Living Dinosaurs, Literary Specimens, and Misplaced Spectacles: Reflections on C.S. Lewis' Autoethnographic Instinct

Abstract (175 words)

C.S. Lewis makes numerous attempts across his diverse *œuvre* to tell his life story. He uses poetry to frame his philosophical beliefs and religious doubts, writes himself into his fiction, narrates his stories and lectures with personal intimacy, and uses his own experience as evidence for his literary and theological arguments. What, then, of Lewis' literary theoretical work in *The Personal Heresy* (1939), which seems to set aside the individual poet when looking at their poetry?

Lewis' parables and stories that illustrate 'Two Ways of Seeing' provide an epistemological structure that bridges the divide between Lewis' theory and praxis. This paper argues that Lewis displays not only a tendency to be autobiographical but an instinct for what later anthropologists, theologians, and critics will call 'autoethnography.' This paper sets the context for autoethnography as an emergent discipline using the critical approach to literature and theology by Heather Walton and others. Lewis consistently offers a critique of modern scholarship that presents itself as a critical, distant, external study and turns to autobiographically integrated explorations of literature, philosophy, and religion—without falling into solipsism or displacing the text and reader in meaning-making.

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The Sense of a Season: Lewis the Athenian Dinosaur

A snapshot of one season in an author's life can show us how life and work, always in flux, are intricately and curiously bound together. Let's freeze the frame of C.S. Lewis' life in the Autumn of 1954: He is at the height of his literary and scholarly career and undergoing a fundamental personal and academic turning point. As Lewis reframes his academic identity for the public, he also provides a rationale for an approach to scholarship that will later be known as autoethnography.

After nearly two decades of research and writing, in September 1954, Lewis published his *magnum opus*, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*. In October, Lewis officially took up a newly designed Cambridge Chair in Medieval and Renaissance Literature after thirty years as an Oxford don. Known outside academia as a Christian controversialist and popular author with bestselling books like *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), in 1952, Lewis released his 25th book, *Mere Christianity*, a compendium of his WWII BBC talks on faith and life. By the autumn of 1954, his Narnian chronicles were mostly written and the first five had been released in successive years. While not an immediate bestseller, infused the fairy-tale form with his love of literature and his intimacy with Christian faith as the mythic core of

human existence. His memoir, *Surprised by Joy*, was complete and awaiting publication in 1955. Soon, Lewis would begin what is arguably his highest achievement in literary fiction, *Till We Have Faces* (1956). All through this season, Lewis was beginning to fall in love—an entwined process of loss and discovery that historians are unable to record in detail. After all, life and literature are implicated in intriguing ways, as I hope to demonstrate here.

When Lewis gives his Cambridge inaugural address on November 29th, 1954, his 56th birthday, his entire public profile pivots. Titling the talk '*De Descriptione Temporum*'—'a description of the times' or 'a sense of the season'—Lewis does not simply present himself as an expert in period literature and culture, as one might expect. He goes much further, inviting the audience to view him not merely as a *guide* to Medieval and Renaissance literature but as a *specimen* of that culture. While a cultural chasm exists between Cambridge in the 1950s and the Medieval and Renaissance canon, Lewis proposes that 'those who are native to different sides of it can still meet; are meeting in this room.' Lewis then claims to be one of those natives to the lands of the old Western texts. Making himself an antiquity is a kind of disqualification, for in this sophisticated academic age, no one wants 'to be lectured on Neanderthal Man by a Neanderthaler, still less on dinosaurs by a dinosaur.' Still, would not the fellowship of the curious—presumably those in the room with Lewis—yearn for something a little more?

> 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.

Lewis goes on to admit that he would give much to hear even an unlettered ancient Athenian talk about Greek tragedy because '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.'

Two Ways of Seeing and The Subjective Self

It is an audacious claim, that in meeting Lewis, visitors to the lands of Medieval and Renaissance worlds in the Western texts can encounter a native. Yet, even more significant is that here, within one of the most rarified of British academic climates—and given the class environment into which Lewis was speaking—Lewis is mapping out a stunning move from critical, distant, external study to autobiographically integrated scholarship. What a dinosaur, Neanderthal, or old Athenian might show us about them in quite unreflective and accidental ways may provide more precise or piercing truth than our highly cultivated fields of academic scholarship.

