

English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama

C.S. Lewis

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This book is intended for students of English literature at 'A' level and above; general readers interested in a complete history of literature from Middle English to the earlier twentieth century.

English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama Details


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
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From Reader Review English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama for online ebook

Seth Holler says

Read once before in 2007: one of my all-time favorite books. Dipping in again as I prepare to teach British lit (Introduction, Sidney and Spenser).

Jonathan says

Truly a classic; opinionated, readable, fun, learned.

Beth Oshiki says

I am reading the Kindle version of this book, so I can't tell you what page I am on, but he's talking about a Scottish poet named Douglas and his translation of Virgil, and how the medieval translation resembles the true feeling of the Aeneid much more than many later translations because there is a great affinity between the medieval mindset and that of the ancients. He says that later "humanist" classicists distorted a lot of their translations because they imagined the tones to be so lofty that they missed making them also lively. He says that reading Douglas' version of the Aeneid is like looking at a well-known loved painting that has been cleaned, and learning that the smokey browns that you had been taught to love and admire as muted tones were actually dirt.

Oh, you just gotta love C. S. Lewis. Even when I don't have any familiarity with the books he is describing, there is still lots to learn, and he comes up with wonderful metaphors to explain his points.

Jason Farley says

At a hundred pages in I have to say that I need an education.

At 200, I've realized that I still needed an education about the fact that I need an education back when I was at 100 pages.

John says

I read about 60% of it. In fact, I used the chapter on Richard Hooker to great effect in an informal debate a friend and I carried on for a few weeks. I really should read Hooker's *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*. C.S. Lewis was enamored of it and he discusses it at length in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*.

It is in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* that we find some of Lewis's most explicit affinities with

Protestantism. He excoriates Thomas More and lauds William Tyndale in a manner that leaves nothing to speculation. C.S. Lewis was deeply Protestant both intellectually and sentimentally.

I really do need to invest in a copy of this book, because right now I would like to compose some reflections on my favorite chapters (the first three) but I can't recall them well enough to do it justice. The copy I read before was from a university library I no longer have immediate access to, living as I do about 70 miles away now.

Oh yes and it was through this book that I discovered the Scottish poets of the late fourteen hundreds!

Mary Catelli says

Lewis in his don mode. a look at Scotland and England in that era and the literature that came out. Plus the influences that went into it.

An interesting look at the era, with its changes in politics, and religion, and science. Some of which are grossly distorted in the pop cultural view. He dislikes the term Renaissance, because it's been so corrupted you can hardly use it to mean the recovery of (some) ancient Latin and Greek works, and even on that topic, he's rather firm on the limits of the benefits.

And its literature. How the bad late medieval English work became the Drab era, of regular meter and trim, neat poems with little poetical splendour, and how suddenly the Golden style erupted. By Golden, he meant, not good, but innocent. The writers had mastered the art of writing meter and poetical imagery; there was nothing more to be done than take obvious poetical topics, and write beautiful poetry with obvious poetic imagery. Metaphysical poetry arose in part because after a period of this, you start looking for more variety. But this is the field of Shakespeare's poems, Marlowe's, Spenser's, Sidney's and so many of the minor ones.

Also a look at Scottish literature which was in blazing splendor at the start of the era, and lost its touch by the end.

Definitely worth looking at for anyone who wants to read more of the era than Shakespeare's plays.

J. Alfred says

Lewis as scholar (as distinct from the much more modest Lewis as apologist) is intimidating, even when one is a Masters English Student (whatever that in fact means). In any case, Lewis' judgements are interesting even when unorthodox (Lewis takes a sort of perverse pleasure, for instance, in giving Donne only six pages of consideration- see the attendant record in Sayers' Jack) and his learning is jaw-droppingly immense. Today's scholars think that his division of this period into "drab" and "gold" poets and poetry is reductionistic, and I hesitatingly tend to agree, though there is more to the theory than these same scholars seem to allot to it.

Taylor Ince says

Unparalleled. Dense but never dry, and actually a fun read. Classic Lewis. His analysis of literature is always so instructive. I read it while writing a thesis of my own. His approach and treatment helped me in my work in Edinburgh, where I did a deep dive exegetical treatment (400 pages) of 11 verses of biblical poetry. Thank you Mr. Lewis, as always. Can't wait to meet you in the life to come.

Noah Nevils says

I am as out of my depth here to give helpful critique as I am anywhere else in Lewis.

