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***Dorothy L. Sayers, A Biography: Death, Dante, and Lord Peter Wimsey* by Colin Duriez and *Dorothy and Jack: The Transforming Friendship of Dorothy L. Sayers and C.S. Lewis* by Gina Dalfonzo**

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Dorothy L. Sayers, A Biography: Death, Dante, and Lord Peter Wimsey by Colin Duriez and *Dorothy and Jack: The Transforming Friendship of Dorothy L. Sayers and C.S. Lewis* by Gina Dalfonzo

1300s because of the way it drew the viewer into the scene and made them participants in the often emotional events transpiring in the rest of the painting. Colman Smith obviously appreciated the effect of this compositional strategy and used it and numerous others drawn from art history as well as theater to facilitate the experience of “reading” the Tarot cards.

O'Connor makes good use of the research provided by the other authors and primary documents in *The Untold Story*, but there are a few indications that she may be less familiar with the history of Tarot than she is with social, cultural, and art history. Minor oversights can survive, even in otherwise carefully written, thoroughly documented, and carefully proofread and edited studies such as this one. There is one point in particular that may become a source of future confusion and that arises from the use of a general website article for information about the “earliest known” Tarot decks (188) followed by references to excellent sources on the subject a mere note or two further on. Even the most casual Tarot historian will be or should be aware that while the late fifteenth-century *Sola Busca* has the distinction of being the first known deck in which the pips, court cards, and trumps are illustrated, the earliest, nearly complete, extant Tarot decks are the mid-fifteenth-century *Visconti-Sforza* and *Cary-Yale* decks.

Pamela Colman Smith: Artist, Feminist, and Mystic and *The Untold Story* are complementary volumes. The earlier book provides copious illustrations, primary resource materials, and discussions by known authorities on the artist. O'Connor's new release provides a more scholarly, detailed analysis of the artist and her work that is attentive to both the context of her time and the forms of current scholarly discourse. Both are essential reading for anyone seeking an in-depth understanding of the artist and her work.

—Emily E. Auger



DOROTHY L. SAYERS, A BIOGRAPHY: DEATH, DANTE, AND LORD PETER WIMSEY. Colin Duriez. Lion Hudson, 2021. 256 p. ISBN 9780745956923. \$14.95

DOROTHY AND JACK: THE TRANSFORMING FRIENDSHIP OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS AND C.S. LEWIS. Gina Dalfonzo. Baker Books, 2020. 298 p. ISBN 9780801072949. \$17.00

FOR FANS OF NOVELIST, PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL, AND DANTE SCHOLAR Dorothy L. Sayers, 2020-2021 was a good year. Three Sayers biographies appeared within 10 months of each other: in August 2020, Gina Dalfonzo released *Dorothy and Jack: The Transforming Friendship of Dorothy L. Sayers and C.S. Lewis*. Two months

later, Crystal Downing released *Subversive: Christ, Culture and the Shocking Dorothy L. Sayers*. Eight months after Downing's book, Colin Duriez released *Dorothy L. Sayers, A Biography: Death, Dante, and Lord Peter Wimsey*. The first and third book take different approaches to Sayers's life, even as they both relay the basic biographical information.

Duriez, author of the authorized Francis Schaeffer biography and at least five C.S. Lewis/J.R.R. Tolkien biographies, takes an accessible-but-studied approach. He retells Sayers's life for general readers but includes endnotes, a timeline of Sayers's life, and an index so researchers can use the book as a reference. Like his 2003 book *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: The Gift of a Friendship*, he bookends chapters about the subject's life with dramatized scenes. Chapter 1, "Looking Back," dramatizes the morning of September 4, 1943, when Sayers received William Temple's letter offering her a Doctor of Divinity. Duriez imagines Sayers reading the letter, considering it as she goes about her day (16-19), and highlights two conflicts that led Sayers to decline the doctorate: her lack of "deep religious emotion" (18) and her need to conceal her illegitimate son, John Anthony. The rest of chapter 1 covers Sayers's early childhood, setting up a chronological overview of her life that continues in chapters 2-9. These chapters organize Sayers's life under key events that dominated a particular period. For example, chapter 7, "Lord Peter Whimsey and Eric the Skull," covers the 1930-1936 period where Sayers joined the Detection Club, had her greatest success as a mystery novelist, and informally adopted John Anthony. While these chapters retell Sayers's life, throughout Duriez makes little connections between events and Sayers's books—how Oxford featured in her life and in the Lord Peter Whimsey novels, etc. The Epilogue closes the biography with another dramatized scene: "a few days before Christmas 1957" (Duriez 176), when John Anthony introduced himself to Muriel St. Clare Byrne and helped her settle Sayers's estate.

