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Becoming C.S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack Lewis (1898-1918), by Harry Lee Poe

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century because people continued to enjoy the games that could be played with it, and also because it was redesigned and rethought in a manner that allowed it to be perceived and interpreted as conforming to and even condoning prevailing beliefs and hierarchical power structures.

More recent evidence of the adaptation of Tarot to a predominantly Christian culture appears in what is now the most popular Tarot deck in the western world, the *Rider-Waite Tarot* (1909), also often called the *Waite-Smith Tarot* to acknowledge the important contributions of its artist Pamela Smith. Waite and Smith are both remembered today for this deck, and Waite is noted secondarily as a Christian mystic and for his involvement with the Golden Dawn. Students of mythopoeia, however, also know him as one of Charles Williams's more important mentors and sources of inspiration for his Tarot novel *The Greater Trumps* (1932). *A Treatise on the Deification of Sixteen Heroes by Marziano Da Sant' Alosio* and *Explaining the Tarot in Sixteenth Century Italy* will be of tremendous interest to those in pursuit of the deep back-story to Williams's Tarot, and Place's reconstruction of Marziano's deck lends tangibility to what can easily become a purely theoretical study. Tarot may have been invented as a game and it may have accrued Christian associations and imagery as the times demanded, but to Smith, to Waite, and to Williams it had implications and applications that are at least as far from prevailing sixteenth-century views as Piscina's were from Marziano. All three publications are recommended to anyone with a serious interest in the history of Tarot, particularly anyone who has embraced the modern interpretation of Tarot images as "archetypal." Archetypal they are, of that there is no doubt, but even archetypes vary in expression with the times and social context.

—Emily E. Auger



BECOMING C.S. LEWIS: A BIOGRAPHY OF YOUNG JACK LEWIS (1898-1918). Harry Lee Poe. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. 312 p. ISBN 978143356273-0. \$22.99.

I HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF SYMPATHY FOR THE OBSERVATION made by the theologian Stanley Hauerwas: "I think C.S. Lewis is better than his readers, but his readers just about kill him!" (Bock and Hauerwas 166). Apologies, of course, to devoted readers of Lewis (myself among them). Given the endless volume of secondary literature on Lewis, I think it would be fair to say that far too often his researchers "just about kill him" too. I am pleased to report that I finished Harry Lee Poe's new biography with the sense that, far from killing Lewis, Poe has brought new life to his subject.

The first of a projected three-volume set of biographies on Lewis, *Becoming C.S. Lewis* covers the first twenty years of the writer's life. Anyone who has read Lewis's memoir *Surprised by Joy* should have a sense of how important and formative his childhood was in his own self-understanding. Lewis identified the sense of joy—an experience of wonder and beauty that elicited a deep longing—that he experienced as a child as the driving force behind his intellectual and emotional life. It is the through-line of his early loss of faith, his deep love of Norse mythology, and his eventual conversion to Christianity. Lewis articulates the nature of this sense of joy, this fundamental longing that is evidenced in all his work, through episodes from his early life. And yet, as Poe points out, the major biographies have moved quickly through Lewis's childhood (87-88), seeming not to take Lewis's youth as seriously as he took it himself. Poe has effectively delved into the wealth of unpublished material on Lewis that is available to flesh out what we know of this formative period of his life.

A biography of this kind could not be written without the wealth of unpublished material that Poe accessed through the Marion E. Wade Center of Wheaton College and the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford. A brief glance at the book's endnotes will confirm that Lewis's unpublished papers held in these archives, along with the three volumes of collected letters edited by Walter Hooper published between 2004 and 2007, provide the foundation for the narrative that Poe tells about Lewis's youth. While *Surprised by Joy* provides the skeleton of a timeline, these sources provide the flesh of the story. Each time that I found myself questioning a claim that Poe had made about certain details of Lewis's childhood, I almost immediately had to retract my objection as he went on to back up these claims carefully and thoroughly with quotations from Lewis's letters. Poe effectively employs Lewis's letters and papers to add layers and perspective to the picture that Lewis offers of his childhood in *Surprised by Joy*.

