

CITYtheology

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“Lucy, Peter, Susan and Edmund step through the wardrobe into a fantastical world. Through this adventure, they learn truths that help them understand and navigate their life back in our world - in the ‘real world’. It’s not always an easy crossing...”

Daniel Ingram-Brown reflects on the connection between fiction and reality.

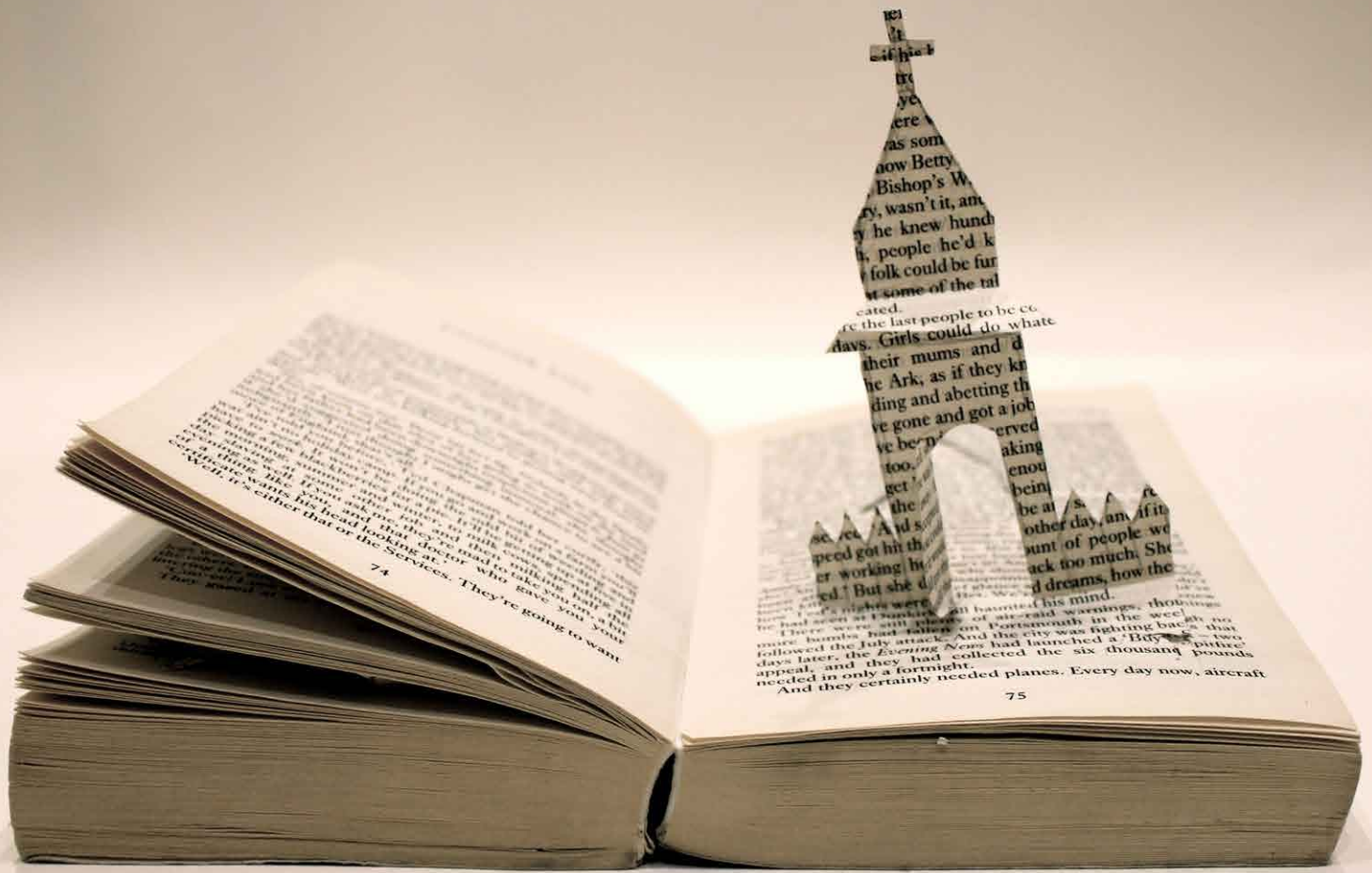


Exploring Christian Culture with Virginia Woolf

Jane de Gay discovers some surprising common ground.

