



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

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Volume 37  
Number 2

Article 20

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Spring 4-17-2019

## ***C.S. Lewis: A Very Short Introduction* by James Como**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Rhone, Zachary A. (2019) "C.S. Lewis: A Very Short Introduction by James Como," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 37: No. 2, Article 20.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol37/iss2/20>

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*C.S. Lewis: A Very Short Introduction* by James Como

**C.S. LEWIS: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION.** James Como. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2019. 134 p. 9780198828242. \$11.95.

COMO'S *C.S. LEWIS: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION* admits it would be easy to approach Lewis from one aspect of who Lewis was or what he did: Lewis the children's writer, Lewis the poet, Lewis the apologist, or any other Lewis. Instead, Como offers a concise portraiture of Lewis, following broad strokes of the major events in Lewis's life, toned by Lewis's creative and academic works and tinted by his friendships and romantic relationships.

Como's first hues are of the many reputations of Lewis, dotted by some of the key scholarship about Lewis as far back as the first study of Lewis' work: Chad Walsh's *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (1949). Out of this survey, Como claims that Lewis's main achievements are in his significant influence on vast numbers of people; the interest around his life and personality; the multiple voices of his work; and his writing style.

Logically, Como begins to trace Lewis's biography from his Irish upbringing with his discovery of Sehnsucht and imagining of *Boxen* with Warnie to composing early poetry (*Spirits in Bondage* and *Dymer*) and forging a family with the Moores. While Lewis's poetry as an atheist demonstrates rumblings of his nominally Christian upbringing, his turn to a committed faith in Christ comes during his Oxford years, where and when he would begin to write works that would quickly bring him fame. This fame would lead him to the Socratic club, his many essays and sermons, the multitudinous correspondences from writers around the world, and, particularly out of those correspondences, to Joy Davidman. Como traces these lines finely, offering sources to his writings and brief examinations of key writings, such as Lewis's space trilogy, and pivotal moments such as Elizabeth Anscombe's well-known challenge to *Miracles*.

New employment at Cambridge, complicated marriage, lost and distanced friendships, possibly his most complex literary piece, loss of a spouse, and many texts of reflection: Lewis's later life, as Como illustrates, was not simple. The many ups and downs contributed to what Lewis wrote and spoke, and his faith commitment, while less militant, seems to have become more firmly his own. As Como proposes in his first chapter, some of Lewis's achievements lie in the impact his life and works have had—and still have—around the world. Appropriately, Como concludes the biography with a survey of the continued impact of Lewis's legacy: from fans to critics to friends. Worth mentioning, in the "Further Reading" index are lists of Lewis' primary works, books important to Lewis, and selected secondary sources.

As with any work of art, elements of the artist make their way into the piece, and this portrait includes tinctures with which not all scholars might agree. Perhaps most notable are the controversies surrounding Walter Hooper

and *The Dark Tower*. Como's opinions are clear in his dedication of the book to Hooper, whom he refers to as his friend: "Now and again there arises the question of who is the greatest authority on Lewis, to which my answer is: there is none, except . . . Hooper. [...] Without him we simply would not have Lewis as we do" (xix). In response to critical concerns about *The Dark Tower*, "many people looking into the matter found no foundation to the charges, which were finally put to rest" (104). It may be overreaching to suggest such views are fact, and these and other claims seem a bit out of place for a text which is intended to be an introduction to Lewis. Still, for scholars who remain skeptical of the grey areas and other artistic freedoms, rest assured that these shaded parts do not significantly impact the whole.

In all, Como's *C.S. Lewis: A Very Short Introduction* is a useful text to recommend to new scholars and fans of Lewis and his work and is a refreshing reminder of how the various Lewises make up the one man. The fluid narrative speaks to Como's status of Professor Emeritus of Rhetoric and Public Communication at York College (CUNY), and his command of Lewisania reflects his enduring commitment to scholarship in the field as a founding member of the New York C.S. Lewis Society (1969) as well as his articles, on-air documentaries, and books (including *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C.S. Lewis* and *Remembering C.S. Lewis*).

—Zachary A. Rhone



**PAMELA COLMAN SMITH: THE UNTOLD STORY** by Stuart R. Kaplan, Mary K. Greer, Elizabeth Foley O'Connor, and Melinda Boyd Parsons. U.S. Games Systems, 2018. 440 pp. with over 400 color illustrations; bibliography and index. ISBN Hardcover 978-1-57281-912-2 ISBN Clothbound limited edition 978-1-57281-944-3

*PAMELA COLMAN SMITH: THE UNTOLD STORY* is a MUST-HAVE for students of early twentieth-century British and American art and art history, illustration, the Golden Dawn, the *Rider-Waite Tarot*, folktales, fairytales, and/or theater, not to mention synaesthesia and spiritualism. Bram Stoker and Arthur Conan Doyle fans might also want to take a good long look as well. A modern homage to the Arts and Crafts movement of which Smith was a part, it has been made for intensive library use and to please the eye of individual patrons. The binding is sturdy and the paper thick and high-quality—off-white for text and tan for sections dedicated to the hundreds of color reproductions. The cover is