Despite writing about many things which I've never heard of, most of which I will probably never read or even come across, he manages to hold--if not my interest, then at least my attention and respect. I am glad to have read this book, and will return to it for help if I ever find myself writing criticism more serious than Goodreads reviews.

A.E. Reiff says

It may be exaggeration that I recognize half the names and references after 50 years living with the subject. Who can count? It made me remember classes I took with Rhodes Dunlap at Iowa, the first Rhodes scholar from Rice University (1931), a sometime student of Lewis at Oxford, who edited the Oxford edition of the poems of Thomas Carew. C. S. Lewis became a fellow of Magdalen College in 1925, as did Tolkien at Pembroke College that same year. I wanted to study with Lewis but by the time I entered graduate school in 1964 he was dead a year. He anyway hated Americans. Coming as close as I did to Lewis with Rhodes Dunlap was notable on several fronts. Behind the desk in his office was a large glass bookcase with all old editions of the poets. Prophetic in themselves. This was a man of some kindness, the right approach for me, since I had no title to anything except the future. But the future is here already, so I read with understanding.

Lewis is surprisingly vacuous when he establishes the most radical points but not with merely quotable sources. One can quote the whole book. The only sound bites are his throw away lines like "the canals on Mars vanished when we got stronger lenses" 64 [but reappeared in greater fantasy yet of the watershed land forms on Mars], "they talk something like angels and something like sailors and stable-boys" 62 "The universe itself is a constitutional monarchy. The Almighty Himself repudiates the sort of sovereignty that Tyndale thinks fit for Henry VIII." 49

I was once approached by a woman who wanted me to read and edit her manuscript on native plants. I told her I was unwilling, but would indeed gossip with her about them. She left in a pout. But that is what I want and get from Lewis, a good gossip about "the great literature of the fifteen-eighties and nineties... which humanism...would have prevented if it could, but failed to prevent because THE HIGH TIDE OF NATIVE TALENT WAS THEN TOO STRONG FOR IT" 19. I was so infinitely and natively attracted to these writers that to study them always seemed a Godsend, to get paid, to be able to live, to spend every moment to

understand! And after a doctorate was granted, even though I knew less than before, the whole thing sat over its cook fire while I and my Frank waited round our caldron. This is because I took up at the beginning Spenser and allegory, the metaphysicals and grammarians, the propagandists and the crazed prose stylists, like loving hurricanes and volcanoes.

Lewis was always afflicted with devoted Americans. In that first semester at Iowa, along with Dr. Dunlap, descriptive bibliography was mandated with Warner Barnes, which required at the end of term a bibliography. I there described and annotated all the Lewis primary works, all the works about him and all the magazine and journal articles as well. Some fifty pages. At that time, so close to his death in '63, no such work had appeared; Barnes flipped over it and gave me a job collating on the Mark Twain Project. He later got me a TA at Texas where he had returned at that time. So this Elizabethan gossip has benefited me well.

I can hear Rhodes Dunlap in Sidney's voice, fool, look in your heart and write, then switching to Donne and complaining about loving and writing about it in whining poetry. Once, a few years later he did me another good turn when I somehow got stuck working for NASA to put in order and audit all their contracts for the previous ten years. I lasted three days but came away with the Lunar Orbiter photographs before they were retouched and Mariner 9, but then sought refuge at the Folger Shakespeare Library, to which I only gained admission as a reader by the mention of Dr. Dunlap's name. He surprised me on our last meeting when I told him I was off to teach at a black college in the south. He asked if I would return, as if he would like that. But I said, unfortunately, sadly, no. But I took with me the impression of him checking books out of the library where I would see him at the counter. Where I scrawled haphazardly, and there began the AE, he carefully and neatly filled every letter. I saw this more than once and it always astounded me. But then he collated every page of Carew!

I say all this to give a sense of what it must be like to take firsts in every level of study at Oxford as Lewis did. The punctiliousness and grasp of ideas along with that wit is wonderful. So in enjoying the 16th century it is all the more warming that Lewis' first statement of the Elizabethans has to do with the Platonism where the worlds of idea and archetype break through, where the invisible is ineffable, if known, but can be said to be known by the unknown, flesh by the spirit. The first essence of the Elizabethan he says was this explosion of fantasy, paradox and color which for the next century became an imaginative "efflorescence of forbidden or phantasmal arts" (6) where "Bercilak resumes his severed head" [Sir Gawain and the Green Knight] (8).

