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***The Undiscovered C.S. Lewis: Essays in Memory of Christopher W. Mitchell*, edited by Bruce R. Johnson**

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The Undiscovered C.S. Lewis: Essays in Memory of Christopher W. Mitchell,
edited by Bruce R. Johnson

Abstract

This is a review of *The Undiscovered C. S. Lewis* edited by Bruce Johnson.

Should Heck offer a revised edition, or a second book on Lewis's other friendships, the inclusion of more recent sources would be welcomed. Finally, as is the case with any book on Lewis, some readers will find certain aspects, statements, or sections questionable. In an ironic twist, objections of these sorts are a large part of what defined many of the friendships Lewis held dear.

—James Stockton

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THE UNDISCOVERED C.S. LEWIS: ESSAYS IN MEMORY OF CHRISTOPHER W. MITCHELL. Edited by Bruce R. Johnson. Hampden, CT: Winged Lion Press, 2021. 398 p. 9781935688136. \$24.99.

WHEN CHRISTOPHER MITCHELL, FORMER DIRECTOR of the Marion E. Wade Center, died suddenly in 2014, he left behind not only friends and family, but also a large number of scholars whose work had been touched by his kindness and generosity. Bringing together new essays by quite a few of these scholars, this memorial volume does so much more than just honor him. The essays in this collection break new ground in Lewis studies, inviting other scholars into exciting new conversations. The idea for the volume began when Mitchell gave a talk at the Arizona C.S. Lewis Society outlining six areas of Lewis studies that needed more academic work. In editing the book, Johnson was able to combine the eighteen essays spanning these six categories into three manageable sections: "Historical Studies," "Assessments and Reassessments," and "Interactions with Contemporaneous or Current Writers." Each of these essays presents new research in Lewis studies that is sometimes enlightening, sometimes surprising, and occasionally even challenging to long-held thoughts about Lewis and his world. However the reader finds herself responding to any individual essay, this collection opens many doors to new scholarship on the life, work, and influences of C.S. Lewis.

The book begins with a forward by Doug Gresham, C.S. Lewis's stepson. Gresham presents a moving description of conversations and adventures he shared with Mitchell. This is followed by Bruce Johnson's preface explaining the events that led to the idea of this book, followed by several paragraphs thanking the many people who helped make this collection possible.

The first section of the book, "Historical Studies," is made up of five essays that approach Lewis studies from a different historical angle. Each of

these essays has been meticulously researched and provides new information regarding Lewis's historical context or earlier writers who influenced him. In the first of these essays, "'Guns and Good Company': C.S. Lewis and the First World War," Grayson Carter collects a wide variety of information about Lewis's activities, experience, and even reading material while he was involved in WWI. In a manner reminiscent of John Garth's *Tolkien and the Great War*, Carter asks his readers to think about how much this experience shaped not only Lewis the person, but also Lewis the writer. While the collection of information in this one place itself makes this an impressive essay, the most intriguing aspect is the support he gives for the claim that while it is never mentioned anywhere, C.S. Lewis suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The second essay, Diana Pavlac Glyer's "Solve for X: C.S. Lewis, Charles Lamb, and the Algebra of Friendship" continues the historic exploration of Lewis's work by first showing how his understanding of friendship is very similar to that of Victorian writer Charles Lamb. Lewis and Lamb both believed that each friendship brings out something unique in each person that no other friendship could do. Glyer then moves on to show how some of Lewis's friendships did exactly that for Lewis. In this sense, she is expanding on work already presented in her books *The Company they Keep* and *Bandersnatch* by focusing on friends not addressed in those two books: Warren Hamilton Lewis, Arthur Greeves, and William Kirkpatrick.

The third essay, "C.S. Lewis in America, 1933-1943," by historian Mark Noll focuses on Lewis's early critical reception in the United States. Noll reveals that in the first decade Lewis's work was available in the US, American interest came from Catholic publications, mainstream Protestant publications, literary critics, and what he calls the "highbrow national press" (60). What is surprisingly absent is the evangelical press. While today Lewis is almost universally extolled and embraced by evangelicals, in this first decade only one evangelical publication treated him as anything other than a suspicious outsider. The popularity of Lewis in both mainstream culture and evangelical circles really began, Noll explains, with the American release of *The Screwtape Letters*, which is how he landed on the cover of *Time* magazine. While this essay will most likely appeal to a much narrower audience than the first two, it is an important addition to the growing number of studies focused on Lewis's reception and popularity, and will fascinate those who enjoy Samuel Joeckel's *The C.S. Lewis Phenomenon* or George Marsden's *C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity: A Biography*.

