

# Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

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Volume 73

Article 1

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2012

## Orts 73, 2012

The George MacDonald Society

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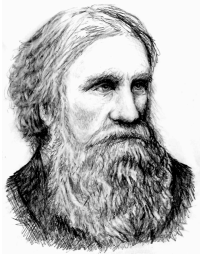
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### Recommended Citation

The George MacDonald Society (2012) "Orts 73, 2012," *Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter*: Vol. 73, Article 1.  
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# *ORTS*

THE GEORGE MACDONALD SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NO. 73, AUTUMN 2012.

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*THE GRAY WOLF* BY MARIE ZAHRADNIK (MEGAHERTZ ILLUSTRATION & DESIGN)

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## NEWS

### Coming Soon: *Orts* Online

*Orts* will soon join *North Wind's* Online Digital Archive, thanks to the ongoing efforts of John Pennington, who teaches at Saint Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin. Dr. Pennington, one of the editors of *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, previously oversaw the digitization of the academic journal. Jaena Manson, an editorial intern at the journal, is assisting in the process, a considerable task given that the archive will encompass the newsletter's entire history, from the first issue published over thirty years ago in 1981 to the present edition. As with *North Wind*, the *Orts* archive will be a free electronic resource, with articles viewable online and downloadable in .pdf form. Completion of the digitization process is anticipated for May 2013.

<http://www.snc.edu/northwind/>

### Forthcoming: 2011 St Andrews Conference Proceedings

Those who were unable to attend—or who wish to revisit—last year's *George MacDonald Among His Contemporaries* conference may take note that publication of its proceedings is currently under way. The event, which Scotland's University of St Andrews hosted in March 2011, sought to position MacDonald historically *via* discussion of his involvement with contemporary thinkers, ideas, and cultural movements of the day. The published proceedings, titled *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, will include sixteen essays based on the talks given at the conference. Edited by Dr. Christopher MacLachlan, Dr. Ginger Stelle and John Pazdziora, the book is being published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies. It is expected to be available in 2013.

## BOOKS

### Gaarden's *Christian Goddess* Earns Distinction

A work of MacDonald scholarship received an award nomination this year. Bonnie Gaarden's *The Christian Goddess: Archetype and Theology in the Fantasies of George MacDonald* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2011) was a finalist for the 2012 Mythopoeic Awards, in the category of Mythopoeic Scholarship in Myth and Fantasy Studies.

This is the first monograph of Dr. Gaarden, who teaches literature at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, and who has previously published a number of articles on MacDonald. Notably, it is also the first scholarly book devoted entirely to the study of his female characters. Readers have long observed the preponderance of sublime womanhood in MacDonald's work, and several shorter academic articles exist, to which Gaarden's book-length treatment of the topic provides a welcome development, one that will open the way for further scholarly discussion.

In *The Christian Goddess*, Gaarden examines how MacDonald uses powerful female figures to represent God. She argues that these goddess figures arose from his dissatisfaction with conventional forms of Christianity, both the stern Scottish Calvinism of his youth and Victorian materialist rationalism. As a result, he "formulated an alternative Christianity he could rejoice in," a Christianity that, for all its emphasis on God's fatherhood, equally affirms God's feminine attributes. Gaarden explores the underpinnings of this re-imagined, female-centered Christianity, showing how MacDonald's thought is grounded in Universalism, neo-Platonism, Romantic theology, and

mysticism, as well as in his personal experience of maternal loss as young boy.

According to Gaarden, MacDonald's female divine is a multi-faceted figure. Each of the book's nine chapters focuses on a different aspect of the goddess, including The Great Mother, The Terrible Mother, The Magic Cauldron, The Muse and The Divine Child, The Great Goddess/Left Hand of God, Biblical Sophia, Victorian Sophia, the Patroness of Heroes, and The Kore. With the notable exception of *Robert Falconer*, Gaarden confines her study to MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies. That said, readers of his realistic novels will find this volume a useful reference, as its insights into his fairy tales' supernatural female characters could easily be extended to the strong heroines that populate his novels. Gaarden reads his work from a psychoanalytic angle, a well established approach in MacDonald studies, as she discusses archetypes and interprets his texts via Jung and Neumann's models of psycho-spiritual development.

Among other things, Gaarden connects MacDonald's goddesses to early twentieth-century poet Robert Graves and anthropologist Sir James Frazer, whose mother-goddess theories they anticipate. She further asserts their contemporary relevance by observing how his female divine functions as a forerunner to recent goddess-centered counter-cultural neo-pagan movements. In her conclusion, she suggests that his ideas continue to percolate through modern discourse on such diverse topics and animal rights, the androgyny of Jesus, and questions of universalism.

