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***C. S. Lewis for Beginners* by Louis Markos**

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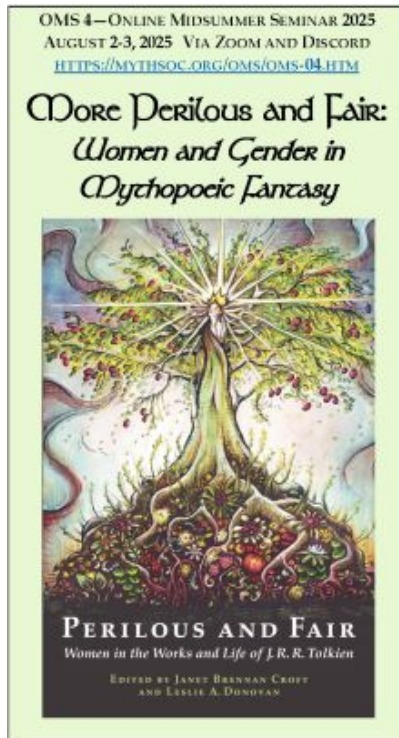
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C. S. Lewis for Beginners by Louis Markos

Abstract

This is a review of the book *C. S. Lewis for Beginners*.

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depth study of each one in order for them to become part of the landscape of Tolkien scholarship. Overall, Ferrández Bru offers many interesting pathways to investigate, and, hopefully, much to look forward to from future scholarship on Tolkien's Spanish connection.

—Nicole M. duPlessis

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C.S. LEWIS FOR BEGINNERS. Louis Markos and Joe Lee, illustrator. For Beginners LLC, 2022. 175 pp. 978-1939994806. \$12.99 paperback, \$9.99 Kindle.

C.S. LEWIS FOR BEGINNERS IS ONE OF THE TWO RECENT VOLUMES in a series that has been published since 1970, each volume of which is titled *X for Beginners*, where X is the subject of the book. (The other is *Tolkien for Beginners*, also by Markos.) There are over a hundred books in the series so far. Each volume is about a subject which can be a person, an academic field, a political movement, a location, or a historical period. A very similar series is one whose volumes are called *Introducing X*. The volumes in both series are paperbacks of less than 200 pages which are illustrated with cartoons. The amount of space taken up by such cartoons in each book varies greatly. In some books in the series, the cartoons take up over half the space. There are considerably less of them in *C.S. Lewis for Beginners*. The cartoons don't really add much to this book, generally just repeating the points made in the written part of the book. It's as if the For Beginners company decided that it was necessary to have some cartoons to make the book look like the rest of the series.

There are 28 chapters in this volume. One of the chapters is a biography of Lewis, one is about four academic works by Lewis, and the other 26 are each about one book by Lewis. Seven of those chapters are about one volume of the Narnia series. Three of them are about one volume of the space

trilogy. One chapter each is about the novels *Till We Have Faces* and *The Great Divorce*. The other 14 chapters are each about a single nonfictional work by Lewis. At the end is an annotated bibliography. Each chapter except the first ends with what Marcos calls a “suggested pairing.” This names one or more of Lewis’s essays which Marcos thinks makes the same point in a briefer form.

Markos begins each chapter about one of Lewis’s fictional works with a list of some basic facts about the work. He then gives a summary of its plot. This is followed by a list of major characters in it and some facts about those characters. He usually then states the themes of the book. The chapters about Lewis’s nonfictional works summarize the points made in that work.

Markos calls Lewis “the greatest Christian apologist of the twentieth century” (1). This strikes me as an excessive claim. There were dozens of Christian apologists during that time. Lewis might be the most well-known popularizer of Christian theology though. There are other sloppy mistakes in the book. For instance, Markos claims that the triple first that Lewis earned at Oxford as a student was “unheard of” (15). Yes, it’s rare, but it’s not unheard of. He claims that Lewis’s voice was the second-most recognizable voice on British radio after Winston Churchill. This isn’t true either. One important fact about Lewis’s fame is that early in his writing career he became more popular in the U.S. than in the U.K. In 1947 he was on the cover of *Time* magazine. This isn’t mentioned anywhere in the book. Markos says that Lewis only used a nib pen to write, not a ballpoint one. This isn’t quite true. He used a ballpoint pen while a student at Oxford but later went back to using a nib pen.

Sometimes Markos makes inaccurate statements because he doesn’t have as wide a knowledge as would be useful for describing Lewis’s academic works. He says that Lewis was not interested in linguistics but in philology. This is only true if you assume that linguistics doesn’t include historical linguistics. In his book *Studies in Words*, Lewis traces the origins of ten modern words, including their changes in meaning over time. This is an application of the linguistic fields of semantics and historical linguistics.

One annoying aspect of this book is that Markos never seems to disagree with Lewis about anything. He quotes statements that Lewis makes in a way that makes it clear that they are obvious even if they aren’t. Furthermore, he sometimes attributes to Lewis views that he couldn’t possibly have. For instance, on his chapter of *The Abolition of Man*, he says that “[m]any of the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s became traditional adults because their chests [i.e., their moral senses] was built up by their parents. But if they fail to build up the chests of their own children, society will pay a price” (83). Clearly this is Markos offering his own interpretation of events that happened after Lewis’s death, so it can’t be Lewis’s own view. It’s also a weird inversion of the claims of people who now think that other people now hold “woke” views for which

they have no proof. If this were true, it would mean that recently people have been advocating additional moral views which were previously little discussed.

Markos is a professor of English at Houston Baptist University. At times I find myself wishing, as I did when I listened a few years ago to his audio course called *Life and Times of C.S. Lewis* (from The Great Courses), that it would have been better if some other scholar had gotten the contract to do an introductory course on Lewis. I find myself saying though that anyone wanting to know more about Lewis can just go ahead and read his books. One snide comment that has been made about the For Beginners books is that they offer sufficient knowledge of a subject that you will know enough that you can talk about the subject at a cocktail party. I don't know enough about cocktail parties to tell if that is true, but then the comment was probably made by someone who didn't go to cocktail parties much either.

—Wendell Wagner



JEWISH FANTASY WORLDWIDE: TRENDS IN SPECULATIVE STORIES FROM AUSTRALIA TO CHILE (JEWISH SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY NO. 4). Edited by Valerie Estelle Frankel. Lexington Books. 2023. **Hardcover:** 978-1-66692-660-6, \$120.00. **Ebook:** 978-1-66692-661-3, \$45.00.

FRANKEL BEGINS THIS COLLECTION BY OBSERVING, “New York Jews invented science fiction as it’s known today” when Hugo Gernsback founded *Astounding Stories* in 1926 (1). Comic book fans will chime in at this point, reminding scholars that during the same period, New York Jews like Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were using less-respected publications to invent a new format for telling speculative fiction stories. From *Iron Man* to *I, Robot*, Jewish writers have invented and then redefined how audiences read speculative fiction for close to a century now.

Given how wide the Jewish influence is on speculative fiction, it’s not surprising that this is the fourth entry in Rowman & Littlefield’s series on Jewish speculative fiction.¹ Previous volumes have explored topics from Jewish speculative fiction characters to sympathetic portrayals of Goliath in various media. This volume takes a broad look at Jewish speculative fiction (science fiction as well as fantasy) in different cultures.

¹ Earlier volumes in Rowman & Littlefield’s Jewish Fantasy and Science Fiction series can be found in the Works Cited.