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John Docherty has done a remarkably good job of setting up a new framework within which to assess and discuss the works of George MacDonald and Charles Dodgson. His book, as the title states, deals with aspects of MacDonald’s and Dodgson’s writings which have been produced through their mutual friendship. It is full of stimulating insights, and the complex analysis of the texts always keeps, the book’s rationale clearly to the fore.

The book is divided into nine chapters, the first discussing MacDonald’s and Dodgson’s friendship, and early literary reflections of that friendship. Thereafter, of MacDonald’s works, *Phantastes*, “The Golden Key” and *Lilith* each have a chapter devoted to them; of Dodgson’s the two *Alice* books and the *Sylvie and Bruno* books are discussed at length. There is a short chapter on four stories: “The Light Princess,” “Cross Purposes,” “Bruno’s Revenge” and “The Giant’s Heart,” and a very useful appendix.

In an undertaking of this kind, the author will at times have clear evidence for parody, allusion, shared imagery, borrowings and so forth; at others, he must make a reasoned connection, and argue for his claim. Docherty is generally careful on both these counts, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of background content. The significance of a “connection,” however, is sometimes weakened if it can be seen to reside in a wider framework, and partake of a common, external source. For example, in “The Golden Key” chapter, he states that most of MacDonald’s allusions are inversions or direct parodies of *Wonderland*, citing as one example the idea of neglect as the initial stimulus of both Tangle and Alice. There is certainly a parallel here, but the notion of “neglect” is common in fairy stories, and generally acts as a pre-requisite and narrative catalyst for the would-be adventurer.

But so many of the parallels and inversions are illuminating. The seemingly trivial mention, in chapter 3 of *Phantastes*, of the strange redness of the white rabbit’s ears and eyes becomes eerily significant when the author points out that it, and Alice’s rabbit, are harbingers of heightened “supernatural” activity. [end of page 44]

It would be impossible to mention all the revealing points in this book,
but among examples I found particularly instructive were: the parallels between Mossy’s and Alice’s golden keys; the parallels between the Little Ones in Lilith and the children in Sylvie and Bruno; the concise discussion of “Cross Purposes”; and the positive interpretation of “The Giant’s Heart.” He also clarifies MacDonald’s many references to Spenser’s Faerie Queen. There are some pertinent general observations in the book, as, when discussing critics claims that Alice is cold and detached, the author writes: “True detachment is not lack of concern, but a suspending of judgement.” He also observes that Tangle’s assimilation of part of her nature (which is how he interprets her consumption of the fish) is a profound improvement upon Alice, who merely sends hers away in the form of a pig. MacDonald, like Dodgson, believed everything capable of development, but by embracing and reversing negative aspects: “The darkness is the nurse of light,” says the king in “The Shadows.”

Docherty offers a welcome analysis of the less well-known Sylvie and Bruno stories, demonstrating character links with the MacDonald children and explaining allusions to the adult MacDonalds. The first chapter whets our appetites for these cross references, and the book doesn’t disappoint us, though there are times when we need more context for the information he gives us—for example, on Schilling’s Nature Philosophy, so important an influence on MacDonald and Dodgson, and the Cycle of Life paintings which MacDonald evidently drew on in “The Golden Key.” The treatment of Lilith, (though rather short), is excellent, and yes, I agree that Lilith does not have to been seen as a rapist—being a vampire is quite bad enough!

Overall, the reader is left with a much wider knowledge of the works of MacDonald and Dodgson studied in this book, not simply as they stand alone, but as they reveal themselves as products of a relationship. The cross references, parallels, parodies and allusions that Docherty discusses create a kaleidoscope of stimulating information, and will lead any observant reader to look at the texts anew. Re-reading well-loved works in a new light is always an exciting experience: Docherty has given readers this opportunity, and his book is heartily to be welcomed. [45]