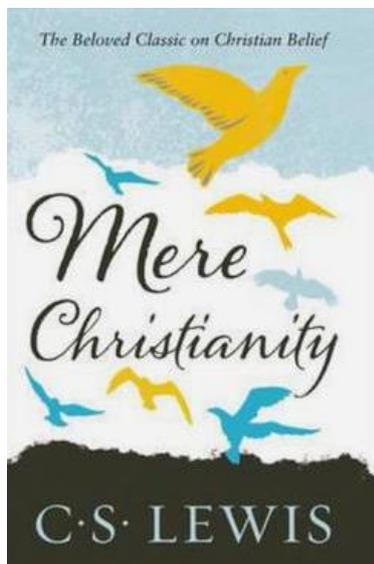


## CS LEWIS BOOKS OVERVIEW

Most of you were here in May when Kel talked about his journey with C.S. Lewis, as he travelled to conduct research in Oxford and Belfast for his series of C.S. Lewis whodunnits. Today I'd like to present my own journey with C.S. Lewis, not so much to places, but through the enormous variety of books that he wrote. I want to give you an overview of his works. In subsequent meetings I hope that some of you will expand on this by talking about specific books.

Now a chronological list of his works would be very boring. So, I plan to make it personal, and to give you an account of my own encounter with his writing. It all began in my late teens when I found myself leading a youth group at my local Methodist church. Someone drew my attention to *Mere Christianity* and *Screwtape Letters*.



As a fledgling mathematician I was attracted to the way Lewis presented Christian themes in *Mere Christianity*. His style was very logical and systematic, and I felt that he wrote like a mathematician, even though he wasn't one. This is a composite of three small volumes: *Broadcast Talks*, *Christian Behaviour* and *Beyond Personality*. All three books were edited versions of radio talks that Lewis presented on the BBC.

His title, *Mere Christianity*, was chosen to indicate that he was discussing core issues, that pretty well all denominations would agree on. As he put it, "it is like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms". I think this is why he is loved by Catholics, high and low Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans and Presbyterians and members of the Uniting Church. He exhorted his readers "when you've reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors". Let me give you a taste of what he says by two excerpts.

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other.

Here you have a mixture of a homely analogy with a deep truth. We are made to be connected with God, and sin, at its heart, is simply a rejection of God.

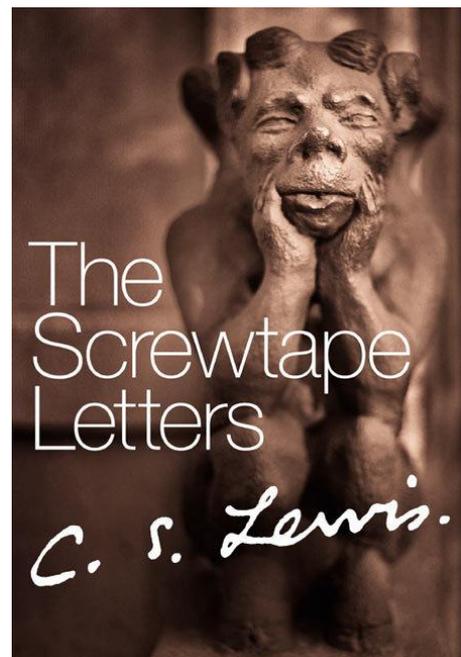
Heaven is the state of being one with God and Hell is the state of being separated from God. Therefore if we end up in Hell it's *we* who've chosen to go there.

Lewis says that it is a really foolish thing to say that "I accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." He suggests that if we're not prepared to accept Him as what he claimed to be, then he must either be like "a man who says he's a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell."

*Screwtape Letters* is written in a totally different vein. It purports to be a series of letters written by a senior devil, Screwtape, towards his nephew, Wormwood – a novice tempter. He offers his advice on how best to corrupt Wormwood's patient. Here there is an inverted logic. What Screwtape suggests is diametrically opposite to what Lewis, himself, would have believed would be best for this patient. Mixed with this inverted logic is some charming humour.

My dear Wormwood, So you "have great hopes that the patient's religious phase is dying away".

