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## ***Many Times and Many Places: C.S. Lewis and the Value of History*, by K. Alan Snyder and Jamin Metcalf**

Landon Loftin

*Gravitas: A Global Extension of the Stony Brook School*

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**MANY TIMES AND MANY PLACES: C.S. LEWIS AND THE VALUE OF HISTORY.** K. Alan Snyder and Jamin Metcalf. Hamden, CT: Winged Lion Press, 2023. ISBN: 978-1-935688-52-5.

OUEN BARFIELD ONCE OBSERVED THAT "[a] fairly unsophisticated person who [...] had read the whole or most that has been written about [C.S. Lewis], might be pardoned for wondering if it were not one writer, but three, with whom he was becoming acquainted; three men who just happened to have the same name and the same peculiar vigor of thought and utterance" (Barfield 129). He went on to describe these three writers respectively as "a distinguished and original literary critic," "a highly successful author of fiction," and a "writer and broadcaster of popular Christian apologetics" (129-130). In *Many Times and Many Places*, Alan Snyder and Jamin Metcalf provide us with an accessible and engaging introduction to another Lewis that did not make it onto Barfield's list: Lewis the historian—and not just "the historian of literature," but also "the historian" *simpliciter*.

Early in the book, especially in chapter 1, Snyder and Metcalf examine various aspects of Lewis's personal, academic, and professional life that support their claim that he is properly regarded as a historian in all but the strictest

senses of the term. This discussion is interesting and necessary to their project, though some readers may wonder whether the case needs to be made at such length. Those who have read deeply in Lewis's corpus—who have read, for instance, *The Allegory of Love* or *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*—will have first-hand knowledge of his impressively erudite treatment of various historical topics and will therefore need little convincing. However, readers whose prior exposure is limited to Lewis's more popular works of fiction and apologetics may benefit from knowing something more about the depth and breadth of humane learning that formed the man who wrote those works.

Snyder and Metcalf spend a sizable portion of the book discussing Lewis's reflections on the nature and limits of historical inquiry. For example, in chapter 2 they examine Lewis's claims about the necessity and the danger of dividing history into "eras" or "periods." While he recognized that "[w]e cannot as historians dispense with periods," he was also quick to warn that "all divisions will falsify our material to some extent; the best one can hope is to choose those that falsify it the least" (qtd. 39). And this is more than a merely abstract and purely theoretical reflection. In Lewis's view, both popular and scholarly accounts of Western history unnecessarily falsify their narratives in maintaining an overblown conception of the Renaissance, which causes them to exaggerate its significance and mischaracterize both the medieval world that precedes it and the modern world that it played a role in inaugurating. Snyder and Metcalf devote the bulk of this chapter to an interesting analysis of this critique, which found its primary expression in *De Descriptione Temporum*—the first lecture that Lewis delivered as Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge.

Another example of Lewis's insight into the nature and limits of historical inquiry can be found in his description and critique of "historicism," which is the subject of chapter 3. Lewis objected to the claims of historicists who believe, in his words, "that men can, by use of their natural powers, discover an inner meaning in the historical process" (qtd. 74). Furthermore, the historicist, according to Lewis, "is a man who asks me to accept his account of the inner meaning of history on the grounds of his learning and genius" (qtd. 74). For Lewis, the vastness and complexity of the past, the severe limitations of the human mind, and the paltry records that are available for contemporary historians to work with, combine to render the historicist's sweeping meta-historical claims incredible. Snyder and Metcalf competently expound Lewis's description of historicism and his objections to it. This section of their book is very valuable so long as it is considered (as they likely intend) a beginning, not an end, to inquiry on the subject. Owen Barfield, who has already been mentioned, points out that Lewis's essay on historicism leaves some pressing questions unanswered; and though Lewis was a remarkably consistent thinker,

it is hard to know how to square his comments on historicism with other things he wrote (Barfield 64-82). For example, Lewis seemed to accept certain aspects of Barfield's thought that, on a plausible interpretation of Lewis's essay, would qualify Barfield—and by implication, Lewis—as a historicist. Future researchers would do well to press further by developing Barfield's concerns and interpreting Lewis's essay on historicism in light of them.

