

and Catholicism, and why, for her, traditionalism was emancipatory in gender terms.

Though this book necessarily does not emphasize Mirrlees's fantastic prose, most familiar to readers of *Mythlore*, Parmar does a good job, in his introduction and notes, of giving an overview and connecting *Lud-in-the-Mist* with what we have here. This volume gives a sense of Mirrlees's range and ambition, which will further add to our sense of her as an important figure in modern fantasy writing.

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—Nicholas Birns



FANTASY, ART AND LIFE: ESSAYS ON GEORGE MACDONALD, ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AND OTHER FANTASY WRITERS. William Gray. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. \$52.99. ISBN 9781443833851.

"THE GOLDEN KEY" CONTAINS SOME OF GEORGE MACDONALD'S most memorable images of life and death. No one who has read the story will be able to forget its sea of shadows, its nocturnal rainbow, or the magical creature arrayed in colorful feathers that swam through the air as a fish swims through water. The air-fish in particular speaks powerfully to the reader's mortal anxieties when, after rescuing the fairy tale's young female protagonist Tangle from a devouring tree and guiding her to the safety of her grandmother's cottage, it flies straightaway into a pot of boiling water to become Tangle's evening meal. Reluctantly eating the air-fish to show proper gratitude for its sacrifice, Tangle is delighted when her grandmother lifts the lid from the pot after supper to reveal the selfsame presence of the fish in a new winged form before it darts away into the darkness of the night. Thus in the multivalent figure

of the air-fish MacDonald sketches an outline of the interpenetrating nature of life and death, the sustaining power of sacrifice, and the interconnectedness of all living things. It is not surprising that William Gray returns to this story again and again in his new book *Fantasy, Art and Life: Essays on George MacDonald, Robert Louis Stevenson and Other Fantasy Writers*.

Gray's new book is a sequel and companion volume to his earlier *Death and Fantasy* (reviewed in *Mythlore* 28:3/4, #109/110, 2010). Like *Death and Fantasy*, this book is a collection of essays loosely organized around a central theme—in this case life. All of the book's eight essays have been previously published elsewhere or delivered as conference papers. The first five are mostly about George MacDonald, while the remaining three concentrate chiefly on Robert Louis Stevenson. While the themes of fantasy and life run through most of the essays, the first four attend primarily to religious values and tropes in MacDonald's work, the fifth and sixth segue from MacDonald to Stevenson as they unfold a variety of literary representations of nature and the natural world, while the final two essays explore a mixture of tensions between art and life in a number of Stevenson's fantasy and mystery stories. This description of the book's structure implies more internal consistency than Gray's collection actually possesses. The readability of the individual essays also varies considerably. For the most part, the Stevenson essays are highly accessible and could be read with pleasure even by those unfamiliar with much of his work. The MacDonald essays, by contrast, are much denser and would almost certainly prove daunting to readers without some understanding of the Inklings and fantasy literature more generally.

The first essay in the collection, "The Life-giving Power of Fantasy: Narrative as Therapy in George MacDonald's *Adela Cathcart*," is one of my favorites. Cathcart, the eponymous protagonist of MacDonald's novel, is afflicted with a mysterious ailment because she has forgotten how to see things with the eyes of a child. As Gray explains, MacDonald framed the book to demonstrate the healing power of narrative and used its realism as cover to publish three fairy stories intended mostly for the consumption of adults. Thus the narrator, Cathcart's benevolent uncle, prescribes a course of stories to assuage the young woman's persistent malady. Gray provides close and insightful readings of the three fairy tales that follow—"The Light Princess," "The Giant's Heart," and "The Shadows"—by foregrounding the theological lessons MacDonald aims to convey at "the very edges of orthodoxy." Drawing on MacDonald's other stories and sermons, Gray places the novel in its broader historical context by suggesting some of the influences figures such as Lewis Carroll and John Ruskin may have had on MacDonald's writing and thought. Although the essay is dense, it amply repays the reader's effort. The themes Gray examines here are explored yet further his second essay, "'The Child in the Midst': Childhood and

Salvation History in Fantasy Fiction by MacDonald, Lewis and Pullman." But don't be fooled by its title: this chapter (like the first half of the collection as a whole) is chiefly about MacDonald. Accordingly, references to the work of Lewis and Pullman serve primarily to shed additional light on MacDonald's theology of childlikeness. Chapter four is perhaps the collection's most disappointing essay. Intended to map the theological use of caricature in MacDonald, Lewis, Pullman and Gaiman, the essay offers little in the way of new material on MacDonald and its treatment of Pullman is too brief. The sections on Lewis and Gaiman are more extensive, but in the end Gray fails to pull all four together in a way that might have broken new ground on the use of caricature more generally in fantasy literature.

