Reviews

Nancy-Lou Patterson

George Colvin

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Reviews

Abstract


The Taste for the Other - The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis. Gilbert Meilaender. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.


VISION AND OPINION: A LIBRARIAN'S LOOK AT FANTASY


Some of my best friends are librarians. Therefore, like other people, some of whose best friends are members of other minority groups, I shall indulge in a stereotype. The Hills of Faraway suffers from all the most appealing virtues and all the most annoying vices that prejudiced minds can attribute with librarians. First, the virtues: the book consists of a long, generally valuable essay about fantasy and a compendious list of nineteenth and twentieth century fantasies including many which were new to me. I certainly do not claim encyclopaedic knowledge of modern fantasy but I do think that even other bibliographers will find a few new titles here. What bothers me is the eccentric selection of what they will not find. How in the world can a bibliography of fantasy be compiled without Alice or Dracula?

Dracula is absent, apparently, because in a horror story, the monsters are "not persons, but a prop." But Dracula is supremely a person. All who meet him are changed. His ultimate defeat is comparable to that of Sauron, bought at a great price. Alice is absent, Waggoner says, because her story is about dream-experience, and "drama is not vision, and a dream-story is not fantasy." (p. 11) If this is true, why is Phantastes included? Because, Waggoner explains, "the dream-frame is merely a clumsy device about which the author "promptly forgets." (p. 11) Ellisons based on arguments like these tend to become tedious and perverse.

In fantasy the unconscious elements, which are present in (and provide the central meanings of) all literature, appear overtly and in their least modified and most evident form. It is their nature, above all, to be numinous. This element Waggoner has grasped, and it is a credit to her intuitive talents that she has done so, for many of her arguments go against these instincts. She is burdened by a truly animus-ridden tendency to disapprove of things. And what she disapproves she will not allow entry to the category of fantasy. Unless she approves: she all but does handstands to overcome the racist motifs in the Doctor Dolittle stories. She seems to think that what she does not like ought not to be part of fantasy. But the unconscious is quite as full of infernal as it is of supernal entitles, and a story whose whole purpose is to parade monsters is none-theless a fantasy. Waggoner can devote most of her description of The Magician's Nephew to sympathizing with Uncle Androcles! (Readers should consult G. F. Ellwood's study of the magus theme in this work for a more balanced approach to the subject: see "A High and Lonely Destiny," Mythicon I Proceedings, 1971.)

The dream is in fact our closest and most universal door to the unconscious. Nearly all cultures have known what our psychologists have but recently discovered. Modern fantasy literature is a true child of the Romantic Movement. It is a liminal form of literature which explores the boundary between conscious life (so-called "realist" literature) and the unconscious, whether as dreams, tales, myths, comedies, epics, or what-have-you. A neat classification—an attempt to "enunciate and clarify the principles that define fantasy as a form" as Waggoner hopes she has been able to do (p. vi) is ultimately impossible. Ian Fleming's Dr. No is a fantasy, in which an evil mage lives on a terrible island to which a brave hero goes, his anima hanging on his arm, to confront non-being face-to-face. There he encounters a dragon, a descent into hell, and a sea-monster, emerging triumphant out of the depths. And so on.

It is impossible in a short review to discuss the multitude of tiny infelicities from which this book suffers. A few, however, cannot be resisted. C.S. Lewis, for instance, was not introduced to Chesterton's writings by Charles Williams (p. 34). Lewis met Chesterton's writings long before he met Williams: in Chapter XIV of Surprised by Joy, Lewis describes how in "the summer of 1922" he was dismayed to find that "all the books were beginning to turn against me" (in his non-Christian position)—Macdonald, Chesterton, Spenser, Milton, Langland, Donne, Browne, Herbert—as well as Plato, Aeschyus, and Virgil! Lewis met Williams in 1936 after writing him a letter complimenting The Place of the Lion (Humphrey Carpenter, The Inklings, London: Allen and Unwyn, 1978, pp. 99-100).

