

Alan Jacobs

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Education

- Ph.D., University of Virginia (1987)
- B.A., University of Alabama (1980)

Current position and employment history

I am currently (since June 2013) Distinguished Professor of the Humanities in the Honors Program of Baylor University. Before that I was Clyde S. Kilby Professor of English at Wheaton College. At Wheaton I was promoted to Professor in 1999, after promotion to Associate Professor in 1992; I joined the Wheaton faculty in 1984. I am also:

- Senior Fellow and member of the Council Trust, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia
- Contributing Editor, *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society*
- Contributing Editor, *Comment* magazine
- Resident Fellow of the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University

Other teaching and administrative experience

Teaching: Visiting Writer, Seattle Pacific University MFA Program in Creative Writing (2009); Visiting professor, Regent College Graduate School, Vancouver, British Columbia, Summer 2006; Visiting professor, Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) Seminary, Igbaja, Kwara State, Nigeria (Summer 1991).

Administrative: Coordinator, Wheaton College Faculty Faith and Learning Program (1999-2006); Director, Wheaton-in-England (summer study abroad program) 2000 and 1996; Co-director, Wheaton-in-England 2011 and 1994.

Teaching and scholarly interests

Modern British and British Commonwealth literature; Christian theology and literature; literature and religion; literary theory and the history of criticism; technologies of reading, writing, and research.

Publications: Books

Paradise Lost: A Biography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025).

Critical edition of W. H. Auden's *The Shield of Achilles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).

Breaking Bread with the Dead: A Reader's Guide to a More Tranquil Mind (New York: Penguin Press, 2020). Translations into Korean, Portuguese, and Turkish.

The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

How to Think: A Guide for the Perplexed (New York: Currency Books and London: Profile Books, 2017). Translations into Arabic, Chinese (PRC and Taiwan), Dutch, Farsi, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish.

The Book of Common Prayer: a Biography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

Critical edition of W. H. Auden's *For the Time Being: a Christmas Oratorio* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Translations into Chinese (PRC and Taiwan), Korean, and Turkish.

Critical edition of W. H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). A Choice Outstanding Academic Title for 2011.

Wayfaring: Essays Pleasant and Unpleasant (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

Original Sin: A Cultural History (San Francisco: Harper, and London: SPCK, 2008). Translations into Korean and Caoatian.

The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis (San Francisco: Harper, and London: SPCK, 2005). Winner of the John Pollock Award for Christian Biography, 2006. Christianity Today 2006 Book Award, History/Biography category. German translation, *Der Mann Aus Narnia* (Johannis Verlag), 2007.

Shaming the Devil: Essays in Truthtelling (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). October main selection, the Anglican Book Club.

A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love (Boulder and New York: Westview Press, 2001), hardcover and paperback.

A Visit to Vanity Fair and Other Moral Essays (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001). Co-Winner, Christianity Today 2002 Book Award, Christianity and Culture category. Audio version (read by the author) produced by Mars Hill Audio in 2002.

What Became of Wystan: Change and Continuity in Auden's Poetry (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998). Paperback edition 1999.

Must Christianity be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology, ed. with Kenneth R. Chase (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003).

Publications: Articles in Books

"Auden's Theology," in *Auden in Context*, ed. Anthony Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013).

"The Chronicles of Narnia," in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, eds. Rob MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 265-280.

"Chinua Achebe: Storytellers and Interpreters," in *The Force of Tradition: Response and Resistance in Literature, Religion, and Cultural Studies*, ed. Donald Marshall (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 255-268.

“Afterword,” *Must Christianity be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology*, ed. Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 224-236.

“Bakhtin and the Hermeneutics of Love,” in *Bakhtin and Religion: a Feeling for Faith*, ed. Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2001), 25-46.

“Auden and the Dream of Public Poetry,” in *Literature and the Renewal of the Public Sphere*, ed. Susan VanZanten Gallagher and M. D. Walhout (London: Macmillan, 2000), 83-105.

“The Nightmare of History Revisited: André Brink’s *An Instant in the Wind*,” in *Postcolonial Literature and the Biblical Call to Justice*, ed. Susan VanZanten Gallagher (University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 183-97.

“Literature and the Bible: British Commonwealth Literature,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

“Adam Naming the Animals,” “Elijah,” “Elisha,” “Joseph the Patriarch,” and “The Transfiguration of Jesus,” in *Dictionary of the Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David L. Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 537-38, 233-34, 235-36, 414-16, 773-75.

