

C. S. LEWIS'S WORLDVIEW AND HIS LITERARY CRITICISM

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*Introduction*¹

The story of C. S. Lewis is by now a well-known one. Born in 1898 in Belfast, now Northern Ireland, and for the most part privately educated, Lewis was widely read in a range of literature and thought before “going up” to Oxford University to study. He was a confirmed atheist by the age of fifteen, even though he had been baptized as a child. At Oxford—his first year was interrupted by military service in World War I during which he was wounded on the front—Lewis studied at University College, reading for the Honours Moderations exam after his second year and the *Literae Humaniores* or greats for his final examinations (in other words, he studied what might be called Classics). Then he read English for another year and took the final examination in that subject. Lewis received a triple first, that is, he was awarded first class honors in all three sets of final exams for his three subjects. It is one of those peculiarities of the British system that, for all of that, he received roughly the equivalent of two BA degrees (the BA degree later being upgraded to the MA,

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1. I have had a lengthy relationship with the writings of C. S. Lewis, and had the privilege of studying as an undergraduate with Glenn Sadler, the well-known editor of the stories of George MacDonald. Sadler taught a popular course on Lewis (which I now regret not taking, though this did not stop us as undergraduates from hearing plenty of Lewis stories in other courses) and was suffused with Lewis and his approach to life. Sadler had originally intended to do his doctorate with Lewis, before Lewis died.

again according to the quirks of the Oxbridge system). Lewis then was hired as a tutor in English at Magdalen College in Oxford in 1925, where he remained a tutor until 1954. During his time as an Oxford student, Lewis became friends with a number of people who would be his life-long companions and colleagues, including Owen Barfield and J. R. R. Tolkien, members of the group called the Inklings. However, as Lewis recounts in his book *Surprised by Joy*, God was already at work in the heart and mind of C. S. Lewis, so that, in 1931, he was converted to Christianity, and began a life devoted to serving Christ through the writing of fiction, apologetics, lay theology and philosophy, and literary criticism.

There are many stories of Lewis's conversion, but allow me to relate one told to me by a close friend who knew the particular student involved. This one-time Oxford undergraduate relates that he was one of four students assigned to Lewis as his tutor in English at Oxford. As it unfortunately happened (as the story is told), two of the students of the four in the tutorial were involved in a fight with each other, with one of the students killing the other and as a result going to prison. The third student apparently committed suicide, leaving the fourth student as Lewis's only tutorial student for his entire three years at Oxford. One day, so the story goes, the student, by now alone of the original four, was waiting for Lewis in Lewis's rooms at Magdalen, when Lewis walked in and brusquely said, "I've been converted," and then proceeded to sit down and commence the tutorial. This must have been in 1931.²

Lewis became a very popular figure in Christian circles. He wrote Christian fiction, such as the Narnia Tales and his science fiction trilogy, among many others. He also wrote numerous works of apologetics and what might be termed lay theology and philosophy, such as *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, and *The Great Divorce*. *Mere Christianity* began as radio broad-

2. There is some confusion regarding Lewis's conversion. It appears that his acceptance of theism was in 1929 or 1930 and his conversion to Christianity in 1931. See McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 141–46, for discussion of the dates.

casts delivered on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) during World War II, as did some of his other apologetics writings. Despite being the most significant member of the Oxford English faculty, as a consequence of Lewis's frequent appearances on the BBC, as well as his popular writing and resulting popularity even among students, Lewis was branded by his Oxford colleagues as having committed what was then in British and especially Oxbridge academic circles the unforgivable sin—he had communicated with the masses, rather than simply addressing fellow academics within the confines of the walls of the Oxford Colleges. As a result, there has been significant and, I believe probably correct, speculation that the reason that Lewis did not receive a faculty chair or professorship within the English faculty at Oxford was because he was more popular with the public and with the students than were the others in the English faculty.³ Lewis was well-known for filling entire lecture halls with students eager to hear his lectures, while other lecturers had trouble filling a small room. At last, however, he was awarded a professorial chair in Medieval and Renaissance Literature at, of all places for an Oxford man who had been in critical conflict with its approach to English literature, Cambridge University, where he also became a fellow of Magdalene College (note the difference in spelling).⁴ He remained in this position until he died on November 22, 1963, one of three significant deaths that day (along with John F. Kennedy and Aldous Huxley).

3. See Barbour, "Lewis and Cambridge," 459, 461. Cf. Bailey, "In the University," for a recounting of life with Lewis as an undergraduate under his direction.

4. An excellent exposition of the conflict between Lewis and the Cambridge school of English study, represented by F. R. Leavis, T. S. Eliot, and I. A. Richards, is found in Barbour, "Lewis and Cambridge." Discussion of some of their differences is found along with excerpts in Lodge, *20th Century Literary Criticism*.

The Literary Criticism of C. S. Lewis

Lewis's apologetic literature, other Christian writings, and fiction are well-known and have often been analyzed. There are many excellent treatments of this material, and courses in the works of C. S. Lewis are sometimes organized around these three bodies of significant writings. From this material, scholars and others have often reconstructed and discussed Lewis's Christian worldview.⁵ However, there are many fewer attempts to treat Lewis's literary-critical work as a whole, especially in order to determine his Christian worldview as indicated by it.⁶ This is surprising, as it seems obvious that one's literary criticism would reflect one's worldview. Despite this, there are few if any sustained discussions of Lewis's Christian worldview as found within his literary criticism. This may be because Lewis's literary-critical writings are less theoretical than they are literary-historical and explicatory, and certainly not as explicitly Christian as his fiction and apologetics. However, even if they are not explicitly Christian in the same way, there are strong indications that Lewis's literary criticism, like his other writing, is written from, and, more importantly, subtly though clearly reflects, his consistent underlying worldview. This Christian worldview merits further exploration. The best way to do this is to engage in an

5. See, for example, Howard, *Achievement of C. S. Lewis*, for an analysis of his fiction, and Holmer, *C. S. Lewis*, for treatment of his Christian writings, including some fiction.

6. See Cawsey, *Twentieth-Century Chaucer Criticism*, 39–57, esp. 40 n. 2, for a summary of Lewis scholarship. An excellent recent treatment is Calin, *Twentieth-Century Humanist Critics*, 85–100 (with literature cited esp. 203 n. 6). Other treatments include: Edwards, *Rhetoric of Reading*, who examines Lewis's epistemology through his literary-critical works; Daniel, "Taste of the Pineapple"; Fleming, "Literary Critic"; Logan, "Literary Theorist"; and Danielson, "Intellectual Historian." In an attempt at a comprehensive treatment of Lewis by Edwards in his four volume collection of essays, *C. S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy*, volume 3 is dedicated to Lewis as an apologist, philosopher, and theologian, with no essay on any of his major literary-critical works. Similarly, volume 4 on Lewis as scholar, teacher, and public intellectual treats three of his literary-critical works in two essays, but not in a distinctly theological way. See Edwards, *Apologist, Philosopher, and Theologian*, and Edwards, *Scholar, Teacher, and Public Intellectual*.

analysis of some of Lewis's literary-critical works to make their worldview explicit.

Before engaging in such an analysis, it is worth recounting the major efforts in Lewis's literary criticism.⁷ Lewis's *The Allegory of Love*, published in 1936 when he was a young Oxford don, and his first major critical work, was a treatment of medieval allegory, especially the courtly love tradition. This work revived British interest in late medieval literature, and clearly reflects much of Lewis's belief regarding the medieval world. He published an important collection of essays in 1939, called *Rehabilitations*, which is in many ways a direct response to the approach to teaching English practiced at Cambridge University.⁸ He engaged in a more explicit yet well-mannered conflict with the Renaissance scholar and Cambridge don E. M. W. Tillyard in a series of articles published from 1934 to 1936 in *Essays and Studies* that was republished with additional essays as a book called *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* (1939), over the nature of subjectivity in criticism (Lewis was against it, taking an objectivist view consonant with his descriptivist bent, with his perspective seen by some to anticipate the later New Criticism, with its endorsement of the literary artifact and rejection of knowledge of authorial psychology, called the intentional fallacy).⁹ Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, published in 1942, remains an important introduction to John Milton's epic poem, formulated as a background-based study of the world that Milton inhabited.¹⁰ *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*

7. Throughout his career, Lewis published a variety of other literary-critical essays on a range of authors and topics. Only a few of those can be referred to in this essay.

8. Barbour, "Lewis and Cambridge," esp. 449–53.

9. Calin, *Twentieth-Century Humanist Critics*, 94. Cf. Barbour, "Lewis and Cambridge," 446. Tillyard and Lewis, *The Personal Heresy*, could be but is not included within the following analysis, because of its dialogical nature, in which Lewis is responding overtly to the arguments of Tillyard, rather than setting his own critical parameters and marshaling his own case. There is also the fact that it is in some ways a direct response to the way English literature was taught at Cambridge University.

