

Book Reviews

Timothy M. Mosteller and Gayne John Anacker (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives on C. S. Lewis' The Abolition of Man: History, Philosophy, Education, and Science*. London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. 176 pp. ISBN 978-1-4742-9644-1.

‘...for without victory, there is no survival’
—Winston Churchill (13 May, 1940)

The Abolition of Man is a great book in the making. And what is a great book? One answer is that it is a book to which one can often return, and that, with each reading, yields yet another vital insight. It is also a book which, upon each encounter, is different from what it was before—as is the reader when he emerges from that encounter. In this capacity, a great book is a mechanism through which one can track one’s own intellectual and moral development.

Another feature of a great book is that it is understood and appreciated in unexpected places. *Abolition* in this connection surely qualifies: Leo Strauss, of all people, said that it was the only book of the twentieth century he could recommend without qualification, and Harry Neumann, nihilist *par excellence*, stated that it offered a superlative statement of the belief required for moral and political order. Of course, a great book is also widely acknowledged in less surprising precincts. The present volume is a testament to that fact, as is Russell Kirk’s recommendation of *Abolition* as the first book to read for college graduates who did not receive a proper education.¹

1 Kirk in the same breath named, as the second necessary book, Polanyi’s *Personal Knowledge*.

In his brief introduction to this welcome new collection, editor Timothy Mosteller reveals that ‘each chapter seeks to criticize *The Abolition of Man* from “within” the spirit of Lewis’ work and not wholly outside of it’ (2). By this Mosteller means that the essays comprising this volume (presumably) presuppose the reality of objective value (Lewis’ ‘*Tao*’) and will not call it into question. Since, according to Mosteller, the target audience for the book is ‘non-experts interested in *The Abolition of Man*’, this starting point is defensible. But, as we will see, for another sort of reader, to concede the reality of objective value from the outset, and not challenge Lewis at this level, is disappointing. This is because reluctance to challenge Lewis on this front is likely to leave in the shadows the most important lessons of *Abolition* as well as its genius. For Mosteller, to concede from the outset the reality of objective value allows the editors and authors in this volume, as students of Lewis, to remain ‘faithful to our master’ (2). One wonders if this is true. In order to know, we must clearly grasp just what it is Lewis is up to in his short yet complex book. It may well be that what makes *Abolition* a great book is that it speaks on multiple levels, i.e., that it possesses a variety of insights intended for a variety of readers. Anyone who reads *Abolition* will benefit, but it will be the reader who asks the most difficult and uncomfortable questions that will reap the greatest harvest, and be most fortified. Might there be a type of faithfulness to Lewis that remains unimagined by the editors? Interestingly, one reason for believing so is the richness of insight offered by several of their authors.

In preparing this volume the editors commissioned nine authors to write essays that focus on the contribution of *Abolition* to particular areas of inquiry (including at least three of the domains mentioned in the subtitle, as well as several others such as literature, natural law, and ‘techno-futurism’). Disappointingly, the result is uneven in sophistication and significance. On a more positive note, a number of the essays include extensive bibliographies. For the student of *Abolition*, and Lewis’ work generally, that alone makes the book well worth reading.

Standing out as the most original as well as the most philosophically technical and sophisticated chapter, is the contribution by Judith Wolfe. Titled ‘Theology in *The Abolition of Man*’, this essay identifies an ambiguity at the heart of Lewis’ book. Wolfe also argues that Lewis’ reasoning in *Abolition* is incomplete because, albeit for good reason, it fails to make reference to God (in contrast with Lewis’ reasoning elsewhere). If there is one chapter in this volume that serious students of *Abolition* must in the future take seriously, this is it.