Objects and Arrangements: artist and photographer Joanna Craddock on The Things that are left behind

Why do Christians participate in Pride?



Exploring Christian Culture with Virginia Woolf

By Jane de Gay, Professor of English Literature at Leeds Trinity University and Associate Priest at St Martin's Church, Potternewton

How does Christianity appear to the world outside the church, to unbelievers and those who are hostile to religion? How do they perceive church buildings and the clergy? And what values do Christians and non-Christians share?

These are questions that I was led to contemplate as I researched my book, *Virginia Woolf and Christian Culture*. Woolf was not a believer in the conventional sense of the word. 'I hate religion!' she shouted at her friend, the composer Dame Ethel Smyth, after hearing her *Mass in D* performed at the Albert Hall. 'Certainly and emphatically there is no God', she wrote in a memoir towards the end of her life. My research into Woolf has been a very interesting dialogue: she has challenged me to reflect on what I do as an Anglican priest, but I've found a surprising amount of common ground too.

In a talk at Leeds Church Institute on 3rd October, I discussed three aspects of my debate with Woolf: social justice, sacred space and the clergy. These topics are all relevant to the church today and so Helen Reid of LCI invited Revd Prebendary Rose Hudson-Wilkin of Westminster Abbey (Chaplain to the Queen and the Speaker of the House of Commons, and Priest in charge of St. Mary-at-Hill, Hackney) to respond to my talk and discuss these questions from her own experience.

Social Justice

Although Woolf was not a believer, her extended family was extremely devout. Her Victorian ancestors were members of the Clapham Sect, an Evangelical group committed to social justice,

most notably the fight against slavery. Woolf's great-grandfather, James Stephen, who lived in the Caribbean for several years, helped Wilberforce in his campaign to end the slave trade; her grandfather, Sir James Stephen, wrote the Act to abolish slavery in 1833. For James Stephen, the struggle involved speaking out against society's values: he was ostracized in the Caribbean for not keeping slaves; he resigned as an MP when Parliament did not support Wilberforce, and he wrote pamphlets urging people to vote out the government.

Woolf took on the mantle of the Stephen family when she spoke up for women's rights, noting how much society depended upon the unpaid labour of women, and urging women to reject the establishment and criticize society from the outside.

My conversations with Woolf have made me aware of the importance of checking my privilege, reflecting on whether my practices are exclusive, and remembering that the church must speak out on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised.

Rose spoke powerfully about the importance of using your privilege to bring others along. Being an 'establishment figure' carries responsibility: you can access resources and you are going to be listened to, so you must use these gifts to help others. This is what the Clapham Sect men were doing when they spoke up against slavery. Rose compared herself to Esther, who spoke to the King of Persia on behalf of the Jews: she can represent the voice of the poor, like the people of Hackney, among politicians.

Rose added that we can only extract ourselves from the values of our society if we are thinking people who are informed and ask questions.

We need to pause in our churches, in our families, and consider our values. Additionally, as women, we have to ask ourselves what we believe about who we are and how the world works: are we still steeped in the kind of patriarchy that sees women as helpmeets?

Sacred Space

My research has shown that Woolf loved visiting churches and cathedrals for peace and solace. However, she also pointed out that churches and cathedrals are built to express power: not so much the glory of God but the power of those who built them. In a quirky essay (written for *Good Housekeeping* magazine in 1932), she showed

how visitors can overcome subservience to those in power by experiencing church buildings on their own terms, learning to laugh at the statues of great men in order to enjoy the peace and serenity of the space.

My studies have shown the importance of opening our churches to people of all faiths and none. Rose wholeheartedly agreed. But Woolf also raises questions as to how visitors experience our church buildings: she reminds us that people may not see our buildings as we would want them to and that that is no bad thing. Rose reminded us that churches should be clean and inviting, a space in which people can sit and be and experience the presence of the spirit. The tombs in churches are there as a reminder that in the midst of life we are in death: they give us a sense of holiness and the chance to pause and think about life.

