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**T**he excellent index to Colin Manlove's new book is headed with the names of Alanus ab Insulis and Bernardus Silvestris. This stimulates the reader's appetite, and the study does penetrate deeper into the world of the spirit than Manlove's earlier studies of fantasy writing, as well as extending much further back in time—the sub-title is "From 1200 to the Present Day."

A central section on MacDonald's fairy tales and Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* is preceded by a survey, of the (relatively rare) earlier works of Christian fantasy. This first section is particularly valuable for the student of MacDonald, since MacDonald draws upon most of the works examined, and Manlove's study in most cases highlights the aspects of these works which particularly attracted MacDonald. The third section begins with studies of the Christian fantasy writing of Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis, then has a comprehensive survey of other twentieth century Christian fantasy and related writing. Manlove very briefly (although often perceptively) compares the approach of the more important twentieth century writers with that of MacDonald, but he does not consider MacDonald's influence upon any of them except very briefly in his introductory chapter. In this chapter Manlove emphasises how "attitudes to the Christian use of the imagination shifted," but gives little attention to concurrent changes in the faculty of imaginative perception. He recognises that for MacDonald the supernatural reality resides in the God-given nature of his imaginations, but he attributes MacDonald's belief that "that what is myth in one world may be fact in another" to Lewis (4).

Of the works considered in the first part, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, *The Divine Comedy*, *The Faerie Queen*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* were all very important influences upon MacDonald, Manlove's treatments of *Paradise Lost*, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* do not seem to suggest any important influences upon MacDonald, and his treatment of the Metaphysical Poets is unfortunately too brief to do so. It is interesting to contrast his analyses, especially his study of *Pearl*, with MacDonald's analyses of the same poems **[end of page 73]** in *England's Antiphon*. MacDonald's comments upon *Pearl* suggest that he was more concerned with potential

negative influences of the poem (upon his friend Lewis Carroll?) than with its positive characteristics.

Manlove's analysis of Spenser's technique in *The Faerie Queen* is particularly useful in helping the reader in his or her approach to MacDonald's similar technique in his fantasy writings. In a "dark conceit":  
the reader is, allowing for some help, [expected] to do much of the work for himself. Thus only if he has . . . some understanding of . . . the Christian faith . . . will he begin to comprehend the full meaning . . . This is quite different from [a work such as] *Everyman*, which labours to be absolutely clear . . . [I]f we read *The Faerie Queen* for its wonders and have some faint glimmerings of significance now and then, there is a cruel truth which says that we will have learnt only about our own materialism. And yet it is typical of Spenser's complexity that, if we read *The Faerie Queen* solely in order to comprehend its deep significance, we run the risk of spiritual pride. (56)

Moreover "a personage or action is often not simply to be summed up or conceptualised, but can only be understood in its total embodiment in the poem" (57).

Manlove's treatment of Bunyan emphasises that although he "thought he was writing an allegory; in a sense what he succeeded in writing was a myth" (119), and this is important to the way that MacDonald draws upon *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Similarly, Manlove's dynamic treatment of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* enables us to recognise how important Blake's book was for MacDonald's recognition that all existence is grounded in the polarities between, and interaction of, opposites. (Charles Williams, so similar to MacDonald in many ways, is antithetical to him in that, as Manlove points out, he continuously makes us aware that all such opposites are opposite sides of the same coin.)

In his chapter upon *The Water Babies*, Manlove's delight in Kingsley's exuberance is evident. But he repeats his previous contrasts between Kingsley and MacDonald already demonstrated as untenable by more than one commentator. In particular he continues to maintain that MacDonald came to reject scientific method and that his stories tend to lack structure (203). His [74] claim that while "MacDonald turned away from allegory; Kingsley by contrast seems to embrace it" (203) is misleading, since both use allegory when necessary but prefer myth. The way "the

personality of the author . . . finds its quirky way into every nook and cranny” of *The Water-Babies* (204) distinguishes the book not just from MacDonald’s fairy tales, as he suggests, but from all other fairy tales. Yet, while it is true that there are few contemporary allusions in MacDonald’s tales of faerie, Manlove’s assertion that there are “scarcely any” (207) is misleading. For example, at the beginning of *Phantastes* the fairy grandmother makes a humorous allusion to a contemporary stage farce, *You Can’t Marry Your Grandmother*; and MacDonald makes humorous play with the fact that Anodos’s castle has apparently just had water plumbed into the bedrooms. And MacDonald’s personality intrudes “into every nook and cranny” of his novels.

The chapter on MacDonald is a reworking of Manlove’s previous articles on MacDonald except that it includes a fine analysis of the spinning-wheel poem in chapter 8 of *The Princess and Curdie*.

Manlove’s survey of contemporary Christian fiction confirms, as one had suspected, that with a few honourable exceptions “these books are fully ‘fantasies’ in that they afford too-ready consolations without much sense of the reality of pain and evil save as bogeys for heroes to drive away” (276):

They reject the world as it is, not out of asceticism as with Bunyan or the *Queste*, but out of what in the end is evasion, the refusal to accept its complexity and fallenness and seek to amend them from within. Their other worlds, centaurs and cherubim, are “ways out”: they write fantasy because their answers involve turning away from the real world. These are hard sayings, but the perspective of all the works considered in this book calls for them.

Another way of putting this is that one feels with these writers that they like the idea of being Christians, but they do not seem fully to know what it is like. (280)

Even in the work of Madeleine L’Engle, possibly the best contemporary writer of Christian fantasy, “[t]he plots are rather strained and absurdly melodramatic,” and “[i]t is interesting to note how little time there is for contemplation . . . we are always being hurried from one place or event to another” (278). The ultimate reason “is the evangelical pressure, the desire to [75] put over a Christian vision, which reduces the fantastic worlds to mere tools” (278). Such works are not going to appeal to anyone, adult or child, who has any real interest in MacDonald’s writings or in any other of the genuine Christian fantasies which Manlove examines. However we

should not forget that at one time a fantasy 'fan-mag' existed with the title *Gwyntystorm!*