

occasion came into his mother's bedroom ... and found it occupied by Jack (i.e. Lewis) and Joy in a compromising position." Since Wilson gives his source precisely, and I was visiting the Wade Center on other business, I read the transcript of Lyle Dorsett's interview with Douglas Gresham. I read it twice, yet could find no mention of the incident Wilson recounts. There is a passage in Douglas Gresham's memoir *Lenten Lands* in which he says that he "soon learnt to knock first" before entering the room his mother and Lewis shared after they were married. And Lyle Dorsett, in his *And God Came In*, writes of the pre-marital period of growing love between Lewis and Joy. But no "compromising position" here, either. Where did Wilson find it - and what, exactly, does he mean by the term?

This lapse, and the pugnacity of his position on Mrs. Moore, as well as many small errors, call Wilson's scholarship into question. Every biographer must speculate when documented fact runs out, but he must not present speculation as fact, nor should he ignore or suppress evidence because it does not support his personal view. An example of the latter is Wilson's claim that "*The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* grew out of Lewis's experience of being stung back into childhood by his defeat at the hands of Elizabeth Anscombe at the Socratic Club" in 1948, and that "a nursery nightmare version" of that debate appears in Lewis's *The Silver Chair*, with Anscombe cast as the Queen of Underland. George Sayer tells the origin of the Narnia books much differently, and more credibly. The germ of *The Lion* was with Lewis since he was about sixteen - an image of a faun with an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood - and the story developed when children evacuated from London during the 1939-1945 war stayed with Lewis at The Kilns. Wilson passes by this reality in order to put forth a psychological basis for the Narnia stories, not very successfully.

Wilson's controversial opinions, provocative manner, and imperfect scholarship unfortunately overshadow the good qualities of *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* and have made it a *cause celebre* in Lewis studies. Lewis enthusiasts will read the book if only to see what all the fuss is about, but they will find it to be, in spite of its faults, a very stimulating biography of a fascinating man. Readers of *Mallorn* will be interested especially in Wilson's many appreciative references to Tolkien and quotations from unpublished comments by Tolkien on C.S. Lewis. Wilson clearly has an interest in Tolkien, and perhaps will write his biography too, in time. If he does, one hopes that it will be written with as much vitality as he put into *C.S. Lewis*, but with rather more care.

Research Report

OXONMOOT ECCENTRICITY SURVEY, by Sarah J. Sturch

Abstract

Until recently very little research had been done into eccentricity, but it was popularly supposed that societies interested in speculative fiction had a relatively high proportion of eccentrics. The E.P.D.S.T. was used to measure eccentricity, first in the Oxford Tolkien Society (Taruithorn) using the Christ Church Christian Union as a control, and in the Tolkien Society, using established population norms for comparison. The Tolkien Societies were found to have a relatively high level of eccentricity. This could be because both eccentricity and speculative fiction are associated with an exceptionally vivid imagination.

Introduction

Although a great deal of research has been done into normal personality and into mental disorder, far less is known about those perfectly healthy people with exceptional characters or who do unusual or outstanding things. Very little indeed has been done on those people known as eccentrics: to date the only major investigation was that conducted by Dr. David Weeks and Kate Wardl. After a nationwide appeal for volunteers, they found 130 eccentrics whom they interviewed extensively and tested with Cattell's 16PF, hoping to find common traits, demographic characteristics, activities and interests or style of thinking. It may at first glance seem strange, if not nonsensical, to look for common characteristics in a population who specialize in being different, but although eccentricity can be expressed in a multitude of ways, it could have its cause in similar ways of thinking, background or personality traits.

Weeks outlines seven criteria by which somebody could be regarded as exceptional. The first is extremity; the second rarity; possession of special attributes or unusual combinations of attributes; fifthly, doing perfectly ordinary things in extraordinary ways; next the violation of the normal "rules" of "normal personality"; and lastly abnormal or disordered personality. Eccentrics fit most of these. Many had extreme scores on the 16PF, with 46 getting extreme scores on more than one trait. They are very rare: possibly only one in ten thousand people in Great Britain are eccentric, and in other countries they may well be still rarer. They are extremely curious and many are highly imaginative. They also find many unorthodox ways of doing everyday things such as eating, sleeping or getting from one place to another: for instance living in a cave or driving a milk float.

It is popularly believed (particularly by critics who disapprove of the genre) that speculative fiction attracts a large number of eccentrics and that fantasy and science fiction fan clubs and appreciation societies are full of people with highly eccentric personalities. Indeed, some have gone still further and suggested that readers of speculative fiction are "out of touch with reality" or even "a bunch of costumed loonies". Clearly such pejorative language, backed up by nothing further than a cursory glance at some of these societies' more colourful activities, is unacceptable. However, it is possible that such societies do contain a small pool of eccentrics and people who to a lesser extent show eccentric characteristics. One society that may well do so is the Tolkien Society. The Oxford Tolkien society, Taruithorn, has a mainly student membership, so when testing for eccentricity levels it was necessary to find a suitable control group rather than using the standards found by Weeks and Ward when testing the normal population. Most societies involve people of similar tastes or subject which could have led to a bias creeping in, whereas giving questionnaires to friends would almost certainly have led to bias. In the end the Christ Church Christian Union was chosen as a suitable control, since its members cover a good range of subjects and interests, being united chiefly by common religious beliefs. Since eccentrics often have strong religious feelings, any bias would be on the side of caution, with weaker results than would be found with a perfect cross sample of Oxford undergraduates.

