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Book Reviews

New Materials on MacDonald: The Cullen Collection

Robert Trexler

It's hard to believe that only 40 years ago, very few of MacDonald's books were in print, and none of his so-called realistic novels. In the 1970s Shaw Publishers, in Wheaton, Illinois, published a few books of his sermons edited by Rolland Hein, David C. Cook published some of the fairy tales, and Schocken Books offered the *Complete Fairy Tales* in 1978. I suspect *At the Back of the North Wind* was being published in various places, and Eerdmans offered the combined *Phantastes and Lilith* which they first published in the 1960s.

The realistic novels, however, were nowhere to be found except in libraries or from antiquarian booksellers. The first efforts to re-introduce those novels were the versions edited by Michael Phillips for Bethany House Publishers. In 1982, *The Fisherman's Lady* appeared, an adaptation¹ of the novel *Malcolm*. In the following years, another 17 adaptations were published. Victor Books also published adaptations of MacDonald's novels, edited by Dan Hamilton.²

In 2018, with the Bethany House editions out-of-print, Michael Phillips revealed a new project to publish 37 of MacDonald's novels, twice as many as he had edited before. This enterprise was called The Cullen Collection (TCC) in homage to MacDonald's love of his homeland of Scotland and the seaside village he visited frequently, the real-life location for his novel *Malcolm*. The aim of this article is to describe and compare TCC with other modern publications of MacDonald's novels since 1982, beginning with those from Johannesen Printing and Publishing and the Sunrise Centenary Editions.

Johannesen Printing and Publishing and The Sunrise Centenary Editions

Johannesen Printing and Publishing (JPP), located in California, reprinted the complete works of MacDonald (48 volumes) from original 19th century editions using photolithography. These hardcover editions were created on a

Heidelberg Press which allows each book to be printed with individual care and precision. The acid-free octavo pages (eight leaf) are then collated, sewn into a book block, and bound to the spine of a coated cotton cloth book cover. The book covers and spines are embossed in gold foil, handsome books made to last a lifetime. For nearly 30 years, these editions have generally been considered the “gold standard” for people wanting original editions of MacDonald’s works, especially a durable complete set.

Around the same time (1988 through the mid-1990s) Michael Phillips also began to reprint selected MacDonald novels using photolithography of 19th century editions. These works were titled the Sunrise Centenary Editions (SCE) which included 16 MacDonald novels (two now out-of-print) and some volumes of sermons and poems. Like the Johannesen books, these are high quality hardcover books with sewn spines and gold embossed covers. Since 2015, the books have been distributed through Wise Path Books (WPB), an internet based bookstore featuring books by MacDonald and selected authors considered to be compatible with MacDonald’s outlook. The proprietor of Wise Path Books is Joseph Dindinger, whose goal, like that of the Johannesen family and the Phillips family, is to preserve and promote the writings of George MacDonald.

Comparing the Johannesen and Sunrise Centenary Editions³

The first thing to note is the number of novels available from the two publishers. Although JPP originally offered 38 novels, seven titles are currently out-of-print (*Weighed and Wanting*, *St. George and St. Michael*, *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, *There and Back*, *Donal Grant*, and *Castle Warlock*). As noted earlier, SCE currently sells only 14 novels, but of the seven out-of-print titles from JPP, only *Donal Grant* and *Castle Warlock* are offered by SCE in their deluxe hardcover editions.

The two companies also publish different sized books. The JPP books have pages that are approximately 4.5 x 7 inches, while the SCE pages are approximately 5 x 8 inches. While I own the complete JPP set, I only own two novels published by SCE—*Robert Falconer* and *Donal Grant*. In the case of these two novels, the reproduced text is larger and easier to read than the JPP versions. There is also a difference in the retail price—the JPP novels list for \$50 each with the possibility of quantity discounts. The SCE novels average between \$27.50 to \$45 with a handful of scarce titles running much higher (such as *Sir Gibbie* at \$175).

The JPP editions conveniently state which of the various 19th century editions they reproduced.⁴ The SCE editions have no such indication. This can be important as some early publishers made dramatic changes to the text. For example, the JPP edition of *Donal Grant* is taken from a “New Edition” published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Truber & Co., while the SCE version is reproduced from an 1883 edition (possibly Loring or Routledge in Boston). While the SCE edition includes 45 chapters, the JPP edition has edited and divided the text into 84 chapters.⁵ Despite nearly doubling the number of chapters, the JPP edition appears to be shorter than the 1883 edition.

A comparison of *Robert Falconer* shows fewer text discrepancies with SCE, apparently reprinting an American edition (Loring or D. Lothrop or Routledge?) and JPP using an 1880 edition by Hurst and Blackett (London). The SCE edition includes an extra final chapter not found in the JPP edition, as well as including MacDonald’s dedication of the novel to A.J. Scott. However, it omits MacDonald’s epigraph from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, which precedes the beginning chapter, a possible clue from MacDonald as to one of the book’s intentions.⁶

Works of MacDonald and the Scots Novels

In 2016, Works of MacDonald (WoM), founded by Jess Lederman, began publishing unabridged editions of MacDonald’s novels whose stories are based in Scotland and which include the Doric dialect of the Scots language. Unlike the deluxe hardcover books from JPP or SCE, these Scottish novels were not photographed from older copies, but re-typeset with the Scots dialog appearing side-by side with an English translation by David Jack. This series of books uses original texts.

