

1996

Teacher and Pupil: Reading, Ethics, and Human Dignity in George MacDonald's Mary Marston

Rebecca Thomas Ankeny

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ankeny, Rebecca Thomas (1996) "Teacher and Pupil: Reading, Ethics, and Human Dignity in George MacDonald's Mary Marston," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 29: Iss. 1.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol29/iss1/18>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Rebecca Thomas Ankeny

Teacher and Pupil: Reading, Ethics, and Human Dignity in George MacDonald's *Mary Marston*

Libraries, readers of books, and books themselves pervade George MacDonald's fiction, classified in an early bibliography as twenty-five novels, three prose fantasies, eight tales and allegories for children, and three collections of short stories. Libraries are central and often symbolic in novels across the spectrum and throughout his career.¹ Similarly, many characters spend time reading.² They read Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Bunyan, Spenser, Herbert, Isaiah, the Gospels, Heine, Hoffman, Richter, Dante, Keats, Burns, Browning, Tennyson, stories by MacDonald himself, and others. They tend to abhor Sterne. This comprises only a sampling of how frequently books and reading occur in MacDonald's fiction, and it suggests that readers, what they read, and how they read are important to MacDonald.³

¹See, for instance, the libraries in *Phantastes*, *The Portent*, *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, *Wilfrid Cumbermede*, *The Flight of the Shadow*, and *Lilith*.

²See, for example, Anodos in *Phantastes* (1858); Duncan Campbell in *The Portent* (1864); Annie Anderson and Cosmo Cupples in *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865); Robert Falconer and his grandmother in *Robert Falconer* (1868); Ranald Bannerman in *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* (1871); Richard Heywood and Dorothy Vaughan in *St. George and St. Michael* (1876); Belorba and Uncle Edward in *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891).

³These issues are discussed with reference to several of MacDonald's novels in my dissertation, "'That Rare Thing, a True Reader': Authors, Readers and Texts in the Fiction of George MacDonald" (U. of Oregon, 1986).

However, assuming that MacDonald cared to depict the typical reader would be incorrect. His concern was with the “true reader,” the reader who reads the kinds of texts MacDonald believed essential, who reads them so as to understand them appropriately and experience them fully, and who allows those texts to change the way he or she interacts with the world. Often this true reader goes on to share what he or she has gained with others and thereby becomes a teacher. In fact, the frequency with which MacDonald incorporates teachers suggests that he may think it a necessity both to learn to read and to teach others to read as well.

Mary Marston (1881) provides an appropriate single text in which to examine these concerns both with reading and teaching. The novel tells the story of a chapel-attending shopkeeper who reads literature and teaches the blacksmith/musician she eventually marries to read music, also. This novel exemplifies several of MacDonald’s concerns with reading. It shows how MacDonald values literacy, how he sees literacy changing the way a person processes information, how literacy provides both discipline and freedom, and how one of the great gifts one person can give another is to teach that other how to read.⁴ It also asserts that literacy and literary tact are not to be limited to the upper classes, and that one’s response to what one reads takes place on both emotional and rational levels. Further, the novel also implies that reading simultaneously sets one free to be one’s true self and connects one to a community of writers and readers, all sharing their separate selves with each other.⁵ Finally, the novel suggests that moral guidelines apply to the activity of reading because it is an interpersonal act.

The stage seems to be set early in *Mary Marston* for a sort of Cinderella story. Though Mary works in a fabric store partly owned by her father, the narrator insists on defining her as a lady. The Prince Charming figure, Godfrey Wardour, comes into the story first because of Mary’s admiration for him. The natural development would seem to be that Godfrey would notice the lovely Mary in her ill-fitting environment, carry her off, and raise her social rank to her natural rank of lady, but this does not happen. Instead, Godfrey occupies such a prominent place in the opening of the novel because he introduces her to “higher literature” by reading to her from Carlyle’s translation of Jean Paul Richter. The relationship between him and Mary turns out to be one of mutual helpfulness, though he never appreciates her true worth. She later helps pre-

⁴A striking depiction of this also occurs in *Sir Gibbie* (1879). The title character is a mute street urchin who is thought by everyone to be simple-minded as well until a Scottish laborer’s wife teaches him to read and write. His literacy allows him to tell who he is and eventually empowers him to take charge of his inheritance as a baronet with an estate.

