Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

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The George MacDonald Society

# *Orts*

**The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 43, Summer 1997**

PLEASE REMEMBER TO WATCH OUT FOR ANY CELEBRATIONS OF THE C. S. LEWIS AND LEWIS CARROLL CENTENARIES IN YOUR AREA IN 1998 AND TRY TO ENSURE THAT THE ALL-IMPORTANT INFLUENCE. OF MACDONALD IS EMPHASISED DURING THESE EVENTS

We have attempted to catch up on our publishing schedules. This issue is only one month late and number 44 should be on time. The brief period since *Orts* 42 however has meant that we have received few contributions, and the issue lacks the 'lighter' material necessary to balance two serious reviews. Please be sure to send us any material you have for the next issue.

We make no apologies for beginning with a review of a special issue of the journal *Para*doxa* on censorship. At the opposite end of the political spectrum to *Para*doxa* is the new volume on MacDonald in the Church of Scotland "Devotional Library" series. For a work in such an authoritative series this gives an astonishingly one-sided picture of MacDonald's theology. As the millennium approaches the attacks upon literature from authoritarians on both sides of the political spectrum become ever more intense. That the works of MacDonald are being subjected to exceptionally sustained attack is indicative of the subversive power of his Christian insights. And it is to be expected that such censorship will usually purport to be in defence of liberty on the one hand or of Christian values on the other.

It is splendid to see no less than four MacDonald-related articles in the latest *Canadian* C.S. *Lewis Journal*, three previously unpublished. We carry reviews of two of them.

*Muscular Christianity* came out in 1994, but we missed it at the time so are reviewing it now. It is burdened with all the post-modernist jargon of that period, but nevertheless provides useful insights.

Martin Gardner's new collection of essays has only a brief allusion to MacDonald, but this is worth reviewing because it shows clearly how some critics of 'Christian fantasy' operate.

Although Arthur Hughes at his best is as fine an illustrator of MacDonald as one could wish for, it is nevertheless interesting to speculate upon what William Blake might have created for MacDonald had they been contemporaries. There is little doubt that MacDonald would have approached Blake, because in his writings, especially in *Lilith*, he alludes directly to various of Blake's illustrations. It is mainly Blake's illustrations for his own illuminated works to which MacDonald seems to allude, and most of these were painted by hand and do not easily reproduce. But several of Blake's illustrations for *The Gates of Paradise* do reproduce well, and a few relevant plates, plus one from *Jerusalem*, are included in this issue.

## LORD HORDER

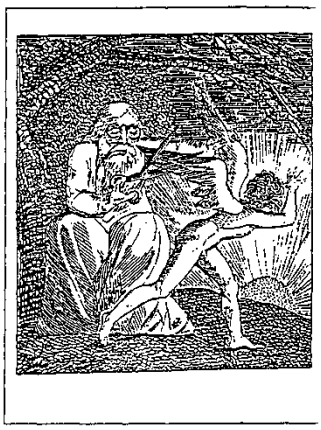
**Lord Horder, the publisher, died on June 30th, aged 86. He was a MacDonald enthusiast, always keen to learn more about the man. I met him last year in the library of London University, searching for Rolland Hein's biography. As usual he had cycled down from his tiny flat in North London. According to the *Times* obituary, although he was a generous and much-loved man, he did not believe in wasting money on public or private transport, a large wardrobe, or an expensive apartment. His interests were in the real things of life: particularly friendships, music and literature. He was just the sort of person likely to be drawn to MacDonald.**

**Book reviews**

*Para*doxa* 2 (3-4) (1996). *Censorship in Children's Literature.*

The Winter 1996 issue of this new American literary journal contains no less than twenty-six articles on censorship in children's literature. They are very far from comprising an objective and wide ranging survey of the subject, although several contributors do provide such a survey for the literature of countries which have endured totalitarian or near-totalitarian regimes. In view of the subject of this issue, it is interesting that extensive covert censorship seems to have been employed in creating it. *Para*doxa* is unusual in expecting its contributors publicly to acknowledge the advice given by the journal's referees. The result inevitably reminds one of the way recanting authors in totalitarian countries used to thank the state authorities for making them aware of the errors of their ways. But one contributor-interestingly the author of what is probably the most sensitive and perceptive article in the collection-in complying with this requirement manages to make her response into an ironic comment upon the censorship which it represents: 'I would like to thank a reviewer for helpful suggestions in order to make this paper "more accessible" to *Para*doxa* readers'!

