

Book Reviews

Nancy Carpentier Brown, *The Woman Who Was Chesterton*. (Charlotte, NC: American Chesterton Society Books, 2015), \$16.95 (paperback).

It's often said the only thing missing from G.K. Chesterton's *Autobiography* was Gilbert himself. But equally missing was his wife, Frances. Though an accomplished writer of plays, poems, and articles in her own right, Frances has often seemed subsumed into the life of her more famous husband. While this may have something to do with male chauvinism, it was in great part due to the woman herself: Frances chose to flee the limelight afforded her husband—ordering him to write about her as little as possible, even in the autobiography—and was, according to biographer Nancy Brown, “tragically lacking the narcissistic impulse to chronicle her life methodically on behalf of future biographers” (xxxvi). Further, like many contemporaries, she burned or ordered burned many of her papers at the end of her life. Yet Brown, a contributing editor to *Gilbert* and the editor of *How Far is it to Bethlehem: The Poetry and Plays of Frances Chesterton*, has managed to fill out the life of Frances heretofore hidden in her husband's poetry, obscure literary biographies of contemporaries, and letters, many of them to and from Father John O'Connor, the model for her husband's Father Brown.

Brown warns, with reason, that readers should already be familiar with the life of G.K. Chesterton, but it's a safe bet that most readers will be interested in Frances because of her husband anyway. Not only does the biography presume a knowledge of Gilbert, but it also adds to it in a number of ways. First, following up on William Oddie's study of the young Chesterton, Brown shows that Frances herself was the one who introduced Gilbert into the rather advanced Anglo-Catholic group who favored a kind of Christian Socialism. Brown sometimes stops, however, when one wants to know more. For example she cites a letter attributing the Chesterton marriage's simplicity to Frances's involvement in a “new thought” group that cut everything from the Anglican service but “the legal parts” (52). What group was this, and how did it fit with her Anglo-Catholicism?

Second, in digging up the forgotten speeches and essays that Frances wrote both before and after her marriage, Brown shows Frances's ideas coincided with Gilbert's, often preceding his own writing about them. Frances wrote first about the divine love of children for repetition and the persistent cry of “Again” that found such marvelous expression in Gilbert's “Ethics of Elfland.” Brown doesn't overstate things, however, noting we'll likely never know which spouse originated which ideas. Yet the numerous examples of similar writing show “a fruitful exchange between two minds, a shared

growth in that childlike sense of wonder" (38). Brown quotes enough poetry to show Frances's lyrical expression of that wonder.

Brown also adds to understanding Chesterton household operations, showing much of the new organization that allowed the Chestertons to continue with their own literary work was actually brought to them by Kathleen Chesshire, who preceded their last secretary and literary executor, Dorothy Collins. Brown also corrects some biographers' depiction of the relationship between Collins and Frances as familial; while Frances certainly thought of and wrote to Dorothy as a daughter, Dorothy's own correspondence shows that she thought of her own relationship as personal but still professional. Finally, Brown shows Frances felt free to edit her husband's work even more than Collins did. Frances was, as Fr. O'Connor noted in a letter to Frances after Gilbert's death, far more responsible for her husband's success than people realized.

Any treatment of Frances must address the claims of Cecil Chesterton's widow, Ada "Keith" Chesterton, in her 1940 book *The Chestertons*, that Frances kept Gilbert from her bed. Brown shows that Frances had three operations for infertility. Why would anyone proceed to surgery even once without trying out their fertility?

Frances had expressed often her desire for a family of (seven!) children, and the couple's struggle with infertility was only one of many crosses born by Frances. Her life was shaped by other difficulties including the early death of her father during her teens, a family history of depression (Brown attributes much of Frances's reluctance to enter the Roman Catholic Church to her sense that her brother Knollys's conversion did not prevent him from committing suicide), and severe pain resulting from one leg being shorter than another—a defect not detected until midlife. Brown argues that if Gilbert was a saint, so was Frances. Frances's "pact" with Gilbert to accept their childlessness and welcome children, providing care and financial support for countless relatives and friends, is a thread running through the book. And one shouldn't forget that Frances had to put up with her husband's practical helplessness and "monumental oddness" (58). Frances was, Brown argues persuasively "the saint beside the saint" (226). Her case is a strong one.

