

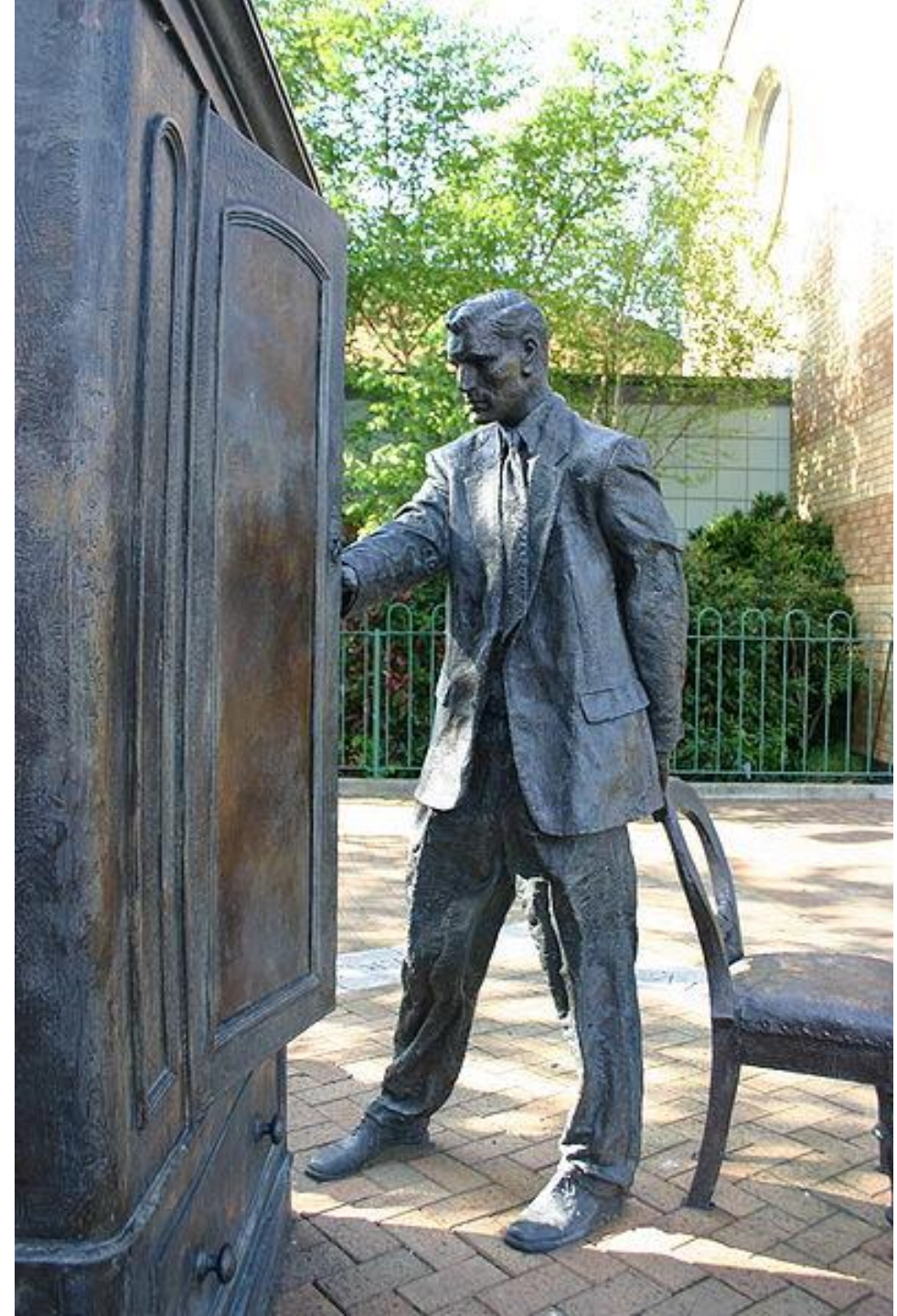
The Personal Heresy
and C.S. Lewis'
Autoethnographic Instinct:
An Invitation to Intimacy in
Literature and Theology

Brenton Dickieson (MCS, PhD)