Considerably less weighty, even in its extended length, is ‘Science in *The Abolition of Man*: “Can Science Rescue Itself?”’ by David Ussery. A practicing chemist whose specialty is genomics,² Ussery admits that “‘unregenerate science’ can be a big threat to humanity’ (125), but then goes on to say that ‘I am not sure what Lewis means by “regenerate science”’ (127). In response, let us recall what Lewis states in *Abolition*:

The regenerate science which I have in mind would not do even to minerals and vegetables what modern science threatens to do to man himself. When it explained it would not explain away. When it spoke of the parts it would remember the whole...The analogy between the *Tao* of Man and the instincts of an animal species would mean for it new light cast on the unknown thing, Instinct, by the inly known reality of conscience and not a reduction of conscience to the category of Instinct. Its followers would not be free with the words *only* and *merely*.

Manifestly, as nearly all the authors in this collection understand, Lewis’ primary concern in *Abolition* is with the preservation of what he refers to as ‘man’, and the primary threat to the possibility of such a being is materialist reductionism. To clearly understand this danger, while perceiving the manner in which excellent science is possible without creating such a threat, there is no better place to turn than to the work of the world-class chemist, later turned

2 This is an apt specialty, given the nightmare scenario presented in *Abolition*.

philosopher, Michael Polanyi.

Within the restricted confines of a review it is possible only to comment briefly on the remaining seven chapters of *Contemporary Perspectives on C. S. Lewis' The Abolition of Man*. In Chapter 1, 'Philosophy in *The Abolition of Man*', Adam Pelser positions the book in relation to dominant currents in twentieth-century philosophy, especially logical positivism. Somewhat surprisingly, given his assigned topic, Pelser focuses on Lewis's emphasis in *Abolition* on the importance of emotional formation. In doing so he brings out the Aristotelian roots of Lewis's recommendations (captured in Lewis's reference to 'irrigating deserts') and, much to his credit, notes that what Lewis and Aristotle are calling for in the formation of human beings is a sort of enabling, an enabling that will permit us to *see*. In his analysis, however, Pelser on this matter inappropriately separates Plato from Aristotle (Lewis cites both), and does not penetrate to the heart of the enabling in question.

Chapter 2 is 'Natural Law in *The Abolition of Man*' by Micah Watson. In an amusing yet insightful understatement, Watson observes that Lewis in *Abolition* is 'up to something different' (32). Also impressive is Watson's recognition that this is 'a fighting' book and that Lewis believes himself to be concerned with matters in which 'the stakes are enormous' (34). (Lewis is of course correct.) Like Pelser, Watson refers to the emphasis in *Abolition* on training the emotions and usefully adds that Lewis is also echoing Aristotle's theme of learning by doing. In short, the preservation of 'man' that is Lewis's primary concern depends on character formation. The most important feature of Watson's chapter, however, is its cognizance of Lewis's conviction that there is no hope through rational debate of bringing over to one's position an adversary who does not share one's moral presuppositions. This is why—and one wishes the authors and editors of this volume all would say so—the heart of Lewis's project is the establishment of such presuppositions (via the emotional formation and character development so widely noted here). It should also be added that Watson, in his recognition of the *reductio ad absurdum* that constitutes the backbone

of *Abolition*, reminds us of the importance to Lewis' philosophical development of Arthur James Balfour's *Theism and Humanism*.

Mark Pike is the author of Chapter 3, 'Education in *The Abolition of Man*'. This essay rightly notes the centrality of education to *Abolition*, which is for Lewis simultaneously 1) an indictment of an increasingly influential pedagogy which undermines the reality, and hence the authority, of principle and ideal, and 2) the outline of a wholesome alternative to it. Like Watson and Pelsler, Pike marks the importance of training in Lewis' scheme. Among the most important features of his discussion is the observation that schooling which is in the grips of a flawed understanding of man and morality will in effect 'curtail freedom' (57). This is because such schooling does not provide the 'enabling' noted above, instead securing the opposite by depriving the young of the needed formative influence. Admirably, Pike recognizes that, on Lewis' account, our very humanity is thereby at stake. The chapter, however, is at times shallow. We have already encountered the observation that, in ethics, argumentation in the end cannot avoid circularity: ultimately, we appeal to moral premises which can only be seen (via proper shaping), not proved, and our conclusions follow only in light of them. But circularity, while unavoidable, can be either naïve or profound. The latter is what we find in *Abolition*; Pike has some distance to travel before joining Lewis on the higher ground.

