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Reviews

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Reviews

Abstract

Timeless at Heart: Essays on Theology. C.S. Lewis. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

The Hero's Journey: The World of Joseph Campbell. Mythology Limited. Reviewed by Norma Roche.

C.S. Lewis: His Literary Achievement. C.N. Manlove. Reviewed by Glen GoodKnight.



REVIEWS

Dark Questions

C.S. Lewis, *Timeless at Heart: Essays on Theology* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1987), 144pp. ISBN 0-00-627136-7.

American readers will find three of the nine essays included in this little volume in *The Grand Miracle* (New York: Ballantine, 1983), and all but one of them along with the selected Letters, in *God in the Dock* (1970), which appeared in England as *Undeceptions* (1971): the "one" appeared in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1980). Long time fans of Lewis will likely have these volumes, but for new readers, fanatics who collect everything, and who are intrigued by Father Walter Hooper's imaginative editing, *Timeless at Heart* will be intensely interesting.

I am not sure that the contents of this little collection are in fact all "Essays on Theology," but I will not quibble. There is something to be learned from every new juxtaposition of Lewis' writings, since he was extremely prolific and one does not, nor at least not yet, fully memorize chapter and verse. New insights, and in this case one rather striking contradiction, arise from the exercise of contemplating these essays in this combination. Lewis says (p. 16) that "If one has to choose between reading new books and rereading the old, one must choose the old," and *Timeless at Heart* provides that chance.

C.S. Lewis was not a Pacifist, but I am: in Lewis' fantasies this puts me in the same category as Eustace Scrubbs and Fairy Hardcastle. I wish I thought that the former's pacifism laid the groundwork for his salvation and that the latter's quick abandonment of pacifism laid the groundwork for her damnation, but I don't. I do think that Pacifism is a vocation to which some are called. In his essay "Why I am Not a Pacifist," Lewis argues that one must base one's moral judgements upon Reason, which is no doubt true, but he concludes that "the voice of almost all humanity [is]... against" the Pacifist. (p. 65) That is, of course, not quite true. There are whole denominations of Pacifist Christians as well as a broad sprinkle of Pacifists in every denomination. If Lewis can list Homer, Virgil, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Montaigne as non-Pacifists, one can list Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi, Dorothy Day, David Thoreau, George Lansbury, John Wollman and Leo Tolstoy as Pacifists. But the point is that Lewis is contradictory in his appeal to authority, especially to authority which may actually have the power to compel him.

In "Willing Slaves to the Welfare State," he writes that "I dread specialists in power because they are specialists speaking outside their special subjects... But government involves questions about... what

things are worth having at what price; and on these a scientific training gives a man's opinion no added value." (p. 122.) I agree. But in the letter "The Conditions for a Just War," he says "The ultimate decision as to what the situation at a given moment as in the highly complex field of international affairs is one which must be delegated" (p. 126) by "private persons" to "governments." This, of course, is exactly what Pacifists are not prepared to do. They feel the same repugnance to delegating decisions about whether to resort to violence as they do about delegating decisions in other spheres of moral responsibility.

To do him credit, Lewis concludes with this: "The question is a very dark one. I should welcome about equally refutation, or development of what I have said." (p. 127) What a sweet cynicist he was, after all. And no doubt by now he has gone where the blessed Peacemakers go, and where there is no darkness at all.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey: The World of Joseph Campbell.
A documentary film by Mythology Limited.

This film explores the meanings and uses of myths with Joseph Campbell, author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell's boyhood interest in American Indians led him to read all he could find about their mythology, and, he said, "I think that's where my life as a scholar began." Brought up a Roman Catholic, Campbell knew the power of ritual, but as he studied biology and evolution, he began to question his faith. "A chance meeting" with Indian philosopher Krishnamurti introduced him to Eastern religions, and he saw that the myths of Hinduism and Buddhism and the stories of the Bible had many elements in common. As a young student in Europe in the 1920's, he was impressed by the uses of mythological symbols in the new abstract art he saw, and by James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which he was so determined to understand he went to Joyce's publisher for help. After spending five years during the Depression "just reading", he became a professor at Sarah Lawrence College, where he taught there from 1934 until his retirement in 1972. He died on October 31, 1987, at the age of 83.

Two modern subcreators, Richard Adams and George Lucas, pay tribute to Campbell in the film. Lucas says the Star Wars series never could have been written without Campbell, and the film looks at the constants in hero's quest tales throughout history, as described in Campbell's best known book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, by using *Star Wars* as an example.

Campbell felt there is really just one myth -- as we might say, one Tree of Tales with many leaves. Theists think myths are facts, atheists think they are lies (as Lewis said, "even though lies breathed through silver"), but Campbell calls them metaphors, neither lies nor facts: "God is a metaphor for a mystery that absolutely transcends all human categories of thought." Campbell thought myth reconciles people to the harsh reality of the natural world, as a story he tells of the covenant between the Plains Indians and the buffalo, and the Indians' prayer of thanks to the buffalo, make sense of the bloody reality of hunting and eating meat.