While Duriez's writing isn't as clean here as in some of his earlier biographies, he tells the story well. The use of semi-dramatized scenes lets him draw casual readers in, framing Sayers's life in its most gut-wrenching event: hiding her motherhood. Little scenes capture the tragic elements well—notably Sayers's mother Helen meeting Ivy Shrimpton's foster child, the child that Helen never learned was her grandson (Duriez 115). However, Duriez never enters soap opera territory: he shows the tragedy, but never overplays it. Most of the book is legitimately about Sayers's accomplishments and legacy, such as her part in what Harry Blamires called the "Christian literary renaissance" of the 1930s-1940s (qtd. in Duriez 146). One of Duriez's more interesting insights is how although Sayers never met Tolkien, her fiction is filled with what Tolkien called *eucatastrophe* (156-159). The combination of storytelling and

contemplation makes this book a good resource for scholars seeking a compact overview, as well as casual readers seeking a good introduction to Sayers.

Gina Dalfonzo's book *Dorothy and Jack*, like Downing's *Subversive*, makes it clear up front that the author will examine Sayers with a particular lens. Downing's lens was Sayers's "shocking insights" (ix), courting controversy with essays like "Are Women Human?" and plays like *The Man Born to Be King*. Dalfonzo has two particular focuses. The first focus is describing a particular facet of Sayers's life: her friendship with C.S. Lewis, from Sayer's 1942 fan letter until her 1957 death. Chapter 1, "No Mean City," contrasts where Lewis and Sayers were in 1917—Lewis starting his studies at Oxford, Sayers starting a job at Oxford, both young poets seeking recognition. "No mean city" is a quote from Sayers's unfinished memoir *My Edwardian Childhood* (Dalfonzo 23), and each chapter title quotes a Lewis/Sayers letter or speech. In a given chapter, that quotation defines the conversation—what Lewis and Sayers discussed in that letter or speech, events leading up to it, other Sayers/Lewis work that thematically connect to that quote. For example, Chapter 3 ("Hey! Whoa!") describes the 1946 letter exchange where Lewis upset Sayers by suggesting she contribute to a Christian education book series. Dalfonzo summarizes Sayers's and Lewis's careers in the 1940s, how they used this exchange to debate "bad work done in a good cause" (73), and their major writings about vocation. This model means that Dalfonzo can describe events chronologically, while also referencing Lewis and Sayers's books and their influence on each other.

Dalfonzo's second focus is how the Sayers-Lewis friendship holds several topical insights. The primary topical insight is what this friendship says about men and women befriending each other. Dalfonzo observes in the introduction that "developments in both the Christian world and in the wider, secular world have made cross-gender friendships a renewed source of friction" (17-18). Many Christians have responded by arguing that unmarried men and women shouldn't associate with each other (ibid). Lewis and Sayers's friendship defied this advice from the start—they became friends when Lewis was a bachelor and Sayers married, and they stayed friends after Lewis married. Furthermore, their friendship was based on interests that Sayers couldn't share with her husband—something "many Christian leaders and thinkers [would consider] a red flag" (88). Despite this, their friendship remained "firmly in the realm of *philia*" (100).

Dalfonzo draws or implies at least two other topical insights. She considers Lewis and Sayers's mutual friend Charles Williams in the context of his toxic sexual behavior. While Lewis and Sayers had chaste cross-gender friendships, Williams had several emotional affairs involving manipulation and "semi-sexual, semi-magical rituals" (110). Dalfonzo also notes that "Jack and Dorothy found it all but impossible to believe that the friend who had seemed

so saintly could have deliberately been involved in anything of the sort" (111), although "the signs of something wrong were there, if Williams's friends had been able to interpret them" (113). Dalfonzo doesn't fault Lewis or Sayers for missing the signs, noting Williams' unusual charisma meant that even women he manipulated remembered him well (15). Furthermore, it was, sadly, "a period when it was easier, even for other women, to discount women's accounts of their own experiences" (114).

