

## **C.S. Lewis and George MacDonald - Phantastes**

**I recently reread Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*, and just finished the last page of MacDonald's *Phantastes*. It is my second time through MacDonald's fairy story; this time I savored the journey. The first time reading *Phantastes* I succumbed to a habit of mine of driving through a region quickly, getting a feel for the land. While I may acknowledge the scenery, I often see it at too fast a speed. This drive was leisurely.**

**Another habit I have is driving quickly through verse interspersed in a manuscript. This time I slowed down and drank it in; experienced it. It was pleasant – like the aroma of honeysuckle on a still summer's evening.**

**I wanted to read *Phantastes* right after *Surprised by Joy* because of the role of *Phantastes* in reawakening “joy” in Lewis. (I wonder if “higher critics” will one day teach that there were at least two men who wrote under the name C.S. Lewis? After all, how could the same person write intellectual/logical material on the one hand and mythical stories on the other? And what will they do with the fact that Lewis called himself “Jack”? No doubt they'll have at least three men writing Lewis's material!)**

***Phantastes* is a Romance, not in the sense that we popularly use the term today, but in the sense that Lewis, Charles Williams, Dorothy L. Sayers and others used the term – and I think I'd include Chesterton though I don't know that he used the term (Chesterton also influenced Lewis in Lewis's journey to Christ). And while MacDonald may have set out to “just” write a Fairy Story, (and my limited knowledge tells me that all Fairy Stories are *Romantic* stories) I don't see how George MacDonald could write anything not imbued with his understanding and experience of Christ.**

**In Romance the transcendent is encountered in the individual object of affection – whether it be a woman, a man, or a virtue such as honor, courage, or truth. Sayers wrote about the “union of the intellect and the imagination as the highest means of reaching religious truth.” It is the Romance that often evokes the imagination, that in Chesterton caused him to reflect that everything he needed to know he learned in the stories told him in the nursery. Chesterton tried to kill the nursery stories and in so doing realized that he almost killed himself – isn’t that what many of us have done? Is this what Lewis meant when he wrote about “men without chests”?**

**And can we hear echoes of Lewis’s comment on Narnia about either reading it when you’re young or when you’re old, because in essence when you’re trying to act like the adult the world expects you to be you’ll disdain Narnia? The problem in our day with those in advanced adulthood is that we’ve been so conditioned by a mechanistic worldview that we can’t seem to find our hearts to discover Narnia. (Is the younger generation’s embrace of fantasy a reaction against a mechanistic view of humanity?) When we do venture into that land we tend to do so as Uncle Andrew in *The Magician’s Nephew*, for hedonistic and utilitarian purposes.**