

# Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

---

Volume 74

Article 1

---

2013

## Orts 74, 2013

The George MacDonald Society

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/orts>

 Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

The George MacDonald Society (2013) "Orts 74, 2013," *Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter*: Vol. 74, Article 1.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/orts/vol74/iss1/1>

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College. For more information, please contact [sarah.titus@snc.edu](mailto:sarah.titus@snc.edu).

# ORTS

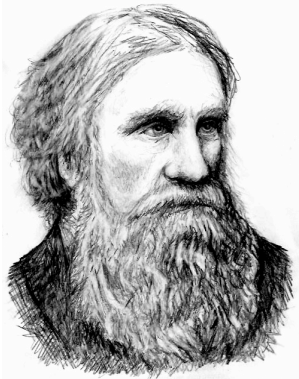
THE GEORGE MACDONALD SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NO. 74, AUTUMN 2013

---



**TRUST THE OAK**, BY CHRISTI WILLIAMS (VISIONS OF HOPE & FEAR, [HTTP://WWW.CHRISTIWILLIAMSART.COM/](http://www.christiwilliamsart.com/))



## CONTENTS

2014 Oxford Conference	2
Two Studies in Allegory	2
Three New Books	3
<i>Through the Year with George MacDonald</i> (Review)	3
Report from the Membership Secretary Mike Partridge	5
Subverting Laughter: Digital Storytelling and MacDonald	6
Q&A with Olga Lukmanova	8
About Orts	13

**Cover:** “Trust the Oak” is an illustration of *Phantastes* by Christi Williams, a Texan artist whose work appears on her website, [VISIONS OF HOPE & FEAR](http://www.christiwilliamsart.com). A philosophy professor who specializes in Kierkegaard, Dr. Williams founded the philosophy department at Houston Baptist University, and now teaches Logic at Trinity Classical School. <http://www.christiwilliamsart.com>.

## NEWS

### 2014 Oxford Conference

The George MacDonald Society will be hosting a conference from lunchtime Wednesday 13 August to Friday 15 August 2014 at C.S. Lewis' own College, Magdalen, in Oxford. The provisional title is *Re-Imagining the Inklings: the Victorian Roots of Modern Fantasy*, and will be chaired by Professor Stephen Prickett our Chairman.

More information and details of speakers will be made available later in the year but do get those dates in your diary now. This is an ideal opportunity for you to combine a stimulating conference, where George MacDonald is a key focus, with a visit to the historic city of Oxford and the United Kingdom.

It would be helpful for us to be able to gauge the number of people thinking of attending, so if you would like to provisionally book a place or register an interest, please contact us ([macdonaldsociety@gmail.com](mailto:macdonaldsociety@gmail.com)) and we will add you to our mailing list so that we can update you when fuller details become available.

MIKE PARTRIDGE

### Two Studies in Allegory

From Canada's University of Saskatchewan, John Parsons writes to inform the Society that two publications of his late mother, Dr. Margaret R. Parsons, are now available electronically. In “Toward an Understanding of George MacDonald” (1978), Dr. Parsons investigates the allegorical dimension of his work in light of literary critic Angus Fletcher's concept of symbolic signposting. Furthering this exploration of allegory, Parson's “Time and Tide: a study of the poetry of George MacDonald” (1985) provides a lengthier consideration of the themes of death, time, and unresolved spiritual questioning in twelve of MacDonald's poems. Both documents are available online through the University of Saskatchewan's website.

<http://ecommons.usask.ca/handle/10388/etd-11302011092939>

<http://ecommons.usask.ca/handle/10388/etd-12192011-080922>

### Three New Books

2013 has brought MacDonald enthusiasts a number of new scholarly works to enjoy.

1. From Gisela Kreglinger, a graduate of St Andrews' Institute for Theology, Imagination, and the Arts, comes **Storied Revelations: Parables, Imagination, and George MacDonald's Christian Fiction** (Wipf and Stock, Pickwick Publications). Kreglinger shows how MacDonald turned to storytelling, especially parables, to convey the profound truths of Christianity. She reveals how the surprising and even disturbing elements of his imaginative tales worked to jolt and reignite faith in Victorian audiences grown dull to religious commonplaces. The book opens with a foreword by Eugene H. Peterson, the poet, scholar, and author of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*.

