

Spring 3-15-1993

Reviews

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Recommended Citation

Patterson, Nancy-Lou and GoodKnight, Glen (1993) "Reviews," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 19: No. 2, Article 12.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol19/iss2/12>

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Reviews

Abstract

Medievalism: Inklings and Others. Jane Chance, editor. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

Dorothy L. Sayers: A Careless Rage for Life. David Coomes. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

Christian Fantasy: From 1200 to the Present. Colin Manlove. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

The Hobbit. J.R.R. Tolkien. Reviewed by Glen GoodKnight.

REVIEWS

INTERLOCKING SPHERES

Jane Chance, editor, "Medievalism: Inklings and Others," in *Studies in Medievalism* (Winter, Spring 1991), Volume III, Numbers 3, 4 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 392 pp. ISBN 0-85991-320-1.

This study, filling half the volume in which it appears, presents essays (not all in the "article" format) of the role and influence of medievalism in a certain sphere of Modern (as a period pre-dating the "Post-modern") English literature. The authors studied in this light are G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Dorothy L. Sayers. Three interlocking spheres of writing are included here under the rubric of "Medievalism." These are, first, actual literature surviving from the Middle Ages, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Medieval versions of the Arthuriad, and Dante's *Commedia*; second, scholarship by, in particular, Lewis and Tolkien, upon these and other sources; and, third, 19th century Romantic writings addressing Medieval themes, such as those of William Morris. All three sources of influence are explored in the eight essays. Jane Chance has given a good summary of these studies in her Preface, and the "Inklings" section of *Mythlore* has contributed strong short commentaries upon them, but for those who want to find out in the context of this review, I will attempt a short overview.

Ian Boyd's essay, "Chesterton's Medievalism," appropriately to the master of paradox, begins thus: "his real views [of Medievalism] turn out to be almost the exact opposite of the views which he is popularly supposed to hold." (p.243) Boyd discusses *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, *The Return of Don Quixote*, *The Ballad of the White Horse*, *Chaucer, The Glass Walking-Stick*, and *The Everlasting Man* in the light of this witty insight, and concludes that Chesterton "does regard medievalism as an ideal and as a model," but "does not believe that the modern world ought to attempt to return to medieval social conditions." (p. 254) He is, Boyd tells us, both a romantic and a realist. The same paired attitudes can be seen in the other four writers discussed in "Studies in Medievalism."

As a major scholar in the field of Medieval Literature, C.S. Lewis is probably (and fairly) evaluated by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton's essay "Standing on Lewis' Shoulders: C.S. Lewis as Critic of Medieval Literature." Seeing his work from a more than half a century's vantage point, she praises his pioneering study of allegory, his extraordinary gift for imaginative historical contextualization, and his

awareness of the need for linguistic and cultural correctives in the modern reader's approach to earlier literature. (p. 258)

I promise that readers will not be distressed to hear of the "critical blindspots" she also revealed: this author treats Lewis' weaknesses as well as his triumphs in a balanced, useful, and generous way.

This introduction to Lewis as a scholar is accompanied by Lionel Adey's consideration of "Medievalism in the Space Trilogy of C.S. Lewis." More than a mere chronicle of source-hunting, it considers *Out of the Silent Planet* briefly, and *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength* in greater detail. *Perelandra* receives the majority of the attention, and Adey's comments on "The Great Dance" at the end of that volume, comparing it with the *Paradiso* of Dante, are especially illuminating and useful. One ends the essay wishing for more, and looks in vain for a further essay on the extremely active and significant role of Medievalism in the *Narnian Chronicles*.

Two essays on Charles Williams follow: Judith J. Kollmann, in "Charles Williams' *All Hallows Eve: A Modern Adaptation of Dante's Commedia*," examines themes of salvation and damnation, and points out effectively the use of a transitional phase between mortal life in both *The Divine Comedy* and this last (and to my mind) best of Williams' novels. In particular, Kollmann traces Williams' use in it of "the doctrine of the Affirmative Way," defined (as she quotes from Dorothy L. Sayers' essay "Dante and Charles Williams") as "the theological doctrine that the sole ultimate Reality which is God can be ... apprehended by means of the Creation in which it is imaged." (p. 293)

Charles A. Huttar's potent and valuable essay, "Arms and the Man: The Place of Beatrice in Charles Williams' Romantic Theology," addresses Williams' most potent and valuable expression of this doctrine, first adumbrated in his study of the theological dimensions of marriage, his very early work which only appeared in publication in 1990, almost simultaneously with Huttar's essay, *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, which I reviewed in *Mythlore* 65 (Spring 1991, p. 43). Huttar traces the figure of Beatrice in Williams' scholarship, fiction, and poetry, as the preoccupation of a lifetime; for Williams, the Beatrician vision (a lover's first encounter with the Beloved as a genuine revelation of the divine) was a real, perhaps the real experience of Divinity.