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Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson, *C.S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), \$45 (hardcover).

There seems to be no end to the books on C.S. Lewis. Whether it is one more biography, a consideration of his apologetic works, or another book on Narnia, nearly innumerable authors have plumbed Lewis and his writings in the hope of drawing upon his wisdom or methods to meet the challenges we face some 50 years after his death. Remarkably, though, Lewis's political views have not attracted much interest, in large part because there has been a sense that Lewis was, in fact, not interested in politics and had little to say about the subject. As Justin Dyer and Micah Watson suggest in their excellent new book, however, that is a serious mistake. Not only was Lewis interested in what we might think of as ordinary politics, but his apologetic, scholarly, and imaginative works also offered important and interesting claims regarding how natural law relates to democratic politics in a largely secular and morally skeptical social order. Dyer and Watson do us a favor in surveying the full range of Lewis's writing to show how the body of his work provides a defense of natural law politics.

The notion that Lewis was, by and large, not interested in politics is not unreasonable, given his studied unwillingness to say much publicly about the politics of his day, his expressed public ignorance about current affairs, and the care he took to ensure that he didn't let his apologetic work get caught up in partisan divides. But Dyer and Watson point out that this picture is at best incomplete, as his private letters reveal a man very much interested in and knowledgeable about the politics of the day. That isn't to say that Lewis was interested in being a political figure—far from it, but he also wasn't merely apolitical. What's more, his full range of works reveal that he had a lot to say about the deep moral, philosophical, and theological foundations of politics, namely the natural law.

Of course, the idea that Lewis accepted and defended the natural law is no surprise. His book *Abolition of Man* is precisely an exposition to those ends. What Dyer and Watson help us see, though, is just how much this defense of the natural law matters to much of the rest of his work. Theories of natural law generally defend the idea that there are aspects to human nature that impose on all of us self-evident moral obligations that we ignore or deride at the cost of what makes us distinctively human. Lewis was not interested in articulating a distinctive theory of natural law but instead showed us the costs—moral, psychological, and political—of our persistent attempts to ignore the inherent implications of our capacity to reason. The corrupt National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.) he develops in *That Hideous Strength* is a vivid and focused picture of what Lewis believed would happen when our social and political orders ignore or try to reject

the natural law. We do not become, as N.I.C.E.'s architects hope, scientific masters of our own nature, but rather the mere subjects of others' technocratic manipulation and domination. It is no small irony, Lewis helps us see, that our modern politics, so dedicated to our liberation from all authorities, ends up profoundly threatening our personal liberty in the name of progress and equality.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose then that Lewis was "medieval" in his politics, that he would have wanted to return to the 12th century. In what are perhaps the most provocative two chapters in the book, Dyer and Watson argue that Lewis paired his natural law ethic with a concurrent commitment to classical liberalism that was more compatible with Locke and Mill than for example Aquinas. Though he did not share all of these philosophers' ontological and epistemological suppositions, Lewis's appreciation for our limits and, indeed, our fallen nature led him to prescribe the kinds of moral projects our political orders should pursue.

We live in a culture that increasingly denies that our human nature carries with it any normative obligations, even as those engaged in morality politics become ever more shrill and unyielding. Christians and others committed to defending the natural law in such an inhospitable environment would do well to consider Lewis again—and Dyer and Watson's excellent book.

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Jerry Root and Mark Neal. *The Surprising Imagination of C.S. Lewis: An Introduction*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015) \$34.99, (paperback).

In a "Meditation in a Toolshed," C.S. Lewis famously notes the difference between looking *at* a beam of light as it shines through a crack into a darkened toolshed, and looking *along* it at the things made visible by its light—a view of the world, as it were, from "inside" the illumination. Though Lewis is clearly seeking to correct a "modern" bias which assumes that looking at things from the "outside" is the only way to assess them accurately and truthfully, he ends the brief meditation with this exhortation: "One must look both along and at everything."

