

## Preface

### Introduction

IN HIS LIFETIME, C. S. LEWIS MASTERED MULTIPLE MODES OF COMMUNICATION. A sound and clear academic writer, able to engage in dialectic and debate on a high level, he gained the respect of those in his field of medieval literature. An admired popularizer of Christianity, he fashioned works in Christian apologetics that are still appreciated and widely read today. A skilled imaginative writer, he crafted a wide range of fiction and poetry, which demonstrates his enduring creative vision. A brilliant teacher, lecturer, and preacher, Lewis often channeled his skills via the medium of radio broadcast with great success. And as an active and proficient public debater, Lewis was rightly called Oxford's "bonny fighter," by his friend Austin Farrer, because of the rhetorical skill he demonstrated at the weekly meetings of the Oxford Socratic Club.<sup>1</sup> In each of these realms of communication, Lewis was not merely experienced; he proved himself to be greatly skilled in each mode of expression and, as a result, enjoyed remarkable success.

There are many reasons for Lewis's success as a communicator and for his appeal to a wide audience, not the least of which is his facility with language. Indeed, the thing that generates Lewis's holding power is his rhetoric—the ability to use words well and with pervasive force. Lewis always appears to be rhetorical, whether explicitly or implicitly so. Professor James Como, Lewis scholar and rhetorician, emphatically asserts that Lewis writes with explicitly rhetorical aims, calling him a "rhetorical genius." Como notes, "Most at home with a rhetoric of demonstration, Lewis was obliged to elicit belief from particular people, at particular times, under particular circumstances. He epitomized the rhetor as defined by that old Roman teacher Quintilian, in his *Institutes*

1. Farrer, "The Christian Apologist," 25.

of Oratory: “The good man speaking well.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, because Lewis had a rhetorical interest in his readers, he was particularly aware of his audience. He desired to persuade them to see the world in fresh ways, using multiple modes of communication. Consequently, he often succeeded at engaging his readers and moving them toward noble action.

Certainly, there were early formative experiences that shaped Lewis as a rhetorician. He was raised in an environment where a rhetorical approach to life was as native to him as the Irish air he breathed. At home, Lewis could not help but be affected by watching his father, who was the Sessional Solicitor of the Belfast City Council, as well as an effective political speaker for the Conservative Party.<sup>3</sup> In school, the young Lewis was classically trained, receiving an education informed by the medieval trivium, with its attention to rhetoric. Furthermore, at the university he worked as a literary historian, aware as any man of the power that rhetoric had over the conventions of writing and speaking.

Although Como observes that Lewis was a natural rhetorician, he is surprised that the books written by rhetoricians in Lewis’s library are lacking the marginalia so characteristic of other books that most clearly influenced Lewis. This mystery may be easily solved, however. First, not all of the books from Lewis’s library were sent to the Wade Center in Wheaton, Illinois, the library collection Como reviewed. In light of this, missing marginalia may not be significant. Second, the works of the rhetoricians may not be the only means by which Lewis could have learned the canons of rhetoric. Lewis himself writes of the Middle Ages, “Everything we should now call criticism belonged either to Grammar or to Rhetoric.”<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Lewis knew the conventions of criticism from that epoch, and his books from this period are full of marginalia. His familiarity with the influence of rhetoric upon medieval works gave him the authority to say that the precepts of rhetoric were “addressed quite as much to poets as to advocates.”<sup>5</sup> Almost as if he is defending

2. Como, *Branches to Heaven*, 16.

3. *Ibid.*, 24.

4. C. S. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 190.

5. *Ibid.* As Lewis continues the discussion here, he indicates that the poets learned rhetoric from one another. He sites as an example that “Virgil is for Dante the poet who taught him his *bello stilo*.” He notes that Petrarch had a similar influence on Chaucer, for “Petrarch in the *Clerk’s Prologue* is for Chaucer the man who illuminated all Italy with his ‘rethoryke swete.’” Lewis also observes the passing on of the tradition through

himself as a rhetorician, he further notes that one could not help but learn rhetorical theory by reading Dante, Chaucer, Lydgate, and others.<sup>6</sup> Lewis writes that “In rhetoric, more than anything else, the continuity of the old European tradition was embodied.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he says that “Nearly all our older poetry was written and read by men to whom the distinction between poetry and rhetoric, in its modern form, would have been meaningless.”<sup>8</sup> Rhetorical study, then, was afforded to Lewis from a variety of sources.