We don't have Wormwood's replies to his uncle but we get an idea of what they contained by short quotations from the uncle's letters.



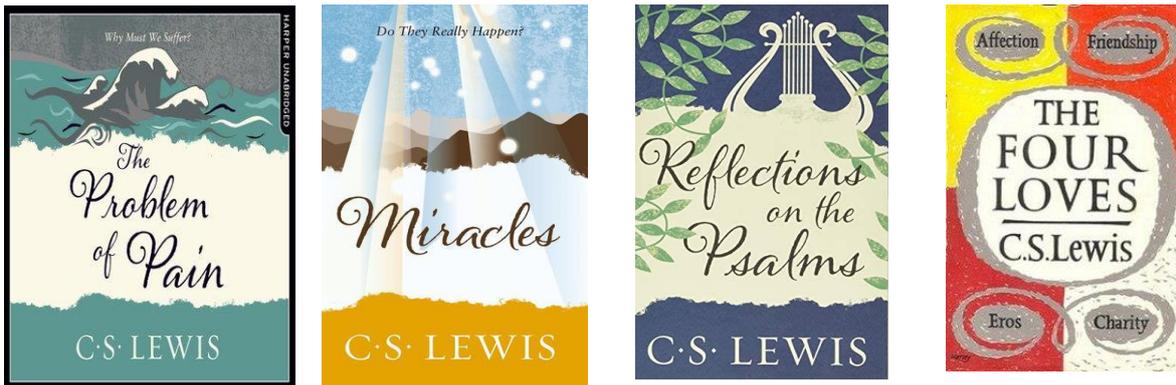
I always thought the training College had gone to pieces since they put old Slubgob at the head of it, and now I'm sure. Has no one ever told you about the law of Undulation?

This book was published in 1942, while the second world war was raging and air raids became a daily occurrence in London. In letter 30 Screwtape writes:

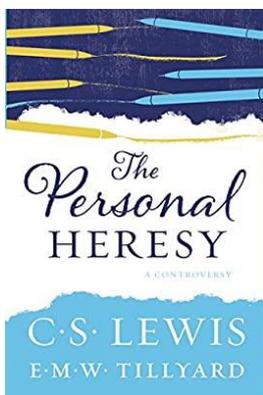
I sometimes wonder whether you think you have been sent into the world for your own amusement. I gather, not from your miserably inadequate report but from that of the Infernal Police, that the patient's behaviour during the first raid has been the worst possible. He has been very frightened and thinks himself a great coward and therefore feels no pride; but he has done everything his duty demanded and perhaps a bit more. Against this disaster all you can produce on the credit side is a burst of ill temper with a dog that tripped him up, some excessive cigarette smoking, and the forgetting of a prayer. What is the use of whining to me about your difficulties?

Eventually the patient slips through their fingers as he dies in an air-raid with a prayer to God on his lips. Screwtape’s final letter is full of hatred and disgust towards his miserable nephew.

You have let a soul slip through your fingers. It makes me mad to think of it. How well I know what happened at the instant when they snatched him from you! There was a sudden clearing of his eyes as he saw you for the first time, and recognised the part that you had had in him and knew that you had it no longer.



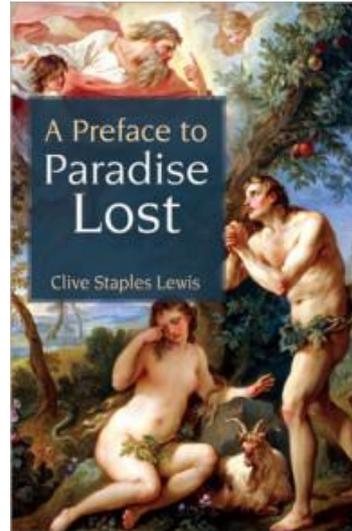
I read a number of his religious books: *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Reflections on the Psalms* and *The Four Loves* to mention a few, but none made as much impact on me as the two I have just mentioned.



