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## **George MacDonald and J.R.R. Tolkien on Faërie and Fairy Stories**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973) is justly famous for his 1939 Andrew Lang Lecture on Fairy-stories at St. Andrews University in Scotland, which became a highly influential turning point for imaginative fiction when it was subsequently expanded and published in 1947 as an essay "On Fairy-Stories", and then revised once more and published in 1964.<sup>1</sup>

What is less known, indeed almost unknown, is that George MacDonald (1824-1905) wrote an essay in 1893 entitled "The Fantastic Imagination," dealing with many of the same issues.<sup>2</sup> The modest purpose of this paper is to outline MacDonald's 1893 ideas on imaginative literature and compare them with Tolkien's as expressed five decades later. In addition, the paper will also draw on an earlier 1867 MacDonald essay "The Imagination: Its Functions and Culture," which is primarily focused on attacking the "science v. imagination" dichotomy common at the time, but does discuss similar ideas, particularly the concept of Sub-Creation.<sup>3</sup> Also considered will be Tolkien's 1967 preface to a planned but unpublished edition of MacDonald's *The Golden Key*.<sup>4</sup>

It would have simplified things considerably if MacDonald and Tolkien had consistently used "Faërie"—both were aware of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*—as the description of the kind of imaginative stories they had in mind. What follows will use Faërie in this sense, except for direct

quotations.<sup>5</sup>

## II. MACDONALD AND TOLKIEN ON FAËRIE

We begin with MacDonald's "The Fantastic Imagination," an essay that he explicitly described as representing his "now more matured judgment" of the subject.<sup>6</sup> His views had solidified owing to an important 1889 event which revolutionized the "Battle of the Fairy Tale" controversy between realist and imaginative literature. This was the appearance of Andrew Lang's *The Blue Fairy Book*.<sup>7</sup> Lang's publisher, Longmans, as well as Lang himself (1844-1912; a sometime Oxford don) were skeptical that there was a market for such a book, but it was so wildly successful that they published a sequel, *The Red Fairy Book*, in 1890, and then ten additional color books between 1892 and 1910. Tolkien later observed "The number of collections of fairy-stories is now very great. In English none probably rival either the popularity, or the inclusiveness, or the general merits of the twelve books of twelve colours which we owe to Andrew Lang and his wife."<sup>8</sup> Lang's book had tipped the balance to respectability for imaginative literature and MacDonald realized it.<sup>9</sup>

MacDonald opens "The Fantastic Imagination"—whose dialogic format will be retained in what follows—by lamenting the fact that there is "in English no word corresponding to the German *Mährchen* (sic)" which "drives us to use the word *Fairy tale*, regardless of the fact that the tale may have

nothing to do with any sort of fairy."<sup>10</sup> Tolkien later emphatically put paid to the idea that Fairy-stories were mostly about beings of "diminutive size" (an idea which he felt had "long ago achieved tiresomeness"). Tolkien pointed out that none of the stories in Lang's Blue Fairy Book were "primarily about 'fairies', [and] few [of the stories] refer to them."<sup>11</sup>

The error, of course, said Tolkien, was that "fairy-stories are not...stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is Faërie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. Faërie contains many things beside elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted. Stories that are actually concerned primarily with 'fairies'...are relatively rare, and as a rule not very interesting. Most good 'fairy-stories' are about the adventures of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches."<sup>12</sup>

Returning to this thought as he perused MacDonald's work in 1967, Tolkien emphasized: "...the truth is that fairy did not originally mean a 'creature' at all, small or large. It meant enchantment or magic, and the enchanted world or country in which marvellous people lived, great and small, with strange powers of mind and will for good and evil....The Fairy Queen was not a queen shaped like a little fairy, but the Queen of Fairy, a great and dangerous person, however beautiful, Queen of the enchanted world and all its people. A fairy tale is a tale about that world..."<sup>13</sup>

To deal with this situation, MacDonald admits that he is prepared to resort to the "old use of the word Fairy, by Spenser...where need must."<sup>14</sup> And so was Tolkien.<sup>15</sup> As late as 1967, he was still troubled by terminology. As he worked on a preface to MacDonald's *The Golden Key*, he "found it necessary to deal with the term 'fairy'—always necessary nowadays whether talking to children or adults..."<sup>16</sup>

