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C.S. Lewis (ed. Walter Hooper),
Image and Imagination: Essays and Reviews.

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C. S. Lewis, *Image and Imagination: Essays and Reviews*. Edited by Walter Hooper. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. 379 pp. ISBN 9781107639270.

More than two decades after what seemed the completion of the process of collecting and publishing C. S. Lewis's scattered legacy of shorter writings, yet another volume of them was published around the 50th anniversary of his death – the day which also saw Lewis's posthumous elevation to the status of an established British master of English letters in Westminster Abbey. This new volume is not the mere celebratory reshuffling of old material flavoured with the odd scrap of newly discovered but painfully unspectacular material that some may have feared. It is a very real, thoroughly enjoyable and important addition to the canon.

A quantitative statement of precisely how much has been added is perhaps in order since the cover text is slightly vague and indeed inaccurate about this. Of a total of fifty-three pieces (82,000 words excluding notes and editorial comments, i.e. a book equalling the size of Lewis's *Perelandra*), forty-two are book reviews reprinted from

journals, magazines and newspapers in the period 1928-1963. The remaining items are: two brief obituaries; two brief prefatory and two long introductory pieces to various books; three essays only found in rare volumes dating from 1939 and 1963; and two essays (totalling 6,200 words) never previously published. Appended to a long piece on Charles Williams there is also an unnumbered short piece in French, with a translation, previously reprinted in a journal in 1995 with a different translation, but now – like most items in the book – almost certainly new to the great majority of readers. Four of the book reviews (less than 5,000 words) were previously reprinted in the 1982 volume *Of This and Other Worlds*; presumably, the aim in reprinting them again has been to make all the extant reviews available in one volume. Authors discussed range from Lewis's closest friends Barfield, Tolkien and Williams, and his wife Joy Davidman, over further friends like Dorothy Sayers and Austin Farrer, and many colleagues in the field of literary

scholarship including W. P. Ker and George Steiner, to some who seem to be approached with a barely suppressed antipathy, such as Hugh Kingsmill, Logan Pearsall Smith and Harold Bloom.

In qualitative terms, what is new may be described as the uniquely varied picture of Lewis at work as a formidable man of letters and learning. Of course, a similar picture emerges from many of Lewis's 4,000-page *Collected Letters* as well as from the two volumes of scholarly essays published by Cambridge University Press in the late 1960s (both of which were reprinted along with the present new publication in uniform covers). However, while the letters are naturally a mixed bag from which readers are apt to glean or remember those elements which fill existing popular Lewisian categories, and the earlier Cambridge books could too often appear forbidding for the general reader, the present new volume may strike a successful balance between brevity and variety on the one hand and scholarly rigour on the other – successful, that is, in broadening the circle of readers who realize with delight the truth of Alastair Fowler's comment, 'Of course he was bookish; hang it, he tutored in literature.'

This observation is not just true but important. As everyone knows, when Lewis took up a professorship of Medieval and Renaissance literature in

Cambridge in 1954, he described himself as a dinosaur surviving into an age that wasn't really his – an Old Western Man in Modern times. If he failed as a teacher, he said, he might at least serve as a specimen of past forms of life. Everyone also knows, and knew at the time, that he was certainly not going to fail as a teacher: he was a success. However, Lewis did not mention specific ways in which he thought or hoped his peculiar status was working in his altogether successful academic career. Obviously this had to be gathered from his work – with the dinosaurian metaphor as a key. And ever since that inaugural lecture, most of those who heard or read it must have felt that this self-description had a wider meaning than could be well expressed in strictly academic terms.

For anyone intrigued by Lewis's self-description it would indeed be unwise to seek its meaning in his academic work only. What this volume offers is an unprecedented chance to watch this eminently articulate dinosaur in full spate, operating in a field where his capacity for appreciation and criticism is evoked by the greatest variety of contemporary writers and writings and finds expression in consistently sharp and pithy language: I mean the field of book reviewing. The Christian, the moralist, the fantasist and the scholar are here rubbing shoulders, advising one another both publicly and secretly, shaking hands and also shaking their

heads, and often keeping their collective distance from the Moderns. Precisely because of the variety of subjects, this book may serve to remove any doubts that Lewis was, as he himself once declared, *a single author*. Now that we have this volume, Lewis scholars may do best simply to admit that they have always been missing an indispensable book.

To give just one example, in a 1937 review the phrase *dialectic of desire* appears in connection with William Morris (318). Apart from two rather dense but clearly important autobiographical passages in Lewis's published work, there was until now only one other passage where he used that phrase; and it was a paper on William Morris dating from the same year, 1937. For anyone commenting on the so-called 'argument from desire' as an element of Lewis's legacy (who never used the phrase, which was coined long after his death by a critic), it would now seem to be not just interesting but obligatory to consider what Morris taught Lewis on the subject.