Lewis could not have known of a revolution in the field of anthropology moving in the same directions, attempting to close the gap between distant objectivist study and an appreciation of both the interior experience of the community being studied and the implicated nature of the observer. A lack of overt awareness of such turns in a field are a consistent feature: Lewis' peculiar ability to anticipate—even in an imperfect or instinctive form—

important questions of literary theory and epistemology in the generations to come. Lewis then works these ideas into his teaching, literary criticism, and fiction-writing.

For example, in a 1945 thought experiment, 'Meditation in a Toolshed,' Lewis asks us to imagine going into an unlit shed and closing the door. A sunbeam pierces a crack above the door and a shaft of light cuts across the darkness. The sunbeam is distinctive in the gloom, but if we step into the beam of light, we no longer see the shaft of light, as such, but we see 'framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that . . . the sun.'

Lewis uses these two different ways of seeing—looking at the beam of light and looking along it—to suggest two different ways of accessing reality. In one illustration, he considers the study of "love" from two angles: the intimate experience of a lover in love and a neuropsychologist examining the phenomenon of love from outside. In another, Lewis turns to the field of anthropology by contrasting the internal knowledge of an Indigenous worshiper in the act of worship and an ethnologist studying the ritual from without. Both ways of seeing, held in tension or tandem, are essential to Lewis' reading of the world and informs the way he works as a scholar, storyteller, and Christian thinker.

Lewis' third Narnian chronicle, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, furnishes a rich example of this two-ways-of-seeing in his fiction. The *Dawn Treader* and her crew have sailed among islands that are cursed with magical darkness—a region of the world where all the terrors and wonders of dreams and nightmares somehow become real. As they flounder about in the dark, trying unsuccessfully to be free of this cursed cloud of darkness, a 'broad beam of light' pierces the darkness and falls upon the ship. Initially the light that pirces the darkness also highlights their peril. Almost immediately, though, the ever-perceptive Lucy looks up along the shaft of light as Lewis did in this toolshed five years previously, and this instinct allows Lucy to perceive a providential way of escape. The parable of the Tool-shed becomes a Narnian myth. Lucy can see in both ways as we read in her various Narnian adventures, where she often combines relational intelligence and spiritual sensitivity with common sense and critical observation.

Returning to our snapshot in Autumn, 1954, when Lewis is re-presenting himself to the community in a newly minted Cambridge Chair, we can immediately see how Lewis is trying to inculcate a shift in how his listeners read well. As there are two ways of seeing, the subjective and integrative as well as the objective and scientific, so there are different ways of considering how literature works in us. Although he stands there as a scholar with decades of objective and scientific knowledge about medieval and renaissance literature, Lewis invites his listeners to change their points of view, to suspend their learned modern responses to literature, and to consider him as an anthropological case study. As a native reader, Lewis claims, '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.'

This autobiographical turn at the height of Lewis' academic career is intriguing. Lewis casts himself not—or not merely—as the neuropsychologist or the anthropologist with objective and peer-reviewable knowledge about love and religion, but as the lover in love or the Indigenous person perceiving the world Beyond. This move captures the heart of a

multidisciplinary shift to 'autoethnography,' an approach to anthropology, theology, and literary studies that uses the 'self' as a source of knowledge, so that the anthropologist, theologian, and critic's own experiences are part of the data of discovery. Although Lewis drew upon historical models of theological reflective self-writing, a critical approach to autoethnography was not a dedicated methodology in Lewis' context. Still, his approach to critical work and storytelling demonstrates an autoethnographic instinct in Lewis that is methodologically suggestive to us as readers today.