Again, Madeleine L'Engle's works are neither "derivative" (p. 35) nor "embarrassing" (p. 36) but, rather, splendid explosions of the eternally numerous, in terms of late twentieth century imagery. (For a superb review of the four fantasy novels of L'Engle, including A Swiftly Tilting Planet, see David A. Leeming's review in Parabola, Vol. 11, No. 4 (November, 1978), pp. 126-130.) And Tim Kirk's paintings are not "amateurish" (p. 72) but delightful and personal visions. The inclusion of fantasy illustration was a good idea, but art criticism (let alone art history) is clearly not Waggoner's forte.

On the other hand Waggoner can be brilliantly accurate on matters often neglected elsewhere: her appreciation of George MacDonald is admirably expressed and her distaste for Willy Wonka well-deserved and well said. Waggoner's book is not in the same ball-park, not even in the same league (or perhaps I should say not in the same orbit, not even in the same galaxy) with other works of bibliographic scholarship, like C.S. Lewis: An Annotated Checklist, by Christopher and Ostling, or Charles W.S. Williams: A Checklist, by Glenn, previously discussed by this reviewer. Rather it is a walk down the aisles of a library in the company of a quirky but learned lady whose opinions (if eccentric) are based on a genuine effort to organize and contemplate what, ultimately, can be neither categorized nor controlled, for it is an outpouring of the human spirit, and only sometimes a carefully created alternative world, far beyond the capacity of any librarian or scholar to hold between the pages of a book.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

WHIMSICAL AND WEIGHTY


The format, title, cover design, and Foreword by William Griffin all indicate clearly that this book is intended as a companion volume to C.S. Lewis, The Joyful Christian (127 Readings) published in 1977 by MacMillan. It would be nice to think that a selection of Charles Williams' writings might be forthcoming under the title of, say, The Mystical Christian, to complete the set. That would require a little more work than The Whimsical Christian, which already existed as a selection of essays published in 1941 under the title as Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World. There are a few
differences which I have detected between the Eerdmans (1969) and MacMillan's (1978) editions. One is the loss of a delightful painting, previously published in colour, which had illustrated "Selections from the Pantheon Papers." The second is the photographic portrait of Sayers which formed a frontispiece. The most significant omission is the original Introduction by Roderick Jellem, who selected the essays from their sources in previous collections--Unpopular Opinions (1947), Creed or Chaos (1949), The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement (1963), and various issues of Punch Magazine, and wrote a witty and erudite essay to explain and interpret his selections. Jellem's choices are an excellent sampler and it is to Griffin's credit that he has re-issued them. His Foreword published in 1978 is short but attractive, and serves to direct the reader who by this time probably needs less introduction to Sayers than was the case ten years ago.

The collection gives us Sayers in all her moods, and her company is both delightful and stimulating. The essays range from deft satire to powerful polemics to entrancing literary commentary. She could write about the most abstruse matters with such forthright language and such engaging and relevant wit that we feel included, enlightened, and entertained all at the same time.

A test of a work's qualities (I don't say quality) might be whether or not one returns to it; and I recently found myself hunting out Sayers' delicious essay, "The Other Six Deadly Sins," in connection with an article I was preparing. Yes, there it was, both learned and trenchant, exactly what I needed to know. And then I had to stop and leaf through other favourites--

But the title, The Whimsical Christian, appealing as it may be, with its allusion to Lord Peter Wimsey, will do for all these forceful essays. Of course, there is humour in the collection: Sayers can send up modern times in her "Pantheon Papers" Calendar, beginning with "ADVERTISEMENTMENT, a season of solemn preparation leading up to the Birth of Science...Then comes the great equinoctial Feast of the Enlightenment, whose season ends on Civilization Sunday..." (p. 3) And her study of "The Dates in The Red-Heads League" is exquisitely satirical not only of Biblical criticism or every sort of academic trivia, but of all people who insist on a fundamentalist or literalist reading of fantasy.