Given Lewis’s rhetorical training, in the broadest sense, and considering the way in which his written work operates with rhetorical purposes, it is only natural that the type of literary critical methodology I will use for this study is rhetorical. British literary scholar Terry Eagleton convincingly makes the case for a return to rhetoric as a form of “discursive theory,” claiming that it is the oldest form of literary criticism. He writes, “Rhetoric, which was the received form of critical analysis all the way from ancient society to the eighteenth century, examined the way discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects.”<sup>9</sup> Even so, Lewis argues in *An Experiment in Criticism*, books must be judged by the way they are read (that is by the way readers are affected by them). Likewise, a rhetorical approach to literature considers how an audience (even a reading audience) might be affected.

Why might rhetorical methodology be useful in analyzing the writing of Lewis? Most important, it must be understood that historically, rhetoric is “the art of persuasion.” (Heretofore, most references to “rhetoric” in this study will signify “persuasion toward a view of reality.”) As Eagleton accurately observes, “Rhetoric wanted to find out the most effective ways of pleading, persuading and debating, and rhetoricians studied such devices in other people’s language in order to use

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the poets, for Lydgate learned his rhetoric from Chaucer. As Lewis notes, “Chaucer in the *Book of Thebes* is for Lydgate the ‘flour’ of poets in Britain by his ‘excellence in rethorike and in eloquence.’” The rhetorical influence is clear and, in some ways, absolute, for Lewis observes that “All Chaucer’s medieval successors speak of him in this way.” The rhetoric of the middle ages was literary and it had a clear influence on Lewis.

6. Ibid.

7. C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 61.

8. Ibid.

9. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 179.

them more productively in their own.”<sup>10</sup> Lewis was well aware of the limitations of exposition, and likewise he saw the natural constraints of each genre of literature. Therefore, when he wrote, he sought to write using the written form most capable of bearing the weight of his purpose. His full and fertile mind had much to express, and he employed many forms of writing to do it—from lectures to literary criticism, from preaching to poetry. This enabled him not only to write about many things, but to provide his readers with a wide variety of vantage points so they might see more clearly what it was that Lewis saw. A voracious reader himself, Lewis wrote well, in part, because he read often. As rhetorician Doug Brent observes, “Reading and writing are intimately connected.”<sup>11</sup> Much of Lewis’s writing is focused on his own reading. Similarly, his writing is centered in his Christian faith; in other words, his writing is theological. Theologian David Cunningham rightly notes that “Whenever people attempt to communicate through language, they will find themselves disagreeing with one another; and, when their language concerns God, they may find themselves disagreeing quite frequently.” Since this is the case, one should expect that “the enterprise of theology necessarily involves the construction and dissection of arguments and argumentative strategies.”<sup>12</sup> This is a further reason why rhetorical criticism is the best methodology for the study of Lewis: he has a theological mind constructed from both deep personal reflection as well as discursive argument. The distinguished University of Chicago Professor, Wayne Booth, a former President of the Modern Language Association, convincingly argues that fiction is itself a means of rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> As a master of fiction, Lewis created his imaginative worlds to convince his readers not only of their plausibility, but also of the gravity of the issues at stake between his characters. “For Lewis every critical posture is always an implicit ontology, teleology, and an eschatology,” argues Lewis scholar Bruce Edwards. This being so, “the critic is always defining the relationship of mankind not only to texts, but also to ultimate matters: the ground of being, the locus of meaning, and the possibility of transcendence. For Lewis, the Christian, this means

10. *Ibid.*, 180.

11. Brent, *Reading As Rhetorical Invention*, xi.

12. Cunningham, *Faithful Persuasion*, xiii.

13. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*.

that literary inquiry is always in some sense apologetics, though rarely explicitly so.”<sup>14</sup> Without question, if Lewis’s literary work is apologetical, then it is also rhetorical in nature.

## The Rhetorical Tradition

Lewis’s rhetorical approach places him in an old and venerated tradition. Its longevity is attributed to the fact that human beings are communal and seek to communicate persuasively with one another. Rhetoric is about persuasion. Undoubtedly, every time Lewis put his pen to paper, he was interested in persuading readers to see a particular point of view. He was not seeking to manipulate his readers, for the key tool in the rhetorician’s toolbox is dialectic. Dialectic functions as the art of debate and supplies rhetoric with its power to persuade. Lewis was a brilliant debater, and he was not afraid of opposition; rather, he encouraged it. Dialectic and the deepening of understanding require debate among able-minded disputants. Lewis was a part of this tradition. He embraced the canons of classical rhetoric as his own. Schooled in the art of invention, he knew how to craft strong argument, looking not only for the main flow of a river of thought but paying attention, as well, to the detailed tributaries and rivulets which supported it. He was a master of arrangement, capable of crafting his written word in such a way that he expressed himself with clarity, making even complex ideas easy to follow. Whatever criticisms one might find with Lewis’s work, “lack of clarity” is never a concern. He crafted his imaginative prose with precision and style. His early practice of reading poetry and his lifetime love of poetry composition enabled him to develop a rhythm to his writing that makes it a delight to read out loud and easy to read in silence. Not only did he write for the ear, but he wrote visually, too. Metaphor and analogy serve to create word pictures that are not mere decoration; they are part of Lewis’s rhetorical craft. Their use, in his hands, brings imaginative sight.