Yet, there is a countercurrent to the reflexive self within Lewis' own literary theory, namely, Lewis' argument in *The Personal Heresy* that critical reading requires a certain objective, distant consideration of the imaginative writer. Considering Lewis' protocritical instincts and theoretical tensions is helpful, I believe, in understanding the integrative nature of Lewis' work. But as it deepens our understanding of Lewis's developing literary critical project, it also suggests a more complex way of reading literature, doing theology, and producing scholarship that collapses subjectivist-objectivist binaries that threaten to limit—rather than extend—our lines of sight.

Autoethnography in Theology and Literature

While the critical conversation is now broad and varied, a single thread within the study of literature and theology helps us look more deeply at what I call Lewis' autobiographical instinct—the way he keeps implicating his self within his texts. Heather Walton's work in literature and Theology is particularly helpful for seeing the protocritical marks of autoethnography in Lewis' writing on theology and literature. Walton is part of the University of Glasgow school, which 'emphasises not theology *through* literature, or literature as the handmaid of theology, but the ways in which literature forms a renewing challenge to theological certainties.' In her approach to the study of theology and literature, Walton intends to first 'interrogate' texts and cultures with the hope that she can then 'generate' new meaning and create a space for transformational possibilities.

Within this frame, Walton's *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* (2014) is an exploration of autoethnography, journaling, and life writing as theological method. While the term 'autoethnography' comes to us from anthropology—initiated in combining writing about culture with participant observer narratives—Walton notes that Christian literature from the beginning is filled with reflexivity: from the Psalms and prayers of Scripture, to the testimonies, martyrology, pilgrim narratives, spiritual guidance texts, spiritual exercises, personal testimonies, pulpit preaching, and spiritual autobiographies from Christian tradition, some of which are models for Lewis. 'Our contemporary interest in reflective theological writing,' Walton argues, 'thus stands within an ancient tradition, but one that is adaptive and responsive to cultural change.' Today's Christian blogging and memoir culture is in continuity with St. Paul and Augustine's *Confessions* in using the self as evidence in theology making.

Autographic theological reflection, or self-writing, is rooted in the principle of 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.' There is in this approach a resistance to the objectivist fallacy that Lewis also resisted, the academic ideal (at least in some times and places) that infers that the

observer can be neutral, detached, and unbiased. Reflexivity 'assumes that there is no possibility of a truly uncontaminated point of view'—a caution Lewis prophetically shares in his epilogue to *The Discarded Image*, where he warns readers that no model of thought is 'a catalogue of ultimate realities.' While we must not negate either of the two ways of seeing, a commitment to both kinds of knowledge-making is not an anodyne to the limitations of our individual or cultural access to all possible facts. Admitting that there are potentials for solipsism in self-writing—and even if there were no specific academic advantages to this type of researcher reflexivity—it remains demonstrably true that, as Anna Fisk says, that 'our stories are never just our own: they are also part of the stories of those others whose lives intersect with ours.'

Lewis' Autobiographical Instinct and Walton's Three Ways of Writing Theological Reflection

It is helpful to explore Lewis' reflexive autoethnographic instincts through Walton's (sometimes overlapping) three ways of writing theological reflection: Life Writing, Autoethnography, and Journaling.

Walton defines 'Life Writing' as the theological work of 'reflecting upon how experience shapes identity.' Lewis spent much of his life trying to tell or retell his story in formal and informal ways. In his last decade, Lewis wrote two memoirs—one a philosophical reflection on spiritual longing, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955), and one a memoir of loss, *A Grief Observed* (1961). Long before *Surprised by Joy*, though, Lewis attempted to tell his conversion story on numerous occasions, including the allegorical *Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), the preface to his *George MacDonald* anthology (1946), the posthumously published 'Early Prose Joy' (1930), and numerous archival fragments that include false starts and short autobiographical experiments.