Most of the essays are, in words Sayers herself quotes in "Strong Meat," definitely the "food of the full-grown." The full force of her considerable personality propels "The Dogma is the Drama," as she sets out expected answers to "a short examination paper on the question of religion," and finds answers like this definition of the Atonement: "God wanted to damn everybody, but his vindictive sadism was sated by the crucifixion of his own Son, who was quite innocent, and therefore, a particularly attractive victim," and then provides her own smashing retort, "It is the dogma that is the drama--not beautiful phrases, nor comforting sentiments, nor vague aspirations to loving-kindness and uplift, nor the promise of something nice after death--but the terrifying assertion that the same God who made the world, lived in the world and passed through the grave and the gate of death."

Strong meat, indeed. And Sayers can be just as direct in literary criticism: she writes, "It is notorious that one of the great difficulties about writing a book or play about the Devil is to prevent that character from stealing the show," and proceeds to set aside Goethe, Marlowe, and Milton, leaving Dante as "the greatest poet, the most exact theologian, the most adult intellect of all," in whose masterpiece, "Down and proceeds to set aside Goethe, Marlowe, and Milton, leaving Dante as "the greatest poet, the most exact theologian, the most adult intellect of all," in whose masterpiece, "Down

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...Nancy - Lou Patterson
TREADING THE ROAD: 
THE CHRISTIAN ETHICS 
OF C.S. LEWIS


Carefully, clearly, Gilbert Meilaender has woven together a precise and sympathetic presentation of what C.S. Lewis actually said about ethics, about the way a Christian (or any person, anywhere) must try to live. The title describes in brief that essential movement away from oneself (not the Jungian Self) towards neighbour and God, the Other of the title. Human life is for Lewis a matter of community. This is not the narrow world-escrowing way of the puritan but the open, accepting Way of the pilgrim, who meets the Creation—animal, vegetable, mineral—with delight. When Lewis quotes, again and again, what Meilaender says was his favourite Biblical phrase: "He who loses his life will save it," he means this kind of loving openness, acceptance, willingness to be met by, willingness to be hurt by, the reality around us.

Perhaps some of the refreshing and luminous tone of the arguments is due to the use of extensive quotations: Meilaender gives more than two hundred substantial and well-chosen passages taken from some fifteen of Lewis' books. The Greeks were concerned with the way in which moral precepts might be taught, and concluded that they were best passed on by contact with people who lived exemplary lives: morality in practice is the best teacher. Meilaender's perception that the Narnian Chronicles offer an excellent school of morality—the company, that is, of people trying to follow this Way—is one of his major contributions to an understanding of Lewis' teaching. For in the end the teachings are, primarily, not Lewis' own. They are, rather Lewis' efforts to understand the teachings of Christianity.

Meilaender's sophisticated knowledge of the disciplines of ethics and philosophy gives him the tools to understand Lewis, to clarify (and, in some cases, to argue gently, courteously, and most effectively with) Lewis' ethical concepts. Lewis was an Augustinian, Meilaender says. St. Augustine is a major source of a very important element in Christian thought and much that one could call "Northern Ireland Anglican" in Lewis can be subsumed under the name Augustinian. Meilaender explicates with elegance and specificity the concept of Purgatory which Lewis held and to which he gave so much imaginative vigour. And he neatly skewers Lewis' predilection for Heirarchy, including that of husband over wife, without any attempt to blunt or mitigate it. Refutation is not necessary in such matters. A flowering from within, by the ever-renewing action of the Holy Spirit (one might say) has already opened Christianity well beyond Lewis' incomplete doctrine of the priesthood (and the Divinity) as an exclusively male institution.

Lewis quoted St. Augustine in the last chapter of Surprised by Joy, which tells of the precise moment of his conversion: "For it is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded ridge, and another to tread the road that leads to it." After conversion, a Christian must live the rest of his or her life following the pilgrim's path. The company is good (think of Shasta on the foggy mountain pass to his homeland Narnia, with the Lion padding invisibly at his side) even if the path is steep. It is of this path that Lewis chose to write. And he shows us, following the promises of his faith, that the end is continuing travel "further up and further in" where everything good that was lost in earthly life is found again, even more crystalline and real than before.

