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Reviews

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Reviews

Abstract


*And God Came In.* Lyle W. Dorsett. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

*Charles Williams, Poet of Theology.* Glen Cavaliero. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.


He That Dies But Does Not Perish...


This film is the most Tolkien-esque of the trilogy that has appeared so far. This is most obvious in the case of the Ewoks, which though very different from Hobbits in many ways, are still "small people with surprising reserves of strength to confound the plans of the great" (Mythlore XXXV, p. 41). Very much as Sauron was brought down because he overlooked and underestimated the Hobbits, the best plans of the Emperor are wrecked because said plans did not include the Ewoks. They are however, more like Ursula LeGuin’s little green furry men in _The Word for the World is Forest_ than like Tolkien’s Halflings, and much fiercer than either.

A closer and more important parallel is found in an element of plot structure. In both stories, the righteous forces gather together for a massive assault on the enemy—but the vast assembly and the subsequent battle, impressive as they look, are in reality but a mere sideshow. The main battle is a private conflict involving only a few individuals, right in the very heart of the darkness.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness...against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12). This is the struggle fought by Luke the son of Anakin Skywalker, as he contends with the emperor for his own immortal soul, and his father’s, and for the freedom of many worlds.

His love proves wiser than the bright wisdom of Yoda and Obi-wan, greater than the dark wisdom of the Emperor and Lord Vader. Because of the filial love and unyielding courage of this brave and loving young man, freedom is won for many, and a man who had lost his soul and his face regains both.

As Lao-dzu said: "He that dies but does not perish, the same has everlasting life." So I feel sorry for the evil old Emperor, who died and perished, and very glad for Anakin Skywalker, who died but does not perish, as we clearly see at the film’s closing scene. This scene has caused the displeasure of the movie critics (the lords of the Philistines), but for real people like you and me, it is an occasion for "tears and cheers and feeling proud." La coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait pas. (The heart has its reasons that reason is not acquainted with).

Another great joy of this movie is the soundtrack, which besides much excellent Tchaikovskyesque and Stravinskyesque material, also contains something that Tolkien would have approved of and delighted in: a song in Huttese ("Lapti Nek") and one in Ewokese. These two songs would be a good enough reason to study the soundtrack. Like everything else therein, their music is written by John Williams, the best movie music man there is. "Lapti Nek" is also listed as "Arranged by John and Joseph Williams and Ernie Fossellius" and it is the only piece not performed by the London Symphony, but rather by "Jabba’s Place Band." The other people involved in creating these songs are listed at the heading of this review. Enough said; go forth and enjoy.

---Benjamin Urrutia

Right Jerusalem Blade


Born into a comfortable Jewish family in 1915, graduated from Hunter College at the age of 19 and published as a significant poet at 23, Helen Joy Davidman joined the American Communist Party in 1938, married the eccentric novelist William Lindsay Gresham in 1942, was baptized as a Christian in 1948, began to correspond with C. S. Lewis in 1950, began to share her household with her married cousin Renée in 1952, visited England (and Lewis) in 1953, where she received a note from her husband announcing his love for their new tenant, was divorced in 1954, married C. S. Lewis in a civil ceremony in April, 1956, learned she had cancer in October, 1956, married Lewis in an Anglican religious ceremony in 1957, and died of cancer in 1960.
Such was the progress of a remarkable twentieth-century pilgrim.

Joy Lewis published four books of her own work during her writing career: one of poetry — Letters to a Comrade (1938) —; two novels — Anya (1940) and Weeping Bay (1950) —; and one of apologetics — Smoke on the Mountain (1954), which she dedicated to C. S. Lewis. She was also an experienced and able critic and editor, and aided in the literary careers of both her husbands. Indeed, two extraordinary novels were dedicated to her during her lifetime: that by her first husband, Nightmare Alley (1946) and that by her second husband, Till We Have Faces (1956). Each is regarded as its author’s masterpiece. The first is a terrifying portrait of damnation, and the second an astounding portrait of salvation. One of Dorsett’s special contributions is a consideration of the works of Lewis which show his wife’s influence. Critics will find much to consider in this list.

