



mythLORE A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 37  
Number 1

Article 21

10-15-2018

***Both Sides of the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis, Theological Imagination,  
and Everyday Discipleship* Ed. Rob Fennell**

S. Dorman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>

 Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

**Recommended Citation**

Dorman, S. (2018) "*Both Sides of the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis, Theological Imagination, and Everyday Discipleship* Ed. Rob Fennell," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 37 : No. 1 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol37/iss1/21>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:  
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



---

## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



respective texts, but their use of psychological and trauma-specialist theories as introductions rather than support overreaches their own plausibility.

Between these two issues, readers may be left with confused ideas about what Abbruscato and Jones's collection is trying to accomplish: is it a manifesto on what fairy tales are or could be, or is it a primer on how fairy tales should be used? Despite this confusion, though, the collection is still valuable for both exposing concerns about a growing preponderance of remediated tales, and for its ability to suggest future directions for further exploration.

—Maria Alberto



**BOTH SIDES OF THE WARDROBE: C.S. LEWIS, THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION, AND EVERYDAY DISCIPLESHIP.** Edited by Rob Fennell. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2015. 114 p. 9781498229876. \$13.60 if purchased at the publisher's website.

EDITOR ROB FENNEL, whose field is historical theology, teaches at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and all the contributors to this volume are also Canadian. The first half of the book includes essays ranging through Lewis's creative and non-fiction works. Michael Tutton writes on private incidents as metaphors of prayer in *The Chronicles of Narnia*; David J. Hawkesworth proposes a Narnian theology; Allen B. Robertson compares eucatastrophe and joy; Brenton D.G. Dickieson discusses cruciformity in Lewis's literary works; and Chris Armstrong notes the influence of *Theologia Germanica* on the conflict of nature and spirit in Lewis's work. The last piece, "The Space Between" by Wayne G. Smith, treats the wardrobe as threshold or borderland, and, in a spiritual metaphor, as a character.

In his preface, Fennell invites us to consider the wardrobe of C.S. Lewis's subcreation in relation to some of his other works and to life outside the wardrobe in our world. The word *wardrobe* suggests a gathering place for robes and other clothing, a place of protection. If people are disciplined and care for clothing they will hang it out of the way, free from dust and moths, instead of throwing it casually in heaps on the bedroom floor. Lewis was just so—clear, orderly, and precise in his writings, and in his study's orderliness (Sayer, *Jack* 28). In the case of Lewis's first book, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the place of the wardrobe is in a spare room, at one more remove from careless keeping.

This inane metaphorical punning is not Fennell's. Perhaps it is like playing with occasional satirical overtones—as librarian and independent

scholar David Mark Purdy suggests in his essay on *The Screwtape Letters*. In “Red Tights and Red Tape,” he calls accepted scholarship a misreading of the book's genre (as a satire). Purdy may be onto something in claiming the devilish letters have been wrongly read since the beginning. They are “Screwtapean fantasy,” according to his view, an entirely separate genre. Thus critical engagement has been stifled by this satirical model. Additionally, says Purdy, its genre category is historically neither confirmed nor questioned (75). This is a very interesting essay to engage with and talk back to while reading.

An extensive bibliography for this essay includes one source, M.H. Abrams, who claims that the satirical subject must be made ridiculous and heaped with scorn, humor, disparagement, and misinterpretation/representation. The devil Screwtape is never misrepresented; his worldviews are not misinterpreted, but are depicted truthfully. Screwtape's nephew must know the truth in order to combat it. When I first read *Screwtape* and on re-reading later I was not aware of the satirical. I took it not literally of course but very seriously. And I have known other readers to be highly perplexed. What troubled me about these fantastical letters is how true they are, how much they accord with reality, and manage to depict this reality of our human state. Sometimes they gave me the shivers. Reality, shown in fresh fantastical ways, can do this. Even so, I accepted that this was genre satire after academics and reviewers presented it so.