In *The Surprising Imagination of C.S. Lewis: An Introduction*, Root and Neal strive to do exactly that. In this case, the "beam" which they look *at* and *along* is the "imagination" and the various ways that Lewis both understood and employed it in his own writings, fiction and non-fiction alike. As the authors seek to show throughout, the key to understanding the core of Lewis's

thought and his unmatched capacity for connecting deeply with diverse audiences is to realize that for Lewis the imagination is neither secondary to nor in conflict with reason. Indeed, for Root and Neal, the richness and clarity characteristic of Lewis's writing is a result of, not a departure from, his deep appreciation and respect for the imagination.

Thus, in an effort to provide a broad lay of the C.S. Lewis landscape, in each chapter the authors focus on a key Lewis text from various genres to begin elucidating twelve distinct kinds (or perhaps dimensions) of the imagination in Lewis's published writings. The book begins with the "baptized imagination" in his autobiographical work *Surprised by Joy*, and then goes on to explore, for example, the "shared imagination" in *Mere Christianity* (Chapter 2), the "awakened imagination" in *Experiment in Criticism* (Chapter 4), or the "material imagination" in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (Chapter 7). In each chapter, the authors also draw in references from literary, theological, and philosophical influences on C.S. Lewis (both ancient and contemporary) in order to give their own readers a deeper appreciation for both the primary text and the aspect of the imagination being discussed. The book also includes an Appendix of eighteen "additional uses of the imagination identified by Lewis" and an extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources.

Root and Neal's introduction is not the first book to note the centrality of the imagination to Lewis's work, but it is, I believe, the first to do so with the explicit goal of offering a more expansive appraisal of the imagination as both a gateway and guide to his writings. Readers of *The Surprising Imagination* will no doubt be served well to look "along" this text to begin appreciating not only the variety and nuance of Lewis's imagination, but also its ultimate coherence—both of which are anchored in Lewis's Trinitarian conception of creation as it is revealed in the recreation of all things through Christ's Incarnation. In particular, readers will benefit from the reminders throughout that for Lewis the imagination is not an escape from reality but rather a radical attention to it. This attention is often "iconoclastic" as it unmasks the painful truths about our own willful misapprehensions and distortions of reality. As Root and Neal point out in their conclusion, the imagination's first and last task is to reconcile us—to our world, to our true selves, and above all to God (194).

Readers looking "at" this book, however, may find themselves longing for a more explicit and precise articulation of what constitutes an act of the "imagination." Though I appreciate the challenge to expand imagination beyond condescending and reductive conceptions of it as "make-believe" while restricting the discussion to an "introduction," the imagination in this text is sometimes used merely as a synonym for "worldview" "way of seeing." Such broad applications can undermine the value of the very distinctions they seek to make. It is not always clear, for instance, whether

the “shared imagination” discussed in Chapter 2 is anything more than “common sense” or “experience” that Lewis shares with his audience and then exploits in order to be rhetorically persuasive.

Such confusion is often exacerbated by a repeated ambiguity about whether Lewis actually identifies the particular forms of the imagination under discussion or whether the authors have created their own designations. Though in either case the terms employed are clearly inspired by a vast reading of all of Lewis’s work, adjectives for the imagination are sometimes conflated with a more formal categorization, sometimes in ways that are unnecessarily misleading. For example, both the general introduction and Chapter 9 present the “generous imagination” as a negative form because “it invites us first to reify, then to personify, finally to deify” (xviii, 123). In this quotation from Lewis’s *Studies in Words*, however, the pronoun “it” clearly refers to a particular account of science and evolution, though earlier he says a “generous imagination” will likely be moved (and, I think, understandably so for Lewis) by the story it seeks to tell. In this case, creating a new term outright (such as the “embellishing imagination”) would more accurately reflect the discussion and avoid not only misattribution but the effort of having to explain why “generous” in this case is actually a negative word, when in fact what characterizes almost every other instance of the imagination is an openness to receive a reality that is other and beyond one’s own immediate perception. Another example of an uncertain connection between label and primary text (and perhaps a vestige of late revisions to the overarching scheme) appears in a discrepancy between the introduction’s description of the final chapter on Lewis’s poetry as an example of the “compelled imagination” and the actual chapter’s presentation of it as the “absorbing imagination.”