2. Daniel Gabelman has produced a work examining the whimsy and humour in MacDonald. **Divine Carelessness and Fairytale Levity** (Baylor UP) calls for a reappraisal of the author. In response to stereotypical portrayals of MacDonald as a straightlaced Victorian moralist, Gabelman argues for a more balanced vision, one that takes into account MacDonald's masterful union of playfulness and spiritual solemnity, a bridging that forms the "vital paradox" at the heart of his work. This book is part of Baylor University's series "The Making of the Christian Imagination," and features an introduction by former archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. Gabelman, a graduate of St Andrews, teaches literature at Eastbourne College in East Sussex.

### 3. **Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries**

(Association for Scottish Literary Studies) is the published proceedings of the 2011 St

Andrews conference. Edited by Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle, the collection opens with Stephen Prickett's discussion of the idea of tradition in MacDonald, and concludes with David Robb's exploration of Victorian perceptions of Scottish literary piety. In between, the book features essays by fourteen more scholars on topics ranging from belief and scepticism, social reform and gender, to ideals and nightmares, and Scottish identity.

J. KOOPMAN

### **Through the Year with George MacDonald: 366 Daily Readings**

**Edited by Rolland Hein (Winged Lion Press, 2012).**

#### **Review by Bethany Bear**

In his Introduction to *Through the Year with George MacDonald*, Hein outlines two goals: "first to provide a handy tool for furthering knowledge of [MacDonald's] thinking and his character, and, second, to offer a devotional calendar for people who may desire a guide for daily meditation." Hein has drawn most of the passages in this new anthology from MacDonald's religious non-fiction, including the *Unspoken Sermons*, *The Hope of the Gospel*, and *Miracles*, as well as his personal correspondence. Only a few of the daily readings feature MacDonald's novels, poetry, or the fantasy works. While Hein admits that he omits much of MacDonald's most artful writing, he maintains that the sermons and letters fit best with the goals of his anthology.

It is as a devotional work that *Through the Year* best fulfills Hein's hopes. The primary features of Hein's collection encourage readers to consider the spiritual implications of MacDonald's work. For example, after each daily reading, Hein

includes Scripture references, which are “intended to suggest how thoroughly MacDonald’s thought is in harmony with the spirit of the biblical text.” Hein’s claim here is both promising and bold. MacDonald’s hermeneutic, while thoughtful and often deeply moving, is rarely conventional. Consequently, readers will surely find that the suggested cross references inspire fruitful reflection on MacDonald’s handling of the Bible and of Christian tradition.

For students and scholars, the anthology offers more modest gains. Hein does include several letters, previously unpublished, from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale. Most of these letters are notes of condolence to various friends and relatives, and a few include promising insights into MacDonald’s life and faith. One, written in 1894, provides MacDonald’s reflections on old age, as well as a striking statement on the relationship between the individual Christian and the history of the Church. Here, MacDonald writes, “It seems to me that the antidote to party spirit is church history, and when the antidote itself has made you miserably ill, the cure is the gospel pure and simple—the story and words of Jesus” (November 11).

Unfortunately, these new pieces are few in comparison to the other selections and previously-published letters. This is not necessarily Hein’s fault, of course; MacDonald is remarkably consistent (some would say, repetitive) in his primary themes and concerns. What might have been improved however, is the apparatus of the book. Scholarly readers may find the book’s apparatus inconvenient, as none of the selections have very exact citations. This is particularly frustrating with the unpublished letters, which are not readily accessible elsewhere. While bibliographic information

might clutter a devotional entry, it could be helpfully collated in footnotes or an appendix. The current appendices—which provide listings of Hein’s titles for each daily entry, the supplemental Scripture passages by date, and also an alphabetical listing of these Scripture passages—are not particularly helpful when seeking to locate a particular passage. The book’s lack of page numbers also complicates citations for those who might wish to quote the new letters Hein has collected.

Hein’s explicitly devotional aims set *Through the Year* apart from most other publications on MacDonald, although similar volumes have appeared before. The nearest comparison comes from Canon Gordon Reid’s out-of-print volume, *The Wind from the Stars: Through the Year with George MacDonald* (London: HarperCollins, 1992). Reid’s daily selections are more varied than Hein’s, giving a more comprehensive picture of MacDonald’s work, while Hein offers more extensive passages, some spanning several days. Thus, Hein provides a better sense of context than Reid’s more epigraphic excerpts. Also worth noting is David L. Neuhouser’s *George MacDonald: Selections from His Greatest Works* (Whitehorn, CA: Johannesen, 1997). Neuhouser arranges his selections according to themes in MacDonald’s work (nature, faith, obedience, etc.). Some readers may prefer such an arrangement for its cogency and navigability.