Yet, literary techniques such as exaggeration as shown here can enhance the view, whether erroneous or not, that satire is essential in these letters. Satire should be very broad, exaggerated, fancifully skewed, in order to show itself as satire to everyone, not intellectuals only. When intellectuals write satire they are writing it solely for their own, who, because of its dry understated wit, will not mistake it. But everyone needs to be in on the joke. This means making a broad show of irony, parody, and the like. Other tonal traits in *Screwtape* include bureaucratic letter writing, familial advice, a cultural setting such as we find in time of war—these qualities contribute to the feel of reality. Turning this into complete satire would involve inversion as mentioned by Purdy—broad inversive buffoonery cast in dry tones, such as Swift uses in his *A Modest Proposal*. Another item from Purdy's lengthy bibliography is Terry Lindvall's take on C.S. Lewis's humor, *Surprised by Laughter*; he also places *Screwtape* among the satires. He recently published *God Mocks*, a full rich history of Western satire, well worth reading if satire is one of your interests. Anyway, this is some of my talking back, picking through the heaps of clothes, searching for an orderly arrangement that suits me.

*Both Sides of the Wardrobe* contains nine more essays, the prefacing invitation to read, and a list of contributors. One of these is Laurence DeWolfe, a Toronto, Ontario Presbyterian minister, who contributes “Apologist

Transposed: C.S. Lewis as Preacher." Lewis, he says, felt "duty-bound to preach" upon request (59). DeWolfe engagingly describes Lewis preaching, and demonstrates which gifts went into these endeavors: teaching, delighting, and persuading through voice and word. Sometimes his words were so persuasive they convicted and moved Lewis himself. C.S.L.'s approach was the whole Lewis, so his literary range came heavily into play. His best listeners understood and embraced all he brought to his talks. One such quality was the mythic, and Lewis relied on this across texts, relished and demonstrated and explicated, and took care to distinguish it from allegory.

The illustrative heart of Wolfe's essay is Lewis's transposition of *glossolalia*, "speaking in tongues." Both the apostle Paul and Lewis, says Wolfe, were embarrassed by the phenomenon. The correspondence between high and low uses of symbols was what interested Lewis here. How are platonic symbols repositioned throughout creation and the human experience: think of the mighty tongues of fire transposing into what seems to some gibberish, and to others a message of power and life, spoken in their own language directly into their longing experience. This is also a difference of literary qualities—both genre and compass. And Lewis writes of transpositions as empowered to swoop up the low and carry it, enveloping, into the high. His "joy" is one of these—sensation, bodily bearing the fleeting holy and whole. (Now I'm admiring the clean study, picking up more of my own haphazardly strewn garments, putting them away. A small-scale version of our clothing/closet analogy. The outside and inside of the wardrobe.)

Gary Thorne, currently a chaplain and adjunct professor in Classics, confesses that he saw only didactic allegory in *Narnia*, point by point, Christianity dressed in charming children's clothing. The title of his essay is "Baptized but Not Sanctified: George MacDonald and the Fantastic Baptism of the Imagination of C.S. Lewis." Thorne wants to know, first, what Lewis meant by the "baptized imagination," and why he himself is unconvinced by the claim. He considers the terms *baptized* and *sanctified*, as these might relate to imagination. He wants us to know better than he does why Lewis and MacDonald "are not at cross purposes" (70). Instead of J.R.R. Tolkien disliking *Narnia* for its inharmonious mash-up of stories and mythology, Thorne claims *Narnia's* allegorical didacticism—Protestant dogma—put Tolkien off. And MacDonald *would not* have intruded an Aslan into his fairy stories, claiming straight allegory to be spiritually wearying in his "Fantastic Imagination" essay (73).

Thorne then begins on *Phantastes*, the baptismal font, the youthful maturation of one becoming acquainted with Self. When he discusses MacDonald's Truth as a Person transposing the creation into a personal act, Thorne misses, to my mind, the clear sub-creation of Aslan as personal creator.

Not allegorical, but living and wild as anything mythic. And, surely, if anything, Tolkien thought MacDonald's fairy tales didactic. MacDonald could not write anything without preaching, without homily. Preachment was one of his greatest gifts, powerful and with a spirit of righteousness from an impersonal source. Meaning, paradoxically, it came not out of self-righteousness. Not from Self.