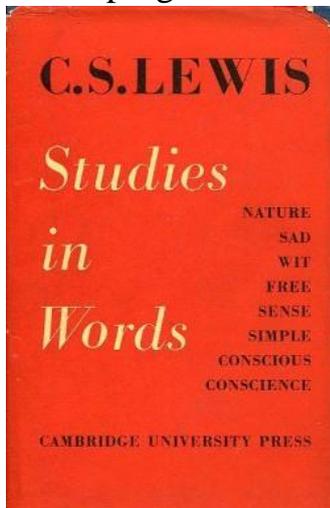
At about the same time I discovered his academic books of literary criticism. I read all of these with the same enthusiasm that I devoted to the theological books. *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* consists of chapters alternately written by C.S. Lewis and E.M.W. Tillyard. Lewis attacks the widely held belief that poetry is, or should be, the expression of the poet’s personality. Lewis says it’s a waste of time learning about the life of a writer – one should judge each book on its own merits. Here I beg to disagree. I think I have learnt nearly as much from learning about his life than reading his books. His life and works run parallel. I think if he knew about all the C.S. Lewis societies around the world he would have said, “humbug” and gone off for a pint.

Reading *A Preface to Paradise Lost* led me to read Milton's work and *Spenser's Images of Life* took me to Spenser himself. Although I had never taught English, I found *The Abolition of Man* interesting, with its discussion on the teaching of English in the upper forms of schools.

I'll have to re-read these books as it's a long time since I opened their covers. The two books that stood out most in my memory are *The Allegory of Love* and *Studies in Words*.



Kel is somewhat of an expert on the meaning and origin of words. He had, for many years, a short radio program called *Word Watch*. But I, too, have always been fascinated by



words, their derivation and their changing meaning. It's something that runs in our family. Did you know that the word 'girl' once meant a young child and could be used for either sex?

Lewis takes the words *Nature*, *Sad*, *Wit*, *Free*, *Sense*, *Simple*, *Conscious* and *Conscience*. I think we all know what they mean ... in today's world. But Lewis explores their meanings in the Medieval world and there are no modern words that quite capture their Medieval meanings.

As words change, so does our world view – or perhaps the other way round. The way men and women back then thought about their world and life was quite different to the way we think about things today. It goes much deeper than the fact that they didn't have our modern technology. In many ways the people from the past are aliens. They might have been physically very similar to modern human beings – shorter perhaps but with the same number of arms and legs. But if you could get inside their minds you would be amazed at the differences. Of course we can't explore their minds directly, but a careful analysis of their writings can give us a glimpse of who they were. This is what makes history, and literature from the past, so interesting.

*The Allegory of Love* is quite different to his *Four Loves*. The latter is an exploration of the differences between romantic and sexual love, family love, platonic love and what is called Christian charity, although by no means do Christians have the monopoly on this sort of love.

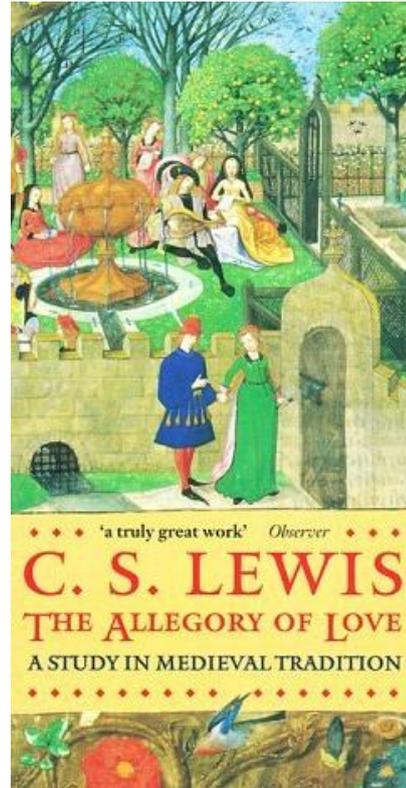
In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis explores the phenomenon of courtly love in the time of the knights of the Crusades. Now it's a form of love that just doesn't

exist in today's world. The knight had his paramour. She was usually a married woman – married to another man, of course – and the relationship was a secret one. So far there is nothing unusual about this in today's world.

