

DECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION: C. S. LEWIS' DEFENSE OF WESTERN TEXTUALITY

Bruce L. Edwards, Jr.*

Schoolmasters in our time are fighting hard in defence of education against vocational training; universities, on the other hand, are fighting against education on behalf of learning.

C. S. Lewis

From many platforms and in numerous publications during his lifetime, C. S. Lewis championed a tradition of values that he believed were under attack in a crassly anti-human modern age. For Lewis the key event in modern culture was the demise of the doctrine of objective value in education, particularly its devastating effect on literary study and the concept of textuality. Lewis himself sought to rescue an approach to written texts that preserved the authority of the author and maintained the objectivity of the text under consideration. While carefully examining the artifacts of the crumbling culture about him, Lewis articulated a literacy he found indigenous to a western epistemology informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Lewis understood, like many present scholars, that when the creation of texts becomes integral to a culture's stability, literacy becomes not only a set of techniques for communication but also a way of thinking, a construct that makes possible a more interior, analytical means of cognition than is possible in a primarily oral culture. As Walter Ong has noted:

With such external, technological equipment (as clay tablets, skins, paper, styli, brushes, pens, inks), the mind can understand kinds of activities previously impossible. The analytically organized treatise, such as Aristotle's *Rhetoric* or *Physics*, can come into existence. There is no way for an oral culture to go through the kind of elaborately analytic thinking processes that constitute such work.¹

Writing, in an even more dramatic way than speech, allows for the transcendence of self, for the detachment of knowledge from personal memory into a self-existent text, accessible to those who know the code. It is the notion of literacy as a paradigm of and basis for analytical thinking and critical inquiry that Lewis vociferously defended in his career. Yet it is this notion that has slowly been eroded in the post-modern era.

Behind the "literacy crisis" is not merely a foreshortened college career for a few more beleaguered freshmen who cannot read *Ulysses* or the disgruntlement of senior faculty members who must now teach so-called "basic skills" to

*Bruce Edwards is assistant professor of English at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

¹W. Ong, "Reading, Technology, and Human Consciousness," in *Literacy as a Human Problem* (ed. J. Raymond; University, Alabama: University of Alabama, 1982) 186.

the unprepared, but a deeper cultural malady that George Steiner has called "organized amnesia." We have reached the point when professors of language and literature must become apologists for literacy itself—the literacy of print, the literacy of texts. And in preserving textuality against the competing literacies of popular culture, one is inevitably involved in the defense of the western cultural heritage upon which this literacy is based.

At the heart of Lewis' work was a stance he would call *rehabilitative*. The rehabilitation that he practiced and that is exemplified in his life is what so many have found compelling and refreshing in his work. In Thomas Howard's words, Lewis "wanted to lead us to a window, looking out from the dark and stuffy room of modernity, and to burst open the shutters and point us to an enormous vista stretching away from the room in which we are shut."² Lewis' rehabilitative stance manifested his reverence for the past, his principled skepticism of his own period's mores and dogma, and his profound propensity for recovering, restoring and preserving lost values and ideals. Specifically in his literary criticism Lewis sought to retrieve and rejuvenate authors and whole genres of literature that had been waylaid, forgotten or ignored by an unappreciative generation of readers and critics.

It is this rehabilitative disposition that informs and unifies the Lewis canon. One walks away from any literary essay of Lewis' knowing not only more about the text under consideration than before but also more about its cultural and philosophical context and one's own than could be gleaned in reading dozens of strictly historical treatments. Indeed, those of us who have tried to read through the entire Lewis corpus confess that we have received an education in history, sociology, philosophy and philology so extensive and exhilarating that other writers seem thin and frivolous in comparison. That so many have found Lewis so haltingly original and unique is more a measure of our period's cultural ignorance and dulled vision, perhaps, than his achievement. He himself, of course, disclaimed any sort of "originality"—caricaturing himself as a "dinosaur," one of the last of the old western men who had simply received and passed along the best and more enduring values and beliefs of the past.

