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Maria Gonzalez Davies

The *Gold Thread* leads the reader through nine essays into the works of George MacDonald and into a world of contrasts. *Contrast* is the key word, for it appears not only in the critics' approach, but also in the works, life, and personality of George MacDonald. This is confirmed after reading the essays since, interestingly, they all deal with one contrasting aspect or another of his books.

However, as in any journey, there are a few stumbling blocks. These are mostly formal. First of all, the bibliography at the end of the book does not come across clearly enough, and it becomes difficult to spot authors and works quickly and efficiently. Perhaps a gap between each reference, or between the numbers used for the references to the introduction, would have solved the problem. Secondly, there are quite a few printing mistakes and elisions. Moreover, only half the title of Catherine Durie's essay appears. Of course, all these things can easily be corrected in a future edition.

David S. Robb is the first to unravel the thread. He sets out to explore MacDonald's best Scottish novels so that we share his insight into the author's evolution as far as his thought and feeling for Scotland are concerned: "In them I believe that MacDonald was conducting a sensitive exploration of his Scottish origins, and meditating on the relationship between those origins and the world of urban England where he had now found himself" (p. 13).

Roderick McGillis picks up the thread and deals with the contrasts in **[end of page 23]** *Phantastes* and *Lilith*. This is perhaps the most academic of the essays. It clearly conveys that MacDonald broke with conventional masculine approaches by devising a new approach where thinking beyond opposites becomes possible.

In a very well structured and thorough essay, Edmund Cusick writes about the centrality of the unconscious in MacDonald. Once again, contrasts are involved—Freud and Jung, animus and anima, fantasy and realism among others.

The most clearly contrasting opinions are those held by F. Hal Broome and by Colin Manlove when dealing with MacDonald's approach to

science. Whereas Broome sets out to prove that “there was a demonstrable element of current scientific theory in his writings” (p. 88), Manlove holds that MacDonald “turns away from science” (p. 159), and compares him to Charles Kingsley, who was highly interested in contemporary scientific discoveries. Broome’s message does not come across so clearly, partly owing to the fact that there are four pages devoted to notes which, although of great help in clarifying the text, should perhaps have formed a direct part of it.

Stephen Prickett believes that *Phantastes* “is the most satisfactory English adaptation of the *Bildungsroman*” (p. 123). His study of the contrasts between Goethe and Novalis and of how MacDonald adapted to them, recognising that realism and fantasy were two sides of the same coin, has been carried out with the clarity and thoroughness which characterise his writing.

Gillian Avery’s introduction to Victorian fairy tales is interesting, but rather long if compared to the space she dedicates to MacDonald. She points out the contrasts between his strict social and historical [24] environment and his imaginative stories and believes that “MacDonald and only one other [Mrs Craik] . . . succeeded in presenting the beauty of holiness” (p. 132).

Finally, Catherine Dury argues “that Lewis draws a great deal from MacDonald” (p. 165). Convincingly, she argues that C.S. Lewis liked MacDonald on a personal and spiritual, not a literary, level, and that there are not so many points in common between them as is currently believed.

This collection of essays makes a definite and positive contribution to the field of fantasy literature and to studies on George MacDonald. Many of the topics and approaches are new and present a challenge for further research. The thread has still not been unravelled completely. [25]