But back then it was quite common for this relationship not to be consummated. The knight would write poetry in her honour and worshipped her as a sort of goddess. He would wait near a path where she walked, and after she passed he would kiss the ground she walked on.

What modern young woman would want such intense adoration? She'd say, "pull yourself together, Bruce," if she found out. But in the medieval times she would accept such intense devotion, without feeling she was disloyal to her husband. Perhaps she would drop a locket, containing her image, or a handkerchief, full of her favourite perfume. This would be a love

'token' and the knight would treasure this and, as he lay dying on the battlefields, he would clutch this memorial of her love.

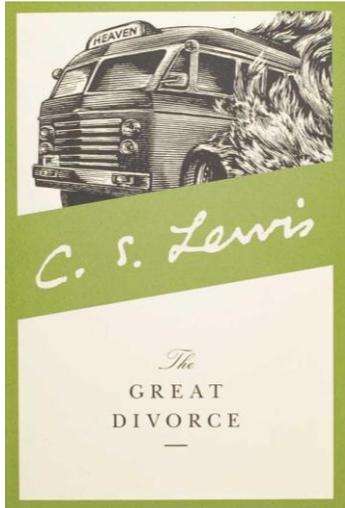


There was no doubt that, at times, some carnal activity took place, when a moment could be snatched, but even this was performed more like a religious ceremony than today's 'quickie'. Courtly love was much more spiritual – more of a meeting of the minds and souls than a meeting of the bodies.

In the summer of 1961-62 I spent three months on a vacation scholarship in Salisbury, a bit north of Adelaide. The Weapons Research Establishment was the headquarters of the Woomera Project, and I spent my time writing computer programs for the rockets that Australia was launching on behalf of the British government. I never actually got to see the computer that ran my programs. But it was one of only half a dozen computers that were in Australia at the time.

I remember going down to Adelaide every Saturday to visit The Book Depot, the Methodist Bookshop. It was during this period that I came to know Lewis's allegories. These made a great impression on me.

This is an adult fantasy – that is a fantasy for grown-ups, not what is usually meant by the prefix 'adult'! *The Great Divorce* is the one that exists between Heaven and Hell. Elsewhere Lewis states that these aren't actual places, and says that the imagery of the Bible – sulphurous pits and burning fire on one hand, and



pearly gates and streets of gold on the other, are just symbols. For Lewis they are states of being. Heaven is the state of being united with God and Hell the state of rejecting God – of believing that one can manage quite well on one’s own. He rejects the literal interpretation of God as a vengeful judge. It is we ourselves who choose Hell by rejecting God.

But in his allegory, Hell is depicted as a dark, dirty, dreary industrial town, like a nineteenth century town in the Midlands, while Heaven is a bright and vibrant garden. But there’s a daily bus service that leaves Hell every morning and travels to Heaven. All the occupants of Hell are entitled to travel on it. And every evening it returns to Hell.

Those who catch the bus from Hell in the morning believe that they ended up in the wrong place by some bureaucratic error. This bus journey will correct the unfortunate error. However when they get to Heaven they find it all too real. The light is too bright, the air is so pure that their diseased lungs can’t cope and the grass is so real it cuts their feet. They can’t wait to get back to the comfort of Hell!

It was obvious from the very beginning that Heaven wouldn’t suit those waiting in the queue to leave Hell. Lewis depicts them as mean and selfish people.

Just as I took my stand a little waspish woman who would have been ahead of me snapped out at a man who seemed to be with her. “Very well, then, I won’t go at all. So there,” and left the queue. “Pray don’t imagine that I care about going in the least. I have only been trying to please you, for peace sake. My own feelings are of course a matter of no importance. I quite understand that” – and suiting the action to the word he also walked away.

I was now next to a very short man with a scowl who glanced at me with an expression of extreme disfavour and observed, rather unnecessarily loudly, to the man beyond him, “This sort of thing really makes one think twice about going at all.

“What sort of thing?” growled the other, a big beefy person.

“Well,” said the Short Man, “this is hardly the sort of society I’m used to as a matter of fact.”