What is a fairytale or Faërie? "Were I asked," MacDonald responds, citing an early 19th century romantic fantasy tale, "I should reply, Read *Undine*: that is a fairytale..."<sup>17</sup> But define it? "I should as soon think of describing the abstract human face, or stating what must go to constitute a human being. A fairytale is just a fairytale, as a face is just a face..."<sup>18</sup>

Thus, while those "who would not attempt to define a man, might venture to say something as to what a man ought to be," and while MacDonald had himself done so earlier in connection with fairytales, his "now more matured judgment" would allow him here only to "say some things helpful to the reading, in right-minded fashion, of such fairytales as I would wish to write, or care to read." This is because, as MacDonald puts it in one of his *Unspoken Sermons*, "Analysis is well, as death is well; analysis is death, not life."<sup>19</sup>

In other words, to define is to destroy, a sentiment shared by Tolkien, who warned us not to analyse Faërie too closely: "Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold....In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys be lost."<sup>20</sup> Thus, in common with MacDonald, Tolkien believed that Faërie could not be defined so much as experienced: "Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities is to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole."<sup>21</sup>

How does Faërie relate to the natural world? "The natural world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them in the way of presentment any more than in the way of use," MacDonald wrote, "but they themselves may suggest laws of other kinds, and man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws; for there is that in

him which delights in calling up new forms—which is the nearest, perhaps, he can come to creation. When such forms are new embodiments of old truths, we call them products of the Imagination; when they are mere inventions, however lovely, I should call them the work of the Fancy: in either case, Law has been diligently at work."<sup>22</sup>

In his 1867 essay, MacDonald had attributed this to imagination, that is to the "faculty in man which is likest to the prime operation of the power of God, and has therefore, been called the creative faculty, and its exercise creation. Poet means maker. We must not forget, however, that between creator and poet lies the one impassable gulf which distinguishes...all that is God's from all that is man's...The imagination of man is made in the image of the imagination of God...where a man would make a machine, or a picture, or a book, God makes the man that makes the book, or the picture, or the machine." When we "consider the so-called creative faculty in man, we shall find that in no primary sense is this faculty creative." Imagination is "to man what creation is to God."<sup>23</sup>

In 1893, MacDonald continued in the same vein: "His world once invented, the highest law that comes next into play is, that there shall be harmony between the laws by which the new world has begun to exist; and in the process of his creation, the inventor must hold by those laws. The moment he forgets one of them, he makes the story, by its own postulates, incredible. To be able to live a moment in an imagined world, we must see the laws of its existence obeyed. Those broken, we fall out of it...Law is the soil in which alone beauty will grow; beauty is the only stuff in which Truth can be clothed; and you may, if you will, call Imagination the tailor that cuts her garments to fit her, and Fancy his journeyman that puts the pieces of them together, or perhaps at most embroiders their button-holes. Obeying law, the maker works like his creator; not obeying law, he is such a fool as heaps a pile of stones and calls it a church."<sup>24</sup>

Finally, in connection with such "an

imagined world", MacDonald observes, "In the moral world it is different: there a man may clothe in new forms, and for this employ his imagination freely, but he must invent nothing. He may not, for any purpose, turn its laws upside down....it would be wicked to write a tale representing a man it called good as always doing bad things, or a man it called bad as always doing good things: the notion itself is absolutely lawless. In physical things a man may invent; in moral things he must obey—and take their laws with him into his invented world as well."<sup>25</sup>

Tolkien would not have questioned any of this since these are concepts that he made crystal clear and a commonplace today in imaginative literature: the ideas of sub-creation, of primary and secondary worlds, and the inner consistency of reality. He wrote "Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the green sun...To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode."<sup>26</sup> The goal is "The achievement of... 'the inner consistency of reality'" with Art as "the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation...."<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, for Tolkien, "fairy-stories as a whole have three faces: the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards man. The essential Face of Faërie is the middle one, the Magical."<sup>28</sup> MacDonald was a primary source for the Mystical face and is directly cited for this as such by Tolkien, "achieving stories of power and beauty when he succeeded, as in *The Golden Key* (which he called a fairy-tale); and even when he partly failed, as in *Lilith* (which he called a romance)."<sup>29</sup>