“Psychological Criticism” and “Deconstruction,” in *Christian Perspectives on Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. Leland Ryken and Clarence Walhout (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 94-124, 172-98.

Publications: Articles in Academic and Literary Journals

“You Keep Using That Word,” *Comment* (Fall 2023).

“Looking Westward,” *The Raritan Review* 42.4 (Spring 2023).

“The Far Invisible: Thomas Pynchon as America’s Theologian,” *The Hedgehog Review* 25.2 (Summer 2023).

“The Blues Idiom at Church,” *Comment* (Spring 2023).

“A Humanism of the Abyss,” *The New Atlantis* 71 (Winter 2023), 105-114.

“Staying for the Truth,” *The Hedgehog Review*, Fall 2022, 9-12.

“Injured Parties,” *The Hedgehog Review* 24:1 (Spring 2022), 94-103.

“Something Happened By Us: A Demonology,” *The New Atlantis* 68 (Spring 2022), 80-89.

“Recovering Piety,” *Comment* (March 31, 2022).

“Prophet of the Human-Built World: An Introduction to John Ruskin,” *Comment* 37:1 (Spring 2019), 12-21.

“After Technopoly,” *The New Atlantis* 58 (Spring 2019), 3-14.

“Outside In,” *Comment* 36:3 (Fall 2018), 48-56.

“Ecclesial Plurality,” *Pro Ecclesia* XXVII:1 (Winter 2018), 22-36.

“From Projection to Promise: A Small Ethics Towards the Future,” *The Hedgehog Review* 20:1 (Spring 2018), 64-77.

“Filth Therapy: A Cunning Word,” *Comment* 35:2 (Summer 2017), 28-36.

“Wokeness and Myth on Campus,” *The New Atlantis* 53 (Summer/Fall 2017), 33-46.

“When Character No Longer Counts,” *National Affairs* 31 (Spring 2017), 92-100.

“Habits of Mind in an Age of Distraction,” *Comment* 34:2, Summer 2016, 38-46.

“The Watchmen: What Became of the Christian Intellectuals?” *Harper’s*, August 2016, 54-60.

“Renewing the University,” *National Affairs* 28 (Summer 2016), 3-19.

“Attending to Technology: Theses for Disputation,” *The New Atlantis* 48 (Winter 2016), 16-45.

“Miss Marple and the Problem of Modern Identity,” *The New Atlantis* 47 (Fall 2015), 18-30.

“The Witness of Literature: A Genealogical Sketch,” *The Hedgehog Review* 17:2 (Summer 2015), 64-77.

“Fantasy and the Buffered Self,” *The New Atlantis* 41 (Winter 2014), 3-18.

“Christianity and the Future of the Book,” *The New Atlantis* 33 (Fall 2011), 19-36.

“Understanding McLuhan,” *The New Atlantis* 31 (Spring 2011), 123-135.

“The Ambiguous Utopia of Iain M. Banks,” *The New Atlantis* 25 (Summer 2009), 45-58.

“In the Garden,” *Cabinet* 31 (Fall 2008), 69-73.

“On Charitable Teaching,” *The Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 11:2 (Autumn 2007), 13-24.

“Paganism and Literature,” *Christianity and Literature* 56:4 (Summer 2007), 667-80.

“Principle, Narrative, Commandment,” *Christianity and Literature* 56:4 (Summer 2007), 681-90.

“Donald Davie: 1922-1995,” *The American Scholar* (Autumn 1997), 579-84.

“Lives of the Essayists,” *Cimarron Review* 112 (July 1995), 115-19.

“Milbank and the Institutional Situation of Theology,” *Arachne* 2:1 (1995), 116-123.

“Auden’s Local Culture,” *The Hudson Review* (Winter 1995), 543-68.

“Diagnosing Christopher’s Case: Smart’s Readers and the Authority of Pentecost,” *Renascence* XLVI:2 (Winter 1994), 83-103.

“Auden at the Opera,” *The American Scholar* (Spring 1994), 287-94.

“Auden and Merton at the Movies,” *English Language Notes* XXVIII:4 (June 1991), 45-56.

“The Social Life of Lyric Poetry: Davie, Milosz, Auden,” *Christianity and Literature* 40:3 (Spring 1991), 277-98.

“The Unnatural Practices of Stanley Fish,” *South Atlantic Review* 55:4 (November 1990), 87-97.

“Beyond Romanticism: Auden and the Choice of Tradition,” *Religion and Literature* 21:2 (Summer 1989), 61-77 .

