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Review of America Discovers C. S. Lewis: His Profound Impact

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God's children live with their Divine Father. As the story ends, Mossy and Tangle now are *in* the rainbow that started them on their journey, thus completely within the experience of wonder. Their lengthy journey led them to this higher, more significant journey in the company of others as they transcend earth and have gained deeper insight through their quest, death, and renewed life. Their transfiguration complete, Mossy and Tangle attain their heart's desire and journey's end.

The Golden Key stands on its own as an enjoyable story for all ages and is rich enough to offer multiple interpretations for the reader upon re-reading. There are over 40 full-page illustrations, along with several smaller ones included on pages with the text. While the drawings threaten to dominate the words at times, there appears to be a good balance between the two, though occasionally the drawings can interrupt the tale's flow by having to pause or flip past some of the pictures to return to the narrative. Overall, this affordable edition by Eerdmans is an attractive copy to add to a collection of MacDonald's works or children's books.

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K. Alan Snyder, *America Discovers C. S. Lewis: His Profound Impact* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2016). ix + 202 pages. \$27.00. ISBN 9781498298209.

A sustained fascination in C. S. Lewis is apparent not only in the success of his books but in the burgeoning number of journals and books dedicated to and written about him. The writing and the breadth of his content contribute to the ease with which authors can find “new things to talk about” in Lewis studies. The wide expanse of his corpus—scholarly criticism, popular apologetics, and fantasy fiction for both adults and children—also contributes to the variety of approaches and academic disciplines which explore aspects of Lewis's work. It may at first sound strange that a man who has only been gone from us for half a century would be pursued by a historian, but it is also refreshing to have an historian's perspective on Lewis. Approximately twenty-five biographies have been written on Lewis, and, despite the occasional claim to perfection,

the definitive Lewis biography is yet to be written. There's just too much to do, enjoy, and consider. Still, we might ask, what else can be written about Lewis? One answer to that question: we can examine C. S. Lewis's relationships with Americans and his influence on America. In revealing that answer, K. Alan Snyder does not disappoint.

After making a case for a study of Lewis and America in his opening chapter, Snyder follows with a look at the "first tier" of significant influence and influencers on this side of the Atlantic: Chad Walsh, Joy Davidman Gresham, and Walter Hooper. Following this section is an examination of a second tier of Americans influenced by Lewis, a review of some of Lewis's correspondence with Americans, an exploration of societies and surveys which shows Lewis's influence on the States, and a concluding analysis of Lewis's impact on America.

If there is a test for "yet another" book on Lewis, it is this question: does it teach the audience something new? Snyder's book accomplishes that task throughout. Even chapters which offer well-tryed material (much of what Snyder writes about Walter Hooper appears elsewhere), also manage to surprise us with delightfully new pieces of information. The name Chad Walsh has floated around Lewis circles for decades—not surprising since he literally wrote the first book on C. S. Lewis. Snyder's account on Walsh's relationship with Lewis over several decades turns facts into an intriguing narrative that offers refreshing insight on Lewis. In this chapter, we also get what is one of the highlights running throughout Snyder's book: an account of first impressions. Before meeting Lewis, Walsh's image was of a "sad-eyed," and "world-weary" man—an impression drawn from pictures of Lewis, and one which made no sense given the vibrancy and life Walsh found in Lewis's books. This mystery disappeared once Walsh met Lewis and he realized that the dust-jacket pictures resembled Lewis "as much as a mummy resembles a living man" (21). Walsh was struck by the "aliveness" of Lewis's face and considered him "one of the most masculine persons I have ever known." He concluded that the wonder to be found in the man could be attributed to "plain unselfconsciousness" (21).

Another great first impression is that of Nathan Comfort Starr:

I got the impression of a solidly built man, not at all fat, who moved lightly. It took me no time at all to realize that his mind moved as effortlessly as his body. There was no sense of the slight embarrassment

that one sometimes feels on meeting a stranger. It seemed as if we had known each other a long time. (80)

And again, William Brown Patterson's testimony is delightful. Upon first seeing Lewis in "baggy trousers" and a "shapeless tweed jacket," he thought him to be a gardener. But he quickly learned that under "Lewis's bluff, hearty, and inelegant appearance was . . . a man of uncommon intelligence, vast enthusiasm for books and learning, and a deep, sometimes mystical devotion to the God he had come to know" (83).

The best moments in Snyder's book are these storied moments, and the author manages the historian's art: to tell a *story* of the past. Among these best moments are testimonials.

Phillip Yancey said reading *Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Pain* tore apart his defenses and convicted him of the "sin of pride" (97). Randy Alcorn found his stifled longing and imagination defended and rejuvenated in the writings of Lewis (99-100). Through the works of Lewis, Chuck Colson came to understand that his entire life was focused on the single pursuit of making himself the center of his universe—of wanting to be God (104).

In giving us the biographies of people influenced by Lewis, Snyder adds something to the biography of Lewis himself. Clyde Kilby's story is worth knowing. Sheldon Vanauken's account is one of the most powerful stories in the book (66-73), carrying much of the potency in this abbreviated telling that is to be found in Vanauken's own account, *A Severe Mercy*. Even more profound is the story of Joy Davidman Gresham, one which Snyder tells with charm and restraint, though the history here suffers from a failure to use the most recent discoveries about Joy and Lewis, particularly the love sonnets she wrote for him.

While the prose of his own testimony in the Preface grips readers and draws them in, the level of writing afterward waivers—always solid (and with a nice line or transition now and then), but occasionally falling to bland prose which, for example, concludes certain sections or chapters with obvious and unnecessary summaries. Chapter Seven, on the various Lewis societies in America, is the least interesting in the book, though its presence seems justified for a complete look at Lewis's influence on America.

In contrast, Chapter Eight's review of surveys regarding Lewis's

influence is filled with several excellent testimonies to the power of the man's writing, nor should Chapter Six on Lewis's letters to Americans be passed over. Here Snyder is smart to track down not only new and surprising stories about Lewis's correspondents, but also the best tidbits from Lewis's letters. The three-volume set of Lewis's letters is a daunting read. Snyder kindly offers some fine moments from an epistolary Lewis in a few pages.

In his final chapter, Snyder appropriately turns from sharing histories to analyzing them. His own conclusions on why Lewis has had a powerful impact on Americans are spot on: "substance," "style" ("he is just so quotable"), and fiction works which have stood the test of time (186). His first point, one readers might initially dismiss, is one of great observation: Lewis's "Britishness has an inherent appeal to a large number of Americans" (185).

There are times when Lewis scholars and fans should ask, "Is this new book about Lewis really needed?" It would be very easy to ask whether or not we need a book about Lewis and America, especially one that moves beyond Lewis and his generation to the generations after. However, K. Alan Snyder's *America Discovers C. S. Lewis* illustrates the first foray into something very much worthwhile. Snyder's book predicts about Lewis what usually takes centuries to recognize in philosophers, theologians, or poets: the need to look back, acknowledge, and analyze the profound influence of a great writer/thinker on our culture. Had Lewis faded in the sixties as he himself predicted, there would be no need for such a study. Yet, despite Lewis's speculation, Snyder firmly demonstrates a powerful trend: C. S. Lewis has and still *is* influencing Christianity in America. He did so in his lifetime, and, as Snyder proves, he continues to do so today.

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J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beren and Luthien*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (New York: HarperCollins, 2017). 288 pages. \$30.00. ISBN 9781328791825.

The value of this latest release by Christopher Tolkien (hereafter, CT) is that it draws together the evolving narrative threads of J. R. R. Tolkien's