The primary purpose of the majority of articles in this 'censorship' volume seems to be to deflect attention away from the censorship-by-selection practised on a huge scale by educators. These articles are devoted to describing the valiant attempts of educators to defend a few books against attempts to get them banned. Predictably, the authors have selected situations where books of above-average quality have been attacked by bigots. Phenomena such as the flood of children's books on sexual perversion are barely mentioned. However an article on the lesbian writer M.E. Kerr is allowed to pass the strict censorship of the journal's referees—apparently because the author emphasises at the beginning that 'Kerr's interest is not in recruiting young people to a homosexual lifestyle, but in teaching them to be more accepting of individual differences, whatever they are.' If the excerpts quoted from Kerr's work are a fair sample, then this is true of her writing. But, in contrasting Kerr's books with the norm, the author of the article has acknowledged the primary purpose of most of the 'gay' propaganda directed at young people.



The guest editor's introductory article presupposes an absurdly wide definition of 'censorship.' She begins: 'Even seven and eight-year olds recognize that in a comic book such miscellaneous symbols as §*!&+ *$! indicate that swear words have been excised.' This is as absurd as suggesting that details of the scenic delights of rail journeys have been 'excised' from rail timetables. Modification or omission of material inappropriate to the overtly emphasised genre of a work is not censorship. The impression that a deliberate attempt is being made here to muddy the waters is enhanced in her next paragraph where she reverses the whole concept of censorship. She interprets as self-censorship the secrecy which children feel obliged to practice to protect themselves from adult censorship: 'they learn to keep from adults much of the folklore that they adapt and pass from one group to another.' Genuine self-censorship, however, takes place when circulation of information within a group for whom it is intended is inhibited by fear of reprisals from another group. Such intra-group inhibition is wholly absent from her example.

Only three contributors consider material more than fifty years old-a factor which considerably decreases the value of the collection for MacDonald enthusiasts. One explore the techniques behind Walter Benjamin's marvellous defiance of Nazi censorship in his programmes for children on Berlin Radio in the l930's; another examines censorship during the process of translation of English classics into German; and the third interprets a typical example of Mark Twain's erotics of innocence in *Tom Sawyer* as self-censorship.

MacDonald approaches children's reading via the concept of 'wise criticism,' which he defines as: 'A spirit of criticism for the sake of the truth.' He goes on: 'Were there enough of such wise criticism, there would be ten times the study of the best writers of the past, and perhaps one-tenth of the admiration for the ephemeral productions of the day (*A Dish of Orts* 40). This is undeniably true, even though some bias towards what is near to us in space and time is natural and appropriate. And commercial pressures will ensure that this will always be present! (MacDonald's concept encapsulates the aims of The MacDonald Society. But what he next says is perhaps more controversial: 'The right teacher would have his pupil easy to please, but ill to satisfy; ready to enjoy, unready to embrace; keen to discover beauty, slow to say, 'Here I will dwell.' The influence which might be wielded by enthusiasts for particular authors is almost completely negated where fanzines are *all too easily* satisfied with their own author; *always* ready to embrace; and *continuously* saying 'Here I will dwell'!)

Classics continue to be reprinted because they offer publishers the prospect of a small but steady cash-flow for little effort. But when these works effectively embody Christian principles, as do MacDonald's stories for children ('of all ages'), they will almost invariably be subversive of the values of 'the consumerist society.' Nearly all MacDonald's works have been rewritten under the pretext of making them 'more accessible to the present-day reader.' The rewrites of his children's books may make them more accessible to the intellectually disadvantaged, but at the cost of making them utterly worthless. It is sometimes argued that the discerning parent will anticipate this and avoid such rewrites. But only rarely are they immediately recognisable. The term 'edited' can be applied to everything from scrupulous adherence to the original text in the Oxford edition of the *Princess* books (edited by Rod McGillis), to complete rewrites. And some of the worst rewrites have been brought out by highly regarded publishers. Had the *Para*doxa* survey of censorship extended to articles on how political correctness, religious bigotry, and the prospect of easy money interact to create this situation, it could have been really useful.

