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## Review of Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis

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course, what helps to underscore his faith. “The instrument through which you see God is your whole self” (*Mere Christianity*; Jebb, 187): the sick self is a poor narrator. To renounce this unreliable self is to find the best self. In Lewis’ words, “To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being in earth” (*Problem of Pain*; Jebb, 258).

This is an important volume, and Lewis scholars and enthusiasts can look forward to hearing much more from Jebb. Perhaps others might also speculate how history would have unfolded if Beckett could have experienced a long walk, followed by a yet longer talk over real ale, with Lewis. The line between blasphemy and belief can shift on such things. •

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Owen Barfield; edited by G. B. Tennyson and Jane Hipolito. *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis* (Oxford, 2011). xxi + 157 pages. \$19.99. ISBN: 9780955958298.

THIS lovely little volume is a reprint from a 1989 Wesleyan University Press publication—and its biggest fault is its failure to update old material or include anything new. Owen Barfield died in 1997, so an introductory essay evaluating his life’s work in relation to C. S. Lewis would have been natural. As it stands, there is no introduction or preface: the reader is plunged into a miscellaneous collection of nine pieces by Owen Barfield (talks, essays—all previously printed elsewhere—and one preface to an essay collection) without contextualization. Barfield’s intense early debates and later important friendship with Lewis unfold in Barfield’s own words, but editorial positioning would have greatly improved this collection. A parallel chronology of the lives and writings of Barfield and Lewis does precede the selections, which gives the uninformed reader useful information—but again, without interpretation. For instance, “In November, OB and CSL meet at Oxford University” under 1919 (xvii) is not extremely informative if someone comes across this fact without knowing the significance of that meeting. Furthermore, this reprint retains a number of typographical errors, such as the frequent omission of periods (or full stops), which further lessens its value as a second edition.

However, the content is so worthwhile that it may be considered essential reading for the Lewis scholar or serious fan. Lewis’ vast capacity for comedy permeates these pages, as does Barfield’s more understated sense of fun. Their mutual humility and admiration is a beautiful subtext to the overt statements

about influence, agreement, and disagreement (there is a useful list of differences on page 118 and following). Indeed, Barfield is full of lofty compliments. He says of Lewis: “The rapidity with which his mind responded to whatever was presented to it, not only forming the necessary ideas but also converting them simultaneously into well-ordered sentences, exceeded that of anyone I have ever conversed with” (29). As this quality of articulate rapidity comes through in Lewis’ writings, it is fascinating to receive confirmation that he spoke in just such a manner, too. Barfield is also the source of this pithy analysis of the quintessential Lewis style: “somehow what he thought about everything was secretly present in what he said about anything” (131). This is what oft has been thought of Lewis, but ne’er so well expressed.

This volume is also, naturally, informative about Barfield’s ideas and personality—frequently overlooked while Tolkien and Williams take center stage in Inklings comparisons. One theme is the seriousness of Barfield’s Christian commitment—although his was not standard Evangelical fare. As an Anthroposophist, he held some marginal doctrinal views, such as his claim that “one feels many of the heretics...to have been more truly Christian” than many Christians (121), and the fact that he was “uneasy about [Lewis’] theology, which is based very much on acceptance of Holy Writ as the final revelation of Divinity to man” (138). Barfield also calls a “rash generalization” the idea “that no Christian can believe in reincarnation” (138). Yet his personal commitment to Christ shines through, which helps explain the strong influence he had on Lewis’ conversion.

Speaking of that conversion: another surprise is Barfield’s assertion that once his “Great War” with Lewis ended (in which they exchanged impassioned letters and conversation on idealism, imagination, and theism), they never again spoke about serious spiritual matters. Barfield writes: “I really know no more of what he thought after his conversion than can be gathered from his published writings” (79). His readings of the post-conversion Lewis are astute, but not without flaws: in deducing a syllogism from Lewis’ writings about historicism, he postulates that Lewis believed there were only two sources of knowledge: divine revelation or the scientific method (79). However, Lewis clearly believed that a priori reasoning was also epistemologically valid. While Barfield’s analysis is a useful corrective to the odd limitations Lewis placed on imagination—at least in theory—it does not consider reason heavily enough.

The most informative theme is related to what Lewis calls “chronological snobbery.” Lewis gives Barfield the credit for curing him of “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited”

(*Surprised by Joy*, 207). Throughout *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, and especially in “C. S. Lewis and Historicism,” Barfield points out that Lewis did not believe that a pattern of positive development can be discerned in human history. He claims Lewis went too far and ended up denying historical bias and repudiating a linear narrative to history (which, after all, the Christian *story* postulates). He thinks that Lewis “emphatically denied any recognizable, certainly any *significant*, evolution or development of consciousness in the course of human history, and this denial applied as much to the fall of man and his redemption as to any other pattern” (69)—or at least that any such pattern is “knowable” (73). Barfield goes on to relate this dilemma—he regards it as a dilemma in interpreting Lewis rather than specifically a flaw in Lewis’ thought—to their differing beliefs on transcendence and immanence, suggesting that their departures were perhaps as profound as their agreements.

This is but one enlightening topic in a valuable collection. Others abound: the concept of the “two Lewises” or even “the Five C. S. Lewises”; a polarity between the “literary Lewis” and the “theological Lewis” that was resolved in *Till We Have Faces* (124); and an account of the time Barfield introduced Lewis to *sehnsucht* (133). The book also contains five pages of photographs and a list of selected works by Barfield. In short, though it lacks editorial front matter, this volume is a must-read for any Lewis scholar. •

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Milton T. Walsh, *Second Friends: C. S. Lewis and Ronald Knox in Conversation* (San Francisco, 2008). 360 pages. \$16.95. ISBN: 9781586172404.

**T**HIS is an extraordinary book about a friendship that never was, a conversation that didn’t take place! C. S. Lewis and Ronald Knox were for many years near neighbors in Oxford. Both men were distinguished writers and great apologists. Both were gifted and learned men with a common love of classical literature and a common conviction that all our gifts can be offered to Christ and brought to flourishing in His light. And yet, for all their proximity, they moved in different worlds and hardly ever met. On the one documented occasion when a mutual friend (Lewis’ doctor, “Humphrey” Harvard) brought them together, they got on well and “both afterwards expressed their delight with the other” (13).

What Milton Walsh has done in this book is to recognize that although the conversation between these men may not have happened physically, it