Digital Commons @ George Fox University

Faculty Publications - Department of English | Department of English

2018

C. S. Lewis' Ambivalence toward Rhetoric and Style

Gary L. Tandy

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/eng_fac

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

CSL
The Bulletin of
The New York C. S. Lewis Society

March/April 2018 | Vol. 49, No. 2 | Whole No. 484

C. S. Lewis' Ambivalence toward Rhetoric and Style

by Gary L. Tandy

Contents

CSL's Ambivalence Toward Rhetoric 1
Report of the February Meeting 9
Bits & Pieces 10
Save the Date 11
Future Meetings 11
CSL Tells Us What to Read 12
Jack & the Bookshelf #36 14
Report of the March Meeting 16

Photo used by permission of
The Marion E. Wade Center,
Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL

Published bi-monthly for the subscribing members of the New York C. S. Lewis Society (Founded 1969)
website www.nycslsociety.com

Library of Congress ISSN 0883-9980

Subscription:
$10.00 for six consecutive issues;
$20.00 foreign

Editor: Robert Trexler
23 Julian Drive, Hamden, CT 06518
RHTrexler@gmail.com

Correspondence/subscriptions/renewals:
Clara Sarrocco,
84-23 77th Avenue, Glendale NY 11385
CSarrocco@aol.com

©2018 NEW YORK C. S. LEWIS SOCIETY

While C. S. Lewis has been called by many names (scholar, teacher, speaker, philosopher, literary critic, and theologian, to name only a few), rhetorician is the name he often used to describe himself, and, based upon his life and body of work, it is perhaps one of the most appropriate titles for him. As James Como asserts, "[Lewis'] rhetorical temper provided a compulsiveness and a posture that could be resolved only in argument. Training, taste, and talent equipped him for an academic and apologetic career, to the exclusion of nearly all others. . . Lewis was the quintessential *Homo rhetoricus*, knew it, acquitted himself superbly at being just that, and yet remained deeply troubled by his own efficacy."[1]

It is this last phrase in Como's description upon which I wish to focus: "yet remained deeply troubled by his own efficacy." Why was Lewis, of all people, ambivalent about rhetoric? After all, he called himself a rhetorician, he practiced rhetoric (most explicitly in the form of apologetics) in his published writings, and he is often cited as one of the twentieth century's most successful Christian communicators.

James Como is not the only scholar to claim that Lewis was ambivalent about rhetoric. Greg Anderson, in a recent article on "Reflections on the Psalms," makes the same claim though he also cites a counter-argument: "When I once advanced this claim, James Herrick remarked, 'Lewis was ambivalent about rhetoric the way George Patton was ambivalent about Sherman tanks'".[2] Herrick's reaction illustrates in a humorous way why this subject merits our attention. It seems puzzling that someone like Lewis, who was so masterful in using the arts of persuasion and language, was, at the same time, apparently troubled about his own success. That Lewis had reservations about rhetoric is evident from his choice of words in a 1940 letter to Eliza Marian Butler: "I am also an Irishman and a congenital rhetorician: that is why I assume in speaking to you the melancholy privileges of a fellow-patient."[3] Here Lewis speaks as if his propensity for the art was contracted, like a disease, in his

1 Como, James. "Rhetorica Religii" in *Why I Believe in Narnia*. (Zossima Press, 2008), p. 21.

2 Anderson, Gregory. "*Reflections on the Psalms:* C. S. Lewis as Biblical Commentator." *The Bulletin of The New York C. S. Lewis Society*. Vol. 46. No. 2, March/April 2015, pp. 1-9, here p. 1.

3 Lewis, C. S. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume 2*. Ed. Walter Hooper. San Francisco: HarperSanFranciso, 2004, p. 444.

childhood. While Lewis' direct comments about his own rhetorical bent tell part of the story, we have to look further—to his literary criticism and his letters—to discover what lies behind those expressions. This analysis looks at Lewis' comments on rhetoric and style in an attempt to explain why and in what ways Lewis was ambivalent about these arts and suggests that his ambivalence revolved around four chief areas of concern, which can be designated as follows: (1) truth concerns, (2) stylistic concerns, (3) spiritual concerns, and (4) literary concerns.

