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C.S. Lewis and the Art of Writing: What the Essayist, Poet, Novelist, Literary Critic, Apologist, Memoirist, Theologian Teaches Us about the Life and Craft of Writing. Corey Latta

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C.S. LEWIS AND THE ART OF WRITING: WHAT THE ESSAYIST, POET, NOVELIST, LITERARY CRITIC, APOLOGIST, MEMOIRIST, THEOLOGIAN TEACHES US ABOUT THE LIFE AND CRAFT OF WRITING.

Corey Latta. Eugene OR: Cascade Books, Wipf and Stock 2016. 250 p. 9781498225342. \$24.00.

AS COREY LATTA CONFIRMS IN THE CONCLUSION OF HIS BOOK — *C.S. Lewis and the Art of Writing: What the Essayist, Poet, Novelist, Literary Critic, Apologist, Memoirist, Theologian Teaches Us about the Life and Craft of Writing* — it “is meant to be an encouraging resource for writers” based on the inspiration and instruction gained from reading and studying Lewis (230). The lengthy subtitle alludes to three main questions about Latta’s impetus for writing it: how Lewis was shaped creatively, what writerly advice Lewis had, and the biography of Lewis as a writer (81). What makes the book more engaging as a resource for writers is that Latta ends each chapter with a brief section entitled “For the writer” that summarizes the chapter and offers reflection questions and a “Do try” writing prompt for the reader/writer to attempt.

C.S. Lewis and the Art of Writing is composed of fifty short chapters in two sections, the first “Of Endless Books,” with 17 chapters emphasizing Lewis as reader, and the second section “Longing for a Form,” with the remaining 33 chapters focusing more on Lewis as writer, though the two obviously interconnect. A theme throughout is the importance of being a good reader in order to be a good writer, which contributes to imagination and creativity. Latta describes this idea well: “Lewis’s reading life was a long inspirative inhale, and writing, his creative exhale” (81). Based on biographical and literary insights, the book includes numerous quotations from Lewis’s works and is a good resource in this regard. Latta highlights various traits of Lewis as a writer that are good models such as his tenacity, creativity, clarity, specificity, and accessibility. The material also helps introduce the new reader/writer to Lewis in reader-friendly portions, and they reinforce or remind one of key Lewisian concepts for the reader/writer well acquainted with Lewis. Although it is useful to have Lewis quotations to support the discussion in each chapter, several blocked quotations within a few pages of text can appear excessive at times.

Due to the brevity of the chapters, they are easy to digest and sequence naturally from one to the next. For instance, the reader/writer could work through the book at a set pace of one chapter per day or per week, depending on how much time and energy one wants to spend on the writing exercises at the end of each chapter. (Having a notebook or open computer document to respond to the writing prompts would be helpful to use along with the book.) Some of the writing activities are timed, such as a minimum of writing for 30 minutes on a topic. Some are open for free writing without a length, whereas

others have a word count requirement, such as “In at least 400 words, write a position paper about creativity. Define it. Narrate your experience with it. Explain how it works in the writing process” (167). Though structure can be helpful, timeframes and word count directives might feel reductive or restrictive, thereby possibly causing reader/writer resistance if it feels more like an assignment than if viewed as engaging or pleasurable. While the range of activity prompts invites more types of expression, it can also seem prescriptive in places if the writer needs to follow the prompt as presented. Overall though, the purpose of the “Do try” activities in the book is for the writer to write, so deviance from the original prompt is likely acceptable as long as the writer is writing.

In sum, the book is accessible for the non-academic and could help engage more general readers/writers with Lewis’s works. Stylistically, there are pleasing turns of phrase, but there are areas where Latta seems to repeat similar ideas with slightly different wording such as “Lewis practiced *proportional word choice*. His writing emanates a *self-imposed lexical limitation*. He wrote with *restraint*” (226; italics added for emphasis). Such reiteration can start to feel excessive or heavy-handed when conveying esteem for Lewis. As a resource for writers, Latta’s book is successful in gathering good advice from Lewis and in proposing a variety of reflective, analytical, and creative writing prompts that could generate true growth in the reader/writer and provide a possibly valuable output of writing for personal gratification and/or sharing with others.

—Tiffany Brooke Martin



C.S. LEWIS AND THE ARTS: CREATIVITY IN THE SHADOWLANDS.

Edited by Rod Miller. Baltimore MD: Square Halo Books, 2013. 150p. 9780978509774. \$18.99.

AS A WRITER AND LITERARY CRITIC FUNCTIONING IN A MODERN CULTURE, does C.S. Lewis have any wisdom to impart to artists in a postmodern world? Rod Miller and his compendium of writers strongly affirm Lewis’ continuing credibility and insight for those intending to produce and/or critique art in the 21st century. The essays variously approve and promote aspects of Lewis’s views and productions of art, while some also challenge or seek to nuance his positions to apply his artistic and literary theories in the post-structural and post-modern world.

In the first essay, David C. Downing criticizes Lewis’s argument in *The Abolition of Man* concerning universal ethical norms. Downing contends that