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The George MacDonald Society

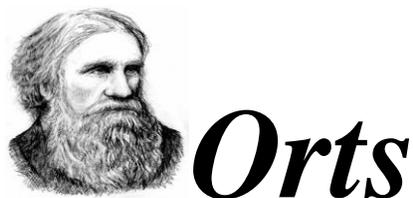
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The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 55, Spring 2000

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR SIR HUGH AND LADY CASSON
Report by Richard Lines

In my capacity as Chairman of the Society I attended the service of thanksgiving for the life and work of Sir Hugh Casson CH KCVO and his wife Lady Casson at St Paul's Cathedral on Monday 29th November 1999. Sir Hugh, the famous architect and artist and former President of the Royal Academy, was a Vice-President of the George MacDonald Society, as was his wife. Lady Casson nee Margaret (Reta) MacDonald Troup, a great-niece of George MacDonald and younger sister of our founder member and long-standing Committee Member Winifred (Freda) Levson, died just two weeks before the date arranged for her husband's memorial service. In the event it became a joint one.

The service was a grand public occasion attended by Princess Margaret, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and dignitaries representing the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, the Queen Mother and the Prince of Wales. There was a huge congregation drawn from 'the great and the good'. Yet the service was warm and personal, and very moving. The prayers were led by Lord Runcie, a keen reader of George MacDonald. There were appreciations by Sir Philip Dowson, President of the Royal Academy, and by the historian and broadcaster, John Julius Norwich. The Dean's address injected a thoughtful, spiritual note and John Casson (Sir Hugh's cousin and the son of Sir Lewis Casson and Dame Sybil Thorndike) read W.F. Henley's poem "Margarit Sorori" ("to Sister Margaret"). Sadly, John Casson himself died aged 90 shortly after Christmas. The obituary in *The Times* stated that this service at St Paul's was one of the last public occasions on which his magnificent speaking voice was heard.

The musical side of the service included well-known hymns, ending (appropriately enough) with the old Scottish hymn, "All people that on earth do dwell". After the blessing Emma Gane and Matthew Beale from the Royal College of Music sang an exquisite love duet from Monteverdi's "The Coronation of Poppea". This made a fitting end to a most moving occasion.

**TOP HONOUR FOR *NORTH WIND* EDITOR DAVID ROBB'S
DEPARTMENT IN *GUARDIAN* SURVEY**

By a remarkable coincidence, the 1999 AGM of the Society was hosted in Dundee by David Robb on the very day that the *Higher Education Supplement* of the *Guardian* newspaper published its survey of English departments in UK universities, with David's Dundee department heading the list! The article accompanying the 'league table' quotes from interviews with Dr. Robb:

**All human life is here:
English graduates emerge
with a profound knowledge of
what literature can do for
them, and be for them**

PHOTOGRAPH: BBC2'S ANIMATED
"BURBURY"

the relatively small size of the department means that academics are able to spend more time in one to one contact with the students. 'It affects the atmosphere of the place, and the kind of interaction we have with our students,' he says. 'We get to know them as individuals more quickly perhaps than elsewhere, and that makes the atmosphere more intimate.'

The Dundee department offers four-year degree courses concentrating exclusively on the study of English literature. 'We are focused on writers, we are focused on texts, we are focused on the history of English literature and literatures in English,' says Dr. Robb. In common with other Scottish universities, students only specialise in a subject at Dundee during the latter years of the degree. Freshers first enrol at Dundee into the faculty of arts and social studies. English literature is studied alongside two other subjects overseen by the faculty. It is only in the final two years of the MA course that students concentrate solely on English.

Spending over £6,700 for every student during the 1997-98 academic year, the department also boasts one of the highest spending per student levels amongst English academic departments.

According to Dr. Robb, English graduates go on to develop careers in a variety of different professions. They emerge he says 'as graduates all the better for having discovered so much more of what literature can do for them and be for them.'