10. A case could certainly be made for including Lewis's *Preface to Paradise Lost* in the analysis below. No doubt Lewis's own worldview is found

Excluding Drama was published in 1954, and remains in print as an Oxford University Press introduction to this important body of literature, of which Lewis was one of its (admittedly few) great masters.¹¹ He then published his *Studies in Words* in 1960, a type of criticism in miniature and at the word and phrase level.¹² Finally, his novel and, for the day, outmoded *An Experiment in Criticism* was published in 1961. However, in 1964, after his death, Lewis's *The Discarded Image*, based upon lectures he had earlier delivered at Oxford, and a final summative statement of his view of the medieval world, was published. Several collections have brought together others of his academic and related essays, including *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* in 1966, *Of Other Worlds* in 1966 on his views on story writing,¹³ *Selected Literary Essays* in 1969, *On Stories* in 1982 on his views on story writing, and *Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories* in 2000, which collects most of his essays in this area. In these essays, there are a number of works, including important works on Chaucer and other medieval and Renaissance authors in particular, on the nature of literature, and on interpretation itself.

in the work (see his chapter on the theology of *Paradise Lost*), but its major ideas are included in his other works. It also includes several direct responses to the Cambridge University approach to English, e.g., the chapters "Is Criticism Possible?" directed toward T. S. Eliot, and "Defense of This Style" directed at I. A. Richards (see Barbour, "Lewis and Cambridge," 457).

11. In fact, Calin, *Twentieth-Century Humanist Critics*, 87, thinks that Lewis made a greater contribution to Renaissance studies than he did to medieval literary studies. This is an interesting, if debatable, point. Lewis would probably have considered his contribution significant to Renaissance literary studies in a negative way, but positive in regard to medieval studies.

12. See Barbour, "Lewis and Cambridge," 476–80, who also emphasizes its anti-F. R. Leavis characteristics (see also below). Again, a case might be made for treating this work in the analysis below, but its scope is more limited than the works that are discussed.

13. Later supplemented, but without the stories, in Lewis, *Of This and Other Worlds*.

Four Major Works of Literary Criticism of C. S. Lewis

If one were to categorize and describe Lewis's approach to literary criticism on the basis of the work mentioned and descriptions offered above, one might well argue that he was primarily a literary historian or even applied critic, who brought his largely implicit critical principles to the study of a wide range of individual works within their literary-historical contexts. This approach is clearly found in such major works as his *Allegory of Love*, *Preface to Paradise Lost*, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, *Studies in Words*, and *Discarded Image*. Only secondarily was Lewis a critical theorist, although he did venture into such territory in his *Personal Heresy* and *Experiment in Criticism*. The concern here is not primarily what type of literary critic Lewis was, or whether his major contribution was practical or theoretical—although these are subjects worthy of further extended discussion—so much as Lewis as literary critic (whatever the type) who through his critical thought reveals his Christian worldview. It may at first appear difficult to glean and then analyze a writer's worldview when that writer ostensibly is concerned with description of the literary work of others and the times in which they wrote. No doubt this approach does incur major challenges, as the author is not writing from an overtly self-reflective perspective. Nevertheless, Lewis was known to inhabit deeply the critical world about which he wrote, and through the choices that he made and the evaluations he offers, he seems to offer evidence of his own worldview against which his critical comments are made.

Of the eleven works that might well call for examination in such a study, this study focuses upon four of them. No doubt others, especially of the monographs, could have been included (as noted above), but these four have been selected for several reasons. One is that they span the entirety of Lewis's literary-critical career, illustrating that Lewis's worldview, regardless of whatever other views he may have had and how they changed over the course of his career, remained relatively coherent and stable. Another is that these works are all relatively broad in scope, focusing not upon a particular author or work but upon a

range of literary works, even if within a single literary period, such as the medieval period or the Renaissance, two periods of which Lewis was an acknowledged master and in which he was greatly interested. A third and final reason is that these works are representative not only of the length of his career but of the breadth of his career, with works included that are more particularly literary-historical, cultural-critical, and theoretical in nature. This provides an appropriate body of writing to explore how Lewis demonstrates his Christian worldview within the range of his literary criticism. Admittedly, more works could—and in future work perhaps should—be included in such an analysis, but these four offer a suitable entrance point into analysis of Lewis's Christian worldview as reflected in his literary-critical writings.¹⁴

Even though Lewis is primarily concerned to describe and comment upon individual works in light of their authors' intentions and literary-historical context, it becomes evident from these works that Lewis engages in such commentary from the vantage point of a particular worldview that is distinctly his own and thereby distinctly Christian. As a result, the focus is upon four of his works: *The Allegory of Love, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, *An Experiment in Criticism*, and *The Discarded Image*. In order to examine Lewis's worldview, one could find the categories that represent Lewis's Christian worldview and apply them to the individual works. This is the way that most discussions of worldview proceed, by taking what might be characterized as an extrinsic approach. This, however, would prejudge the categories of discussion, using categories

14. The question of defining and articulating a worldview, including a Christian worldview, is itself problematic. However, everyone has one, and everyone functions out of their particular worldview, even if one does not necessarily believe that an author, such as Lewis, overtly embeds his worldview in his literary criticism. Nevertheless, in his major literary-critical works, Lewis does reflect a Christian worldview at least compatible with, if not similar to, the view he displays in his fiction, philosophy, and Christian apologetics. On worldview, see Walsh and Middleton, *Transforming Vision*; Nash, *World Views in Conflict*; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*; Downey and Porter, *Christian Worldview*; and Sire, *Universe Next Door*.

based presumably upon Lewis's other writings or a more general conception of what constitutes a Christian worldview. Instead, it is better to take an intrinsic or organic view and allow Lewis's literary-critical works to determine the categories of his worldview by means of their exposition of their respective topics. This is not to say that every topic that Lewis examines reflects his worldview, because he is often, if not usually, concerned to understand the works he examines in terms of their own authors' interests and their contexts. Nevertheless, Lewis's choice of authors, of works, of literary periods—even if he cannot control their content—always and undeniably reflects his own orientation to these, and thereby offers insight into his own worldview. Therefore, I proceed selectively through the works in order to determine their respective emphases, before returning to them to explicate and synthesize their characteristic worldviews.

a. *The Allegory of Love*

The Allegory of Love is the place to begin, because this is where, in essence, Lewis began.¹⁵ This was his first major work of literary criticism and his first major scholarly monograph—some say still his most significant work.¹⁶ The writing of the book corresponded with Lewis's own journey to Christian faith, with the book begun in 1928, Lewis becoming a theist in 1929 and a Christian in 1931, and the book being completed and published in 1936.¹⁷ The work is quite daunting for the uninitiated because of the range of medieval and early Renaissance literature to which it makes reference, although it has been criticized by some later literary critics for failing to appreciate Chaucer adequately

15. Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, cited by page numbers in parentheses within the text using the Oxford Galaxy paperback edition. Lewis had published an important earlier essay in 1932 on Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, entitled "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*." He was responded to by Sharrock, "Second Thoughts." Lewis's essay is still worth considering.

16. See Piehler, "Visions and Revisions," esp. 91. Cf. Hannay, "Provocative Generalizations." Yandell, "*Allegory of Love*," compares it directly with *The Discarded Image*.

17. See Duriez, *Lewis Encyclopedia*, 16. Lewis's journey to faith is captured in Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*.

and for revealing a lack of exposure to a wider range of continental, and in particular French and Italian, literature, especially in the courtly love tradition.¹⁸

Lewis's *Allegory of Love* is a complex and dense work that, in seven chapters, explores courtly love as its fundamental concept and sees how this tradition is expressed by means of allegory, in the composite work *The Romance of the Rose*, in the work of Chaucer apart from the *Canterbury Tales*,¹⁹ by John Gower and Thomas Usk (noting in the course of discussion how allegory became the dominant literary form), and, finally, in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.²⁰ Along the way, even if he does not invoke many continental authors, Lewis shows his deep knowledge of a vast wealth of (sometimes obscure) English and classical authors, the latter forming the basis for many of his interpretations of the development of the courtly love tradition. The first two chapters are of paramount interest for recreating Lewis's worldview, because they define the concept of courtly love itself and then trace the origins and development of the major literary form used for expression of it, the allegory, with the further chapters offering readings of significant literary texts in support of his thesis.

Lewis's work purports to be—and in many ways exactly is—a treatment of “allegorical love poetry of the Middle Ages” (1), in which the subject matter of the medieval lovers is represented by means of allegorical form as a “struggle between personified

18. See Calin, *Twentieth-Century Humanist Critics*, 96.

19. Lewis (*Allegory of Love*, 157–97) instead focuses upon Chaucer's romance works, because these are the ones Chaucer was known for in his time (162). As a result, Lewis concentrates on several of his poems and especially *Troilus and Criseyde* (178–97). There is some problem with Lewis's analysis of *Troilus and Criseyde* in “What Chaucer Really Did to Il Filostrato,” because it seems that he manipulates elements—such as his citing Criseyde's words to Troilus out of order (the episode appears before the house of Deiphebus episode), downplaying the tragic characteristics of Criseyde so that the play ends in pathos rather than tragedy, and failing to note the complexity of and post-crisis change in the character of Pandarus—so as to support his thesis regarding the courtly love tradition.