To accommodate the side-by-side translations, the page size needed to be considerably larger than older versions. At 7 x 10 inches, the book can easily transition to a two-column format when necessary. Another feature of the series is the illustrations. *Robert Falconer* includes illustrations by Leighton Isaacs, *Castle Warlock* with illustrations by Melissa Alvey, and *Sir Gibe* with illustrations by Carrie Stout. Each novel includes introductions by both David Jack and Michael Phillips. The other benefit is the price—\$19.95 from Amazon or \$15.95 from either WorksofMacDonald.com or WisePathBooks.com. One shortcoming with these affordable and attractive books is the length of a single line of text when it appears in a single column. The optimal line of text for readability is considered to be 60 to 75 characters per line, whereas a line of text from these editions (when in a single column)

is 92 characters.⁷

In addition to its book publishing, *The Works of George MacDonald* website seeks to be a comprehensive source of conveniently organized information on George MacDonald's life and works, and a place for people to present essays and works of art, music, and literature based on or inspired by MacDonald. The website states: "We are working to make it easy to find links to, or information on how to obtain, virtually everything about MacDonald; to provide a forum for discussions of his life and works; and to develop and encourage the community at large to create new resources that will be helpful to readers, as well as new works inspired by George MacDonald."

***Wingfold*—Barbara Amell**

No article about the efforts of individuals to promote appreciation and scholarship of George MacDonald would be complete without mentioning *Wingfold* by Barbara Amell. *Wingfold* is a quarterly magazine that restores material by and about George MacDonald, in print since 1993. The issues feature the first reprints of press reports covering MacDonald's extempore sermons and lectures, the first publication of MacDonald family letters from diverse collections, reprinted articles on MacDonald by his contemporaries, new articles providing information on the MacDonald family, and rare illustrations for MacDonald's works. Amell's vast knowledge and research, particularly about MacDonald's perspectives on Shakespeare and Dante as reflected in his novels, is an important resource. A complete table of contents of *Wingfold* is listed at the Marion E. Wade Center's website. Subscriptions are available online through WoM and WPB.

The Cullen Collection

Now, it is finally time to discuss Michael Phillips' recent release of 37 volumes of George MacDonald's novels. However, that story begins with Phillips' work with Bethany House Publishers (BHP) in editing MacDonald's novels 35 years ago. The Christian book market at that time was hungry for edifying fiction and Phillips perceptively realized that the time was ripe for those novels, long out of print, to become available to modern readers.

As authors and editors will understand, many decisions in marketing a book are within the publisher's purview. Thus, the BHP books were largely presented as romance stories for women to read. The books were retitled and the cover art frequently emphasized the love interest of the main character. While it is accurate to classify many of MacDonald's novels as in the style

of “gothic romances,” there is, as readers of *North Wind* will appreciate, much more between the covers of a MacDonald novel than the love story. Yet this approach was probably the most expedient way to market the novels to women.

It was also deemed necessary to translate the Scots dialog MacDonald sometimes included in his novels. In the BHP editions, nearly all of the Scots language was rendered into modern English. However, Phillips retained some of the dialect that would be easily understood. In the TCC editions, more Scots language is retained, thus preserving more of the Scottish atmosphere. Here is a comparison between the older and modern editions:

Original: “Varra well, my lord. Sae lang ‘s it’s fair, I s’ bide it ohn gruten (*without weeping*)”

BHP: “Very well, my Lord. So long as it’s fair. I’ll abide it without complaining.”

TCC: “Very weel, my lord. So long as it’s fair. I’ll abide by it wi’oot complaining.”

One may surmise that MacDonald believed that most of the dialect in this sentence was understandable to English readers with the exception of “ohn gruten” which required an English translation. Another element BHP believed necessary for modern readers was to reduce the length of MacDonald’s originals. Phillips writes in the Foreword of each TCC novel that for the BHP versions, “Cuts to length had to be more severe than I would have preferred. Practicality drove the effort.”

Phillip’s goes on to explain his frustrations in editing the BHP editions:

Added to that was the challenge of working with editors who occasionally changed MacDonald’s wording and *removed* more than I intended, then also sometimes took the liberties to the opposite extreme by *inserting* words, sentences, even whole paragraphs that originated neither from myself nor MacDonald. Those editions were also subject to sanitizing editorial scrutiny, which occasionally removed aspects of MacDonald’s more controversial perspectives, and added evangelistically correct words and phrases to bring the text more in line with accepted orthodoxy. As MacDonald himself knew, there are times when an author has little to say in details of final text, design, art, or overall quality. Thus the covers and titles were not mine. And I was often kept in the dark about internal textual changes

and was unable to correct them.⁸

The amount of text removed from the 19th century original when creating the BHP version of *Malcolm* (titled *The Fisherman's Lady*) can be substantiated accurately thanks to Michael Phillips' reply to my email asking for the word count of the 1982 edition. The BHP edition contained about 106,000 words compared with the original which contained 192,024 words—thus about 45% shorter. To translate that percentage in terms of page count (assuming 425 words per page) the BHP edition removed about 202 pages of text.