Douglas Gresham, in the volume’s foreword, offers the most sensible praise of *Through the Year*, which is that it may “whet [the] appetite” of readers new to MacDonald. As for Hein’s own goals, as a devotional work, *Through the Year* offers some thoughtful aids to reflection. Reading through this volume, one feels as though she has received a long letter from Hein, in

which he annotates some of his favorite passages from a beloved author. Thus, while the anthology is less systematic than a scholar might prefer, it certainly carries the

earnest, reverent, and curious spirit of MacDonald himself.

BETHANY BEAR  
UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE, ALABAMA

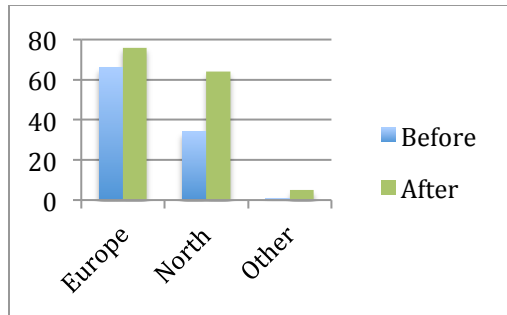
### Report from the Membership Secretary Mike Partridge

At the beginning of 2013 I took over from Roger Bardet (who continues to serve the Society as both Secretary and Treasurer) as Membership Secretary. My first priority was to seek to increase the membership of the Society, which had been relatively static for a number of years. I am now able to provide an update on the current position following our recent online promotion in advance of the latest edition of North Wind. The table below shows the change that has occurred between March 2013 and the 10th June this year excluding any University/Library subscriptions.

#### Individuals

Country	Before	After	% Change
Australia	0	1	New
Canada	3	6	100%
Czech Republic	1	1	0%
France	1	1	0%
Germany	5	5	0%
Hong Kong	0	1	New
Hungary	0	1	New
Ireland	1	3	200%
Italy	1	2	100%
Japan	1	2	100%
New Zealand	0	1	New
Sweden	2	2	0%
United Kingdom	55	61	11%
USA	31	58	87%
	101	145	44%

Region	Before	After	% Change
Europe	66	76	15%
North America	34	64	88%
Other	1	5	400%
	101	145	44%



Clearly the option of subscribing using PayPal via our revamped web site has been a key factor in this growth due to the ease of use and accessibility. It also avoids the problems we had experienced previously with currency conversion although PayPal do still take a fee (currently \$0.81 on each \$15 subscription).

The growth area has been USA but we also now have members for the first time in Australia, Hong Kong, Hungary and New Zealand. This emphasises the broad geographical spread of our membership.

What are the implications of this for the future activities of the Society? I believe we will soon be reaching the point where the combined membership for USA/ Canada will match or exceed Europe as a whole, although our members there will be spread over an even larger area, which limits the potential for face-to-face meetings.

In addition to the planned conference in Oxford in the Autumn 2014 perhaps we

should be considering some form of activity in North America next year as well. This will be very much dependent on our North American members taking the initiative though.

The other growth area for the society has been our Facebook Group, which now has 1,192 subscribers with more being added each week. In addition to being a lively and welcoming forum this directly benefits the Society in terms of prospective members, personal interaction and the potential for publicity. Effective use of the internet (our new web site/ Facebook group/ Wingfold email list) is seen as key for the future health of the Society.

I think we can honestly say that we have reversed the negative trend that has afflicted other similar societies, due to aging memberships, etc. in recent years. The challenge now will be to build on this, particularly in 2014, but we have made a promising start and can be encouraged at the progress we have already made.

Finally, please ensure that, if your mailing or email address changes, you keep us informed. To keep costs down, contact with the Society is increasingly electronic and we would hate to lose touch with you.