*The Christian Goddess* will surely interest students of MacDonald's

theology and mythopoesis, as well as those interested in archetypal and gender studies approaches to fantasy. Gaarden explains complex ideas with enviable clarity and ease, making this book accessible to the scholar and the layreader alike. It is a significant addition to MacDonald scholarship, and one that deserves distinction.

J. KOOPMAN

***Библейские образы, символы и мотивы в сказках Джорджа Макдональда (Biblical Images, Symbols, and Motifs in George MacDonald's Fairy Tales)***  
by Olga Lukmanova  
(Lap Publishing, 2012)

From Russia comes a book on MacDonald's fairy tales. Dr. Olga Lukmanova is an associate professor at The State Linguistics University in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, where she teaches American English, British and American Studies, Intercultural Communication, and Translation and Interpretation. She has previously translated into Russian such works as *Phantastes*, *Lilith*, *Sir Gibbie*, *Donal Grant*, and *Thomas Wingfold*. Her new book, *Biblical Images, Symbols, and Motifs in George MacDonald's Fairy Tales*, investigates the myth-making function of traditional fairy tale motifs in MacDonald's tales. She approaches his work from the perspective of Russian literary scholarship, including such critics as Mikhail Bakhtin, Vladimir Propp and Sergei Averintzev, as she examines how he imbues fairy tale structures with Biblical meaning. Although unfortunately not available in English, Lukmanova's book is the first ever monograph on MacDonald in the Russian language.

J. KOOPMAN

***Review: The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia***  
by Rowan Williams (London: SPCK, 2012), 151 pages, £8.99 (UK)

C. S. Lewis's Narnia stories have never lost their appeal to both children and adults. There is likely to be renewed interest in Lewis in 2013 (he died on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1963, the day that President JF Kennedy was assassinated) and a memorial to him is to be unveiled in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey on the fiftieth anniversary of his death. This book will attract particular attention because its author was not only Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012, but has become Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge on his retirement. Lewis was a fellow of this college from the mid-1950s when he was appointed Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at the university. But Lewis is remembered more as an Oxford man. He was a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford from 1925 to 1954 and carried on living at his house "The Kilns" just outside Oxford and meeting his fellow Oxford "Inklings," particularly J. R. R. Tolkien, after his appointment to a Cambridge chair.

Although it is short and the subject matter, Lewis's Narnia stories with frequent references to his other fiction, is familiar to me, I did not find it an easy book to read. I needed to read it twice and I will probably want to read it again after returning to the original stories. It is based on a close reading of the Narnia novels, but Williams ranges much more widely, citing Shakespeare and Dostoevsky (about whom Williams wrote a powerful study published in 2008), as well as modern critics of Lewis like Philip Pullman.

As he writes in his preface, Rowan Williams came late to Narnia.

He had read Lewis's apologetic works like *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mere Christianity* as a teenager and only read the Narnia stories as a young adult, reading them later to his own children. A few years older than Williams, I did not read the Narnia books until I had children of my own, although I had read some of the popular confessional books when I was a teenager. I returned to Lewis when I read A. N. Wilson's biography, which was published in 1990. Williams praises this book, although admits it is controversial and has been disliked by some Lewis fans.

The first thing to note about Williams's book is that he treats Lewis seriously as a theologian. When Williams was a young priest it was fashionable to sneer at Lewis's theology. He is pleased that those days are long gone. A strong, coherent spiritual and theological vision shapes the Narnia stories, argues Williams, and he devotes most of the book to explaining and unravelling that vision.

But first he deals with some of the criticisms that have been levelled against Lewis, notably that his books display sexist and racist attitudes and an enthusiasm for violence. Williams points out that Lewis was a writer of his own time and refers to the influence on him of Edith Nesbit, an author still read today but who flourished during Lewis's Edwardian childhood and some of whose stories are actually mentioned in *The Magician's Nephew*. In his treatment of Asian characters Lewis adopts an old-fashioned *Arabian Nights* language, which the modern reader is likely to find inappropriate. Here Williams points to the influence on Lewis of G. K. Chesterton. Williams says that Lewis "cannot by any means be wholly acquitted of the cultural and

racial prejudices of his day," but warns that "we shall not understand what he is doing unless we read him mindful of the tradition of storytelling he is both continuing and parodying." Likewise, the amount of violence in his stories should be seen in the context of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and of the boys' adventure stories fashionable in Lewis's youth.

