



The Roots of Tolkien's Tree:

The Influence of George MacDonald and German Romanticism Upon Tolkien's Essay 'On Fairy-Stories'

by Frank Bergmann

"No one ever influenced Tolkien—you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch": thus Tolkien's friend, colleague and fellow-Inkling C.S. Lewis on his and the other Inklings' role in the genesis of *The Lord of the Rings*.¹ Although the remark categorically rules out the possibility of any *personal* influence by friends and critics upon Tolkien's work, it does not question the possibility of *literary* influence. Indeed, Lewis strongly believed in the value of literary influence upon a writer's life and work.² Tolkien himself offers a far-reaching notion of literary influence in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," which is at face value a treatise on the nature, origins and

¹*Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. H. Lewis, (London, 1966), p. 287.

²See his comment on *Quellenforschung* [the study of sources] in *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, (London, 1946), p. 20.

uses of fairy tales but, on reflection, far more than that—a transcendental, Christian poetics.³ Although speculation about the sources of Tolkien's trilogy has been constant and plentiful, interest in the sources of the essay has been slight and mostly recent.⁴ Aside from its intrinsic value, however, the study of the essay's sources is a step toward the clarification of a larger question which puzzled Lewis and is an obstacle in current efforts to define the nature of fantasy literature: can the conventional critical instruments be applied to mythmakers?⁵ As the "tree" in Tolkien's *Tree and Leaf*, the essay "On Fairy-Stories" extends its roots to earlier mythmakers, notably to George MacDonald (1824-1905), the Scottish Victorian whom C.S. Lewis acknowledged as his "master,"⁶ and, through MacDonald, to the German romantic writers of the early nineteenth century, especially to Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777-1843), E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), and Novalis (1772-1801). To change to a metaphor central to Tolkien's discussion of literary influence in his essay: with many other sources, the works of these writers have been part of the "Soup" in the "Cauldron of Story," and in using the "Pot" in formulating his poetics, Tolkien does "not dip in the ladle quite blindly."⁷

Tolkien's direct references in the essay to German literature are scant, confined as they are to a few comments on the Grimms whose collections began to appear in 1812. But one of these references is important: Tolkien's discussion of the Grimms' Lower German dialect tale *Von dem Machandelboom* sets forth his concept of the essentially literary quality and continuity of fairy-story and thus contains the seeds of the eschatological argument

³Originally given as an Andrew Lang Lecture at the University of St. Andrews in 1938, "On Fairy-Stories" was first printed in C. S. Lewis, ed., *Essays presented to Charles Williams*, (London, 1947), pp. 38-39, then combined with "Leaf by Niggle" into *Tree and Leaf*, (London, 1964). References in this paper are to the Ballantine reprint in *The Tolkien Reader*, (New York, 1966), pp. 3-84 (OFS).

⁴Trilogy, e.g.: Several of the essays collected 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, 1968); J. S. Ryan, "German Mythology Applied: The Extension of the Literary Folk Memory," *Folklore*, 77 (Spring 1966), 45-59; Lin Carter, *Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings,"* (New York, 1969); Colin Wilson, *Tree by Tolkien*, (Santa Barbara, 1974); Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*, (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 152-206. Essay, esp.: R. J. Reilly, "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," in Isaacs/Zimbardo, pp. 128-150 [originally 1963]; Jan Wojcik, S.J., "Tolkien and Coleridge: Remaking of the 'Green Earth,'" *Renascence*, 20 (Spring 1968), 134-139, 146; Randel Helms, *Tolkien's World*, (Boston, 1974), pp. 1-18 (excellent discussion of the connections between the essay and Tolkien's 1936 Gollancz Lecture "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics").

⁵MacDonald, p. 16; Neil D. Isaacs, "On the Possibilities of Writing Tolkien Criticism," in *Tolkien and the Critics*, pp. 1-11; Jane Mobley, "Toward a Definition of Fantasy Fiction," *Extrapolation*, 15 (May 1974), 117-128.

⁶MacDonald, p. 20.

