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Review of A Hebraic Inkling: C. S. Lewis on Judaism and the Jews

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great medieval scholar, but his own chronology for the life of “Old Western Man” extends well into the nineteenth century. It seems a little reductive to link his accomplishments to the study of the Middle Ages alone. He was also a great classicist, a great critic of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature, viewed himself as an advocate of Romanticism, and was learned in classical and modern philosophy. Medieval traditions such as direct borrowings and literary imitation can be found in the modernist poems *The Wasteland* and *The Four Quartets*, and the ability to create tangible descriptions of the next world owes as much to Plato’s thought as to Dante: for example, in the penultimate scene of *The Last Battle*, while the chief characters race “further up and further in,” Lord Digory exclaims, “It’s all in Plato, all in Plato!” (chapter fifteen).

In addition to the analyses of direct correspondences drawn between certain medieval authors, ideas, and literary devices and Lewis’s own work, Jason Baxter’s book should be recognized for its richer, deeper, more expansive treatment of additional medieval topics in each chapter than are mentioned in the summaries above. For example, there are extended discussions of significant topics, such as time as an image of eternity, *lectio divina*, Boethius on reason and imagination, Abbot Suger on the material excess of Notre Dame cathedral and its evocation of spiritual meanings, and much else. As a scholar of the Middle Ages himself, Professor Baxter is an excellent guide to Lewis’s medieval learning and his use of it in his fiction and apologetics.

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P. H. Brazier, *A Hebraic Inkling: C. S. Lewis on Judaism and the Jews* (Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications, 2021). 301 pages. \$34.99. ISBN 9781725291973

The author’s stated purpose in *A Hebraic Inkling* is to demonstrate the development of Lewis’s thought, from dismissing to esteeming the Hebraic mindset. “Hebraic” in the title of this book is specifically defined by the author as “relating to the Jewish people, especially the Hebrews of ancient Israel, and to Judaism, the religion of the chosen people of God”

(xvii). It will help the reader to keep this in mind as the author weaves and skips between various sub-topics that fit under the umbrella of this term.

Brazier's endeavor is a difficult prospect, as there is relatively little material until after Lewis's conversion. Consequently, with the exception of one letter,¹ Brazier uses generalizations about the era to demonstrate his case. When Lewis's conversion is referenced, Brazier introduces Hebraic ontology. However, he spends little time developing this line of thought, so that the conclusion seems forced. This pattern is repeated as the book winds through various topics, unsatisfactorily concluding one, before shifting focus to another that may seem tangential. For one example, Brazier is insightful when discussing the Hebrew names of God, and how the revealing of the names mirrors the "evolving conversion" (60) of Lewis's Christian walk. It would have been interesting to have this expanded upon, but the chapter ends abruptly.

Also problematic is the uneven tone of the book. Sometimes it is scholarly, sometimes obscure, and to some degree, confrontational. The book is sprinkled with sharp remarks towards those who hold to ideologies the author disagrees with. While they may have been intended as ironic humor, they play more like quick jabs, and lack a sense of humility that would give them consideration. Throughout the book, phrases by the author or quotes of Lewis are repeated but provide no additional weight to the line of reasoning by this repetition.

When Brazier moves to the section on scripture, primarily the Psalms, there is ample material to work with. He analyzes the structure of Hebrew poetry, highlighting the parallelism and the ability to survive translation, which Lewis had observed. The author surveys topics of creation, judgment, and prefigurement within the Psalms. While he integrates Lewis's views on prefigurement with his own, readers may be surprised at Brazier's challenge of Lewis over the imprecatory Psalm 137. He critically observes, "Lewis almost automatically objects to the infanticide called for" (122) and defends the psalmist as "at least candid, truthful and authentic" (124).