The canon of works generally accepted as 'children's classics' changes continuously. Many works are removed which prove to be ephemeral or are believed to be out of date, many which were temporarily out of fashion are reinstated. (Comparison of the list of titles 'for young people' in the old Everyman's Library with today's canon illustrates this very clearly.) If we are to follow MacDonald's wise advice, we will recognise that books which have survived the test of time are the most likely to be of value. A modem work threatened with censorship may be subversive of accepted folly, but is just as likely to be an evil book, advocating a life-style which degrades the human spirit. But when a classic is censored, by withdrawal from library shelves, rewriting, etc., it is almost certainly for the former reason.

The world, however, is changing very rapidly, and the great evils of the late twentieth century are not all identical with those of the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, with the enormous increase in the power of the media, children are not so easily shielded from evil today. MacDonald knew that poor urban children never can be sheltered from evil, emphasising this in *At the Back of the North Wind*. But children who are sheltered from knowledge of some evils are better able to develop the strengths necessary to cope with evil in adult life. And adults who do not feel obliged to give priority to what they see as their own interests (such as their 'need' for television) can, even amongst today's media pressures, do much to shield younger children. But what all older children, and the unsheltered majority of younger children, most need, as one sensitive contributor to *Para*doxa* expresses it, 'are books that are honest in their portrayal of the human condition—especially as it relates to children—and books that will demonstrate the human resilience in the face of catastrophe.' This contributor would even apply the principle to picture-books for young children. And, indeed, one cannot easily imagine a better book than Maurice Sendak's *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*, for children already aware of and concerned for the plight of homeless city children. It powerfully conveys its message of inner transformation through love, without fudging or glamorising the children's desperate situation. It is not one of the picture-books which the author specifically mentions, but these seem to be of comparable quality and to employ a broadly similar approach.

Sendak can find a publisher for such a highly subversive book because he has already established himself as a major author. The same is true of Shalman Rushdie, whose *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is the subject of another good Para*doxa article. Rushdie's book begins with the problem of loss of access to the sea of stories, a problem which equally concerned MacDonald and his contemporaries. Soon, however, it turns to the deliberate pollution of this 'sea.' That problem was beginning to appear at the end of the nineteenth century. Now, as Rushdie emphasises, it has reached catastrophic proportions. Because of huge changes of this sort during the twentieth century, the 'classics' can help young people with only some of the problems they face today. Children equally need access to good contemporary books. But it is no coincidence that Sendak and Rushdie write within the same tradition as MacDonald, and allude frequently and sensitively to his stories. Attacks upon the human spirit change with time, as our understanding waxes and wanes, but the informing Spirit is the indwelling presence of God.

*The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* 91 (1997).

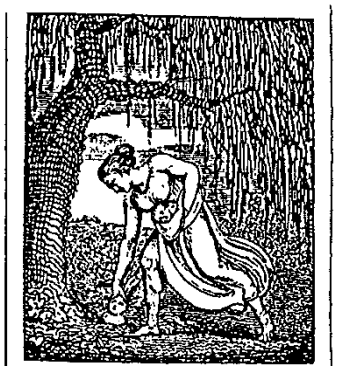
This issue of the *Journal* includes four MacDonald-related articles.

Chris Mitchell's biographical essay on Rolland Hein will be reprinted in *North Wind*.

George Sayer's article on "C.S. Lewis and George MacDonald" first appeared in *Inklings* in 1988. A review of it was drafted for *North Wind* at the time, but we were unable to obtain

answers from Sayer to some questions which we had, so, as a great deal of material on MacDonald was then being published, the review was abandoned. Sayer's article combines various of Lewis' comments to him about MacDonald with appropriate allusions to Lewis' and MacDonald's writings. The first-hand nature of the account brings it vividly to life.