The fourth essay, "C.S. Lewis and the Oxford Literature Discussion Group" by Walter Hooper begins with the footnote that since Hooper died before the manuscript was finished, the final editing was undertaken by one of his executors. While this article presents specific, previously-unpublished

information about Lewis's involvement in the Oxford Literature discussion group where, as an undergrad, he met Neville Coghill, the real value of this piece is two previously unpublished pieces, one in Chaucerian style written by Coghill and describing a presentation Lewis gave, and one by Lewis in the same style describing a presentation by Coghill. These are both enjoyable, and give a glimpse into Lewis the student. It is also touching that Hooper's essay is in this book, since it was his life's work to make so much of Lewis's writing accessible to both fans and scholars.

The final essay in this section, "How Shall We Then Read? George MacDonald and the Beginnings of a Discipline Called English Literature" is by George MacDonald scholar Kristin Jeffrey Johnson. An article about MacDonald's role in the founding of the academic study of English Literature may at first glance seem out of place in a collection on C.S. Lewis, but Johnson defends this by first reminding the reader of the influence Lewis claims MacDonald had on him, and then explains how MacDonald's role in helping shape English Literature as an academic field had both a subtle and substantial influence on Lewis's academic career. This essay will be particularly interesting to anyone involved in the field of English Literature, as it explores the origins of this field and why its founders believed it was important enough for academic study. Some scholars may even find this a useful starting point to discuss how far the field has moved from its origins, analyzing in its turn whether it has strayed off course or developed into greater things.

While the first section of the book consisted of essays that collected concrete information about dates, times and specific events, the second section, "Assessments and Reassessments," presents seven essays focused on literary analysis of Lewis's texts. Several of these essays involve interpreting Lewis's fiction through his study of medieval thought, *The Discarded Image*.

The first of these essays, Michael Ward's "Planet Narnia Revisited," is, like Glycer's, a continuation of work already done elsewhere. For those who have enjoyed his books *The Narnia Code* and *Planet Narnia*, this chapter will be equally enjoyable and interesting, as it gives a selection of new ideas that Ward feels support the claims in the earlier two books. For those who have not read those, or who do not find them particularly convincing, this chapter may well feel like an allegorical treasure hunt of the sort that Lewis warns his readers away from. Because the essay misses the work done elsewhere, these readers may find this essay asking them to make logical jumps that do not make a lot of sense out of that context. For example, one of the claims presented here is that since chairs are usually made out of wood, the fact that there is a chair in the Narnia books that is made out of silver symbolically connects the chair to the moon, the heavenly body associated with both silver and madness. For those already convinced, this makes a lot of sense. For those who are not so convinced, this

feels like a long stretch. This is especially true if the reader is aware of the Indian wedding tradition in which it is not uncommon to have the bride and groom sit in a chair completely covered in silver. These readers may see a very different, and definitely darker, symbol than Ward suggests when a story involves a witch binding a prince to a silver chair. Whatever the reader feels about Ward's theories, however, this essay is in a vital place in this collection, because several of the later essays rely on Ward's work as either an interpretive lens or a base for their own research.

The next essay, "The Figure of Merlin in *That Hideous Strength*" by David C. Downing, is both interesting and delightful. While Lewis's use of the character Merlin has been addressed in other studies, Downing brings fresh light to the question. He asks why Lewis, who loved the Arthurian legend, would have created his own Merlin in such a way that he was a "soul in need of saving?" (141). To answer this question, Downing takes his readers on an adventure through the earliest texts that mention Merlin, into the medieval and renaissance ideas regarding white magic, black magic, and science that Lewis addresses in *The Discarded Image* and his volume in the Oxford History of English Literature, finally bringing the reader back to *That Hideous Strength*. The conclusion Downing draws is that while the magic Merlin practices is not "sorcery of the Renaissance" (148), all magic ultimately shares the N.I.C.E.'s desire to control nature, and therefore it is more closely aligned with evil than with the way of love that rules the house at St. Anne's. For anyone who loves Arthurian literature or *That Hideous Strength*, this chapter is both an intriguing and delightful read.