“Huh!” said the Big Man: and then added with a glance at me, “Don’t you stand any sauce from him, Mister. Then, seeing I made no move, he rounded suddenly on the Short Man and said, “Not good enough for you, aren’t we? Like your lip.” Next moment he had given the Short Man a blow on the side of the face that sent him sprawling into the gutter.

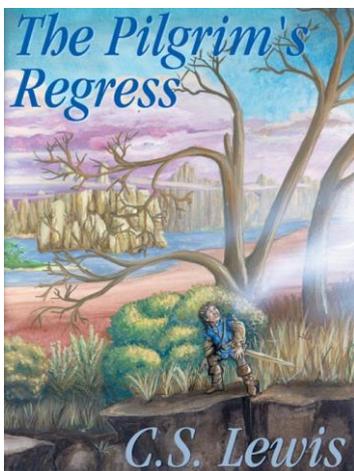
The squabbling continues on the bus. But when the bus arrives at the other place it becomes obvious that those who alight from the bus are transparent, like ghosts.

At first, of course, my attention was caught by my fellow-passengers, who were still grouped about in the neighbourhood of the omnibus, though beginning, some of them, to walk forward into the landscape with hesitating steps. I gasped when I saw them. Now that they were in the light, they were transparent – fully transparent when they stood between me and it, smudgy and imperfectly opaque when they stood in the shadow of some tree. They were in fact ghosts: man-shaped stains on the brightness of the air. One could attend to them or ignore them at will as you do with the dirt on a window pane. I noticed that the grass did not bend under their feet: even the dew drops were not disturbed.

After some time the narrator sees some people coming to meet the wraiths from the bus. They are described as ‘solid’ people.

Because they were bright I saw them while they were still very distant, and at first I did not know that they were people at all. Mile after mile they drew nearer. The earth shook under their tread as their strong feet sank into the wet turf.

Lewis describes the Hell dwellers as mere shadows compared to those in Heaven who were more real than anything we might imagine. The former discover that Heaven is too real for them and they go back to the bus to await the return journey. His meaning is that by choosing to have a relationship with God, one becomes the sort of person that can enjoy Heaven. Those who reject God are happy to return to the slums of Hell, without realising what they are missing out on.



For *Pilgrim's Regress* I'll just quote from the dust jacket.

Though the dragons and giants of this fable are different from those of Bunyan, the allegory performs its old function of enabling the author to say with brevity and simplicity what would otherwise have demanded a full-length philosophy of religion.

The straight road which guides the pilgrims past the City of Claptrap, between the tableland of the High Anglicans and the far-off marsh of the Theosophists, is

traditional Christianity; but the motives for walking that road are shown as they exist in certain neglected *facts* of the romantic imagination.

Many contemporary, and many personal absurdities come by turn under the lash before the tale escapes, in its closing chapters, out of the realm of controversy.

In 1965 my wife and I travelled on the *Orcades* to London. Lewis had died two years earlier, so my dream of meeting him would never be realised. On the ship we met a Rhodes scholar, Daryl Williams. A few weeks after we arrived Daryl invited us up to Oxford for the weekend. To my amazement and delight, he shared a flat with Walter Hooper. As I said last meeting, Walter was C.S. Lewis's literary secretary at the time Lewis died, and was responsible for preparing Lewis's posthumous work for publication.

So that weekend became like a C. S. Lewis pilgrimage. We met Lewis's brother, Warnie and visited The Kilns.

I was in my mid twenties before I started reading the Narnia books. I need say very little about them because I'm sure that you've all heard of them and most of you have probably read some of them. Coming upon them as an adult I was fully aware of their Christian content.

Lewis denied that they were a Christian allegory, but he was using the word in a fairly narrow sense. It's obvious that several of the volumes have a Christian sub-plot. It's clear that Lewis's aim was to expose children and teenagers to the Christian concepts in a subliminal way. Such tender young minds would enjoy the stories purely for the fantasy and they would be oblivious to their hidden Christian message. But when these readers became adults they would say, "wow – so *that's* what these books are all about" and they'd be motivated to re-read them and to ponder on the Christian message.