Poe has clearly immersed himself in this archival material. This familiarity is evidenced by the judgments that he offers about Jack's attitudes, character, and opinions on a host of issues. He notes the conflicting reports that Lewis gives on a number of issues, depending on whether he is writing to his father Albert Lewis, his brother Warnie Lewis, or his friend Arthur Greeves. Poe gives a picture of Jack's musical tastes, his literary preferences, his romantic interests, and the status of his faith by untangling the conflicting reports that he gives to father vs. friend. Poe claims that Jack spent much of his adolescence striving for independence from his father and other authority figures, and he demonstrates this by comparing the intimate and (mostly) honest correspondence with his friend Arthur with the guarded and sometimes outright dishonest letters to his father. The portrait that Poe offers of Jack's

character is complex and interesting, accounting for the differing motives of Lewis's letters and his autobiographical writings.

Lewis's education is a major concern of the book, from his misery at Wynard School, to his hatred of team sports at Malvern, and finally to his time preparing for university entrance examines with W.T. Kirkpatrick at Great Bookham. Lewis idealizes this time at Great Bookham and mythologizes Kirkpatrick, the "Great Knock." One of the accomplishments of this biography is to humanize this figure that Lewis so successfully lionized in *Surprised by Joy*. The picture that Lewis painted of the ruthlessly logical intellectual, a man who turned every statement into a syllogism and left no assertion unquestioned, becomes a teacher concerned with his own livelihood, his own reputation, and a willingness to use nuance in persuading his pupil's parents of the best path for their children. Poe interprets the correspondence between Kirkpatrick and Lewis's father to give a human face to the myth in Lewis's mind.

A major theme of the book emerges from Lewis's time at Great Bookham. Kirkpatrick imparted to Jack a skepticism and logical precision that resulted in his departure from the faith of his childhood and a naturalism that denied the existence of the non-material. However, his pleasure reading during this time included Norse mythology, William Morris' *The Well at the World's End*, Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. However much Jack adopted Kirkpatrick's skepticism, he nursed a romantic streak that ultimately led to his acceptance of the "true myth" of Christianity. According to Poe, this conversion "began with the irreconcilable cognitive dissonance that grew between the philosophy of materialism he had accepted from Kirkpatrick and his own experience from reading stories" (264). This theme of the young Lewis's "cognitive dissonance" is far from a new insight, but Poe effectively illustrates and documents it in a way not accomplished before.

The theme of pleasure reading also leads to another insight that Poe offers regarding the nature of the scholarly and/or literary life. While Jack inherited philosophical precision from Kirkpatrick, "Because of the stories he read for pleasure, C.S. Lewis emerged as a literary scholar of the medieval and Renaissance periods" (265). I am sure that most people who carve out a life in literary or academic circles can attest to the importance of this kind of "unassigned reading." Poe also traces the emergence of Jack's sensibilities as a literary critic to his correspondence with Arthur Greeves, arguing that the mature opinions and arguments of *The Allegory of Love* (1936) and *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961) can already be discerned in these early exchanges. Jack's pleasure reading paved the way for Lewis's career as a critic.

The book depicts Jack emerging into adulthood as he is accepted into Oxford, his entrance into the army is negotiated, and his service in the trenches