This intriguing chapter is followed by another enjoyable read, Marjorie Lamp Mead's "The Theological Imagination: C.S. Lewis as Reader and Author." Mead invites her readers into an exploration of Lewis's integration of his faith into his imaginative writings, challenging some common assumptions, reminding the reader of what Lewis himself said on the topic, and asking readers to think in new ways about the topic. Mead declares that there are two critical errors readers make regarding the role of theology in Lewis's fiction. The first is to miss it altogether, while the second is misunderstanding its purpose and role. Mead goes on to explain to her readers that Lewis asked his readers to think of the theology present in the story not as a treasure to be hunted, but as a part of the delight of the story itself. For a story to work on its reader, it must become an experience to be enjoyed instead of a mine to be dug or a game to be played. In order for these stories to have the transforming power that marks all good literature, the reader must first enjoy the story and experience its presentations of beauty, truth and holiness. This will in turn heighten the reader's awareness, enhance their clarity of vision, increase their depth of understanding, and awaken the reader's longing for the transcendent.

Where the first two articles in this section were focused on specific images in specific texts, this essay is more theoretical. But that should not put the reader off: this is how theory should be done. Mead presents the ideas in a way that is both engaging and refreshing.

The next chapter, Mark Neal's "Recovering the Mythical Imagination," works alongside Mead's to explore Lewis's thoughts about imagination and story. Neal begins his study by giving examples of different terms Lewis used to identify specific aspects of imagination, and then argues that, because the medieval mind was steeped in the mythical imagination, select characteristics of the medieval mind are also characteristics of the mythical imagination. These include an awareness of the medieval cosmology, a general lack of skepticism, an interest in the moral significance rather than the truth of a story, and the idea that light and knowledge of God fade in the movement down through the heavens toward the earth. The final aspect of the medieval mind that Neal identifies as part of the mythical imagination is the belief that stories exist to be passed on to others. Instead of writing all new stories, medieval writers retold older stories. Neal downplays the additions and changes to the stories that each writer engages in, and focuses instead on the idea of simple repetition. He then explains that he sees three nuances or subsets within the mythical imagination: satisfied, classical, and romantic. The satisfied imagination engages the same ideas as Chesterton and Tolkien about re-enchanting or re-seeing the world with new eyes. The classical imagination, on the other hand, engages the concepts of harmony, symmetry, and self-explanation. The romantic imagination is intrigued by mystery and that which is not self-explanatory. Neal argues that these three things work together to help the person engaging in mythical imagination to see beyond the thing itself. When showing how the mythical imagination is at work in actual texts, Neal relies on Ward's interpretation of medieval cosmology at work in the Narnia book. In doing this he misses the opportunity to explore how these might be at work in the fiction of Lewis's that overtly and directly engages medieval cosmology in a variety of ways. Of course, it could be said that he is simply leaving that for another scholar to pick up at another time.

Chapter ten, Wayne Martindale's "From Suffering to Service: Edmund's Spiritual Formation" takes a new perspective on the Narnia series, exploring the growth and change of Edmund. Martindale shows how Edmund's development as a character goes through the stages of spiritual formation as understood by Evelyn Underhill. These include a new awareness of the reality of the Divine, a joining in the suffering of Christ, a new moral clarity that develops as one comes to know God, the choice to obey God even in his absence, which all culminates in a joyful unity with God. This unity in turn flows through the individual as love and overflows into acts of service for others. According to

Martindale, across the Narnia series Edmund grows through all of these stages. But even more importantly, Martindale sees Edmund as a model of spiritual formation and growth for all of us. Instead of presenting Lucy as the spiritual giant that some writers have suggested should be the model for each of us, Martindale suggests that we are all more like Edmund, who provides for us a sympathetic model.

In the next essay, “The Shorter Planetary Fiction of C.S. Lewis,” the editor of the collection tackles two short science fiction pieces that have previously received limited academic attention. Because they are both about space, Johnson sets out to prove that these two stories fit Ward’s model. This is first done by showing how the story set on Mars, “Ministering Angels” reflects all of the things that Ward associates with the medieval Martian mindset, while the other, “Forms of Things Unknown” which takes place on the moon is associated with all things lunar. He then addresses the little amount of criticism that has been applied to these: “Ministering Angels” has been accused of being misogynistic, while Kathryn Lindskoog refused to believe that Lewis had written “Forms of Things Unknown” at all. To answer the first charge, Johnson explains the context in which the story was written: it was a response to an article in which another writer made a specific, misogynistic claim about the future of space travel, and Lewis was simply showing the absurdity of that claim through a satirical story. The other argument, in Johnson’s mind at least, is answered by how well the story fits Michael Ward’s theories. Ward’s *Planet Narnia* and *The Narnia Code* thus become not merely an interpretation of Lewis’s work, but the standard by which the authenticity of Lewis’s texts can be measured.