The specifically Christian themes may lie below the surface but the deep issues of good and evil, of temptation and forgiveness, of disloyalty and guilt, would be all too obvious to children.

It's interesting to compare Lewis's *Narnia* books with Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Most of you will know that Lewis and Tolkien were very good friends and were both the key players in the Inklings group. At their meetings they would read the latest chapters in books that they were writing and so both Lewis and Tolkien would have been in the wonderful position of seeing each others work develop.

Although he was a devout Catholic, Tolkien declared that *The Lord of the Rings* had no Christian subplot. His motivation wasn't to make good Catholics out of his readers, or even good Christians. He wrote this trilogy to provide a platform where he could employ his philological talents. His story is about a world that is entirely disjoint from the world that we live in. It has its own

language and history and customs. Nevertheless even in other worlds, the fundamental notions of good and evil, and the struggle for power, exist.

There's a strong similarity between Tolkien's Ring and Wagner's Ring. Of course the reason is that they both drew from ancient Norse myths. Incidentally Tolkien was once asked if the ring of great power that had to be destroyed in the Mountain of Doom was a symbol for the atomic bomb. He denied it. His world was not simply an allegory for our world.

Narnia, on the other hand, runs parallel to our world. It has a different time scale, so that Lucy can spend months in Narnia and return just a few seconds later according to human time. But they seem to speak English there. At least none of the Pevensey children have any problem in making themselves understood.

The protagonists are human children from this world who stumble into the other world. Lewis has an interesting collection of 'doors' between these two worlds. In *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe* it's the wardrobe with its fur coats and false back. In one of his C.S. Lewis whodunnits Kel uses a similar wardrobe.

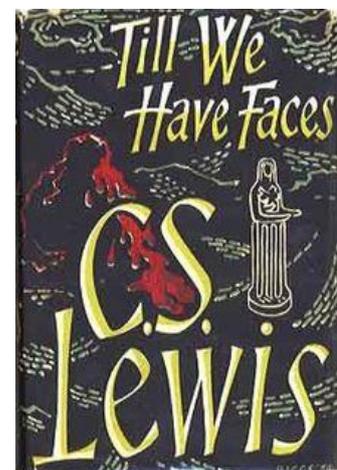
In another Narnia book they are transported there when a train rushes past the station on which they were waiting. In yet another there's a painting of the ship, the *Dawn Treader*, which becomes more and more real the longer they stare at it, until at last they can taste the salty spray and find themselves on the deck.

In 1956 Lewis wrote an adult fantasy, *Till We Have Faces*. It is a re-telling of the ancient Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche, from the perspective of Orual, Psyche's older sister. It's a book that I've had on my bookshelves for many years, but found it hard to get into. Then a few months ago I tackled it again, and found it fascinating.

It begins as the complaint of Orual as an old woman, who is bitter at the injustice of the gods. She has always been ugly, but after her mother dies and her father the King of Glome remarries, she gains a beautiful half-sister Istra, whom she loves as her own daughter. Throughout the novel Istra is known by the Greek version of her name, Psyche.

Now Psyche is so beautiful that the people of Glome begin to offer sacrifices to her as to a goddess. The Priest of the goddess Ungit, a powerful figure in the kingdom, then informs the king that the various plagues in the kingdom are a result of Ungit's jealousy of Psyche, so Psyche is sent up to the mountain to become a human sacrifice to appease the unseen "God of the Mountain".

Some days later, Orual goes up the mountain to bury her body. She's stunned to find Psyche is alive, free from her chains and she says she doesn't want to be rescued. She says that she lives in a beautiful castle – one that Orual can't



see. “Can’t you see it? It’s all around you.” The God of the Mountain has made her his bride rather than a victim.

Orual believes she has a brief vision of this castle, but then it vanishes like a mist. Now Psyche has been commanded never to look on the face of her god-husband and they only come together at night. Orual is immediately suspicious and she argues that the god must be a monster, or that Psyche has actually started to hallucinate after her abandonment and near-death on the mountain. There is no such castle at all, and her husband is actually an outlaw who’s hiding on the mountain and is taking advantage of her delusions in order to have his way with her.