of France begins. An important development at this point in Lewis's life—one that has intrigued and confounded his biographers—is his relationship with Mrs. Janie Moore. Mrs. Moore was the mother of Lewis's friend "Paddy" Moore. After Paddy Moore was killed in the First World War, Mrs. Moore and her daughter Maureen lived with Lewis from the end of that war until Mrs. Moore's death in 1951. The standard explanation for this living arrangement has been to point to a pact made between Lewis and Paddy to take care of the other's family should one of them not survive the war. Lewis lost his mother at the age of nine, and his search for a maternal figure is thought to lend support to the notion of a pact between Lewis and Paddy. Even while most biographers acknowledge that Lewis and Mrs. Moore probably had a sexual relationship (at least in the early years), they still point to this pact as explanation for the arrangement. However, the reports of this pact are second hand rather than mentioned anywhere by Lewis. Poe's contribution to explaining the mystery of Mrs. Moore is to cast some doubt of the earnestness of this pact. He points to Lewis's letters to Arthur Greeves early in his acquaintance with Mrs. Moore (before Paddy's death) and the clear suggestion that something intimate took place between them. Even more importantly, Poe gives numerous examples from Lewis's correspondence that suggests Paddy was not in Lewis's close circle of friends. The suggestion emerges that whatever pact might have arisen between Lewis and Paddy had more to do with Lewis's attraction to Mrs. Moore than his devotion to his friend.

There are a few oddities in *Becoming C.S. Lewis* that gave me pause. At several points, Poe indulges in lengthy summaries of the stories that captured Lewis's imagination as a child. The point of these summaries is surely to provide context for modern readers who might not be familiar with Wagner's *Ring* cycle or Homer's *Iliad*. However, what these summaries offer in context, they take away in boredom. Much briefer summaries would have sufficed without sacrificing the flow of the narrative.

On the topic of Mrs. Moore, Poe takes a strange approach to discussing the possibility of Lewis's attraction to an older woman. Noting that when they met, Lewis was only eighteen to Mrs. Moore's forty-five, Poe goes on to list several actors like Sandra Bullock, Jennifer Aniston, and Nicole Kidman and names several movies each starred in during their mid-forties. He offers this as evidence that "some women continue to be remarkably attractive to young men during the middle years" (251). I am not exactly sure what this proves other than the fact that Poe considers these actors attractive. At the very least, the interjection is distracting and a bit comical.

Oddities aside, one final feature of the book is worth mentioning. This is a thoughtfully and beautifully produced book. The dust jacket includes an image of young Jack Lewis around the age of fourteen against the backdrop of

a wallpaper print by William Morris—a nod to one of the authors that spurred Jack’s imagination. The front endsheets have reproduced a photograph of Royal Avenue in Belfast around the time of Lewis’s birth, and the back endsheets reproduce a photograph of Lewis with his officer cadet battalion at Keble College in 1917. These images effectively bookend the scope of the biography. The overall aesthetic quality of the book coincides nicely with Poe’s observation about young Jack’s “attachment to a pretty binding” (209). This is no doubt a book of which Jack would have approved.

Becoming C.S. Lewis treats Lewis’s childhood with a depth that no other biography approaches. Poe is to be thanked for his careful scholarship, his original insights, and his overall contribution to our understanding of Lewis. I am left with a question and a hope. The question is, given the number of biographers who have already covered Lewis’s adult life, will Poe be able to offer something substantial and original in the next two volumes? My hope, given the quality of this initial volume, is that he will prove more than capable of bringing to life the writer, academic, husband, brother, and friend.

—Andrew C. Stout

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BRIEFLY NOTED

THE WANDERER’S HÁVÁMAL. Translated by Jackson Crawford. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2019. 216 pp. 978-1-62466-842-5, \$26.00 cloth; 978-1-62466-835-7, \$12.00 paper; \$9.95 Kindle ebook.

THIS COMPACT VOLUME INCLUDES the original Norse text of the poem with English translation on facing pages. “The Words of the High One,” as the title is sometimes translated, has often been “billed as a ‘Viking code of ethics’” (xi). The Introduction includes notes on the translation, rhyme structure, pronunciation, and further reading. A commentary and excerpts from related texts follow. Like Tolkien’s “Sellic Spell” appended to his *Beowulf* translation published in 2014, there is an added delight at the end: “The Cowboy *Hávámál*,” a condensation and retelling in Western idiom as inspired by the author’s family heritage. Imagine it read by Sam Elliott as The Stranger in *The Big Lebowski*, and you’ll have the right tone. “Don’t be unkind to a wanderer” (162).