

**George MacDonald--A Messenger Unfettered:
Depictions of Spiritual Conversion
in MacDonald's Realistic Adult Fiction**

Submitted by:

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Abstract

Victorian author George MacDonald is best remembered for his writing in the genres of fairy tale and fantasy. MacDonald was, however, most popular during his own time as a writer of realistic adult fiction. He was widely read but critically dismissed as a writer whose works were both didactic and predictable in plot. MacDonald was primarily a teacher who used the novel as a means to convey to readers his Christian message of hope and transformation.

This thesis begins with a study of those individuals and ideas that influenced MacDonald's thoughts and beliefs. The second part of this thesis is an overview of studies of spiritual conversion, with particular emphasis on the works of V. Bailey Gillespie, Lewis Rambo, John Lofland, and Norman Skonovd. Their works in the field of conversion studies include several schemata which are helpful in explaining specific depictions of conversion within MacDonald's adult fiction.

The remainder of the thesis focuses on MacDonald's portrayals of characters who experience conversion in his novels. They are placed into the following categories: Children on the Path; Waking from Slumber; Courageous Stances; Toppled Pride; and Broken Vessels. The experiences of the characters are thoroughly examined and justification is offered for their inclusions in their respective categories.

This study counters the criticism levelled at MacDonald during his own time that he was caught in repetitive plots for lack of skill or inspiration. My findings suggest that MacDonald's depictions show a deep as well as wide understanding of the process of conversion, an understanding which seems to have encompassed a broader understanding than those of most of the religious writers of his own day. I suggest that his focus was on his message rather than his art. Therefore, his adult realistic fiction constitutes a very substantial literary achievement and offers contemporary readers and writers a benchmark against which to measure both their own understandings of conversion and their own expressions of it.

I, Deborah H. Fox,
declare that this thesis entitled

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has not been submitted for a higher degree
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