When discussing how Sayers and Lewis answered critics, Dalfonzo brings in a third topical theme: anti-Christian prejudice in the academy. Dalfonzo highlights how Lewis called himself a dinosaur in his inaugural Cambridge lecture, which Joy Davidman and Owen Barfield both felt was overplayed. However, they "could not wholly grasp just what the hostility at Oxford had been like for him" (144). As an example, Dalfonzo cites Tolkien describing the Oxford faculty's "extraordinary animosity" to Lewis (143), and points out "he was turned down twice for a promotion that he richly deserved, solely—by all accounts—because he was a popular Christian apologist, and that sort of thing was just not done by Oxford dons" (144).

Dalfonzo describes the Sayers-Lewis friendship well, capturing their friendship and shared ideas. The way she organizes events within chapters allows her to summarize Sayers's life in a different way than Duriez. Both writers summarize her life and see certain themes in it, but Duriez's themes are Sayer's difficult motherhood story and her life's broad phases (detective novelist, Dante scholar, etc.). Dalfonzo's themes are summed up in whatever quote frames each chapter, the events orbiting that particular idea.

Dalfonzo's search for topical insights is slightly less effective than her biographical descriptions, but only because one insight needs more backing. Her point about Lewis struggling as a Christian academic does resonate with contemporary stories—the same year that Dalfonzo's book came out, Inking scholar Matthew Dickerson released a book on contemporary discipleship describing anti-Christian prejudice he has experienced at Middlebury College (92-93, 103). However, when Dalfonzo talks about Lewis experiencing prejudice, her support is Tolkien's quote about Oxford animosity and a reference to Lewis being passed over for promotions. The latter point has no endnotes or citations, and while seasoned Lewis researchers will know what Dalfonzo refers to, this is a book for general readers who may not know Lewis's detailed biography. Add to this the strong wording of "what the hostility at Oxford had been like" for Lewis (144), and this second point comes across as a bit weak. It needs a pithy quote or paraphrase to drive the point home. For example, one could reference Warnie Lewis's 1958 diary entry about an elector saying he wouldn't nominate *The Screwtape Letters'* author for a professorship (Hooper 56) or Lewis's

comment to Harry Blamires, “You don’t know how I’m hated” (qtd. in Blamires 16).

This oversight aside, Dalfonzo clearly shows how Sayers and Lewis can help readers consider today’s concerns. She particularly excels at making her subjects topical without overselling what readers should learn from them. She doesn’t turn the discussion about Charles Williams into “10 tips for handling toxic Christian leaders,” although her comment about Williams’ charisma masking his behavior certainly feels applicable. She doesn’t turn Sayers and Lewis’ friendship into a textbook model of cross-gender friendship, but notes “the fact that both of them put such a high priority on friendship—cultivating it assiduously and considering it just as important as other kinds of love—meant that they had a proper category and role for their interactions” (101). All things considered, Dalfonzo gives a great overview of the under-discussed Lewis-Sayers friendship, and a clever argument for why Sayers and the Inklings continue to be worth studying.

—G. Connor Salter

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ETHICS AND FORM IN FANTASY LITERATURE: TOLKIEN, ROWLING, AND MEYER. Lykke Guanio-Uluru. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 261p. 978-1-137-46969-4. \$109.99.

*E*THICS AND FORM IN FANTASY LITERATURE: Tolkien, Rowling and Meyer by Lykke Guanio-Uluru is a stand-alone piece of literary criticism that analyzes the presentation of ethics in *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* books. The author writes in her introduction that she is interested in exploring “the ethical ‘patterns of meaning’ embedded in best-selling literature” (1). She chose the works of Tolkien, Rowling, and Meyer because of their immense popularity and influence upon the development of current fantasy literature. The book is divided into *Part I: Quest Fantasy* that includes the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling, and *Part II: Paranormal Romance*, about Stephanie Meyer’s saga. The analysis of each writer’s works is of roughly equal length, but the balance of the book is more towards the Quest Fantasy, with three chapters, while only two chapters are devoted to Paranormal Romance.