Chapter 4 applies the insight of *Abolition* to pedagogy itself, and should be read by anyone responsible for classroom teaching. Titled 'So How *Should* We Teach English', this essay, authored by Charlie Starr, describes the unique potential of literature, properly employed (i.e., through showing as opposed to telling), to achieve the formative task that is viewed by Lewis as the necessary condition for the preservation of humanity. Reminding us of the important work done by Russell Kirk in regard to what he (and predecessors such as Irving Babbitt and Edmund Burke) call 'moral imagination', Starr tells us of the power of literature (which is to say, stories) to evoke in the young certain responses. These responses register in us at a deep level so as to shape our view of

the world and thereby affect how we act. In other words, what is shown through what we read determines how we see. It shapes our *character*. In short, Starr's essay is a 'how to' manual that illuminates the pedagogical art that effects the shaping (training) which is noted so prominently elsewhere in *Contemporary Perspectives*. It is important to add that it is not only literature that possesses the potential to shape and enable young minds; all of the disciplines, including art, history, science, and mathematics, have a role to play. The reader interested in this principle is well advised to read the work of Harry Broudy, attending especially to his concept of 'al-lusionary store'. A final word on this essay: While it does not itself make the point, it serves as a reminder that Lewis practices what he preaches. In an act of impressive and ultimate consistency, *Abolition* not only calls for shaping of the imagination through the use of literary devices, it is itself just such an endeavour.

The theme of Chapter 5 is captured by its title. In 'Is *The Abolition of Man* Conservative?', Francis Beckwith argues that the answer depends on what we mean by 'conservative'. His argument is simple and direct, yet instructive: if the term refers to 'the conservatism of the traditional moralist—that appeals to the normativity of the natural law in the deliberation of our public questions' (91), then the answer is 'yes'. But if the term is understood in another way, e.g., as *market* conservatism, then *Abolition* does not qualify, for its commitments are in conflict with rule by market principles alone and is at odds with the strictures of the libertarian mentality.

Chapter 8, authored by James Herrick, is titled '*The Abolition of Man* and British Techno-Futurism'. In this essay Herrick shows that the fantastic scenario that in large measure yields *Abolition's* disturbing *reductio ad absurdum* is, due to advances in science, becoming increasingly feasible. Placing the three lectures that constitute the book into context, Herrick explains that Lewis is responding to the powerful impact of three popular futurist writers: Olaf Stapledon, J.D. Bernal, and J.B.S. Haldane. Herrick adds, '[t]he stakes could not have been higher: the fate of the human race hung in the balance' (147). And later, he observes, Lewis offers 'a call

to arms in response to a dangerous ideology...Lewis challenged a deified science, driven by a corrupt philosophy and taking human nature as its patient. He wrote to save the human race from such a fate' (151). Like Churchill in the 1930s, Lewis in 1942 is a lonely voice aiming to inform an audience that 'has yet to realize that a battle is looming' (151). Herrick aptly states that, as we observe the 75th anniversary of *Abolition*, this is more than ever 'a timely warning' (151).

Given that Herrick, as do several of the other authors in this volume, clearly recognizes that, for Lewis, humanity itself is at stake, it is puzzling that neither he nor they ever pause to explicitly declare just what this 'man' is that, on Lewis' account, is threatened with abolition. Lewis himself is forthright on the matter (though, granted, it is easy to pass over the key phrases). Herrick in fact cites one such statement from *Abolition*: 'The Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may be said that *it is by this middle element that man is man...*' (quoted on 137; emphasis added). To put it briefly, that which is faced with abolition is the creature that is able and willing to live in light of principle or ideal. The shaping, training, and formation that is so prominently called for in *Abolition* is recommended by Lewis precisely because it enables the individual to act in such a manner. As we shall note below, there was no guarantee that such a creature would at some time emerge (it is miraculous, really), and there is no guarantee that, once it did emerge, this creature would continue to exist. *That* is what makes *Abolition* a terrifying book. The most important thing is indeed at stake and, in fact, always has been and always will be. The question Lewis raises is 'So, what, in the face of this fact, are we going to do?' This is the reason that *Abolition*, above all else, is a masterwork in the philosophy of education.