First, some definitions are in order. Lewis uses the word "rhetoric" in at least two distinct ways. He often uses it to refer to the historical art of rhetoric, as in this passage from *The Discarded Image*: "The ancient teachers of Rhetoric addressed their precepts to orators in an age when public speaking was an indispensable skill for every public man—even for the General in the field—and for every private man if he got involved in litigation. Rhetoric was then not so much the loveliest (*soavissima*) as the most practical of the arts."[4] When Lewis uses the word in this way, his tone is typically positive or neutral. However, he more often uses the term in a decidedly negative way, as in this remark on Sidney's *Arcadia*: "The only real fault is that all the people talk too much and with a tendency to rhetoric . . . ."[5] The Oxford English Dictionary defines rhetoric in this sense as "speech or writing expressed in terms calculated to persuade; hence (often in depreciatory sense), language characterized by artificial or ostentatious expression" and provides this example from the early 17th century: "Heere is no substance but a simple peece Of gaudy Rhetoricke."[6]

But there's another term important for discerning Lewis' attitude toward rhetoric. It is a word that appears over four times as often as "rhetoric" in Lewis' collected letters: "style." In a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves, Lewis, as an 18-year-old, provided his own definition of style: "For every thought can be expressed in a number of different ways: and style is the art of expressing a given thought in the most beautiful words and rhythms of words."[7] As we shall see, Lewis had strong preferences regarding prose style; thus, his remarks concerning his own and the style of other authors can help us understand Lewis' nuanced views of rhetoric and language. Also, though a number of scholars have noted Lewis' ambivalence toward rhetoric, few, if any, have recognized a similar ambivalence in Lewis' comments on style.

Truth Concerns

Ever since Plato raised the objection that rhetoricians (or at least Sophists) were skilled at making the weaker argument appear the stronger and taught others to do the same, rhetoric has been under attack. Is rhetoric nothing more than the manipulation of language to doubtful ends? Is rhetoric simply a means of ignoring or subverting truth? Lewis was keenly aware of these objections and addressed them directly. In discussing John Milton's manipulation of the reader in *Paradise Lost*, he notes: "I do not think (and no great civilization has ever thought) that the art of the rhetorician is necessarily vile. It is in itself noble, though of course, like most arts, it can be wickedly used. Both these arts [poetry and rhetoric], in my opinion, definitely aim at doing something to an audience. And both do it by using language to control what already exists in our minds."[8]

Even in his defense of rhetoric, Lewis admits that dishonest and unprincipled writers and speakers could use the art of language wickedly. He gives two striking examples in his letters where he believed this to be the case. The first comes from a 1927 letter where he shares this anecdote with his father:

> I dined the other night at an Italian Professor's, who is a Fellow of Magdalen, and sat next to a Frenchwoman who has met Mussolini. She says he is a rhetorician, and escapes from questions he doesn't want to answer into a cloud of eloquence. I asked if she thought him a charlatan. She said no: he quite believes all his own gas, like a school boy, and is carried away by it himself. It interested me very much as being true to type—Cicero must have been just that sort of man. She also claimed to have said to him 'Yes, I have heard all the rhetoric, now I want the real answer', which I took

4 Lewis, C. S. *The Discarded Image.* London: Cambridge University Press, 1964, p. 190.

5 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to Arthur Greeves," June 20, 1916, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume 1.* Ed. Walter Hooper. San Francisco: HarperSanFranciso, 2004, p. 197.

6 *The Oxford English Dictionary.*

7 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to Arthur Greeves, August 4, 1917, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 333.

8 Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost.* London: Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 53.

leave (silently) to disbelieve.[9]

Lewis seems to be citing Mussolini here as a cautionary tale about a misguided thinker, in this case a powerful political leader, who nonetheless used rhetoric effectively. And the Frenchwoman's comment that Mussolini believed his own gas would have been confirmation for Lewis of the dangers of getting carried away with one's own rhetoric, dangers that he recognized not just in others but in himself. In a letter to his father written some four months later, Lewis notes: "like all us Celts, I am a born rhetorician, one who finds pleasure in the forcible emotions independently of their grounds and even to the extent to which they are felt at any time save the moment of speaking. Like the obscure poet whom I saw mentioned in the local newspaper at Caerleon, I love to 'ride like a cork on the ocean of eloquence': and whenever you hear me inveighgling in 'Ercles vein' you must take this into account."[10] The similarity between the Frenchwoman's description of Mussolini and Lewis' description of himself is hard to miss, and, given that the letters were written near the same time, it's possible that Lewis has the Mussolini anecdote in mind when he describes his own rhetorical tendencies.