Clergy

Woolf was highly critical of the clergy, who were all male in her lifetime. She did, however, value some ministers like her local vicar at Rodmell, who was approachable and one of the community. Rose reminded us that the clergy should always love the people they are called to serve, walking with them and playing a key role in the life of the community.

Woolf recognized that women had spiritual gifts that the church of the time was ignoring. In her 1938 essay *Three Guineas*, she celebrated the ancient prophetesses who received divine wisdom, and she reminded the church of her day that Jesus and St Paul had female disciples.

In these and other examples, I find much in Woolf that affirms my calling as a female priest – but she also makes me aware that the church has often been hostile to women and that I should constantly review its values. Rose agreed, putting it beautifully and succinctly: we should celebrate being female priests, but we should take care not to model ourselves on men.

Churches today are called more and more to reach out and serve people whoever they are and to meet people wherever they are in life's journey. As my dialogue with Rose showed, Virginia Woolf's observations offer us much food for thought as we seek to do these things.

De Gay, Jane (2018) Virginia Woolf and Christian Culture Edinburgh University Press



Passage (2016)

Objects and Arrangements: The Things that are left behind

By Joanna Craddock, Senior Lecturere at Leeds Arts University

As an Artist and photography lecturer, my work is primarily a studio practice concerned with still life. Recently this work has taken a reflective turn. Motivated by having lost a number of significant women in my family, I have been exploring things that are left behind when someone dies. If we are lucky we might be left money or heirlooms, however the things in which I am interested are those that have value because of the emotional connection to the deceased. I have objects cluttering up boxes and drawers, and yet I can't let them go because they help me remember. If discarded, bereft of context, their

history will disappear and these objects will become detritus, unless found in a charity shop, when another story forged through a new network of relationships, might begin.

Since my mum died in 2016, I have spent a lot of time looking at photographs of her as a young woman in the 1950's, in the time before I knew her. In *Camera Lucida* 1980, writer on culture and photography Roland Barthes reflects on photographs of his deceased mother as a child, and discusses the uncanny way in which the photograph

can bring the dead into a kind of co-presence with the living, suggesting that there is a kind of time travel backwards for the viewer, and even an 'emanation' of the past moment into the present. He explores the peculiarity and power of photography to do this. This is perhaps a particular characteristic of the family photograph, and part of the 'magic' of photography, where the subject is resurrected in some way in the viewers' mind, especially where the viewer is closely connected to the subject of the image.

I have also been left what is for me an 'affective object', this term used by sociologists Casella & Woodward to describe objects through which emotional relationships are in some way embodied. They discuss the way in which these relationships can 'fold and unfold' through the 'object world' and by evoking a labyrinthine network of shifting experience, they suggest that objects are in some way act as an extension of ourselves. The object I have is a plaster bust of mum made by a fellow art student, when they were both studying at Belfast Art School in the late 1950's. Due to the political and religious situation they weren't allowed to marry, and my mother left Ireland for England to study, starting a new life, and the bust came with her. It had been sat on the family mantle piece all my life, and it wasn't until the very end of her life that mum told me its' story, which in some way brought it alive for me. Since then I have been photographing the bust in various iterations.

Passage (2016) is a photograph made just before I was to send the plaster bust to a foundry to be made into a bronze through what is called the lost wax process. I took the photograph primarily to document the bust, in case there was any damage to it during its transport or in the foundry, as it had never been out of the family home before. The title and the visual language of the photograph were indicative of this deeply emotional time. I saw the bespoke travelling box shown at the back of the image as a coffin, and the care needed in the act of moving, wrapping and unwrapping the bust for the photograph became hugely significant. After the photo shoot the plaster bust was put in its box, to go on a journey, mum's image to be materially transformed from plaster, to wax, and then to bronze. Shortly before this, with Lewy Body Dementia, my mother had finally retreated over a number of difficult, painful months and then disappeared entirely from the physical world. This sculpture of her, in becoming bronze,

was going to be made permanent.