Method

Eccentricity was tested using the Eccentricity Predisposition Self-Test (E.P.D.S.T.) developed by Weeks and Ward as a result of their study of eccentrics. Subjects were asked to answer all the questions, marking whatever answer seemed more appropriate whenever neither fitted perfectly. Questionnaires were given out at meetings and subjects were asked to fill them and return them in there and then, thus ensuring a good return rate. They were then marked and the scores tested to see if there was a significant difference between the two means.

Subjects were members of The Oxford Tolkien Society (Taruithorn) and controls were the Christ Church Christian Union. Altogether 20 members of Taruithorn and 14 Christian Union members were tested.

Results

All the questionnaires given to Taruithorn members and 12 of the control group questionnaires were returned. Eight of the experimental group scored above the cut-off score for eccentricity of 66, whereas only one

control appeared to be eccentric. The mean score overall for the experimental group was 60.8, with a standard deviation of 10.32. The mean score for the control group was 55.25, with a standard deviation of 7.09. This difference is just significant ($P < 0.05$).

Discussion

These results suggest that members of Taruithorn and Christ Church Christian Union are not drawn from the same population. There are more eccentrics in Taruithorn. It was particularly interesting to find as many as eight eccentrics in such a small society, given the rarity of such people in the general population. Weeks suggests a figure of around one in ten thousand, although owing to the difficulty of getting accurate data about the proportion of eccentrics in this (or indeed any) country, this figure could have a margin of error as great as 50. The actual proportion of eccentrics could be anywhere between one in five thousand and one in fifteen thousand. Whatever the true figure is, however, it is clearly a long way from two in five.

The sample available was, however, very small, and the results, although significant, were not particularly strong. A larger sample, using a wider cross-section of the community than a student society, could yield interesting results. The national Tolkien Society has a large convention in Oxford every year. This covers what is probably the widest range of activities of any of the major meetings. It is certainly the one with the largest attendance. There are many people there who could be described as eccentric, as well as the more serious, academically-minded people. It therefore looked as though it might be profitable to give the "E.P.D.S.T." to people attending Oxonmoot as well.

Method

The E.P.D.S.T. was given to all attendees at Oxonmoot. Altogether 132 people attended. The questionnaires were given to people with their registration packs on arrival. A large, clearly labelled box was placed prominently by the entrance to the hall in which the main activities took place, and people were alerted to its position, and asked to co-operate and fill it in, in an appeal over the tannoy as well as in person.

The results were compared to the population norms found by Weeks and Ward when they tested the E.P.D.S.T. They were tested for difference of two means.

Results

Many people did not hand back their questionnaires, some because of inability to read (two nine-month old babies and a nonagenarian with failing sight), some because

they were not fluent enough at English, and the remainder gave no reason. Altogether 65 (49) were returned. Of these, 20 (31) scored above the eccentricity cut-off point of 66, a far higher proportion than the 0.01 thought to be found in the general population. The average score was 61.8, with a standard deviation of 8.7. Weeks and Ward found an average of 52.5, with a standard deviation of 11.2, in their normal sample. The difference of the two means was tested, and the probability of getting the results found from the Tolkien Society from a random sample of the community was considerably less than 0.0001 (≈ 7.165). This is highly significant.

Discussion

These results seem very decisive. There are indeed a very high number of eccentrics in speculative fiction groups such as the Tolkien Society. This is unlikely to be entirely due to demographic variables, although members of the Tolkien Society and the eccentrics studied by Weeks and Ward do share some characteristics in common. They both tend to be predominately "white-collar", with a wide age range, and well educated. All are literate and enjoy reading. 34 of eccentrics said they read "a lot" and 37 said they had an obsessional interest in reading, whereas only 2 said they never read books. No data is available on how widely read Tolkien Society members are, although presumably people who do not read will not be found in a literary society. However, since Weeks and Ward matched their normal sample for such demographic variables, it is unlikely that this could account for much of the higher proportion. It also seems improbable that reading speculative fiction could cause anybody to become eccentric. There is no obvious mechanism for this to happen.

More interesting is the possibility that some variable associated with eccentricity is also associated with a taste for fantasy and science fiction. One possible mediator could be the possession of a vivid imagination. Weeks and Ward report that many of their eccentric sample had powerful imaginations and scored highly on the "M" scale of the IGPF. 10 had a sten of 10, the highest score possible, and the sample as a whole scored significantly higher than the general population. A strong and vivid imagination is also necessary in order to fully appreciate fantasy or science fiction, which stimulates and stretch the imagination even more than the intellect.

Weeks and Ward did a multiple regression of their results on the IGPF and found that those eccentrics who scored highest on the "M" scale also tended to score highly on the "T" scale (emotionally sensitive and tender minded). Members of the Tolkien Society have a reputation for being very friendly and likeable: the BBC Radio series "To keep the memory green" which looked at a variety of different

literary societies including the Tolkien Society concluded that they were "by far the friendliest". It would be interesting to see if this could be established.

Another interesting factor is the large number of people from other countries who attended Oxonmoot and participated in the experiment. Although the British have a world-wide reputation for eccentricity, it is by no means a British monopoly. Arnold-Foster, reviewing the "To keep the memory green" series, comments "It isn't just another aspect of British eccentricity; it was American students who scrawled 'Frodo Lives' on the walls."² It would be interesting to know if people with a strong interest in the works of Tolkien from other countries are particularly eccentric.

Whatever the reason, it seems as though speculative fiction does attract eccentric people. This is a far cry from the "costumed loonies" of the critics, and such irresponsible comments can of course only be condemned. However, we can safely conclude that societies such as the Tolkien Society include in their ranks a sizeable pool of eccentrics.

NOTES

1. Weeks, D. and Ward, K. : *Eccentrics: The Scientific Investigation*. Stirling University Press, 1988.
2. Arnold-Foster, V. : *Guardian Weekend* 21/1/89, quoted in *Arnon Hen* 96.