A study of the life of this remarkable woman is long overdue. After her conversion from Communism to Christianity was documented in a couple of articles at midcentury, she appeared again only as a kind of footnote in various studies of Lewis, with two significant exceptions — writings by her brother-in-law Warren Lewis (notably his introduction to his brother’s Letters and in his own recently published diaries) — and most powerfully in the portrait drawn by C. S. Lewis from memory, A Grief Observed, in which he wrote of her:

“She is in God’s hand.” That gains a new energy when I think of her as a sword. Perhaps the earthly life I shared with her was part of the tempering. Now perhaps He grasps the hilt; weighs the new weapon; makes lightnings with it in the air. “A right Jerusalem blade.” (Lewis, 1961, p. 50)

Now comes Dorsett’s fine study, balanced, forthright, and fascinating. He has interviewed Chad Walsh, who introduced Joy to the writings of C. S. Lewis; Joy’s brother, Dr. Howard Davidman; her cousin Renée who became Bill Gresham’s second wife; and a number of people in England who knew the Lewises in their married years. Both of Joy’s sons by Gresham, to whom Lewis became stepfather — Douglas and David Gresham — were interviewed as well. The result is a work entirely free of hagiography which offers a clear view of this complex woman. Justice is done to every phase of her meteoric career as she moved on the fateful trajectory that was to crash across Lewis’s quiet orbit. Christians will read " Providential" where I have written "fateful."

The last third of the book describes what must rank as one of the most poignant love stories in modern biography, told here in the fullest and frankest terms. Dorsett refers quite unabashedly to the fact that Lewis fell in love with his extraordinary visitor, a woman so absolute in her intelligence and individuality that his world was unmade. The onset of her illness, its remission, the last honeymoon in Greece, her final hours: these have been told before. What is revealed most clearly here is the full and profound nature of the love which surrounded these tragic but joyous events.

No book with the name of C. S. Lewis on the cover title can lack new letters from his hand; And God Came In contains words of a toughness compared to which those quoted in Severe Mercy soften to a caress! As Joy lay dying, her former husband wrote to ask that his sons be returned to him after her death. Lewis retorted in one letter: “You have tortured one who was already on the rack ... there is nothing she dreads so much as a return of the boys” (p. 134) and in another: “The boys remember you as a man who fired rifles through ceilings to relieve his temper, broke up chairs, wept in public, and broke a bottle over Douglas’s head.” (p. 135) It would be hard to imagine franker words.

Lewis was a formidable man and his wife was a formidable woman. Between them they remind us that the love of God does not soften, but rather steels His followers to make their difficult passage in His footsteps. It is in this context that Joy’s last
words, "I am at peace with God," are to be understood. No wonder Lewis called her his "right Jerusalem blade."

Theological Poet

In the six chapters of this valuable and badly needed study of Charles Williams's oeuvre, a poet, critic, and teacher of English literature comments upon Williams as a poet, critic, and teacher of English literature. Not since C. S. Lewis has there been so qualified a commentator upon Williams (excepting Mary McDermott Shideler, a theologian whose explication of Williams as a theologian is without peer). These chapters divide Williams' works into a sequence of which his own personal and public life forms a first and obviously related portion: he was very much his own creation. Chapters Two through Six set forth this prolific writer's five areas of literary endeavor in a manner which suggests not only a progression in time but a rising level of evaluation: "The Early Poetry," "Criticism, Biographies and Plays," "The Novels," "The Arthurian Poems," and "Theology." The last chapter alludes not to the range of theological teachings as expressed throughout Williams's work but to his theological books, He Came Down From Heaven (1938), The Descent of the Dove (1939), Witchcraft (1941), and The Forgiveness of Sins (1942), along with selected essays, especially "The Cross," which was anthologized posthumously in The Image of the City (1958).

Cavaliero states that "Williams's theological books are a curious blend of speculative theology, couched in the language of myth, with an acute feeling for its personal application." (p. 127) This might be a statement about all of Williams's works, as might Cavaliero's additional comment, that "he interprets the doctrines of the Church as so many symbols for a multidimensional experience of life and does so in a manner which enhances their credibility and their imaginative impact." (p. 127)

In this meticulous, elegant, and even-handed study, Cavaliero has offered the same service to the neglected figure whom Dorothy L. Sayers called "the dead Master," not only enhancing his credibility but explicating his imaginative impact. Every chapter offers illumination, and the book as a whole is a landmark in Williams studies, a superb work which has been long awaited by readers of his books and long deserved by Charles Williams.

VII Times IV

Rejoicing in two brief notes and eight splendid articles, this is the first volume of the four now in print to contain no primary material, that is, no work by one of the seven authors to whose work VII is dedicated. A.R. Peacocke and D.J. Taylor add postscripts to the Kathleen Nott controversy which I discussed at extreme, not to say excessive length in Mythlore XXXV. The articles concern Lewis, MacDonald, Chesterton, Tolkien, Williams, and Sayers, and they are all excellent.

