George MacDonald in the Virtual Library: The *North Wind* Digital Archive and the Evolution of MacDonald Scholarship

Gretchen Panzer and John Pennington

Introduction

Chapter one of *Lilith* is titled "The Library." MacDonald describes the library as follows:

> The library, although duly considered in many alterations of the house and additions to it, had nevertheless, like an encroaching state, absorbed one room after another until it occupied the greater part of the ground floor. Its chief room was large, and the walls of it were covered with books almost to the ceiling; the rooms into which it overflowed were of various sizes and shapes, and communicated in modes as various—by doors, by open arches, by short passages, by steps up and steps down. (6)

In "The Library of Babel" Jorge Luis Borges writes that the library is "the universe . . . composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings" (51). The story ends with the narrator contemplating personal mortality and the immortality of the library: "I suspect that the human species—the unique species—is about to be extinguished, but the Library will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret" (58).

MacDonald's library is not that dissimilar to Borges's Library of Babel, for Mr. Vane finds himself in a "space larger than imagination" (35), a transitional space that connects with the region of the seven dimensions, where "two objects" can "exist in the same place at the same time!" (23). The Library holds secret knowledge that promises to unlock the mysteries of the universe, if only one could find the key to navigate the infinite knowledge that is housed in these circular runes.

That MacDonald can find a portal from the library to an alternative universe—fairyland—is an apt metaphor for the virtual or digital library, a space that Borges anticipates. By nature, the digital library resides in cyberspace, waiting to be accessed. Yet the inability to access this knowledge is a real concern, for the scholar's desire for certain knowledge is often thwarted by the difficult—and sometimes impossible—task of retrieving print sources that are housed in numerous places around the world, many not cataloged efficiently. Cyberspace, for all its allure, can become, as William

Gibson describes in *Neuromancer*, "a consensual hallucination" (5l). That is also not a bad metaphor for fairyland: imagine Mr. Vane logging onto his computer, choosing his favorite internet browser, and clicking to a digital archive of materials that he needs, all materializing on his computer screen like magic, ready for consumption. This digital library is now a reality for Mr. Vane and other MacDonald scholars: *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies* is now online. With a few mouse clicks, scholars from around the world will have access to all issues of the journal, which started publication in 1982.

Digital Humanities and Digital Archives

Digital humanities (DH) is an evolving field. In "The Landscape of Digital Humanities," Patrik Svensson canvasses the short developmental history of digital humanities, which can be loosely defined as a movement that reflects a

> rich multi-level interaction with the "digital" that is partly a result of the persuasiveness of digital technology and the sheer number of disciplines, perspectives and approaches involved. Humanists are exploring differing modes of engagement, institutional models, technologies and discursive strategies. There is also a strategy-level push for the digital humanities which, among other things, affects university research strategies, external funding and recruitment. (par. 1)

Svensson uses Tara McPherson's typology for DH to help capture this digital landscape

> that makes distinctions between the computing humanities, blogging humanities and multimodal humanities. According to McPherson, the computing humanities focus on building tools, infrastructure, standards and collections whereas the blogging humanities are concerned with the production of networked media and peer-to-peer writing. The multimodal humanities bring together scholarly tools, databases, networked writing and peer-to-peer commentary while also leveraging the potential of the visual and aural media that are part of contemporary life. (par. 14)

We are excited that the *North Wind* Digital Archive is part of the overall DH movement. George MacDonald is in the matrix.

The *North Wind* Archive

The *North Wind* Digital Archive is housed at St. Norbert College in De Pere, WI, USA, and was created by Gretchen Panzer and John Pennington. Pennington is the co-editor, with Fernando Soto, of the print

journal *North Wind*, which is also housed at St. Norbert College. The print copy of *North Wind* will continue by subscription through the George MacDonald Society; the digital archive will be an open access site that makes the scholarship more readily available. In addition, the archive is linked to the Victorian Web, the webmaster George Landow a pioneer in the DH movement. The archive will also be listed in the online *MLA International Bibliography*; in the future we hope that the MLA will include "hot" links to the archive so scholars can access the full texts of articles directly from the MLA site.