MIKE PARTRIDGE

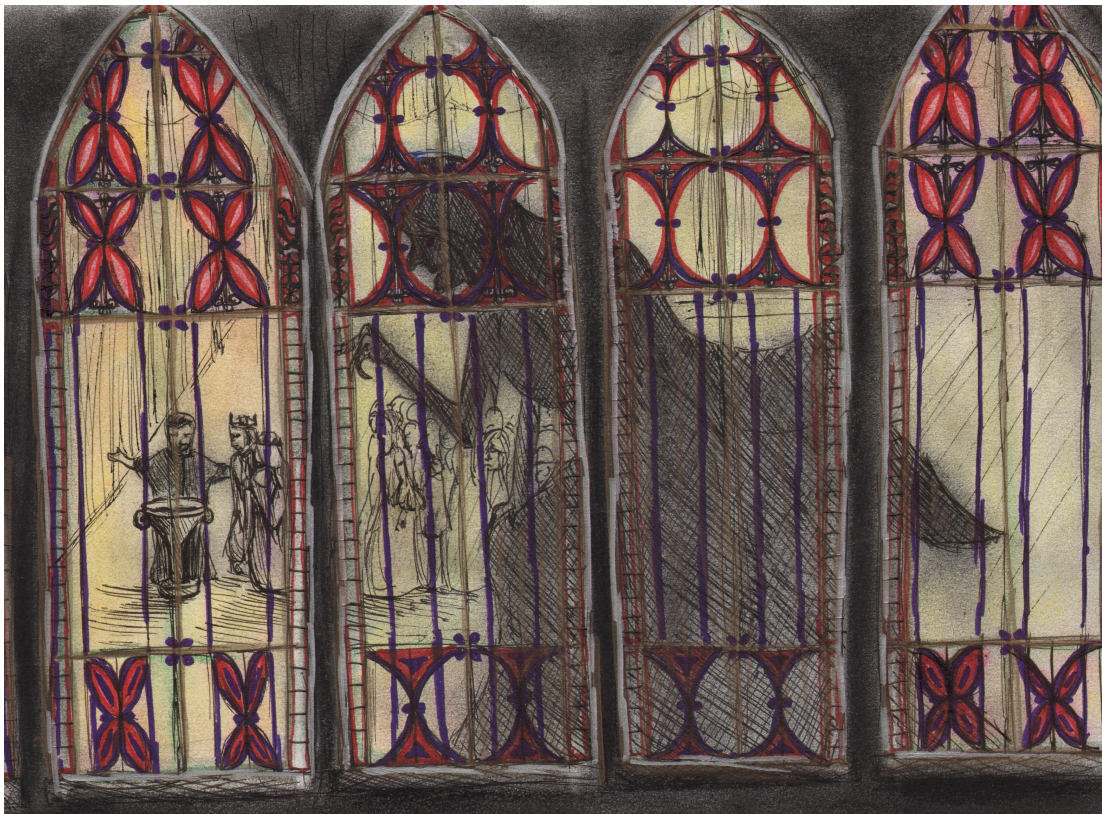
## ***Subverting Laughter: Digital Storytelling and MacDonald***

This year saw the launching of a digital storytelling project focusing on MacDonald's work. *Subverting Laughter*, a wordpress website located at <http://subvertinglaughter.wordpress.com/> is the brainchild of Christine Chettle, a doctoral candidate at the University of Leeds. The first phase of the project, which launched in March 2013, involves a collaborative, mixed-media approach to telling the story

of "The Light Princess" over the course of several months. Its goal, as Chettle explains, is "to inspire new discussions of the tale in an online space, allowing a wide range of audiences to engage with MacDonald's Victorian text." One post is dedicated to each chapter of "The Light Princess," with contributors from around the world providing written commentary, including such names as George Bodmer, Roderick

McGillis, Jan Susina, and William Gray. Each post is accompanied by a link to an audio recording of MacDonald's original text, as

well as a visual image by artist Christi Williams (whose work also graces the cover of this issue of *Orts*).



“Won’t I, Just”: Christi Williams’ illustration for Chapter 2 of “The Light Princess”

Since discussion of the final chapter of “The Light Princess” wrapped up in October, *Subverting Laughter* has begun a six-month musical series. Entitled *Re-Awakening: MacDonald and Music* (<http://subvertinglaughter.wordpress.com/re-awakenings-macdonald-and-music/>), this phase of the project features the work of American and British artists as it explores how musical interpretations of MacDonald's texts enhance our appreciation of his work.