The other example from Lewis' letters of someone using rhetoric wickedly is an even more powerful political leader: Adolf Hitler. In a 1940 letter to his brother, Lewis recounts an evening when he and his friend Dr. Havard listened to one of Hitler's speeches. Lewis notes: "I don't know if I'm weaker than other people: but it is a positive revelation to me how *while the speech lasts* it is impossible not to waver just a little. I should be useless as a schoolmaster or a policeman. Statements which I *know* to be untrue all but convince me, at any rate for the moment, if only the man says them unflinchingly."[11] While the Mussolini anecdote focused on the rhetorical situation from the speaker's perspective, Lewis' comment on Hitler's rhetorical skill takes the audience's perspective. Lewis expresses amazement at his own gullibility in the presence of the expression of forcible emotion by a convincing speaker, underscoring the dangers of rhetoric used for deceptive purposes.

Lewis' fears about misuse of rhetoric by powerful men would find expression in several of his novels. Consider, for example, Weston (or the Unman) in *Perelandra* or Shift in *The Last Battle*, both of whom use rhetoric and twist the meaning of language for evil purposes. Underlying Lewis' concerns especially was his belief that truth could be ignored or obscured by false rhetoric. In a 1940 letter to Eliza Marian Butler, he turns to his own experience during his atheist years for an example of the dangers:

> What makes me specially sensitive to this danger is that I believe I fell victim to it myself for many years, during which I professed indeed to be in mental suspense but really talked, felt, and behaved sometimes as if one answer were right and sometimes as if the other were right, choosing whichever happened to suit the rhetorical or emotional needs of the moment—with the result that the *total* effect of my talk, feeling, and behavior was compatible with *no* conceivable universe. For the one thing we do know is that both can't be true.[12]

Or as Lewis commented in much briefer fashion about his research for *The Allegory of Love*, "Indeed . . . the most delightful sentences would come into one's head: and now half of them can't be used because, knowing a little more about the subject, I find they aren't true. That's the worst of facts—they do cramp a fellow's style."[13]

Stylistic Concerns

In addition to his concerns about the connection between rhetoric and truth, Lewis often commented in his letters and literary criticism on the connection between rhetoric and style. Some background will be helpful in placing these remarks in the context of Lewis' thought. In his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis notes: "Every poem can be considered in two ways—as what the poet has to say, and as a *thing*, which he *makes*. From one point of view it is an expression of opinions and emotions; from the other it is an organization of words which exists to produce a particular kind of patterned experience in

9 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to his father," March 30, 1927, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 681-82.

10 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to his father," July 29, 1927, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 713-14.

11 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to Warren Lewis," July 20, 1940, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 425.

12 Lewis, C. S. October 14, 1940, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 448.

13 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to his father," July 10, 1928, *CL*, vol. 1, pp. 766-67.

the reader."[14] Similarly in defending his apologetic method against critics, he notes: "This is relevant to my manner [style] as well as my matter."[15] The main point to note here is that Lewis always makes a distinction between matter or content and manner or style, and, while both are important, Lewis believes that content is more important and that considerations of style should never be given preeminence over considerations of content. It was a view Lewis developed early in life. The distinction can be seen easily in this comment by the fifteen-year-old Lewis: "This week I have taken a course of A. C. Benson's essays, which have impressed me very favourably indeed. . . . He has a clear, simple, but melodious style, second as I think only to Ruskin, and the matter is always suggestive, weighty, and original. He always makes you think, which a book ought to."[16] Lewis' separation of style and content did not mean he denied the power of language, nor did he think that separating style from content was a simple matter. Note this comment from the seventeen-year-old Lewis: "Isn't it funny the way some combinations of words can give you—almost apart from their meaning—a thrill like music?"[17]

