

C.S. Lewis and the Apologetics of Story

Some have claimed that C.S. Lewis drifted towards fiction the last decade of his life because he was failed as an Apologist and no longer able to keep up with the complex philosophical questions of his day. In fact, fiction was always part of Lewis's output. He wrote, "The imaginative man in me is older than the rational man and more continually operative." Lewis used story as one of the tools in his rhetorical tool box because he knew that some people will not listen to a coherent and reasonable presentation of the Gospel. Their rejection of the things of God is buttressed with rationalization and self-justification. Reason stands before these people's hearts like dragon sentries preventing even the best apologetic arguments from getting through. But, Lewis believed, sometimes story can get past watchful dragons. This Network will explore Lewis's use of story as a rhetorical and apologetic tool for the Gospel.

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I. Some have claimed that C.S. Lewis drifted towards fiction the last decade of his life because he was failed as an Apologist and no longer able to keep up with the complex philosophical questions of his day.

A. The Anscombe Debate February 2nd 1948 at the Oxford Socratic Club meeting at the Junior Common Room at St. Hilda's College, Oxford.

1. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings*.
2. George Sayer, *Jack*.
3. Peter Schakel, *Reason and Imagination*.
4. A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*.

B. What does the evidence truly suggest?

1. Anscombe's paper is in print and is accessible for anyone to read. Given the comments so many have made about the debate and the actual content of the paper one must conclude that most of the commentators have never read the actual paper. The point of the debate was the discussion of the word "valid" regarding the arguments made by naturalists/materialists—can they make valid arguments?
 - a. What Lewis said in *Miracles*.
 - b. Anscombe's criticism and what was in the balances.
2. Lewis's first explicitly Christian book was an apologetic book using fiction/allegory to make his point: *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Romance and Reason*.
3. *Out of the Silent Planet* and the power of smuggled theology—"any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people's mind under the guise of romance".
4. During the time Lewis produced his book length, popular apologetic works [*The Problem of Pain*; *Mere Christianity*; *The Abolition of Man*; *Miracles*] he also wrote: *Perelandra*; *That Hideous Strength*; *The Great Divorce*; and *Screwtape Letters*. He wrote the same number of fiction books as the number of apologetic books during the same period of his life; where is the evidence that he stepped away from apologetics to write fiction? Someone might suggest that he didn't produce any more apologetic books after the debate; doesn't this support the claim that Lewis backed away from any kind of formal apologetics?
5. In fact, Lewis wrote 36 essays in Christian Apologetics before the debate and 34 essays in Christian Apologetics after the debate. This is hardly a sign indicating that Lewis's apologetic endeavors ceased. Furthermore:
 - a. He wrote his essay "Christian Apologetics" instructing others how to do apologetics shortly after the debate.

- b. The 34 essays he wrote after the debate made up substantive portions of books edited by Walter Hooper after Lewis's death: *God in the Dock* and *Christian Reflections*.

C. In fact, fiction was always part of Lewis's output.

1. He wrote, "The imaginative man in me is older than the rational man and more continually operative."
2. He wrote in a letter that he preferred to write fiction most; wouldn't anybody?
3. Oxford philosopher, Austin Farrar said Lewis' supreme power was in depiction; he was able to craft metaphors and images to make his point and make it stick.

a. Lewis's use of Metaphors:

- 1) Pupil's Metaphor
- 2) Master's Metaphor
- 3) Transposition

b. Lewis's classifications of the uses of the imagination in *The Discarded Image*.

- 1) Primary Imagination—Coleridge. Lewis wrote, "Common sense is that which turns mere sensation into coherent consciousness of myself as subject in a world of objects. It is very close to what some call apperception and what Coleridge called primary imagination." (P. 165)

a) The five senses provide sensory information about the objective world (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell).

b) Common sense, in Coleridge's understanding, was that which unifies and makes common the data

discovered and develops a unified grasp of the world one lives in.

c) For Coleridge this was a synonym for the Imagination.

2) Transforming Imagination—Wordsworth. This is equal to the psychological idea of projection.

3) Penetrating Imagination—Shakespeare [Dante]. Lewis actually wrote two essays developing this concept: “Variation in Shakespeare” and “Dante’s Similes”.

4) Realizing Imagination—Medieval [Lewis preferred this form of the Imagination. Note its use in Science for the development of Hypotheses and Models].

5) There are many more nuances in Lewis’s use of the imagination and each of these is instructive in its way.

II. Lewis’s own claim was that he was a rhetor.

A. “I am a rhetorician” Letter dated September 25th 1940.

1. Rhetoric is concerned with persuasion.

2. Richard Weaver’s *The Ethics of Persuasion*.

a. The most ethical argument is the one from *Definition*.

1) Definition means “of the finite”.

2) How do you define the infinite?

b. The second most ethical argument is the one from *Similitude*.

- c. The least ethical form of argument is the one from *Consequence*.
 - d. A final form of argument is the one from *Authority*.
- B. While one may have rhetorical points to make one must be wise when selecting the form by which these points might best be made.
- 1. Lewis reminds his readers in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*: “We must remember that a man who writes a love sonnet not only loves the beloved, he also loves the sonnet.”
 - 2. An author selects the literary form that helps him say best what he wants to say.
 - a. The author selects his literary form as carefully as a sculpture selects his marble.
 - b. Lewis wrote an essay: “Sometimes Fairy Tales Say Best What is to be Said.”
- C. Some of Lewis’s primary rhetorical points made throughout his fiction.
- 1. God is big and man is small. [Note Lucy meeting Aslan for the first time in *Prince Caspian*]
 - 2. When man disregards God it is perilous to man and his institutions.
 - a. Subjectivism explained.
 - b. The argument of *The Abolition of Man*.
 - c. Examples in Lewis’s fiction:
 - 1) The City and the Magician in *Dymer*.

- a) The City—“tortured into stone the bubbles the academy had blown”
 - b) The Magician—dreams are better than reality.
 - 2) Weston, the Unman in *Perelandra*, denies reality and loses his humanity because of it.
 - 3) The ghosts in *The Great Divorce*, deny reality and are diminished by it.
 - 4) Arthur in Charles Williams’s *Taliesin Through Logres* as commented on in Lewis’s *The Arthurian Torso*.
 - 5) Jadis Queen of Charn and the Deplorable Word in *The Magician’s Nephew*.
3. More: Those caught in the balances such as Orual; Digory; etc.
4. We must not give up in the areas that challenge us theologically but stay engaged. Lewis wrote: “If our religion is something objective then we must never avert our eyes from those elements in it which seem puzzling or repellent; for it will be precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know.” (*The Weight of Glory* para. 7). Lewis employs his imagination as he begins to work through thorny matters such as:
- a. The Problem of Evil—*The Horse and His Boy*
 - b. The Idea of Hell—*The Great Divorce*
 - c. The Fall—*Perelandra*; *The Magician’s Nephew*
 - e. Spiritual Formation—*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; *Till We Have Faces*; *That Hideous Strength*

f. The Responsibility of the Church—*The Silver Chair*

g. Etc.

5. More...