      The archive can be accessed at *http://www.snc.edu/english/ nwarchive.html*. The contents are arranged on the archive into the following categories:

- •By contributor (80)
- •By genre or topic (26)
- •By volume (28)
- •By work (28)
- •Index

The number in parentheses provides a quick measure: *North Wind* has published work by 80 scholars, the website has 26 topic or genre categories, houses 28 volumes, and covers 28 of MacDonald's creative, critical, and theological works. Each category, we hope, becomes a useful reference tool so that the archive becomes a bona-fide research site that goes beyond a static collection of critical essays published in *North Wind*.

      For example, the "By genre or topic" category is broken down into the following:

- •Allegory and Symbolism (13)
- •Archetypes and Mythology (7)
- •Art and Aestheticism (5)
- •Biography (22)
- •Book Reviews (39)
- •Children (3)
- •Education (5)
- •Fairy Tales (12)
- •Fantasy (12)
- •Gender and Sexuality (6)
- •Imagination (8)
- •Influences, Contemporaries, and Collaborators (56)
- •Language (3)
- •Literary Criticism (2)
- •Literary Structure (6)
- •MacDonald Scholarship (7)
- •Mysticism (2)

- •Nature and Ecology (5)
- •News and Updates (8)
- •Notes and Queries (4)
- •Philosophy and Ethics (3)
- •Science and Mathematics (2)
- •Scottish Heritage (7)
- •Theology (31)
- •Victorian Era (8)
- •Works in Progress (1)

This categorization becomes a quick, useful tool for focused research. For example, if a scholar was working on gender issues in MacDonald, he or she would see that six essays have been published with this focus in the journal. We will continually update and modify these categories to best reflect the archive's complexity, and, eventually we will have the archive become a searchable database: if you wanted to find all articles that mention F. D. Maurice, for example, you would simply type in "Maurice" and a list would be generated. As with any DH database or archive, the structure is fluid and evolving.

The creation of the archive blended good old-fashioned researching with the latest computer programming. To start, we had to acquire all back issues of *North Wind*. We found quickly that this was a more difficult task than it appeared, for there are few—if any—libraries that house all volumes of the journals. Thankfully the George MacDonald Society has back issues, so we received print copies, many of marginal quality, reflecting the printing and duplicating methods used by the Society as it began the journal.

Once we acquired all back issues, we had to scan articles into an Adobe PDF format. Then we had to translate the PDF files into a readable word-processing format, Microsoft Word. We used the AbbeyFine Reader program, which scanned the PDF file as an image, converted it to text-base, and then converted it to a Word document. While this process seems simple, the reality is that any translation creates numerous errors in content and format. Thus much of the archiving included copyediting of the Word documents to make certain that they were correct. After copyediting, we put the Word document into a desktop publishing program—InDesign—to ensure that all back issues would be formatted in a manner that is consistent with the current journal. Finally, we published the new PDF file on the archive's website using Cascade, the server used by St. Norbert College for all pages linked to its site, and the Web Site Live program, which automatically creates lists of hot links for documents that are saved in the college's NetStorage folders.

There are admittedly more efficient methods we might have been able to use; however, we were limited by the programs supported by St.

Norbert College. In the future, we hope to transfer the archive to a more elegant program in order to fix certain issues that arose in Web Site Live. For example, file names are limited to a certain number of characters; therefore, some article titles had to be abbreviated. In addition, due to flaws in the Web Site Live program, which automatically generates file names based on certain characters and an index that cannot be manually altered, we had to choose whether we wanted to save each file only once (resulting in the appearance of strange characters in the file names) or multiple times (resulting in the listing of each article multiple times in the index). We choose the latter to preserve readability, but ideally we would not have to settle for the lesser of two inaccuracies. Still, despite these organizational flaws, the overall result of our work is that the *North Wind* Digital Archive houses all issues of *North Wind* from 1982. In addition, every article has the same format and layout, thus creating a unified look for the journal.