⁵Lady Alice in *The Portent* learns the conventions of spelling and reading from Duncan Campbell. Her learning allows her to reunite her waking and her sleepwalking selves, which split again when she is kept from reading.

vent him from making a disastrous mistake in marriage. In fact, Mary becomes something like a fairy godmother figure, strict but loving, bringing order out of the chaos of lives she sees around her.

George MacDonald places Mary Marston squarely in the moral center of her story. She does wrong neither intentionally nor unintentionally, and she brings order as far as they will allow it into the chaotic lives of those she serves. Yet she is not only good: she is an attractive character, too. The qualities of listening, understanding, and serving God and others that make her a good reader, a good pupil, and a good teacher also enhance her appeal as a character. Furthermore, she has other qualities which prevent her from being saccharine sweet. Her thin nose, firm upper lip, and large, sharply defined chin all suggest a certain unbending quality, which she shows by standing up for herself and what she believes. She is not as likely to comfort as she is to encourage or confront. Strong-minded and careless of the opinions of others, Mary is more assertive than many good women in literature. We first see Mary holding her own in conversation with two young men. The dialogue shows her to know her own mind, to be guided by firm principles, and to have a temper. The narrator's description emphasizes her calm self-possession, her firmness, her directness, her simplicity: "Everything about her suggested the repose of order satisfied, of unconstrained obedience to the laws of harmonious relation."⁶

The eventual marriage of Mary to Joseph Jasper is made in heaven, as their names imply. Both maintain their independence, Mary as shopkeeper, Joseph as blacksmith. "Mary was proud of her husband, not merely because he was a musician, but because he was a blacksmith" (p. 458). MacDonald's refusal to signify approval by elevating them in social rank carries meaning: there is honor in working honestly for a living. The blacksmith does not need to be transformed into a prince to be a gentleman. The shopkeeper does not need to be promoted in social class to be a lady.

Further, Mary's sensitivity as reader and teacher means that this novel shows neither the ignorant female being enlightened by the erudite male, nor the crude male being civilized by the gracious female. Instead, MacDonald writes of Mary and Joseph after two years of marriage, "They look up to each other still, because they were right in looking up each to the other from the first. Each was, and therefore each is and will be, real" (pp. 458-9). Because Mary recognized the humanity and giftedness of the nearly illiterate blacksmith, she was never even tempted to condescend to him. Similarly, because Joseph recognized the humanity and giftedness of Mary, he never approached her with anything but respect.

Finally, Mary continues to work in a shop she herself owns. Such an ambition and action demonstrate her independence and desire to serve: "she would

⁶*Mary Marston* (Philadelphia: David McKay, nd.), p. 14. Further references will be cited in the text.

walk steadily back the well-known way to the shop, where, all day long, ministering with gracious service to the wants of her people, she would know the evening and its service drawing nearer and nearer, when Joseph would come . . ." (p. 460). For Mary, "effort and struggle add immeasurably to the enjoyment of life, but those I look upon as labor, not strife. There may be whole worlds for us to help bring into order and obedience. . . . Seeing we are made in the image of God, and he is always working, we could not be happy without work" (p. 461). In her calmly assertive independence, Mary reminds one of the Florence Nightingales, Octavia Hills, and Elizabeth Gurney Frys of Victorian England, women who saw the need to bring order out of some aspect of the chaos surrounding them.⁷

Some of the intriguing aspects of MacDonald's description of this exemplary woman can be seen more clearly if we compare Mary with George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea is also presented as a reader with strong opinions and a strong desire to do what is right. Yet, unlike Mary, her religion contributes to her need to be dominated by a man: "The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it."⁸ Dorothea has a strong impulse toward martyrdom and asceticism which conflicts with her other strong impulses toward pleasure, control, and beauty.

Mary cares a great deal for her father's approval, but, having it, stands up for her beliefs and dignity against three or four men in her book. Further, she is the teacher, not the pupil, and the relationship she develops between teacher and pupil is one of mutual respect. Mary avoids martyrdom of several sorts as much as possible and praises God for pleasure and beauty. She would never feel, as Dorothea does, that she should give up riding *because* she enjoys it.