Barbara Amell provides a highly personal introductory essay on MacDonald's poetry. Her description of *Within and Without* as partially describing 'his relationship with his beloved wife Louisa' would not lead anyone to suspect that the great power of this poem lies in the honesty with which he describes their struggles to overcome the difficulties in their relationship-difficulties so immense that the heroine of the poem leaves her husband and their child and is reunited with them only after death! The poem was largely written before he and Louisa were married, and it was not MacDonald's first published work, as Amell claims (45). According to Raeper (103),' *The Monthly Christian Spectator* had already published 'poems, articles and some stories' Subsequently Amell quotes the whole of MacDonald's best-known poem "Baby," yet characterises it by the curiously inadequate appellation of 'a dainty sketch'! In fact there is spiritual wisdom in every one of the images which the questioning child in this poem, with its love-filled intuition, recognises as the baby's answers to its questions. Young children, still 'trailing clouds of glory,' can recognise many things which materialistic adults deny outright. Amell describes MacDonald's critical survey of religious poetry, *England's Antiphon* as a 'distinguished book,' but it is worthy of warmer praise than this. Some of the poetry which MacDonald examines will probably never again be popular, but many of his analyses and asides in this work shake us into a completely new appreciation of the nature of poetry, for example in the passage Amell quotes where he observes that while '[t]he heart of poetry is indeed truth, . . . its garments are music, and the garments come first in the process of revelation.' Amell closes with comments on *The Diary of an Old Soul*, which she describes as MacDonald's 'crowning achievement as a poet' (48). By this she presumably means that it is the most important work MacDonald wrote in verse form. Some is quotable, as she demonstrates, but in many of the verses the meaning glimmers only fitfully and faintly through pointlessly contorted syntax.



Glenn Sadler's essay is equally idiosyncratic. For example he describes MacDonald as a writer who 'simply did not stop to consider the imaginative process' (37). Yet few—if any—other writers have possessed such understanding of the complex process of writing mythopoeia. As Stephen Prickett has pointed out in *North Wind*: 'Behind the magical beings of MacDonald's universes lie the philosophical and theological principles of a scheme that is as carefully worked out as that of Dante.' Glenn's essay is reviewed here by Rachel Johnson:

> Reading this article in which Professor Sadler outlines some of the story behind the production of *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald* was both fascinating and frustrating.
>
> In his characteristically unassuming way, the author gives some insight into years of painstaking research. He likens it to playing the childhood game Hide & Seek. The questions and enquiries he received as a result of the published volume point up expectations from his readers that could never be fulfilled in one book. For example, he refers to the lack of material on MacDonald's mode of composition, and the sparseness of references to significant people that he knew.

MacDonald does analyse his process of sub-creation (Tolkien's term, from *Tree and Leaf*) in his

essay on "The Fantastic Imagination" found in *A Dish of Orts*. Also his view of the process of artistic creation is expressed succinctly in the entry for March 5th in *The Diary of an Old Soul*.

The reference to Lewis Carroll's occasional visits is an understatement, 'uncle Dodgson,' as the children called him, being a frequent visitor and almost one of the family. The Ruskin connection was also a long-standing friendship, albeit a very different one from that with Lewis Carroll.

As MacDonald himself frequently expressed, and Prof Sadler points out (see letter p.297), his writing was the place where he himself and those who had influenced him would be found.

The main body of the article consists of the fascinating insight into the research and methodology employed in the production of this volume of letters. Starting in 1972 (when photocopiers were not the bane of every librarian's life), he describes the time spent deciphering letters in the Beinecke and transcribing them in pencil. The inspiration to keep the project alive, despite the frustrations and disappointments, is expressed by Prof. Sadler as 'my rediscovery of MacDonald's vision of life,' in which his vision of a loving God remained constant.

In the short paragraph on the selection process (p.35) I found myself wanting to go deeper into the criteria of this process. The context of this article did not allow for greater detail, but perhaps in the future this could be taken further.

The building strategy for the book was particularly interesting. His starting point in Greville's biography led on to other collections, notably those of the Mount-Temples in the National Library of Scotland. The progression from transcription to photocopying and subsequent editing, including a major technical hitch, is described briefly. Decisions such as that to write introductions for each section rather than one lengthy piece are explained, and frequently asked questions, such as: 'Why this title?' addressed.

The article refers again to the Lewis Carroll and Ruskin connections, pointing further enquiries in the direction of John Docherty's close study *The Literary Fruits of the Lewis Carroll—George MacDonald Friendship*. Also a look at the chapter on MacDonald in Raphael Shabennan's *In Pursuit of Lewis Carroll* is recommended.

Prof. Sadler writes of an unsigned letter in typescript which MacDonald supposedly wrote, but Ruskin supposedly never received. It is described as 'one of the harshest letters MacDonald ever wrote.' The web of mystery surrounding this letter may never be unravelled, but the suggestion that it was written as a telegram seems unlikely, given its length. It was excluded from the collection as it was not possible to verify its origin.