A second of Walton's methods for theological reflection is more common to Lewis' practice, though the term was not yet coined. 'Authoethnography' employs 'personal experience to investigate a particular issue or concern that has wider cultural or religious significance.' Evidenced in his Cambridge lecture, Lewis retains an oral-narrative quality in the academic books that have evolved from lectures, such as his famous *Preface to Paradise Lost* (1941) and *The Discarded Image* (1964), where he confesses that he is unabashedly entranced by the medieval world that he is describing. Given the mode, it is no surprise that Lewis' sermons are often reflexive, where his own life is part of the primary data for discovery. But in his public lectures and books as well—including the BBC Talks that became *Mere Christianity* (1952) and his foundational 'On Stories' lecture and essay (1939; 1947)—Lewis finds that he must 'be autobiographical for the sake of being evidential.' Lewis knows that beyond 'autobiographical interest,' his experience suggests that he is 'not absolutely alone' and there may be the chance that his experience might help clarify views.

A third category of theological reflection is 'Journaling,' 'a way of using experience that allows us to see changes taking place over time.' This category may raise eyebrows as Lewis, classically, felt that in his conversion to Theism he was blessedly cured 'of the time-wasting and foolish practice of keeping a diary.' Although Lewis appreciated the diary-keeping of others, like Pepys and Boswell, he was at this season in his life convinced that journaling increased an

unhealthy habit of self-attention while not providing the kind of perspective that looking back on the pages of history provides. In a letter to a deeply autoethnographic spiritual writer, Dom Bedes Griffiths, Lewis described this backwards glance as the 'gradual *reading* of one's own life.' For Lewis, the great illumination of old age was 'seeing the pattern emerge' from that reading.

Lewis does not seem to have kept the daily habit of journalling or diary-keeping after his last entries in 1927—now published as *All My Road Before Me*, a sometimes tedious but profoundly helpful research resource. However, his literary habits show some hints toward this kind of theological reflection. Lewis' extant papers at the Bodleian archive includes a number of happenstance notebooks, meant to be available for the act of getting his thoughts into print. Notebook V (Dep.d.809), for example, includes notes on Milton, poetic quotations and comments, lists of works, bibliographies for his publications, fair copies of essays, stories, and poems, rough poems, light reflections and incomplete thoughts, lecture notes, sermon notes, practice writing for chapters, rationales for writing, philosophical queries, sketched maps and images, the beginning of at least one novel, scientific logic for his science fiction, and at least one false start to an autobiography.

Moreover, ostensibly at least, the memoir of loss, *A Grief Observed*, began as journaling project, the 'jottings' of a man in mourning attempting to observe his own grief in process over the course of a few days or weeks. Lewis also visualizes what journaling can do in theological reflection in *Till We Faces*, a story told by Orual, who becomes queen of her little kingdom in the pre-Christian Greek borderlands. Orual intends her diary to be her affidavit in a suit against the gods. Her life story is the evidence that the gods are deceptive, capricious, and unnecessarily occult. As she writes, though, the testimonial works on Orual in profound ways: 'The change which the writing wrought in me (and of which I did not write) was only a beginning—only to prepare me for the gods' surgery. They used my own pen to probe my wound.' While Orual's intention was autoethnographic theological reflection—a sort of anti-*Confessions*—it takes on the transformative effect of journaling as a form of life writing, the kind of divine surgery Lewis records in *A Grief Observed* about 'this terrible little notebook to which I come back and back.' Lewis closes the narrative of *A Grief Observed*, somewhat arbitrarily at the end of a fourth manuscript book because reflexive writing on loss can go on forever: 'There is something new to be chronicled every day. Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape.'

This movement between authoethnographic memoir and fictional expression reveals an interplay through his writings. In this vein, Lewis writes himself into his fiction at various points and in various ways. Lewis was a prolific, though reluctant, letter writer—arguably a way that Lewis journalled his experience—and much of his fiction is epistolary in form: letters (*The Screwtape Letters,* 1942; *Letters to Malcolm*, 1964; *Out of the Silent Planet*, 1938); diaries (*Till We Have Faces*, 1956, and parts of *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 1952); and dream accounts (*The Great Divorce*, 1945; *The Pilgrim's Regress*, 1933). What is not formal epistolary fiction still has the narrative 'I' at the forefront of the storytelling and poetry. When teaching Narnia, students are divided about whether the narrator is more like a grandfather, uncle, older storyteller, or Professor Kirke.