	Teaching Quality Assessment	Value-added score (out of 10)	Spending per student (score out of 10)	Student-staff ratio (score out of 6)	Job prospects (score out of 6)	Average entry points (score out of 6)	Total score (out of 100)	% entering further study 1997/98	% entering paid employment 1997/98	Student numbers	Research (RAE)
Dundee	23	5	10	6	5	5	90	30	28	57	3a
Warwick	23	9.4	4	3	6	6	87.4	37.	37	1371	4
Nottingham	23	6.9	5	5	5	6	86.9	39	33	1130	4
Leeds	23	7.3	4	4	6	6	86.3	31	43	2475	5
OxfordBrookes	23	6.2	6	5	6	4	86.2	17	50	420	
Sussex	23	8.9	4	4	5			26	28	1025	
Cardiff	..		4		5			7	47	1525	

"GORDON 2000" - AUGUST 3rd-5th

This event, described in the last *Orts*, although in some ways resembling a grand county-show or state-fair, is unlike such events in not encouraging cultural bodies by offering space at reduced fees. Thus the Society, like the Library Service and similar bodies, has been driven to search for accommodation away from the main show- ground. However the Library Service has very kindly given us a stand in their Brander building in the town square, which in many ways will be far better for us, particularly if there is typical August weather for part of the event!

We will man our stand on a 2hr rota basis and, although we now have a core of volunteers, we would be grateful if any further visitors or local members can offer help for any period of two

hours from 10am to 6pm on one or more of the three days. **Please contact Vivienne Forrest, whose address is on the back cover, if you can help.**

Seth Johannesen expects to be in Huntly to open The Farm to visitors; Patrick Scott will lead MacDonald walks; and Ian Blakemore hopes to be selling MacDonald-related literature and rare editions of MacDonald's books

DAS IST DER SINN DES GANZEN UNSINNS

Eine Tagung in Oxford Uber MacDonald und Chesterton offenbart die Verbindung von Christentum und Imagination

This was the title of a full-page report by Elmar Schenkel on our Oxford Conference in the weekend arts-supplement *Feuilleton* of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* for October 9th 1999. His continental approach is refreshingly different from the more familiar Anglo-American one. The following translation is by Alan and Maren Stott.



Irene, die vierte Tochter George MacDonalds, fotografiert von Lewis Carroll, 1863.

IRENE MAC DONALD

The approaches adopted to deny one's own time are various. When people feel they do not belong to their own time they tend to associate with like-minded people. A person oriented towards literature looks towards some largely-neglected author who shows how to overcome one's own time. If these related aspirations come together a literary society may arise. A Scottish author who conspicuously transcended his times was George MacDonald (1824-1905), who wrote a succession of socially critical religious novels and also children's books and fairy tales. But his most important contribution to Victorian literature is probably his two adult fantasies: *Phantastes* (1858), acknowledged as a very early seminal work of fantasy literature, and *Lilith* (1895) in which space and time are systematically explored—a kind of neurological novel.

MacDonald may have been lost to a greater public, yet he has never completely disappeared out of the literary consciousness. His association of Christendom with Imagination especially

fascinated a group of Oxford writers who called themselves 'Inklings': C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield and others. Another Christian author, G.K. Chesterton, claimed that nothing had changed his life to such an extent as a children's book by MacDonald.

Consequently it was high time to research more in detail the relationship between the Victorian MacDonald and Chesterton who died in 1936. The Chesterton Society and the MacDonald Society held a small conference at Plater College in Oxford in order to investigate how far the imagination of the Scottish author can be found again in the Catholic convert Chesterton. The fantasy-specialist Colin Manlove (Edinburgh) insisted at first on the differences. Although both authors relate to the Middle Ages and pursue a sacramental vision, Chesterton exalts the individual and consequently stands in a British tradition stretching from Chaucer to Dickens. MacDonald on the other hand shows no interest in the individual character, but establishes his allegorical position in the battle between good and evil. He is oriented to the world beyond—eschatological to his roots. Transformation is the key in his conception of reality.

The principle of metamorphosis is certainly valid for the fantasy works. David Robb (Dundee) on the other hand, explored the background of Scottish literature behind MacDonald's non-fantastic novels. He repeatedly creates a specific Scotland—the Scotland of his childhood—and constantly transforms it, for example by the use of allegorical names, into a land steeped in allegory. Stephen Prickett (Glasgow) placed MacDonald's work in another context—that of European literature. As a translator of Novalis and reader of the Romantics, MacDonald was not merely conscious of the unity of inner and outer, of psyche and world. Prickett emphasised the role of books in *Lilith*, a meta-fictional element which generates mirror effects in the 'death-novel.' MacDonald knew all about the forth dimension, and also of time travel. Thus it is not surprising that Prickett's paper can already be read: it appeared in 1995 in the *Inklings Jarbuch*.