So while Lewis appreciated the beauties of stylistic expression, he remained distrustful of writers who used rhetoric as a substitute for clear thinking and of critics who allowed stylistic effects to become preeminent in their evaluation of literature. Lewis himself held strong personal preferences regarding effective style. His comments on Sir Thomas Elyot's prose are typical: "The important thing is that Elyot is aware of prose as an art. His sentences do not simply happen, they are built. He keeps a firm hold of his construction, he is nearly always lucid, and his rhythm is generally sound."[18] Lewis clearly valued artistic prose so long as it was clear and easy to understand. By contrast, Lewis disliked prose that was self-consciously artistic or excessively embellished. He criticized Thomas More's style, for example, for its "invertebrate length of sentence" and "fumbling multiplication of epithets."[19] Lewis' pejorative use of the term "rhetoric" often occurs toward writers whose content is deficient, as in this comment on Lavengro: "I still dislike his anti-Catholic propaganda and the rhetorical passages where the inspiration failed him and he filled up with the usual style of the period."[20] For Lewis, the ideal situation occurred when the rhetoric was aligned with the meaning, as he notes in this reference to G.K. Chesterton: "Yes, Chesterton can be, in the bad sense, rhetorical, but v[ery] seldom is. As a man once said to me 'G.K.C. has the same quality of becoming *more* eloquent the more exactly he means what he says.'"[21]

Lewis' concerns about an overemphasis on style should be seen in the context of his larger theological beliefs about the relationship of art to the Christian life and imagination. Readers of Lewis' fiction will recall a striking example from *The Great Divorce.* When the artist from the Grey Town wants to remain in heaven so he can paint it, the bright person advises him to put art aside and attend to more significant matters: "At present your business is to see. Come and see. He [God] is endless."[22] As Marsha Daigle-Williamson explains in her study of Lewis and Dante:

> As in *The Divine Comedy*, art is not condemned . . . . Although art is not inconsistent with or contrary to spiritual life and can even communicate that life, when it no longer maintains a secondary, subordinate position and ceases to be a means of expressing and becomes an end in itself, it is no longer in 'right order.'
>
> When love of art is in that 'disordered' state, it effectively eclipses the reality that art has the potential to communicate.[23]

If we replace the word "art" in the quote above with "style" and replace "spiritual life" with "truth"

14 Lewis, C. S. *"Preface,"* pp. 2-3.

15 Lewis, C. S. "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger" in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics.* Ed.Walter Hooper. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970, pp. 177-183, here p. 182.

16 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to his father," June 7, 1914, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 65.

17 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to Arthur Greeves," March 21, 1916, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 175.

18 Lewis, C. S. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama.* London: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 276.

19 Lewis, C. S. *English Literature,* p. 180.

20 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to Arthur Greeves," February 14, 1920, *Collected Letters*, vol.1, p. 475.

21 Lewis, C. S. "Letter to Corbin Scott Carnell," December 10, 1958, *Collected Letters,* vol. 3, p. 995.

22 Lewis, C. S. *The Great Divorce.* San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001, p. 84.

23 Daigle-Williamson, Marsha. *Reflecting the Eternal: Dante's Divine Comedy in the Novels of C. S. Lewis.* Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015, p. 199.

or "meaning," we will arrive at a fair description of Lewis' attitude toward style. For Lewis, style was a useful tool, but like rhetoric, it must be used and seen as subordinate to truth and meaning; it was a matter of priority, a matter of order.

As to literary critics who overemphasized style, in a 1931 letter to his brother, Lewis expressed his annoyance at

> this endless talk about books 'living by the style'. Jeremy Taylor 'lives by the style in spite of his obsolete theology'; Thos. Browne does the same, in spite of 'the obsolete cast of his mind': Ruskin and Carlyle do the same in spite of their 'obsolete social and political philosophy'. To read histories of literature one would suppose that the great authors of the past were a sort of chorus of melodious idiots who said, in beautifully cadenced language that black was white and that two and two made five. When one turns to the books themselves—well I, at any rate, find nothing obsolete. The silly things these great men say, were as silly then as they are now; the wise ones are as wise now as they were then.[24]

While Lewis' primary concern here is to cite an instance of what he called chronological snobbery, the quote still demonstrates his warning about what happens when critics emphasize style and deemphasize content. Much later, Lewis would state his opinion to Dorothy Sayers that rhetorical criticism had become fashionable among literary critics: "No, sister Dinosaur, under the influence of Rosamund Tuve all the v[ery] best youngest people have stopped using 'rhetoric' as a term of abuse. They'll talk about the technique of Rhetoric till the cows come home."[25]

Taken together, Lewis' comments about style relate to matters of proper emphasis and his concern that attention to style not divert the reader or critic from what was most important in the art of communication. As he notes in *The Allegory of Love,* "There is nothing so cold, so disinterested, as the heart of a stylist."[26]