Finally, we arrive at the closing chapter, 'Metaphors of Meaning: The Dance of Truth and Imagination in *That Hideous Strength*' by Scott Key. As most students of Lewis know, *That Hideous Strength* is a fictional counterpart to *Abolition*. In it, the nightmare that is

foretold by Lewis in his lectures dramatically unfolds. The novel is an enlightening companion to *Abolition* and we are indebted to the editors for including an analysis of it in this collection. Key comes as close as any of his fellow authors to acknowledging what, for Lewis, it means to be human (158; 160). In addition, Key makes an important contribution to our understanding of the role played in Lewis' philosophical anthropology by imagination: 'imagination is the organ of meaning on which the reason works to determine truth' (171). In clarification of this assertion, Key quotes a passage from an early essay by Lewis: 'For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition' (quoted on 164). Key then explains why this is so important: 'If truth is not the result of a rational assessment of the "meaning" that lies before us but only the blind product of instinctual processes, then truth is ultimately a meaningless concept signifying nothing. In the end, the human project is merely survival devoid of purpose' (165). Now, this is precisely what the nihilist declares. Therefore, the monumental questions that face us are: How can we ensure that the nihilist assertion not be true? What stands in the way of the loss of all that we esteem? What makes meaning (and hence truth) possible? What must we do to make this happen? In the final analysis, these are the issues raised by *Abolition*. We are indebted to Key for bringing them to our attention. It is its capacity to provoke reflection and struggle at this *deep* level that makes *Abolition* a great book.

In closing, let us again attend to *Contemporary Perspectives* taken as a whole. What the authors in this volume most importantly bring to our attention, often unintentionally, is the deep and troubled insight that inspired the lectures that constitute *The Abolition of Man*. To the degree that the nine essays cast light on this centre ring of Lewis' concerns, it is precisely because the authors in question did *not* presuppose the existence of objective value. Instead, in illuminating the intention and meaning of *Abolition* (especially in relation to the 'stakes' involved), the authors in such instances reveal that

behind Lewis's fighting words and powerful reasoning is a terrifying realisation. He states, 'It is in Man's power to treat himself as a mere "natural object" and...if man chooses to treat himself as raw material, raw material he will be'. In these disturbing phrases Lewis is reminding us that the pedagogical chain that makes possible the most important thing (the '*Tao*' and everything it sustains) may be broken. And, once the chain is broken, that thing may be lost forever. A darker prospect is unimaginable.

But *Abolition* is a hopeful book; in the name of consistency it must be. Lewis' message is constructive in the most significant way. If we still care about principle and ideal, as well as the creature ('Man') that makes them real and possible, it is obligatory to adhere to Lewis' educational program. A necessary condition for our acting in this fashion is that we join Lewis in his candour: the dearest things are at stake precisely because nothing is guaranteed. Only conviction and commitment, followed by appropriate action, can save our precious heritage. It is the responsibility of the persons who possess such conviction and commitment to ensure that those who follow do as well. As Lewis clearly indicates, there is nothing new about these insights and the educational practices that follow from them. What *may* be new, however, is the degree to which the responsible parties have forgotten what they have been shown and, for that very reason, have failed to share this wisdom with those who are younger and require formation. It is well and good under healthy conditions to declare the objectivity of value. (Objective value is, after all, the occasion for our conviction and commitment.) But taking objective value for granted is the very error that led to the complacency that, in turn, gave rise to the conditions with which Lewis is so concerned. What a tragic irony it would be for a reading of *The Abolition of Man* thereby to reinforce the corruption and decay it was intended to arrest and undo.

Jon Fennell
Hillsdale College

George M. Marsden, *C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity: A Biography*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016. 280 pp. ISBN: 978-0-691-15373-5.