David Jasper (Glasgow) a specialist on the connections between literature and theology, took Chesterton's 'perverse' book on Francis of Assisi as the starting point for considering MacDonald as 'a St Francis of Aberdeen.' But whether post-modernist clichés, like the 'pure surface' which Jasper believes he can demonstrate in *Lilith* by analogy with some of Turner's paintings, contribute towards our understanding of MacDonald remains questionable. Such statements can ultimately be just as useless as the depth-metaphors of earlier literary criticism or the attempt by the catholic priest Robert Wild (Yorkshire) to denigrate Chesterton as a mystic.

Yet more revealing may be a rumoured anecdote about Chesterton told by Wild. Chesterton's wife Francis was once asked why her husband had joined the Catholic Church. 'The devil made him do it' was the answer. This may also be the reason why Chesterton's work, unlike MacDonald's, is not to be found in new-age bookshops. He had too sharp an eye for evil, and secured himself against this temptation with all the dogmas of the Church and a battery of unshakeable prejudices. The Chesterton Room recently installed at Plater College illustrates the aggressive tendencies of this otherwise friendly man. His drawings there are full of strokes and points and sadistic twists, bearing witness to the dangers he sensed from the demonic world. Amongst assorted memorabilia is a beer-mug recalling 'The Third Competition of the German Male-Voice Choirs, 1909.' In his autobiography Chesterton reports his visit that year to the beer-cellars of Frankfurt. Along with all the joviality there, he sensed the approaching storm.

The *genius loci* of the Conference was a friend of MacDonald, an author who also had to do with mirrors and meta-fictions in which abysses are reflected. John Docherty (Forest Row) led the participants on the trail of Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald through an Oxford seen as 'sacred landscape,' showing relationships between *Lilith*, *Through the Looking-Glass* and Botticelli's paintings. The climax was the wall on top of which the most intelligent egg in history had sat. Humpty Dumpty, explaining to the world the sense of the nonsense—at least that is a timeless occupation!

ONE-DAY MACDONALD SOCIETY MEETING AT BEDFORD
SAT. SEPT. 9th 2000

The details of this meeting are currently being finalised. Complete details will be published in the next *Orts*, but enquiries before then can be directed to Vivienne Forrest. The cost is expected to be £15, which will cover a full lunch and a two-hour coach tour visiting Bunyan sites in the neighbourhood. Bedford has excellent road and rail connections and the time schedule aimed for—10.30-for-11 am until 4pm—should enable most members in the Midlands and the South to attend this Meeting without an overnight stay. The Meeting is open to all people who are interested.

Rachel Johnson and Aidan McKay will speak about the importance of Bunyan to the MacDonalds. Echoes of Bunyan appear in many of MacDonald's works, as readers will doubtless have noticed. Equally importantly, Louisa MacDonald's dramatisation of Part II of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was the mainstay of the MacDonald Family Dramatic Troupe, whose performances largely financed their summer visits to England when they lived in Bordighera. Greville MacDonald arranged for this dramatisation to be published by the Oxford University Press in 1925.

NEW BOOKS

Rolland Hein, *The Harmony Within* (Revised Edition), Chicago: Cornerstone, 1999, p.b., \$12.95 U.S., \$17.95 Canada.

Rolland Rein's book, first published in 1982, is probably the best known of all the critical studies of MacDonald's writings. The 1982 edition has long been out of print, and the last we heard about Michael Phillips' Sunrise edition was that there were only a handful of copies left and he would not be reprinting. This new edition is therefore very welcome. Appearing under the imprint of such an enterprising publishing house as Cornerstone Press, it will bring MacDonald to the attention of many new readers. It is the most readable book to recommend to people asking for an introduction to the life and writings of MacDonald.

Rein's rewritten introduction is well-judged to appeal to new readers, taking up themes he has previously explored in *Christian Mythmakers* (1998), a work also published by Cornerstone. The changes in the rear-matter are even more extensive. A new seven-page "Glossary of Scottish Terms" is very welcome as it includes a high percentage of words which most people would be likely to misinterpret. Hein has also added a "Suggested Reading Plan" which names one novel, one fantasy and one sermon for each month of a year. This can be recommended unreservedly.