“The Values of Literary Study: Deconstruction and Other Developments,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* XVI:4 (July 1987), 373-82.

Publications: Essays and Essay-Reviews in Other Periodicals

- “Yesterday’s Men,” *Harper’s*, July 2024.
- “Between Chaos and the Man,” *Harper’s*, December 2022.
- “The Love Feast” (on W. H. Auden), *Harper’s*, May 2022.
- “Status Anxiety” (on Jonathan Franzen), *Harper’s*, October 2021.
- “Seeking a More Tranquil Mind? Take Horace’s Advice,” *Literary Hub*, September 13, 2021.
- “Everything Is Illuminated” (on William Blake), *Harper’s*, April 22, 2020.
- “Patience” (on Terrence Malick’s *A Hidden Life*), *The Point*, March 5, 2020.
- “Raising Kael,” *Literary Hub*, November 26, 2019.
- “Thomas Merton, the Monk Who Became a Prophet,” *The New Yorker*, December 28, 2018.
- “Automata, Animal-Machines, and Us,” *Education and Culture*
- “Can Evangelicals and Academics Talk to Each Other?” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 2017.
- “The Centrifugal Experience of Knowledge,” *Books & Culture*, July/August 2016, 35-38.
- “The Two Cultures, Then and Now,” *Books & Culture*, March/April 2014, 35-38.
- “Percy and Sagan in the Cosmos,” *Books & Culture*, March/April 2013, 19-22.
- “Just-So Stories,” *Books & Culture*, January/February 2013, 19-22.
- “The Man Who Delivered the Computer,” *Books & Culture*, September/October 2012, 35-38.
- “So Blessed a Liturgy” (on the Book of Common Prayer), *Books & Culture*, March/April 2012, 9-12.
- “The Ghost Writer” (on Iain Sinclair), *Books & Culture*, November/December 2011, 20-24. German translation, “Der Geisterbeschwörer: Unterwegs mit Iain Sinclair,” in *Merkur*, 2012 Heft 758:630-37.
- “We Can’t Teach Students to Love Reading,” *The Chronicle Review*, July 31, 2011.
- “A Prophet Wrongly Honored” (on Terry Eagleton), *First Things*, June/July 2011, 21-26.
- “A Bachelor’s Degree in Atheism,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2011.
- “Overloaded” (on Ann Blair), *Books & Culture*, May/June 2011, 19-22.
- “The Poet’s Nature Subdued” (on W. H. Auden), *Books & Culture*, March/April 2011, 19-22.
- “The Idea of the Book,” *Books & Culture*, November/December 2010, 35-38.
- “Man of Sorrows” (on Samuel Johnson), *Books & Culture*, January/February 2010, 30-31.
- “Beyond the Wild Wood” (on Kenneth Graeme), *First Things*, October 2009, 32-36.
- “Choose Your Own Adventure,” *Books & Culture*, September/October 2009, 9-10.
- “Blessed Are the Green of Heart,” *First Things*, May 2009, 19-22.
- “Gardening and Governing,” *Books & Culture*, March/April 2009, 18-21.
- “The Way, the Truth, and Philip Jenkins,” *First Things*, March 2009, 13-15.

“A Religion for Atheists,” *First Things*, February 2009, 20-21.

“The Poet’s Prose” (on W. H. Auden), *Books & Culture*, January/February 2009, 39-40.

“Do-It-Yourself Tradition,” *First Things*, January 2009, 27-32.

“The Life of Trees,” *Books & Culture*, July/August 2008, 14-17.

“Amis Amiss,” *First Things*, June/July 2008.

“Too Much Faith in Faith,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2008.

“The Youngest Brother’s Tale” (review-essay on *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*), *Books & Culture*, September/October 2007, 47-50.

“On the Recent Publication of Kahlil Gibran’s Collected Works,” *First Things*, November 2007, 19-21.

“In Search of Eden,” *First Things*, February 2007, 26-30.

“To Be A Christian College,” *First Things*, April 2006, 22-26.

“Bran Flakes and Harmless Drudges,” *Books & Culture*, January/February 2006, 23-26.

“Opportunity Costs,” *Books & Culture*, November/December 2005, 22-24.

“The Professor, the Christian, and the Storyteller” (on C. S. Lewis), *Boston Globe Ideas* page, December 4, 2005.

“Into the Wonder,” *Christianity Today*, December 2005. Reprinted in *The Best American Spiritual Writing 2005*, ed. Philip Zaleski (Harper San Francisco, 2006).

“A Narnia C. S. Lewis Might Love,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 05, 2005.

