

# Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

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## Orts 46, 1998

The George MacDonald Society

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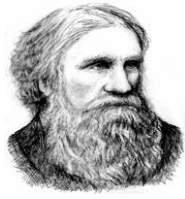
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# Orts

## The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 46, Spring 1998

### ADELA WORKSHOP 1998

Adela workshops explore the penetrating spiritual/psychological insights of MacDonald's fairy tales and seek to discover how they can be put to direct practical use in everyday situations. Following the very successful workshop on *Adela Cathcart* held in Massachusetts in 1995 we hope to hold a similar workshop focusing on *The Lost Princess (The Wise Woman)* in New Hampshire or Maine in July 1998. Workshops actively involve all participants, there are no lectures. *The Lost Princess* is particularly suited for such an approach. MacDonald has written the story in such a way that it is impossible for readers not to imagine themselves in the same situations as the two contrasting families in the story: wondering whether they would make, or have made, the same mistakes with their own children; and speculating what other mistakes they may have made, or will be likely to make. It is equally impossible not to identify with the Princess herself, the 'Rose of the World,' as she struggles with the deadly serious role-playing games which the Wise Woman devises for her.

Full details of the workshop are available from Nancy Mellon, 82 Gage Road, WILTON, NH 03086-5806. Tel. 603-654-2982.

### Next Issue

Tim Braithwaite will still be working in the Far East this year, but he is becoming a very efficient copy-writer, so when he returns we can expect a high quality *Orts*! In the meantime we are investigating the possibility of members receiving an alternative newsletter. For the time being, however, please send copy to the address in *Orts* 45.

### THE STATED AIMS OF THE GEORGE MACDONALD SOCIETY

Some confusion seems to have arisen during the last two years as to the aims of the MacDonald Society. Cultural societies devoted to one person or one subject, with few exceptions, employ almost identical statements of **objects**. That of the George MacDonald Society, as embodied in the Constitution approved by the Charity Commission in 1993, reads as follows:

**The objects of the Society are to advance the education of the general public in the life and works of George MacDonald, in particular through promoting an appreciation of his works and of his influence on other writers and thinkers.**

The law does not permit these objects to be modified.

'In furtherance of these objects,' as the standard wording expresses it, charitable societies are invested with specific **powers**. These likewise have to follow a standard form, with the items listed in order of priority. For our Society they are:

- i) To undertake and promote scholarly research in connection with the life and works of George MacDonald and his circle, and to disseminate the useful results of such research.**
- ii) To publish a journal and hold public lectures, conferences and exhibitions on the life and work of George MacDonald and his circle.**
- iii) To promote the preservation for the education and benefit of the public generally of buildings and places, manuscripts, works of art, photographs, books and artifacts associated with the life and works of George MacDonald and his circle. [This, of course, can only be implemented as opportunities arise.]**
- iv) To raise money to further the attainment of the objects listed above; provided that, In raising funds, the Society shall not undertake any substantial permanent trading activities and shall conform to any relevant requirements of the law.**
- v) To do all other things which shall further the objects of the Society.**

Understandably, the Charity Commissioners are particularly careful to supervise the powers granted under item iv. Thus, for example, although the specialist presses which have been reprinting MacDonald's works are not, in practice, profit-making bodies, they are engaged in 'substantial permanent trading activities,' so the extent to which the Society can be associated with them is very limited.

Virtually all literary societies are supported by members' subscriptions. Thus they have a substantial responsibility to this membership. They must always be open to suggestions, and endeavour to assist members in their appreciation of their particular author in every practicable way—subject to the stated Aims and to limitations of human and financial resources. Much of the interaction with the members is by means of publications. The majority of such societies produce a members' newsletter several times a year. Where there are keen members and adequate resources, societies sometimes additionally produce a publication exploring some particular aspect of their author. But the Journal of a literary charity must primarily fulfil the criteria noted under i) above and represent the whole range of scholarly research on the author. 'Scholarly research' does not necessarily mean research by professional scholars. A great glory of such journals is that contributions by dedicated amateurs have always been accepted alongside those of academics. This is of inestimable value in that contributions are thus not restricted to what is currently fashionable in content and style. But, of course, even so it is not always possible over a short period to obtain contributions upon every aspect of the work of an author as wide ranging as MacDonald.