Campbell strongly objected to the interpreting of myths as historical facts, as the Judeo-Christian tradition does. Science cannot find truth in the way mythology can, because there are always new discoveries, and "truth" must be revised. But mythology must keep pace with those discoveries, it must not become fixed in time so that as time passes, it has no relation to the culture we're living in or the reality we're experiencing. Each of us must sift through the richness of symbols that have come down to us through history and find those that mean something to us -- we must pluck our own handful of leaves from the Tree of Tales, choosing the leaves that best sustain us.

To compare some of these ideas with those of the Inklings, I looked at Humphrey Carpenter's account of Lewis' conversion in *Tolkien: A Biography*. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson challenged Lewis to let himself be moved by the Christian story in the same way the story of Balder moved him, and Tolkien said that all myths come from God, and "reflect a splintered fragment of the true light." But they go further -- Tolkien and Lewis felt sure that the Christian story is "a myth that really happened." I wondered too about extent of the effect of knowledge on myth. Does knowing that field biologists don't find real lions to be particularly brave or noble change the way I experience Aslan? And to what extent do myths about lions affect what those biologists themselves see?

This documentary works as a film -- it's not just "talking heads," but is well illustrated with artistic renditions of myths through the ages. Mr. Campbell is a personable-seeming man and a good storyteller. If you like to think about myth, it's worth seeing. I knew nothing about Joseph Campbell before seeing it, but enjoyed it very much. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Second Edition, Princeton University Press, 1968; Bollingen Series, XVII) is 416 pages long and appears not to be light reading, so the film will, I'm sure, serve as a helpful introduction to (or in the worst case, a substitute for) the book. A transcript of the film, as well as videotapes of lectures by Campbell, are available.

Norma Roche

Lewis as Writer

C.N. Manlove, *C.S. Lewis: His Literary Achievement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 242pp. ISBN 0-312-00899-6.

Manlove argues in his preface, that aside from Roger Lancelyn Green and Humphrey Carpenter, all other 50 writers on Lewis are American. While claiming not to provoke judgement, Manlove feels Lewis has been relatively neglected by his own countrymen. (Manlove is British.) He also comments that the bulk of

writing on Lewis addresses the "moral and edificatory" aspect of his writing, but does not note that writers such as Peter Schakel, in *Longing for a Form: Essays on the Fiction of C.S. Lewis*, and Brian Murphy, in *C.S. Lewis*, do comment on Lewis as writer. Manlove wishes to carry on that attention "to show that Lewis is to be valued not only as a Christian with a brilliant mind and moving insights who wrote fantasy, but also as a writer of fiction of considerable literary merit and subtlety in its own right."

Manlove correctly points out that in Lewis' fiction the images he worked from came before the "spiritual content," and wishes to pay primary attention to his skill in creating his fiction, though agreeing that Lewis' literary richness is directly linked to his spiritual vision. Manlove also argues that Lewis' considerable sophistication and depth at times goes beyond, but not at variance with, his intention as a writer, and that there is a much closer correlation between Lewis' fiction and his apologetics than with his literary criticism. "The apologetics attempts by intelligence to argue for a divine basis behind the universe: the fiction shows people finding it." The richness, and luminous clarity is expressed in his fiction with surprising subtle design and always with that current of numinous joy. Manlove says sometimes something surprisingly refreshing about the pervading numinosity in Lewis' fiction:

These are things literary criticism should not speak about, because they are somehow immodest. But the usual literary criticism will not quite suffice. God is not concerned with modesty. To tell of Lewis' works without founding such talk on the 'dialectic of Desire' that runs through it is to lose as much of its essential nature as to talk of his books as though they could be reduced to spiritual formulas and lessons.

Manlove then proceeds to analyze Lewis' major fiction: *The Pilgrim's Regress*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, *That Hideous Strength*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Narnia Books*, and *Till We Have Faces*. Each book is well covered, and many valuable insights are brought forth. Manlove should have, however, checked his facts with slightly greater care. For example, in his coverage of *The Magician's Nephew*, he makes the error that Uncle Andrew and Aunt Letty were married (the text says they were "a brother and sister, old bachelor and old maid" which, among other things, avoids the problem of adulterous lust when Uncle Andrew imagines the Witch is attracted to him).

Manlove concludes with an overall assessment, pointing out that Lewis was inherently revolutionary in his treatment of established forms. Despite the great diversity of Lewis' fiction, there are some underpinning similarities: the almost continual journey out of self into Reality; the love of the "new" of freshness, paradoxically in the rediscovery of the old; the sense of otherness; the inversion of old habits of seeing; and how the 'dialectic of desire' runs through the works, allowing spiritual mobility and exposure to the new. Much more could be said about this penetrating, significant, and recommended book. In my opinion it ranks in the top ten books written on Lewis to date.

--Glen GoodKnight