

2017

Review of Jack Lewis and His American Cousin, Nat Hawthorne: A Study of Instructive Affinities

John Stanifer
Morehead State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cslewisjournal>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stanifer, John (2017) "Review of Jack Lewis and His American Cousin, Nat Hawthorne: A Study of Instructive Affinities," *Sehnsucht: The C. S. Lewis Journal*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 17.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/1940-5537.1393>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cslewisjournal/vol11/iss1/17>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Sehnsucht: The C. S. Lewis Journal* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

D. G. Kehl, *Jack Lewis and His American Cousin, Nat Hawthorne: A Study of Instructive Affinities* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013). ix + 247 pages. \$29.00. ISBN 9781610978361.

Like his friendship with Catholic and philologist J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis's "friendship" with Nathaniel Hawthorne began in spite of difference. D. G. Kehl opens and closes his study of the affinities between these two authors by referring to a letter Lewis wrote to Arthur Greeves after his first enthusiastic read-through of Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. After labeling it "the most glorious (almost) novel I have ever read," Lewis remarks, "What a pity such a genius should be a beastly American!" (ix).

It is, however, easy to look past this remark once Kehl unfolds his study, starting with an examination of the parallels between the authors' backgrounds and personal worldviews before progressing to mutual themes and similar characterizations, then concluding with a series of chapters that offer side-by-side comparisons of specific works from each author's body of writing. Kehl never refers to Lewis's concept of the First Friend in *Surprised by Joy*, in which such a person is defined as that "man who first reveals to you that you are not alone in the world by turning out (beyond hope) to share all your most secret delights,"¹ but that famous passage might well be the best frame of reference for grasping what Kehl is suggesting about the relationship between Lewis and Hawthorne. Of course, the two never met and never could have, but if they had been able to meet, Kehl argues, they might very well have spent hours over a few pints at the Bird and Baby in animated conversation about their mutual interest in the deeper issues of life, like sin, salvation, or the many facets of the human heart.

One of the foremost questions on any potential reader's mind: can Kehl's study be read with profit by those who have never read Hawthorne or whose experience of his work is limited to a compulsory examination of *The Scarlet Letter* in high school? Though prior experience of Hawthorne is helpful, it is certainly not necessary to learning a great deal from Kehl's well-researched book. Enough context is given for each of the works under discussion; most readers should have little difficulty appreciating

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (San Diego, California: Harcourt Brace, 1955), 199.

the connections that are drawn between the two authors. This is especially important since many of Hawthorne's lesser-known novels and short stories come under the spotlight.

A bibliography and index are included, and footnotes are frequent though never intrusive or critical to understanding the main argument. Primary sources on Lewis include most of his major fiction and nonfiction, with particular attention given to *Perelandra*, *Till We Have Faces*, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, and *The Four Loves*. Hawthorne's corpus is equally well-represented, with *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Marble Faun*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The House of the Seven Gables* joined by several of the short stories. Among the secondary sources are judicious selections from both authors' correspondence with friends and relations, with Greeves and Hawthorne's wife Sophia being the most significant figures featured.

For a study that is essentially the first of its kind, this is an excellent beginning to what will hopefully become a number of works dealing with the spiritual kinship of two great writers—separated by time, distance, and culture—but who nevertheless held much in common when it came to what mattered most. In future volumes, it would be nice to see more discussion of the role that friendship played in each author's life and work, in the way that Diana Glyer did for the Inklings in *The Company They Keep* and *Bandersnatch*; for example, perhaps a look at Melville as Hawthorne's Second Friend, alongside Barfield as Lewis's, would shed light on the dynamics that helped to produce some of each man's greatest works. That being said, there is little room for complaint, as Kehl covers much in a little over two hundred pages, inspiring his readers not only to consider the deeper issues that both Lewis and Hawthorne cared so much about, but to fill in the gaps in one's firsthand knowledge of each writer by reading, and enjoying, each man's work in a new light.

JOHN STANIFER
Morehead State University