20. Calin, *Twentieth-Century Humanist Critics*, 87, calls *Allegory of Love* essentially a preface to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

abstractions” (1). Therefore, through the depiction of the medieval characters, such virtues as humility, courtesy, adultery, and love itself are depicted in poetic form. Lewis contends that, rather than being simply an isolated episode in the course of literary history, the courtly love tradition demonstrates a continuity and importance that is worth exploring in more detail. Even though, on their surfaces, with the personification and allegorization of various abstract virtues, the conventions of courtly love seem unnatural, they have played an important role in the history of literature for hundreds of years. It is on this basis that Lewis places more significance on the allegorical courtly love tradition than have others, and than one might at first expect him or anyone else to do. The main reason for this, and it may seem obvious to note, is that the courtly love tradition promotes a view of genuine love not found in previous literature, including that of the classical period through to the Dark Ages, nor found in modern concepts of love and marriage.²¹ It is distinguished by the virtues noted above—its courtesy and humility, its distance from and otherness from marriage (of the time) and sex, and its becoming in effect a religion of love. This becomes in effect its own religion, one that is distinct and, in keeping with Lewis’s own objectivist view of poetry and literature, in itself an objective entity or object, besides being a life-like being.

The importance of allegory in this objectified personification is that allegory—a characteristic feature of poetry of the Middle Ages—is distinguished by the bringing together of “an immaterial fact” (44), such as human passions, and created or invented “*visibilia* to express” (45) this fact. Lewis distinguishes allegory from symbolism and sacramentalism, not by degrading allegory or treating it as an earlier form of representation, as later critics often have done, but by explaining how the two tropes approach the issue of the relation between immaterial and material being. Allegory, as already noted, moves from the genuine immaterial fact to complex visible personification, especially in narrative,

21. This essay is not concerned with larger implications of the influence of the courtly love tradition on, for example, modern conceptions of romantic love, because that is not the thrust of Lewis’s argument.

while symbolism refers to the material or actual world that is the copy of an invisible world. As Lewis states, “[s]ymbolism is a mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression” (48). They are thus complementary to each other, but with allegory occupying Lewis’s attention because of its expressive potential. Whereas the notion of symbolism is part of the classical heritage,²² allegory is a literary construction, not the content of the poetry but the means by which the immaterial though very real fact is expressed in tangible poetic form. This process occurred by means of what Lewis calls a “drift towards allegory” (49) and personification. With the fading of the Greek pantheon and polytheism came the maturing of monotheism, and with it the “apotheosis of the abstractions” (56). For Lewis, this represents a fundamental shift in the mindset or worldview of antiquity, in parallel with but not solely the responsibility of Christianity. In other words, the larger world seems to accept if not a Christian at least a monotheistic orientation. This transformation is not to be seen simply as a rhetorical or literary convention or device, but represents a genuine revolution in thought and being. This involves the awareness of the reality of the immaterial, including development of an awareness of the mind of the human being, with its possibility of a divided will, and a moral revolution. The result was a newly discovered, and in reality newly created, sense of the creativity and imagination of the human being, who was free to create new worlds previously unthought of. This legacy of the ancient world was fully developed in the Middle Ages with its use of allegory—to the point where it became difficult for people to distinguish between their allegorized personifications and their own spiritual being, as witnessed in the personification of the deadly sins. Nevertheless, there are numerous examples of healthy development of allegory in the Middle Ages, in which the journey became the best literary form by which to express allegory, because it expresses the inherent

22. Lewis directly ties symbolism to Greece, seeing it makes “its first effective appearance in European thought with the dialogues of Plato” (*Allegory of Love*, 45). He does not discuss the relationship of Plato to allegory.

motives by means of buoyantly displaying the actions of the travelers.

Throughout the rest of the book, Lewis demonstrates the use of allegory—which emerges as the preeminent literary form—to depict courtly love, in a range of master works of the period, extending into the Renaissance and in many ways reaching its highpoint in the highly allegorical work of Spenser.

b. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*

As noted above, Lewis in his next several literary-critical works engaged in his own transition from medieval literature toward the Renaissance. After his discussion with the Renaissance scholar Tillyard over the role of subjectivity in criticism and his treatment of *Paradise Lost*, Lewis wrote his *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*.²³ English literature of the sixteenth century is often distinguished by the drama, especially that of William Shakespeare (though his major tragedies and romantic comedies were written in the first decade of the seventeenth century), but also that of such luminaries as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, and Ben Jonson (his early plays). However, the sixteenth century was a transitional period in English literature, and not one—according to Lewis—characterized by literary advance on all sides. As a result, Lewis divides his important and enduring volume into three main parts.²⁴ The first deals with the late medieval period in Scotland and England, that period of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century in which he describes a decay in Scottish and English poetic achievement, especially in religious verse. The second part is characterized as literarily “drab,” before its later revival in poetry and prose. The third part concerns the “golden” period of

23. Lewis, *English Literature*, cited by page numbers in parentheses within the text using the Oxford paperback edition.

24. Calin, *Twentieth-Century Humanist Critics*, 87, calls *English Literature* Lewis's “most solid and learned” work in the field of English literature. He also notes (89) that it is in many ways his “most controversial” because he goes against the standard views of the Renaissance, especially but not exclusively in his rehabilitation of Puritanism. For similar opinions, see Williams, “*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*.”

such authors as Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, among many other writers of both prose and poetry.

The above characterizations may surprise those who typically describe this period as one of great Renaissance and related Reformation achievement. Lewis opens the book with a major introduction, entitled “New Learning and New Ignorance,” as a means of explaining his perspective (reflected later in *Discarded Image*; see below),²⁵ and this introduction is what I will focus upon.²⁶ This viewpoint is reflective of a common emphasis in Lewis’s works, as will be pointed out in the fourth section below on *Discarded Image*, that, contrary to the conception of many, the Renaissance was not a time of unadulterated renewal and intellectual progress, but was a time when many of the old structures from the medieval period—for good and for bad—continued to have currency and importance. In fact, Lewis indicates that there is no firm line separating the medieval from the Renaissance periods, but there is a transition with both gains and losses. Lewis’s contention is that what marks the transition from the medieval to the Renaissance period was not the scientific developments that are typically heralded, such as the view of the “new astronomy” that the sun was the center of the cosmos, but the scientific methods developed to verify such contentions. These methods led to two major results: “[o]n the practical side it was this that delivered Nature into our hands” (3) and it demythologized nature into its mathematical elements in terms of thoughts and emotions. The result was not materialism, as one might expect, but “dualism” (3) of a world emptied of its natural beauty. This unfortunate dualism resulted in the mind standing opposed to the object of its reflection, a pattern of thought development that continued until the later rise of romanticism, which attempted to bridge the ever-widening divide.

For the sixteenth century, however, nature, according to Lewis, was pre-eminent. A robust view of nature stands behind

25. See Duriez, *Lewis Encyclopedia*, 65.

26. A critical assessment of Lewis’s *English Literature* in its entirety is certainly too large a task to take on here, so the major introduction, which frames his entire discussion, forms the basis of the analysis of his worldview.

all of the literature that is worth studying in the century. There was what amounts to an animated view of nature that might seem to be metaphorical, when in fact it reflects the actual view of the world as personified. What appears to be the survival of the worldview from a previous era, the medieval period (on which more will be said below), is not a residue but a continuing flourishing of “the animistic or genial cosmology of the sixteenth century” (5), that is, not “alien and intrusive” but “characteristic” (5) of the age itself. This is so much the case in Lewis’s opinion that it leads to a new type of empiricism—the sense that humans can in some way control nature—that verges on magic and mysticism. This type of magic—not that of witchcraft or satanism or the like—appeals to the highest intellect and is reflected in the structure of their perceived world. Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, so Lewis thinks, is an excellent example of how failing to understand the magic of the sixteenth century has resulted in misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the age and its literature. The play, with its magical elements, is not a fantasy or an allegory, but one inhabited by a genuine magician as its central character, one who must renounce his magic for the play to end satisfactorily and happily. There is a spirit world, a genuine and populated world of spirits, not those necessarily of Christianity with its angels and devils, but one that derives from Platonic theology.