Next MacDonald raises the problem of meaning. "You write as if a fairytale were a

thing of importance: must it have a meaning?" the reader asks. MacDonald replies: "It cannot help having some meaning; if it have (sic) proportion and harmony it has vitality, and vitality is truth. The beauty may be plainer in it than the truth, but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairytale would give no delight. Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another."<sup>30</sup>

But "Suppose my child asks me what the fairytale means?" MacDonald replies "If you do not know what it means, what is easier than to say so? If you do see a meaning in it, there it is for you to give him. A genuine work of art must mean many things; the truer its art, the more things it will mean. If my drawing, on the other hand, is so far from being a work of art that it needs THIS IS A HORSE<sup>31</sup> written under it, what can it matter that neither you nor your child should know what it means? It is there not so much to convey a meaning as to wake a meaning. If it does not even wake an interest, throw it aside. A meaning may be there, but it is not for you. If, again, you do not know a horse when you see it, the name written under it will not serve you much. At all events, the business of the painter is not to teach zoology. But indeed your children are not likely to trouble you about the meaning. They find what they are capable of finding, and more would be too much. For my part, I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five."<sup>32</sup>

Tolkien strongly agrees with MacDonald on meaning as well. He concurs that Fairy-stories were not necessarily written for children and that meaning will differ with the reader. With MacDonald<sup>33</sup> he supports Lang's statement that "He who would enter into the Kingdom of Fairy should have the heart of a little child," though Tolkien qualifies this by noting that "They may have children's hearts...but they have also heads."<sup>34</sup> In the end, "Children are meant to grow up, and not to become Peter Pans. Not to lose innocence and wonder, but to

proceed on the appointed journey: that journey upon which it is certainly not better to travel hopefully than to arrive, though we must travel hopefully if we are to arrive...If fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults. They will, of course, put more in and get more out..."<sup>35</sup>

MacDonald moves next to a hotly controverted issue: allegory. He is emphatic: "A fairytale is not an allegory. There may be allegory in it, but it is not an allegory. He must be an artist indeed who can, in any mode, produce a strict allegory that is not a weariness to the spirit."<sup>36</sup>

Tolkien is in full accord with MacDonald's views. As Tom Shippey notes, "the essence of an allegory" is making equations, something distinctly uncongenial to Tolkien's mind.<sup>37</sup> Two examples will suffice. In the foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien wrote: "As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical...I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author."<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, in a 1957 letter, Tolkien wrote: "There is no 'symbolism' or conscious allegory in my story. Allegory...is wholly foreign to my way of thinking." However, "That there is no allegory does not, of course, say there is no applicability. There always is...the tale is not really about Power and Dominion: that only sets the wheels going; it is about Death and the desire for deathlessness. Which is hardly more than to say it is a tale written by a man."<sup>39</sup>

If not allegory, then what? MacDonald writes: "A fairytale, like a butterfly or a bee, helps itself on all sides, sips at every wholesome flower, and spoils not one. The

true fairytale is, to my mind, very like the sonata. We all know that a sonata means something; and where there is the faculty of talking with suitable vagueness, and choosing metaphor sufficiently loose, mind may approach mind, in the interpretation of a sonata, with the result of a more or less contenting consciousness of sympathy. But if two or three men sat down to write each what the sonata meant to him, what approximation to definite idea would be the result? Little enough—and that little more than needful. We should find it had roused related, if not identical, feelings, but probably not one common thought."<sup>40</sup>

"But," a reader might protest, "words are not music; words at least are meant and fitted to carry a precise meaning!" MacDonald's reply is that "Words are live things that may be variously employed to various ends....A fairytale, a sonata, a gathering storm, a limitless night, seizes you and sweeps you away: do you begin at once to wrestle with it and ask whence its power over you, whither it is carrying you? The law of each is in the mind of its composer; that law makes one man feel this way, another man feel that way. To one the sonata is a world of odour and beauty, to another of soothing only and sweetness. To one, the cloudy rendezvous is a wild dance, with a terror at its heart; to another, a majestic march of heavenly hosts, with Truth in their centre pointing their course, but as yet restraining her voice....The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is—not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself. Nature is mood-engendering, thought-provoking: such ought the sonata, such ought the fairytale to be."<sup>41</sup>