Lewis also understood the rhetorician’s three classical modes of appeal, as developed in the Aristotelian tradition: pathos, logos, and ethos. Lewis sought to move his audiences by means of pathos, rooted in his own passions, sorrows, disappointments, joys, and expectations. There are some who believe that Lewis was not in touch with such emo-

14. B. Edwards, *A Rhetoric of Reading*, 110.

tions, but a close read of Lewis leads one to experience a heightened sense of emotion. Lewis, the letter writer, who answered all of his mail out of tender respect for those who happened to write him, is never far from any of his other publications, as well. Lewis's mind, prepared for debate not only by his training in logic but also in his wide knowledge of languages—Greek, Latin, Anglo-Saxon, French, German, Italian and a limited use of old Icelandic—knew the power of the word. He used logos to develop his content. One never gets the idea that he is fumbling for something to say. His mind was fertile, manifesting fruit whenever he put his pen to paper. Perhaps the mode most strongly evident in him is ethos. He is honest, and he displays in his work that authenticity of character that is full of genuine humility and childlike wonder. His ethos is exhibited when he wrestles with thorny passages in the Psalms that others tend to avoid because of their difficulty. It is seen as he announces to his readers that there is much about prayer he does not understand, or when he confesses that academic study should end in some degree of doubt. His ethos is equally evident by the confidence with which he presses a point that he has developed discursively, championing it with bulldog tenacity. Clearly, Lewis was in touch with the rhetorician's skill; he benefited by its tradition, and others benefited by his rhetoric, as well.

### **Lewis's Rhetorical Aim**

Considering C. S. Lewis as a rhetorician, what primary concern occupies his persuasive endeavors most often? Actually, there is one theme that is seldom addressed by scholars: Lewis's concern about subjectivism. He believed that if subjectivism were left unchecked, it would tend toward evil. While he writes about the problem of evil often enough, and about that aspect of it he defines as subjectivism, it is interesting to note that virtually all of the evil characters in his fiction attempt to justify their actions by means of subjectivist rhetoric. On the other hand, those protagonists caught in the balances between evil and good begin to emerge from temptations to evil when they reconcile themselves to the objective world about them and surrender to its demands. Evil characters seek to conform the world to their wishes; good characters grow out of the conformity of thought and will to habits of harmonious concord with the world in which they find themselves. Lewis's rhetori-

cal concern about that aspect of the problem of evil he calls subjectivism is a theme which is pervasive in his writing and which is the focus of this investigation.

Subjectivism, as I define it for the purposes of this study, must be distinguished from the word subjective. The subjective refers to the subject's attempt to respond to objects with thoughts, feelings and motives appropriate to those objects. The objects are points of reference by which thoughts, feelings and motives may be assessed and judged. Subjectivism, on the other hand, is a point of view isolated from, and unresponsive to, objective reality. In its worst examples, subjectivism may even refer to those attempts to shape reality in order to make it fit preconceived notions about it; or, subjectivism may seek to shape reality in order to maintain evil motives. Lewis's concern about subjectivism and its connection with evil is stated explicitly in "The Poison of Subjectivism:"

One cause of misery and vice is always present with us in the greed and pride of men, but at certain periods of history this is greatly increased by the temporary prevalence of some false philosophy. Correct thinking will not make good men out of bad ones; but a purely theoretical error may remove the ordinary checks to evil and deprive good intentions of their natural support. An error of this sort is abroad at present. . . . I am referring to Subjectivism.<sup>15</sup>

Lewis was an objectivist and argued that others should be, as well. His rhetoric against subjectivism is demonstrated in both discursive and imaginative writing.