Such confusions aside, *The Surprising Imagination of C.S. Lewis* offers its readers a view from “inside” Lewis’s remarkably vibrant and expansive imagination. And Lewis fans, both old and new, will find ample opportunities to return to his work with new questions and a renewed appreciation for the vision he makes possible.

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***Approaches to Teaching Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and Other Works*, Ed. by Leslie A. Donovan. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2015), \$24.00 (paperback).**

"Tolkien in Context," the heading of the first subsection of Leslie A. Donovan's *Approaches to Teaching Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and Other Works*, highlights the main strength of this edited collection. The book will help teachers situate Tolkien's writings in their scholarly, historical, cultural, and literary contexts; and it provides suggestions for exploring how his stories of Middle-earth have been received by and adapted to different audiences. The collection also addresses instructors working in a variety of classroom environments. It will be useful in preparing for discussions and lectures; creating survey, seminar, team-taught, and online courses; and designing classroom activities, assignments, and exams. Furthermore, Donovan has made an attempt to include pieces that speak to different academic disciplines. Contributors discuss Tolkien's works in relation to literature, linguistics, history, philosophy, religious studies, and sustainability studies. The volume is, in short, noteworthy for its breadth.

I finished the book with a long list of texts to weave into my Christianity and Fantasy course. In future versions of the course, I will be able to incorporate more passages from Tolkien's letters into class discussions, assign relevant portions of *The Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth* alongside *The Lord of the Rings*, and examine with students "how adaptations of [Tolkien's] work subsequently formed the basis of the modern genre of fantasy in books and film" (Ford and Reid 214). I also found *Approaches* to be helpful in describing how Tolkien's fiction relates both to the medieval period (and Victorian medievalism) and to modernism (and with it, events surrounding World War I) (Donovan 7-8; Felsen 99; Ford and Reid 214; Schroeder 126-136; Smol 193-196). To navigate the medieval and modern aspects of Middle-earth with my students, I now plan to focus on Tolkien's concept of heroism—an approach recommended by several of the volume's contributors. Instructors interested in this approach should start by reading Liam Felsen's reflections on the "Anglo-Saxon heroic code and its relation to the *comitatus*" (98) and Jane Chance's observations about the importance of the "antiheroic hero" in Tolkien's writings (56). Such chapters will, I believe, inspire pedagogical confidence and innovation among those who teach, or are keen to teach, Tolkien.

Despite all that the book offers to readers, I wanted more from the section devoted to interdisciplinary courses. Missing here—and largely absent from the collection as a whole—are descriptions of creative writing courses and courses in the performing and visual arts. This is not to say that *Approaches* does not contain any reflections on creative writing, music composition, or filmmaking; however, throughout much of the collection, students are posi-

tioned not as artists but as readers, critics, and researchers. While there are a few exceptions to this point (Stacey 85-86; Vitullo and Jensen 212), most of the teachers in this volume focus on analyzing and interpreting creative works, not on making them. Enchantment is primarily Tolkien's power to wield.

This critique is a minor one, given all that the collection does—and does well. In addition to the strengths noted above, the book provides support to instructors confronted with questions about the value of courses on fantasy literature in general and on Tolkien's writings in particular. Taken together, contributors make a convincing argument that studying such writings is a worthwhile educational endeavor, deeply relevant to the lives of students. I especially appreciated how Nancy Enright and Anna Smol address this issue in their classes. Enright, who concludes her chapter by highlighting connections between *The Lord of the Rings* and Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, invites her students "to consider how texts like Tolkien's, in a religious context, can serve as models and perhaps even catalysts for engaging the world morally and spiritually" (176). And Smol unpacks Ted Sandyman and Samwise Gamgee's debate in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, noting, "Ted boisterously proclaims a belief only in what he can see with his own eyes....In contrast, Sam puts his faith in, and is moved deeply by, old legends" (194). She then adds, "The narrative proves Sam right, of course: Elves and other strange creatures do exist in his world, and what seems like fantasy becomes reality in this narrative. The old stories prove repeatedly in Tolkien's work that they convey valuable truths" (194).