In this Platonic theology, there is a realm of beings who are “theologically neutral” (9) in the sense that they are not devils or angels, but are part of the philosophy and reality of the age. This Platonic theology is a “deliberate syncretism based on the conviction that all the sages of antiquity shared a common wisdom and that this wisdom can be reconciled with Christianity” (10). In fact, many may have thought, of the few who considered such things at the time, that such syncretism was ordained by God, in which case natural religion was different only in its apparent or superficial rituals. However, there are dangers to such beliefs, Lewis believes, including the migration of thought away from its centeredness on Christianity. The syncretism also drew into its orbit all the spiritual and theological bits and pieces from late pagan sources. This put such thought at odds with Christianity.

Christianity has traditionally held that the human is a composite being, combining rationalism and animal being, and could only be as good or bad as is possible within the confines of “the hierarchy of being” (12). Those who followed the pagan sources seemed to think that human possibilities were limitless and dependent solely upon the human’s own actions, and thus the attainment of the highest level of the spirits was a reachable goal. The constraints were thereby cut loose and humans began to believe that they could attain almost limitless achievements without finite encumbrances. The overweening desire for power had been born and began to develop. The consequence may at first seem relatively insignificant in light of surrounding contemporary developments. However, the major result was the displacement of the human being from its established place within the earlier doctrine of humanity. Whereas previous thought had recognized human freedom within the constraints of the human’s place within a hierarchy of being, “now, both the limit and the guarantee become uncertain—perhaps Man can do everything, perhaps he can do nothing” (14).

Whereas these were the developments from a scientific perspective, at least as important and probably more immediate, yet with somewhat similar consequences, was what can be said about the development of humanism and Puritanism. These two terms are often opposed to each other as radically disjunctive. However, Lewis reminds us that often humanists and Puritans were the same people, or at least those with common orientations and interests. Puritans were those who argued strongly for justification by faith, not simply opponents of episcopal structure in the Church of England and certainly not the dowdy ascetics typically conceived. Puritan theology was embedded in the Reformation as “either a recovery, or a development, or an exaggeration . . . of Pauline theology” (33), springing from “specialized religious experience” (33). It certainly held to strong moral standards, but these were no different from those of the Roman Catholics of the time. Rather than emphasizing differences among people then, one must recognize that most people were highly religious, that most believed that all of human life and society was grounded in “the supernatural” (38), and that most

affirmed a “theocratic polity” (39) in which the ruler could enforce religion upon its subjects. This quite understandably is related to the notion of the divine right of kings, a view that is not to be overemphasized, but to be recognized as the fundamental root of the notions of national sovereignty.

The Puritans were not necessarily opposed to the Humanists, who embraced the learning and teaching of Greek and the new Latin. The Humanists were, in a sense, those who embraced classicism, not those who argued for exaltation of the human above all else, including God. The Humanists were responsible for perpetuating classical literature by recovering and promoting the classical languages, especially Greek, as many Latin authors had never been lost. Here, however, is where the situation begins to go wrong, according to Lewis. The Humanists argued for a return to “classical” Latin, instead of retaining medieval Latin. Medieval Latin, according to Lewis, was itself an invention of the Humanists, who wished to label it as “barbarous.” In fact, the Latin was not barbarous but the living Latin language of the time. The return to classical Latin was a retrograde linguistic step, an attempt to undo the development of the language by introducing supposedly classical constructions, when the actual result was to introduce “a great archaizing movement” (21). The results were cataclysmic, not only for the Latin language itself, but for the resultant Latin literature and view of medieval literature. The product was, in Lewis’s words, “vulgarity” (24), and resulted in the kind of hyper-correction typical of such movements, in which the imposed standard was more “classical” than the original classical writers themselves. These Latinists ended up imposing their own standards upon the classical writers, much to the disfavor of the literature, and imposed allegorical interpretation upon it, in which every great work became “an allegory and an encyclopedia” (28). They thereby lost the ability “to respond to the central, obvious appeal of a great work” (26). Rather than being part of the continuity of human thought from the ancient to the medieval to the Romantic period, humanism ended up standing outside of this line of development.

Puritan and humanist thought are seen to coincide in the notion of natural law. The concept continued in the literature of

the period, even after it began to fall out of favor because of science. The abiding thought was that there was a system of natural law in place to which God himself was subject. More than that, this natural law was the creation of God and would exist even if God himself did not. Within this framework, humankind had its place within the “divine, anthropomorphic harmony” (50). With the new view of humanity (noted above) and of the rise of the notion of the state, however, this challenged the place of natural law, to the point whereby the label of “law of nature” may have been retained but its understanding was quite different. Sovereignty was sacrificed in order to appeal beyond the laws of nature to a notion of political power as in itself “inventive, creative” (50). This marks a transition from reason, in which each element is seen within its lawful order, to one of will, which itself “decrees what shall be right” (50). The literature of the sixteenth century becomes an exercise in seeing the literary outgrowth of these theological, social, and political transformations. Even more than that, the legendary status of the Renaissance had its beginnings in the humanists’ own creation of the Renaissance legend, which was promoted through education rooted in ancient rhetoric and which unfortunately tainted their view of the literature, so that the figures of speech came to be more important than the literature itself.

Despite its perceived status within the development of English literary history, Lewis does not hesitate to see the sixteenth century as transitional, in which many of the best features of the medieval period are retained and what later became noteworthy features of the Renaissance are questioned as to their intentions and significance in the history of development. The result is the endorsement, even if by means of contrast, of much of the portrait of the Middle Ages already seen in the *Allegory of Love*.

c. *An Experiment in Criticism*

As already noted above, Lewis’s *An Experiment in Criticism* ostensibly stands out from much of his other critical work²⁷ and

27. Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, is here cited in the body of this essay by page numbers in parentheses from the Cambridge Canto edition.

alongside the debate he engaged in jointly with Tillyard, as his only general work wholly dedicated to the subject of criticism itself (but see further discussion below). His *Preface to Paradise Lost* is also literary criticism—seen by many as one of the finest instances of criticism of its type—but it is focused primarily on a single work of literature, Milton's epic poem, albeit by placing it within its larger literary context.²⁸

Experiment in Criticism is an attempt by Lewis to draw together a number of the recurring ideas that governed his literary criticism as found in numerous individual essays. In that sense, this work is consonant with his other literary-historical criticism, in that it reveals something of the basis of this criticism. However, here he develops these ideas in a new way—in a way that admittedly moved against the mainstream of contemporary literary criticism, especially at Cambridge University during his time there as professor²⁹—by calling for criticism that involves both historical and authorial issues (for which Lewis is known as a literary historian), and, surprisingly and more importantly, readerly and related issues.³⁰ In the address of these topics, Lewis of necessity thinks in terms of his worldview.

28. See also other works mentioned above: Lewis's *Rehabilitations*, an early collection of literary-critical essays; *Selected Literary Essays*, a broad-ranging collection of Lewis's criticism; *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, which collection focuses upon the two periods mentioned; and *On Stories*, containing essays on writing the kind of literature that Lewis wrote.

29. Calin points out some contradictions in Lewis (*Twentieth-Century Humanist Critics*, 97), in part motivated, he believes, by Lewis's opposition to the major literary critic at Cambridge University at the time of his arrival, F. R. Leavis. Leavis practiced a form of moral criticism (so Scott, *Five Approaches*, 25), and in his *Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis opposes the kinds of valuations that Leavis made, although he elsewhere makes such evaluative comments himself. On Leavis, see Tambling, "After the 'Cambridge School.'"

30. As a result, Calin, *Twentieth-Century Humanist Critics*, 93, sees Lewis as anticipating reader-response criticism such as is found in Wolfgang Iser (*Implied Reader*), sociology of literature as evidenced in Raymond Williams (*Culture and Society*), and reception criticism as outlined by Hans Robert Jauss (*Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*). I am not sure that Lewis would have seen it this way, as he wished to emphasize the return to the author/text, rather than reader evaluation, even if by means of considering types

Lewis begins by saying, “In this essay I propose to try an experiment. Literary criticism is traditionally employed in judging books” (1), almost assuredly a statement addressed to the kind of criticism promoted by F. R. Leavis and his so-called moralistic criticism, which was often harsh on authors for not conforming to the types of judgments about literature that Leavis held to. Lewis continues, however, to say, “I want to find out what sort of picture we shall get by reversing the process. Let us make our distinction between readers or types of reading the basis, and our distinction between books the corollary. Let us try to discover how far it might be plausible to define a good book as a book which is read in one way, and a bad book as a book which is read in another” (1). One easily notes the at least ostensible similarity to readerly oriented criticism, since Lewis wishes to emphasize not that it is the books themselves that are good or bad, but that it is the readers who make them so. However, Lewis is also quick to point out that he is addressing not the vast majority of readers, those who may read a book once, who do not put much store in it, who rarely read important works, or who rarely are affected by reading, but the few for whom reading is an altogether other experience, even if it is difficult to define who exactly these readers are.