The chapters in this collection are each connected in some way with Lewis's art, each author either alluding to, or explicitly showing, Lewis's vigorous engagement with literary history. The tilt toward theology is resonant of Lewis's own compass in his knowledge of great works of Western literary tradition. There is no Lewisian creativity without this range and depth. "The Eschatology and 'Amen' of C.S. Lewis" was written by teacher, historian, and independent scholar Sarah Layman. She says, "Lewis had a particular way of writing fiction that conveyed theological themes *without naming within the narrative the specifically Christian content*" (emphasis mine, 87). Obliquely, indirectly, he wanted readers to receive themes deeply concerning to him. There is no getting away from what Lewis cared about: an imagination submerged in creation and its Maker's intent. That is, if you really want to think about them, as well as immerse yourself in his stories, they are ready. His stories will not only furnish one's imagination, but will clothe it with intelligence, with natural and supernatural beauty.

Even narrative crackpot doom-saying and doomsday prophets, mentioned in the Layman essay's opening paragraph, are capable of communicating an ancient and "pivotal" (as she puts it) proclamation (85). Yes, there are end times and gateways to new beginnings in Lewis's fiction, as in his own medieval and classical literary studies, and all have been fleetingly glimpsed in his creative ability. *Pilgrim's Regress*, *That Hideous Strength*, *The Last Battle*, *Till We Have Faces*, and perhaps others—these are the stories we find in our closets, underneath trees, in the library. But really, every place is a secret place, a wardrobe in a spare, even empty, room. The secret empty place quietly waiting to be filled up with all the apparel of creation we're wearing at the moment. All the star-particles, and divine dust of creation. It's even got breath for a while, enlivening, walking about, picking up other garments to hang in the wardrobe that we might brush past, privately, on our way to a living adventure.

In the last paragraph of his preface, Rob Fennell expresses his hope that this collection will "bolster your imagination in your own walk through the wardrobe." He says Lewis would want us to return to the world after reading, "a world in which God has promised always to accompany us" (x).

—S. Dorman

## WORKS CITED

- Lindvall, Terry. *God Mocks: A History of Religious Satire from the Hebrew Prophets to Stephen Colbert*. New York UP, 2015.
- Sayer, George. *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis*. Crossway Books, 1994.



**DISCWORLD AND THE DISCIPLINES: CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE TERRY PRATCHETT WORKS.** Edited by Anne Hiebert Alton and William C. Spruiell. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2014. 9780786474646. 231 pp., ill. \$29.95. Kindle edition \$9.99.

THE EDITORS OF THIS VOLUME make the bold claim that Terry Pratchett could well be “regarded as the Chaucer of our time” for his insightful and humorous commentary on the human condition, but observe, correctly, that his choice of genre and sheer popularity make his *oeuvre* “not as attractive to literary critics as it might be otherwise” (8), a characteristic he shares with J.R.R. Tolkien. And as Lois McMaster Bujold has commented about her own Vorkosiverse, “series fiction [...] is difficult to teach within the time constraints of a semester” (Croft 2); the sheer mass of the Discworld series can make critical engagement with it, inside or outside of the classroom, a daunting task. This book makes a solid contribution to rectifying the situation. Secondly, many of the essays also demonstrate that fantasy is “the proper diet for the growing soul” (qtd. 8), a statement with which *Mythlore* readers will likely find themselves in agreement.

Alton and Spruiell note the “proliferation of Discworldiana” (3)—audio books, plays, films both live-action and animated, graphic and illustrated novels, cookbooks, maps, computer and board games, figurines, t-shirts, stamps, jewelry, conventions, even alcoholic beverages—as an indication that our definition of an author’s body of work or “text” must be very broadly expanded. I think perhaps in their introduction they blur the line too much between an author’s initial subcreation, authorized expansions of the work, and fan activity; the subsequent essays are clearer on this. But current literary theory may support their broad definition.

They are also on somewhat shaky footing in their application of the term *multidisciplinary*. Can Pratchett’s work be considered multidisciplinary simply because he mixed genres freely and drew on his knowledge of (using *Night Watch* as an example) “elements of criminal justice, history, philosophy, economics, geography, politics, and [...] physics” (4)? Can the use of paratextual