But in an age that is generally ahistorical (and antihistorical when it is not), in an age in which all history is thought to be revisionism, in an age in which the past is regarded as merely the mirror of the present or the collective superstitions of a backward era—in other words, in an age of "chronological snobbery" gone mad—a man the stature of Lewis will emerge as the sanest and wisest of men. In such an age as ours, one can hardly underestimate the worth and necessity of having had someone of Lewis' erudition and lucidity to bring us to our senses.

What Lewis perceived in the movements of his time, both academic and social, was the gradual dismantling of an epistemology fundamental to western thought. Lewis possessed an uncanny ability to uncover the hidden assumptions and veiled agendas submerged in otherwise innocent texts. He knew that seemingly innocuous theories of art and literature, tucked away in obscure undergraduate texts and freshman anthologies, tend to influence society in dramatic ways over time.

²T. Howard, *The Achievement of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1980) 13.

His most sustained critique of the direction of western thought, *The Abolition of Man*, began with the careful dissection of a wartime composition text. In sifting this surfacely unremarkable book, Lewis demonstrated that its authors played the role of amateur philosophers, subtly undermining the doctrine of objective value, which Lewis posited as the center and core of the western cultural heritage. While he could not have foreseen the particulars Lewis did in fact glimpse the broad outlines of a literary nihilism that, I believe, grips the critical assumptions of this generation of artists and teachers.

In the balance of this paper I wish to juxtapose Lewis' rehabilitative stance with this contemporary nihilism in literary study, which I will discuss under the rubric of "deconstruction." Lewis viewed his critical task to be that of clearing away debris from the reader's line of sight, allowing him to read the text free of chronological or cultural myopia. His belief in objective value and his trust in the ability of language to refer to a reality outside of itself provided him a secure platform from which he could speak confidently. In his fantasy *The Great Divorce* Lewis chose George MacDonald, the Victorian novelist and clergyman, to be his companion and guide—much as Dante chose Virgil and Kierkegaard chose Socrates. In a cultural and critical wilderness that seems to grow more dense and impenetrable week by week, volume by volume, I find in Lewis the qualities of a wise and experienced navigator worthy of our attention and respect and utmost confidence in a journey into treacherous territory.

Let it be said that we live in a time of fashionably arcane critical theory. I use the word "theory" advisedly since, as one surveys contemporary literary scholarship, one finds that the study of criticism itself has superseded the study of literary text. Let us also notice that there is hardly a thinker less sympathetic to theories and systems of literature than Lewis. If one accepts Paul Holmer's analysis of Lewis' scholarly disposition, it is clear that Lewis would have immediately moved to rest any debate of a literary kind on the ground of particular texts, authors, periods—and not on something so flimsy and unreliable as someone's theory about literature. But let us attempt to meet the adversary on his own turf momentarily, first by trying to see as clearly as possible the substance of his theoretical stance and then proceeding to its implications for literature and society.

In contemporary criticism, reading has been transformed into a nebulous, rather mystical act—something, in fact, that is basically for "experts." Reading has come to mean such things as (1) an archaeological trek into the author's psyche, (2) the decoding of a hopelessly involuted palimpsest, or sometimes (3) the reader's own reconstruction of the text in displacement of the one the author wrote. Texts themselves have more or less disappeared as objects of analysis or appreciation among many contemporary critics. Some do not believe the texts are "really there" but are simply present in the consciousness of the reader, while others will concede the existence of texts but will grant them an autonomy of meaning so radical that no one can ever quite construe it. In the place of such traditional questions as "Who wrote this and why?" "When was it written, and what does it mean?" "How should one read this text?" have come questions that center around the philosophical status of texts: (1) What constitutes a text? (2) In what does meaning inhere: the text, the reader, the

author? (3) Are texts and their meanings stable over time? (4) Can language, in fact, mirror a reality outside of itself? (5) Is there an objective reality beyond one's subjective perception of it?

As one can see, we are already in a labyrinth of epistemological issues once considered peripheral to the reading and enjoyment of literary texts. Though Lewis would have been dismayed by this shift in emphasis, one can imagine him relishing the debate that might emerge therefrom. But let me depart from this generalized and unfocused discussion to consider two particular strains of contemporary criticism.