A third and more ambitious phase is also in the works, as Chettle is currently coordinating a larger project based on *Adela Cathcart*. MacDonald's 1864 novel—in

which “The Light Princess” also appears—is a frame story that promotes storytelling as a cure for the protagonist's spiritual and physical malaise. Chettle's digital project will explore, as she describes it, “how MacDonald's representation of storytelling as a transformative partnership between medical science and the fantastic imagination might translate to a modern online space.” Readers interested in participating in this upcoming digital initiative are invited to contact Ms. Chettle via email at [c\\_chettle@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:c_chettle@yahoo.co.uk) or [en08cc@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:en08cc@leeds.ac.uk)

J. KOOPMAN



## Orts Q&A with Olga Lukmanova

*Olga Lukmanova is a scholar and translator of MacDonald's works who lives in Russia, where she teaches English at the Linguistic University of Nizhny Novgorod. In 2012 she published the first ever Russian monograph on MacDonald, entitled **Biblical Images, Symbols, and Motifs in George MacDonald's Fairy Tales**. Unfortunately for English readers, the book exists only in Russian. Happily, however, Lukmanova generously stepped to the plate to discuss her work with Orts.*

### **In your opinion, what is the primary appeal of MacDonald's work?**

My first encounter with MacDonald (I first read some of his Scottish novels in 1995 or 1996) astounded me with the sheer, almost delicious goodness of the God that I saw there – not some sort of theoretical, abstract goodness, a mere notion to assent to, but the goodness I could almost smell, taste, and touch. To this day the principal appeal of MacDonald's work, for me, lies in his ability to imagine and portray the good. His stories constantly defy the popular notion that goodness is bland and boring, and show it as the most beautiful, vibrant, powerful and invigorating thing imaginable, the only real reality, which we, in our own unreality, can't or won't recognize. Also, the accuracy and subtlety MacDonald's spiritual insights, and the idea of fair play that he keeps returning to, never fail to leave me refreshed and comforted. His books leave you changed, and changed for the better – that's their true mythopoetical power.

### **Your book investigates Biblical images, symbols, and motifs.**

#### **Describe your approach.**

In many ways, my book, as well as my Ph.D. thesis, had to be very introductory, since there are simply no books about George MacDonald available in Russian, and what information there is in articles and book prefaces (most of them popular and not scholarly) is not always accurate and

sometimes can be misleading. I focused entirely on the fairy tales, excluding *Phantastes* and *Lilith* as a more mixed genre, and my research was largely based on the work of Vladimir Propp, a renowned Russian scholar, whose classic studies form an important theoretical foundation for all fairy tale studies in the Russian literary scholarship – which, incidentally, is very exacting: it lays a strong emphasis on well-formulated theory, based on thorough empirical research, and demands close reading of texts and precise genre definitions (the idea being that form and content are organically whole, and genre definitions necessarily have to reflect form, content and function). In his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), Vladimir Propp sought to give a sound and precise definition of “the magic fairy tale” (or “the wonder tale” in some translations), based on an empirical study of Russian folktales, which revealed amazing uniformity of magic tales' structure, given the wide variety of plots, motifs and characters, and enabled Propp to identify a set number of “fairy tale functions” (including thirty-one “plot functions” and seven “character functions”) and to describe the specific genre of “the magic (or mythical) fairy tale.”

Propp's further analysis is limited to this specific kind of folk tale – “the magic tale” – and is especially pertinent to MacDonald's fairy tales, because, in my opinion, it helps us uncover the “mechanism” of

MacDonald's mythmaking. Vladimir Propp also calls this type of fairy tale "mythical" because of its historical origins. In his later book, *The Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale* (1946), he provides a historical analysis of magic tales and shows that the magic tale originated in ritual, especially initiation and funeral rites, and is, therefore, firmly rooted in myths surrounding these rituals. Fairy tales are shown to be "remnants" of myths, with all conscious ritual long gone, but the basic plot and narrative elements of the Principal Myth still lingering in their form and structure. If you look at the basic structure of Propp's classic mythical fairy tale (in a grossly simplified form, it is this: the initial setting – something goes wrong – the hero departs seeking to right the wrong – the hero encounters the Giver (Donor) which results in his magical transformation and empowerment – battle and victory over evil – wedding celebration), you can't help noticing that it reflects the mythical story of the world, with its awareness of the reality of the supernatural, of the tragedy of sin, and of the need for man to make a transformative journey into "the Other World" (through death and rebirth) in order to experience victory and final completion, consummation of his humanness. The two consecutive connections – that of myth with reality and that of the fairy tale with myth – seem to be what makes fairy tales so powerful and lasting in the collective human memory and culture, and it is the presence (or masterful usage) of mythical touch points in fairy tales that gives the latter their poignancy.