As a result, Lewis uses art as a way of exploring the difference between good and bad readers. The majority of people appreciate art only temporarily and for its ephemeral value as a substitute for something they would like to see, its depicted reality. He equates this with “using” art, but not appreciating it. For Lewis, “[r]eal appreciation” involves “laying aside as completely as we can all our own preconceptions, interests and associations” (18). In effect, the majority will use the art, but the few will actually receive it. Good art will reward continued study, in a way that poor art will not. It is similar with music. Whereas the majority may respond in a social, participative way, the few will respond emotionally, which leads to imagination. Having said that about art and music, Lewis is ready to discuss

of readers. Lewis was more concerned with evaluating readers than with reader evaluation or response.

literature. Unliterary readers, according to Lewis, are distinguished by five characteristics. These include: their reading only of narrative, their having no ears for hearing the words, their lack of recognition of style, their preference for minimalist narrative as in comic strips, and their attraction to action of several different and usually exciting types. However, Lewis wishes to make clear that the fault of the majority is not that they enjoy reading stories in this way, but that they *only* read stories in this way.

On the basis of the above analysis, it may seem, so Lewis says, as if the many would desire what might best be described as “myths,” those stories that have value in themselves, that is, “a value independent of its embodiment in any literary work” (41). Such myths are “extra-literary” (43), do not depend on “suspense or surprise” (43), are not subject to human projection, are “fantastic” (44), and are always serious. That, however, is not the case. The many prefer the unliterary, whereas the few move into the world of the extra-literary, where their imaginations are allowed and even encouraged to roam. The term “fantasy” requires delineation at this point. There are two kinds of fantasy, according to Lewis, the disinterested and the egoistic (52). The egoistic is self-indulgent, where the reader attempts to enter into the action for personal reward and pleasure. Disinterested fantasy must be taken as it is, with the reader observing from the outside and being constrained by the fantasy itself.

The notion of realism is also important in defining the difference between the many and the few readers. Realism can be understood as a “realism of presentation” or a “realism of content” (59), which forms are independent of each other. There are four types of writing in relation to realism—that of realism of presentation and not content, of content and not presentation, of both, and of neither. In essence, Lewis is arguing against the priority of realism in literature, as well as affirming that non-realistic literature is not simply escapist in orientation. All reading is escapist in some sense, but that does not mean that it is to be shunned. Instead, one should recognize that there are benefits to, say, fantasy, because of the worlds that it invokes. This is one of Lewis's major criticisms of the field of

contemporary literary studies (at least contemporary with him at the time, although the criticism seems still to hold), including the study of English in college and university curricula—there is a philosophizing about literature that even literary figures impose on the texts they read, to the point that such philosophizing can take the enjoyment and experience away from reading. Readers are left trying to identify with tragedies or distance themselves from comedies—neither of which actually depicts life (e.g., there is no point where the stage clears after a real death, as in literary tragedy, and there is no guarantee that marriages are happy, as in comedy), but both of which are meant to offer the experience of what such a life is like. The development of poetry has only exacerbated this situation. What was once a unified field—poetry, song, and dance—has been pulled apart and poetry has developed to the point that the reader of it, so Lewis contends, is in need of skills similar to those of the poet him- or herself, with the result that poetry is not widely read as it once was, as its readers must now themselves nearly be poets.

Lewis is now ready to culminate his exercise in criticism by defining the experimental dimension. Lewis essentially wants to reverse the process by which one usually judges a reader by what the person reads, so that instead one might judge literature by the way people read it. In other words, good literature is literature that “permits, invites, or even compels good reading” (104). In a phrase surprisingly reminiscent of the later Stanley Fish, Lewis begins by noting that books are only “potential literature” (104) until they are read.³¹ Thus, any efforts at literary criticism must be preceded by the reading of literature, not independent of it. Although it may not seem like it, this reversal, Lewis believes, puts the process of evaluation on firm ground, because, rather than simply appealing to personal preference or the opinion of the times, evaluation is based upon how the person reads, not

31. In his *Is There a Text in This Class?* Stanley Fish asks the provocative question of whether there can be a “text” if there is no reader of that text. In other words, a text is only a potential text without its realization through the act of reading by an actual reader. For a defense of Lewis in relation to postmodernism, see Downing, “From Pillar to Postmodernism.”

what they read. This also makes the process of “critical condemnation” (107) a more difficult exercise. The way such an experiment in criticism works is to begin with readers, distinguishing between those who read and those who do not. Then, when one turns to judging books, one does so not simply to accept or condemn various works, but to examine the basis on which a judgment of a book is made in light of what readers find within them. Those opinions of good readers—that is, those who read books—must be taken seriously, especially with regard to those works that are favored by such readers. Such favored books are not to be quickly dismissed, as there are reasons for these readers judging them to be good books. Thus, no judgment of a book, so long as there are opinions of readers, is ever final or absolute.

The results of such an experiment in criticism are several for Lewis. One is to be cautious in how one dismisses a particular author, especially one who has in the past been highly regarded, and especially if it is simply on the basis of contemporary impression. Another is the dethronement of simply appealing to whatever is fashionable in literary taste. A third is to recognize that a book may be read in a number of different ways, but at the invitation of the work itself. A good book rewards and responds to different reading approaches. Rather than Lewis's approach dismissing objective evidence, the book being considered allows for constructive dialogue with other readers, all of them with minds open to reading anew works that reward their reading in different ways. Lewis turns away from evaluative, moralistic criticism (such as that of Leavis) and instead welcomes the perspective of Matthew Arnold, who invites the reader to “see the object as in itself it really is” (119).³² At this point, Lewis clearly returns to the foundations of his literary criticism. Of those resources that help in this reading task, Lewis states that the most useful are such things as good editions, commentaries,

32. Lewis is citing Arnold, *On Translating Homer*, 11. He does not designate the edition. This again reinforces the kind of objective criticism that Lewis first promoted in his debate with Tillyard over the personal heresy and was later reflected by the New Critics in their attention upon the work in itself.

and lexicons, followed by literary historians, then what he calls “emotive critics” (122), and finally the so-called “great critics” (122), whom he disparages as not having actually helped him to understand any passage of literature any better. The opposite is the case—rather than needing “the critics in order to enjoy the authors” (123), “we need the authors to enjoy the critics” (123). Literature is, therefore, not a means of instructing people in truth or improving culture, nor a good in itself. There is a sense in which literature both instructs and delights,³³ but it is mostly that literature enlarges one’s being, so that we can become, while remaining ourselves, also “more than ourselves” (137).

While recognizing the role of the reader as very important in reading, and in determining the value of literature, something that he says stands behind all of his own reading of literature, Lewis in the end, as a literary historian, endorses the work of literature itself—not the opinions of others either now or then—as establishing the parameters of its own understanding.

d. *The Discarded Image*

The fourth and final work to examine, *The Discarded Image*, is one of the last books, if not the last, written by Lewis.³⁴ Based upon lectures that he had given in Oxford University years earlier, the manuscript was prepared and sent to the printer before he died but only appeared in print the next year (1964). Although now it seems in some ways quaint even though it has come to be a hallmark of Lewis’s position, *Discarded Image* is similar in content to several other works written around that time and treating similar subject matter, including A. O. Lovejoy’s *The Great Chain of Being*, already a classic work by the time of publication of Lewis’s treatment and used by him, and Tillyard’s *The Elizabethan World Picture*, a work that appeared in print

33. Traditionally, literary-critical discussion has been divided on the question of whether literature is designed to delight or instruct. In many ways, perhaps arguably until the last third of the last century, virtually all literary criticism could be divided into these two responses to the value and function of literature.

34. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, is cited by page number in parentheses within this essay using the Cambridge paperback edition.

before Lewis's, but is not cited by him.³⁵ Nevertheless, some of the most important worldview ideas that Lewis holds to, I believe, especially in relation not only to medieval and Renaissance literature but to the world and life themselves, are found in this important volume.