⁷OFS, pp. 29-30. Tolkien takes the "soup" from Dasent, *Popular Tales from the Norse* (OFS, p. 19), but Herder had used the term *Grundsuppe* [soup stock] exactly in Tolkien's sense as early as 1777 ("Von Ähnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst" ["On the Similarity of Middle English and German Literature"]—see Richard Benz, *Märchendichtung der Romantiker: Mit einer Vorgeschichte*, (Gotha, 1908), p. 42.

developed in the essay's conclusion. For Tolkien, the details of the tale, including the cannibalism, are not preserved in the story because of someone's thoughtfulness about future comparative folklorists but because of their "story-making value."⁸ The most lasting impression the tale makes is one of "distance and a great abyss of time, not measurable even by *zwei tusend Jahr*," opening "a door on Other Time." "Other Time," Tolkien makes clear, is timelessness, infinity, eternity. This sense of "Other Time" merges with the tale's curious temporal approximation to the time of Christ, with its themes of birth, death, murder, Eucharist, resurrection, and Last Judgment into a prefiguration of the essay's joyous conclusion of "the Great Eucatastrophe," of the Gospel as supreme fairy-story.

Looking back, in the essay, over the literature of his childhood, Tolkien singles out as "best of all" the "nameless North of Sigurd of the Völsungs, and the prince of all dragons."⁹ It is likely that Tolkien found the Nibelungen material much the same way C.S. Lewis did when he was a child—through William Morris—though their appreciation of the story differed, Lewis preferring Morris's prose romances.¹⁰ One of the "Nordic" and chivalric influences on Morris, in turn, had been Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué whose heroic trilogy *Der Held des Nordens* (1810) stands as the most ambitious poetic effort on the part of the German romantics to revive the Nibelungen material and as a chief source for Richard Wagner.¹¹ Fouqué was immensely popular in Romantic and Victorian England. Carlyle translated *Aslaugas Ritter* and characterized Fouqué as a deeply Christian epigone of medieval knighthood and as "a man of genius, with little more than an ordinary share of talent," a mixed judgment which strangely parallels Lewis's view of George MacDonald and certain critical evaluations of Tolkien.¹² Morris came to Fouqué by way of Charlotte M. Yonge (*The Heir of Redclyffe*, 1853), whom Lewis also read.¹³ But the Victorian writer most familiar with Fouqué was George MacDonald, himself translator of poetry by Novalis and other German writers from Luther to Heine. MacDonald imbued not only Lewis with the Christian spirit he derived from the German romantic writers

⁸OFS, p. 76. The following quotations from pp. 31, 32, 72.

⁹OFS, p. 41.

¹⁰Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, (London, 1955), p. 155.

¹¹Fouqué's influence on Wagner is especially noteworthy in view of Lewis's saturation with Wagner. See Max Koch, ed., *Friedrich Baron de la Motte Fouqué und Josef Freiherr von Eichendorff* (= Deutsche National-Litteratur 146/1), (Stuttgart [1893]), pp. XXXII-XLVI, LXVI, and Lewis, *Joy*, pp. 74 ff., 156.

¹²See B. Q. Morgan, *A Critical Bibliography of German Literature in English Translation 1481-1927 with Supplement Embracing the Years 1928-1935*, (Stanford, 1938), for the long list of English (and American) translations of Fouqué. Thomas Carlyle, *German Romance. Translations from the German with Biographical and Critical Notes*, vol. I, (New York: Scribners, n.d. [originally 1827]), pp. 209, 213. Lewis, *MacDonald*, p. 16. For Tolkien, see esp. Burton Raffel, "The Lord of the Rings as Literature," in *Tolkien and the Critics*, pp. 218-246, and Manlove, *op. cit.*

¹³See J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, (New York/London, 1968 [1899]), vol. I, p. 41, and Lewis, *Joy*, p. 138. Also Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Reading*, (Boston, 1962 [1935]), p. 53. (Fouqué's *Sintram* is the only German fiction mentioned, albeit by "a French writer of the late eighteenth century"), and Margaret Mare and Alicia C. Percival, *Victorian Best-seller: The World of Charlotte M. Yonge*, (London, 1948), pp. 135-136, 165.

but also Tolkien, who read MacDonald closely, as three specific and important references to him in "On Fairy-Stories" show.¹⁴

Having briefly mentioned Fouqué in *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance* (1858), MacDonald makes Fouqué's *Undine* (1811) the touchstone of his essay on fairy-stories, "The Fantastic Imagination" (1893):

Were I asked, what is a fairytale? I should reply, *Read Undine: that is a fairytale; then read this and that as well, and you will see what is a fairytale.* Were I further begged to describe the *fairytale*, or define what it is, I would make answer, that 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; and of all fairytales I know, I think *Undine* the most beautiful.¹⁵