It is his treatment of women, particularly his banishment of Susan from Narnia as she enters adolescence, that I find most problematic. In *The Last Battle* Lewis comments that "She's interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She was always a jolly sight too keen on growing up." Lewis, of course, was writing for children, perhaps in the Edwardian tradition exemplified by J. M. Barrie in *Peter Pan*, but I feel the bachelor Oxford don *may* have been a little frightened of dealing with the erotic because at that time he had not experienced erotic love himself. It was only in the later 1950s that he fell in love with and married Joy Gresham. Williams quotes from a letter that Lewis wrote to a young reader in 1960 who was distressed by Susan's exclusion from Narnia:

Not that I have no hope of Susan's ever getting to Aslan's country, but because I have a feeling that the story of her journey would be longer and more like a grown-up novel than I wanted to write.

Aslan is not a tame lion, both Lewis and Williams tell us. He is a disturbing presence who challenges us and our cosy attitudes about religion. "The truth of God is found in rebellion against the oppressive clichés of the world," writes Williams. In a moving passage he shows how Aslan's "animality" "permits the evoking of physical pleasure without trespassing directly on the realm of adult

erotic experience.” In his discussion of *The Silver Chair* (a particular favourite of mine) where Eustace and Jill and the wonderfully gloomy Puddleglum (a character alleged by A. N. Wilson to have been based on Lewis’s gardener) are imprisoned in an underground world by the Green Witch and told that Narnia is just a figment of their imagination, Williams tells us that “in certain moods, the most dedicated believer will be faced with the apparent emptiness of the claims that faith makes.” Here he draws a comparison with Dostoevsky’s assertion that, faced with a choice between Christ and the truth, he would choose Christ, and also with the “dark night of the soul” described by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish mystic and poet San Juan de la Cruz.

In another passage Williams draws a startling comparison between Lucy’s behaviour in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, where she succumbs to a temptation to cast a spell that will enable her to know exactly what her friends thought of her, and that of Othello in Shakespeare’s play where he seeks information about Desdemona’s real feelings for him. The true answer for both Lucy and Othello is to *exercise* friendship or love for the other person.

Perhaps the most important chapter in the book is the final one. “Not many children’s books end with the death of all the main characters,” observes Williams, and then he guides us through Lewis’s attempt to *demystify* death. Some of Lewis’s critics, notably Philip Pullman, have seen him as a “life-denying” writer who puts his faith in a fantasy that is just “pie in the sky.”

Williams shows us the Platonic philosophy that underlies Lewis’s writing and then points to the belief in the Resurrection that is the counterpoint to death. At the very end of his book Williams quotes Stella Gibbons (the author of *Cold Comfort Farm*) and the shock she felt when she came to the final page of *The Last Battle* and read these words: “and as He spoke to them, He no longer looked like a lion.”

Somewhat surprisingly, Williams makes no mention at all of the influence of George MacDonald on Lewis, although the latter had acknowledged him as his “Master.” Williams does make reference to *The Great Divorce* where a (fictional) MacDonald acts as Virgil to Lewis’s Dante in his imagined journey to heaven and hell. MacDonald was not afraid to make death the subject-matter of a children’s story (notably in *At the Back of the North Wind*) and it is inconceivable that a man of Rowan Williams’s erudition can have been unaware of MacDonald and of his profound influence on C. S. Lewis. Professor Tom Wright, whose comments appear on the back cover of this book, says that those who do not know Narnia will be encouraged by Williams’s book to read the stories for themselves. That might be true for a learned theologian like Tom Wright (a former Bishop of Durham), but for the ordinary reader without much theology I am not so sure. Those, however, who already know and love the Narnia stories will be stimulated to return to them and read them again with greater understanding.

RICHARD LINES

## INTERVIEW

### Nils Taranger's *Gifts of the Child Christ*

In 2008 *Nils Taranger* wrote, produced, and directed a short film version of "The Gifts of the Child Christ." The film, viewable on the YouTube channel <http://www.youtube.com/blueflowerfilm>, was included in the 2010 Central Florida Film Festival, and was also selected as a finalist in 2010's Las Vegas Film Festival. Taranger, who recently completed his MFA in Digital Entrepreneurial Cinema at the University of Central Florida, described to Orts the process of translating MacDonal'd's story to film.