Even though in MacDonald's stories the basic structure of the classic magic fairy tale is greatly complicated by rearrangements of the fairy tale functions, plot twists, and theological and educational interpolations, most of them fit very well into the classic

description of a mythical fairy tale (in fact, most novels by MacDonald follow the same narrative structure, confirming G. K. Chesterton's insight about their essential fairy tale nature). Once you see this structure, identify the principal functions, and look at them in the light of Vladimir Propp's discoveries, made in conjunction with their historical, mythical origins and described in *The Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale*, it becomes very obvious that, in many respects, MacDonald takes the magic fairy tale back to its roots, not only restoring its initial mythical content but also deepening and refining this content, bringing it up to the level of what he believes to be the True Myth: the Judeo-Christian story as the objective reality that is the foundation and starting point of all myths.

To give an example of how this works (unfortunately, *The Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale* has not been translated into English, so I can't simply refer English-speaking readers to Propp's conclusions), one of the central magic tale characters is the Donor who gives the Hero a magic Agent or Helper, thus predetermining the further development and ending of the story. According to Vladimir Propp, the classic form of the Donor in folktales is Yaga (or Baba Yaga, a witch-like character in Slavic folklore) who is a reflection of death and initiation rituals, where man dies and comes down to the chthonic world. Analyzing different types of Yaga and bringing in myths from many parts of the world, Propp finally presents the image of an unmarried old woman who is mistress of all, a universal mother with unlimited powers not only over animals but also over people's life and death, and who serves as a guardian of the entrance to "the faraway kingdom" (the Other World, the world of the dead) from the living (or uninitiated),

thus being a personification of initiation rituals. All this certainly brings to mind the many maternal figures in MacDonald's fairy tales and opens up many possible avenues for further reflection and analysis. The Old Princess Irene of the *Curdie* stories, for instance, combines most of these characteristics, and in the second book she is more obviously the central omniscient character, who is behind all events and initiates many of them, has authority over the main characters and their helpers, extending far beyond their earthly life. If we identify this figure with the Yaga Donor from magic folk tales, in this one character there immediately emerge at least three important and interrelated themes, central to the whole of MacDonald's creative work: 1) death as transformative entrance into more life; 2) believing (or coming to faith) as initiation (always through death) into the Other World; and 3) the nature of God as someone wholly good and loving, maternal and paternal all at once, intimately and purposefully involved in the life of all His creatures.

***What other motifs tend to recur, and how does he use them?***

Another excellent instance of MacDonald's mythopoeic genius is staircases and forests, which certainly abound in his fairy tales, romances and novels. In classic fairy tales, both invariably function as pathways to the Other World (again, through transformative initiation which is death) – and it's intriguing to see how they are used in MacDonald's work. I could cite many more examples – the spinning wheel, songs and colors, beasts and their transformations, food and eating – honestly, sometimes it feels almost like MacDonald read Propp's work and used all the classic fairy tale functions in all the right places and meanings. Often MacDonald's

intuitions and usage of these fairy tale functions are quite subtle and very sophisticated. For example, in the *Curdie* stories MacDonald comes very close to the initial, mythical meaning and purpose of giving the magic Agent to the Hero (in every classic fairy tale the Donor equips the Hero with a magic Agent after the Hero goes through a number of trials). At first sight it may seem that both stories deal with a mere testing of the Hero's virtue (the Little Princess is asked to visit the Old Princess a week later, despite all doubts and others' adverse opinions; Curdie is asked not to acquiesce to people's idle gossip and is later ordered to put his hands into the fire of roses). However, according to Vladimir Propp, the essence of the Hero's heroism is that he has been initiated, and the Donor (who guards the world of the dead from strangers, from those who have not yet died) tests not so much his virtue as his magic power (as the fruit of this initiation), his right to be in the Other World and ability to function there. Thus, by testing the faith of both the Little Princess and Curdie, the Old Princess tests not how virtuous they are, but whether they have been initiated into the Other World, again opening up a whole new level of theological subtlety.