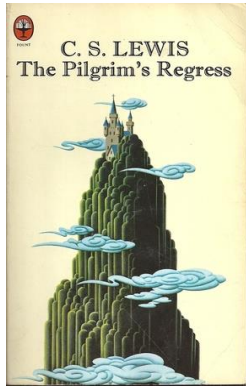
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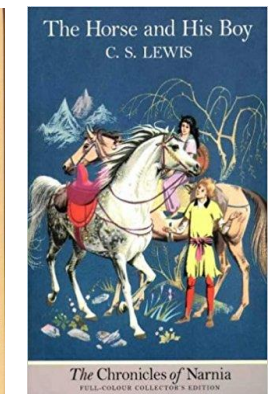
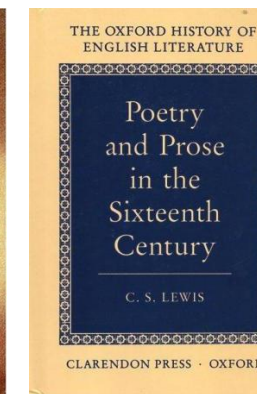
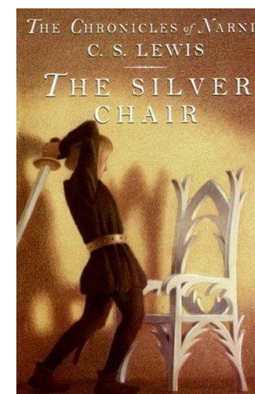
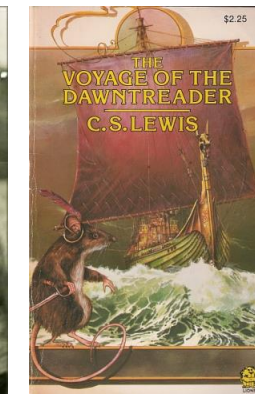
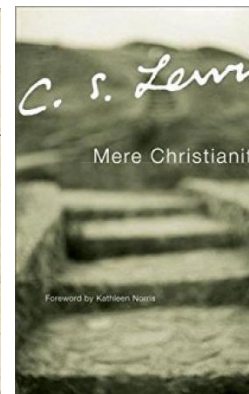
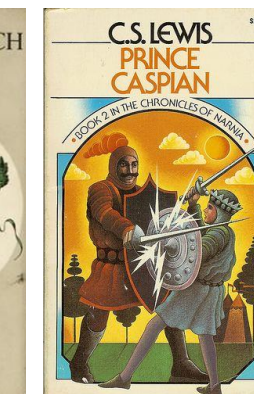
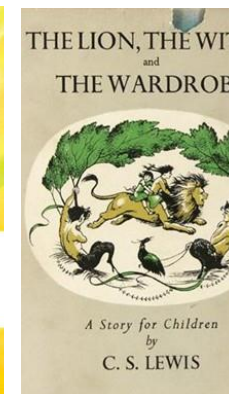
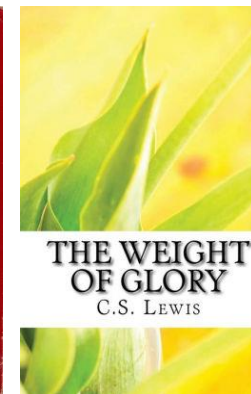
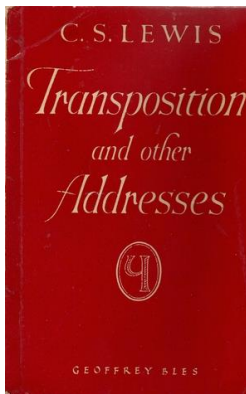
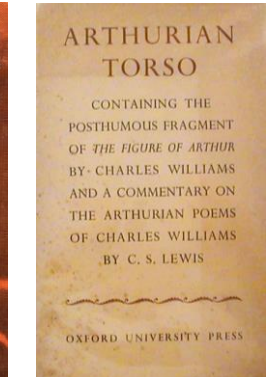
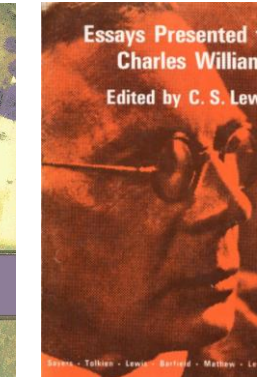
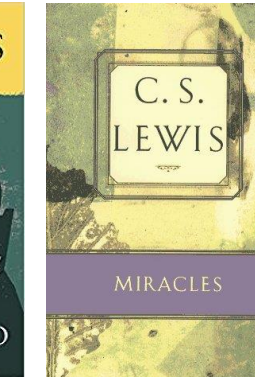
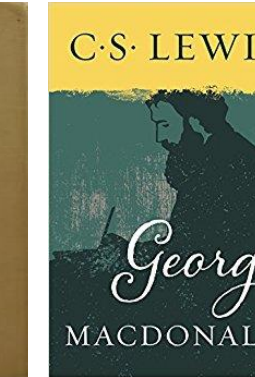
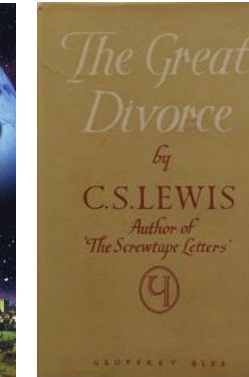
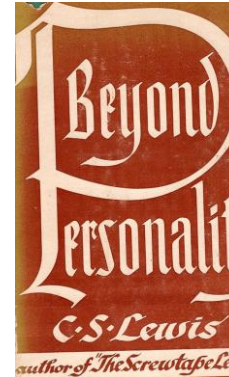
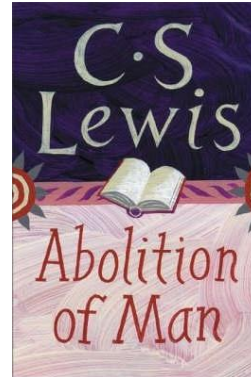
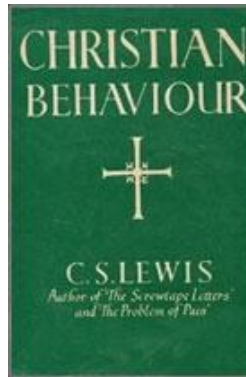
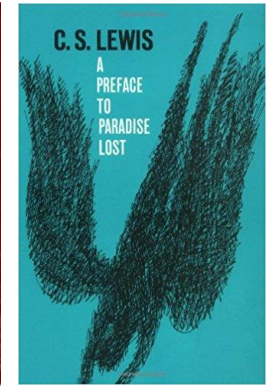
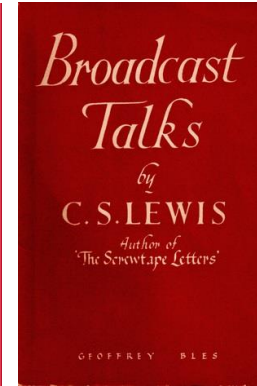
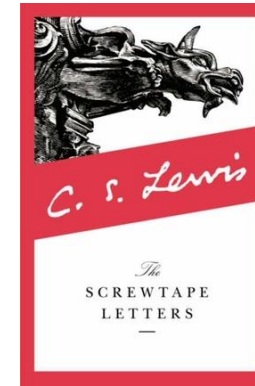
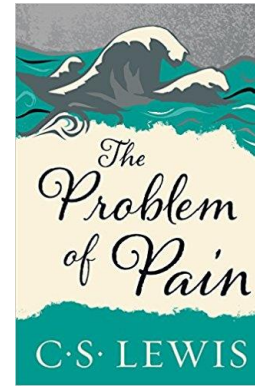
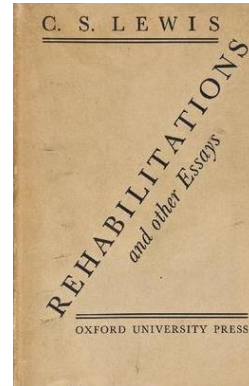
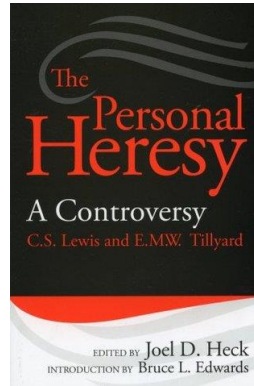
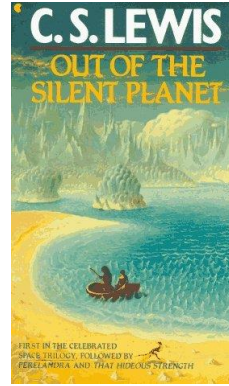