The touch of coy wit in Huttar's title ("Arms and the

Man") refers not to Shaw's play but to the erotic vision of a woman's arm, treated in the novels as well as in the poems. Frankly, I do not agree with Huttar's view that all Williams' behaviors — especially those revealed in A.M. Hadfield's second biography of Williams and in Lois Lang-Sims' *Letters to Lalage* are to be regarded as "unerotic" or incapable of being "dismiss[ed] ... as pornographic." (p.331) And I do think Williams' continual pressing of his attentions upon his associate and (in that day, as a Librarian to his Editor) social inferior in the mutual place of employment, Oxford University Press, Phyllis Jones, would today be regarded as sexual harassment; she did not want these attentions, clearly rejected them, and yet he pursued her well beyond the point of what now seems like persecution.

Aside from these concerns, which other authors have been more willing to entertain and admit, I find Huttar's excellent and detailed study convincing and authoritative, and regard his essay as a major contribution to Williams studies.

Tolkien receives the most attention of the three Inklings here, having three works devoted to him: the essay by Miriam Y. Miller, "Of sum mayn meruayle, pat he mygt trawe": *The Lord of the Rings and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*;" the "Note" entitled "Echoes of William Morris's *Icelandic Journals* in J.R.R. Tolkien" by Marjorie J. Burns; and the "Review of Literature," by Jane Chance and David D. Days, called "Medievalism in Tolkien: Two Decades of Criticism in Review."

Miriam Miller's essay, while it seems to me to press the parallels almost to the breaking point, nevertheless succeeds in addressing Tolkien's scholarship in the field of Medieval Literature (he produced a major translation of *Gawain*) and its undoubted role in his masterwork. Students of both aspects of Tolkien's writing will find this essay useful and illuminating.

Marjorie Burns' "Note" (actually a short but nicely argued essay) suggests that some of Tolkien's potent descriptive passages in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* spring from his familiarity with Morris' *Icelandic Journals*. This thesis is convincing, even to one like myself, who has read only excerpts from those journals in various studies of Morris, for in them the watercolor world of his poetry gives way to a far more awesome vision as he encountered what we in Canada mean when we talk about the "True North" — C.S. Lewis may well have been influenced in describing the Northern Waste of Narnia by this source as well.

And a close reading of Jane Chance and David Day's detailed bibliographic annotation and evaluation of studies of Tolkien's Medievalism in the body of Tolkien criticism (I leave it to Joe R. Christopher to determine if this, indeed, comprises the *whole* body), shows not only how valid and apposite a collection of essays on this topic must be, but how well attested is its importance in the critical

oeuvre in print. In some ways this is the most useful essay of all those included in these considerations of "Inklings and Others."

That title's use of the word "Others" refers to G.K. Chesterton, as we have seen, and also to Dorothy L. Sayers, whose work is discussed last, in what is usually called a "review essay," Alzina Stone Dale's sharp-eyed consideration of Barbara Reynolds' superb study, *The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter With Dante*. I wish Ms. Dale had been invited to contribute a full essay on Medievalism in Sayers, a subject well worth an entire book. Here she confines herself (as did Dr. Reynolds) exclusively to Sayers' works on Dante, and especially praises (rightly) the strongly biographical thrust of *The Passionate Intellect*, which is indeed (along with other virtues) one of its major contributions.

This collection of essays and studies not only contains valid and engaging contributions to knowledge of Medievalism in the writings of Chesterton, Lewis, Williams, Tolkien, and Sayers, but calls out for the development (as is already the case for Tolkien) of a whole canon of studies on this significant theme. Highly recommended!

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

SAYERS ON SAYERS

David Coomes, *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Careless Rage for Life* (Oxford: Lion Publishing), 242 pp. ISBN 0-7459-1922-7.

While this lively and endearing biography will not replace the major studies of Dorothy L. Sayers already published, it will have a useful place on the shelf beside them, and will make a very good first biography to offer a student (which is more than you can say for many student-intended biographies). Why?

First, because it sees her life as a continually developing and deepening scholarly and spiritual quest on the part of this extraordinary literary polymath, who functioned with remarkable success across the whole spectrum of letters. There has been an almost irresistible tendency to see her work as centered upon Lord Peter, with everything else as secondary or an afterthought. Clearly Miss Sayers did not experience her career in this way, for she died in harness, some two-thirds of the way through her sublimely rambling translation of *The Divine Comedy*, and with her Christmas presents still unwrapped.