I then went on to make a series of images of the results of the bronze making process, which involved the mould taken of the original plaster bust, the wax and the final bronze bust in various combinations, and which I entitled **Matrices (2018)**. The word Matrices evokes ideas about origins, in nature it can mean the womb, and in manufacturing processes it can refer to a mould from which casts are taken. Here I was thinking about my mother as my biological origin, and also about the copying processes involved in sculpture and photography, and the way in which the photographic copy in particular can extend the life of its' subject. I was fascinated by the likeness of mum as a young woman to the bust, which can be seen in photographs of her from the same period of time, and which I montaged into the images of the sculptures. Both the photographs of mum and the sculpture of her capture a trace, a moment in time that is both memorialised and yet still resonant.

I displayed this photographic work, entitled *Objects and Arrangements* at St Martins Church in LS7, which opened up its' doors to the local arts community this year in a series of art exhibitions that ran from April to August. The Revd. Dr Nicholas lo Polito initiated this, with the aim of creating new dialogues and friendships. LS7 is known for its' many communities that live side-by-side, and this reality was aptly reflected in Jonathan Turners' photography work 'Street-Studio', which, through a number of portraits of community, religious groups and individuals, represented the diversity of the area so well, and was the first in the series of exhibitions.

Photography for me is a fascinating medium for many reasons, one of them being its' relationship to the past, to memory, evident in local and national archives, or personal collections, whereby seemingly fleeting moments can, overtime, become culturally or personally significant. Showing work drawn from my family archive in the reflective space of the church felt very fitting; it enabled the work to be a prompt to talk to others about bereavement and remembrance, and in so doing gave it a social function. As well as this, meeting members of the clergy, congregation and the community, and hearing about the work that they do, in particular the work of the BHI and the dementia initiatives they are developing has been really valuable in making me more aware about the people, place and city in which I live.



Matrices 1 (2018)



Matrices 2 (2018)



Matrices 3 (2018)



Matrices 4 (2018)

Why do Christians participate in Pride?

By Revd Anthea Colledge

Inspired by the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York, the UK's first 'Gay Pride Rally' took place in central London in 1972, with around 700 attendees.

Since that time local Pride events have proliferated, the large Prides are no longer just a march but are high-profile whole weekend events, and attendance has massively increased. In many areas LGBT+ Pride has become mainstream. Accurate numbers are difficult to ascertain, but British news media have reported that 1 million people lined the streets for this year's Pride in London parade, while an estimated 400,000 people travelled to Brighton to take part in Pride weekend events. Against this backdrop, individual Christians and Christian groups have responded in different ways to LGBT+ Pride. The enduring media image may be of an angry Christian protestor holding a neon sign proclaiming the judgement of God – and those protestors do exist – but in the last few years there have been an increasing number of Christians taking part in Pride to enjoy, support, affirm or celebrate Pride, as well as individual Christians taking part in Pride because they identify as LGBT+ themselves. Churches and other Christian groups are visibly present at the events alongside other community groups. They may march in the parade, hold signs or banners along the parade route, hand out water or sweets, or host a stall in the festival park. This type of involvement has come to be loosely described as 'Christians at Pride'.

There is now an informal, largely online, network of people and churches who have an ecumenical presence at their local Pride under the Christians at Pride branding. This particular form of Christians at Pride developed from Pride in London but they now offer resources and support for Christians to be a visible presence at other Prides. The extent to which groups use the Christians at Pride branding varies.

This piece of research developed out of this background, specifically from the recognition that 1) affirmative Christian participation in Pride is a relatively recent but growing phenomenon, 2) there is diversity in practice, and 3) in dispersed and informal networks it can be hard to retain or share wisdom and knowledge. As Leeds based researchers we have a particular interest in, and involvement with, the Christian presence at Leeds Pride, so have taken Leeds as the primary case study.



Leeds Pride takes place on the first Sunday in August. It has a large parade (approx. 130 groups in 2018) through the city centre and two main Pride stages (one at each end of the parade route) with stalls, fairground rides and food vendors also at the end of the parade route. The parade is free to enter for small community groups. Registered groups are allocated a specific place in the parade but there is no further system of registration or group administration (such as allocating wristbands or providing a safety marshal as happens at other Prides). This, combined with the fact that the parade route is not behind barriers, means that parade participation is to some extent flexible – people and groups can, and do, decide to join the parade on the spur of the moment, and contributes to a community feel despite the large numbers of commercial sponsors and parade entries. Stalls at the end of the parade are allocated on a commercial basis, although many of them are taken by not-for-profit organisations. Community grants are available to support fringe or community events.