The final essay in this section wraps up the textual analysis section by exploring yet another angle regarding the medieval cosmos and Lewis’s fiction. “Silent No More: Lewis’s Cosmological View of Christ’s Atoning Work” by Adam Johnson argues that through the space trilogy, Lewis creates a completely new doctrine of the Christian atonement. “Atonement” is the scholarly name for the idea that Christ has done something to make fallen humanity right with God. The beginning of the essay does an excellent job of pulling the reader into the topic by referencing a conversation in *Out of the Silent Planet* between Ransom and the Oyarssa of Malacandra about what Maleldil—that is, Christ—did and is doing on the bent planet Thulcandra (Earth), and points out that because the conversation happens offstage, the reader is left wondering what was said. The essay then takes the reader on a swooping study of all of Lewis’s texts to find every reference to the atonement in them. Finally, he presents his theory that in the space trilogy, Lewis argues that Christ’s death and resurrection changed not only our planet, but to re-unite the earth with “the music of the spheres” (216). While it is a fascinating read, there do seem to be

two potential weaknesses. As the essay is worded, it appears that the author assumes that ideas presented in fiction must be what the writer genuinely believes. There is definitely space for this view of the atonement within the fictional world of Ransom, Weston and the N.I.C.E. And in that context, it not only makes sense, but provides a wonderful structure for understanding the three books as a series. But the article is worded in such a way that it appears that the author is arguing that Lewis is presenting what he thinks is a valid, real-world interpretation. Maybe that is what is intended in the essay, but if not, a few sentences soundly keeping this interpretation in the fictional world would clarify. Another that may slow down or confuse some readers is that the implied or intended audience of the text already knows about existing models of atonement. Therefore, terms such as “Christus Victor” or “substitutionary atonement” are employed with little or no explanation. The reader who is already conversant with the rich and varied language of atonement will find this an entirely engaging article. Those who do not, however, may struggle a little more. That being said, this article succeeds in not only adding something new to Lewis studies, but also to the conversation regarding theories of atonement that has been growing and changing over two thousand years.

The third and final section of this book is titled “Interactions with Contemporaneous or Current Writers.” In spite of the seemingly self-explanatory title, the first two chapters of this section focus not on one or two writers, but whole academic fields. The first of the six essays in this section, “C.S. Lewis: Communications Professor” by Steven A. Beebe is about Lewis’s interactions with an entire field that was not taught at either Oxford or Cambridge during Lewis’s time: Communication. Beebe manages to fit an impressive amount of supporting evidence in a small space to argue that Lewis should be considered a Communication scholar. Intriguingly, each of the supporting details that Beebe gives for this are also topics addressed in the field of English Studies. While Beebe is setting out to prove Lewis’s competence in a field of study other than his specialization, with just a little tweaking this essay could be used to defend a claim that the fields of Communication and English Studies, with their shared interest in such things as language, symbol, meaning, rhetoric, and effective communication skills, are very closely connected.

The next chapter, Maxie B. Burch’s “Teaching as Translation and the Theological Formation of Imagination,” argues that teachers of theology, whether in lay, professional, or academic settings, need to engage the imagination of their students as well as their reason. When the teacher of theology can use Lewis as an effective model for re-enchanting the field, it moves the study of theology from a dry, seemingly-pointless duty into a transforming process in which the individual grows in both in how they live and think, ultimately enacting the gospel in everyday life.

Chapter fifteen, the third chapter in this section, brings the conversation back from Lewis the teacher to thinking again about the books he wrote. "A Holy Grief: The Pilgrim's Path to Consolation" by Monika B. Hilder begins by discussing the differences in how grief is treated in *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed*. This article goes on to explain that for those who are actually suffering, Lewis's fictional accounts of grief provide the most comfort. Stories such as *The Magician's Nephew*, the ghost with the lizard in *A Grief Observed*, and Orual's suffering in *Till We Have Faces* engage a pattern of affliction, comfort and healing that give the reader models for entering into grief in order to work through it and become transformed by ultimate consolation.