We are particularly fortunate in the MacDonald Society in that we possess MacDonald's own literary criticism as a guide. This is not of the highest stylistic quality—as he was the first to acknowledge—but his approach is outstanding in its depth of perception. Thus we frequently

have occasion to quote some of his comments upon the importance of in-depth study of a book and his explanations of how **any reader** should be able to undertake this.

We appreciate that some members are not interested in understanding more about MacDonald's intentions, and that others would like the Journal to concentrate upon their own specialist interest, such as nostalgia for a vanished age, or evangelism. They are entitled to their opinions and entitled to have them published. But their wish that the contents of the Journal be essentially determined by their interests is contrary to normal practice for journals of literary societies, contrary to MacDonald's own outlook, and thus contrary also to the strict Charity Laws.

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### Arthur Hughes

The most successful and best-attended meeting, bar one, which the MacDonald Society has ever held was when Dr. Leslie Cowan gave an illustrated talk at St Martin's in the Fields on the paintings of Arthur Hughes. Hughes is often linked with MacDonald in the same way as Sir John Tennie) is linked with MacDonald's friend Lewis Carroll. This is fully justified. But in addition he was a friend of MacDonald and even used him and his children as models, as was noted in *North Wind* 10 and 11. There is no parallel there in Carroll's relationship with Tennie! Carroll was, however, a friend of Hughes and his family and even commissioned a painting from him: *The Lady of the Lilacs*, now in Toronto.



© An unused drawing for *At the Back of the North Wind*.

In this issue, by kind permission of the publishers of the new catalogue raisonne of Hughes' works by Leonard Roberts—who was present at Dr Cowan's talk!—, we are including reproductions of four drawings made for George and Greville MacDonald's books. We are also enclosing a flyer for the book. We are very sorry we are obliged to fold the colour plate!

Hughes often worked-up early studies for a painting into finished works on their own account. He developed one of his initial studies for the young lady in *Silver and Gold*—the painting reproduced on the flyer—into the picture for Carroll. *Silver and Gold* is technically a fine painting, but the subject matter is less attractive than that of the majority of his paintings. He was particularly admired for his paintings of children. Many of his paintings of rural scenes capture the same mood as the Revd. Kitvert's wonderful vignettes of rural life in his *Diaries*. Of course, the people they depict were very poor, and of course their lives were hard. But anyone who can look back to a pre-war childhood in a poor family not too badly hit by the depression (i.e. half way back to the time of Hughes' paintings) knows that-contrary to what the sociologists wish us to believe-life for ordinary people then was richer and more meaningful than it is in today's consumerist society. It was not necessarily 'happier,' but Hughes and MacDonald would have placed little value upon a 'happiness' measured by the cost-of-living index!

Hughes was one of the most gentle and unassuming of men, and this meant that he could approach romantic or sentimental subjects with simple sincerity. This was an unspoken Pre-Raphaelite ideal, but no one realised it as completely as Hughes. Leonard Robert's book will provide very many hours of pleasure with its highly informative text and fine colour plates. Hughes reworked some paintings so much that their surface actually became 'vermiculated', as one critic complained, but modern photography permits even these paintings to be reproduced tolerably well. A full review of the book will be published in the next *North Wind*.

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### **Additions to the Library**

During 1997 the following books were purchased and added to the Society's collection at Kings College, London.

*3000 Quotations From the Writings of George MacDonald*, Compiled by Harry Verploegh, Paternoster: 1996.