The main Christian presence at Leeds Pride has three components:

- A group walking in the parade. For the last two years this has been booked as 'Faiths at Pride'. Churches and individuals from a range of Christian denominations walk together, including Anglican, Methodist, Quaker, United Reform, and Unitarian. There is also interfaith

representation, though this varies by year – at different times there have been Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim and Pagan representatives, as well as members of Leeds Concord and Leeds Faiths Forum. The largest groups, who also have the longest history of Pride attendance, are probably All Hallows’ Anglican church and the Quaker Meetings.

- A group standing on the parade route with banners and signs. This presence is led and organised by members of Revive Baptist church and Queer Church Leeds, with support from others.
- A ‘Churches Together Supporting Pride’ stall at the end of the parade route, giving out free stickers and information about LGBT+ inclusive churches. The stall is regularly booked and paid for by Leeds Church Institute, although in some years individual churches have contributed financially. Staffing of the stall has varied over the years; Quakers have usually had a significant presence.

At different times there have been other events associated with Pride, either organised ecumenically or by individual churches. These have included Christians in Conversation events (LCI and All Hallows), ecumenical worship in the city centre, reflective drop-in space (hosted at Holy Trinity Boar Lane and Mill Hill Chapel), and Pride services at individual churches.

Research methods

The primary research questions were:

- Why do individual Christians participate in Pride?**
- Why do individuals and groups seek to have a visible Christian presence at Pride?**
- How do the individuals/groups perceive that their participation is received by other people at Pride?**
- How did the organised Christian presence develop in the case study Prides (Leeds, Sheffield, and Hull)?**

Methods were an online survey plus a small number of semi-structured interviews with a) a purposive sample of survey respondents who have attended Leeds Pride, and b) key stakeholders from Leeds, Sheffield and Hull Christians at Pride groups and national Christians at Pride. A researcher also attended the three Prides to observe and take part in the Christian presence.

The online survey was open for 4 weeks and participants were eligible to complete it if they consider themselves Christian and have been to a UK Pride, or intend to go for the first time this year; or if they have participated in Pride as part of an organised Christian group (regardless of their own religious identity). They were also asked to agree that their attitude towards Pride is to participate, celebrate, enjoy, affirm or support the Pride events or people at them (i.e. not to protest).

Research Findings

Headline statistics

Of the 140 survey participants:

- **93% had been to a Pride event in the past, 59% of whom were planning to attend another event this year**
- **7% were planning to go to a Pride event for the first time this year or next year**
- **79% had participated in, or were planning to participate in, an organised Christian group at Pride**
- **They had been to, or were intending to go to, 56 different Pride events in the UK and Channel Islands. London was the most frequently mentioned, followed by Leeds, Sheffield, and Brighton**
- **71% recalled reactions from other Pride attendees in response to seeing Christians at Pride**
- **70% of the described reactions were perceived as positive, 8% as negative, and smaller percentages of unclear, mixed, or confused reactions. 11% of the responses were about Christian protestors (both their reactions to the Christians at Pride groups, and reactions by Pride attendees).**