Second, because Coomes takes seriously and treats with a respect free of what C.S. Lewis called the "chronological heresy," the richly orthodox and profoundly valid intellect-centered Christianity which Miss Sayers, a true daughter of the Church of England, followed to the best of her very extraordinary abilities. He treats her efforts to understand, respect, and express effectively and accurately the creedal faith of her church — for her, the church — for the intellectual achievement that it is.

Third, and this is why I would recommend the book to those newly discovering her, this biography depends to a very great degree upon extremely well-chosen selections from Miss Sayers' own writings. Delicious letters, autobiographical fragments, boisterous essays, touching confessions, poignant records of unrequited love, profound insights intellectual and spiritual: these comprise a fast-track tour of her exquisitely individual mind that leaves the reader breathless and hungry for more.

Nancy-Lou Patterson.

NATURE & SUPERNATURE

Colin Manlove, *Christian Fantasy: From 1200 to the Present* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 356pp. ISBN 0-268-00790-X.

As a book indispensable from here on out in the understanding of C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams as twentieth century representation of a 700-year-long tradition, *Christian Fantasy* must take its place as one of those rare works that truly remake our understanding of Western literature. Tracing the form he identifies as Christian Fantasy from Dante to L'Engle, Manlove sets out a canon of required reading which will provide a lifetime's intellectual delight not only for Christian readers but for all those who seek, from whatever stance, to understand a significant aspect of Christianity's second millennium. The works he discusses stand out like jewels, beacons, stars, glories, works of art which are profoundly presentational (in the language of Suzanne Langer) rather than purely discursive.

The first eleven chapters of *Christian Fantasy* trace the sequence of Christian Fantasy from the "world-renouncing" French *Queste del Saint Graal* (1215-30), which "places Galahad at the centre" of the narrative, "as a Christ figure" mediating between "the Old Law...and the New" (p. 14), through Dante's incomparable *Commedia* (1307-21), "the first great work of Christian fantasy" (p. 21). We see the exquisite Middle English *Pearl* (1375-95), a "visionary and consolatory episode," "a piece of Christian supernaturalism," and "a poem of rare beauty" (p. 42); and on to Spencer's elegant *The Faerie Queene*, Book I (1509-6), a work marking the transition from a world where heaven/hell and earth were in close communication, to one where "this kind of communication is reduced" (p. 51). Then comes Marlowe's ironic *Dr. Faustus* (1604-16), a play about a man "who makes a pact with the devil to grant him the powers his impatient imagination seeks" (p. 74), only to show "how lacking in imagination this ambitious wizard is" (p. 79), and then the Metaphysical Poets of the seventeenth century, including Donne, Vaughn, and Traherne, with their "potential gap between imagination and devotion" (p. 94). This is followed by Milton's magisterial *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674), a poem involving "the presentation of the whole cosmic scheme as he has so unforgettably given it" (p. 103) given, in its turn, a most astonishing Freudian reading by Manlove, and Bunyan's poignant *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678, 1684) of which Manlove says that "while

Milton seeks to liberate the imagination, Bunyan seeks to confine and curb it" (p. 115). We see Swedenborg's visionary *Heaven and Hell* (1758), a work written when, "Swedenborg soberly tells us, he was in direct communication with angels" (p. 132), and its counterpart, Blake's gnostic *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c. 1790) "which involves a rewriting of Christianity itself" (p. 144).

The second half of the book devotes seven chapters to the subject introduced in Chapter Twelve, "Modern Christian Fantasy," the works composed during a period when "the 'mythology' of Christianity, the supernatural stories recounted in the Bible, become increasingly open to discussion" (p. 156). The two great Christian fantasists of the Nineteenth century are George McDonald, whose fantasies work extend from *Phantasies* (1858) to *Lilith* (1895), each describing a "magic land" (p. 167), and include *The Back of the North Wind* (1871), *The Princess and Goblin* (1872) and *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), as well as "a whole range of shorter fairy tales" (p. 167); and Charles Kingsley, whose "only fantasy" is *The Water-Babies* (1863). Manlove shows how McDonald finds the divine within "the mysteries of the imagination" (p. 184), that is, within the psyche, while Kingsley makes "an attempt to square the Christian view of things with the then-new scientific discoveries about the nature of the world" (p. 185) by finding the divine eminence in the creation. These two strategies continue to find defenders to the present day.