C.S. Lewis in Autumn, 1954

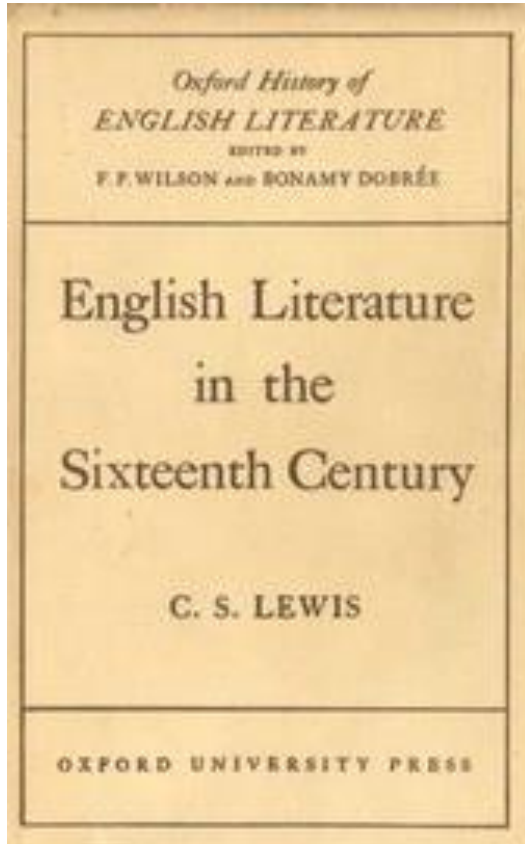


C. S. LEWIS

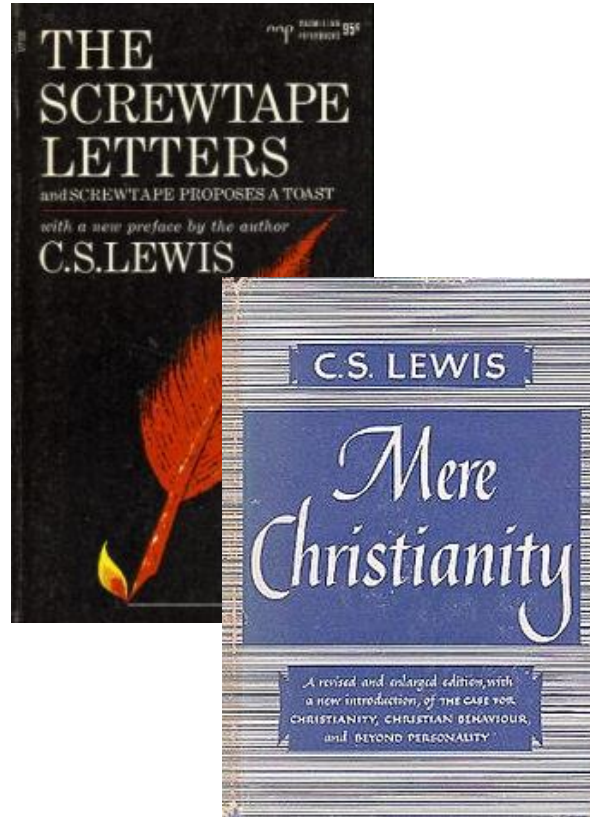
THE ALLEGORY OF LOVE



C.S. Lewis in Autumn, 1954



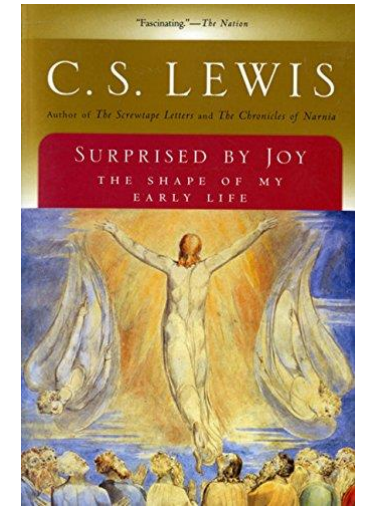
English Literature in the 16th Century, Excluding Drama (1935-54)



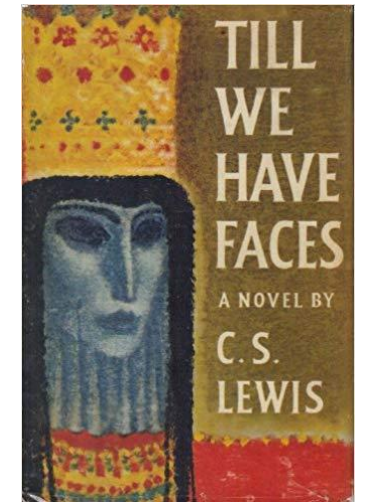
The Screwtape Letters (1940-42); Mere Christianity (1941-44, 1952)



The Chronicles of Narnia (1949-56)



Surprised by Joy (complete 1954)