#### *What made you gravitate toward this story in particular?*

I read every single MacDonal'd short story before I made my choice. I chose "The Gifts of the Child Christ" for three main reasons. First, many of MacDonal'd's stories are full of fantasy elements that would have been either very expensive or very cheesy if I had attempted them. Second, to meet the requirements of my school project, I needed to come in under six minutes, and that eliminated a lot of his longer shorts. The main reason, however, is that I fell in love with the character of Sophy, and identify strongly with her innocence and pure love. I had to make it!



A scene from the film set.

#### *MacDonal'd's text runs to seven chapters and over 12,000 words. What sort of challenges did you encounter in adapting the story to a short-film format?*

I had just taken a screenwriting course specifically for adapting literary works for film, so I was excited to try it out. I had to make sure and focus on Sophy, and leave out everything that did not directly pertain to her storyline—the biggest omission being all of the drama with Alice, I suppose. As far as challenges, one of the hardest things to convey within my six-minute time frame was the backstory involving the death of Mr. Greatorex's first wife and the inner turmoil that he has from seeing her image in Sophy.

#### *Did you have a particular vision in mind?*

At the time of writing and even during shooting, I actually was intending to release the film as a black and white silent film with old-fashioned title cards for dialogue. I didn't want it to be corny, but I certainly intended to imitate the feel of an old silent film. However, after I got into the editing room and saw the colors, especially in the scene where Sophy sees "Jesus" lying on the bed with the light streaming in, I had to change my vision. I needed that beautiful golden light! So I promptly removed the title cards and wrote voice-over narration—and that is how it ended up.

#### *Where did you shoot the film?*

We shot in Kissimmee, Florida, where I was raised, at a museum. It is a real Florida "Cracker" House, fully furnished



so there was no need to spend a lot of money on props and furniture. If I had shot on the soundstage at school, it would have been extremely expensive to replicate—with this location, all I had to pay for was food for the crew and the costumes.

*What was it like making the film?*

Making the film was a dream come true. It was my first experience working with professional talent and lighting equipment, which was exciting. I was very nervous at times, however, because everything in the museum was so fragile. We were told to not even sit on some of the chairs as they might break. We were also told not to have any candles or lanterns lit, because of the fire risk. As you can see from the film, I'm not too good at following rules! Thankfully we made it through the shoot without lighting anything on fire.

*According to your website, [www.ablueflower.com](http://www.ablueflower.com), your current documentary project, *A Blue Flower*, involves entering “the world of the metaphysical and the spiritual on the quest of a lifetime.” What is *A Blue Flower*?*

The Blue Flower contains many metaphors. In German Romanticism, it symbolized the quest for the impossible - blue flowers were not supposed to exist. My documentary is a quest for enlightenment, and many people would tell me that it is impossible to achieve or non-existent. However, the metaphor for a blue flower goes back many more thousands of years and has links to different cultures. In ancient Egypt, the god Nephertem rises out of a blue water lily to meet Ra. It was a symbol for resurrection and rebirth. Also, I had an experience of seeing my pineal gland or third eye chakra in the center of my forehead, and it looked like a blue flower with a pink center. So, there are many answers to the question!

*To what extent does MacDonald’s story, which follows a trajectory from spiritual neglect to healing and wholeness, relate to your current work—might it be considered a preliminary step of sorts? It is no accident perhaps that MacDonald, for whom life and literature revolved around the idea of the spiritual quest, found inspiration in Novalis, whose Romantic ideal of the blue flower informs his 1856 novel *Phantastes*.*

Wow! I had no idea that MacDonald used the blue flower metaphor for some of his work. I am shamed to admit that I have only read his short stories thus far. As to *The Gifts of the Child Christ* relating to *A Blue Flower*? Absolutely. Every film I make is a reflection of who I am at the moment. Little did I know that soon after filming I would come out to my parents as gay, and begin to experience Sophy's story in a much more visceral way. My search for *A Blue Flower* is my search for the Christ child within me, and for the gifts of the Christ child to come upon my household as well.

*Would you ever consider producing or directing another of MacDonald’s stories—and if so, which ones?*

I love MacDonald's short stories, and I would jump at the chance to direct a feature film based on one of his longer novels. My all-time favorite short besides “Gifts of the Child Christ” is “The Castle”—the last line still makes me tear up: “The loftiest hope is the surest of being fulfilled.” However, I am not sure that I could properly convey the emotion in that story or many others visually. MacDonald invites us into his wonderful, unique imagination and I am doubtful that adaptation would do it justice. I am always open to suggestions, though!