The reigning orthodoxy in most post-World-War-II Anglo-American departments of literature was what was called the "New Criticism." This stance toward the reading and study of literary texts had two identifiable rallying points: New Critics argued that the meaning of a text had nothing to do with an author's intention and that, further, the meaning of a text should not be confused with its effects upon the reader. They hoped to redirect attention to the text, regarding the traditional methods of analysis—historical, biographical, genre and philological criticism—as distracting and too committed to peripheral matters. Their famous injunction—"poems should not mean, but be"—reflected their vigorous and scrupulous devotion to the text itself as an autonomous artifact that is to be experienced as a whole and not interpreted with cultural compass or authorial intrusion. I should mention in passing that though Lewis is sometimes referred to as a "New Critic" and though there are some obvious emphases within New Criticism that he would endorse, it is not strictly correct so to label him. Lewis would not ignore historical setting or authorial intention in confronting a literary work when it obviously contributed to its understanding.

It is against this New Critical orthodoxy that much contemporary criticism rebels. Deconstruction, as an emerging model for reading criticism, finds its substance in a variety of sources, but primarily in the work of continental philosopher Jacques Derrida, who argues that language is a self-contained, self-enclosed system of signs that bears no direct relationship with the external reality it is thought to name. That is, in fact, a common structuralist position, which suggests that since all signs are arbitrary—there is no reason why C-A-T should signify the animal we call "cat"—so too any texts derived from such arbitrary signs are themselves arbitrary. The result, according to Derrida, is that texts are radically ambiguous, authorless and impenetrable; they recede into an infinite regression of meaningless symbols. Readers seeking texts with a determinate meaning or center are disappointed. The text is, in this view, a flux whose tenuous connection to an objective reality is constantly undermined.

What does a deconstructive reading look like? It is a sifting of the text to uncover its pretense of referring to reality. For example, an American practitioner of deconstruction, J. Hillis Miller, recently wrote that Dickens' work, *Sketches by Boz*, is not at all a realistic text "firmly attached to the social facts of London in 1836." Rather, Dickens is "really" writing about his inability to write truly about the world, about how all of our lives are made up of self-created fictions that can never be corroborated as corresponding to reality. No doubt Dickens would have been surprised at this. But it is in this sense that this kind of reading is "deconstructive": Such a reading "deconstructs" or re-

duces each text to the basic message that there is and can be no message. All texts consist of an infinite play of meanings, turning all reading into misreading. This brand of deconstructive criticism may be seen, I believe, as an ironic derivative of the New Criticism it seeks to displace. Since New Critics discarded the relevance of intention in responding to a work and made the reader a spectator, as it were, to his own reading act, the text was thus left open to the skeptical aberrations cited above.

A second strain of deconstructive criticism is that promoted by Stanley Fish—though he would by all means try to distance his views from the radical skepticism of Derrida and company. Fish's stance involves not the problem of no meaning but of too many meanings. He believes the meaning of a text resides wholly in the reader who reads and not in the intention of the author or in the words on the page. Fish argues that a reader initiates and constitutes a text from his own consciousness—that is, a reader “creates” the text as he reads and is marginally, if at all, constrained by what actually appears in black and white. A given text can mean in fact whatever a reader can make it mean. The job of the critic is not to limit options but to increase them. There is, for Fish, no right—or range of right—interpretations to impose on the text. His testimony is telling: “Rather than restoring or recovering texts, I am in the business of making texts and teaching others to make them by adding to their repertoire of [reading] strategies.”³ Fish's *Surprised by Sin*, a study of *Paradise Lost*, suggested that Milton's purpose in the poem was not to “justify the ways of God to man” but to convict the reader of his own sin. This at least is what reader Fish has made of the text.

These brands of deconstructive criticism have in a common a rejection of the realism inherent in traditional criticism. Critics such as Derrida, Miller and Fish call in question the ability of language to refer to a reality beyond itself. All three turn reading into a sophisticated form of solipsism. There is no authority or objectivity to turn to; “to write” and “to read” become intransitive verbs; readership trades denotation with authorship; the text, long the most stable and reliable component in the study of literature, has relinquished its ability to mean or be. What can or should be said in response?

