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C.S. Lewis and the Arts: Creativity in the Shadowlands. Ed. Rod Miller

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Art, Beauty, Literature

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

Lewis's argument about ethical norms is sustainable, but his willingness to intermingle aesthetic and ethical values confuses both. Aesthetic values, particularly the belief that objective values lie behind the experience of nature, are not universal as Lewis claimed but rather are the effects of the Romantic Era. Lewis was wrong, Downing contends, when he claimed that all cultures maintained the objective and universal value of beauty. However, in other writings Lewis seemed to maintain that aesthetic values are established by cultural values, as Downing rightfully notes. Ultimately, Downing ends his critique with an appreciation for Lewis's God-centered understanding of nature, reminding the reader that "Lewis's aesthetic theories seem most persuasive when he views varied experiences of beauty less as embodiments of a neo-platonic principle than as glimpses of a Person" (6).

Next, Bruce Herman invites the reader to consider the coalescing literary and aesthetic theories of C.S. Lewis, George Steiner, and Hans George Gadamer. Herman points us to their shared experiential vision of art expounded in Lewis's *Experiment in Criticism*, Steiner's *Real Presences*, and Gadamer's *Relevance of the Beautiful*. The good reader of literature, according to Lewis, is the one who approaches the book unguarded in order to submit and receive the experience from the (author of the) work. Similarly, Steiner proposes "the concept of *courtesia*—a certain intellectual hospitality that welcomes the text, the painting or poem, novel or symphony into one's intimate place of being" (10). Gadamer's theory of art similarly contains the community enactment of *symbol* in which the artist creates a work that engages in hospitality and loving invitation (11). Lewis, Gadamer, and Steiner envision a community between the artist who hospitably creates a work of shared value, and the thoughtful and intentional reader who receives the work with submission. For Lewis, Gadamer, and Steiner, a basic responsibility of any artist is first to establish trust before proceeding to introduce an expanded aesthetic work. How, then, can one engage art intentionally designed to shock, deconstruct, and create an inhospitable relationship between artist and (Christian) audience? After decades of deconstruction and post-modern art, audiences have grown skeptical and the previously shared values of the artist and reader have become widely disparate. Herman points towards three solutions. First, artist and audience require shared trust in order to communicate. This must begin to be bestowed, first by the artist in their work, then by the receptive and submissive audience. Second, the entire arts community must consider and address the major gap between the value of art designed to shock and the resulting skepticism of audiences. Third, after establishing the artist-audience incongruence, a new exploration can consider anew the relationship of humanity's deep and abiding inclinations to religion and cultural and mythopoetic articulations.

In the third essay, entitled “The Moral Aesthetic of *Perelandra*,” Scott B. Key points to contemporary desire for style as evidence of our deeply rooted longing for true beauty. Modernity relegated the recognition of beauty to the inner stratum of one’s mind, so that all aesthetic experience is strictly a subjective one. The current cultural appreciation and affixation on style in entertainment, art, and tools illustrates the shallowness of this description. C.S. Lewis provides an ancient solution to the postmodern nihilism: a re-enchantment of the cosmos. The Christian worldview provides the necessary values, source, and *telos* of beauty, truth, and goodness: God our Creator. Key examines *Perelandra* and finds a compelling artistic vision of the properly ordered and experienced world which is full of higher pleasures of sustained enjoyment than the physical senses are currently capable. In the climax of the novel, the coronation of the King and Queen, Lewis paints a vision of the Modernity-rejecting aesthetic experience of Ransom who beholds the “cosmic structure of reality within which the dynamic and pulsating life of *Perelandra* finds her meaning and true value” (25). Key concludes his examination of Lewis’s sacramental cosmology with an application to the Christian church to cultivate the aesthetic imagination in the Arts with a deliberate appreciation of the Creator God as the source, value, and reality of beauty, goodness, and truth in a recognition and articulation of his Spirit at work in the lives and vocations of his people.

Many admirers of C.S. Lewis appreciate him for the *Narnia* books, apologetic works, space fiction, or literary and educational criticism. Don W. King, in his essay “The Art of C.S. Lewis’s Poetry,” reminds us that Lewis perceived himself as a poet and worked hard for the duration of his life to create, not just study and dissect, prosody in his own art. King highlights how industrious and intentional Lewis was at his experiments with “meter, rhyme, and lyric forms and this interest extended throughout his poetic career” (42). He accomplishes this first by showing three drafts of Lewis’s poem *As the Ruin Falls* to illustrate his relentless pursuit of perfection in his poetry, which included consistent seeking of criticism from friends and colleagues. Second, King examines short units from many of Lewis’s poems to demonstrate the breadth of his enacted poetic knowledge and skill. Lewis desired to join the ranks of iconic English poets, yet this never occurred. However, his love of poetry continued throughout his entire career, and he bestowed upon his readers works of art that demonstrate he was a man who saw a poet in the mirror.