Bruce R. Reichenbach, in "C.S. Lewis on the Desolation of Devalued Science" discusses Lewis's treatment of "science without values" (p. 21) in That Hideous Strength. David Holbrook, whose unpublished study of MacDonald is to be anticipated with pleasure, gives a delicately Freudian interpretation of this author's psychological motivations, in "George MacDonald and Dreams of the Other World." The longing for a dead mother becomes in MacDonald an exploration of "the feminine element of 'being' in human experience." (p. 37), he writes.

Translated from the French, the fine essay by Christiane d'Hausy, "The Symbolism of the Key in Chesterton's Work" explores this intriguing motif to its position in the hand of the man who "holds the key of the Apocalypse, for he is the alpha and the omega." (p. 44) A writer well-known to Mythlore readers, Thomas Egan, contributes a delightful comparison of the narrative tech-
nicques of two of the Seven in "Chesterton and Tolkien: the Road to Middle-earth." Aragorn and Alfred, White Tree and White Horse: "Each symbolizes both purity of ideals and the ultimate power of righteousness," (p. 53) Egan concludes.

Elisabeth Brewer writes of "Charles Williams and Arthur Edward Waite," in an essay of considerable interest to students of the occult sources in Williams: she concludes that "both came to regard magic as repulsive and corrupting, Williams using his extensive knowledge as a source of symbolic imagery for the evil in the mind of man," (p. 65) And Charles Huttar's exquisite essay, "Charles William's Christmas Novel: The Greater Trumps," is without a doubt the strongest and most revelatory reading ever given to this rich and significant work. He explores in this essay the thesis that "It was by means of the Christmas setting that Williams sought to unify the riot of images...in The Greater Trumps, and he succeeded to a degree which many critics have failed to appreciate." I note with humility and gratitude his gracious acknowledgement of my earlier study of this novel!

In Peter J. Schakel's study, "Seeing and Knowing: the Epistemology of C.S. Lewis's Till we have faces," traces a movement from early dependence upon reason in Lewis to a position "closer to Barfield's wariness of the rational and reliance on the imagination as the only source of knowledge." (p. 93) The last essay, Donald G. Marshall's "Gaudy Night: an Investigation of Truth" gives a reading to this major work which is as sophisticated and debonair as its subject, no small achievement! As he says, "We ought not to deny to an honest and courageous artist her due of concentrated thinking." (p. 114) What a rich feast VII continues to be!

Verging on the Epic

A reviewer of the first biography of Dorothy L. Sayers, Peter Green, said that "if her life was, in several respects, a tragedy, her professional career verged on the epic." (Youngberg 1975:25) If a capacity to have every published work reviewed is an indication, in itself, of success, Sayers' professional career certainly enjoyed an epic response! From the first anonymous review of Op. I in the Times Literary Supplement in 1917 to the appearance in 1981 of James Brabazon's authorized biography and Gaillard Dawson's monograph on her work of the same year, Sayers rejoiced in a series of critical responses justly related (as Youngberg points out) to her work: the popular press for her writings, academic comment upon her scholarly efforts, theological observations upon her Christian apologetic utterances, and literary criticism upon her poetry and drama. Those who dislike her among her critics and commentators do so vehemently; those who praise her do so with delight.

I read every entry with pleasure, welcoming a chance to hear of each work as it appeared, following the course of her literary career reflected back from a wide variety of mirrors. A heady, almost dizzying experience! C. S. Lewis once wrote that an author can learn at least one thing from a critic of his (or her) own work: whether or not that critic had understood what he meant. I can state with assurance that Youngberg knew what I meant in the two articles by myself which she includes; in both cases she has summarized with perfect accuracy exactly what I had intended to say. I assume therefore that her accuracy in reporting the other works is equally felicitous. Anyway, I hope so: the task of reading every single one of the some five hundred entries here was an herculean one not likely to be repeated! This is a fine piece of work, extremely useful to readers and/or students of Sayers.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Mythopoeic Celtic Stationary
by Patrick Wynne

This new stationary is now available for $5 plus $1 in handling. It features four designs, all found in Mythlore 35: The Celtic circles portraying themes from J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams (found on page 3 of Issue 35). Each circle is at the top right of the page and is 3 5/8" in diameter, with a lined border around the page. The fourth design is of the four corners found on page 2 of this issue, but much larger in size. The set includes 4 sheets of each design, making 16 printed sheets, 12 blank second sheets, plus 16 envelopes. The paper is of a neutral but beautifully antique appearance. This would make fine personal stationary for both men and women, as well as for gifts. Send you order to: Orders Department, 1008 N. Monterey St., Alhambra, CA 91801.