Rather than tracing a direct line of continuity from the Middle Ages back to earlier, primitive civilizations, Lewis believes that the Middle Ages stand out because the period was an age of authorities, with the chief authorities being not only the Church, as most think, but predominantly books. The age was one that looked to books for their authority. And the source of authority for these books was earlier Latin writers, who depended upon earlier Greek thinkers, such as Aristotle. Instead of their roots being in barbarism, the line of connection goes back to the Roman Empire itself, whose authority was spread by means of books, with the Empire not only encompassing more than those of Roman ethnic descent but extending even beyond its own edges. No doubt as a remnant of the chaos that resulted from the fall of the western Roman Empire, the person living during the Middle Ages sought order during turbulent times. The result was that—rather than the ballad or romance distinguishing the age—the Middle Ages are characterized by structure. The medieval person “was an organizer, a codifier, a builder of systems” (10). There was a place for everything, and everything had its appropriate place. This pertained to all areas of existence, including ethics, science, theology, the plant and animal worlds, human life, and the cosmos. This structure exists in the period's view of the world and in its literature, such as Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. All was seen to fit together, and the encapsulation of this was manifest in its view of the world itself: “This is the medieval synthesis itself, the

35. See Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being*, and Tillyard, *Elizabethan World Picture*. Lewis had forecast his return to this issue in his inaugural lecture as professor in Cambridge University, *De Descriptione Temporum*, reprinted in his *They Asked for a Paper*. In fact, he makes more explicitly audacious claims, such as that there is no divide between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (22).

whole organization of their theology, science, and history into a single, complex, harmonious mental Model of the Universe” (11). This comprehensive perspective was brought about on the authority of books to satisfy the need for order, by means of which contradictions were eliminated and a unified whole created. This model of the universe may seem now as at best interesting and perhaps only a work of ingenuity to be admired. According to Lewis, however, “I think there is abundant evidence that it gave profound satisfaction while it was still believed in” (12). More than that, it “is in a sense the central work, that in which most particular works were embedded, to which they constantly referred, from which they drew a great deal of their strength” (12). In other words, this inclusive system comprised the medieval worldview.

In response to how deterministic this may seem, Lewis notes that, despite a number of changes in other areas of medieval thought, the model he outlines was not finally abandoned until the end of the seventeenth century. In the meantime, the model was used in its simpler forms as an intelligible backdrop for the literature of the time, while the scientists of the time accepted it as a scientific model. Its being a model does not mean it was not taken seriously, but that it was a theory that could be duly modified so that the new phenomena encountered would fit it. Thus, as the model was appropriately modified, what was really being developed was not a new theory but a theory of how theories are developed. Some writers, however, such as the Christian authors of the time, do not appear to use the model, but that is probably because their writings are not theoretical but practical. Thus, the model, in and of itself, Lewis believes, is “eminently religious” (18), but “not eminently Christian” (18).

There is no need to outline the exact structure of the medieval model of the universe. Instead, there are important individual features that merit attention. One of the most important is that the “fundamental concept” for its scientific view “was that of certain sympathies, antipathies, and strivings inherent in nature itself. Everything has its right place, its home, the region that suits it, and, if not forcibly restrained, moves thither by a sort of homing instinct” (92). This is not to say that people believed that

“inanimate objects were sentient and purposive” (93), any more than modern people do who speak about laws and obedience within the material world. In other words, both express their views of the world in metaphorical fashion. However, Lewis observes, we moderns use a more “anthropomorphic” (94) approach with our language regarding obedience to laws than did those in the Middle Ages. The language used to express one’s view of the world, Lewis contends, makes a difference: “On the imaginative and emotional level it makes a great difference whether, with the medievals, we project upon the universe our strivings and desires, or with the moderns, our police-system and our traffic regulations” (94). A further feature of this cosmology is that the world is both incredibly large but also “unambiguously finite” (99). Within this finite world, there is “an absolute standard of comparison” (99), the “universe is finite, it has a shape, the perfect spherical shape, containing within itself an ordered variety” (99), and it is, above all, harmonious.

Driving what is so far depicted as a static universe is, above all, God, the unmoved mover, who works through the *Primum Mobile* to motivate the universe, in which the planets have influence upon the earth. This universe, rather than being dark as it appears when one looks out into it at night, is continually illuminated by the sun, and is both warm and filled with music. God makes this entire system work through love: “The *Primum Mobile* is moved by its love for God, and, being moved, communicates motion to the rest of the universe” (113). Although the idea of love moving the universe originates with Aristotle, and seems, in its medieval “thirsty and aspiring love of creatures” (114), to be opposed to the Christian view of “provident and descending love” (114), Lewis does not view this as a contradiction. Instead, a “real universe could accommodate the ‘love of God’ in both senses” (114) of love toward and from God. The rotation of the universe and its intelligent planets within it, all involved in “the revelry of insatiable love” (119), appear to be a highly religious conception, though not necessarily Christian. This is because the human in this depiction is a marginalized creature, the earth is influenced but not an influencer, and God is beloved

by the heavenly spheres—in distinction from the Christian view “where the fall of man and the incarnation of God as man for man’s redemption is central” (120). Earth itself, long recognized as a sphere, though not “guided by an Intelligence” (139), does however, according to Dante, have Fortune as its guide, the same Fortune that guides empires in their growth and decay.

Of the earth’s animate inhabitants, the human occupies a “peculiar” (153) place as “a rational animal, and therefore a composite being, partly akin to the angels who are rational but . . . not animal, and partly akin to the beasts which are animal but not rational” (152); hence the human forms its own microcosm. The human rational soul “is created in each case by the immediate act of God” (154), as there was no belief in pre-existence of the soul during this time. The rational soul refers to two human faculties, the *Intellectus* and the *Ratio* (157), with the former the higher reason and the latter reason against which passion creates moral conflict. In another sense, the human is a microcosm by its being composed of the four contrary elements of fire, air, water, and earth. Human history, not to be caricatured as either cyclical or revealing simply the hand of God,³⁶ is captured in “story” or “history,” two words that were still synonymous during the Middle Ages.³⁷ Thus, the distinction one might make between fiction and history cannot be used of medieval literature or attributed “to the spirit in which they were read” (179). Responsibility for the origin and trustworthiness of stories is given to the authors whom the history writers cite. The readers believed the stories, or, as Lewis states, “they did not believe [them] to be false” (181), but their “business was to learn the story. If its veracity were questioned they would feel that the burden of disproof lay

36. Lewis characterizes both views as types of Historicism, “the belief that by studying the past we can learn not only historical but metahistorical or transcendental truth” (*Discarded Image*, 174).

37. Story and history, and other contrasts between story time and external time, are now commonly differentiated, especially as a result of structuralism and the rise of narratology. Lewis seems only to acknowledge the former through its manifestation in what has come to be called the New Criticism (e.g., he refers to the work of William Empson, in *Studies in Words*, 9 n. 1, to disagree with him), and did not live to see the latter.

wholly with the critic" (181). The impersonal is not treated in medieval histories, and there was no sense of different historical periods (hence historical personages are depicted as wearing medieval period clothing), but there is the sense that the world had at one time been better and would one day be better again. "Historically as well as cosmically, medieval man stood at the foot of a stairway; looking up, he felt delight. The backward, like the upward, glance exhilarated him with a majestic spectacle, and humility was rewarded with the pleasures of admiration" (185). As a result, humans knew their places within this great model of the universe: "One had one's place, however modest, in a great succession; one need be neither proud nor lonely" (185).

In conclusion, one may ask about the influence of the Model of the Universe that Lewis has depicted. Lewis describes it in these terms: "the Model universe of our ancestors had a built-in significance. And that in two senses; as having 'significant form' (it is an admirable design) and as a manifestation of the wisdom and goodness that created it" (204). In other words, in itself it was significant, and more than that it reflected its creator in his wisdom and goodness. This accounts for many characteristics of medieval literature, including both its dullness but also the "absence of strain" (205) in its language. People of the medieval age "have a complete confidence in the intrinsic value of their matter. The telling is for the sake of the tale" (205). They have a "realising [*sic*] imagination" (206), not a transforming one. They are not trying to elevate their subject matter, but it "possesses them wholly" (208). "Their Model of the Universe is firmly in place, but it is transparent and goes unnoticed. Emphasis is not on originality, but on handing on "the 'historial' matter worthily; not worthily of your own genius or of the poetic art but of the matter itself" (211). What moderns may view as originality may well have been seen by the medieval person as a serious weakness. The result is "a certain humility as the overall characteristic of medieval art" (214).

Lewis thus concludes with an endorsement of the medieval person placed firmly within an ordered and structured universe, which organizes and sustains all of its elements.

A Concise Summation of C. S. Lewis's Christian Worldview

In the previous major section, expansive readings of four of Lewis's important literary-critical works have been rendered, with the purpose of assembling a mass of data that constitute an elaborate tapestry of ideas that might indicate his Christian worldview. Such a task might at first seem highly speculative, even dubious, because of the nature of these works as literary criticism, to the point of it being a mistake to extrapolate from Lewis's literary histories to his own worldview. It is, indeed, unwarranted to make such a simplistic equation as moving from one to the other. Such reservations must be acknowledged, even if they do not mitigate the task. Lewis's literary-historical and literary-theoretical tapestries are many and varied, and so it is not necessarily to be expected that he would have a completely or totally consistent worldview revealed to similar degrees in all of his works, especially works as varied as these written over the length of his academic career. It is completely without support to take the view—nor is it legitimate to infer—that Lewis has “embedded” a hidden theology within his works, as if his literary criticism is one of the allegories that he so ably defines. His literary criticism is first and foremost historically grounded literary criticism, not Christian apologetics buried within literary criticism for later readers or the cogniscenti to uncover or reveal. Lewis is not writing systematic or dogmatic theology—in fact, he clearly identified himself as only a lay theologian—so one should not expect the kind of emphases or issues in his worldview that one might expect if one had asked him to write a complete account of his set of theological beliefs. Besides the fact that Lewis had no apparent interest in performing such a task—after all, he was a creative literary figure, not a theological pedant—it is not appropriate to expect his works to be able to be analyzed in such a way.

