George MacDonald on Hamlet

Pam Jordan
Taylor University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons, History Commons, Philosophy Commons, and the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol3/iss1/17

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis & Friends at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Inklings Forever by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.
George MacDonald on *Hamlet*

Most George MacDonald scholars are aware that MacDonald lectured on Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*. It has been the good fortune of Taylor University to come into possession of MacDonald’s annotated copy of the play. This manuscript is apparently the one MacDonald used to lecture from and is a preliminary of *The Tragedie of Hamlet*, which was published in 1885. MacDonald took a copy of the play found in the 1623 edition of Shakespeare and had it rebound with flyleaves inserted between the pages. On these flyleaves he wrote copious notes about the play. On the opening flyleaves he reminds himself to give the audience “a short account of the two quartos and folio.” The title page of the play is inscribed to his daughter Lilia and dated 1881.

MacDonald’s notes and marginalia reveal much about MacDonald as a scholar, critic, linguist, dramatist, lover of Shakespeare, and man of religious feeling. He carefully analyzes the first quarto and folio editions comparing them with the second quarto. He studied other printed versions of *Hamlet* and in this one expounds what he felt were proper reiterations and word choice. He comments often on lines that should be omitted and lines that should be kept in order to clarify meaning. Frequently, he pauses on a single word to trace its possible meanings. He indicates where the play should be divided into acts.

Not surprisingly, MacDonald’s notes also provide insight into character interpretation, particularly that of Hamlet. These notes are some of the richest and most telling in the manuscript. MacDonald includes advice for actors and comments on how certain lines should be delivered. Revealing that he was widely read and a student of Shakespeare, the manuscript also contains commentary on other critical remarks and interpretations of the play. MacDonald often disagrees with other critics. Finally, as one would expect, MacDonald’s theology and personal faith are evident in his marginal notes and commentary.