## Methodology

Throughout this analysis, I will utilize the rhetorical ideas of Richard M. Weaver in order to make critical judgments about Lewis's writing and his own rhetorical endeavors. I have chosen to employ Weaver's theoretical perspective for several reasons. First, he was a contemporary of Lewis; they died the same year—1963. There is no indication that Lewis ever read anything by Weaver, but Weaver was familiar with Lewis. On rare occasions he quotes him, and on one occasion he wrote

15. C. S. Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism," in *Christian Reflections*, 72.

a favorable book review of Lewis's *Studies in Words*.<sup>16</sup> Although Weaver was from America and Lewis from Ireland, they were both affected by similar global issues and concerns. They were also both academics in rigorous academic environments, Lewis at Oxford and later Cambridge, Weaver at the University of Chicago. Both authors published in several literary genres and wrote across several disciplines. As Weaver scholar Ted J. Smith III notes, Weaver was one of the last century's leading rhetorical theorists, and he was a traditionalist.<sup>17</sup> He was a critic of his own culture, as, in his way, Lewis was also. Like Lewis, Weaver appears to have made an enduring contribution to letters, though not in as wide-ranging a manner as Lewis. Furthermore, scholar Robert Preston writes that Weaver was influenced by "the Western tradition, that of the high Middle Ages from the 10th to the 14th centuries." This interest in the medieval period also links Weaver to Lewis, and like Lewis, he was opposed to Nominalism to the degree that it denied the objective reality of universal principles. In other words, Weaver was also concerned about the dangers of subjectivism and promoted objective values, as a result.<sup>18</sup>

### A Summary of Richard Weaver's Salient Thought

Robert Preston writes that "Weaver's vision is based on two premises: the world is intelligible and the human person is free."<sup>19</sup> Weaver, like Lewis, accepts the idea that there is an objective world that exists independent of anyone's thoughts about it. He believes that the universe has design and therefore possesses this quality of intelligibility. Preston further observes of Weaver, "In appealing to the intelligibility of the universe, Weaver is siding with the philosophical realists against the nominalists."<sup>20</sup> His realist convictions put him in a position contrary to subjectivism and relativism. Weaver also believes that this world is moral. If man is a free and communicating being, and if the world is complex, then it is necessary for man to enter into a dialectical development in order to enrich his understanding of the world in which he lives. This process is a rhetorical one.

16. Weaver, "A Moral In a Word," from *In Defense of Tradition*, 448–49.

17. Ted Smith, introduction in Weaver, *In Defense of Tradition*, xix–xlviii.

18. Preston, "Ideas Have Consequences' Fifty Years Later," 47 and 51.

19. *Ibid.*, 47.

20. *Ibid.*, 47–48.

Weaver believes in three levels of knowledge. First, there are facts, or ideas. Second, there are beliefs; these include interpretations of those facts which one holds with a degree of conviction. Third, there is the Metaphysical Dream; this is a kind of world view that informs the interpretations of facts; including antecedent assumptions about the world as those assumptions are embraced by a culture. According to Weaver, the “Metaphysical Dream” unifies a culture: the “dream” is communicated and refined through language. Dialectic is the means employed by the rhetorician in the hopes of persuading the culture to understand the “dream” more thoroughly and to discard those things that are unhealthy for the culture. It is possible for a false “dream” to emerge, which is not maintained by reasonable dialectic and debate over the meaning of facts. It is maintained by the use of what Weaver calls Ultimate Terms. There are, likewise, “god terms.” These are words that have an attributed sacredness to them, and to depart from them is to risk being shunned by the culture. Similarly, there are “devil terms.” These are the reverse of the “god terms;” they are little more than dismissive ad hominem, allowing a detractor to condemn without reason, to persuade without dialectic.

In Weaver’s schema, a proper dialectic is maintained by various forms of argument, each with an ethical gradation of effectiveness. The most ethical form of argument is the argument from “Genus and Definition.” Such an argument seeks to understand the essence and nature of a thing, as well as the purpose to which that thing serves. This dialectic approach has respect for the object as a thing in itself. It is ethical because, though the full truth of a thing may never be known, its approximations are based on the thing itself. The second most ethical type of argument is the argument from “Similitude.” This argument seeks to understand the thing itself by use of comparison and analogy. When done well, it may establish an understanding that approximates the argument from definition; this is due to its comparisons to real things. The third type of argument—and the least ethical—is the argument from “Cause and Effect,” or the argument from “Circumstance.” For Weaver, this is the least ethical, for it appeals to something that has not yet occurred. Consequently, that something may be little more than the subjectivist’s imagined concern. The rhetorician using this type of argument may use rhetoric manipulatively to secure responses in order to fulfill his own desires. Finally, there is a fourth type of argument to which Weaver refers; it is an appeal to “Authority and Testimony.”

This type of argument depends on the traditions and dialectic of others; it appeals to history and tradition for authority and support. These concepts are at the core of Weaver's rhetorical theory, and will serve to orient the methodological analysis that will follow.