Creating a digital archive, as we stated above, entails a lot of editorial work, some that goes beyond copyediting. We decided not to include "Editor" statements for issues, primarily because they would not be indexed in the *MLA International Bibliography*; we also did not include "filler" material—i.e., reprints of MacDonald's poetry, letters, or family photographs. Furthermore, in some early articles we were not able to include graphics because the print copy did not have adequate resolution. The benefit of a digital archive is that we can now fill in any omissions by tracking down higher resolution images. We may even create a separate category that contains editor statements (a majority of the issues do not have such statements). In other words, the digital archive is a living entity that will be continually modified and updated. We will rely on users of the archive to report to us any problems or to make any suggestions for its improvement.

Reception of MacDonald Scholarship in *North Wind*

After we finished the archive and made it active online, we discovered that we also had a wealth of information that went beyond the process of creating a digital archive—through our copyediting we got a holistic view of the scholarship in *North Wind* and began to see trends in MacDonald scholarship that were quite illuminating.

One of MacDonald's most lasting works is *The Princess and Curdie*, serialized in *Good Things: A Picturesque Magazine for Boys and Girls* (January-June 1877) and published in novel form by Chatto and Windus in 1883. In *The Princess and Curdie*, readers are introduced to Lina and her fellow beasts, who are described as "the most grotesquely ugly, the most extravagantly abnormal animals imagination can conceive. To describe them were a hopeless task" (129). Curdie, however, can see the goodness of these

creatures: after a baptism in a rose fire, Curdie has the ability to recognize who is evolving to a higher spiritual state or devolving to an animal state by the mere touch of their hands. When Curdie touches Lina's paw, he knows its evolving to a higher state. The grandmother tells him: "That paw in your hand now might almost teach you the whole science of natural history—the heavenly sort, I mean" (103). This evolutionary metaphor is an apt one to apply to MacDonald's legacy, for it suggests that a writer's "value" is continually in a state of flux or reassessment. Our contemporary attitudes of MacDonald, in turn, are influenced by the past reception of his work. By tracing this reception in *North Wind*, we can better comprehend the ways MacDonald is read and appreciated by academic critics and general readers today; we can also forecast trends that might evolve in MacDonald studies in the future.

In *Toward and Aesthetic of Reception*, Hans Robert Jauss claims that "the historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees. For it is only through the process of its mediation that the work enters into the changing horizon-of-experience of a continuity in which the perpetual inversion occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them" (19). Jauss's "aesthetics of reception" (19) situates a writer's critical reputation over time as readers' needs and expectations change. "The coherence of literature as an event," writes Jauss, "is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics, and authors" (22). Jauss's "literary evolution" (34) suggests that a work's aesthetic response transforms—positively or negatively—according to the readers' views over time. Current MacDonald scholarship, consequently, is directly related to past criticism, as contemporary attitudes toward MacDonald will influence the direction of MacDonald studies for the future. This essay will now trace the horizon of expectations that have defined MacDonald scholarship in *North Wind* historically and will end by suggesting possible futures for MacDonald studies, one that is now part of the digital age.

The Evolution of MacDonald Scholarship in *North Wind*

While some features of the journal have remained the same since its first volume in 1982—such as the inclusion of previously unpublished letters and stories by MacDonald, as well as reviews of relevant books and articles—*North Wind* has seen drastic changes in the interests and theoretical approaches of its contributors. The appendix to this volume of *North Wind* (found on pages 102-127) is a chronological list of the articles that have appeared in the journal to date and the tags we used to classify these articles in the archive. This list, originally intended to serve simply as a reference as

we created the archive, has become much more: it is a visual representation of the evolution of MacDonald scholarship as published in *North Wind*. Using this list to investigate our impressions of *North Wind*'s history, we noted that the journal's 28 volumes could be divided into three categories: early volumes, characterized by the biographical focus of its contributors; transition volumes, which reveal a gradual but significant shift in the journal's focus; and the most recent volumes, which are often highly theoretical, representing a variety of critical approaches to MacDonald's works.