Of the making of books about C.S. Lewis there is seemingly no end, an industry given a fresh injection of enthusiasm (did it need it) by the 50th anniversary of Lewis's death in November 2013. One might deem it reasonable, therefore, to enquire carefully about the usefulness (weighed in the balance, say, against the well-being of trees) of each new offering to the genre. Is there really anything new to be said about Lewis, any significantly new way of saying it, or any readership as yet unexposed to what has already been said by others?

The main thing that disentangles this volume from the growing pile of works designed to fill a much needed gap in the market is its narrative centre of gravity, tracing as it does the genesis, evolution and reception of a quite remarkable work of popular Christian theology – Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. This slim-line book, as George Marsden demonstrates, seems from its inception to have had an impact of a mostly positive sort on generations of thinking Christians of every stamp, including many who have themselves duly been figures of influence. That fact alone (quite apart from sales figures guaranteed to stimulate Pavlovian responses in the world of publishing and, after sixty-five years, still growing rather than diminishing) merits the sort of precise exploration and analysis in which Marsden, with characteristic care and grace, engages his own readers here.

The danger in being invited to review a book about a book, of course, is that one may end up saying too much about the wrong book. To some extent that danger cannot be avoided, and must simply be kept an eye on.

Marsden's approach to his subject is, as his title (or that bestowed by the series to which this volume belongs) suggests, 'biographical'. In this particular case it is necessarily difficult to avoid a certain amount of Lewis's own biography being rehearsed. It provides, af-

ter all, the matrix within which the origins, gestation, production and initial reception of *Mere Christianity* (first published in 1952, towards the end of Lewis's career as a writer of Christian 'apologetics' and, as Marsden suggests, more or less as an afterthought to it) must be set if it is to be made sense of at all. The first half of the book renders sufficient of Lewis's life and work into compelling narrative to accomplish this, and is likely to assist North American readers in particular, these being less familiar with the peculiarities attendant upon Lewis's unapologetic 'Englishness'.

The narrative thread around which these early chapters are woven is that of an invitation from the British Broadcasting Corporation to Lewis to deliver several series of short radio talks during World War Two. The success of these (in which Lewis's characteristic wit and intellectual rigor were combined with his capacity to speak in a manner congenial to his audience) led duly to the publication of three short volumes – *Broadcast Talks* (1942), *Christian Behaviour* (1943), and *Beyond Personality* (1944). The eventual combination of these three without substantial revision into a single volume makes the apparent integrity and undoubted force of *Mere Christianity* across the intervening decades even more remarkable, and bears witness to the lively mind and skillful imagination of the man who first penned them as talks to an unseen (and, to an Oxford don, largely unfamiliar) bank of listeners.

Lewis's aim in the talks was to speak of the substance of 'mere Christianity' – viz, not a minimalist version of what Christians believe, shorn of its less culturally unforgiving elements, but an account of those core 'dogmas' to which, across the centuries, Christians have in fact held and about which they have rarely disagreed in broad terms at least. This meant the colourful and compelling exposition of such dramatic themes as the incarnation of God as a man, the atonement as the only remedy for human sin, and the life of God in eternity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Additionally, Lewis did not pull his punches where the Christian evaluation of human spiritual and moral capacity and incapacity were concerned. Inevitably, all this drew the ire of many who much preferred 'Chris-

tianity and water' (in Lewis's phrase) to being forced to swallow it neat. Marsden's account is clearly sympathetic to Lewis's version of things, but he gives a generous account (when it is due) to Lewis's detractors in his own day and since. He also grants Lewis the credit for those weaknesses in his argument that were the product of his time and place, and treats them with critical respect.

Given the latter consideration, why, it must be asked, does *Mere Christianity* appear otherwise so successfully to have transcended the cultural gap between mid-twentieth-century England and a global readership over the past sixty-five years? What, as Marsden puts it, is the source of its 'lasting vitality'? He ventures some possible answers in his final chapter, and it is here in particular that seasoned readers of Lewis may find considerable food for thought, and so be glad to have yet another volume to add to their creaking bookshelves.