“Robert Alter’s Faithfulness,” *First Things*, August/September 2005, 22-26.

“City Poet” (on James Agee), *Boston Globe Ideas* page, September 25, 2005.

“Apocalyptic President?” *Boston Globe Ideas* page, April 4, 2004.

“A Bible for Everyone,” *First Things*, December 2003, 10-13.

“What Narrative Theology Forgot,” *First Things*, August/September 2003, 25-30.

“Leon Kass and the Genesis of Wisdom,” *First Things*, June/July 2003, 30-35.

“The Devil in Scotland,” *The Weekly Standard*, March 31, 2003, 33-36.

“The Re-Invention of Love,” *Books & Culture*, March/April 2003, 10-13.

“Computer Control: The Virtues of Resistance,” *Books & Culture*, September/October 2002.

“Computer Control: Life among the Cyber-Amish,” *Books & Culture*, July/August 2002, 14-22.

“Computer Control: Who’s In Charge,” *Books & Culture*, May/June 2002, 16-22.

“Shame the Devil,” *Books & Culture*, March/April 2002.

“Wole Soyinka’s Outrage,” *Books & Culture*, November/December 2001.

“Dorothy Osborne,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 10, 2001.

“Auden and the Limits of Poetry,” *First Things*, August 2001, 26-32.
 “Narrating Ethics,” *First Things*, May 2001, 37-43.
 “The Devil’s Party” (on Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*), *The Weekly Standard*, October 23, 2000, 31-34.
 “The Only Honest Man: Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” *Books & Culture*, May/June 2000, 11-16. Reprinted in *The Best Christian Writing 2001*, ed. John Wilson (Harper San Francisco, 2001).
 “George Eliot: Good without God,” *First Things*, April 2000, 50-53.
 “Harry Potter’s Magic,” *First Things*, January 2000.
 “The God of the Bestseller List,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 5, 1999.
 “An Entangled Thing,” *The Oxford American*, 29 (Sept./Oct. 1999), 13-16.
 “Preachers without Poetry,” *First Things*, August/September 1999.
 “Killer Over the Rainbow,” *The Oxford American* 27/28 (1999), 24.
 “Funeral at Eleven,” *The Oxford American*, 26 (1999), 65.
 “The Editor and the Exile,” *Books & Culture*, November/December 1998, 42-44.
 “The First Indian Nukes,” *The Weekly Standard*, June 1, 1998, 16-17.
 “Narnia Business: C. S. Lewis at 100,” *The Weekly Standard*, April 20, 1998, 31-34.
 “It Ain’t Me, Babe,” *Books & Culture*, May/June 1998, 16-19.
 “What I Was Afraid Of,” *The Oxford American*, 20 (1998), 49-52.
 “God and the Gulag,” *The Weekly Standard*, February 23, 1998, 31-35.
 “Revenge of the Scroll,” *Books & Culture*, January/February 1998, 26-27.
 “A Bible Fit for Children,” *First Things*, May 1997, 22-27.
 “In on the Kill,” *First Things*, February 1997, 17-19.
 “Flags, Traditions, and Charity,” *First Things*, November 1996, 12-13.
 “Martha Nussbaum, Poets’ Defender,” *First Things*, October 1996, 37-41.
 “Camus the Stranger,” *Books & Culture*, May/June 1996, 19-22.
 “Mikhail Bakhtin: The Man Who Heard Voices,” *Books & Culture*, January 1996, 24-26.
 “Dowsing in Scripture,” *First Things*, October 1995, 16-18.
 “Give Me That Old Time Hypocrisy,” *The Oxford American*, August/September 1995, 70-71.
 “Still Leaving Birmingham,” *The Oxford American*, May/June 1995, 114-17.
 “Iris Murdoch’s Go(o)d,” *First Things*, February 1995, 32-36.
 “The Second Coming of C. S. Lewis,” *First Things*, November 1994, 27-30.
 “A Tale of Two Stanleys,” *First Things*, May 1994, 12-14.
 “Preferring the Fog,” *Perspectives*, February 1994, 6-8.

“Signs and Wonders,” *First Things*, December 1993, 5-6.

“To Read and to Live,” *First Things*, June/July 1993, 24-31.

“Friendship and its Discontents,” *First Things*, December 1992, 42-46.

“Suya Wars,” *First Things*, May 1992, 17-19.

“Salman Rushdie Gets Religion,” *First Things*, January 1992, 45-51.

“David Byrne and the Curse of ‘Lifestyle,’” *First Things*, January 1991, 8-10.