What I appreciated most about the volume, though, is that its arguments about the value of studying Tolkien are never detached from delight. This does not mean that the authors shy away from critical readings or ignore problematic aspects of Tolkien's writings: the book directly addresses what Michael D.C. Drout calls "the hard parts of Tolkien" (231). However, all of the contributors clearly love Tolkien's works and enjoy teaching them. Such enjoyment is contagious, and I find that I am more excited than ever to return to Middle-earth with my students next semester.

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Grevel Lindop, *Charles Williams: The Third Inkling*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), \$34.95 (hardcover).

Who, exactly, was Charles Williams? With curiosity piqued by the barest outlines of his biography, casual readers, students, and scholars have sought, with varying degrees of seriousness, an answer to this question, over the seventy-plus years since Williams's death. And I freely admit: I have spent more than four decades—my entire adult life—in reading, study, and academic inquiry, looking for an answer myself.

Viewed through the lens of what might be considered to constitute success in England around the turn of the twentieth century, the life of Charles Williams (1886-1945) was disadvantaged. He lacked the material benefits afforded by inherited family wealth, a university education, and aristocratic friends. Poor eyesight and a frail constitution kept him from military service in World War I. With no family connections to rely upon, his entry-level start at the Oxford University Press came through the good offices of a friend who already worked there, and for most of his life, Williams was chronically short of money. Not a terribly auspicious set of core circumstances.

Even so, by the end of his life, this largely self-educated man had accumulated a vast *oeuvre* of published writings: introductions to collected editions of the works of a number of authors, living and dead; short reviews of popular works of detective fiction; seven "supernatural" novels; biographies of historical personages; popular histories; theological studies; literary criticism and history; plays intended for amateur theatricals; and the genre for which he himself most wanted to be remembered, poetry. Williams also left behind a corpus of unpublished writings, which consist primarily of letters to colleagues, family members, friends, and friends-who-were-more-than-friends (usually female, mostly far younger than himself). Surely, we might think, somewhere in the midst of all of these words, public and private, there must be something to reveal who Charles Williams really was! Is there? Well, maybe.

Charles Williams was a fiendishly-complex human being. Small wonder that numerous friends and students and scholars who have attempted to learn who he was, among all of these words and circumstances, have come up short.

When I was engaged in the work that eventually comprised my doctoral dissertation, *Under the Mercy: The Doctrine of the Atonement in the Novels and Theological Works of Charles Williams (1886-1945)* [Drew University, 1993], I learned through correspondence with several of Williams's surviving friends and co-workers that the Bodleian Library of Oxford University held a treasure-trove of original source materials. However, some of these materials were in files that were to be kept locked up, sealed, inaccessible to scholars until specific numbers of years following their donors' deaths.

Undeterred, and with a youthful and undiplomatic pig-headed-ness I now find embarrassing to recall, I tried to gain the permission of one of these donors either to meet personally with her, or to be allowed to read her papers at the Bodleian—requests that were summarily denied. Fortunately, there were enough unrestricted primary-source materials available to me in the Western Manuscripts Collection at the Bodleian, to which I had access during two trips to Oxford (1987 and 1992), along with published materials, to allow me to complete my dissertation. Even though I was, at the time of my defense in 1993, arguably the most knowledgeable person in the world on the subject of my dissertation, I could not claim to have made any large advances toward finding out who Charles Williams really was.

