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Roger Phillips
Taylor University

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NARNIA IN THE NEWS

C.S.LEWIS & HARPERCOLLINS

Roger Phillips
Reference Librarian
Zondervan Library
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana

C S. Lewis' beloved Narnia has withstood the attack of the White Witch (aka Queen Jadis) from within and the Calormenes from without, but can it stand against modern publishing giant HarperCollins? This question in various forms has been voiced in the *New York Times*, *Atlantic Monthly* and *Christianity Today*. So let's just get the facts out into the light of day and decide for ourselves. But those facts are shrouded in a fog that would rival any to be found in Narnia.

An often-quoted memo from Steve Hanselman, senior vice president for Harper San Francisco is key to one of the current concerns. One line of that memo states, "We'll need to give emphatic assurances that no attempt will be made to correlate the [Narnia] stories to Christian imagery/theology." This could have been the prompting for the following response, "Plans are afoot to purge Christian content from the seven Narnia stories. Harper intends to censor out of C. S. Lewis' masterpiece that which is most essential to it—its Christian imagery." But that never seems to have been an intention. For a publisher to edit a publication that has sold over sixty million copies does not make sense. The quote actually applied to a proposed television documentary and reads, "The pages of the script suggest that Narnia will be treated from the vantage of children in need of hopeful fantasy, with the

inspiration coming from memories and pictures in his [Lewis'] head. If Stephen King and J. K. Rowling are the commentators on Narnia, as the script suggests, Simon [Adley] should be quite pleased. We'll need to be able to give emphatic assurances that no attempt will be made to correlate the stories to Christian imagery/theology."

Who is Simon Adley that he needs assurances from HarperCollins? Simon Adley is managing director of the C. S. Lewis Co. in the United Kingdom. The Lewis Co. holds the Lewis copyrights. Mr. Adley was able to sign a multi-million dollar agreement with HarperCollins. Where the multi-millions ended up is somewhat of a

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mystery. Mr. Adley is purportedly responsible for scuttling the documentary about Lewis that was "too Christian" according to its producer, Carol Dean Hatcher. But when asked, Mr. Adley responded, "It's

fatuous to suggest that we're trying to take the Christian out of C. S. Lewis. We wouldn't have made the effort that we have with *Mere Christianity* if we felt that way. It's just crazy. I suppose you could get a little depressed by this. I'm trying to get more people to read."

Part of getting more people to read is what HarperCollins has in mind by adding to the *Chronicles of Narnia*. In an early June response to public criticism, HarperCollins said: "The goal of HarperCollins Publishers and the C.

S. Lewis Estate is to publish the works of C. S. Lewis to the broadest possible audience, and to leave any interpretation of the works to the reader. The works of C. S. Lewis continue to be published by HarperCollins and Zondervan as written by the author, with no alteration. Zondervan's editorial standards and Christian mission [have] not changed in any way." But authors are being approached to write additional Narnia stories to "fill in the gaps." Responses to this range from viewing this as tantamount to adding another book to the Bible to approving this as a good move, since it will get increase readership for Lewis.

Attempts to keep authors' works alive after their deaths have met with varied success. Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers have had books published long after their deaths. The reception has been lukewarm. But others have been more successful. Nancy Drew books have been written by a number of authors and it is hard to know which Sunday comics are being written by the person named in the tag line. We readers want more. We don't want good things to end. There are big-name bands with none of the original members. There are baseball teams that relocate and continue without any former members, but they keep the name and we enjoy the fantasy. So if there is a new Narnia book, perhaps it should be read and critiqued after the fact, not beforehand. But will C. S. Lewis's name be the only one on the cover? That would be troubling.

The marketing monster is seen as another threat to Narnia. HarperCollins has dared to take steps that would broaden the market for Narnia. One comment reported on several occasions equates disparagingly that what HarperCollins is intending to do is make Aslan a British Mickey Mouse. It's difficult to conceive of Mickey Mouse as a villain. Perhaps if Aslan were to become a British Felix the Cat, star of X-rated films, it would be easier to see the threat, but to have a child curl

up in bed with Aslan might be more of a comfort to some parents than a cause for concern.

Merchandising is a part of the American way of life. Is it a part of the Christian life? The commercialization of Christianity is sometimes condemned but many Christian homes have merchandise from a Christian bookstore prominently displayed in their living rooms. A Bible verse on a cheap plastic top may put a new spin on the Gospel, but why not? If someone in a church is passing out prizes, perhaps a Bible verse—even if on a pencil—will be beneficial.

Perhaps Lewis himself has become mythic. We seem to have less trouble picturing C. S. Lewis, hobbit-like, sitting in an English pub with his pipe and his pint at the elbow in a congenial gathering of friends, than picturing him in a modern setting such as McDonald's or Chick-Fil-A. As we can picture Christ more readily in the rugged hills of Judea as opposed to the streets of our hometown, yet both Lewis and Christ would hope that the message of the Gospel should be proclaimed by whatever means in any setting.