Nevertheless, Lewis through his varied writings himself integrated theology constantly within the work that he did and brought theological and, more importantly, distinctly Christian ideas to bear on his analyses. Further, he identified with particular periods in literary history and found them fertile with

ideas that influenced his own thinking.³⁸ As a result, though they are more fully realized in his fiction and Christian apologetics, there are a number of features of Lewis's Christian and apologetic worldview that do clearly emerge from within his literary criticism.³⁹ In fact, due to the nature of his work as literary criticism, the broad ideas that reveal his Christian worldview are fairly basic, and include views of empirical reality and truth, God and nature, the human, interpretation, and, finally, the book.⁴⁰ As will be seen, several of these notions are intertwined in Lewis's thought and exposition.⁴¹ The views explicated are all found directly in Lewis's criticism, as already cited above.

a. *Empirical Reality and Truth*

Lewis uses a number of different words to describe what might best be called "reality" in his works of literary criticism. These words include such things as the "universe" (or Model of the Universe), "reality," and "nature" with its "natural law." For Lewis, these all seem to indicate his affirmation of, and his depiction of, the Middle Ages and Renaissance as holding to a view of empirical reality. Lewis clearly was an objectivist, in that he believed that there was an objective reality outside of the human being, even when this reality is not a physical world or is a world accessed through myth or fantasy. This is reflected in how Lewis speaks in his literary criticism of the objective world. It may be, as he notes in his *Allegory of Love*, a set of passions,

38. One of the most important correlations to notice is Lewis's use of allegory, both in his fiction and in his Christian expositions, such as *Pilgrim's Regress* and *Great Divorce*.

39. I refer in what follows mostly to Lewis's book-length Christian works, not primarily his essays, although these essays also provide numerous parallels as well. Lewis's own effort at integration is clearly shown in his famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory," in *They Asked for a Paper*, 197–211.

40. On some of the relations between literature—the topic of his literary criticism—and Christianity, see Lewis, "Christianity and Literature," esp. p. 10.

41. I do not pretend to believe that these points are unique to Lewis, or that he was the only one who had a Christian worldview within his literary criticism. Glycer (*The Company They Keep*) has shown—in opposition to most previous criticism—that Lewis and his circle had mutually informing influences upon each other.

such as love. Love is a very important emotion for Lewis, as seen in both his description of medieval literature and his own study of love, *The Four Loves*, which defines the four major types of love. This reality is not to be equated simply with made-up or fictitious tales, but with stories that contain the essence of reality or truth, just as Lewis draws upon this particular genre in his *Till We Have Faces*. Or, it may be a highly complex and interconnected universe that constitutes the “discarded image,” in which every dimension of the universe, from God at the top to whatever is at the bottom—and with the earth and humanity in between—is part of a “real” world. Or, as he indicates in his treatment of sixteenth-century literature, the scientific discoveries were less about new knowledge than they were about being able to grasp and understand the world around us.

Lewis notes that one of the characteristics of developing thought during the Middle Ages and later, before reaching what is now called the Romantic period, was a conscious individuation, by which the subject and object became increasingly separate and distinguishable from each other. Lewis has rightly identified what has become the western philosophical preoccupation with the relationship between the subject and object, pursued in different ways by various philosophers, such as Descartes, Kant, Ricoeur, and the contemporary continentalists (e.g., Badiou).⁴² In Lewis’s mind, medieval thought fully anticipated this development in helpful ways. Lewis sees the Middle Ages as instrumental in recognizing that the subject and the object are not identical. This important insight allows the human to recognize that humanness is a thing in itself that is different from and not the same as otherness, or the object. The human being does not simply create reality or form reality within the human mind, but interacts with and engages with something out there, something that can be called nature or reality. Even in his treatment of criticism itself, with reference to reading, Lewis identifies an object to be read, even if it involves a reader. The way one judges good and bad works is on the basis of the kinds of readers that these books attract.

42. See McCumber, *Time and Philosophy*, passim.

This identification of reality or nature, and the distinctness of the human from nature, is a way of characterizing objective reality but it is also a way of saying that there is such a thing as ultimate being, even truth. For Lewis, Christian truth is not truth that is alienated from or foreign to all other truth. For Lewis, all truth is God's truth, and even distinctly Christian truth is embedded within God's ultimate truth.⁴³ This is why it is possible for him to characterize the roots of the Middle Ages and Renaissance in what he sometimes refers to as not specifically Christian teaching. It is general religious belief, which itself is often clearly traceable to earlier Latin and especially Greek thought, such as Plato and Aristotle. For Lewis, this tapestry of truth does not compromise the validity of it, just because some forms of it were perhaps known by humans before the advent of Christianity, or were instilled within general humanity or within other societies than those that are Christian. This instead points to Christian belief as the fullest expression of divine or ultimate truth, and provides a common ground for examination and critique of all truth, because all truth is related and ultimately divine in origin. This is the kind of basis that Lewis sees elsewhere in his apologetics, such as his *Mere Christianity*, as providing the basis for developing a common morality. This common morality is grounded in a common ultimate and objective reality.

b. *God and Nature*

God is the underplayed minor character in Lewis's literary criticism, even though he occupies a major role in Lewis's worldview. Behind all of the depictions that he makes of the various elements of the Middle Ages and even the Renaissance is the God of this universe that he has identified. This is certainly evident in Lewis's Model of the Universe, where he depicts God as the unmoved mover, one of the traditional theological depictions of the Christian God as the uncreated Creator who instigates and controls his creation (a view that goes back through Aquinas to Aristotle, but has been dominant in not only medieval but other

43. For another exposition of this idea, see Lewis, "The Laws of Nature," in *God in the Dock*, 76–79.

Christian thought). However, a similar type of conception is seen in Lewis's tracing of the scientific achievements of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, where humans develop in their ability to understand a world that is less foreign and more understandable, but is nevertheless part of a larger created order. Lewis's view of God even comes through in his depiction of the world of courtly love. The passions that are depicted through allegory are passions that are "real facts" even if they are abstract and intangible. They are genuine and sincere and important passions, the chief of which is love. The concept of love as depicted in medieval literature is a pure and wholesome love that is reflective of divine love, the kind of love that God has toward humanity. That is why such love is depicted in terms of physical representation, striving, achievement, and purity.

This depiction of God, however, is also related to Platonic theology. As mentioned above, for Lewis all truth is God's truth, and so he is not willing to abandon what humans have discovered of God in other realms of thought, such as the great philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Although Lewis refers to syncretism taking place within the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the kind of syncretism that he depicts is one in which the distilled divine truths of other systems of thought are brought into relationship with the truths of the Christian God. Therefore, there can be such a thing as Platonic theology, in the sense that Plato realized and depicted a substantial world of thoughts and ideas that lie behind reality, just as the Christian God is not only seen in incarnation but through other avenues, such as natural law. Natural law is one of the major ways in which God is clearly though discretely seen within the universe as Lewis depicts it. Many of the great advances in thought during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance came about as human beings gained more knowledge of the laws of the natural world around them. These natural laws are embodiments of the laws that govern and

control the natural world within the great model of the universe that God has created.⁴⁴

c. *Humanity*

Lewis lived during the heights of modernism, an age in which the human being was placed at the center of the (material) universe. Human achievement was thought to have reached acclaimed and unparalleled heights, and as a result the human being should be exalted as the master of the natural world. In some ways in anticipation of the postmodern critique of modernism,⁴⁵ yet from a distinctly Christian perspective, Lewis rejects this view within his fiction and his apologetics, as well as within his literary criticism. Lewis notes that the human being has an important but not necessarily central role to play in the universal economy. Lewis notes that the medieval depiction does not give as overtly a Christian role to the place of incarnation and redemption as Christian theology demands. Nevertheless, as he notes in his depiction of the Model of the Universe, the human being, while not the apogee of creation or the fulcrum or central point of the created order, indeed does occupy an important yet defined place within a larger order. More like what is stated in Paul's speech to the Athenians in Acts 17, humans are given parameters to their habitation, and a defined role within limits for them to play. Lewis notes that the human in medieval times was defined as consisting of two characteristics, intellection and passion. The first governs the rational thought processes and recognizes an important stage within developing human consciousness in which the human has important mental faculties to exercise. However, equally important is the passionate nature of the human being. This is more clearly discussed by Lewis in terms of the courtly love tradition, where he notes that human passions provide primary human motivations to action, and as a result require means by which they can be both expressed and governed in legitimate and fruitful ways. They are abstract—

44. This conception, as found in his literary-historical description, is definitely related to Lewis's notion of the Tao, developed in *Abolition of Man*, 28 and passim, and the basis of his exposition in *Miracles*.

more so perhaps than the expressions of human intellectual pursuit—but nevertheless real, and better understood when they are allegorically interpreted and depicted.