When one must defend the individual and objective identities of author, text and reader, he is somewhat in the position G. K. Chesterton describes upon being asked, “Why do you prefer civilization to savagery?” “The ordinary intelligent man,” he says,

would look wildly around at object after object, and would be able to answer vaguely, “Why there is that bookcase . . . and the coal in the coal-scuttle . . . and pianos . . . and policemen.” There is, therefore, about all complete conviction a kind of huge helplessness. The belief is so big that it takes a long time to get it into action.⁴

It is such a natural thing to distinguish between author, text and reader, assigning them distinct roles and responsibilities, that it is hard to muster the

³S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1980) 180.

⁴G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Doubleday, 1962) 83.

skepticism it takes to question them. What is at issue here, Lewis would tell us, is not merely abstruse literary theory but rationality itself:

It is a disastrous discovery, as Emerson says somewhere, that we exist. I mean, it is disastrous when instead of merely attending to a rose we are forced to think of ourselves looking at the rose with a certain type of mind and a certain type of eyes. It is disastrous because if you are not very careful, the colour of the rose gets attributed to our optic nerves and its scent to our noses, and in the end there is no rose left.⁵

One might add that it is equally disastrous that we have “recently discovered ‘reading’” and that this discovery has led to a loss of the text as a text.

Lewis would trace this new gnosticism of the deconstructive critics to the rejection of objective value, to the blurring of the subject/object distinction. He argues that when value and knowledge are “transferred to the subjective side of the account”

the subject becomes gorged, inflated, at the expense of the Object. The same method which has emptied the world now proceeds to empty ourselves. . . . We, who have personified all other things, turn out to be ourselves mere personifications. Man is indeed akin to the gods: that is, he is no less phantasmal than they. Just as the Dryad is a “ghost,” an abbreviated symbol for all the facts we know about the tree foolishly mistaken for a mysterious entity over and above the facts, so the man’s “mind” or “consciousness” is an abbreviated symbol for certain verifiable facts about his behavior: a symbol mistaken for a thing.⁶

With the loss of the subject/object distinction, man becomes exclusively a “himself” who devolves increasingly into narcissism. Unperturbed by outside values and judgments, his life itself, his thoughts, his muffled entanglements with other human beings, his reading all loom as “incessant autobiography.” Here is a creature intended to become a person, but who cannot “come out” of himself-as-subject to the objective world where minds may meet.

For Lewis, the loss leads to a rather impoverished view of literature, of reading, while dispensing entirely with the author—whose purposes in the text are an encumbrance. In confronting the text the would-be reader will find in it mirrors of his own consciousness, a litmus paper of his own emotions and sentiments, confirming, reasserting, but never challenging or displacing them. In contrast, Lewis saw literature as a means for transcending oneself, leading him out of the prison house of his own time and idiosyncrasies into a new and distinct world wherein he might recover vision and purpose. For discourse to enable a reader to do this, it must have an objective textual status. Of course a reader may choose texts that “mirror” his own consciousness and confirm his emotions—and who would not say that there are texts in existence that could fill the bill? This is a very different thing, however, from saying that any text he happens upon will serve this function just by being a text and his being its reader. In the former case, a reader must objectively know that a text—distinct from his own consciousness—contains elements that reflect his already desired

⁵C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 271.

⁶C. S. Lewis, “Preface,” in D. E. Harding, *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) 9–10.

status. A woman who sees herself "unlucky in love" and a victim of vicious caddery may deliberately choose to read romances in which a heroine suffers, then triumphs over her wicked suitors. On the other hand a similar woman who reads every novel as a vindication of her own sexual and romantic status is dealing not with texts-as-they-are but as she intends them to be. The reader's and not the author's intention reigns in such a case.