Theologues had better dream of power to bring this invisible realm to bear on the political. Knowledge for the sake of power preoccupied Bacon, Paracelsus, Dee, Machiavelli and all European thought. In their megalomania they thought Soul power justified anything because it was "being in proportion superior to the world." Thus they ordered the extinction. Read this either as extinction of the invisible world or of the visible. Why can't the two coexist? Why must they annihilate each other? It is a theological question. You would not believe that the whole purpose of science is to manifest this Platonic spiritual world to the physical, filtered always through its megalomania for power. This purpose of science would call itself the whole purpose of existence. You would not believe that even if I said it in Opiomes, or in HistoPossum, or in the Severed Head. So I won't. If there are three terms, the visible, the invisible, the megalomania, there is also a fourth, the true man who opposes supernatural coitus, cosmic intercourse. I think it is our purpose to find him. I am looking <http://apoeticalreadingofthepsalmsofd...>

That Lewis is less a humanist is warranted by the first ten pages of 16th but also in the war between the humanists and the schoolmen 17f and the puritans, John Colet, rediscovered Homer, bishops at bowls: "in the field of philosophy humanism must be regarded, quite frankly, as a Philistine movement: even an obscurantist movement 31...they introduced a subtle falsity of approach to them from which we took centuries to recover." But no less do we recover from the "catastrophic conversion" of the pietist puritan

mind that enters into "the assumption, unemphasized because it is unquestioned, that every event, every natural fact, and every institution, is rooted in the supernatural." 38 This was the 16th century at will and at large and out of it he sees the new villain or the new villainy (44) which introduces a meditation on law which evolved in the 16th century toward absolutism, from the divine right of kings to absolute sovereignty of the state, but "the king is under the law because it is the law that makes him king" 48. His consideration of pre-existing law that "creates and is not created by, the State" 47 bespeaks of natural law, much discarded in modern courses. This keeping of 'unwritten law and custom" is the real sovereign entity, however overthrown by the Machiavel and Tamburlaine, two sources of the rebel, the first a liar and the second a megalomaniac, perfect pictures of what passes now as leaders of government who everybody believes has their best interest at heart. He means it as a compliment that "a Protestant may be Thomistic, a humanist may be a Papist, a scientist may be a magician, a skeptic may be an astrologer" 63. He sees it as function of the cross currents then, however naivete now sees it as a dissociation. Indeed dissociation is now the singlemost paramount reality, all macro and micro alters in the lineup of myth making made prosperous in scientific basements <http://insightstatutes.blogspot.com/2....> The overwriting of neural linguistic programming makes his take on governance prophetic of the emergence of a state that seals the minds of its citizens while it preaches their freedom.

The thing that gets me about the 16th century is this worlds within worlds. So once I may have wanted to bring down the establishment, a la hurricane carter medici, but it was a local thing, confined to certain customs, like racism say, or prejudice against animals, confined to an issue, but now, with the 16th century wind at the back it's the whole enchilada, I mean the avocado and the cheese, the taco and the nacho, like cooks in the world first fast food kitchen have prepared this meal for consumption and I want to overturn the serving cart, for the meal is already cooked, I want with Tamerlane or Coriolane or Dunsinane to bring the woods to bear, I want this to be understood, the whole enchil: and that's just chapter one:<http://www.scribd.com/doc/63893086/Bu...>

II.

Lewis has variable affection for Spenser I think, but the greatest for Sidney, so that is useful to me since I have felt the opposite. Of Spenser he allows more "commerce than Sidney's with our subconscious and semi-conscious minds; probes deeper. 347 Spenser's historical allegory got him in trouble with King James in 1596 who protested that the character of Duessa was untrue to Mary Queen of Scots however. This historical myth structure, "a vast, invented structure which other men could walk all round and in and out of for four centuries" 352 embodied "a more or less agreed mythology and allegory" that provided the forms with which he had to work. Spenser tuned to past forms of emblem, pageant, especially in that "Cambridge in his day was certainly a center of Puritanism, so that it is said he was the greatest of the Puritan poets of those two hundred years.