The perspective of the author is unashamedly American throughout, and British readers in particular might crave slightly more by way of critical attention to reasons underlying the 'cult' of Lewis in the US (including coffee mugs, tote-bags, daily planners and all manner of other 'CSL' paraphernalia available for purchase in college bookstores) which, even allowing for characteristic British understatement, is hardly matched in Lewis's homeland. And the well-oiled machinery of consumer culture must surely be granted its proper part in the story of 'the lasting and growing appeal of *Mere Christianity*' (over 3.5 million copies in English alone sold since 2001)?

Those who have read and re-read *Mere Christianity* over the years, though, will trust Marsden's judgment that this is indeed a rare book, and one whose significance must be measured in terms of its faithful and compelling exposition of claims central to the Christian's creed. And they will be glad that this little book in its turn affords such a reliable and judicious introduction to the other.

Trevor Hart
St Mary's College
St Andrews

Denis J. Conlon, *G. K. Chesterton: A Reappraisal*. York, UK: Methuen & Co, 2015. 466pp. ISBN 978-0-413-77768-3.

Over the last several years, there has been an exciting increase in research dedicated to the life and writings of G. K. Chesterton. With a figure of such immense literary output, scholars tend to find themselves challenged not by the limits but by the sheer scope of their subject matter. As Ronald Knox confessed, 'When I undertook to give a lecture on G. K. Chesterton I felt, from the start, that the difficulty would lie not in finding material for it, but rather in cutting down the limits of my subject . . . How was I to say little enough about Chesterton?'¹ There is fitting irony in this: Chesterton himself, after all, loved the concept of limits, and felt that a fundamental purpose of imagination was to impose a perimeter on objects and ideas in order to expand our understanding of them. As the author himself maintained, one 'can only represent very big ideas in very small spaces'.²

In his latest work, *G. K. Chesterton: A Reappraisal*, Denis J. Conlon seeks to balance this concept of limits by further increasing our knowledge of the author, while at times constricting and fragmenting the space given to such new revelations. As the author and editor of various works by and about Chesterton, Conlon is well situated to add to the scholarship on this influential thinker and writer. Like all new biographies, and true to its subtitle 'A Reappraisal', this work attempts to provide information not yet published elsewhere, and to act as a corrective to previously held notions about the author. Yet Conlon's purpose is not to completely overhaul earlier understandings of Chesterton's life and writings, but to supplement these sketches with a fuller and more nuanced depiction. His stated objective is to 'fill in the gaps left by design or default' (5) by Chesterton himself and by biographers for whom Frances Chesterton and Dorothy Collins were the primary sources of information. In

1 Ronald Knox, *Literary Distractions* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1958), p. 153.

2 G. K. Chesterton, 'The Toy Theatre', in *Selected Essays of G. K. Chesterton* (London: Methuen & Co., 1955), p. 190.

this endeavour, Conlon is largely successful.

In his quest *ad fontes*, Conlon structures his research into three distinct parts: a chronological biography, an assessment of Chesterton as a 'Man of Letters', and critical judgments revealed in Chesterton's own words and in the observations of others. He remains largely consistent throughout all three sections in his recourse to primary and early secondary sources, while referring rarely to other recent biographies. Part of his strategy is to paint a compelling portrait not only of Chesterton, but also of those individuals who surrounded, supported and influenced him throughout his lifetime. Therefore, Conlon adorns the well-weathered branches of Chesterton's life with the blossoms of previously unseen and less-familiar material: early outlines and versions of his novels, an extensive collection of quotations from early reviewers, interviews with the remaining individuals who knew him personally, thirty-six unseen photographs and twelve illustrations by Chesterton, as well as an extensive reproduction of the letters and journals of his wife Frances Chesterton, his 'adopted daughter' Dorothy Collins, and his brother's partner, Ada Chesterton.