Discussing "Twentieth-Century Christian Fantasy," Manlove finds only three main "straightforwardly Christian fantasists" — T.F. Powys, who "rather minimizes the fantastic" (p. 209) and Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis, each of whom is given a full chapter. Manlove addresses Williams' seven "prose fantasies" (p. 218), written between 1929 and 1945, and the two volumes of the unfinished Arthurian cycle, *Talesin Through Logres* (1938) and *The Region of the Summer Stars* (1944). The novels, Manlove says, concern "this world subject to penetration by 'supernatural' events" (p. 218), and he treats these with the same piercing insights he has accorded the previous works in his study, giving as his conclusion that "Williams... presents us with a world remade to express his vision; this is the world as it variously might be, a world less given than invented." (p.236)

As for C.S. Lewis and his fantasies, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1933), *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1938), *The Great Divorce* (1946), the *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-6), and *Till We Have Faces* (1956), "his fantasy takes place off-world" (p. 238). The only exception is *That Hideous Strength* (1945). Manlove says Lewis "associates wonder with distance" (p. 238) and "the larger aim behind most of his stories is the realization of 'otherness.'" (p. 239) This chapter, the finest in the book, comprises a dense and penetrating study of the last and perhaps greatest of the Modern Christian fantasists.

The "Other Writers" of Manlove's last chapter include

J.R.R. Tolkien, whose *The Lord of the Rings* (1945-55) is classified as "obliquely Christian" along with Michael Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (1928-40). I suspect that many *Mythlore* readers will object to this characterization and wish to see a whole chapter devoted to Tolkien, while others will agree and maybe even rejoice to see the Master escape the Christian net. Many other powerful works are discussed in this chapter; including David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920) — emphatically "not Christian" (p. 281) and Walter M. Miller's wonderful and — to my mind — oddly but fully Christian *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960). Madeleine L'Engle's works are accorded portions of three pages: Manlove says "a vision of joy does come through. What these stories suggest is that, if we can only open our eyes wide enough, we will see the wonderful spiritual reality all about us." (p. 277) I would hope that another book by Manlove will discuss what he might choose to call Twentieth Century Religious Fantasy in great detail.

From 1200 to the present, he finds a handful of authors — Dante and the anonymous authors of *Saint Graal* and *Pearl*, Spencer, Marlowe, the Metaphysicals, Milton, Bunyan, Swedenborg, Blake, MacDonald, Kingsley, Williams, and Lewis — so few over so long a time, to fit his category of Christian Fantasy. But "from another point of view," he says, "it may be that this is only the beginning, a point where a genuine and unforced merging of the old categories of nature and supernature, God and man and world, may take place." (p. 302)

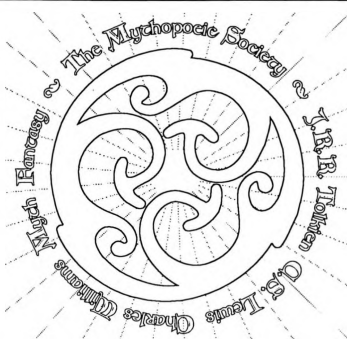
C.N. Manlove has written three previous books touching upon authors considered in *Christian Fantasy*, all of them reviewed by myself in *Mythlore*; they are *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (1975), *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature* (1983), and *C.S. Lewis: His Literary Achievement* (1987), as well as one not reviewed because only peripherally (at least until now) relevant to *Mythlore*'s mandate: *Science Fiction: Ten Explorations* (1986). I called his study of C.S. Lewis "the book Lewis students have been waiting for." I will now call *Christian Fantasy* the book all students of Mythopoeia have been awaiting. Of all the literary studies I have recommended since I began to review for *Mythlore* in 1975, I would recommend this book the most highly, for the following reason: no study afterwards can be complete without taking its thesis, that these writers comprise a deep and essential Christian tradition in literature, into account.

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

TURN OUT THE LIGHTS

J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Hobbit*. BBC Audio Collection. Novato, CA; The Mind's Eye. Adapted by Michael Kilgariff; produced by Joyhn Powell; music by David Cain of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

This four cassette set, comprising eight 30-minute episodes covers the entire story of *The Hobbit*. It features



Anthony Jackson as the "Tale Bearer" [Narrator], Paul Daneman as Bilbo, Heron Carvic as Gandalf, and a "large supporting cast."

This is an interesting rendition, obviously done with the extensive resources of the BBC. The story has been compressed, so that we are directly dependent on the words the characters speak to carry the story along, rather than hearing actual Tolkien's narrative, as we do in reading the book. The "Tale Bearer" only intercedes where character dialog cannot carry us along.

The compression has caused some minor deviations from the text, which can be annoying for those who already know the story well.

The music and sound effects are good, helping to add color and depth to the story. Liberties were taken, such as a sound much like a canon shot when the Battle of the Five Armies begins!

Overall this is an enjoyable presentation, if one can lay aside the demand for full textual reproduction. Since this was originally performed on radio, it is best perhaps savoured with the lights out, to allow the imagination fuller exercise.

— Glen GoodKnight

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