Dorothea has read many of the Christian classics, and she takes away from them her impression of "the secondary importance of ecclesiastical forms and articles of belief compared with that spiritual religion, that submergence of self in communion with Divine perfection which seemed to her to be expressed in the best Christian books of widely-distant ages" (p. 47). In other words, she is looking for a spiritual experience unmediated by formal doctrine or ritual which results in a relationship to "Divine perfection" similar to the one she envisions

⁷Mary is a strong female character, and there are others in the rest of MacDonald's fiction. MacDonald was friends with Octavia Hill and taught at the women's college in London, Bedford College. However, as William Raeper writes, "[T]hough [MacDonald] thought that women ought to be well-educated (if only to become better mothers), and reviled the marriage market, his view of woman remained fundamentally romantic." Bearing this in mind, it is still possible to see MacDonald as being "in many ways . . . liberal, even . . . feminist." William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, Herts & Batavia, IL, 1987), pp. 261, 259.

⁸George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. W. J. Harvey (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 32. Further references will be cited in the text.

with that husband-father. She has no clear understanding of how to translate her aspiration to do good into the facts of her daily life, though she sketches plans of improved cottages on the estate. She wants to lead "a grand life" when she gets older (p. 51), but she learns instead through hardship a quiet domestic heroism.⁹

In contrast, Mary has read primarily the Bible until Godfrey widens her horizons. From her reading of the Bible, she sees religion not as primarily a spiritual experience, but as a guide for living; one does not so much submerge the self in communion as discipline oneself in obedience, and Divine perfection for Mary means the personal God incarnated in Jesus. The vagueness of Dorothea's religion derives perhaps from Eliot's dissatisfaction with Evangelicalism, her skepticism about the Bible, or her distrust in reading as a way to know truth, while the concrete helpfulness of Mary's religion to her derives from MacDonald's belief expressed in several texts that God reveals truth to the heart that takes the risk of obedience.¹⁰

The differences between the two arise partly from the social class differences. Dorothea lives in "the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman's world, where everything [is] done for her and none [asks] for her aid" (p. 307). She resembles most closely the upper-class Hester Redmain in *Mary Marston*, for whom Mary works temporarily as lady's maid. Mary must be practical, because she is a shopkeeper's daughter who works for a living.

Another difference is that Dorothea's story is one of initiation as she comes to terms with her choices and her society: "For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it" (p. 896). Nevertheless, Eliot's narrator insists that while Dorothea has not fulfilled the dreams of greatness she set out with, she is one of the influences in-

⁹It is true that Dorothea's Christian impulses are treated with a certain amount of irony, and that unlike Mary for MacDonald, Dorothea seems not to be George Eliot's ideal woman. She may represent the typical aspiring woman of the times, rather than the exception. Nonetheless, MacDonald's Mary is presented as an achievable ideal, not as an impossibly heroic woman.

¹⁰Paula Reed-Nancarrow discusses MacDonald's ideas concerning revelatory texts in her dissertation "Remythologizing the Bible: Fantasy and the Revelatory Hermeneutic of George MacDonald," (Diss. U. of Minnesota, 1988). She argues that MacDonald's views shifted from a Romantic approach which saw all texts—literature, history, and the Bible—as symbolic and capable of revealing God to a more anxious attempt to separate objective history from imaginative fiction, valuing the first over the second. She places this shift approximately in the 1880s and uses the two adult fantasies *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895) to illustrate the two hermeneutics. The emphasis on obedience in *Mary Marston* seems to fit in more with the later position identified by Reed-Nancarrow—that obedience precedes any kind of correct perception (p. 149). However, obedience to what one understands as God's truth is central to MacDonald's world-view throughout his life.

strumental in the “growing good of the world” by living “faithfully a hidden life.” In contrast, Mary begins her story much as she ends it, surviving the tests of her goodness and courage so well that the narrator remarks: “she was one of the lights of the world—one of the wells of truth, whose springs are fed by the rains on the eternal hills” (p. 466). Like Dorothea, Mary also lives faithfully a hidden life. Perhaps the fact that she seems to come out victorious while Dorothea seems at least partly defeated arises from the fact that Mary is not portrayed as being greatly “determined by what lies outside” her; the hardships of her life only reveal her truth and strength. She is like the heroine of fairy tale who proves her worth by endurance and goodness, and who then has the power to bring goodness into the world.

Because MacDonald presents Mary as a strong and good character throughout the novel, we can take note of her responsiveness to the reading of Jean Paul Richter to see the kind of reader MacDonald values.¹¹

What she had heard was working in her mind with a powerful fermentation, and she longed to be alone. . . . She knew almost nothing of the higher literature, and felt like a dreamer who, in the midst of a well-known and ordinary landscape, comes without warning upon the mighty cone of a mountain, or the breaking waters of a boundless ocean.