A further strength of Conlon's work is its revelation of small anecdotes that reinvigorate subjects or episodes to which scholars have become too accustomed. Thus, he provides a corrective to Dorothy Collins' account regarding Chesterton's highly-lauded biography of Thomas Aquinas. While most biographers rely on Collins in perpetuating the claim that Chesterton's account of Aquinas' life and thought was mainly derived from a cursory reading of his works, Conlon demonstrates that Chesterton had absorbed the *Summa* early in life and frequently alluded to Aquinas throughout his early work (210). Furthermore, for a person who made the acquaintance of so many well-known individuals and who achieved such accolades himself, the reader should not perhaps be surprised to learn that the Chestertons were provided a limousine to use at their leisure by American mobster Al Capone during a holiday in Italy (198), or that Chesterton was nominated for a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1935, the year prior to his death (252). Yet, per-

haps one of the strongest elements in this biographical description comes in the wake of Chesterton's death, in which Conlon gives an informative account of what happened to Frances Chesterton, Dorothy Collins and Ada Chesterton after his departure, before concluding this section with a discussion concerning recent developments in the cause of Chesterton's canonization within the Catholic Church.

The second half of this volume shifts away from a biographical account of Chesterton's life and addresses elements of his various literary roles, such as that of novelist, poet, essayist, playwright, storyteller and critic. Here, Conlon's work moves into an uneven and unorthodox account of Chesterton's writings. While the chapter on Chesterton's novels is both interesting and informative—revealing early drafts and motivations—the rest of the chapters in this section would be more appropriate as a series of appendices. For example, the chapter on Chesterton 'The Poet' is a mere four pages in length, a little less than half of which is a reproduction of Chesterton's essay 'How to Read Poetry'. In similar fashion, the chapter on Chesterton 'The Essayist' runs to around five pages in length, with the vast majority consisting of Chesterton's own reflections on essay-writing, along with an essay he wrote on London. Beyond the provision of new material, one is left to wonder why these chapters were included in this particular format. For those readers interested in these areas of Chesterton's oeuvre, Michael Hurley's book *G. K. Chesterton* (Northcote House, 2012) provides a more judicious and comprehensive examination.

The third, and final, part of Conlon's work seeks to correct allegations of Chesterton's anti-Semitism. In this regard, the author has provided a mini-anthology of Chesterton's writings on Jewish matters in order that readers may understand what he actually believed and stated, rather than relying on secondary sources. Additionally, the final chapter expresses various critical judgments of Chesterton and his work by well-known figures—among them Kingsley Amis, W. H. Auden, Agatha Christie, Neil Gaiman, Mahatma Gandhi, and Theodore Roosevelt. Chesterton is one of

those rare individuals who is constantly quoted by the most unlikely of sources and appreciated for his literary efforts across the full spectrum of literature, theology, and cultural studies. It is nice to have such an array of accomplished individuals who have appreciated the work and genius of Chesterton in one place for current and future reference.

While the information presented in Conlon's biography is an essential and significant contribution to Chesterton studies, I offer two main critical observations that impede its successful delivery. Firstly, as alluded to earlier, the structure of the book is a bit perplexing, both in the content of each section and in the way that the information is conveyed. A primary concern is the overall flow of the material, both in its prose and in the manner in which it is collected. Perhaps a proper introduction to this volume would have provided the necessary explanation to prepare the reader for its content and structure. Although Conlon is to be applauded for his emphasis on the primary sources surrounding Chesterton in order to reveal a more accurate picture of the man and his work, the reliance on these sources proves to be a double-edged sword. The reproduction of substantial portions of letters, reviews, outlines, poems, and journal entries disrupts the narrative flow and often renders a disjointed account that fails to achieve a necessary confluence between fact and prose.

Likewise, the second and third sections are extremely informative, but appear more appropriate as either appendices or material for more fully developed treatments. While the chapter on 'Chesterton and the Jews' seems to accomplish Conlon's task of correcting views on Chesterton's supposed anti-Semitism, I would have liked to see a bit more introductory explanation of this controversial topic. Those unfamiliar with the charges recently laid upon Chesterton will be unsure what it is Conlon appears to be correcting, beyond general defamatory accusations. It would have been useful to situate this controversy in its historical context a bit more, to provide examples of what others have written, and to educate readers as to why this point is significant enough that Con-

lon should expend so much time and effort in correcting misconceptions about it. Unfortunately, readers are left to consult other salient works to provide this information, such as Ann Farmer's *Chesterton and the Jews* (Angelico Press, 2015).