Lewis calls his a Platonized Protestantism more generally and with the time a syncretist, with Sidney and Shakespeare, who likewise held to this body of "common knowledge" that was not original thought. "Spenser expected his readers to find in it not his philosophy but their own experience--everyone's experience--loosened from its particular contexts by the universalizing power of allegory." 387 That is "his business was to embody in moving images the common wisdom."386 So whether Puritan or Protestant it was Platonic, for "Plato's thought is at bottom otherworldly, pessimistic, and ascetic, far more ascetic than Protestantism. This Platonism touches the allegory, for "in the present life it is the reminders of Beauty that especially inflame us" 377 in this fusion of medieval allegory and romantic epic of Italy" important to consider when in "allegory neither strictly religious nor strictly erotic but universal, every part of the poet's experience can be brought in." 380 Thus "it is in Spenser that the myth of the visionary princess effectively enters modern literature." The way this works in Platonism is "that every inferior good attracts us only by

being an image of the single real good. The false Florimell attracts by being like the true, the true Florimell by being like Beauty itself." 382 The FQ is filled with false and true, shrines and anti-shrines to this end. "Earthly glory would never have moved us but by being a shadow or idolon of the Divine Glory, in which we are called to participate." 382

The coinage of these reflections, embodiments and antitheses is meant to show ourselves what we are, the self revealed in the literary allegory of the form, so the "Eros religion, the thirst of the soul for the Perfection beyond the created universe" 383 explains the mechanism of the allegory's work upon the reader, for "the soul cannot know her true aim till she has achieved it. The seeker must advance, with the possibility at each step of error, beyond the false Florimells to the true, and beyond the true Florimell to the Glory. This could be seen as a deeply mystical purpose. It sounds awfully like Charles Williams which explains the affinity with Lewis. In Platonism the natural universe is a world of shadows, "of Helens false as Spenser's false Florimell" into which the soul has come "only because she has lost her wings in a better place" so "the life of wisdom, while we are here, is a practice or exercise of death." 386

The syncretism joining these ideas to Protestantism was part of the common knowledge of that time that incorporated predestination and total depravity too. The philosophical and iconographic supersedes the historical allegory, but the historical ties the Platonism to its time and place, to Elizabeth, Calvinism, Jerusalem. "Sensual temptation, frivolous gallantry, the imprisonment and frustration of long, serious, and self-condemned passions, happy love, and religious melancholy..." "All the states become people or places in that country" 380. Thus every part of the poet's experience is brought in. These are the reminders of Beauty that enflame us. As he says, "the vision of the Divine Wisdom is not purely a bookish conception" 377, it is much more. "the lady the lover sees his potential and more beautiful self" 375

These Platonisms are important in Spenser's Hymn of Love and Hymn of Beauty. Plato's "Form of beauty, the supercelestial Venus, the model from which the Creator drew the visible universe" is expanded by Ficino, whose "First Venus is the Angelic Mind considered in its contemplation of Divine Beauty. His Second is the generative power in the Anima Mundi (a being inferior to the angels." This illustrates nicely the Platonic shadow and reflection for the "Second Venus endeavors to procreate material things in the image of the Divine Beauty." 375 So, as said, in the lady the lover sees his potential and more beautiful self. This more or less agreed upon mythology and allegory pours out in Spenser, in allegory of several kinds the vast invented structure men walked around for four hundred years.

Douglas Wilson says

Stupendous.

Steven Wedgeworth says

Should still be considered the standard.

Steve says

"In reality the puritans and the humanists were quite often the same people." (18)

"To be sure there are standards by which the early Protestants could be called "puritanical"; they held adultery, fornication, and perversion for deadly sins. But then so did the Pope. If that is puritanism, all Christendom was then puritanical together. So far as there was any difference about sexual morality, the Old Religion was the more austere. the exaltation of virginity is a Roman, that of marriage, a Protestant, trait."
(35)

"The fierce young don, the learned lady, the courtier with intellectual leanings, were likely to be Calvinists. When hard rocks of Predestination outcrop the flowery soil of the Arcadia or the Faerie Queene, we are apt to think them anomolous, but we are wrong. The Calvinism is as modish as the shepherds and the goddesses."
(43)

"The word Renaissance helps to impose a factitious unity on all the untidy and heterogeneous events which are going on in those centuries as in any others. Thus the "imaginary entity" creeps in. Renaissance becomes the name for some character or quality supposed to be immanent in all events, and collects very serious emotional overtones in the process. Then as every attempt to define this mysterious character or quality turns out to uncover all sorts of things that were there before the chosen period, a curious procedure is adopted. Instead of admitting that our definition has broken down, we adopt the desperate expedient that "the Renaissance" must have begun earlier than we had thought. "
(55)

Brian says

Okay, now I am a full Lewis fan.