This conception of reality is not shared by everybody, and those who do not share it will not be converted to it by Meilaender's book (which is not, after all, a work of apologetics, but a scholar's study of one sustained vision of man in society). But anyone who reads The Taste for the Other will certainly be shown, with clarity, the world that Lewis saw and shows us. That makes this a very good book indeed.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

SISTERHOOD 
AND STRAW BEDDING


In the warm spring of 1953 when I was confirmed as one of many post-war collegiate converts to Christianity in general and Anglicanism in particular, the first friend I made in the Church (besides the priest) was a jolly, hearty, intelligent, and witty girl who became (and still is) an Anglican nun, Sister Christopher of the Order of St. Anne. And the first book she pressed into my hands, saying "You must read this," was Creed or Chaos by Dorothy L. Sayers.

That's the way one feels about one's closest companions—one's favourite writers—a sense of personal relationship, of the participation of these writers in one's personal life. It is no good insisting, as C.S. Lewis did, that the writer and the writing ought to be separated. The writer's voice is as familiar as the voice of one's dearest friends. In the case of Dorothy L. Sayers, there is a special reason for this. In her personal and professional life, she was an excellent friend to a number of women who were her teachers, school-mates, lifelong acquaintances, secretaries, and literary collaborators.

It is Alzina Stone Dale's particular contribution in her charmingly written, serenely balanced, and profoundly Christian biography of Dorothy L. Sayers, to have brought out this aspect of sisterhood in Dorothy L. Sayers' life. So much has been made of the friendship of men: one almost grows tired of the masculine friendships of the Inklings, with their ritualized, even self-congratulatory, male companionship. Their story (well told by a number of writers) sometimes seems to imply that such relationships might not be possible among women. Dale's biography of Sayers shows us otherwise, not by feminist declaration, but by telling the story, showing the truth.

In Maker and Craftsman, which has been called an "excellent junior biography" by the Dorothy L. Sayers Society Bulletin No. 21 (1979), Alzina Stone Dale has accomplished a remarkable feat. She has written within the strict limitations of language and expression of ideas required for young readers, and has made her account vivid, full, and resonant with meaning. C. S. Lewis wrote to tell clergy that if they couldn't say something in the vernacular they probably didn't understand it, and Dale passes that test admirably. Her explanations of the institutions and usages of the place, period, and culture of Sayers' life, are at once unobtrusive and genuinely helpful. I would question only her use of the word "minister" for priest in referring to Anglican clergy. But she is writing for a predominantly Protestant audience and that is probably the reason for her choice.

She has written openly and humanely about Sayers' family life, telling us new information about her son Anthony Fleming, who has become familiar to us as the inheritor of Sayers' copyright and who also inherited, Dale tells us, his mother's scholarly mind and capacity for scholastic accomplishments. Sayers' girlhood education by her father, her school days, her brilliantly successful Oxford education, her lifelong friendships, her romantic if rueful marriage, and her professional accomplishments are detailed, showing us a splendidly individualistic human being who participated
fully in the culture of her time. Dale writes of Sayers' literary activities, from advertising copywriting to poetry to detective fiction to drama for stage and radio to apologetics to translation of The Divine Comedy, in such a way as to intrigue the reader and invite further exploration: this is an entirely desirable and suitable approach.