Gray's two essays on ecocriticism serve as a kind of bridge that links the two parts of the book as the collection transitions from MacDonald to Stevenson. The first of these two essays situates comparative readings of MacDonald's "The Golden Key" and Tolkien's *Smith of Wootton Major* with reference to a broader Romantic tension scholars have identified between works that frame the natural world as a reflection of the writer's self, and works that treat nature as a vital force in its own right. Gray describes the former as an "ego-protecting, other-devouring mechanism" (75) in fantasy that is equally lacking in both MacDonald and Tolkien. Gray concludes that Tolkien's quarrel with MacDonald as a writer of fairy stories (he described *Smith* as his "anti-GM tract") did not turn on this fundamental axis, but on the fact that MacDonald's protagonists go through Fairyland to somewhere else, while Tolkien brings Smith back from Faery to this world at the conclusion of his tale. Setting aside all but the common theme of nature, Gray strikes out in a new direction in the sixth chapter where he explores Stevenson's view of nature and the way in which his writing influenced, or at least anticipated, later movements such as ruralism, neo-paganism, and other conservation activities. The last essay in the collection is one of the longest and offers a fascinating survey of Stevenson's "dark fantasies" or what in other contexts might simply be called gothic tales.

My only serious complaint about Gray's book is the inorganic way in which the two parts fit (or don't fit) together. Although the themes of fantasy, art, and life run through the book as a whole, there is very little intellectual tissue connecting the two sections on MacDonald and Stevenson. Gray acknowledges the problem these two solitudes pose in his introduction, but ultimately fails to offer a convincing argument for why the works of these two men ought to be considered side-by-side within the covers of the same volume. Indeed, although they were both raised in the shadow of Scottish Calvinism and wrote in the second half of the nineteenth century, their work seems worlds apart in so many ways. Gray might have assuaged this difficulty considerably had he written a new essay to serve as hinge between the two parts of the book rather than

confining his remarks on the subject to a few pages in the introduction. None of this detracts from the fact, however, that there remains much of value in this collection for readers interested in either MacDonald or in Stevenson—just not both in the same breath.

—Scott McLaren



C.S. LEWIS AND THE MIDDLE AGES. Robert Boenig. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2012. 181 p. \$55.00. ISBN 9781606351147.

THE SUBJECT OF C.S. LEWIS'S WORK WITH, AND INFLUENCE BY, the Middle Ages is well worth exploring. Lewis's literary scholarship is too often seen as separate from his apologetics and fictional work; a book that helps scholars and general readers to appreciate the effect of Lewis's medieval scholarship on the rest of his *oeuvre* would be very useful. Robert Boenig's *C.S. Lewis and the Middle Ages* attempts to do just this; the result is an over-ambitious book that succeeds in its informational but not its analytical goals.

Boenig notes that he will attempt to answer three questions: "What comprised [Lewis's] scholarly work about the medieval period, and what were his contributions to the ongoing professional discussion about the significance of the literature and culture of the Middle Ages? Why was he first attracted to medieval narratives and treatises, both scholarly and devotional? What was the impact of medieval modes of creativity on his imaginative writing?" (3). Even under the best of circumstances, it would be difficult to address all three of these questions adequately in only 150 pages.

Chapters 1 and 2 comprise the stronger half of the book. In Chapter 1, Boenig systematically summarizes Lewis's major work on medieval literature, focusing on *The Discarded Image* (20-28), *The Allegory of Love* (29-39), "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*" (39-41), and other essays (41-48). It is a useful overview for readers who are unfamiliar with Lewis's academic work in literature. In particular, Boenig's summary and discussion of Lewis's *The Allegory of Love* makes accessible for non-medievalists an excellent book that is probably more often appreciated at a distance than actually read.