Editor Rod Miller contributes the next chapter, “Mirrors, Shadows, and the Muses: C.S. Lewis and the Value of Arts and Letters.” In this essay, Miller considers Lewis’s position(s) on the value of art for the Christian. As one contending against Modernity’s reduction of beauty to the subjective realm, Lewis’s response tended towards embracing the Romantic imagination of ‘art

for art's sake.' However, Lewis also struggles to ground a critical analysis and aesthetic appreciation for a piece of art in an objective Ideal. Miller finds evidence for this in several essays, as well as *Experiment in Criticism*. Lewis embraced evaluation of the morality within art by means of an external, moral law, but had difficulty finding the same grounds for an aesthetic experience. Lewis suggested that the value of a work, in order of importance, is that it gives us pleasure and then enlarges us personally as one submits to the work.

Miller's problem with Lewis's suggestion for the value of art is in his moral visions of the art itself. Could one not willingly place oneself in a morally precarious position by voluntarily submitting to art that is ethically perverse, and thus be shaped and pleased by it? Miller finds his solution in Lewis's essay "Christianity and Literature," in which Lewis grounds the value of artistic expression of the individual in the eternal Beauty and Wisdom of God. The more closely one harnesses nature and/or words to reflect the truth, beauty, and wisdom found in the objective Ideal (God), the more valuable, true, beautiful, and wise is that work of art for the artist as a mirror of the divine. Consequently, the work of art shapes and instructs the receiving audience to see and seek the truth of God through the beauty and wisdom of the artist's creation.

In perhaps the best essay in the volume, Jerry Root argues that Lewis's trajectory maintained a consistent Objectivist ideology that framed his evaluations of art. In order to understand Lewis's thoughts on beauty, truth, and art, one must perceive that Lewis believed objective realities exist and that his epistemology dictated that one's thoughts about truth are to lesser or greater degrees true as they correspond accurately to objective existence. From *The Abolition of Man*, Root finds Lewis willing to extend the argument concerning objective valuation of truth towards art and beauty. Building on Lewis's affirmation of the possibility, and Aquinas's taxonomy of beauty as containing integrity, proportion, and clarity, Root points towards the possibility that one can not only evaluate art objectively, but also deepen one's appreciation of how the beauty depicted in the novel or sculpture is not only admirable but also enjoyable. Root finishes his essay with an examination of Lewis's application of his objective standards of beauty in *The Personal Heresy*, where Lewis articulates not only the nature of poetry, but also how great poetry can be evaluated and substantiated. Poetry is a skill, or art. Every art skill is interrelated with its instruments or materials. The greater degree of skill an artist demonstrates with these materials (rock, canvas, words), the greater objective truth and beauty are manifested in the artist's work. However, this does not mean that all observers will agree completely about the value of a work, and those with greater affinity to perceive and grasp the beauty in the work can be of aid to others who cannot. Root frames the work of Christian artists with a summary that encapsulates the application for those who have learned from Lewis. He urges that:

it is not only pastors and theologians who can help the lay person see and makes [sic] sense of things; the artist also might see through these calamities and bring light to both the bad and the beauty that can emerge from the rubble of such tragedies. Winters do break into springs; a mother's labor pains do give way to birth; some cracks do allow light to shine through, and the Crucifixion is followed by Resurrections. (72)

Root's essay alone is worth the price of this edited work.

David Rozema's essay, "C.S. Lewis on the Transformative Power of (Theory-Free) Literature," is an appeal to learn and listen from Lewis's solution to theory-driven interpretation of literature. The contemporary field of literature is riddled with 'bad' readers, literature professors and critics who establish *a priori* psycho-historical theories with which to derive the true meaning from a work of art. These critical theories are applied to all literature, rather than individual characters or works themselves. Drawing from both Lewis's *Experiment in Criticism* and Plato's *Republic*, Rozema rejects this approach as a type of 'using,' a failing to engage in an appreciation that seeks first to approach the work with openness and the possibility of being transformed by reading. This type of 'appreciative' reading produces good readers who can then, and only then, lead and teach others about the value of a book or piece of art and apply *a posteriori* critical theory to individual books.

Peter Schakel's essay is concerned with the significance of music and dance in Lewis's writings, particularly his fiction. In the essay entitled "'The really important things': Music and Dance in C.S. Lewis," Schakel argues that music and dance were particularly meaningful to his understanding of the world, and in the production of his literary worlds. Music, for Lewis, was tightly interrelated to the longing and desire for ultimately God himself. Dance, although not a particular interest of Lewis's, is also evident in his writing, particularly in connection with communal expressions of festal joy. In much of his fiction and even his criticism, Lewis utilized music and dance as a metaphor for the orderliness and harmony of the universe. Lewis derived this artistic rendering of the cosmos from the medieval model in which he found such enjoyment, beauty, and delight. It is from this rich and diverse well of medieval cosmology that Lewis draws and embodies in his literary worlds as metaphors of the living world created and sustained by the living Creator as a contrast and invitation to the Modern, 20th century worldview.