One of C. S. Lewis' friends, Dorothy L. Sayers, worked at an advertising firm at one time and some credit her with the slogan, "It pays to advertise." Though Lewis disagreed with Sayers about a person's relationship to their work he did not take her to task for her work with an advertiser.

We seem reluctant to let Aslan and Christ loose in the world. Perhaps we want them too much for ourselves. Dorothy L. Sayers penned these words, "We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him 'meek and mild,' and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies." Perhaps rather than being defenders of Narnia we should applaud the loosing of Aslan into the marketplace.

The following annotated bibliography is listed (roughly) in chronological order to give a sense of the develop-

ment of "Narnia in the News."

Raugust, Karen, "Licensing Hotline," *Publisher's Weekly*, August 14, 2001, 247:33, p208.

Though published in 2001 this announcement refers to fall, 2000 when United Media and the C.S. Lewis Company would be licensing products including gifts, collectibles, software and stationery to coincide with the 50th anniversary of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Harper was announced to be spending \$250,000 to promote the anniversary in a program designed to reach 150,000 educators. In addition new Narnia stories were announced for 2002 along with toys, plush, games and apparel. Below is an internet link for teachers to contest rules for HarperCollins' "Create your own world of Narnia art contest." The contest ended October 31, 2000.

Narnia Contest Brochure http://www.narnia.com/pdf/teachers_entry_form.pdf

"HarperCollins Signs Deal with the C. S. Lewis Company," *The Write News*, March 21, 2001, http://write.news.com/2001/032101_harpercollins_cslewis.htm, 11/8/01, 2:44 p.m.

Announces HarperCollins as finalizing a multi-million dollar deal with C.S. Lewis Company to publish Lewis titles including the Narnia series. HarperCollins excited about the prospect of bringing Lewis' children's and adult books to audiences around the world.

Paulson, Michael, "Publishing Deal Spotlights C.S. Lewis," *Boston Globe*, April 7, 2001, B2.

Quotes Mary Ellen Curley, marketing director for HarperCollins, "We're looking to broaden him to anyone who is interested not only in Christianity, but in a broader sense of spirituality—the seekers out there."

Carvajal, Doreen, "Marketing 'Narnia' Without a Christian Lion," *New York Times*, June 3, 2001, 150:51773, p.1,18.

Front page of the *New York Times* Sunday edition. Items include marketing tactics, Narnia as a British Mickey Mouse, quotes from an internal HarperCollins memo, the failed C.S. Lewis documentary by Carol Dean Hatcher, quotes from Simon Adley, managing director of C.S. Lewis Company, goals of HarperCollins marketing of Lewis, information on Lewis's step-sons including Doug Gresham's plea to have Narnia in with secular materials rather than in the religious sections of bookstores.

Peek, Laura, "Lion, witch and Mickey Mouse," *The Times*, Overseas News, June 4, 2001, p. 11.

"The seven novels...are having a Harry Potter-style makeover, which includes plans to play down their Christian themes."

Murchison, William, "The Lion, The Witch and the Nonsense: Harper Collins Under Spell of Mammon," *Human Events*, June 11, 2001, 57:22, p10.

Based on *New York Times* article. Takes the stance that money has led to repackaging Lewis and that the current American culture as perceived by HarperCollins will only accept a mild Christianity that accepts the Christian creed as just one among many.

Fletcher, Robert, "Lewis's Narnia," *The Times*, Features, June 11, 2001, p. 17.

Letter to the Times stating that his family possesses a letter from Lewis where he "made it clear that his Narnia was a world that 'needed to be saved' in the scriptural Christian sense."

"Neutering Narnia," editorial, *Boston Globe*, June 14, 2001, 3rd section, p. A18.

Likens adding books to the Narnia chronicles to urban renewal. Contends that the Christian symbolism should be maintained in any new Narnia stories.

Greeley, Andrew, "The folly of censoring C. S. Lewis: Publisher ponders purging Narnia of its mysticism," *MSNBC*, Opinions, June 14, <http://stacks.msnbc.com/news/587393.asp?cp1=1>, 11/8/01, 2:10 p.m.

Contends that HarperCollins is taking Christian content out of Narnia based on greed. HarperCollins secularism and arrogance are also cited.

Powell, Sian, "Revising C. S. Lewis: a cautionary tale," *The Australian*, June 16, 2001, p. 5.

Librarian Cathy Symonds is opposed to adding to the Narnia chronicles. Article quotes Harper Collins assurance that original works will continue to be published without alteration.

Olasky, Marvin, with reporting by Ed Plowman, "Remarkable Providences: Spending my inheritance: C.S. Lewis's stepson makes tradeoffs," *World on the Web*, 16:23, June 16, 2001, http://www.worldmag.com/world/issue/06-16-01/closing_2.asp, 11/8/01, 2:00 p.m.

