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Further Up & Further In: Understanding Narnia, by Joseph Pearce

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the role of archetype in fantasy literature, or the evocation of the fantastic through image and word.

Nancy-Lou Patterson, herself, is someone of interest to all readers of *Mythlore*. Her impact, not only on the history and appearance of this journal, but on mythopoeic scholarship in general, is significant and should not be forgotten. Auger and Croft have given us six volumes in which to remember or acquaint ourselves with the work of this remarkable woman. The Patterson Papers series is available from Emily E. Auger's website (<https://emilyeauger.weebly.com/mdashpatterson-papers.html>).

— Kris Swank

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FURTHER UP & FURTHER IN: UNDERSTANDING NARNIA. Joseph Pearce. Charlotte, North Carolina: Tan Books, 2018. 202 pp. ISBN 978-1-5051-0866-8. \$24.95 (hardcover).

CAN AN ENCHANTED WARDROBE ALSO BE FOR GROWNUPS? After all, C.S. Lewis did intentionally write the Narnia stories for children. *Further Up & Further In: Understanding Narnia* is a new book about the imaginative world of Lewis, and it begins with this sometimes-overlooked question.

The issue of how we as adult readers should approach the layers of meaning within *The Chronicles of Narnia* is the latest topic taken up by Joseph Pearce, who has authored several books about C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, G.K. Chesterton, and countless authors who either influenced this triumvirate or were influenced by them. Pearce is also the editor of the journals *Saint Austin Review* and *Faith & Culture*, and he works as Director of Book Publishing for the Augustine Institute. All of this shows that whenever Pearce is not writing

directly about Lewis, Tolkien, Chesterton, or The Inklings, he remains very influential to the field.

Unlike so many scholarly texts that come to us from the dissertation-to-book pipeline, Pearce's biographies and histories are very readable. I have read several of his books, and I find them to be full of wit and wisdom, and Pearce is very insightful as he writes about the philosophies and fictional worlds he explores. Though Pearce was born and formed in England, he has lately sojourned in the United States, working at several schools and universities as a distinguished lecturer and writer-in-residence. Today he and his family reside in South Carolina. Aside from his expanding body of impressive professional work, Pearce has a compelling personal story of how he became a Roman Catholic (the same faith as Tolkien) after dabbling away his youth in the radical politics of London.

Pearce explores the Narnia stories as part of a broader and ongoing conversation between generations of storytellers, readers, and great thinkers. While many of us might want a champion to rescue the Narnia stories from the mess that Hollywood has made of them, Pearce's book avoids the popular cultural phenomenon and goes to the core of these stories. For the most part, Pearce's newest book is an intertextual study of C.S. Lewis's Narnia stories, which means he examines the interconnections between Lewis's work and the ideas and writings of other authors. While Pearce is most known for his biographies, *Further Up & Further In* might be considered an intertextual biography of Lewis's characters, themes, symbols, and their underlying meanings.

As an intertextual study of Lewis's fiction, Pearce's book often poses questions that lead him to other books and authors in search of an answer. To answer the question of whether Narnian wardrobes are for adults as well as children, Pearce returns to the essential role of the fairy tale itself. He argues that "fairy stories give us the moral framework necessary to see the world as it is, in all its glorious heights and goriest depths, from the perspective of the way it should be." According to Pearce, if we do not accept the moral ethos that the fairy tale presents to us, then we risk being "dehumanized. We become less than we should be, less than we are meant to be. We become dragons who devour the innocent and lay waste to the world around us" (6). In other words, we as adults should walk into wardrobes because "adults need fairy stories even more than children do" (6). From here, Pearce then dives into the individual novels in the series (each a chapter in his book) to explore the literary and philosophical truths within each of Lewis's fairy stories. Aside from providing sound literary criticism and moral insight into the stories, Pearce uses his skills as a writer to enable us to also re-experience those moments in *The Chronicles of Narnia* that first captivated us as readers.

Along the way, Pearce provides much new and needed insight into the Narnia stories that might have escaped the notice of many readers (myself, at times, included). For example, in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Pearce explains that Eustace Scrubb's parents—who are vegetarians, non-smokers, teetotalers, modern-minded, and wear "a special kind of underclothes" (VDT 1)—have all of the characteristics of Shavians, followers of the writer George Bernard Shaw, who had "a supercilious approach to history and tradition, both of which he treated with indifference or contempt." Pearce reminds us that Shaw "believed that humanity was inexorably progressing toward a better future," but he also maintained a "general contempt for the common man, leaving him suspicious of democracy and prone to support the rise of totalitarianism in all its forms" (112). According to Pearce, readers in the mid-20th century would have more easily recognized Lewis's critique of the Shavian mindset in how he handles Eustace's conversion from modern arrogance to Christian humility: "[Eustace] denies the existence of dragons and is, in consequence, unable to see that he is himself a dragon, a monster who wants to lay fairyland to waste" (116). As Pearce concludes, "The punishment is the cure! In becoming a dragon, [Eustace] would cease to be a dragon; in seeing the monster he had *become* as a mirror of the monster he had *been*, he experiences a desire for love, a desire for communion; in short, a desire for conversion" (122).