Does this mean, MacDonald is then asked, that anyone can, "imagine in your work what he pleases, what you never meant!" MacDonald replies, "Not what he pleases, but what he can. If he be not a true man, he will draw evil out of the best; we need not mind how he treats any work of art! If he be a true man, he will imagine true things...One difference between God's work

and man's is, that, while God's work cannot mean more than he meant, man's must mean more than he meant."<sup>42</sup>

The questioner returns, "But surely you would explain your idea to one who asked you?" And MacDonald responds: "I say again, if I cannot draw a horse, I will not write THIS IS A HORSE under what I foolishly meant for one. Any key to a work of imagination would be nearly, if not quite, as absurd. The tale is there, not to hide, but to show: if it show nothing at your window, do not open your door to it; leave it out in the cold. To ask me to explain, is to say, "Roses! Boil them, or we won't have them!" My tales may not be roses, but I will not boil them. So long as I think my dog can bark, I will not sit up to bark for him."<sup>43</sup>

MacDonald's aim is to bring the reader to life. "If there be music in my reader, I would gladly wake it. Let fairytale of mine go for a firefly that now flashes, now is dark, but may flash again. Caught in a hand which does not love its kind, it will turn to an insignificant, ugly thing, that can neither flash nor fly. The best way with music, I imagine, is not to bring the forces of our intellect to bear upon it, but to be still and let it work on that part of us for whose sake it exists. We spoil countless precious things by intellectual greed. He who will be a man, and will not be a child, must—he cannot help himself—become a little man, that is, a dwarf....If any strain of my 'broken music' make a child's eyes flash, or his mother's grow for a moment dim, my labour will not have been in vain."<sup>44</sup>

For his part, Tolkien famously summarized his position on the value and function of fairy-stories thusly: "If adults are to read fairy-stories as a natural branch of literature—neither playing at being children, nor pretending to be choosing for children, nor being boys who would not grow up—what are the values and functions of this kind?...First of all: if written with art, the prime value of fairy-stories will simply be that value which, as literature, they share with other literary forms. But fairy-stories offer also, in a peculiar degree or mode, these things: Fantasy, Recovery, Escape,

Consolation, all things of which children have, as a rule, less need of than older people."<sup>45</sup>

Tolkien's conclusion? "...in God's kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small. Redeemed man is still man. Story, fantasy, still go on, and should go on. The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the 'happy ending' [the Eucatastrophe].<sup>46</sup> The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die, but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed. So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation. All tales may come true, and yet, at the last, redeemed, they may be as like and as unlike as the forms that we give them as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know."<sup>47</sup>

### III. CONCLUSIONS

Did MacDonald's essays influence Tolkien's ideas on Fairy-stories? We know that MacDonald's work impacted Tolkien in a general way. According to Humphrey Carpenter, the Curdie books were among Tolkien's favorites as a child.<sup>48</sup> In a 1938 letter, Tolkien wrote that *The Hobbit* was "derived from (previously digested) epic, mythology, and fairy-story—not, however, Victorian in authorship, as a rule to which George MacDonald is the chief exception."<sup>49</sup> This is reinforced by a manuscript version of his essay "On Fairy-stories," that contains a statement by Tolkien about Andrew Lang and George MacDonald: "To them in different ways I owe the books which most affected the background of my imaginations since childhood."<sup>50</sup>

Lastly, Tolkien recognized late in life that his mind was "stored with a 'leaf-mould' of memories" to which his ideas owed a great deal.<sup>51</sup> "A careful reading of Tolkien's essay 'On Fairy-Stories' alongside MacDonald's essays on imagination," Kreglinger writes, "show how deeply Tolkien's thinking about fairy stories was shaped by MacDonald,

especially in regard to the relationships among faith, imagination, and fantastic writing."<sup>52</sup> While we need to be careful not to assume too much about this influence, it seems safe to affirm that MacDonald was a primary ingredient in Tolkien's "leaf-mould".<sup>53</sup>

