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This is the second collection of essays on MacDonald to appear within the last few years. Bill Raeper's *The Gold Thread* is primarily a British book, with seven of the nine contributors working in the U.K. and only two in North America. With *For the Childlike*, by contrast, eleven of the authors work in North America and only three in Britain. Another contrast is that in Raeper's anthology—although several contributions are on subjects which their authors have written upon elsewhere—all the contributions are previously unpublished pieces, whereas five of the essays in McGillis's book have been published elsewhere.

In both books it is noticeable that the British contributors adopt a much more conservative approach to the critical process. Two or three of their essays are unoriginal, but none is insubstantial. The essays in McGillis's collection range from the outstanding to the trivial. The spontaneity of the New World approach is infectious, and can give penetrating insights. But too often only one feature of a work is considered, and in some essays in the collection general conclusions are drawn without any consideration being given to other more significant features.

This is particularly evident in A. Waller Hastings's study of "Cross Purposes." MacDonald's story is an initiation fairy tale with a contemporary setting. The class relationships in it are subtly delineated, and Hastings explores these subtleties for us. But he is so impressed by what he finds, in what he has prejudged to be a "lesser work" of MacDonald's (75), that he concludes the social commentary to be the *raison d'être* of the work.

Even McGillis himself slips into this approach to some extent in his introduction. Noting that "few of the writers here acknowledge the child reader of MacDonald's work" (6), he sets out to consider "The Giant's Heart" from this aspect. It is an appropriate choice, since it is the only story in *Adela* [end of page 48] *Cathcart* told to an audience of children. He is inevitably drawn to consider the ways the story parodies many of the conventions of contemporary tales for children, and he does this brilliantly. But some details of "The Giant's Heart" suggest that MacDonald is parodying specific stories, and McGillis attempts

convoluted interpretations for these details instead of looking for the original models.

McGillis notes with pleasure that several of his contributors are very clearly aware of MacDonald's method of conjoining "apparently disparate aspects," from "two worlds" (2-3). The method is investigated with particular lucidity in Stephen Prickett's essay on, "The Two Worlds of George MacDonald." This essay was first published in *North Wind 2*, but Prickett has added an important middle section where he quotes from Owen Barfield's writings to show how MacDonald is drawing upon a Neoplatonic tradition.

Two contributors, following Louis MacNeice, read the fantasies as parables. With Cynthia Marshall this leads to a very helpful study of the narrative techniques in "The Golden Key," in which she compares MacDonald's story with the parable of the labourers in the vinyard. Most of her conclusions, however, are untenable. Melba Battin's parabolic study of *The Lost Princess* is less directly helpful, but her suggestion that the Wise Woman in this story is developing morally stimulates one to recognise parallels with Jung's 'wise old man' figure and with the meggid who is ultimately recognised as an aspect of the Sophia in Barfield's *Unancestral Voice*.

The high point of the book is McGillis's essay on "Language and Secret Knowledge in *At the Back of the North Wind*." Only the truly childlike can begin to really appreciate this story, but the field of MacDonald criticism is at present blessed in having several critics who can reveal—to those readers who are striving to become again as little children in the spirit—some of the workings of MacDonald's magic (*s. str.*: i.e. what McGillis, quoting Northrop Frye, terms "secret wisdom, the keys to all knowledge" 147). McGillis describes the technical basis of MacDonald's magic in detail. This is appropriate, because such magical writing is "intended neither to suspend intellect nor to direct intellect, but rather to motivate it" (149). He quotes from *England's Antiphon*: "The heart of poetry is indeed truth, but its garments are music, and the garments come first in the process of revelation" (149). *North Wind's* realm and Victorian London are "the within and the without of imaginative activity" (154). [49]

McGillis notes that it is important to remember that the "experience of essences will appear somewhat different to different people" and this is the reason MacDonald insists upon ambiguity' (157). This is well illustrated in his other piece, in the collection on structure and theme in *Phantastes*: he notes there that his conclusions are "remarkably close" to those of John Docherty in his "Note on the Structure of *Phantastes*" in *North Wind*—which is true, yet he and Docherty differ completely in their interpretation of many major details.

The other essays in the collection can be summarized only briefly. Michael Mendelson lucidly examines how MacDonald adapts traditional fairy-tale themes. His examination of “The Light Princess” in this context is highly illuminating, but when he turns to “The Golden Key” and *The Princess and the Goblin* his essay is so full of factual errors and second-hand interpretations that one might believe he had never read the stories. Joseph Sigman’s Jungian reading of the *Princess* books is a great disappointment after the insights of “Death’s Ecstasies,” his similar study of *Phantastes*. Frank Riga increases our understanding of MacDonald’s Neoplatonism by going back to some of the original sources in Plato’s own writings. Celia Anderson convincingly argues that MacDonald draws upon some themes contained in Milton’s *Comus* for “The Golden Key.” Nancy Willard makes a useful contribution to the current discussion of MacDonald’s Grandmother-Wise Woman figures, and Nancy-Lou Patterson also writes on this subject. Bill Raeper contributes a helpful essay on MacDonald and the lowland Scottish folk tradition. Cordelia Sherman contrasts the fantasy worlds of MacDonald and Ursula LeGuin, drawing conclusions strikingly different from those of Colin Manlove in *Christian Fantasy*, and supporting some of them by extraordinarily perverse readings of MacDonald’s text, such as the statement that “Irene and Curdie’s children undermine the castle that their ancestors saved” (203). And Lesley Smith recognises “Old Testament prophecies of punishment” in *At the Back of the North Wind*, which are “irradiated by the New Testament ideal of love” (161)—an important and fascinating theme which deserves a far fuller treatment than is possible in a short essay.

It scarcely needs to be said that this is a book which should be read by everyone who is seriously interested in MacDonald’s vision. Not only does it contain two quite outstanding essays, but every essay can stimulate the reader into new insights, even though this will frequently be by errors and omissions. [50]