While Conlon may not have fully met Chesterton's standard of saying big things in small spaces, his latest work is a valuable contribution to Chesterton studies in its extension of our knowledge concerning this enduring writer and thinker. For those who are looking for an introduction to Chesterton, this particular biography may prove too fractured, detail-oriented, and idiosyncratic. However, future studies into Chesterton will be unable to ignore the new material and correctives provided by the extensive research presented in this work and, for that, Conlon appears to have accomplished his purpose to the benefit of us all.

Brett H Speakman
University of St Andrews

Gisela H. Kreglinger, *Storied Revelations. Parables, Imagination, and George MacDonald's Christian Fiction*. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014. xiv + 236 pp. ISBN 978-0-7188-9329-3.

Working from the premise that Jesus used parables to reveal the kingdom of God and to move those listening from being onlookers to actually receiving and internalising God's words—the revelation of God—Kreglinger examines how George MacDonald (Lewis's self-confessed 'teacher and mentor') used the parabolic technique to try to reawaken a deep personal realization of the truth of God in the Gospel. Aware of MacDonald's own reservation (that parables run the risk of being buried as 'mummies of prose'), she astutely and successfully extrapolates how MacDonald used the

parabolic form. Kreglinger notes how an over-familiarity with the language of Scripture generally, and the gospels specifically, can lead us to block out the effect—the generation of understanding and realization that is revelation—that parables should have on us. Why the parabolic, why the narrative? Kreglinger demonstrates how as a Calvinistic Scot (whose wider understanding of Christian theology upset the kirk authorities), as a Victorian, as a poet and theologian, George MacDonald observed this desensitization process at work in late-nineteenth-century Victorian society. He saw how Britain was a culture saturated with the language and practice of Christianity, but on a communal and individual level demonstrated no understanding of the depth of the Gospel and its comparison with civic religion and institutionalized belief. Therefore Kreglinger can illustrate how ‘the language of Scripture no longer penetrated people’s hearts, imaginations, and attitudes; it no longer transformed people’s lives. MacDonald, called to be a pastor, turned to story and more specifically the “parabolic” as a means of spiritual awakening. He created fictional worlds in which the language of Jesus would find a new home and regain its revelatory power for his particular Victorian audience’ (p. 3f).

Kreglinger’s study is in five chapters:

1. George Macdonald: Poet and Theologian;
2. Patterns of Subversion and Promise: Jesus’ Parables;
3. Patterns of Subversion and Promise: Romanticism;
4. George Macdonald’s Theological Rationale for Story and the ‘Parabolic’;
5. Patterns of Subversion and Promise: Lilith.

Kreglinger successfully explores the relationship between the biblical parables and MacDonald’s theological fiction, specifically investigating the manner in which Jesus’s language illuminates MacDonald’s efforts, while MacDonald himself was clearly influenced by biblical idioms and language. Kreglinger notes:

The 'parabolic' is an important genre both in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God and more subtly in MacDonald's fantasy and fairy tale writing. Rather than serving as a nice illustrative story to an important theological point made elsewhere, the form of parabolic speech is crucial for the message that it seeks to convey. The form and content of Jesus' parables work together in a unique way to break open the reality depicted in parable. The genre of Jesus' parables is thus not an arbitrary means of figurative speech but a well-chosen tool for a provocative proclamation. (p. 207)

Therefore (the author asserts along with Coleridge, p. 209), the imagination is much more fundamental to human life and action than has generally been acknowledged, even though, as she acknowledges, defining the genre of Jesus's parables is not easy, 'and there is in fact considerable confusion and disagreement among biblical scholars as to the nature of NT parables and how to interpret them' (p. 207). Metaphor, allegory and parable are difficult terms to establish in relationship with each other. Perhaps C.S. Lewis's concept of 'supposal' could help here.

All round an worthwhile study.

P.H. Brazier