Phillips believes the new TCC reductions are in the range of 5% to 25% shorter than the originals and perhaps an average of 26% longer than the BHP editions. My own estimation of the reduction of *Malcolm* in the TCC edition is 18% or about 82 pages shorter than the original. Therefore, around 120 pages have been added to the 1982 BHP edition. It is worth noting that the typography for TCC novels is excellent, with 67 characters per line and ample vertical space between lines; the text is very readable.

Phillips prefers to use the term “redactions” to his work on TCC novels, which he describes as preparing a text for publication without any predetermined objective to shorten the text. Thus his purpose was to prepare the text by means of standardizing American spelling, replacing obsolete words, updating punctuation, shortening run-on sentences, breaking up long paragraphs, and removing selected passages or poetry which appeared to have no bearing on the novel's plot.⁹

Each novel in TCC is preceded by an introduction explaining not only the writing and publication of that novel, but of MacDonald's personal circumstances at that stage in his career. The introductions provide insights and opinions from Phillips' lifetime of close study of MacDonald's life and works. To use an example, The Cullen Collection edition of *Malcolm* has over 30 pages of introduction and photos before the actual novel begins. Publishing a complete and affordable set of MacDonald's novels (books cost between \$9 and \$16 dollars) with knowledgeable introductions is a significant achievement.

Conclusion

With the advances of modern publishing technology, more options for readers of MacDonald are becoming available. The Cullen Collection novels and the Works of MacDonald novels are examples of the tremendous progress that has been made recently in printed versions. Although scholars cannot afford to disregard the original texts, even with their flaws and digressions, general

readers and MacDonald scholars alike have much to thank Michael Phillips for in skillfully placing the novels in the context of MacDonald's life and thought. One can realistically hope, building upon current research, that more unabridged novels will one day be available.

Endnotes

1. I use the word in the scientific sense of the process of change by which something becomes better suited to its environment, which is one of Phillips' goals in modernizing the novels while being faithful to the original source material.
2. Dan Hamilton's 11 editions of MacDonald's novels (published by Victor Books in the 1980s and 1990s) are out of print. They included: *The Parish Papers* (A one volume trilogy including *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood*, *The Seaboard Parish*, and *The Vicar's Daughter*), *The Last Castle (St. George and St. Michael)*, *The Prodigal Apprentice (Guild Court)*, *On Tangled Paths (Weighed and Wanting)*, *The Elect Lady*, *Home Again*, *The Boyhood of Ranald Bannerman*, *The Genius of Willie MacMichael (Gutta Percha Willie)*, and *The Wanderings of Clare Skymyer (A Rough Shaking)*.
3. Abbreviations used in this article: The Cullen Collection (TCC), Johannesen Printing and Publishing (JPP), Wise Path Books (WPB), Works of MacDonald (WoM), Bethany House Publishers (BHP).
4. Michael Phillips' book *George MacDonald: A Writer's Life* chronologically discusses the publishing history of MacDonald's books. Of particular help in understanding the various publishers of his novels, see endnote #13 on pages 103-105.
5. Likewise, the Johannesen edition of *There and Back* is unreliable or at least suspect as it was reproduced from a 1900 Kegan Paul, Trench, "New Edition," dividing the original 39 chapters into 66 chapters (and probably making other edits). Scholars should refer to *There and Back* text from either a 19th century American edition or possibly the online text from Guttenberg when 19th century originals are not available.
6. Other MacDonald novels which are sometimes reprinted without the original epigraphs include *Adela Cathcart* (Chaucer), *Alec Forbes* (Wordsworth), and *David Elginbrod* (originally published in three volumes with an epigraph before each book/section: Chaucer, Shakespeare-*Macbeth*, and Thomas Dekker). Other of MacDonald's triple-decker novels might also have original epigraphs which were not

carried over into the one volume editions.

7. *Robert Falconer* is also available in a large print edition from WoM with 14.5 point type instead of 11 point type. The fourth book in this series, *Donal Grant*, is due later in 2019.
8. This explanation in many ways confirms the analysis of the BHP redacted novel reviewed by Docherty, John (2000) "The Limitations of Reductionist Approaches to Thomas Wingfold, Curate," *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*: Vol. 19, Article 4.
9. Six novels in The Cullen Collection are exactly as first published in MacDonald's lifetime: *Phantastes*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Wise Woman*, *The Princess and Curdie*, and *Lilith*.