

Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

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The George MacDonald Society

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ORTS

The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

No. 76, Winter 2020



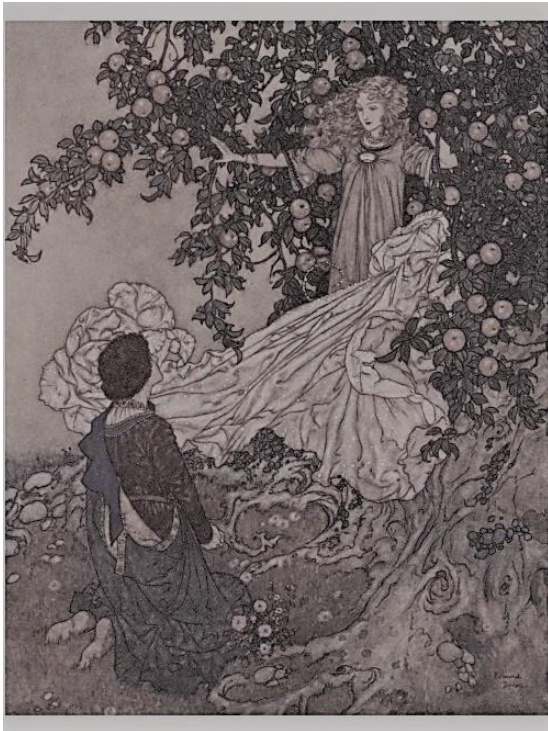
Princess Irene at the bottom of her Grandmother's Staircase

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Editorial



“You must learn to be strong in the night as well as in the day, else you will always be only half brave.”

This quote, from MacDonald's *The Day Boy and the Night Girl* seems particularly

resonant in today's 'unprecedented times'. As Covid-19 creates for us a new 'normal', we all endeavour to brave the darkness and uncertainty.

As culpable as any to succumbing to fear and doubts, MacDonald, as he has done all my life, becomes a place of quietude and focus for me.

George MacDonald is part of my personal heritage in a very special way: my mother, Kathy Triggs, is author of the acclaimed MacDonald biography *The Stars and the Stillness* and was also one of the first editors of *Orts*! I can remember her drawing one of the magazine's original frontispieces by hand (those were the days!) - a copy of the Arthur Hughes illustration from *The Princess and the Goblin* of Princess Irene peering up her grandmother's staircase.

It is an honour for me to become the new editor of *Orts*. I hope to share with you all various 'morsels' of my own MacDonald-related endeavours and adventures, but

equally, I invite you all to share news of events or projects that you think may be of interest – I will include all that I can.

In times of chaos we must learn to weather the storm - I am reminded of little Diamond in *At the Back of the North Wind*, sitting in his tree oblivious to the fierce external elements and chanting his little song:

“The lightning and thunder they go and they come, but the stars and the stillness are always at home.”

It was a quote which hung above the piano in my childhood home; I invite you to help make *Orts* a place of repose and homecoming for us all.

The Editor

Donna K. Triggs

Committee Update and Notices



Since the last *Orts*, there have been various changes to the society.

2020, for all of us, has been a strange year and for the society it has also been a time of sadness and transition. As many of you will already know, we lost our Chairman Richard Lines in 2017 and in recent months our President Professor Stephen Prickett and former Secretary/ Treasurer Roger Bardet. Back in December 2019, Kirstin Jeffery Johnson (Canada) and Mike Partridge (UK) agreed to act as co-Chairs of the Society, and Malcolm Guite (who was already on the committee) assumed the role of Ambassador for the Society. Donna K. Triggs and John McNeill (both UK) also joined the committee, alongside Denise Vasileu (Romania). In addition, Donna will be acting as the new editor of *Orts*, replacing Jennifer Koopman who had stepped down for personal reasons.

For those of you who did not have the pleasure of knowing him personally, the tribute to Stephen Prickett by Malcom and Kirstin gives you the flavour of the man. He will be sadly missed but his legacy lives on, both in his books and the impact he had on so many. Roger Bardet had asked to stand down as Secretary/ Treasurer of the Society due to ill-health last December, and I would like to acknowledge his years of faithful service to the Society. Our thoughts are with all their families. For the time being, Mike Partridge will cover both these roles.

