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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

C.S. Lewis: Chronicler of Narnia

Mary Dodson Wade
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"[You] must not believe all that authors tell you about how they wrote their books," says famed writer C.S. Lewis, "because a man writing a story is too excited about the story itself to sit back and notice how he is doing it." This authoritative biography peeks into the "wardrobe" of its imaginative subject, leading readers not only to Lewis's fabled Narnia, but to Ireland, London, Oxford, and the Lewis home called "The Kilns," where he lived and wrote and had lively friendships with intellectuals such as J.R.R. Tolkien.

The later chapters provide insight into how the mind of a man writing a story works. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, perhaps the most famous of Lewis's seven *Narnia* fantasies, children enter an imaginary world through a magical wardrobe, which was inspired by a childhood piece of furniture near where Lewis often told his stories. Among the illustrations in this book is a photograph of the original wardrobe.

Wade explains that Lewis's characters are based on people that he knew, such as his beloved Professor William Kirkpatrick. Lewis also worked his knowledge of mythology, religion, and philosophy into the themes and content of his books. For example, Wade writes that Lewis believed that children should not just read essays but should also be encouraged to write stories to exercise their imaginations—an educational philosophy that still has merit.

Readers' imaginations will be exercised if they delve enthusiastically into their studies, as Lewis did. He learned five languages, and "spoke the language of children." Wade writes that he could "correspond with a child about her hamster." Lewis's friendships were deep and long lasting. He was very close to his brother, Warren; a neighbor, Arthur Greeves; and, later, fellow students and colleagues at Oxford. They shared a love of books and recommended titles to each other throughout their lives.

Wade's high level of research and documentation may be attributed to her twenty-five-year career as an elementary school librarian and her master's degree in library science. She is also the author of more than thirty-five children's books.

The book is part of the publisher's series called "Authors Teens Love," which also includes R. L. Stine, E.B. White and J.R.R. Tolkien. While the biography is academic enough to help teens with school research papers, it is quite readable. There are light touches, such as how Lewis came to be called "Jack," and poignant stories of his horrid years in a boarding school, which will keep teen thirsting for more.
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