Orual goes off, but returns with a lamp for Psyche to use while her ‘husband’ sleeps. Psyche insists that she won’t disobey his command but Orual threatens both Psyche and herself, by stabbing herself in the arm to show that she means business. Eventually Psyche gives in.

When Psyche disobeys her husband, she’s immediately banished from her beautiful castle and forced to wander as an exile. The God of the Mountain appears to Orual, stating that Psyche must now endure hardship at the hand of a force that he himself can’t fight. He says “You too shall be Psyche,” which Orual takes to mean that she must suffer like Psyche. From this day Orual keeps her face veiled at all times.

That takes us to the middle of the story. I won’t tell you how it ends.

In 1976 I returned to London and during this year I spent much time in libraries searching journals and literary magazines for contributions by Lewis. I have three volumes of photocopies. I haven’t checked to what extent these have been reprinted in various collections of essays.

In *A Note on Jane Austen*, from *Essays in Criticism*, Lewis begins by taking four passages. Catherine from *Northanger Abbey*, Marianne from *Sense and Sensibility*, Elizabeth from *Pride and Prejudice* and Emma from *Emma*.



All four heroines painfully, though with varying degrees of pain, discover that they have been making mistakes both about themselves and about the world in which they live. All their *data* have to be reinterpreted. Indeed, considering the differences of their situations and characters, the similarity of the process in all four is strongly marked. All realise that the

cause of the deception lay within themselves.

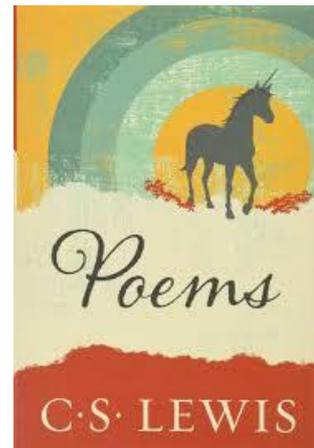
Catherine, from *Northanger Abbey* realises that she has brought to the Abbey a mind ‘craving to be frightened’. She loves the Gothic novel and believes that the converted Abbey must contain dark secrets.

Marianne, from *Sense and Sensibility* realises that she has ‘courted ignorance’ and ‘driven reason away’.

The eponymous Emma, wakes up to the fact that she has been practising deceptions on herself. She believes that Mr Elton has fallen in love with Harriet Smith, the young girl that she has taken under her wing for whom she seeks to find a husband, but discovers that he has only taken an interest in her because she is Emma’s protegee.

Elizabeth, from *Pride and Prejudice*, sees Darcy in a new light. ‘I never knew myself,’ she says. She realises that Darcy is not the proud and unfeeling man she thought him to be.

Lewis’s first published work, published in 1919 when Lewis was 20, and still an agnostic was a poetic cycle. His second book was *Dymer*, published in 1926, although he had been working on it since he was 17. This is a long narrative poem about the adventures of Dymer, who comes across a castle, and encounters a woman with whom he sleeps without seeing her face. He later discovers that she is a hideous she-monster and is one of the gods. He eventually comes across a monster which he learns is the off-spring of his one night stand at the castle. They fight, and Dymer is killed. Here there is an echo of Frankenstein’s monster, and a pre-echo of the Unseen God of the Mountain in *Till We have Faces*.



He published many shorter poems throughout his life, in magazines such as *Punch*, *The Spectator* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. The following amusing poem, with a twist at the end, was published on *Punch* in 1948.

## THE LATE PASSENGER

The sky was low, the sounding rain was falling dense and dark,  
And Noah’s sons were standing at the window of the Ark.

The beasts were in, but Japhet said, ‘I see one creature more  
Belated and unmated there come knocking at the door.’

‘Well let him knock,’ said Ham, ‘Or let him drown or learn to swim,

We're overcrowded now as it is, we've got no room for him.'

'And let him knock, how terribly he knocks,' said Shem, 'Its feet  
Are hard as horn – but oh the air that comes from it is sweet.'

