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Review of Our of My Bone: The Letters of Joy Davidman

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portant books by Thomas Howard, Clyde S. Kilby, Jerry Root, and Chad Walsh? Even more disappointing is the way Velarde ignores some of the important women in Lewis' life besides his mother and his wife. How rich it would have been and how much more he could have engaged women readers if Sister Penelope, Stella Aldwinkle, Ruth Pitter, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Jean Wakeman had made appearances. And, in this vein, why are we not given a richer glimpse of Joy Davidman the brilliant poet, apologist, novelist, essayist, and critic rather than merely the bedridden victim of cancer? To the point, the author unintentionally reinforces some of Lewis' critics who accused him of being prejudiced against women.

In the final analysis, Velarde is to be commended for both taking the reader on delightful fantasy journey and providing a unique piece of Christian apologetics. The book deserves a wide readership.

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Don W. King, ed., *Out of My Bone: The Letters of Joy Davidman* (Grand Rapids, 2009). xxxi + 421 pages. 22 b&w photos. \$28.00. ISBN 9780802863997.

Don King has edited a remarkable volume that will interest both Lewis specialists and the general public. Although the title only mentions the letters, the book also contains King's fascinating critical introduction; a biographical chronology; Davidman's autobiographical essay "The Longest Way Round"¹ (previously very hard to find); several of her poems; and extracts from letters she received from her first husband, Bill Gresham, Chad Walsh, Warnie Lewis, and various other friends. Eight pages of photographs are also included.

The letters were written between 1936, when Davidman was just twenty-one years old, and 1960, shortly before she died at the age of forty-five. The contents are very enlightening and help the reader to understand their author's complex personality, ideas, and cultural background. In the first section, we accompany Davidman in her first steps as a published writer, in her love-hate relationship with New York Judaism, and in her intellectual struggles with the Communist Party and Marxist ideology. Later on, we gain insight into her difficult marriage, the frustrations of being a housewife with young children in an isolated district, and

¹ First published in David Wesley Soper, ed., *These Found the Way: Thirteen Converts to Protestant Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1951), 13–26.

her spiritual pilgrimage and conversion to Christianity. Finally, we see through Davidman's eyes the practical and financial difficulties of her life in England, her growing friendship with and later marriage to C. S. Lewis, and her struggles with—and temporary victories over—the cancer which would ultimately lead to her death.

Taken as a whole, this book gives a fascinating overview of Davidman's thought and intellectual development. Many of the traits she shared with Lewis, including her ideas on how to establish truth and her style of argument, turn out to have been part of her mental make-up long before she wrote to him or met him. The reader gets the feeling that, like Lewis, she also would have reveled in Kirkpatrick's educational methods. She certainly shared, from a relatively young age, Lewis' understanding of good and bad writing. Her conversion, too, was not dissimilar to Lewis'. She describes herself as "the world's most astonished atheist" (94) when she found herself on her knees praying—not at all a seeker after God, but rather the Hound of Heaven's prey.

Several minor mysteries in Lewis' own letters are also solved here, including how Lewis ever made friends with such an unlikely kindred spirit as the science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke. It is also interesting to discover the extent of her willingness to disagree with others, even with those she knew and loved. Although, for example, she admired the way Lewis delivered his inaugural lecture at Cambridge, when it came to the content she accused him of "sacrificing accuracy in the interests of a good show" (226). In the same way, her strong affection for Katherine Farrar, wife of the eminent Oxford theologian, did not prevent her from soundly criticizing her detective novel, *Gownsmen's Gallows* (1957).

This selection of Davidman's writings also helps the reader to understand her success as a writer. She comes across as a very entertaining writer with a clear, compact style. The rich intertextuality of the letters reveals the breadth of her reading, as does her varied vocabulary and her willingness to turn her hand to many and various literary genres. Even when complaining to her former husband about financial problems, which she did frequently, her letters are never boring, and she gets over potentially heavy ground as lightly as possible. The letters to Jewish correspondents also reveal much about Davidman's relationship to the culture and faith of her ancestors, and her Jewish identity is clearer here than in her published works. She even confesses that until she married the Gentile Bill Gresham, she had been Jewish in all her "habits of thought and speech, and quite unable to see anything from a non-Jewish point of view" (75). Illuminating insights also abound about the relationship between Judaism and American Communism.

All in all, there are several good reasons to read this book. Many readers who do so merely on account of her marriage to Lewis may find that, although the vol-

ume does indeed provide some new information about Lewis and other members of the Inklings, its main achievement is to reveal why both the Lewis brothers found Davidman such an attractive person and their intellectual equal.

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Suzanne Bray and Richard Sturch, eds., *Charles Williams and His Contemporaries* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009). xi + 160 pages. \$52.99. ISBN 9781443805650.

This smartly produced volume contains the proceedings of a conference of the Charles Williams Society in 2008. This reviewer was present at that conference and it was very encouraging to see the wide range of interests Williams commands. The book is divided into four sections illustrating some of these interests.

Grevel Lindop's opening essay comprises the entire first section, "General Survey." Lindop is writing a new biography of Williams and has turned up much new material. He points out that many of the contemporaries whom Williams acknowledged as influences are nowadays considered negligible, and that he seemed to have had no contact with those who are nowadays regarded as significant. Later on, Williams frequented many circles in addition to the Inklings, and, of course, in his role as editor at Oxford University Press he came into contact with numerous writers. Lindop dissents from the "reverential tone" that accompanies so much discussion of Williams. Finally, he contrasts Williams' relations with T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden.

In the second section, "The Past as Contemporary," Michael Paulus addresses Williams' efforts to get Kierkegaard's works published in English; in his role as an academic editor, Williams combined theological interest and business acumen. Next, Paul Blair compares Williams' view of love with that of Dante, and also with more recent Roman Catholic writers. He finds some similarities, but an engagement with Nygren, Burnaby, de Rougemont, and d'Arcy—all Williams' contemporaries—would have been preferable.

The third section brings in the C. S. Lewis connection under the heading "The Inklings and Other Friends." First, Gavin Ashenden compares Williams with Owen Barfield and notes that, as an Anthroposophist, Barfield degrades the role of matter as compared to spirit in a way that Williams, as an orthodox Christian, found unacceptable. Next, Flora Liénard contrasts Williams' concept of the city as the place of exchange with Tolkien's preference for the "green world." It is pleas-