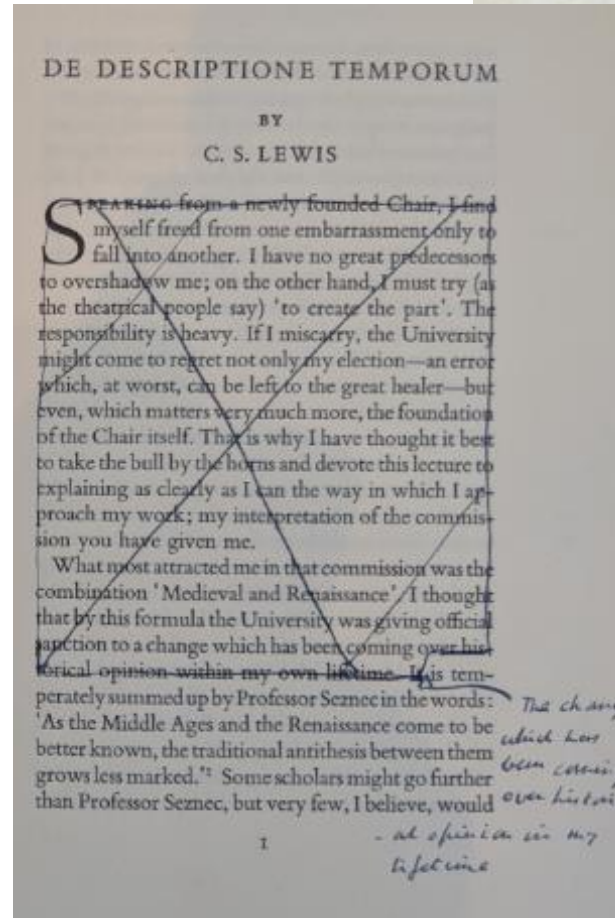
Till We Have Faces (written Spring 1955)

“*De Descriptione Temporum*”

Nov 29, 1954, Cambridge University

I ... belong far more to that old Western order than to yours. You don't want to be lectured on Neanderthal Man by a Neanderthaler, still less on dinosaurs by a dinosaur. ...

[However,] If a live dinosaur dragged its slow length into the laboratory, would we not all look back as we fled? What a chance to know at last how it really moved and looked and smelled and what noises it made! And if the Neanderthaler could talk, then, though his lecturing technique might leave much to be desired, should we not almost certainly learn from him some things about him which the best modern anthropologist could never have told us? He would tell us without knowing he was telling....



DE DESCRIPTIONE TEMPORUM

An Inaugural Lecture by

C. S. LEWIS

*Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English
Literature in the University of Cambridge*

Quotus quisque reliquus qui rem
publicam vidisset? TACITUS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

“De Descriptione Temporum”

Nov 29, 1954, Cambridge University

He would know in his bones so much that we seek in vain. At any moment some chance phrase might, unknown to him, show us where modern scholarship had been on the wrong track for years....

I stand before you somewhat as that Athenian might stand. I read as a native texts that you must read as foreigners.... It is my settled conviction that in order to read old Western literature aright you must suspend most of the responses and unlearn most of the habits you have acquired in reading modern literature. And because this is the judgement of a native..., the fact of my conviction is a historical datum to which you should give full weight. That way, where I fail as a critic, I may yet be useful as a specimen. (14-5).

C.S. Lewis

Selected
Literary Essays





“interrogate” ... “generate”

Literature, theology
and feminism

Heather Walton

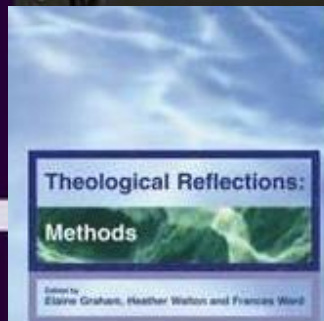
IMAGINING THEOLOGY

Women, Writing and God

HEATHER WALTON



EDITED BY
HEATHER WALTON
LITERATURE
AND THEOLOGY
New Interdisciplinary Spaces



THEOLOGICAL
REFLECTION
METHODS
2ND EDITION

Elaine Graham,
Heather Walton &
Frances Ward

Self/Same/Other

Re-visioning the Subject in Literature and Theology

edited by
Heather Walton & Andrew W. Hass



WRITING METHODS IN
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
HEATHER WALTON

Heather Walton on Autoethnography

“Autoethnography is a way of using personal experience to investigate a particular issue or concern that has wider cultural or religious significance. The experience here acts as a lens that allows us to see and interrogate aspects of the concern in question that might be missed in a more abstract discussion of ethics or values. The method comes to us from the disciplines of social research, where it has been growing in significance in recent years. It is particularly effective in reflective theological writing because it allows us to look with fresh eyes at familiar beliefs and practices” (xxxix).

“Our contemporary interest in reflective theological writing thus stands within an ancient tradition, but one that is adaptive and responsive to cultural change” (xiv).

Heather Walton on Autoethnography

Some Notes:

- “My conviction that good writing is always contextually located and painstakingly constructed...” (xii).
- “reflection” and “reflexivity”: Reflexivity turns the lens of discovery upon the self—the observer’s interrogation of and writing about the observer, approaching the task of “meaning-making” as “relational, provisional, embodied and located.”
- Walton: “assumes that there is no possibility of a truly uncontaminated point of view” (xvi)
- Lewis: “no model of thought is “a catalogue of ultimate realities” (*Discarded Image*, 222)
- Dangers: ethical questions as writers and readers; intersectional nature of stories; solipsism and narcissism; temptations to self-blindness, formula, mechanical thinking; the need for honest; the need for “self-care” (wisdom, restraint, distance, etc.)

WRITING METHODS IN
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
HEATHER WALTON

Walton's 3 Ways of Writing Theological Reflection (xxx-xxxii)

- 1. Authoethnography:** “personal experience to investigate a particular issue or concern that has wider cultural or religious significance.”
 - “*De Descriptione Temporum*,” literary criticism, *Discarded Image*
 - “On Stories,” *An Experiment in Criticism*, & the reader’s response
 - In both apologetics (*God in the Dock*) and general faith talks (*Christian Reflections*), especially in sermons (*The Weight of Glory*)
- 2. Journaling:** “a way of using experience that allows us to see changes taking place over time”
 - *All My Road Before Me, A Grief Observed*
 - *Till We Have Faces, Voyage of the Dawn Treader*
 - Epistolarity? *Letters to Malcolm*, letter collections, fictional letters
- 3. Life Writing:** “reflecting upon how experience shapes identity”
 - *Pilgrim’s Regress*
 - *Surprised by Joy*
 - Autobiographical Attempts