The earliest editions of *North Wind* (volumes 1-11) are primarily comprised of biographical studies and reprints of letters that were written to or by MacDonald. These articles paint a detailed picture of MacDonald's childhood, relationship to Scotland and Scottish literature, theology, and adult life as a husband, father, friend, author, and minister. Other articles in these early volumes trace the influence of other writers through MacDonald's works or discuss his use of symbolism, allusion, and genre. Most do not focus on a particular work, but rather consider the overarching themes of his writing. The early volumes also feature personal reflections of contributors and information on the George MacDonald Society's activities, as in volume 9, which includes a description of the society's trip to Huntly and an excerpt from a lecture delivered there. As a whole, the early volumes illustrate the growing interest in MacDonald and provide new scholars with the background information they need to start focusing on his writing.

The transition volumes of *North Wind* (volumes 12-20) illustrate a shift in contributors' scholarly interest from biography to close reading. Unlike earlier volumes, these feature articles that focus on a particular text rather than on MacDonald's body of work. Popular subjects are his fantasy novels and fairy tales, especially the *Princess* novels, *Lilith*, and the fairy tales in *Adela Cathcart*. While more theoretical than earlier volumes, these articles are primarily concerned with identifying MacDonald's works as part of various traditions and genres (the symbolist and mythopoeic traditions, for example) and with tracing particular themes throughout his works—it is not until the most recent volumes that contributors take highly theoretical and textually specific approaches to MacDonald's works.

The final shift in the journal's history to date—the narrowing of contributors' focus to specific texts and theoretical approaches—is clearly demonstrated in volume 21. For this edition of the journal, editor John Docherty invited the volume's contributors to respond to John Pennington's article "Of 'Frustrate Desire': Feminist Self-Postponement in George MacDonald's *Lilith*." The resulting conversation is particularly fascinating in that it highlights the contributors' unique theoretical approaches to *Lilith*. Pennington's article applies feminist literary theory to the text, an approach that the other contributors analyze according to their own critical approaches,

which range from Christian interpretations to Lacanian psychoanalytic speculations to postmodern deconstructive impulses—and everything in between, including traditional close reading, Jungian readings, and theological discussions. The contributors' conversation also reveals their differing opinions on the nature of the journal itself. Though one contributor expresses concern that *North Wind*'s increasing emphasis on literary theory will alienate its audience, the others contributors clearly enjoy this opportunity to apply their chosen theoretical perspectives in their discussion of *Lilith*, thus situating MacDonald more centrally in the canon of Victorian literature.

While "Of 'Frustrate Desire'" is unique in that it is the only article for which such an extensive, direct discourse has been published in *North Wind*, contributors to the journal have continued to utilize a variety of literary theories as they examine MacDonald's works. Volumes 22-28 feature many unique and fascinating approaches to the texts, including feminist, ecocritical, theological, philosophical, pedagogical, and new historical analyses. More focus is also being placed on fairy-tale theory and MacDonald's importance to children's literature. Unlike the earliest volumes, these recent articles almost always concentrate on one or two of MacDonald's works—the most popular being *Lilith*, *Phantastes*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, the *Princess* novels, and MacDonald's fairy tales—rather than exploring general themes throughout his body of work. Also unlike the earliest volumes, they are rarely strictly biographical; however, analyzing the influence of contemporary writers on MacDonald's work remains one of the most popular subjects for contributors. Even as *North Wind* changes—both in content and in format, as it enters the digital age—it also upholds its tradition of enthusiastic, relevant, and intellectually stimulating contributions to the field of MacDonald studies.