## Development of the Argument

Lewis was an objectivist and wrote at least one essay, "The Poison of Subjectivism," and one book, *The Abolition of Man*, to declare rhetorically that he was committed to this principle. These works, however, do not reflect the totality of Lewis's objectivist stance, as it appears also in many other bits and pieces of his writing. I have sought, for the purposes of this study, to pull together a systematic exposition of the more salient ideas of Lewis. If the tendency to slip into subjectivism and its potential for evil is a genuine risk, one might suppose that its allure is subtle. Was Lewis himself conscious of this? Does he seek to make accommodation for these risks by developing checks and balances helpful for himself, as well as his readers? I argue that Lewis was conscious of subjectivism's subtlety and that he uses his rhetoric to make the danger more evident.

Lewis was interested in the larger problem of evil, as is attested by his publications *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed*. Lewis rejected the faith of his childhood for its failure to console him after his mother died, when he was merely nine years old. He also had a deformity of his thumbs that made him awkward and the brunt of abuses in school. As he looked at his difficulties and the deficiencies of Christianity to provide satisfactory answers to his questions, he turned to atheism. Clearly, he was in a position to project onto the world an understanding driven by his own subjectivist assessments. However, it is important to note that he was an objectivist before his conversion to Christianity. His attempt to understand reality drove him from his childhood faith, and it also brought him back to faith as an adult convert. He was willing to modify his intellectual position. Although his conversion to Christianity has been discussed at great length, scholars have not pointed out that Lewis's own modifications of thought were due to his objectivist commitments. As he writes about the problem of evil, he is constantly asking his readers to consider more deeply what is involved in understanding the problem properly, and in doing this he offers fresh and helpful insights. These insights are not without flaws,

and they are far from being last words on the subject, but they do reveal that Lewis's thinking about such things was "under construction," so to speak, as he sought to conform his thinking, as best he might, to the objective world. With the death of his wife, Joy Davidman, Lewis was forced to reconsider these matters more deeply, seeking for satisfactory answers—not only for the mind, but also for the heart. In looking at these matters, I argue that Lewis is cognizant of the problems of subjectivism, and his wrestling with these things is an example of one committed to the benefits of an objective pursuit of truth.

Lewis's professional career as an Oxford don and Cambridge Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature demanded that he attend to literary historical and critical matters related to this period. If subjectivism concerned Lewis, as I argue it did, then it is reasonable to suspect that he sees the need to address rhetorically the dangers of subjectivism in his literary critical work as well. I will examine how Lewis addresses subjectivist habits as he sees them practiced by literary critics and what he does in an effort to address them rhetorically. His literary critical work stands as a warning to the academy regarding the dangers of subjectivism.

Some have suggested that Lewis's interest in writing fiction was a retreat from his failed attempts as a Christian apologist. Certainly few, if any, would argue that Lewis was never an influential apologist. Many, on the other hand, would argue that Lewis could write popular works for the masses who lacked the technical skill to see through the weaknesses of his reasoning, but he lacked the background to keep up with the debates of the academy in areas of philosophy and theology. Due to his deficiencies, there are some, such as Lewis biographers George Sayer and A. N. Wilson, as well as Inklings and Tolkien biographer Humphrey Carpenter, who are convinced that fiction enabled him to press his ideas in a less threatened medium. I argue that Lewis continued producing works of apologetics throughout his life, and his interest in writing fiction resulted because that form of literature worked best for what it was he sought to convey rhetorically. One of the things he concerns himself with in his fiction is how subjectivism, unchecked, supports evil. It is one thing to state this as a proposition, but there is something of richer interest in portraying a supposal, in fiction, about how such a slide might occur. Lewis is not fleeing from the arena of debate as he does

this; rather, he adds more texture to his body of work, and, in essence, he fleshes the significance of his ideas out as he does this.

Upon discovering the level of Lewis's concern about subjectivism, I will give attention to Lewis's fiction. Lewis has rhetorical interests in making it clear to his readers that evil is likely to grow from unchecked subjectivism. While he does not say this explicitly, it is implied in the argument of his work. Using Weaver's ideas about objective value, I will analyze several texts gathered from Lewis's fiction. The breadth of Lewis's fiction provides more data than can possibly be analyzed in this study; therefore I will take examples from four different decades, from the 1920s through to the 1950s. When these examples resemble similar instances in other texts, I will make note of the similarities as a means of highlighting other works with similar motifs. Lewis is concerned about a problem of evil, particularly subjectivism, and this idea is supported by the fact that he addresses its significance rhetorically in his fiction.

SAMPLE