Charlie W. Starr maintains that "evangelical Christianity for the last hundred years (and longer) has gotten art and culture all wrong, but, as per usual, C.S. Lewis gets it right" (115). In his essay "Aesthetics vs. Anesthesia: C.S. Lewis on the Purpose of Art," Starr highlights the two main approaches to art by evangelicals, explains why they are invalid, then points to Lewis as an

exemplar and guide towards the appropriate way to make and utilize art. Evangelicals have tended towards appraising art via the 'culture war' model or the 'worldview analysis' framework, both of which neglect aesthetic values and (hyper) focus on moral and ethical values. According to Lewis, these approaches fail because the primary purpose of art is the experience of mythic realities, which only later can be abstracted and considered. Art, for Lewis (and Starr), "communicates experiences more than abstract truths and meanings more than philosophical positions." Thus, "if the only thing we look for in examining an art form is a series of abstract, philosophical truth statements, we are missing both the power and purpose of art" (123). Art does have an educational component concerned with morality, but its primary function is first to give a taste of reality via an imaginative experience of myth that is satisfying to one's aesthetic sensibilities. Evangelical Christian art has forgotten this and, embracing the 'worldview analysis' and 'culture war' method, has attempted to change culture via stale, 'anaesthetizing' art which functions to inform and explicitly educate morality. Thus, it has little to no imaginative power to transform, and is quickly forgotten. The appropriate path for creating and embracing art's true purpose, according to Starr, is to follow Lewis as a model in his own creative endeavors. He did not create *The Chronicles of Narnia* by attempting to mythologize Christian truths, but rather was captured by images, which he wanted to turn into stories for the primary purpose of enjoyment, and only secondarily as a means for moral development. When Christians embrace their created purpose as sub-creators and do so for the purpose of creating good art for the sake of enjoyment, then they will be able to effectively affect culture through artistic undertakings. Because, as Starr aptly says, "to be truly effective in affecting culture, we must stop making the affecting of culture our first goal" (124).

What can C.S. Lewis teach us about engaging culture and creating art as a Christian? Will Vaus commends Lewis to Christian artists in the 21st century. Lewis deemed God the great Artist, which makes humans sub-creators and culture-makers in his primary creation. Humans do this cultural work to the glory of God when these (sub-)creations are presented to Creator God as humble offerings. The Christian takes culture less seriously than the non-Christians, who often will see art as an end in itself or a quasi-religion of aesthetic occurrences. The pleasure and enjoyment derived from enjoying cultural artifacts like a novel, painting, or play, are ultimately intended to point towards the longing only God himself can fulfill. So long as the work is intelligible and done well, art can also be instructive without losing its aesthetic enjoyability. For Lewis, what each culture needs from Christians is not explicitly Christian art, but rather good work done well by a Christian.

C.S. Lewis and the Arts: Creativity in the Shadowlands is a brief and nuanced articulation and application of Lewis's views on the Arts. Unfortunately, the more one reads, the more redundant the essays become, with a particular reliance on and quotation from Lewis's discussion of art and literature in *The Abolition of Man* and *An Experiment in Criticism*. However, as each essay aims at different nuances and applications from these and other essays, this redundancy is a unifying thread of diverse exposition throughout the volume. Additionally, one minor criticism of this book concerns the final format. One labors to discover anything more about each contributing writer beyond his name (*his*, as all of the contributors are male). Unless directly aware of the identity and vocation of each essayist, the only recourse one has is to look externally to discover that the writers are artists and educators. The inclusion of a brief biography for each writer at the end of each essay would have added value for the reader who wishes to know the credibility of each writer.

As with most edited books, some of the essays shine brighter than others. However, the contributions of each essay add nuance and depth that make this a varied and compelling read. In the words of the editor Rod Miller, this book was written for "those who want to be faithful and discerning when encountering art and/or using their creative gifts to make art" (xiii). Miller and the other essayists have successfully created an accessible and readable book for artists, practitioners, pastors, and educators who desire to learn from Lewis' vision for the arts in culture and the church and apply it well in their production and evaluation of art.

—Michael David Prett



GAME OF THRONES VERSUS HISTORY: WRITTEN IN BLOOD. Brian Pavlac. Wiley-Blackwell, 2017. ISBN 978-1119249422. \$18.95. Kindle \$7.99.

IN 2016 AN EXERCISE IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT placed me on the review panel for a graduate conference run by a small, young university in a small, young country. One of the papers passed to me was by a student who had graduated the previous year, recording a breakthrough he had achieved by reading the only entry in his bibliography, Humphrey Carpenter's *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*. After four readings of what was breathlessly presented as the fruits of a counterintuitively innovative research technique, I was forced to conclude that the student's core argument was that *The Lord of the Rings* had been written by a university professor.