'Now hush,' said Ham, 'You'll waken Dad, and once he comes to see  
What's at the door, it's sure to mean more work for you and me.'

Noah's voice came roaring from the darkness down below,  
'Some animal is knocking. Take it in before we go.'

Ham shouted back, and savagely he nudged the other two,  
'That's only Japhet knocking down a brad-nail in his shoe.'

Said Noah, 'Boys, I hear a noise like a horse's hoof.'

Said Ham, 'Why, that's the dreadful rain that drums upon the roof.'

Noah tumbled up on deck and out he put his head;  
His face was grey, his knees were loosed, he tore his beard and said,

'Look, look! It would not wait. It turns away. It takes its flight.  
Fine work you've made of it, my sons, between you all to-night!

'Even if I could outrun it now, it would not turn again  
– Not now. Our great discourtesy has earned its high disdain.

'Oh noble and untamed beast, my sons were all unkind,  
In such a night what stable and what manger will you find?

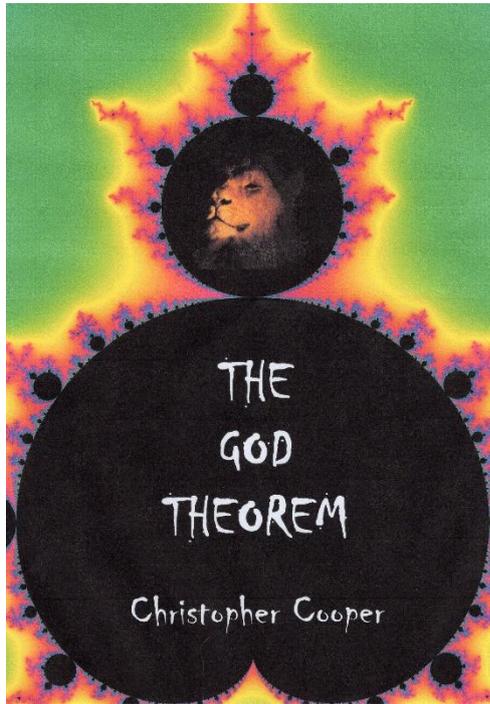
'Oh golden hoofs, oh cataracts of mane, oh nostrils wide  
With indignation! Oh, the neck wave-arched, the lovely pride!

'Oh long shall be the furrows ploughed across the hearts of men  
Before it comes to stable and to manger once again,

'And dark and crooked all the ways in which our race shall walk,  
And shrivelled all their manhood like a flower with broken stalk,

'And all the world, oh Ham, may curse the hour when you were born;  
Because of you the Ark must sail without the Unicorn.'

Let me finish by mentioning one of my recent books. Kel promoted his C.S. Lewis whodunnits last time so I suppose it's in order for me to mention mine today, especially as it contains quite a few C.S. Lewis references.



It's called *The God Theorem*. It purports to contain a proof that God exists. Actually there's an appendix that *does* really contain a perfectly logical proof of the existence of God. This proof doesn't violate any of the standard laws of logic. Nor does it contain any self-referentiality, like the paradox to which St Paul refers when he mentions a Cretan who says that all Cretans are liars.

The only problem with this 'water tight' proof that God exists is that it can be slightly modified to prove that Father Christmas exists, and even that God does *not* exist!

So, in effect, it's a demonstration of the care that needs to be taken with logic rather than as a serious contribution to theology. I wrote the book after somebody asked me how a mathematician, who only believes in what he can prove, can be a Christian, who believes by faith. I use my mathematical experiences of higher mathematics where logic can take on some of the qualities of a religion.

Did you know that in a certain branch of higher mathematics, called Set Theory, there are some statements where we don't know whether they are true or false. And, what is more, we never will! How can one say that it will be forever impossible to decide whether or not they are true? Can we put limits on man's ingenuity? Indeed we can.

Only the first part of the book gets into such nitty gritty, mind-bending, philosophy. The second half gives my version of many of the themes that are discussed in *Mere Christianity*, such as miracles, the problem of pain, the nature of prayer, angels and Heaven and Hell. It's self-published and costs \$20, which just about covers the cost of printing.