The author is not an apologist, yet Brazier writes from the perspective of one who believes both the Hebrew and Christian (Old and New Testament) scriptures, as C. S. Lewis did. In fact, he also assumes his

¹Letter of 20 April 1921 in C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. by Walter Hooper, 3 vols. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004-7), 1:536-8.

audience is Christian when describing Christ and related doctrine. Despite the ostensible thesis of *A Hebraic Inkling*, another theme is at work. Throughout the book, Brazier argues for the re-evaluation of Western church conceptions to embrace the Jewishness of Jesus. To emphasize this, he frequently uses the word *Yeshua* in place of *Jesus* to provide more emphasis on the Jewishness of the Messiah. He states that translating the word from Hebrew “into Greek and Latin—*Christos*, the Christ—it takes on a different, possibly, more universal character,” (179) although he does maintain that this character is rooted in the Hebrew notion. One passage that Brazier omits concerns Lewis’s own words from *Surprised by Joy*: “I was in that state of mind in which a boy thinks it extremely telling to call God Jahweh, and Jesus, Jeshua.”² The younger Lewis may have had an ally in Brazier.

Some reflections of the author do not derive from Lewis, such as “Christianity is to be seen as an extension of Judaism” (76), and “the nature of the Torah, which is still considered valid and relevant, and is thus binding on those of faith in Yeshua” (196). These and other passages extend the author’s gaze beyond Lewis and edge close to advocating the primacy of Hebraic as *opposed* to “Christian” thinking.

His third section titled “Family” uses Lewis’s theological development to extend Brazier’s own understanding of the Messianic Jew and the chosen status of the nation. In the last chapter on family life with Joy and her sons, Brazier inclines more towards admiration than assessment. He extols Joy for her insight as a converted Jew but fails to balance this portrayal with the discernment revealed in Santamaria’s exceptional biography, *Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman who Captivated C. S. Lewis*.³ The final pages on Douglas and David Gresham lean more towards family bickering (however righteous) than academic inquiry; it leaves a dismal reverberation as the section ends.

The book contains the usual barbarisms and errors that are common in current publishing. Some run-on sentences could benefit from editing. Those with an appreciation for the Hebrew Scriptures and current Messianic thought will find the book familiar. For those interested in the intersection

² C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 173.

³ Abigail Santamaria, *Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman who Captivated C. S. Lewis* (London: SPCK, 2015).

of Hebraic and Lewis studies, it could serve as an index for researching the letters and other writings by Lewis. Although *Hebraic Inkling* proffers an interesting delve into Lewisiana, the result is less than the sum of its parts. One Lewis aphorism that Brazier uses to good effect is “all that was best in Judaism survives in Christianity.”⁴ It gives a valid pause to reflect on the current perspective of the church towards its Hebraic roots. One is left wondering if the author would invert the saying to “all that is best in Christianity is met eschatologically in Judaism.” However, the case has not been substantiated from Lewis’s own reflections on the Scriptures.

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James Como, *Mystical Perelandra: My Lifelong Reading of C. S. Lewis and His Favorite Book* (Hamden, CT: Winged Lion Press, 2022). 148 pages. \$16.99. ISBN 9781935688297.

James Como’s recent release, *Mystical Perelandra*, is a bit of a departure from his previous publications. Como’s text is a blend of memoir and critical analysis of a book that he calls a “revelation.” In fact, it features excerpts of his other writings assembled and combined with new material in one volume. Following in the publication trend of other works such as Katharine Smyth’s *All the Lives We’ve Ever Lived: Seeking Solace in Virginia Woolf*, James Como unpacks the literary impact of *Perelandra* and how that specific book, along with others in C. S. Lewis’s corpus, changed Como’s life.

Como writes that *Mystical Perelandra* was conceived “as a conversation intended to invite impressions, arguments, recollections, and opinions of fellow sojourners” (5). This book particularly argues that not only was Lewis a mystic, but *Perelandra* is “his fully formed Vision” (9). Como separates his treatise into six chapters: “The Tongue is Also a Fire,” “Hope,” “Storytelling,” “Myth,” “Strife,” and “Awe.” Como also includes

⁴ C. S. Lewis, “Religion without Dogma,” in *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1971), 99-144.