Preface

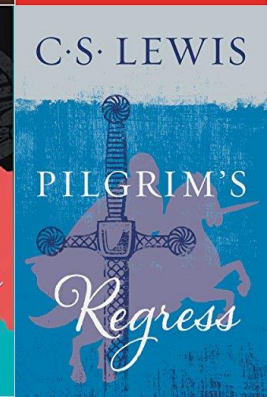
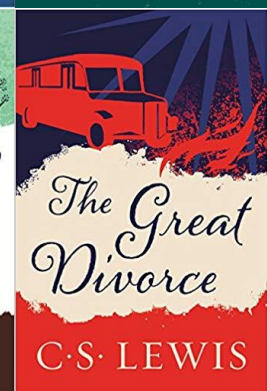
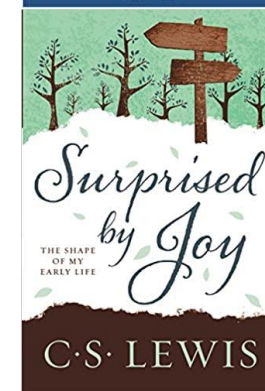
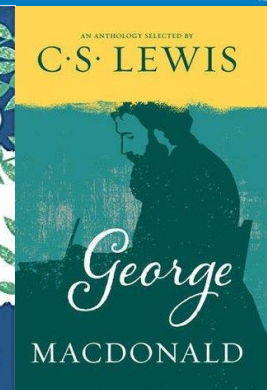
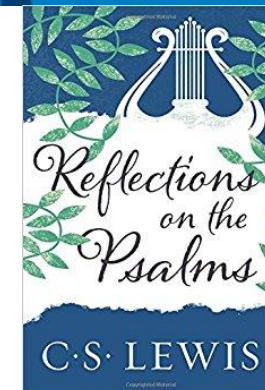
I GAVE these talks, not because I am anyone in particular, but because I was asked to do so. I think they asked me chiefly for two reasons: firstly, because I am a layman, not a clergyman; and secondly, because I had been a non-Christian for many years. It was thought that both these

I was born on Nov 29th 1898 in a semi-detached house in the suburbs of Belfast, being the second son and second child of a solicitor and a clergy.



7 Major Trajectories in Theological Reflection (xx-xxi)

1. **Writing the Living Human Document:** God is experienced in intimate personal communion speaking through interiority. Journaling, autobiography and therapeutic accounts of the self become vehicles for theological discovery. ***A Grief Observed***
2. **Canonical Narrative Theology:** Believers seek to place their own stories within the framework of the story the Church tells about Jesus in order to discover and perform their own parts in this great drama. **A hint in *Reflections on the Psalms*, but see Lewis' retellings of biblical stories (e.g., *Perelandra*, Narnia)**
3. **Constructive Narrative Theology:** The narratives that form the foundational traditions of faith are woven together with the stories that believers tell of encounters with God in their own lives, becoming revelatory for us and linking back to the Christian tradition. **See Lewis' "baptism of the imagination" narrative (*George MacDonal*), his conversion story as military surrender (*Surprised by Joy*), his Dantean purgatory dream (*The Great Divorce*), fictional use of myth and Augustinian *Confession* (*Till We Have Faces*), progress narratives (*Pilgrim's Regress*, Narnia, *Out of the Silent Planet*), liturgy (*That Hideous Strength*), retelling *Paradise Lost* (*Perelandra*)**
4. **Corporate Theological Reflection:** The community generates corporate narratives in the course of life together, articulating purpose in shared stories. **Not a huge feature of Lewis' work, but see *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, *Arthurian Torso*, the Socratic Club Manifesto, Tolkien's "Notion Club Papers," Diana Glycer's *The Company They Keep***



Did C.S. Lewis Ask Walton's Questions for Self-writing? (xvi)

1. How does my personal history generate presuppositions that influence my approach to this topic?
2. How does my gender/ class/ ethnicity/ sexual identity/ cultural location influence my understanding?
3. Where do my allegiances lie? How do my commitments guide my approach to inquiry?
4. What can my body and my emotional responses contribute to generating the knowledge I seek?

"I must add that the limitations of my own gifts has compelled me always to use a predominantly intellectual approach" ("Modern Man and His Categories of Thought")

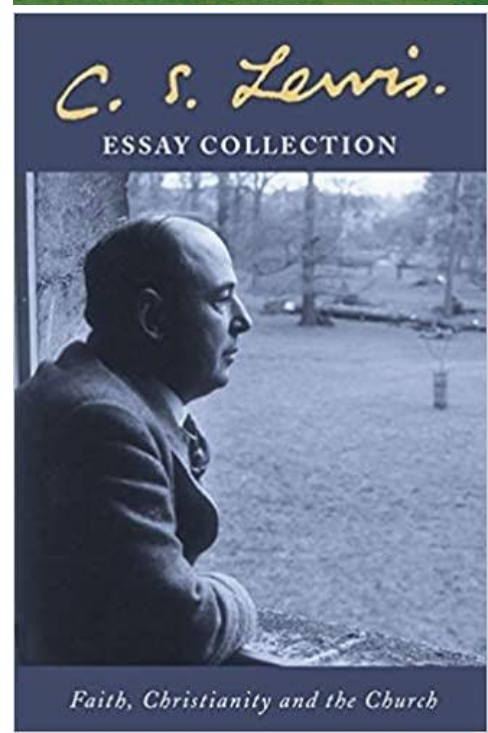
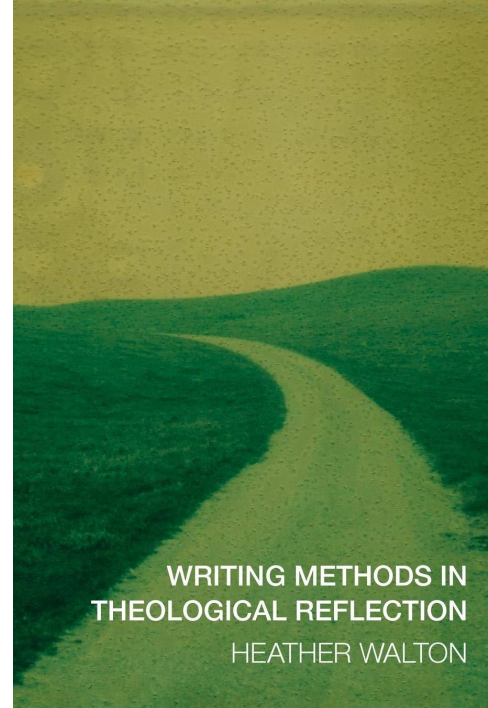
"These strict limitations in my experience must be kept in mind by the readers. How rash it would be to generalise from such an experience I myself discovered...." ("God in the Dock")

"My experience even of such feeble attempts as I have made to live the spiritual life..." ("Religion: Reality or Substitute?")