*George MacDonald, Wisdom to Live By: Nuggets of Insight From All Collected Works*, Compiled by Michael Phillips, Sunrise: 1996.

*George MacDonald in the Pulpit*, Compiled by J. J. Flynn and David Edwards, Johannesen: 1996.

*Lilith: A Variorum Edition* (2 vols), Edited by Rolland Hein, Johannesen: 1997.  
VII (volume 13). The Wade Center: 1996.

Two books have been donated by the publishers:

*George MacDonald: A Devotional Guide to His Writings*, Compiled by G.W. & C.A. Deddo, St Andrew's Press: 1996.

*Arthur Hughes: His Life and Works*, by Leonard Roberts, Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1997.

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### **Responses**

William Webb points out that Cruikshank did illustrations for *Aunt Judy's Magazine*. The illustrations of her own story "Amelia and the Dwarfs"—one of which was reproduced in *Orts* 45—are in his style so they are probably by him. Outside the pages of her magazine 'Aunt Judy' (Mrs Gatty) usually published under her maiden name of Juliana Horatia Ewing.

In *Orts* 44 our new Committee Chairman Richard Lines was described as a company lawyer. Actually he is a Civil Service barrister. We apologise to him for this curious inversion.

A function of any newsletter is to be stimulating, awakening its readers into action in support of its cause. For a MacDonald newsletter this is particularly appropriate, since he was one of the most consistently provocative of all popular writers. But, as Eric Rabkin observes in *The Fantastic in Literature*, 'his theology has nearly won the day.' Consequently, MacDonald's more

popular novels can now seem like cosy affirmations of traditional values. As has been said before, *Orts* must be provocative at times to break through this cosiness and generate reader response. Issue 44, for example, included deliberately provocative material questioning the nature of the New Jerusalem depicted in *Lilith*. Whatever way the relevant passages of MacDonald's *Lilith* texts are understood they depict strange characters in a strange city. Improved understanding of MacDonald's intentions is only likely to come through unconstrained open debate. Therefore we are always grateful when critical comments in *Orts* generate a critical response.

We are equally grateful when uncritical comments in *Orts* generate a critical response. In common with other literary newsletters, *Orts* has begun experimenting with the new and informal style which has evolved in response to the rapid and simple transmission of information possible via the internet. One reason for the openness and directness of this style is that an electronic newsheet enables any contributor's assertions to be refuted immediately. Thus there is less need for the elaborate precautions against misrepresentation necessary for a journal. But these do still need to be observed when the style is taken up by infrequently published newsletters.

In *Orts* 43, reviewing an essay by Martin Gardner which in some particulars misrepresented MacDonald, it was mentioned in passing that Gardner had similarly misrepresented MacDonald's friend Lewis Carroll. This comment was not elaborated because *Orts* is not a Carroll journal. But it should, of course, have been either justified or omitted, and Richard Reis very properly criticizes us for this lapse:

It is doubtful whether Gardner would himself object to being called 'a militant anti-Christian', even though his attacks are usually oblique and invariably good humoured. Typical is his allusion—in the introduction to his *Annotated Alice*—to the *Alice* books, Homer and the Bible as 'great works of fantasy.' Also it is questionable whether any study of a book which concludes that the plot is nonsensical can properly be tenned an 'interpretation'.

Richard Reis writes:

A review in *Orts* 43, treating Martin Gardner's discussion of George MacDonald's Wandering Jew material in Thomas Wingfold, Curate, states that Gardner's 'most notable achievement has been to mislead millions of readers as to the true nature of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books' in 'blinding people to the profound Christian truths in Carroll's stories.' That makes it seem that Gardner is *deliberately concealing* something that he perceives to be there but somehow considers to be too dangerous for Carroll's readers to learn about. In my opinion, Gardner doesn't see any specifically Christian 'message' in the *Alice* books because such a message in fact *isn't* there. Carroll is mocking human follies in a human spirit, but that spirit isn't exclusively Christian, and Gardner fully appreciates it. Then the review even goes on to call Gardner 'a militant anti-Christian.' This sort of thing strikes me as bigoted and intolerant—so *unchristian* that it would horrify both Carroll and MacDonald.