Describes Doug Gresham's role with respect to the C.S. Lewis Company, the Hatcher documentary, and talks about he and his wife Merrie's leadership in the International Institute of Pregnancy Loss and Child Abuse Research and Recovery (IIPLCARR) and their help in founding the International Society of Centurions (ISOC), a group ministering to past practitioners of abortion.

Olasky, Marvin, "Off with his head," *World on the Web*, 16:23, June 16, 2001, http://www.worldmag.com/world/issue/06-16-01/cover_1.asp, 11/8/01, 2:05 p.m.

Lengthy article quotes memos indicating that Zondervan and HarperCollins wish to water down Lewis's Christianity. Details the formation of the C.S. Lewis Company, the entrance of Simon Adley, Carol Hatcher's failed documentary, Skip Duncan's on-schedule documentary,

Doug Gresham's role, and questions concerning whether Lewis's Christianity as he expressed it will survive.

Byfield, Ted and Byfield, Virginia, "Christians needn't worry about the Narnia deal—but maybe HarperCollins shareholders should," *Report/News magazine* (Alberta Edition), 28:13, June 25, 2001, p. 53.

Quotes HarperCollins memo. Talks about the futility of posthumous imitations.

Margolis, Rick, "HarperCollins to Commission New Narnia Books," *School Library Journal*, 47:6, June 2001, p.18.

Reports Fall 2003 as a release date for the new Narnia books. States that the old books are doing fine.

Woodard, Joe, "De-Fanging C. S. Lewis," *Catholic.net*, July 4, 2001, http://www.catholic.net/us_catholic_news/print.phtml?article_id=190, 11/8/01, 2:44 p.m.

Cites opposition to HarperCollins memo from Catholic, Protestant and agnostic commentators. Quotes Focus on the Family's Paul McCusker. Christopher Mitchell, director of Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College, relates how believable evil characters are easier to create than believable good characters and that will be the challenge for authors of any new Narnia stories.

Crossman, Cathy Lynn, "'Narnia' won't write off Christian values, publisher says," *USA Today*, 19:215, July 19, 2001, p5D.

Quotes Susan Katz, head of the children's book division for Harper Collins, as saying HarperCollins is committed to the integrity of Lewis' work. Mentions that the Narnia website www.narnia.com does not mention Lewis' Christian worldview. Ted Olsen, online editor for *Christianity Today*, lists possible problems with bringing out new volumes.

Sutton, Roger, "Bring Out Your Dead," *Horn Book Magazine*, 77:4, Jul/Aug, 2001, p.387.

Editorial comparing this with attempts to keep other series going where the original author has died. "Mingling high-culture literary appeal with mass-market brand loyalty is a formula designed to undermine what made these books stand out in the first place: that there was nothing else like them..."

Marziani, Elianna, "Beachy Keen on Classics," *Insight on the News*, 17:29, August 6, 2001, p.26.

Says HarperCollins trying to capitalize on Harry Potter success by bringing out new Narnia books. Classics ought to be preserved.

Cutrer, Corrie and Guthrie, Stan, "Mere Marketing?" *Christianity Today*, 45:10, August 6, 2001, p. 19ff.

Extensive article chronicling issues beginning with HarperCollins announcement in March of deal with C.S. Lewis Company. Hatcher's failed documentary and accompanying coffee table book deal are detailed. Simon

Adley is seen as a key player in insuring no Christian content to a Narnia documentary. Documentary about Lewis by Arman Nicholi going forward without input from C.S. Lewis Company. Doug Gresham's views of getting Narnia into the marketplace as a Christian ideal are coupled with his views that people thrive on outrage. Concludes that C.S. Lewis will prevail.

"Aslan Is Still on the Move," Editorial, *Christianity Today*, 45:10, August 6, 2001, p.32f.

Contends stories of memos about documentary have been attributed incorrectly to Narnia books. Cites Lewis' plan to publish theology in fiction in such a manner as to "steal past those watchful dragons." Wonders why Christians are up in arms about a publisher spending millions to get Christian writing distributed more broadly. Also cites HarperCollins multimillion-dollar campaign to reissue Lewis' nonfiction such as *Mere Christianity*.

Shulevitz, Judith, "Don't Mess with Aslan," *New York Times Book Review*,

150:51857, August 26, 2001, p.27.

Christian imagery in Narnia is impossible to eliminate. Describes creation of Aslan by Lewis and Lewis' ability to engender "an overpowering longing for goodness." Also mentions stories are inhabited by nasty Jews, Muslims, and women.

"Bad News" *U. S. Catholic*, 66:9, September, 2001, p.11.

Relies on *New York Times* article for information.

Easterbrook, Gregg, "In Defense of C. S. Lewis," *Atlantic Monthly*, 228:3, October, 2001, p.46ff.

Threat of corporate marketing is coupled with criticisms claiming Narnia is racist, misogynistic, and "poisonous." Details anti-Narnia writing in England. Ending paragraph endorses Narnia in *The Last Battle* as presenting heaven open to anyone of good will. *