MacDonald's reticence to explain himself—the remainder of the essay is to be understood as "some things helpful to the reading, in right-minded fashion, of such fairytales as I would wish to write, or care to read"—invites speculation on his reasons for selecting *Undine* rather than a *Märchen* by a different writer. He might well have chosen E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Golden Pot," which left its mark on *Phantastes* and *Lilith* and whose emphasis on the childlike and on the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity contains the essence of MacDonald's Christian poetics. Or he might have selected a *Märchen* by Novalis, his spiritual mentor, his poetic "Saint John."¹⁶ And why does MacDonald ignore Goethe, who in 1795 created a new kind of tale to which—with generic aplomb—he simply gave the title *Mährchen*?

Richard Benz writes of Goethe's *Mährchen* that it is a complete dream, not in touch with the suffering and the joy of the human soul, and that therefore it could not very well have moved anyone.¹⁷ The "complete

¹⁴For MacDonald's translations see his books *Exotics*, (London, 1876), and *Rampolli: Growths from a Long-planted Root*, (London, 1897). Tolkien on MacDonald in OFS, pp. 16, 26, 68.

¹⁵Motto for Chapter VI of *Phantastes*, from Fouqué's *Der Zauberring* (1813): "Ach, hüte sich doch ein Mensch, wenn seine erfüllten Wünsche auf ihn herab regnen, und er so über alle Maasse fröhlich ist!" ["Oh that a man were on his guard when he is showered with fulfilled wishes and glad beyond measure!"], in: "*Phantastes*" and "*Lilith*," Grand Rapids 1964, p. 48 (all future references to these works to this edition). "The Fantastic Imagination" in: *A Dish of Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakspeare*, (London, 1895), pp. 313-322. Since the essay is short, no page references will be given. "Preface" is perhaps a more accurate designation, as MacDonald suggests, p. vi: "The paper on *The Fantastic Imagination* had its origin in the repeated requests of readers for an explanation of things in certain shorter stories I had written. It forms the preface to an American edition of my so-called Fairy Tales." G. E. Sadler, "The Fantastic Imagination in George MacDonald," in: C. A. Huttar, ed., *Imagination and Spirit: Essays in Literature and the Christian Faith presented to Clyde S. Kilby*, (Grand Rapids, 1971), pp. 215-227, makes some connections between the essay and German romantic thought. R. L. Wolff's excellent discussion of German influence on MacDonald centers on motifs and poetics of Novalis and Hoffmann: *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald*, (New Haven, 1961).

¹⁶MacDonald on Novalis in *Orts*, p. 230. For Hoffmann, see the eighth and tenth vigils of "Der goldene Topf," in: *E.T.A. Hoffmann Werke*, (Frankfurt, 1967), pp. 126-204, and Wolff, Ch. 2.

¹⁷*Märchendichtung*, p. 89.

dream” does not immediately make the *Mährchen* unacceptable: MacDonald's *Phantastes* is deeply informed by Novalis' idea that a fairy tale should be like a dream, that even our life should and perhaps will become a dream. But the similarity to Goethe's concept is deceptive, for Goethe is intent upon separating reality and imagination, whereas they become one in Novalis.¹⁸ The last line of MacDonald's *Lilith* (1895) repeats Novalis' thought that “Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one”: in 1893, MacDonald believed in Novalis as firmly as he had in 1858; one must therefore conclude that it could not have been possible for MacDonald to consider Goethe's *Mährchen* a paradigm.

But why *Undine* instead of Novalis' “Klingsohr” or “Hyazinth and Rosenblütchen?” The reason seems essentially one of form. The Novalis tales are part of larger works, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, fragments both. Their influence on MacDonald is manifest especially in *Phantastes*, which is not a traditional fairy tale but rather an example of what Benz, speaking of *Ofterdingen*, calls *freie Phantasiedichtung* (p. 150). In “The Fantastic Imagination,” MacDonald declares:

Many a man, however, who would not attempt to define *a man*, might venture to say something as to what a man ought to be: even so much I will not in this place venture with regard to the fairytale, for my long past work in that kind might but poorly instance or illustrate my now more refined judgment.