J. KOOPMAN

## Out of the Everywhere and into Popular Culture

Where did you come from, baby dear?  
Out of the everywhere into the here.  
(*At the Back of the North Wind*, Ch. 33)

Perhaps the best-known quotation from *At the Back of the North Wind*, this couplet first appeared on August 1, 1870, in *Good Words for the Young*'s serialized version of the novel. MacDonald had a knack for aphorism and produced many such eminently quotable lines. This couplet in particular, specifically the first four words of the second line, "Out of the everywhere," has enjoyed an especially lively career in the one hundred and forty-odd years since its publication, as the phrase has worked its way into diverse areas of the arts, science, and media. A short list of its top dozen appearances:

*Out of the Everywhere*, artist Ralph Peacock's 1907 painting of a nude infant posed atop a clump of grass before a sunwashed mountain landscape.

*Out of the Everywhere and Other Extraordinary Visions*, James Tiptree, Jr.'s 1981 short story collection. Contains the story "Out of the Everywhere," which won the Seiun Award for overseas short fiction in 2000.

*Out of the Everywhere*, a 1992 collection of essays by Isaac Asimov. Contains two chapters titled, respectively, "Out of the Everywhere" and "Into the Here."

*Out of the Everywhere*, Australian writer Winifred Howard's 1929 book of children's poetry.

*Out of the Everywhere: Tales for a new world*, an illustrated collection of folk tales retold for modern readers, by Jan Andrews and Simon Ng (2000).

*Out of the Everywhere*, Irish playwright Una Troy's 1976 novel.

*Out of the Everywhere*, a 1996 album by American guitarist and songwriter Angie Aparo.

*Out of the Everywhere*, Brittany Shane Safranek's 2002 album. Its first track is also titled "Out of the Everywhere."

*Out of the Everywhere*, a 2010 album by Saltwater Grass, a Funk/Rock/Soul band from Jacksonville Beach, Florida.

*Out of the Everywhere*, an orchestral work by Nathaniel Stookey. Described in 2005 by Joshua Kosman in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as a "22-minute celebration of childbirth... a lush riot of orchestral color."

"Out of the Everywhere," Season 2 Episode 8 of *Upstairs, Downstairs*. Aired 22 Feb. 1974, and featured the story of a newborn daughter and her nanny.

"Gerontological nursing practice: out of the everywhere into the here."

*Journal of the American Health Care Association*. 1977 May 3 (3): 59-65.

J. KOOPMAN



"Out of the Everywhere" 100% Cotton Infant Onesie, available at the George MacDonald Society's online shop.  
<http://www.zazzle.com/gifts?ch=georgemacdonald>

## A Message from the Treasurer of the George MacDonald Society

First of all, a warm welcome to seven new George MacDonald Society members:

- Lynda Bayley of Belper, Derbyshire;
- John de Jong, Bexleyheath, Southeast London;
- Mr & Mrs Pearson, Preston, Lancashire;
- Dr Lesley Smith, Canterbury, Kent; and, from the U.S.A.:
- James Charpe, Columbia, South Carolina;
- Matt Imboden, Winston Salem, North Carolina;
- Thomas Robson, Valley Stream, New York.

I'd like to say to you & to the rest of our members that we're going through all the records & you'll be getting an email (or a letter) soon to make sure you've not missed any issue of *North Wind* or of *Orts*. These have been coming out roughly once a year with Dr. Pennington looking after *North Wind* & Jennifer Koopman taking care of *Orts*. If you've missed out on any of them, we'll make good shortcoming.

One of our long-standing members will soon be freed up to help me get our admin side ready to deal with the eight hundred plus enquirers & contributors to our chat & social pages. So hold on! The Society hasn't been

forgotten!

For the time being I'd like to add the following:

A neighbour of the late John Docherty, has made an illustrated edition of *The Golden Key* in tribute to a friend now passed on. The lady doesn't have access to email facilities but, if you want to know more, send me an email & I'll provide more information. Finally, Professor Spina, of Genoa, in the region where the MacDonalds had their home, has been regularly sending me monographs on themes from English Literature. Two at least are on George MacDonald topics. For further information, I may be contacted by email.

I'm sure, in conclusion, that 2013 is going to be an especially eventful year for the Society. We're very spread out all over the globe & we're missing the service & experience of members who were in at the beginning, but I'm sure we can all make the Society something they'd have been proud of.

With very best wishes to you all for Christmas & for 2013,

ROGER BARDET  
[r.bardet@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:r.bardet@hotmail.co.uk)

## 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 an article, announcement, notice, or news, 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).