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George MacDonald's Children's Fantasies and the Divine Imagination by Colin Manlove

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<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>

Abstract

book review of George MacDonald's *Children's Fantasies and the Divine Imagination* by Colin Manlove

Additional Keywords

Mythlore; George MacDonald's *Children's Fantasies and the Divine Imagination* by Colin Manlove; Tiffany Brooke Martin; imagination

outward and inward: on the one hand, it pushes the boundaries of current fairy-tale scholarship, calling for and successfully exemplifying greater (linguistic, cultural, geographical, etc.) scope, while critically re-examining the foundations of that same scholarship, challenging its Western-centrism and questioning the universal applicability of its key concepts. Despite their somewhat uneven quality—some papers being more thought-provoking and thought-through than others being an inevitable drawback of this type of publication—the contributions in this stimulating volume live up to the ambitious project outlined in the introduction by bringing forth much novelty, both in terms of under-researched (and often under-appreciated) texts and media, and fruitful interdisciplinary dialogues. In this way, they open new avenues of thinking, and argue for more comprehensive transmedia and transcultural analyses while simultaneously providing their possible blueprints, thus promoting a more comprehensive, comparative, and truly global fairy-tale scholarship.

—Nada Kujundžić



GEORGE MACDONALD'S CHILDREN'S FANTASIES AND THE DIVINE IMAGINATION. Colin Manlove. Cambridge UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2019. 140 p. 9780718895549. £16.00 / Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019. 140 p. 9781532668494. \$20.00.

SCHOLARLY AND ACCESSIBLE, *George MacDonald's Children's Fantasies and the Divine Imagination* by Colin Manlove is an enjoyable, easy read with numerous insights about several of MacDonald's fantasies dating from the 1860s to 1882. Manlove introduces the book with some background on MacDonald, fantasy, and the imagination. As a creative source, imagination turns ideas into images, as in, it "gives form to thought" (8). "For MacDonald, [the imagination] is clearly a part of the mind different from the intellect" (10) and "originates in God" (12), hence, the reference to the divine imagination in the book's title. Manlove evaluates MacDonald's usage of imagination in select fantasies for children, beginning with the shorter fairy tales in chapter 2 and moving to MacDonald's longer works for the next four chapters.

MacDonald's earlier fairy tales such as "The Light Princess" (1864) and "The Golden Key" (1867) show different aspects of the imagination and the characters' experiences of it, along with how it can be either good or bad. Manlove spends more time on MacDonald's four lengthier fantasies for children by homing in on an aspect of the imagination in each story. Chapter 3 discusses how the imagination is *in the world* in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1870). In one

sense, the story expresses MacDonald's belief that all of creation in the world is thanks to the divine imagination and evidence of imagination because God created and creates the world and humanity (45). The story's protagonist Diamond experiences both the world we know and the fantastic world, and how they can intersect and together shape the world and those who live in the world.

Chapter 4 shifts from the imagination in the world to the imagination *in the self*, as portrayed in *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872). The story shows a "mental battle" (61) using imagery that are symbols of the protagonist Princess Irene's mind, for instance the goblins (71) and the house (77). A central theme is the appearance of things and the reality of what they mean and their existence. For example, though the grandmother character's appearance changes in her various meetings with Irene, "she is revealing more of what she is" (76). The grandmother is symbolically part of Irene's "'higher' imagination" and key to the princess's journey (69) and her transformation and resolution to the mental battle by the end.

In chapter 5, another aspect of imagination is *against the self*, which Manlove explores in the next fantasy *The Wise Woman* (1875). The two girls in the story, Rosamond and Agnes, are from different backgrounds, exhibit bad behavior, and are prime candidates for "training in being good, leading to the growth of a good imagination" (80). Their imagination is not in a good place because of their selfishness, but a wise woman works with both of the girls as part of their training to confront their corrupt selves and work toward healthier imaginations and relationships, with different outcomes for both (92). There are multiple illusions/images in the book, some false and some true that show what is really real. Imagination helps reveal what is true and can bring about greater transformation.

The Princess and Curdie (1885) is the last fantasy for analysis, and in this story that follows *The Princess and the Goblin*, the imagination is now *against the world*. Instead of focus on just an individual, there is more at stake with many characters and society/the world as a whole. Unlike MacDonald's other fantasies, Manlove claims that "things are continually hidden" (104) in this story, with appearances not what they seem. For the protagonist Curdie, his imagination helps him know what is true and real despite how it may look, informing his decisions and actions. Spiritual growth or conversely spiritual decline are evident in different characters. The imagination's role is critical to whether a person develops or degenerates (107), which also impacts the health of society, and this one in particular does not end well.

Although "the imagination cannot often transform the world for the better, every one of these fantasies [by MacDonald] insists that it is the truest thing that exists in life" (127). Manlove's book presents imagination's value and use from different angles, and the text is affordable and recommended reading

for anyone interested in MacDonald's work, ideas, and approach to fantasy. The various uses of the imagination by MacDonald, as seen in his fantasies for children, offer more insight to the stories and also room for further study and broader application.

—Tiffany Brooke Martin



THE CARDS: THE EVOLUTION AND POWER OF TAROT. Patrick Maille. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2021. 260 pp, including 44 b/w illustrations, a suggested reading list, lists of works cited by chapter, and index. Hardcover ISBN 9781496832993 \$99.00 Paperback ISBN 9781496833006 \$25.00

PATRICK MAILLE IS A PROFESSOR OF HISTORY at the Oklahoma Panhandle State University, the Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Education, and the Department Chair of Social and Behavioral Sciences (University website accessed July 2021). *The Cards* is his first book and the only publication credit identified in his university biography. I found no claims to any interest in Tarot apart from mentions in his book connecting it with his wife, his daughter's sideline business as a Tarot reader, and a class he teaches on magic. He tells his readers that a colleague "introduced him" to the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA) conference, a regional version of the national Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (PCA/ACA) conference where I established Tarot as an area in 2004. I have never attended the SWPACA and do not remember ever meeting Patrick Maille or receiving a submission from him for the PCA/ACA conference, so it took some digging to find out what his involvement at the SWPACA conference has been. It appears that the first paper he presented there was "Tarot Cards in American Popular Culture" (2016), followed by "What Do Don Draper, Lisa Simpson, and Xena Have in Common?: The Use of Tarot Cards in Popular Television" (2017), "James Bond and Sherlock Holmes Take Tarot Cards to the Movies" (2018), and "Comics and Tarot" (2019). Like many individuals who present at the SWPACA conferences and have faculty positions or other professional credits, Maille also moderated some of the sessions he presented in, including those in 2018 (Film and History area) and 2019 (Esotericism and Occultism, chaired by George Sieg). In 2020, he moderated a session in the Film and History area, where he also presented on *Nacho Libre*. In 2021 he moderated two round-tables in the area of Esotericism, Occultism, and Magic, one on "Plagues and Magic" and another on "The Ir/Rationality of War."