Almost without exception, though, they create a "Lewis the Narrator" figure in their heads in a way they do not in other narrator-centred writers. It is hard to read Lewis without feeling there is a "person" there in and behind the text—and not just a persona or character. Walter Hooper notes of Lewis that 'almost all his books are written in the first person.' Beyond the first-personality of the novels, in the WWII-era Ransom Cycle, Lewis really is a character in his fiction with various storytelling and editorial functions. While the autobiographical elements are complex in his narrative poem, *Dymer* (1926), Lewis admits to these elements in a later preface, and his first poetry collection from WWI, *Spirits in Bondage* (1919), is deeply autographic, though it contains various kinds of narrative voices.

Thus, applying Walton's three modes of autographic theological reflection—life writing, autoethnography, and, less paradigmatically, journalling—Lewis tells his life story, uses poetry to frame is philosophical beliefs and religious doubts, writes himself into his fiction, narrates his stories and lectures with personal intimacy, and uses his own experience as evidence for his literary and theological arguments. Lewis is a thoroughly autographic and even autoethnographic writer—despite living in a literary generation that precedes the critical turn to autoethnography.

The Penetrating Writer and the Personal Heresy

Despite this autobiographical instinct, in Lewis' first book of literary theory, *The Personal Heresy* (1939), he wants to ensure a clear distinction between the author and text. In this debate with Dr. E.M.W. Tillyard, Lewis warns against confusing the author and the text in the task of reading, for in order 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 makes a complex case that 'within the realm of imaginative literature,' at least, there is 'a good reason for putting the poet out of sight while we read.' For Lewis, as we suspend our disbelief and immerse ourselves in the image or tale, 'the poet's personality is . . . an intruder in this imagined world.'

Lewis' critique of subjectivist interpretation goes further in his 1943 lectures published as *The Abolition of Man*. Lewis is concerned there to reject the idea that reading is merely a physiological and psychological phenomenon within the experience of the reader. Lewis' aptitude for autoethnography is an intriguing surface tension between a broad reading of these early texts and Lewis' lifelong practice.

Lewis' call for clarity about the goals literary criticism in *The Personal Heresy* is the launching point for W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley's famous essay, 'The Intentional Fallacy.' In this essay, they argue that 'the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable' in literary exploration. The New Critical school they are partly responsible for birthing—and the eventual 'Death of the Author' movement that follows—begins in embryonic form with Lewis, who continues this trajectory in his only other overt book on literary theory, *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), which pulls criticism even further from the author and refocuses it upon the reader. Indeed, George Watson argues that Lewis predicts the critical turn to reader's response—though *An Experiment in Criticism* is really an 'essay,' an experiment, a suggestion of a turn from text and author to the reader's experience more than a conclusive path for critical enquiry.

While the Death of the Author has been greatly exaggerated, it is still misguided to include Lewis in the dossier of conspirators to the Author's assassination. Wimsatt and Beardsley use Lewis's argument that poetry can exist without a poet to make a claim that causes me to question whether they had read Lewis' essay clearly: "the history of words *after* a poem is written may contribute meanings which if relevant to the original pattern should not be ruled out by a scruple about intention." While Lewis might find that proposal experimentally interesting, his life project as an historian, critic, and teacher, I argue, is about helping readers situate themselves so that they can share—or at least appreciate—the consciousness of the imaginative writer. In teaching the evolving meaning of words and images, the atmospheric descriptions of times and places, and the mythic expressions of human experience and cultures stories, Lewis helps the reader to see what the poet is seeing.

Wimsatt and Beardsley's use of Lewis would make us doubt the evidence that he is a thoroughly autographic writer of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry—a poet, scholar, and imaginative writer who is continually revealing his personality in his writing. What I call a surface tension comes, partly, from limited readings of *The Personal Heresy.* Walter Hooper summarizes the popular understanding of Lewis' 'Personal Heresy': '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.' Lewis commits not a few pages to challenging genesis theories and thinking about a critic's job—and he seems to bemoan a rise in biographical criticism—but does he really mean that the author's life is irrelevant in good reading? This definition is just too narrow.