That more matured judgment held, as we have seen, on to Novalis in 1895, which in this context leads to the conclusion that MacDonald does indeed not consider *Lilith* (which he was writing at the time of the essay) and *Phantastes* and the Novalis fragments to be fairy tales. *Undine*, on the other hand, though fairly long and subtitled *Erzählung* (tale) rather than *Märchen*, is formally more acceptable.

It is more difficult to find a reason for MacDonald's failure to select Hoffmann's “Der goldene Topf,” especially so since he firmly appropriated for *Lilith* Hoffmann's technique of changing from one world to another and back again. That technique, however, may well hold the answer. At the end of Hoffmann's tale Anselmus does not come back to his garret in this world, nor does he remain in Lindhorst's blue salon. Rather, he goes to the other world to stay (Hoffmann tells us that he is in secret bound not to reveal his source of this and all information about Anselmus!). The narrator himself discovers in the Twelfth Vigil that Hoffmann's *Himmelsleiter*—in this case the friendly intervention of Lindhorst—allows one to catch a glimpse (“Vision”) of Anselmus in Atlantis but not to follow him there.¹⁹ Conversely, Mr. Vane in *Lilith* returns to his library in this world, to the “endless ending” the last chapter heading announces. Like Hoffmann's narrator but unlike Hoffmann's hero, Vane knows that the other world exists but that he must bide his time to enter it: “‘All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come.’” That change is death, profoundly to be desired—as

¹⁸*Phantastes*, p. 180. The following from *Lilith*, p. 420.

¹⁹For Hoffmann's “Ladder to Heaven,” see Marianne Thalmann, *Romantiker als Poetologen* (=Poesie und Wissenschaft XI), (Heidelberg, 1970), p. 80.

it was in *Phantastes*—and patiently to be awaited, as not Hoffmann but Novalis had taught MacDonald.²⁰

Why, then, *Undine*? It would be facile to suggest that MacDonald succumbed to the continuing popularity of *Undine* or that by, as it were, one moderately talented mythmaking genius for another he desired to rectify Carlyle's judgment of Fouqué. Reading *Undine* today, when it is practically forgotten, one cannot help noticing the tale's shortcomings, though it seems unnecessary to judge it as harshly as Benz does in his attempt to sift the artificial fairy tale from the genuine.²¹ The discussion of Goethe's, Novalis' and Hoffmann's fairy tales reveals that MacDonald demands two elements besides the traditional form: the merging of reality and imagination, and both man's knowledge of the blissful other world and his inability to enter it permanently except through death. The Christian concept of a life after death includes these elements, and *Undine* is supremely a Christian tale, reminding man through Undine's transformation from elemental spirit (*Elementargeist*) to wife of his uniquely privileged position in nature—of having a soul.

Following Paracelsus, Fouqué spins out the story of a lovely water nymph with a perfectly human anatomy. But Undine does not have a soul, and even baptism does not give her one. Sent by her kingly father to live among men so that she may obtain a soul to escape the final annihilation awaiting all elemental spirits, Undine is bent upon catching a human husband. Her love for Huldbrand is purely erotic, but the consummation of their marriage changes her from a fun-loving, laughing child into a loving and suffering wife possessing a soul. Her extraordinary selfishness—caring for herself only and ignoring the needs of other people—turns into true *caritas*: when Bertalda denies her parents, Undine doubts that Bertalda has a soul, thus questioning Bertalda's human essence. Such is the change in Undine's behavior that Huldbrand feels he must have given Undine a better soul than he has himself, emphasizing not only Undine's angelic bearing but Huldbrand's inability to live on her level as well. As Huldbrand gravitates toward Bertalda, Undine learns that love and suffering are close neighbours in human life. Yet the more Huldbrand betrays her, the stronger her heavenly goodness becomes: when the water spirit *Kühleborn* attempts to drown Huldbrand and Bertalda, Undine intervenes, descending like a white dove and carrying them to safety. Even after Huldbrand's lack of faith and love force her to return to her elemental world—surely a metaphor for man's inability to prize what is divine in him—she retains her soul and hopes to save Huldbrand's life. His terrestrial life, however, cannot be saved; in fact, the lifting of the rock from the well that opens Undine's way to Huldbrand as the agent of his death shows that man brings his doom upon himself. At the very end, the truth begins to dawn upon Huldbrand: he submits to his fate because his heart tells him that he has deserved death. Hence, his death comes not as horror but as *Liebestod*, in which Undine's

²⁰*Lilith*, pp. 419, 420. For Novalis and death, see "Hymnen an die Nacht," which MacDonald translated (*Rampolli*).