The bibliography is enormously extended by the inclusion of all the Johannesen reprints (now complete except for the Sidney anthology), but Cornerstone have somehow managed to leave out large chunks of the sub-list of "Secondary Sources" which in previous editions was a valuable resource as it included many entries not found in other bibliographies.

By contrast, in the main text of the book Hein has made only very minor changes to adapt it to the new introduction. These are insufficient to justify its purchase by anyone who already has a copy of one of the earlier editions. This is a pity, as it had been hoped that Hein would take advantage of a new edition to correct various errors.

The publishers' blurb on the back cover states that: 'This edition includes more biographical material,' but such material is not conspicuous. One can applaud their concern that this important book should reach as many new readers as possible. But the confidence of such readers will be diminished when they study it alongside the works to which it alludes and notice the mistakes. Michael Szuk's review of *Christian Mythmakers* in number 95 of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* drew attention to the unacceptable number of mistakes of similar type in that work. It is sad that, only a year later, Cornerstone Press's copy editor should allow similar mistakes to slip through in another book by Hein.

George MacDonald: *The Complete Fairy Tales*. Ed. U.C. Knoepfmacher. New York: Penguin, 1999. \$13.95. (London: publication due 24.2.2000 £7.99).

This is an excellent edition including all the shorter fairy tales plus "The Lost Princess." U.C. Knoepfmacher's notes are very helpful. Tell all your friends about it! It will probably be reviewed in the 1999 *North Wind*.

John Docherty

Colin Manlove. *The Fantasy Literature of England*. London: Macmillan 1999.

This book offers us an enormous amount of information in a volume of manageable size. While it is particularly useful as a reference or guide book, it is written as continuous text and is as pleasantly readable as the nature of the work allows.

Fantasy fiction has had a striking revival in recent years in England and America, especially in the department of Science Fiction. The author's main emphasis is upon fairly recent fantasy in the form of prose narratives. Fantasy in poetry and in drama is given more elective treatment and one wonders whether poetry and drama perhaps called for a separate book. In his chapter on origins, Dr Manlove begins by searching the very distant past for examples, before prose had developed at all. He includes the adventurous story of *Beowulf* (Old English period) and the religious poem *The Dream of the Rood*. We are given a sample of this poem in the original Old English, with a translation—the fantasy element presumably being that the cross of Christ speaks with a voice of its own.

In later years of our history some attention is given to the seventeenth century Metaphysical Poets—and in the same period we meet with the truly memorable and eccentric Duchess of Newcastle. (One of her poems is "The Pastimes and Recreations of the Queen of Fairies in

Fairyland.")

How will the book be used? The more serious kind of reader will find the index absolutely vital, as the classification provided is a little subjective and sometimes vague. For instance, how does one recognise Emotive Fantasy, and distinguish it from, say, Metaphysical Fantasy? Secondary World Fantasy has clear boundaries (the phrase needs a hyphen if used adjectivally). Juvenile Literature is found under Children's Fantasy, logically enough—but the humour of A.A. Milne's Pooh stories causes them to be placed under Comic Fantasy. There is a good deal of overlapping between different chapters.

It seems to me the distinctive note or mood of fantasy occurs where we find persons, scenes or incidents which are totally different from, or opposed to, the conditions which the average reader would call everyday and commonplace. So I feel that T.S. Eliot's play *The Cocktail Party*, with its appearance of realistic comedy, does not really belong to the book at all. Graham Green's novel *The End of the Affair* is also problematic, as the miracles involved might possibly not be miraculous. Occasionally Dr Manlove seems to use 'fantasy' as meaning nothing more specific than 'imagination,' as in discussing a single poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins.

In dealing with George MacDonald, Dr Manlove, a Scot himself, assures us that the Scottish brand of fantasy is entirely different from the English. The outstanding fantasies of MacDonald are the work of a Scot in self-chosen exile, a 'London Scot.' Perhaps the background presence of Scottish fantasy may be traceable in the Scottish novels, even, more remotely, in the English fiction. The scope of the present volume does not permit Dr Manlove to give us the insights on MacDonald possible in his more detailed studies.

The present book offers many pleasures: so many interesting writers whom one doesn't know; and one may meet again with 'fantasists' who are long out of fashion and practically forgotten. I remember that I once owned *The Secret Mountain* by Kenneth Morris when I was too young to appreciate it. I discover here that Morris seems a worth-while author, of Welsh origin. Another story-teller I used to enjoy is Ronald Fraser—One of his many books is mentioned here.

