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Book Reviews

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Abstract

The C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia. Foreword by Christopher Mitchell. Ed. Jeffrey D. Schultz and John G. West. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers. Vol. 3. Ed. Barbara Reynolds. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

Roverandom. Tolkien, J. R. R. Ed. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

Book Reviews

The C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia. Foreword by Christopher Mitchell.
Ed. Jeffrey D. Schultz and John G. West. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
464pp. ISBN 0310-21538-2

A major achievement, essential for every serious collection of works in the field of Lewis studies, this strong, richly varied (and richly flavored) assembly of brief essays by 43 contributors, many of them major students of Lewis's works, offers hours (weeks, actually) of significant, delightful, and occasionally trenchant comment, explication, analysis, evaluation, and celebration.

With the exception of John Bremer's remarkably explicit and genuinely riveting 56-page biography of Lewis, with which the volume begins, the entire contents are arranged alphabetically. An index reiterates the contents, listed in the categories of: Bibliographical Essay; The Works of C. S. Lewis (books, articles, book reviews, poems, and letters); Concepts, Places, People, and Themes.

The essays are, with only occasional wobbles, remarkably good, not only useful, but engaging, many in the very specific and characteristic tone of their particular authors. Happily, the *Chronicles of Narnia* are discussed book by book (in alphabetical order, which tends to isolate the individual volumes), by the most appropriate of all scholars for this task, Paul F. Ford. He accomplishes his contribution with clarity, generosity, accuracy, and wisdom. He graciously draws in part upon his fellow and equally insightful scholar, Doris T. Myers, whose essay "The Compleat Anglican: Spiritual Style in the *Chronicles of Narnia*" (*Anglican Theological Review* 66 [April 1984]: 148-60) should be for all non-Anglican readers essential reading on the *Chronicles* in particular and Lewis in general.

The three volumes *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength* are recounted (with less analysis) by Thomas Howard, in his characteristically boisterous and declamatory style, including a description of Jane Studdock which is far more condescending than what Lewis actually wrote.

But all his evaluations have a swashbuckling tone, so those who have read Howard's many previous writings cannot pretend to be surprised. In contrast, *Till We Have Faces* is given a luminous (and highly illuminating) reading by Charles A. Huttar, whose comment, "sacrifice becomes a central motif in the novel" (405), reaches the heart of this great novel's meaning.

Since this encyclopedia contains entries on not only everything Lewis wrote but also on people, places, concepts, and themes, discussion of them all in a single review would burst the binding of *Mythlore*. Among them, however, the best essay on Lewis's importance is M. D. Aeschliman's entry on "Modernity," which pays due tribute to Lewis's prophetic work *The Abolition of Man*: "[It] is a revealing and gratifying fact, and one that vindicates Lewis's works as an aid to the humane future for which we should strive that he is still so widely read by so many people in so many walks of life" (283). Again, James Prothero's entry on "Redemption is one of the finest in the encyclopedia, combining Lewis's thoughts on Hell, the Atonement, and the relation of the redemption of humanity to "the rest of creation" (35).

Old and dear friends of *Mythlore* also make strong contributions, including Joe R. Christopher, Diana Pavlac Glyer, and Kathryn Lindskoog. I would note that contributors to this volume frequently and favourably include Lindskoog's findings and questionings of the validity of certain purported (and posthumously published) works, stating her arguments accurately and respectfully, which is a nice change from the vituperations so regrettably present in certain other sources.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers. Vol. 3. Ed. Barbara Reynolds. Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 1998. 539pp. ISBN 0-95180-05-1

In its passion of expression, and in its chief matter, Miss Sayers's encounter with *The Divine Comedy*, this third volume of her letters is the most exciting and moving to date. Her years as a detective novelist are documented in Volume 1, and her efforts to bring *The Man Born to Be King* to fruition in Volume 2. So, now, as the exuberant letters she wrote to Charles Williams about Dante appear in extensive form for the first time, we are able to follow her in her own words as she encounters the greatest mythopoeic writer of all time.

Her reading of Dante, as Barbara Reynolds says, “was the beginning of a cultural event which was to change awareness of Dante in the English-speaking world” (45). That is, her translation for Penguin Books into mid-twentieth century English made Dante broadly and clearly accessible. In addition, her play *The Just Vengeance*, probably her most profound work, is discussed in detail, not only as regards its content, but the details of its production. Miss Sayers states, not entirely unseriously, that “nobody can give an intelligent opinion of the play without having undergone the tremendous intellectual discipline of reading the *Divine Comedy*” (205).

