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Review of Mystical Perelandra: My Lifelong Reading of C. S. Lewis and His Favorite Book

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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.

a Bibliography, an inventory of Spiritual Writers, and Other Books of Interest. Essentially this book is a love letter to the works of C. S. Lewis and serves to illustrate how writing can ultimately alter our lives for the better.

One fascinating aspect (among many) of Como's text is his exploration of the spiritual journey of Ransom as parallel to his own. Como recalls fondly his first meeting of the New York C. S. Lewis Society, his first pilgrimage to Oxford, and initial meeting with Lewis's secretary Walter Hooper. Como's and Lewis's spiritual journeys share many resemblances. Similar to Lewis, Como lost his mother at a young age, a loss that left Como, his older brother, and his father inconsolable. Como writes, in a passage that echoes chapters from *Surprised by Joy*, that "the world shrank, my church-going became formulaic, my praying virtually ceased. For reasons that have no place in these reflections I was frightened, lonely, and isolated" (64). Como admits that two significant changes in his life occurred to sober him "out of the funk": finding the works of C. S. Lewis and meeting the woman who would eventually become his wife. These factors, combined with the revelation of *Perelandra*, restored Como's hope. Como interestingly applies the same critical eye to his own life as he does Lewis's works. In his chapter on Storytelling, Como unspools the literary and spiritual significance of *Perelandra* as perhaps autobiographical, and the larger significance of the Ransom Trilogy as more of a bildungsroman than a science fiction tale. In fact, Como argues that *Perelandra* engages three levels of belief: literary, imaginative, and spiritual. This, he writes, is what Wordsworth and MacDonald achieved for Lewis, and what Lewis now does for Como and many other modern readers. This spiritual level of belief is "conveyed by awe and marked . . . by holiness: we are fully immersed in the numinous" (Como borrowing language from Lewis's *The Problem of Pain*) (69). Thus, Como urges the reader to interpret *Perelandra* not only as a typical "outer space story" or a "good versus evil" homage, but as a metaphor for the critical spiritual battles fought on *this* planet. Como fully embraces the parallel that his journey is similar to Lewis and to his character Ransom, a fact which undergirds his premise that *Perelandra* can serve as a myth of spiritual development. Indeed, Como's book serves to illustrate Lewis's own belief in the integration of reason and imagination; the work itself serves to understand a story that resonates on multiple levels. Ultimately, Como's investigation is both entertaining and instructive.

Como's approach and exploration are a surprising twist in Lewis scholarship but a valuable addition to texts surrounding the impact of the science fiction trilogy. *Mystical Perelandra* is a testament to the transformative power of the written word.

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Paul Fiddes, *Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis: Friends in Co-inherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). 432 pages. \$115.00. ISBN 9780192845467.

If shared merriment, as C. S. Lewis claims in “The Weight of Glory,” “must be of that kind . . . which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption,” surely shared theology should follow suit. In his book *Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis: Friends in Co-Inherence*, University of Oxford Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology (and contributor of a number of insightful essays on the Inklings), Paul S. Fiddes does exactly that. In this study, which Rowan Williams has rightly called “a brilliant work,” Fiddes pays Lewis and Williams the important, often-neglected compliment of taking these authors and their theologies seriously. By doing so, Fiddes's magisterial study accomplishes at least two critical tasks: it deepens and widens our knowledge about one of the most crucial friendships in the Inklings, and it explores key literary and theological concepts vital to that friendship.

Fiddes divides his book into five parts, the first three of which deal the most explicitly with Lewis and Williams's friendship and its intellectual implications; the final two sections explore the wider implications of the concept of co-inherence, considered in a specifically theological context. For most scholars of C. S. Lewis and admirers of the Inklings, these first three parts, “The ‘Secret Road’ of Friendship,” “Ways of Exchange,” and “A Collaboration in Co-Inherence,” offer a treasure trove of helpful observations and analysis of the inception, growth, and implications of their friendship. The final two sections, “Further Studies in Co-Inherence” and “The Theology of Co-Inherence,” go a long way to furthering Williams studies, and build on important work by Sørina Higgins and Grevel Lindop, among others.