The next chapter, Crystal L. Downing's "Dorothy L. Sayers and C.S. Lewis at War," sets a different tone as it explores an area of Lewis studies that has only recently begun to gain attention. In exploring Lewis's rich friendship with Dorothy L. Sayers, Downing artfully plays with two different meanings of the phrase "at war." This is done by discussing Sayers' actual experiences with the first World War, then shifts to her engaging, lively and sometimes confrontational exchange of letters with C.S. Lewis. In this way, the phrase "at war" is being used both literally and figuratively. The explanation of Sayers' war experience traces her growth from the young student who found it exciting to be in France when the war broke out, to the creator of the sympathetic, war-scarred detective Lord Peter Wimsey, finally discussing her role as the wife of a man who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder—what was then called "Shell Shock." The essay then turns to her friendship with another person who suffered from that war, C.S. Lewis. But instead of focusing on his much darker war experience, the essay turns to their delightful letters in which they discussed, and sometimes argued, ideas. Their friendship involved more than just friendly sparring: Lewis's book *Miracles* was written at Sayers' suggestion. Ultimately, this essay is an excellent companion to Gina Dalfonzo's 2020 book *Dorothy and Jack: The Transforming Friendship of Dorothy L. Sayers and C.S. Lewis*. The two together break new ground in both Lewis and Sayers studies.

The second to last chapter of the book, "In the Company of Strangers" by James Como, takes the reader back to literary analysis in such a way that it makes sense in this third section instead of the first. Como places *Till We Have Faces*, the book he calls Lewis's only real novel, in the same tradition as Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Thornton Wilder. This sub-genre, he argues, is set by a certain tone that is both alluring and at the same time, spiritually unsettling. The plot, setting and characters are less important in defining this category of books than the tone itself. The stories are usually told in first person, presenting an unreliable narrator who describes situations leading to existential crisis, but any didacticism is downplayed in the presence of the dark numinous. In order to soundly place *Till We Have Faces* in this genre, Como first explains two other

books he believes are prototypical examples: Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business* and Sigrid Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter*. Like *Till We Have Faces*, they are strange stories that engage wonder or mystery breaking into the everyday world of the characters. Como argues that in *Till We Have Faces*, the tone creates space for the numinous, which in turn opens space for Lewis's *sehnsucht*, which in its turn opens the possibility for Orual to, after all of her struggles and suffering, finally rest in the presence of the god.

The final chapter of this book takes a surprisingly fitting turn. Laura Schmidt, one of several employees of the Wade Center who have contributed to this book, eschews Lewis to explore one motif in the works of an author she and Chris Mitchell used to talk about. "Across Western Seas: Longing for the West in Tolkien's Legendarium" does not waste time making a connection between the two writers; instead, Schmidt makes the case for this essay by explaining that she and Mitchell used to talk both about their shared love of Tolkien, and about heaven. This, in turn, led Schmidt to think about how the "closest approximation" Tolkien's legendarium offers to the longing for heaven is the longing for Valinor and The West (337). They are not the same thing since these are tangible places that can, if one knows how, be reached by ship. After establishing that the longing for heaven and for Valinor are not the same thing, but they are related, Schmidt moves the discussion into an exploration of the prevalence of this longing for mythical, Eden-like Western lands in myths and legends that influenced Tolkien. Once she has pointed out the specific influence of *The Voyage of St. Brendan* on Tolkien's work, Schmidt presents a very useful chart displaying the wide variety of such stories in Irish, Welsh and Greek mythology, as well as Arthurian folklore. The conversation even draws a connection to the early American ideal of Western Expansion, before diving into what these connections mean within the study of Tolkien's work. Ultimately, this fascinating and well-written article ties the longing for the west that Tolkien's characters experience with the consolation of the happy ending that he introduces in "On Fairy-Stories." With such a focus on consolation and happy endings, this essay is a fitting conclusion for not just this section, but the collection as a whole.

Ultimately, this densely-packed book does an excellent job of honoring Christopher Mitchell and his interest in the future of C.S. Lewis studies, while setting the stage for a whole new wave of research in this field. While this is a scholarly work, any serious Lewis fan will find it interesting. But the reader should be warned: this is a book best enjoyed slowly, savored like a fine wine as one encounters new ideas from experienced scholars.

— Melody Green