Finally we are given a taste of the unpublished family letters in the Yale collection, in the form of a letter from Greville to his sister Mary Josephine, written during the tour of America and Canada. The chauvinistic tone is not complimentary to the Americans, and only to the Canadians in so far as they are like the British!

One unpublished letter by George MacDonald, to Ted Hughes, nephew to Arthur Hughes and engaged to Mary Josephine when she died, is included in the article. As in so many of his letters he looks toward the eternal perspective on this, and the future life. This is the vision which is indeed 'an expression of his character' and the factor which inspires so many of us who continue to read MacDonald with unabated enthusiasm.

Prof. Sadler's 'rediscovery of MacDonald's vision of life' was also found in fragments of poetry, both unfinished and revised, which surfaced during his research. He quotes one unfinished sonnet to Lady Mount Temple, cited for the insight it gives into MacDonald as a writer. Such a study of the fragments would, he says, be no easier than playing 'pin the tail on the donkey' and other childhood games, the analogy being one that George MacDonald would without doubt have appreciated. R.J.

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Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, number two: *Muscular Christianity*, ed. Donald Hall.

Although published by the C.U.P., all ten contributions to this volume are by North American academics. Essentially the essays build upon the foundation provided by Norman Vance's book *The Sinews of the Spirit* (Cambridge 1985). Also highly relevant is Edward Norman's *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge 1987). Through their wide-ranging nature, these essays together build up a clearer picture of the milieu in which MacDonald wrote his early works than has previously been available. In some cases they also provide clues to the actual sources of specific incidents in MacDonald's books. To give a few examples:

> C. J Wee's observations on Kingsley's allusions to Edmund Spenser in *Westward Hof* (1855) provide important clues to the way MacDonald draws upon Spenser in *Phantastes*. Wee's study also leads one to feel that Robert Falconer's death may draw upon that of Alton Locke, and that the quotation from Milton prefacing "The Light Princess" in *Adela Cathcart* may not be unconnected with Kingsley's allusion to Milton in *Westward Ho*! David Rosen's study of Kingsley's *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850) provides clues to the way the personalities of MacDonald's protagonists Anodos and Hugh Sutherland are developed in *Phantastes* and *David Elginbro*. The only essay which considers MacDonald directly is John Pennington's "Muscular Spirituality in George MacDonald's *Curdie* Books." He avoids the post-modernist jargon employed by the other contributors and devotes his essay to basic concepts with which readers of *Orts* will already be familiar. There is a brief, but good, discussion of MacDonald's attitude to science, although he does not mention MacDonald's debt to Goethe in this respect. He notes Colin Manlove's important distinction between Kingsley's Aristotelian approach to God's manifestation in Nature and the Platonic approach of MacDonald. He concludes with a curious quotation from Vance:
>
> It is not surprising that the conventional novel-form gradually collapsed under the weight of the manly Christianity entrusted to it. Dream, myth and fable tend to take over from straightforward realistic narrative (7).

This was undoubtedly a factor in the decline of the traditional novel, but surely it came directly from the influence of the German Romantics of a generation earlier?

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*George MacDonald: A Devotional Guide to His Writings*. by Gary and Catherine Deddo. Edinburgh: The Devotional Library - Saint Andrew (Church of Scotland) Press 1996.

This is the sixth volume in a series of monographs on major Scottish theologians designed equally for 'lay people, students and ministers.' Another volume in the series which should be of considerable interest to MacDonald enthusiasts is that on Erskine of Linlathen. The Deddos' volume on MacDonald contains thirteen pages of biography, eleven pages examining MacDonald's theology in its contemporary context, and ninety-five pages of carefully selected and arranged passages from his writings where, in each of ten sections, quotations from his published sermons are followed by quotations from the novels.

The robustly American approach of the authors may not be altogether appropriate for a work aimed initially at Scottish readers. This tone is set at the very beginning: 'George MacDonald was born in 1824 in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. From that inauspicious origin he came to be regarded as one of the leading writers of the nineteenth century'! Why it should be an 'inauspicious origin' is beyond the power of a British reader to grasp. One would have thought that Huntly at that time would have been a more-than-usually stimulating environment for an intelligent and imaginative boy.