The other significant change is that membership subscriptions to the Society, which includes our academic journal *North Wind*, are now due on the 1st January each year. If you have not been in recent contact with us please make a note to renew then (if you renew before then it will be carried over until the end of 2021).

A tribute to Professor Stephen Prickett (1939-2020)

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Professor Stephen Prickett, but also with great gratitude for the years of his scholarship, friendship, and collegiality. Long-time president of the George MacDonald Society, Stephen's writings are a standard part of the reading and learning of scholars in the field of MacDonald studies, and more broadly Romantic and Victorian Literature. Some have been fortunate to also learn from his brilliant conversations and lectures. Stephen invested deeply in his students and gave generously of his time to many academics across the globe who sought him out through email. He was a raconteur extraordinaire on almost every topic under the sun... if you shared a table with him you were guaranteed a lively and fascinating evening. As colleagues who sometimes enthusiastically concurred with Stephen, and sometimes vigorously disagreed with him, we valued both his input and his camaraderie.

Members of the George MacDonald Society may mostly know of his work with MacDonald, Inklings, and perhaps Fantasy Literature - and if you had the pleasure, through engaging with his contagious *joie de vivre* at conferences (assessing fine wines, discussing fine art, punting on the fine Cam). But Stephen's academic and pedagogical gifting was wider and deeper than those spheres.

An honorary Professor of English at the University of Kent at Canterbury, and Regius Professor Emeritus of English Language and Literature at the University

of Glasgow, his academic honours are too many to name. Stephen was born in Sierra Leone, educated in Canterbury, studied both at Oxford & Cambridge (with CS Lewis as one of his tutors), and taught in Nigeria before completing a Ph.D. in Cambridge in 1968. He continued to teach in universities quite literally around the world in such countries as the U.S., Australia, Singapore, Denmark, Italy, France, Romania, Denmark, and of course England and Scotland (and was a guest lecturer in many many more). He was Chair of English at the Australian National University and Director of the Armstrong Browning Library at Baylor (in addition to being a professor there). He was a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the English Association, Chairman of the U.K. Higher Education Foundation, President of the European Society for the Study of Literature and Theology, and President of the George MacDonald Society.

Stephen's written output also gives testimony to both his energy and his acumen: two novels, multiple monographs and edited volumes (many award-winning), and well over a hundred articles on Romanticism, Victorian Studies, and related topics. Some of his work has been translated into multiple languages; his *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (1976) remains required reading for some university courses; his *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (1986) was described by the

Inkling Owen Barfield as "a distinguished and original book." Stephen was also editor and consultant for numerous series, most recently *The Edinburgh Companion to the Bible and the Arts* (2014). The fourteen-language, parallel text, *Reader in European Romanticism* of which he was general editor was awarded the Jean-Pierre Barricelli Prize for the year's best book in Romanticism Studies. In 2015 Stephen was honoured with the prestigious Christianity & Literature Lifetime Achievement Award.

The seventies and eighties was a period when mainstream English academic studies were heavily secularised and the religious and spiritual dimension in the work of authors in the literary cannon was ignored or explained away. Stephen's magisterial '*Romanticism and Religion*' bucked that trend and was a vital book for any student that wanted to defend and explore the theological and spiritual implications of poetry, especially the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