“If one could but get hold of such things, what a glorious life it would be!” she thought For the first time she heard the full chord of intellectual and emotional delight. . . . Were there many books to make one’s heart go as that one did? She would save every penny to buy such books, if indeed such treasures were within her reach! Under the enchantment of her first literary joy she walked home like one intoxicated with opium—a being possessed for the time with the awful imagination of a grander soul, and reveling in the presence of her loftier kin (pp. 34-5).

As a good hearer/reader, Mary listens twice before passing judgment, allows the work to touch her heart, works to understand what she has heard, and recognizes the author of his work as one of her own kind. Her emotional responsiveness, her sense of the author behind the text, her understanding, her eagerness to reread, all mark her as one of MacDonald’s exemplary readers.

¹¹Compare her response to another of MacDonald’s exemplary characters, Gibbie, on his first hearing of narrative poetry:

Gibbie’s eyes grew wider and wider as he listened; their pupils dilated, and his lips parted: it seemed as if his soul were looking out of doors and windows at once—but a puzzled soul that understood nothing of what it saw. Yet plainly, either the sounds, or the thought-matter vaguely operative beyond the line where intelligence begins, or, it may be, the sparkle of individual word or phrase islanded in a chaos of rhythmic motion, wrought somehow upon him, for his attention was fixed as by a spell. *Sir Gibbie* (New York: A. L. Burt, nd), p. 96.

Godfrey Wardour's presence in the novel, however, shows that even well-educated readers may read inadequately on MacDonald's terms. From the narrator's point of view Godfrey as a reader is inferior to Mary; he reads intellectually with an eye toward modifying or confirming his theories of life, rather than with "the highest aim of all—the enlargement of reverence, obedience, and faith" (p. 36). Godfrey's reading and the narrative commentary reveal that he is self-absorbed and cares too much about what and who he is. Mary, in contrast, completely occupies herself with obedience to God, is self-forgetful, and takes care for what she will become. Her emphasis on growth and moral development, in the narrator's evaluation, places Mary from the start ahead of Godfrey as a reader and keeps her ahead of him as a teacher.

Godfrey's limitations as a teacher reveal themselves when he sets out to improve his cousin's mind. He discovers his younger cousin Letty Lovel polishing his stirrups. Godfrey feels indebted to her, and the only way he can think of to repay her is to give her books to read and to teach her to think. However, despite his good intentions and generosity, Godfrey's teaching methods intimidate Letty. She distrusts her understanding and abilities and thinks herself a fool. She says, "He used not [to talk to me]; but I think he does now more than to anybody else. . . . Now he is always giving me something to read. I wish he wouldn't; it frightens me dreadfully. He always questions me, to know whether I understand what I read" (pp. 29-30). Though Godfrey is generous, delicate, and gentle in his teaching, he fails to listen to Letty as a person. He talks to her only as a pupil, behaving to her as a pedagogue rather than as the informal tutor he is. His pride prevents him from knowing Letty and from allowing Letty to know him:

Good fellow as he was, he thought much too much of himself; and, unconsciously comparing it with Letty's, altogether overvalued his own worth. . . . [D]escend he would not . . . from his pedestal, to meet the silly thing on the level ground of humanity, and the relations of the man and the woman! (p. 90)

The distance he places between them makes it easy for Letty to fall in love with the much inferior but sympathetic Tom Helmer, despite the superficiality and selfishness Tom reveals early in the way he reads and explains Milton to Letty.

Mary Marston begins as Godfrey's pupil, but he severs their relationship over Letty's love for Tom. Mary continues her reading, however, taking boxes of books with her when she moves to London to serve as lady's maid to Hester Redmain. While there, Mary meets her own prospective pupil. However, her approach differs significantly from Godfrey's, just as her reading and moral development are also at a higher level though her social class is lower.

While Mary is visiting Letty Helmer, the blacksmith Joseph Jasper enters the story as a disembodied music-tone. The third time Mary hears the music, she follows it to its source. She invites the violinist to pay for Letty, unwell after birthing her son. Significantly, Mary listens, appreciates, and values

Joseph and his music before she even thinks of teaching him anything. She discovers that his playing has gentleness and delicacy, though it also contains much that is inartistic, incongruous, and lawless. She elicits from him the information that he does not read music but instead plays what runs out of his fingers when he shuts his eyes (p. 288). Listening again, however, with less critical and more emotional attention, Mary finds that the music creates pictures rather than thoughts in her mind. Later she learns from Joseph that he calls the composition “The Ten Lepers.” When she connects it with a shared formal text, she appreciates it thoroughly.