Of her taking up the task of translating Dante, she reported, “I frequently find myself translating Dante in my head, while I peel potatoes with my hand” (468). This volume covers the late World War II and early post-World War II privations, fears, and inconveniences, which included not only severe rationing, but the very real likelihood of death by bombing. She was, as well, living through the last years of her increasingly ailing husband, while also still sending a regular allowance to her son, even though he married during this period. Touching as well as humorous aspects of her private life add poignancy and genuine charm to the words of a professional author who was also a wife and mother.

A marvelous addition to her account is the inclusion of lovely reproductions (some in color) of the costume designs for the production of *The Just Vengeance* and of the renewed *The Zeal of Thy House*. One of her admirers rightly called her “our ecclesiastical Amazon” (34). The number of projects she undertook justify this epithet, although, had she not been so prolific, she might have lived to complete her translation of the *Commedia*. (On the other hand, we might not have had the benefit of Barbara Reynolds’ own translation, or perhaps, of her impeccable scholarship in perpetuating Miss Sayers’ legacy.) Barbara Reynolds says of *The Just Vengeance* that “more than any other of her works, it is an expression of her personal life” (188).

Sayers’ astonishing letters to Charles Williams are accompanied by additional letters to and about C. S. Lewis; for readers of *Mythlore*, this volume of *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers* offers insights into both Williams and Lewis which make the collection a very welcome source of insight. In one place, she says frankly of Lewis, “I do admit he is apt to write shocking nonsense about women and marriage” (375). She is, of course, entirely correct, but we, the readers, know, as Sayers could not, that the books Lewis published after her

death rectified this tendency to shocking nonsense, through the influence (as many believe) of a wife who a match in intensity, wisdom, and Christian zeal not only for Lewis, but also for Sayers herself! In another place, she says of Lewis: "He is God's terrier" (315), which is much better than being "God's Trombone."

As for her long dormant mystery writing, which she never again took up except for passing references, she refers to it as "all this old stuff" now behind her (454). But she has not forgotten its fundamental point: "Possibly the most Christian thing about popular literature is the persistent looking after the 'happy ending'" (5). One might note that she had left behind mystery novels in the process of taking up mystery plays, that is, plays in the great tradition of medieval Europe and particularly England; *The Just Vengeance*, like *The Divine Comedy*, has a very happy ending indeed.

It is the unabashed wholeheartedness of Sayers that remains as the book closes, leaving us eager for Volume 4, even though it will end, as all such collections must, with her death. After all, we can always start at the beginning and read the whole sequence again and again, just as we do the Lord Peter stories and the *Commedia*, and C. S. Lewis, and Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien, and

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Tolkien, J. R. R. *Roverandom*. Ed. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond. London: HarperCollins, 1998. xxii, 106pp. ISBN 0-262-103539

Certainly the most endearing of Tolkien's short works, whether for young readers or adults (*Roverandom* is clearly a children's story), this witty and charming work, written circa 1925, is illustrated by artwork from Tolkien himself, and is exquisitely and usefully annotated by Scull and Hammond. Like many great children's tales, it delights an adult reader with its wit and wordplay. A potent and delicious example is provided by Tolkien's description of the moon's environment, in a jeweled caprice of literary wit as perfect as a Faberge egg:

What sounds there were, were made chiefly by the plants. The flowers—the whitebells, the fairbells, and the silverbells, the tinklebells, and the ringaroses; the rhymeroyals and the pennywhistles, . . . made tunes all day long. And the feather-grasses and the ferns-fairy

fiddlestrings, polyphonies, and brasstongues, and the cracken in the woods. . . kept up the music, softly, even in the night. In fact there was always a faint thin music going on. (27-28)

Roverandom is a miniature masterpiece, funny, clever, witty, charming, and exquisitely detailed. At greater length it might have cloyed, even annoyed. But Tolkien was a master of proportion, and just as *The Lord of the Rings* is the perfect length, not a word too long for its matter, so here, in this perfect miniature, exactly befitting its little dog made even littler by magic. Christian Scull and Wayne G. Hammond are to be thanked and praised for their altogether delicious and entirely useful scholarship; their introduction and endnotes are almost as much fun to read as the book, which I highly recommend.

Nancy-Lou Patterson