Conclusion: General Speculations

MacDonald criticism today is thriving—what Jauss would call evolving—with books and articles appearing in a variety of critical journals and presses. The George MacDonald Society's *North Wind* is the major scholarly outlet for MacDonald scholars; *Orts*, the Society's newsletter, edited by Jennifer Koopman, provides a miscellany of information about MacDonald; and its website, The Golden Key, links to useful information. Barbara Amell's independently electronically produced *Wingfold* publishes Victorian reprints of book reviews and illustrations of MacDonald and his work. Perhaps the best way to trace current scholarship on MacDonald is to search the Modern Language Association's online *MLA International Bibliography*, which at the time of this article's writing lists 441 entries since 1963, including books, book chapters, articles, and dissertations. The future

of MacDonald studies looks very bright.

The current state of MacDonald scholarship is dependent on the past reception of MacDonald's work, which has been traced in this bibliographic article. "In the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history" (19), argues Jauss. In other words, the readers' reception of an author over time is instrumental to a more comprehensive understanding of an author's current literary state of affairs. MacDonald's status as a writer, then, is influenced by readers' changing horizons of expectations over time. While this essay is designed to prompt readers to further discuss how MacDonald studies has transformed over time, rather than to make definitive conclusions, we do think it is wise to make a few general observations:

First, MacDonald's reputation today is primarily based on his adult fantasies, *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, and on his fairy tales, where he is considered an important precursor to modern fantasy literature (specifically Lewis and Tolkien) and a creator of original fairy tales that rank in the highest order of writers (e.g., Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, Andersen, Carroll, Wilde, Baum, Nesbit, and Barrie, to name only a few). It is important to note, however, that MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies, while primarily well received during his lifetime, where not seen as a form of literature that could rival the more realistic novel form. Today, however, with the stretching of the canon, MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies are now part of the fantasy canon, which is seeping with gusto into the traditional literary canon. That children's literature has become an important field in academic studies also privileges MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies. College classrooms also reflect the exploding canon by offering courses on fairy tales, science fiction, and fantasy literature, with MacDonald often central in classroom syllabi.

Second, the nineteenth-century reception of MacDonald's more realistic novels was mixed, with some critics praising and some chastising them for their overt sermonizing. The current discussion about MacDonald's novels revolves around this very point of contention. Bethany House Publishers, Sunrise Publishers, and Victor Publishers offer editions of MacDonald's novels that are edited—or redacted—to highlight theological themes, which is a fascinating phenomenon that can be traced to the early reception of his novels. Numerous blogs about MacDonald usually refer to these editions, with discussion usually centered on MacDonald's devout Christianity. That Johannesen Publishing in Whitethorn, California, now offers the complete, unedited work of MacDonald highlight this on-going tension in MacDonald studies over the quality of his realistic novels, a concern we can trace back to the nineteenth century.

Third, MacDonald has been rediscovered by theologians, who are now beginning to reassess his importance to that field. If MacDonald is seen,

for example, as a major theological voice of the Victorian age, his novels—and fairy tales and fantasies—may be read from a new perspective, which will impact his overall reputation.

We leave it to the readers of MacDonald to add to this list. But the simple fact remains that the field of MacDonald studies is evolving rather than devolving. If Curdie could shake hands with MacDonald scholarship, he would find a literary Lina, whose scholarly paws reflect a transformation into something powerful and good—and something that resides in that electronic fairyland known as the *North Wind* Digital Archive.

Works Cited

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Library of Babel." *Labyrinths*. Ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New York: New Directions, 1964. 51-58. Print.

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace, 2000. Print.

Jauss, Hans Robert. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. Timothy Bahti. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1982. Print.

MacDonald, George. *Lilith*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Print.

—. *The Princess and Curdie*. Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000. Print.

Pennington, John. "Of 'Frustrate Desire': Feminist Self-Postponement in George MacDonald's *Lilith*." *North Wind* 21 (2002): 26-70. North Wind *Online Digital Archive*. Web. 26 Jan. 2011.

Svensson, Patrik. "The Landscape of Digital Humanities." *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 4.1 (Summer 2010): 179 par. Web. 27 Jan. 2010.