Such a view is antithetical to Lewis', of course, because he sees it as ultimately self-defeating and debilitating—not just within literary theory but in the matter of mundane everyday thinking. It is here, perhaps, that one needs to take note of Lewis' distinction between "looking at" and "looking along"—or, as he discusses them more extensively elsewhere, "contemplation" and "enjoyment." The latter terms are drawn from Samuel Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity*, a book that Lewis read prior to his conversion to Christianity and that, by his own admission, profoundly affected his way of viewing the world:

"Enjoyment" has nothing to do with pleasure, nor "contemplation" with the contemplative life. When you see a table you "enjoy" the act of seeing and "contemplate" the table. Later, if you took up Optics and thought about seeing itself, you would be contemplating the seeing and enjoying the thought.⁷

The enjoyment is the doing of an activity, the contemplation is the apprehending of the object of the activity:

We do not "think a thought" in the same sense in which we "think that Herodotus is unreliable." When we think a thought, "thought" is a cognate accusative (like "blow" in "strike a blow"). We enjoy the thought (that Herodotus is unreliable) and, in so doing, contemplate the unreliability of Herodotus.⁸

Lewis regarded this distinction "as an indispensable tool of thought" because it allowed for the separation of seer from object of sight, knower from object of knowledge, thinker from object of thinking, and so on. To "see" a table was to be distinct from it, perceiving it and registering it as an "outside" entity. On the other hand, to shift from the seeing of the table to one's act of seeing it—"to take one's eyes out to look at them"—is to lose the object itself:

In other words the enjoyment and the contemplation of our inner activities are incompatible. You cannot hope and also think about hoping at the same moment; for in hope we look to hope's object and we interrupt this by (so to speak) turning around to look at the hope itself.⁹

Lewis might have been talking about the activity of reading when he discusses "introspection" below:

All introspection is in one respect misleading. In introspection we try to look "inside ourselves" and see what is going on. But nearly everything that was going on before is stopped by the very act of our turning to look at it. Unfortunately this does not mean that introspection finds nothing. On the contrary, it finds precisely what is left behind by the suspension of all our normal activities; and

⁷C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955) 217.

⁸Ibid., pp. 217–218.

⁹Ibid., p. 218.

what is left behind is mainly mental images and physical sensations. The great error is to mistake this mere sediment or track or by-product for the activities themselves. This is how men may come to believe that thought is only unspoken words, or the appreciation of poetry only a collection of mental pictures.¹⁰

As the reader approaches the text and reads, he is “enjoying” the reading and “contemplating” the text: The text is the object of his “enjoyment.” However, as soon as the reader’s attention shifts from the text to the act of reading—in Lewis’ terminology, from contemplating the text to contemplating “reading”—the object of reading, the text, drops from view. The reader who attends to his own reading may mistake the “sediment” of his own introspective look at reading for the text itself.

Lewis would not deny, of course, that one might choose to attend to one’s reading as a process and examine it. He is simply making the proviso that attention to the process of reading is not the same thing as reading a text. On the surface this may sound like a restatement of the New Critic’s “affective fallacy,” the “confusion of the poem with its results (what it is and what it does),” but that is not Lewis’ point here. Instead Lewis would distinguish two different kinds of acts: reading-as-such, and the examination of what reading is. The former involves one intellect engaging another’s textual discourse. The latter involves one intellect examining itself in the act of reading. The former has an object outside of the intellect that engages it; the latter does not. Reader-oriented critics like Fish confound the act of reading by trying to “contemplate the enjoyed,” by merging criticism with reading. If, as Fish and other deconstructive critics like Derrida and Miller contend, reading is always-already an “interpretation,” and the author’s text cannot be confronted, then the question must arise: “What is it an interpretation of?” Lewis, of course, would respond that by confusing the contemplation of the text with the contemplation of reading, deconstructive critics lose the text:

You cannot go on “explaining away” for ever; you will find that you have explained away explanation itself. You cannot go on “seeing through” things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that windows should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to “see through” first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To “see through” all things is the same as not to see.¹¹

By “explaining away” the text as an “interpretation,” the critic like Fish argues that he is, in effect, “seeing through” to what already “really is”—in Fish’s case, merely the accidental impression the ink spots make on the mind. The problem here is not the “affective fallacy” but that of failing to distinguish between one’s apprehension of the reading process and the actual reading of a text, not a “confusing of the poem with its results” but a failure to see the poem at all. In the parlance of the New Critic, Lewis believed that a poem could both mean and be and that a poem may in some sense include its effects. However,

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 218–219.