Indeed the real point of watching the articulate dinosaur in action is, as he would himself have insisted, not to see him, but to see what he saw. Perhaps the most striking example – certainly the longest piece – is not a review but an 8,500-word piece contributed to a 1963 volume of *Essays on Malory*, i.e. on the great late-medieval compilation

of British medieval legends called *Le Morte Darthur*, first printed by Caxton in 1485. After many centuries the book's original manuscript was discovered in 1934, edited by Eugène Vinaver, and published in 1947. The interpretation of the differences between the classical text and the newly found original was of course a major subject of scholarly debate among medievalists. While this may not exactly be an appealing subject for the general reader, Lewis at once turns it into a feast of fascinating and crystal-clear reflections, working his way towards the conclusion that Vinaver's edition 'smacks of our century as Caxton's smacked of his' (275). The conclusion is arresting and amusing, devastatingly well-argued, and highly instructive about both the past and the present.

In its original context of 1963, this piece was followed by a long reply in which a grateful Vinaver concedes that 'alone among critics you [i.e. Lewis] have perceived the significance of Malory's treatment of the supernatural and the religious'; but then in the same breath Vinaver betrays a crucial misapprehension of precisely this point in Lewis's essay. Adding this reply to the essay in the present volume would surely have added depth and colour to the dinosaurian drama; but since this would have also added another 4,700 words, it is easy to see why it hasn't happened.

Perhaps the conclusion from such dilemmas should be that here is a useful direction for further additions or appendices to the Lewis canon. Replies to Lewis, or things he was replying to, have so far made some very rare appearances in volumes edited by Walter Hooper – usually as quotations in footnotes and perhaps only once as a full paper (C. E. M. Joad’s 1950 reply to Lewis’s speculations on ‘Animal Pain’). One valuable and sharply critical response from Owen Barfield is included in the present volume. Such things have till now invariably proved worthwhile. The full publication of the *Socratic Digest* in 2012 might therefore be considered the greatest boon for Lewis studies since the *Collected Letters*. Many more useful and enjoyable projects would be possible, such as a full compilation of the eighty-four extant letters exchanged between Lewis and Dorothy Sayers; all the pieces making up Lewis’s intermittent debate with philosopher H. H. Price in the years 1944-1953; or, most urgently needed, a full publication of all surviving documents related to his ‘Great War’ with Owen Barfield in his last few pre-Christian years.

In conclusion to this all too brief account of an embarrassment of riches, two things should be noted. First, the title essay “Image and imagination” is long and difficult. It is one of the two pieces never previously published, and

one sees why it wasn’t. The readability problem here could have been more immediately obvious if the editorial introduction to this piece had preserved Lewis’s footnote to the passage quoted (34) from a letter to T. S. Eliot: as Lewis noted, the essay needed to be recast in ‘a less technically philosophical form’. What might also have helped readers today is some explanation of what he meant by ‘a frontal attack on Crocean aesthetics’ or why he engaged in one. As it is, the reader does well to consult Lewis’s *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, using the index for ‘Croce’. In the end, Lewis’s argument here turns out to be perfectly well-considered and to contain as many good ideas and memorable passages as anything he wrote. The title, Hooper’s choice, is well chosen as a pointer to the chief and perhaps unique importance of this piece. What remains to be spelled out is exactly how and where this early piece fits into (and perhaps elucidates) the story of Lewis’s defection from Idealism in the period around 1930.

Secondly, while Hooper’s editorial work and arrangement of the material in six sections is generally as expert and helpful as could be expected after his half-century of dedication to Lewis’s legacy, the book does seem to suffer from at least some inadequacy of proofreading. Inexplicably, the title of Rougemont’s book is changed from *Passion and Society* into *Poetry and*

Society (59) and ‘the Haggards ride no more’ into ‘are no more’ (321); ‘failed to invent’ (146) makes no sense and is indeed an incorrect translation of French *failli inventir* (144); the obituary for Charles Williams is dated two months before his death (147); a Roman numeral ‘V’ has, rather confusingly, been converted from the correct 1963 original into the incorrect Arabic ‘5’ (265); and there is more. If none of these defects is in itself fatal, the point about dependable correctness is, of course, that such real difficulties as occur must not be compounded by doubts whether one is wrestling with mere textual defects. For example, in the title essay, did Lewis actually write ‘that, if it were real’ or, as seems more likely, ‘that which, if it were real’ (49, line 10)? Or ‘with imagination’ rather than ‘within imagination’ (47, bottom)?

However, if such occasional problems are all that can be said against having this wealth of material at such a friendly price, no one should hesitate to buy it and be grateful.

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