Martin Gardner is a rationalist and a sceptic, not some horrid Antichrist. Indeed his annotated editions of the *Alice* books are helpful, informative, and entertaining, not viciously misleading. Obsessively doctrinaire 'critics' who regard interpretations of literature (or scripture!) other than their own as somehow blasphemous and sinister, or at least naughty—such folks may be earnest proselytes, but they are incompetent readers.

Indeed, this fatuous review (at least at its beginning, on the subject of Carroll-later it's more intelligent) strikes me as typical of too many MacDonald enthusiasts, who often tend to regard the man as a religious teacher only, not as a literacy artist. Like Carroll, MacDonald in his best work is subtly *symbolising* or *dramatising* rather than preaching. By contrast, in his weaker efforts he is clumsily explicit or crudely allegorical. The ethical concepts in *Lilith*, *Phantastes* and *Alec Forbes of Howglen* are often not narrowly Christian at all; instead, they can be appreciated by civilised and humane people (such as Martin Gardner) who may even be (O horror!) atheists. The same can be said of the *Alice* books, of Tolkien's and Lewis' masterpieces, of classic fairy tales, of many pre Christian biblical materials (one thinks of Ecclesiastes), and in short of much great literature. By contrast, MacDonald spoils too many of his novels by introducing 'spokesmen' characters who sermonise at tedious length, as though the author doubted his readers' ability to get the point otherwise. The later Wingfold novels are egregious examples of this artistic failing.

Enough sermonising on my part, too. Still I deplore the self-righteousness of this review's beginning (see Luke 18, 9-12), and urge MacDonald enthusiasts to be less narrow-minded.

Richard H. Reis.

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### **Maurice Sendak**

We would like to publish in *Orts* and *North Wind* more illustrations of MacDonald's books by modern artists, but copyright restrictions make this impracticable. After Arthur Hughes, the most famous illustrator of MacDonald is Maurice Sendak.

Maurice Sendak has been a famous name in children's literature for many years now. Even readers with no special interest in this subject find his illustrations and his original stories very original and memorable—combining originality with a sense of illustrating tradition. Though he uses pen and ink rather than the engraving techniques of the nineteenth century, he often captures the look of the pictures which were nominally engraved by craftsmen 'after' the original drawings.

His own stories have been very successful, and most are in print. *Where the Wild Things Are* quickly became a best-seller when it appeared. He retains a feeling for childhood—a feeling of childhood really—even in later life, and says that he almost feels the child he was must be alive and existing somewhere still.

His young people tend to look like the child, or the baby, that Sendak himself was, and may have a peasant-like Slavonic appearance not always in keeping with the tale he is illustrating. They are far from sentimental and look like tough survivors in the making.

A few years ago an excellent survey of the artist was published in America—Selma G Lanes *The Art of Maurice Sendak* New York: Abradale Press—H.N. Abrams, 1984. This is a generous-sized volume with plenty of personal detail backing up the work. We learn he is now a solitary man who like Walt Whitman prefers to turn and live with animals (a few dogs anyway) not too close to others of his own kind.

He feels the dark un-childish elements in tales like Grimms' very keenly and suspects that children understand this too—that in fairy tales a stepmother may be a thin disguise for every actual mother, who a child fears may be cruel or neglectful and rob him of that vital sense of home and security.

Sendak shares with MacDonald a complex personality capable of visions sometimes beautiful, sometimes macabre. As an illustrator he lacks the delicate poetry of Arthur Hughes, who was a typically pre-Raphaelite artist. Sendak's grotesquely humorous side finds some expression in *The Light Princess*—and might be well suited to MacDonald's "Cross Purposes" if he became interested in this tale. But on the whole the present century has not produced quite the right artist for the creator of Diamond, or Princess Irene. Perhaps some young artist now at work may prove to be the ideal person.