In a book of this kind the author's net is thrown so wide that many readers must meet with material they knew nothing of, and may well want to know better. I was greatly intrigued by two collaborating authors who published their book *Musrom* in 1968, and another, *Wintersol*, a few years later. They are Eric Thacker and Anthony Earnshaw. In their brand of fantastic fiction, they 'want to push the mind out into M.C. Escher—like impossibilities, as when they write of "halls and rooms constructed exterior to the walls" of a house—the inside being inaccessible.' The parallel with Escher's disturbing eccentric perspectives is probably helpful. Dr Manlove's descriptions are certainly intriguing, here and in very many other cases. When writing of 'Sci-Fi' he is helping to wipe out the associations of the genre with pulp fiction and should encourage readers to judge such things on their own merits.

The book will be valuable for those who want to know something of the quality of authors they may never read for themselves but like to know something about. Time and occasion may be lacking or the rarer works may be simply impossible to acquire. The greater libraries are not within everyone's reach.

Dr Manlove's list of scholarly publications must have very few if any parallels. His new study is built on so much laborious research, and so little has been missed that I am almost unwilling to mention a few names or titles which I do not find here. Although Walter de la Mare is not overlooked, his important novel, *Memoirs of a Midget*, much admired in its time, does not find a place. His forgotten fairy play "Crossings" is also an example of true fantasy. Oliver Onions has some effective ghost stories which might have been mentioned—also Edward Harold Visisk, author of stories such as *Medusa*, 1929, admired by Colin Wilson and David Lindsay. It has been recently revived in a German translation!

I will end with two quotes from his general reflections at the end of *English Fantasy*. The 'Englishness' of literature and anything else is an endless topic for definition and explanation. In spite of the sinister and horrific qualities which are found in our literature today (not to mention film and T.V.) Dr Manlove considers that English fantasy is 'on the whole an optimistic, daylight genre, full of the sense of some delight in life, whether past, or now, or elsewhere, or to come.' Yes, it may be called 'escapist,' but its very escapes give us extraordinary visions and triumphs of invention we would not otherwise have possessed. And above all it is *English* fantasy, its character one with that of its country and its people, and unique.'

William Webb

The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers

The fourth and final volume of these letters has now been published, covering the years 1951 up to her sudden and totally unexpected death in 1957. ISBN 0 951800 06, 448 pages, cased-bound £25. With the completion of this project, recognition of her status is confirmed as one of the great letter-writers of the twentieth century who still has much to say to the twenty-first.

The Dickens Magazine

This is a new, popular, high-quality magazine being launched by Euromed Communications, apparently with the approval of the Dickens Fellowship. The price looks rather high at £28.50 (\$50) plus £6 (\$15) p & p for six issues. Their address is The Old Surgery, Liphook Rd. HASLEMERE, GU27 INL.

Early editions of MacDonald's books

Ian Blakemore, whom many members will have known as an editor at Paternoster Press has just brought out his first catalogue of SECONDHAND AND NEW BOOKS BY GEORGE MACDONALD. It costs £2 post free (deductible from first order) and can be obtained from Ian at Rosley Farm, Rosley, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 8BZ. Tel. 016973 49924, Fax 016973 45149. Ian also produces a similar C.S. Lewis catalogue.

The Mythopoeic Society

Not all members may be aware of this Society, which since 1969 has been publishing an excellent journal *Mythlore* that not only contains frequent papers on MacDonald but also stimulating artwork, such as the MacDonald seal and the illustration for *The Princess and Curdie*

reproduced below (half actual size). The Society also holds an extremely enjoyable annual conference with papers, panels, discussions, a musical programme, a pageant, book auction, an art show, films, etc. etc.. The Membership Subscription is \$20 for four issues. Send to P.O. Box 6707, ALTADENA, CA 91003.



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Society web site c/o: http://ds.dial.pipex.cpm/partridge/md_index.htm

E-mail enquiry service:
We are currently negotiating with a charity for help with this project and hope to be on-line very soon.

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Manuscripts, preferably on disc with hard copy, should be presented in accordance with the guidelines indicated in the latest edition of the MHRA Style Book and should observe the spelling usage of Chambers English Dictionary.

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