The task of writing a detailed literary biography has been taken up by Ralph E. Hone, whose Dorothy L. Sayers, a Literary Biography, is forthcoming from Kent State University Press, and by Margaret Hannay's collection of various authors in As Her Whimsey Took Her: Critical Essays on the Works of Dorothy L. Sayers from the same press: I am indebted to Joe R. Christopher for details of the above bibliographic information. Previous studies of Sayers include Janet Hitchman's biography, Such a Strange Lady (London: New English Library, 1975) which I reviewed in Mythprint (November, 1975), Vol. 12, No. 5, p. 4, and Robert B. Harmon and Margaret A. Burger's An Annotated Guide to the Works of Dorothy L. Sayers (New York: Garland Publishers, 1977) which was reviewed by Joe R. Christopher in Mythlore, Number 17 (May, 1978), Vol. 5, No. 1. pp. 43-44. Readers may also want to refer to The Sayers Review (write to Christe McMenomy, 3138 Sawtelle Blvd., #4, Los Angeles, CA 90066 USA for subscriptions and back copies) for a number of excellent essays.

On the shelf beside these works (and their future companions), Alizina Stone Dale's Maker and Craftsmen will find a respected place. There is a certain humility required to write a "junior" work, and this Dale shares with Sayers, for among her most compelling statements of Christian teaching is Dorothy L. Sayers' composition for an Advent Calendar (which I had the delight of using for a long-ago Advent), published as The Days of Christ's Coming (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960) with exquisite illustrations by Fritz Wegner. In this jewel of children's writing, the innkeeper tells the pregnant Mary and anxious Joseph, "Now then!...Be off, or I'll set the dog on you," and Mary says to a kindly innkeeper's wife, on being shown the stable, "Nothing could be better...I am sure we shall manage beautifully." In these passages we have Dorotog L. Sayers' own voice, at once brusquely impatient of interruption, and comfortably competent in the fact of life's oxen, asses, and straw bedding. Sayers once asked, "Are Women Human?" and answered herself in a delicious essay. The present biography has presented Dorothy Leigh Sayers as fully comfortably competent in the fact of life's oxen, asses, and straw bedding. Sayers clearly has got hold of a good thing. It is the most recent book in her series on the world of Pern, and the end is not yet. This news will not disappoint her numerous fans. Nor will this book, which is a very good bit of work.

Dragondrums tells the adventures of a teenage apprentice on the message drums named Plemur. He was assigned to the drums after his voice change at puberty made him ineligible for the Harper Craft hall choir. His swiftness in learning quickly brought him to the attention of Masterharper Robinton and Masterharper Journeysman Nenolly (heroine of other books in the series). It also earned him the hatred of Pies and his parents, who were both highly skilled messengers. They led him on to involve himself rather more deeply than anyone intended in secret political missions for Master Robinton. However, having to do with the exiled Old Ones and the dying Lord Holder Meron.

Though it is largely a tale of adolescence, Dragondrums has some sections with a more adult outlook. The coldblooded blackmailling of Meron by Master Robinton, for example, is a bit of political action of which Machiavelli might have been proud. The scenes painting, too, is done with considerable artistry. Dragondrums is a good companion to McCaffrey's previous works.

An Introduction to Elvish, edited by Jim Allan and representing the toll of many members of the Mythopoeic Linguistic Fellowship (MLF), is a book of quite another type. Almost since the publication of The Lord of the Rings, people with a linguistic bent have pored over and worked out the languages of Middle Earth and have written beautiful Elvish dialects. The several numbers of Parma Eldalamberon, the journal of the semi-independent MLF, are perhaps the principal repository of this lore or were until An Introduction to Elvish was published. These exact scholarship and obviously great skill evident throughout the book is astounding, particularly considering that the work itself is purely in fun a game in the highest sense of that term.

The book actually is a collection of articles, most of which come from Parma Eldalamberon, or a private publication by Jim Allan called Tolkien Language Notes. The titles of some of these articles, all fully worked out in the text, show the complexity and care involved: "Quenya Grammar and Dictionary," by Jim Allan; "Proto-Elbasin Vowels: A Comparative Survey," by Chris Gilson and Bill Welden; "An Etymological Excursion Among the Shire Folk," by Paula Harmon; and "A Survey of the English-Tengwar Orthographies," by Laurence J. Kring.