Pearce's account of the Narnian world is most powerful when he explores its "deep theology," and how Lewis uses it as a commentary for our own world. Pearce begins his chapter on *The Magician's Nephew* with a discussion that sheds light on the characters of Uncle Andrew and Digory Kirk. Pearce discusses the more "broad-minded days" when "the physical sciences" were one of many branches of science (from the Latin word 'knowledge') concerned with "what was called natural philosophy." Pearce gives the impression that the splitting of the natural sciences from the other philosophies during the Enlightenment period might have been a more powerful split than that of the atom itself. According to Pearce, "science is no longer seen as being inseparable from ethics or subject to virtue."

In placing the knowledge of nature outside the sphere of the love of wisdom, the materialists of the Enlightenment have delivered the physical sciences into the hands of those who employ it to pursue the will to power, connecting modern scientific research with the experiments of medieval alchemists and their experiments in "magic." In this way, believers in scientism, such as Uncle Andrew, can be seen as synthesizing both medieval "magicians" and modern scientists, thereby making magic synonymous with certain types of technology. (36-7)

Unlike his Uncle Andrew, Digory becomes the ethical and virtuous scientist who learns from his earlier mistake when he was seized with a wild curiosity to strike the bell in the enchanted room on Charn. However, according to Pearce, Lewis uses Digory to do more than represent an older and better view of scientific study: Digory's actions and choices convey to us the "deep theology" at work in the Narnia series. Aslan declares that "as Adam's race has done the harm, Adam's race shall help heal it" (MN 136), which Pearce argues is "the role of humanity in salvation history made manifest in *The Magician's Nephew*" (56).

In his refusal to succumb to the temptress in the garden, Digory, as a "son of Adam," can be seen to be the Adam who does not fail, as distinct from the biblical Adam who fails so miserably. In this sense, Digory has more in common with Christ, who, as the New Adam, resists the temptations of the devil during His days in the wilderness in order to do the will of His Father than he has with the Adam who falls into sin at the devil's behest. Digory is, therefore, transformed from being a figure of the Old Adam who fails into a figure of Christ, the New Adam who succeeds, a literary transfiguration that signifies the soul's conversion from the life of sin to the life of grace. (59-60)

Finally, what is Pearce's conclusion about our place as adults in enchanted wardrobes? After all, none of this answers the question with which we began. What is our excuse after all these years of continuing to indulge ourselves in stories that were written for children? Perhaps the answer is another question. What if adults and children need the same reminders? What if we both need to be taught lessons that are similar?

Those of us for whom Lewis's thoughts and words are endearing should also consider these questions because Lewis as an adult writer often considered the implications of his writing for children. In his paper "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said," Lewis tells the readers of *The New York Times Book Review* how he first came to create his Narnia stories 'for children.' One of the claims Lewis makes is that "I never wrote down to anyone; and whether the opinion condemns or acquits my own work, it certainly is my opinion that a book worth reading only in childhood is not worth reading even then" (48). Lewis also argued in his essay "On Stories" that he saw books for children as having a potential far beyond writing an educational or entertaining tale for a child: Lewis's vision was for a "story that can mediate imaginative life to the masses while not being contemptible to the few" (17). Lewis had high goals for the children's story, but, if Pearce is correct, we have seen the embodiment of Lewis's ambitions when we examine the Narnia series.

If the distinction between adult and child readers is more porous, then perhaps we need no defense for enjoying the Narnia novels. Pearce argues that part of growing up for children and adults is to “learn *critical* wonder and *critical* tenderness, which means that we must become critical of what we see and read.” Pearce often distinguishes between childlike and childish, the one being that “the childlike remain open to the sense of wonder that animates the classics of children’s literature,” whereas “the childish sink into the sin of cynicism that blinds them to the love and beauty of reality.” Pearce is clear that in order to fully understand Lewis’s stories, we must “learn to read like grown-ups so that we can pass through the wardrobe into wonderland with eyes wide open to what we will see and discover when we get there” (12-16). Since what Pearce says here applies both to children and adults, then we should conclude that wardrobes are for all of us.

In the end, Pearce gives us as readers a deeper understanding of a country we might already know, or a country we long to rediscover as adults. In better understanding Lewis’s Narnia and the intertextual richness that helped to form it, we can better understand where we belong both as readers and as persons who belong to something larger than ourselves. As Jewel the unicorn says in *The Last Battle*, “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. [...] Come further up, come further in!” (171).

—Chad Chisholm

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