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A passage from Ursula Le Guin's *The Language of the Night: Essays in Fantasy and Science Fiction* is twice quoted by contributors to Kath Filmer's book:

fantasy is true of course. It isn't factual but its true. Children know that. Adults know it, too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phoney, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. (44)

E. T. A. Hoffmann says much the same thing when he describes his heroes as "enemies of the Enlightenment"; so does G. K. Chesterton in his Introduction to Greville MacDonald's biography of his parents where he remarks that *The Princess and the Goblin* is "of all the stories I have read . . . the most real, the most realistic, in the exact sense of the phrase the most like life" (9).

Profound mythopoeic writing *can* be read as escapist literature, of course, and much contemporary fantasy writing is no more than escapist literature. In these two important new studies, however, 'fantasy' is regarded essentially as extended metaphor; the term carries no pejorative connotations. Filmer describes such fantasy writing as "works of social or cultural criticism, taking into account moral value and the uncharted regions of the human mind." The studies in her collection examine the way such fantasy subverts established dogma (except that two studies in Filmer's **[end of page 36]** collection undertake the not very difficult tasks of demonstrating that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* reinforces "an essentially conservative outlook" and that Frances Browne's *Granny's Wonderful Chair* exhibits an extraordinary confusion of spiritual and utilitarian values).

Jack Zipes, in his splendid anthology *Victorian Fairy Tales* (1987), elegantly demonstrates, by simple juxtaposition, the contrast between

subversive, radical Christian writing and the work of the much larger number of authors who “conceived plots conventionally to reconcile themselves and their readers to the status quo of Victorian society” and whose “imaginative worlds could be called exercises in complicity with the traditional opponents of fairy tales” (xxiii). In these two new studies a similar end is achieved by the use of all the techniques of Post-Modernist criticism.

In Filmer’s collection, the fashionable tides and abstruse introductory passages of some of the essays may deter some readers: for example, Barbara Garlick at the beginning of “Christina Rossetti and the Gender Politics of Fantasy” writes of “Goblin Market” as being “predicated on Rossetti’s recognition of the patriarchal imperialism within the visual and written texts against which she was writing” (133). Yet, in all the essays, as soon as the writers become absorbed in their subjects this pose is dropped, and it is difficult to imagine any reader not being stimulated to examine or re-examine the works discussed.

Four essays out of the fourteen in Filmer’s volume are wholly or largely concerned with MacDonald’s writing. Several more are very important for the serious student of MacDonald, notably Roslynn D. Haynes’ study of the “Dreamland” chapter of Kingsley’s *Alton Locke*, but space cannot be devoted to them here.

Bruce L. Edmunds Jr., in “Towards a Rhetoric of Nineteenth Century Fantasy Criticism,” calls for a return to C. S. Lewis’s “rehabilitation” criticism (*Rehabilitation and Other Essays* 1939). This [37] recognises the essential “quiddity” of a work, in opposition to conventional “reclamation” criticism which reclaims a forgotten work by fitting it into the Procrustean bed of contemporary literary dogma. Matthews recognises that this stance places Lewis “in the tradition pioneered by G. K. Chesterton” (71); but he does not appreciate that Lewis in applying it also adopted Chestertonian paradox. Such paradox shines from every page of Chesterton’s collection of essays *The Defendant* (1901). But because Lewis does not habitually use the technique, Matthews and many other critics fail to see the deliberate paradox in Lewis’s dismissal of MacDonald’s novels (introduction to *George MacDonald: An Anthology* 1946) and thus take his comments literally. Matthews further damns MacDonald’s novels by describing them as “conventional” and “realistic,” thus ignoring all David Robb’s careful studies.

Stephen Prickett has a short essay, “George MacDonald and the Poetics of Realism,” employing Jakobson’s theory of “Poetics” to examine MacDonald’s extensive, but inconspicuous, use of contemporary scientific

theories in his writing. He argues that failure to recognise such allusions in the romances makes them seem far more fantastic than they are. The examples he gives are less convincing than those used by F. Hal Broome in his essay on the scientific background to MacDonald's writing in *The Gold Thread*.