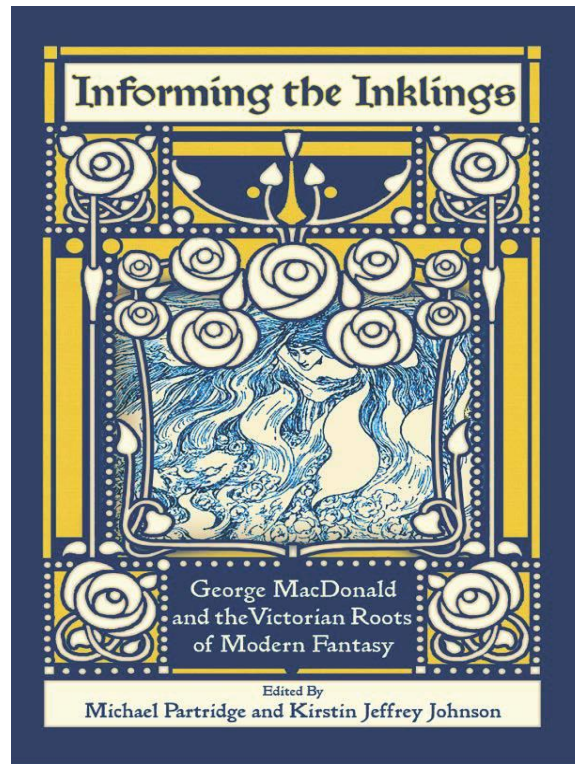
That book gave students of Malcolm's generation something substantial with which to counter the pervasive hermeneutics of suspicion purveyed by their own professors and kept alive the flame of a torch which has now been passed to a whole new generation of scholars who are exploring the burgeoning field of theology and the arts. Kirstin's discovery of the same text in Canada in the nineties similarly gave her permission to pursue studies of MacDonald in a manner many in the universities there were yet resisting.

Thus we are both amongst the scholars who owe Stephen Prickett a great debt. Professor Stephen Prickett will be greatly missed, though his work will continue to inform and challenge us. Our deep sympathy and care goes out to Stephen's wife Patsy (Patricia Erskine-Hill), a talented linguist and delightful lecturer in her own right, and to his other family and friends.

Malcolm Guite & Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson

October 2020

**Informing the Inklings: George MacDonald and the
Victorian Roots of Modern Fantasy**



This new book, edited by Michael Partridge and Jeffrey Johnson, is available from Amazon. Its twelve essays, originally presented at the 2014 George MacDonald Society Conference, examine the rich fantasy lineage of George MacDonald and fellow literary figures.

The twelve essays collected in this book examine this rich lineage of mythmakers. Contributors include Stephen Prickett, Malcolm Guite, Trevor Hart, and Jean A. Webb as well as other Inklings experts. Like the authors they write about, these scholars believe imaginative fiction has the power to enrich and even change our lives.

“This marvellous collection of essays appeals to both the intellect and the meaning and transformation today. The connection between George MacDonald and his circle to C. S. Lewis and his circle has never been made so clear.”

Bruce R. Johnson
Editor of *Sehnsucht: The
C. S. Lewis Journal*

*Informing the Inklings: George Macdonald
and the Victorian Roots of Modern Fantasy*
can be ordered from Amazon at:

www.amazon.co.uk/Informing-Inklings-MacDonald-Victorian-Fantasy/dp/1935688421

At The Back of the North Wind – A New Audiobook

Article by the Editor

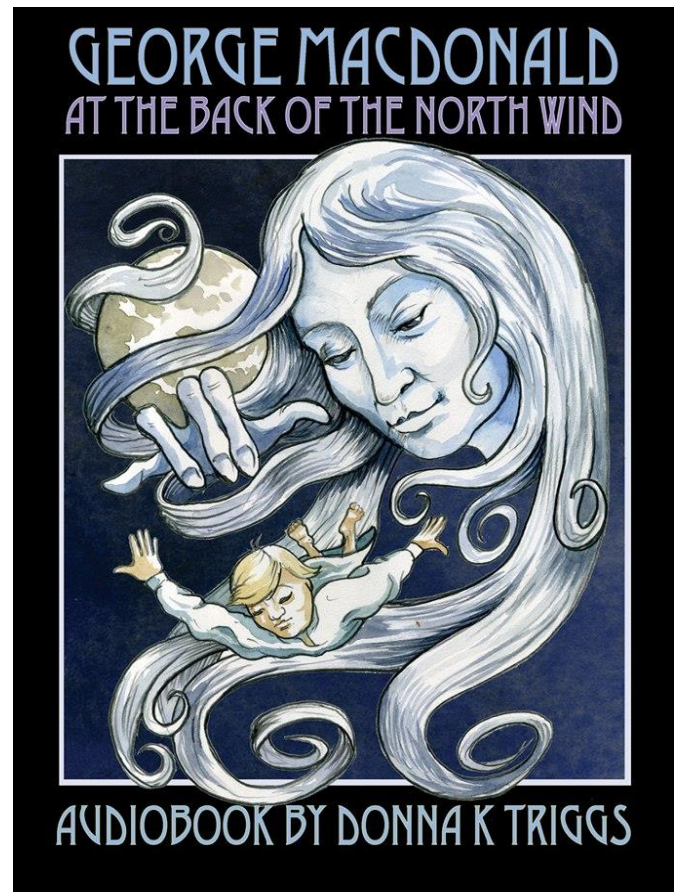
I am obsessed by the idea of ‘voice’. In my PhD studies in drama I investigate the connection between language and thought; between the way we use voice in performance and the way we use voice in everyday life. I have noticed that the physical expression of a great sorrow or great joy through spoken word, can move us to tears in a way mere thoughts cannot.