An important difference here between Mary and Godfrey is Mary’s willingness to hear the other human being before trying to educate him. In fact, she has no thought at this time of improving Joseph’s mind or music. Godfrey, in contrast, ignores Letty until he feels indebted and then immediately sets about to improve her mind. But he gives her little of the attention necessary in order to hear and know her accurately.

Almost by accident, Mary discovers that Joseph can hardly read words at all. This prompts her to begin to analyze his abilities and needs, another form of listening or attending to her pupil before setting out to improve him. Joseph has had little education and a working class upbringing. He can barely read aloud, though with great effort he can read for himself. He can write his letters, but he can hardly spell. He is completely outside his cultural heritage—literature, history, or science. However, his music, his conversation, and his workmanship lead Mary to consider him a genius. Furthermore, like Mary, he makes obedience to God his highest priority.

When Mary reads George Herbert aloud to the dying Tom Helmer, she has a chance to see Joseph’s ability to respond. Joseph listens to the poem and remarks that

“the old gentleman plied a good bow.”

“Tell us how you see it,” said Mary, more interested than she would have liked to show.

* * *

“[A]ll the time you were reading it, I heard the gentleman—Mr. George Herbert, you call him—playing the tune to it” (p. 348)

Joseph plays the tune he heard in the poem, Mary identifies the poem from the tune, reads it over again, and Joseph recognizes the tune in the poem. As teacher, Mary discovers first what the pupil’s experience of the poem is and allows him to respond in the way in which he is gifted. Having listened to and interested herself in that response, she turns to the task of explaining what she sees in the poem. Her teaching has validity because she has now been reading Herbert—listening to him—for a long time, and she has an experience of life similar to his; she shares with Herbert his love for God, “the secret from which came all his utterance,” and can therefore “fit herself into most of the convolu-

tions of the shell of his experience, and [is] hence able also to make others perceive in his verse not a little of what they were of themselves unable to see" (p. 349).¹² Mary has paid attention both to the poet and then to her future pupil, giving both of them the respect other human beings deserve.

MacDonald brings music and language together in his 1893 essay "The Fantastic Imagination," and he insists that the proper function of both is "not to give [your fellow] things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself."¹³ This is Mary's goal; she is "desirous of contributing to [Joseph's] growth—the one great service of the universe" (p. 352). She wants to see Joseph's musical genius expressed with perfect facility and diagnoses that his main fault lies in his timing. She tries Beethoven on him, but he is uninterested. Though he thinks in music, he lacks the experience and knowledge of form necessary to listen well to others' music. "The man was open and inspired, and stupid as a child" (p. 351). She expresses to him how nice it would be to play her piano and his violin together. He agrees but sees the main impediment to be the fact that he plays extemporaneously, in fact, formlessly. She suggests that he might learn to write his compositions down. He responds that he doesn't know how to learn. Finally, she asks him if he will let her teach him how to read music. He expresses interest and soon learns the need to keep good time, to love good music, and to play the works of other composers. Mary laughs at herself for her temerity in "teaching the man of genius his letters" and becomes "afraid lest, in developing the performer, she [has] ruined the composer" (pp. 356, 357). She hasn't; instead she has moved his music from chaos that communicates little to order and form which makes communication possible.

The main difference between Mary and Godfrey as teachers is the degree of respect with which they approach their pupils. Godfrey patronizes Letty, quizzing her and lecturing her. Mary dignifies Joseph by valuing his music, listening to what he has to say, and finally by asking him if he wants to learn what she can teach. Godfrey's habits as a reader are less offensive than as a teacher, since he does in fact attend to what the writers have to say and uses it to re-evaluate his theories of the world. However, even here he falls short of the ideal; because he does not also listen with his heart, coming as a humble pupil,

¹²This organic metaphor of text as shell shares with Romantic thinking the belief that art develops organically, like a flower, but it shifts the focus to the physical absence of the artist. The shell remains, as does the work of art, with its convolutions peculiarly derived from the "shape" of its maker, but the maker no longer inhabits it directly. However, the reader can make the attempt, according to MacDonald, to form him or herself into the convolutions of the work of art, inhabiting it more or less comfortably.