The introductory sections could be useful to readers unfamiliar with MacDonald, although there are numerous contradictions and errors, not all of them minor ones, particularly in the section on "His Literary Ministry." Proof-reading too is poor, with amusing malapropisms such as: 'the hope that an externally imposed righteousness would be instantaneously deferred [conferred ?] upon the elect at death'

(10); and: 'As a Christian writer MacDonald exhibits an uncanny perspective' [prescience ?] (18). Sometimes, however, unexpected phrases seem to represent an exceptionally careful choice of words, as where the Deddos describe how: 'Throughout the years MacDonald *desperately sought* both to find for himself, and to extend to others, a true comfort when grieved by the death of loved ones' (7, italics added).

The greatest importance of the introductory part of this book lies in the way the Deddos systematically demolish the pretensions of the abridgers and rewriters of MacDonald's works. Many sections of MacDonald's published sermons can undeniably seem boring where he is alluding to themes where his stance has now become the generally accepted one. But this is never the case with the novels. And even in the sermons there are many themes, often appearing where one least expects them, which can still seem astonishingly radical to the present-day reader.

The Deddos point out that in MacDonald's novels:

> Extensive treatment was . . . required by the intrinsic depth of the spiritual realities that he attempted to illuminate and by the limitations of human language itself. A cursory treatment of these themes cannot adequately do justice to his concern to call for a more profound apprehension of spiritual truth and even for a radical reassessment of convictions and attitudes which were at the time accepted as being absolute orthodox Christian faith.
>
> To be sure, MacDonald does often circle the same territory many times, but from differing vantage points to provide a larger perspective and a more exact apprehension of that element of the truth under discussion . . . .[I]n many instances what have been regarded as digressions on his part are, in fact, prolonged meditations on various themes viewed from multiple vantage points (2).

The Deddos press home the same point-that a cursory treatment of MacDonald's texts is worthless-in their choice of passages from the novels. Thus one of their first quotes from a novel repeats MacDonald's magnificent gesture in beginning *David Elginbrod*, his first novel, with a passage of pure Doric dialect. They choose a passage in *David Elginbrod* (bk.3, ch.22) where Margaret relates to Euphra an incident illustrating her father's loving understanding, and it is manifestly impossible that Margaret could have described this incident except in dialect. Equally, the account would lose most of its power without the humorous ending where she vomits. Yet MacDonald's earthiness is another aspect almost invariably removed from the novels by the rewriters. Despite all this, the Deddos claim that 'unedited editions of George MacDonald's novels, sermons, poems and essays are difficult to locate' (33), which was wholly untrue by the time their book went to print. And they list the publishers of more than two dozen rewrites of the novels!

As the Deddos remark, 'MacDonald's corpus is at once voluminous and eminently quotable,' so their problems lay in selecting, not in locating suitable material. They refer to 'a number of fine editions aimed at similar ends'(2), and by this curious phrase seem to imply that they have avoided quotations popular with other anthologists. Certainly they have avoided the blandness associated with all too many 'bedside-table' anthologies: a blandness which must surely turn many potential readers away from MacDonald. What makes the Deddos' selections so successful is that they permit MacDonald's humanity to shine through, whereas most anthologists are anxious to detach their nuggets of doctrine from the specific human situations in the novels which they are intended to illuminate.

Many readers, however, may be puzzled that none of the Deddos' selections relate to what William Raeper in his biography alludes to as 'Mother,' where he describes MacDonald's

theology of "God our Father and Mother." But MacDonald realised that the 'feminine' aspect of Christianity must be approached in a different fashion from the 'masculine,' and explores it in his mythopoeia. This aspect cannot be accommodated into the theological framework which the Deddos have constructed in order to conform to the format of the series.