I experienced this myself whilst reading *At The Back of The North Wind* aloud for my recent production of a new audiobook. It is a story I know well. It is, I believe, the first story I can remember being read aloud to me as a child; it was North Wind’s all-engulfing hair that first informed my ideas of an omnipresent god.

I have read the story to myself many times since. Yet speaking the words newly aloud gave them a new power to surprise and move me - Diamond’s gentle faith, and the story’s ultimate message that death is conquerable – did indeed make me cry.

Dealing with illness and death – particularly childhood illness - resonates particularly at this time. This is why stories like *At The Back of the North Wind* – that acknowledge our fears yet reassure us that better times are to come – are important, and need to be kept fresh and relevant for the young and old alike.

It was a great joy to me to narrate and produce this audiobook; I hope my passion and emotion come over in the recording!

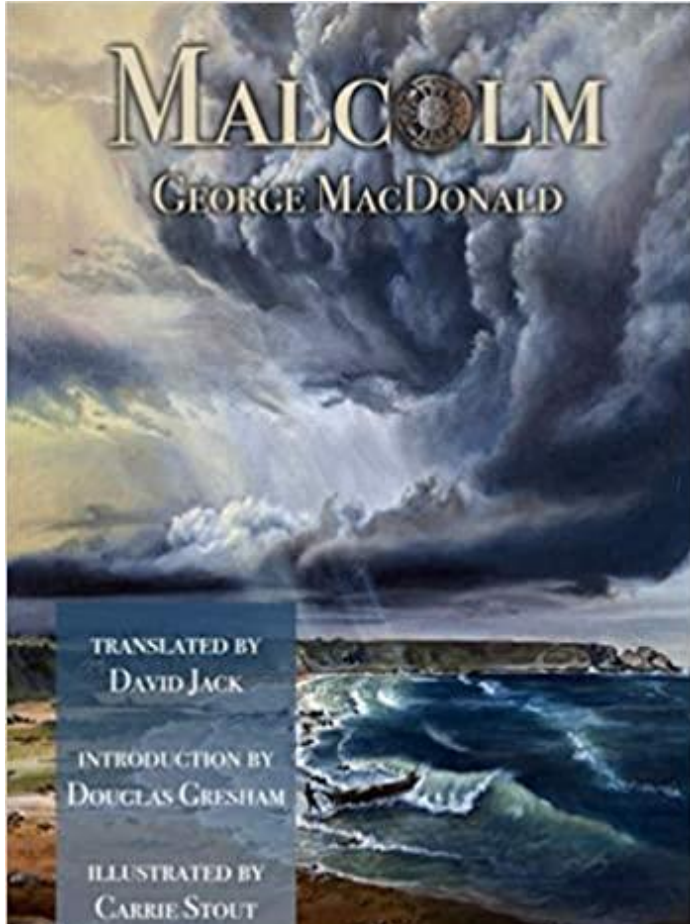


***At the Back of the North Wind* by George MacDonald, narrated by Donna K. Triggs, is available as a download from Audiobooks.com:**

<https://www.audiobooks.co.uk/audiobook/at-the-back-of-the-north-wind/486097>

10% of any profits will go to The Starlight Foundation, which is a national UK charity that exists to preserve childhood throughout the suffering of serious illness.