Fast-forward to 2015, when the Oxford University Press brought out *Charles Williams: The Third Inklings*, by Grevel Lindop. Much to my delight—and hopefully the delight of those who encounter this book—the author has had access to those restricted private papers at the Bodleian, along with other sources previously unavailable for study. Lindop dates the beginning of this vast project to 1998, after conversations with Anne Ridler, a former student and co-worker of Williams who was, like Lindop himself, a poet. The Acknowledgment section reads like a “Who’s Who” among survivors of Charles Williams. Dozens of individuals allowed Lindop access to their correspondence with Charles Williams; a number of those who had known Williams personally permitted Lindop to record his conversations with them and patiently assisted his research as the documents raised fresh issues. Among the many providing assistance were the staff of the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College. The Wade Center also awarded Lindop a Clyde S. Kilby Research Grant, to assist him in meeting the expenses associated with conducting research there. The sheer number of those involved in this project shows that Lindop has made a very serious effort to have as broad a knowledge-base as possible from which to draw information. The numbers also lend an authoritative voice to the finished project—as if to say that Lindop has done his homework, and then some, to discover who Charles Williams was.

Grevel Lindop is, like Williams himself, a man of diverse interests and talents, although their outward background and circumstances differ significantly. Lindop read English at Oxford University and did post-graduate research at Wadham and Wolfson Colleges in Oxford. His published works include collections of poetry and *A Literary Guide to the Lake District*. He has, in *The Third Inklings*, created a vast and magisterial study that is eminently equal to the task of presenting a narrative that balances the inherent contradictions found in the life of Charles Williams, with the achievements that form Williams’s literary legacy.

And contradictions abound. To cite just a few examples: Charles Williams was a life-long, active lay communicant of the Church of England,

but he was also part of a secret quasi-religious order whose ritual paraphernalia he retained in his office long after he ceased active membership. Though without academic credentials himself, Williams became a popular lecturer in English language and literature to Oxford undergraduates during World War II. After working out what he called a Theology of Romantic Love, describing the mystical union that exists between Christ and the church within the context of human love, Williams was involved in very strange relationships with women who were not his wife. Contradictions abound.

Other reviewers in other publications have spoken to Lindop's analysis of Williams's Arthurian poetry as being the most original contribution *The Third Inklings* brings to scholarship. However, I was particularly interested in Lindop's treatment of Williams's novels and theological works, as these reveal Williams's Doctrine of Substituted Love—incorporating what I have argued to be his unique three-tiered configuration of the classical Doctrine of the Atonement: Co-Inherence, Exchange, and Substitution. Urged by friends to put this doctrine into practical use, Williams created a group known as the Companions of the Co-Inherence. The fact that the Companions of the Co-inherence was founded just prior to England's entry into World War II is a highly original response on Williams's part to the vast uncertainties of political turmoil. In examining this group, Lindop's careful work-by-work descriptions of Williams's writings help to draw the sometimes fragmented, sometimes poorly written, but always unique, corpus together into a whole that reveals the development of a highly original polymath's understanding of classical Christian theology.

If Charles Williams is the Third Inklings, then C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien are the First and Second Inklings. Lindop discusses at some length the relationships that grew among them during the war years in Oxford. While he covers much the same ground as do Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski in their detailed study, *The Fellowship*, also published in 2015, Lindop's primary focus throughout is Williams himself. The narrative Lindop weaves is not directed upon how much light Williams may have reflected from these more famous authors, but rather, how the three of them found ways to enlighten one another. Lindop makes a convincing case that it is time to allow Inklings #3 to emerge from behind the shadows of Inklings #1 and #2. Charles Williams has much to offer as a singular and formidable voice of twentieth-century thought, in and of himself.

So: Who was Charles Williams? Grevel Lindop uncovers a wealth of clues pointing toward ways to answer that question, arising from his own quest to discover and understand the disparate fragments that somehow make up the whole of Williams's life and work. Speaking out of my personal search for Charles Williams, in the end, I have come to believe that how the individual reader answers that fundamental question for him or herself is

as much a reflection of that individual's pilgrimage in faith as it is an accumulation of facts and critical analysis. I stand in awe of the achievement this book represents. I cannot thank Grevel Lindop enough for accepting the challenge of writing *The Third Inking* and tracing, insofar as possible, the life of this admittedly strange and incontestably gifted man. Lindop has written what will surely stand as *the* biography of record of Charles Walter Stansby Williams.

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