

FANTASY TO THINK ABOUT

Beyond the door, Jacqueline Nugent. Douglas & McIntyre, 1984. 166 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-023-5.

Jacqueline Nugent's *Beyond the door* is a fantasy full of remarkable characters in strange and wondrous situations. The two main characters, Iris and Luc, both feel life has dealt them a poor hand. Iris suffers from a club foot, and Luc, abandoned by his father to the care of his grandfather, is a loner who feels unloved and who spends most of his free time helping in Grampa Willie's store. When fire breaks out in the local movie theatre, Luc drags Iris through the Exit Door, believing himself outside. But when he awakens, what he finds "beyond the door" is hardly what he expects.

Fundamental to *Beyond the door* is the quest or journey motif common in fantasy, which maps out how, through the experiences of an alternate reality, one comes to greater understanding of oneself, as well as the world. Along with their new friends, Alice Dakin, Jill Vine, and the Porridge-Eater, Iris and Luc each become a "Quaester," or "a person who at some time in his life discovers a basic question that has never been answered." Although Porridge-Eater is the only one to articulate a question, as he wonders why some are born lucky and some are not, this question concerning the "why" of things is really the fundamental question underlying all questions. It is, moreover, a question for which there is no definite answer. That the Quaesters are persecuted in the town of Preach by Mayor Prop and his dogmatic citizenry underlines the illusion of absolute answers and how the desire for absolutes leads to unyielding sensitivity to the world.

The point of the novel is that happiness lies in seeing what is really in the world and accepting what cannot be changed or explained away. Thus in the vision of Saga the witch, Luc sees that in his grandfather there had always been the love he despised his father for not giving him. And when Iris sees how wrong it would be to let the healer suffer in removing her disability, she also sees that life demands courage to face the bad and trust in the good. Trusting the good does not mitigate sadness, however, as Iris and Luc also learn when they eventually separate from their friends, although, when they do return through the door, they discover life "back home" has taken a decided turn for the better.

Beyond the door is a novel for adolescent readers willing to reflect on what they read. The characters and action are intriguing in themselves, but it would be unfortunate if one's appreciation of the story stopped there.

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