"I should not deceive you: I should not even deceive myself. I have therefore decided to bestow all my childishness upon you...." (Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?)

"Such are the reactions of one bleating layman..." ("Fern-seed and Elephants")

"I am only a layman, and I don't know much" ("Answers to Questions on Christianity")

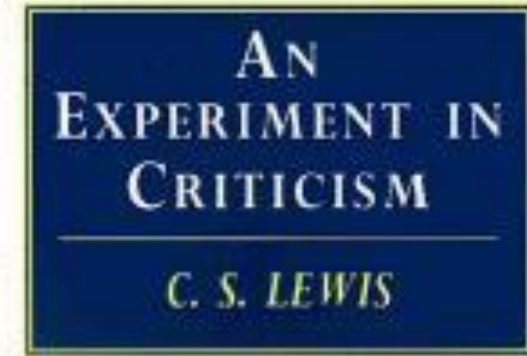


The Prophetic Role of Literature in C.S. Lewis' Thought

We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own....

In love we escape from our self into one other. In the moral sphere, every act of justice or charity involves putting ourselves in the other person's place and thus transcending our own competitive particularity. In coming to understand anything we are rejecting the facts as they are for us in favour of the facts as they are. The primary impulse of each is to maintain and aggrandise himself. The secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness. In love, in virtue, in the pursuit of knowledge, and in the reception of the arts, we are doing this.

Obviously this process can be described either as an enlargement or as a temporary annihilation of the self. But that is an old paradox: "he that loseth his life shall save it."

