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The Story, the Teller and the Audience in George MacDonald's Fiction. Lewiston N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000. 235 x 160 mm, 156 p, h/b, ISBN 0-7734-7728-4.

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This important book was unfortunately received too late for a full review to be published in the present issue of *North Wind*. Its importance lies primarily in the fact that Ankeny has recognised how thoroughly MacDonald “understands the intricate relationship between textuality, authorship, readership and authority,” as Roderick McGillis expresses it in his preface (viii). Very many readers of MacDonald have intuited this fact, but have not brought it fully to consciousness. Ankeny’s analyses of some of MacDonald’s novels on this basis are at once profound and (now that they have been pointed out) self-evident—the hallmark of genuine research.

Ankeny’s introductory chapter serves its purpose to prepare the reader for her principal themes, although it has some glaring omissions. For example, there is no exploration, here or elsewhere in the book, of how MacDonald’s thinking developed over the period of his writing career. The first chapter is hard reading, but Ankeny becomes inspired when she starts to explore specific texts. *Sir Gibbie* is the main subject of chapter 2, subtitled “Literacy, Humanity and Epistemology.” *David Elginbrod* and *Home Again* are the principal texts used to illustrate “Text as an Invitation to Relationship” in chapter 3. There are many important observations in chapter four, which is subtitled “Authors and Their Audience.” Here the two principal texts used are *Donal Grant* and *Adela Cathcart*. But the exploration of *Donal Grant* is not as inspired as that of the previously mentioned works and the treatment of *Adela Cathcart* is very peculiar indeed. As a consequence, while the promise of the subtitle can be said to be fulfilled, Ankeny does not bring her material together in a very satisfactory way. In chapter 5, her final chapter, subtitled “Autobiography and the Co-Creation of Text,” Ankeny again amasses sufficient fine insights for an original and co-ordinated study of the topic, but, with the exception of her analysis of *The Elect Lady*, the various texts she considers are poorly handled and her material is scarcely organised at all. Her bibliography is peculiar, including many works of no direct relevance to her text which are not otherwise mentioned or even hinted at. The index, by contrast, does not even list most of the authors who are cited in the text.

Thus, like many works published by the Edwin Mellen Press, Ankeny's book is a "curate's egg." The mixture of chapters where research of unusually high quality is lucidly expounded, with others containing good material but hopelessly disorganised, could almost be said to be a hallmark of the Mellen press. A typical example of such disorganisation is Ankeny's duplication of her references to the first included story in *Phantastes* (136 and 139). Part of her interpretation of this story very closely parallels Adrian Gunther's, but there is no reference to Gunther. A paper by Gunther which is listed in the bibliography is not the one from which Ankeny appears to have borrowed. Ankeny's techniques for avoiding referring to the work of other critics at times verge on the bizarre. For example, Nancy Mellon's study of *Adela Cathcart*, "The Stages in Adela Cathcart's Cure," *North Wind* 15 (1996), is a thorough study with a similar approach and of similar length to Ankeny's analysis of this book. Yet Ankeny's study resembles nothing so much as a Scottish sword-dance around Mellon's paper, performing the seemingly impossible feat of continuously keeping extremely close to it without ever once touching it. Defects like this in the book will need to be rectified when a second edition is prepared.

Roderick McGillis in his preface is particularly successful in encapsulating Ankeny's achievement. He points out that for MacDonald, "the book" is "a metaphor for relationship, connectedness, communion. This is why the book is central to MacDonald's thinking and also why the book functions in the same way as nature, music or even persons." He suggests that "MacDonald's continual recourse to paradox, symbol, riddle, mystery, fantasy was his attempt to emulate nature, and nature exists to wake meanings in humans who inhabit nature." This "means freeing the reader to interpret, to take on the knowing that comes from thinking actively and engaging with another who also thinks challengingly and imaginatively" (viii-x). The crucial elements in MacDonald's writing identified here are precisely those which are eliminated by the creators of the rewrites of MacDonald which flood the American market. In these rewrites all freedom is withdrawn from the reader.

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