Filmer's MacDonald essay "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is a study of social criticism in *Lilith*. Much of the social criticism in *Lilith* is self-evident and scarcely requires analysis, but arguably it is the only path into the romance for the modern reader. Interpretation in purely psychological-social terms is, however, not always easy: for example, Filmer's categorisation of the Little Ones as providing "a symbol for a social group outside the mainstream" (93) does not assist our understanding. [38]

Filmer recognises that MacDonald's approach is dependent upon his psychological understanding, in particular his realisation that "the spiritual healing of society depends upon the spiritual healing of individuals" (92). Like other critics, she notes MacDonald's emphasis upon Vane's "Cold Charity." She considers MacDonald's portrait of Vane in this respect as inferior to Dickens' Mr Bounderby and Charlotte Brontë's Reverend Brocklehurst. Yet those caricatures are so extreme that we tend to regard them as unique monsters, whereas, although we repeatedly recoil with loathing from Vane's behaviour, we do not cease to feel that he is an Everyman figure.

Filmer totally misrepresents the faceless dancers, seeing them as "headless corpses" which "haunt" Vane. She maintains they are "clearly an appropriation of Gothic motifs" (97-98), although, as Mr Raven explains them, they are far closer in mood to the similar figures who appear between supine skeletons and wholly restored individuals in Signorelli's resurrection frescoes at Orvieto.

Filmer suggests that "when MacDonald shifts his attention to Lilith . . . he is enabled to encode his social criticism much more subtly" (95), but this is because she fails to recognise most of the subtlety in his description of Vane's relationship to the dancers and to the Little Ones. For example, the main reason Vane endures the ill-treatment of the Bags and remains with the Little Ones is clearly the intense (although wholly "cold" and self-centred) sensual pleasure he derives from contact with these naked children.

Filmer notes that MacDonald intends Vane's masochism in the presence of Lilith as a metaphor for power-worship in all its forms. She implies that Lilith's charms are irresistible and does not notice that Vane's apparent necrophily upon first encountering Lilith's seeming cadaver recalls

the behaviour of the “Young Man who Set Out to Learn Fear” in Grimm’s story. Vane, like that young man, is emotionally [39] unmoved by skeletons and cadavers but desirous of company and willing to resurrect a cadaver to obtain it. Immediately he has committed himself to this her charms have power to influence him. Apart from this important detail, Filmer’s analysis of the redemption of Lilith and Vane is very perceptive.

The most interesting essay in Filmer’s collection is by Adeheld Kegler, who in “Silent House” looks at MacDonald’s writing from a Neoplatonic viewpoint. But she is so at home in Noumenal thinking that she sometimes forgets that other people may walk less surely in these worlds. She also tends to assume her readers are familiar with the whole corpus of MacDonald’s writings and makes frequent allusions but only few, brief quotations.

Kegler lays particular emphasis upon the images of the Divine Sophia and the “house of the soul”; the latter with its upper stories closed off—or, at the very least, shuttered from reality—throughout the Victorian period. She sees MacDonald as the first protagonist of “a renaissance of romanticism, a ‘romanticism come of age’” (106). This is Owen Barfield’s phrase, and the present reviewer has been urging Barfield to recognise the key role of MacDonald for several years. A Neoplatonic perception irradiates all of MacDonald’s writing, but it has been largely ignored by critics. Kegler quotes Greville MacDonald to imply that he may have burnt his father’s novel “Seekers and Finders” because it was explicitly Neoplatonic (127).

Parts of Kegler’s Conclusion confirm and reinforce the picture of MacDonald’s deepest perceptions which McGillis draws from the “community of the centre” passage in chapter 12 of *Phantastes* (in press):

If that “sophianic” dimension is shut out of the cosmos of the soul, the remaining parts, striving to be autonomous, are involved in envious strife or ideological warfare. That strife as an experience of isolation can be relieved only by an [40] anticipatory insight into the holistic structure of being . . . by apprehending a structure of being, everlastingly unhurt. The “deep” structure of reality reveals itself only in the absence of revenge and violence.

It is the central message of both Brontë and MacDonald that the defenceless good is in fact able to renew the world.

Karen Michalson’s book is unusually free from jargon and has a wide-ranging approach to its subject matter. It combines an examination of

the reasons for the exclusion of fantasy fiction from the accepted canon with stimulating studies of five fantasy writers and of one work by each of these writers (two in the case of Kipling).

Michalson examines:

the role of the Anglican Church as well as that of the Non-Conformist or Dissenting Evangelical in the educational institutions of nineteenth-century Britain [strictly England and Wales Ed.] in the first half of the century and . . . the function that the academic study of English literature played in British imperialist ideology in the latter part of the century (i).