So, on the one hand, MacDonald makes very powerful use of myth, and the classic magic fairy tale, with its essentially myth-based structure, proves to be the perfect vehicle for his purposes. On the other hand, he clearly relies on his contemporaries' familiarity with Biblical texts and stories, all the while seeking to redeem and refresh this often trite familiarity by, in the words of Sergei Askol'dov, another Russian philosopher and literary scholar, "sprinkling dead words with the living water of poetry." Here it seems MacDonald does

two things: firstly, by using familiar Biblical language, he “sets the stage,” defines his story in certain terms, places it within a certain paradigm of interpretation (although, of course, he would have been the first to allow multiple interpretations, judging by what he says in “The Fantastic Imagination”). His usage of instantly recognizable Old Testament prophetic language in *The Princess and Curdie* allows readers to see the story in those terms and draw parallels, for instance, with the Book of Judges – and this, in its turn, certainly throws a very different light on the ending, which many have called gloomy and hopeless, but which, in fact, seems to indicate something very different from disappointment and despair. By the same token, “The Carasoy” (where the fairies are called the Good People who “sat down and wept” when they were banished) can be seen as an imaginative retelling of the story of God’s chosen people – et cetera. Secondly, MacDonald frequently takes a familiar notion or phrase, dull with religious overuse, and fleshes it out into a compelling image: for instance, “the beauty of holiness” becomes a sanctifying fire of roses, and one would be hard taxed to even enumerate all the imaginative embodiments MacDonald gives to faith, obedience, guidance and provision. He also weaves biblical notions and imagery into his fairy tales and thus revives and enriches their original meaning, simply by taking them out of the habitual religious (and, at that time, often purely intellectual, speculative) context into an imaginative narrative, enabling his readers to connect with them on an entirely different, transformative level. One could think, for example, of all the water images, biblically connected with baptism (which is also death and birth) and the Holy Spirit, of

the rainbow, of redemptive sacrifice, sanctification, etc.

### **You’ve also translated several works of his into Russian.**

As of today, I have translated *Phantastes*, *Lilith*, *Sir Gibbie*, *Donal Grant*, *Thomas Wingfold*, two fairy tales, “Cross Purposes” and “The Shadows,” that have never been translated before, and two essays: “Imagination: Its Functions and Culture” and “The Fantastic Imagination.” I also have my own translations of “The Giant’s Heart” and *The Golden Key*.

### **Any favorites?**

It’s hard to name just one or two, there are too many. The books I most often return to are the *Curdie* books, *The Wise Woman* (some of my favorite quotes are from there), *Thomas Wingfold*, *Paul Faber* and *Robert Falconer*. It’s hard not to love the books that you’ve translated, so I love all those very dearly. I have been speaking mainly of MacDonald’s works of fiction, but his *Unspoken Sermons*, *Miracles of Our Lord*, and other theological and literary studies have had a great impact on me as well. There exists an amateurish Russian translation of *Unspoken Sermons*, *Miracles of Our Lord* and *Hope of the Gospel* (done by another MacDonald enthusiast a few years back), but it needs serious reworking to bring out all the discerning richness of MacDonald’s thought.

### **How well does MacDonald translate to a Russian context?**

In my opinion, MacDonald translates very well into Russian, and Russian readers respond very warmly to the poetic tone, humor, and whimsical imagery of his stories. There seems to be a natural congeniality between the Russian and the Celtic temperament in their shared love of nature (and seeing in it so much more than merely natural objects, however beautiful or plain),

their passionate love of poetry, a certain sweet sentimentality and a yearning for something inexpressible, elusive but all-important. Many of my students have told me how much they loved reading *Phantastes*, in all its refreshing strangeness, open-endedness and baffling charm. We Russians are highly romantic; we enjoy complex symbolism, multiplicity of interpretations, and fanciful imagery, so MacDonald is really right up our alley – when and if translated right.

### **What sort of challenges did you encounter?**

For me, the main challenges in translating MacDonald (aside from challenges common to any translation of imaginative fiction) have been in translating the many poems and songs that he writes and quotes. Even identifying and translating the epigraphs in *Phantastes* was an education in itself – I do not think I could have done it without access to the Internet, especially with the limited English language resources available in Russian libraries. Another challenge has been translating Scots in MacDonald's Scottish novels: not so much understanding it (one gets the hang of it fairly quickly), as rendering its lovely rough poetic quality in Russian.