¹³*The Gifts of the Child Christ*, ed. Glenn Edward Sadler (Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 27.

he participates in what MacDonald condemns elsewhere as “intellectual greed.”¹⁴

MacDonald’s story suggests that the first quality necessary for both pupil and teacher is humility, and their first behavior needs to be listening. This is equally true of his ideal reader. Furthermore, though intellectual knowledge is a good thing, it is better to involve the heart in how and what we know. MacDonald’s epistemology acknowledges the role of feeling as well as seeing. It issues in an ethic of interpersonal relationships that requires us to recognize others as valuable human beings whose emotions and intellect and perspective matter before we do anything to or for them.

Writing in the 1899 journal *Education*, Frances Lewis offers an analysis of how MacDonald differs from his contemporaries in his depiction of teachers, a depiction that explores theory and method explicitly.¹⁵ According to Lewis, Charlotte Brontë focuses on teachers, but primarily on stories about them, not on their teaching theories or methods. Only in *Hard Times* does Charles Dickens express any preference about teaching methods, and then, Lewis writes, “his opposition to the teaching of facts exclusively is only a phase of his opposition to that hard materialistic way of looking at life” (p. 358). Comparing MacDonald’s teacher Mr. Graham in *Malcolm* with George Eliot’s Bartle Massey in *Adam Bede*, Lewis finds that

Mr. Graham and Bartle Massey are both village schoolmasters, both men of kindly sympathetic natures, both conscientious teachers. Mr. Graham . . . is the more learned, but his learning does not hold a prominent place in his presentation. He is a thinker, and a teacher of thinking; while Bartle is a teacher of reading, writing and casting accounts. But this is not the main difference between the two men. . . . The author’s interest [Mr. Graham], the reader’s also, is in him as a teacher, and in his theories and methods of teaching. Bartle Massey on the other hand is not especially interesting as a teacher. . . . Bartle as a man with all his eccentricities is interesting to [Eliot], Bartle’s pedagogics she cares nothing about. (pp. 359-60)

Though Lewis does not discuss them all specifically, there are numerous tutors or teachers in MacDonald’s fiction. One of the earliest, Duncan Campbell in *The Portent*, seems to be nearly exemplary. Another tutor, Hugh Sutherland in *David Elginbrod* (1863), is a self-serving, arrogant reader whose reading heresy, according to MacDonald, is to sever the connection between literature and life; Hugh does recognize the pathology of this way of reading in his pupil Harry, so he immerses Harry in the world around him with the aim of awakening a need to know and the ability to question. Donal Grant particularly in the novel by that name embodies MacDonald’s ideal as a tutor. He says to his pu-

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁵Frances W. Lewis, “The Pedagogics of George MacDonald,” *Education*, 19 (1899), 358-60.

pil, "You are like a book that God has begun, and he has sent me to help him to go on with it, and I must learn what he has written already before I know what to do next."¹⁶

The concern MacDonald shows in *Malcolm* (1875) and other "tutor" novels to explore the art of teaching is not less prominent in *Mary Marston*, though Mary is not a teacher by career. Mary is concerned not just for the communication of knowledge but for the growth of the pupil. In a small way, this illustrates the connection MacDonald characteristically portrays as necessary between knowing and doing the truth. Joseph needs to use his new intellectual knowledge of form to give his own composition order and unity. Mary does not want knowing the work of other composers to overshadow or eliminate Joseph's own desire and ability to compose as well. The goal of teaching is not to eliminate individuality but to initiate the individual into the conventions which make it possible to share that individuality with others. In *Mary Marston* as well as other novels, MacDonald's depiction of teaching makes it a metonymy for sharing anything we know that others do not. It is a means of bringing order out of chaos.

All genres of MacDonald's works, realistic and fantastic, adult and children's fiction, can be examined to see how MacDonald includes reading. In some novels, he uses reading to define how literacy empowers people to suggest how the mind makes sense of what it perceives through the senses; to speculate about the relationships between reader, text, and writer; to describe metaphorically the relationships between human beings and between a human being and God. In *Mary Marston*, George MacDonald gives us a working-class heroine who reads and teaches as if both activities were interpersonal relationships governed by courtesy and concern for human dignity. She listens first with both head and heart. It seems possible that both readers and teachers in our century can learn something from Mary.

George Fox University

¹⁶Donal Grant (Boston, 1883), p. 130.