Spiritual Concerns

"Rhetoric," says Alan Jacobs, "is the art of persuasive speech or writing; therefore anyone who does Christian Apologetics is willy-nilly engaged in rhetorical activity."[27] Much of Lewis' literary activity in the 1940s focused on apologetics. The British novelist John Wain notes that Lewis saw it as "his duty to defend the Christian faith . . .against the hostility or indifference that surrounded it" and that Lewis had a "naturally rhetorical streak in him that made it a pleasure to cultivate the arts of winning people's attention and assent."[28] Lewis' own writing provides ample evidence that he felt called to this work, and the unexpected response to his broadcast talks on the BBC and the ongoing popularity of *Mere Christianity* indicate he excelled at it. Why, then, would Lewis feel ambivalent about applying his skills to apologetic work? It appears one concern had to do with the effect on his spiritual life. As James Como notes, "His old, ambivalent view of the art is intimately tied to his equally ambivalent view of one's self and the Christian demand that it be transcended."[29]

In his poem entitled "An Apologist's Evening Prayer," Lewis addresses the rhetorical issue directly:

> From all my lame defeats and oh! Much more
> From all the victories that I seemed to score;
> From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
> At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
> From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
> Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.
> Lord of the narrow gate and the needle's eye,
> Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.
>
> (Lines 1-6; 11-12)[30]

24 Lewis, C. S. November 22, 1931, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 21.

25 Lewis, C. S. July 1, 1957, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 863.

26 Lewis, C. S. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition.* London: Oxford University Press, 1936; Rpt. 1981, p. 106.

27 Jacobs, Alan. "Rhetoric and the Task of Apologetics in Contemporary America." *The Challenge Of Religious Pluralism: An Evangelical Analysis and Response: Proceedings of the Wheaton Theology Conference*, Volume 1: Spring, 1992, pp. 163-173, here p. 163.

28 Wain, John. "A Great Clerke." in *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table.* Ed. James Como. New York: Macmillan, 1979, p. 69.

29 Como, James, pp. 173-74.

30 Lewis, C. S. "The Apologist's Evening Prayer." in *Poems.* Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964, p. 129.

The words "cleverness" and "trumpery" seem especially notable in view of earlier discussions about the dangers of rhetoric. In his concerns about rhetoric and truth and rhetoric and style, Lewis feared that the skillful rhetorician could make the worse appear better or the skillful stylist could mask untruths or lack of sincerity through ornamentation. In the poem, as Lewis considers the spiritual dimensions of rhetoric through apologetics, he fears that even rhetoric used in the service of truth can become a temptation to spiritual pride for the writer. In the end, Lewis suggests, brilliant logical arguments and stylistic ornamentation become so much foolishness and "gaudy rhetorike" when seen from God's perspective. Lewis states a related concern in a 1946 letter to Dorothy Sayers:

> "My own frequent uneasiness comes from another source—the fact that apologetic work is so dangerous to one's own faith. A doctrine never seems dimmer to me than when I have just successfully defended it."[31]

At least part of Lewis' problem here appears to focus on pride and reminds us of his discussion of what he called "the great sin" in *Mere Christianity.* In that chapter he confesses, "I wish I had got a bit further with humility myself: if I had, I could probably tell you more about the relief, the comfort, of taking the fancy-dress off—getting rid of the false self, with all its 'Look at me . . . .'"[32] Lewis was painfully aware that, like the painter in *The Great Divorce*, who was disappointed that his artistic skills were not praised—or even needed—in heaven, the Christian apologist/rhetorician could be tempted to place his confidence in himself and in his rhetorical brilliance, not in God.

31 Lewis, C. S. August 2, 1946, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 730.

32 Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity.* San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001, p. 128.

When ordering through Amazon go to Amazon Smile for the New York C.S. Lewis Society and a percentage of your purchase will be sent to the Society at

http://smile.amazon.com/ch/11-2970934

Literary Concerns

Ultimately, Lewis' ambivalence toward his apologetic work may have been a factor in his negative attitudes toward his literary career in the closing years of the 1940s. In his recent biography of Lewis, Alister McGrath identifies a desire on Lewis' part to move away from a frontline apologetic role following the war. McGrath cites several factors that may have figured into Lewis' decision, including the famous Socratic club debate with Elizabeth Anscombe. In that debate, the philosopher questioned the validity of Lewis' argument against naturalism in his book *Miracles.* As McGrath notes, "While it is important to avoid exaggerations about the impact of Anscombe on Lewis in his later Oxford years, there are clear indications that she played a part in causing Lewis to rethink his role as an apologist around this time."[33] One of the clearest is Lewis' 1950 letter to Stella Aldwinckle, President of the Oxford Socratic Club, suggesting a program of speakers for the upcoming year. Lewis gives his strongest recommendation for Elizabeth Anscombe, saying, "having obliterated me as an Apologist ought she not to *succeed* me?"[34]