Yet although relieved from any necessity to discuss MacDonald's mythopoeia, the Deddos nevertheless feel obliged to attack that aspect of his writing, particularly its allusive nature. They dismiss everything outside their own reading of the scriptures: for example all of what Blake describes as 'The Eternal Body of Man . . . The Imagination, that is God himself/The Divine Body, Jesus.' They claim that: 'If we are to be true to MacDonald's perspective, we should regard any secondary sources to be for him only subordinate and derivative of the truth found ultimately in God through Christ' (21).* The principal techniques they employ to establish this claim are the traditional ones of skilful blending of the self-evident with the preposterous, and equally skilful blending of the evil with the innocent. The above-quoted sentence is a good example of the former. The latter is evident in: 'He freely explored the mysticism of Swedenborg and Novalis and even spiritualism' (21). 'Freely' here has an utterly different meaning when applied to the way MacDonald approached spiritualism from when applied to the way he approached Swedenborg's writings, which again is different from how he approached Novalis. This is because the degree of trust which he could place in these three ranged from zero for spiritualism to very high indeed for Novalis.

It is particularly the side of MacDonald which the Deddos deny which draws major churchmen and theologians, such as Lord Runcie, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, to his writings. MacDonald undertook two tasks: on the one hand, to bring alive the simple but immeasurably profound 'everyday truths' of Christianity; and on the other hand to explore equally crucial aspects of Christianity which cannot easily be accommodated to our materialistic patterns of thought and have to be expressed in parables, metaphors and imaginations. The first approach predominates in his novels, the second in his mythopoeic works-although the mythopoeic approach is often (perhaps always) present at a deep level in the novels. His mythopoeia is essentially a development of "The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible," investigated by Stephen Prickett in Origins of Narrative (1996). Prickett describes how alongside this came a recognition that the Biblical canon remained fluid until a remarkably recent date. Such considerations invert the Deddos' claim that, in general, 'literary commentar[ies] on MacDonald . . . . do not reflect an in-depth knowledge of the broader theological context in which MacDonald lived and wrote . . . . [A]t times this has led . . . to a misunderstanding of what he was trying to say.' In fact, it happens to be the literary critics who in most cases possess the deeper understanding.

All too many theological commentators feel their authority threatened by the implications of much of MacDonald's mythopoeia and seek to deny or discredit it. But the Deddos' comments, because of their appearance in an influential series, are probably the most serious attack upon the sources of MacDonald's mythopoeia which has appeared in Europe the twentieth century, denigrating those thinkers whose imaginations MacDonald, by profoundly creative imitation, acknowledges as the inspiration for his own.

** On this point Alan Stott adds the following comment:*

The Deddos imply that commentary on MacDonald 'from within a literary perspective' has led to 'misunderstanding.' They claim to have contributed a corrective (28). The 'in-depth' studies for

which they seek, however, are to be found precisely in the artistic and literary context, and not in 'the broader theological context in which MacDonald lived and wrote.' The quotations which they have selected amply demonstrate that his life and writings are rooted in human experience, not Pharisaism-in a Person, not a book. To date it does not appear to be theologians who are gradually revealing his genius, but literary critics and biographers of integrity: such as Chesterton and Lewis in earlier generations and Stephen Prickett and David Robb today. Prickett above all opens the way for a fruitful marriage of the theological and the literary approaches in reading MacDonald and other Romantics.

*The Night is Large* by Martin Gardner New York 1996.

Martin Gardner's most notable achievement has been to mislead millions of readers as to the true nature of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, in best-sellers such as *The Annotated Alice,* and *More Annotated Alice.* A militant anti-Christian, he has been astonishingly successful in blinding people to the profound Christian truths in Carroll's stories. Those who know his monthly column in the *Scientific American* will not be surprised to learn that he is also a prolific essayist. In this new collection of essays, number 45, "The Wandering Jew and the Second Coming," alludes to MacDonald. The essay is a good example of Gardner's basic techniques. Bibliographic material on The Wandering Jew is easily obtainable. The little-known relationship between this myth and the popular understanding of the biblical texts referring to the *Parousia* and related matters can be explained simply and briefly. And this relationship, once explained, is very interesting and self-evidently obvious. Thus it is a perfect subject for a frivolous, easily written essay.

