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***A Joyful Outpost: Exploring the Household Economy of the Beavers from The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* by Aaron Bair**

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A Joyful Outpost: Exploring the Household Economy of the Beavers from The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe by Aaron Bair

Abstract

Aaron Bair's new book on Mr. and Mrs. Beaver from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* combines scholarship with promotion of traditional values he believes are in keeping with C.S. Lewis's view of the world.

Additional Keywords

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe; Mr. and Mrs. Beaver; Hospitality; Gender Roles

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between the “stages of mystical ascent” (121) and ties together the elements of Lewis’s legacy with the belief that is fostered in his readers.

As a whole, Como’s work provides interesting insights from a lifelong study of C.S. Lewis’s works. While *Mystical Perelandra* is neither an in-depth analysis nor purely reflective in nature, it provides an interesting blend of scholarly background and personal insights that could appeal to either those already well-versed in Lewis or those looking for someone to pique their interest in Lewis’s works or beliefs. Those looking for in-depth analysis (particularly of *Perelandra*) may find this book interesting as a jumping-off point for research but will be left unsatisfied by the book’s more meditative and personal tone.

— Eleanor Knobil

ELEANOR KNOBIL is currently studying the works of J.R.R. Tolkien as a postgraduate research (PGR) student at the University of Birmingham. She also teaches dual-credit and post-secondary courses through Isothermal Community College in Spindale, North Carolina.



A JOYFUL OUTPOST: EXPLORING THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY OF THE BEAVERS FROM *THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE*. Aaron Bair. Las Vegas, NV: Independently Published, 2023. 125 p. 979886993867. \$12.99.

LEWIS SCHOLARS MAY WONDER what to make of Aaron Bair’s elegant new book, *A Joyful Outpost: Exploring the Household Economy of the Beavers from The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Bair is not an established author in the field, there are no endorsements on the back cover, and one never knows what to expect from a self-published book. Is this a collection of casual musing, a work of scholarship, or a manifesto? Can one really justify a whole book on two animal side-characters, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, however beloved they may be? It piqued my curiosity, so I took it upon myself to read the book and give others a sense for what it is.

First off, the book draws on much scholarship regarding C.S. Lewis and Narnia. The “Joyful Outpost” title is taken from Michael Ward’s description of the Beaver’s home in *Planet Narnia*. Bair makes use of Jason Baxter’s *Medieval Mind of C.S. Lewis* and Matthew Dickerson and David O’Hara’s *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C.S. Lewis*. He brings in an obscure beaver reference from *That Hideous Strength* and draws many insights from Lewis’s non-fiction works and his letters. He draws fitting parallels from

Tolkien, Chesterton, and Kenneth Grahame (of *The Wind in the Willows*). He knows that “Ransom Trilogy” is preferred to “Space Trilogy.”

But the book can also be quite casual. Bair often uses first person and phrases that sound much more like *Mere Christianity* than *The Allegory of Love*. (e.g. “I am not saying that man has the power of salvation. That’s out of bounds,” 44). The only time the term “Household Economy” is used is on the cover. The pacing is quick (he gets past the anachronism of Mrs. Beaver’s sewing machine in a couple pages), and sounds like an enthusiastic English teacher excited to point out the next implication of an underappreciated detail.

Much of the content is derived from close reading of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. He’s deft at drawing out details, such as Mr. Beaver’s modest pride in his dam and Mrs. Beaver’s noticing that the White Witch couldn’t make eye contact with Aslan. He compares and contrasts the hospitality of the Beavers with the “hospitality” of the White Witch. He reminds readers of the austerity and hostility of the Witch’s always-winter-never-Christmas setting—sometimes lost for those who have adopted the romantic vision of snowy Narnia from the Walden movie and the “Ambient Worlds” soundtrack—to situate the Beaver’s home as truly an outpost in an enemy-controlled territory.

Speaking of enemy-controlled territory, the book is also a call to action. Bair is explicit about having an agenda: “It is my contention that looking at the Beavers and how they structure their household is an antidote our society desperately needs.” (16)

Much of his exhortation will be uncontroversial to the “mere” Christian, or even to anyone of good will. Bair endorses the practices of courage, hospitality, hard work, and rest. The Beavers are harboring wanted individuals *after* their friend Mr. Tumnus has already been arrested for doing so. They open their home—basically a small studio apartment as Bair points out—to strangers, and “It is clear that their house is lived in. It’s a place for the people. If it was only a museum for things to be viewed at a distance or their own personal playroom, closed off to outsiders, their home wouldn’t be of much importance at all.” (96) He presents joyful feasting with Father Christmas as an act of defiance against the darkness.

Bair also unapologetically tackles more controversial topics such as hierarchy, chivalry, and complementary gender roles, taking stances he contends are shared by C.S. Lewis. He quotes Lewis’s “Membership”: “I do not believe that God created an egalitarian world. I believe the authority of parent over child, husband over wife, learned over simple to have been as much a part of the original plan as the authority of man over beast” (33)—and like passages from “Priestesses in the Church,” “The Necessity of Chivalry,” and “Is Progress Possible?” He claims not to be advocating a 1950s housewife vision for women—the creation mandate from Genesis 2:1-3 was given to men *and* women

both—but he seeks to elevate the glory of running a good home. Being a housewife is as real a vocation as any nine-to-five career. Mrs. Beaver is met sewing with the kettle on, potatoes boiling, and—to be revealed later—a sticky marmalade roll already in the oven. She’s able to pack up for a long journey in a pinch, even if she does consider bringing the sewing machine. Bair cites a letter from Lewis to a Mrs. Ashton in which he sympathizes with her sense of housewifery as a Sisyphean enterprise, but Lewis ends by asking “What do ships, railways, mines, cars, government, etc exist for except that people may be fed, warmed, and safe in their own homes.” It is for the sake of the home that all the other enterprises exist (84-85).

Bair packs a lot in to his 125 pages, even if they are 4.5” by 7”. Perhaps the best comparison is to say it is like a more focused version of Joe Rigney’s *Live Like a Narnian* (which he cites frequently) or Charlie Starr’s *The Faun’s Bookshelf* (which he does not cite but should have).

—Josiah Peterson

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JOURNEY BACK AGAIN: REASONS TO VISIT MIDDLE-EARTH. Edited by Diana Pavlac Glycer. Altadena: Mythopoeic Press, 2022. 163 pp. 9781887726290. \$11.95 pbk.

IN HER FOREWORD TO THIS RELATIVELY SLENDER VOLUME, Janet Brennan Croft calls this an “ambitious project,” explaining it as a “conversation in book form, where the authors of the papers work as both individuals and as a creative community, writing back and forth to each other while finding new insights to contribute to the many-decades-old field of Tolkien studies” (i). Indeed, many of the essays contain multiple footnotes directing the reader to related points in other chapters in the book. The ‘academic family’ type feel of the volume is reflected in editor Diana Pavlac Glycer’s preface, inviting the reader “to walk alongside us, to revisit Middle-earth, and to discover details you might have missed” (iv).