Did MacDonald and Tolkien agree completely on Fairy-stories? No. For example, in 1964 when he was working on the MacDonald preface, he told a correspondent that he was "not as warm an admirer of George MacDonald as C. S. Lewis was; but I do think well of this story of his." Tolkien felt MacDonald a little too prone to allegory and moralizing, while Tolkien himself was "not naturally attracted (in fact much the reverse) by allegory, mystical or moral."<sup>54</sup> Later he wrote Clyde Kilby that he was more or less glad in the end that the MacDonald project had collapsed because his re-reading of MacDonald had reminded him of why MacDonald "critically filled me with distaste."<sup>55</sup>

How well did George MacDonald and J. R. R. Tolkien succeed in their "indirect" method of defining Faërie? W. H. Auden provides a succinct summary in an "Afterword" to a 1967 re-edition of MacDonald's *The Golden Key*<sup>56</sup>: "Every normal human being is interested in two kinds of worlds: the Primary, everyday, world which he knows through his senses, and a Secondary world or worlds which he not only can create in his imagination, but also cannot stop himself creating. A person incapable of imagining another world than that given to him by his senses would be sub-human, and a person who identifies his imaginary world with the world of sensory fact has become insane....The Secondary worlds of myth and fairy tale, however different from the Primary world, presuppose its reality. As Professor Tolkien has said: 'If men could not distinguish between men and frogs, stories about frog kings would not have arisen. A Secondary world may be full of extraordinary beings...and extraordinary objects...but like the Primary world, it must, if it is to carry conviction, seem to be a world



governed by laws, not by pure chance....In recent times, under the influence of modern psychology, critics have acquired a habit of 'symbol hunting'.....to hunt for symbols in a fairy tale is absolutely fatal."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For details, see my paper "The Development of J. R. R. Tolkien's Ideas on Fairy-stories," *Inklings Forever*, Vol. 8 (2012), pp. 115-127; the comprehensive edition of J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tolkien On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition with commentary and notes edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2008); and Robert J. Reilly, "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," in Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, eds., *Tolkien and the Critics. Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 128-150.

<sup>2</sup>Published in George MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakespere (sic)* (London: Sampson Low, 1893). I have used the Project Gutenberg online edition, [www.gutenberg.org/files/9393/9393-h/9393-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9393/9393-h/9393-h.htm); downloaded 24 February 2014. This piece has been given wider circulation by being included in George MacDonald, *The Complete Fairy Tales* edited with an introduction and notes by U. C. Knoepfelmacher (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 5-10. The essay was written as a preface to an American edition of MacDonald's tales. Also helpful on MacDonald and faëry are Frank Bergmann, "The Roots of Tolkien's Tree: The Influence of George MacDonald and German Romanticism Upon Tolkien's Essay 'On Fairy-Stories,'" *Mosaic*, Vol. 10 (1977), Nr. 2, pp. 5-15; and Gisela Kreglinger, "MacDonald, George (1824-1905)," in Michael D. C. Drout, ed., *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia. Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, paperback edition (New York/London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 399-400.

<sup>3</sup>Also republished in MacDonald's *Dish of Orts*, 1893, cited hereafter as MacDonald, "Imagination: Functions and Culture," 1867.

<sup>4</sup>See J. R. R. Tolkien, "Tolkien's draft introduction to *The Golden Key*," J. R. R. Tolkien, Smith of Wooton Major. Extended Edition edited by Verlyn Flieger (London: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 71-75, cited below as Tolkien, "Golden Key," 1967. Flieger provides detail on this episode.

<sup>5</sup>For further discussion, see Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, revised and expanded edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), pp. 56 ff.

<sup>6</sup>MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination," 1893, in MacDonald, *Complete Tales*, 1999, p. 5. Hereafter cited as MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893.

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<sup>7</sup>Glenn S. Burne, "Andrew Lang's *The Blue Fairy Book: Changing the Course of History*," Perry Nodelman, ed., *Touchstones: Reflections on the Best in Children's Literature. Volume Two: Fairy Tales, Fables, Myths, Legends, and Poetry* (West Lafayette IN: Children's Literature Association, 1987), pp. 140-150.

<sup>8</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup>On MacDonald's contribution to fairy tales, see Gillian Avery, "George MacDonald and the Victorian Fairy Tale," in William Raeper, ed., *The Gold Thread. Essays on George MacDonald* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp. 127-139 and Michael Mendelson, "The Fairy Tales of George MacDonald and the Evolution of a Genre," in Roderick McGillis, ed., *For the Childlike. George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children* (Metuchen NJ: The Children's Literature Association and the Scarecrow Press, 1992), pp. 17-30.

