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***The Faun's Bookshelf: C.S. Lewis on Why Myth Matters* by Charlie Starr**

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The Faun's Bookshelf: C.S. Lewis on Why Myth Matters by Charlie Starr

Phantastes from the 1800s and 1900s as “insight on the reading tastes at a particular time in history” (199). Appendix C compiles several excerpts of literature that influenced MacDonald, such as Edmund Spenser’s *The Fairie Queene* and writings by Novalis and William Blake. The reprinted short stories that had a shadow character in them (similar to the shadow figure and symbolism in *Phantastes*) were especially of interest to read. The fourth appendix addresses realism in the nineteenth century with excerpts of representative texts from the time, and while examples can be helpful to contrast realism with fantasy, the selection sometimes seemed to be excessive (with three by Charles Dickens, for instance). The appendix includes parts of two essays by MacDonald about imagination (published in *A Dish of Orts*) which will be familiar to MacDonald scholars. The last appendix is visually interesting with the illustrations by Arthur Hughes for the 1905 edition of *Phantastes* with its preface by MacDonald’s son Greville, along with an analysis by Jan Susina of the illustrations.

Pennington and McGillis conclude their annotated edition with the sections “Select Bibliography” and “Other Books of Interest” for additional reading and research. Although the book is a scholarly edition, this does not prevent the general reader from enjoying it as well, and this makes the text all the more valuable as an introduction to MacDonald due to its thoroughness and reasonable cost. The book is also a good teaching resource and model for others possibly interested in producing an annotated edition of another text. For those interested in the subject matter, this particular edition with its thoughtful selection of texts and numerous illustrations would be a nice addition to any reader’s or library’s collection.

—Tiffany Brooke Martin



THE FAUN’S BOOKSHELF: C.S. LEWIS ON WHY MYTH MATTERS.
 Charlie W. Starr. Kent OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2018. 204 p. 9781606353493.
 \$16.95.

AS MOVIES GO, THE FILM VERSION OF *PRINCE CASPIAN* was quite well done. Although I did not approve of many of the changes, I was impressed by the screenwriter’s success at taking a novel that does not introduce its title character until chapter four and then rambles through a four-chapter flashback into a taut narrative with a firm beginning, middle, and end. And yet, for all its virtues, the movie leaves out three elements of the novel that are not only vital to Lewis’s thematic structure but that would have made for great cinema.

First, the film turns Uncle Miraz into a simple tyrant in search of power. In the novel, Miraz has just as much in common with Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens as he does with Hitler or Stalin. Miraz wants more than political control; he wants to eliminate—a postmodernist would say “erase” or “elide”—all memory of Narnia’s magical-spiritual past. In Miraz’s progressive kingdom, talking animals, living trees, and divine lions are reduced to mere myths that have neither existence nor meaning. Sad that the mythic power of film was not used to defend deeper, transcendent truths and realities from an Orwellian usurper who orders his nephew never to speak *or think* about Aslan or the four Kings and Queens who came from another world.

Second, whereas the greatest film directors have made rich use of parallel action—that is, cross-cutting between two or three actions that eventually converge—the makers of *Prince Caspian* drop the ball on what is arguably the best example of parallel action in The Chronicles of Narnia. Preserving what he saw as the God-given complementarity of the sexes, Lewis has his three boys (Caspian, Peter, and Edmund) use their masculine martial skills to defeat Miraz while his two girls (Susan and Lucy) simultaneously use their feminine gifts of nurture and intuition to help Aslan wake up the trees and set free the Narnian countryside. The film chooses instead to put a weapon in Susan’s hand and let her kill even more bad guys than the boys, while essentially leaving out the liberation of nature and the oppressed villagers.

And that leads to the third thing that the film excises. In the novel, Susan, Lucy, and Aslan are assisted in their endeavors by none other than Bacchus, the Greek god of wine, women, and song. What a cinematic coup it would have been to capture the divine madness of Bacchus working in conjunction with and under the authority of Aslan. But the filmmakers, perhaps because they could not understand what Bacchus was doing in a children’s novel, left him out completely.

If only the author of *The Faun’s Bookshelf: C.S. Lewis on Why Myth Matters* had been invited to collaborate on the screenplay for *Prince Caspian*, those three elements might not have been left on the cutting-room floor. In his brief but penetrating book, Charlie Starr delves into the centrality of myth to Lewis’s work and thought, defends Lewis’s traditional view of gender and the complementarity of the sexes, and explains how and why Lewis combined myth and history, paganism and Christianity, the Greco-Roman-Norse and the Judeo-Christian in his fiction and non-fiction.