Following these discussions, Snyder and Metcalf discuss Lewis's greatest gift as an expositor of history: that is, the power and fecundity of his historical imagination. "Much has been written," they say, "about how Lewis's understanding of the imagination influenced both his literary and apologetic work," but "very little has been said about how his view of the imagination influenced his work as a literary historian." They go on to argue that "[t]hroughout Lewis's career at both Oxford and Cambridge, he argued for a unique approach that privileged the role of the imagination both in the study and composition of history" (84). To elaborate this point, they delve into Lewis's understanding of the imagination and the way it illuminates the distinctive character of Lewis's historical reflections. If G.K. Chesterton was right that the "whole object of history is to enlarge experience by imagination," then Lewis's historical writings are as effective as anyone's. In chapter 5, the discussion of the historical imagination continues, though taking a different turn, in an exploration of the ways in which Lewis's fiction is "awash with history" (105). This chapter contains Snyder and Metcalf's most original contributions to the study of Lewis.

The subtitle of *Many Times and Many Places* is *C.S. Lewis and the Value of History*. It is therefore appropriately framed by reflections on the value that Lewis saw in cultivating "intimate knowledge of the past." For Lewis, the story of humanity is not only intrinsically interesting, but also worth the attention of anyone who wishes to become aware of, and to some degree transcend, the values and assumptions that characterize his or her own age. "A man," Lewis wrote, "who has lived in many times and places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village; the scholar who has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and microphone of his own age" (qtd. 11.) Readers who wish to learn more about a neglected aspect of Lewis's work will enjoy Snyder and Metcalf's book. It is especially recommended to teachers of history (at any level) who wish to help their students see value in the study of history, and approach it, as Lewis did, with their imagination fully engaged.

—Landon Loftin

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**THE MAJOR AND THE MISSIONARY: LETTERS OF WARREN HAMILTON LEWIS AND BLANCHE BIGGS.** Edited by Diana Pavlac Glycer. Nashville TN: Rabbit Room, 2023. xxxv + 309 p. ISBN: 9781951872205. \$18.00.

ALTHOUGH HE WAS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE INKLINGS, the life and writings of Major Warren H. Lewis have seldom received from scholars the same careful attention which is so often lavished on the more famous members of this literary group. Studies on J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis abound. Numerous capable treatments of Charles Williams and Owen Barfield are also readily available. Until last year, the same could not be said of the older Lewis brother, Warren Lewis. The January 2023 release of Don King's biography on Major Lewis and the publication nine months later of Diana Pavlac Glycer's *The Major and the Missionary* have altered this landscape. King's biography did much to sharpen our understanding of Warren's capabilities in the hard skills required of a professional soldier and amateur historian. Now, Glycer adds nuance to our understanding of Warren Lewis's capabilities in the soft skills of courtesy, charity, and encouragement. This latter proficiency is reflected in the remarkably preserved correspondence between Warren and medical missionary Blanche Biggs.

It was customary practice for Biggs to retain both the letters she received and carbon copies of letters she sent to others. After decades on the mission field of Papua New Guinea, she had accumulated a "20-year collection" of both "official" and "semi-official" correspondence (2). Puzzling over whether to preserve this record of mission activity or use the documents as fuel for a grand bonfire when her service ended, Briggs wrote to Major Lewis for advice. She had read the *Letters of C.S. Lewis* edited by Warren and published just two years earlier. In an October 1968 reply to her first letter, the Major encouraged the missionary to retain the documents and, when she was ready to retire, to "have a go at making a book out of it yourself. I can see from your letter that you are the kind of person who would have no difficulty in writing" (6). She replied with a compliment of her own. "I admire your courage in launching out into