### **Is he much read in Russia?**

In general, MacDonald remains relatively unknown to wider Russian audiences, although his fairy tales are available in mainstream bookstores, and there are small but faithful groups of MacDonald enthusiasts on various Russian social network sites (like [FantLab](#), a well-known website for lovers of fantasy, sci-fi, and other imaginative fiction). Those who read and love MacDonald clamor to see more of his work translated into Russian. Ideally I would like to translate at least *Paul Faber*, *Robert Falconer*, *What's Mine is Mine* and the

*Malcolm* novels, because they all have meant so much to me, and I know my compatriots would really appreciate them. *The Diary of an Old Soul* would be an enormous challenge, but certainly a very worthwhile effort. Of course, translation is time-consuming, but the problem with continuing the work is not even so much the lack of time (although there is that too), as lack of money for publication. I have *Paul Faber* begun, but it's hard to go on, when even *Thomas Wingfold* (which was done about five years ago) has still not been published for lack of funds. I have made all my translations of MacDonald available online, free of charge, and it is lovely to see different people quote them on social networks. Recently, to my great surprise and joy, I discovered that *Donal Grant* has been made into an audiobook (very well read, too!) and, along with MacDonald's other stories as e-books, made available on [Predanie](#), a major resource website run by Russian Orthodox Church. Still, if there is anyone out there who is willing to invest into translating and publishing George MacDonald in Russian, do please give me a shout.

### **Any particular books that you would wish to translate?**

It would also be great to re-translate the *Curdie* books and *North Wind*: not that they have been done very poorly, but they definitely could be done better, with more awareness of and consideration for MacDonald's own creative philosophy, personal symbolism, the many literary references he employs, and all the mythical and biblical motifs that I spoke of before. My very exacting editor (Sergei Polikin of [Agape Publishing](#)) tells me that, ideally, all MacDonald's fairy tales need to be done again, because, even though there are some very good translations of *The Light Princess*,

“The Wise Woman,” “Photogen and Nycteris,” “they [the other translators] just don’t get the deepest level, that elusive but defining quality that is central to MacDonald” – must be that “red spot” that MacDonald himself talked about. This is very flattering, but certainly leaves one with plenty to do. I also believe that, in order to translate MacDonald well, one should never underestimate the complexity of his work or gloss over some of the less transparent images and ideas (as has been the case in some instances). With all this in mind, I am going to try and write a good Russian biography of George MacDonald, putting him on the literary map here in Russia, correcting some of the existing misconceptions about him, and bringing what I can glean from English language resources to the Russian audiences.

***What do you like to read when you are not reading MacDonald?***

To quote Lord Peter Wimsey (one of my absolute favorites in all fiction), “my

tastes are fairly catholic,” but all-time favorites – the “masters” that I have stuck to over the last 15-20 years or so – include C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, and Charles Williams. I would mention Russian authors, but they may not be meaningful to an English-speaking audience: our literature is much, much wider than the fairly standard combination of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Solzhenitsyn, with some Chekhov thrown in for good measure, which is familiar to most readers in the West. Again, I am mainly thinking of fiction; otherwise I would mention authors like Evelyn Underhill, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Alexander Bloom (Metropolitan Antony of Sourozh). I also really enjoy reading history: I loved *Guests of the Ayatollah* by Mark Bowden and *Team of Rivals* by Doris Goodwin, and the next book on my list (after I finish re-reading MacDonald’s *Alec Forbes*) is about the Kennedys.

J. KOOPMAN

## ABOUT ORTS

The word **orts** means scraps, or fragments of food left after a meal. The newsletter *Orts* depends upon contributions from its readers, so please send your morsels this way. *Orts* welcomes submissions: if you wish to share artwork, an article, notice, news, or comments pertaining to MacDonald, or if you’d like to be featured in an article or interview, please contact the *Orts* editor, **Dr. Jennifer Koopman**, at [ortseditor@gmail.com](mailto:ortseditor@gmail.com), or the GMS chairman, **Richard Lines**, at **38 South Vale, Upper Norwood, London, SE19 3BA**, [r.lines878@btinternet.com](mailto:r.lines878@btinternet.com).

[www.george-macdonald.com](http://www.george-macdonald.com). Registered U.K. Charity No. 1024021.