Conclusions and emerging themes

1. Taking part in Pride is an important occasion for many LGBT+ Christians. People reported that it is a rare opportunity to bring both of those identities together, to joyfully hold them both in one hand (to borrow the words of the chair of Christians at Pride). There is a sense through the survey and interviews of weariness, of being an inconvenience whichever setting they're in. People may not encounter outright hostility, but they feel the need to hide their Christian identity in LGBT+ settings, and vice versa. Pride may be the one day in the year when they are able to celebrate as an LGBT+ Christian.
2. Offering a counter-narrative to homophobic or non-inclusive Christian teaching, and also to the perception that all Christians are 'like that' is a significant motivation for Christian presence at Pride. Christian protestors may be more evident in the media (and the wider experience of affirming groups) than at Pride itself.
3. The vast majority of reported reactions are positive. As with the perception of Christian protestors, there can be a perception that a Christian presence would be unwelcome (e.g. at Leeds Pride someone from HMRC suggested that the organisations with a bad reputation should stick together!) People expressed anxiety about potential negative reactions to an organised Christian presence at Pride, but this is largely unfounded. When negative reactions do occur they are relatively minor. There is the possibility that roadside supporters could be mistaken for Christian protestors, but this seems to happen infrequently and does not persist beyond the first glance.
4. There is potentially a lack of clarity around the purpose of Pride, especially participation in the parade. This is apparent in discussions about corporate sponsorship of the parade, about the appropriateness of churches participating, and about the allocation of limited parade spaces. Side-stepping those discussions, LGBT+ Christians are as much as part of the LGBT+ community and Pride as other LGBT+ people. This suggests that, where relevant to the local context, it could be sensible to have LGBT+ Christians in the parade while allies maintain a roadside presence could be a sensible plan (though this suggestion is likely to be taken badly by at least some people!)
5. To avoid accusations of hypocrisy and tokenism it is important for organisations that take part in Pride to have a year-round demonstration of support. This may be particularly true for local faith groups if their central bodies are perceived to be non-inclusive. The reported negative reactions at Leeds Trans Pride also indicates need for an affirming Christian presence at smaller and more diverse events, which may not be embraced by the wider community in the same way as the large Pride events.
6. Communication and partnerships may be difficult in a diffuse network where people relate mainly to their own church or group and do not have a strong sense of what is happening outside their own local experiences. For example, there are three major organisations working in this area: Christians at Pride, OneBodyOneFaith, and Inclusive church. Very few people explicitly used the term 'Christians at Pride' to describe their involvement (though this may have been implied by the survey), none referred to 'OneBodyOneFaith', and one may have referred to Inclusive Church (or may have been using 'inclusive church' as a description). There seems to be a tendency for churches and groups to work in parallel with each other rather than together. This may not matter, but even in this small survey it is possible to pick up inaccuracies arising from this tendency, for example people believing (wrongly) that only one church in Leeds goes to Pride (and perhaps inadvertently strengthening the perception of a very dominant non-inclusive Christian narrative). Given that 'strength in numbers' was an important reason given for participating in an organised presence at Pride, this tendency may reduce the effectiveness of that presence. It may also mean that local wisdom and knowledge is lost because, for example, a person moves on or one group stops participating.
7. Smaller Pride events can learn from the experience in other places. Drawing on the experience of Christians at Pride in London suggests the importance of intentional ecumenism (to model diversity), having a planning team rather than just one person, pre-planning, and reaching out to other groups to pool resources and reduce perceptions of exclusivity.

*You can read the full report at
<https://lcileeds.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/cap-final.pdf>*



Any plans for Christmas Eve?

Reflections on *Through the Uncrossable Boundary* by Daniel Ingram Brown, author and PhD student

Over the past few years, I've made a journey away from institutional church, away from attending services on a Sunday. This journey has been an act of faith. Part of my reasoning was the realisation that the culture and language of church separated me from the 'real' world – a world I believe God has called me to inhabit fully. For me, the songs and rituals, language and assumptions, of the church community became a story that separated me, often in subtle ways, from the reality many of my friends inhabited. This was a boundary I felt God was asking me to cross. In the process, I have had to let go of many of the things that used to define me as a Christian. I have missed many of these things. At times, indeed, I've doubted whether I am a Christian anymore and questioned what gave me the right to make that claim. I have become more aware of my own failings, of my habitual struggles, of the weaknesses in my character. But through this, I think I have, perhaps, grown closer to the character of Jesus, who inhabited reality fully, even to death.

Richard Rohr writes:

"Faith in God is not just faith to believe in spiritual ideas. It's to have confidence in Love itself. It's to have confidence in reality itself. At its core, reality is okay. God is in it. God is revealed in all things, even through the tragic and sad, as the revolutionary doctrine of the cross reveals!"