Starr, an expert on Lewis’s handwriting who has lectured and written on Lewis and Tolkien for two decades, takes as the starting point for his study of myth the four imaginary books that appear on the bookshelf of Mr. Tumnus in Chapter II of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe: The Life and Letters of Silenus, Nymphs and Their Ways, Men, Monks and Gamekeepers, and Is Man a Myth?* After

supplying copious background material and context for Tumnus's books that will be much appreciated by lovers of trivia—and any true lover of the Lewis corpus *must* share Lewis's medieval love of trivia—Starr divides the four books into two sets of two each. The first two, argues Starr, take up fauns and nymphs, creatures that are real in Narnia but mythic on earth; the second two focus on men, creatures who are real in our world but mythic in Narnia.

By working through this original and incisive distinction, Starr gets to the beating heart of Lewis's mythic view of the world; he also explains—unconsciously—the importance of the three Lewisian elements left out of the film version of *Prince Caspian*.

Fans of Lewis will likely be aware of the night stroll he took with Tolkien and Hugo Dyson down Addison's Walk, during which he confessed his inability to distinguish between the crucifixion of Christ and dying god myths like those of Adonis and Balder. It was Tolkien's suggestion that Christ was the myth that came true that finally nudged Lewis from Theism to Christianity. But Starr fleshes things out more fully, explaining well the exact effect that Tolkien's words had on Lewis: "When Lewis could finally see Christianity as being myth as well as fact—that is, when Lewis's own demand for mythic wonder on the one side and rational reality on the other finally met in Christianity—he was able to believe" (76).

And that belief, Starr goes on to argue, rested in part on Lewis grasping a fundamental difference between Balder and Christ: "In pagan stories, God is expressing His mind through the pagan poets [...]. In Christianity, God expresses Himself in a myth that actually happened in history" (77). God's myth trumps all human myths but without ceasing to appeal to our imagination and our sense of longing and awe. In seeking to crush not only the old stories of Aslan and the talking beasts but any and all forms of mythic longing *for* the stories, Miraz nearly succeeds in demythologizing Narnia and reducing its inhabitants to automatons.

The modern world with which Lewis identified before his conversion was as hell-bent as Miraz or the Green Witch of *The Silver Chair* to fashion a "dull, lifeless world" in which "reality equals the death of dreams" (62). "The sleeping trees in *Prince Caspian*," Starr explains, "have been put to sleep by modernity, by scientific materialism" (63). Myth, in sharp contrast, "shows us glory in the stuff of life—the very world we live in—by lifting the veil of the familiar from our imaginations" (93). Myth shows forth the glory of God, but it also shows forth the glory of man and of nature.

Starr states the problem and the solution in a way that combines the vision that shines behind so many of Lewis's books, essays, and letters:

We are myth-less, glory-less, subhuman creatures. If we *were* myth, everyone would know it; the attempts we make at turning man into something less than what he is would stop: We wouldn't be advanced apes. Minds wouldn't be just complex brains. Gender wouldn't be a mere description of sex organs, but a spiritual reality. (97)

Every so often, writes Starr, in a passage of acute psychological-sociological insight that is worthy of Lewis, we catch a glimpse of

mythic man: In a hero who makes a woman's heart flutter (despite our best attempts to tell women they don't need the son of a king—a prince—to come and rescue them). In a woman so beautiful that men have to look away because it hurts too much to go on gazing (or out of shame because they've been taught to either turn her beauty into objectifying lust or ignore her beauty because it's said to equal objectifying lust). (97)

Starr is well aware that issues of gender have become prominent in books and essays about Lewis, and he boldly takes them up, explaining but never apologizing for Lewis's views. In a chapter cleverly titled "Fauns Are from Mars, Nymphs Are from Venus," Starr argues, after Lewis, "that physical gender is incarnationally tied to spiritual gender, that men are masculine, body *and* soul, and women feminine in both as well" (45).

While admitting that he is "not sure exactly what it means for men to have a masculine soul or women to have a feminine one," and while conceding that there are a few places where Lewis writes that "gender roles can be fluid and sometimes reversed," Starr nevertheless remains true to Lewis's unwavering belief that "gender is a spiritual quality, representing real difference, and [that] it is incarnationally tied to physical nature" (50-51). It is finally the true myth of the incarnation that lies behind the spiritual quality of gender and not social constructs or political-economic forces.

I doubt that Starr could have convinced the filmmakers of *Prince Caspian* to celebrate the spiritual quality of gender by following the novel's division of labor for Caspian-Peter-Edmund and Susan-Lucy, but he might have been able to nudge them toward including Bacchus, Silenus, and the Maenads in the climax of the film. In Lewis's writings, Starr explains, "Bacchus is a fertility god, especially associated with the vine; by being the god of wine, he also becomes the god of revelry to the point of divine ecstasy" (29).