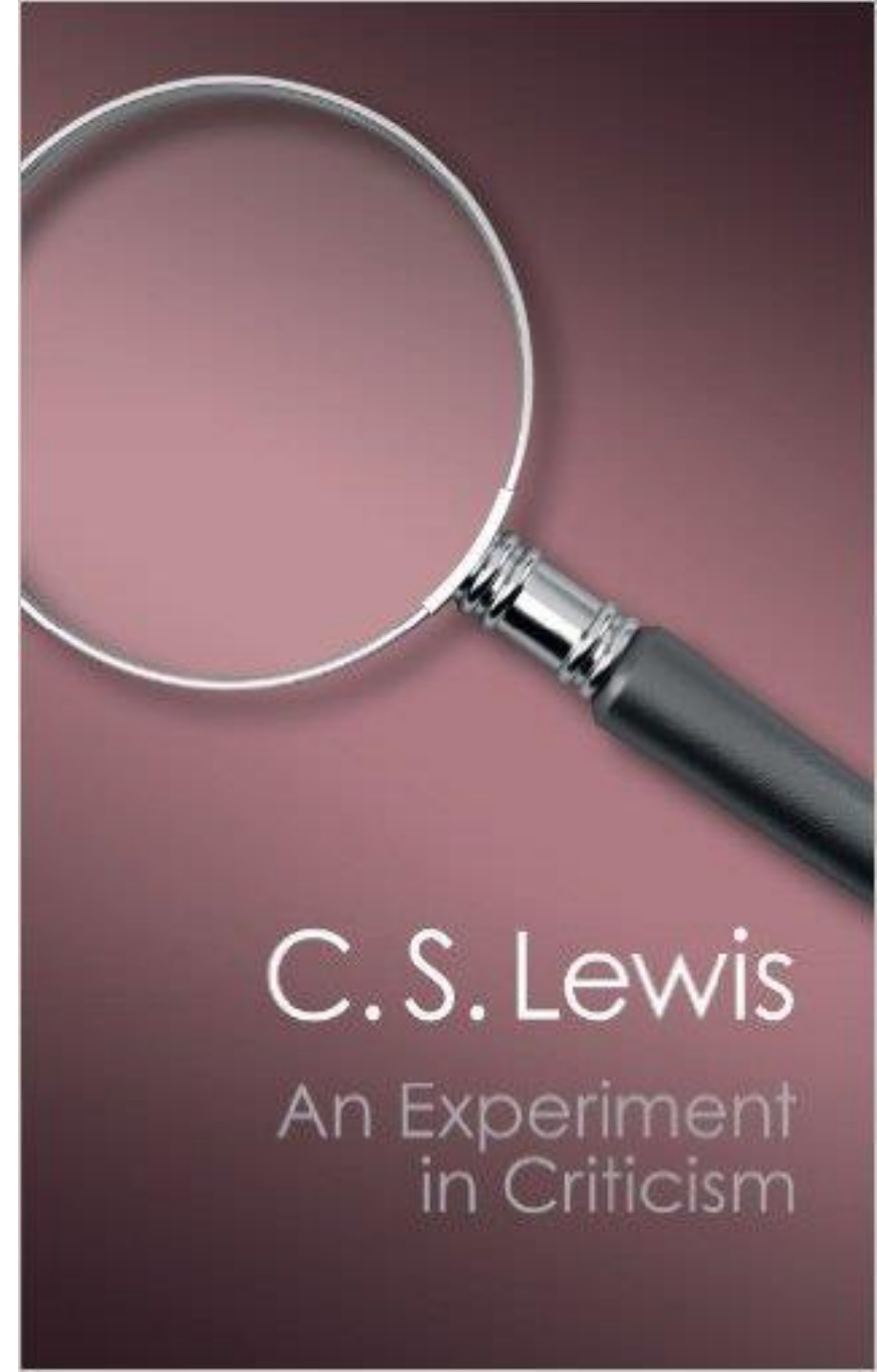


Canto

The Prophetic Role of Literature in C.S. Lewis' Thought

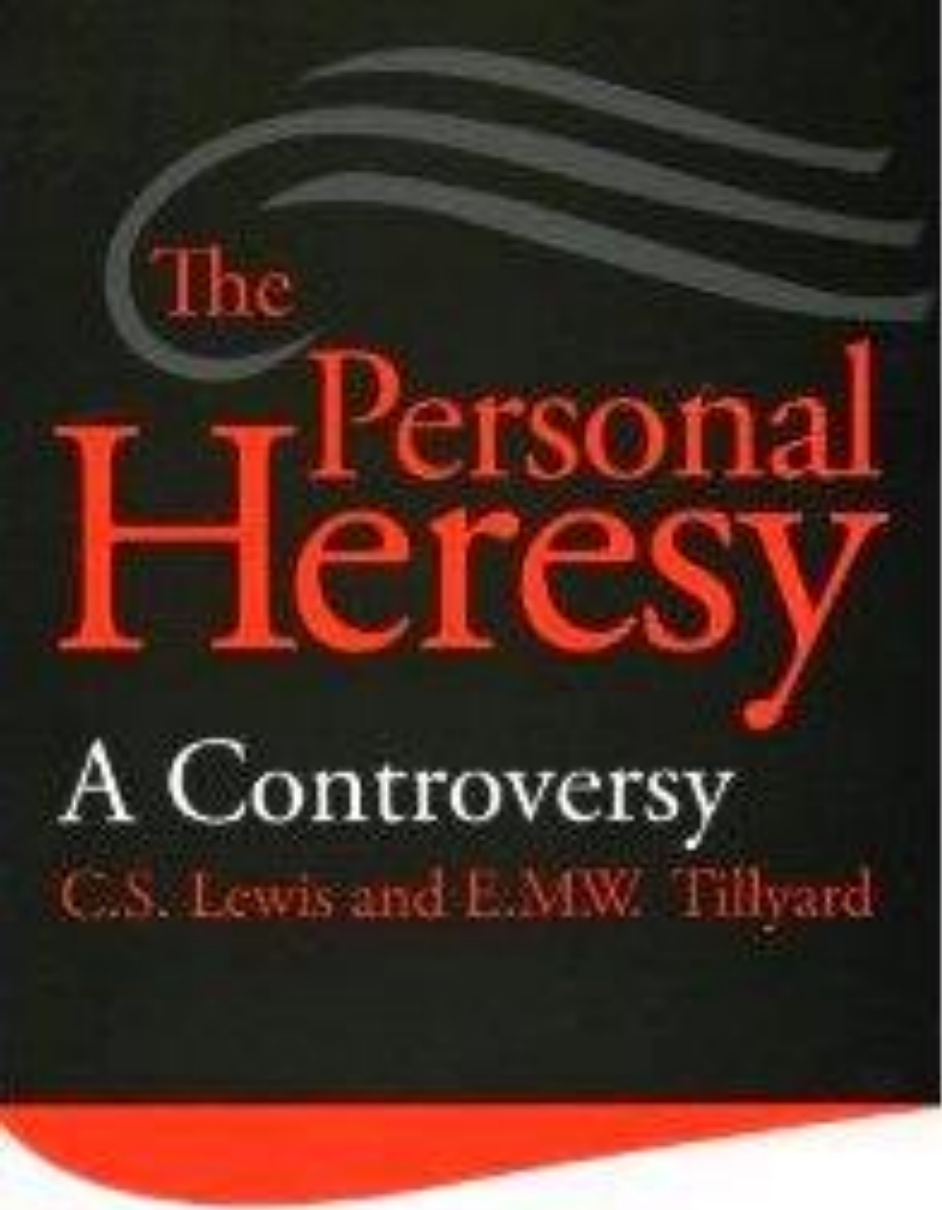
We therefore delight to enter into other men's beliefs ... even though we think them untrue. And into their passions, though we think them depraved. And also into their imaginations, though they lack all realism of content. Not only nor chiefly in order to see what they are like but in order to see what they see, to occupy, for a while, their seat in the great theatre, to use their spectacles and be made free of whatever insights, joys, terrors, wonders or merriment those spectacles reveal.

My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others.... But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do (Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 138-141).



C.S. Lewis

An Experiment
in Criticism



The
Personal
Heresy

A Controversy

C.S. Lewis and E.M.W. Tillyard

EDITED BY Joel D. Heck

INTRODUCTION BY Bruce L. Edwards

The Personal Heresy

“In this paper I shall maintain that when we read poetry as poetry should be read, we have before us no representation which claims to be the poet, and frequently no representation of a *man*, a *character*, or a *personality* at all” (Lewis, 4).

“To see things as the poet sees them I must share his consciousness and not attend to it; I must look where he looks and not turn round to face him; I must make of him not a spectacle but a pair of spectacles” (Lewis, 14).

“Lewis believed that the proper work of a literary critic is to write about the merits and faults of a book, rather than to speculate about the genesis of the book or the author's private life” (Hooper, *God in the Dock*, 10; see *Abolition of Man*).

The Personal Heresy

a controversy



E. M. W. Tillyard



C. S. Lewis

The Personal Heresy ... however ...