²¹For Carlyle, see n. 12 above. Benz, pp. 131-137. The popularity of *Undine* in England was immediate and lasted through the end of the century (cf. L. A. Willoughby, *The Romantic Movement in Germany*, [London, 1930], p. 116). The following discussion includes some literal paraphrases of the German text of *Undine*.

tears drown his life but cleanse his heart. Huldbrand's burial leaves us with hope rather than grief: God's justice has been done, and under a serenely blue sky Undine, sharply contrasting from the black of the mourners in her snow-white garb, turns into a silver-clear brook circling the Knight's grave.

The story of the soul, *Undine* is the story of man's fallibility and God's justice and forgiveness. It is the story of "good death" that marks MacDonald's fantasy work and leads Tolkien to observe in "On Fairy-Stories" that "Death is the theme that most inspired George MacDonald." Tolkien derives from MacDonald—and MacDonald's German sources—the insight that the richest fairy tales do not end with the perpetuation of the hero's presumably carefree *terrestrial* life ("and they lived happily ever after"): "Few lessons are taught more clearly in them than the burden of that kind of immortality or rather endless serial living, to which the 'fugitive' would fly." Tolkien's next step leads him to the "Consolation of the Happy Ending," the "good death," the "*eucatastrophe*," which "denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief."²²

The idea of *eucatastrophe* is so compelling that Tolkien returns to it in an "Epilogue." It is here that he further develops his transcendental poetics:

The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels—peculiarly artistic (the Art is here in the story itself rather than in the telling; for the Author of the story was not the evangelists), beautiful, and moving: "mythical" in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable *eucatastrophe*. But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation. The Birth of Christ is the *eucatastrophe* of man's history. The Resurrection is the *eucatastrophe* of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the "inner consistency of reality." There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation.

And again: "But this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men—and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused."

The insistence upon a transcendental rather than a conventional happy ending is not original with Tolkien, nor does it solely arise from his thinking about fairy-stories such as *Von dem Machandelboom*: MacDonald and German romanticism laid the groundwork. In "A Sketch of Individual Development" (1880), which is comparable to Lewis's account of his Christian

²²C. S. Lewis on "Good death" in *MacDonald*, p. 21. Quotations from OFS, pp. 67-68. The Joy is, of course, the same thing as Lewis's in *Surprised by Joy* and MacDonald's in *Phantastes* and *Lilith*.

development in *Surprised by Joy*, MacDonald deals with the gospels as story.²³ He posits a man in confusion and despair to whom comes “an uncertain rumour, a vague legendary murmur” which he knows “has come down the ages”:

Upon those, however, with whom he has chiefly associated, it has made no impression beyond that of a remarkable legend. It is the story of a man, represented as at least greater, stronger, and better than any other man. With the hero of this tale he has had a constantly recurring, though altogether undefined suspicion that he has something to do.

The strongest reason for looking into that rumour is that it “has been vital enough to float down the ages, emerging from every storm.” The man then learns the essence of the Christian story “from the reported words of the man and from the man himself as in the tale presented” and finally knows desire: “If the message were but a true one! If indeed this man knew what he talked of!” Further attention to “the reported words of the man himself” lead him to a full understanding of the imaginative force of the Christian story:

To the man who believes in the Son of God, poetry returns in a mighty wave; history unrolls itself in harmony; science shows crowned with its own aureole of holiness. There is no enlivener of the imagination, no enabler of the judgment, no strengthener of the intellect, to compare with the belief in a live Ideal, at the heart of all personality, as of every law.

Novalis also noted that the history of Christ is certainly as much a *poem* as a history, and that in fact only that history is history which can also be story. And he marvelled at the similarity of the gospels to fairy tale.²⁴

The merging of story and history, of fact and of imagination born of desire, in the greatest fairy-story of all explains why Tolkien, philologist as well as mythmaker, in contrast to MacDonald chooses “fairy-story” rather than “fairytale” as the generic term. He thus goes beyond MacDonald’s formal considerations, for neither the gospels nor *The Lord of the Rings* have traditional fairy tale format. More importantly, Tolkien goes beyond MacDonald not only in terminology but also in the uses of the imagination. His own views of Fancy and Imagination (extending to Fantasy)²⁵ are not materially different from MacDonald’s:

The rational world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them in the way of presentment any more than in the way of use; but they

²³*Orts*, pp. 43-76. Again, no page references will be given.