My reflections on this journey of faith resonate with my reading and writing. In C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, Lucy, Peter, Susan and Edmund step through the wardrobe into a fantastical world. Through this adventure, they learn truths that help them understand and navigate their life back in our world - in the 'real world'. It's not always an easy crossing: When

the time comes for Edmund and Lucy to finally return to our world for good, Lucy is heartbroken, until Aslan reassures them that they will meet again:

“...This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”

When I was writing *The Firebird Chronicles* series, I wanted the direction of travel to be different to the Narnia stories. I wanted the movement to be from the fantasy realm into reality. And so in the first book, *Rise of the Shadow Stealers*, my two main characters, Fletcher and Scoop, two Story Characters training to be Apprentice Adventurers, realise they have a connection to our world, a connection that draws them ever more strongly away from their own fantasy realm and into this world of flesh and blood. This movement finally brings them across the Boundary that separates their world from our reality, leading them first to Christchurch on the south coast, and then, for Fletcher, to Kirkstall Abbey in Leeds.

For me, this is a story of incarnation, of becoming flesh. Having faced the various challenges of their story world – fleeing giant spiders that are gradually taking the islanders captive and escaping the NIGHTMARE army – the two apprentices finally cross the Boundary and find themselves in our world. As they do, the story changes from a third-person, universal narrator voice, to a first-person voice. We begin to see the story through Fletcher and Scoop’s eyes. Time slows. The apprentices feel lost. In their story world, there was always a narrative voice pushing them forward, making their choices for them, keeping things active. Now, they discover they must make their own choices. As Fletcher says:

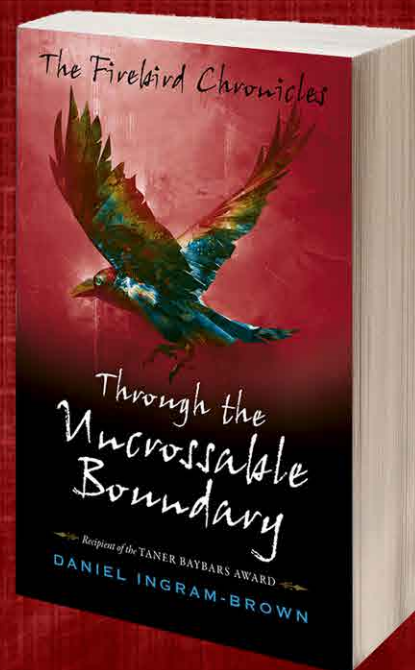
“It’s up to us now, we have to choose our own story.”

Scoop is terrified by the prospect. Gradually, as Fletcher and Scoop navigate our world, they begin to forget where they’ve come from, to doubt their origins; they begin to fade. But there are voices, often from the periphery, that call them back. While exploring the town of Christchurch, a homeless man sees Fletcher. Fletcher is shocked. He is used to being unseen. The man directs Fletcher to a foodbank, where he meets Hilary, who tells him that ‘words need to be made real, they need to be made flesh.’ This sticks with Fletcher until the end of the story, when there is a final moment of revelation.

The third and final book in *The Firebird Chronicles*, *Through the Uncrossable Boundary*, is a story about growing up, leaving the safe structures that once defined us and setting out into the unknown. Such journeys are scary but are ultimately the way in which we grow. One of the things I’ve learnt as a writer is that the more honest I am, and the more personal I make my writing, the more universal my writing seems to be – something else that suggests that incarnation, specificity, is the way to discover truth. Because of that, I hope this story will relate to other moments of passing from one reality to another. For my younger readers, perhaps the transition from primary to secondary school; for older readers moments such as grief or the challenges of losing a job. The message is that even through the struggle of these moments, or perhaps because of them, there is enlargement and hope to be found.

And so, it’s in keeping that *Through the Uncrossable Boundary* ends on Christmas Eve, the night before we celebrate the incarnation of the word made flesh. And so it is on this, the last day of Advent, that Fletcher and Scoop finally become fully fledged advent-urers and walk into a new beginning...

Ingram-Brown, D (2018) *Through the Uncrossable Boundary*. *Our Street Books*
Rohr, R. *Daily Meditations*, Monday 29th Oct 2018, <https://cac.org/>



Through the Uncrossable Boundary is released on 30th November. For details of launch events, including a family-friendly story hunt, visit www.danielingrambrown.co.uk

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