Pulling back, in full honestly, almost every Lewis reader I know—and most critics of any stripe—are inclined to Tillyard's approach: 'I sometimes find that the criticism which tries to explain the author's state of mind instead . . . gives me satisfaction.' Tillyard intimates a presence there in the text, sometimes nearer and sometimes farther from the surface of the poem or story. The artistry itself reveals the artist, Tillyard wants to assert. When challenged by Lewis, he admits a compromise: '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.'

And, practically speaking, there really does seem to be something of the author *there* in the text we read. Virginia Woolf once quipped, 'For though we say that we know nothing about Shakespeare's state of mind, even as we say that, we are saying something about Shakespeare's state of mind.' Lewis himself admits "to the Shakespearianity of Shakespeare." While research about the words, images, and cultural possibilities in Shakespeare's imagination cannot replace good close reading of the lines on the page, a sense of the historical milieu can energize and inform our reading as much as studying sources or thinking about genre can add new dimensions. Most critics in Lewis studies do this precisely, bringing together Lewis' own fiction with his work as a scholar and his personal life. I did this above by suggesting a link between Orual and Lewis in the possibilities of what life writing can do.

Moreover, when Lewis is working as a scholar, he often attends to the 'facts of personality' or 'the mental pattern' of a poet's life in considering their poetry. On almost every page of *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, published in the Autumn of 1954, Lewis

makes some link from the poem to the author's life—whether that link about the author's reading, education, ideology, social relations, theology, aim, or interior thought. He speaks of what authors liked or loved or lived for—or all three in a paragraph on Puttenham. 'Dunbar . . . is playing a practical joke on his audience,' Lewis claims. Lewis is able to determine that 'Genuine humanity was clearly' Reginald Scot's motive when he began writing. Lewis writes of the 'ogreish glee' of one poet and the 'rankling, personal animosity' of another, defends the unsinister intentions of a third poet, while knowing that a fourth 'intended' to shock, likely with his tongue placed firmly in his cheek. We all know the ethical possibilities for satirists, but Lewis is interested in the 'real motive'—the personal drive that runs behind the literary one. Dozens of times Lewis uses the words 'intend,' 'intention,' and 'motive.' 'Sometimes, for a few lines,' Lewis claims of Spenser's pastoral poetry, 'it does perhaps really achieve the pungent, homely effect that he intended.'

Lewis remains cautious about going too deeply into the personality of the poet. Of the '*Scotish Feilde*,' Lewis argues that if the poem 'throws no light on the poet's personal sensibility, [it] does throw light (where, for my part, I much prefer to have it) on the bills and bows, the moors and the banners.' 'Visualize what the poet sees in his mind's eye,' Lewis wants to say. His discussion, however, is still bound up with the reader for whom 'the poem was intended.' Though Lewis may be right about the generation that Shakespeare was a part of—'Most of the Golden poetry was not primarily intended either to reflect the actual world or to express the personality of the poet'—his literary historical writing does both, putting him in danger of committing the Personal Heresy—at least as it is popularly understood. Frankly, Lewis is usually at his best as a literary historian when he does so.

Reading Lenses and Surface Tensions

All of this seems somewhat contradictory and a bit odd. Lewis' first work of literary theory is about defeating the Personal Heresy, and his most generative work of philosophical cultural criticism, *The Abolition of Man*, rejects a subjectivist point of view where all that matters is the 'self.' And yet, Lewis implicates the 'self' in all of his writing—whether imaginative, literary, or theological. Not only does Lewis tell his own story over and over again, drawing himself into the text, but he seems to commit the Personal Heresy in his own literary criticism. How do we resolve these tensions in Lewis' thought?