Human beings are perhaps seen at their interpretively most active and expressive in their attempts to understand the world in which they live. As already noted above, humans were able to grasp the need to differentiate themselves from the world around them, that is, to implement a useful subject-object divide that enabled them to grasp the otherness of the world, and not to confuse themselves with all that the world is, or to place themselves in too exalted a place within this world. The human expression of intellect is also seen in the process of reading and interpretation. Readers play an essential role in the interpretive process and hence are essential components of the interpreted world (see below for further discussion), and there are such things as good and bad readers. The importance of this distinction relates both to the works themselves that are read and to the role of readers. Lest readers end up believing that the act of reading itself is sufficient to produce good readings, Lewis notes that there are such things as good and bad readers, and that readings can change over time, ideally for the better as readers become better interpreters.⁴⁶ This is an act of ensuring that readers as human interpreters understand the limits of their knowledge, and occupy the kind of place within the universal scheme that the Model of the Universe defined for humanity.

d. *The Role of Interpretation*

As emphasized above, Lewis reveals in his literary criticism a worldview in which there is such a thing as objective reality, a reality that exists apart from the interpreting subject, and that indicates that there is an ultimate or absolute truth, in Lewis to be associated with divine truth that emanates from God. This

45. On developments in modern hermeneutical and interpretive theory, see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, esp. 190–213.

46. On the limitations of human intellect in criticism, see Lewis, “On Criticism,” in *Of Other Worlds*, 43–58. The particular fault of autobiographical criticism is focused upon in Tillyard and Lewis, *Personal Heresy*, 1–31.

reality is seen in a variety of ways, whether it is characterized as natural law or nature or reality or the universe. In all such cases, there is something that exists apart from the interpreting self. However, Lewis also notes that there is a role for interpretation to be played in the grasp and appreciation of this reality, and hence interpretation is an essential component of a well-formulated worldview. The role of interpretation may come as a surprise for those who are looking for an entirely objectivist formulation of Lewis's worldview. Lewis was too intelligent to see objective truth to be a thing that comes unmediated to the human being, thereby eliminating the need for interpretation. His fiction is predicated upon the role of interpretation by the informed reader, whether that person be a Christian who is fully appreciating the symbolism of *The Chronicles of Narnia* or a non-Christian who is being challenged by the symbolic conceptions of good and evil. Similar statements may be made about his space trilogy. Lewis's Christian writings as well include those that are formulated around allegorical depictions that require interpretation, such as in the *Great Divorce* and *Pilgrim's Regress*, and perhaps most boldly in *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis clearly believed that allegory was an important means of interpretation, along the lines that the medieval mind viewed allegorical personification as a means whereby difficult abstract concepts could become fully embodied so that they could be tangibly grasped and understood. Lewis's overt Christian apologetics also presents challenges of interpretation to the reader, on several fronts. There is not the same use of allegory, but Lewis demands of readers that they either accept or reject his characterizations of the major secular arguments that he presents, requires that they judge whether his responses to these arguments are adequate or not, and then allows for readers to decide for themselves whether he has provided a plausible argument to convince them to change their beliefs (or in some instances reaffirm their beliefs with more cogent arguments).⁴⁷

47. That interpretation is fundamental to Lewis is seen in his frequent responses to other authors, as well as their responses to him. Many of these are captured in such works as *Personal Heresy* and other essay collections.

Lewis's equation of Puritans and Humanists in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* illustrates well his belief in the importance and role of interpretation. Rather than playing these two parties off against each other as is usually done, he posits that Puritans and Humanists were often the same people, even if viewed from different perspectives (that is, perspective in criticism is fundamental). They were those who were concerned with preserving, transmitting, and interpreting culture, by means of the best thoughts and literary accomplishments of their day, including within that the role of theological thought. In Lewis's *Experiment in Criticism*, what at first looks like an endorsement of a reader-response criticism becomes a clear defense of objective criticism consistent with his worldview expressed elsewhere in his literary criticism, as well as in his apologetics, thus unifying and uniting all of the works treated in this essay. The literary text is something to be read. Nevertheless, it can be read better or worse by some than others. Lewis does not despair of interpretation, but he does believe that interpretation requires work. He wishes to reject moralistic judgments of the literary work, but to proceed toward evaluation as interpretation, that is, better readings are those that treat the text as a work in itself and as worth reading and interpreting. Those who read better, in other words, those who are better interpreters, will eventually come closer to grasping the meaning of the text. Those texts that result in such readings, or to put it in better terms, those that reveal more important and substantial meanings, are better pieces of literature. Therefore, evaluation is an important part of literature, but it is only a part and a result, not a preliminary move that establishes the agenda for reading and circumvents the reading process by arriving at premature and precluding judgments. In any case, interpretation is part of a worldview, including a Christian one, in that interpretation is part of the human condition and role within the created order.

e. *The Book*

The book constitutes the final point of correlation between Lewis's worldview as revealed through his literary criticism and his Christian apologetics and writing. The book is clearly some-

thing that Lewis holds dear and chooses to focus upon. By this is meant not only “the book” as an instance of literature—certainly this was important to Lewis, because it was books that contained and transmitted the wealth of human knowledge. Lewis notes the importance of the book for medieval culture. Rather than view medieval life as a primitive society that was governed by superstition or the exercise of unbridled authority, such as that within the Church, Lewis points out the importance of the book. It was the book that preserved and transmitted knowledge from the ancients to the Middle Ages. It was likewise the book that was the repository for increased knowledge as humans explored their surrounding (objective) universe and then transmitted this knowledge to subsequent generations, those who retained their place within the Model of the Universe that persisted until the seventeenth century.

More than this, however, the book is for Lewis “the Book,” that is, the Bible. The two are intertwined, as the Bible, the Book, as repository of God’s truth is a unique example of the implement or tool, the book, by which human knowledge and civilization has been transmitted.⁴⁸ The close relationship between “the book” and “the Book” is seen in even greater force in Lewis’s essay on “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism.” In this essay, Lewis addresses biblical critics for their failure to understand the Bible correctly on the basis of their failing to have read enough non-biblical literature to form the kinds of literary judgments they propound. He uses two poignant examples. One is the statement by a scholar that John’s Gospel is a “spiritual romance” similar to what this author purports to be other romances. After dispensing with the parallels, Lewis states, “I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this [i.e., John’s Gospel].”⁴⁹ He then cites Rudolf Bultmann’s statement that the personality of Jesus cannot

48. Other essays that make a similar point are Lewis, “The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version,” in *They Asked for a Paper*, 26–50 and “On the Reading of Old Books,” in *God in the Dock*, 200–207.

49. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” 155.

be discerned from the Gospels. “Through what strange process has this learned German gone in order to make himself blind to what all men except him see? What evidence have we that he would recognize a personality if it were there?”⁵⁰ Lewis finds this virtually incomprehensible, on the basis of his reading of accounts both ancient and modern that convey the personality and actions of various figures, historical and otherwise. As Lewis concludes regarding modern biblical scholarship, “These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can’t see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight.”⁵¹

Lewis’s analysis above would also appropriately fit regarding interpretation, except that Lewis has vented his frustration regarding the blindness of biblical readers. This is not merely because interpretation is a necessary and complex process (perhaps too complex to be left to biblical scholars!), but because of the importance of the book that they are reading, the Book, one that requires that they bring a breadth of experience and ability that he finds lacking.

Conclusion

Lewis is well known for his Christian apologetics, found within his Christian writings, apologetics, and fiction. Lewis is less well known for his Christian worldview as discernable within his literary criticism. Lewis clearly did not set out to write Christian apologetics within his literary criticism or to argue for a rigorous Christian worldview. His literary criticism, whether it is literary history, applied criticism, or critical theory, stands on its own as first-rate scholarship that has stood the test of critical time and established Lewis as one of the most important literary scholars of the twentieth century—regardless of one’s view of his Christian beliefs, fiction, and apologetics. Nevertheless, all of Lewis’s

50. *Ibid.*, 156, citing Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 35.

51. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” 157.

most important literary criticism was written after his conversion to Christianity. This criticism has a common orientation within Lewis's own critical perspective, as has been noted above, and it often addresses issues that stood at the center of his interests. Therefore, it stands to reason that this literary-critical work would also in some way—even if it is not overt or at the forefront—reflect his Christian worldview, one that he developed and continued to refine for over thirty years. This essay has attempted to examine four of his major works to ascertain the Christian worldview that appears to underlie and undergird them. In five significant areas, Lewis makes clear that the framework by which he evaluates literature—especially the literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance—is also the same framework by which he evaluates life itself.

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