²⁴See “Fragmente und Studien 1799-1800,” in G. Schulz, ed., *Novalis Werke*, (München, 1969), pp. 530, 544.

²⁵OFS, pp. 46-55. The following MacDonald quotation from “The Fantastic Imagination.” See also “The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture” (1867) in *Orts*, pp. 1-42, esp. pp. 2-5.

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.

MacDonald continues:

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. The imagination in us, whose exercise is essential to the most temporary submission to the imagination of another, immediately, with the disappearance of Law, ceases to act.

Here is Tolkien's view of the creative process:

Children are capable, of course, of *literary belief*, when the story-maker's art is good enough to produce it. That state of mind has been called "willing suspension of disbelief." But this does not seem to me a good description of what happens. What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful "sub-creator." He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is "true": It accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. (OFS, 36-37)

MacDonald's phrase "to the most temporary submission to the imagination of another" contains the same kind of goodnatured passivity Tolkien objects to in Coleridge's expression. Tolkien sees the successful sub-creator as exerting a special power of enchantment: his emphasis is on the writer's activity rather than on the reader's yielding. As the end of *Phantastes* and even more so of *Lilith* shows, MacDonald's message is obedience and patience. In a conversation between Vane and Hope about his dream, Hope says:

Thy brain was the violin whence it issued, and the fever in thy blood the bow that drew it forth.—But who made the violin? and who guided the bow across its strings? Say rather, again—who set the song birds each on its bough in the tree of life, and startled each in its order from its perch? Whence came the fantasia? and whence the life that danced thereto? Didst *thou* say, in the dark of thy own unconscious self, 'let beauty be; let truth seem!' and straightway beauty was, and truth but seemed?

And MacDonald adds: "Man dreams and desires; God broods and wills and

quickens.” Fouqué, too, was cautious, as MacDonald well knew.²⁶ Tolkien, however, aspires to more:

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. (OFS, 73)

In “The Fantastic Imagination,” MacDonald goes far: “Obeying law, the maker works like his creator,” but he does not go far enough for Tolkien. For Tolkien-Niggle, as God’s assistant, designs a new leaf: as the divine Second Voice says: “a leaf by Niggle has a charm of its own.”²⁷

How is a literary critic to deal with the works of a writer of fantasy who sets himself up—in a small way, to be sure, but nonetheless—as an assistant to the Creator? It may be argued that critical tools designed for the literal level are not the proper tools for a literature operating on the anagogic level, yet Tolkien himself tells us that the leaf is not only idea but design as well. Novalis may have seen the connection between genius and talent most clearly; without offering much posthumous consolation to C.S. Lewis or much practical help to Tolkien critics, Novalis’ words may stand as an illuminating commentary on Tolkien’s poetics and fantasy fiction:

Genie ist das Vermögen von eingebildeten Gegenständen, wie von wirklichen zu handeln, und sie auch wie diese zu behandeln. Das Talent darzustellen, genau zu beobachten, zweckmässig die Beobachtung zu beschreiben, ist also vom Genie verschieden. Ohne dieses Talent sieht man nur halb, und ist nur ein halbes Genie; man kann genialische Anlage haben, die in Ermangelung jenes Talents nie zur Entwicklung kommt.²⁸

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²⁶*Lilith*, pp. 419-20. For Fouqué, see n. 15 above, and *Undine*, in Koch, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

²⁷From *Leaf by Niggle*, the “leaf” to the “tree” that is OFS, in: *The Tolkien Reader*, p. 100. In OFS, p. 56, Tolkien asks: “Who can design a new leaf?”

²⁸“Genius is the ability to conceive of imagined objects as of real ones and to treat them like these. The talent, however, to present something, to observe closely, to describe the observation appropriately, is different from genius. Without this talent one has only half the vision and is only half a genius; it is possible to have the potential of genius but never to develop it for lack of talent.” Given in Thalmann, *op. cit.*, p. 75. Thalmann’s brilliant compilation and discussion contains many more details useful for the illustration of MacDonald’s and Tolkien’s beliefs.