The seeming tensions in Lewis' thought begin in the very first words of *The Personal Heresy*: 'During the war I saw. . . .' Lewis begins an attack against implicating the author in the text by drawing *his own life story into his metacriticism*. Lewis will refine his ideas throughout the debate with Tillyard. Jason Lepojärvi draws Lewis' argument out to analyze what he calls the 'Personal Opinion Fallacy,' where he discusses how Lewis will later distinguish 'intention' (found in the author) and 'meaning' (found in the reader-text interaction). It is a helpful guide, but not all the rough edges seem to align.

I argue that these seeming tensions are not a fundamental contradiction in Lewis, but we must understand what he is doing. Besides the fact that there is some development in his thought processes even through the *Personal Heresy* debate, reducing Lewis' Personal Heresy to a flat rejection of biographical research will only occlude its evolving power within Lewis' larger map of reading. Instead, we can see how Lewis holds these different approaches

together in a way of thinking already suggested. Lewis' 'two ways of seeing' mediates these seeming contradictions from a methodological standpoint.

On the one hand, Lewis wants to affirm the value of the poem as a poem, the story as a story, the work of literature that is in some ways no longer the author's when the reader encounters it. Good critical reading will attend to the details of the work as it exists before trying to find a secret meaning within that work of art—whether it is a meaning revealed in the cultural context of the poem or story, symbolic realities within the work of art, the physiology, ideology, or psychology of the writer, or in the facts of the writer's life.

On the other hand, moving outside of the text may be necessary to gain the perspectives needed to share the poet's consciousness—to see what the imaginative author is showing us. At the very least—and here, Lewis challenges Wimsatt and Beardsley's lack of scruples about the available definitions of a word—the reader needs to know the language of the poem. For the reader, Lewis proposes, is part of the meaning-making of the poem. Thus, as Lewis works out most clearly in *An Experiment in Criticism*, the first step of a reader is to surrender to the text, receiving what the author has left them. This is to look 'at the beam' in Lewis' Toolshed meditation. What critics may do—and what Lewis does as a literary historian, popular theologian, and Christian controversialist—is to shift perspectives once they have received the text, looking back along the beam at the source of the light. Then they can consider the personal realities that the author reveals or does not reveal in the work.

This second step grounds readers deeply in the contextual, philological, historical, generic, linguistic, and worldview realities of the text's context. These works are from another time and place, thus the challenge of sharing of consciousness of the poet that would allow the reader to receive the poem. Readers must recognize this gap and negotiate the space between the reader and the text without annihilating the author.

Indeed, failing to receive the poem, recognize the strangeness and otherness of the piece, and negotiate that gap will create readings that are in some ways a reflection only of the reader's instincts or expectations. In Lewis' final work of literary history, the posthumously published version of his 'prolegomena' lectures, *The Discarded Image* (1964), Lewis criticizes readers who do not respect the cultural distance between their own context and that of the text, comparing them to English tourists 'who carry their resolute Englishry with them all over the Continent, mix only with other English tourists, enjoy all they see for its "quaintness," and have no wish to realise what those ways of life, those churches, those vineyards, mean to the natives' of the place they are visiting. Look up on a clear night, Lewis invites his contemporary readers, and the sky you see is something unrecognizable to medieval poets who wrote about the heavens:

> These facts [of medieval cosmology] . . . become valuable only in so far as they enable us to enter more fully into the consciousness of our ancestors by realising how such a universe must have affected those who believed in it. The recipe for such realisation is not the study of books. You must go out on a starry night and walk about for half an hour trying to see the sky in terms of the old cosmology. Remember that you now have an absolute Up and Down. The Earth is really the centre, really the lowest place ; movement to it from whatever direction is downward movement. As a modern, you

> located the stars at a great distance. For distance you must now substitute that very special, and far less abstract, sort of distance which we call height; height, which speaks immediately to our muscles and nerves.

The fact that we say "look up" instead of "look out" when pointing to the night sky shows vestigial language patterns in the way we speak, but the older poets simply did not experience a cosmos the way we do, after Copernicus, Newton, Einstein, and the Internet. To receive the vision of the poet means respectfully recognizing the differences in cosmic imaginaries between the reader and the poet, and then doing one's best to appreciate the poet's worldview. Like Ransom's lesson Malacandra, it is a jarring reversal of colonial patterns, which aim to convert others to our own worldview. There is humility in Lewis' call to respect otherness in the art of receiving a poem.