Several of Lewis' comments in his correspondence indicate that certainly by 1947, he had grown weary of his work as an apologist, and this evidence leads McGrath to suggest that Lewis was beginning to "see apologetics as an important episode in his career, rather than as its goal and zenith."[35] Lewis' comment to Dorothy Sayers about the damaging effect of apologetic argument on his faith has already been cited. But the clearest expression comes from his Latin correspondence with Don Giovanni Calabria, this from a 1949 letter:

> As for my own work, I would not wish to deceive you with vain hope. I am now in my fiftieth year. I feel my zeal for writing, and whatever talent I originally possessed, to be decreasing; nor (I believe) do I please my readers as I used to. I labour under many difficulties. My house is unquiet and devastated by women's quarrels. I have *to dwell in the tents of Kedar.* My aged mother, worn

33 McGrath, Alister. *C. S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet.* Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2013, p. 258.

34 Lewis, C. S. December 6, 1950, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 35.

35 McGrath, Alister, p. 258.

out by long infirmity, is my daily care.[36]

As the reference to family life makes clear, Lewis' crisis was not simply a literary one. Though he focuses on Mrs. Moore's condition, the truth is that Lewis himself was worn down, physically and emotionally, from caring for her. Only a few months later, he would be admitted to the hospital with a severe case of streptococcus and exhaustion. However, as the next part of the letter to Calabria makes clear, Lewis was undergoing a crisis of confidence as a writer and its scope was larger than his apologetic work:

> These things I write not as complaints but lest you should believe I am writing books. If it shall please God that I write more books, blessed be He. If it shall not please Him, again, blessed be He. Perhaps it will be the most wholesome thing for my soul that I lose both fame and skill lest I were to fall into that evil disease, vainglory.[37]

Of course, readers of Lewis are grateful that his creative slump was just that and that he went on to write *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Till We Have Faces*, among other books, in the 1950s and 60s. Still it is striking, as McGrath points out, "how few of his writings of this later period of his life deal specifically with apologetic themes, if understood in terms of the explicit rational defence of the Christian faith."[38] That this was a conscious decision on Lewis' part is again indicated by his correspondence. In a letter of September 1955, declining the invitation of the American evangelical leader Carl Henry to write some apologetic pieces, Lewis wrote:

> My thought and talent (such as they are) now flow in different, though I think not less Christian, channels, and I do not think I am at all likely to write more *directly* theological pieces. . . . If I am now good for anything it is for catching the reader unawares—through fiction and symbol. I have done what I could in the way of frontal attacks, but I now feel quite sure those days are over.[39]

36 Lewis, C. S. January 14, 1949, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 905-06.
37 Lewis, C. S. January 14, 1949, *CL*, vol. 2, p. 906.
38 McGrath, Alister, p. 260.
39 Lewis, C. S. September 28, 1955, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 651.

Earlier, I quoted Alan Jacobs's comment on rhetoric and apologetics. In that same article, Jacobs suggests that Lewis' apologetics were aimed at an audience modeled, consciously or unconsciously, on his highly rational atheist tutor Kirkpatrick, a breed that had all but died out by the time Lewis wrote.[40] Perhaps when Lewis refused Carl Henry's request, he had come to accept the limitations of the rational approach. Going forward he would appeal to his audience, not through the frontal attacks of rational argument, but indirectly through imagination, for as he said in the essay "Bluspels and Flalansferes," "reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning."[41]

To put Lewis' decision about his literary career in context, we should be clear it was not that Lewis was dropping one literary form (apologetics) and adopting a new one (fiction). For, in fact, during the 1940s, Lewis had also published an impressive amount of imaginative literature including *The Great Divorce, The Screwtape Letters, Perelandra,* and *That Hideous Strength.* Rather Lewis was saying that his literary preference would henceforth be imaginative literature as opposed to nonfictional apologetics.

