Tree and Forest Models in Victorian/Edwardian Fantasy: MacDonald, Morris and Grahame as Triggers of J. R. R. Tolkien’s Creativity

Andoni COSSÍO
UPV/EHU
E-mail andoni.cossio@ehu.eus
ORCID: 0000-0003-2745-5104

Abstract
Creativity is known to be the art of crafting a new work. However, its innovative nature tends to be more limited than generally believed, as its building blocks frequently belong to previous creators. In literature, and therefore in fantasy, it is a commonplace to look into the past in order to reuse and adapt successful old models. In this sense J. R. R. Tolkien was no exception, building the credible world of Arda with the aid of legends, myths, characters and landscapes from different periods. Tolkien was a writer who belonged to the modernist period by chronology, but who shared more with the literature of Victorian/Edwardian England. By using Jason Fishers’ (2011) tenets for acceptable Tolkien source criticism, this paper aims to show that the portrayal of trees and forests in the works of George MacDonald’s Phantastes, William Morris’ The House of the Wolfings and Kenneth Grahame’s The Wind in the Willows served as the catalysts that triggered Tolkien’s creativity in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien was well acquainted with these novels as his letters and biography corroborate. The passages and examples here analysed, not only vouch for his own words, but also show how he developed and combined these writers’ characterisation of trees and forests with his imagination to create and develop certain aspects of the Ents, Mirkwood and the Old Forest.

Keywords: Trees, Tolkien, creativity, fantasy, Victorian/Edwardian