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W.W.

### **Aids to reading *Lilith*.**

Mr Raven: *Even if I were happy enough to be able to show it to you [, you] would not therefore be able to find it. But I cannot show it to you [.N] either, I believe, can any man.*

Mr Vane: *Show me what you can. I ask nothing more.*

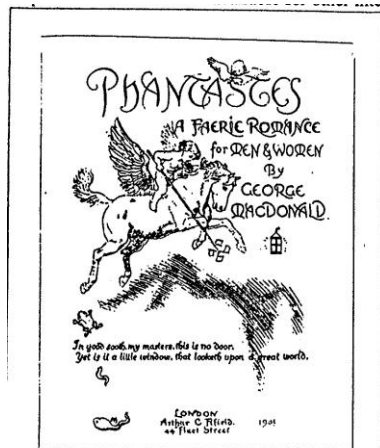
Page 39 of "B" MS. of *Lilith*.

Most of the editions of *Lilith* (and *Phantastes*) which contain any introduction at all use as their introduction a series of more-or-less disconnected passages from C.S. Lewis' preface to his 1946 anthology of MacDonald's writings. This is interesting for readers who do not know the anthology. But it is of no use at all as an introduction to *Lilith*. In fact it is downright misleading, because the remarks of Lewis which have been selected allude to MacDonald's novels—few are relevant to the Faerie Romances. An edition of *Phantastes* plus *Lilith* is due to be published soon with a new long introduction, and this should greatly help matters. But many readers may still be grateful for help from more extended commentaries.

Readers must not expect any worthwhile introduction to *Lilith* to explain the book for them. Firstly, any such explanation would take away a great part of the readers' pleasure in discovering MacDonald's meanings for themselves. Secondly, MacDonald seems deliberately to have constructed the final version in such a fashion that no consistent picture of its overall meaning is possible. That is not so very unusual in a mythic work: Goethe's *Faust Pt II*, for example, to which MacDonald alludes several times, is constructed in the same way.

Some two years ago we recommended a very helpful set of student notes for *Lilith*. These had been compiled by Dale Nelson for his own students, but at our request he has made them available for other interested readers.





© Arthur Hughes' unused title page for the 1905 edition of *Phantastes*. The lowly metamorphosis from tadpole to toad counterbalances the winged horse. An infant with a wind-vane toy is an old spiritual symbol—i.e. Mr Vane's name in *Lilith* is not wholly negative. The child on a winged horse recalls *The Lost Princess*.

The completion of the *Variorum Edition of Lilith* has encouraged us to look again at the very sparse literature on the early drafts. Rod. McGillis' overview: "George MacDonald: The *Lilith* MSS" in the *Scottish Literary Journal*, 4 (1997) is helpful, but brief. When Elizabeth Weinrich's exploration of the "B" draft is completed the situation will be very different. Until that time the most extended study is Greville MacDonald's "Paraphrase of the Earlier Manuscript Version [i.e. "A" Draft] with Quotations and Comments," which he published as pages 355-396 of his Centenary Edition of *Lilith* in 1924. Despite uneven coverage and careless mistakes, it still remains the only study of *Lilith* which succeeds in giving a clear picture of the overall spiritual structure of the story.

The incomensurability of the final version makes Greville's interpretation of the "A" draft, with his numerous cross-references to the final version, far more valuable than it would otherwise have been. Accordingly, an unabridged transcript, with full corrections as footnotes, has been added to Mike Partridge's MacDonald web site at [http://ds.dial.pipex.cpm/partridge/md\\_index.htm](http://ds.dial.pipex.cpm/partridge/md_index.htm). For those who would like a copy but do not yet have internet access, photocopies are available from John Docherty for \$3 (cash only) or £1.50 inclusive of postage. Address: 9 Medway Drive FOREST ROW, RH18 5NU.