The fragment about the Wandering Jew in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (chapters 77-79 and 95) looks like part of a melodramatic juvenile work. MacDonald has reused it by depicting it as the creation of a posthumous character: the brother of Joseph Polwarth and father of Rachel Polwarth. Although the fragment is poor as literature, as MacDonald implies and Gardner is at pains to emphasise, the way it is reused is extremely effective. Robert Polwarth imagines himself as the Wandering Jew, who during one period of his deathless existence has a vision of himself as Robert Polwarth! Fragments of his story are read by Joseph Polwarth to Thomas Wingfold. It is a measure of Gardner's scholarship that he perceives 'the Wandering Jew as an Anglican minister' (529): i.e. as Wingfold himself. His brief summary of what he describes as 'Wingfold's' adventures is, in general, accurate, although the Jew does not climb every church tower which he passes, as Gardner implies. Surprisingly, Gardner omits any mention of the Jew's erotic initial encounter with the young woman who briefly becomes his wife but is then immolated in a volcano (a detail extrapolated from a work by Shelley).

MacDonald's Wandering Jew *is* always able to distinguish his strange visions from his equally strange adventures in the world, at least in retrospect. In the last of these visions he re-encounters Jesus, is forgiven, and is led to paradise. But Gardner apparently feels that, in a work of fiction concerned with what he regards as the fiction al the heart of Christianity, a vision is no different from any other sort of occurrence. So he treats this final vision as a factual occurrence! He employs similar techniques in his explorations of the *Alice* books.

W.W. & J.D.

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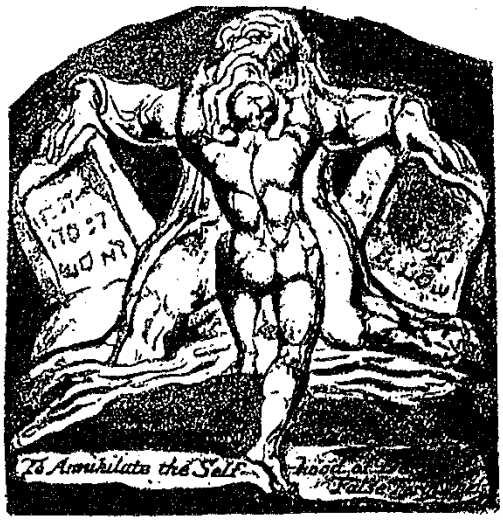
**Conference report**

'The Ways of Creative Mythologies"—One-day conference at the University of Manchester

June 1997.

This conference, aiming 'to work towards a clearer definition of myth and mythology' and sponsored by the University and the Tolkien Society, attracted some eighty participants. It was certainly stimulating and enjoyable, although I am not sure whether any 'clearer definitions' were achieved. The proceedings will be published, so copyright rules preclude any detailed descriptions of the contributions at this stage.

The primary conclusion, perhaps predictable when a majority of the participants were Tolkien Society members, seemed to be that Tolkien had provided an 'empowering myth' for the late twentieth century. That is to say: his myth of Middle Earth seems to help ordinary people to be more independent of the repressive myths which sustain 'the consumer society' than they would be in its absence. The Waterstone's survey, which found *The Lord of the Rings* to be the Book of the Century, was much cited in this context. Inevitably, one was reminded of Blake's comment that he must create his own myth or be enslaved by another man's. But Tolkien enthusiasts claim to be able to appropriate his myth *as* their own.




Blake's etching of Milton reforming the image of Urizen collapsing into the mire *(Milton* pl.18). The frontispiece from his *Book of Urizen* was used as the logo for the Conference.

In a fine paper, Chris Garbowski saw the capacity for empowerment as arising from Tolkien's emphasis upon dialogue. His myth is unusual in that the story evolves out of the lively interaction of many different individuals in open-ended encounters of astonishing variety. This emphasis upon true brotherliness is central to all that is positive in our era, as is Tolkien's emphasis that evil is within us as much as without. In the nineteenth century, by contrast, the rewriting of old myths, and the creation of new 'ancient myths' was crucial in assisting the (then justified, but now decadent) rising tide of nationalism in many European countries. That theme was brilliantly explored by Tom Shippey. He did not need to remind his audience that the values inculcated by those rewritten myths are not wholly positive ones: the holocaust has made most people aware of this.

The majority of the contributors examined how myth is treated by specific authors or

in specific genres. MacDonald draws upon Spenser's myth in *Phantastes,* but seems to be creating his own myth in "The Golden Key." And in *Lilith* he re-examines several of the archetypal figures of Judreo-Christian myth. Study of these works could have made a very helpful contribution to the conference theme, but although we advertised the conference in good time the only MacDonald-related paper presented was John Docherty's study of how *Phantastes* stimulated critical responses which took the form of contemporary myths.