“Rushdie’s Surprise,” *Reformed Journal*, April 1989, 6-8.

Publications: Online Writing

- My active personal blog, The Homebound Symphony
- A scholarly/creative project made up of texts and images, The Gospel of the Trees
- My work for the Technology Channel of *The Atlantic*
- My work for the *Hedgehog Review*
- My retired blog, Text Patterns (on technologies of reading, writing, and research, at *The New Atlantis*)

Publications: Reviews

Approximately seventy-five reviews in many publications, including *The American Scholar*, *Books & Culture*, *First Things*, *The New Atlantis*, *The Oxford American*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Hedgehog Review*, and *The Weekly Standard*.

Lectures and Talks: a representative selection

“Against (Calls for) Civility,” lecture for the Ethics/Religion and Society Program, Xavier University, April 15, 2019.

“Embrace the Pain: Living with the Repugnant Cultural Other,” lecture for the Kenan Institute for Ethics, Duke University, January 29, 2018.

“Reading: A Meditation in Two Parts,” lecture for Faculty Development Day, Wheaton College (Illinois), February 2, 2016.

“What We Talk about When We Talk about Reading,” lecture at Carleton College (Minnesota), September 22, 2015.

“The Attentive Reader,” lecture given for the Liberal Arts Consortium for Online Learning, Vassar College (New York), November 21, 2014.

“Religious Reading,” a seminar for congregational rabbis sponsored by the Tikvah Fund, co-led with Michael Fishbane of the University of Chicago, Glen Cove, NY, June 4-6, 2012.

“The Pleasures of Reading: a Theological Perspective,” the annual Lee Lecture at the University of St. Thomas, Houston Texas, March 6, 2012.

“Reading as Play and Rest,” lecture for Humanities Week at the University of Notre Dame, March 21, 2012.

“Writers Save,” annual Drumwright Family Lecture, Honors College of Baylor University, Waco, Texas, November 17, 2011.

“Writers Save,” lecture at the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, November 15, 2011.

“Christianity and the Future of the Book,” Jerusalem and Athens Forum, Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts, April 11, 2011.

“The Wayfaring Mind,” talk sponsored by the Erasmus Institute, at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, April 10, 2011.

“Christianity and the Future of the Book,” Celebratio Lecture, New St. Andrews College, Moscow, Idaho, September 17, 2010.

“The End of the Book and the Future of Reading,” Intersections Lecture Series, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, January 25, 2010.

“What’s So Bad About Original Sin?,” lecture for Socrates in the City, Union League Club, New York City, September 19, 2008.

The Stob Lectures, Calvin College, November 7 and 8, 2006.

Presentation on “Christian Witness and the Academic Life,” Christianity Today fiftieth anniversary meeting, October 26, 2006.

“C. S. Lewis and the American Culture Wars,” lecture for the Cambridge Forum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, January 18, 2006. (Later broadcast on National Public Radio and C-SPAN’s Book TV.)

“Can Charitable Reading Be Taught?,” lecture sponsored by the Kuyers Institute for Teaching and Learning, Calvin College, April 19, 2005.

“Christology and Eros: Bonhoeffer and the Song of Songs,” paper at the annual Society of Biblical Literature conference, San Antonio, Texas, November 22, 2004.

Forum on Leon Kass’s *The Genesis of Wisdom* (with Leon Kass, George Weigel, and Leon Wieseltier), Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, D.C., June 18, 2003.

“The Judgment of Grace” and “The Grace of Judgment,” two lectures at the Trinity Arts Conference, Dallas, Texas, June 5-7, 2003.

“On the Very Idea of the Symbolism of Evil,” Modern Language Association Convention, New Orleans, December 27th, 2001.

“Shame the Devil,” lecture at the annual Image Conference (Conference theme: “Disturbing the Peace: Provocation and Prophecy in Contemporary Arts and Letters”), University of Chicago Divinity School, November 10, 2001.

“Auden in Berlin,” lecture at the Chicago Humanities Festival X, November 5, 1999.

“Chinua Achebe: Storytellers and Interpreters,” lecture at Loyola College (Maryland), October 1996.

“Apologetics in Contemporary America,” First Annual Wheaton College Theology Conference, March 1992.

“The Ethical Limitations of Historicism,” Midwest Modern Language Association Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, November 1989.

“The Traditional Canon” (panel presentation) and “Where We Stand and What We Stand For” (closing address), Christian College Coalition Conference on Literature, Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, Massachusetts, November 1987.