Two illustrations by Arthur Hughes for Greville MacDonald's Fairy Tales: the title page from *Jack and Jill* and a plate from *Trystie's Quest*.

## MacDonald's Works on the Internet

Those who have read Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* will recall the ending of the story where the survivors of a nuclear war become those books of which copies have survived the universal destruction. Each survivor commits a book to memory, line by line and chapter by

chapter; undertaking to transmit it, when the time comes, to some younger person who in turn will become the book. The present situation is not as dire as this, but enormous changes are likely to accompany the millennium, so it is well that as many people as possible become aware of the value of MacDonald's writings and anxious that they should survive. To this end the Johannesens are gradually putting the whole of their edition of MacDonald's works onto the internet. Various MacDonald titles are already available on scattered sites, usually where private individuals have transcribed them as a labour of love, but this is a new venture for a publisher. It may have a negative effect upon the sales of Johannesen's books in the immediate future. But I hope they will not mind us stating bluntly that they are doing it for the sake of mankind.

All MacDonald's works are, of course, still available in the Johannesens' high-quality, low-priced edition from any good bookseller. Or they can be ordered direct from the Johannesens at PO Box 24, Whitethorn CA 95589 in North America and from Rachel Johnson, 61 Longdales Rd. LINCOLN LN2 2JS in Europe.

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### **News from the web-sites**

We would like to carry a regular feature on the MacDonald and related web sites in every issue. Are there any members who enjoy surfing the net with a purpose in mind (if this is not a self-contradiction? I am not sufficiently familiar with the jargon to know!) If anyone feels they could condense their MacDonald browsings into two or three pages of informative and entertaining material for each quarterly issue of Orts, we would be delighted to hear from them. Mike Partridge already lets us have his e-mail newsletter, so there is no need to cover that.

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, a great part of the MacDonald material consists of transcriptions of his stories, and that again does not require comment. Nor is there really any need for us to quote the prospectuses of colleges who include MacDonald in their English courses, nor the many sites with genealogical material. Readers with these types of specialised interests will look up such material for themselves. And, of course, we certainly do not want any commentary upon the large quantity of material referring to the deplorable *Flashman* books of George MacDonald (Fraser). Different search programmes yield astonishingly different selections. The firm which provides access for your computer to the web may not offer any search programmes which are really suitable to your specific needs. Moreover one often finds that even when allusions to interesting sites are located by a search programme the provider has never provided access to these particular sites.

For the beginner, search is tedious and not very rewarding, although an occasional important item turns up. For example, this week I found an announcement from the Aberdeenshire Libraries Information Service stating that all the original MacDonald manuscripts housed in the Brander Library at Huntly are now available from them on microfilm.

Most of the encyclopaedia-type pages alluding to MacDonald seem to be both elementary and out of date. The page reproduced below is a good example of one of the better information pages available, although its use of obscure jargon is wholly unnecessary.

*Phantastes*-Literary Relations

<http://mirrors.org/victorian/gm/phan1>

### ***Phantastes*—Literary Relations**

George P. Landow, Professor of English and Art History

*Phantastes*, a rich and allusive work, situates itself within a field of literary relations by means of the epigraphs at the head of each chapter. They show that MacDonald wished to emphasize his work's relations to the English and Germany Romantics (whom Carlyle had introduced to Great Britain) as well as to Renaissance poets. In addition, throughout the text alludes to both fairy-tale lore and to the medieval romance, whose plot and structure of repeated tests *Phantastes* employs.

In addition, MacDonald's work, like those by Ruskin and Carroll, creates the genre of Victorian fantasy in implicit opposition to the dominant mode—realism. Finally, he was the direct R. R. Tolkien, and more recent writers, such as Michael King, whose *Lorien Lost*, according to the author, "is told in the style and spirit of nineteenth-century fantasist writers such as MacDonald."

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