New Scots/English Translation of *Malcolm* by David Jack



David Jack's Scots-English translation of MacDonald's *Malcolm* is now available from Amazon.

As with Jack's translations of *Sir Gibbie* and *Donal Grant*, *Malcolm* is illustrated by Carrie Stout.

The book can be purchased here:

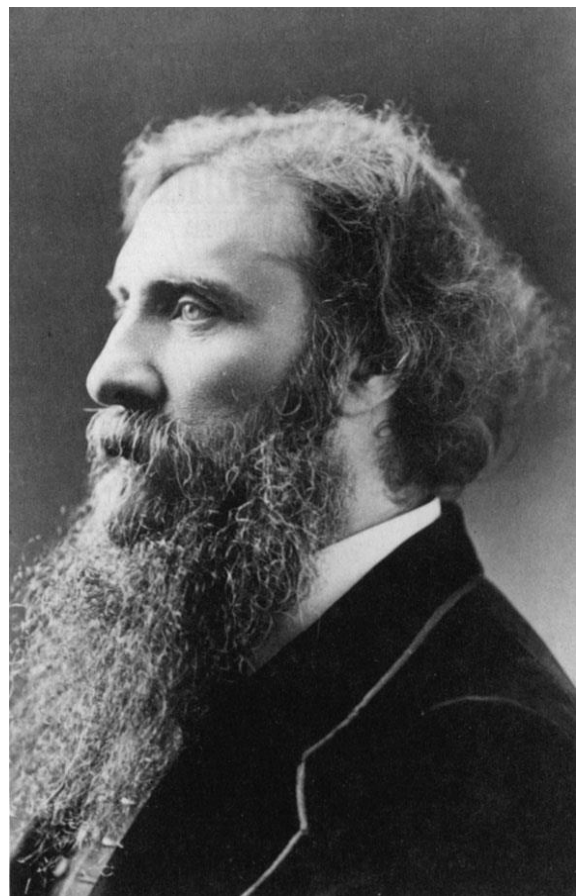
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Malcolm-Scots-English-Illustrated-George-MacDonald/dp/1657405729>

Bicentenary of George MacDonald's birth – **Suggestions Invited**

The bicentenary of George MacDonald's birth in 2024 is a significant date for all those who admire his work and legacy. The committee are thinking about ways to celebrate it, but would like input from Society members.

Perhaps some outdoor theatre and other festival events – in Huntly, or elsewhere (pandemic allowing)? Or maybe we could start a tradition of 'MacDonald Night' (like Burns Night!), where people from all around the world can gather to share their personal and family celebrations via zoom?

Whatever your thoughts and suggestions, please share them – either by contacting the Editor at gms.orts.editor@gmail.com or via the George MacDonald Society Facebook page. This society belongs to you, and needs your involvement to thrive!



Keep in Touch!

There are many ways of keeping in touch.

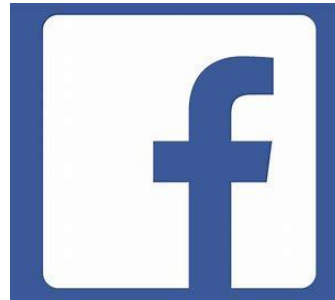
Society Membership, which entitles members to receive the Society's respected annual academic journal *North Wind*, as well as the quarterly *Orts* (via email) is available here:

www.george-macdonald.com/macdonaldsociety/membership.html



If you are in any doubt about your current subscription status please do not hesitate to contact us at macdonaldsociety@gmail.com or message Mike Partridge on the Society's Facebook group

Facebook



There is a vibrant and international MacDonald Society Facebook page. Please join in the conversation at:

www.facebook.com/groups/GeorgeMacDonaldSociety/

Orts

To contact the *Orts* Editor please email gms.orts.editor@gmail.com. All comments and contributions will be gladly received.

Articles and notices for inclusion in the Spring 2021 edition must be received by March 1st.

Front cover photo is from a 2020 theatre adaptation of *The Princess and the Goblin*, premiered at Holkham Hall in Norfolk and featuring Alicia Fortini as Irene. Photo credit: Robin Watson