In the novel of *Prince Caspian*, when Susan first sees Bacchus and his wild followers, she says to Lucy that she would not feel safe were Aslan not with them. Lucy heartily agrees. Starr, picking up on this vital exchange, interprets its meaning for the novel and for Lewis's view of the interchange between pagan myth and Christianity: "It is Aslan, the true source of Bacchic power and

pleasure, who governs the living personification of that power in the form of the wild boy and his wood-women. The pagan god answers to the true God, as Lewis believed was the case with ancient myth" (57).

It is not just that the pagan myth is non-historical while the Christian myth takes place in time and space; the former prepares the way for the latter, foreshadowing its glory as the seed that dies and is buried, only to return as an oak tree, foreshadows the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ: the true Bacchus and the true Messianic Root of David.

The Faun's Bookshelf contains many more gems, but I will close by mentioning only three that stayed with me long after I closed the book. First, though Starr champions the imagination as an organ of perception that draws us toward meaning, allowing us to experience it in all its reality, he also warns that the imagination has its limits and that it can be led astray by the demonic. That is why

in the fallen world in which we find ourselves, mythic and imaginative knowledge will have to be checked against reason, not because the latter is superior, but because the concrete and the abstract have been split in human knowing, and it's the only way we can come close to any kind of complete knowledge down here in the valley of separation. (124-125)

Second, after discussing the lure that Norse myth and culture had for Lewis, Starr passes on to us a warning that Lewis issued in his forward to *Smoke on the Mountain*, a meditation on the Ten Commandments written by Joy Davidman, the woman who would one day be his wife. Both Joy and Lewis discerned in modern Western man a growing spirit of fear and cowardice. Lewis, writes Starr, argues for the "sober truth" that if we cannot gain back our courage, "Western civilization will have to confess that two thousand years of Christian influence have not raised us to the 'level of the Stoics and Vikings.' The worst that a Christian has to face is to die for Christ and rise in Him, but the Vikings were willing to die and *not* rise with Odin" (133).

Finally, Starr offers one of the best and most original arguments for why the Chronicles of Narnia must be read in the order of publication rather than in the order of Narnian chronology (which change ranks, to my mind at least, as the single worst publishing decision since Gutenberg). To read *The Magician's Nephew*, which describes the birth of Narnia, before reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is to lose far more than the joy of recognition that comes when one suddenly realizes the origin of such things as the White Witch, the Lamppost, and the Wardrobe.

When a first-time reader of the Narnia Chronicles reads *The Magician's Nephew* first, he reads it as a Terran who is encountering Narnia for the first time. When he reads it sixth, he reads it as a Narnian—or at least a human who has experienced Narnia—and its entire origin story takes on a mythic gravity that can't be experienced in reading it first. (88-89)

There is a rational way of knowing things and a mythic way of knowing them. Starr is to be commended for helping us see the world of Lewis—and our own world—through the eyes of myth.

—Louis Markos



CHRISTIAN MYTHMAKERS: C.S. LEWIS, MADELEINE L'ENGLE, J.R.R. TOLKIEN, GEORGE MACDONALD, G.K. CHESTERTON, CHARLES WILLIAMS, DANTE ALIGHIERI, JOHN BUNYAN, WALTER WANGERIN, ROBERT SIEGEL, AND HANNAH HURNARD. Rolland Hein. Forward by Clyde S. Kilby. 2nd ed. Eugene, OR: WIPF & Stock, 2014. 303 p. 9781625643841. \$37.00.

IN THE FORWARD TO THIS SECOND EDITION OF ROLLAND HEIN'S *Christian Mythmakers*, Clyde Kilby states that a rational definition and context for myth must be ascertained before any appreciable grasp of the foundations of this tradition may be obtained. He proposes a Jungian basis for myth-making, based on Jung's postulation that the human urge toward knowing is a persistent force: "The two most basic characteristics of man, beyond his mere physical needs, are to know and to worship" (ix).

Hein sets out to review key foundational texts in Western Literature upon which the Inklings and their successors depended and from which they drew mythic inspiration. He proceeds to examine in detail the techniques and methods of the various Inklings as they wove various mythic underpinnings of that Western canon into their works. He then shows how subsequent 20th-century writers, as heirs of that mythic tradition, succeeded to a greater or lesser degree in furthering the mission of these vanguard writers. In doing so, Hein tells an engaging story of the evolution of altered reality across the ages leading to the genre of fantasy we know and love today. He demonstrates that "while myth is not the same as the story that contains it, its power is enhanced by a story well-told" (277). The symbolic imagery may come and go, but the abstract precepts and concepts remain.