<sup>10</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, pp. 31-32.

<sup>13</sup>Tolkien, "Golden Key," 1967, pp. 73-74.

<sup>14</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 31. Though Spenser and Tolkien shared the heritage of Medieval literature, Tolkien, of course, rejected Spenser's allegorical approach. See Julaire Andelin, "Spenser, Edmund," in Drout, *Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 2013, pp. 624-625.

<sup>16</sup>Tolkien, "Golden Key," 1967, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup>On Udine, see Bergmann, "Roots of Tolkien's Tree," 1977, pp. 8 ff.

<sup>18</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons, Third Series* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1885), [www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9057/pg9057.html](http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9057/pg9057.html), accessed 19 May 2014. The full quotation is "...human science cannot discover God; for human science is but the backward undoing of the tapestry-web of God's science, works with its back to him, and is always leaving him—his intent, that is, his perfected work—behind it, always going farther and farther away from the point where his work culminates in revelation. Doubtless it thus makes some small intellectual approach to him, but at best it can come only to his back; science will never find the face of God; while those who would reach his heart, those who, like Dante, are returning thither where they are, will find also the spring-head of his science. Analysis is well, as death is well; analysis is death, not life. It discovers a little of the way God walks to his ends,

but in so doing it forgets and leaves the end itself behind. I do not say the man of science does so, but the very process of his work is such a leaving of God's ends behind. It is a following back of his footsteps, too often without appreciation of the result for which the feet took those steps."

<sup>20</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 27. One can find echoes of this in the work of C. S. Lewis, such as his essay "Meditation in a Tool Shed," C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock. Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 212-212, on the difference (and incompatibility) of "looking along v. looking at", and the distinction made by Samuel Alexander between enjoyment and contemplation that was critical to helping Lewis solve his search for joy. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), pp. 217-221.

<sup>21</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, pp. 32-33.

<sup>22</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, pp. 5-6.

<sup>23</sup>MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Functions and Culture," 1867.

<sup>24</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 6. Compare "When we understand the Word of God, then we understand the works of God; when we know the nature of an artist, we know his pictures; when we have known and talked with the poet, we understand his poetry far better. To the man of God, all nature will be but changeable reflections of the face of God." MacDonald, "Wordsworth's Poetry," *Dish of Orts*, 1893.

<sup>25</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, pp. 6-7. On MacDonald and imaginary worlds, see Stephen Prickett, "The Two Worlds of George MacDonald," in McGillis, *For the Childlike*, 1992, pp. 17-30; and Richard Reis, *George MacDonald* (New York: Twayne, 1972), pp. 126 ff.

<sup>26</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 59. See Verlyn Flieger, *Green Suns and Faërie. Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien* (Kent OH: Kent State University Press, 2012).

<sup>28</sup>"Manuscript B," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 226; and Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup>Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 44. Kreglinger, "MacDonald," in Drout, *Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 2013, p. 400, emphasizes that for MacDonald, "works of the imagination should always embody old truths, which are anchored for MacDonald in his Christian worldview." Compare C. S. Lewis: "What it actually did to me was to convert, even to

baptise...my imagination.... What I learned to love in Phantastes was goodness." C. S. Lewis, "Preface," to *George MacDonald. An Anthology* (New York: Dolphin Books, 1962), originally published in 1947, p. 26-27.

<sup>30</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup>Compare René Magritte's surrealist paintings "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (1928-1929) and "Ceci n'est pas une pomme" (1964).

<sup>32</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup>In his 1867 essay, MacDonald writes: "we dare to claim for the true, childlike, humble imagination, such an inward oneness with the laws of the universe that it possesses in itself an insight into the very nature of things."

MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Functions and Culture," 1867.

<sup>34</sup>"Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, pp. 185-188.

<sup>35</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 58. For Tolkien's whole argument on children and fairy-stories, see pp. 49-59. He blames Lang for perpetuating, in part, the idea that there is an association between children and fairy-stories. He maintains the same position in Tolkien, "Golden Key," 1967, p. 73: "fairy" is often "misused" to identify a story as "specially suitable for children."