Her careful recording of her numerous sources of reference is invaluable, but the study could have been condensed with advantage, leaving room for an equally needed study of why the same attitude towards fantasy fiction prevailed throughout most of the twentieth century.

Michalson's study of John Ruskin's *King of the Golden River* is fascinating and important, but she sees the story as more different from the best traditional fairy stories than it actually is. In Charles Kingsley she recognises someone who experienced life intensely [41] because (like Novalis) he acknowledged the universal flux of creation; and she shows how this—and his clear understanding of scientific method—is reflected in *The Water-Babies*. *The Water-Babies* is an important influence upon a number of MacDonald's stories from "The Gold Key" onwards, and Michalson's study of the book is one of the best so far published.

Michalson remarks that Kingsley initially admired the practical side of F. D. Maurice's Christian Socialism but withdrew when its adherents seemed to become rigid and doctrinaire. Ruskin and MacDonald, also, were attracted by Maurice, despite disagreeing with some of his basic ideas. Michalson suggests that one of the attractions of Maurice for MacDonald was that his doctrine of atonement through suffering gave MacDonald a way of circumventing an inconsistency in Calvinism:

How can a believer put God first and live only with an eye towards promoting God's glory when even Calvin himself admitted that God was unknowable? . . . Self-sacrifice, under certain conditions, becomes a way of knowing that we are indeed privileging the unknowable. (94)

MacDonald, however, followed Calvin in holding "the free exercise of the faculty of the imagination to be necessary to the performance of Christian duties;" Maurice did not.

Michalson has a very high opinion of *Phantastes*. like Kegler recognising that MacDonald “dared to create a didactic Christian Romanticism” (75). She suggests that initially Anodos “successfully negotiates his way through Fairy Land because he is not fearful or self-fixed but curious and accepting about the unknown The imagination is the proper guide through seeming randomness” (85). At one level, of course, Anodos certainly is self-fixed, and this has tended to prevent critics recognising the deeper freedom he initially possesses. He is not hampered as [42] other characters are: for example, the woman in the first cottage is restricted by her superstition, the knight by his rigid chivalric code, symbolised by his armour.

Anodos comes to grief, Michalson suggests, when he allows himself to become merely part of the dream of another imaginative creator, the Alder maiden (86). When Anodos awakens to this realisation the “maiden” appears as a living coffin, and it appears to be his fate to be confined within this coffin or the similar hollow trunk of her companion the Ash ogre. At one level this is a perceptive analysis, but Michalson does not notice how MacDonald associates the Alder maiden with “fallen Nature” when Anodos muses about her after being saved by the knight. In that passage MacDonald clearly alludes to Shelley’s poems in *Alastor* about Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s loss of their Imaginative vision of Nature. It is Anodos’ encounter with the marble lady which transforms his Innocent perception of Nature (Beech dryad) into the vision of Experience (Alder dryad). Yet all critics except Rolland Hein ascribe his change of outlook to his encounter with the Alder.

Michalson has a particularly clear understanding of Anodos’ adventure in the “long, low hut” where he:

becomes as Eve, or as Pandora, characters from other creation myths, consumed with curiosity and desperate to find the Answer, to obtain the forbidden knowledge of Good and Evil.

Anodos opens a door:

“to see what was beyond it.” Of course, there is nothing “beyond” the groundless, self-determinative play of infinity the ogre-woman has just attempted to describe. “Beyond” is a linear concept which is useless as a governing motivation in Fairy Land. (88)

Michalson gives a very good analysis of the effects of the shadow Anodos acquires at the hut, describing it as [43] “an indicator of his fallen status from creator to mere learner” (90).

The central included story of Cosmo is also perceptively analysed

by Michalson, particularly where she recognises that Cosmo is concerned, by the use of his magic mirror, to transform “dull fact . . . into the realm of art,” an inversion of the true Fairy-Land sequence but a reflection of Anodos’ musings on mirrors. Her survey of the rest of the story is very brief as she examines only MacDonald’s theme of sacrifice. She suggests that Anodos’ final achievement is that when he finds himself back at home “the world of Fairy Land has merged with the real world, and the real world can now be perceived as unknowable” (96).

In her Conclusion, Michalson points out that while “pre-industrial people in general did not separate fantasy and fact,” this outlook became marginalised in the Age of Reason and thus fantasy writing carried little respect in the Victorian period. This is the theme of Colin Manlove’s new book *Christian Fantasy* which it had also been hoped to review.