Conclusion: Lewis the Author

In all of these questions, we should not forget the epistemological truth revealed by the narrator in *The Magician's Nephew*: 'For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing.' There is much good sense in Lewis' Personal Heresy and his resistance of certain subjectivist streams of thought—and, indeed, his twinned critique of reductive objectivist philosophies that brook no rivals to truth. Beyond Lewis' works of literary theory and history discussed here, his WWII-era nonfiction texts are an anti-viral cocktail against "The Poison of Subjectivism."

Yet, Lewis does not annihilate the subject—either the subjective experience of the reader or the author behind and potentially within the text. *The Personal Heresy* and *An Experiment in Criticism* are ancestors of the Death of the Author movement, but in drawing critical distinctions between the poet and the poem, Lewis is trying to put authors in their proper place—not the final Death of the Author but the Author's Dislocation. In *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis rejects methodologies that make the author disappear—either into a general universal "poet" or human experience, or the habitual temptation to transform the poet in the page into the image of the man in the critic's mirror.

Moreover, Lewis' warning about equating the literary 'I' within a text with the author serves as a helpful caution as we consider the ways Lewis speaks in his texts. It is far from clear that he 'is' Dymer, Dr. Ransom, Orual of Glome, or whatever one of the heroes (or villains) of Narnia in whom we find intriguing connections. It is wise to doubt that the author of Narnia is also its narrator, for the narratorial voice may well be a character Lewis has formed for the purpose of telling the story. In the Ransom Cycle, do we need to presume that Ransom's partner in his interplanetary resistance movement, "Lewis" the Editor-Writer, is really Lewis the Author and not Lewis the Character who emerged organically in the process of writing? Even Lewis' most clearly autobiographical fiction gives us some pause. 'John' in *The Pilgrim's Regress* is certainly Lewis, but he is also an Everyman character in the medieval tradition. And while the Dantean pilgrim of *The Great Divorce* is clearly Lewis, we would do damage to over-literalize the details of the dream.

Though I simply cannot agree with her analysis of how this works, Kath Filmer is probably correct that Lewis was constantly hiding and revealing himself in his fiction. Indeed, one of the Inklings quipped that rather than *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis' memoir should be entitled

Suppressed by Jack—'Jack' being the name most of Lewis' friends knew him by. There is enough in Lewis' work that we can, I believe, find the deep-water aquifer that unifies the various literary theoretical principles and methods that emerge as single wells in Lewis' books and essays. That said, the danger of looking in a sufficiently deep well, as we well know, is that we are likely to see our own reflection.

I am suggesting that there is an intriguing and understudied—but, I think, generally appreciated—way in which Lewis writes himself into his fiction and nonfiction. On the one hand, Lewis practices various kinds of self-writing, encouraging us to examine the implicated realities of reading, writing, and scholarship. On the other hand, Lewis offers a series of cautions, urging us to be wary of reducing knowledge and morality to physiology, culture, hermeneutics, ideology, or—especially in the reading site—psychology. For Lewis, there is a proper distance between the implicated self and the annihilated one. Classically, Lewis is always encouraging us to negotiate between the 'two equal and opposite errors.' No way of thinking, for Lewis, is 'a catalogue of ultimate realities,' but neither is it 'a mere fantasy.'

Thus, providing we do not press any of Lewis' theoretical principles to the very edges of human experience or reduce the Personal Essay to the Intentional Fallacy, an inviting discovery emerges. Lewis consistently triangulates himself with his reader and the matter at hand—whether that is a poem he is reading, a cultural moment he is critiquing, a story he is telling, or an 'imaginative interpretation of spiritual life.' With epistemic intentionality and a protocritical autoethnographic instinct, Lewis is always writing himself and, in doing so, unites the work of the theologian, the teacher, the scholar, the critic, and the mythopoeic storyteller.