings out a dimension to her characters that would otherwise be missed.

Although Lewis was fond of Baynes’s work, he certainly did not abstain from criticizing it. He called “[h]er Mouse [...] one of her best beasts” (CL 3: 80) (see fig. 11) but said that she needed a lot of work with her anatomy. He was not afraid of being candid with her, for he once wrote to her: “If only you cd. take 6 months off and devote them to anatomy, there’s no limit to your possibilities” (CL 3: 412). In a later letter to Dorothy Sayers he wrote:

The main trouble about Pauline B. is not her femininity but her total ignorance of animal anatomy. [...] I have always had serious reservations about her (this is sub sigillo [*under seal*]). But she had merits (her botanical forms are lovely), she needed the work (old mother to support, I think), and worst of all she is such a timid creature, so “easily put down” that criticism cd. only be hinted, & approval had, on a second shot, to be feigned. At any real reprimand she’d have thrown up the job; not in a huff but in sheer, downright, unresenting, pusillanimous dejection. She [...] has no interest in matter—how boats are rowed, or bows shot with, or feet planted, or fists clenched. (CL 3: 638-639)

Agreeing with Sayers, Lewis calls Baynes’ draying “effeminate too,” which he does not like but rather “prefer[s] people (CL 3: 639). George Sayer writes that Lewis “often found the faces of her children empty, expressionless, and too alike. Although he thought she improved in this respect [even writing to Geoffrey Bles that her faces were “greatly improved” (CL 3: 299), he was never entirely satisfied.” Lewis told George Sayer “[m]ore than once” that “[s]he can’t draw lions [see fig. 12], but she is so good and beautiful and sensitive that I [Lewis] can’t tell her this” (Sayer 314-315).

Figure 11. One of Baynes’ Illustrations of Reepicheep the Mouse (Riordan) (Photo Courtesy: Kathryne Hall)

Lewis did think that Baynes improved and wrote, “[i]t is delightful to find (and not only for selfish reasons) that you do each book a little bit better than the last—it is nice to see an artist growing” (CL 3:412). He even lists several examples from her drawings that
he liked and specifically compliments her on each way that she improved (CL 3:412-413). His praise continues in another letter to “Miss Baynes” saying that “This Horse, whether charging with his hansom, or growing his wings, or flying, is the real thing: and so is the elephant. Congratulations! I mention the beasts first because they show the greatest advance” (CL 3: 511-512). Though Lewis was harsh at times about Baynes’ drawings, he did admire her greatly. When she sent him a letter commending him for receiving the Carnegie award, he replied and said, “[I]t is not rather ‘our’ Medal?” (CL 3: 850).

Perhaps Lewis’s particular thoughts about art derived from how he came to know art and beauty. He writes in his autobiography, “This absence of beauty, now that I come to think of it, is characteristic of our childhood. No picture on the walls of my father’s house ever attracted—and indeed none deserved—our attention. We never saw a beautiful building nor imagined that a building could be beautiful. My earliest aesthetic experiences, if indeed they were aesthetic, were not of that kind; they were already incurably romantic, not formal” (SBJ 6-7). Warnie once made a homemade garden to bring into their room, which fascinated Jack. He continues, “What the real garden had failed to do, the toy garden did. It made me aware of nature—not, indeed, as a storehouse of forms and colors but as something cool, dewy, fresh, exuberant” (SBJ 7). He did not care much for the realness of nature in his early years, so it is intriguing that he is so particular about it later in the illustrations of Baynes. Concerning when he and Warnie used to draw together as boys, Lewis writes “Trees appear as balls of cotton wool stuck on posts, and there is nothing to show that either of us knew the shape of any leaf in the garden where we played almost daily” (SBJ 6).

C.S. Lewis loved to draw from an early age, and he enjoyed looking at the illustrations of other books—especially those of Aubrey Beardsley. It is too bad he did not illustrate more of his books because his attention to detail and perspective would have resulted in some very good drawings.

Lewis chose Pauline Baynes as his illustrator, and although their relationship was strange and perhaps strained because of Lewis’s criticism, “[i]t was the perfect marriage of author and illustrator” (CL 2: 1020).
Works Cited