<sup>36</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, pp. 7-8. Time and space does not permit consideration of how many critics have run amok on this topic. For a sample, see Robert Lee Wolff, *The Golden Key. A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), whose psychoanalytical approach can only be described as bizarre, and Cynthia Marshall, "Allegory, Orthodoxy, Ambivalence: MacDonald's 'The Day Boy and the Night Girl,'" *Children's Literature*, Vol. 16 (1988), pp. 57-75, who tries to resolve a number of issues simply by re-defining "allegory."

<sup>37</sup>Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, revised and expanded edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), pp. 43-44.

<sup>38</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), p. xxiv.

<sup>39</sup>Tolkien to Herbert Shiro, 17 November 1957, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 2000, p. 262. For other comments on allegory, see Tolkien, *Letters*, 2000, pp. 41, 121, 145, 174, 220, and 246. On the other hand, Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 2003, p. 43, points out that it is more than a little ironical and amusing that one of Tolkien's best stories, "Leaf by Niggle", 1945, is an allegory.

<sup>40</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, pp. 8-9.

<sup>42</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, pp. 9-10

<sup>44</sup>MacDonald, "Fantastic Imagination," 1893, p. 10.

It certainly did this for C. S. Lewis, who wrote:

"MacDonald's work "gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives." C. S. Lewis, "Preface," to Lewis, ed., George Macdonald. *An Anthology*, 1962, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, pp. 58-59. He concludes somewhat wryly that most of these "are nowadays very commonly considered to bad for anybody."

<sup>46</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, pp. 74-75, notes that "Death is the theme that most inspired George MacDonald," and leads up to the *Eucatastrophe*, but not quite. Cp. Bergmann, "Roots of Tolkien's Tree," 1977, pp. 11 ff., who writes that Tolkien "goes beyond MacDonald not only in terminology but also in the uses of the imagination."

<sup>47</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, pp. 78-79.

<sup>48</sup>Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien. A biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p. 22.

<sup>49</sup>Tolkien to the Editor of *The Observer*, February 1938, in J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, A selection edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien, paperback edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 31.

<sup>50</sup>Manuscript B of "On Fairy-stories," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 207. This statement was omitted from the published text.

<sup>51</sup>Tolkien to Graham Tayar, 4-5 June, 1971, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 2000, p. 409.

<sup>52</sup>Kreglinger, "MacDonald," in Drout, *Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 2013, p. 399.

<sup>53</sup>Bergmann, "Roots of Tolkien's Tree," 1977, makes a somewhat stronger claim, while Flieger and Anderson are content to observe that the 1867 and the 1893 MacDonald essays were "forerunners and influences on Tolkien's essay." Flieger and Anderson in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, p. 98. Kreglinger, "MacDonald," in Drout, *Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 2013, p. 400, concludes: "MacDonald was certainly an important inspiration for Tolkien...and it is therefore justified to call MacDonald the true founder of modern fantasy."

<sup>54</sup>Tolkien to Michael di Capua, Pantheon Books, 7 September 1964, in: Tolkien, *Letters*, 2000, p. 351.

Lewis, on the other hand, praised MacDonald in 1944, before the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, for writing "fantasy that hovers between the allegorical and the mythopoeic. And this, in my opinion, he does better than any man." C. S. Lewis, "Preface," to Lewis, ed., George Macdonald. *An Anthology*, 1962, p. 18. Lewis agreed, however, with Tolkien's low assessment of MacDonald from a literary point of view:

"certainly Macdonald (sic) has no place in its first rank—perhaps not even in its second.... Necessity made Macdonald a novelist, but few of his novels are good and none is very good." (pp. 18, 21)

<sup>55</sup>Tolkien's Note to Clyde Kilby," in Tolkien, Smith of Wootton Major, 2005, p. 69.

<sup>56</sup>Published as George MacDonald, *The Golden Key*, with pictures by Maurice Sendak, Afterword by W. H. Auden (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967, Sunburst Book edition, 1984), pp. 81-86. The publisher that Tolkien had been writing for was Pantheon Books. Auden's afterword is dated December 1966. It is likely that the appearance of the Auden edition contributed to the abandonment of the Pantheon project.

<sup>57</sup>Also interesting is W. H. Auden, "George MacDonald," in W. H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 268-273.