This book is one of those books you keep from being a snob because you always read the classics. Not that it isn't great, but so much fact and so many authors I don't know and have no desire to read.

So what are the gems?

The first chapter is probably the best for anyone to read. He gives you the picture of the Reformation that questions a great deal reformed types tend to think. "The process whereby 'faith and works' become a stock gag in the commercial theatre is characteristic of that whole tragic farce which we call the history of the Reformation. The theological questions really at issue have no significance, except on a certain level, a high level, of the spiritual life; they could have been fruitfully debated only between mature and saintly disputants in close privacy and at boundless leisure. ... In fact, however, these questions were raised at a moment when they immediately became embittered and entangled with a whole complex of matters theologically irrelevant, and therefore attracted teh fatal attention both of government and the mob. ... It was as if men were set to conduct a metaphysical argument at a fair, in competition or (worse still) forced collaboration with the cheapjacks and the round-about, under the eyes of an armed and vigilant police force who frequently changed sides."

Lewis maintains a charity that should continued to be encouraged, but you can tell he is protestant over and against catholic (but he does NOT take Tyndale over against More, and insists More is a saint) and Anglican over Puritan (though he grants that Martin's tracts were justly provoked). He doesn't like Calvin much and considers the fervor he inspired (somewhat justly though) as much like Marxist fervor.

Lewis clearly loves Hooker and for that reason I want to read the judicious and charitable author. Other good bits are his surprisingly understandable discussions of Scottish poets, Douglas and Dunbar, as well as his

discussion of religious texts, Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespeare's Sonnets, and Marlowe and Chapman's joint effort *Hero and Leander*. Spenser he writes much on, but I think better elsewhere.

There is less than I thought of Lewis saying, "Don't read this: it's no good," but a lot of the drag is just the minor authors who I would never read anyway. Grand, but rightly OHEL.

*Postscript: I just re-read the bits on Spenser, or at least the bits on *Faerie Queene*. This is kind of the summa of everything Lewis had said on Spenser elsewhere, and though I wouldn't make this the first reading of Lewis on that particular book (go to *Allegory of Love*, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Lit*, and then *Spenser's Images*), it has some invaluable comments:

[383] "We must not, of course, forget that Gloriana is also Queen Elizabeth. This was much less chilling and shocking to the sixteenth century than it is to us. Quite apart from any prudent desire to flatter his prince (in an age when flattery had a ceremonial element in it) or from any romantic loyalty which he may have felt and probably did feel as an individual, Spenser knew that even outside poetry all reigning sovereigns were *ex officio* viceregents and images of God. No orthodox person doubted that in this sense Elizabeth was 'an idole' of the divine magnificence. It is also easy to misunderstand the sentence 'Gloriana is Elizabeth'. She is Elizabeth in a sense which does not prevent Belphoebe from also being Elizabeth nor Elizabeth from being also a remote, unborn descendant of Arthegall and [384] Britomart who are contemporaries of Gloiana."

[387] "That is why it is at one so true and so misleading to call his poetry dream-like; its images have the violent clarity and precision which we often find in actual dreams, but not the dimness and evasiveness which the overtones of the word dream-like (based more on waking reverie than real dreaming) usually call up. These images are not founded on but merely festooned with, philosophical conceptions."

[391] "he is not the poet of passions but of moods. I use that word to mean those prolonged states of the 'inner weather' which may colour our world for a week or even a month. That is what Spenser does best. In reading him we are reminded not of falling in love but of being in love; not of the moment which brought despair but of the despair which followed it; not of our sudden surrenders to temptation but of our habitual vices; not of religious conversion but of the religious life. Despite the apparent remoteness of his scenes, he is, far more than the dramatists, the poet of ordinary life, of the thing that goes on. Few of us have been in Lear's situation or Hamlet's: the houses and bowers and gardens of the *Faerie Queene*, both good and evil, are always at hand."

[392] "No poet, I think, was ever less like an Existentialist. He discovered early what things he valued, and there is no sign that his allegiance ever wavered."

Laurel Hicks says

Twelve essays and speeches on literature and language by C. S. Lewis.

They were originally published as a part of a volume that is no longer in print, *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*.

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The man makes sense.
