

Book Reviews

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Stephanie L. Derrick, *The Fame of C.S. Lewis: A Controversialist's Reception in Britain and America* (Oxford University Press, 2018). \$30 (hardcover), i–viii + 232 pp.

Stephanie L. Derrick's study of the fame and reputation of C.S. Lewis in Britain and the United States is based on her Ph.D. dissertation, defended at the University of Stirling in 2013. It is not, as she herself insists, "a book of literary analysis" (181), but an attempt to account for the popularity of Lewis, or sometimes lack of it, in the historical and social context of the last sixty years on both sides of the Atlantic. An initial overview of Lewis's childhood, experiences as a student and soldier, and academic career are followed by an analysis of how his many works have been received at various times and places since their original publication, both before and after the author's death. Particular emphasis is placed on the differences between the way Lewis has been and is perceived in the United Kingdom and the rather less critical reception he has received in the United States, particularly among Evangelical Christians. Derrick's approach to Lewis may almost be seen as a case study for the question: "How is renown made and kept?" (5).

The work is divided into five chapters of more or less equal length. After an introduction which makes Derrick's intentions clear, the first chapter deals extensively with the reasons Lewis chose to write for the general public instead of the academic elite—although it does not address the role of the Lewis's conversion to Christianity played in his decision to abandon the rather obscure, intellectual poetry he had previously published and to concentrate on much clearer, comprehensible prose. The second chapter explores the mixed reception given to Lewis's works by his intellectual, British contemporaries, while chapter three looks at the general reader during Lewis's lifetime. The fourth chapter, perhaps the one with the most original material, deals with the marketing of Lewis's work after his death and the creation of his posthumous reputation in a transatlantic context. The final chapter looks at conflicts over his legacy and also how the cultural changes that have taken place in Britain and America have influenced the way Lewis is perceived. Finally, a substantial conclusion provides further thoughts on the significance of the fame of Lewis.

Highlights include the section on Puffin Books and the role of Kaye Webb in turning *The Chronicles of Narnia* into bestselling children's classics read in almost every British primary school (135–39). Equally interesting are the pages on the role of Walter Hooper and the C.S. Lewis Estate in marketing

his work (110–15) and reflections in the conclusion on Lewis's reception among British Christians since 2000 (192–99), especially the quotations from several current British or transatlantic Evangelical leaders. Likewise, the statements that the British population is much smaller than the American and that the intellectual elite in Britain in Lewis's day all knew each other may be obvious, but have not previously been considered with regard to the reception of Lewis's work and help to explain several discrepancies.

However, there are a few quibbles. It seems strange to refer to an author who was eleven when the Edwardian era ended as "an Edwardian reader and critic" (13) and unusual to include Swinburne and the Decadents among Lewis's literary influences, at any rate after his conversion, considering his criticism of them and his dislike of their unchristian sentiments.¹ It is also misleading to state that Lewis "did not type, drive, or go to the cinema" (29), when the first two omissions were the result of his extreme physical clumsiness and the absence of joints in his thumbs. He is known to have seen at least Walt Disney's *Snow White* in January 1939.

Among Derrick's excellent presentation of the British intellectual elite's criticisms of Lewis, there seems to be little about why ordinary people in Britain were so enthusiastic about him. Indeed, she claims that "his apologetics saw a sharp decline from the 1960s" (193) and that it was "not a common pattern" for British Lewis fans to be "proactive about promoting his work" (106). Although this may well have been the case among the academic elite and the influential, research carried out for my own book on the fame of Lewis shows that the general population and ordinary Christians continued to read and recommend him. John Finney's *Finding Faith Today* (1992) notes that in the previous thirty years "the writings of C.S. Lewis" were the "most influential books" (65) in bringing people to the Christian faith. Equally, a survey conducted among British people in the mid-1990s showed that over 75% had heard of Lewis and over 60% had read at least one of his books, which would certainly not be the case today. It is also perhaps an exaggeration to state that Lewis enthusiasts in Britain "tend to be Evangelicals" (194), although this may be increasingly the case at present. In the last quarter of the 20th century, Walter Hooper with his High Church and Roman Catholic friends, the Oxford C.S. Lewis Society, William Grey at Chichester (surprisingly absent from the bibliography), Archbishop Rowan Williams, Bishop Richard Harries, and a selection of other definitely non-Evangelical Anglican clerics all promoted Lewis's writings and wrote about him themselves.

1. Letter from Lewis to his father, 13 February 1915: "I have been reading this week a book by Swinburne from the Library, a 'Study on Shakespeare'. This is my first experience of his prose, and I think I shall make it the last." In a letter to Laurence Whistler about the authors he would allow in a literary journal, Lewis stated that he would accept "Hardy (but not Oscar Wilde)."

This well-researched book provides much interesting material, some of it completely new, on Lewis and his reputation of both sides of the Atlantic. Although some of Derrick's points are open to debate and some may wonder if it is possible to analyse Lewis's fame without considering literary issues at all, this work provides helpful analysis of the non-literary factors involved in turning Lewis into the huge bestseller he became in his lifetime and still is today.

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