- Lewis softens his thesis: “within the realm of imaginative literature,” at least, there is “a good reason for putting the poet out of sight while we read” (Lewis, 61)
- Almost every Lewis critic I know commits the Personal Heresy, agreeing with Tillyard’s approach: “I sometimes find that the criticism which tries to explain the author’s state of mind ... gives me satisfaction” and “the biography, the facts of personality, the data for the mental pattern of the man’s life, may substantially help our understanding of the mental pattern as revealed in his art” (Tillyard, 71, 43)
- On almost every page of the central literary critical work in mammoth study of 16th century literature makes some link from the poem to the author’s life
- “During the war I saw....” (1)
- *An Experiment of Criticism* (1961) is about the reader’s response
- *The Discarded Image* (1964) is about linking poetry with culture

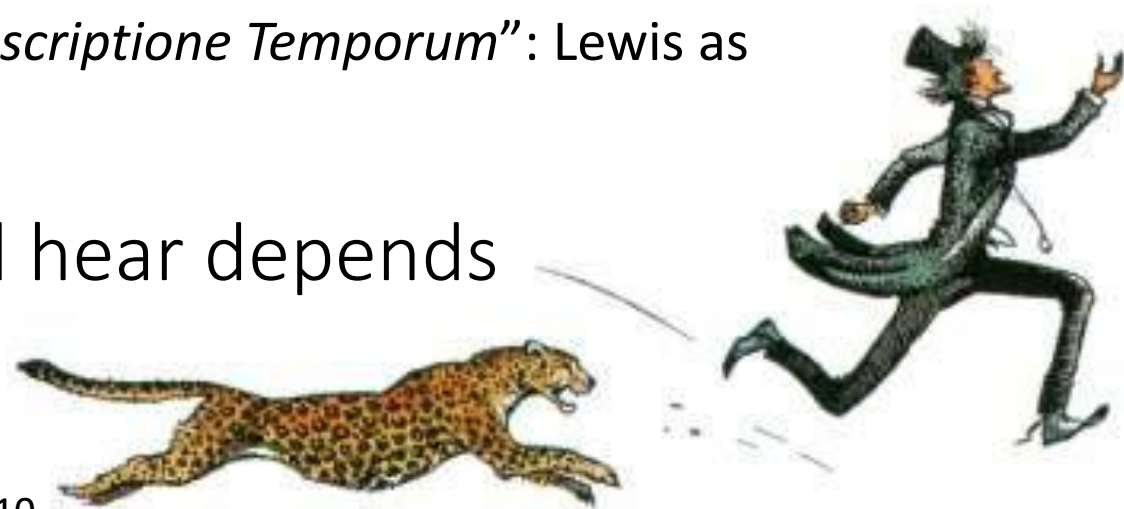


C.S. Lewis' "Two Ways of Seeing"

- In the course of *The Personal Essay*, Lewis distinguishes not just genre or voice, but develops a two-stage reading: first, surrender to the text, receive it, let it work on us and us in it; then, consider the poem
- *An Experiment in Criticism* completes his argument for this "surrender to the text"
- His literary books are about giving students and readers tools to read well (culture, religious contexts, historical setting, language, words)
- "Meditation in a Tool" (in *Undeceptions/God in the Dock, First and Second Things, Compelling Reason*)
- Lucy and the Albatross (*Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, ch. 12)
- This brings us back to "*De Descriptione Temporum*": Lewis as specimen vs. scholar

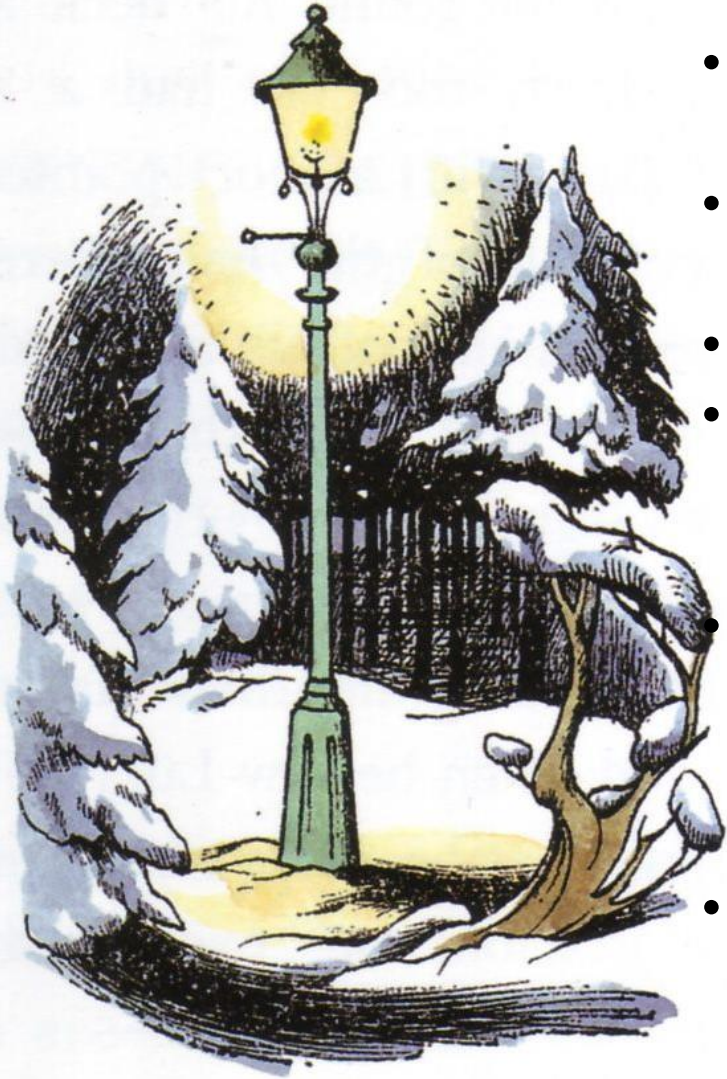
"For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing"

Lewis, *Magician's Nephew*, ch. 10



How Do We See This?

- Lewis' distinctions in literary theory were about avoiding objectivist and subjectivist reductionisms and resisting cultural hegemonies
- There are prophetic elements in Lewis: "the whole present dynasty has got to die and rot before anything can be done at all" ("Unreal Estates")
- What *would* it mean to receive the literature before we use it?
- Does what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing? If so, what does that mean for our work? What does it mean to recognize different kinds of knowledge today?
- In an incomplete and often instinctive form, Lewis consistently offers unusual and intriguing perspectives about contemporary questions of literary theory, cultural criticism, and teaching
- I hope that we can open ourselves creatively, with excellence, care, and perspicuity, to self-writing and autoethnography in our teaching, writing, and scholarship



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Literature and Theology

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