

REVIEW

Saving Faith (2007)



Patrick Garry

Saving Faith is a rare accomplishment, a philosophical novel of ideas with an allegorical structure and popular appeal. The style appears to be plain, but “Everything is more than it seems.” Cast in the form of a mystery, it evokes the fundamental mysteries of life, combining popular with high art. The narrative is poignant in tone, humanistic in perspective and rich in ironies, similes and wit.

Patrick Garry has emerged in the tradition of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Flannery O’Connor, and Marilynne Robinson, allegorical religious writers with moral visions that have a striking clarity and power when contrasted to novels by even the best Postmodernists, such as Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo. Garry is strongest where the New York Postmodernists are weakest, in vision--in showing us ourselves with historical perspective, an objective sense of proportion, psychological insight and spiritual depth.

The young narrator is Jack, an orphan who grew up in an institution, one of the many young people today who were conditioned to feel unwanted in a society dominated by narcissistic adults. “In the orphanage we were all mistakes,” he observes. The opposite of most Americans in the past, with their great expectations, he has no expectations at all: “The key to finding love, I figured, was to find someone who didn’t want to be in their own home.” What he misses most about the orphanage is “being around people who believed, despite the odds.” To survive in the cynical and corrupt world outside the institution, he learns, a person must be able to place faith in something, however unlikely. Love, in particular, depends upon faith.

At the center of this novel, giving birth to its allegory, is an otherwise unidentified patient called Faith Powers, who demonstrates the powers of faith by reviving the lives of those around her while herself remaining comatose. Jack’s personal life seems empty until he happens into the room of Faith, where he meets the nurse who keeps her alive, befriends a disgraced journalist who uses her to revive his career, and gets involved with a confused modern woman who talks to Faith as if praying, or talking to the best part of herself. As he gets to know the people who care about Faith, Jack compares them to hopeful orphans.

Insightful satire and wit display the range of Garry's fiction. His greatest appeal as a writer, beyond even his talent for allegory, is his overall perspective and elegiac tone, both here and in his deeply moving previous novel *In the Shadow of War*. His writing has a soul. It is redemptive and sustains a loving spirit of compassion, sacrifice and transcendence.

Michael Hollister (2015)

