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Review of C. S. Lewis and the Art of Writing: What the Essayist, Poet, Novelist, Literary Critic, Apologist, Memoirist, Theologian Teaches Us about the Life and Craft of Writing

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that same endearing devotion to Lewis and Tolkien in the essential work of Humphrey Carpenter, Walter Hooper, and George Sayer. Clyde Kilby, as evidenced in *A Well of Wonder*, should doubtless be mentioned alongside them.

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Corey Latta, *C. S. Lewis and the Art of Writing: What the Essayist, Poet, Novelist, Literary Critic, Apologist, Memoirist, Theologian Teaches Us about the Life and Craft of Writing* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016). ix + 239 pages. \$24.00. ISBN 9781498225342.

The twin *foci* of this volume—the writing life of C.S. Lewis and his dedication to the writer’s craft—are subjects as enticing as they are rich with promise. As such, they amply warrant detailed exploration. In the opening pages of this book, the author justly suggests Lewis had a deep and abiding “writerly desire,” which shaped “the life of his craft” (2).

That is a salutary place to begin: with the recognition that Lewis was once a young man who aspired to be a writer, but that there was a time when he had yet to become one. It was, Latta tells us, Lewis’s life as a young reader that opened this world of possibility. Rightly, we are told that he “read himself into the writing life” (13).

This felicitous phrase opens a window on the prime merit of this book: it charts the journey of a greatly gifted writer, in prose that is often finely burnished and well considered. Latta’s detailed description of Lewis’s reading life is no less a benison. In youth, and after, he lingered over books in ways we too seldom know in our time, and could recall:

I am a product of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences, attics explored in solitude, distant noises of gurgling cisterns and pipes, and the noise of wind under the tiles. Also, of endless books.¹

It’s little wonder that with such memories of quiet, unhurried sojourns,

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy* (New York: Harcourt, 1955), 10.

the young Lewis treasured the rare gift of time to know and absorb the books of his parents' library. And as Narnia was a fictional realm he would later create, he must have known in youth a world of literature that would render Narnia the more vivid and fully realized.

In all, fifty well-researched chapters comprise this book—the better in conception as they are none too long (3-4 pages), even as they unveil the facets of Lewis's writing life. Here we encounter Lewis's literary friendships, and how that milieu guided him. Were it not for friends like Arthur Greeves (a lifelong correspondent), and the constructive camaraderie of the Oxford circle we know as The Inklings, Lewis's writing life would have been far different. Lewis's literary influences are also taken up and well considered—poets and prose stylists alike. And Lewis the writer-as-learner is well described in passages that touch on the crucial role played by his tutor, W. T. Kirkpatrick.

Then too, we discover the sheer hardihood that Lewis displayed as a writer as well as his great dedication and discipline to his craft; and this despite incessant demands on his time that mitigated against the keeping of a writer's hours. Among the gems of Latta's text, we learn that Lewis the writer once admonished Arthur Greeves to "practice, practice, practice" (103). If one truly wishes to be a writer, it would be difficult to find wiser or more succinct good counsel.

Throughout his text, Latta largely achieves a fine balance of conversational voice, authorial admonition, interrogatory dialogue, and competent research. Here and there, some forays with the conversational tone fall a bit flat, as with a description of Lewis's first resolve to write *The Screwtape Letters*: "the itch immediately followed the idea" (170). One gets the gist, but another choice of words would have served better.

But such moments are indeed rare. Instead, we may be grateful for shafts of ably written vignettes and fine reflection. Readers wishing to know why C. S. Lewis was, and remains, a "writer's writer" will find much to savor, return to, and profit from in this book.

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