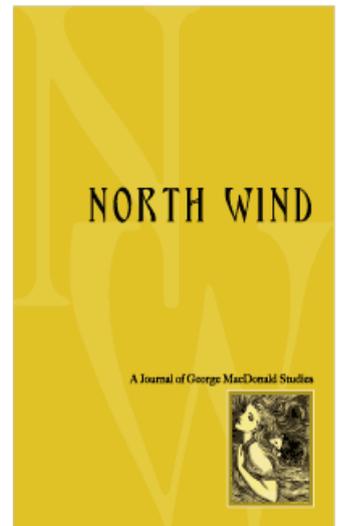


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I am just a humble George MacDonald scholar. You know, George MacDonald, the Scottish writer? Born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire in 1824, MacDonald was raised on the farm family, a deeply religious family that belonged to the chapel, the Missionar Kirk. In 1840, he went to Kings College at the University of Aberdeen, where he received his M.A. in 1845 specializing in chemistry and physics. By 1850, MacDonald was trained as a Congregational minister and moved to Arundel, only to leave the pulpit under duress in 1853. That was a fortuitous event. He changed careers and became a writer. But a Scottish one? Certainly in works such novels as *David Elginbrod* (1863) and *Alex Forbes of Howglen* (1865). MacDonald's lasting reputation, however, does not rest on these Scottish novels. No, it is based on his fairy tales and fantasies, set in a country that has no geographical boundaries—fairyland. His best work includes the adult fantasies *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895), and his all-ages fairy tales such as

the full-length *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), and his classic shorter works, “The Light Princess” and “The Golden Key,” to name only two.

Scotland has a rich tradition of faery, yet MacDonald still appears a marginal figure. While doing research in Scotland last year, I looked for MacDonald everywhere we went but could hardly find him. I needed, it seemed, to enlist Scotland Yard to track down the elusive writer. In Edinburgh I spotted an antique bookshop and found an 1890 edition of *At the Back of the North Wind*; the bookseller told me that not many people inquire about MacDonald, and that he knew about him but had never read him, though he was always meaning to. At the

work—goes beyond the fiction to his sermons, particularly those found in *Mere Christianity*. In other words, Lewis's conversion to Christianity is partly attributed to MacDonald; consequently, much of MacDonald's following in America comes from conservative, evangelical Christians who focus on MacDonald's theology (quite incorrectly, in most instances). Strike two: MacDonald is seen as a conservative Christian, his writing, including the fairy tales and fantasies, lauded for its sermonizing qualities.

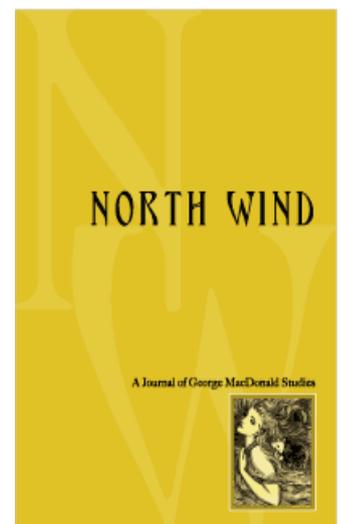
But MacDonald hasn't had strike three yet. And maybe I've had some small part in that, making me an undiscovered Scottish scholar of literature, one who focuses on George MacDonald. As an undergraduate English assistant for Robert Boyer and Kenneth J. Zahorski at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin, United States, in 1978, I read "The Light Princess" for a collection of fantasy stories they were editing, called *The Fantastic Imagination*, a title, I later learned, coming from MacDonald's critical essay of the same name. "The Light Princess" stayed with me, and in graduate school, when it came time to choose a dissertation focus in 1987, I narrowed my choices to Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, and George MacDonald. As you can anticipate, my dissertation committee asked suspiciously, "Who is George MacDonald?" When I decided that work on MacDonald had potential, I had to convince those committee members that MacDonald was, indeed, an important writer. That was no small task. One member even brought up Lewis's comments about MacDonald. No one on the committee was interested in his Scottishness. In retrospect, I made a wise choice, for interest in fairy-tale studies, particularly of the Victorian age, is at its height, and MacDonald is central to that study. My scholarly work has attempted, I hope, to add to the scholarly discourse on MacDonald.

I am currently editor of *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies* (with Fernando Soto, from Canada) and we have redesigned the journal to reflect, we hope, the growing scholarly interest in MacDonald, including work not only on his fairy tales and fantasies, but on his realistic novels, poetry, sermons, and literary criticism. We are also creating a digital archive of all scholarship from *North Wind* (founded in 1982), which will make access to such scholarship easy—just a mouse click or two away. This database will be the most complete archive on MacDonald scholarship to date. To learn more about the journal *North Wind* and explore the digital archive, please go to [www.snc.edu/english/northwind.html](http://www.snc.edu/english/northwind.html).

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*the Ultimate Online Guide* and *Writing Scotland: A Journey Through Scotland's Literature*. Maybe I don't need Scotland Yard after all.

Why hasn't Scotland claimed MacDonald as its own? He's quite popular in America, primarily riding the coat-tails of C. S. Lewis, who wrote after reading *Phantastes*, that MacDonald "converted" and "baptised" his imagination. And in "On Fairy-Stories," J. R. R. Tolkien demonstrates his indebtedness to MacDonald. Lewis and Tolkien are still literary gods to us. And when Madeleine L'Engle, the

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