As this list shows, the book is not limited to Elvish, nor is its treatment even of Elvish limited to the spoken word. Indeed, at various places in An Introduction to Elvish one can find all sorts of information: translational "dictionaries" for all Elvish words, including suffixes and prefixes and roots, from Elvish to English and from English to Elvish; a discussion of the sources of the names of Tolkien's characters, including the hobbits; a provocative comparison between the calendar of Rivendell and the French Revolutionary calendar; an original poem in Qenya; and a comparison between Tolkien's orthography for Elvish, the tengwar, and a surprisingly similar orthography for a new language published in 1647. Though some of these discussions use terms and symbols easily comprehended only by linguists, much of the material can be understood by students and many ordinary readers of Tolkien's works. The depth of content is a powerful if supererogatory tribute to the genius of the inventor of the languages so lovingly dissected here.

An Introduction to Elvish does have one important weakness: it does not cover the material published in The Silmarillion--primarily, as Jim
was finery and her weapons charm and guile against her enemy, whom she beheaded while he was dead. She is also dependent on her cousin for her intention was solely to act on behalf of her nation—but she is objective as well—Deborah of Scriptural fame. A figure whose adventure is a struggle to gain or regain initiative, and thus should be classed as a consort rather than a virgin. Her armor is more evolved than Inanna. She is a wife and a "mother to end as consorts, and children's stories.

An occasional other objective female adventurer comes to mind from the literature of myth, such as the Hindu demon slayer Durga. But compared to male heroes, they are few. The only kinds of literature in which they abound are formula gothic novels, where they have a decided tendency to end as consorts, and children's stories.

The subjective adventurers of myth, those who are profoundly committed to a spouse, lover or child and whose adventure is a struggle to gain or regain the beloved, are not usually consorts in the sense of auxiliaries. Apuleius's Psyche perhaps comes closest; she rebels against the restrictions imposed on her when she lights the lamp, but her several quests are a submission to the consequent punishment by Aphrodite.

The fertility and mystery goddesses are often subjective adventurers, and more virgin than consort. Isis, on quest for the severed parts of her spouse, is the central and moving figure of the pair (or family); Ishtar seeks and finally restores Tammuz, Cybele Attis, and Anath or Ashtoreth, Baal. None of them are consorts; all are usual or take leadership in the relationship. Desmer in her search for Persephone shows basically the same pattern.

One may hope, however, to be spared this labor through the publication in future of a revised edition of The Silmarillion.

To move from myth to the fantasies of our three authors: Tolkien presents us with some anomalous figures. Eowyn has the makings of an objective adventurer; she chafes at restrictions from the very beginning, and wants to fight the enemies of Rohan. Yet when she finally does go to battle and slays the Nazgul lord, she is motivated chiefly by a thwarted love become a deathwish. Betrothed to Faramir, though not strictly an auxiliary she clearly lacks the one-in-herself quality of the virgin.

Luthien is remarkable both in the completely balanced relationship with Beren, and in the shared nature of the adventure. She emphatically rejects the shelter he would have kept her in while he went on quest to Thangorodrim for the Silmaril. Both Beren and Luthien are subjective in that he goes forth to win her bride-price, and she to rescue him from Sauron, yet their adventure is a joint battle against a universal foe.

Charles Williams has several adventuring female characters, Chloe, Pauline and Nancy among them. In contrast to Eowyn and Luthien they are obviously people rather than archetypal figures. Sybil, however, comes close to being pure archetype. She is the most conspicuous example both of the virgin status (Henry compares her to the zodiacal Virgo) and of objective motivation; she rescues Lothair because he needs rescuing, not from any passionate attachment. She is an embodiment of the Fool, sovereign and supremely balanced.

Lewis has no developed female figure comparable to Sybil or Luthien (though the Narnia children are potentially such). Orual appears to outsiders to be the Virgin, but her unhappiness and the destructive effect she has on her sisters and Barda show that she is far from being one-in-herself. Given Lewis' view of the true Feminine as essentially receptive, it is no surprise that he did not create such a figure. Consort figures he does have, of course—Jane and Tindil—who have adventures, in the course of which they learn that their truest freedom lies in submission.