So, yes, Lewis was ambivalent about rhetoric and style for several reasons—artistic, theological, spiritual, and personal. He understood their usefulness and power, but as a Christian author, he also recognized all too well the dangers inherent in the arts. He saw rhetoric and style as tools that should be used carefully and that must always be subservient to truth. Additionally, his attitudes toward rhetoric appear to have evolved and shifted throughout his literary career. During the war years, he saw it as his Christian duty to use his rhetorical powers for apologetic purposes, but in his later career, he came to prefer an indirect approach to apologetics, which he said could be found in fiction and symbol. It seems fair to say that rather than abandoning apologetics, he discovered how to do apologetics through a different medium. Lewis would continue to use rhetoric, but he would use it for different effects and in imaginative forms that would renew his zeal for writing and captivate his readers in a surprising way. Those of us who read and teach the works of this congenital rhetorician are well aware that

40 Jacobs, Alan, p. 164.
41 Lewis, C. S. "Bluspels and Flalansferes" in *Selected Literary Essays.* Ed. Walter Hooper. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 265.

they continue to intrigue and captivate readers even in the 21st century. As a result, our understanding of writing, literature, and faith and that of our students is, thankfully, enriched.

# # #

Gary L. Tandy is Professor of English and Chair of the English and Theatre Department at George Fox University, near Portland, Oregon, where he teaches a course on C. S. Lewis and Friends. He frequently reviews books related to the Inklings for *Christianity and Literature*. His book, *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C. S. Lewis's Nonfiction Prose*, was published by Kent State University Press in 2009, and his article, "The Stylistic Achievement of *Mere Christianity*," appeared in *Sehnsucht: The C. S. Lewis Journal* in 2012.

Works Cited

Anderson, Gregory. "*Reflections on the Psalms:* C. S. Lewis as Biblical Commentator." *The Bulletin of The New York C. S. Lewis Society.* Vol. 46. No. 2, March/April 2015, 1-9.

Como, James. "Rhetorica Religii" in *Why I Believe in Narnia.* Zossima Press, 2008.

Daigle-Williamson, Marsha. *Reflecting the Eternal: Dante's Divine Comedy in the Novels of C. S. Lewis.* Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015.

Jacobs, Alan. "Rhetoric and the Task of Apologetics in Contemporary America." *The Challenge Of Religious Pluralism: An Evangelical Analysis and Response: Proceedings of the Wheaton Theology Conference*, Volume 1: Spring, 1992, 163-173.

Lewis, C. S. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition.* London: Oxford University Press, 1936; Rpt. 1981.

Lewis, C. S. "Bluspels and Flalansferes" in *Selected Literary Essays.* Ed. Walter Hooper. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Lewis, C. S. "The Apologist's Evening Prayer." *Poems.* Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964, 129.

Lewis, C. S. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume 1.* Ed. Walter Hooper. San Francisco: HarperSanFranciso, 2004.

Lewis, C. S. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume 2.* Ed. Walter Hooper. San Francisco: HarperSanFranciso, 2004.

Lewis, C. S. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume 3.* Ed. Walter Hooper. San Francisco: HarperSanFranciso, 2007.

Lewis, C. S. *The Discarded Image.* London: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

Lewis, C. S. *The Great Divorce.* San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001.

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity.* San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001.

Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost.* London: Oxford University Press, 1942.

Lewis, C.S. "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger." *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics.* Ed. Walter Hooper. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970, 177-183.

Lewis, C. S. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama.* London: Oxford University Press, 1954.

McGrath, Alister. *C. S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet.* Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2013.

Wain, John. "A Great Clerke." *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table.* Ed. James Como. New York: Macmillan, 1979.

Books in Brief

The Misquotable C.S. Lewis: What He Didn't Say, What He Actually Said, And Why it Matters.
by William O'Flaherty. Forward by Jerry Root

C.S. Lewis wrote many great words, but not everything you see with his name on it is from the famed author of the Narnia books. Seventy-five quotations are presented that have an association in one way or another with a host of names, including: Ryan Seacrest, Anthony Hopkins, Max Lucado, Rick Warren, and Tim Allen!

Learn the three most common ways Lewis is misrepresented: 1. Falsely Attributed Quotes: Expressions that are NOT by him. 2. Paraphrased: Words that are ALMOST what he said. 3. Out of Context: Material he wrote, but are NOT QUITE what he believed.