¹¹C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1973) 91.

it was only because of this "indispensable tool of thought"—the distinction between enjoyment and contemplation, between object and subject—that a reader could be in a position to discern the poem.

Lewis believed then in the integrity of the text—that one must attend to it, refusing to go outside of it, except to "restore the poem" its author originally wrote:

We want to know—therefore, as far as may be, we want to live through for ourselves—the experience of men long dead. What a poem may "mean" to moderns and to them only, however delightful, is from this point of view, merely a stain on the lens. We must clean the lens and remove the stain so that the real past can be seen better.¹²

Lewis' *The Discarded Image* is an excellent example of the kind of scholarship that illuminates and preserves the "real poem" without displacing it or substituting one of one's own making. Lewis proposes, in reading poetry out of one's own time, that the reader acquire beforehand a "tolerable (though very incomplete) outfit," which, taken along in the reading, might lead into instead of out of the text:

To be always looking at the map when there is a fine prospect before you shatters the "wise passiveness" in which landscape ought to be enjoyed. But to consult a map before we set out has no such ill effect.¹³

This "map," which Lewis elsewhere calls "the insulating power of context," represents an unobtrusive adjunct to the text that sets the text within its historical and intentional context, making it possible for the reader still to put the text first, without distraction.

Lewis, in his rehabilitative way, maintained a balance among the components of the reading process that has been lost in the cacophony of competing contemporary critical theories. While believing in the integrity of the text he avoided the excesses of New Criticism by taking authorial intention seriously and approached the text from within its historical context. Against the nihilistic and solipsistic extremes of deconstructive critics, one may extrapolate from Lewis' work a sane model for confronting literary texts.

The author creates a text out of the language and context of his cultural community—a text that reflects, when successful, his intention. The author may inadvertently mean more or less than he intended—i.e., more (or less) than he desired—but in either event the reader may receive the text as a purposeful expression from the author's mind. The reader brings to the text his own set of expectations and viewpoints, which may be confirmed or questioned or supplanted in the course of reading. Nevertheless the reader's first task is always to read the text that the author has actually written and not one created from his own integrity. The text is both a *logos* (something said) and a *poiema* (something made), implying that a reader may respond favorably to a text without necessarily accepting its implicit worldview or message and

¹²C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979) 2.

¹³C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1974) vii.

likewise appreciate a text's outlook or sentiment without believing it is a well-made artifact. The text exists as an objective entity apart from the author or reader's consciousness and as such may delight, teach or move the recipient. Though a text's "public meaning" or significance may change from age to age or from culture to culture, a text's original ontological meaning remains stable and is recoverable by historical and philological study.

The unspoken premise behind this Lewisian stance is that through writing an author may step out of himself and that through reading a reader may do the same, enabling one to understand his own personhood, to become something other. If the study of literature is to have any meaning, if literacy is to be rehabilitated in our time, it will be on the basis that Lewis articulates in his work. I can think of no better way to conclude this paper than to quote Lewis' eloquent defense of the reading act found in the closing pages of his too little known and most theoretical literary work, *An Experiment in Criticism*:

Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom fully realise the enormous extension of our being which we owe to authors. We realise it best when we talk with an unliterary friend. He may be full of goodness and good sense but he inhabits a tiny world. In it, we should be suffocated. The man who is contented to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison. My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through the eyes of others. Reality, even seen through the eyes of many, is not enough. I will see what others have invented. Even the eyes of all humanity are not enough. I regret that the brutes cannot write books. Very gladly would I learn what face things present to a mouse or a bee; more gladly still would I perceive the olfactory world charged with all the information and emotion it carries for a dog.

Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. There are mass emotions which heal the wound; but they destroy the privilege. In them, our separate selves are pooled and we sink back into sub-individuality. But in reading great literature, I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.¹⁴

With Lewis, we must rail against the notion that truth is merely consensus, that reality is merely a construct. If our literary crisis is to be met successfully, it will be by restoring the sense of proportion and objectivity that animated Lewis' work. Lewis' rehabilitative work must go on.

¹⁴C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969) 140–141.